

Discourse Issues And Discursive Strategies In Selected Online Newspapers Articles On Farmer-Herders' Conflict In Nigeria

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Abstract

Online journalists overtly or covertly deploy linguistic resources to project certain discourse issues based on the ideological leanings of their proprietors (or existing media frames on a news event), by means of the discursive strategies deployed. This study investigates those resources and discursive strategies. 10 online news articles were purposively selected from five Nigerian online news sources between January 2017 and December 2018. Teun van Dijk's (2004) Critical Discourse Analytical framework provided insight for analysis. It was found that discourse issues as legitimisation of hate speech, commonization of death, existential contestation, securitisation and glocalisation of an international malaise were preponderant in the corpus and were communicated using seven discursive strategies: Metaphor, Generalization, Actor description, Implication, Authority, Negative other-presentation, and Number game. The study found that whereas the discourse issues reported in the corpus were representative of real time conflict situations involving actual characters and verifiable settings (temporal and spatial), the discursive strategies utilized to communicate these issues were seen to step towards an existing us-them polarized media frame between a favoured in-group (the farmers) and an out-group (the pastoralists). Consequently, the study recommends that online news writers maximize the use of neutrally coloured lexicogrammatical structures when accounting for conflict situations between farmers and herders/pastoralists in Nigeria. If this is implemented, it is hoped that it will contribute to the ongoing national advocacy for peaceful coexistence and revival of national ethos for brotherhood and mutual coexistence, aimed at sustainable national growth and development.

Keywords: Discourse issues, discursive strategies, online newspapers articles, Critical Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

Information seeking, managing and handling are integral to humans; the results of which determine the reactions, counter reactions or inactions of the parties involved. This is because humans are socioculturally-modelled phenomena whose activities are

conditioned by the diverse levels of influence exerted from several fronts, one of which is language. Language is a treasure trove containing resources which can either be deployed to productive or destructive communicative ends. We are constantly

inundated with occasions requiring interaction with language on a daily basis (as producers-encoders or processors-decoders). This exposure has capacity to determine and/or influence our actions, reactions and postures to events and happenings.

A salient sphere which confronts us always is media (traditional or neo) language usage. The media plays an important role in human society in that it serves to inform, entertain and educate members of the society. Simply put, the media trades information to the society which is always in need of it. Whether the news item is credible or not, the kind of language used in creating the information has influence on the interpreted meaning and subsequent reaction to it. It is for this purpose that the media works assiduously in supplying information to members of the society on a wide range of subjects, which are categorized as hard and soft news.

In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed a spate of unpleasant social upheavals ranging from armed banditry, insurgency, to conflicts between farmers and herders. Each of these have had diverse trows on the nation and her citizens in various ways: socio-economic cum political, social interaction, social cohesion, etc. While it is possible to trace these impacts to the implications of these upheavals on social interaction, it is also possible to relate these to media handing of information.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the deployment of linguistic resources in the transmission of information relating to farmer-herder's conflicts in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the discourse issues as well as the discursive

strategies deployed in selected online news reports on farmer- herders conflicts in Nigeria.

Conceptual clarification

Language of newspaper reports

Language is an important resource available in every spectrum of human activity. The dynamic nature of language makes it easy for exploitation. A language user's ability to skilfully exploit language yields the expected results whereas the reverse is the case in instances where language is not skilfully exploited. Newsmakers are conscious of the implications of language use. It is against this background that media language, like other varieties of language, has its own vocabulary and style. Even within the media, writing styles and vocabulary choices differ from newspapers, radio to television reports due to the "unique nature of each medium and the manner in which its audience consumes each medium" (Fang 38).

A newspaper report, as Fang (46) submits, starts with a summary lead which tells readers the most important of the 5W's and H: Who is involved? What happened? Where? When? Why and how did it happen? In events where including all 5W's and H will clutter the lead sentence, the less important elements are reserved for the following sentence. An ideal sentence length is thirty-five (35) words or less.

From an opposing perspective, Tuchman (8) observes that sentences in most news texts usually contain below twenty words and avoid words of more than two syllables. Van Dijk contends that news articles have long and complex sentences (1987; 1988; 1988). This contending position is supported by a study carried out on international press

coverage of an event (see Van Dijk 1988b). The study revealed that the average sentence length in newspaper stories is about twenty-five words contrary to Tuchman's argument of fewer than twenty words being the norm. Van Dijk also observed that sentences in news texts contain embedded clauses and nominalizations.

