Chapter 18

On The Threshold of Democratic Fragility: A Macrospeech Act Explication of Media Representation of the Nigerian 2011 Post-Presidential Election News Reports

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ABSTRACT

The recent events in the Nigerian political space are clear indications of a match towards the ‘unwanted’. These political events, such as the 2011 presidential elections resulted into the most violent post-election killings in the history of Nigeria. In the light of this, media representation of that election may not be a value-free exercise but one imbued with value judgments or opinions which conveyed certain ideological leanings. It is against this background that the author examines the macrospeech acts which characterize the discourse of the 2011 post-presidential election news reports with a view to identifying and interpreting the prominent acts and their ideological imports. The study is situated within the broad frame of pragmatics and operationalises Searle Speech Act model in order to uncover the macrospeech acts in the news reports and how the acts covertly convey instances of prejudice and control.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy as a system of governance, for the second time after a protracted military rule, found its return into Nigerian political space in 1999. The return ushered in the Fourth Republic of democratic dispensation and Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief. Among the institutions that were in the fore front of the struggle and clamour for a democratic rule in the country was the media. That necessitated their active involvements and other political and social institutions in contributing to the sustenance of democracy.

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in the country. The role of print media, therefore, in political processes, such as election and campaign cannot be overemphasized. Print media informs and consequently shapes the perceptions and attitudes of the readers. Chiluluwa (2011) in his assessment of media power asserts that the press may conceal truths that need to be told in some particular representations and may also legitimize particular label or identity in the interest of certain people or government. This claim may be possible because media is a contested vacuum and not everybody in the contest is of equal power (Devereux, 2009). That is, many social actors and other social institutions, with different interests, are usually in the contest to influence what media produces. The Nigeria 2011 Post-presidential election news reports is not an exemption because its representation by various national daily newspapers has underlying ideologies which are subtly and carefully constructed in the headlines and the contents of the news.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The analysis of speech acts in print media has received significant attention in media studies but there is still dearth of researches on macrospeech acts in news discourse since its introduction in the 80s by van Dijk. Also, political discourse studies have received interest from researchers in Political Science, Media Studies and Linguistics in a bid to examine language use in Political discourse. Taiwo (2007) for instance, studies language, ideology and power relations in Nigerian Newspaper headlines. He situates the study within the framework of CDA and notes the peculiarity in the vocabulary and rhetorical devices in the selected Newspaper headlines. The study is not a completely political discourse study because it includes headlines on religious discourse, health and education. The study observes that the headlines have hidden ideological meanings and leanings which are polarized between the powerful people or groups whose interests are being served and those whose interests are being undermined. This review, though largely a quantitative classification of headlines along their themes and surface structures, is significant because it lays a foundation for the present study by demonstrating that headlines are not ideologically neutral. Similar conclusion can be made from the study conducted by Mahfouz (2013).

Mahfouz (2013) analyses the linguistic structures of two Egyptian newspapers, ‘Al-Gomhuria’ and ‘Al-Dostour’ in their framing of police news story. The study takes a comparative look at a totally state-controlled newspaper and an independent newspaper. It adopts CDA perspective to explore the nature and scope of the newspapers’ ideologies because language can be used in constructing ideologies and the ideologies can exercise a great deal of power in shaping the reader’s interpretation. The study, therefore, examines the words of the headlines, the lead and the structure of the news stories to decipher ideological polarity between the newspapers. It observes that ‘Al-Gomhuria’, in its style and tone, follows the official line by showing solidarity with the police and downplays their negative side while ‘Al-Dostour’ is biased against the police. The findings in this study are further evidences that news reporting is shaped by the ideologies of the owners which in turn usually have elements of bias against the other group. That is, news reporting is never neutral and ideology free and this informs the careful construction of news headlines, lead paragraphs and structures of news stories in order to reflect the ideological slant of the writer. The next review is a media representation of Nigeria’s Joint Military Task Force (JMTF) in the Niger Delta Crisis.

Chiluluwa (2011) examines the role of the media in the manipulation of the people’s perception and the public opinion of the activities of the JMTF in the Niger Delta Crisis. The study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis framework and identifies two recurrent themes in the newspapers analyzed: theme of