

**AFRREV LALIGENS**

An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Vol. 1 (1) March, 2012:52-64

ISSN: 2225-8604

**A Linguo-Stylistic Analysis of Newspaper Reportage on the  
2010 and 2011 Crises in Jos: A Case Study of *The Nation*  
and *This Day***

**Pam, Keziah Jonah**

*Department of English,  
University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria  
E-mail: [keziapam11@yahoo.com](mailto:keziapam11@yahoo.com)*

+2347039642843

**Abstract**

*Editorial writers have consistently manipulated language to achieve their aims. Language, in whichever way it is used, is not an end in itself but a means to an end. It is a tool used in achieving a variety of communicative goals or meeting certain needs imposed upon human life and experiences. This paper takes a critical look at the way English language is used in editorials to effectively communicate sensitive issues. These sensitive issues cut across security, religion, health and a wide variety of academic subject fields. This research explores the linguistic and communicative significance of the editorials in influencing readers' attitudes as regards 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. This demonstrates that the good writer consciously manipulates linguistic and stylistic devices in order to communicate effectively.*

### **Introduction**

Linguistic stylistics is a very complex domain and a very fertile ground for investigation. There is an intricate web of linguistic stylistic functions in any text i.e. literary and non literary that pleat so as to create the individuality of the discourse itself, and the impact of the text on the reader. This is obvious in the newspapers reportage under study. The concepts of style and stylistics may never be clearly defined. Due to its highly interdisciplinary nature, linguistic stylistics displays multiple levels of analysis related to various language- study domains, i.e. lexical classes, morphology, syntax, semantics, discourse analysis, etc.

Style is not just ornamental to writing; it results from the many choices the writer makes in the course of his writing and it is these choices that set apart one writer from the other. Newspaper editorials share relatively common features, but they differ in style and organisation as it has been seen in 'The Nation' and 'This Day' newspapers. Newspaper editorials play a vital role in shaping public opinion. They deal with topical issues or up-to-date events within the society or elsewhere. Opinions are not forced on readers; rather, readers are expected to be able to differentiate between facts and opinions. Editorials are influential because they influence the opinion of the public and try to gain control of people's minds. An editorial is like "the voice of the people"; as such it is expected to promote public interest. Thus the public expect fairness. The newspapers objectivity in reporting topical issues will be tested through stylistic analysis of sampled editorials. Since the linguistic stylistician derives the import of a text from the one before him, it is believed that an objectively verifiable analysis can be made on the editorials. Let us first see what style is.

### **Style Defined**

This study is not the first of its kind to be undertaken. A considerable amount of work has been done within the area covered by the study such as that done by Enkvist (1973), Todd (1969), Leech and Short (1981), Crystal and Davy (1976), Azuike (1992) among others.



The concept of style is one which many have tried to define. The definitions are inexhaustible considering the inherent nebulous nature of the concept. Leech and Short are of the opinion that the term style is:

Sometimes apply to the linguistic habits of a particular writer at other times; it has been applied to the way language is used in a particular genre, period, school of writing or some combination of these epistolary styles... (11)

From this definition, style is seen as a manifestation of the individual. Azuike also says style “seeks to establish symmetry between a person’s expressive capacity and his other characteristic”(113). Style in this sense is seen as the individual’s identity, or the expression of an individual’s personality and vision of reality. Azuike further says that “there is no linguistic yardstick against which a particular feature or style can be measured”. What is accepted as a norm by one ground may not necessarily hold for another group. Therefore, the norm can be “a product of conscious codification of a set of ‘correct’ or ‘proper’ usage accepted within a speech community” (116).

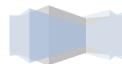
Another definition of style as a manifestation of the individual is by Crystal and Davy. They define style as “some or all the language habits of an individual” (11). They use the word ‘singularity’ (76) to mean that a speaker or writer can achieve a pattern of writing or speaking attributable and exclusive or peculiar to him. Most notions of style as we have seen carry with them an implication vis-a-vis generality. Enkvist observes as well that “style is notoriously slippery and difficult to codify into concrete terms that allow operational study” (50).

Style can be summarized as follows:

- A shell surrounding a pre-existing core of thought or expression
- As the choice between alternative expressions
- As a set of individual characteristics
- As deviation from a norm
- As a set of collective characteristics
- As those relations among linguistic entities that are stable in terms of wider spans of text than the sentences Enkvist (12).

Three discoveries have also been made by Azuike as regards the definition of style.

1. No definition is generally acceptable.



2. There is neither a consensus amongst linguists on what its aims are nor a uniform approach in methodology for its analysis.
3. The only point of agreement among the practitioners is in their 'condemnation' of the concept of style as 'nebulous' (Hassan, 1964), 'elusive' (Turner, 1979), 'slippery' (Enkvist, 1973), and even 'non-existent' (Benninson, 1969).

