
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analizing the Stylistic Effects of Material Processes in Nigerian Newspaper Headlines

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| ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to find out the pattern through which the material processes, which predominantly appear in the headlines of political news reports of the Daily Trust and The Guardian newspapers, operate. It is aimed at making a stylistic study of the choices of linguistic features (participants) with a view to examining their style and effects on the experiential meaning of the selected texts (headlines). The main objectives of the study were to find out whether the frequent choice of the identified process types has any effect on the experiential meaning of the language of headlines in Nigerian newspapers. This study involves fifty-five (55) plain headlines selected via content analysis by using non-random purposive technique. The analytical framework adopted was the Hallidayan transitivity model of systemic functional linguistic theory. Findings of the study established the pattern of the choice of material processes, which established the language of headlines in Nigerian newspapers as oriented towards "Action" in relation to their respective participants, which are functional linguistic features realised in the nominal groups and is expressive towards the roles of Nigerian politicians as political actors capable of drawing the attention of the people.

| KEYWORDS

Daily Trust, Guardian, Material processes, Newspaper Headlines, transitivity.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

This paper explored the choice of language in newspaper headlines from a stylistic point of view. The study centred on the choice of process types in newspaper headlines of political news reports in the two Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian*. It is aimed at making a stylistic study of how the choice of process types that are realised in the verbal groups provides a distinctive pattern and influences the overall meaning of the selected texts (headlines language) in relation to their respective participants, which are functional linguistic features realised in the nominal groups. The study explored the meaning potentials of the newspaper headlines through linguistic choices by applying the transitivity model of systemic functional linguistic (SFL) theory.

This theory regards language as part of the social semiotics which constitutes meaning potentials that have evolved to enable human beings exchange three fundamental types of meaning through linguistic choice: the ideational meaning, which involves the description of people, things, actions and events; the interpersonal meaning, which involves the expression of social roles and attitudes, and the textual meaning, which involves the coordination and organisation of texts both internally and with respect to their contexts. The main focus of this study is to uncover

the ideational meaning through the pattern of processes used by the writers (newspaper practitioners) to express the events or happenings. The study identified the predominant process types, which appear in the headlines, with a view to examining the structures in which they unfold. This is because the choice of language in the headlines of newspapers, as realised by Mardh (1980), is specially composed to shape readers' attitudes and perspectives towards a particular group of people referred to or constructed by the newspapers.

In essence, the language of headlines expresses the world-view of the news practitioners (editors) regarding the news (events, happenings), which can reveal the meaning encoded in the linguistic choices made, which represent the events or actions of the participants expressed.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Newspaper Headlines

Newspaper headlines are often the first things that everyone notices in a newspaper. They often guide the readers in deciding whether to continue on reading the whole news report or to skip on to another one. However, some scholars such as Mardh (1980) maintain that headlines do not normally contain certain grammatical features, because of the limited space provided for each headline and the problem of fitting the best words, which he claimed to be deliberate to make the headlines somehow special with the aim of attracting the readers' attention to the news reports. Consequently, the choice of linguistic system may be manipulated in such a way that a headline can be rather difficult to understand (Mardh, 1980). This study is motivated by this trend, which is the choice of language in newspaper headlines and how this can possibly influence the experiential meaning of the texts. Therefore, the study involves the analysis of material processes and the participants' roles which they unfold, that are realised in the lexicogrammatical stratum known as transitivity.

Crystal (1987) claims that newspaper represents a wide range of linguistically distinctive varieties more than any other domains of language use. Within the pages of a newspaper there will be juxtapose, such diverse categories as news reports, which are the most important components of the newspaper and also editorial comments which have a different social context. Other items in newspaper include cartoons, reviews, letters, imaginative articles, headlines and advertisements; each of which requires a different form of writing (Style). This is as a result of the fact that each of the items is a socially distinctive variety of its own context. Different categories of readers read newspapers for various pieces of information. The types of information are stored in different columns, and this classification normally requires varying language uses and styles. Therefore, obscuring the facts with linguistic features is one of the methods that can be used in determining the pattern of choices between different ways of saying more or less the same thing by using different words or different linguistic features.

