

MOOD IN OPINION ARTICLES ON BOKO HARAM CRISIS: DISCOURSE FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

Amao, M.K. Akintunde, A.M. Ajao, R.A. Adeleke, O.F and Olawore, H.O.

Oyo State College of Agriculture and Technology, Igboora

Abstract

The study explores the discourse functions of mood in opinion articles on Boko Haram crisis, drawing examples from three randomly selected Nigerian Newspaper. The study explores the grammatical system of mood and its discourse functions within the ambits of Systematic Functional Grammar in opinion articles on Boko Haram crisis based on contextual variables with a view to knowing the attitude and stance of writers. Four types of opinion feature prominently in the article, namely criticism, rejection, acceptance and belief while four discourse functions of the categories are identified such as critical, negative, sentimental and positive, reflect the attitude and the stance of the writers. The opinions identified are enclosed in interrogative and declarative mood types. The interrogatives manifest in wh-, yes/no and rhetorical questions. Declarative structures are deployed by writers through statements of facts and assertions. The study therefore, concludes that the writers' deployment of mood in opinion articles portrays their attitude and stance on the Boko Haram crisis, hence readers are expected to take cognizance of the implicit and explicit intentions of the writers on the crisis.

Key words: Discourse functions; mood; Boko Haram crisis; opinion articles; Nigerian national newspaper.

Introduction

This study examines the choice of mood as deployed by writers of opinion articles on the Boko Haram crisis in selected Nigerian national newspapers in order to discover additional voices and attitudinal meanings underlying what is written. In 2009, many groups of Islamic fundamentalists in Nigeria morphed and transcended into one complicated Boko Haram umbrella. The name Boko Haram, which means 'western education is sin', was adopted by the sect and thereafter announced its intention to islamise Nigeria with the ultimate aim of imposing strict Sharia law. Among these groups are Hisbah, Al-Suuna Wal Jamma and Shura Council of Jama'atu. Upon fusing together, Yusuf Mohammed became their leader and that was how they started unleashing mayhem in the northeastern part of the country, most especially in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states.

Since 2009, Boko Haram related attacks have occurred in almost all of the Northern states and in the Federal Capital Territory. The leader of the sect, Yusuf Mohammed was arrested in 2009, but in an unknown circumstance was killed in police detention. A protégé of Yusuf called Abubakar Shekau, took over the reins of the Boko Haram and massive attacks have occurred in many places since then.

The foregoing has necessitated many news reporting and comments as well as opinions in various media outfits in Nigeria and beyond which signify the

intentions of the commentators and the writers of the opinions which is possible due to the existence of many media houses in Nigeria. Getting insight from the above, our study spans through January and December, 2014 which happened to be a time of intense attacks by the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria.

There were series of attacks on public and private agencies, mosques, churches, markets, the highways, police stations and military barracks. With all the efforts being made by the governments (states and federal) through the use of force, the crisis still went on unabated. In 2013, the Federal Government imposed state of emergency in three northeastern states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe to no avail. Many military formations were hurriedly established to quell the menace but the more all these actions were taken and the members of the sect were being arrested or killed, the more their number increased. Thus Boko Haram crisis as discussed by various writers of public opinions in Nigerian newspapers became aspect of interest to researchers (Aghedo and Krisagbedo 2014, Chiluwa and Ajiboye 2014, Konje 2013, Aghedo 2012) and the core of this study.

For the purpose of this study, therefore, the opinion articles of Nigerian national dailies were sampled through purposive sampling. The national dailies were *The Punch*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Guardian*. These national dailies were selected for their wide coverage of Boko Haram crisis and their expansive

readership. Details of the newspapers being studied are as follows:

- (a) *Nigerian tribune*, a daily, privately owned newspaper and published by African Newspapers of Nigerian Plc;
- (b) *The Punch*, a daily newspaper, privately owned and published by Punch Plc; and
- (c) *The Guardian*, a daily privately owned newspaper published by Guardian Newspaper Plc.

