



Effects of The Language and Discourse of Nigerian Newspaper Reporting on National Security: Peoples' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the people's perceptions of the effects of the use of the language and discourse of Nigerian newspaper reporting on national security. One hundred (100) newspaper readers from Lagos and Ogun states were randomly selected as the sample for this study. A self-developed questionnaire with Yes and No options was validated and administered to the respondents. The data collected were analyzed using chi-square analysis. The findings of the study showed that the use of the language and discourse of Nigerian newspaper reporting will significantly enhance the timely dissemination of security information to the people and foster national interest and direction for security assurance in the nation. Therefore, it is recommended that the government invest more in the newspaper industry; and that the language of newspaper reporting should be worked on to give room for more effective communication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of language over time is to communicate. Language is surely the most important communication tool individuals have at their disposal. Language is a fundamental aspect of human identity and a key factor in distinguishing humans from other species (McWhorter, 2016). Language acquisition is a universal human accomplishment, allowing people to share knowledge, express attitudes, and impart information (Chun *et al.*, 2016). In today's digital age, language continues to evolve, with new forms of communication emerging, such as social media and online platforms (Kessler, 2018; Reinhardt, 2019; Hermsley and Mason, 2013). Language's expressive and informative power is evident in various forms of communication, including the print media. The print media play a crucial role in informing, enlightening, and entertaining the public, as noted by Alo (2006).

Apart from disseminating information to the public, the print media are supposed to prevent society from stagnation, regression, decadence, or insecurity. There is a kind of connection between the content of the media and public attitudes, standards, morals, and tastes. Thus, the fate of a nation and its people is determined by the kind of information from the media to the public. Moreover, language has become increasingly important in the digital era, where misinformation and disinformation can spread rapidly (Bennett & Livingston, 2018).

The print media, including newspapers, have a three-pronged responsibility to the public. Firstly, they must disseminate accurate and comprehensive information to inform the public (Kuang, 2011). Secondly, they should provide interpretation and explanation to help readers form informed opinions on current issues (Britt *et al.*, 2014). Lastly, they should guide public opinion by presenting balanced perspectives that promote the greater good. In recent years, print media have faced challenges from digital sources, leading to a decline in readership and revenue. However, they remain vital in shaping public discourse and holding those in power accountable (Sheresheva *et al.*, 2021).

The language and discourse used in Nigerian newspaper reporting play a crucial role in shaping national security, but the prevalent use of sensational, inflammatory, and biased language in reporting security issues raises concerns about its impact on public perception, national interest, and security assurance. Effective communication is vital for national security, and language is a key facilitator. However, mismanaged language can lead to verbal conflicts, misunderstandings, misinformation, and communication breakdowns, ultimately compromising national security. This study seeks to address how the language and discourse of Nigerian newspapers significantly impact the dissemination of security information to the public and the perceptions of newspaper readers regarding the effectiveness of Nigerian newspapers in disseminating security information with a focus on the following research questions. Research questions are:

- (i) Will the language and discourse of newspaper reporting enhance effective and timely security information dissemination to the people?
- (ii) Will the language and discourse of newspaper reporting foster national interest and direction for security assurance?

The following hypotheses were postulated based on the problem identified in the study.

- (i) The language and discourse of the newspaper will not significantly enhance effective and timely security information dissemination to the people.
- (ii) The language and discourse of the newspaper will not significantly foster national interest and direction for security assurance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Language and The Print Media

Recent linguistic studies on the language and discourse of the print media have focused on the dynamic relationship between news creation, the writer's intention and perspective, and its impact on audience reception and interpretation (Facchinetti, 2021; Touri & Koteyko, 2015). The language of effective print media is characterized by simplicity, clarity, and emphasis, achieved through the deliberate selection of familiar vocabulary, concise sentences, and paragraphs that facilitate rapid comprehension (Jukes, 2019). Additionally, newspaper writing should embody the principles of accuracy, brevity, and directness. The language of newspapers employs a complex system of lexical, phraseological, and grammatical elements to inform, instruct, and entertain readers (Touri & Koteyko, 2015). This multifaceted purpose is reflected in the diverse content of newspapers, which encompasses factual information and evaluative materials, commentary, and the perspectives of news writers, particularly in editorials and feature articles.

