An Analysis of Western and Nigerian Media Depictions of President Jonathan's Presidential Bid

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Abstract

Nigeria is once again in the news, not for the nation's problems with the terrorist group Boko Haram, nor our mirage of economic problems plaguing Nigeria; rather we are attracting the attention of the world because we are on the verge of another major election in the country. An election that might see a change in leadership, thereby removing President Goodluck Jonathan from Aso Rock Villa, or one that might win him a mandate to remain for another four years as president of one of the richest countries in Africa. This election holds a lot of meaning for Nigerians, and for Africa generally, due to the fact that there has been an incessant call for change of leadership or leadership style as the incumbent has maintained a seemingly lackadaisical attitude in the face of rampant corruption and Boko Haram's continued reign of unabated terror on Nigerians in the north. Both foreign media and local media alike have reported numerous bombings, killings and corruption cases in Nigeria as well as having shown keen interest in the outcome of the next general election in Nigeria. On November 11, 2014, President Jonathan declared his intention to run for re-election come February 2015. This declaration has elicited different responses from different media outlets all over the world as there has been some doubt about the President's intention to run. This paper examines both Western and indigenously owned media depictions of this declaration. The author has made use

of Van Dijk's Social Ideological Discourse Theory and Ideological Square Theory. It was found that although both news articles reported on the same issue, they are still very different with regard to macropropositions and Local meanings. The ideology and personal perception of the writers is reflected clearly in the way the news articles are written.

Keywords: *Discourse analysis, ideological square, semantics, macrostructures, macroproposition and superstructure, Nigeria elections 2015.*

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that the news is sometimes manipulated to suit the ideology or political agenda of a nation, establishment or person. This is particularly true in Nigeria, where the majority of our media outlets are directly or indirectly owned by people in office and the cronies of those in office. So it is often difficult to get objective information on the goings on in Nigeria. The wide spread corruption has been widely reported but in most cases there is no follow up except for foreign media and not until there is a public outcry on an issue before it can make the front pages of the local media. It is only safe to assume that Nigeria is looked upon with suspicion when there is any news about it. This work aims to find out the ideological differences between local media and Western media's depiction of President Jonathan's declaration to run for re-election. The comparison shall be conducted against the backdrop of Van Djik's Ideological Square and Theory of Semantic Macrostructures. By carrying out a comparative analysis of news reports, we gain an understanding of the ideological make-up of the different news. Fowler (1991) explained how powerful the press is when he said that tabloids and quality press are involved in the ideological manipulation of their readers.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research –through critical discourse analysis of news articles – is to understand the foreign perspective on President Jonathan's intention to re-run for president and to identify any differences that might exist between local reporting of this issue and foreign media presentation. The research is also aimed at understanding how foreigners perceive Nigeria and its president, assuming the press represents societal values and perception.

The article analyses news reports on President Jonathan's declaration to run for president as covered by one Western news sources and one local Nigerian news source.

The objective of this article is to examine:

1. The difference and the similarities in the macropropositions and global structures

2. The difference and similarities in local meanings, lexical style and rhetoric

Data Criteria

The source of the news articles were selected based on careful considerations. The *Vanguard* is arguably the biggest and most reliable newspaper in Nigeria with very impressive online presence as well. They have grown to become the reference point for a lot people for their news on Nigeria. *The Guardian* online news site, on the other hand, is a highly rated news site with loyal visitors; it also has won numerous awards including a Pulitzer award. Both papers reported on the issue under discussion around the same time, making them the perfect source for this discussion. This gives us an opportunity to get different perspectives from completely different locations and an ideology framework.

Below are the news sources and their headlines:

1. *The Vanguard* (online): 2015: Jonathan finally declares

2. *The Guardian* (online): The Goodluck Jonathan show goes on, a day after Nigerian suicide bomb

Another reason for choosing to use two different newspapers is that it would present an opportunity to study empirically the differences in writing and orientation. As Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) explain, the simplest way of building an impression of the nature of text is to compare it with other text.

Scope of Study

This work analyses Western (*The Guardian*) and local (*Vanguard*) reports covering President Jonathan's declaration to run for re-election. This work is limited to using discourse analysis to analyse the text and does not include detailed quantitative or qualitative analysis.

Theoretical Framework

This article draws upon two theories of news discourse, namely:

1. Theory of Ideological Square by Van Dijk (1998)

2. Theory of Semantic Macrostructures by Van Dijk (1980)

To carry out a proper analysis of news text, it is usually better to use a combination of theories or methods that would best answer the underlying questions of the research. These theories are applied to examine the cultural, social, political and ideological factors, if any, that may have affected the news coverage.

The Ideological Square Theory by Van Dijk is concerned with the question of ideology. Van Dijk notes that opinions may be expressed in many complex ways in text. The Ideological Square as explained by Van Dijk is intended to highlight key functional moves in developing an ideological strategy (Philo, 2007).

