

A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE SYNTACTIC FEATURES AND COHESIVE DEVICES IN THE COLUMNISTS' USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

The study was a stylistic analysis of the syntactic features and cohesive devices in the columnists' use of language in Nigerian Newspapers. The corpus for the study consisted of five texts selected from different Nigerian Newspapers. The result of the study revealed that dependent clauses are prevalent which serve as extension of the ideas in the independent clauses. There also abound simple sentences which are used by the writers to achieve logical and step by step presentation of ideas. The reader finds them easy to understand since they convey only single idea. Complex sentences were as well noted as common syntactic features in the columnists' use of language. Through the use of complex sentences, columnists supply additional information to what obtains in the main clause either by serving subordinate clause before the main clause or after it. Similarly, compound sentences were employed by the columnists as a means of conveying more than a single idea in a stretch of language. Coordinating conjunctions therefore were used as joining or linking devices. The analysis of the cohesive device showed that substitution and reference cohesions were the predominant cohesive devices used. Both the cataphoric and anaphoric references were predominant. The columnists based on the outcome of the study used intermixed styles to convey their message to the audience.

Keywords: Stylistics, Syntax, Cohesion, Columnist and language.

INTRODUCTION

The languages used by journalists enable them to create and maintain relationship with the target audience or readers. In doing this, journalists perceive the world correctly through the power of language. The creation of relationship between them and the audience is done through the language that the reader can understand. It is usually through the language of journalism that communities get their information (Rhetorica, 2010).

The language of the print media by extension the language of journalism is not the same with the language of medicine, law, engineering etc. It has a different language usage entirely because journalists use their own kind of register that is only peculiar to the media profession. Crystal and Davy (1969) explain that journalese language is an important aspect of journalism, because it tends to be explicit and precise devoid of jargons. As a rule, journalists do not use long sentences while a short one will serve.

However, every newspaper has its own style. The different styles adopted by the different newspaper houses means the form of the language adopted to meet their target audience. The basic quality of the Language of Journalism is clarity, and its most desired effect is for the language to be understood. This language serves as a watching to the reader because it is the language used that determines what the reader can get from the story. The simplicity of the

language of journalism makes the reader to have confidence in the kind of print media he choose to read, because the reader believes that what is being reported is the truth.

Journalists in their use of language make use of terms that are understood among them. It is the peculiarities of the language used that sets apart the field from others. For instance, words and phrases like ‘watching’ ‘man, 25, drowns in well’ ‘As INEC’s deadline clicks; this does not really connote the real interpretation that an individual outside the profession can easily understand. The language of the media is used in such a way that the language is used to erase the barriers between the producers of the news and the consumers thereby fostering a good relationship between them.

Statement of the Problem

Newspaper writing derives its meaning from the word “News” and the word news refers to a story that has never been seen or heard. Before the invention of newspaper, official government bulletins and edicts were circulated at times in some centralized empires. In ancient Rome, government announcement bulletins were made public by Julius Caesar. They were carved on metal or stone and posted in public places (Wikipedia, 2011).

Commonly, newspaper the world over is a useful tool for promoting literate communities, because of its invaluable functions of informing, educating and entertaining. According to Cheyney (1992), Newspaper is the textbook that provides up to date information on local, state/provincial national and world affairs; the most current analysis and criticism on executive and legislative decision-making; the latest in music, theatre, television and even columns and comics to make people laugh. Newspapers are among the most accessible texts available to the vast majority of people – literate, illiterate, young and old, students, workers, elites and peasants in any community. This is because every category of reader mentioned above can find something they care about inside the newspaper’s pages.

Academic American Encyclopaedia (1989) describes newspaper in a broad sense as an unbound publication issued at regular intervals that seeks to inform, analyze, influence and entertain. Hynds (1975) provides nine criteria for classifying newspaper. Some of these are frequency of publication that is a newspaper can be published at various intervals but usually appears weekly or daily; time of publication, purpose, circulation, geography, method of production and intended audience, etc.

The universal format of a newspaper according to Babalola (2002) presents information in a predictable way. In a straight news story, the headlines give the reader the main idea of the story, the lead paragraph gives a summary of the story, answering the important newspaper questions – who, what, when, where, why and how the remainder of the news story provides additional details and the least important information at the end of the story.