Different texts reveal different patterns of dominant or foregrounded features. This is the sense we adopted in this study. The realisation of processes and participants; and their distributions in newspaper headlines are as much to provide a certain pattern of linguistic choice in the context of "language of headlines".

2.2 Linguistic Choice as a Resource for Stylistic Analysis

The concept of "choice" is fundamental in Stylistic analysis and has been approached by different scholars that share different but overlapping perspectives. The general overview of the stylistic approach to language study as posited by Halliday, 1978 and Rasheed, (2002), is the meaning-making potentials (semiotic potentials) that every language sought to accomplish; a resource for the social man for making meaning by choosing (choice), and this meaning resides in specific contexts and in the patterns of choices of linguistic features. This approach has been recognized by Halliday (1968; 1994); Halliday and Mathiessen (2004; 2014) as an explanatory and evaluative framework for analysing language use in context.

The proponents of the SFL, with Halliday as a leading figure, highlight the systematic variations as related to contextual values as key issues in linguistic descriptions. Thus, they explain that linguistic features provide a speaker or writer a rich inventory of alternative choices, which he or she eventually makes from the totality of other choices open to him or her.

These choices depend on his position in the context of situation and on the function that a particular choice performs in his life and the function of that choice in the context toward meanings realisation. This was described by Halliday and Mathiessen (2004; 2014) as the '*potential*' and the '*actual*'. The former refers to the total meaning potentials leaning in the linguistic elements from where a speaker or writer chooses a particular linguistic system from among a range of options open to him (systemic). While the latter, refers to the actual choices, including the function of the choices in a given context of situation (functional). Thus, the concept, "systemic-functional" derives from these twin attributes of language. It is on the one hand as systemic, because it comprises a network of potential alternative choices. On the other hand, it is functional because the actual choices we eventually make, out of the totality of the options open to us in the linguistic system, have certain functions to perform in our lives. This latter point of view is our concern in this study. In other words, it focuses on how the linguistic choices made of process types (material processes) and the participants involved influence the meaning of the selected texts. Halliday and other scholars working in the SFL, such as Halliday and Mathiessen (2004; 2014), Mathiessen (1990), Eggins (2004) and Bloor and Bloor (2004; 2013) described the concept of "Transitivity" as a way meanings are represented in a clause. These meanings reside in the systemic choices made of the processes, participants and circumstances. These scholars believe that the choices made in the system of transitivity indicate the way the writer sees the world around him, because they are concerned with the representation of the mental picture that a speaker or writer has of the world (world-view) (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2014; Bloor and Bloor, 2004 and 2013).

Transitivity thus focuses on how a writer represents who acts (Actor) and who is acted upon (Patient), who says (Sayer) what (Verbiage) to whom (Target). Transitivity being part of the ideational metafunction, portrays the writer's world-view, and because of this, many critical analysts such as Fairclough (1989; 1992); Fowler (1991; 2008); Simpson (1993) and Taiwo (2004; 2007) investigate it as a means of uncovering the links between language and ideology; and how meanings are foregrounded, backgrounded or not included in a text. However, these critical analysts predominantly rely on contextual variables toward realisation of meaning. In other words, meanings of the linguistic features are contextually derived. This study however, focuses on how the linguistic pattern used in news headlines (material processes) can potentially bring out the world-view of the newspaper practitioners. The analysis focuses on the linguistic features that characterised the ideational meaning in the headlines.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Research Design

The method employed to study the selected materials is both qualitative as well as quantitative. The data were collected, analysed and classified numerically according to the description of certain linguistic features (process types and participants' roles). They were then counted and a statistical model was constructed in an attempt to present what has been observed. This method allows us to compare the results to others in the same manner as all scientific investigations that are based on data samples (McEnery and Wilson, 1996:75).

3.2 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework used to analyse the data for this thesis is transitivity model of systemic functional linguistic (SFL) approach. The approach seeks to explain the working behind the linguistic choices of language users. The selected samples were analysed according to the process types and the participants involved in each process in the texts. The data were analysed from the narrowest pieces of news (headlines). To calculate the frequency of occurrence of linguistic items (process types and participants) simple calculations of the frequency of occurrence of linguistic choices in relation to others that occurred in the data are made to ascertain the frequency of use, with the result given in percentage. The study looks at the micro categories of texts such as lexical choices. Therefore, it focuses on the text itself. At this degree of micro level analysis, the functional linguistic features of the headlines were examined. These features were divided into two categories: representation of participants and process types which represent actions, events, and who are involved based on Halliday (1985; 1994) and Halliday and Mathiessen (2004 and 2014).

