

A CRITICAL STUDY OF MEDIA BIAS AND IDEOLOGICAL IMPORTS IN SELECTED (IN)SECURITY REPORTS IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

Existing studies on insecurity have concentrated on agenda setting, framing techniques, and pragmatic strategies neglecting the relationship between stances and media bias. These relationships give a full understanding of group-induced motivations for the insecurity operation in Nigeria. This paper therefore undertook a critical study of media bias and their ideological imports with a view to identifying various forms of media bias and stances used by newspaper reporters on insecurity. van Dijk's (1996) Socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis with his ideological structures served as the theoretical framework for this study. The study adopted a qualitative procedure to analyse thirty (30) reports purposively. Data were selected from three National newspapers, namely: *The Punch*, *This Day* and *The Guardian*. The data span through January 1st 2021 and May 31st, 2022. Findings reveal that news writers often resort to bias and framing techniques in reporting insurgent related news some of which include biased nominal, biased adjective, naming bias and bias adverbs. This study further reveals that the presupposition of the ideologies found was to increase the information deliveries and acceptance in the written reports of insurgent actions of the various insurgent groups in Nigeria. Most importantly, the ideologies were used to present two major groups, namely the in-group and the out-group. While the in-group refers to Nigerian citizens who are portrayed as victims and innocent, the out-group refers to the various insurgency groups who bring about tears, pains and bloodletting among the Nigerian people. The study concludes that newspapers are often biased especially in their reportage of insurgent operations as revealed in the paper.

Keywords: Media Bias, Stances, Banditry, Herdsmen, Critical Study

Discourse Analysis

Introduction

The level of insecurity in Nigeria has increased since the return to democratic governance in May, 1999. These cases of insecurity are caused by communal clashes, ethnic/tribal conflicts, religious riots/conflicts, militancy and ritual killings, cultism and ethnic militia attacks and farmers-herdsmen conflicts (Akinola, 2016). These further increased with the arrival of the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East from 2009 to date. The level of insecurity further increased with the changing of the farmer-herdsmen clashes into banditry and cattle rustling from 2010 to 2021. In some states of the North, this form of insecurity further changed to not only banditry, cattle rustling but to also include kidnapping of people for ransom.

Insecurity, in whichever country it is experienced, constitutes a serious threat to lives and property, hinders business activities and discourage domestic and foreign investors, all of which retard a country's socio-economic development (Ewetan, 2014). These issues of insecurity are transmitted to the audience through the media.

The human language plays a major part in the process of social construction of reality and this is the realm in which the language of the news operates predominantly. Language of the news assists in the creation of a set of public discourses through its selection of narratives and the language it employs to project them. Just as language is a socially constructed form of communication, so is news with its own varieties of language in use. This is achieved through language manipulation, pragmatic nuances, discursive lexical choices, transitivity choices and structural pattern of sentences. Nigerian media reports therefore use specific discursive choices and lexical variations in their reports to reinforce or create ideological perspectives among readers.

The mass media are naturally inclined to crisis situations; they thrive in crisis reportage and are brought to prominence during crises. Also, they create news by deciding what is newsworthy and what is

not, therefore they have the ability to shape public discourse. Because crises in most cases usually escalate into varying degrees of violence, the mass media may be torn between abiding by the principle of objective reporting, and acknowledging the emotional realities such crisis situations evoke in them (Allan & Zelizer, 2004). This is in line with Thomson's (2006) perspective that journalists do not only present reports of event that are entirely true and objective, but they also employ rhetorical strategies in their writings which are aimed at persuading readers to adopt their (journalist's) point of view.

In recent decades, media discourse has become a key area of interest to language analysts and media sociologists (Anderson, 1997). In some Western countries, different social issues in media discourse such as security, power, discrimination, prejudice, and bias have attracted the attention of linguists as well as practitioners of other related disciplines. Of all these social issues, control, discrimination and prejudice give serious cause for concern. Media discourse has become an increasingly pervasive part of readers' lives. It has significantly altered the nature of political negotiations and social behaviour. The newspapers have specifically become deeply embedded in the system to the extent that security, social, economic, religious and political activities can hardly go on effectively without them (Kuhar, 2007). For example, security challenges, election campaigns, religious activities, minority group emancipation campaigns, government policies, etc., have become highly managed media businesses. In managing these activities and policies, personalities, groups, policies, opinions, beliefs, and ideas are represented in different ways to imply or suggest different things to the audience.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is one prominent strand of media discourse study that is concerned with taking a critical approach towards the analysis of media discourse. Keefee (2006) adds that Critical Discourse Analysis has more potential as a framework for newspaper analysis, and there have been a number of significant studies in this field. CDA provides a highly strong technique for analysing how newspaper texts frame issues through time when used

with corpus linguistics. This approach to language study is an interdisciplinary pattern to the study of discourses which views language as a form of social practice. It plays a vital role in mediating inequality, injustice and oppression in the society through the use of language. van Dijk's approach to CDA holds the view that media discourses can be systematically analysed with focus on its structure, such as lexicon, syntax, topics, metaphor, actor description, social identities, and rhetorical figures and so on, in order to expose the motivation behind such discourse format.

