

SAME EVENT; DIFFERENT STORIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO KENYAN DAILIES REPORTING ON MURDER

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ABSTRACT

On the basis of Lexical Choices as a Linguistic device, this study examines headlines and introductory paragraphs of articles on a murder story that was covered in different Kenyan Dailies in the year 2018. The current paper argues that since every instance of language use is imbued with meaning and purpose in relation to its user, the language used in different newspapers covering the same event will be different. Apart from using language to bring out the reality of the situation to the news consumers, news reporters also struggle to use it to reflect the positions they take in relation to their reports. It is through this struggle that different constructions of the same murder event are realized. This study will qualitatively examine the language use in two different newspapers in Kenya i.e the Daily Nation and the Standard in relation to the representation of murder story revolving around a slain university student and a county chief who is the perceived perpetrator. Analyses of the articles by the help of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory revealed that the same murder event reported in the DN is represented differently in the STD through the use of a more biased lexemes and that ideology is the driving force in these representations.

Keywords: Ideology, Representation, Lexical Choices.

INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, Media has been used to report about events happening in the societies and the world at large. Since they are the dominating presenters of language in the society and that they have a mass audience, they have large power and influence in the world. They can use language to shape people's perspectives, opinions and views about situations very easily. The Media therefore intentionally uses both textual and/or visual language to represent attitudes, entities, individuals, ideals and institutions. It is from these representations that they position and differentiate themselves from each other.

In Kenya, there exist various media groups which report murder stories through prints, online and audio. These include among others the Nation Media group, The Standard group, The Kenya Times, Citizen, Kenya Broadcasting Cooperation etc. These papers operate under different ownership structures. The Nation Media group is owned by the state while the rest are under different ownerships. Through these different ownership structures, the need to create ideological positioning of the said media houses in reference to murder reports is inevitable. Despite the varying ownership structures of these newspapers, many other aspects of the papers are similar. Not only do they operate within the same geographic locations and therefore have similar markets comprised of very similar demographics but also all these papers are communicating to the same general type of people in the same specific region of the country giving rise to a state of affairs that creates a situation that has a commercial implication to the media houses. Given the social contexts within which these newspapers operate, it is thus logical to assume that these different newspapers in Kenya will use language distinctly to

position themselves, differentiate themselves from each other, promote their efforts and attract the attention of distinct audiences including politicians, the masses, political analysts etc. thereby creating different stories of the same event reported. This study is therefore keen to show how lexical choices in murder reports work towards reconstruction of murder stories differently in two different newspapers: The Daily Nation (DN thereafter) and The Standard (STD thereafter). In relation to this, this study also considers the communicative functionality of the language use and ideological stances taken assumed by the concerned media houses in relation to the murder stories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars in Linguistics have carried out studies on the language of news report in general eg Thomposon, White & Kitley, (2008) and news report about murder and crime-related events in particular eg Lombardi, D (2018); Abuga J, A (2016) etc, which have taken several angles in Linguistics ranging from the structures of the news report, language used in reporting and many other issues. Some have explored the rhetorical properties of the modern newspaper report so as to account for the distinctive style of news report e.g White, (1998); Aini, N and Widodo, P (2018); Hudock, L (2005) while others have tried to explore the relationship that exists between the ideological positions of the media and language use (e.g Ononye, (2017); Lombardi, D (2018); Timucin, M 2010). Studies conducted by Ononye, (2017) and Timucin, M (2010) are worth noting. The latter observed that the language used by different types of newspaper is explicitly different even when they refer to the report of the same event and that the Linguistic insights into the use of language can be of great assistance in the understanding of this diversity. This study focused on biased language of sports commentary. The present study borrows a lot from this study in many ways; One is on the focus given on biased language used in the media, secondly, the keeping constant of the subject matter of discussion and many others. Whereas Timucin, M (2010) study settles on sports commentary considered to carry 'soft news' which is highly subjective, the article in hand looks at murder stories considered as 'hard news' and thus factual in nature. By keeping the subject matter constant ie murder story only, different lexical coloring which each newspaper throws over the story can be seen clearly. Consequently, a great deal of communicative functionalities and ideological distinctions stemming from differences in expressions is seen mainly because differences in expression carry ideological distinctions and thus differences in representations according to Fowler (1991:4).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Fairclough (1995) CDA approach

