

INVESTIGATING THE LITERARY COMPONENTS OF PRINT MEDIA: A CASE OF PUNCH AND GUARDIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT: *The paper investigates the literary components of print media with specific reference to Punch and Guardian Newspapers as case studies. It uses syntax and semantics components of the English language as units of inquiry. The paper starts by describing the history of the newspaper in Nigeria and conceptualizes the syntax and semantics components in media. Also, the review of the documentary evidence as secondary resources from journal articles, paper reports and books were utilised in gathering the information used in analysing the situation. The syntax of any language is governed by rules that are fairly stable and which, unlike the phonology, cuts across both horizontally and vertically among the users while semantics is the study of meaning. The paper unravels the appropriate usage of syntax and semantics of English language to pass across messages to reader by removing the ambiguity, and minimizing errors when it comes to newspaper editorials.*

KEYWORDS: Media, Newspaper, Editorials, Syntax, Semantics

BACKGROUND

The contents of newspapers have been held to yield a lot of influence over the mind of readers, just as literature does. For majority of people, reading the dailies makes up their most substantial and significant consumption of printed discourse. However, from the view point of linguistic analysis, the institutionalized position of the editorial writer has made it easier for him/her to inundate the column with ambiguous statements (semantics level) which make readings (meaning) confusing to readers. Also, some statements are ungrammatical. That is, they are replete with errors which violate the standard British English rules. This paper presents analytical instances of such and shows their effect on readers and writers. English as a second language in Nigeria, started with minimal functions but has evolved to become the “linguistic messiah” in a multilingual nation with over five hundred languages and numerous dialects. It is the language of education, law, media, administration, business and commerce, entertainment, information and communication technology, politics, religion, and so on. It has contributed immensely to the dissemination of information to the entire public through the media, of which the newspaper is not an exception.

A Brief History of the Newspaper Industry in Nigeria

According to Tosanwumi and Ekwuazi (1994), the history of the Nigerian press dates back to 1859 when, in Abeokuta, Reverend Henry Townsend released **Iwe Iroyin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba** (The Newspaper for the Egba and Yoruba). The newspaper was the first to be published in what is now known as Nigeria. It was a bilingual newspaper since it was published both in

Yoruba and English. This newspaper spearheaded the attack on slavery. In 1863, the second newspaper was published. It was edited by Robert Campbell and was called **The Anglo African**. It carried both local and national news, while its editorials were dedicated to the appraisal of the problems of the time.

The blossoming of the Nigeria Press started 17 years later in the exigencies of socio-political and economic activities. The first newspaper of this period was by Andrew Thomas, who came out with **The Lagos Times** on 10th November 1880. This bi-monthly newspaper was used to aggregate public opinion on topical issues. Fifteen months later, Bagan Benjamin began the publication of **The Lagos Observer**. This was followed closely by **The Eagle**, which made its debut on March 31, 1887 when Adolphous Mark started **The Mirror**.

Nationalistic sentiment and struggle erupted with the establishment of the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906, as well as the reports of the amalgamation of the North and South in 1914. This led to the emergence of the new set of Nigerian newspapers. Johnson Brothers started **The Nigerian Chronicle** in 1908, while Kukoyi Ajasa started **The Nigerian Pioneer**. He aroused a lot of criticisms because his newspaper was seen as a mouthpiece of Fredrick Lugard's administration. In 1926, the Nigerian Printing and Publishing Company started **Nigerian Daily Times**. The first editor of **Daily Times** was Ernest Okoli whose newspaper, **The African Messenger**, was taken over by the government due to its dwindling financial fortune. **The West African Pilot** of Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe later joined in 1936 and this brought about an increase in nationalistic consciousness. Its news reports were mainly anti-colonialism and it championed nationalist struggles. Chief Obafemi Awolowo established **The Nigerian Tribune** in 1946. The newspaper strengthened the anti-colonialism campaigns through its critical analysis of the problems of the time. However, in the present day Nigeria, a host of other newspapers are now in circulation. Some of these are: **The Vanguard Newspaper, The National Concord, The Punch, This day, Comet Newspaper, Daily Sketch, The Monitor, Alaroye, The Guardian, The Post Express**, among others.

Newspaper industry in Nigeria

Nigeria's newspaper industry is a vibrant one and this is because the press institution in the country has come a long way. Since the introduction of the first indigenous newspaper in 1859, the Nigerian reading public has been inundated with different newspapers, many of which are privately owned. According to Sommerlad (1966), Nigeria has not only made progress in this important aspect of national growth and development; it has been made to adopt the press as a political tool for economic development, stimulation of change and for social function. Another important role of the newspapers in Nigeria is that of serving as catalyst to literacy development. This role will be further explored in the course of this paper.