The time range of this study was between January and December, 2014. The period was chosen for its political importance as it spanned through a tumultuous moment, most especially after the abduction of more than two hundred school girls by the Boko Haram sect in April, 2014. Till now, just a handful of the abducted girls have been released, or rescued by the security agents.

In Nigeria, the print media are either owned by the government (federal and state), corporate bodies or private individuals. Most of these media bodies are owned by the government and this has made it possible for the government to play dominant roles in dissemination of information in such media, most especially on the matters that concern domestic and international reputations of the government. The privately owned media outfits have always been resistant to government influence on their dissemination of information to a certain extent. However, the government ensures compliance with regulations set by its agencies saddled with the responsibilities of curtailing excesses relating to mass media. The regulatory agencies are the Press Council and National Broadcasting Commission. According to Alo (2007):

Although each newspaper or magazine tends to have its philosophy and unique in-house style, in practical terms, the information released to the audience is often dependent on the “media ownership and philosophy”.

In the light of the foregoing, it is believed that if any media house will be efficient and effective in dissemination of information, such will have to consider information credibility, information content and cultural realities. Here, the media house will use language that is easily decoded and not fail to employ a common cultural frame of reference between the discourse agents (sender and receiver) Alo (2007).

Existing studies and problem statement

Many linguists have carried out studies on media discourse as it concerns the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria. As virile as they are, most of the studies have been approached from the perspectives of pragmatics (Chiluwa and Oyegoke, 2013; Odebunmi and Oloyede, 2016), aspects of sociolinguistics (Aghedo, 2012), aspects of grammar and discourse analysis (Osisanwo, 2016 a and b; Amao, 2018), critical discourse analysis (Chiluwa and Ajiboye 2014), rhetorical analysis (Konje 2013; Ogbondah and Agbese; Oparinde *et al.*, 2021), socio pragmatics analysis (Aghedo *et al.*, 2012), lexis (Ogungbe and Alo 2014) and so on.

The present study examines the grammatical system and discourse functions of mood deployed by the writers of opinion articles with a view to investigating the attitudes and stance of the writers on Boko Haram crisis. The study answers the following questions: what are the opinions expressed in selected opinion articles? What are the mood types chosen by the writers of opinion in the study and their discourse functions? How do situational contexts necessitate the use of the linguistic devices found in the study by the writers and their discourse functions?

Methodology

The aforementioned newspapers were selected for their being rich in opinion articles focusing on Boko Haram crisis and wide coverage of security issues both at national and international levels. The study covers 2014, as the period was very important because it was then that the security situation in the country became tense due to the activities of the Boko Haram sect, who has soiled the whole country in their daily bloodletting. That was the time the Boko Haram sect was seriously attacking several places in Nigeria despite the declaration of state of emergency in their areas of operations and heavy presence of security men.

Theoretical orientation

According to Alo (2007), it is believed that if any media house will be efficient and effective in dissemination of information, such will have to consider information credibility, information content and cultural realities. Here, the media houses will use language that is easily decoded and not fail to employ a common cultural frame of reference between the discourse agents (sender and receiver). In the light of the foregoing, this study is interested in the various writer's opinion articles in selected national newspapers with a view to finding out their attitude and stance. To realise this, the grammatical mood

aspect of SFG is deployed in the analysis. This gives vivid explanation of the intention of the writers on the activities of the Boko Haram.

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a form of grammatical description originally developed by Michael Halliday which is a part of social semiotic approach to language called Systemic Functional Linguistic network of system, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning (Halliday, 2004). Thus, grammar is described as a system and not as rules, on the basis that every grammatical structure involves choices from a describable set of options. Language is thus described as a meaning potential. The functionality refers to Halliday's view that language is as it is and what it has developed to do.

The SFG is chosen as a model for this study to show the linguistic variations in the public opinion section of the newspapers under study which are not just functions of syntactic forms but also the representation of the writers' perception of events that concern the Nigerian security situations. According to Halliday, every language involves three generalized functions which are semantic in nature: ideational, interpersonal and textual.