Crystal and Davy (69) corroborate by observing that newspaper articles involve more complex pre- and post-modification than is usually found in non-media texts. They opine that the complexity of sentences may be occasioned by space constraints and the need to write concisely and informatively. It may also be that the formal nature of newspaper language makes reporters adopt complex sentences and expressions. Fang (91) adds that in newspaper reports, straightforward declarative sentences are the most frequently written, but dependent clauses at the start of a sentence are perfectly acceptable. To eliminate them from writing will result in a choppy, hard-to-read style thus: "Accusing the Acme Tool Works management of bad faith, 6,000 union employees went on strike this morning". Consequently, a good writer chooses sentence structures from the rich variety afforded by the English Language, including long, short, active, declarative, periodic and passive constructions, although the active voice is more preferred to the passive.

Fang (99) also comments that information in news stories is presented in the inverted pyramid structure style which begins with the most important information. Succeeding paragraphs contain details that are less important. In terms of diction, Fang (87) observes that a good newspaper report has the following features:

- i. Proper grammatical usage: The importance of this is that a newspaper provides not only information but an educational standard for the community. Sloppy regard for language should be treated as intolerantly as sloppy regard for facts. Accurate spelling, particularly of names and places, is essential. The way a name or place is spelled is, in itself, a fact.
- ii. Adjectives and adverbs should be employed in such a manner that they add to understanding and the richness of language.
- iii. The best choice is often the simplest word or phrase that comes to mind. The choice of the right word means the difference between accuracy and almost-accuracy.

Generally, newspaper language is formal and impersonal. This accounts, in part, for the reason it does not accommodate colloquial words and expressions, except in quotations. There is also a tendency to use active rather than passive voice forms in reporting stories.

Language and conflict

The nexus between language and conflict is integral for obvious reasons. One of which is the role of language before, during and after a conflict situation. It cannot be contested that if properly exploited, language has the potency of preventing the occurrence of conflict or ameliorating the extent of damage of a given conflict situation. It is against this background that a lot of scholarly input has been made in this regard.

Adedimeji (20) undertakes a descriptive appraisal of the language of politics in Nigeria.

The study reveals that it is marked by such features as rhetoric, bombasts, exaggeration, illiteracy, meaninglessness, lies, verbal violence, etc. all of which justify the Orwellian thesis that political language is designed to make lies sound truthful, murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. The study concludes that sincerity and politeness should be displayed in the linguistic choices of politicians and language users in general to avoid outbursts of crisis as is the case when language is not properly utilized to promote peace.

Similarly, Daniel (15) explores the role played by language in the whole political process, especially as it concerns attendant violence that has consistently been visited on Nigeria in recent times. The study analyses media reports of the political speeches of some politicians and the way these have impacted on the resultant political violence that followed such speeches. It uses the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) models to grammatically analyse the speeches to determine how the linguistic choices actually reflect the messages and how these are consequential to the attendant violent reactions from sections of the populace. The findings show that linguistic choices are important elements in causing explosive reactions from long standing and simmering undercurrent of ethno-religious sentiments. However, using language for conciliatory purposes by politicians is very effective in avoiding electoral violence and maintaining security in Nigeria. The study concludes that the Nigerian political class can avoid conflict situations before and/or after electoral processes if appropriate linguistic usages are deployed.

Kamalu (13) also examines the construction of racist and ethno-religious oriented discourses that engender and legitimize acts of violence and domination in group relations in Africa using the tenets of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with insights from the Theory of Conceptual Metaphor. The data for the study were two short stories from Uwem Akpan's (2008) *Say You're One of Them: "Luxurious Hearses"* and *"My Parents' Bedroom"*. While the former is a "factional" representation of the violent religious "wars" that engulfed Nigeria in 2000, the latter is on the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The study show how groups use language to construct individual and collective identities, legitimize their actions, and justify acts of violence against others.

Furthermore, Adedimeji (26) studies language functions from formative perspectives. The study advances the thesis that language essentially performs four functions: to form, to inform, to reform and to transform man and his society. It relates how such functions, based on the Systemic Functional Linguistic construct of unit, structure, class and system can be applied to the resolution of all sorts of conflicts ensnaring Nigeria. The study recommends that a language therapy be adopted for Nigerians which will cure the personal and psychological ills of Nigerians.