How the news writer presents events in the news may depend on his or her world of view, the cultural matters involved, as well as his or her intention to influence social change. Therefore, examining the language resources used for these purposes is important. The bulk of the vocabulary used in newspaper writing is neutral and literary (Touri & Koteyko, 2015). However, some researchers (Wekpa & Udoudom, 2022) identify some specific features of the vocabulary found in print media as follows:

- (i) Special political and economic terms such as stability, election, anti-terror, terrorism, freedom fighter, opponent, vote, human rights, etc.
- (ii) Non-term political words, such as kidnappers, breakdown, local, terror cells, emergency, and protest.
- (iii) Lofty bookish words like phrases based on metaphors and thus, having emotional undertone such as overwhelming majority, the global hunt for terrorists, a shot of power, escalation of the war.
- (iv) Newspaper clichés: These are stereotyped expressions and commonplace phrases that are familiar to the reader, e.g. public opinion, to cast a veto over crucial problems, pressing issues, or long-term agreements. Clichés are very essential in newspaper style. They give room for understanding and prevent ambiguity.
- (v) Abbreviations of names of organizations, public and state bodies, and political associations, e.g. UNO (United Nations Organisation), EFCC (Economy and Financial Crimes Commission), FG (Federal Government), FEC (Federal Executive Council). Sometimes, names of persons constantly in the public eyes are abbreviated e.g. IBB (Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida)
- (vi) Neologisms: These refer to words that developed from the newspaper's quick reaction to new developments in the life of society in science and technology. For example, words like cybersickness, online auction, and access provider are all related to computers and the internet.
- (vii) Foreign words: These are words from different languages other than English. Others have come from new technology like computers, the internet, business, and entertainment. Such words include *beaucoup*, *ad hoc*, *bonafide*, and *curriculum vitae* (CV). Some of the words are traditionally used in newspaper writing.

Some researchers Benmamoun *et al.* (2013) refer to the distinctive language patterns that emerge in specific contexts, characterized by definite features that become customary in those contexts as registers. A register refers to the language used in a particular situation,

profession, or field of human endeavor. The print media, as well as the associated register, plays a great role in the life and endeavors of society and the people via news, opinions, comments, entertainment, cartoons, pictures, and so on. The connection between the content of the media and the public attitudes, standards, morals, tastes, reactions, and stands to issues cannot be over-emphasized. All these are presented through the effective use of language.

From the viewpoint of discourse analysis, linguistic illustration refers to how language is used to represent and describe the real world. As acknowledged by some researchers (Benmamoun *et al.*, 2013), representation can be related to the three 'meta-functions' of language – 'ideational', 'interpersonal', and 'textual'. Other researchers Benmamoun *et al.* (2013) described language as a meaning potential and open-ended and theoretically infinite range of options in meaning. Therefore, the ideational function serves to express content. This has to do with the speaker's or writer's experience of the real world, including the inner world of his/her consciousness. In the interpersonal function, language establishes and maintains social relations. Language serves to express social roles, including the communication role created by language itself. Semantic or functional components play a vital role in carrying out the interpersonal function of a sentence as a unit of exchange of information in English. The textual function accounts for the thematic organization and the information structure of the sentence. This study suggests that language is used to create these functions within the structure of print media.

2.2. Language and The Print Media Impact of Language use in Print Media on Security Issues in Nigeria

The media environment in Nigeria is often characterized by sensationalism, with newspapers using captivating language and selective headline framing to capture the attention of their audience. These characteristics have enhanced public perceptions, including heightened awareness and emotional connection to social issues, a stronger sense of community and collective concern, increased prioritization of important topics, and a better contextual understanding of multifaceted issues (Ibrahim, 2020). Over time, these factors have positively impacted Nigerians' engagement with and understanding of news and social issues, ultimately shaping a more informed and empathetic public discourse. (Baum & Abdel, 2021). Likewise, Nigerian newspapers often frame stories that shape public opinion, influencing how people perceive security threats and the government's response (Ibrahim, 2020; Omolabi, 2023). However, exaggerated reporting can create unnecessary panic, leading to public unrest and instability (Edeani, 2022). Sensational reporting can inadvertently reveal sensitive information, compromising military operations and intelligence gathering (Ogbondah, 2022).

Technology advancement paved the way for the growth of digital journalism in Nigeria. The advent of online news platforms can be attributed to several factors, such as improvements in internet infrastructure, computing power, and mobile devices, which have enabled faster and wider access to online content (Jenkins, 2004). This technological progress sets the stage for digital convergence, where the integration of text, images, audio, and video creates an opportunity for multimedia storytelling and allows for new forms of journalism to take shape. Changing audience habits also played a significant role as people increasingly sought convenience, immediacy, and interactivity, leading online news platforms to emerge and meet these demands (Sheresheva *et al.*, 2021). Economic pressures, including the decline of print advertising revenue and the rise of digital advertising, drove news organizations to explore online platforms (Braun & Eklund, 2019).