Based on this, this paper examines the bias and ideological imports of Nigerian newspaper reports of insurgent activities in Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are to bring out discourse patterns of newspaper reportage, examine media bias and determine the discourse techniques used in insurgent reports of Nigeria newspapers

Review of Related Concepts

Media Bias

By giving information to the public for both individual and communal decisions, the news media plays an important role in society. The news media, however, is widely seen as biased. Bias can be defined as prejudice against or in favour of one thing, person, or group in comparison to another way. Nelson (1996) asserts that whenever the positions or interests of a portion of the audience are overlooked, distorted, or censored, the problem of bias is found. Because the news media plays such an important role in society by disseminating information, media bias is when journalists, news producers, and news outlets show bias in the selection of events and stories as well as the ways they are reported. This, according to Duggan and Martinelli (2010), is also known as media slant. According to them, media bias is founded on the idea that the media favour particular competing concerns in its coverage and reporting. They see media tilt as systematic filtering that simplifies social reality and as indicators of relative weight, and they intuitively link positivity and negativity to many social issues.

Barron (2004) holds the view that the news media is biased in their reportage. He believes that newspaper bias can manifest in a variety of ways, which can be through an absence of balance resulting in one side of a story receiving unwarranted attention, through the fabrication of information, from information hidden or distorted by sources, or from career concerns of journalists who compete to be published or be on the air. Furthermore, Barron (2004) noted that media bias could be ideological, where owners, editors, or journalists present stories that support particular world views, it could also be partisan, where owners, editors, and journalists present stories to support the policies or causes espoused by political parties or interest groups. It could also arise from the personal preferences of journalists.

Owolabi and O'Neill (2013) consider the Nigerian mass media, particularly newspapers, to be one of the most vibrant on the African continent. One of the most essential duties that the media is intended to serve society is the ability to cover social issues and happenings with the utmost righteousness, honesty, and equity for the ordinary man, especially since the media has such a large influence on society. Regrettably, the Nigerian media has failed miserably in this regard. This may explain why Pate (2012) asserts that the media has been accused of culpability in truncating and subverting the democratic process at various periods. The media assists the general public in obtaining knowledge on a variety of topics as well as forming opinions and making decisions on a variety of subjects. It is the media that keeps people up to date and informed about what is going on in their communities and throughout the world, and from which everyone learns something. News organizations, on the other hand, do more than just disseminate information; they also contribute to the creation, preservation, and transfer of specific narratives and discourses. The Nigerian media has not overtime given reports on Nigerian conflicts fairly. In his study, Okali (2011) asserts that the Nigerian media has not done a good job of executing its monitoring duty, notably in crisis reporting in Nigeria.

In reporting daily occurrences, including the outbreak of conflicts, the media despite the ownership pattern are generally expected to display a real sense of objectivity. They must ensure balance and fairness in their reports; this implies that their report must be free from bias. To guarantee this, all parties involved must be given equal attention. Stories must not be one-sided and facts must be separated from opinions.

Roles of Newspaper Reports

Throughout history, the media, whether conventional or social, has been viewed as a change agent. Certainly, neither is constantly positive nor always negative, but rather alternates between the two. Human beings, on the other hand, yearn for change, particularly positive change that lasts. However, this is impossible due to the human condition's inherent impossibility. Since Nigeria's pre-independence and post-independence eras, the press has played a critical role in national development by keeping those in power accountable to the people and informing the public about government policies and activities.

It is also worth noting that the Nigerian government has been grappling with security challenges posed by Boko Haram insurgency, farmers and herders clashes, kidnappings, and militancy in various parts of the country since 2009, for which the solution will require collective efforts of all stakeholders, including the press, to address them in various capacities. This has created significant difficulties as well as strife in many parts of the country. In this regard, the media can both cause and resolve conflicts; the former can be accomplished through inciting coverage, inadequate reporting, or no reporting at all, while the latter can be accomplished through objective and balanced reporting, adequate and non-sensational reporting, and surveillance reporting (Anyanwa, 2004).

In the case of the current security issues engineered by different sects threatening the peace of Nigeria, sufficient coverage by the media can play an important role in resolving the crises. The

media's surveillance function must be used properly to alert people to an imminent risk. As a result of competent reporting, individuals who perpetuate crises may have their perceptions altered, while peace-loving Nigerians may have their security awareness raised. Journalism, including newspapers and other types of media, has succeeded in making itself necessary to modern society over time. Focusing on these roles, Momoh (1987, p.53) believed that a duty is imposed on the press to ensure that the political objectives of Nigeria are achieved in accordance with the motto which is "Unity and faith, peace and progress". "We tend to be too arrogant in our perception of our place in society," Macebuh (1987, p.07) added, emphasizing this point. He goes on to say that the press can never claim to be playing a meaningful role if it does not regularly depict, if not outright denounce, the numerous ways in which the chase of riches corrupts the politics and jeopardizes the future. However, it is important to note that one of the fundamental principles of media and communication practice is to always promote peace. That is not to imply that peace is the absence of conflict, but rather that the press bears a social responsibility.

Moreover, certain obligations to society should be accepted as a sacrosanct and must be fulfilled by the press. These responsibilities are primarily to be met by maintaining high professional standard of truth, accuracy, objectivity, and balanced information dissemination while doing their job. Communication academics have proposed that the mass media should self-regulate within the framework of legislation and established institutions in this regard. According to Mac Quail (1987), society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance from the media, and intervention can be justified to protect public goods since journalists should be accountable to society.

