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Lexical, Structural and Rhetorical Features of Nigerian English Print Media

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ABSTRACT

Language is invariably a great instrument in the media world. It is the vehicle of disseminating and presenting issues, trends, happenings and events in the society to the general public. Though language is universally used in media, the style of use differs from one genre to the other. Therefore, this paper attempts to examine the peculiar linguistic and stylistic elements in Nigerian English print media. Methodologically, the study collects data from national Nigerian English newspapers and linguistically analyses them to identify peculiar features. Specifically, it identifies lexical, structural and rhetorical features that are peculiar in Nigerian newspapers. It discovers that the English of the Nigerian print media possesses certain linguistic features and as a result, it is stylistically different from the official English usage often used in Nigerian educational institutions. The paper avers that the peculiar use of English language in the Nigeria media reveals a variety of English with a distinct Nigerian flavour.

Key words: Nigerian English, Print Media, Rhetorical, Structural and Lexical Features

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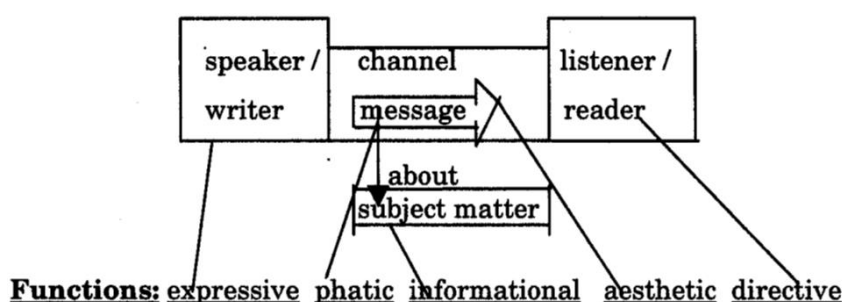
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1.0 Introduction

Language plays an indispensable role in the media. It is the 'vehicle' of the genre. Bell (1991), the news media use language to mirror the wider society. In his book, *Language of News Media*, he emphasizes that journalists are professionals whose daily occupation is to communicate news using language while the editors are responsible for 'cutting and modifying that language'. Since the creation of news language is often based on the journalist as a 'creator of language' (Bell 1991:7), hence, it is not uncommon to find different linguistic choices and structures used in reporting news and events in newspapers. Tiono argues that these different linguistic choices and structures peculiar to newspapers can be seen in the headlines (2003: 53). Language is an important means to provide information in the newspaper and newspaper itself deals with the society as a whole. Thus, it is important to look at the functions language is used to perform in the newspapers. Leech (1974: 49) posits that language has at least five functions in the society which are presented in the diagram below:

Functions of Language in the Society Leech (1974: 49)



He discussed these functions of language which is briefly summarized as follows. Language has *informational* function; that is, to convey information which is also the subject matter. The *expressive* function is used to express the speakers /writers' feelings and attitudes which include poetic use of language, swear words and exclamations. The *phatic* function is used to keep social relationships. Thus, phatic function is the function of maintaining cohesion and interaction within social groups. He further explained that the *aesthetic* function is the use of language for the sake of the linguistic artifact, that is, to create an artistic effect. The *directive* function is used to direct or influence the behavior or attitudes of others which include commands, requests and so on. Therefore, according to him, the orientation of a directive function is toward the listener/reader or the receiver's end rather than the speakers/writers end of the message. It is noteworthy that these functions of language as identified by Leech (1974) can also be seen as exemplified in the newspapers. In newspapers for example, language is used for the purpose of communication; the news is the subject-matter that is communicated while the readers are the receivers. Besides, the expressive function is exemplified in the fact that the choice of words may reflect the journalist's feelings and attitudes towards the event. This use of language can also be seen in the interview sections of newspapers where people express their views over topical issues in the society. Moreover, through the newspapers, people can keep social relationships. This occurs, for example, when people want to relate socially with their friends, they could give them some entertainment features in the newspaper to read. Thus, the language used in the newspaper also has phatic function. Language use in newspapers can also be directive although this is implicitly realized through the events presented which often form people's opinion and sometimes provoke people to act or to respond based on reporters' point of view or just based on one's ideas.

2.0 Literature Review

Some studies on the use of language in the Nigerian media will be briefly examined. Owolabi (2007) establishes the use of English in the mass media in Nigeria. He notes that Nigeria has over four hundred languages and about two hundred and fifty cultures and this has placed a difficult choice before the Nigerian journalist whether to write in indigenous languages and not be read at all. He further explains

that English has been accepted as the language of mass communication which is also exemplified in the Nigerian newspapers. His study also reveals the choice and use of language in the Nigerian press where it is noted that Nigerian journalists often use unclear and complex linguistic constructions to convey their messages.

However, *Chiluwa (2005)* examines pragmatic processes and social meaning in the news headlines and lead stories of three major Nigerian news magazines. He underscores that language in the news media is a representation of a particular ideological position. Thus, language in a news text performs a mediatory function and as a semiotic code reflects what experience, perspectives or an idea about that the news hold. He identifies the ‘context of situation’ as essential to the understanding language in a news text. *Ehineni (2014)* examines the syntactic structure of Nigerian newspaper headlines. Using the framework of Chomskyan Generative grammar, he identifies lexical heads including word classes such as nouns, verbs, prepositions; and functional heads including determiners, complementizers, inflection in the headlines. He underscores that syntactic heads are important features of Nigerian newspaper headlines.

