A Critical Stylistic Analysis of the Identity of Minority Groups in the Nigerian Print Media

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Abstract

This study aims to examine and elucidate on how minority groups are portrayed and constructed in the discourses reported in two Nigerian print media, *The Nation,* and *The Guardian*. The study adopts Jeffries' Critical Stylistic as its framework. The data for the study were collected from the newspaper archives of the Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. The analysis of the data shows that Critical Stylistic tools such as enumerating and exemplifying, assuming and implying, presenting other's speech and thoughts, and presenting processes and states account in no small measure to the meaning of the texts under study and at the same time serve in the linguistic construction of the minority groups in Nigeria.

Keywords: Identity**,** Minority**,** Critical Stylistic**,** Print Media

1.1   Introduction

The word "minority" is conceptually and ideologically laden. It has quantitative, economic, social and cultural components. It covers ethnic, racial or religious groups. It expresses different meanings in diverse places and at different times. It is a group with a small numerical population relative to another or other groups. It sometimes refers to a powerless group or groups relative to more powerful groups in society. In the latter sense, Alemika (2001) interprets minority as a synonym for disadvantage. Therefore, a minority could either be one with a small population or one with very little power to influence decisions in the public domain within the society.

Despite the different opinions on the word minority, scholars such as Nnoli (1978), Suberu (1996) and Otite (1990) opine that minorities are culturally specific and relatively cohesive groups which occupy a status of numerical inferiority and or socio-political subordination in relation to other cultural sections in the society. Further, the term ethnic group is implied when undesirable distinctions are not intended. However, when the term minority group is used, invidious distinctions are implied. The two concepts underscore physical, religious, racial and other cultural features of a designated group which distinguish it from other dominant ethnic groups in the society. The United Nations, according to Suberu (1996) consider minorities as groups that are: "numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population, and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religions or language".

The concept poses some problems regarding what features should be appropriately applied to designate the minority status of a given group. Basically, such features include statistical or numerical size, socio-economic and political power distribution, homogeneous physical and/or cultural traits, and differential treatment or status. With respects to the latter, there is the question as to whether or not it is self-imposed; and whether or not members of the minority groups are collectively conscious of the differential treatment to which they are subject. This therefore implies a low status in a social power relationship between a dominant power group and a dominated group (Eteng 1997:117). The minority groups vary depending on whether they are geographically concentrated or dispersed, whether they seek participation in, or isolation from, the broader political system, and whether the policies of the majority groups are made to enhance the liberation, continued subordination or elimination of such minorities (Amersfoort 1978).

Further, minority means a group of persons who, as a result of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from others, and who, therefore, consider themselves as objects of collective discrimination. The minority status therefore possesses an exclusion tendency of the minority group from full participation in the activities of the society. This exclusion character places the minority group more often than not in opposition to the majority group. In the same vein, Schermerhorn (1997) conceptualised minorities as: "sub-groups within a culture, which is distinguished from the dominant group, by reason of differences in physiognomy, language, customs or cultural patterns, including any combination of these factors."

Schermerhorn's definition appears to be contradictory, especially when considered within the context of the Nigerian experience. If, as Schermerhorn argues, dominant groups do recognise minority groups as inherently different on the basis of easily identified objective characteristics, then there is the exclusion of the minority groups in society. Although numerical size is deemphasized in these definitions, it often gains potency in relation to other major minority group characteristics.

In Nigeria, for example, the age-longstanding minority challenges are attributable to three key factors, namely, the way Nigeria is structured, coupled with the role of the state as the absolute controller of resources; and the absence of constitutional protection of minority rights. Further, the minority problem in Nigeria is traceable to the ill-conceived colonial policy, which agglomerated and agglutinated diverse groups under so-called regional formation that marked the beginning of domination politics in the country. In northern Nigeria, for example, colonial chauvinism established Hausa/Fulani as the regional identity and coercively integrated the minority groups, thereby super-imposing the language, culture, religions and socio-political organisation of the 'superior', dominant group. Therefore, according to Danjibo (2002), minorities' identities were either assimilated or suppressed. In southern Nigeria, the Yoruba and Ibo dominate the numerous minorities who mainly reside in that part of the country. The present study is a critical stylistic analysis of the identity of minority groups with a view to revealing the underlying ideologies and how the minority groups in the country are constructed in the Nigerian print media.