Maikaba (2006) in Adamu and Ibrahim (2014, p.8) proposes some ways through which the mass media could ensure attainment of peace and resolution of crises and conflicts and by implication function better in the society. These ways include: issuing reminders

on mechanisms of peaceful resolutions. During conflicts, the mass media is expected to issue reminders on how best to achieve peace. The media should assume the role of arbitrators and mediators, trying to settle the differences and reach a compromise. Also the media should ensure objective coverage and reporting. This way, the parties to a dispute may be willing to adhere to solutions to the problems that are proposed by the media. The media can also suggest new alternatives. In case of deadlocked negotiations, the media should provide new alternatives on how best to solve the conflict. Another way the media can function well is through the generation of consensus: The media could help in resolving conflict by generating a consensus which the parties to the dispute might adopt to find a settlement to the conflict.

When reporting major events such as insurgent operations, adequate coverage is unquestionably required from the media. As a result, the media owes the public an obligation to not only report on such events, but also to appropriately account for them. Because insurgencies, terrorism, and other types of war are such terrible occurrences that they easily receive appropriate media coverage around the world, adequacy here refers to the volume of coverage given on the topic as well as the objectivity in the process of reporting the events.

Herdsmen Bandits

Adding to the security challenges facing Nigeria is the incessant periodical clash between cattle herders and farmers in various part of the country, especially in the wetland areas of the middle belt and the North East of Nigeria. The herdsmen in Nigeria are majorly Fulani, a migrant ethnic population who are scattered throughout many parts of West Africa. The relationship between these nomadic herders from Northern Nigeria and the local sedentary agrarian communities is inevitable owing to climate change, rapid desertification of grazing land and lower rainfall making cattle rearing more difficult in northern Nigeria. The herdsmen seek alternatives as

they have to journey from the North through to the South in order to seek fertile grazing land for their cattle. The Fulani in Nigeria have long competed with other communities for land and vegetation, and these struggles over land have only increased since the 1999 democratization of Nigeria (Bahir, 2018).

The disputes between Fulani and farmers across many parts in Nigeria has primarily centred around access to land and water resources as the Fulanis have resorted to widespread terrorist activity recently. In fact, between 2010 and 2013, only 80 people were recorded killed by Fulani militants compared to more than 1,200 killed in 2014 alone, an escalation for which many factors have been credited (Nwogu, 2018). Their inhuman and violent activities ranges from carrying out vicious attacks on the local communities, kidnapping for ransom, raping and killing scores of the innocent citizens of the country, particularly, the defenceless farmers.

According to the Global Terrorism Index (2015), Fulani herdsmen's activities between 2010 and 2013 resulted in the extrajudicial deaths of about 800 individuals in total in 2013, but increased to roughly 1,229 people in 2014, posing a severe threat to the country's peace and stability. States like Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kaduna, and Katsina have recently been the hardest hit, with deadly attacks by Fulani herdsmen and bandits, resulting in a high toll of human lives and property.

Surprisingly, Fulani herders, who were once thought to be friendly in their nomadic activities, have recently been armed with sophisticated weapons by the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) in order to launch surprise deadly attacks on farmers and targeted communities, usually at a time when the communities are unprepared, such as at midnight or on Sundays, when people are assumed to have gone to sleep or to church. As a result, people are killed indiscriminately, residences are burned down, and property is looted (Michael, Inyang & Ukpog). These more lethal attacks on the country's innocent residents appear to have devolved more regularly in the southern states, with more deadly

attacks in states such as Rivers, Abia, Imo, Ebonyi, and Enugu in the southeast, and Ondo, Ekiti, and Ondo in the southwest.

It could be said that the initial targeted individuals were the farmers but recently, the bandits have extended their nefarious activities to harmless citizens who go out in search of daily bread. Similarly, banditry according to Anyadike (2021) is an offshoot or a derivative of armed herdsmen originated in 2014 in the North-West Nigeria, particularly in the states like Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina, who intensified their activities between 2017 and 2018 to include cattle rustling, raping, kidnapping for ransom, sexual violence and killings amongst others in the area. In the recent time, banditry activities in the aforementioned north-western states have been particularly worrisome and nightmarish, as the attacks intensified, thus, leading to the death of hundreds and the destruction of houses and property worth millions of naira.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative critical content analysis of three Nigerian national dailies (*This Day*, *The Punch*, and *The Guardian*). The three newspapers were 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. 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. Thirty (30) news reportages on insecurity related ideologies and biased Banditry and Herdsmen' crisis reportage from 2021 to 2022 were purposively selected for the analysis. The theoretical appurtenance of van Dijk's socio cognitive model was used for the analysis of the selected data. The analysis discusses some common media biases and stances adopted by the journalists in reporting the news on banditry and herdsmen's attacks.

Theoretical Framework

Teun van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Model

van Dijk is one of the most frequently referred and quoted CDA practitioners in critical studies of media discourse, even when the studies do not necessarily fit within the CDA paradigm (Ammour 2013). In order to illustrate the assumptions made by the stronger of the less powerful, Van Dijk integrates diverse linguistic theories and methodologies in developing social and discursive processes.

