Analysis of Syntactic Structures in Selected Nigerian Investigative Media Reports

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Abstract

This paper has analyzed the structural patterns of information in selected Nigerian media texts. Six reports drawn from Nigerian newspapers and magazines formed the corpus which was subjected under investigation. The paper employed the technique of Triangulation to form the methodology that helped in analyzing the corpus. Triangulation allows the combination of two or more models in the study of a similar data set. Therefore, Halliday (1979) and Matthiessen (2004) Systemic Functional models were adopted into an integrated theory which aided the identification and subsequent analysis of the corpus. The study discovered that different syntactic strategies have been used by the writers in communicating ideas to their readers. The result revealed that a combination of complex, compound, periodic, loose sentence structures were predominant in the corpus, while simple sentences were in negligible use. Our investigation further showed that complex and compound sentence structures used by the writers helped in the presentation of larger issues which simple sentences cannot deliver. While the prevalent occurrence of loose and periodic sentences were interchangeably used to create suspense and at the same time end the suspense. We came to the conclusion that the combination of these structures by investigative reporters places language above ordinary or uneducated readers with the intention to make language suitable for a target audience - those bourgeoning actors the essays are basically about.

Keywords: Syntax, Investigative news, Text and Corpus.

1. Introduction

Systemic linguistics belongs to the Prague tradition of linguistics, which combines structuralism with functionalism. Halliday (1979) postulates that language can be studied by its structure and its functions. Structuralism implies an appreciation of the diversity of functions fulfilled by language and a theoretical recognition that the structure of language is largely determined by the characteristic functions of its diverse form (Atolagbe 2001).

Halliday's theory is based on *Behaviour*, *Function* and *Situation*. The theory views language as a form of functional behaviour related to the social setting. The theory is also interested in relating the internal organization of language and the various kinds of patterns a language exhibits. That is, from the functions of the language, the social situation of the language, to how the patterning varies in different social settings. Systemic Functional Linguistics' postulation recognizes three (3) primary levels of language; *Substance*, *Form* and *Situation*. Substance, as an aspect of the theory hinges on the actual stream of sounds that a person hears or the structures of writing that the reader sees. From the linguistic point of view, 'substance' denotes the phonic sounds – k/ l/m/z/u: and the graphic symbols – a,b,c,d. It also pays attention to variations in accent.

'Form' in the theory, according to Atolagbe (2001) is classified into complimentary sub-levels of lexis and grammar. He explains that lexis is the study of vocabularies and patterns of co-occurrences between them (simple, complex, compound or collocations), while grammar studies the actual structures within the paragraphs and discourse. He adds that 'situation' which is the third category, constitutes the background to a text under analysis. *Context of situation* in which language is used, and the ways in which one type of situation may differ from another, is of great concern to the theory. Halliday (1979) identifies three situations: what is actually taking place, who is taking part, and what part the language is playing. These three variables put together, determine the range within which meanings and forms are selected and used for their expression. The three variables, in other words determine the 'register'. Halliday (1984) provides further, the following elements that determine the context:

i.   The Field of Discourse
ii. The Mode of Discourse
iii. The Tenor of Discourse

The *Field of Discourse,* according to Halliday relates to the subject- matter which entails what is actually taking place in the text while *Mode of discourse* specifies the medium of a text as basically written or spoken. To him, *Tenor of Discourse* denotes the degree of formality and familiarity of the discourse – who is taking part. These types of situation account for 'register'. Register, according to Halliday, is a theory that describes that the language people speak or write varies according to the situation in which they use it. Variations that occur according to situational use of language of the investigative reporting in the print media is the primary focus of the paper. The language of the print media is not wholly homogenous and this is why

Umaru, Hamza and Sharndama (2013) argue that the print media and by extension journalism has different styles of language according to corporate house styles adopted to meet their target audience. Our investigation shows that the patterns which characterize investigative reports in Nigeria are consciously targeted at the educated audience.