Language use in Newspaper reporting and indeed in reporting issues by respective columnists in newspapers, like any other form of language use for mass communication and public orientation, should take cognizance of rules that govern the use of the language. This is referred to as syntactic rules. The rules of syntax of any language regulate the way the language is used to provide common understanding and acceptable utterances and constructions. Therefore, meaning of a written or spoken discourse resides in the way and manner the writer or the speaker observes the rules of syntax of that language.

As users of English language as a second language, the columnists of Nigerian Newspapers, and indeed other article contributors, are faced with dilemma of selecting the theme on which to write and the choice of how to put it in a way that an average user of English language in Nigeria could understand the message the written discourse is conveying. Reconciling these two important ingredients of writing by the columnists and indeed most users of English language becomes a problem that Liu (2000) says it plagues many English users as second language (ESL). This according to Malgwi is manifested in ESL writing as incoherent ideas, misuse or insufficient use of functional connectives and deficiency in content lexical ties. These features of ESL writing were earlier described by Oluwadiya (1990) as cited by Malgwi (2007) that learners and indeed users of English language in Nigeria write they way they speak and the resultant effect is the production of text that are full of colloquialism, awkward sentences, careless punctuation, mechanical errors, wrong word formation, poor use of homonyms and homophones, use of super flux adjectives, adverbs and prepositions, inability to use grammatical rules of agreement and concord and so on.

Both people with good language proficiencies and learners of English language in Nigeria write and read articles in newspapers. The models of writing learners read in these papers may contribute significantly in shaping and reshaping the language abilities and skills of such learners and indeed all other readers. Therefore, the style of language use in newspapers need to be evaluated and analyzed to help both writer and readers to understand the ways it is used by the various papers. This provides the need for a study to be carried out on a syntactic analysis of the language use by columnist in Nigerian Newspapers in order to find out how the columnists use the language.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to analyze the syntactic features of the use of language by columnists in Nigerian Newspapers. In order to achieve the aim, the following objectives were drawn:

1. To examine the prevalent syntactic features used by the columnists in their articles.
2. To identify and analyze the phrases and clauses used by the columnists in treating the theme of their discourses to the readers.
3. To identify the sentence types used by the columnists with the view to discuss the nature of the sentences and how they help in relating what they have for the readers.
4. To identify and analyze the cohesive devices that the columnists use to make their ideas coherent.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the syntactic features use by the columnists to address their audience?
2. What are the phrases and clauses used by the columnists in treating the theme of their discourses to the readers?
3. What are the sentence patterns and structures that help the columnists in relating what they have for the readership?
4. What are the cohesive devices the columnists use in the articulating their subject matter of the columns?

METHODOLOGY

This study was basically on the language of newspaper columnists in some selected Nigerian newspapers. It was therefore, a corpus based study that analyses the language used by the columnists to assess how they present their contributions. Descriptive and discursive approach was adopted in this study. Being a corpus based analysis, the selected texts were presented, analyzed and the identified syntactic features and cohesive devices were discussed. It was paramount to adopt the descriptive study because it exposes linguistic features as used in its natural context. The corpus on which this study was based consisted of selected columns from five selected Nigerian newspapers which included: The Daily Trust, New Nigeria, The Nation, The Punch and the Leadership Newspapers. Two columns were selected from each of the five newspapers based on systematic sampling which made up ten texts.

As there were numerous newspapers, the selection of the corpus was carried out using convenient sampling technique. The convenient sampling refers to the ease by which the texts are obtained. It is the availability of the newspapers to the researcher that determine their selection. There are different approaches to the stylistic analysis of texts but for the purpose of this study Leech and Short's (1985) approach would be adopted for the analyses. The method is based on linguistic checklist that focuses on the analysis of literary texts which can as well be applicable to nonliterary texts. The checklist consists of four (4) categories as follows: lexical category, grammatical category, figures of speech and context and cohesion. The Leech and Short (1985) approach is adopted because it provides the detail levels of analysis. Crystal and Davy's (1969) linguistic levels of analysis which encourages focusing on graphetic and graphology, phonetics and phonology vocabulary and Grammar or syntax was adopted. The descriptive method used was therefore eclectic. These approaches helped to look at language the use; the variations, how the columnists generally select language etc.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the texts in the corpus were analyzed and discussed under the following headings:

Syntactic Features

The study of how words are combined together to form phrases and sentences is referred to as syntax. Radford (1997) opines that syntax studies the level of language that lies between words and the meaning of utterance; that is, sentence structures. It is the level that mediates between sounds that someone produces and organizes into words and what they intend to say. The following are the syntactic features identified and discussed.