Review of related literature

Scholarly investigations have continued to be carried out with varying degrees of interest in media language (as a tool for reporting conflict) from different angles, ranging from Linguistics to Peace and Communication Studies.

Similarly, Keziah Jonah Pam in 2012 study explores language use in selected newspaper editorials on sensitive issues as security, religion, health and a wide variety of academic subject fields, from a linguistic stylistic perspective. Consequently, the study explores the linguistic and communicative significance of the editorials in influencing readers' attitudes on the crisis in Jos and its environs. Its objectives are to identify those linguistic features of grammar, lexis and semantics that have been used distinctively by editorials to portray the 2010 and 2011 crises in Jos. The investigation is based on the analysis of eleven editorials in *The Nation* and *This Day* newspapers between the periods under review. The study shows that linguistic items were carefully selected by the newspapers to achieve their intentions and goals. It was discovered that "the writers used simple and precise words which enhanced the clarity of their work. Words associated with war or crisis pervaded the editorials" (66). Other words used were those associated with the number of deaths and registers associated to the frequency of the crisis. Various sentence types were employed to sustain the readers' interest while the tone of the writers was sometimes sarcastic, optimistic, that of concern and sympathy. This demonstrates that the good writer consciously manipulates linguistic and stylistic devices in order to communicate effectively.

In another study Rasaq M. Adisa (2012) examines the extent of newspaper coverage of the Jos conflict, determines how the coverage of the protracted conflict has been framed by the print media and investigates the level of compliance of Nigerian newspapers with conflict sensitive journalism practice. To

achieve these objectives, the work employs two approaches for the study: The Libertarian and Radical approaches. The study analysed 20 editions of two newspapers (*The Daily Trust* and *The Guardian*) which were sampled using the systematic sampling technique. The findings show that locational factor determines the level of attention given to conflicts in newspaper reports. It observes that the newspapers were partially conflict sensitive and reflected plurality about the conflict as substantial sources of their facts were based on journalists' observation and views of one party in the conflict. The journalists were seen not "adequately using the legal instrument of Freedom of Information" (15) which has affordances for journalists to freely access government data on diverse issues of concern, including information on conflict situations.

In a 2014 study, Umar Bello employs the Critical Discourse Analysis analytical tool [with insights from Teun A. van Dijk's (1988) and Norman Fairclough's (1988,1995) and Van Leeuwen's (2008)] to analyse two news reports from the *Daily Sun* Nigerian newspaper. The study examines two news coverage from the same newspaper that reported on some violent occurrences in Jos and environs involving two constructed divisions. The aim of which is to provide an empirical sample or model of the form of sometimes skewed reportage that bounds in the Nigerian media scene and that may have been contributing in deepening distrust and conflicts. To achieve this, the study examines both the textual and contextual aspects of the news reports, from three distinct levels of analysis: Lexical, clausal and rhetorical/schematic. At the lexical and clausal levels, headlines and leads were analysed "due to their importance in capturing the macro-propositions of the news" (73). For the

rhetorical/schematic analysis, attention was given to “the global level of representation and the hierarchization of news contents” (73). The result reveals that news reports are sometimes made from an *a priori* perspective based on frames recalled and rebuilt in fresher news and that actors and actions are constructed to suit the perspectives. The study concludes that the reportage was bias and subjective because reporters were seen to report the news based on frames that had already been formed in the minds of the audience from previous reports rather than on contemporary realities.

Fatima I. Abubakre (2016) examines how the Nigerian news media (print) frames the Fulani herdsmen and farmers’ conflict as well as present the causes of and solutions to the conflict. *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspapers (published between 1st March and 31st May, 2016) were subjected to descriptive comparative (quantitative) content and (qualitative) textual analyses to achieve the goal of the study, using Framing Theory. The study found that the reportages were mostly framed using the Responsibility Frame which revealed that *Vanguard* newspaper preponderantly accused the Fulani herdsmen as being responsible for the altercations; with the government being culpable. For *Daily Trust*, the study showed that it consistently expressed confidence in the government’s ability to mitigate the gnawing of the conflict on host communities and offered suggestions which could be useful in this regard. The study recommends, among others, that “the media should refrain from exploring fault lines that seeks to promote a divisive “we” versus “them” outlook in their headlines and reports” (95).