Summary and Details of the Corpus

S/N	Print Genre	Title of Article	Author	Date of Publication	Text type
1.	Magazine (The Source)	Kashim Shettima: Fraud in High Places. (Pp 30-31)	By Segun Abifarin	Vol 31 No10 June 2012	TEXT A
2.	Newswatch Magazine	Obasanjo's N800 Billion Roads: Fact and Fiction (Pp 14-23)	By Mikail Mumuni	Vol. 47 No23 June 9, 2008	TEXT B
3.	Newswatch Magazine	A Nation's big Burden: How the Political Class Bleeds Nigeria(Pp 14-19)	By Chris Ajaero	Vol. 43 No. 26, June 27 2011	TEXT C
4.	Nigerian Pilot (newspaper report)	Fake Anti-Virus on the rise (Pp 37)	By Peter Chris Ajaero	Vol. 1 No. 191, July 13, 2011	TEXT D
5.	National Life (newspaper report)	How Desperate Nigerians sell Kidneys in Asia for N10m	Anonymous	Vol. 1 No. 75 July 5th 2011	TEXT E
6.	Magazine Desert Herald	Nigerian Biggest Oil Fraudsters; The Worst Subsidy Scam Ever	Anonymous	July-August 2012	TEXT F

2. Methodological Framework

This study adopted the technique of Triangulation as the methodology of the study. Triangulation, according to Golafshani (2003) is the combination of two or more research strategy in the study of the same phenomenon. It contributes to the completeness or confirmation of findings. Mitchell (1986), states that there are many types of triangulation in research. He explains that Theory Triangulation uses more than one lens or theoretical framework in analyzing of the same set of data. While data Triangulation consists of time, space and person triangulations. He further points out that in time triangulation; researchers collect data about a phenomenon at different points in time for analysis. To him, methods triangulation occurs at the level of design or data collection while design method triangulation uses quantitative methods.

This study was based on *Theory Triangulation*. It employed two models of analysis: the Systemic Functional Linguistics model by Halliday (1984) and Matthiessen (2004).

3. Findings And Discussion

This section discusses the syntactic features of the corpus. In the corpus, different forms of structures have been identified and they range from complex, compound, periodic, loose, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory structures The structures identified are based on meaning of sentences and physical functions of the patterns.

3.1 Compound Sentence Structures

A compound sentence consists of two or more coordinated simple sentences. In other words, compound sentences are made up of either two or more sentences which are co – joined by a conjunctive element. Fakuade (2003) opines that each of the co-joined simple structure is independent of the other. Below are some examples from the corpus:

Example 1.   Will Shettima be swept away from the corridor and prosecuted for his crimes?
Example 2.   The irony however is that the vessel, MT ZEN Star does not exist and no fuel was imported.
Example 3.   This is a major trunk road in this country and I cannot understand how it has been allowed to degenerate.

In the first example, two simple sentences are co-joined. The first simple sentence 'Will Shettima be swept away from the corridor?' is linked by an additive conjunct 'and' to the next simple sentence 'Will Shettima be prosecuted for his crimes'. In example 2, the first simple sentence is 'the Irony however is that the

vessel, MT Zhen star, does not exist' and this sentence has been joined to 'No fuel was imported' with the help of an additive conjunct 'and'.

In the third example, two simple sentences are coordinated by additive conjunction 'and'. The sentences are: (1) 'this is a major trunk road in this country' (2) 'I cannot understand how it has been allowed to degenerate'. In the investigative reports, the journalist makes use of these additive conjuncts where almost all the subjects of the sentences are not similar, indicating that it is a deliberate device to build up discourse.

3.2 Complex Sentence Structures

According to Fakuade (2003), a complex sentence has a main clause which is supported by one or two subordinate or dependent clauses. The main or independent clause contains the major information for which the dependent clause or clauses depend on for meaning. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), in explaining this relation, state that the subordination is a non-symmetrical relation, holding between two clauses in such a way that one is a constituent or part of the other. These examples are provided below:

Examples   1.   It was this dead and defunct vessel that Nasaman claimed delivered its petrol.
            2.   The driver took them for policemen because the spot had for long been a police check point in the day time.
            3.   Theophilus Danjuma, a retired lieutenant General and former defense minister, recently spoke the minds of many Nigerians who have grown increasingly concerned about the state of finances.
            4.   The oil was brought into Nigeria by the vessel, MT Delphina EX MT Overseas Limar, which arrived at offshore Cotonou, Benin Republic.

