A Lexical Analysis Of Select News Reports In Three Nigerian Newspapers

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ABSTRACT
An investigation of language use in a given occupation can be done stylistically, or linguistically. The Lexico-Semantic level is one of the four levels of linguistic organization and analysis. The other levels are: phonology, syntax, and graphology. The lexico-semantic level refers to the level of word choice and meaning specification in utterances. Stylistics on its own means the study of literary and non literary discourse from a linguistics orientation. It offers useful insights into the explication of texts. This paper highlights stylistically, some of the lexical items found in journalese, in Nigerian newspapers and their usages. The newspapers studied include: The Guardian, The Pointer, and Vanguard published on February 26, 2017. Our choice of linguistic model is the Systemic Functional Grammar of M. A. K. Halliday. It is a grammar of texts which views language as a social phenomenon. The paper concludes that journalese demands simplicity of language to make it accessible to all readers and recommends among others that more English courses should be introduced into the curriculum of mass communication and journalism departments; journalists should avoid undue sensationalism, as well as the use of ambiguous and contentious words that cause confusion and disunity in the body polity.

Keywords: Lexis, language, News Report, Nigerian Newspapers, Lexico-Semantic level

INTRODUCTION
That Nigerian English exists is an established fact. Journalese in Nigeria is its sub-sect. An investigation of language use in a given occupation can be done linguistically or stylistically. In this paper, we have chosen Stylistics, and three Nigerian newspapers as text corpora for analysis. This paper, therefore, defines stylistics, lexis and semantics (lexico-semantics) and text and proceeds to introduce the three newspapers chosen as text corpora before proceeding to do a lexico-semantic analysis of the newspapers, from which it draws conclusion and makes recommendations.

Stylistics is a branch of linguistics that studies varieties of language whose properties position that language in context, and tries to establish principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language. (Wikipedia, 2009).

H. G. Widdowson in “stylistics” (1974) posits that, “stylistics means the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation. In an attempt to distinguish among stylistics, literary criticism and linguistics Widdowson goes further to state that:

…what distinguishes stylistics from literary criticism on the one hand and linguistics on the other is that it is essentially a means of linking the two and has (as yet at least) no autonomous domain of its own… stylistics
however, involves both literary criticism and linguistics as its morphological make up suggests. The style component relating it to the former while the istics to the later.

From the above, it can be said that stylistics occupies the high ground between literature and linguistics. It offers linguists the opportunity to discuss literature. It is a relational term that marries literature and linguistics in textual realization. By this is meant that the study of stylistics, literary criticism and linguistic criticism is text based. In other words, without a text there will be nothing to criticize or analyze literarily, linguistically or stylistically.

A text has been rightly described as a linguistic event. It is a contextual, coherent and cohesive reality in concrete graphological term, or an abstract phonological realization which can also be captured and reproduced on tape, disc or other input and output devices. It can span a minute or decades. This is probably, what Halliday and Hasan (1983) have in mind when they describe a text as:

… product and the text as process and to keep both these aspects in focus.
The text is product in the sense that it is an output, something that can be represented in systematic terms. It is a process in the sense of a continuous process of semantic choice, a movement through the network of meaning potential, with each set of choices constituting the environment for another set. (56)

The above is a further explanation of their earlier postulation that text is best regarded as a semantic unit: a unit not of form but of meaning. Thus, it is related to a clause or a sentence not by size but by realization, the coding of one symbolic system into another. A text does not consist of sentences; it is realized by or encoded in sentences.

At this point it would be necessary to define semantics, lexis and lexico-semantic. By semantics we mean the study of meaning. Saeed 2003:2 defines semantics as, “the study of the meanings of words and sentences”. The level of semantics in linguistic studies is the level of meaning specification. It is the level at which we can say that “man” means “an adult male”.

Lexis on the other hand means the total number of words that make up a language. In other words, it refers to the corpus or repertoire of meaningful sounds and signs available in a given language. According to Matthews (2007:226) lexis is the vocabulary of a language and the study of vocabulary. Hornby (2010:854) sees it as all the words and phrases that make up a language. Taken together, lexico-semantic analysis seeks to explain the relationship between words and what they stand for. In other words, it pinpoints the reasons for the choices of certain words and the meaning they convey in relation to the texts.