Use of Phrases

A phrase is usually a group of words that denote a single idea and form a separate part of a sentence, but not containing a subject and predicate. It is a string of words that form a grammatical unit, usually within a clause or sentence, Ewuzie (2009). They are used by the columnists to achieved different purposes in communication contexts. The text from leadership newspaper of Friday July 15, 2011 contains prepositional phrases used possibly to draw the attention of the reader on distance and time in history.

While *in the federal Government College, Enugu, in the early 70s, my primary mode of transportation from Kaduna rail to Enugu was the train. The rail track that runs from Kaduna – Kafanchan – Makurdi –Enugu to Port Harcourt* was very active. Trains were on time, and reserved coaches for young students from all over the country were common place.

In the text, phrases are stylistically used by the writer, possibly to colour the story and catching the attention of the reader in order to develop a curiosity that will make him see to the end of the story. The prepositional Phrases in the above texts depicting distance and time include: ‘in the federal government college; ‘from Kaduna to Enugu; ‘in the early 70s; on time: The writer did not bring out clearly what he wants to say but these phrases depict specific distance at a point in time that the writer covered by rail transportation.

Furthermore, special use of phrases it can also be seen in an article in the New Nigeria of Monday July 4, 2011, how phrases are used as a style of the writer “ I carried a small basket, in front of me, wheeling a shopping trolley was a senator from....In front of us, was the women sanitary ware tray, he parked different type of pads as they are so called.”

The prepositional phrases “in front of me” and “in front of us” are as a matter of importance show a physical relationship between one and another. “in front of me” for instance shows a relationship between the person who carried the basket, the narrator and the person wheeling a trolley, a distinguished Nigerian Senator. This relation is unusual in Nigerian context. The phrases ‘in front of me’ and ‘in front of us’ are used in the text to indicate the proximity of the writer to the scene of the incidence that he got his story from. These indicate that the writer was really present at the place of the incidence he was narrating.

Use of Clauses

Clauses according to Oluikpe (2002) are group of words which contains a subject, a verb, a modifier and occasionally an object. It is classified into an independent and a dependent clause. The independent clause sometimes called a principal or main clause is actually a simple sentence, a complete sentence. The dependent or subordinate clause on the other hand, is joined by a conjunction to a principal clause. It depends on the principal clause in order to fully communicate. The following text is studied to analyze this concept.

I learnt they were disappointed that he was a turncoat. How could anyone be disappointed at El-Rufai? A man who is capable of any emotion is capable of any betrayal. So he was once in government. Does that mean he should not take on government? What makes the government sacrosanct? We want more people in government who will lash out at government and unveil its seedy underside. At one time; El-Rufai was the good guy of the security forces. He was the one with whom the Owu chief was pleased, the one who knew who was safe for Nigeria and who should go to jail. He was the quite essential patriot, and he condemned others for lack of favour for Nigeria. (THE NATION, JULY 11, 2011)

The dependent and independent clauses are commonly used. The following dependent clauses were identified from the text: ‘that he was a turncoat,’ ‘who will lash out at Government,’ “that the time had not come,” ‘who is capable of any emotion’ ‘whom the Owu Chief was please,’ etc. None of these give any clear interpretation. The independent clauses were also observed in the text, some of them are; ‘I learnt they were disappointed,’ ‘we want more people in government.’ etc. These clauses that are independent in nature do not need any support to bring out their meaning. They are just simple sentences. Furthermore,

similar style on the use of clause is found in the Daily Trust of Tuesday January 25, 2011. The following clauses were identified in the title of the text ‘So Kwankwaso thought he could go scot-free? His supporters surprised me when they pretended to be shocked that they lost.’ The above is a combination of both independent and dependent clauses. ‘His supporters surprised me’ is an independent clause whose meaning is complete, while ‘when they pretended to be shocked that they lost’ did not provide a clear interpretation.