Clauses in a complex sentence do not share equal prominence (Fakuade 2003). In all the sentences above, there is a main clause which is important than other clauses. In the first sentence: "that Nasaman claimed delivered its petrol" is the main clause subordinated by "it was this dead and defunct vessel". Fakuade (2003) argues that the main clause can appear in any position in a sentence. It could begin, or be in the middle or end a sentence. For the second example: "the driver took them for policemen" is the independent or main clause and this has been subordinated by "because the spot had been for long time a police check point in the day time'. The main clause in Sentence three is "Theophilus Danjuma, retired lieutenant General and former Minister, recently spoke the minds of Nigerians' which is made complex by a relative clause "who have grown increasingly concerned about the state of finances". Example 4 equally has subordinate clauses introduced by relative clauses as indicated above. The investigative journalist deliberately or unconsciously brings these sentences into life to aid his theme which requires vividness that cannot be conveniently conveyed by the use of simple sentence structures. Leech and Short (1991) have indicated exactly how the complex sentence works and this is similar to the investigative print media. This kind of sentence gives, withholds information, subordinates those of equal weight, and ties into a neat package as many suggestions, modifiers, and asides as the mind can attend to in one stretch.

3.3 Periodic Sentence Structures

The periodic sentence structure has major constituent at the end while the anticipatory constituent begins the sentence. The periodic sentence structure is the opposite of a loose sentence structure. Ebest et al (1999) also calls the periodic sentence the 'climactic sentence' and subsequently submits that in this sentence, the main idea is delayed until the end while the subordinate ideas or modifiers come first. The corpus for the study has such structures in profound use. Examples are given below:

Sentence 1   Even so, many Nigerians are angry and consequently, have suggested that the job of a federal legislator should be part time.
Sentence 2   Bennelt Elendu, the traditional ruler of Ohiaocha autonomous community in Abia State, said it was disheartening that a road contract which was awarded six years ago had barely reached 22 percent completion.
Sentence 3   Nick Udam Abul, a staff of Nigerian Breweries Plc who resides at Mararaban Rido, expressed shock that the company could be allowed to spend so much time without finishing a project, that is of much importance to the state as well as commuters from all over the world.
Sentence 4   In addition, several shipments of fertilizers, meant for farmers at a subsidized cost, were allegedly diverted to lucrative black market through manipulation of supply records.

SENTENCE 1:

1. | Even so | Anticipatory constituent

2. | Many Nigerians are angry and | Anticipatory constituent

3 | Have suggested that | Anticipatory constituent

4 | The job of a federal legislator should be part time | Major constituent

SENTENCE 2:

1. | Bennelt Elendu | Anticipatory constituent

2. | The traditional ruler of Ohiacha autonomous community in Abia State | Anticipatory constituent

3. | Said it was disheartening | Anticipatory constituent

4. | That a road contract which was awarded six years ago had barely reached 22 percent completion | Main

SENTENCE 3:

1. | Nick Udam Abul | Anticipatory constituent

2. | A staff of Nigerian Breweries PLC | Anticipatory constituent

3. | Who resides at Mararaban Rido | Anticipatory Constituent

4. | Expressed shock that the company could be allowed to spend so much time without finishing a project that is of so much importance to the state as well as commuter from all over the world |

SENTENCE 4:

1. | In addition | Anticipatory

2. | Several shipments of fertilizers | Anticipatory

3. | Meant for farmers at a subsidized cost | Anticipatory

4. | Were allegedly diverted to lucrative black market through manipulation of supply records | Major

Periodic sentences in the investigative reports are used both as a strategy for suspense and a way to make readers get attached to the text until the end. When main ideas in the reports are delayed, the expressions are meaningless till the reader reads to the end. The reporter keeps readers in suspense with these structures, so

that they could always rush ahead to know.