A common strand that transverses the above studies is the interest exhibited in conflict discourse from different viewpoints, covering different periods and news media. While these scholarly efforts are highly commended for their varying contributions to the ongoing conversation on the impact of the media in either mitigating or aggravating conflict situations by the nature of deploying their roles as the fourth estate of the realm, they do not consider the neo media (online) outlets of news. Similarly, little or no attention is shown in investigating herder-farmer conflict reports using discourse-pragmatics tools with a view to explicating the implications of the news stories on the readers as evidenced by the stance adopted in such stories as well as the discursive and pragmatic strategies utilized. This has created a gap which this research attempts to fill.

Theoretical framework **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

This study adopted van Dijk’s approach to CDA. Dijk’s model centres on the discourse-cognition-society triangle (van Dijk, 64). Central to this triangle is the notion of mental models, which derives from Moscovici’s work on social psychology. Mental models are stored in ‘episodic’, i.e. personal or autobiographic memory and defined as ‘subjective representations of the events and situations observed, participated in or referred to by discourse’ (van Dijk, 65). In this sense, mental models in general are ‘semantic’ as they do not interfere with the communicative phenomenon; and hence, general though they may be, they cannot all be described as being directly involved in the aforementioned mediation between discourse and society. What controls this mediation is what van Dijk (82) refers to as ‘context models’ which are a specific kind of

mental model that in addition to being subjective representations, have the responsibility of 'controlling discourse processing and adapting discourse to the social environment so that it is situationally appropriate' (van Dijk, 65). In context models, then, semantics is replaced by 'pragmatics', as it incorporates how language use is implemented and adapted in accordance with the social environment.

In Dijk's work on politics, ideology and discourse, he identified twenty-seven discursive strategies deployed in text and talk to assert the stance or ideological posture of the language user. These strategies, he submits, "involve many formal aspects of grammar, discourse and conversation" (735). An examination of the corpus revealed a copious deployment of certain discursive strategies which were seen to carry a good deal of information about the discourse issues expressed therein. Consequently, the analytical pattern which has been adopted here is mixed, in that a discourse issue is presented alongside the discursive strategies employed to express it by means of instances from the corpus to buttress.

This study finds this strand of CDA most appropriate because it can be used to investigate discourse issues and discursive strategies in media discourse, particularly online newspaper articles on farmers-herders' conflicts in Nigeria.

Methodology

Data for this study comprise online news reports on farmers-herders' conflicts in Nigeria purposively surfed online from five popularly read online news sources: *The Guardian Nigeria*, *Punch Newspapers*, *Sahara*

Reporters, *Vanguard* and *Tribune Online*. The study was corpus based and adopted an evaluative as well as descriptive approach which was based on the 10 selected online newspaper articles. The periodization of the study spanned between January, 2017 and December, 2019.

Results

An investigation of the corpus showed that several discourse issues were expressed in the corpus ranging from legitimisation of hate speech, commonization of death, politicization of criminality and radicalism, existential contestation, securitisation to globalisation of an international malaise. These discourse issues were seen to be conveyed using discursive strategies like: Metaphor, Generalization, Actor description, Implication, Authority, Negative other-presentation, and Number game.

Legitimation of hate speech

In the interest of national cohesion and peaceful coexistence, the Nigerian government has invested tremendous resources in advocating against the use of hurtful words or expressions against certain ethnicities, groups or persons which have come to be conceptualized as hate speech. The study found that the reporters used the emotions surrounding the unceasing altercations between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria as a cloak to legitimise their use of hateful words or expressions against the Fulanis, who are perceived as the out-group. The excerpts below serve to buttress the claim of legitimising hate speech:

Excerpt 1:

Forces of history drive Nigeria's herder-farmer conflict.

Fulani herders are routinely called “terrorists,” and a supposed Fulani “plot” to Islamise Nigeria, begun under Fodio, is also media fodder (*Legitimation of hate speech: Metaphor, Generalization, Actor description*).

Stigmatisation worsened after the election in 2015 of **President Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim Fulani from the North** (*Legitimation of hate speech: Metaphor, Actor description*).

