

Research paper

An Analysis of the Meta-functions of Language of Selected Nigerian Newspaper Headlines

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This study investigates the role and importance of the meta-functions of language in the constructions and the understanding of the content and context of newspaper headlines in selected Nigerian National Dailies. Five (5) National Dailies were selected, namely; The Vanguard, The Guardian, The Sun, This Day, and Leadership newspapers. Two (2) newspaper headlines each were purposively selected from the five National Dailies for analysis. The study is a corpus based study and descriptive analysis was adopted for the study. It was discovered that most of the components of the meta-functions of language such as the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual served as a guide for the construction of newspaper headlines in the Nigerian national dailies. It can be concluded that most of these dailies do not use conjunctions and references in most of their headlines. The study serves a guide to all who read newspapers to help understand the technicalities and modalities media practioners implore in the construction of newspaper headlines.

Key words: Meta-functions, Ideational, Interpersonal, Textual, Theme, Rheme

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INTRODUCTION

Three meta-functions of language are identified by M. A. K. Halliday in Systemic Functional Linguistics that is the ideational function, the interpersonal function and the textual function. Each of the three meta-functions is about a different aspect of the world. The ideational meta-function is about the natural world in the broadest sense, including our own consciousness. The interpersonal meta-function is about the social world, especially the relationship between speaker and hearer. The textual meta-function is about the verbal world, especially the flow of information in a text. In addition, the ideational function is the 'content function of language' (Halliday 2007: p. 183). It is realized intransitivity and serves to represent situations and events in the world and the entities, actions and processes involved. It is in the

ideational function that the text-producer embodies in language their experience of the phenomena of the real world (Halliday 2007). The interpersonal function is the 'participatory function of language' (Halliday 2007: p. 184). It allows for the expression of attitudes and evaluations and is realised by mood and modality. It also allows the expression of a relation set up between the text-producer and the text-consumer. The textual function of language is an enabling one. It is in the textual function that ideational and interpersonal meanings are actualized (Halliday 2007: 184).

The textual function is realised in information structure and cohesion. A key concept in Halliday's approach is the "context of situation" which obtains "through a systematic relationship between the social environment on the one

hand, and the functional organization of language on the other" (Halliday, 1985: p.11). Halliday (1994) pointed out that, in order to make sense of a text, "the natural tendency is to think of a text as a thing—a product" while "seeing the text in its aspect as a process". Kress (1985: p.18) lucidly summed up the nature of text of the systemic genre theorist as texts arising in specific social situations and they are constructed with specific purposes by one or more speakers or writers. Meanings find their expression in text—though their origins of meanings are outside the text—and are negotiated (about) in texts, in concrete situations of social exchange. Whereas interaction between text and context is seen in the form of the nexus between language and society (Leckie-Tarry, 1993: pp. 33-34), social contexts comprise two different levels of abstraction, that is genre and register, which are respectively described in terms of context of culture and context of situation (Eggins, 1994: p.32), and which "are the technical concepts employed to explain the meaning and function of variation between texts" (Eggins & Martin, 1997: p. 234).

Meta-Function of language is an integral part of Discourse Analysis. Discourse analysis is restricted to the search for units of language that demonstrates a relationship that occur in predictable patterns and have rules that govern the occurrences of these elements (Royce, 1998). Media discourse has two main interconnected objectives, which are to inform and to influence readers and viewers. It is worthwhile to mention that the study of values in media should not be limited only to what is printed by the print media but attention should also be paid to other linguistic features for proper understanding of news items by the public whose perceptions are expected to be shaped. The importance of the media in the modern world is incontrovertible. The media is seen as the primary source of understanding of the world. Since discourse plays vital role in constituting people's realities, the implications for the power and influence of media discourse are to an extent unclear to lots of people. Everyday engagement with the media is hugely significant and a theoretical understanding of this engagement is crucial.

This study therefore seeks to analyze selected newspaper headlines based on text linguistics parameters to enable readers have a better understanding of the context and content of the news in newspapers. Thus the analysis is based on the meta-functions of language, cohesion and coherence

Newspaper Headlines

Headlines are often first thing the readers come across in newspapers. It is generally agreed that the headlines possess one of the striking features of modern day newspapers, and that journalistic language, in particular,

headlines, has its own characteristics that can clearly be distinguished from the ordinary or everyday language. The newspaper headline is a unique type of text. It has a range of functions that specifically dictate its shape, content and structure; and it operates within a range of restrictions that limits the freedom of the writer. All newspapers use the largest headline on their front page to present the biggest news of the day. A headline is sometimes followed by a smaller or secondary headline called "subhead" or "deckhead" which gives more information. According to Reah (2002), the headline carries key information and attracts the attention of the readers. It delivers some details on what happened, who was involved, where it happened, and other facts. This can be simplified into these Wh-words: what, who, where, when and how.