3.4 Loose Sentence Structures

A loose sentence structure begins a sentence with the major constituent and ends with an anticipatory constituent. Adekunle (1991) explains that, in this utterance, you make the audience know the main idea before getting to the end of the whole construction. He argues that, in this kind of sentence, the main intention is to give information rather than tell a story or create suspense. Investigative reporters make use of these expressions in combination with the opposite periodic structures as can be seen below:

Sentence 1	Security investigation in Abuja and Kaduna have revealed that Shettima incorporated several companies in Nigeria including Barbedos ventures Limited, Sky Limit International Limited and Engine oil Services.
Sentence 2	The slowest pace of work on the dualization project appears to be on the fourth section being handled by Gitto.
Sentence 3	He is unhappy that a greater chunk of recurrent expenditure is spent on travels of public officials and things that are irrelevant or contribute nothing to the quality of lives of Nigerians.

Sentence 1:

1.	Major Constituent	Security investigation in Abuja and Kaduna have revealed that Shettima incorporated several companies in Nigeria
2.	Anticipatory	Including Barbedos Ventures Limited
3.	Anticipatory	Sky limit international limited and Engine oil services

Sentence 2:

1.	Major Constituent	The slowest pace of work on the dualization project appears to be on the fourth section
2.	Anticipatory	Being handled by Gitto

Sentence 3:

Major Constituent	He is unhappy
Anticipatory	That a greater chunk of recurrent expenditure is spent on travels of public officials
Anticipatory	Things that are irrelevant or contribute nothing to the quality of lives of Nigerians.

By making readers know the main ideas before the supporting ones in the investigative reports, it could be a sure way of introducing variety of structures to continuously keep readers in suspense and save them from being bored. Several constructions have been identified, which include the periodic structure, and by making use of loose or cumulative structures in the reports, the reporter engages multiple construction strategy as a way to add elegance to the stories and wholly spice up the reports. Loose sentences do not keep readers in suspense but open up main ideas as sentences begin.

3.5 Declaratives

A declarative sentence here is described based on meaning and not on structure. Declarative sentences convey information or make factual statements. In our corpus, the statements run across the investigative reports of the Nigerian print media. Here are some of these statements:

Sentence 1	The president refused to sign the bill into law.
Sentence 2	I am not sure.
Sentence 3	From this transaction alone, Brilla got a subsidy payment of N1 billion.
Sentence 4	The road is simply impassible.

Given the extensive use of larger structures in the investigative reports, declarative sentences are sometimes invented by the reporter to ease comprehension which becomes a communicative strategy to pass information in a simple and understandable manner.

3.6 Conditional Statements

Conditional Statements make proposition as condition for another thing, it issues a ground to fulfill certain expectation in order to resolve another thing. Conditional sentences have been used in great sense in our corpus as shown in the following examples:

Sentence I   If they can do this, their names would be written in gold.

Sentence II   If and when roads construction probe comes up, it will be doing so on the heels of similar ones.

Sentence III   If the payment is made, the person's card details are simply collected and could be used by criminals or sold on the black market.

The linguistic effects of conditional statements in the investigative reports function mainly to resolve certain expectations. Here conditions are provided to resolve certain conditions which are signaled by the conjunction "if". The reporter makes use of these conditional statements to unite both the "given" and the "new" in a single structure. It also function in the text as hypothetical constructions to deepen the argument and extend the possible application of the instances raised in the reports.

3.7 Appositives

Ebest et al (1999) define an appositive as a noun or word group functioning as a noun (a noun phrase) that renames another noun or word group. In other words, Fakuade (2003) opines that if a phrase stands in apposition to a noun or a noun substitute, they refer to same person or thing and are placed one after the other without being joined by a conjunction. In our corpus of our analysis, appositives are used severally. Some of these examples are as follows:

Sentence I   Anthony Anenih, Former Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the ruling People Democratic Party, PDP was the minister of works during Obasanjo's first tenure between May 1999 to May 2003.

Sentence II   Nick Udam Abul, a staff of the Nigerian Breweries PLC who resides at Mararaban Rido, expressed shock.

Sentence III   Itse Sagay, Professor of Law, is not happy with the legislators for appropriating large sums of money to themselves.

Sentence IV   Anthony Cardinal Okogie, Catholic Arch Bishop of Lagos, suggested that the remuneration of public office holders be drastically art down...