Essentially, it should be noted that while *Chiluwa’s (2005)* work deals with the pragmatic uses of language in the newspaper headlines, *Ehineni (2014)* examines the syntax of Nigerian newspaper headlines. Significantly however, this study discusses the style of language use in Nigerian newspapers with a view to identifying lexical and rhetorical features in selected newspapers.

Given the above literature review, This paper collects data randomly from different Nigerian newspapers. Specifically, the data comprise the news headlines of these newspapers. The study linguistically analyzes the data to:

- i. identify lexical features in Nigerian newspaper headlines.
- ii. identify structural features in the headlines
- iii. highlight rhetorical features in the news headlines
- iv. discuss some policy implications for language use in Nigerian print media

3.0 Data Analysis

3.01 Lexical Features in Nigerian English News Headlines

Lexical features have to do with lexical items such as words, titles, names etc. Lexical features of Nigerian news headlines can mainly include four parts. They are exemplified as follows.

[1] Acronyms

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, acronym can be defined as “a word formed from the initial letters of other words or (occas.) from the initial parts of syllables taken from other words, the whole being pronounced as a single word”. Generally speaking, there are three kinds of acronyms observed in the news headlines.

1. Acronyms for organizations

Examples: NFA = Nigerian Football Association
 PDP = Peoples Democratic Party
 APC = All Progressive Congress
 NNPC = Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
 NUC = National Universities Commission
 ASUU = Academic Staff Union of Universities
 NURTW= National Union of Road Transport Workers
 NASS= National Assembly
 FRSC= Federal Road Safety Corps
 NYSC= National Youth Service Corps

2. Acronyms for profession and career

Examples: VC= Vice Chancellor
CEO = Chief Executive Officer
GM = General Manager
PA = Personal Assistant
IG= Inspector General of Police
DPO= District Police Officer

3. Acronyms for Exams

Examples: UTME= Unified Tertiary Matriculation Exam
SSCE= West African Senior Secondary Certificate Exam
JSCE= Junior Secondary Certificate Exam
TOEFL = Test of English as A Foreign Language
IELTS = International English Language Testing System

[2] Shortening

Shortening is a form of reduction of words in the news headlines which does not involve the selection of only initial letters of a word.

Examples:

Fed govt – Federal government
Reps – Representatives
Int'l – International
Hi-tech – High technology

[3] Compounding

Compound words in Nigerian English newspaper are usually formed by two or more words. Compounding, as a process of word formation, is done to give expressions a unique style in the newspapers.

Examples:

- i) “The shame of campus prostitution” *Vanguard*, Oct.10.2014.
Here “campus prostitution” refers to “the form of prostitution practiced on campus”.
- ii) “Officials privatise govt secretariat in Asaba” *Vanguard*, Oct.10.2014.
Here “govt secretariat” refers to “the secretariat of the government”.

3.02 Structural Features of Nigerian English News Headlines

Structural features have to do with sentences and clauses. Structural elements of Nigerian English newspapers can be divided into two aspects. They are discussed as follows:

[1] Deletion

Deletion is a process of removing certain elements of a structure and it is one of the major structural features of English newspaper headlines. Specifically, deletion can be categorized into four basic types.

i. Deletion of Articles

Examples: Ruling class crippling Nigeria’s democracy *The Sun* 09.29.2014
(The Ruling class crippling Nigeria’s democracy)
APC NWC in crucial meeting *The Sun* 10.10.2014
(The APC NWC in a crucial meeting)
Falcons tackle Ivory Coast *Vanguard*, Nov.10.2014
(The Falcons tackle the Ivory Coast)

ii. Deletion of Conjunctions

Examples: Eagles, Falcons seek glory across Africa *Tribune* 10.10.2014
(Eagles and Falcons seek glory across Africa)

- Muazu, PDP, Mark, Daniel beg Obasanjo for forgiveness *Vanguard*, Oct.10.2014
(Muazu, PDP, Mark and Daniel beg Obasanjo for forgiveness)
Aziza was a true Nigerian, rare gem —Jonathan *Tribune* 10.10.2014
(Aziza was a true Nigerian and rare gem —Jonathan)
Why we reconciled Buruji, Daniel –PDP national scribe *The Sun* 10.07.2014
(Why we reconciled Buruji and Daniel –PDP national scribe)
Spain crash, England cruise in Euro qualifiers *Vanguard* 10.09.2014
(Spain crash and England cruise in Euro qualifiers)

iii. Deletion of “be” verb

Examples:

- Bristow Helicopters committed to ‘Target Zero’project *Vanguard* 10.11.2014
(Bristow Helicopters is committed to ‘Target Zero’project)
Victory for Nigeria non-negotiable —NFF *Tribune* 10.10.2014
(Victory for Nigeria is non-negotiable —NFF)
Bayelsa Monarch brother abducted *Sahara Reporters* 10.3.2014
(Bayelsa Monarch’s brother was abducted)
Jonathan’s transformation agenda not working —Amaechi *Tribune* 10.09.2014
(Jonathan’s transformation agenda is not working —Amaechi)
APC presidential ticket not zoned – Oyegun *The Sun* 10.07.2014
(APC presidential ticket is not zoned – Oyegun)

iv Deletion of lexical verbs

Examples:

- Advent of ICT, blessing to NIPOST —Oyo APM *Tribune* 10.10.2014
(Advent of ICT has been a blessing to NIPOST —Oyo APM)
Robbery gang in multiple accidents after operation *The Sun* 10.03.2014

(Robbery gang lands in multiple accidents after operation)
No going back on Fayose’s inauguration) *Tribune* 10.10.2014
(There will be no going back on Fayose’s inauguration)

v. Deletion of nouns

Examples: 7 injured in car accident *Tribune* 10.06.2014

- (7 people were injured in car accident)
12 killed, scores injured in Katsina multiple crash *The Sun* 10.03.2014
(12 people were killed and scores injured in Katsina multiple crash)
2 suspected cultists killed in Ogun *Tribune* 10.06.2014
(2 men were suspected cultists killed in Ogun)

[2] Substitution

Nouns are frequently used in newspaper headlines to replace different words to form various structures. So nouns are the most animated words in news headlines.

Examples: Govs task Nigerians on nation unity *The Sun* 10.02.2014

(“nation unity” = “national unity”)

Jonathan welcomes support on terror war *The Sun* 10.03.2014

(“terror war” = “war against terrorism”)

3.03 Rhetorical Devices of Nigerian English News Headlines

Rhetorical devices of the newspaper headlines can be classified into four categories. They are as follows.

[1] Metaphors

Metaphor is a means of making an implicit, implied or hidden comparison between two things.

Examples: Broken Tongues

The Tango in Jalingo *The Sun* 09.03.2014
The Gordian Knot *The Sun* 09.04.2014
Wages of Impunity *Sahara Reporters* 10.09.2014
War is Peace *The Sun* 06.19.2014
Dance of Madness *Sahara Reporters* 10.09.2014

[2] Alliteration and Rhymes

Alliteration, according to the *Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary*, is ‘the repetition of consonants at the beginning of two or more words’.

Examples: Two pastors and Two big troubles *The Sun* 10.06.2014
Sweet and Sour *Vanguard* 10.9.2014
IBB: The myth and the man *The Sun* 08.19.2014

[3] Puns

Pun is defined according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect”. In other words, it can be seen as an attempt to play on words to express humor.

Examples: Celebrating infamy; honoring thieves *Punch* 08.02.2014
Want cure for Ebola? Ask Mr blackman *Tribune* 08.14.2014
Nigeria: Is there anyone in charge? *The Sun* 08.17.2014
Chibok: Bringing Back Our Guts *Tribune* 05.12.2014

[4] Idioms

Idioms are figurative expressions used to comment on issues.

Examples: Not over until it’s over *Punch* 09.13.2014
 The rich also cry *Punch* 08.02.2014
 One good term deserves another *Punch* 10.02.2014

4.0 Conclusion and Policy Implications for Language Use in Nigerian Print Media

This paper underscores some policy implications for language use in Nigerian print media. First, the choice of linguistic devices in the media should be based on simplicity and clarity since the pieces of information conveyed are meant to be understood by the wider audience and readers otherwise the ultimate goal of the media is defeated. Second, acronyms and abbreviations that are unfamiliar or uncommon to the public should be disused to avoid intelligibility on the part of the readers; only familiar linguistic constructs should be employed.

Furthermore, rhetorical devices such as metaphors and puns should be well linguistically crafted to avoid semantic ambiguity. The paper therefore suggests that while language use in the media is often used to reflect a peculiar linguistic style and architecture, the place of simplicity, clarity and intelligibility on the part of the audience should be more emphasized.

This paper has examined lexical, structural and rhetorical features of Nigerian English newspapers. It identifies lexical features such as acronyms, shortening and compounding. The structural features identified include deletion and substitution while the rhetorical features are metaphor, alliteration/rhyme, pun and idiom. It is pertinent to note that these linguistic features are not just peculiar constituents of Nigerian English newspapers but can also be found in other English newspapers. However, based on the data, the linguistic features of Nigerian newspaper headlines are more specifically described.

Significantly, the paper argues that these lexical, structural and rhetorical features are linguistic devices used in the newspapers not just to convey information but to create media stylistic effects. These features give newspapers a peculiar linguistic architecture and distinguish them from other genres of

language use. This paper opines that the understanding of these linguistic elements will enhance adequate understanding of the newspapers.

Finally, this paper underscores some policy implications for language use in Nigerian print media. First, the choice of linguistic devices in the media should be based on simplicity and clarity since the pieces of information conveyed are meant to be understood by the wider populace otherwise the ultimate goal of the media is defeated. While language use in the media is often used to reflect a peculiar linguistic style and architecture, the place of simplicity, clarity and intelligibility on the part of the audience should be more emphasized for a successful dissemination of information.

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