Van Dijk further explains that an ideological account would:

1. Emphasize our good properties/actions

2. Emphasize their bad properties or actions

3. Mitigate our bad properties/actions

4. Mitigate their good properties/actions

The theory of ideology has certain levels of description of the semantic components in a text and these are:

1. Explicitness versus implicitness

2. Generality versus specificity

3. Negativity versus positivity

4. Directness versus indirectness

5. Direct questioning versus statement

For an article to be considered linked to an ideology it must fall into one of these categories. It implies that a news text must be in our favor, interest, or should impact positively on our image while doing the opposite to our opponents or enemies.

In the Theory of Semantic Macroproposition, Van Dijk identifies three major levels of news discourse; Semantic Macropropositions, Global Superstructure (News Schema) and Local Meaning (Microsemantics). This work shall identify these three levels in the chosen news articles and base the analysis on them.

The Semantic Macroproposition, or macro-structures, is simply the global meaning of the text. In trying to get the Semantic Macroproposition, we look at the news report as a whole: by identifying the Macroproposition, we should have a good idea of what the whole text is about, i.e. the theme of the article. Van Dijk (1980) in his article on the pragmatic macrostructures in Discourse and Cognition further explained that:

Semantic macro-structures make explicit the important intuitive notion of topic of discourse:

They specify what a discourse, as a whole, is about, in a non-trivial way, i.e. not by a simple enumeration of the meanings of its respective sentences. (p.48)

Macrostructures also contribute to local coherence at the micro-level of connections between propositions in composite sentences and successive sentences (Van Dijk, 1988). The semantic can be divided into two, the primary Macropropositon contains the main message, the secondary one reveals the ideology of the writer, which can be identified through analysing the choice of words and also the background of the writer or the policies of the media outlet (Ghayda, 2011). In a nutshell, the Macroproposition explains what is important, relevant or prominent in the discourse as a whole (van Dijk, 1988); it gives meaning to the message and makes it easier to understand the news.

The Global Superstructure or news schemata identify the structure of the news, which can be used as a benchmark to identify any flaws in the article. For instance if it is agreed that a news article should have a heading, lead, body, background, conclusion and evaluation (the schemata), and it is discovered that a news article is missing part of these sections, then such an article can be said to be incomplete. In a nutshell we try to identify the structure of the news text and see if there is any logical sequence based on our understanding of what to expect from a news article.

The Local meaning of a text characterizes its microstructure, consisting of the meanings, word groups, clauses, sentences and sentence connections. The Local meaning collectively forms the Macroproposition and should give a clearer understanding of the heading or main topic (Van Dijk, 1988).

Assumption

The basic assumption of this research is that a societal perception of a nation, as well as the ideological and cultural makeup of the media houses, exert important impacts on the construction of coverage concerning the presidential declaration.

Analysis Methodology

This work uses - discourse analysis as described by Van Djik in his Theory of Semantic Macrostructures. (1988).

The analysis of each newspaper article begins with the headline analysis, which involves examining the headline to find out the main theme, the major actors and structure. It is at this point that we identify the semantic Macroproposition.

Once the headline analysis has been completed we move on to examine the body of the news report to determine participants, structure and, if available, secondary themes. The local meaning analysis is then attempted which involves examining lexical style and rhetorical dimensions present in the news reports.

Once these have been successfully completed it is then easy to identify the ideological influences that were in play during the writing of the article.

In a nutshell this comparative analysis is analyzed by identifying the semantic Macropropositions, Global Structures and Local meanings in the news articles.

Analysis 1: **Vanguard** *(Online)*

Headline: 2015: Jonathan finally declares

Date of Publication: 12th November, 2014

Authors: Henry Umoru, Ben Agande and Johnbosco Agbakwuru

Source: http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/11/2015-jonathan-finally-declares/

Semantic Macroproposition. A news headline is usually a summary of the news report or at least should give a reader a general idea of where the news is headed. The headline, in combination with the lead paragraph, should be able to answer some of the important questions in news writing which are the 'what', 'who', 'where' 'when', 'why' and 'how'.

This headline does a good job of succinctly answering the important questions. From the headline we know the 'what': Jonathan's declaration; the 'who': Jonathan; and the 'why': for the upcoming general election in 2015.

From the headline, the reader immediately gets the impression that there has been a long wait for the president's declaration. The word 'finally' in the headline makes it seem as though it is a much-anticipated and even welcome declaration. The average person reading the headline would assume the writer is implying that this is something every Nigerian wants or needs. By phrasing it this way, it gives an impression that *Vanguard* is implicitly in support of Goodluck Jonathan's re-election ambition.