His every decision – from the speed with which he has condemned massacres to the response of the armed forces and the appointments he makes in the army and police- is scrutinised through the lens of ethnic bias (*Legitimation of hate speech: Metaphor, Implication*), says Ndiaye. (The Guardian Nigeria, June 28, 2019)

Excerpt 2:

ICYMI: Again, herdsmen kill 18 persons in Plateau midnight attack

The spokesperson for Miango Youths Development Association, Lawrence Zango (*Legitimation of hate speech: Authority*), also shed light on the attacks in a WhatsApp message to THE PUNCH in Jos.

He said, “Again, **Fulani gunmen** (*Legitimation of hate speech: Metaphor, Generalization*) have killed 18 people in Ariri village of Miango District in Bassa LGA of Plateau State. Four persons sustained serious injuries including the youth leader of Ariri who is now receiving treatment in Enos Hospital Miango.

“**The Fulani people have declared war on the Plateau. They are achieving their plans through genocide attacks and killing**

of citizens (*Legitimation of hate speech: Metaphor, Implication*). We are always in security meetings which have not achieved results. No investigation to arrest **the criminals** (*Legitimation of hate speech: Metaphor, Negative other-presentation*). Now Ariri village has been displaced. This is too bad, this is **an evil genocide** (*Legitimation of hate speech: Metaphor*) going on in a democratic dispensation. (Punch Newspapers, October 4, 2018)

The conversation on hate speech and its allied implications on the national fabric in terms of cohesion and development is increasingly becoming contentious, to the point of attracting a national legislation to curb it. Despite the energy hate speech discourse has generated, it still finds its way into our conversations on an everyday basis. One of the avenues through which it is propagated is in online media where it is subtly realised by wrapping it around sensationally accounted narratives, as being demonstrated in the excerpts above. In the excerpts, character actions and descriptions are realized hatefully by means of lexical items as ‘terrorists’, ‘Fulani gunmen’, ‘the criminals’, ‘rampaging Fulani herdsmen’, ‘the assailants’, and ‘the invaders’.

The above identified instances of hate speech were seen to be deployed using discursive strategies as Authority

(**The spokesperson for Miango Youths Development Association, Lawrence Zango**), Metaphor/negative other-presentation (**terrorists, the criminals, rampaging Fulani herdsmen, the assailants, the invaders, Fulani gunmen, the Fulani people have declared war on the Plateau**), Generalization (**Fulani gunmen**) and Implication (**His every**

decision – from the speed with which he has condemned massacres to the response of the armed forces and the appointments he makes in the army and police- is scrutinised through the lens of ethnic bias; They are achieving their plans through genocide attacks and killing of citizens).

Communization of death

Death and gory images of dead people which hitherto were uncommon sights and occurrences have become everyday tales and experiences consequent upon attacks/clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria. This has ushered a new (commonized) perspective about death and dying which is at variance with the typical African cosmology in which death was revered and highly respected. Unfortunately, contemporary experiences have made death a common occurrence which has been reduced by the incessantness of farmer-herder conflicts resulting in a spate of killings and deaths, as shown in some examples below:

Excerpt 3: Farmer-herder conflict sparks Nigeria stability fears

At least 1,500 people (*Communization of death: Number game*) have been killed in clashes between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers in central states since September last year, the thinktank said. Of these, more than 1,300

(*Communization of death: Number game*) occurred between January and June this year, it added.

This is at least six times higher than the number of people estimated by the UN to have been killed by Boko Haram in the same period (*Communization of death: Number game, Implication*). (The Guardian Nigeria News, July 26, 2018)

Excerpt 4:

REVEALED: In 2018 Alone, 1,814 Nigerians Have Been Killed- More Than Double The Entire 2017 Figure

Amnesty International, a human rights group (*Communization of death: Authority*), says 1,814 people (*Communization of death: Number game*) have been killed across 17 states since the beginning of 2018- a figure that is already more than double the 894 (*Communization of death: Number game*) that was recorded in the whole of 2017.

In a statement signed by Osai Ojigbo, the Director of its Nigeria office, AI (*Communization of death: Authority*) said on Wednesday that the deaths were usually as a result of farmers-herders' conflicts, Boko Haram attacks and armed banditry (*Communization of death: Implication*).