1.2   Theoretical Anchor

1.2.1   Critical Stylistics

This is a stylistic method of linguistic analysis that is concerned with how language conveys social meanings. 'Critical Stylistics' owes its origin and development to Jeffries in 2007 when she attempted the exploration of (a) the hegemonic discourses on the female body in society and (b) whether feminist ideologies have successfully been incorporated into these hegemonic discourses.

Critical Stylistics is concerned with bringing together the main general functions that a text has in representing reality, which is based on the fact that 'there is a level at which texts organize the world we experience and that this is demonstrable in the words and structures of the texts themselves (Jeffries, 2010). Jeffries (2010) opines that 'language is essentially a finely balanced combination of rules and broken rules, where the fact that there is no one-to-one form-function relationship is the key to many of the most useful and life-enhancing aspects of language, such as the writing of poetry and the use of metaphor in daily life, as well as of the more negative aspects, such as lying and manipulation'.

Critical Stylistics bridges the gap between CDA and Stylistics by using and further developing the Critical Linguistics approach to text analysis. The major accomplishment of Critical Stylistics is the provision of a more comprehensive and systematic set of analytical tools. Therefore, it should be seen as another approach to CDA and should be grouped under Critical Language Studies, since both CDA and Critical Stylistics work to reveal ideologies and power relations in discourse.

Critical Stylistics is not linked to any political outlook. It argues that all texts are ideologically based whether these ideologies are part of a conscious or unconscious process. It is interested in uncovering and revealing hidden ideologies in texts and discourse. There are a set of analytical tools through which Critical Stylistics uncovers the ideologies hidden in the text thereby saving the analyst from subjectively looking for them in an attempt to confirm preconceived assumptions. The tools of Critical Stylistics include the following: (a) Naming and Describing, (b) Representing Actions/Events/States, (c) Equating and Contrasting, (d) Exemplifying and Enumerating, (e) Prioritizing, (f) Implying and Assuming, (g) Negating, (h) Hypothesizing, (i) Presenting the Speech and Thoughts of other Participants, and (j) Representing Time, Space and Society.

1.2.2   Methodology

This study got its data from the Nigerian print media. Two newspapers, *The Nation,* and *The Guardian* were selected for data gathering. The selection was done along a broad parameter of national spread. *The Nation,* and *The Guardian* consistently demonstrate a high level of professionalism and objectivity. Further, the two newspapers enjoy a measure of prestige among a cross section of Nigerian readership. Over one hundred articles and reports on minority groups were gathered and read. The newspapers were drawn from the newspaper

archives of the Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. Out of these, only 40 articles were purposively selected for analysis using critical stylistic analysis tools.

1.2.3 Data analysis

1.2.4 Enumerating and exemplifying

This involves generic categories and their examples; most often enumerating a long list of the members of a category. Sometimes, these functions create categories and categorise members in much the same way that opposites and equivalences are described as being textually created (Jeffries 2010). The structural techniques which set up exemplification are many and varied, but often include explicit reference to the fact that they are examples, using verbs such as *include* or adverb introductions like *suchas*. For some cases, where the items in the list are clausal, and there is structural repetition, there may be a strong rhetorical effect reminiscent of Biblical or poetic parallelism. Assuming such relationships help the text too set up a further ideological apparatus. An example is shown below:

Text 1

Governor Liyel Imoke highlighted Cross River's agenda to include compensation for the loss of the Bakassi Peninsula, the right to control its solid mineral resources, etc (*The Guardian*, 02.18.14)

Text 2

Also to be canvassed by the yet-to-be nominated state's delegates, according to him, are control of National Waterways, as well as what constitutes the definition of federal roads in the state. (*The Guardian*, 02.18.14)

Text 3

The ethnic minorities demanded, among others, that the Nigerian constitution should define, defend and criminalise acts of marginalisation and discrimination against minorities (The Nation, 05.31.2014. pp 6)

Text 4

The injustice, deprivation and marginalisation of the minority ethnic nationalities, (The Nation, 05.31.2014. pp 6).