The headline also does a good job of introducing the major actor in this news which is President Jonathan as well as his antagonist – the All Progressives Congress (APC). The subheadings mostly show President Jonathan's resolve to tackle the terrorists in Nigeria. The only subheading that might be offensive to the President is bolded and tagged as stated by the APC, thereby removing all blame from the editors and writers of the news article.

In view of the above points, I believe that the headline is not just a news summary, but also an editorial commentary or evaluation. The writer clearly welcomes the declaration to run for re-election by Jonathan.

Local Meaning. In understanding and analyzing a news text, it is pertinent to look at the structure, the writing style, linguistic and rhetorical elements of the text to get a broader understanding of the message being transmitted.

The participants in this news item are; President Goodluck Jonathan as the major actor, and the APC as his opposition. The news article is basically written from the point of view of these actors. However, from the number of paragraphs used to talk about the intentions of the President, it is clear that the article is skewed in his favor. Out of a total of 33 paragraphs, 26 paragraphs are dedicated to reporting the President's point of view and eulogizing him. In fact there is a whole section of the article dedicated to eulogies for him. In stark contrast, only six paragraphs are dedicated to the APC, who is the President's major opponent.

From the article we can identify two groups, the in-group represented by those in support of President Jonathan and the out-group represented by those against him.

The article attempts to appear balanced by adding one or two anti-Jonathan sentiments, but to the keen observer it is clear that there is a clear support for Jonathan from the editors and writers of this article. And from the arrangement of the paragraphs it is clear that the news is biased in favor of the in group. The first and second paragraphs clearly state President Jonathan's intentions and also indicate that he paid his respects to the recently murdered students. These paragraphs are immediately followed by the opposition reacting harshly to his declaration. One paragraph is allowed for this which is immediately followed by over 15 paragraphs covering the President's plans and why he wants to re-run in the election. There is no comment from him in reaction to his opponents. In fact there is no place in the whole issue where the president directly addressed the major issue raised by the opposition which is the insensitivity of the president to be campaigning just one day after 47 school children were murdered.

The section titled Gale of Eulogies, shows only a one-sided response to the declaration; in fact the writers seem to have captured the reactions of everyone in support of Jonathan and intentionally excluded those against it. The reactions of the APC are covered at the end of the article where these opinions are least likely to be seen by most readers. The whole article is simply a direct reporting of the words of the actors, thereby not leaving much room for the writing style of the media house to be expressed. In fact, it seems almost deliberate that, apart from the introductory paragraph, the writers chose to avoid using any of their own words, and just relied on quotes from various people and the speech of the President. However, from the way the article was arranged, it is clear that there is a bias against the opponents of the president.

Global Superstructure. The news report is based on President Jonathan's declaration to run for re-election. It does not follow a traditional news format with a heading, lead, body and conclusion. It is rather more of a combination of quotes and the President's speech with an abrupt ending to the news article. It however answers the five 'W's of news writing:

What- President declares intention to run for re-election

Who – President Goodluck Jonathan

Why – the President aims to ensure a brighter future for generations yet unborn

Where – Nigeria

When – 11th November, 2014

It however does not state how the president made his intentions known (how), was it through a press conference? Or during a rally? Nothing in the article indicates this.

Analysis 2: **The Guardian (*Online*)**

Headline: The Goodluck Jonathan show goes on, a day after Nigerian suicide bomb

Author: Simon Allison

Publication Date: 13 November, 2014

Source: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/13/-sp-nigeria-goodluck-jonathan-election

    Semantic Macroproposition. This headline gives a brief summary of what the news entails. It immediately makes it clear that the writer does not consider this news welcome in any way. There is cynicism in the headline: "Jonathan show goes on…" There is an implicit accusation that the President does not care about the plight of Nigerians and that this is not the first time. From the headline and subheading, it can easily be deduced that the writer feels the president needs to show more concern and be more sensitive to the plight of those being killed in Nigeria. The writer, Simon Allison, tries to pass across a message of callousness on the part of the President, a look at the subheading makes this immediately clear: "President ignores escalating violence and gets straight on the campaign trail, after 46 schoolchildren are killed in Yobe State". The choice of words – "ignores" and "gets straight on campaign trail" – makes it clear that this was not just an oversight on the part of the President, but a deliberate disregard for the loss of lives a day before.

    The headline gives us a peek into what to expect from the content of the article. We know immediately that this would not be an article praising the achievements of President Jonathan, rather it would be a scathing review of his inadequacies and inability to tackle the insurgents or terrorists. The headline seems to denote that it is the popular opinion of people in the West, that the presidency in Nigeria is one big joke – by using the "show goes on…" in the headline, we get a picture of a performer, a puppet mercy to the whims and caprices of his puppeteers. There is nothing flattering in the headline and it continuously draws attention to the fact that people are dying and that the President seems to feel campaigning is the right thing to do.

