

PROMOTING PEACE, SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LANGUAGE USE IN THE NIGERIAN MEDIA

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ABSTRACT: *This paper investigated the utilization of language by the Nigerian media to propagate peace, security and national development. Radio news has the ability to influence public opinion in diverse ways. The study adopted a critical discourse analysis of some selected messages which were relayed at the middle of the radio news texts of Osun State Broadcasting Corporation, Nigeria. Twenty mid-news messages were purposively selected for analysis based on the information conveyed in them in order to reveal the inherent and embedded messages in them. The data were grouped and analysed using four major headings – Government and politics; Education, health and religion; Socioeconomic and cultural issues; and National peace, crime and security. For our analysis, the theoretical frameworks adopted are Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) which emphasizes the form/function relationship in language. The linguistic features embedded in the messages and the contributory ideological effects on the listeners were analysed. The study revealed that the mid-news messages were useful for public enlightenment, social mobilization and they also served as facilitators for development and growth by enhancing the public orientation towards national integration, economic empowerment, educational awareness, political discourse, sociocultural issues and poverty alleviation. The paper, therefore, brings to the fore the significance of radio mid-news messages in sensitizing members of the audience towards actions needed to be taken as the situation demands.*

KEYWORDS: Radio News, Mid-News Messages, Critical Discourse Analysis, Language, Media Discourse

INTRODUCTION

Radio news plays a crucial role in mass communication. Language is the medium by which information is communicated to people and the aim of writing or speaking a language is basically to produce a pattern for transmitting a message to the audience (Odudigbo 2014). The notion of media news in every day usage implies a news item or news report, i.e., a text or discourse on radio, on television or in the newspaper, in which new information is given about recent events (van Dijk 1988:4). According to Fowler (1991:12), news is a product of journalistic process and an end result of a “systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories”. As observed by Reah and quoted in Chilwa (2007:64), news refers to stories or information about social events that are of interest to a sufficiently large group, or that may affect the lives of a sufficiently large group. In Fairclough’s views, news tends to be seen as a conceptual and ideational business, as a matter of statements, claims, beliefs, positions rather than feelings, circumstances, qualities of social and interpersonal relationships, and so forth (1995:64). According to Barnhurst (2005:253), news is a product of human meaning making and journalists have taken the manufacture of social meaning as their primary task. Falobi as cited by Adegoju (2010) asserts that the radio

is a primary medium of communication for reaching a large number of people in Africa. He stresses further that the radio is constantly present in homes, streets, market places and work places.

Inuwa (2007) citing Nwabueze observes that the role of media in national development lie in their capacity and capability to teach, manipulate, sensitize and mobilize people through information dissemination. In Okusaga's (2018) views, Nigeria's news media grew out of the need to inform and enlighten the people and as argued by Okoro (2013), the press is not only indispensable in a political process, but it has also become inseparable from development strategies especially in the present information driven societies. Also, the Vice President of Nigeria – Yemi Osibajo posits that “the democracy we enjoy in Nigeria would not have been possible without the guerilla efforts of some of our finest and most irrepressible journalists (www.nigerianbulletin.com).

Some earlier studies in this research area focussed on discourse strategies in reports on youth crime in UK radio news (Haig 2008); the press and the politics of the marginal voices (Adebanwi (2004); critical linguistic study of language variation and ideological differences in media discourse in Nigeria (Chiluwa (2006); representation of people in the news in the Nigerian print medium (Alo 2007); ideology and power relations in news headlines (Taiwo 2007); dramatic and persuasive techniques in radio soap opera of South-western Nigeria (Adegoju 2010) and ideology and discourse strategies in radio news (Ajewole-Orimogunje (2012).

The language of the radio

Language is the dominant form of communication in the radio. It is useful for participatory communication and also serves as an instrument for economic and social development. As noted by Utor (2000), the media perform the functions of teaching and decision making. They have the ability to reach out to large number of people to inform and educate them. According to the National Broadcasting Code (1993:22), “the language of news must be reachable to the majority of the audience. It must be delivered using the accepted norms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and accent of the general public”. As rightly observed by Salami (2010), changes taking place in the social, political and economic lives of human communities are not only expressed by language but also promoted through the use of language. This coheres with Fairclough's (1995) assertion that media texts constitute a sensitive barometer of socio-cultural change, and they should be seen as a valuable material for researching change.