The two-part list in texts 1 and 2 seem to gesture towards a longer 'real' list, but indicates that the main cases are covered. In Text 1, what the people of Akwa Ibom State have lost is brought to the fore- *Bakassi Peninsula and the right to control its solid mineral resources* and in Text 2*control of National Waterways, as well as what constitutes the definition of federal roads in the state*, though the range is not ordered in any significant way, for example from minor to major. However, Akwa Ibom State which is peopled by various ethnic minority groups is constructed to be deprived in different ways. The state has lost part of its ancestral land; does not have control over its solid mineral resources, its national waterways. This supports the ideology that ethnic minority groups in the country are not being catered for and they are neglected to fend for themselves.

Sometimes, there is a symbolic three-part list which is striking. Though it cannot easily be 'proven' to be a different kind of textual practice, it does seems noticeable that when you read a three-part list, its significance is often more rhetorical than informational. This is noticeable in Texts 3 and 4 where there are overlapping; though not identical words. In Text 3,taken from *The Nation Newspaper,* 'defining' marginalization and discrimination against minorities will lead to 'defending' the ethnic minorities and this in turn will criminalise those exploiting the ethnic minority groups. In Text 4 also, three part list is deployed- 'injustice', 'deprivation' and 'marginalisation' of the minority ethnic nationalities. In fact, the ideological standpoint of the minority ethnic nationalities is that the current constitution relegates the minority ethnic nationalities in the country. It is often believed that the impact of a three-part list is to give the impression of completeness, rather than providing a comprehensive list of items that happens to have three parts. Texts 3 and 4 support this claim, as they seem to either reiterate essentially similar ideas, in order to achieve three parts and/or choose three items from a potentially much longer list.

1.2.5   Assuming and implying

It concerns how knowledge is either treated as background information or implied in texts. Presupposition and implicature help to realize this textual-conceptual function. Presuppositions concern the existence of an entity or event, or assume the occurrence of an action. For instance, in the NP 'her love making', the possessive pronoun 'her' presupposes the existence of the nominalised action of sexual activity, and the existence of the female participant. In 'he stopped fighting,' the verb 'stopped' presupposes that the male participant previously fought. Conversational implicatures refer to meanings implied by the text which the reader infers via a process of 'reading between the lines.' These are based on occasions where a speaker flouts one or more of Grice's maxims of conversation, giving rise to implicatures, the implied meanings that must be uncovered by the reader. Examples in the two newspapers are shown below.

Text 5

> I am from the North Central; we have been under series of attacks from the Fulani militia. In the sixties we lived with the Fulani; our forefathers lived with them; we ate their fura and nono (cow milk) and indeed as a Tiv man, we exchanged nicknames with the Fulani. They called us Munchi and we called them Agwai; and we retained friendship. (The Guardian, 04.11.2014, pp 4)

In Text 5, the presupposition that prior to the present time there was peace between the Tiv and the Fulani is indicated by the use of the adjunct, 'in the sixties' and the past tense verb 'lived'. The presupposition that the Tiv as a people are very friendly and jovial is achieved by the phrase-'indeed as a Tiv man'. This presupposes that a Tiv man is necessarily friendly; should be capable of exchanging nicknames with total strangers and settlers in their midst. This helps to entrench the ideology that minority ethnic groups, who in many instances, act as hosts for the majority settlers in the North Central are peace loving people while settlers are oppressors.

