

Discourse Analysis of Deictic Features in Nigerian Newspaper Reportage on Boko Haram Activities

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Abstract

This study examines the use of deictic features in Nigerian newspaper reportage on Boko Haram activities in Nigeria. Since 2002, Nigeria has been at the mercy of Boko Haram insurgency and terrorist attacks. So many researchers have tried to analyze some of these reports using deictic theories but none has used the deictic theory of Stephen Levinson in the analysis of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The study was carried out using qualitative approach to examine the reports via deictic feature analysis. Data were collected randomly from four national dailies namely: The Sun, Guardian, Champion and The Punch newspaper, published from 2020 to 2024. The theoretical framework employed for the analysis is Stephen Levinson's theory of deixis, which enabled the researcher to reveal that police or military unit confirmation of any attack is believed to be an unquestionable truth and any "suicide bomber" is believed to be Boko haram member as reported by the press without any further confirmation. This analysis was made with the aid of person, temporal, spatial, discourse and social deictic features, some of which were found lacking in most related research works on deixis. The findings revealed with the aid of deictic feature analysis, that most information on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria were gotten through a telephone conversation which gives room for exaggeration of reports or under-reports of the insurgence. The study recommended that similar content analysis be carried out on news on Boko Haram activities published online in the social media blogs.

Keywords: Deixis, Terrorism, Boko Haram, National Dailies, Journalism

Background to the Study

Terrorism as a global threat has dominated the reports of our national dailies. Boko Haram is a terrorist group whose mission is to oppose not only western education but also western cultures and modern science. Since 2002, Nigeria has been at the mercy of Boko Haram insurgency and terrorist attacks consequent upon an enormous increase in unemployment, poverty, increase in crime rate and decrease in the flow of Foreign Direct Investment (Kehinde and Olaosun 4). Information concerning terrorism in Nigeria is believed to be either exaggerated or under-reported. Some of these reports may inadvertently boost the confidence and ego of the terrorist group while at the same time dampens the spirit of Nigerians to fight back. So many researchers have tried to analyze some of these reports using deictic theories but none has used the deictic theory of Stephen Levinson in the analysis of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

The word 'deixis,' deals with the relationship between language and context which is reflected in the structure of language. Studies have shown that language is purely human and a medium through which ideas, emotions and desires can be communicated. Language is a means of communication between individuals who share a common code which may be in a written or oral form.

The objective of a discourse analyst may not be to give specific answers to a problem by exploring a subject, but to give a newer and wider perspective on the issue and expose the little implications that are hidden behind the words and thus, create room for the readers to decide on how to react to analysis and eventually make their own discourse. Against this background therefore, does the

researcher embark on this research specifically to employ the deictic theory of Stephen Levinson in analyzing the Newspaper reportage on Boko Haram's activities in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Terrorist information in Nigeria is either exaggerated or under reported in our National Dailies. Deixis is the most empirically understudied aspect of discourse analysis. Little or nothing has been done using the deictic theory of Stephen Levinson especially in analyzing Boko Haram insurgences. Inadequate exposition of the implications that are hidden behind the words of the reporters on Boko Haram's activities.

Purpose of the Study

- (i) To identify the use of deictic features by the reporters in reporting Boko haram insurgency in Nigeria.
- (ii) Discuss how the identified deictic expressions can be used to know the actual person, place, time, discourse and social effects and other wise of the insurgency under report.
- (iii) Point out how the application of deictic expressions affect cohesion and coherence in media discourse on Boko Haram's insurgency in Nigeria.
- (iv) Gather data that can instigate further research in discourse analysis and thus provide a soft landing for other researchers writing on any related topic.

Significance of the Study

The study would contribute to the existing data on the analysis of Boko Haram's activities in Nigeria using the deictic theory of Stephen Levinson. The findings will reveal if the reports on

Boko Haram's activities in Nigeria are on eye- witness or hear-say-account. The time and distance of the reporter from the scene of the events, social information encoded within an utterance etc.

will be made known via deictic expressions The findings will go a long way in filling the gap that long exist in the field of linguistics especially as it concerns social and discourse deixis which is what Levinson's theory is trying to project. It will also help to balance the ethics of journalism and that of national security which may have been threatened by the insurgency. More so, the topic is timely and will be useful to future researchers who may wish to research further on this topic or carry out a survey on a related topic

Scope of the Study

The study is restricted to the investigation of the deictic features as pointing devices in order to ascertain the nature of report on Boko Haram's activities in Nigeria's national dailies and the extent to which the use of deixis in their reportage has affected clarity in their reports. The survey centers on the reports of four National newspapers on Boko Haram's insurgency in Nigeria from 2020-2024. The limitation of the report to four national dailies is because the study does not necessarily depend on large data. The selection was based on the representativeness and accessibility of the reports

Research Questions

- (i) Which deictic features are prevalent in the selected Nigerian Newspaper reports on Boko Haram insurgency?
- (ii) What meaning implication do these deictic expressions have on the media representation of Boko Haram?

