

Style of Igbo Newspapers: A case Study of *Òzísà*

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Abstract

*This paper analyzes the style adopted by the newspapers that are written in the Igbo language, with the *Òzísà* newspaper as a case study. *Ozisa* is, in the main, a quarterly church newspaper. We attempt the analysis of its style from the points of view of its layout, sentence types, punctuation marks employed, choice of words, use of figurative expression, etc. All these are categorized and discussed under the graphetic, grammatical, lexical, and semantic levels (See Salawu, 2004). The aim is basically to contribute in improving on the readership of *Ozisa*; more so as available materials show that many Igbo people now prefer the English language to the Igbo language (Eme, 2004; Okodo, 2006). The analysis concludes that the style of *Ozisa* is generally good, but there is still room for an improvement.*

Introduction

Òzísà Newspaper is an Igbo newspaper. It is usually published every quarter, but sometimes every four months. However, a monthly edition could be published depending on the available news items. (See the November-December 2003 edition which was followed by another edition for December 2003-March 2004). The paper could well be called a Catholic Church newspaper as it is published by the Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri. Its content, however, goes beyond church events. This newspaper which came on board in September 8, 2001 has the reputation of being, as far as 2006, "the only [surviving] Igbo newspaper" (Chinagorom, 2002:16). This is as a result of the death of the earlier existing Igbo newspapers -

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Udoka and Ogene.

Many works have been written on the style of newspapers or the language of the press in general. Style, according to Crystal (1997:66), is "the (conscious or unconscious) selection of a set of linguistic features from all the possibilities in a language". Two of the more current notions of style are often distinguished - style as coherence and style as deviation. According to Todorov (1971:30), the distinction runs thus: "Style as coherence, that is as form, structure, totality, a unique and harmonious assemblage of several more general categories within the particular work ... and style as deviation that is infraction, transgression of a norm ...". Crystal (1997) gives insights into what could be seen in a newspaper. They include editorial comments, headlines, news reports, letters, captions, imaginative articles, announcements, cartoon dialogues, television programme descriptions, lists of sports results, crossword clues, competitions, and many kinds of advertising. He explains that because of these different categories of items that a newspaper can contain, it is not possible for a newspaper to be using the same style for all the items. However, each newspaper could adopt a style of writing peculiar to it. This is what he calls the paper's distinctive visual 'house style'.

Nkamuke (1987) writes on the style of the Igbo newspapers, *Ogene* and *Udoka*. She examines the sentence types, grammar, print layout etc, as used in the papers and gives the newspapers a pass mark for their style. Omu (1986) discusses the press and politics in Nigeria, pointing out the contributions of the press in the Nigerian political landscape. According to him, "the language of the press is the language which the press use in educating, informing and entertaining the masses" (Omu, 1986:9). For Mbakwe (2004), the language of the press is that language style employed by the press for the effective fulfilment of their expected role of, among other roles, being the watchdog of the people, disseminating information, educating and entertaining them.

It has been observed that the indigenous language of a community is the best language suited for relaying whatever information to the members of that community (Nwuneli, 1986). Thus Aziza (1996: 31) asserts that "every aspect of a culture finds a place in the language

indigenous to that culture.” Bolaji (2002) explains that the press use ‘the language of the press’ to pass on information to the masses. For him, the publications by the press in the form of headlines bring this language to the limelight. This is to say that it is not out of place for a language style to be identified with the press; hence ‘the language of the press’.

Writing on the styles of Yoruba newspapers for development communication, Salawu (2004) says he toes the line of Crystal and Davy (1969) in his stylistic analysis of three Yoruba newspapers – *Gbohunbohun*, *Iroyin Yoruba* and *Isokan*. Although he identifies some lapses in their style (like their inability to tone-mark, inappropriate use of punctuation marks), he points out that the newspapers, nonetheless, are able to effectively disseminate development messages.