3.3 Data Presentation and Analysis

TEXT A: *The Guardian* (GD)

- H1) New electoral law to check military abuse of elections
- H2) bloodshed, tears, sorrow went with 2014
- H3) Reps in last minute move to bequeath legacy
- H4) UPP will give Nigerians revolutionary policies
- H5) Controversy trails Ondo PDP Presidential campaign...
- H6) Day SDP Landed in Jalingo
- H7) Jonathan Returns Fire for Fire at kick-off

TEXT B: *Daily Trust* (DT)

- H8) Kwankwaso finally gets APC ticket for Kano central
- H9) One shot others injured in Jigawa PDP,APC clash
- H10) Akwalbom senators, 22 Guber-aspirants set to dump PDP
- H11) 37 defect from PDP to APC in Ondo
- H12) Masari constitutes committee
- H13) PDP inaugurates campaign committee
- H14) APC pull-out of BON organised debates

TEXT C: GD

- H15) President Banks on developmental stride, Others for Election
- H16) Agbaje canvasses support for Jonathan, PDP
- H17) PDP can't postpone May Handover date
- H18) Igbide political elite forum endorses Okowa
- H19) Agbaje visits Riverine areas, Commissions MDG Projects for Jonathan
- H20) Weak Institution, Lack of Ideology cause Electoral Crisis

TEXT D: DT

- H21) Ex- minister Pate Defects to APC
- H22) Elle Dumps PDP for APC
- H23) Esep Plots to postpone Election
- H24) Kebbi Deputy Governor meets Wamako to Defect to APC
- H25) THUGS Destroy APC's structures in Gombe
- H26) Nigerians Await 2015 polls amid threat of violence
- H27) 16 Southern Kaduna Groups Canvass votes for PDP

TEXT E: GD

- H28) Umuoji Women Mobilise Support for Buhari, APC
- H29) Mimiko, Kashamu Berate APC, Canvass Support for Jonathan
- H30) Pwajok Rallies Stakeholders for Oneness
- H31) LP Will use Rotary model to Govern Kwara
- H32) I LL Find political will to Transform Abia
- H33) Vice-President Namadi Sambo Loses Ward

TEXT F: DT

- H34) Nasarawa Suspends 45 officers for working for Maku
- H35) LP Guber candidate Receives Royal Blessings in Plateau
- H36) Rivers Deputy Governor Defects to PDP
- H37) Buhari will produce 4Million Home owners by 2019
- H38) CPP Presidential Candidate Steps down for Jonathan
- H39) Former Kogi Speaker Defects to APC

TEXT G: GD

- H40) Nigerians React to Buhari's victory
 H41) APC Victory will consolidate good governance in South West
 H42) Militarily, Boko-Haram is Defeated

TEXT H: DT

- H43) Battle for NASS gets Hot in North East
 H44) Nnamani, Nnaji Battle for Enugu East Senatorial Zone
 H45) Suspended Nasarawa PDP members Defect to APC
 H46) Onoja, Saraki, Kalu's mother, others Defect to APC
 H47) Over 70,000 PDP Bigwigs Defect to APC in two weeks

TEXT I: GD

- H48) Yerima Tipped for senate majority leader
 H49) Jostle for NASS headship Heightens
 H50) Crisis Rocks Ekiti, Lagos PDP
 H51) Campaign found ministerial slot Divide Enugu APC

TEXT J: DT

- H52) APC To Revisit Jonathan's Eleven hour contract appointments
 H53) PDP Constitutes post-election assessment C'tee
 H54) Oyo Election tribunal Receives 36 petitions
 H55) Imo PDP Expels Ararume, 19 others