Our texts for this analysis are: The Guardian, The Pointer, and Vanguard. All are newspapers published in Nigeria. The selected stories are those published on April 26, 2017.

The Guardian newspaper was founded by Alex Ibru in 1982. It has as its motto “Conscience Nurtured by Truth”. At inception it was published weekly, but gradually metamorphosed into a daily newspaper. Today, The Guardian has on its stable, The Guardian on Sunday, Saturday Guardian, etc. It is a member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC). It is Nigeria’s most respected and most widely read newspaper because of its objectivity, balance fairness and wide coverage. The Guardian has won series of awards. Recently, it emerged the print media with the best news website at the 2017 Nigerian Internet Registration.ng Media Award.

The Pointer Newspaper is owned by the Delta State Government. It was established in 1992 following the creation of Edo and Delta States from the Old Bendel State. It covers national and international events as well as local (Delta State) events. Its focus is the practice of developmental journalism.

The Vanguard newspaper is published by the Vanguard Media Ltd, a Nigerian owned company established in 1983 by Mr. Sam Pemu (a renowned veteran journalist) with three friends to carry on the business as proprietors, printers and publishers of newspapers, journals, magazines, books and literary works and undertakings. The company commenced operation in 1984 and flagged off its first newspaper, a two page weekly – Sunday Vanguard, on June 9th, 1984. It went daily on October 1st 1984. Today, the company has in its stable, Weekend Vanguard, Sunday Vanguard, Daily Vanguard and Vanguard Yellow Pages.
Why Study Words?
Words (Lexis), the staple of the craft of written communication must be kept crisp as fresh naira notes; otherwise, the intended message becomes squeezed and a communication breakdown, at the best, results. In order to prevent or avoid communication breakdowns, therefore, we study words. Little (1980:15) lends credence to this point when he says “sound syntax is therefore “an important aim of the conscientious communicator and he will also wish to avoid handling his WORDS in such a way that offend against educated usage (emphasis mine).

This is not all, earlier Oluikpe (1977:37) in Balogun, Ikupa and Onyechere (2006) had succinctly summarized the ennobling reasons for studying words when he said that in the study of words, the terminal objective should not be so much on the expansion of vocabulary as it should be on the following:

i.) To become aware of lexical appropriateness.
ii.) To develop the ability of expressing ourselves precisely, correctly, and vigorously in the formal situations.
iii.) To write idiomatically.
iv.) To develop the ability of communicating our native sensibilities intelligently to native speakers of the language.
v.) To become aware of areas of meaning.
   Let me quickly add also that we study words:
vi.) In order to make language idiosyncratic or subject specific.
vii.) To avoid meaningless communication and communication breakdown.

Lexical Analysis
Here, our concern will be to isolate lexical items (words) that are fore-grounded in journalese and account for their usage and abusage (if any). In this regard, we have lexis, lexical collocation, collocational clash, lexical borrowing, lexical innovations, lexical conversions, acronyms and abbreviations.

Lexis
As stated earlier, lexis refers to the total number of words that exist in a given language. In the texts under survey the journalists made use of a good number of words which fall into the closed and open class system. The open class items are also referred to as content words or major word class. They are nouns, main verbs, adverbs and adjectives. This group is called the open class items because it is open to additions. The list is not exhaustive. New words can be admitted in at all times. Examples of words belonging to this class in the articles are as follows:

i. Court grants ‘iron bail’ to IPOB leader, Kanu
   - To produce Jewish leader, 2 others as sureties; each to deposit N100m
   - Kanu fails to meet bail conditions, returns to Kuje prisons
   - Fayose, Fani-Fayode (sic) defy DSS to enter courtroom
   Vanguard, April 26, 2017, p.1
ii. Parents, Ohaneze, Afenifere reject bail conditions for Kanu
   - urge unconditional release of agitators
   - Fayose, Ex-Minster in Court to solidarise
   The Guardian, April 26, 2017, p.1
iii. IPOB Leader, Kanu Gets N300m Bail
   - Igbo Group Hails Judiciary, Urges FG To Obey Court Order
   The Pointer, April 26, 2017, p.1

