

Pragmatic Expression of Stance in Nigerian Newspaper Reports on Pro-Biafra Protests

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Abstract

The 2015 and 2016 pro-Biafra protests, mostly held in Nigeria's southeastern region, became one of the widely reported issues that have caused ethno-political polarization in the country because of its call for self-determination. Previous studies on the reportage of protest have focused on ideology and discourse strategies in news reports, leaving out how stance markers are pragmatically deployed for positioning and alignment in the discourse. This study examines stance resources in what is referred to as 'threatening discourses' of the 2015 and 2016 pro-Biafra protests as reported in selected Nigerian newspapers. Combining the theory of stance with insights from Jacob Mey's pragmatic act theory, the study examines how expressions of stance are pragmatically deployed in the 2016 pro-Biafra protests. Data for the study were news contents collected from five Nigerian newspapers (*Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *Nigeria Tribune* and *The Sun*) published between 2015 and 2016. These widely circulated newspapers gave due reportage to the pro-Biafra protests. The findings of the study reveal that hypothetical constructions, naming and labeling, rhetorical and embedded questions, and purposive vagueness are the stance strategies used in the text to achieve pragmatic goals of threat, defending, accusing and denying. The paper concludes that addressing marginalization and leadership failure in the country is a pre-condition to douse the protracted violent agitations of the pro-Biafra protesters.

Keywords: Secession, Biafra, stance and appraisal, pragmatic acts, IPOB.

Introduction

All across the globe, there are concerns about separatism. Most of these calls for separation have been violent. While separatism has provided a solution in some cases, it has not in others. The demand for secession has greeted many African nations, and Nigeria is not an exemption in this case. Conflicting issues in governance, politics, and the economy always generate waves of protest in Africa, as this is one way for society to express discontent. In Cameroon, there are waves of protests for secession between the English-speaking areas and the French-speaking areas, led by the Anglophone secessionist movement. There is the Tuareg separatist movement in Mali, led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). In Senegal, the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) was at the forefront of demand for the secession of Southern Senegal. Several West African countries like Niger, Sudan, and South Africa have also had their share in the calls for separation.

Calls for secession by some parts of the country have also been one of the several contemporary issues affecting Nigeria's national security in recent years. Nigeria witnessed a civil war between 1967 and 1970 that threatened its existence as a country. Ever since then, there have been calls to resuscitate the clamour for the secession of the southeastern states from Nigeria. The earliest origin of the agitation for secession could be traced to the May 1967 secession declaration by Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, Military the governor of the then Eastern Region. This secession was not accepted by the General Yakubu Gowon-led military administration. There were conflicting reports about the number of casualties. For instance, while Aneke (2007) reports that more than three million Igbo lives were lost in the war, Aremu and Buhari (2017) claim that about two million people died in the civil war, with larger casualties on the part of Biafra sessionists. Since then, several groups and organisations have resurfaced to raise renewed calls for Biafra's secession from Nigeria. Notable among these Biafra separatist groups are the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). These groups have been involved in a series of protests and demonstrations.

Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), has been at the forefront of this agitation and considered a threat to Nigeria's national security. Due to several protests he organized, he was arrested and detained on October 17th, 2015 and these incidents provided an avenue for constant engagement of the issue in the newspaper on Biafra separationist discourse. The issues surrounding the Biafra secession have continued to raise concerns about the rights of a people to self-determination and the future of Nigeria as a united country. The newspaper became a site for struggle where evaluations are placed in the discourse. Social actions and actors are presented from different perspectives to influence the attitudes of the readers and to communicate vital messages to the public. These orientations are pragmatically conveyed through some strategies to achieve certain communicative goals. Many studies on news reports on terrorism and protests have focused on ideology in the news reports (Chiluwa, 2012; Osisanwo, 2019) and pictorial representations (Osisanwo, 2020). This study will examine these various forms of representation using the stance and appraisal theory (Martin and White, 2005) and pragmatic acts theory (Mey, 2001).

The present study is interested in investigating the resources used in adopting stances in the discourse on the pro-Biafra protests. It identifies the linguistic and discursive features used to signal stance. The adoption of pragmatic theory also helps in identifying how social and cultural factors influence the negotiation of social power.