Three components of van Dijk's (2001) model of critical discourse analysis show how discourse can reflect social ideologies: discourse, cognition, and society. The background of the social analysis is the overall societal structures, whereas the discourse analysis is mostly text-based (syntax, lexicon, local semantics, topics, schematic structures, and so on). In this way, van Dijk's method combines the interpretative (text-based) and social tradition (context-based) approaches to media education into a single analytical framework for studying media discourse.

However, another element of van Dijk's approach that sets him apart from other CDA approaches is his use of cognitive analysis. Personal/social ideas, understanding, and evaluation in speech are examined here, whereas society refers to local interlocutor relationships or worldwide societal institutions such as political systems and group/subgroup ties. van Dijk's cognitive phenomena are linked to discourse structure and the ways in which social inequity, dominance, and ideology emerge. The relationship between the discourse structure and the structure of society must be examined in order to uncover social actors' social representations, attitudes, and ideologies.

According to van Dijk (2009), white dominance leads to socioeconomic inequality, racism, and dominance in some countries. Furthermore, the CDA top-down paradigm is emphasized because discourse reveals a common kind of social injustice. van Dijk also considers the comprehension, "memorization, and reproduction" of

news content in his other level of analysis. The relationships between the three levels of news text production (structure, production, and comprehension processes) and the wider social context in which they are entrenched are what van Dijk's media analysis aims to demonstrate. van Dijk's study takes place on two levels: microstructure and macrostructure, in order to identify such correlations. The semantic links between propositions, syntactic, lexical, and other rhetorical aspects that offer coherence in the text, and other rhetorical features such as quotations, direct or indirect reporting that lend factuality to news stories are all examined at the microstructure level.

The examination of macrostructure, which is concerned with the thematic/topic structure of news articles and their overall schemata, is central to van Dijk's analysis of news reports. These models explain how language reveals social and personal characteristics in itself, as well as how discourse differs depending on the social setting. Also, the macrostructure reflects the common ideological strategies of positive and negative self-presentation. Positive self-presentation is the strategy that shows the writers in positive attributes as "us" while negative self-presentation is the strategy used by the writers to describe the "out group's" negative position as "them". The semantic macro-ideological strategies used in creating division between "good" and "bad", "superior" and "inferior", "us" and "them" are the framework which represents positive self-representation or in-group favouritism and negative other-representation or out-group derogation (Igwebuke 2018).

Critical Discourse Analysis and News Reports

Communication can be considered an activity because it is active. As a result, language use as a mode of communication is a deliberate activity, a social action, and a practice (Richardson, 2007). According to Gee and Green (1998), as mentioned in Odebunmi and Ajiboye (2016), news is written with the purpose of doing something. Interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is aimed at a non-present

reader, listener, or spectator are referred to as media discourse. Despite the fact that the discourse is aimed at these recipients, they are frequently unable to respond immediately to the discourse's producer(s), but this is changing with the arrival of new media technology.

Journalists, according to Rodin and Steinberg (2003), not only report on civil society and public discourse events, but actively shape them. As a result, they believe that when examining public discourse, the pertinent issues to ask are whether the craft as a whole is serving the public interest rather than the journalists' ability or professionalism in reporting events. Public affairs, policies, disputes, and other public concerns are frequently presented by the press as active participants in public life.

Journalism is often regarded as the primary source of information about current events and issues in society. Journalists in most civilizations regard the reporting they provide for their audiences as authentic or factual. Similarly, Kieran (1998) claims that the goal of journalistic news reporting is to persuade the audience that their descriptions and interpretations are reasonable and appropriate. Thomson (1996), on the other hand, says that journalists use rhetorical methods in their writing to persuade people to embrace their point of view. He also emphasises that an analysis of ideology in modern society must be properly aware of the nature and effectiveness of mass media in the production and distribution of ideology.

Scholars have attempted to address non-literal speech from a critical viewpoint since the inception of CDA. CDA's analytical projects include media discourse, as well as other forms of mass discourse such as advertisements and official fields. So far, media discourse has consistently topped the list. News stories, like other discourse, contain or demonstrate the reporters' perspectives and positions as a result of a social activity.

By implication, there is no way that media discourse could accurately reflect and report on reality and society. This explains why White (2006, p.37) dismisses the media's claims of objectivity. He

posits that the media's discourse is designed in order to evaluate the producer(s)' point of view, with the goal of "influencing its audience's preconceptions and views about the way the world is and should be". Apparently, the media decides what they believe is in the public's best interests. As a result, they discursively structure their findings in order to impact public discourse and influence readers' interpretation and perception; this could include bringing an issue to the foreground or placing it in the background (van Dijk. 2001). According to Olowe (2003), Nigerian newspapers purposefully manipulate language usage. Nigerian newspapers producer(s) choose language patterns that meet the audience's ideological expectations, which is an ideological empire on the one hand, and the mass media house's ideological expectations, which is another ideological empire on the other.