- (iii) With the analysis of deictic features in the reports of our national dailies, are information on Boko Haram in Nigeria truly exaggerated or under reported?
- (iv) How does the use of deictic expressions help in the identification of the participants in Boko Haram's insurgence in Nigeria?
- (v) Using deictic feature analysis, how does the report boost or reduce the ego of the terrorist set?

Review of Related Scholarship

Terrorism in Nigeria: An Overview on the Boko Haram Terrorist Sect Terrorism is the use of violent acts to frighten the people in an area as a way of trying to achieve a political goal, religious or ideological objectives. It is the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purposes. Andrew opines that "terrorism aims at changing the behaviour of free people through fear" (2). Hence, it is viewed as the unlawful use of threat or violence, especially against the State or the public as a politically motivated means of coercion. Terrorism is generally believed to be a weapon of the weak and not of the strong. According to data from the Global Terrorism Database, more than 61,000 incidents of Non-State Terrorism claiming over 140,000 lives have been recorded from 2000 to 2014 (Global Terrorism Index 2015).

Terrorism in modern times, is considered a major threat to the society and therefore illegal under anti-terrorism laws in most jurisdictions. It is also a war crime under the laws of war when used to target non-combatants such as civilians, neutral military personnel or enemy prisoners (Kehinde and Olaosun. 8). A Secretary General of the United Nations, in November 2004, described

terrorism as any act "intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international

organization to do or abstain from doing any act." Barack Obama in his comment on the Boston Marathon bombings of April 2013 says that "anytime bombs are used to target on innocent civilians, it is an act of terror" (Daily News Website 2013). Terrorist acts frequently have a political purpose. As a global threat, it has dominated the reports of our national dailies. Since 2002, Nigeria has been at the mercy of Boko Haram which till date has made insurgency to be on the increase. Boko Haram is believed to be a subsidiary of the historical advancement of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria since the time of Usman Dan Fodio - the Nigerian Islamic legend.

The term, Boko Haram, is derived from the combination of Hausa and Arabic words. "Boko" is Hausa word, which means "Western or non-Islamic education" while "Haram" is an Arabic word which figuratively means "sin" and literarily means "forbidden". Their mission is to oppose not only Western education but also Western culture and modern science. They are Islamic extremist groups based in the Northern Nigeria and also active in Chad, Niger and Cameroon. They were founded in 2002 by Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf with their headquarters in Maiduguri (Nigeria) led by Abubakar Shekau and Mohammed Yusuf. The group is a controversial Nigerian militant Islamist group that seeks the imposition of Sharia law in the Northern States of Nigeria. (Kehinde and Olosun 9)

Empirical Studies

In view of the fact that an ample work has been done on media representations on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, as a related work on this study, it is worthy to review Kehinde and Olaosun's work on 'Media Representation of Boko Haram in Some Nigerian Newspapers. The data for the study were derived from newspaper reports published in July and August 2011. Their data were

subjected to inter- discursive analysis using a combination of their knowledge of contemporary world history, Islamic and Christian practices, and Nigerian geo-politics.

Their analysis revealed that the Nigerian newspaper media represented Boko Haram as closely linked or allied to Al Qaeda, the cross-national terrorist group, whose founder, Osama Bin Laden, was killed by the US security forces on May 2, 2011. The paper concludes that contrary to skepticisms about daily newspapers as purveyors of misery and libel, Nigerian national newspapers serve as a source of accurate information and perceptive analysis on Boko Haram, a socio-political group whose actions are inimical to public peace and Nigeria's political stability. The paper submits that the bombing of the Nigeria Police Headquarters and the United Nations House in Abuja by the group exposed the ill-preparedness of the Nigerian security agencies to meet the security challenges of the 21st century.

In another study, an investigation into 'Measuring Public Opinion on Boko Haram Insurgency through Editorial Matters in Selected Newspapers: An Assessment of The Punch, This Day, Daily Sun and Daily Trust' was carried out by Ganiyu, M. Adekunle, in 2012. The study content analyzed 520 issues of four newspapers over a six-month period from October, 2011 to March, 2012. With five units of analysis including editorials, letters to the editor, opinion articles, press interviews and four content categories which also include: editorial framing, agenda focus, frequency and

editorial reaction, the study employed a coding sheet to collect relevant data for analysis and presentation.

Findings revealed that the political undertone that drove the Boko Haram violence was far more than the religious motive popularly associated with it. Findings also showed that the government

and the elite class got less criticism in newspaper editorial reactions than the Boko Haram insurgents. The study concluded that the newspapers did not fully utilize the potency of editorials to hold the ruling class accountable for their contribution to the worsening case of violence brought about by Boko Haram insurgency. The study recommends that more critical editorials be done by newspapers on the shortcomings of the government and the elite class in order to foster national interest and curtail violence.