In our study of the style of *Ozisa*, we shall use some editions of the paper spanning from its year of inception in 2001 to 2006. By this study, we aim to contribute in improving on the readership of *Ozisa*, more so as available materials show that many Igbo people now prefer the English language to the Igbo language (Eme, 2004; Okodo, 2006). We attempt the study of the newspaper’s style from the points of view of its layout, sentence types, punctuation marks employed, choice of words, collocation of words, use of figurative expression etc. All these are discussed under the graphetic, grammatical, lexical, and semantic levels, as seen in Salawu (2004).

Graphetic level

At the graphetic level, we consider the layout of *Ozisa*. By this we mean how the paper writes out all that can be found in it in order to make a good impression on its readers and possibly attract more people to patronize it, for the effective fulfilment of its role in the Igbo society. The paper is laid out with the name of the paper on top. It appears boldly on the front cover, written with white on a green background. On the back cover it is inscribed with green on a white background. The title is always preceded by a logo that appears in colour. The attractive green and white colours of the paper name and the bold type-face, with the combination of other colours at the front and back covers for lead stories,

give the paper a beautiful look and make it quite attractive to behold. The cover pages of the newspaper are usually adorned with colour pictures.

Often times, the front cover contains only a lead story whose headline is written in a colour background that is different from the colour of the background where the story is narrated. Sometimes, however, there may be two or three main stories as the headline stories for a particular edition of the newspaper. For example the April-June 2003 edition has one headline story entitled: Aleluya! Kristi Emerigo!! Other editions that have one headline story include the following: November-December 2001, July- September 2003, April-June 2004, and December 2005-March 2006. For those that have more than one headline as the cover stories, we have the April-July 2006 edition as an instance. It has three headline stories with the captions:

Ka Anyị N̄omienụ Onye Ohi Chegharịrị N’Elu Obe
E keela Parishị Atọ ọhụrụ n’Owere
E chetala Agbam Afọ ọnwụ Popu Jọn Pọl II

The story for the last of the three captions is not narrated on the cover page instead the reader is referred to the page where the story eventually appeared. Another instance is the edition for December 2002-March 2003. Apart from these few with more than one headline story; most others have only one; though one or two important announcements could be accommodated within the front cover page.

We are of the view that this style of having only one lead news headline on the front cover page of *Ozisa* is not in the best interest of the paper and the reading public. Rather than have a lone lead story that begins and ends on the front cover page, we suggest having between three to five cover page headlines where the stories for the headlines are started at the cover page but concluded in the inside pages. Thus we take those editions that have more than one headline cover story as being better than those that have only one. Our reason for this is that individuals are unique in their taste concerning the story that captures their fancy. Having multiple cover stories therefore has an advantage of attracting a wider readership since different people’s interest could be

captured by one of the stories or the other. Moreover, most newspaper readers buy their papers based on the cover stories, as they hardly have time to read the stories in the inside pages before making their choice as to which of the papers to buy.

Some of the headlines tend to be instructions and directives. This is not surprising since they are excerpts from the speeches of great men. As such, the source of the title is written after the headline. For example:

E Nweghị Ike Inwe Udo Na Ikpe Nkwumọto Bereso
Mgbaghara Dị - Popu Jọn Pọl II (December 2001-
March 2002 edition)
Busowenu Mpụ Na Arụrụala Agha - Amarachi (April-
June 2005 edition)

Sometimes, the nature of the headline content does not allow for its rendition into catchy or dramatic titles that easily attract a reader's attention. Experience has shown that a lengthy and undramatic headline does not entice a reader into reading the full story. The reverse is the case for a short and catchy headline. We are, however, not saying that all the headlines must be reduced to short dramatic titles, for this might not be possible. But we feel it would be better if many of them are. It helps in attracting more patronage for the newspaper. Let us compare the following headlines in terms of their capturing the reader's attention:

Popu Enyela Ndị Achibishopu oheru Nke Onicha na
Kalaba Palum (July-September 2004)
Achidayosis Owere Adila Njikere inabata Ndị Bishopu
Naijiria (July-September 2003)
Popu Anọla 25 (November-December 2003)
Aleluya! Kristi Emerigo!! (April-June 2003)
Ndu Popu Benediti XVI (July-September 2005)

The last three captions are apt and more concise. They, therefore, would be better able to capture the attention of a Nigerian newspaper reader who, often times, is in a hurry.