Text 6

> Further the South-South delegates had not acted surprised when told the North's demand for scrapping of the Niger Delta Development Commission, (NDDC). (*Nation*, 05.13.2014. pp 58)

The adverb *not* in Text 6indicates an implicature. This sentence flouts the maxim of relation because it mentions a lack of surprise and thus implicates its expected presence (Nahajec, 2009). When reading this sentence without any context except bearing in mind that it is taken from a newspaper report on the national conference, also the adverb *surprised* as well as the verb *told* the North's demand for scrapping of the Niger Delta Development Commission could also indicate an implicature. This is due to the background knowledge we have of the issue where anything concerning the scrapping of the NDDC is usually sensitive and therefore surprising. Again, this lack of surprise flouts the maxim of relation because it implicates its presence, in particular with a telling the Niger Deltans that NDDC should be scrapped. Therefore, we can deduce that this sentence contains a conventional implicature which refers to societal expectations/conventions of how people from the South-south should react when being given an unexpected notification like scrapping the NDDC that they still see as a way of compensation for the misuse of the crude oil in their region of death.

1.1.8   Presenting other's speech and thoughts

This is 'a very manipulative way of implanting other people's views in the reader' (Tabbert, 2012). This is especially true with quoting authorities which assigns the verbiage a high rate of presumed truthfulness. This further paves the way for manipulation because the less faithful the quotation is compared to the original utterance, the bigger the potential for 'slanting or misrepresentation' (Jeffries, 2010). Leech and Short identifies the following: Direct Speech (DS), Indirect Speech (IS), Free Indirect Speech (FIS), Narrator's report of Speech Act (NRSA) and Narrator's presentation of Voice (NV) in descending order of faithfulness.

Text 7

> The former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister, Lt. Gen. Jeremiah Useni (rtd) is demanding full payment to the original settlers of the FCT whose land was taken over by the Federal Government; claiming that "part payment was made but not

directly. In fact, this was done long time ago when I took over as minister in 1993.
But since then no kobo has been released." (The Guardian, 04.21.2014, pp 35)

In Text 7, the Federal Government of Nigeria is accused of failing to pay the *full payment to the original settlers of the FCT whose land was taken over by the Federal Government*. The verbiage of the former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister, Lt. Gen. Jeremiah Useni (rtd) is a mixture of different categories of speech presentation, starting with Narrator's report of Speech Act (The former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister, Lt. Gen. Jeremiah Useni (rtd) is demanding full payment to the original settlers of the FCT), Free Indirect Speech (claiming that "part payment was made but not directly), Direct Speech (*"part payment was made but not directly. In fact, this was done long time ago when I took over as minister in 1993. But, since then no kobo has been released"*). The reader is unable to assess if this blend of the former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister, Lt. Gen. Jeremiah Useni (rtd)'s words still contains the original illocutionary force, which is the underlying intention of the speaker (Tabbert, 2012: 142). Quoting the former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister, Lt. Gen. Jeremiah Useni, who speaks on behalf of the original settlers of the FCT, assigns the assertion a high degree of trustworthiness because of the former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister's role in the transaction involving the original settlers and FGN. His verbiage provides the argument for why only the FGN can be at fault by talking about the part payment made by the government when he became the Minister of the FCT. This constructs the FGN as a cheat and the minority ethnic groups in Abuja who are the original settlers as deprived and exploited. A lot of different information are stuffed into the statements from the ex-minister which the reader is unable to question and take them for granted which opens the gate for manipulation.

Text 8

Speaking to reporters in Warri yesterday, President of The Itsekiri National Youth Council, Shola Jakpa, said it would be difficult to get the Itsekiri people to be calm in the face of the ongoing exclusion of the people in a manner that affects their destiny**;** "we have been told to be calm about being made not to have a say in a conference to determine who gets what, when and how in a renegotiated Nigeria. How does anybody expect us to be calm? This is the only National Conference since in the annals of Nigeria that we being alienated." "It is more surprising that this is happening to us at a time the Itsekiri nation remains entirely a PDP territory under a minority President even in the face of the current wind of defections against the ruling party. All Itsekiri lawmakers at state and federal level remain Itsekiri. We respect President and remain supportive of his government. How can we then be calm to be so humiliated?" (The Nation, 03.11.2014, pp 5)

These sentences contain Direct Speech taken from what the President of The Itsekiri National Youth Council told some reporters of *The Nation newspaper*. The President of The Itsekiri National Youth Council implies that the Itsekiri are naturally calm, which shows their internalisation and therefore the naturalisation of the labelling process. But although through the labelling he positions the Itsekiri as a very calm and cooperating ethnic group in the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general, he aims at distinguishing them from other ethnic groups in the region and in the country by claiming that they support the PDP and the president. His verbiage supports the fact that being calm in Nigeria does not always yield the desired result especially concerning minority ethnic groups. His interrogative statement *how does anybody expect us to be calm*?, distances him even further from the earlier claim that the Itsekiri nation is always calm by implying that in this instance they are no longer calm as things are no longer at ease; they have been excluded from a conference where their destiny is going to be discussed.

