

A Discourse Analysis of Media Reports on the Niger Delta Crises in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigates reports on the print media such as newspapers and magazines, employing the techniques of Discourse Analysis. The aim of the research is to analyse the news headlines in selected newspapers and magazines to identify and discuss the linguistic and non-linguistic codes employed by journalists in their reports. The paper is also concerned with ascertaining the speech acts performed by the words in the media reports to determine their felicity conditions and their pragmatic implications. The main finding of the study is that the different sections of the media have been useful in transmitting information from the government to the masses and vice versa. They have also been involved in carrying propaganda on both sides of the divide, that is, the in-group (the Niger Delta communities) and the out-group (the government and the multi-national oil companies).

Introduction

The crisis in the Niger Delta region was an issue on the lips of many Nigerians about a decade ago. The struggle began in the early nineties as a result of agitation by the people from the Niger Delta for self-determination and control of the oil resources produced in their region.

There were peaceful protests, militancy, dialogues and negotiations both nationally and internationally.

Speeches were made by the agitators, the Nigerian government representatives and the multi- national oil companies involved. This paper is an attempt to explore the role of the media in the negotiations that took place for the resolution of the Niger Delta conflict. The objectives of this research, therefore, are to explore the discourse strategies employed in the media reports, ascertain the level of media involvement in the dissemination of information to the Nigerian populace at the time and highlight their function in propagating significant information that enhanced or helped in the resolution of the conflict.

This is a qualitative research which employed a purposive sampling technique in the collection of data from newspapers. Data relevant to the research was collected randomly from national newspapers and magazines mainly from the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and the University of Nigeria Nsukka libraries.

The media and communication

The media is a general term used to refer to the different tools of communication employed for the dissemination of information from one source to another. The media incorporates different aspects of the communications industry like the print media, news media, broadcasting, advertising, social media and others.

Communication is a very significant aspect of human life in the sense that it helps human beings discover themselves establish and maintain meaningful

relationships and also examine and try to change their personal attitudes and behavior as well as that of others. Furthermore, communication enhances man's ability to develop himself and his surroundings, thus implying its significance in human development (Nkenchor 2019:15).

In a related study, Ezinwa and Okoye (2015) assessed the role of the social media in public relations practice in Nigeria. Their findings reveal that the social media have helped in the reduction of the communication gap between public relations practitioners and the general public, thereby creating a favourable atmosphere for interaction and meaningful dispensation of information about products and services.

An integrated framework is employed in this research, consisting of discourse analysis and the pragmatic field of study. Discourse can be defined as any expression, either written or spoken, which is larger than a sentence. Any succession of sentences, all texts (either written or spoken), may be said to constitute discourse. Discourse analysis can therefore be defined as the analysis of discourse, that is, the analysis of language in use (Brown and Yule 1983:1) and Osisanwo (2003:8). As stated earlier, this paper is a discourse analysis of some media reports on the Niger Delta crisis. Pragmatics, on the other hand, is a field of study which is concerned with different aspects of interpersonal communication from the point of view of context. It is preoccupied with issues of correctness and appropriateness in language use. Leech (1982) in his book titled "Principles of Pragmatics", considers pragmatics from three angles; speech- acts, conversational implicature and interpersonal rhetorics. In this research, we shall also

highlight the speech acts performed in the media reports along with their pragmatic implications.

Media Reports on the Niger Delta Crisis

The media is normally used in a collective sense to describe and to refer to the different means of mass communication which includes the radio, television, newspapers and magazines. But for the purpose of our research, we shall limit our analysis to reports on the print media, that is, newspapers and magazines. This work analyses news headlines in selected newspapers and magazines to ascertain the linguistic and non-linguistic codes employed. It also considers the speech acts performed through them by determining their felicity conditions and drawing out their pragmatic implications.