The language used in online news platforms has a significant impact on security in Nigeria. The effective use of language can facilitate enhanced information dissemination, enabling swift response to security threats through the rapid sharing of information (Edeani, 2022). This is particularly important in Nigeria, where timely information can help prevent or mitigate the impact of security threats such as terrorism and kidnapping. The language of online news can also influence public perception and sentiment, contributing to or undermining national security efforts (Ibrahim, 2020). In Nigeria, online news platforms have been known to sensationalize security-related issues, which can create panic and exacerbate security challenges. However, responsible language use can help promote calm and constructive engagement between security agencies and the public.

Furthermore, the language of online news can shape the narrative around security issues, influencing how the public understands and responds to security threats (Nwosu, 2022). In Nigeria, online news platforms have raised awareness about security issues and promoted accountability among security agencies. By using clear and concise language, online news platforms can help promote transparency and accountability, which are essential for effective security governance.

However, studies have identified the major challenges of the language of online news. One of the pressing issues is the spread of misinformation and disinformation, which can create panic and exacerbate security challenges (Ibrahim, 2020). Online news platforms in Nigeria have been known to publish unverified information, which can compromise national security efforts. Additionally, sensationalizing security-related issues can create a culture of fear and undermine trust in security agencies. The language of online news can also be used to promote hate speech and divisive rhetoric, which can fuel insecurity and conflict (Nwosu, 2022).

2.3. Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Agenda Setting Theory, which postulates that media exposure significantly influences public perception and opinion formation. This theoretical framework underscores the importance of message construction and dissemination in shaping public discourse. Furthermore, it highlights the role of media bias in promoting specific agendas, thereby influencing policy decisions and societal priorities. Some researchers (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) pioneered the agenda-setting theory to challenge conventional wisdom with a groundbreaking idea. They proposed that the media actively shapes public opinion and perceptions rather than merely reflecting reality. This revolutionary concept, known as the Agenda Setting Theory, revealed the profound impact of media on the public collective consciousness. The media's selective focus on certain issues influences what the public thinks about and how they prioritize those issues. This insight sparked a new understanding of the media's role in shaping public discourse.

The Agenda Setting Theory identified two assumptions challenging people's understanding of the media's role in shaping their perceptions (McCombs *et al.*, 2014). The first assumption reveals that the media does not merely report reality, it acts as a filter, selectively presenting information to create a constructed reality. The media influences how we understand the world through careful framing and coverage. This notion shatters the illusion of objective reporting, exposing the media's subtle yet profound power. The second assumption suggests that the media's focus determines public priorities. When the media shines its spotlight on a particular issue, the public takes notice. The more attention devoted to a topic, the more importance it gains in the public eye. This, in turn, sparks demand for action.

This study employed this theory to critically evaluate information, recognizing the media's role in shaping understanding. By acknowledging this dynamic, we can seek diverse perspectives, challenge biases, and engage in more informed discussions. The agenda-Setting Theory is a crucial reminder in the digital era that the media has a much larger impact than just disseminating news. It directs and molds people's priorities and realities.

3. METHODS

This study explored the public perceptions of the language and discourse of newspaper reporting toward enhancing effective national security information. A quantitative approach was employed to achieve this objective. The quantitative phase involved a survey of 100 respondents from Ogun and Lagos states, representing a diverse range of demographics. A structured questionnaire was designed to measure people's perceptions of language and discourse in newspaper reporting, focusing on clarity, objectivity, emotional tone, and relevance to national security. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across age, gender, education, and occupation.

The questionnaire was developed and pilot-tested with a small group (n=20) to ensure reliability and validity. Survey administration was conducted personally within 4 weeks. Data analysis was done using SPSS for the data collected. Informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were ensured to avoid harm or exploitation. This study seeks to identify public perceptions of language and discourse in newspaper reporting, determine the impact of these factors on national security information dissemination, and provide recommendations for improving newspaper reporting. By exploring public perceptions of language and discourse in newspaper reporting, this study may contribute to a better understanding of effectively communicating national security information to the public.

We ensured ethical considerations, including informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, transparency, and accountability to protect the participants and maintain the integrity of the research. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, ensuring they understood the purpose and scope of the research. Respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, with assurance that their identities would remain undisclosed throughout the study. Additionally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point if they felt uncomfortable.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Question 1: Will the Language and Discourse of Newspaper Reporting Enhance Effective and Timely Security Information Dissemination to The People?