Given the foregoing, one important strand of media discourse research, namely critical discourse analysis, is preoccupied with taking a critical stance to media discourse (CDA). It is critical that we evaluate the messages we receive from our manufactured mass media on a regular basis. Because media discourse is open to the public, it attracts the attention of many conversation analysts who study it as a type of institutional talk that may be compared to other types of talk, both mundane and institutional. The fact that media speech is documented appeals to discourse analysers, and this appeal is growing as newspapers, radio stations, and television shows become more accessible online. Technology advancements have considerably reduced the ephemerality element that used to be associated with media discourse, particularly radio and television in that these productions are accessible anytime and any day.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Bias and Framing in the Selected Insecurity Reports

Biased Adjectives

Excerpt 1

Bandits Attack Worshippers, Kill One, Injure Others in Kaduna Church

One person was killed while **several** others sustained injuries in an attack on worshippers yesterday at Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), Gabaciwa, Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State. The statement added that El-Rufai was **sad** over the incident, "describing it as evil act targeting innocent citizens exercising their constitutional and universal rights to religious freedom."

(*This Day* September 27, 2021. P. 58)

Excerpt 2

In a **brazen new** onslaught, bandits on Sunday slaughtered 34 people, including a family of 13, following attacks on Madamai and Abun communities in Kaura Local Government Area of Kaduna State. Eight persons sustained **various degrees** of injury, while the terrorists burnt down about 20 houses.

(*This Day* September 28, 2021. P. 11).

Excerpt 3

11 Killed, 30 Houses Burnt in **Fresh** Plateau Terror Attacks

A source who spoke on condition of anonymity said, "the gunmen came in **large** number and invaded our community early Thursday morning after they had attacked four other communities. The bandits began operation Wednesday and carried on till Thursday. They killed 17 people in the communities and left many other with **serious** injuries."

(*The Punch*, February 6, 2022. P.7)

Excerpt 4

Gunmen kill 10 in fresh Plateau Attack

Gunmen have killed no fewer than 10 persons in Chanzo Zerrici village Bassa Local Government Council of Plateau.

(*The Guardian*, April 4, 2022. P.8)

Excerpt 5

Katsina Attack claims 17 lives

Seventeen people were killed in the other attack by bandits in Karfi ward in Alumfashi Local Government Area of Katsina State. **Several** others were injured when the bandits opened fire as soon as they invaded the area at about 11pm, Friday.

(*The Punch*, March 30, 2021. P.7)

Adjectival bias through the use of adjectival words is a lexical choice to consider in the reportage of news writers on insurgent operations in Nigeria, specifically. As observed in the excerpts above, certain evaluative adjectives are put into use to further illustrate the persistent havoc caused by the non-state groups to the Nigeria states. Evaluative adjectives such as "several", "various degrees" and "serious" are deliberately put into use to explain the degrees of calamities caused by the non-state groups. Whereas, it could have been said as "they killed 17 people in the communities and left others with injuries" excerpt 5 put it in such a way as to intensify the degree of their operation by saying "they killed 17 people in the communities and left **several** other with **serious** injuries". Also, the indefinite adjective "several" to qualify the set of "injured" is a deliberate inadequacy to represent a high number of people affected. This also is a conscious attempt to emphasise the degree of negative operations of the insurgent groups.

In addition, adjectives such as "fresh" in excerpts 3 and 4, as well as "brazen new" in excerpt 2 are observed to have ideological presuppositions. These adjectives underscore the fact that the insurgent groups had been carrying out their nefarious operations especially in the areas where the "new" attack took place. It goes further to subtly state that the insurgent operations in these areas are occurring yet for another time, hence the adjectives "new", "fresh" and "brazen new". Finally, in this category, adjectives such as "sad" "evil" and "innocent" in excerpt 1 maintain ideological stand where these insurgent sects are regarded as evil while the Nigerians (the victims) are portrayed as innocents. The implication of this illustration implies that the adjectives in the news reportage are deliberate insertions which have ideological imports to foreground the opinions of the news writers.

Biased Naming and Nominals

Excerpt 6

Bandits Attack Worshippers, Kill One, Injure Others in Kaduna Church

According to Aruwan, “the governor added that the attack on the worshippers was a divisive intent of the **criminals** leveraging religious sensitivity.” “The governor condoled the ECWA Church and the family of the deceased in particular, and prayed for the repose of the soul of the worshipper.

(*This Day* September 27, 2021. P. 58)

Excerpt 7

Again, Fulani Herdsmen Attack Isuikwuato, Kidnap 10, Kill Woman

The travellers, according to sources, had on Thursday evening boarded a vehicle at a motor park opposite the main campus of Abia State University Uturu (ABSU) and were heading towards Akara Junction when they ran into the trap set by the **hoodlums**.

(*This Day* November 27, 2021. P. 8)

Excerpt 8

Gunmen Abduct, Ex-Assembly speaker, four others in Imo.

In what looks like renewed **onslaught** in Imo State, unknown **gunmen** yesterday kidnapped a former Speaker of the State house of Assembly, Lawman Duruji and four others.

(*The Punch*, March 30, 2021. P.7)

Excerpt 9

Herders kill in fresh Benue attack, lg chair laments

While the marauding herders invaded Waya around 11:00am on Thursday when the people were in their farm, the **killer herders** were said to have invaded Mbapa and Ikyanda in Gwer West Council as of 3:30pm on Friday. Members of the joint patrol of 93 Army Battalion and the police are currently combing the bushes in the area to trace the **attackers**.

