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### **Language and power relations: A study of selected news reports in Nigeria**

#### **Abstract**

*This paper explores language and power relations in television news reports in Nigeria. The premise of the study is that power relations are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in verbal discourse and communication. They are also enacted in non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures and news footage. The objectives are to explore the various means through which language projects power relations in television news reports and to identify and describe the nature of power relations as enacted in the visual and verbal elements. Critical Discourse Analysis was used as the theoretical framework and the study is essentially analytical and descriptive. Data collection was done through field work. The findings revealed that power is enacted by news agents through the use of discourse heteroglossic elements and antypophora to project power relations in television news reports. It is also noted that television houses flout and misuse power by giving too much information and in many cases, imposing their views and the ideology of the television houses on the audience. It is expected that this study should give more visibility on the best way television discourse, through the news reports, reaches indeterminately large audiences and also showcases how it adopts/draws from a particular set of verbal repertoires to constitute its distinctive order of discourse...*

#### **Introduction**

Television news reportage not only describes current events and their possible consequences, but essentially portrays the actions and represents the opinions of major political, economic and social actors in any society. This way, according to van Leeuwen (2008), the consensual basis of power is constructed and established. What is presented on television tends to get internalised by the audience, sometimes without any chance of being questioned. Television images in most cases get absorbed directly by the unconscious mind. These images relayed on television may come across to the audience as a direct temporal relationship to the events they depict by presenting images as a continuous flow through skilful editing. Television news and the way they are packaged, provide a familiarity which offers the viewer or audience the illusion of truth. Live coverage also presents the audience with the opportunity to witness distant events as they occur.

Carroll (2003) is of the view that television imagery prevents the audience from envisioning other alternatives, from thinking that things could be other than the way they are portrayed on the screen. Carroll's view arises from the impact of the immediacy of the news reports; the audience in most cases hardly has the opportunity of cross-checking facts that are presented on such news reports. In what appears to agree with Carroll's view, Groening (2008) observes that television news reports offer auditory and visual stimuli that resemble more closely the interaction with actual people in real time. This view by Groening, we argue, provides the basis for the audience familiarity which allows the audience the illusion of complete knowledge of the issue(s) under discourse.

#### **The Research Problem**

This study is based on the idea that linguists and sociolinguists in Nigeria have not adequately explored relations of power in television news discourse (Taiwo 2007). Studies in television discourses have, however, provided tremendous insights into the syntactic patterns and semantic choices in television accounts of events (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, Lemke 2002, O' Halloran 2004). But

there has not been any significant study carried out on multimodal and inter-textual relations of power in a public and private television outfits in Nigeria and also on how power is enacted in news reports. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge this vacuum.

Subsequently, most times too, in an overall news package there is no synchrony of the visual and the verbal reports of incidents. In most cases, the newscasters through intertextual references superimpose old stories on new ones, making it difficult for the audience to have a chronological view of the incidents in a report. When this happens, meaning is distorted. Thus, this study focuses on the different forms and levels of power that are enacted and expressed by news agents through the contrary verbal and visual elements that are portrayed in television news reports. It also explores how as a result of this, the audience's understanding and perception of the issues under discourse are skewed.

### **Research Objective**

The objectives of this study are:

- To explore the various means through which language projects power relations in television news reports.
- To identify and describe the nature of power relations as enacted in the visual and verbal elements of television news reports.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

#### **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

CDA is one of the many sub-areas of Discourse Analysis (DA) which identifies discourse as a form of social practice (Fairclough 1995, 1989). It argues that all linguistic usage encodes ideological positions. CDA studies how language mediates and represents the world from different points of view. It links ideas, language, power and the ordering of relationship within society that is important for those involved in it. While DA focuses on the relationship between language forms and a limited sense of context, and tends to be oriented to a narrow understanding of the larger society, CDA goes further to address the ideological dimensions of discourse. It is a version of discourse that does not posit language use free of ideological conditions.

CDA arose as a result of the need to tackle the myriads of social problems which in most cases go unquestioned in the society. Recent studies on media discourse within the paradigm of CDA has unequivocally established the media as a social and discursive institution which regulates and organises social life as well as the production of social knowledge, values and beliefs through linguistic and nonverbal means (Fairclough, 2001; Thomborrow, 2002; Van Leeuwen, 2005).

CDA views discourse as central to the functioning of power in social processes. It also examines the reproduction of power in a given situation in order to understand the processes of power and how these processes use discourses to achieve power. The basic thrust of CDA is that discourses are not neutral; therefore, people should be aware that in the analysis of language, efforts should be made to situate it within the specific context of the social practices of which it is a part.