In the interpersonal metafunction, language is used to enable speakers/writers to participate in communicative act with other people, to take on roles, to express and understand feelings, attitude and judgments. In short, the interpersonal metafunction relates to a text's aspect of interactivity which comprises three component areas: the speaker/writer persona, social distance and relative social status (Bloor and Bloor, 1995)

In the light of the foregoing, the interpersonal metafunction is concerned with the interaction between writer and reader or speaker and addressee(s), that is, the grammatical resource for enacting social role in general, the speech roles in particular and in interactions for establishing, changing, and maintaining interpersonal relations. One of its grammatical systems is mood.

Matthiessen and Halliday (1997:8) define mood as "the grammatical resources for the interaction between speaker and addressee, expressing speech functional selections in dialogue". This shows that it is concerned with the speaker's attitude towards the proposition, and this manifests in the form of the verb (Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002). Thus, in interacting with one another, the interactants enter into a range of interpersonal relationship, choosing among semantic/pragmatic functions such as scolding, challenging, justifying, persuading, praising, warning, informing and so on while their discourse functions

are positive, negative, neutral, ambivalent, sentimental, critical and so on. This reflects in semantic categories of imperative and indicative mood by giving information (statement), demanding information (question), and demanding services or goods (commands). Mood, therefore, is a grammatical concept which is a form of a highly generalised set of clause system, providing us with the basic resource for expressing these speech functions.

Imperative mood

Imperative mood, according to Lyons (1977:746), is "ontogenetically more basic than the indicative, the mood of statement" and it is the mood of the verb and the "principal mood of will and desire". The verbal groups marked for imperative mood are finite, base form verbs; they do not mark modality, occur with an auxiliary (except in negation), or make tense, person and number contrasts. Imperative (will mood) expresses non-factual situations that are desired by the speaker/writer to become true and in which the speaker/writer wants the hearer/reader to be the primary doer. Hence, the imperative is used to signify that the situation expressed is desired to such a degree that he or she can order others to make that situation happen. Thus, the imperatives are usually used in directives such as:

1. **Go and listen** to what he has to say. (directive)
- From the foregoing, it is obvious that the use of the imperative constructs unequal power relation between the speaker/writer and the hearer/reader because the former is required to have some authority over the latter. Apart from giving orders, there are other functions of the imperatives, which are also permitted by an unequal power relation such as command, instruction, request, permission, advice, prayer and so on

Indicative Mood

Indicative mood subdivides into interrogative and declarative. The two defer syntactically, phonologically and semantically though they both make tense, person and number contrast.

Interrogative Mood

Interrogative mood is the mood of questions and this seeks information. This is further subdivided into polar and non-polar subtypes (Quirk et al., 1985) e.g

- a. Does he come here often? (polar question)
- b. What would have been his motive? (non-polar question)

Interrogative sentences normally express question, but can also perform other functions.

In interrogatives, the subject normally comes before the verb or between auxiliary and main verbs. However, at times, it is found in subject + verb order as shown below:

c. They **brought** what?

Declarative Mood

Declarative mood is the mood of statement and so gives information e.g.

d. The man **came** here and *gave* me some money. Declarative sentences, though express statement or give information, also have other functions too, such as directive:

e. You **have** not **cooked** enough food. (This can mean "Cook more food".)

Normally, declarative sentences have subject verb word order. But sometimes, there may not be a subject as in:

f. **Don't know** what he means. Probably meant to bring the money.

Analyses and findings

Our findings regarding the data collected on discourse functions on mood as deployed by writers of opinion articles on Boko Haram crisis in selected Nigerian newspapers show that the indicative mood types have been mostly deployed by the writers: declarative mood and interrogative mood. Four discourse functions of mood are identified in the study: positive, negative, critical and sentimental discourse functions and the type of opinion expressed are criticism, rejection, acceptance and belief. The analysis shows the classification of opinions as expressed by the various writers of the articles under investigation which includes instances, sources, texts and the grounds of their arguments.

In the opinion articles under investigation in this study, the writers' intentions and attitudes vary. The interrogatives are meant to elicit information and seek 'yes' or 'no' responses in relation to validity of predications and awakening consciousness respectively as well as expressing rejection and criticism of the government and stakeholders' positions on the Boko Haram crisis. Also in declaratives, the writers' intentions vary from statement of fact and assertions on the certainty of their statements, acceptance and rejection of various security issues.