The language of the radio is more accessible, easy to understand, not complicated and comprehensible to listeners. As observed by Fang (1991), the radio listener is often engaged in some tasks like driving, working etc. other than absorbing the latest news, and consequently paying little attention, unlike the newspaper reader. Hence, according to him, the reality is that understanding is more important than grammar to a radio news writer. Consequently, radio news style writing includes the choice of simple words and short declarative sentences. The radio makes use of spoken words and therefore, relies majorly on the verbal codes of the spoken words. Fairclough (1995) also posits that the radio uses an oral channel and spoken language and relies on technologies of sound, recording and broadcasting.

The OSBC mid-news messages

According to the functionalist paradigm, the analysis of language cannot be divorced from the analysis of the purpose and functions of language in human life (Mayr 2008:7) The mid-news messages relayed in the OSBC radio serve as channels of mass mobilization. Apart from news articles, mid-news messages are other types of informative and evaluative texts in the news. They are specifically useful for government programmes such as elections, immunization exercise, census etc. They also serve as means of sensitizing members of the public on payment of tax, civic duties and responsibilities and new government policies and agenda. Such messages are used to propagate government policies and to win public support. The mid-news message is usually a statement comprising one or two sentences relayed by the newscaster during the course of the news and it comes in the middle of the news. It is usually signed on by the expression – “Now, the mid-news message” or “Now let’s listen to the mid-news message”. The remaining part of the news follows immediately. The timing of the mid-news message is strategic as it comes mid-way into the news. The messages usually contain issues that enlighten, educate, appeal to or warn members of the audience.

In these messages, a great deal of information is revealed and many presupposed. The messages are relayed to listeners and are meant to be decoded, interpreted, comprehended and acted upon. They contain embedded information which listeners need to decode. Such need unraveling and interpretation; hence the need for their analysis.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical frameworks adopted in this study are:

- Fairclough’s three-part model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and
- Halliday’s meta-functions of language.

In Fairclough’s approach of CDA, there are three analytical focusses of analyzing any communicative event. These are text (eg. a news report), discourse practice (the process of production and consumption) and socio-cultural practice (eg social and cultural structures which give rise to the communicative event) (Fairclough 1995:57). According to Fairclough, CDA views language as a social action which explores the relationship between discourse and society. He stresses further that CDA tries to unite and determine the relationship between three levels of analysis – the actual text, the discursive practices (that is, the process involved in creating, writing, speaking, reading and hearing), and the large social context that bears upon the text and the discursive practices.

Halliday’s meta-functions of language include the Interpersonal, Experiential and Textual functions (Halliday 1994). The interpersonal function refers to the use of language to enact social relationships, the experiential refers to the use of language for construing experience, while the textual refers to the use of language to organise texts to fit particular contexts. Halliday stressed the relationship between the grammatical system and the social and personal needs that language is required to serve.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study are derived from radio mid-news messages relayed on the Osun State Broadcasting Corporation, Osogbo, Nigeria. The OSBC is situated in Osogbo, the capital city of Osun State, South-west region of Nigeria. The radio station of the corporation broadcasts news at different intervals of the day and at the middle of every newscast, the mid-news message is relayed. Twenty mid-news messages of the radio station of the OSBC covering different issues on politics, health, development, national peace, security etc were purposively sampled for analysis. The selected data are representative samples of daily radio mid-news messages aired at different intervals during the different news bulletins. The samples were subjected to a critical analysis to reveal the hidden and embedded meanings in them and to bring out their significance as the situation demands.

Data Analyses

For our analysis, the data are grouped and analysed using four major headings:

- Government and politics
- Education, health and religion
- Socio-economic and cultural issues
- National peace, crime and security

Government and Politics

TEXT 1: Nigeria cannot be a model in Africa amidst growing ethnic and sectarian crises. Let us be more tolerant of one another to safeguard the nation's nascent democracy.

The information in the above extract connotes that Nigeria is regarded as a perfect example that deserves to be imitated by all the other countries in Africa. Nigeria is often referred to as “the giant of Africa”; thus it is expected that citizens of the country should live up to expectation. There is an insinuation in the extract which suggests that the country is experiencing problems associated with tribal and ethnic issues. Nigeria is made up of different ethnic groups with the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo as the major ones. Some parts of the country had experienced one form of violence or the other usually generated through tribal or religious issues. Hence, the expression –“let us be more tolerant...”. Through this message members of the public are advised to shun ethnicity and tribalism so as to move the nation forward.

TEXT 2: Remember that Nigeria is your beloved country. Do everything possible to make her great for the benefit of the present and generations yet unborn.