Basically, we can categorize Nigerian newspapers into two broad groups. The first group comprises daily newspapers. Examples are **The Guardian, The Punch, The Nigerian Tribune,**

The Comet, This Day, The Daily Sketch, The Observer, The New Nigerian, etc. Still within this group, we have some titles specifically devoted to weekends, evenings or early mornings. Such titles as **The Sunday Punch, The Sunday Guardian, AM and PM News**, etc. can be recognized. The second group comprises magazines, which are published weekly, bi-weekly or

monthly. We can equally identify two types of magazines in Nigeria. There are those that are devoted to serious or investigative journalism like **Tell, the News, Newswatch**, etc and others that are called soft-sell magazines which are devoted to entertainment, celebrities, gossips and the like. Notable among these are **Ovation, National Encomiums, Hints, Hearts**, etc. The first group claim to tell the news as it breaks, while the second group claim to add flesh and meat through in-depth analysis and investigative activities. Complementing the above groups in news reporting are the few newspapers published in indigenous Nigerian Languages. These ones are regionally based since they are confined to areas where the language of publication is spoken. These newspapers are also good instruments to promote literacy in the indigenous languages. Our observation in this study is that these newspapers enjoy high patronage among the semi-literates and stark illiterates in the society. The stark illiterates usually depend on their children or friends that are literate at least, in the local languages, who will read the news to them. And since no interpretation is involved, it is very easy to digest the news.

Private entrepreneur can establish newspaper publishing being part of the mass media in Nigeria where the newspaper is owned solely by private individual(s) or companies without any financial help coming from any government. Examples of privately owned newspaper outfits are **The Guardian, The Nigerian Tribune, Punch, This day**, etc. However, in terms of government ownership, the newspaper outfit is solely established, funded and financed by the government that is involved.

In Nigeria today, the vibrancy, fearlessness and steadfastness of a newspaper are usually conditioned by the ownership status of the newspaper. The privately owned newspaper outfits are usually more direct in their reports, not given to unbridled propaganda and acting as government mouthpiece like the government-owned outfits. They usually tell the story as it is without fear or favour. Perhaps that is why some of them are more vociferous in criticizing government policies. As a result, they get hounded and molested by the agents of the government. Also, privately owned newspaper outfits rarely get advertisements from the government, its agencies or individuals that happen to be pro-government. But government-owned newspapers are usually used as propaganda machinery to popularize government policies and portray them in good light. Well, he who pays the piper dictates the tune.

Understanding the Concept: Syntax and Semantics

The Syntactic Level:

The syntax of any language is governed by rules that are fairly stable and which, unlike the phonology, cuts across both horizontally and vertically among the users (Chomsky, 1965). That is, the rules remain obligatory to the different geographical and social groups using the language, and any instance of violation or misapplication is readily recognizable as such. For this reason, it is plausible to insist on a monolithic standard Nigerian English syntax. The proposed criteria here are grammaticality, appropriateness and acceptability. As stated earlier, most of these rules are violated by editorial writers. These are examined more closely below.

Grammaticality:

Language use is governed by rules of grammar among others. Many of these rules are well known and apply logically and consistently most of the time. They are thus relatively easy to learn. But others are subtle, illogical and

inconsistent in their application. And it is the mostly unconscious violation of rules of the latter type that has consistently yielded deviant expressions of the type that many have unjustifiably labeled 'Nigerian English', rather than the outright errors that they are. For example, such expressions as

*luggages *equipments
 *smoothen *can be able to
 *some few things *that your friend
 *you are enjoying *talkless of
 *it does not worth it *we discussed for a long time
 *make him to do it *I asked him that are you not coming? *matured person

are often all taken for granted as standard Nigerian English usage, whereas each violates one rule of grammar or another. These errors also reflect in our newspapers and magazines language usage every day. However, while errors can be overlooked and ignored in spoken language, written language is expected to follow the rules of the standard British English. The apparent illogicality of some of these rules is often perplexing. For instance, in the sentences below, "make" has the same meaning as "compel" and they are both verbs, but while the first three are grammatical, the last is not even though it has the same syntactic structure (both surface and underlying) as the third, and the contrasting lexical items have the same meaning. These are:

He was compelled to do it. (passive) (correct)
 He was made to do it. (passive) (correct)

(1.3.3.b) Analysis.

Copies of editorials of the punch newspaper are used for this analysis. Two extract are used, from publication of wednesday, May 8th 2019 to point out the success of the communicative interaction between the editorial writer and his readers.

(1) *Adeleke arraigned for forgery, gets ₦2m bail, permission for US trip*

The statement violates the lexical rules of the English language. It will definitely confuse the reader, who might not know Adeleke before now. Also, some missing lexical items render it meaningless and incomplete. The correct form should be:

Former governorship aspirant of Osun state, Adeleke has been arraigned for forgery, he gets two million naira bail and permission for his US trip.