Headline 1 A Story of Rape

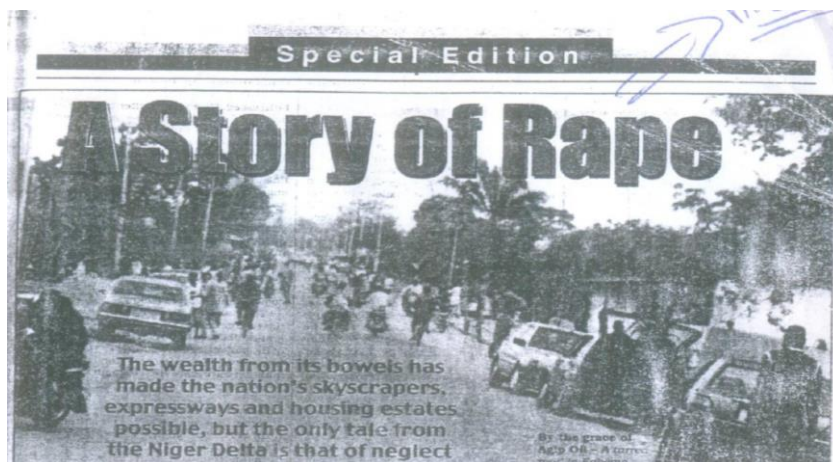


Figure 1: A Story of Rape

A story of rape by Lucky Fiakpa, *Tell*, 14, April 7, 2003. The wealth from its bowels has made the nation's

skyscrapers, express ways and housing estates possible, but the only tale from the Niger delta is that of neglect.

Linguistic Coding Figure 1

Linguistic coding can be described as the messages and ideas that writers and users of language encode in linguistic forms at different levels of linguistic analysis such as phonology, morphology, lexis, syntax and semantics. The headline begins with a phrase “A story of rape” as if the writer intends to tell a story (which he eventually does in the content) about Oloibiri and other ND communities from which oil explorations had been done. These communities, according to the report were abandoned after the oil wells dried up. Today, the places are still under developed. The writer explains this better in the content using the following expressions:

The saddest tale of all was that as the oil dried up in Oloibiri, shell folded up its operations and left the place. Today, all that are left are the abandoned oil wells all over the place. It is a story of rape. It is a story of sadness ... the people and government of Bayelsa only remember Oloibiri with a deep sense of nostalgia. (Tell, April 7 2003: 51).

At the lexical level, the writer’s choice of words is deliberate because he intends to communicate a particular meaning: rape means the use of force to have sexual relationship with someone against the person’s will. The victim is treated mercilessly. The writer by implication compares and likens the “act” of shell on Oloibiri and the ND communities to the act of raping

someone. After using the available resources to their satisfaction, they abandoned the people.

The writer's lexical choice in the second part is also remarkable. The land Oloibiri, representing the ND communities is personified. It possesses the qualities of a human being. (With bowels), that is to say, the oil represents the wealth from its bowels drilled and used to build skyscrapers and other infrastructure in Lagos and later Abuja. But as the story still continues; the "tale" from the Niger Delta is that of neglect.

The pragmatic implication of the writer's choice of the word "rape" is that the people feel as if they have been raped and cannot believe what has happened to them. They cannot imagine the extent of their loss and naivety. It is like a story, a folk tale, something fictitious, maybe a dream from which they should arise and find out that "it" never happened.

At the syntactic level, the headline consists of two parts; the major headline which is in bolder print, with additional visual effects, is composed of a noun phrase, "A story of rape". This, functions as an introduction while the second part, in smaller not so bold prints consist of two simple sentences which function as explanations to the rather incomplete introduction. The two sentences are joined by the coordinating conjunction "but" which further serves pragmatically as a corrective, linking the two speech acts expressed in the two sentences.

At the pragmatic level, the two sentences; "the wealth from its bowels..." and "but the only tale..." are declarative sentences which have the illocutionary force

of assertives. They assert the state of affairs of the Niger Delta communities representing the writer's state of mind.

Propositional Content

The kind of meaning expressed in the propositional part of the above headline specifies that it is a declaration, an assertive which makes a proposition that while the wealth from the ND soil has developed other parts of the nation, it has ravaged and made the host communities poorer and abandoned.

Sincerity Rules

With regard to the sincerity conditions of the above headline, we bring to the fore the significant factor of the general knowledge about the world which the writer talks/writes. Individuals acquire knowledge about the world in different ways; through personal experiences of different social, political and economic happenings and interactions with people, through observation and acculturation. (Osisanwo (2003:84). Based on the foregoing, we adjudge the speech act in the above headline to be felicitous because the assertives are sincere. They describe the exact state of Oloibiri and most ND communities. From the present researcher's personal observation and from other documented evidence, we can say that the above assertives are true. Moreover, the writer substantiated his claim through some non-linguistic codes such as two pictures showing the deplorable conditions of some host communities.

Preparatory Condition

These are the conditions that must necessarily hold for the successful performance of the speech act. For our

study, the writer is a journalist and we are mainly concerned with a media event here. Consequently, the conditions are met making Lucky Fiakpa's assertives felicitous.