(*The Punch*, March 8, 2021.P.7)

Excerpt 10

It was black Thursday as suspected herders renewed their **onslaught** two local government area of the state.

(*The Guardian*, April 15, 2021. P.16)

The naming representation of the sects gives an ideological opinion of the news writers. In the reportage, members of the insurgent groups are named "killers", "bandits", "gunmen", "attackers", "killer herders", "hoodlums", "criminals" and so on. This goes to clearly represent the various out-groups as enemies of the nation. On the other hand, the Nigerian military are referred to as "troops", "army" and "police", considering them as the "in-group" operatives. In the same vein, certain non-noun words have been nominalised in order to express the activities of these insurgent groups. These words include "attacker" from the verb "attack", "onslaught" "killers" from the word "kill" and so on. This further illustrates the perpetrators of the insurgent acts as the enemies of the people of Nigeria. The ideological motivation of this is that, through those carefully selected words, the news writers are able to influence the judgment of the readers and the readers, through the nominal portrayal of the insurgent group are able to see them as "out-group" members of the community.

Verbal Bias

Excerpt 11

Boko Haram **Attacks** Yunusari LG of Yobe State

Meanwhile, Boko Haram **intensified** their assault on the country by **attacking** Kanamma, headquarters of Yunusari Local Government of Yobe, State, barely a week after they **invaded** Geidam and displaced over 6,000 residents.

(*This Day*, May 1, 2021. P. 5)

Excerpt 12

Again, Fulani Herdsmen **Attack** Isuikwuato, Kidnap 10, Kill Woman

The travellers, according to sources, had on Thursday evening boarded a

vehicle at a motor park opposite the main campus of Abia State University Uturu (ABSU) and were heading towards Akara Junction when they ran into the trap set by the hoodlums.

(*This Day*, November 27, 2021 p.6)

Excerpt 13

48 Hours after Attacking Kaduna Airport, terrorists **Blow up** Abuja-Kaduna Train

In less than 48 hours after the Kaduna Airport was attacked, terrorists again attacked Abuja Train yesterday.

(*This Day*, March 29, 2022, P.)

Excerpt 14

Katsina Attack claims 17 lives

Seventeen people were **killed** in the other attack by bandits in Karfi ward in Alumfashi Local Government Area of Katsina State. Several others were **injured** when the bandits **opened** fire as soon as they **invaded** the area at about 11pm, Friday.

(*The Punch*, February 6, 2022. P. 4)

Excerpt 15

Bandits **raid** Kaduna community, abduct 22 residents

Twenty-two persons were reportedly **abducted** by bandits that **operated** at Idon Town in Ijuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

(*The Punch*, February 17, 2022. P. 8)

Excerpt 16

Hundreds of Kaduna residents **flee** as bandits **attacked**

Hundreds of residents **are fleeing** Damaru community in Birnin Gwari Local Government Council of Kaduna State, as bandits **moving on motorcycles invaded** the villages yesterday.

(*The Guardian*, January 17, 2022. P.5)

Through the verbal presuppositions, the readers are able to come to the realisation that the different militia groups in Nigeria are not peace-seeking groups of people. Activities of these people have been depicted through the insertion of such verbal meaning as "blow up" "attacked", "killed", "abducted", "raid", "operated", "terrorized", "injured", "invaded" and so on. This further foregrounds the negative actions of the insurgent groups. In the same manner, through the verbs, Nigerians are portrayed as victims of the insurgent activities as many Nigerians are "killed", "abducted", "displaced". Also, due to the various attack by bandits and Boko Haram, many Nigerians "are fleeing" from their various towns and villages in order to escape the attack of the "out-group". For this reason, the subtly inclusion of the verbs is to ideologically portray the insurgent groups as threatening and dangerous.

Adverbial Bias

Excerpt 17

Again, Herdsmen Kill 5 in Benue State as Ortom Chides Presidency
Five people were **yesterday** killed by suspected Fulani militia herdsmen in four different villages in Gwer-West Local Government Area of Benue State in the early morning attack.

(*This Day*, May 1, 2021. P. 10)

Excerpt 18

16 security agents killed as bandit's attack Kebbi deputy governor's convoy
Fifteen soldiers, one policeman and one unspecified number of civilians were said to have lost their lives **when bandits attacked the convoy of Kebbi State Deputy Governor**, Colonel Samaila Yonbe (retd).

(*The Guardian*, March 30, 2021. P.7)

Excerpt 19

Niger government restricts movement in troubled council areas
In Niger Delta **where bandits have continued to terrorise** the people, the government slammed curfew on two local government areas as part of the effort to check banditry and protect the citizen.

(*The Punch*, March 30, 2021. P.7)

Excerpt 20

Gunmen abduct ex-assembly speaker, four others in IMO

The Guardian learnt that, suspected members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) infiltrated the boundary of the communities and started shooting **sporadically**, causing panic in the area.

(*The Guardian*, January 11, 2022. P.7).

Excerpt 21

Again, dare-devil robbers attack bullion van, kill two in info

Gunmen suspected to be armed robbers have **again**, for the third time within six weeks, attacked a bullion van in Ondo and reportedly shot two people on the spot.