A closely related work to this study is Christiana Eragbe and Samaila Yakubuin's work on "The Use of Deixis and Deictic Expressions in Boko Haram Insurgency Reports: A Study of Selected Boko Haram Insurgency Reports by the Media", which examined the uses of deictic expressions in Boko Haram insurgency reports by the media in the four affected countries of West Africa. The study was carried out using the qualitative approach to explore the incidences and functions of deictic expressions in Boko Haram insurgency reports by the media. The result of the investigation shows that media reporters use person, temporal and spatial deixis to locate the participants in discourse. Spotting of the participants in discourse via deictic expressions gives the audience a clear picture of the incidence of insurgency reported on.

Deictic expressions as used in insurgency reports point to the insurgents, the victims, the place of operation and time. These put together enhance cohesion and coherence in the discourse of Boko

Haram insurgency reports. The difference between Christiana Eragbe and Samaila Yakubuin's work and this study is in the population to the study and the theory applied.

Given the superfluity of newspapers and the daily role they have in meaning- making, it is surprising how few linguistic studies there are and proportionally, of how they use language. The

area of critical discourse analysis offers more potential as a framework for the analysis of newspapers and there has been a number of substantial works in this area but no serious investigation has been done using the deictic theory of Stephen Levinson, which differs from other forms of deixis, to analyze these reports on Boko Haram as reported in our national dailies. This, as a matter of urgency, necessitated this investigation.

Population of the Study

Reports on Boko Haram published within 2020-2024 in the following national dailies: Daily Sun, The Guardian, This Punch and The Champion Newspapers

Sampling Techniques

Random and Purposive sampling techniques will be adopted in this research. This will enable the researcher to collect data for the investigation purposively at random from the selected newspapers

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Corpus based study is used in the collection of data in this research. The researcher relied on qualitative approach to the study in order to give adequate and in-depth descriptions of the application and functions of the deictic features in the reports selected for analysis.

Excerpts from the texts showing incidence of deictic expressions will be provided and explained to support claims.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is a method of studying and analyzing a text, be it in a written or spoken form. McCarty opined that Discourse Analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the context in which it is used (5). The approach of DA is often described as going beyond the sentence.

Theoretical Framework

Levinson's deictic theory goes beyond the deictic views of other linguist to include not only the usual person, time and place but also the social and discourse deixis. Person deixis helps to locate the insurgents and their victims in discourse. Temporal deixis will enable us know the time of the insurgence. Spatial deixis will reveal the place of the event. Social deixis reveals the social information encoded within an utterance. Discourse deixis concerns itself with the expressions used as part of the discourse.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Person Deixis: The researcher looks at the reporter's use of personal pronouns such as: I, you, he, she, etc. to determine if the reports were given as an eyewitness or otherwise of the incidence. In

deictic terms the third person (he, she, they, etc.) is not a direct participant in the "I or you" interaction. Hence it is being regarded as a more distant participant than the first and second person

Analysis of person deixis reveals that most of the information on Boko Haram were second handed. Most of which were gotten through telephone conversations. Information on phone may be exaggerated or under reported though at times the reporters go extra mile to confirm these incidents

from the nearest police station to validate their reports. The constant use of third person pronoun in their reports to a large extent reveals the distance of the reporter to the crime scene.

Temporal Deixis: The texts under analysis shows that the incidents took place sometime in the past. The reporter who relates the events is like the narrator in prose fiction. In most cases, the reporter is detached from the events because he is not part of it while some of the information were given by some unknown sources

Social Deixis analysis revealed that police or military unit confirmation of any attack is believed to be an unquestionable truth and any "suicide bomber is believed to be Boko Haram's member as reported by the press without any further prove. An audio message alleged to be Abubakar Shekau's voice shouldn't have been believed if the society have not attributed fear to the name "Boko Haram or Shekau."

Discourse Deixis: Expressions such as therefore, however, on the other hand, which relate portions of earlier discourse to portions of later discourse, are sometimes included

Summary of Findings

Deictic expressions as revealed by the analysis enhance clear report by the reporters. It enables the media reporters to locate interlocutors in discourse and as well as help the reader to assimilate the information without any ambiguity. The reporters only serve as participants in media discourse in interview with the active participant.

The study analysis and findings to a very large extent, have shown that deictic features are prevalent in the newspaper reports on Boko Haram's violence and also shown is the keenness with which reporters' periscope the insurgency using deictic features to communicate to their readers.

Conclusion

Deictic features are prevalent in the reports of our national dailies. They are categorized as spatial (place), time (temporal), person, social and discourse deixis. The words and phrases that fall into the above classifications are interpretable only in relation to the context in which they are used. Deictic features or expressions enable the media reporters to locate interlocutors in discourse as well help the reader to assimilate the information without any ambiguity.

Recommendations

In order to bring about a measurable solution to Boko Haram issues through deictic feature analysis of press reports on Boko Haram's activities in Nigeria, the study recommends that the national dailies and other media agencies should give adequate attention to the government and the ruling class on issues bothering on areas of deficiencies or shortcomings. This effort should also offer

steps and suggestions on more proactive and participatory measures to be taken towards quelling the violence.

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