### **Methodology**

This study is essentially analytical and descriptive. However, aspects of data collection were done through field work. The components of the fieldwork include: media monitoring, data elicitation, data recording and data transcription.

### **Sources of Data**

The data for this study was drawn from the Nigeria Television Authority's (NTA) network news at 9.00 – 10.00 pm (public TV) and Channels Television news at 10.00 – 11.00 pm (private TV) from January to June 2013.

### **The Sampling Procedure**

This study adopted the simple random sampling method of data selection. According to Osuala (2005) "Sampling is taking any portion of a population or universe as representative of that population or universe". The target population is all NTA's and Channels Television's news aired within the six months period, i.e. January – June 2013. Since it is very difficult to do a complete analysis of the entire population, I drew my sample based on the topical issues prevalent in the country as at the time my data was drawn:

- Federal Government (FG)/Labour deliberation of the national minimum wage
- The Bombing of the Police Force Headquarters by the Boko Haram (Islamic) sect
- The Non-interest Banking Awareness.

Therefore, the sample I selected represented the entire corpus.

### **Data Presentation**

The transcribed data were divided into extracts. I distinguished between statements that were simply reported by correspondents, statements from the newscaster and statements from key figures in the data. The data was recorded for me by insiders from the electronic archive of NTA and Channels Television. As a back-up, some were also downloaded from YouTube. All issues relating to Bombing Attacks, Non-interest Banking and the National Minimum Wage aired within this six month period were recorded but not all was transcribed. Though I got some insights after going through all the data, the sheer volume of reports generated was enormous and was clearly not a manageable size for analysis. Therefore, I read through the reports, pruned them and classified them accordingly.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The method of analysis I adopted was within the general framework of CDA, using a discourse analytical/multi-modal approach as espoused by Fairclough (2004) and van Leeuwen (2005), and Pragmatics implicatures as proposed by H.P. Grice (1975). Fairclough's approach to discourse is three-dimensional. First, the socio-cultural level analyses discourse based on the social context in which the text under investigation is produced, is adopted in this study. Our data were analysed for each key stakeholder group presented in the news report and the accompanying footage to uncover the implicit and unstated assumptions embedded within them which shaped the very form of the text. This level of analysis in our study allowed the text to be assessed within the Nigerian environment in which it was created. The second is the discourse practice level; this is concerned with the production of the text. In this study, the nature of the discourse practice relies on the interaction between the various socio-cultural practices present and in which the discourse was situated and also what necessitated the discourse. The analysis included the history (inter-textual) and practices surrounding the textual medium through which the text under analysis is presented. Micro level discourses were identified, including the position promoted by the discourse and by whom. The third and final level is the textual level; analysis at this level was concerned with how the text was formed and what linguistic devices were used in order to produce meaning and express power. I identified these through the codes or lexical items used and the discrepancies between the verbal report and the visual images on the screen.

The multimodal approach which focuses on visual and moving text is important, because it is not only the spoken language that contributes to representations of meanings in a text but also the visual input. So, in investigating the construction of the various discourses of labour, non-interest banking in Nigeria and the bombing of police force headquarters in line with one of CDA's main tenets, I used an

interdisciplinary approach, integrating linguistic, visuality and socio-political perspective. This interdisciplinary perspective enhanced the discourse-analytical aspects of the corpus and shed light on the possible hidden power-enacting devices in our data which were not visible at first sight.

**Table 1. Categories of data obtained within the six month time frame**

FG/LABOUR	BOMBING	NON-INTEREST BANKING
1. Reports on Leadership tussle in NLC	1. Reports on Boko Haram's ammunition factory uncovered in Gombe State	1. Reports on CBN adjustments of guidelines on non-interest banking.
2. Reports on the senate passage of the N18,000.00 national minimum wage bills into law.	2. Reports on police raiding of Boko Haram sect's hide-out in Borno State.	2. Reports on workshop by Muslim students on the benefits of non-interest banking
3. Reports on National Governor's Forum's that Federal Government should remove oil subsidy to enable governors to pay the minimum wage.	3. Reports on people's views on insecurity in Nigeria as a result of Boko Haram's activities.	3. Reports on workshop on non-interest banking by the Muslim community.
4. Worker's day parade at Eagle Square with Vice President, Namadi Sambo	4. Ambassador Usman Goltimare's presentation of report on security issues to the secretary of the Federation, Pius Anyim.	4. Reports on non-supporters' views on non-interest banking.
5. Reports on National Governor's Forum's proposal for the upward review of revenue allocation formula to enable them to pay the minimum wage	5. Reports on the Police Headquarters' Bombing.	
6. Reports on the joint deliberation of the national minimum wage by the FG and Labour.	6. Updates by the Federal Bureau of investigation, security agent on the Police Force Headquarters' bombing	

### Data Analysis

The transcripts were divided into excerpts; each excerpt in some cases was longer than a sentence. I transcribed each excerpt noting the visual image on the screen. Our analysis featured the various levels of discourse that specifically enact, express, signal, conceal or legitimate power relations.