(2) *Surulere potholes of hell*

Sola Olatunji, 9, Obasun Street, Aguda, Surulere, Lagos.

There are two potholes at Alhaj Masha Road, inward National Stadium, Lagos.

It should be:

There are two potholes on Alhaji Masha Road, inward of National Stadium, Lagos.

Some missing lexical items or omission of lexical item i.e. (on, of,) in the sentence render it incomplete and inappropriate.

The Semantic Level:

According to Okoro (1986), semantics is the study of meaning. But the question of what is meaning has generated controversy among philosophers and linguists alike over the centuries (Lyons, 1981). However, this paper will not focus on the definition of meaning or the distinction made between 'lexical meaning', 'sentence meaning', 'grammatical meaning', or 'utterance meaning'. Instead, it will simply be concerned with meaning as it affects the intelligibility of the speaker and reader of English language in our newspapers regularly for information. For Nigerian English to be justifiably described as a world variety of English, it must remain

internationally intelligible, and the concern here is to delimit what should be acceptable or otherwise as standard Nigerian English usage as far as intelligibility is concerned. Here again, the paper draws a line between expressions that amount to misuses of the code and those that do not.

Okoro (1986), extends the semantic scope of certain expressions as is commonly the case with kinship terms. The wide range of application of such terms as 'father', 'mother', 'uncle', 'aunt', 'brother' and 'sister' by Nigerians is very well known. Any adult of one's parents' age is a 'father' or 'mother'. Youths of one's age from one's village or town are 'brothers' and 'sisters'. Family friends are 'uncles' and 'aunties', and within the family itself, it is not unusual for an elder sister to be called 'auntie' by her younger siblings if she is sufficiently older than they are. On the other hand, such terms as 'nephew', 'niece', 'second cousin', 'great-uncle', 'great-aunt', 'step-father', 'step-mother' are little used or known by Nigerian speakers. The misuse of kinship terms though widespread among Nigerians, should not be accepted as standard Nigerian English usage in writing of editorials as it undoubtedly impairs intelligibility. Moreover, the correct terms can easily be learnt and properly used. But, out of mental laziness, they are not. All these and many more confusing words are vivid in our newspaper editorials.

Analysis

Copies of editorials of the Guardian newspaper are used for this analysis. There are many errors, but two extracts are used from publication of Wednesday May 8th, 2013. This analysis is based on the theory of cooperative principle (CP) aimed at providing a rudimentary frame work to validate the success of the communicative interaction between the editorial writer and his numerous readers.

(1)RELIGION FROM THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

By Anthony Akinola

Two athletes, one African and the other British, were interviewed after the successful conclusion of their respective events. The African who had won an event attributed her success to the grace of GOD. "He touched my limbs, I could not have done it without him". The British athlete, on the other hand, gave substantial credit to her coach as she attributed her success to a regime of rigorous training.

The text above opens with a voice of total and sweeping African sentiments and generalization concerning receiving divine intervention to win a race. Of course, all glory must be given to God, but there are certain things we can never achieve in life through religious sentiments unless we do the needful: hard work, focus and determination. The metaphor, "He touched my limbs" gives the average readers serious tasks in the meaning processing mechanism because it is puzzling but not for majority of Nigerians and Africans who will understand because of African religious sentiments.

(2)With this Kaduna polytechnic is now rated third among the well over 1,800 universities and polytechnics around the world that teach entrepreneurial education. By any standard, this was not a small achievement....

This great achievement in spite of the obvious financial constraints the institution has is noteworthy. Twenty two students had qualified to participate in this year's competition from

Kaduna polytechnic, but there (sic) enough money to sponsor only five students and three coordinators.

The anaphoric deictic term “this” gives the impression that the reader has already known the subject in discourse. The first sentence violates the maxim of quality by not stating what the writer specifically knows but just based the statistics on an extrapolated and ambiguous figure “well over 1,800 universities and polytechnics” or both put together. Thus, the overgeneralization is a mere assumption which is far from the truth.

CONCLUSION

We have examined four editorials from the Punch and Guardian newspapers, two from each, to discuss the issues related to syntactic and semantics errors related to ambiguity. The categorization above is by no means exhaustive. It merely gives an indication of the overriding considerations in delimiting standard usage, which in this section are grammaticality, intelligibility, appropriateness and acceptability to the speakers of the language. In this regard, the researcher identifies guidelines for the delimitation of standard Nigerian English usage. Although they are many more, our concentration is on syntax and semantics. Admittedly, the problem of such delimitation is not as easy in practice as it may appear on paper, and in proposing some of the guidelines above, we may have ridden roughshod over some areas that require a more delicate treatment. But it is hoped that our suggestions more than give an indication of what should be recognized and regarded as standard Nigerian English usage.

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