Meta-Functions of Language

Language Metafunctions: Halliday (1994) describes three types of meanings, or language meta functions: textual meanings, ideational meanings, and interpersonal meanings. These meanings correspond to the register variables mode, field, and tenor, and lie behind the various functional approaches to language (Eggins 1994; Halliday & Hasan 1989). These three kinds of meaning - textual (clause as a message), ideational (clause as a representation), and interpersonal (clause as an exchange) - are integrated in the structure of a clause; the structure as a whole construes, or realizes, the meaning. Textual meanings organize "the language into coherent and meaningful spoken and written texts" (Droga & Humphrey 2002: 11). Textual meanings correspond to the register variable mode. The parts of the grammar realizing textual meanings are thematic structures and nominalizations. Another important part of the textual meta-function is cohesion analysis. Cohesion analysis refers to the analysis of cohesive ties that is pairs of cohesively related items, within a text. A tie includes the cohesive element and what presupposes it (Halliday & Hasan 1976). Ideational meanings express what is going on and participants and circumstances surrounding events (Droga & Humphrey 2002). Ideational meanings correspond to the register variable field. The part of the grammar that realizes ideational meanings is the transitivity system (participants, processes, and circumstances). Interpersonal meanings express ways of instituting relationships with others. Interpersonal meanings correspond to the register variable tenor. The parts of the grammar that realize interpersonal meanings are the mood structures, modality, and appraisal system. Mood alternatives in English are declarative, interrogative, and imperative. Modality facilitates the representation of probability, necessity, usuality, inclination, and certainty.

Halliday's SFL is emphasizing on semiotics, the code of language and how the utterances and texts specify all the meaning potentials, studies the functional and situational organization of language in the social context (Halliday, 1985: p.11). It is concerned with how the speakers generate utterances and texts to convey their intended meanings through the "generalized metafunctions that relate language to the outside world where interlocutors and their social roles matter. According to SFL, language: metafunctions ideational, interpersonal, and textual reflected in a huge system network of meaning potentials including sub networks of Transitivity, Thing, and Quality with specific set of semantic features for an utterance production. The ideational function expressing the experiential and the logical content of the text explains our experience of the outer world in the environment; the textual function is language-oriented and deals with cohesive and coherent text production by organizing and structuring the linguistic information in the clause; and interpersonal function deals with the social and power relations among language users. It relates participant's situational roles to the discourse produced. (Halliday, 1981)

Ideational meta-function provides grammatical resources at clause rank to construe the inner and outer experience or 'goings-on' of the word, as the domain of functions and meanings of the world through the systems of transitivity. It has two components of logical and experiential functions.

In traditional grammar, transitivity was developed as the concept of transitive or intransitive verb (Halliday, 1976: p.159) whether the verb takes an object or not, but in SFL it functions to link grammar to the meta functions; however, in Halliday's terms, transitivity as a major component in experiential function of the clause deals with the "transmission of ideas "representing 'processes' or 'experiences': actions, events, processes of consciousness and relations" (1985: p.53) It is a semantic system to analyze representations of reality in a linguistic text and create the same experience through various lexico-grammatical options influenced by different mind styles or authorial ideology. (Fowler, 1986: p.138) It manifests how certain choices encode the author's certain ideological stance affected by social and cultural institution because according to Fowler these linguistic codes cannot reflect reality neutrally and definitely embody ideologies. It also functions as a rich analytic tool utilized in critical discourse analysis, dealing with "who or what does what to whom or what?" where actor, action and goal as affected are highlighted. Transitivity with inter-related options to represent different types of process or experience investigated from above, below, and around consists of process, participant with different labels such as Actor, Goal; Senser, Phenomenon; Carrier, Attribute; and circumstance including Cause, Location, Manner, Means and

Instrument. Process refers to a semantic verb (doing, happening, feeling, sensing, saying, behaving, and existing) and anything that it expresses like event, relation, physical, mental or emotional state when sorted in the semantic system of the clause is classified into material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes. (Halliday, 1976:159) These Linguistic "processes" as the products of our perception of the world are socially and culturally constructed with participants, any animate or inanimate noun phrase in circumstances expressed by adverbial and prepositional phrases. (Halliday, 1985: pp.101-102)