(*The Punch*, August 26, 2021. P. 6)

The use of certain adverbs, adverbial phrases has also been noted for their ideological significance. Adverbs of time such as "yesterday", adverbs of manner, "sporadically" and adverb of frequency such as "again" are indicatives of the nature of insurgent operations carried out by the insurgent groups. To indicate the time of their action, the use of "yesterday" is a deliberate attempt to make the readers realise that the action being reported is a recent action. "Sporadically" which explains an action that is rare and scattered in occurrence? To report the act of shooting by the insurgent groups as sporadic goes a long way to create a mental picture of irregular shootings in the mind of the readers. Excerpt 21 uses the word "again" to express the frequency of the insurgent operation, specifically in Ondo State. This is to further make the readers realize that the state has been under attack by the gunmen.

Going further to the clausal adverbial analysis, the adverbial clause of place, "where bandits have continued to terrorize the people" in excerpt 19 also portrays an ideological implication. The clause headed by "where" points to Niger Delta as a place that has been under continued attack of the bandits. This is beyond a linguistic coincidence. The ideology uncovered here is that which draws the attention of the recipients to the fact that the Niger Delta has suffered

series of attacks in the hands of the bandits. Although, excerpt 18 does not explicitly posit that the bandits killed fifteen soldiers, one policeman and one civilian, however, the adverbial clause "when bandits attacked the convoy of Kebbi State Deputy Governor, Colonel Samaila Yonbe (red)" tries to indirectly link the death recorded to the attack by the bandits. This further exposes us to the fact that, through the use of adverbs and adverbial, news writers tries to subtle express their biased opinions.

Lexical and Collocation Pattern in selected reports on insecurity

Excerpt 22

Amid Unending Killings, Buhari Mulls Fresh Strategy at Security Meeting Amid **deteriorating** security across the country, caused by **Boko Haram**, **bandits** and other **terrorists**, President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday convened a meeting of the National Security Council at the State House, Abuja, to fashion out new strategies to stem the unending killings. Boko Haram also **re-entered** Adamawa State nine days ago with an incursion into Kwapre, a village in Hong Local Government Area of the state.

(*This Day* May 1, 2021. P.5)

Excerpt 23

Buhari Mourns **Victims of Insecurity**, Condemns Nationwide **Bloodletting**

The president, in a statement by his spokesman, Mallam Garba Shehu, condoled with the relatives of those who lost their lives in what he called **madness** going on nationwide.

(*This Day*, May 10, 2021. P. 11)

Excerpt 24

Bandits Slaughter 34, Burn Down 20 Houses in Kaduna

In a brazen new onslaught, bandits on Sunday slaughtered 34 people, including a family of 13, following attacks on Madamai and Abun communities in Kaura Local Government Area of Kaduna State. Eight persons sustained various degrees of injury, while the terrorists burnt down about 20 houses.

(*This Day* September 28, 2021. P. 11)

Lexicalisation as an integral part of CDA is also considered a pertinent tool applied to perfectly understand whether a news story is biased or not. This linguistic tool in this study is considered useful in order to uncover bias instances in the reportage of insurgent operations in newspapers under study. The lexical items and collocation in the headlines and lead paragraphs above are considered to have ideological understanding in their reportage. These words have been subtly supplied to negatively represent the various insurgent groups (out-groups) and their negative activities among the Nigerian people (in group). Furthermore, the inclusion of these words and phrasal expressions is a way to negatively present these sets of people before the audience as trouble-making sets of people, causing threats and insecurity to the Nigeria state. Through an elaborate way of lexical choices such as "fighters", "bandits", "terrorists" and so on, the Boko Haram and other similar groups are misrepresented. They are considered as chaos-loving people who bring about "killing", "bloodletting", "attacks" and displacement of people in their towns and villages. In fact, excerpt 23 particularly describes their actions as "madness". *Mariam Webster dictionary* describes the word madness as a state of being insane or the quality of being mad. This goes further to represent these sects not only as people who constantly cause insecurity but beings who are not in their right senses.

The reportage goes further to illustrate, through lexical choices and phrases the negative implication of their actions with expressions such as "leaving behind blood, tears, pains", "killing an officer and scores of soldiers, as they "spread their tentacles to other parts of the North-east and beyond, with ease". Ideologically, the marked phrase "with ease" subtly expresses how powerful and intimidating these groups of people are. It goes further to suggest that the groups are superior to the Nigerian security agencies while representing the Nigerian military as inferior because the violent sects move and operate without any strong challenge from the Nigerian security agencies. The ideological consequences of the lexical and collocated choices are attempts to make the readers see the various insurgent

groups (out-groups) as threat, potentially dangerous, insane, inhuman, defiant and superior, while the Nigerians are seen as the victims as well as those who are inferior.

Passivisation and Activation

Excerpt 25

11 Killed, 30 Houses Burnt in Fresh Plateau Terror Attacks

No fewer than 11 persons, including children, were killed yesterday and 30 houses burnt when terrorists attacked Te'egbe community in Bassa Local Government Area of Plateau State.

(*This Day* September 27, 2021. P. 5)

Excerpt 26

Four Police Operatives Killed as Gunmen Attack Station in Anambra

Gunmen have attacked a police station in Atani, the headquarters of Ogbaru Local Government Area in Anambra State. A source told *The Punch* that the gunmen arrived yesterday at about 1:30am and immediately launched an attack on the police facility.