Non-Linguistic Codes

In the course of their information presentation, journalists also use non-linguistic codes such as photographs, pictures, images and cartoons. In the headline under investigation, Lucky Fiakpa employed such codes in the form of pictures taken to substantiate his claim. The first pix is titled: By the "Grace of Agip Oil" a Tarred Road in Egbema and the second is captioned: Ugborodo's Primary School-Razed and yet to be completely renovated.

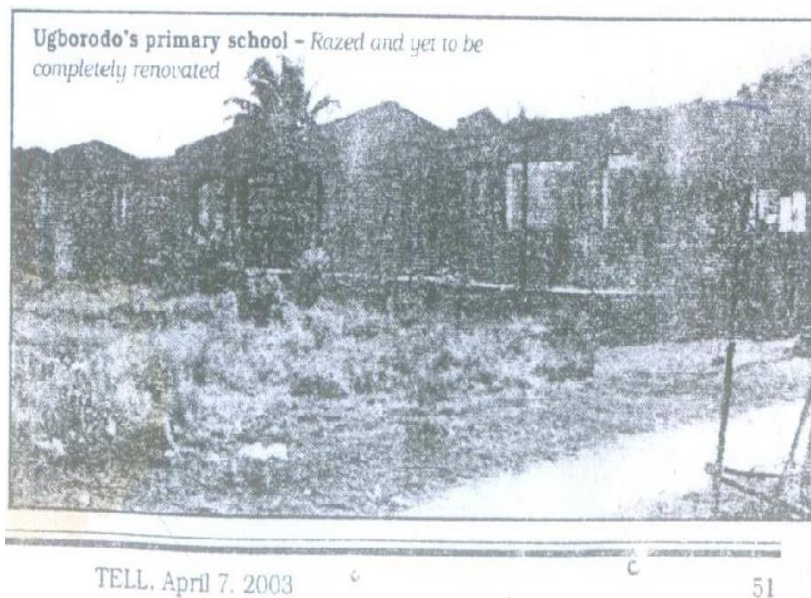


Figure 2: Ugborodo's Primary School-razed and yet to be completely renovated

The pictures highlight the substandard tarred road constructed by the Grace of Agip Oil and the school that was apparently razed due to a leaking or vandalized pipeline but it is yet to be given attention. What comes to the mind here is Saro-Wiwa's accusation against shell that shell does in Ogoni land what it would not do in other countries where it was prospecting oil.

Headline 2 Heaven and Hell, Side by Side By Osita Nwajah.

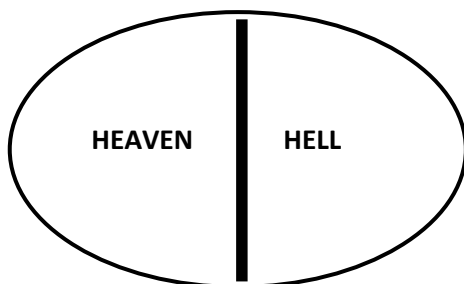


Figure 3: Heaven and Hell: Side by Side

Oil companies in Nigeria own and maintain restricted islands of splendour while giving scant regard to the squalor and deprivations foisted on their host communities.

Linguistic Analysis

The paradoxical “Heaven and hell, side by side”, possesses an almost magnetic visual effect that cannot but draw every eye that sees it to the paper. The writer, obviously burdened by plight of the host communities artistically put the words together in such an eye-catching way. This is linguistic parallelism employed by Osita Nwajah to achieve different perlocutionary effects in his readers.



Most people have this notion and belief from childhood that heaven is somewhere up in the sky while hell is in the bottomless pit, beneath the earth. But in this report by Nwajah, he created a new experience where both places are placed side by side. The expression is carefully foregrounded to spark off and yield different pragmatic implicatures.

At the lexical level, the writer's lexical choice deserves attention. Why does he choose "heaven" and "hell" which denote very distinct/opposing ideas and experiences and connote very heavy semantic and pragmatic contrasts. Heaven connotes everything that is [+ GOOD] while hell connotes everything that is bad and evil, suggesting that they are polar antonyms which have no gradations in between. Thus, we have a dichotomy between +good and -good

Table 2: Lexical Choice Describing This Dichotomy

+ Good		- Good
Heaven	DICHOTOMY	Hell
Oil companies		Scant regard
Own		Squalor
Maintain		Deprivation
Islands of splendor		Host communities

At the syntactic level, we have two phrases, "heaven and hell" a noun phrase and "side by side" an adverbial phrase of place. The verb being modified by the adverb is either floating somewhere or completely deleted by the writer's journalistic license which permits them to use language in this scanty and economical way.