Simple Sentences

A simple sentence has one clause beginning with a noun group called the subject, one finite verb, which may be followed by a noun group or an adjective or a noun group and an adverb called the predicate, Ewuzie (2009). These kinds of sentences are stylistically used by writers, because it is often short and straight to the point. They are simply recognized by the number of verbs they contain and not by length. The simple sentence expresses an assertion, a question, a command, a wish or an exclamation that usually begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, a question mark or an exclamation mark. Examples of which include “It’s all about El-Rufai’s interest even if it masquerades as a national pride. He is one of our enduring peacocks. He is also a chameleon of interest. (THE NATION, Monday July 11, 2011)”

The columnist in his approach to reach out to the readers uses sentences that are simple in nature. Sentence like ‘He is one of our enduring peacocks’: His is also a chameleon of interest,’ are simple sentences used by the writer. These sentences are clear and easy to comprehend by the reader, because they are direct and contained just a noun representative as subjects and auxiliary verb as predicate. In the New Nigerian of Monday July 14, 2011, the use of simple sentence is also found as follows “I love Nigeria. Things change and remain the same all at the same time. He interjected. “I did not know, I actually thought..., he muted in my language and we both laughed.”

To create emotion and curiosity about the text, the columnist uses simple sentences like ‘I love Nigeria.’ ‘He interjected’.

Complex Sentence

A complex sentence is one that has a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses. The main clause normally contains the most important information on which the subordinate clause or clauses depend. The subordinate clause may come at the beginning or end of the sentence (Sharndama 2008). The use of complex sentences is found in a text such as:

Now it is senator Bello HayatuGwarzo who is signing a protest on behalf of his colleagues insisting that it was wrong for the national working committee of their party to cancel the results, and order a re-run of the gubernatorial primaries in Kano State. (Daily Trust, Jan 25, 2011)

Apart from the main clause that came at the beginning i.e. ‘It is senator Bello HayatuGwarzo’, the supporting information that contain a relative pronoun ‘who is signing....’ a that clause, ‘that it was wrong....’ and a conjunction and, ‘and order a re-run...’, provide additional information to the main clause. Furthermore, it can also be seen in another text how complex sentence is used as follows:

He does not respond to attacks or abuse on his person, despite the fact that he has in abundance, the brash and dare-devil underlings who are free to return the attack and abuse with all the rudeness and venom they can muster. (New Nigerian July 4, 2011)

In the sentence above, which is complex in nature, ‘that he has in abundance, the brash and dare-devil underlings’, ‘who are free to return the attack and abuse’, are subordinate clauses in the sentence, which depend on the main clause and expand its meaning; ‘He does not respond to attacks or abuse on his person’, to be meaningful. The complex sentences are also identified in another text as can be seen in the following “The rail track that runs from Kaduna- Kafanchan-Makurdi-Enugu to Port Harcourt was very active (Leadership July 15, 2011)”

It is very easy to say that ‘that rail track was very active’ is having a complete sense that can be referred to as a simple sentence which is the same as the main clause. But the subordinate clause ‘that runs from Kaduna – Kafanchan – Makurdi – Enugu to Port Harcourt’, cannot provide a clear interpretation of the sentence alone.

From the above, it is observed that columnists use complex sentences, because it is the most important and effective types of sentence structures in the English Language that reduce the monotony of using ‘and’ or ‘but’.

Use of compound sentence

Oluikpe (2002) explains that a compound sentence is one in which two or more simple sentences are coordinated, each independent of the other and joined with the conjunction and, but, or etc. Sentences of this nature are identified in the texts under study as can be seen in the following “ I got there and started greeting people from all over Nigeria who were able to make it that early morning to Zaria with short condolences and moving from one person to another without seeming end. (Leadership Friday July 15, 2011)”

In the text under study, sentences of this nature are identified. For example in; ‘I got there and started greeting peoplewho were able to make it that early morning to Zaria with short condolences and moving from one person to another....’ It can be analysed that each segment of the compound sentence can stand alone as a grammatical structure of its own, for instance; ‘I got there’, ‘I started greeting people’, ‘I move from one person to another’. However, what is significant is that the use of the conjunctions provides a link to make the segments in one inclusive sentence that provide a straight forward message. The following sentences are also observed in other texts:

Trains were on time, and reserved coaches for young students from all over the country were commonplace. (Leadership: July 15, 2011)

He shoots but he does not always hit the target. (The NATION: July 11, 2011)