The closed system items also known as grammatical words on the other hand are the prepositions, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, pronouns and articles or determiners. Examples of these abound in the texts. See the following examples.

i. The parents of detained leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Eze Israel and Lolo Ugoeze Sally Kanu have rejected the bail terms given their son by the Federal High Court, Abuja. They described the hurdles as needless.
ii. ABUJA – EMBATTLED Leader of the indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, Mr. Nnamdi Kanu who has been in detention since October 14, 2015, yesterday, secured bail from the Federal High Court in Abuja. 
Vanguard, April 26, 2017, p.5

iii. The Federal High Court in Abuja has granted bail to the leader of the Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB). Nnamdi Kanu, who is facing charges bordering on treasonable felony. (The Pointer, April 26, 2017, p.1)

**Lexical Borrowing**

This has to do with code–switching and mixing. In other words, the use of words from other languages such as French, Latin, and Local languages such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Urhobo, Ijaw, Edo etc within the code which is predominantly English amounts to lexical borrowing. A few examples of these can also be cited here. One example common in all the newspapers is the word *en route*. Others are *ex parte, prima facie*, while local words used include: *baba* and *Ise l’ogun Ise*. For example:

(i) The Judge held that none of the six charges established a *prima facie* criminal case against any of the defendants. 
Vanguard, April 26, 2017, 2.

(ii) The freezing order was sequel to a further and better affidavit in support of an *ex-parte* originating summons deposed to by Abdulahi Turkur, an investigating officer of EFCC. 
The Pointer, April 26, 2017, 3

(iii) The order of the court was sequel to a further and better affidavit in support of an *ex-parte* originating summons deposed to by Abdulahi Turkur, an investigating officer of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, (EFCC) and filed before the court by EFCC prosecutor, Rotimi Oyedepo. 
The Guardian, April 26, 2017, 4

**Lexical collocation**

By collocation we mean the tendency of words to go together. In other words, collocation means the likelihood of certain words to co-occur in certain context. For example, *weak* and *feeble* may mean the same thing but we can say *weak tea* but not *feeble tea*. This means that tea collocates with weak and not with feeble. Yule (1997) exemplify this thus:

If you ask a thousand people what they think when you say hammer, more than half will say nail. If you say table, they mostly say chair and for butter–bread, for needle – thread and for salt – pepper. (p.122)

In our texts for analyses examples of collocations abound. Some are as italicized below:

(i) According to the monarch, the bail conditions were like *giving something with one hand and taking it with the other hand*, saying that the IPOB leader must be *set free* without any condition attached. 
Vanguard, April 26, 2017, 2.

(ii) He was arrested by security operatives upon his arrival in Nigeria 
The Pointer, April 26, 2017, 3.

(iii) In the same vein, the apex Igbo socio-cultural organization, Ohaneze Ndigbo *expressed reservations over the development* saying it would *challenge the bail terms* (The Guardian, April 26, 2017, 6.)

**Lexical conversion**

This refers to the conversion from one class to the other as we have in a word like entrance, a noun achieved through the conversion (inflexion) of the verb enter by adding the suffix –*ance*. Examples of these are many in the texts. Below are a few:
(i) Granting bail to Nnamdi Kanu was long overdue…. The conditions given him to meet are very unkind. He should have been granted bail unconditionally.  
   *Vanguard.* April 26, 2017, 2.

(ii) The conditions are unconstitutional inhuman and gagging…. he has not committed any non-bailable offence.  

(iii) Meanwhile Kanu has returned to Kuje prisons pending perfection of his bail conditions.  
   *The Pointer,* April 26, 2017, 3

**Acronyms**

Other lexical items frequently used by journalists in our texts are acronyms. These are words formed by putting initial capital letters of certain words together to form a single word especially the names of organizations. For example: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Some are written without first giving the full words while others are written as above. This is done for clarity. However, the use of acronyms helps the journalist to economise space and time. This is because newspaper and magazine (print) stories occupy space while radio and television (electronic) stories occupy time. Some examples of acronyms in the texts are as follows:

- FG - Federal Government
- IPOB - Independent People of Biafra
- SAN - Senior Advocate of Nigeria
- EFCC - Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
- MASSOB - Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra
- ECA - Eastern Consultative Assembly
- CBN - Central Bank of Nigeria
- SFG - Secretary to the Government of the Federation
- DBIR - Delta State Board of Internal Revenue
- IGR - Internally Generated Revenue
- SON - Standard Organisation of Nigeria
- PDP - Peoples Democratic Party
- DSS - Department of State Services

**Abbreviations**

These are short forms of longer words usually used in informal communication. For example: phone for telephone; Prof for Professor, Doc for Doctor; gas for gasoline, etc. As a result of word and space economy the stories are replete with examples of abbreviations. See the following headlines for example.

(i) Senate to hold valedictory session, Reps adjourn plenary to honour Adeleke  
   *The Guardian.* April 26, 2017, 7

(ii) About two Years On: Gov Okowa Walking His Talk On Roads Construction  
   *The Pointer,* April 26, 2017, 1

From the above examples, gov is an abbreviation of the word governor; Reps abbreviation of Members of the House of Representatives while senate stands for House of Senate. Other examples in the newspapers studied include: guber for gubernatorial, varsities for universities, plane for airplane, govt. for government etc. As earlier stated, these abbreviations help the journalist to conserve space for his newspaper. As a rule, journalists are enjoined to prefer the use of shorter words to longer ones.

**Abbreviatory Devices in Headlines**

To achieve that sharp, direct and informal appeal required of newspaper headlines, editors employ some abbreviatory devices as noticed in the newspapers under survey. These include: the elimination of the verb “to be” and determiners.
Elimination of the verb to be

One way to achieve pungency and verbal economy in headline casting is to eliminate the verb “to be” either as a main verb or auxiliary. For example:

(i) FG, media chiefs divided over New Bill
(ii) Senate, reps in Budget Presentation face-off
(iii) Budget: Senate, House on collision course again.

The verb to be it should be noted is the only verb that has eight different forms in English. The variants are: am, is, was, are, were, being, been, and be. The singular forms are: am, is, was, while the plural are, were and are. The past forms are, were and was and the past participle been while the present participle (progressive) form is being.

A look at the above headlines will show that the be forms have been omitted. In normal English grammar the above headlines will be regarded as incomplete sentences. The incompleteness is a deliberate stylistic device to achieve an economical style by the omission of the be forms. With the be forms, the above headlines will appear as follows:

(i) FG, Media chiefs [are] divided over New Bill.
(ii) Senate, Rep [are] in budget presentation face-off
(iii) Budget: Senate, house [are] on collision course again.

It is obvious from the above that these new versions of the headlines with the missing elements in square bracket are less effective and quite un-journalistic. Thus, the omission of the verb to be is an established feature of journalese.

Elimination or Suppression of Determiners

This is another device used to achieve conciseness and effectiveness in headlines, Determiners are words such as the, a, an, some, these, this, that his, her, one, two that normally appear before nouns to pinpoint them. Examples of headlines where they are eliminated or suppressed are as follows:

(i) FG, Media chiefs divided over New Bill
(ii) Media Chiefs stress need for ombudsmen
(iii) 3 students killed in inter-varsity campus war
(iv) Mimiko unveils New Ondo logo
(v) Senate, Reps in Budget presentation face-off
(vi) Budget: Senate, House on collision course again.

It is an established fact that countable nouns in English must take determiners if they appear in their singular forms. For example, we know intuitively that the following expression is incomplete:

*Okoro lost book.

This can be corrected or normalized by adding ‘s’ to book to make it plural or by preceding book with a determiner. Examples:

(i) Okoro lost books
(ii) Okoro lost some books
(iii) Okoro lost a book
(iv) Okoro lost one book.

While the presence of a determiner before a singular countable noun is mandatory, it is not grammatically obligatory to precede a plural noun with a determiner (such as some) hence (i) and (ii) above are correct.

Now see new versions of the above headlines with the omitted determiners in square brackets.