The approach adopted for this study is Discourse and General stylistic analysis because stylistics itself is described as linguistic study of different styles.

### Graphological Analysis

This feature is used to capture the attention of the readers. This is enhanced by the juxtaposition of different shapes and sizes of words and phrases which are eye catching. Different newspapers have consistent styles of using the graphic design which constitute their 'in-house-style'. The first alphabet is boldly typed with a larger font size than all other alphabets. This method is peculiar to the two newspapers under study.

Another interesting aspect is the headline. The significant thing about a newspaper headline is that it contains a clear, succinct and if possible intriguing message. This is to kindle a spark of interest in the potential reader, who on the average, is a person whose eye moves swiftly down a page to see what will capture his attention. The major means of producing 'eye-catching' effects is by making use of the full range of graphic contrasts. There is a slight difference between the two papers under study. In 'This day' the first alphabets of content words are written in uppercase and function words in lowercase.

Samples of 'This Day' Headlines on Jos Crisis

11 Killed as Jos Erupts in Violence Again

2 Killed in Maiduguri. Policeman Set Ablaze in Jos

Voter Registration: 3 Killed in Jos

However, this is not the case in 'The Nation'. The first alphabet of the caption is written in uppercase. All other words are in lowercase except nouns. Only the major headline of the paper is written in uppercase.

Samples of 'The Nation' Headlines on Jos Crisis



*Jos again*

*Will it ever end?*

*Impunity in Jos*

From the samples above, it can be deduced that there is something different about the content of the Headlines. ‘This Day’ seems to be interested in reporting the number of deaths right from the headline caption. ‘The Nation’ has a different style. A general statement is given as a headline and the body of the editorial then carries other details such as, number of deaths. Another notable feature is, ‘The Nation’ writes the very first words of all editorials in uppercase.

### **Sentence Structure Analysis**

The sentence is the vehicle the writer uses to convey the intensity of his message. Maximum effectiveness in communication is achieved by the way a writer uses sentences. Systemic grammar as explained by Muir, gives the formula of the clause structure as (S), P, (C), (A). The use of the simple sentence is pervasive in the editorials under study. The simple sentence consists of only one clause.

i. Samples of Simple Sentences in ‘This Day’ Editorials

S                      P                      C  
//But normalcy/ has since returned/ to the area//

S                      P                      C                      A  
//And that/ was the last that was heard/ of the occupants /of the vehicle//

ii. Samples of Simple Sentences in ‘The Nation’ Editorials

S                      P                      C  
//So just what /is/ the problem? //

S                      A                      P                      C  
//The crisis /in Jos, Plateau State, / can be likened/ to a gangrened sore//

The clauses analysed above are simple declarative ones. This feature is typical of editorials. It facilitates direct report of messages. Besides, the clauses are syntactically balanced and complete with all the obligatory sentence elements, as they often present their messages in unambiguous and complete forms.



iii. Sample of a Compound Sentence in ‘This Day’ Editorials

At least 11 people were killed in Jos yesterday amid fresh tensions linked to a political meeting and an attack on buses carrying some passengers.

iv. Sample of a Compound Sentence in ‘The Nation’ Editorials

Indeed, the failure of security operatives to arrest the sponsors of communal conflicts and arms importation simply serves to entrench the apparent impunity of such sponsors.

v. Samples of Complex Sentences in ‘This Day’ and ‘The Nation’

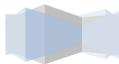
- a) The Ulama further revealed that a second vehicle, a Toyota Carina II with eight other occupants that were on their way to Jos, was stopped by some four youths at Bugal but the occupants managed to escape and reported the incident to the military post at Mangu Halle.
- b) Up till December 24 when the most recent crisis occurred, the pattern has been the same: the world wakes up to the news of carnage in Jos with its usual casualties and calamity; government imposes a curfew; more troops are deployed, some arrests are made; victims are buried, a panel is set up to investigate the issue, sometimes a parallel enquiry is instituted.

### Lexico-Semantic Analysis

Words are essential in language and they influence the outcome of whatever we write or say. The diction a writer uses has great influence on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the message being passed across. If a register is inadequately used, communication will be impeded. The writer may decide to employ simple and concrete words or abstract and obscure words and expressions. A writer’s choice of words determines the aesthetic appreciation of that piece of writing. In this section, attention will be paid to the meaning(s) generated by the lexical items. The editorials in their choice of lexical items draw from a wide range of registers. Simple diction that is appropriate to the situation of things is used in the editorials.