Sincerity Condition

To ask about the sincerity of the above illocutionary act is like asking whether black and white are the same colour. At the literal and truth-value levels, there is no happy functioning of the above illocutionary act. It is therefore infelicitous. However, considering its pragmatic implicature, going beyond surface meaning and falling back on shared background Knowledge, the above statement is true, as the data gathered in the field shows.

Propositional Content

The proposition made in the above expression is difficult to be determined since it is incomplete and lacking a performative verb. However, given the content in which the expression is made, in the content of journalism and given that shared knowledge, it is easy to explain that the sentence is an example of an ellipted one. We understand that underlyingly, the complete sentence should be something close to any of the following:

- (a) Heaven and hell are living side by side.
- (b) Heaven and hell are side by side.

Based on this, one can argue that the positional content of the above headline is a declarative sentence with the illocutionary force of an assertive. The headline states and asserts the practical state of the Niger Delta host communities, where people in the same community live in different worlds, one group in heaven and the other in hell. The words “heaven” and “hell” are descriptive terms for the opposing living conditions.

Maxim of Quality

This stipulates that the speaker should make his contribution one that is true and that S should not say that for which he lacks adequate evidence. Nwajah (2003:4a) to the best of his knowledge asserted what he believed to be true. He also included some visuals in the form of pictures to provide evidence to back up his claims. (See plate 6.2). Therefore, this does not flout Grice’s maxim of quality.

Maxim of Quantity

This requires that the speaker makes his contribution as informative as required and not more than is required.

The news headline does not provide much of the information needed. However, the content of the report provides enough information on the matter. Some excerpts from the content read:

The Niger Delta spreads through more states of the Niger Federation...

In a region corralled by environmental degradation, pollution and above all...The unfortunate ones are condemned to squalor

...

Sex and "sly", as the local ring of addicts ...

Only a handful natives of Ugborodo would in their lifetime ever get the opportunity to tell first hand stories of life within the Chevron Escravos tank farm... every single person... who has made it, into the farm has without exception come out with tales of splendour ... firing the imagination and anger-of the vast majority who cannot make it in their lifetime. Yet this paradise- beyond-reach is only about 400 meters away...The same is true of the shell tank farm at Ogulagha and its host community, the Ogulagha people. It is a tale of two worlds situated in one community.

Therefore, the content provides enough information making the entire text obey Grice's maxim of quantity.

Maxim of Relation

This states that the speaker's expression must be relevant to the context of speech. With regard to the headline under study, we can say that the speech act is

relevant to the context of the discourse. Therefore, the above maxim has not been flouted.

Maxim of Manner

With regard to the topic of the discourse and the sensitive nature of the issues, the writer tried to be as informative as necessary. Therefore, it may not be described as brief. But if we are to consider just the headline, then it is brief. The speech-acts are clear, there are no issues of vagueness or obscurity in meaning. The expressions are not ambiguous and they are presented in an orderly sequence. Consequently, to some extent, the speech acts in our context obey Grice's maxim of manner, except in the area of being too brief.

Non-Linguistic Devices

The non-linguistic device employed by the writer is the use of photographs to further provide evidence to substantiate his claims and assertives. Some of the captions of the photographs read:

- (a) Gas flaring – overheats the environment, destroys the ecosystem.
- (b) A typical home in an oil-rich town in the Niger Delta- symbolizes the poverty in the wealth region.
- (c) Exposed oil pipe in farmlands – Omnipresent in the Niger Delta

In the following sections, we shall present some other news headlines to determine the illocutionary act performed along with pragmatic implications.