This study uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a research theory. More specifically, it adopts Fairclough's (1995) CDA approach. In his approach to critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (1995) posits that there exist three different but interrelated dimensions of a communicative event: text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice. The text dimension is concerned with the meaning and form of written or spoken language, the discourse practice dimension focuses on practices of text production and consumption, while the sociocultural practice dimension broadens the scope of the research to observe the situational context surrounding the text (Fairclough, 1995). Since the article in hand aims to look at Lexical Choices made on headlines and introductory paragraphs of articles on murder stories in the Kenyan print media, this study will restrict itself to the text dimension so as to realize its objectives.

At the level of text analysis this study looks at vocabulary which focuses on lexical choices in their experiential, relational and expressive values. According to Fairclough (2001:93), experiential values

relate to content, knowledge and beliefs, relational values relate to relations and social relationships while expressive values relate to subjects and social identities. Applied to this particular article, the vocabulary aspect within the text analysis level is studied with reference to how words have been deployed by news reporters to present facts and ideologies, the identities they construct for the participants in the communication and the relationship they establish between the writer and the reader of the communicative event (Fairclough, 1995). The study thus focuses to understand how the violent acts are described, the identities set up for those associated with the acts, the ideologies, if any, implied in the words and forms used by journalists and finally explore why certain words and forms are preferred or avoided as opposed to others.

METHODOLOGY

The approach taken in the analysis is descriptive in nature. The study purposefully sampled a total of 18 samples of both headlines and introductory paragraphs from two Kenyan mainstream media: the Daily Nation and the Standard covering a murder story revolving around a slain university student and a county chief who is the perceived perpetrator. This murder happened in September 2018 and was covered in the Kenyan Dailies from September to October 2018. Since different media houses were covering the events, the news consumers were actively searching for information about those coverages and naturally, different media groups being aware of this, would alter, edit and update content accordingly. Through these efforts, different versions of the same event emerged. Data analysis involved exploration of the selected lexical items in each news item as exemplified below:

1. DN Article 1 (2018).
Obado and Sharon: murder plot thickens
2. STD Article 2 (2018).
Pregnant varsity student likely raped before killing

Both headlines are making reference to some investigations being carried out and are hinting to some observations already made. The Daily Nation article displays a more direct approach in reporting. It's short and factual in nature. It doesn't reveal observations made but it mentions the names of the social actors involved in the event in a casual manner to imply the level of relationship between them. With reference to the relational value of language, it can be said that the social actors in this case are partners who related closely. This reference invites the readers to join in this relationship since it's not formal but a casual one; in the longrun, their (readers) interest to read the text is aroused.

The same murder news reported in a different newspaper, the STD, displays a different tone. The STD journalists display an evaluative and speculative report in a more emotional tone through an emphasis on the manner of killing. This is well captured in the use of the words **raped before killing**; something that the DN never captured. The speculative nature of the report is further heightened by the use of the word **likely**. This usage expresses the authors' personalized and subjective assessment of the event. Through the selection of these words the readers are made to sympathize with the deceased since they appeal to their emotional aspect. In this case, the readers are implicitly put in a social group to collectively condemn the act in the strongest term possible. Through this social group, the author is able to show that the readers are standing in solidarity with the family of the dead; an ideology which could be in line with the media house concerned.

At expressive value, the STD avoids mentioning names instead it uses titles e.g **pregnant varsity student** as opposed to **Sharon**. This nominal group is heavily pre-modified to make the readers really feel for the deceased because she belonged to a vulnerable group of people

in the society who need to be taken care of. Her vulnerability emanates from two factors; one reason being that she was pregnant and the second one being that she was a university student, young at heart who needed to be protected by the same society that killed her. Here ironical tone is implied to ridicule the killers and bring out their cruel nature. In the long run, it makes the readers re-align with the authors' view of the event and the media house ideology of framing the perpetrators as culpable and thus advancing a case against them. In a different news item, the writer reports:

3. DN Article 3 (2018)
Obado's PA still in custody as police intensifies watch over all.
4. STD Article 4 (2018)
Man at the epicenter of murder mystery Michael Oyamo, the man holding the trump card in the killing of Sharon Otieno, is a quiet man with intimidating physique.