The group also said the failure of the government to hold people accountable contributed to the increased death toll in the country

(*Communization of death: Implication*). (Sahara Reporters, June 28, 2018)

The figures of dead people (Nigerians), in the excerpts above, are mindboggling especially when viewed from the contemporaneity, viciousness and relentlessness of the attacks, on the same targets, from presumably same source- social miscreants under diverse labels. This has unfortunately commonized death and dying in a such an unAfrican style that has left many displaced and orphaned. The figures, as contained in the excerpts, range from 1,300 to 3,600 spanning within a short period of three years (2016-2018). In Excerpt 3, the UN is reportedly said to have compared the number of deaths occasioned by herder-farmer conflicts

Excerpt 6:

4 injured as herdsmen, farmers clash in Anambra

According to the source, the clash started at 10 a.m. **when the herdsmen invaded the farmland with their cattle and destroyed a large farmland which resulted in a clash as a farmer from Okoti-Odekpe and three herdsmen were injured**

(Existential contestation: Implication, Number game).

(Vanguard News January 18, 2017)

One of the (psychological) triggers for the perennial impasse between herders and farmers, as shown in the excerpts, is the crave to satisfy a human instinct for continued existence of self, beliefs and cultural values. Excerpt 7 shows that consequent upon the implications of global issues as climate change, there is an incidence of "...**limited natural resources available, groups go to war over water, vegetable, and sustenance**". Excerpts 7 and 8 indicate a similar posture, adding that in an endeavour to ensure subsistence, "...**herdsmen invaded the farmland with their cattle and destroyed a large farmland which resulted in a clash as a farmer from Okoti-Odekpe and three herdsmen were injured...**" This implies that the contestations between the key actors (farmers and pastoralists) gets as brutish as mindlessly killing any opposing force and destroying property owned by the opposition.

To drive the discourse issue, the reporters were seen to use discursive strategies as Implication **(the effects of climate change has not received enough attention, when the herdsmen invaded the farmland with their cattle and destroyed a large farmland which resulted in a clash as a farmer from Okoti-**

Odekpe and three herdsmen were injured, etc), Number game (three herdsmen) and Actor description (the federal government). These discursive strategies, jointly deployed in the corpus as demonstrated in the few examples above, made real the theme of existential contestation.

Securitisation

The sense of securitisation adopted here is that of Olajimbiti, Ezekiel Opeyemi in his 2017 study "Contexts and Proximation Features in President Muhammadu Buhari's Speech on Regional Security in West Africa" which conceptualizes securitization as "...measures put in place to guard a place and its inhabitants against attacks, threat, crime, danger and other situations...." (141).

Considering the macro thematic inclination of the corpus which borders on security of lives and property, members of the affected communities crave to know the securitisation efforts of the government to shield them from wanton attacks which are usually unannounced. So as to meet the need for this, the corpus is replete with efforts of the government to address the security concerns of the people, as shown in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 7:

Gunmen Kill 3 Herdsmen In Southern Kaduna

An indigene of Ungwar Miyashi, told our correspondent that the incident occurred at about 4 O'clock in the evening on Saturday when the herdsmen were grazing with their cattle inside a bush.

He said that their corpses were later traced to a river **by security agencies** *(Securitisation: Authority)* on Sunday morning in the **two local government areas** *(Securitisation: Number game).*

and those of Boko Haram insurgency attacks. The results showed that the number of deaths caused by the farmer-herder conflicts were "... **at least six times higher than the number of people estimated by the UN to have been killed by Boko Haram in the same period**". However, the reporters, as in Excerpts 3 and 4, unanimously opine that the government's weak posture in prosecuting the perpetrators of the heinous crimes of killing fellow humans had enhanced the spate of killings and the boldness of the killers, thereby making the victims increasingly lose hope in the government with every death recorded; especially when they interacted with or heard about "...**thousands of other people homeless....**" (Excerpt 4)" in their homelands.

Similarly, the excerpts indicate that the discursive strategies deployed to communicate this discourse issue are Authority

(Amnesty International, a human rights group, Osai Ojigbo, the Director of its Nigeria office, Al, The international human rights organisation), Number game (At least 1,500 people, more than 1,300; 1,814 people; More than 3,600 people; more than 2,000, among others), and Implication (the number of people estimated by the UN to have been killed by Boko Haram in the same period, the deaths were usually as a result of farmers-herders conflicts, Boko Haram attacks and armed banditry, among others).

These strategies seem to have been consciously used in a manner that the reporters made use of Authority to authenticate the figures of deaths expressed by means of Number game.