- i. Register associated to war or crisis is pervasive in both newspapers.

War of attrition	multi-purpose machine guns	genocide
Genocide	casualties and calamity	inhuman cruelty



Mindless	Killings hapless victims	killing field
Critically wounded	murderous gangs	ammunition
Arson	guns and machetes	AK 47 assault rifles
Outbreaks of violence	rescue operations	carnage
Unconscionable ruthlessness	mindless brutality	fracas
Murderers'	massacres and riots	open confrontation
Attacked	gross cruelty	gun fire
Havoc	anti-aircraft launcher	carnage in Jos
Disagreements	arguments and grievances	tempers rose

In fact the list of words associated with crisis used in the editorials under study can go on and on.

- ii. Another register that is prevalent in the editorials is that of the legalese:

Apprehend	investigate	Law
Prosecute	face trial	crimes
Jurisdiction of the court	arrest	culprits
International Criminal Court		

- iii. Number of Deaths:

At least 11 people were killed in Jos yesterday...

Three people were allegedly killed and several others injured

A riot policeman ... in Jos was yesterday killed...

At least six people were recorded in the fracas...

...latest killings of July 17, of 10 people in Maza village...

With the reported fresh killing of seven in Jos...

At least 32 persons were officially confirmed dead and many others...



SERAP claimed that ... more than 20,000 lives that included those of women and children

Seven bombs were said to have been released between 7.30 p.m. and 9.00 p. m....

iv. Register Associated with the Incessancy of the Crisis

‘The Nation’ of 10/06/2010 and 28/07/2010 has ‘Jos again!’ as the caption of the headlines. This clearly indicates the frequency of the crisis in Jos. For the writers to use the word ‘again’ obviously shows that the crisis is not the first of its kind. Other words and expressions used are:

Recurring crises in Jos	frequency of the eruptions	Cycle of violence
Random violence	the incessant crises	will it ever end?
Persistent violence	hotbed of violence	epidemic of violence
Unending violence	amid fresh tensions	Crisis erupted again
Another crisis ensued in Jos	menu of killings,	reprisal killings

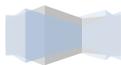
**Tone**

The tone of a writer towards a subject or issue is clearly seen from his choice of words. The writers’ diction presents his attitude and actual feelings to his readers. The tone could be sarcastic, ironic, pessimistic, optimistic, humorous, or that of anger and acceptance. An example of an expression with a sarcastic tone is seen in the extract below:

Plateau State police commissioner Gregory Anyating must be talking about a different kind of peace when he suggested to Reuters, that peace had returned to Plateau State... This only goes to show that the only peace that has been in Jos is that of the graveyard.

Another tone observed is that of optimism. Below is an example of an expression with an optimistic tone:

In an effort to resolve the deepening Jos crisis once and for all, the Federal Government has decided to set up a special security force for Plateau State... it will be well-equipped, highly motivated, easy to contact and extremely mobile, ...headed by an Air Force officer... directly answerable to President Goodluck Jonathan... this measure



appears to offer a workable solution to the vexed orgy of bloodletting in Jos.

This writer is optimistic that the step the government has taken will be a lasting solution to the crisis in Jos. Another tone observed in the editorials is that of concern and sympathy.

Almost all efforts to end the violence in Jos so far have failed... the killings certainly cannot continue. Every single death in Jos diminishes all of us.

The tone of this writer is that of concern for the number of deaths. The writer is also sympathetic towards the state of the unending violence in Jos. From the extracts, the editor's attitude is reflected in his choice of words.

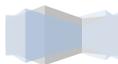
### **Figurative Language Analysis**

Any study of language and style which ignores the figurative use of language is to a large extent impoverished. We use figures of speech sometimes when we speak or write to make our ideas clearer, vivid and even to add aesthetic value to what we say or write. This feature has not been ignored by the editorials under study.

#### **i. Metaphoric feature**

Metaphorical statements are essential in good writing. It is a kind of spice of good writing and reading. The editorials reveal this feature and style of language. This is evident in the data below: The federal and Plateau State governments must take stock of events

- The delay only expands the theatre of the impending configuration ...thereby bringing culprits on their knees
- Jos crises have become a festering sore that has refused to heal
- The government has shown serious ineptitude ... finally nip the ugly trend in the bud
- They will face their Waterloo
- ...send signals to all evil doers in the country that their days are numbered
- Jos has made the country the butt of the jokes in international circles



- It is regrettable that... which has of late become a hotbed of violence
- And if they have any axe to grind with other road users, they quickly suspend...
- Okada business started as a child of necessity in the country
- For a decade now it has been a harvest of violent protests...
- As with previous crisis in the state, the government has promised to get to the root of the matter
- The security agencies have not... effective countermeasures to nip potential eruptions in the bud