At the expressive level, the Daily Nation doesn't use the exact name of the suspect. It uses his title in a possessive form **Obado's PA**. This strategy places **Obado** at the centre of discourse and frames him as a person of interest in the murder case. It thus draws the readers' attention from the PA to Obado, the governor, as one very responsible person for the murder of Sharon.

In a different newspaper, the STD, the same news is reported differently. The PA is framed as the key person in the murder case. In fact, Obado is excluded from the murder case. The PA is identified with his full name **Michael Oyamo** as a person at the **epicenter** of the murder. His role in the murder is heightened when he is likened to a **man holding trump card**. This shows that he holds the key information of the mystery of the murder event.

One interesting point about him is the contrast used by the author of the text to report about his nature. The words **quiet, intimidating physique** used to describe his nature implies the complex nature of the investigation itself. Oyamo's quiet nature makes it hard for the detectives to get any meaningful information from him yet he is **the man holding trump card** to mean that he holds the key information about the mystery of the murder event. Through the evaluative language used to assess Oyamo's position in relation to murder, the author implies a very personal and subjective way of framing the suspect. He may be thought of by the readers to be a reservist and therefore innocent but again his physical appearance which contradicts his facial looks reveals him as an aggressive, rough and daring person likely to have committed the stated crime. This contrasting nature of Oyamo therefore makes complicated the detectives work.

5. DN Article 5 (2018)
Prosecutor Haji promises there will be no 'scared cows' in quest for justice.
6. STD Article 6 (2018)
Haji and Kinoti under pressure to speedily resolve the two cases.

The DN author uses the lexical item **sacred cows**; a noun that disapproves a custom, system etc that has existed for a long period of time and that many people think should not be questioned or criticized, to represent the untouchables due to their status in the society. In this context it could be implying to the governor who's powerful economically, socially and politically. This discourse through the prosecutor, assures the public that even such people will not be spared. This discourse also aims to reveal the thorough nature of the investigation department as an institution willing and ready to carry out its duty. Through this re-assurance discourse, the public is made to trust this institution since the initiative originates from within it.

The STD reports this differently. The choice of the lexical item **under** combined with **pressure** shows that the initiative to resolve the two cases originates not from within the institution but from some external force. The agents may not have carried out the investigations were it not for the pressure that they are subjected to. This interpretation, coupled with lack of the agent that is pressurizing Haji and Kinoti render the story less credible and makes the readers not to fully trust it. The STD introduces the number of cases as **two cases**. This strategy reminds the readers of the two murders committed. One is for Sharon and the second one for the fetus -her unborn baby. Through this use, the author seems to be advancing a case against the perpetrators by implying on the magnitude of the case; thus the ideology of framing the perpetrators as culpable is at work.

7. DN Article 7 (2018)
Oyamo released and re-arrested
Oyamo walked to freedom in the morning but was swiftly re-arrested by detectives who were waiting outside Homabay police station.
8. STD Article 8 (2018)
Detectives stage suspect's release

The DN uses a wordplay strategy by juxtaposing the lexical items **released** and **re-arrested** to stress the contrast brought about by the usage. This contrast helps to create an image of the actions affecting Oyamo in the readers' minds. It also helps to make the story dramatic thus interesting to read. In the opening sentence author uses the lexical item **walked** to intensify the actions of being freed. In the text clause, the author uses the word **but** to bring out contrast between freedom and captivity; situations under which Oyamo finds himself in within a very short period of time captured by the lexical item **swiftly**. All these choices of words are used to make the story dramatic by creating a mental picture of the turn of events in the readers' minds. This language use, in the long run becomes speculative and thus biased.

The STD chooses to report the same event very briefly rendering the report factual and objective.