The textual meta-function of language is classified into intentional or spontaneous performance of an animate or inanimate, material processes, externalized and concrete embody an action verb of doing or happening, a doer is labeled as Actor and optional Goal, affected by the process and circumstance that provides details of the verb in terms of place, time, manner, condition, etc. The processes performed by an animate or inanimate Actor are respectively called Action and Event processes. Action process can be classified into Intention and supervening processes if respectively performed intentionally or unintentionally. Material processes can be viewed: 'from above', it construes action, activities, and events. 'From below', it refers to directedness and benefaction; it consists of Process + Actor + Goal (+Recipient). 'From around', it accompanies the system of projection to report a speech or thought. Interpersonal meaning is expressed by mood structures. This meaning is influenced by the tenor of discourse. Ideational meaning is influenced by the field of discourse and realized through wording by Transitivity system. Textual meaning or clause as message. Theme structures express the organization of the message. It learns how the clause relates to the surrounding discourse, and to the context of situation (Halliday & Mattiessen, 1994:309). Textual meaning is influenced by mode of discourse.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design is employed in this study. It is considered appropriate and suitable for this study because the study is corpus based. According to Jen (2004), the descriptive design deals specifically with the documentation of details of events in their natural settings without the manipulation of variables. The descriptive design makes inquiry; it goes into details to discover important features, undertakes holistic perspective to understand complex system of text, captures respective features and experiences and places findings in context

The Corpus

The corpus for this study was selected using the purposive random sampling method. The corpus consists of ten (10) news items, two from each of the designated National Dailies, covering a period of three months. The study adopted three criteria for the collection of data. They include; availability, authenticity, and sufficiency. Availability refers to how easily available and accessible the newspaper headlines are to the researcher. Availability is the ease by which texts are sourced for analysis. The newspaper headlines for analysis in this study are readily available in the selected National Dailies. While authenticity is a factor that enables the researcher select authentic news headlines. The newspaper headlines selected are authentic because the

corpus was collected from the newspapers. Then sufficiency of linguistic data in the newspaper headlines is the ability of the news headlines selected for the study to have sufficient linguistic data for the research. There are sufficient linguistic data in corpus collected

The data in this study is analyzed using the descriptive analysis of observed phenomenon. The analysis is Van Dijk (1991). Van Dijk (1991) viewed text most especially news report from the angle of the microstructure of the news report. The microstructure deals with the semantic relations between proposition and coherence, causality relations, consequence and implication. Microanalysis also identifies syntactic and lexical characteristics of news headlines. (Table 1)

Data Presentation and Analysis

The Corpus

Table 1: The Corpus

| S/N | Date | Name of Newspaper | Text | Extracted Newspaper Headlines |
|-----|-----------------------------|-------------------|------|---|
| 1 | 20th June, 2018 | Vanguard | A | Osinbajo Says Fayemi is God's Man for the job |
| | | Vanguard | B | ISIS, Secret Entry; Nigeria'll contend threats to Peace-FG |
| 2 | 20 th June, 2018 | Guardian | C | CAN Warns Government Execution of Christians |
| | | Guarding | D | NFF Pleads Continuous Support as Eagles Leave for Volgorad Tomorrow |
| 3 | 20 th June, 2018 | The Sun | E | School Principal Flees After Rapping Male Student |
| | | The Sun | F | Court Halts Trial of Peace Corps Boss, Akoh |
| 4 | 20 th June, 2018 | This Day | G | APC Governors, NWC on Collision Course Over Convention Unity List |
| | | This Day | H | Get your PVC, Vote out PDP, Osinbajo Tells Ekiti Voters |
| 5 | 24 th Oct., 2018 | Leadership | I | Card Readers Gets Legal Backing as Senate Okays Electoral bill |
| | | Leadership | J | Army Launches Crocodile Smile III in Niger Delta |

Data analysis

The first data extracts will be analyzed based on the interpersonal meta-function of language which focuses

on statement mood which is the declarative mood, command mood and or interrogative mood. The second data extracts will be analyzed based on the ideational meta-function of language and the last four will be

Table 2: Text A, B, and C

| Texts | Newspaper headlines |
|--------|--|
| Text A | Osinbajo Says Fayemi is God's Man for The Job |
| Text B | ISIS, Secret Entry; Nigeria'll Contend Threats to Peace-FG |
| Text C | CAN Warns Government Execution of Christians |

Table 3: Texts D, E, and F

| Texts | Newspaper headlines |
|--------|---|
| Text D | NFF Pleads for Continuous Support as Eagles Leave for Volgograd |
| Text E | Tomorrow |
| Text F | School Principal Flees After Raping Male Student Court Halts Trial of Peace Corps Boss, Akoh |

Table 4: Texts G, H, I AND J

| Text | Newspaper headlines |
|--------|--|
| Text G | APC Governors, NWC on Collision Course Over Convention Unity |
| Text H | List |
| Text I | Get your PVC, vote out PDP, Osibanjo Tells Ekiti Voters |
| Text J | Card Readers Gets Legal Backing as Senate Okays Electoral Bill Army Launches Crocodile Smile III in Niger Delta |

analyzed using the textual meta-function of language.