## ii. Personification

Non-animate object is given animate attributes or animate to inanimate. This feature is seen in the editorials under study. Examples are:

- ...more so that the nation still lays claim to...
- It will naturally disappear when the circumstances that gave birth to it cease to exist
- ...the world wakes up to the news of carnage in Jos with its usual casualties and...
- Weapons are paraded by triumphant security operatives in a glare of publicity

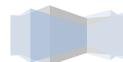
## iii. Simile

Simile is a direct comparison making use of words as 'like' and 'as'. Examples from the editorials are as follows:

- In short, they behave as if they are laws unto themselves
- Like a love story turned awry, Jos has metamorphosed from a tourist haven to a nightmare

## iv. Paradox

A statement containing two opposite ideas that make it seem impossible or unlikely, although it is probably true. An example was seen in one of the editorials.



- ...it will have to go beyond military force which is a blunt instrument at best, and an irrelevant one at worst

v. **Synecdoche**

A part is used to represent a whole or a whole to represent a part. Extracts from the editorials with this feature are written below:

- ...with quite a number of lives and limbs lost, not to talk of properties...
- ...the world wakes up to the news of carnage in Jos with its usual casualties and calamity
- ‘Limbs’ have been used here to represent legs likewise ‘the world’, used to represent people.

v. **Rhetorical Question**

This is an emotive device used to appeal to ones feelings or sentiments. They are questions that require no actual reply. The answers are already implied in the context. Examples from the text are:

What is happening to us as a nation?

Crises without end?

For how long will the crisis continue?

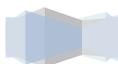
Have we got used to such mindless killings that we no longer care?

So, just what is the problem?

These figures of speech discussed so far can be said to have added artistically to the quality of the editorials. In as much as the issue discussed was a sensitive one, the editors still passed their messages across.

**Conclusion**

It is obvious from the analyses of the editorials carried out in this study, that the language of editorials is more often than not exhibiting some unique features. Language and news reporting is inseparable. 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. Other words used are those associated to the number of deaths and registers associated to the incessancy of the crisis. Various sentence types were employed to sustain the readers' interest. The tone of the writers was sometimes sarcastic, optimistic, that of concern and sympathy. Various stylistic features were also used.

This study, aside its contribution to knowledge, it is also aimed towards Nation building. Therefore, the following solutions are proffered for lasting peace in Jos. There is a/the need for;

- i. Re-orientation of the values of our people as it relates to the dignity and sanctity of the human life, from the political, social, religious and ethnic perspectives.
- ii. White papers should be released and those indicted should be made to face the law.
- iii. A review of the wards within Jos-North so as to accommodate the constant growth of the city and to accommodate the cosmopolitan nature of the town.
- iv. Itinerant preachers, public preaching leading to noise pollution and the closing/blocking of roads during prayers should be abolished.
- v. Detailed study by academics on fundamentalism and terrorism and their manifestations should be undertaken and a liaison with security agents be established to curb these issues.
- vi. Associations with no defined aims and purposes be scrapped and banned.
- vii. Inter-religious communities should be established to preach and teach tolerance and mutual respect for individual religions and respect personal and group opinions.
- viii. The influx of all sorts of people, unemployed youth from various states i.e. presently serving as (mairu was and motor bike riders) who serve as a ready force at anytime for crisis, should be curtailed.
- ix. Laws should be enacted to check and register almagirais under particular mallams.

Solutions adopted from Larab A. T. 2007.



### Works cited

- Ayeomoni, M. O. 'A Linguistic-Stylistic Investigation of the Language of the Nigerian Political Elite.' *Language and Discourse in Society*. Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2004.
- Azuike, Macpherson Nkem. 'Style: Theories and Practical Application.' *Language Science Journal*, vol. 14. Oxford: Pergamon, 1992.
- Crystal, David & Derek Davy. *Investigating English Style*. London: Longman, 1980.
- Esizimotor, David O. & Itaya Nyong A. 'A Stylistic Reading of Shakespeare's King Lear.' *Language and Discourse in Society*. Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2004.
- Enkvist, Nils Erik. *Linguistic Stylistics*. The Hague: Mouton, 1973.
- Larab, Ayuba Tangshak. 'Roles of Fundamentalism and Terrorism in the Jos Crises of 1994 and 2001.' *Historical Perspective on Nigeria's Post-Colonial Conflicts*. Lagos: Unimark Limited, 2007.
- Leech, Geoffrey & Michael Short. *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. London: Longman, 1981.

### Sources of Data

'*This Day*' editorials on Jos Crises

'*The Nation*' editorials on Jos Crises