(*The Punch*, September 27, 2021. P. 18)

Excerpt 27

16 security agents killed as bandit's attack Kebbi deputy governor's convoy

Fifteen soldiers, one policeman and one unspecified number of civilians were said to have lost their lives when bandits attacked the convoy of Kebbi State Deputy Governor, Colonel Samaila Yonbe (retd).

(*The Guardian*, March 30, 2021. P.7)

Passivisation and Activation are nuances that are considered useful in uncovering bias in news reportage. Passivisation as a technique is used to foreground the actions of the actor while the actor is back grounded or deleted. The activation technique on the other hand fronts the actors in cases where less emphasis is placed on the action. To illustrate this, excerpt 25 and excerpt 26 deleted the

actors and fronted the action. This is considered to have ideological implication for two reasons. First, to show that the action is more important than the actor. This is done to intensify other reports on the same subject matter i.e. killing. The second ideological reason might be the assumption that the actors in the sentences are known already. This is a subtle way of attributing killing to a known agent which in this case are bandits. The other is uncovered ideological import in the excerpt above is activation which can be noticed in excerpt 25. Activation allows the fronting or foregrounding of the actor by following the grammatical order of the sentence. Unlike the ideological import of passivisation, activation foregrounds the actor. This is to draw the attention of the readers to the perpetrators of the evil acts. Activation in the excerpts above foregrounds the Boko Haram sects as killer, as well as agent of threat in the society.

Topicalisation

Excerpt 28

In 3 months, bandits kill 323 in Kaduna State; Boko Haram attacks Yunusari LG of Yobe State

Amid deteriorating security across the country, caused by Boko Haram, bandits and other terrorists, President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday convened a meeting of the National Security Council at the State House, Abuja, to fashion out new strategies to stem the unending killings.

(This Day, May 1, 2021. P. 5)

Excerpt 29

400 killed in April, says report

Troops of the 3rd Brigade of the Nigerian Army in Kano have raided Filin Lazio in Hotoro quarters of Nassarawa Local Government Area of Kano State and arrested 13 suspected members of Boko Haram. The arrest came just as the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Financial Derivatives Company Limited, Mr Bismarck Rewane, has estimated that 400 Nigerians were killed in April by suspected Boko Haram insurgents, bandits, herdsmen and other non-state actors.

(This Day, May 10, 2021. P. 11).

Excerpt 30

Bandits **raid** Kaduna community, abduct 22 residents
 Twenty-two persons were reportedly **abducted** by bandits that **operated** at
 Idon Town in Ijuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

(*The Punch*, February 17, 2022. P. 8)

Apart from headlines, topics are another way of examining bias in news reportage. The topics are written very close to the headlines to emphasise the views of the of the news writers and to bring to the realisation of the audience the themes of the news. Through the insertion of certain words, we come to see clearly the emphasis placed on the militia groups terrorising the Nigeria state. For instance, in excerpt 28, we get to see the blending of the acts of both bandits and Boko Haram summarising their negative activities in three months. The topic here did not just report, rather it foregrounds and portray both the bandits and the Boko Haram sects as similar groups who kill and attack the citizens of Nigeria. The bringing together of these two groups also portrays that they are two different groups with similar operations such as killing and attacking, therefore making the readers see both groups as out-groups. The same ideology is represented in excerpt 29 where the report claimed that "...400 Nigerians were killed in April by suspected Boko Haram insurgents, bandits, herdsmen and other non-state actors". This is to further state that Boko Haram, bandits and herdsmen are classified as non-state actors as they continue to kill and intimidate many Nigerians. This further emphasizes the "Us" vs "Them" dichotomy where these out-groups are regarded as "Them" and their evil deeds condemned and the Nigerians are seen as "Us" by emphasizing their innocence.

Findings

From the analysis, it can be seen that news writer's reports on insurgent activities in Nigeria rely on such bias strategies as nominal bias, adjectival bias, verbal bias, biased naming and nominals as well as adverbial bias. These bias strategies are used through lexicalisation

to express partiality towards the insurgent groups while also appealing to the reader's minds and perspective to see these non-state groups as portrayed. The study uncovered through the examination of these strategies the various degrees of violence, hardship, killing, emotional outrage, displacement which the insurgent groups have caused the Nigerian citizens. Through this framing also, the citizens are portrayed as powerless and helpless in the hands of these groups while the security agencies are said to constantly lose the battles against these groups. The presupposition behind these strategies is to trigger emotions both on the part of the reporters and the readers whose reactions are those of sympathy and the quest for a sane, better and safer society.

Conclusion

Language which is an integral part of news production has in this study, been given a critical analysis in relation to reports on insurgency in Nigeria newspaper outfits. Contrary to the objectivity claim of the news writers, this study has revealed that news reports are embedded with certain linguistic ideologies which are used to covertly express the opinions of the news writers and not the natural occurrence of event. From this case, it could be seen that the mass media has a role in constructing the readers' point of view and contributing to control other's minds. It can be understood that the media have their own views and ideologies in making insurgent reports and for this reason, the concept of objectivity and neutrality often claimed by news reporters is not to be reckoned with. An important contribution of this research work is to make scholars aware that through the strategic use of language, humans have the ability to shape discourse in order to achieve certain effects among language users.

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