### Discussion and Findings

My objective one is to explore the various means through which language projects power relations in television news reports. Below are the findings

- One of the major findings of this study is that power is enacted by news agents through the use of **discourse heteroglossic elements**. Discourse heteroglossia (multiple voices) in a text are the inclusion of diverse ideas, opinions and shifts in points of emphasis in a news report. These discourse heteroglossic elements are used to represent certain moral and ethical values as well as preserve the conventionality of the television outfit's programmes. In the analysed extracts, multiple voices on the one hand are from newscasters, correspondents, editors and camera men who collectively report the news and who are oriented to likely reflect their personal ideology and the ideology of the television outfit they reported for. On the other hand, multiple voices occurred when voices of key actors interviewed in the course of a

particular news report co-occur with those of other actors or news agents. For instance, in NTA's report of the Bombing of the Police Force Headquarters, the audience heard multiple voices all making a single report. The voice of the newscaster was heard in extract one; in extract two, the voice of Segun Ojelade, a correspondent, was heard; in extracts three and four, the voice of another correspondent was heard. Segun Ojelade returned in extracts five and six to continue the report. Ifeanyi Okafor, another correspondent, took over from Segun Ojelade to continue the report in extract seven. In this single report, the audience heard a complex weave of so many voices all jointly trying to push the ideology of NTA that the Police are "incapable of securing lives and property of Nigerians" while the dissident group, Boko Haram, were portrayed as "insurmountable". Multiple voices were also evidence in the extracts of Non-interest Banking Awareness Programme. The voices of the news agents and the voices of supporters of non-interest banking were all trying to push for the acceptability of non-interest banking. The report included substantial references to supporters of non-interest banking speeches and activities; thus giving the audience many opportunities to hear voices and perspectives of only one party in the discourse. In doing so, the report not only appeals to the audience's interest and curiosity, but more importantly highlights the extreme irrationality in any future protest from the protesters (i.e. non-supporters of Non-interest Banking).

- The study also found out that **Antypophora** device is another means through which language project power relations in television news reports. Antypophora is the asking and answering of one's question ([www.silvarhetoricae.com/rhetoric.byu.edu](http://www.silvarhetoricae.com/rhetoric.byu.edu)): Channels Television's correspondent modelled his questions/ answers in a way to make a point:

'what can N18,000.00 do for an average Nigerian?, (Just what can that buy you and how far can it take you over a period of one month in a country like Nigeria?). "Not very far, most people would say, and of course they would not be wrong". "That is exactly the point labour unions in the country are making." (see extracts 3 and 4 of Channels Television FG/Labour data)

The correspondent used this question/answer mode of reporting to encourage the audience to consider his message or viewpoint. Hence, they were not meant to gain information about the usefulness of N18, 000.00, but to insinuate that N18, 000.00 is insufficient. The answer has the ability to persuade the audience into believing the correspondent's view that N18, 000.00, the said minimum wage in contention, is not enough. Antypophora method of questioning suggests that a dialogue is like a correspondent trying to play two parts on the stage. The correspondent thus flouts the quantity maxim by providing more information than the audience needs in this discourse.

- Another finding here through which language projects power relations is the use of **marked epistemic modality**. Channels Television's correspondent used the modal auxiliary "may", in the first extract of the FG/Labour data to suggest to the audience that there was going to be an unavoidable future strike by Labour. This assertion (Nigeria may witness another round of national strike) by the correspondent is prone to mark modality choice which includes the correspondent's personal point of view. By implication, the correspondent's preference of using the modal "may" is a linguistic device that may underpin an assertion. The correspondent succeeded in creating doubts about the propositions used in reporting the national minimum wage issue through the use of "marked epistemic modality" (Machin & Mayr 2012). The correspondent vouched so strongly for a futuristic action which he is unsure of.
- **Repetitions and Parallelisms** were also devices through which language projected power relations in the bomb blast extracts. We noticed the same syntactic structures being repeated

and paraphrased in different parts of the reports. Parallelism, a device which expresses ideas in a series of similar structures, draws attention to repeated information and makes them stand out from other information contained in the news report. Instances of repeated and parallelized ideas from the extracts are found in extracts 1, 3, 4 and 5. By so doing, Channels Television flouts the quantity maxim by over informing the audience and the manner maxim by using an oscillated mode of reporting in the form of repeated syntactic structures. My objective two is to identify and describe the nature of power relations in the visual and verbal aspects of television news reports. The following findings were made here:

- a) The visual and verbal analyses of my data reveal some form of unequal and unstable power relations between news agents. Asymmetrical power relation was observed between news agents such as the newscaster, the correspondents, the editors and the television outfit. Newscasters seem to have the least power because they delivered to the audience whatever news that was given to them. In reading to the audience, they can affect the news through voice control. Also, we found out that power shifts from the newscasters to the correspondents as was evident in Channels Television on FG/Labour data (see extract 2). The newscaster gave the correspondent, Deji Gbadamosi, some measure of power by introducing and projecting him as a symbol of authority "*our senior correspondent who will proffer some issues in respect of the National Minimum Wage*" (see full extract at the appendix). The newscaster by implication wants the audience to believe and accept whatever the correspondent reports. As the correspondent made the report, I observed that he did so in a noticeably evaluative way. The correspondent's identity as a detached reporter shifts as he inserts evaluative and interpretative statements of his own into the statements of facts. In doing this, the correspondent identifies himself with one particular version of the news report taking an identity not only as a reporter but also as a symbol of authority that has the right to guide the audience's understanding of the issue under discourse. This way, he transgressed the second sub-maxim under the maxim of quality, saying what he did not have evidence for and also providing the audience with a framework with which to interpret the discourse. In other cases too, correspondents clearly displayed their positions as symbols of authority to report a contrary view to what an interviewee has said. I noticed this in NTA's report of the Police Force Headquarters' bomb incident. For example, a Red Cross official who was at the scene of the incident as he was being interviewed, told the correspondent that six people died in the incident (see extract 8), but the correspondent went ahead to report that eight people died, supporting the verbal with the footage in the form of a large banner headline, "EIGHT PEOPLE DEAD IN BOMB LAST"
- b) The finding also reveals the strategy of reversal of power where power shifts from the correspondent to those interviewed in a discourse. The projected correspondent favoured a party in a conflict by giving the preferred party prominence and more power. The three delegates of Labour (Comrades Owei Lakemfa, Peter Esele and Richard Egbule) who were interviewed by NTA's correspondent in the FG/Labour discourse were given enough time to air their views, but the Federal Government's delegate, Chief Emeka Wogu, the Honourable Minister for Labour and Productivity, was not. Labour, the preferred party in the conflict was given more verbal power than the Federal Government. Through this method of biased reporting, the correspondent has broken the second sub-maxim under the quantity maxim. In other words, he over -informed the audience through the diverse information.
- c) **Pysmatic** mode of questioning entails asking of series of questions in quick succession. ([www.siivarnetoricae.com/rhetoric.bvu.edu](http://www.siivarnetoricae.com/rhetoric.bvu.edu)) The three rhetorical questions which Channels Television's correspondent read to the audience were ways of enacting power in the verbal and visual aspects of our data. The correspondent who made the report on the Police Force Headquarters' bomb blast hid behind three rhetorical questions to cue the audience into reasoning along with his views and ideas. In addition to this, the audience were made to see a

visual display of the questions on the screen. This way the correspondent exercised power verbally and visually:

- How did the police conclude that the suspect was on a suicide mission?
- If he was discovered to be on a suicide mission, why was he allowed into the police headquarters without screening at the gate?
- Is it the practice to ask a traffic warden to enter into a visitor's car to direct him to the car park for what the police called 'searching and checking'? These are some of the questions which the police have to answer in the ongoing investigation (see full report at the appendix).

These questions have a way of setting a thought model for the audience and also presenting the correspondent as one who was in direct dialogue with the audience. The quantity and relevance maxims have been flouted here by Channels Television. The three questions which were meant as cues for the audience were an overt way of over informing the audience because they were not needed for an understanding of the discourse.