    From the headline we know who the major players are – Jonathan as the out-group (bad guy) and the writer as the in-group (good guy). We also get the gist of the whole article: at the least it

answers the 'what' (Jonathan's campaign), 'when' (one day after the suicide bomber attack), and 'who' (President Jonathan).

Local Meaning. The article begins by decrying the timing of the announcement by Jonathan to re-run for president. It compares him to other politicians in other climes and finds him seriously wanting. The author categorically states that "most politicians, in most countries, would have cancelled campaigning after the devastating suicide bombing…." (para.1) the author makes it clear that he considers the announcement distasteful and even disrespectful to the memories of those recently lost when he states: "with barely a mention of his country's deteriorating security situation.…" (para.1).

This paragraph sets the tone for the whole article as the writer goes on to lambast the decision and question a lot of the President's assertions. For example the writer makes a point of debunking Jonathan's assertion that he has improved the fortunes of Nigeria, economy-wise:.

Take the economy, for instance. Yes, it has ballooned to become the largest in Africa, but that's only thanks to a long-delayed reworking of how GDP is calculated – in other words, the numbers on the spreadsheet improved but not necessarily the economy itself. (para.16)

Allison continuously chooses to focus on the deteriorating living standards and insecurities Nigerians are facing and not to directly report the President's speech. In fact the only time he alludes to the length and content of the speech was when he wanted to call attention to the fact that out of 112 paragraphs, only about two lines directly addressed the issue of kidnappings and bombings in Nigeria.

There is absolutely no mistaking the fact that the writers feel Nigerians are led by an incompetent leader who, if care is not taken could just win another four years as president. We see towards the end of the article that the writer, although he feels President Jonathan does not necessarily deserve to be re-elected, the opposition is not making it easy to remove him as they

themselves are not organised and the in-fighting is seriously reducing their chances of being a serious contender for the position.

The writer ends the article with the closing statement of President Jonathan's speech, "God bless Nigeria." He goes on to comment that if Nigerians are going to make it through another five years with Jonathan, Nigerians would need all the help they can get. This in fact nicely sums up the feelings and the perception of the writer.

Global Superstructure. The news report is based on President Jonathan's decision to contest for re-election in 2015. It follows the regular news article format of heading, lead, body and conclusion. It uses more of a conversational and narrative format that does not necessarily want to persuade you not to vote for Jonathan but firmly makes it clear the writer does not support his campaign. This can be deduced from the arrangement of the narrative, the choice of words, and the strong tone of the message.

The news answers the five 'W's and 'H' of news writing:

What – President Jonathan's decision to run for office

Who – President Jonathan

Why – to be re-elected into office

Where – Nigeria

When –November 11, 2014

How – during a mass rally at Abuja's Eagle Square

Differences and Similarities

Both Western and local media have clear Macropropositions but very different meanings. Where the *Vanguard* seemed to be in support of the President, Western media clearly showed that it was against the declaration. The clarity of their messages is where any similarity ends; the

message itself could not be more different. The *Vanguard* reported the news as though it were something expected and wanted while *The Guardian* reported it as something we have no way of controlling and must live with. *The Guardian* showed in very clear terms that they found it appalling that a president would be campaigning at a time of tragedy.

The body of the news articles is where the two newspapers set themselves completely apart. Reading the two articles one would not guess that the same issue is being reported. *The Vanguard* chose to directly quote a lot of President Jonathan's speech, thereby reporting what the President hoped would be reported, while *The Guardian,* on the other hand, chose to report on issues surrounding the announcement. *The Guardian* writer focused on the bombings and other developmental and economic challenges Nigeria is currently facing. In fact he made it a point to call into question most of the President's campaign points. *The Vanguard* news reporting seemed guarded, almost as if they do not want to challenge the status quo; so they limited the writing to quotes and viewpoints making sure to remove any personal opinions. *The Guardian* article, on the other hand, is full of personal opinions and perceptions, one can almost feel the anger of the writer, and also the disappointment.

In terms of structure there is absolutely no similarity between the two articles. *The Vanguard* news chose to simply quote sources and people and one cannot see any logical progression of the message. There is no concluding remark that neatly wraps up the story. *The Guardian,* on the other hand, uses a more professional way of writing but chooses to go with a conversational tone. So a touch of casualness shows through the article. However, the writing has a clear format. It has the basic elements of news writing – heading, lead, body and conclusion which was lacking in the local reporting.

Conclusion

Ideological and cultural differences play a major role in how we chose to view an issue. From this paper we found that the perception of the writer on an issue has a tendency to influence how they choose to report it. Different people wrote on the same issue but it is clear that they feel very differently about it, which reflected in their writing and choice of words. To the untrained eye some omissions or mistakes might be viewed as shoddy reporting, but if critically examined one would find that elements were omitted intentionally to distort the meaning in the minds of their audience. It is therefore important that people choose their sources for news carefully and make sure the in-house ideology matches their own.

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