In interpersonal metafunctions of language, it is obvious that language is used to interact. It shows the relationship between the person speaking and the people listening. The sentences used in a communicative event in the interpersonal meta-function of language can be any of the following; statement mood which is the declarative mood, command mood and or interrogative mood. From the table 2, *the Vanguard* and *the Guardian* newspapers use the declaratives sentences in the three headlines extracted. The relationship between the speaker and the listener in text A is official. This is because the speaker 'Osibanjo' is Nigeria's vice president. In the same light, texts B and C are also in the declarative sentences. Turn taking as a communicative effect is not reflected in the texts A, B and C. The interpersonal meta-function of language plays an important role of the development of newspaper headlines in Nigeria.

The ideational meta-function of language focuses on grammatical resources for putting across our experiences of the world around us. It analyzes meta-function based on transitivity. It has the following processes; material, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential, relational and circumstantial processes. From the table 3, it can be

deduced that the ideational meta-function of language plays a vital role in the analysis of newspaper headlines in the Nigerian national dailies. Most of the processes in the ideational meta-function of language are inherent in texts D, E and F. The material process of the ideational meta-function focuses on actors, process, and the goal. The actors in the texts are; NFF, school principal and court. The processes are; pleads, flees and halts. While the goals are; continuous support for eagles, after rapping a male student and trial of Peace Corps boss, Akoh respectively. In the same light, the mental process focuses on phenomenon. In texts D, E and F the mental process can be found in text E 'rapping a male student' and text F 'trial'. The verbal process deals with sayer and the receiver. In texts D, E and F, the sayers are; NFF in text D, and court in text F. The receiver for all the texts is the general public. The behavioral process is encapsulated in the behavior. The behaviors in the three texts are, NFF, the principal and the court. The behavioral process is also depicted in 'school principal fleeing, rapping, halting and pleading. (Table 4)

The textual meta-function of language deals with the thematic structure of a communicative event and focuses on theme and rheme. It also analyzes discourse base on field of discourse, mode of discourse and tenor of

Table 5: textual meta-function on theme and rheme

| Theme | Rheme |
|------------------------|---|
| Card readers | Gets legal backing as senate okays electoral bill |
| Army | Lunches crocodile smile III in Delta state |
| APC governors, NWC | On collision over convention unity list |
| Get your PVC, Vote Out | Osinbajo tells Ekiti Voters |
| PDP | |

discourse. Theme helps give cohesion and coherence to a text. The cohesive ties include some of the following; conjunction, reference, ellipsis to mention a few. Theme and rheme play a vital role in textual analysis of newspaper headlines. Theme has the textual theme, interpersonal theme and the ideational theme and lastly, the topical theme. Rheme focuses on clauses in a given communicative event. From the above table 4 the use of theme and rheme played a predominant role in the construction of the extracted headlines. The table 5 gives an insight on theme and rheme.

In addition, there is the use of ellipsis in text H. Get your PVC, vote out PDP. The comma in between PVC and vote is ellipsis. The use of conjunctions and references are not cited in texts G, H, I and J.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Meta-functions of language are an integral part of Discourse Analysis. The study analyzed selected newspaper headlines with a focus on the meta-functions of language. Based on the study and analysis, it can be deduced that there is massive connection between the actors and the goals in a given communicative and such connection is the base for a comprehensive understanding of the items that make up newspaper headlines. The sentences used in the newspaper headlines as stipulated by the interpersonal meta-function of language are in the declarative and are simple in nature. In addition, transitivity as a component of the ideational meta-function of language which highlights on the several processes that include mental, material, verbal, behavioral and existential dwells its searchlight on the grammatical units that make up the newspaper headlines. Similarly, the processes of the ideational meta-function help the media practioners through the headlines put across the experiences of individuals to the world. The textual meta-function of language deals with theme and rheme. It depicts the cohesive of information in the newspaper headlines

Conclusively, the interpersonal, the ideational, and the textual meta-functions of language play important roles in

the development of newspaper headlines.

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