We agree that for example that Akwa-Ibom gets more than Plateau, Nasarawa and Bauchi put together, but the governors of the same state would buy same luxury SUVs, and strangely the one from Bauchi would have more aides, more cars, go on more foreign trips for investments that never come and we allude to sanity when we are at best delusional. (New Nigeria: July 4, 2011)

The excerpt above shows the functions of ‘and’ and ‘but’ as coordinating conjunctions. “And” is an additive conjunction that joins one sentence to another. It provides more

information, surprising or unexpected information, or a general or specific statement about the precious sentence. In the texts portions above, all those characteristics of the **and** group are reflected. 'But' as a conjunction is used in sentences to suggest contrast, concession, reservation etc. In this compound sentence: 'He shoots but he does not always hit the target', it can be analysed that the '**but**' is a concession word that highlighted that although he attacks, and he does not make much impact. It is also used to contrast the revenue of AkwaIbom with that of Plateau, Nasarawa and Bauchi as well as their spending.

Cohesion

Cohesion means the connection of ideas at the sentence level which makes ideas coherent. It refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text. There are two types: Grammatical and Lexical cohesion. Halliday and Hasan (1976) opine that cohesion expresses the continuity that exists between one part of a text and another. Cohesion is one of the internal cues that speakers/writers use to create desired meanings. It refers to the ties and connections that exist within a text (Yule 2006). Cohesions are commonly considered and described in terms of specific syntactic units. They are seen as a property of syntactic units which are not interpreted by elements that do not belong to them. Words are generally cohesive, that is they are not interpreted by other words or elements that belong to other words (Matthews 2007).

This implies that there are ties or connections which exist in the texts that aid the understanding of the meaning of the text. In most of the texts under study there are some lexical items that are used as cohesive devices. Analysis of the texts in the corpus has shown that reference is prevalent. Reference cohesion shows the relations which holds between an element of text and something else by reference to which it is interpreted in the text. The text below contains examples.

His supporters surprised me when they pretended to be shocked that they lost..... As a former insider he knew there never was any genuine intra-party democracy in there. Now it is senator Bello HayatuGwarzo who is signing a protest on behalf of his colleagues insisting that it was wrong for the national working committee..... According to them no reason was given for the re-run. (Daily Trust, January 25, 2011).

I got there and started greeting people from all over Nigeria who were able to make it that early morning to Zaria with short condolences and moving from one person to another without seeming end. As we gathered at a football field there, full of people already, then arrived the emir of Zazzau, Alh. (Dr.) ShehuIdris, looking so downcast and loaded with the weight of the death of one of his most revered District Heads and assistant the WalinZazzau. (Leadership, Friday July 15, 2011).

From the excerpts above, **His, me, they, he, their, them** e.t.c make anaphoric reference to nouns serving as antecedents etc are identified to refer to certain characters in the text. For instance, 'His' for instance referred to AtikuAbubakar, 'who' to Bello HayatuGwarzo and 'them' to the man Gwarzo and his colleagues. Other instances where reference cohesion is used as a style of the writer, is seen in the following lexical items; **there, his, one** etc. The writer used 'there' as an anaphoric reference to '**kaura in the city of Zaria**' where the late's House was located. The word form '**there**' was also used to refer to the **football field where the funeral prayer took place**. In a like manner, the word forms '**his**' anaphorically referred to the **emir of Zazzau** and in another contest **the Iman** who led the funeral prayer.

Additionally, the text contains reference that is cataphoric, in this manner, the word form ‘one’ was used to refer to those who came for the funeral prayer; **and moving from one person to another without seeming end**; and also referred to the late WalinZazzau as in this sentence;**One of his most revered District Heads and assistant the WalinZazzau**. The occurrences of reference cohesion frequently confirms with the expository nature the columnists’ topics. The use of these reference devices enables the reader keep pace with the unfolding of the plots of their stories.

CONCLUSION

Based on the outcome of this study, it can be deduced that the vocabulary used by the columnists are simple everyday words, though abstract and concrete nouns are common, it is not difficult to uncover meanings. Complex and compound sentences were found common which enable the columnists to lump up ideas in a single stretch. However, immature readers may find it difficult to explicate the lump information. Rhetorical devices are commonly used to show linguistic expertise and to colour the stories in order to dress the content of their texts and encourage search for meanings. Looking at the analysis corpus used in the study, it would also be concluded that syntactic devices such as reference cohesion, phrases, clauses, compound and complex sentences characterize the write of the columnists.

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