Interrogatives and discourse functions

There are several interrogative statements found in the opinion articles aired by different writers in the selected Nigerian dailies. These characterise their stance on several issues on security situations in

Nigeria, most especially on Boko Haram crisis. They are interrogative with negative, positive, critical, sentimental opinions. We shall take these in turn.

Interrogatives (wh-question) and negative opinion

Interrogatives with negative opinions were found to be prominent in opinion articles on Boko Haram crisis. This implies that many of the writers are pessimistic about the readiness of the military, and most especially the government, to bring the unbearable insecurity situation in the country to an end, as found in the following text:

Text 1

What makes a man or woman so persuaded that they do not mind losing their life? What convinces a mortal to think that they have a right to take another life as well as their own and that they will be rewarded for it?...What is driving these killers? It is not just poverty, it is more than a result of the poor against the rich because both the poor and the rich are being killed indiscriminately. It is more than a religious war because both Muslims and Christians are being killed; it is an ideology! An ideology that has been carefully sold to people through indoctrination, teaching, preaching and spiritual subjugation.

The Punch Monday, April 21, 2014, Page 24

The writer of the above text asks, "What makes a man or woman so persuaded that they do not mind losing their life?" in bewilderment because it beats one's imagination that any man will decide to end his life just to see others dead with him. He also asks, "What convinces a mortal to think that they will be rewarded for it?", signifying that it is absolutely bad for any man to think of killing another man so as to be rewarded in heaven. Another question, "what is driving these killers?" points to the writer's negative attitude, saying it is not poverty or religion that is driving the sect to be unleashing mayhem on Nigerians. This is because the poor, rich, Christians and Muslims are being attacked by the insurgents. He concludes that it is an ideology that has been sold to them "through indoctrination, teaching, preaching and spiritual subjugation" that has been pushing them to misbehave in such a way.

Interrogatives (wh-question) and critical opinion

Apart from the fact that it is evident from the opinion articles that some writers are pessimistic about the readiness of the concerned authorities to ameliorate the security situation in the country, many of them are critical of government policy and attitude towards securing a conducive atmosphere for good livelihood. This involves careful, fair and at times severe judgement through the government's response to security matters, most especially on the Boko Haram crisis. These are seen in the critical opinion expressed by the writers as follows:

Text 2

What further proof do we need to know that this President cannot guarantee our safety?

What further reasons do we need to know that Nigerians are powerless? Fellow Nigerians, if our commander-in-chief is this clueless in stemming mindless killings of innocent Nigeria, what should be our fate?..**What is the use of being the "largest economy" in a country where life is worth nothing?** Did the World Bank not just tell us that our country is home to a large chunk of the world's poor? Massive corruption has made nonsense of this administration. **The Punch Monday, April 17, 2014, Page 22**

In the above text; a question is asked, "what is the use of being the 'largest economy' in a country where life is worth nothing?" to task the government to stop the proclamation of being the largest economy with nothing to show for it. To buttress the foregoing, it is also stated that the World Bank has said that the "country is home to a large chunk of the world's poor".

The opinion of the writer of the above text is a critical one where he takes the President of Nigeria to the cleaners by describing him as an incompetent leader. The reason adduced for this is that the President cannot guarantee the safety of Nigerians because he is clueless as to know how the Boko Haram sect has been operating in the country through killing of many innocent Nigerians. He is also critical of the economic

pride which the nation has always boasted of. The writer in his opinion sees this as an empty boast as people's lives are worth nothing, and concludes that the bane of the nation and the cause of many mindless killings is massive corruption as evident in all facets of life in Nigeria. This also, the President has never made any attempt to stop.

There is another example of interrogative with critical opinion as it concerns the attitude of the government to securing public places to forestall invasion of such places by terrorists.

Text 3

How do you explain to parents that the kids they put in school have vanished with some nameless people we have chosen to simply call insurgents? What consolation can the chief-hunter offer to the townsman whose mother was killed and devoured by a tiger?