Studies on media reports on terrorism and protests

There are several studies that have examined the construction of protests in the Nigerian and international media. These include Lee and Craig (1992) and Mitu (2015), who have examined the linguistic and non-linguistic representations in news reports in times of crisis. There are also extant works done on news reports on terrorism and protests on the Nigerian scene.

Chiluwa (2012) examines how people champion resistance on social media networks, with a specific focus on discussions on a forum hosted by Biafra Online

Campaign Groups. The study examines the discourse structure, implications of the online resistance, and ideology in Biafra online forum discussions using the theoretical orientations of CDA. Though the study reports the lack of correspondence between online and offline resistance of the online campaign groups, it notes that the continued use of social media for resistance may go a long way towards raising negative attitudes towards the Nigerian government, especially in light of its role in the Nigerian civil war. Relying on framing theory, Egbunike (2015) examines the frames employed by the media in reporting the *#Occupy Nigeria* protests in January 2012, following the government's removal of subsidies on premium motor spirit (PMS). The study was able to connect the importance of social media to the representation of social events as it notes the imbalance in the representation of events on social media. There is, however, no close link between the frames and the underlying ideologies identified in the study. Chilwa and Odebunmi (2016) examine how the *Boko Haram* group is evaluated in Nigerian cyberspace, drawing data from online conversations in an online news community using the theoretical insights from stance and engagement. They report that there is a negative evaluation of not only the *Boko Haram* members but also Islam and Northern Nigeria as a whole. This, they argue, is potentially dangerous for the restoration of harmonious living among the people.

Osisanwo (2016) examines how online readers of the E-Punch newspaper construct and negotiate their feelings on how the Nigerian government under President Goodluck Jonathan was able to wage war against the *Boko Haram* insurgency. Ethnicity, religiosity, and partisanship fuelled the comments on the forum. Engagement techniques such as questioning, appeal to shared knowledge, use of pronouns, and personal asides are used to condemn the administration's performance in curbing terrorism and also defend the administration. Guided by theoretical orientations from van Leeuwen's (visual) representation of social actors, Osisanwo (2020) examines the pictorial and verbal representation of *Boko Haram* terrorists in Nigerian newspapers. He reports that negative perceptions of the group are reinforced through two tools: individualisation, where social actors are solely presented, and collectivisation which is concerned with how social actors are jointly presented as pursuing similar goals. The study also analysis how setting, colour, and arrangement of elements serve purposive functions in the negative presentation of the *Boko Haram* group. Osisanwo and Iyoha (2020) examine representations of actors in the discourse surrounding pro-Biafra protests. The relevance of this study lies in its detailed account of representational strategies of protesters as 'freedom fighters' and 'economic saboteurs on the one hand, and 'law-biding citizens' on the other hand. This shows how news reports become sites of struggle among social actors in the discourse.

These studies have examined the grammatical choices used to pursue ideological ends. The present study examines how social actors take stances through their choice of lexis and grammatical structures in order to achieve specific goals. This is important because only the contextual study of language will reveal how people are positioned in news reports and account for the reasons for this evaluative positioning.

Methodology

The data for this study were newspaper reports on the 2015 and 2016 pro-Biafra protests published by four Nigerian newspapers: *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *Nigeria Tribune* and *The Sun*. These newspapers, all based in the south, allocate sufficient space to the coverage of the protests. It was a period when there were heated issues, especially due to the arrest and detention of the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Nnamdi Kanu. The data for this study is made up of fifty news reports gathered from all the selected newspapers on the 2015 and 2016 pro-Biafra protests. However, six news reports were purposively selected from each of the newspapers for analysis for objectivity and balancing. Pro-Biafra protests in 2015 and 2016 were heated and important as they mark the build-up to the 50th anniversary of the commemoration of the 1967 declaration of the independence of the Biafran region, which was pronounced on May 27, 1967. The pro-Biafra protests generated increased interest in local and international news media during this period. The data were analysed using the stance and pragmatic act theory.