Table 1: Linguistic Features in TEXT A

SS/N	ACTOR	Proc:MAT	GOAL
H1	New Electoral law	To check	Military abuse of election
H2	Bloodshed, tears, sorrow	went	With 2014
H3	Reps	move	To bequeath legacy
H4	UPP	Will give	Revolutionary policies
H5	Controversy	trails	Ondo PDP presidential campaign...
H6	Day SDP	landed	
H7	Jonathan	returns	Fire for fire

KEY: Proc:MAT = Material process CIRC.= Circumstance BENF.= Beneficiary

Table 2: Linguistic Features in TEXT B

SS/N	ACTOR	Proc:MAT	GOAL
11	-	gets	APC ticket
22	-	Shot/injured	-
33	Akwabom senators, 22 guber- aspirants	Set to dump	PDP
44	37	defect	From PDP to APC
55	Masari	constitutes	committee
66	PDP	inaugurates	Campaign committee
77	APC	Pulls-out	of BON organised debates

Table 3: Linguistic Features in TEXT C

SS/N	ACTOR	Proc:MAT	GOAL				
11	president	banks	On developmental stride/others for election				
22	Agbaje	canvasses	Support				
33	PDP	Can't postpone	May handover date				
44	Igbide political elite forum	endorses	Okowa				
55	Agbaje	Visits/commissions	Riverine areas/MDG projects				
66	Weak institution, lack of ideology	cause	Electoral crisis				

Table 4: Linguistic Features in TEXT D

SS/N	ACTOR	Proc:MAT	GOAL				
11	Ex-minister Pate	defects	To APC				
22	Elle	dumps	PDP				
33	Esep	Plots to postpone	election				
44	Kebbi deputy governor	meets	wamako				
55	Thugs	destroys	APC's structures				
66	Nigerians	await	2015 polls				
77	6 southern Kaduna groups	canvass	votes				

Table 5: Linguistic Features in TEXT E

SS/N	ACTOR	Proc:MAT	GOAL				
11	Umuoji women	mobilise	support		-	-	-
22	Mimiko, Kashamu	Berate/canvass	APC/support				
33	Pwajok	rallies	stakeholders				
44	LP	Will use/to govern	Rotary model/Kwara				
55	I	'll find	Political will				
66	Vice-president Namadi Sambo	loses	ward	-		-	-

Table 6: Linguistic Features in TEXT F

SS/N	ACTOR	Proc:MAT	GOAL	CIRC.	BENF.	RECEIVER	RANGE/SCOPE
11	Nasarawa PDP	suspends	45 officers	For working for Maku	-	-	-
22		receives	Royal blessing	In Plateau		LP guber candidate	
33	Rivers deputy governor	defects	To PDP				
44	Buhari	Will produce	4 million home owners				By 2019
55	CPP presidential candidate	Steps down		For Jonathan			
66	Former Kogi speaker	defects	To APC				

Table 7: Linguistic Features in TEXT G

SS/N	ACTOR	Proc:MAT	GOAL	CIRC.	BENF.	RECEIVER	RANGE/SCOPE
11	Nigerians	react	To Buhari's victory				
22	APC victory	Will consolidate	Good governance	In south west			
33		Is defeated		millilitarily	Boko haram		

Table 8: Linguistic Features in TEXT H

SS/N	ACTOR	Proc:MAT	GOAL	CIRC.	BENF.	RECEIVER	RANGE/SCOPE
11	Battle for NASS speaker	gets	hot	In north east			
22	Nnamani, Nnaji	battle	For Enugu East senatorial zone				
33	Suspended Nasarawa PDP members	defect	To APC				
44	Onoja, saraki, kalu's mother, others	defect	To APC				
55	Over 70,000 PDP bigwigs	defect	To APC				In two weeks

Table 9: Linguistic Features in TEXT I

SS/N	ACTOR	Proc:MAT	GOAL	CIRC.	BENF.	RECEIVER	RANGE/SCOPE
11	Yerima	tipped	For senate majority leader				
22	Jostle for NASS headship	heightens					
33	crisis	rocks	Ekiti, Lagos PDP				
44	Campaign fund	divide	Ministerial slot/Enugu APC				