Table 1: News' Headlines and their Pragmatic Implications

S/N	News headline	Author/Contributor and paper	Positive comment/recipient	Negative comment against	Illocutionary act/ pragmatic implication
1.	The Niger Delta- looming war in the oil fields	<i>Tell</i> cover story no 28, July 11, 2005 pp20-21		Yes/NDs	Assertive/ there's war in the ND region
2.	The way the cookie crumble	Ibim Semenitari <i>TELL</i> cover story, July 4 2005 pg22.			Explanation/ how the trouble began at the national political reform conference.
3.	No retreat, No surrender	Ibim Semenitari <i>TELL</i> cover story, July 11, 2005 pp20-21		Yes/both in-group and out-group	Commissive/ No compromise on both sides
4.	This conflict is not about oil. This is a war against a bad regime.	Howard Jeter US Ambassador to Nigeria in <i>TELL</i> April 7, 2003: 36		Yes/FGN (Govt)	Assertive/ A bad govt.
5.	On a keg of gun-powder	Lucky Fiakpa <i>Tell</i> , April 7, 2003:42-43			Impending explosion and danger
6.	Newswatch, man of the year 2009: the Niger Delta militants	Chris Ajaero <i>Newswatch</i> January 4, 2010 pg 11.	Yes/NDS (militants)		Declarative/ Well-done to the ND militants!
7.	How shell funds criminal gangs in Niger Delta	<i>Newswatch</i> October 31 2011:cover	Nil	Yes/shell	Explanation/ Shell is not guiltless.
8.	How shell promotes criminal gangs in Niger Delta	Mauren Chigbo <i>Newswatch</i> October 31, 2011 pg 14			Explanation/ shell is guilty

9.	Niger Delta terrorists	Fasure, Sola <i>The Comet</i> December, a 2003:10.	Nil	Yes/NDs	Assertive / ND militants are criminals
10.	Government to name foreign forces behind Warri crisis	Oliomomgbe, Hendrix <i>Sunday Vanguard</i> December 7, 2003;)	Nil	Yes/international world	Assertive / there are foreign influences and external sponsorship in ND crisis.
11.	Resource control agitation returns. We won't give up this time...south south governors and leaders vow	<i>Vanguard</i> December 13, 2003 pg 9.	Nil	Nil	Commissive/south south governors support resource control
12.	Ogoni: The long search for sweetness.	Alabi Williams <i>Guardian</i> , December 14, 2003 pg A7			Assertive / The Ogonis want better quality of life
13.	We all don't have to carry placard and shout over Ogoni crisis	Theo Vincent. <i>Guardian</i> December 14 2003 pg a4	Yes/NDs		Assertive/ All NDs are not militants and confrontational
14.	Niger Delta woes: Ijaw in UK petition Blair, threaten hunger strike.	Oyadongha S. <i>Vanguard</i> March 1, 2006 pg 8			Assertive NDS in the UK contribute their own quota to the agitation.
15.	Obasanjo, Niger Delta stake holders meet	Oyo, O. <i>Vanguard</i> March 16, 2006	Yes/both groups		Assertive/ dialogues and negotiations are going on
16.	Gunmen kill oil expatriate in Port Harcourt	Ebiri Kelvin <i>The Guardian</i> mat11, 2006 pg 1.		Yes/NDs	Assertive militants at work
17	Obasanjo	Nwankwere,	Yes/FGN		Assertive ND

.	unfolds developmenta l plan for Niger Delta.	Lucky. <i>Daily sun</i> , April 20, 2006 pg 4			problem is a national problem
18	Niger Delta problem, a national chanllenge Obasanjo	Nwankwere, Lucky. <i>Daily sun</i> April 7, 2006 page 6.	Yes/FGN		Assertive ND problem is a national problem
19	Mend threaten to resume hostilities.	Oreere Onajoimo <i>Guardian</i> , May 11, 2006 pg 3	Yes/NDs		Assertive MEND threaten militant actions
20	Tales of empty fish traps	Amuchre, M. <i>This Day</i> , February 15, 2006 pg1.		Yes/oil companies	Environmental pollutions real in the ND region

Discussion and conclusion

Apparently, these headlines have been used by the writers to perform different illocutionary acts of informing and explaining with the illocutionary force of assertives and commissives (see Table 6.1). These speech acts have been performed not only to inform the masses but also to affect the senses of the readers, capture their imagination and bring about different perlocutionary effects.

In addition, some non-linguistic codes were employed to bring different semiotic and visual effects. For example pictures of oil pipelines running through farms, gas flaring completely destroying the people's ecosystem and many others (see appendix)

The different sections of the media have been useful in transmitting information from government to the masses and vice versa and for propagating issues, carrying propaganda on both sides of the divide (in-group and out-group), name calling (militants, kidnappers, terrorists) all came through the services of the media. Needless to say, the media is responsible and

instrumental in making people respond to both the Niger Delta plight and the Federal Governments position in particular ways. In other words, the government influences the masses through the media to make them think about militants in certain ways while the militants on their own part had to cry out to make the world see their plight. All these were brought to the living rooms of the masses through the media.

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