Table 1 reveals the percentage of responses to the questionnaire items. 87% of the respondents agreed that using language and discourse in newspapers will enhance the effective dissemination of security information to the people, while 13% disagreed. It was also believed by 76% of the respondents that the use of language and discourse in newspaper reporting would help expose activities that result in insecurity in the nation, while 24% of them disagreed. 26% of the respondents believed that the security of the people could be endangered through newspaper reporting, while 74% disagreed. 92% of the respondents thought that the language and discourse of newspaper reporting could motivate self-direction towards applying security measures, as against 8% of the respondents who disagreed. In addition, 92% of the respondents believed that newspaper reporting could help people to be security conscious.

Table 1. Influence of the language and discourse of newspaper reporting on the timeliness of security information dissemination to the public.

S/N	Items Description	Yes %	No%	Remarks
1	Effective dissemination of security information to the public.	87	13	Yes
2	Exposing activities resulting in insecurity of the nation	76	24	Yes
3	Endangerment of the security of the people	26	74	No
4	Motivating self-direction toward applying security measures	92	8	Yes
5	Helping people to be security conscious	92	8	Yes

4.2. Research Question 2: Will the Language and Discourse of Newspaper Reporting Foster National Interest and Direction for Security Assurance?

Table 2 summarizes the respondents' responses on whether the language and discourse of newspaper reporting would foster national interest and direction for security assurance. The table identifies the effects of the use of the language and discourse of newspaper national security through the responses of the respondents as boosting the morale of security personnel to effectively discharge their duties (86%), motivating government interest to curb insecurity in the nation (84%), giving right direction to the national security council on formulation and implementation of national security policies (87%), motivating security outfits towards protecting the people against insecurity (86%), and fostering national interest for security assurance(77%).

Table 2: Fostering national interest and direction for security assurance.

S/N	Items Description	Yes %	No%	Remarks
1	Boosting the morale of security personnel to effectively discharge their duties	86	14	Yes
2	Motivating government interest to curb insecurity in the nation	84	16	Yes
3	Giving the right direction to the National Security Council on the formation and implementation of national security	87	13	Yes
4	Motivating security outfits to protect the people against insecurity	86	14	Yes
5	Fostering national interest for security assurance	77	23	Yes

4.3. Hypothesis 1: The language and Discourse of Newspapers Will not Significantly Enhance the Effective and Timely Dissemination of Security Information to The People.

Table 3 shows that the chi-square calculated values are 54.76, 27.04, 23.04, 70.56, and 70.56; *P*- values are 0.00 at a 0.05 significance level. It is evident in the table that the *P*-values are less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis, which says that the language and discourse of newspapers will not significantly enhance the quick dissemination of security information to the people, was rejected. Thus, the hypothesis is significant. Hence, using the language and discourse of newspaper reporting will significantly enhance the quick dissemination of security information to the people.

Table 3: Chi-square analysis of data on quick dissemination of security information through the use of language and discourse of newspaper

S/N	Items	Observed Frequency		Expected Frequency	Chi-Square Calculated	P-Value	Inference
		Yes	No				
1	Effective dissemination of security information to the people.	87	13	50	54.76	0.00	significant
2	Exposing activities resulting in insecurity of the nation	76	24	50	27.04	0.00	significant
3	Endangerment of the security of the people	26	74	50	23.04	0.00	significant
4	Motivating self-direction toward applying security measures	92	8	50	70.56	0.00	significant
5	Helping people to be security conscious	92	8	50	70.56	0.00	significant
P < 0.05							

4.4. Hypothesis 2: The Language and Discourse of Newspapers Will Not Significantly Foster National Interest and Direction for Security Assurance.

Table 4 above shows that the chi-square calculated values are 51.84, 46.24, 54.76, 51.84, and 29.16; P- values are 0.00 at 0.05 level of significance. Since p-values are less than 0.05, the null hypothesis, which says that the language and discourse of the newspaper will not significantly foster national interest and direction for security assurance, is rejected. Thus, the hypothesis is significant. Hence, using the language and discourse of newspaper reporting will significantly foster national interest and direction for security assurance.

Table 4: Chi-square analysis of data on fostering national interest and direction for security assurance.

S/N	Items	Observed Frequency		Expected Frequency	Chi-Square Calculated	P-Value	Inference
		Yes	No				
1	Boosting the morale of security personnel to discharge their duties effectively	86	14	50	51.84	0.00	significant
2	Motivating government interest to curb insecurity in the nation	84	16	50	46.24	0.00	significant
3	Giving the right direction to the National Security Council on the formation and implementation of national security	87	13	50	54.76	0.00	significant
4	Motivating security outfits to protect the people against insecurity	86	14	50	51.84	0.00	significant
5	Fostering national interest for security assurance	77	23	50	29.16	0.00	significant

The findings in this study from **Table 3** suggest that using the language and discourse of newspaper reporting will significantly enhance the effective and timely dissemination of security information to the people. This result resonates with the other researchers

perspectives (Edeani, 2022; Ibrahim, 2020), who argue that the press plays a vital role in disseminating information about human experiences, sentiments, and perspectives to a wider audience. In addition, news reporting, especially in the print media, usually seeks to inform, entertain, and enlighten people (Alo, 2006).