Direct Writing in Text 8 is used to construct a formerly calm minority ethnic group who as result of conspicuous and deliberate is ready to fight for its right by using their leader's own verbiage. The use of Direct Speech preserves the locution and illocution of the utterance and thus creates the impression that the president speaks up for himself and his people without changing his words. This leaves the reader to judge the President of The Itsekiri National Youth Council, Shola Jakpa by his own verbiage which is far more powerful than the use of another form or speech presentation which the reader might question for its faithfulness. The major linguistic device which constructs the Itsekiri nation in terms of being calm is the employment of the already mentioned Direct Speech.

The following example in Text 9 below shows how the words of a leader of an ethnic group can also be used to construct the group generally.

Text 9

The coordinator of the Urhobo People Forum, Nathaniel Dortie said the marginalisation of Urhobo in the forced marriage called Nigeria is very offensive.

By every measure, Urhobo deserves a good number of representations in the South-South delegates' list. (The Nation, 03.11.2014, pp 5)

Text 9 refers to the alleged marginalization of Urhobo ethnic minority group in the country, after they were not apparently well represented in the 2014 National Conference. The coordinator of the Urhobo People Forum is quoted in Indirect Speech. This choice of category is a stylistic choice which is still close to the original verbiage in terms of faithfulness. Text 28 constructs the Urhobo ethnic group as first, a marginalized group and second, as not believing in the marrying together of the various ethnic groups in the country through the verbiage of one of its sons (*coordinator of the Urhobo People Forum, Nathaniel Dortie*). The coordinator's assertion that marrying the various ethnic groups in the country together was a forced one constructs a 'family' disaster and ordeal which implies not strong family ties and an ethnic group which does not believe anymore in the said marriage.

1.2.6   Presenting processes and states

Transitivity analysis in our data reveals that Material Action Intention is used with the target (minority groups) as the goal. This indicates the construction of a passive minority group in the majority of analysed sentences with the minority groups on the receiving end of the action. Some examples are shown below.

Text 10

They daily killed hundreds of Christians in the North. (The Guardian, 04.02.2014, pp 5)

This sentence illustrates the use of active voice and Material Action Intention to construct a passive victim (*hundreds of Christians in Plateau State*) as the Goal who is acted upon by the Actor - *they*. The Actor *they* could refer to Islamic fundamentalists in the North or misguided Muslims. However, the truth is the Christians are the overall minority group in the North and they are constructed as being hated by the majority group- the Muslims in the North.

Text 11

It is more surprising that this is happening to us at a time the Itsekiri nation remains entirely a PDP territory. (The Nation, 03.11.2014, pp 5)

This example combines a material process indicated by the verb group- *is surprising* and the circumstantial process of time to describe the plight of the nation in the build up to the national conference. The Itsekiri nation has been grossly under represented; as a result, they kick about what is happening to them despite the fact that they are totally in support of the government of the day at the national level. This constructs a people not regarded in spite of their contribution to the political and economical life of Nigeria.

1.3   Conclusion

The data for this study were analyzed using Lesley Jeffries' Critical Stylistics as analytical model. Working with the model revealed that the minority groups are constructed through various Critical Stylistic tools such as enumerating and exemplifying, assuming and implying, presenting other's speech and thoughts, and presenting processes and states. The study has provided linguistic evidence which allows assertions about how the minority groups in Nigeria are constructed linguistically in the press, namely in the *The Nation* and *The Guardian* newspapers. These articles mirror how society views the different groups and are a valuable indicator for society's attitude towards them.

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