Nigerian Tribune Monday, 3 March, 2014, Page 20

The above text, by asking how it will be explained "to parents that the kids they put in school have vanished?", is used to criticize the Nigerian government by saying unequivocally that the government has failed by not providing adequate security for the citizens. It likens the mothers of the children earlier murdered by the Boko Haram sect to a townsman whose mother was killed and eaten by a tiger. The chief hunter, according to the writer, is the President that could not offer any explanation "to the townsman whose mother was killed and devour by a tiger". This further shows that as an incompetent hunter cannot provide security for a town, so the President cannot ensure security for Nigerians. This is, therefore, concluded that the incompetence of the government to face the Boko Haram sect once and for all, and to destroy it will make the menace go on unabated.

Interrogatives (rhetorical question) and sentimental opinion

Sentimental opinions were also observed in interrogative mood as deployed by the writers of opinion articles. Here, the writers are easily affected by emotions based on feelings rather than by practical reasons. In the following instance of interrogative with sentimental opinion as found in our data, emotion runs high as the writer believes or perceives that the government has not done enough to improve the

security situation in the country, most especially on incessant abduction of innocent citizens by terrorists.

Text 4

So in a sense, the Chibok girls remain a pawn in the power play of politics and politicking, which is sad; almost tragic!

How do we toy with the destiny of those innocents?

The Guardian Wednesday, June 25, 2014, Page 13

In **text 4**, a question is asked to express a sentiment that “How do we toy with the destiny of those innocents?” The belief of the writer is that the government does not deserve the battering in form of criticism being received from the opposition. Earlier, some girls were kidnapped by the Boko Haram sect and were not found for a very long time which prompted series of abuse on the government. It is therefore concluded in the text that the opposition has turned the issue of the abducted girls into “a pawn in the power play of politics and politicking”, thereby playing politics with the lives of the innocent girls. The expression is emotional in the sense that the writer is not comfortable with the way the opposition accused the government of incompetence. This is because from their actions and utterances, the opposition believed that the government does not respond to the plight of the kidnapped children and their parents by not launching a serious attack on the terrorists.

Declaratives and discourse functions

In many occasions, the writers of opinion articles in the national dailies use declarative statements to affirm that they are sure of what they air for public consumption. These are analysed based on the functions they perform i.e. positive, negative, critical and sentimental functions. All these are discussed in turn.

Declaratives and positive opinion

Here, the writers of opinion articles are very sure that what they write is right or morally good. Their opinions are also used to encourage the citizens to behave in a way that is morally good. Instances of positive opinions are also found in the expressions of the writers of opinion articles in Nigerian national dailies under discussion. In the following text, the writer opines that the government is doing its best in stemming the tide of insurgency in Nigeria which is considered a global issue.

Text 5

While terrorism and insurgency remain a global challenge and a source of continuing concern in some countries, Nigeria has done comparatively better with remarkable progress in reducing the incidence of terrorist attacks within its borders to a reasonable level. **The military have done so much to reverse the tide of terrorism.**

Nigerian Tribune Wednesday, 1 January, 2014, Page 20

The positive attitude in **text 5** is borne out of what is termed “a remarkable progress in reducing the incidence of terrorist attacks” within the borders of Nigeria to an appreciable level. According to the writer, the Nigerian armed forces “have done so much to reverse the tide of terrorism”, thereby facing the Boko Haram insurgency as against what was earlier reported in some quarters that they had been fleeing from the battle field whenever they were called to face the insurgents. The position of the writer is to encourage Nigerians that the Boko Haram sect will soon be defeated by the military. This is to douse the tension already created by the sect’s attacks on several institutions in Nigeria.

Declaratives and negative opinion

The opinions expressed here by the writers occur when they consider only the bad qualities of situations featuring hostility or withdrawal that hinders or opposes constructive treatment of such situations. There is a declarative mood with negative opinion found in the data as written in a response to the constant killing and destruction of lives and properties by the terrorists in Nigeria which seem not abated.