Theoretical Orientation

Several scholars have combined the theory of stance with other theories such as conversation analysis (Haddington, 2006), politeness theory (Chojnicka 2015), theory of identity (Abrar, 2020), and critical discourse analysis. The aim of these approaches is to understand and unravel how language is used in social interactions. This study, therefore, combines the theory of stance with pragmatic act theory. As Chojnicka's (2015: 27) notes, "all stance markers are additionally connected by a pragmatic function that they have in common." Integrating the theory of stance and pragmatic acts theory is essential to revealing interpersonal relationships in conversations/texts. Combining these two approaches will help us understand not just the lexical, grammatical, or textual evaluation present in texts, but also the intentions producing these evaluations and how they align. This will help to understand how resistance is pragmatically developed in texts by pointing out how acts of resistance are pragmatically positioned in texts.

Pragmatic Acts Theory

The theory of pragmatics is concerned with the mental structure underlying how interlocutors in communicative events negotiate meanings. It is the concern of pragmatic theoretical framework to account for the communicative intentions of speakers when they perform linguistic, non-linguistic, and extra-linguistic acts. This is because, in certain situations, the meaning of an utterance goes beyond what is stated. Since language is used to serve different purposes, it is possible for a speaker to say more or less than what is said in a communicative event. Levinson (1983, p. 5) defines pragmatics as "the study of language in use." This definition points to pragmatics as a field of study concerned with the study of meaning generated between a speaker and a listener within a given context. The pragmatic act theory is suitable for this study so as to examine the situated speech acts, taking note of the context in which the speech acts are used. As Haddington (2013: 4) notes, 'an analyst should be able to say more than simply that a linguistic practice expresses a stance.'

Mey's pragmatic act is concerned with how meanings to utterances are constrained by the context of use. Pragmatic meaning, therefore, refers to

contextualised meaning. Mey's (2001) model of the pragmatic act has two integrated elements: the activity and the textual part. Mey's (2001) model of the pragmatic act is a framework for analyzing the communication process and understanding how meaning is conveyed beyond the literal interpretation of words. PAT emphasizes the situational and contextual nature of text. It is a theory of context that places value on the context of situation than the spoken act itself. As such, pragmatic acts are situation-derived and situation-constrained, determined by the broader social context in which they occur.

This study is interested in Mey's conceptualization of "pragmatic acts as social empowerment" (Mey, 2001: 263). Mey conceptualizes pragmatic acting as exploiting one's social empowerment, rather than exercising power in a given situation. This implies that language is not only used to convey information but also to perform actions or accomplish goals in social situations. Pragmatic acts are actions performed through the use of language, such as making requests, giving orders, making promises, and expressing thanks. Pragmatic acting as an exploitation of one's social empowerment refers to the idea that individuals use their linguistic and social skills to achieve their goals or influence others in a particular situation. In other words, pragmatic acting involves using one's ability to communicate effectively and navigate social situations to achieve a desired outcome, rather than relying on formal authority or position of power.

When combined with stance and appraisal theory, pragmatic act theory can help to identify the communicative function of the speaker's stance and appraisal, are shaped by the context of the discourse, such as the social and cultural norms, and how it is related to the broader goals and purposes of the discourse, and the speaker and the listener, and the specific communicative situation. Analysts thus can gain a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which language is used to convey meaning, express attitudes and perspectives, and achieve communicative goals in various contexts.

Theory of stance

Stance refers to the way authors adopt points of view as it relates to the issues they discuss in their works. It refers to how emotions are infused into texts and meanings are negotiated in interactions through implicit evaluations of opinions. Authors negotiate meanings not only through words but also through the intricate values that language expresses through aspects of non-referential information such as mood and feelings that allow readers to know the positions maintained by the writers. Hence, no use of language is considered truly neutral, objective, and value-free (Simpson 1993, p. 7) but all use is related to specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts through which writers seek to offer a credible representation of themselves and their work. The interactional feature of language gives room for writers and speakers to express their opinions, stamp their personal authority onto their arguments, step back and disguise involvement... (Hyland 2005, p. 175). Scholars employ different terms to describe the linguistic recourses that are deployed when speakers and listeners or writers and readers interact. These terms have been identified in discourse using many terminologies, such as stance (Biber and Finegan 1989; Hyland 2005), metadiscourse (Hyland & Tse 2004), and appraisal (Martin 2000).