TEXT 3: As Nigerians celebrate the country's independence today, do not be indifferent to all efforts at making the country great. Contribute your quota.

These extracts are made up of short declarative sentences employed by the journalists to bring certain important information to the listeners. That Nigeria is one's beloved country is stating the obvious; but it is necessary here to reiterate it to the public and by so doing the listener's sense of belonging is being appealed to. The first day of October every year is celebrated in

Nigeria to commemorate the nation's independence. Nigeria got her independence on October 1, 1960, and since then it has been an annual celebration. We also have the use of imperative sentences – “Do everything possible...”; “do not be indifferent...”; “Contribute your quota”. These serve as commands whose communicative function is primarily to instruct someone to do or not to do something.

TEXT 4: One of the ways by which the labour of the fallen heroes could be fruitful is by avoiding all acts capable of jeopardizing the forthcoming general elections. Be patriotic.

TEXT 5: Love for your country emanates from the love you radiate in your home and community. Love one another to make Nigeria great.

The message in Text 4 is historic as it makes reference to those Nigerians who had laboured for the country. It brings to memory the activities of some great Nigerian like late Obafemi Awolowo and other nationalists who fought for Nigeria's independence. The expression “Be patriotic” carries the connotation that the “fallen heroes” referred to in the extract demonstrated great support for and defended the interest of Nigeria when they were alive. The message conveyed in this extract is that all Nigerians should also be supporters and defenders of the country in all areas of life. The message came at the wake of the 2007 general elections in Nigeria and it was meant to remind the people of their civic responsibilities to the country. Text 5 presupposes that the love for one's country starts from one's immediate environment. Thus, people need to demonstrate love to their community and by extension to the nation.

Education, Health and Religion

TEXT 6: Education is the best legacy. Therefore give your children sound education.

TEXT 7: Easter celebration is not all about wining and dining. Let the lessons from the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ be your guide. Endeavour to live a Godly life.

TEXT 8: The human body is primarily designed to consume food made by nature. To achieve optimum health, eat good food always.

TEXT 9: The alarming rate at which AIDS is devastating the people of Africa calls for decent sexual behaviour. Do not be insensitive; avoid dying young.

TEXT 10: Avoid self-medication and seeking medicare from quacks. Consult a qualified physician for your treatment.

An idea can be better expressed in a more detailed and compact way by the use of metaphor. The first statement expressed in Text 6 is a metaphor. Going by this statement, education can be described as an inheritance, heritage or birthright. The importance of education is expressed by the use of metaphor. The essence of metaphor according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. Also Lakoff and Turner (1989) posit that metaphors allow us to understand ourselves and our world in ways that no other modes of thought can as they form an integral part of our everyday thought and language. A very important piece of information is conveyed in a succinct way in the extract by the use of a metaphor. The information contained in Text 7 is an indirect warning to people about the

inherent dangers in indulging in bad habits such as excessive consumption of alcohol during festive periods. The remaining part of the extract can also be viewed as a way of projecting the Christian religion and to remind the audience of the mission of Jesus Christ on earth.

The statement in Text 8 implies that there are certain food items which can be injurious to the human body. In other words, there are certain food items which are ‘not made by nature’. This can be understood to mean processed or junk food which may not serve any nutritional value to the body. When people eat good food they are not likely to fall sick and the society will be better for it. The campaign against the deadly disease HIV/AIDS is projected in Text 9 to highlight the dangers in immoral living. The choice of the lexical item ‘devastating’ – a verb, paints the image of destruction and ruin. This gives an idea of the great danger that the disease portends to human beings. To be insensitive to the warning is equivalent to dying young. The image of death is created in the listener’s mind and as noted by van Dijk (2006:376), “people’s emotion may be roused and appealed to by specially selected words”. Again there is a serious warning in Text 10 about the dangers in self-medication. Many people have died and are still dying in Africa due to the abuse of drugs and addiction to certain dangerous drugs like marijuana, cocaine and the likes. People consult quacks for treatment due largely to poverty as many cannot afford to pay hospital bills. As a means of helping the masses, government in some states in Nigeria provide free health services to the people.

Socio-economic and cultural issues

TEXT 11: The naira is a symbol of national identity. Do not deface it.

TEXT 12: Nigeria belongs to all of us. Avoid all acts capable of affecting adversely her socio-economic and political development.

TEXT 13: The task of building a politically stable and economically virile nation requires the cooperation of the various groups and people in the federation. Do not be a saboteur.

