

Ways of Doing Media Discourse Studies

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Abstract

The study explicates some basic concepts in media discourse analysis. It explains the differences between print and electronic media. The study also focuses on the study of newspapers reports to further illuminate the concept and also to enhance its understanding. The main function of media discourse is to influence mass audience through content-based information and evaluative data transmitted by media channels. Bell (1995:23) states that media are a rich source of readily accessible data for research and teaching. Media usage influences and represents people use of and attitudes towards language in a speech community. Media are presenters of culture, politics, and social life, shaping as well as reflecting how these are formed and expressed. Several studies exist on media discourse. However, some basic concepts and features of media discourse need further explication for pedagogical purposes. Media discourse studies is crucial for what it reveals about a society and for what it contributes to the character of society. The work highlights several approaches to media discourse analysis and properties of mass media. It shows how media are powerful and important contributors to public knowledge and consciousness of some issues on human and national development.

Key words: Media discourse, media channels, content-based, newspapers reports, pedagogical

Introduction

The study of media language is relevant within many disciplines, such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, semiotics, communication studies, sociology and social psychology (Bell 1991:5). Several studies exist on media discourse. Scholars have looked at media discourse from different perspectives. Media discourse refers to interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to a non-present reader, listener or viewer. 'in other words media discourse is a public, manufactured, or recorded, form of interaction' (Fairclough (1995:6). Types of media discourse analysis are critical discourse analysis, conversational analysis, ethnomethodology, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, rhetorical and ideological analysis, multimodal methods and social theory, among others.

Types of Mass Media

Mass media refers to a diverse array of media technologies that reach a large audience via mass communication. The technologies through which the communication takes place include a variety of outlets. Mass media include print media and electronic media. Print media refers to a type of mass media

which creates, deliver news and information through printed protocols. Electronic media is a form of mass media which creates, delivers news and information through electronic medium. In printed media, limited available space is utilised while online media enjoys more (un)limited space. Print media as a form of mass communication helps in spreading information or news related to different sectors like, sports, entertainment, politics, to a large population in a short period of time, print media and electronic media are two of the major forms of mass media. Print media has the ability to reach a specific number of people unlike the electronic media which has a worldwide coverage. It uses printing technology and methods to spread news, messages, information among people.

Types of print media

1. Newspapers
2. Magazines
3. Books

Electronic media refers to all means of sharing information, except the print media, such as radio, television, internet etc. It is shared on electronic devices for the audiences and broadcast to the whole population. It has visual appeal. It shows images, picture of events, people, object etc.

Differences between Print Media and Electronic Media

	Electronic media
One of the earliest forms of media	Advanced form of media
It retains its form e.g. book. It cannot be changed as early as electronic media could if items need to be edited.	It can be edited anytime e.g. videos, sound text can be edited.
Production takes a lot of time	It is faster than print media.
Its main types are newspaper, magazine books	The main types, include radio, television, and internet.
The reach of print media is limited in coverage	Electronic media is worldwide. it can send information across the world within a short time.

Selected Studies on Media Discourse Analysis

van Dijk (1986) investigates the global organisation of news, claiming that media discourse has a conventional news schema. He also notes that there is a systemic relationship between text and context, which affects the creation of standardized textual structures in recurrent social context of news production. In the essay *Structure of News in Press*, van Dijk (1986) analyses the schemata of newspaper reports and establishes the conventional cognitive categories of news reports as summary, main event, backgrounds etc. He postulates a thesis that media texts have a conventional news report schema' with what is referred to as *Relevance Structure* - a structure which indicates the most important information for the reader (van Dijk 1986:87). According to van Dijk, media texts are characterised by the recurrent patterning of structural elements like the headline. In this respect, it is important to mention the notion of semantic macrostructure, which denotes the overall global meaning of discourse, typically expressed

through such structural intertextual elements as headline, lead, etc. in media discourse. The elements of text structure are important markers of genre. This is the reason why they are also intertextual in character (e.g. inverted pyramid structure of news reports, triad structure of the editorials, and the question-answer structure of interview genres in media discourse). Fowler's (1991:01) work on media discourse involves 'how language is used in newspapers to form ideas and beliefs'.

Bell (1991) approaches media language from a linguistic perspective.

On why we study media language, Bell (1991:3) highlights the following:

1. accessibility of media as a source of data for some language features we want to study;
2. interest in the way the media use some language features;
3. interest in media's role in affecting language in the wider society;
4. interest in what media language reveals as a mirror of the wider society and culture;
5. interest in how media language affects attitudes and opinions in society through the way it presents people and issues;
6. availability media language is easier to collect than conversation. It is 'there' in large quantity; and
7. media language can tell us things about media and language.