Four types of stance have been identified in the literature. These include: affective stance (the emotion expressed by the speaker); evidential stance (the source of the knowledge expressed and the speaker-based evidence for the claim or assertion made); epistemic stance (how committed the speaker is to the amount of certainty or possibility resident in a proposition); and evaluative stance (the evaluative judgment of beauty, goodness, or other specific socio-culturally determined attributes expressed by the speaker) (cf. Keisanen & Karkkainen 2014, p. 297). In these types of stance, the linguistic resources expressing stance include references, deixis, clauses, stance verbs, stance adjectives, stance nouns, reported speeches, adverbials, stance adverbs, complement clauses, modals, and passivisation (Biber and Finegan 1989, 2007, Biber 2004, Keisanen & Karkkainen 2014). These resources have been termed stance components: evidentiality, affect, and presence (Hyland, 2005).

Martin and White's 2005 appraisal framework combines three interacting systems of Engagement, Attitude and Graduation. The Attitude component refers to the speaker's evaluation of the content, whether positive, negative, or neutral. This component is further divided into three subcategories: affect (emotions and feelings), judgment (assessment of the content), and appreciation (subjective evaluation). The Engagement component refers to the degree of emotional involvement of the speaker in the content. This component is divided into two subcategories: affect (emotional state of the speaker) and responsiveness (reaction to the content). The Graduation component refers to the degree of intensity or forcefulness of the evaluation. This component is divided into two subcategories: force (the degree of strength or emphasis in the evaluation) and focus (the degree of specificity or generality of the evaluation).

Analysis and discussion

Strengthening modality through hypothetical constructions

In the engagement subsystem of appraisal framework, modality does not only signal the commitment of a speaker to a truth value. It expresses meaning in negotiation to other possible meanings. Hypothetical constructions are sentences that are conditional. They present situations that are unreal, imagined, or suggested. Hypothetical sentences can be true, but they are not necessarily true. In other words, it presents issues that do not exist or are yet to exist as though they would. The study examines hypothetical constructions mainly marked by the conditional *if*-clauses. A hypothetical construction is considered a strong signal of evaluation because of its capacity to present a non-factual event at the moment as if it were a fact, although it may eventually occur in the future. Structurally, the hypothetical sentences in the data are made up of two parts: the conditional part marked by the "if" marker and the consequent part, which expresses the effect of the former. In the data, hypothetical constructions are used to express conditionality, and possible consequences of actions, mostly threats. Its evaluative use positions the reader to align with the opinion of the writer or speaker.

Text 1

MASSOB Deputy Director of Information, Mazi Chris Mocha, stated this yesterday in Onitsha while speaking with journalists. His words, *"Buhari cannot stop us from actualisation of a sovereign state of Biafra even if he*

sends the entire security operatives in the country to the South East and South South geo-political zones."

(The Sun, Wed. Sep. 16, 2015 Pg 10, Buhari can't stop Biafra –MASSOB)

In text 1, the speaker, Mazi Chris Mocha, appears to be highly engaged and emotionally invested in the actualization of a sovereign state of Biafra. He uses forceful language to express his views and positions himself and his group, MASSOB, as the rightful advocates for the cause. The use of the lexes "cannot" and "even if ..." demonstrates his confidence and determination in achieving their goal, despite the obstacles that may be presented. The conditional clause reinforces the determination of members of MASSAB to actualise their goal. The conditional clause is used to pressurize the Federal Government of Nigeria and security operatives. The positioning of the two parts of a hypothetical structure is even a mark of evaluation and positioning. The first proposition is a declarative: "Buhari cannot stop us from actualisation of a sovereign state of Biafra..." followed by the conditional part, "**even if** he sends the entire security operatives in the country to the South East and South South geopolitical zones." The positioning in the text would be different if the conditional preceded the declarative proposition. The positioning of a declarative sentence before the subordinate clause marked by the *if* clause makes the proposition in the sentence very strong. The pragmatic act of challenging is made to signal that President Buhari does not have the power to stop the actualization of a sovereign state of Biafra.