TEXT 14: Drunkenness is a sign that you lack respect and discipline. Avoid alcohol as you go about wining and dining this weekend.

TEXT 15: Blocking of roads for ceremonies amounts to causing hardship to others. Be considerate. Use open fields for such ceremonies.

The naira which is Nigeria’s currency is often mishandled by some people. It is handled carelessly, abused, bastardized and kept in wrong places other than wallets and purses. Some have even turned the naira to a piece of paper used for writing. Thus, you find the money with different inscriptions on it. This usually makes the naira to become dirty, torn and wrinkled. At parties, the naira is spent and displayed as a sign of affluence. This may imply that it is worthless and of no value. Hence the appeal to listeners to give the naira the prestige it deserves as the nation’s currency. The message in Text 11 thus becomes necessary to checkmate those who handle the naira carelessly. The socio-economic development of a nation is important for its survival. The economy of a nation is a determining factor in its overall development. Thus, Texts 12 and 13 carry the connotation that all Nigerians have a role to play in one way or the other to make the nation economically viable. The warning – “Do not be a saboteur” presupposes that there are some individuals whose activities undermine the economic progress of the country.

Text 14 carries the embedded message of the evil effects of excessive intake of alcohol and its attendant dangers. Drunkenness may lead to hooliganism, breakdown of law and order which may eventually result into absence of peace in a community. Blocking of roads especially at weekends for different types of ceremonies is common in most Nigerian cities. Ceremonies such as wedding, burial etc are done at weekends and most people prefer using the major roads to event centers or open fields. This disrupts free flow of vehicles and causes hardship for road users. The message in Text 15 could be understood against this backdrop and it serves a good purpose to educate people who might want to use the roads for ceremonies to search for alternatives.

National peace, Crime and Security

TEXT 16: Neither aid nor abet criminal activities. Assist the police in efforts to make the society habitable for law abiding people.

TEXT 17: Avoid late night journeys to prevent ugly experience of men of the underworld.

TEXT 18: The gains of crime will not be able to sustain you when the long arm of law catches up with you. Desist from criminal tendencies now.

TEXT 19: Peace is an essential ingredient for sustainable democracy. Let us embrace peace. Give peace a chance.

TEXT 20: Our nation, Nigeria needs peace more than ever before. Do all within your power to promote it.

The expression in the latter part of Text 16 carries the connotation that there are some people in the society who are not law abiding and that there are people who cover up criminals and their activities. It presupposes that some members of the public have not been supporting the police to combat crime. Text 17 is a warning to travelers to prevent them from falling victims of criminals. The noun phrase – ‘men of the underworld’ meaning ‘criminals’ refers to armed robbers who operate most especially in the night to rob unsuspecting travelers of their belongings. According to Dixon and Linz (2000:138), crime is defined as “behaviour either pertaining to the commission of a particular lawbreaking act, or social or legal reaction to lawbreaking more generally”. Text 18 is an advice and also a warning to criminals to desist from crime.

Peace has been defined as freedom from war; the absence of violence and other disturbances within a state (Encarta Dictionaries). In Text 19 there is repetition of the word ‘peace’. This is done for the purpose of emphasis. The Nigerian government has continued to advocate peaceful co-existence of her citizens as evidenced in Text 20. This has become necessary due to the various nefarious activities of some groups such as the Niger-delta militants, kidnappers and recently the Boko Haram. The Boko Haram is a group of Islamist militants who abhors western education, western culture and modern culture. They regard western education as sinful and they advocate the imposition of Sharia law. They operate mainly in the northern part of the country by attacking and killing people with bombs and other dangerous weapons. Through their operations, hundreds of Nigerians have been sent to their early graves. Hence, the repeated appeal in the media to encourage people to embrace peace.

CONCLUSION

Radio messages are important means of communication as they serve as essential devices for conveying information among the people. Mid-news messages on the OSBC radio are goal-oriented; that is, they serve informational and persuasive functions. The contents of the messages may influence the interpretation and hence their persuasive effects on the listeners. The messages are used for public enlightenment and for social mobilisation to inform, create awareness, sensitise, warn and prevent people from taking certain actions that can be dangerous or inimical to peaceful coexistence of members of the society. Our analysis reveals the significance of mid-news messages in sensitising members of the audience towards actions needed to be taken as the situation demands. The mid-news messages disseminated in OSBC radio news serve as facilitators for development and growth as they aid the public orientation towards national integration, economic empowerment, educational awareness, political discourse, security, crime reduction, health promotion, socio-cultural issues and poverty alleviation.

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