The prints for all the editions used for this write-up are clear and

quite legible both at the cover and inside pages. This makes it easy to read the paper because there are no erased or blurred portions. The use of punctuation marks in the newspaper is generally good. There are though, some few cases of omission or inappropriate use of punctuation marks. (See, for example, the wrong use of the full stop in paragraph 3 of the back page story in the April-July 2006 edition).

The editions of the *Ozisa* published from its inception in September 2001 to the March 2005 edition have their lead stories captions appearing in bold lower case letters. But from the April-June 2005 edition up till the April-July 2006 edition, the style changed to bold upper case letters. Although both styles are good, the latter style seems to have a more aesthetic face value than the former.

Grammatical level

Most paragraphs in *Ozisa* contain as many as four to six sentences. These sentences could be simple, complex or compound. But often times, complex sentences dominate, followed by compound sentences. Simple sentences are few. There are, however, some one-sentence paragraphs in the paper. They are made up of complex sentences. Sometimes the one-sentence paragraph is really long, being as long as twenty or more lines. For example, the back page story on casting of votes in the 2003 elections seen in the April-June 2002 edition has the following conditional sentence as one of its paragraphs:

Ọ buru na ikpe ziri ezi na imenyere Ogwugwu
menyekwara Anosike na Dannedie adirj n'usoro iwu
itu votu na uzọ e si etinye ha n'oru, dirikwa na uzọ e si
eleba anya ka itu votu si aga; o burukwa na ikpe ziri
ezi adirj n'uzo e si akpoputa ka okwe itu votu siri gbaa,
dirikwazie n'etu otu nlebara anya (ndi a na-ehiwe maka
ileba anya na nsogbu na ebubo ndi na-eso itu votu)
siri chaa ikpe ndi na-abjara ha, a ga-enwe ochichi
ohakarasi juru afo nke ga-eweta obi iru ala ma mejuputa
ebumnobi nke odimma oha mmadu.

Such extremely long sentences are better broken down into shorter sentences. If not for the good use of punctuation marks in the above example, its clear understanding would be difficult. Another long sentence paragraph is paragraph one on the front page of the July-September 2004 edition. In general, the sentence structure and types found in the *Ozisa* newspaper do not constitute any problem to the reading and understanding of the news stories.

Lexical level

Ozisa newspaper uses mainly words that are of normal everyday use. It also tries to use the Igbo language "not merely [as] an instrument of communication but [also as] a purveyor of culture and traditions" (Enemaku, 2004:650). This is seen in the use of, for example, some lexical items and collocations. For instance:

Onye anya ukwu bu onye ohi (December 2001-March 2002:7)

... ụmụ Naijiria takwutere ya okwute (back page, April-June 2002)

The paper also uses some words that are either not of everyday use or dialectal, may be, to add a special flavour to the newspaper. In most cases, the meanings of the words are understood from the context. For example, the use of the dialectal form 'ọchịchị ọhakarasi' (back page, April-June 2002) in place of 'ọchịchị onye kwuo uche ya' meaning 'democratic rule.' We are of the view that the newspaper should prefer lexical items which are of general usage across the Igbo nation to those that are dialectal; that is, if the paper is to have a wider readership. In a few cases, however, it is not easy to understand the meanings of such words from the context. For instance, the use of the word 'palum' in the headline story of July-September 2004 edition. The headline reads:

Popu Enyela Ndi Achibishopu oheru Nke Onicha na Kalaba Palum

This word 'palum' does not appear in the body of the story. A reader has

to read up to the 20th line of the first paragraph before he vaguely sees the meaning of the word - olomgbo na-egosi okwa nnukwu olekota ogbe - i.e. 'mantle of authority.' One had expected the paper to explain the meaning of the word by, may be, putting 'palum' in brackets immediately after the descriptive meaning of the word is used.