Text 2

If Ojukwu were alive, I know he would have declared another war, which *perhaps*, would have been the departing point in Nigeria.

(*The Guardian*, Nov. 15, 2015. Pg. 20, Special Report, Biafra: In The Throes Of Dreams, Daredevilry And Deaths)

Text 2 is a hypothetical sentence that marks regret about the demise of the former leader of the Biafra movement, Ojukwu. The use of the modal verb "would" suggests a high degree of certainty in the speaker's assessment. The text expresses a negative emotion, namely fear, regarding the possibility of another war. The use of the word "war" itself carries a negative connotation, and the speaker's assertion that it could be a "departing point" suggests a potential catastrophic outcome. There is also a subjective judgement about the potential consequences of Ojukwu's actions, presupposing a causal relationship between Ojukwu's hypothetical actions and the departure from Nigeria. The conditional clause marker "if" is used with a past verb form to express regret for an impossible desire or wish. It expresses regret by indicating that a course of action could have taken a different direction but for the death of Biafra's former leader, Odumegwu Ojukwu. This implies that but for the death of Ojukwu, there could have been another civil war. The use of "perhaps" in the text is also evaluative. Although it indicates that the agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra would have been resuscitated by Ojukwu, it also indicates that the secession may not be successful. As such, there is no assurance that the fight will be worthwhile.

Text 3:

... He stressed that *if* the people, especially the youths were gainfully employed, they would not have resorted to street protest. "*If* these men agitating for the state of Biafra are gainfully employed, they will not be in the streets protesting.

(*The Guardian*, Mon. Nov. 23, 2015, Pg 7 Senator blames pro-Biafra protests on worsening economy)

Using the judgement subsystem, the text evaluates the cause of pro-Biafra protests, suggesting that if the people, particularly the youths, were employed, they would not engage in such activities. While this presents a negative judgment about the agitators, implying that they are unemployed and, therefore, resorting to street protests, it also highlights the complex social, economic, and political issues underlying the agitators' grievances. It points out the government's insensitivity to the protesters' legitimate claims and struggles. The text is an instance of causal relations. It shows the cause-and-effect situation as it relates to the Biafran agitators on the one hand and the Nigerian government on the other hand. It connects the unrest created by those agitating for the creation of the Biafran state to economic neglect by the government. The agitators position themselves as victims of economic neglect, which tries to arouse pity to justify the reason why they engage in the agitation for secession.

The presentation of the agitators as victims helps appeal to the readers' emotions and evoke pity. An accusation is made here against the federal government of Nigeria for its neglect of a vital demography of the population – youths. This shows that youth unemployment and a lack of economic opportunities are some of the reasons for the violent agitations by the protesters, who are presumably youths. Since they feel that they have been marginalised in the distribution of the commonwealth, they have to agitate for self-determination to be able to manage their resources themselves. The text highlights the importance of job creation and economic empowerment as a means of addressing social unrest and promoting stability. The text also pragmatically directing the government to take action to ensure that Nigeria's democracy is inclusive and reflective of the country's diverse population.

Text 4:

If we want everybody to be part of the Nigeria nation, then our democracy should be practised as it is being done in other countries of the world; we should be able to tailor ours to suit our multi-ethnic composition.

(*Nigerian Tribune*, Thurs. Nov 12, 2015. Pg 18 Reasons for the Biafra agitation)

The use of "if" and "should" in text 4 suggests that the author is presenting a conditional statement and expressing a sense of obligation. The use of "if" indicates that the author believes that inclusivity in Nigerian democracy is not a given, but rather something that needs to be actively pursued. The use of the modal verb "should" conveys a sense of responsibility and indicates that the belief in the need to

adapt democracy to suit Nigeria's peculiar needs. The text expresses a positive attitude towards the idea of evolving democratic practices to suit Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition. This is evident from the use of the word "should" which indicates a sense of obligation. The text reveals that intra-class struggle is also fuelled by ethnicity. It implies that the condition for a safe society will be premised on its consideration for the multi-ethnic composition of the country. The above conditional sentence presents the reason for and solution to the Biafra agitation. The text points out neglect, marginalization, and ethnic challenges as the main problems that led to the agitation for Biafra. This positions the reader to become aware that unity as a basis for progress in a multi-ethnic Nigerian society is not there. Adaptation of democracy will require that there should be mutual respect and accommodation for all ethnic groups. Through the pragmatic act of suggesting, the text advocates building a united country devoid of ethnic chauvinism as the solution to the challenge being faced by the country.