Consequently, the possible imports and/or reasons for the attacks are made known to the readers using Implication.

Existential contestation

Each of the prime parties (pastoralists/herders and farmers) of the conflict is engaged in a frantic tussle for survival, of self, means of livelihood and cultural ethos. While the pastoralists are seen to be striving to keep a culture and means of livelihood whose fortunes are dwindling as dictated by climatic and socio-temporal realities, the farmers are seen to suffer a similar fate. In the event of a threat to their communal means of sustenance, i.e. arable land and allied resource of water, an outburst is imminent. The following instantiations from the corpus will suffice:

Excerpt 5:

Herdsmen- Farmers Crisis: A Fallout Of Climate Change

While several analysts have limited the discussion of the causes of the crisis to Tribalism, Resource Control, Religion, Land and Trade, the nexus between herdsmen migration southwards and **the effects of climate change has not received enough attention**

(Existential contestation: Implication).

The effects of climate change have caught many countries off guard, posing major challenges to the socio-economic and political spheres. The occurrences of natural disasters are like never before; hunger owing to drought; migration, land and territorial disputes.

Because of the limited natural resources available, groups go to war over water, vegetable, and sustenance

(Existential contestation: Implication).

A classic example would be the feud between the Fulanis and the other tribes of West Africa. (Sahara Reporters, February 24, 2018)

Confirming the incident, the spokesman for **the Kaduna state Police Command, Aliyu Usman** (*Securitisation: Authority*), says that **some suspects have been arrested in connection with the incident** (*Securitisation: Implication*).

He also said that **more policemen have been drafted to the area to avert any form of reprisal or break down of law and order, adding that the suspects would be charged to court as soon as investigations are completed** (*Securitisation: Implication*). (Tribune Online, March 12, 2017)

Excerpt 8:

Herdsmen attack Niger village, kill 21

The command's Public Relations Officer, **Bala Elkana** (*Securitisation: Authority*), who confirmed the incident, said **20 people** (*Securitisation: Number game*) were killed during an early morning prayer.

Elkana said the attack was a reprisal to an earlier killing of a herder by the villagers. He, however, said **the riot policemen** (*Securitisation: Authority*) **had been deployed to the troubled community while officials of the Department of the State Services and officers of the command's Criminal Investigation Department had commenced investigations into the crisis** (*Securitisation: Implication*).

(Punch Newspapers, May 15, 2017)

Arising from the sense of insecurity suffered by members of the ravaged communities as an aftermath of farmer-herder's conflict, the need becomes apt for the government to reveal its securitisation strategies to the masses. The aim of which is to douse the fear and anxiety levels of the masses and win their confidence in the government

and her institutions/agencies. It is for this purpose that the excerpts above contain information revealing the government's diverse efforts at securitisation, thus: **"...some suspects have been arrested in connection with the incident, more policemen have been drafted to the area to avert any form of reprisal or break down of law and order, adding that the suspects would be charged to court as soon as investigations are completed...."**

Excerpt 9: **"the riot policemen had been deployed to the troubled community while officials of the Department of the State Services and officers of the command's Criminal Investigation Department had commenced investigations into the crisis...."**

Excerpt 10. In excerpts 9 and 10, the masses are made to know about the efforts of the Nigeria Police Force and the Department of the State Services in ensuring that peace and a secure environment are restored to troubled communities.

In order to give the reader a clearer picture of the magnitude of the security threat and authenticate the source of information, discursive strategies as Number game (**two local government areas, 20 people**), Metaphor (that **terrorism** is negatively affecting), Authority (**The command's Public Relations Officer, Bala Elkana**) and Implication (**visited the village and other troubled communities on Tuesday, lamenting that terrorism is negatively affecting the development of the state, among others**) were effectively deployed to communicate the discourse issue of securitisation as exemplified above.