Cotter (2003:417) notes that the objectives of many research work on media are often 'the registering of the presence of bias or ideology in language or the problematising of power relations in society'. Wodak and Busch (2004:106) note that media texts depend on intertextual relations with many other genres diachronically or synchronically and that a text relates to other texts, represented by the media, through quotes or direct references. They note further that texts could present particular meanings through de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation. Wodak and Busch (ibid) also state that the media produce and reproduce social meanings.

Matheson (2005:2), cited in Chilwa (2012:12), notes that a discourse analysis of media language will enable the analyst to assess and describe how the media construct people and cultures at a particular time and place, especially the ways of living and shared meanings and purposes that make up particular culture. Media representations of people, instructions, and cultures, and events and situations are established through particular ways of using language. Matheson (ibid) argues that one of the strengths of discourse (or pragmatic) analysis of media text is that, it gives allowance for the study of media discourse and its connection to other parts of social and cultural life.

'O' Keffe (2006) states that media discourse refers to the interaction that takes place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to non-present readers, listener or viewer. She states further that media discourse is a public, manufactured, on-record, form of interaction and that the written or spoken discourse itself is oriented to the readership or listening/viewing audience, respectively. She notes further that all the basic characteristics of media discourse are crucial to the investigation, description and understanding of media discourse.

Olorunyomi (2007:97) states that the media play a catalytic role in creating and sustaining a common public culture and its components help to forge communities by preserving or undermining a cultural space or collective identity. Ayoola (2008:17) notes that the main focus of many media research work is the news story, comprising the spoken text, the electronic media and the written text which refers to the print media. Ayoola (ibid) states that, apart from textual analysis, media discourse also focuses on the

process involved in the production of texts and stories. He submits that media discourse analysis seeks to make sense of what makes our world tick. Ayoola (2008:18) also notes that the analysis of media texts on issues such as transitivity, modality, passivisation, nominalization, agency, voice, etc. using linguistic, pragmatic and stylistic frameworks have been carried out by scholars such as Fowler, 1991; Fowler et al., 1979; van Dijk, 1991; Halliday, 1994; Mey, 1999 and 2003.

Kornetzki (2012:125) states that media texts are characterised by the presence of peculiar features of journalistic style. Depending on the text type of an article, the journalist must follow a particular pattern of producing journalistic writing. She states further that if a newspaper article is created in conformity with the generic patterning of the hard news genre, the following features of newspaper style can be traced in the text: a neutral, objective style of reporting, no instances of the reporter's explicit comment; matter-of-fact narration; where stereotyped forms of expression prevail; stylistically neutral vocabulary; simple; accurate; concrete and neutral language, etc. However, if the article belongs to the genre of a column or editorial, the writing style of such a text will have much in common with the belles-lettres descriptive writing, which implements creative, vivid images for emphatic purpose.

Lavid, Arus, and Moraton (2012:2) state that within the now consolidated research strand of media discourse analysis, numerous studies have focused on certain linguistic features of the different newspaper genres, such as; news stories, reports, or editorials. News stories and reports have been extensively studied from different perspectives by (van Dijk, 1988; Bell, 1991; Fairclough, 1995; White, 1998; Scollon, 1998; among others); newspaper commentaries by (Wang, 2008a and b), opinion columns by (Dafouz, 2008) and editorials by (Alonso Belmonte, 2007; Hawes & Thomas, 1996; Lavid, Arus & Moraton, 2009; Tirkkonen –Condit, 1996) The works of these scholars offer interesting results for the description of opinion newspaper genres across languages and cultures.

All over the world, media coverage of sports can be accessed via television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the internet and even mobile phones. Sports appear in the main stream of mass media. Bernstein and Blain (2002) confirm this in the quotation below:

...many publications concerned with sports in general also include chapters focusing on mediated sport; a reflection on the fact that sports and the media have become associated to such an extent that it is often difficult to discuss sport in modern society without acknowledging its relationship with the media. (Bernstein and Blain, 2002:3)

Through the media, sporting events can reach people from both print and electronic media. Media coverage of sports is very important because sports have contributed to the development of the entire globe. It is a medium of national identity and it also brings unity and bilateral relations among the continents of the world. Furthermore, Kirk (1993:18) states that:

media culture is not merely consumed and discarded, but is utilised to construct personal identities... the material the media supplies is not passively absorbed, but is actively appropriated as the stuff of people's sense of self, their place in the social world, and the bases of their hopes and expectations of the future...