- d) Cases of **synchronised editing** in the data especially in the Police Force Headquarters' bomb blast clips and the FG/Labour data were uncovered. It was observed that the news reports consisted of sequences of shots, skilfully edited so that the audience scarcely noticed the edits. Not only did the verbal track referred the audience to the edited visual track, the visual track had also been carefully edited to match the verbal track, so that the former boundaries from the separate tracks coincided without the audience noticing. In the NT A's bomb blast clips for example, I noticed that parts of the clips were got from elsewhere, and parts of the clips too were made up scenes. In addition, some of the clips did also not have any bearing with the issues under discourse.
- e) **Anchorage** strategy also enacts power in diverse ways. First, auxiliary embellishments in the form of large banner headlines were used to draw support from the audience. Large banner headlines suggest the biased summary of a news report and leave a longer lasting memory on the audience. Jason Bainbridge (2006) notes that anchorage is “the use of captions or commentary designed to select and/or control the connotations that can be made by a reader... This “anchors” an image text (through a caption) or a written text (through a headline) to a certain meaning...” The graphics that were used by Channels Television in the form of the multiple rhetorical questions in the Police Force Headquarters' bomb blast report and the emboldened headlines found in the FG/Labour deliberations can make a quick and powerful impression on the audience. The rhetorical questions are also capable of being used as a guide for the audience in condemning the Nigerian Police as incapable of securing lives and property and also present the Boko Haram group as “insurmountable”.
- Another instance of anchorage was in NTA's report of the Police Force Headquarters' bomb blast. In spite of the fact that Police spokesman, Olusola Amore, told a press conference that two people died in the bomb blast, NTA still showed in the footage that “POLICE CONFIRMS 8 PEOPLE DEAD”. Channels Television equally used a large banner headline as visual to accompany the verbal reports of the FG/Labour report “BATTLE FOR MINIMUM WAGE NATIONWIDE STRIKE LOOMS” (see extracts 1, 3 and 4). The ideas of large banner headlines are mostly the handiwork of editors whom though not seen in the course of the news reports, but reflect their ideas and views through the graphics the audience reads.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

News report is a textual phenomenon. It takes shape in verbal, non-verbal and visuals. It is also offered to the audience on a variety of platforms, purveyed in a variety of media, each of which constitutes meanings for the audience in quite different ways. Television discourse, through the news reports, reaches indeterminately a large audience and adopts/draws from a particular set of verbal repertoires which constitute its distinctive order of discourse. One striking feature of news discourse is the way in which it weaves together representations of speech, vision and writing of

a complex range of voices into a web which imposes order and interpretation. Reports are rarely even handed with all the various voices represented. Some are given prominence, others are marginalized. These media imperfections suggest not so much the inevitable imperfections of any human endeavour but a systemic flaw which has some ideological backings. The major news agents present the public with unnecessary and incomplete news because with rare exceptions, they take most of their video footage from archives and shun important recent footage because they contain information which they consider “not important” and which will not project the ideology they intend. Television reports produce images of the society, which give events particular meanings. These reports do not simply reflect the world, they re-present it. Instead of reproducing the “reality of the world out there” the account of events by correspondents/reporters redefines reality. As Hall (1982) puts it, “representation is a very different notion from that of reflection. It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping, not merely the transmitting of an already existing meaning, but the more active task of making things mean”. The media do not reflect information but re-present information. Power enacting devices used in the television reports often constitute particular representations of the world, projecting certain versions of reality depending on the media's institutional purposes and interests. The opacity of television reports, their practices and the invisibility of their ideological viewpoint and of the assumptions which underlie the practices help sustain power relations.

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**APPENDIX**

**A summary of the discourse and pragmatic elements through which television outfits enact power**

**NIGERIA TELEVISION AUTHORITY**

	<b>FG/LABOUR</b>	<b>NON- INTEREST BANKING</b>	<b>BOMBING</b>
<b>DISCOURSE ELEMENTS</b>	Foregrounding		
	Discourse Elements		Parallelism and repetition
	Back grounding	Discourse element	Back grounding
	Agent deletion		Anchorage
			Marked theme
	Rhetorical devices		
<b>PRAGMATICS ELEMENTS</b>	Unequal representation of actors	Unequal of actors	
			Conversational marker
	Non-chronological Footage		Non-chronological Footage
	Field		

**CHANNELS TELEVISION**

	<b>F/G LABOUR</b>	<b>NON INTEREST BANKING</b>	<b>BOMBING</b>
<b>DISCOURSE ELEMENTS</b>	Marked epistemic		Parallelism and
	Modality		Repetition
	Marked theme	Foregrounding	Foregrounding
	Anchorage		Anchorage
	Anthypophora	Back-grounding	
	Rhetorical devices		Rhetorical devices
<b>PRAGMATICS ELEMENTS</b>	Synchronised editing		Synchronised editing
			Pysmatic elements
	Unequal representation of actors, lexical	Unequal representation of actors	Unequal representation of actors
	Subjective	Suppression	Present tense to refer to past activity
	Choice		
	Field Shift		
	Reinterpretation	Reinterpretation	Reinterpretation