Text 5

Look at the way President Buhari has made his appointments, it is purely skewed against Ndigbo and even at this age, I still feel I should fight again if that can remedy the situation. I want to see Biafra in Igboland before I die.

(*The Guardian*, Nov 15, 2015. Pg 20, Special Report, Biafra: In The Throes Of Dreams, Daredevilry And Deaths)

Through the judgement subsystem in appraisal framework evaluates the text evaluates the actions of the President based on social norms. The judgement about President Buhari's appointments is negative with appointments unfair and biased against the Igbo people. The text also presents a positive judgment of the idea of fighting again provided it can remedy the situation. This indicates that the author sees value in taking action to address the problem of biased appointments. The judgement in the text can be viewed from both moral and legal perspectives as it concerns the appointments and the legitimation of fighting for change as a result of marginalization. Just as text 4, text 5 shows how imbalance in economic and political development is a factor that has fuelled the agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra. By implication, ethnicity becomes a powerful tool in mobilizing solidarity among groups of people.

Expression of attitude and graduation through naming and labeling

Naming and labelling are ways of judging social actors and their actions (Chiluwa, 2011). It affords speakers to express their judgement of behaviour in actions. The judgement subsystem of appraisal deals with how human behaviours are assessed. Naming and labeling are strategies used not only to describe social actors and actions but also to weigh the acceptance of these behaviours in society. The description of actions is an evaluation strategy that is used to tag or link people to what they do, so that instead of the original name they are known by, there is a shift in the way people look at them because of the new label attached to them. Here, we are concerned about how the government is represented and how the militants are represented. While the government is represented as 'violators', 'oppressors', the

protesters dis-align and present themselves as "victims," "freedom fighters," and "Biafrans." The naming of social actors is a good way to strategically position readers. It gives information and a picture of who social actors are, and it also reinforces the beliefs of people about their actions.

Text 6:

...to resuscitate Biafra for what? With who? It cannot be with Nigeria because the country has gone past that stage of fighting itself. The truth is if these Biafran **agitators** do not retrace their steps, they would be treated like the Niger Delta **militants** and Boko Haram **insurgents** – that is as common **criminals**. (*The Nation*, Thursday, Nov. 19, 2015, Pg. 17)

Naming and labelling are used to accuse and counter-accuse. The text below shows how news reports become sites of struggle among social actors. In the text below, the Biafran protesters are projected as "agitators," "militants," "insurgents," and "criminals." This shows that aside from the Biafran protest, the country is also faced with similar challenges like the insurgent acts of *Boko Haram* in North-Eastern Nigeria and militancy in the Niger Delta region of the country, among other emerging social crises. This equates the agitations of the protesters with acts of criminality that should be devoid of due consideration and societal empathy. The choice of these labelling to describe the actions of the protesters incriminates them and raises a negative tag towards their perception. In text 7, 8, and 9, the Biafra agitators refer to themselves as "freedom agitators," "freedom fighters," and not "terrorists."

Text 7:

We are **armless**, we have not harmed anybody and we owe nobody any apology for what we are doing. As **Biafrans**, we stand for peace and justice will reign. (*Vanguard*, Wed, Oct 21, 2015 pg 14, Protesters in Rivers, Delta, Anambra demand unconditional release of Biafra boss.)

Text 8:

Chanting songs of grievance and displaying placards, which bore various inscriptions such as "Freedom for Biafra, free Nnamdi Kanu", "**We are not terrorists**, we are **freedom fighters**", "We are tired of intimidation and harassment by Nigeria Government", (*Vanguard*, Wed, Oct 21, 2015 pg 14, Protesters in Rivers, Delta, Anambra demand unconditional release of Biafra boss.)