Communities' self-esteem also could be raised as a result of sporting activities. According to Lavric et al. (2008), the role of the media in football reporting cannot be over-emphasised. They state that:

the media play a decisive role in how football is staged and presented. A series of articles analyse how football games are reported in various media, ranging from television and

radio to newspapers and on-line minute-by-minute commentaries.

It is no gain saying that the media play significant roles in bringing sports closer to people across cultures. Schmidt (2008:11) states that football has its vocabulary. In his attempt to shed light on the language of football, Schmidt (ibid) makes some aspects of the vocabulary accessible, he presents kicktictionary. The kicktictionary, according to Schmidt, is an electronic multilingual (English, German, French) lexical resource of the language of football. The kicktictionary is a specialised kind of dictionary. Schmidt utilises the lexical resources constructed by the frameNet (Fillmore et al. 2003) and WorldNet (Fellbaum (1998) as a starting point for the task. The kicktictionary is a lexicographic resource for human users. Schmidt presents the resource as a website on www.kicktictionary.de.

Selected Studies on Newspaper Reports

Peelo, Francis, Soothill, Pearson and Ackerley (2004) investigate the report of homicides in England and Wales in three national newspapers: *The Time*, *The Mail* and *The Mirror* in the period 1993-97. The study explores the contributions of newspapers to the social construction of homicide. That is, how print reporting contributes to the way in which societies frame criminological problems such as illegal killing (act of murder, man slaughter or infanticide carried out on one or more victims by one or more perpetrators at the same time). The study reveals that newspapers are powerful and important contributors to public knowledge and consciousness of crime.

Taiwo (2007b) examines language, ideology and power relations in Nigerian newspaper headlines. The study utilises the critical discourse analysis approach to identify and describe the typologies of headlines in some daily and weekly newspapers in Nigeria as they relate to the themes of discourse. The study reveals that apart from the rhetorical and graphological devices employed in newspaper headlines, there are hidden ideological meanings behind those written words. The study is relevant to the present study because it considers newspaper headlines as very obligatory in any form of newspaper reporting.

Using speech acts, Agbedo (2008) analyses the writings of Bayo Onanuga and Yakubu Mohammed of *The News* and *NewsWatch* magazines respectively. The study considers their backgrounds and professional antecedents as editors of these mentioned magazines and analyses their writings during the reception of the 2005 winner of *The Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting*. The study reveals that the illocutionary acts deriving from their individual speech acts fail to meet J.L. Austin's felicity conditions which include sincerity, preparatory, executives and fulfillment conditions. The infelicitous speech acts equally fails to meet Grice's cooperative principles, which participants in any given communicative event are expected to adhere to. The four maxims of quantity, quality, relevance and manner are violated. The study concludes by suggesting that journalists must endeavour to resist the temptation of lending undue embellishments to the bored existence of the politicians and ascribing credence to their pristine executive rascality and should also aim at factual and sincere reporting, one free from the enslaving manacles of misinformation.

Yaghoobi (2009) examines the relationship between language and ideology in analysing texts selected from Iranian and American print media on the representations of The Hizbullah – Israel War. The study adopts the Systemic Functional Linguistic approach. The study is in line with the sociopolitical context of Iran with an American magazine and an Iranian newspaper, namely *NEWSWEEK* and *Kayhan International*, respectively. It elaborates on the function of language as a social practice in media discourse. The study reveals that ideological differences in these two different printed media's treatment

of the same event could be called bias in media discourse.

Eme's (2009) work is on the style adopted by a newspaper written in one of the indigenous languages in Nigeria- 'Ozisa'. 'Ozisa' is a quarterly newspaper written in Igbo Language. The study observes that the indigenous language of a community is the best language suited for relaying whatever information is needful to members of that community. The study suggests that the stylistic study of the newspaper will enhance understanding of 'Ozisa' and suggests areas that need to be improved upon by the writer if the newspaper must play a significant role in news dissemination among Igbo people.

Ayoola's (2010) works on the use of language for the presentation of conflicting ideological position in Niger-Delta discourse in some Nigerian newspapers. He adopts the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis for the analysis of texts. Ayoola notes some ideological issues in Niger-Delta discourse such as: equity and justice, ownership and control of resources among others.