Text 6

What is happening in our country today is worse than any of such crimes in history. This systemic decimation of our people by Boko Haram and other mindless killings across the country are unprecedented. This country is drifting dangerously toward the precipice.

The Punch Thursday, April 17, 2014, Page 22

In **text 6**, the writer is apprehensive by expressing a negative opinion exaggerating that the insurgency

being experienced in Nigeria as “...worse than any of such crimes in history”. This is premised on the recent happenings where many lives and properties are destroyed at will by the insurgents. It is believed that Nigeria, as a result of this occurrence, is gradually “drifting dangerously toward the precipice”, which means a very dangerous situation and any further laxity would spell a doom. This, in turn, can lead to an eventual fall of the nation. By claiming that what is happening in Nigeria has never been experienced in the history of the world, it is meant that the nation can be termed the most dangerous in the world.

In an instance of a critical opinion expressed by deploying declarative mood, a writer shares his mind, commenting on how the security forces have become so porous that terrorists were able to invade barracks and wreak havoc there, thereby killing some officers. This is found in the text below:

Declaratives and critical opinion

In this section, critical opinions of some writers are analysed to show their involvement in careful and fair judgement as well as judicious evaluation of issues.

Text 7

The ship of state is sinking and unfortunately no one is doing anything about this dangerous slide to the abyss. Our country has become a killing field close to what happened in Somalia. The situation has degenerated to the level where Nigerians do not even know where the next attack will take place.

The Punch Thursday, April 17, 2014, Page 22

In the above **texts 7**, the writers are critical of the irresponsiveness of the Nigerian government by stating that “The ship of state is sinking and unfortunately no one is doing anything”. They believe that both the federal and the 36 states’ governments have turned deaf ears to the plight of the innocent citizens who are being cut down by the Boko Haram sect on daily basis. The writer of **text 7** compares the situation in Nigeria to that of Somalia by declaring that the country has become “a killing field close to what happened in Somalia”, where there has not been any central government for a very long time due to the activities of terrorists in that country. Somalia, as is known all over, is a place where no one is secure and the terrorists are having field days. The writer believes that Nigeria, as a nation, is almost sinking into a great “abyss”, which signifies a total collapse.

Declaratives and sentimental opinion

Some writers, as analyses of their opinions show here, normally leave practical reasons and write based on their feelings, or emotional ideas. An instance of a sentimental opinion was found in the data as expressed by a writer deploying declarative mood where the government is blamed as being unresponsive to the plight of some teenage girls abducted by terrorists. This is explicated as follows:

Text 8

The most important responsibility of any government is the protection of the lives and property of the citizens. **The abduction of more than 200 teenage girls** from a school in a state rife with indiscriminate and gratuitous violence **is another example of the federal and state governments’ failure to meet their duties.**

The Punch, April 29, 2014, Page 24

A sentimental opinion is expressed in **text 8**, thereby claiming that the governments (federal and states) have failed to live up to expectation by not providing enough security for lives and properties in Nigeria. This is reflected from the words of the writer as “... another example of the federal and state governments’ failure to meet their duties”. A mention was specifically made of “The abduction of more than 200 teenage girls from a school” in Chibok in Borno state. One may ask the writer if it is possible that security men be drafted to every school in the country and if that would stop the insurgents. If critically considered, the writer’s emotion runs high as he cries out to make known the frustration the whole country is experiencing.

Conclusion

The work has contributed to existing knowledge in many ways. Notably, with its didactic input, the study applies the grammatical concepts of mood, subdivided into interrogative mood and declarative mood. Thus, this reveals that the use of language in opinion articles requires writers to possess certain linguistic skills, notably grammatical mood to effectively employ different discourse strategies such as criticism, rejection, acceptance and belief in interacting with the readers. The study also locates the intention and views of writers such as negative, positive, critical and sentimental from both contextual and linguistic

perspectives by locating the contexts of security situation in relation to Boko Haram crisis and exploring both the discourse forms and functions of the opinions. Lastly, the deployment of mood by writers of opinion articles portrays their attitude and stance on the Boko Haram crisis. Hence, readers are expected to take cognisance of the implicit and explicit intentions of the writers on the crisis.

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