Text 9:

One of the protesters Ikechukwu Okoye once said, "We were not protesting to cause any form of trouble but for the release of our leader, Nnamdi Kanu. **We are freedom agitators**, we obey the laws of the land, knowing that there is freedom of speech and freedom of movement," he said. (*The Guardian*, Nov 15, 2015. Pg 20, Special Report, Biafra: In The Throes Of Dreams, Daredevilry And Deaths)

Naming and labelling is connected to the Attitude subsystem of Appraisal framework when people or groups are categorized in a particular way to generate emotional feelings. It may also connect to the graduation subsystem as when naming and labelling is used to intensify or downplay the evaluation of a person or group. Naming and labelling allow speakers/writers to express their attitudes towards people, groups, or concepts through the use of evaluative language. When speakers/writers use naming and labelling, they are categorizing people or groups in a particular way that carries evaluative implications. Text 7 presents the agitators as "armless" and "Biafrans." The choice to be considered armless communicates the message that violent actions that are meted out to terrorists and insurgents are uncalled for. They also present themselves as "Biafrans." This raises the assumption that they are either not Nigerians or they refuse to identify with Nigeria, having created a new ethnic identity. In Text 8, there is also a disalignment through the use of negation to counter the earlier portrayal of the protesters as "militants." This shows that there is a supposed dialogic positioning that has earlier presented them as terrorist by the government. Text 9 builds upon the rights of the protesters to speech and movement to express their grievances and demand "freedom."

Positioning through rhetorical questions

Within the Engagement subsystem, the use of rhetorical questions encourage active interactions with the issue being discussed, thus creating the possibility of multiple voices, options and opinions in discourse. Rhetorical questions are used to persuade the audience. They have strong persuasive ability in discourse to position readers to align with a particular line of thought. In certain situations, the speaker who poses a question may go ahead and answer it in order to further reinforce the weight of the proposition contained in the expression. Rhetorical questions are used to perform the pragmatic acts of challenging and

Text 10:

The population of the South East is kept low through an unwritten state policy, yet we remain the only tribe that can boast of having a presence in all the towns in the country, we have five states, the only zone so favoured. **The question is what is the Igbo man being punished for?** (*The Guardian*, Nov 15, 2015. Pg 20, Special Report, Biafra: In The Throes Of Dreams, Daredevilry And Deaths)

Text 11:

The eternal question remains: "Can Biafra be realised? Should the Federal Government not engage the agitators before this thing gets out of hand?" said a civil servant in Awka, Mr UzuakwoNwosu, (*The Guardian*, Nov 15, 2015. Pg 20, Special Report, Biafra: In The Throes Of Dreams, Daredevilry And Deaths)

Text 12:

Why are the people of the South East crying for an independent homeland (Biafra) now? It is because Nigeria is not well-structured. Everybody is not benefitting from the Nigerian State...I am thinking that we should have a

situation whereby we will have the president, who will be assisted by five vice presidents from the other geo-political zones in the country. (*Nigerian Tribune*, Thurs. Nov 12, 2015. Pg. 18, Reasons for the Biafra agitation)

Text 10 provides certain information about the southeastern part of the country before posing the question. The previous statements give positive information about the contributions of people from the part of the country. Part of this includes their wide geographical dispersion in all parts of the country. Despite this, they are presented as marginalised considering the number of states in the geopolitical zones. The southeast geopolitical zone is made up of five states, while other zones have six. This resonates the concern for political and socio-economic marginalization of the people. The questioner in text 11 goes ahead to provide a hint about the possible solutions to the questions posed. In this text, the questioner foregrounds a certain proposition in the question posed. The second question posed, "Should the Federal Government not engage the agitators before this thing gets out of hand?" is given as though it is an already accepted notion that the protesters have been truly neglected by the government. This, as contained in the rhetorical question posed, should not be subjected to doubt. Text 12 also goes ahead to suggest a solution to the problem of marginalisation being experienced by the protesters. Pragmatic act of challenging contests the policy of marginalization, asserting act stresses that the agitation for Biafra is due to the unequal representation of different regions in government and suggesting act recommends restructuring the country to ensure that all regions are equally represented in government.