Murphy (2010) examines the representation of public service workers in the *Irish Independent* using a framing analysis approach. It adopts the framework of 'propaganda model' of media operations by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988). The study reveals that the representation is symbiotic and reflective of the dominant discourse of government, business and employer elites that seek to shift the burden created by the Casino Capitalism of the free market to ordinary workers and the most vulnerable society. The study concludes that the print media coverage of Irish Independent News and Media Group which is aimed at maintaining the status quo rather than challenging it, and that media representation circulated by the Independent News and Media Group are ideologically driven and raises serious issues that strike at the heart of democracy and citizenship of the republic.

Olaniyan (2011) investigates cohesion and coherence in editors' comments in *Tell Magazines*. The study discusses the implications of the devices to readers of *Tell Magazine* by adopting Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion and coherence in analysing the discourse. The study reveals that cohesion and coherence standards of textuality can enhance the unity of meaning of texts. The work concludes that text producers can generate unified, cohesive texts that facilitate effective communication between them and text consumers. The study also reveals that cohesion and coherence in editors' comments illuminate the discourse value of cohesive ties and can be utilised for discourse pedagogy.

Ashipu (2012) examines the use of cohesive devices in the editorials of Nigerian print media. The study utilises Halliday and Hasan's (1976) approach to analysing cohesion and concept of tie to analyse the editorials of *Newswatch Magazine*. The study reveals that news editorials are highly coherent texts as they tend to make use of all cohesive devices in hanging sentences together. The study also concludes that two major types of cohesion, namely; lexical and reference cohesion are mainly used on almost equal terms to achieve cohesion in the editorials.

Pam (2012) explores the linguistic and communicative significance of the editorials in *The Nation* and *This Day Newspapers* in influencing readers' attitudes as regards the 2010 and 2011 crises in Jos and its environ. The study employs linguistic stylistic approach to the analysis of the news editorials. The study reveals that the language of editorials more often than not, exhibits some unique features and that writer(s) carefully select their linguistic items and stylistic devices in the editorials to achieve their intentions and goals.

In a study similar to the above, Nozomi (2012) carries out a linguistic analysis of newspaper reports

published in Australia, the United States, and Japan, which include articles written in English and Japanese. The cross-linguistic sets of newspaper reports were written about a specific issue where one can assume that the three countries would maintain different stances. The study utilises transitivity analysis which identifies ideational meaning realised by grammatical choice. The study locates different perspectives expressed by grammatical choices in the newspaper reports and identifies the strategies that the writers employed in expressing their stances in the newspapers. The study reveals that linguistic strategies that may not be obvious to the readers, yet influence the news reports to reflect the writers' perspectives on the events. The study concludes that grammatical choices in newspaper reports play a role to covertly express the writers' perspectives toward the events and that readers could be affected by those linguistic manipulations in their opinion making process if they continue to receive input from one specific source.

Lavid, Arus and Moraton (2012) analyses the thematic features of two newspaper genre-news reports and commentaries. The study employs the Systemic Functional Linguistic approach to text analysis. The study reveals that each newspaper genre prefer certain thematic features and that the differences between the two genres are statistically significant. The study concludes that the thematic preferences could be attributed to genre-related variables such as the communicative purpose or the subject matter of the texts.

Kayode and Adeniran (2012) examine the media coverage of development issues in Nigeria using Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) as examples. The study analyses two prominent Nigerian national newspapers, *The Punch* and *The Guardian*. The units of analysis from the two sampled newspapers include all straight news, news analysis features, opinions and editorials published on any of the eight MDGs. The study adopts agenda setting and development media theories to analyse the texts. The study reveals that the Nigerian media did not give equal coverage to the development issues they covered. The study concludes that MDGs- related issues are poorly covered by two Nigerian newspapers and that they focus mainly on governance and its politics rather than development issues like MDGs.

Aiyesimoju and Awoniyi (2012) work on content analysis and empirical review of coverage of agriculture and environment of three Nigerian Newspapers: *The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *The Sun*. The study reveals that the issues on agriculture did not receive a favourable coverage by the newspapers. The study concludes that the press should endeavour to give adequate attention to various issues on agriculture and its developmental programmes and intensify effort on the environmental issues to facilitate sustainable development in agriculture and environment.

Conclusion

The study of media language is crucial to human and national development. Mass media is a tool of globalisation. It influences society toward development and civilisation via the dissemination of information across the globe. Mass media is the prime source of information, entertainment, marketing, advertising and a form of motivation for everyone across the globe. Studying media language is very beneficial to human and global development. The study will add to the increasing literature on media study and also enhances the understanding of media language in general.

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