Table 10: Linguistic Features in TEXT J

SS/N	ACTOR	Proc:MAT	GOAL	CIRC.	BENF.	RECEIVER	RANGE/SCOPE
\1	APC	To revisit	Jonathan's eleventh hour contract appointments				
22	PDP	constitutes	Post-election assessment C'tee				
33	-	receives	36 petition			Oyo election tribunal	
44	Imo PDP	expels	Ararume, 19 others				

4. Results and Discussion

The results of these analyses indicate the frequent choice of "Actor" and "Goal" as participants' roles in material processes in the selected sample headlines of both papers, which indicate both actions and events. The choice of "Actor" and "Goal" indicate the prototypical action-type processes, which involve doing-words as propounded by Bloor and Bloor (2013) and Eggins (2004). They are the prototypical participants of material processes as presented by Halliday and Mathiessen (2004; 2014) and Bloor and Bloor (2004) that present people doing things, things happen or people make things happen in the physical world. The doings or happenings according to Halliday, involve two inherent participants: Actor; which is the doer of the process and Goal; which expresses the point of impact. In some cases, someone would be realised as affected positively or negatively by the action undergoes by an Actor or affected by the event that happened; that is Beneficiary.

In essence, participants in newspaper headlines are realised as people doing something physically or something in the physical world happened (to them) and might have some impact on them. Halliday and Mathiessen (2014) believe that material processes are used in news reports to express the main events of the story, which indicate what happens and who makes them happen, or who are involved. The frequent choice of material processes in newspaper headlines are meant to summarise the main events of the news reports, because the main event line is predominantly construed by material clauses. This signifies that news practitioners in the construction of their headlines are action-oriented.

The results of analyses of this study revealed the use of "Actor" as "someone or something does something", but the "Beneficiary" and "Receiver" has been very insignificant participants' roles. This is in line with Halliday and Mathiessen (2014) that one participant may be realised in material process structure; that is the outcome unfolding through the process confined to the Actor. Sometimes the unfolding of the process extends to another participant, which is either Beneficiary or Receiver. This depends on the kinds of the structure and the style of the writer.

For example:

- H1) New Electoral Law To Check Military Abuse of Elections
- H9) One Shot, Others Injured in Jigawa PDP, APC Clash
- H16) Agbaje Canvasses Support for Jonathan, PDP
- H21) EX-Minister Pate Defects to APC
- H50) Crisis Rocks Ekiti, Lagos PDP
- H53) PDP Constitutes Post-Election Assessment C'tee

In H1, the participants are two: 1) New Electoral Law (something) (will be) doing the act of checking another participant, which is also (something) Abuse of Election. However, in H9 for instance, One and Others were the participants who were affected by what happened in Jigawa between PDP and APC. In addition, EX-Minister Pate in H21, was simply did something (change position from one place to another). While, in H50, something (crisis)

caused something in Ekiti and Lagos PDP and finally, in H53, something did something that must be done by an intelligent personality (constituting assessment C'tee). In essence, the choice of material processes in newspaper headlines were directed toward actions and events.

1. It also revealed that "Actor" and "Goal" are the most common or frequent linguistic features, which represent the participants' roles in material processes, while Circumstance, Beneficiary, and Receiver and Range/Scope being the least frequent participants' roles in the selected samples of the study.
2. Non-neutral structuring verbs are the most frequent material processes in both papers.
3. The study indicates that news practitioners (editors) construe their world-view in terms of "Actions" in their headlines.

5. Conclusion

The frequency of the distribution of Circumstance, Range/Scope and Beneficiary is very low, with 6.7% and 7.9%; 5% and 2.8%; as well as 2.9% and 1.4% as shown in Table 69. This signifies that they are highly optional or peripheral, unlike "Actor" and "Goal". Halliday and Mathiessen (2014) provide a model for construing our experience of goings-on: doings and happenings. They posit that the nature of participants varies according to the type of material process, and how they configure the participants, which constitute the experiential meaning of the structure. They made a contrast between creative structure where the Actor or Goal is brought into existence as the process unfold and transformative structure, where a pre-existing Actor or Goal is construed as being transformed as the process unfolds. The choice of different varieties of material processes that were mostly creative in the selected sample was established; therefore we can establish a pattern through which they operate as either the "Actor" or the "Goal" brings about the situations as unfolding in the headlines of political news reports.

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