The results in Table 4 also revealed that using the language and discourse of newspaper reporting will significantly foster national interest and direction for security assurance. The press is interested in cultural matters as well as influencing social change (Alo, 2006). The press, besides disseminating information to the public, essentially prevents a society from stagnation, degeneration, or corruption (Wekpa & Udoudom, 2022). The providence of a nation and the world is triggered by the kind of information from the media to the public or the government. Newspaper reporting, in most cases, sharply influences the course and shape of events in a nation.

The chi-square test analysis confirmed the significance of these findings, rejecting both null hypotheses and indicating that the language and discourse of newspaper reporting profoundly impact the quick dissemination of security information and fostering national interest and direction for security assurance. These findings align with existing literature, which emphasizes the vital role of the press in disseminating information, influencing social change, and preventing societal stagnation (Wekpa & Udoudom, 2022; Ibrahim, 2020; Omolabi, 2023). The study's results underscore the importance of newspaper reporting in shaping national interest and direction on security assurance, contributing to a more secure and prosperous nation. Ultimately, this research highlights the need for continued collaboration between the media, security personnel, and government agencies to leverage the power of language and discourse in promoting national security.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the use of the language and discourse of Nigerian newspaper reporting is noted to be indispensable in enhancing information dissemination on pertinent issues such as the security of a nation. The effects of the use of the language and discourse of newspapers on national security have been identified to provide dissemination of security information to the people, exposing activities resulting in insecurity, boosting the morale of security personnel to discharge their duties effectively, helping the people to be security conscious; motivating self-direction towards applying security measures; motivating government interest to curb insecurity in the nation; giving right direction to the national security council on formulation and implementation of national security; motivating security outfits towards protecting the people against insecurity; and fostering national interest and direction on security assurance in Nigeria. Nigerian newspapers are noted for using language to expound various viewpoints which have to do with the well-being of the nation. Thus, effective language use gives room for information dissemination.

This paper has unequivocally demonstrated the vital role of Nigerian newspaper reporting in amplifying the dissemination of critical information on national security. The strategic deployment of language and discourse in newspaper reporting has been shown to have far-reaching consequences, including the dissemination of security information, exposure of activities that compromise national security, and the bolstering of security personnel's morale. Moreover, it has been established that effective language use in newspaper reporting fosters a security-conscious citizenry, motivates individuals to take proactive measures to ensure their safety, and galvanizes government interest in addressing security concerns.

Furthermore, the language and discourse of Nigerian newspapers have been shown to provide invaluable guidance to the National Security Council in the formulation and implementation of effective security policies. The media's watchdog role in holding security outfits accountable for protecting citizens against insecurity has also been highlighted. Ultimately, this paper underscores the significance of Nigerian newspapers in shaping national interest and direction on security assurance, thereby contributing to the well-being and stability of the nation. By harnessing the power of language and discourse, Nigerian newspapers have proven to be an indispensable tool in the quest for a secure and prosperous Nigeria. The following recommendations were made:

- (i) News platforms:
 - Implement responsible language use and verification of information
 - Promote transparency and accountability in security governance
 - Avoid hate speech and divisive rhetoric
 - Conduct public awareness campaigns
- (ii) Security agencies and government officials:
 - Collaborate with news platforms for accurate and timely reporting
 - Provide timely and accurate information to all news platforms
 - Engage in public awareness campaigns to promote national security
 - Use clear and concise language when communicating security-related information
 - Avoid using inflammatory or divisive rhetoric
 - Engage in transparent and timely communication with the public
- (iii) Regulatory bodies:
 - Establish and enforce regulatory frameworks for online news platforms
 - Monitor compliance with responsible language use and ethical standards
- (iv) Journalists and media professionals:
 - Undergo training and capacity building on responsible language use and security reporting
 - Adhere to ethical standards and responsible language use
- (v) Individual citizens:
 - Engage in critical thinking and media literacy when consuming online information
 - Use respectful and inclusive language in online interactions
 - Report hate speech and divisive rhetoric to platform moderators
- (vi) Government:
 - Provide support and resources for regulatory bodies and news platforms
 - Encourage collaboration between security agencies and all news platforms

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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