(i) [The] FG, Media Chiefs Divided over [a] New Bill
(ii) Media Chiefs stress need for [an] Ombudsman
(iii) 3 Students killed in [an] inter-varsity war
(iv) Mimiko unveils [a] new Ondo logo
(v) Senate, Reps in [a] budget presentation face-off
(vi) Budget: Senate, House on [a] Collision course again

It appears that a journalistic rule enjoins editors to identify singular nouns and delete the determiners preceding them. Yet, no journalist will delete them in similar contexts as the headlines when writing a letter or even the body of the news story. That we do not notice any incompleteness when we read the headlines suggests that the style is contextualized.
However, there are instances when the determiners are deliberately included to achieve force or pungency in headline writing. In such situations, the editor or journalist chooses semantic and stylistic effectiveness over brevity.

**Use of Colloquial Expressions:** Certain words that would be regarded as colloquial, vague, old fashioned, trite or imprecise in discourses other than journalese are frequently employed by journalists with great effect. For example, the word *okay* abbreviated as *ok* which occurs frequently in informal speech is frequently used in journalese. In the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, it is graphically stated that about 1000 people per a million use the word *okay* in speech while only about 50 per a million use it in writing. In fact, the use of the word *okay* as a verb is almost restricted to journalism as (Dare 1997) had noted. See the following for example:

(i) Trial Justice Binta Nyanko granted Kanu bail on stringent conditions and refuse to *okay* the release of three other pro-Biafra agitators-


Some other lexical and structural forms peculiar to journalese as noticed in the stories under survey include:

- Impeccable sources
- *The Guardian/Vanguard Sources*
- The Guardian/Vanguards/The Pointer learnt
- It was learnt
- It was gathered
- When Vanguard/The Guardian/The Pointer visited
- Efforts to reach him proved abortive
- In a telephone chat/interview
- In an interview with
- Fielding questions from reporters/state house correspondents,
- …disclosed that
- This was disclosed
- The youths were protesting non implementation (for; the youths were protesting against non implementation)
- feared dead (a form of speculative reporting)
- allege/alleged (used as a safe guard against libel
- brief/briefing (verb)
- to arrive Lagos(in place of to arrive in Lagos)
- Petroleum Minister (for Minister of Petroleum)
- To arrive the country 10 am tomorrow (for to arrive the country at 10.00 am tomorrow.
- Get (for obtain, receive, kept, secure, appropriate, is awarded etc)
- Fuel hike (for fuel price hike)
- Hike in fuel (for increase in fuel price)

**CONCLUSION**

Indeed words are the skeletal frame, while all else constitute the flesh and ornamentation in the structure of language and communication. A problem in the frame is a problem for the entire structure; hence this paper has examined here the various types of words employed by journalists in their writings and why. The journalist’s choice of words is guided by his knack for simplicity, clarity, safety, space, and word economy. In fact, Dimgba Igwe and Mike Awoyinfa (1991:102) state that a good feature writer [journalist] has the ability to stoutly resist the urge to sound erudite and to strike the right balance in his choice of words that will appeal to the greatest number of his audience. In the newspapers studied, it was discovered that newspapers that are radical and pro-democracy such as Vanguard used words that could be considered harsh or high handed and also tailored the news in the direction that is masses friendly while The Guardian being a more objective newspaper selects words that can be described as neutral. The pointer which is owned by government and practices developmental journalism – which is journalism aimed at letting the people know what government is
doing for them lived up to its expectation by using words that are aimed at justifying government’s actions – as he who pays the piper dictates the tune.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Flowing from the above, it is hereby recommended as follows:

i. In reporting the news, journalists should avoid the use of ambiguous and contentious words that are capable of causing confusion and disunity in the body polity.
ii. The journalist must eschew undue exaggerations, sensationalism and yellow journalism in his choice of words.
iii. The unity and peace of Nigeria in particular, Africa and the world at large should be the overriding judgment in the selection of lexical items for use in news reports.
iv. A good journalist should consider whether a given word is contextually appropriate, precise, simple and concrete before using it.
v. Practicing journalists should be exposed to refresher courses in English language structure and stylistics.
vi. More English Language courses should be introduced into the curriculum of mass communication and journalism departments and schools in Nigeria.
vii. All the English language courses in the departments of mass communication and journalism of all the training schools should be taught by graduates of English employed for the purpose of teaching English and not Mass Communication graduates.

REFERENCES