Purposive vagueness

Purposive vagueness can be used to create ambiguity in language, which in turn can serve a rhetorical purpose in expressing Attitude. Discussions on sensitive and controversial topics may motivate the use of vagueness for positive or negative purposes. Vagueness in discourse is an interactional strategy geared towards achieving a specific goal. Vague language refers to expressions used indistinctly and may have the possibility of generating multiple meanings in a discourse or not making any specific meaning at all. Expressions including imprecise quantifiers, modificational adverbs, and vague nouns are used to realise vagueness in the texts.

Text 13:

Biafra is not a new phenomenon.....unfortunately, **some funny characters** who knew nothing about the origin of Biafra are today making noise all over the place, claiming that they want to resuscitate Biafra. (*The Nation*, Thursday, Nov. 19, 2015 Pg. 17, The Pro-Biafra jokers)

Text 13 uses vagueness to make a negative evaluation of those who are advocating for the resuscitation of Biafra. By referring to "funny characters," the text is using vague language to make a judgement about those who are advocating for Biafra, without specifying exactly who they are or what their motivations might be. The use of vague language in this case could be seen as a rhetorical strategy designed to imply that those advocating for Biafra are misguided, uninformed, or otherwise unworthy

of consideration. The text above has successfully evaded the mention of the agitators who could have been mentioned.

Text 14:

No fewer than three persons were *reportedly* killed following a clash between Navy personnel and members of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) in Onitsha, Anambra State. *It was gathered that some members* of Biafra were allegedly killed on Sunday afternoon during a clash with men of the Nigerian Navy at Onitsha. **Some sources said as many as 10 persons** were shot dead while other sources said between three and five persons were allegedly killed. (*The Sun*. Tues, Sep. 1, 2015 Pg. 10, 3 killed as naval officers, pro-Biafran group clash in Onitsha)

The text employs vagueness by providing conflicting information about the number of casualties in a clash between Navy personnel and members of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) in Onitsha, Anambra State. Vague quantifiers are used in the text. The report states that "as many as 10 persons were shot dead" according to some sources, while other sources claim that "between three and five persons were allegedly killed." The use of vague language in this instance can be interpreted as a means of conveying the uncertainty surrounding the incident. The vagueness used in the text creates ambiguity around the actual number of casualties, which could be a deliberate attempt to minimize the severity of the incident or to avoid making a definitive statement about the number of casualties without concrete evidence. The use of self-mention would have helped in the report above to clearly state the source of the knowledge rather than the use of "reportedly," which gives no credence to the source of the report. The use of vagueness in the text serves to convey the complexity and ambiguity of the situation.

Conclusion

The study has examined how stance strategies are performed for the purpose of certain pragmatic acts. The study finds out that hypothetical constructions are used to make threats and warn the Nigerian government. The study finds out that hypothetical constructions serve pragmatic purposes of warning and threat. Naming and labeling is a strategy used by the protesters as a means of exoneration so as to positively position and portray themselves in good light. On the part of the government, this strategy is used to emphasise the deviant behaviours of the protesters and attach it to their actions. Rhetorical questions are used to appeal to the emotions of the public to get the government to accede to the agitations of the protesters. There is the use of purposive vagueness to avoid providing sufficient information through the use of imprecise quantifiers. Pragmatic acts of challenging, directing, suggesting, warning, asserting, threatening were used in the discourse to serve various purposes. The agitations of the Biafra secessionists contain threatening discourses which are inspired by their marginalised claims and thrives in the discourse because of the weak democratic structures that should have addressed these concerns.

The study concludes that news reports provide a site of struggle for the negotiation of interests between the government and the pro-Biafra protesters. If certain conditions that address the concerns of the protesters are met, the agitation

for secession by the protesters may be shelved. Thus, government can constructively engage the concerns of the protesters for meaningful through positive engagements. The Nigerian government needs to constructively engage the concerns of the protests by addressing issues of marginalization and running an inclusive government in order to mitigate the calls for secession in Nigeria.

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