Glocalisation of an International Malaise

Glocalisation is the act of localising an experience which is of a global scope, magnitude or implication. On the global scale, discourse activities and rationalisations for the incidences of increased heat wave, drought, food crisis and their attendant levels of discomfort to man are rife and unceasingly focusing on global warming, industrialization and climate change. These explications are scientific (unbiased, data based and objective) and are systematically linked to the contemporary Nigerian incidences of farmer-herder conflicts to this global reality. Therefore, a reporter whose aim is to dig to the roots of the crisis and engender discussions/interrogations which will yield policy statements to curb the crisis will be more interested in reporting stories about farmer-herder conflicts from the prism of the global reality of global warming and climate change. However, a sensational journalist would rather focus on the immediate (localized) consequences of the global reality and amplify the engagements of the actors in the crisis to his undue advantage, to rather promote ethno-religious cleavages. In the reports studied, it was found that these two perspectives were adopted. However, the latter view gained higher patronage, as shown in the few excerpts below:

Excerpt 9:

Herdsman- Farmers Crisis: A Fallout Of Climate Change

Speaking on Climate Change at the 2018 World Economic Forum in Davos, **Dr (Mrs) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who is the Co-chair of Global Commission for the Economy and Climate** (*Glocalisation of an international malaise: Authority*), had

expressed serious concern on the handicapping impacts of climate change on Africa (*Glocalisation of an international malaise: Implication*). According to her, **though Africa was not primarily responsible for the high carbon emissions taking place in the world, Africans are suffering** (*Glocalisation of an international malaise: Implication*).

(Sahara Reporters, February 24, 2018)

Excerpt 10:

Herdsman, farmers' clashes kill 33 in Kaduna

Southern Kaduna has seen a spate of deadly clashes between the predominantly Christian farmers and Muslim Fulani herders, a historically nomadic people who graze cattle on the land (*Glocalisation of an international malaise: Actor description, Metaphor, Implication*).

Originally, the clashes were over land and water rights disputes (*Glocalisation of an international malaise: Implication*).

But ethnicity and religion have been playing a larger role in the conflict after post-election violence in 2011 that saw hundreds of Muslims killed and forced to flee the area (*Glocalisation of an international malaise: Implication, Number game, Metaphor*).

Without a national strategy in place to address the conflict, tensions between herdsman and farmers have not subsided, and tit-for-tat killings have become common. (Punch Newspapers, July 21, 2017)

The above excerpts demonstrate the varying positionings of the reporters regarding the theme of discourse: while in Excerpt 11 the reporter situates the conflict within the context of an emerging international malaise of the implications of "...climate change on

Africa... though Africa was not primarily responsible for the high carbon emissions taking place in the world, Africans are suffering [as occasioned by the incessant unrests between farmers and herders over resources]"; Excerpt 12 takes a different shot at it, which is to unduly glocalise the conflict by reporting it from a parochially skewed perspective. For instance, the view deployed in reporting the conflict is that of ethnicity and religion as evidenced in the description of the conflict as "...a spate of deadly clashes between the predominantly Christian farmers and Muslim Fulani herders, a historically nomadic people who graze cattle on the land...."

The reporter accentuates this posture by adding that "... ethnicity and religion have been playing a larger role in the conflict after post-election violence in 2011 that saw hundreds of Muslims killed and forced to flee the area...."

In order to present the above views, the reporters deployed discursive strategies as Authority (**Dr (Mrs) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who is the Co-chair of Global Commission for the Economy and Climate, Experts, The governor**), Implication (**allow the Fulani herdsmen, who he constantly referred as an armed bandit, to wipe out the people of the communities**), Number game (**...in 2011 that saw hundreds of Muslims killed and forced**), and Metaphor (**that saw hundreds of Muslims killed and forced to flee the area**).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The focus of the inquiry in this paper was to investigate the discursive strategies explored in the corpus to express the various discourse issues. It was found that discourse issues as legitimisation of hate speech, commonization of death, politicization of criminality and radicalism, existential contestation, securitisation and glocalisation of an international malaise were conveyed in the corpus. The identified discourse issues were expressed by means of the following discursive strategies: Metaphor, Generalization, Actor description, Implication, Authority, Negative other-presentation, and Number game.

While the discourse issues expressively portrayed the real time situations in the reported conflict situations in Nigeria, the discursive strategies deployed were seen to step towards enhancing an age long existing us-them laced polarization between an in-group (the farmers) and an out-group (the pastoralists). This dimension of reporting estranged events/situations, especially in a highly multicultural context as Nigeria, as identified in the corpus is divisive and anti-progressive journalism.

To this end, the study recommends that online news writers, in the interest of national development and cohesion, deliberately invest in neutrally coloured lexicogrammatical structures when accounting for conflict situations between farmers and herders/pastoralists in Nigeria, using online media space.

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