In sentence 1, the appositive is "Former Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the PDP" renames "Anthony Anenih". Also, a similar tendency occurs in sentence 2, "a staff of the Nigerian Breweries PLC who resides at Mararaba Rido" renames "Nick Udam Abul". More so, "Professor of Law" stands in opposition to "Iste Osagay" in the third sentence and finally," Catholic Arch Bishop of Lagos" is an appositive to " Anthony Cardinal Okogie". The wider Nigeria media enjoys the use of appositions not just to introduce news makers in varying sense, but in most cases to colour up their personalities for some gains. Appositions in the investigative reports do not function very different from this claim. All the items identified as examples either sing praises to elevate personalities or provide detailed information about them. On the contrary, appositives seek to define and expand the meanings of the nouns in order to reveal their specific relevance to the case being investigated since veracity in the case of investigative journalism is based on authority and believability.

3.8 Expletives

An expletive is an expression that occupies the position of some other word, phrase or clause without adding to the sense. The common expletives here in the corpus are 'this' ' it' and 'there' as shown in the following sentences:

Sentence I   **It** is estimated that the political profligacy cost the FG 76% percent of its yearly expentiture.

Sentence II   **It** was originally designed to provide an access way from the northern parts of the country who do not want to pass through Kaduna.

Sentence III   **It** was a grand deceit, never seen in Nigerian history.

Sentence IV   **It** will be naive that we can recover the whole amount.

Sentence V   **This** explains why the country is not developing as it ought to despite the huge revenue accruing to it annually from oil wealth.

Sentence VI   **There** are numerous senior special advisers, Senior Special Assistants, SSAs, Special Advisers and Special assistants.

Sentence VII   **There** were no visible signs of activity last week.

In the sentence structures 1-4, the pronoun 'it' occupies the position of the subject but do not act as the subject of those sentences. A subject of sentence stands in the traditional SPA position as a 'doer' of some action, while the verb expresses the action. 'This' also occupies the subject position, in sentence 5, 'there' occupies

subject position in sentence 6, but all are not the real subjects in those sentences neither do they act in such capacities. In explicit sense, expletives are introduced in the investigative reports to bring external ideas which have some bearing on the information given in the sentence. The examples in the corpus show that investigative reporters fall back to some of this existing information to support their recent claims. In example I, "It is estimated…" the question is, who estimated that". Expletives have no clear cut strength to substitute subject position, but do that for the information ahead. It could be argued that due to the controversial nature of some of the investigative reports, there is need for anonymity of certain information. It is for this reason that expletives are used.

3.9 Fronting Elements

Fronting is an important syntactic feature in the work of an investigative reporter. Fronting is carried out to achieve both giving certain information prominence and also emphasizing relevant details. These are some of the examples:

Sentence I   Refusing to accept that it was over and out, arising from the measly income that was trickling in, die-hards, as Nigerians are acknowledged, invented yet another conduit.

Sentence II   Under the new act, voodoo priests and priestesses are hired to prepare charms.

Sentence III   Reacting to the development, which seems to be on the rise, a medic who attended to the deceased ...

Sentence IV   Owning to the great demand for kidneys in most western and Asian countries, a supply can hardly be met.

Sentence V   Contrary to the company's claim, MT Hellenic blue had been dead and unused.

Sentence VI   Newswatch investigation shows that, government contracts are bought…

Sentence VII   Others are entertainments, 30 percent of basic salary N828, 081. 83, personal assistants, 25 percent, N621, 061. 37, vehicles maintenance allowance 75 percent .

Fronting is one of the greatest keys that link ideas together in investigative reports. Apart from linking up longer details across paragraphs they are introduced for prominence. They also give clues ahead of a major submission as can be deduced from the corpus.

4. Conclusion

Our analysis of the corpus show that different syntactic structures are involved in reports of investigative writers. While the mixture of compound and complex structures aid the writer to handle larger issues which simple sentences cannot, periodic, fronting and loose sentences support them to create suspense and end it at another point. We discovered that the swapping of these structures has made reading tolerable to educated readers but places language above uneducated readers. We conclude that language use in investigative reports in Nigeria is not ordinary language used in day to day activities to communicate across statuses in the society.

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