Moreover, the spelling adopted by the paper for some words leave much to be desired. The spellings give the wrong impression that these words are not pronounced as spelt. Examples of words not properly spelt, with their correct spelling in brackets, are:

popu (poopu) 'pope' (July-September 2004:1)

votu (vootu) 'vote' (April-June 2002:6)

bishopu (bishoou) 'bishop' (July-September 2004:11)

parishi (pariishi) 'parish' (April-June 2005:3)

Herodu (Heroudu) 'Herod' (Dec. 2004-March 2005:1)

Katoliki (katoliiki) 'Catholic' (July-September 2004:11)

The words in this category are mostly the 'Igbonized' words.

We find in *Ozisa* some words or collocations that are dialectal, for instance, the use of the phrase, *ndi nwere nkwaru* to mean *ndi nwere orusi* 'the disabled' (April-June 2004:11). The collocation, *Okeke na Okafo* is replaced with *Ogwugwu, Anosike na Dannedie* (back page, April-June 2002). Except where these are common expressions covering many sections of Igboland, we feel that they are better replaced with the widely and almost pan-Igbo usages in order not to restrict the patronage for the paper to only a small section of the Igbo society; more so as the paper covers events from some other dioceses.

Semantic level

One style *Ozisa* adopts concerning its tone is that of trying to relate personally with the reader. The stories or events are narrated by the writer as if he is discussing face-to-face with the reader. This style manifests in the use of such features as rhetorical questions, exclamations, proverbs, and figurative expressions like simile and metaphor. Example:

... takwu takwu banyere ɔnwu ... na akwuputa dika
anwuru oku (front page, December 2002-March 2003)

Instances from page 7 of the December 2001-March 2002 edition of
Ozisa include:

Ebe onye bi ka o na-awachi
Anaghi eji mmanu emenyu oku
Ihe na-esi nkaji isi di ya n'okpukpu

Other instances are:

Chukwu daalu oo! (front page, November-December
2003)
Nurjanu n'omumu Kristi na anuri afo ohuru!!!
(December-March 2004:2)
Chineke amaka!! (December-March 2004:4)

In the presentation of issues in the editorial comments of *Ozisa*, the tone is formal. This could be a way of emphasizing on the seriousness of the issues being discussed. The use of both informal and formal tones in the different sections of *Ozisa* makes the reading of the paper a pleasure. This is because the use of the appropriate tone for a particular news item brings the reader closer to the context or situation of the news item in question.

Summary and conclusion

This paper examined the style of *Ozisa*, an Igbo newspaper published by the Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri. The style was studied by bringing the different issues about the newspaper into four appropriate levels: The graphetic, grammatical, lexical, and semantic levels. At the graphetic level, the style of issues discussed included the general layout of the paper, how and where the name of the paper is written, the quality of the printed materials on the pages of the newspaper, how the headlines appear, etc. The size of the paragraphs, the sentence types and structures were examined under the grammatical level. Whereas the choice of words and collocation of words were discussed at the lexical level, the tones in

the presentation of materials to show formality or informality were looked into at the semantic level.

The investigation discovered that the style of *Ozisa* is generally good but there are certain areas that should be improved upon if the newspaper must play a significant role in news dissemination among the Igbo people. Such areas of improvement include having between two to five headlines at the front cover page so as to make many people see a caption of interest at a glance, making the captions at the cover pages apt and concise or even catchy and dramatic where possible as this helps in capturing the interest of the reading public; and breaking up the one sentence paragraphs into numerous sentences for easy understanding of the content.

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