The use of the word **stage** has same reference to **release** and **re-arrested** used in the DN. The only difference is on the effect it has on the readers. The former lexical item is less dramatic. The DN uses the suspects name **Oyamo** making the report impersonal unlike the STD which prefers to use the title **suspect** thus rendering the report personal. As such, the DN reports Oyamo in a neutral sense but the STD prejudices him as likely to have committed the murder.

9. DN Article 9 (2018)
Obado puts on a strong show after day-long date with police
Is he under arrest or just enjoying better security? Police cagey on governor's status
10. STD Article 10 (2018)
Obado's long day with detectives in Kisumu
County chief's lawyers maintain their client was not arrested but had responded to summons by the area DCI

The choice of lexical items **strong** and **show** emphasizes on the manner of Obado's appearance after a long day meeting with the police. This usage of language to imply on Obado's personality as a strong person who is not shaken by any kind of grilling about the murder case is highly subjective since the readers are compelled to view Obado as a strong person. The choice of the word **police** makes the probe less serious since its usage is in such a general sense and it could mean any police ranging from traffic, administration, detectives implying that the meeting between Obado and the police could have been about anything general. Lastly the choice of the word **date** supports this view by making the meeting casual and that it may have been held on a friendly basis despite the fact that it lasted for a whole day. These implications

coupled with the statement **puts a strong show** aims at making the events in the story less serious. It could also imply that the author implicitly aims to frame Obado innocently and support the fact that Obado has no case to answer, an ideology that could be in line with the media house concerned.

The opening statement which is interrogative in nature and followed by an answer purports to support the media ideology of framing his innocence, since the following statement which is a main clause doesn't out rightly answer the question priorly asked. The lexical item **cagey** is appropriately chosen since it carries the main information that serves as an answer to the preceding question. It implies the reluctant nature of the police to give the required information. This strategy leaves the readers in suspense as to whether the governor is innocent or not. It thus pushes them to read on so as to get the answer.

The STD reports the same differently, it doesn't appeal to Obado's appearance after the meeting with the detectives but it does specify, just like DN, that the meeting lasted for a whole day. This makes the report factual. The use the word **detectives** make the meeting serious and very formal.

Unlike in the DN where the author holds back the details of the meeting, the author of the STD pre-exempts the details of the meeting in the opening statement making the reader less curious to read the following story.

11. DN Article 11 (2018)
Obado owns up to Sharon affair
In statement to police, governor confesses that he was in a 'romantic affair' with university student even as he trots out his wife and children in an attempt to shore up his family credentials.
12. STD Article 12 (2018)
Obado brings out family, denies role in Sharon murder.
Governor appears at news conference with wife and son, proclaims innocence and calls for speedy probe into Rongo university student killing.

The DN uses the word **trots out** to capture the manner in which the governor brought to public his family i.e wife and children. The manner intensifies the urgency and significance of showing off his family to the public so as to be accorded the self-lost respect that married men are accorded in the society ie as responsible people. Through this status the writer hopes to rebuild the already spoilt image of the governor, and in a way frame him innocently; an ideology which could be in line with the media house concerned. The use of the word **trots out** also adds to the dramatic way of reporting the story unlike the way the STD author reports through the use of the word **appears** making the action less active. The author of the DN goes on to give out the reason for trotting out of his family as **to shore up his family credentials. To shore up** means to reinforce or support with evidence. The author therefore appropriately uses these words to show how Obado uses his family to support his intention of showing the public that indeed he is a properly married man who is happy and responsible. He therefore could not have done what is being alleged against him. In an attempt to re-create a positive image of himself, Obado further on and unknowingly assassinates his character as an immoral person who flirts with young girls yet he is married. The readers will not fail to wonder what a 'properly' married man like him would be doing with young girls; making the readers not to sympathize with him.

In the STD the reference made to the family is more specific. This family is made up of three members only i.e wife, son and Obado but the DN does this in a more general sense and the family seems to have more than three members i.e wife, obado and children. The author of the DN chooses the lexical item **confess** deliberately to imply that Obado admits that he was in a relationship with Sharon. One normally confesses to a sin or a crime committed with an intention of being sorry. This therefore points out that Obado indeed knows that it's not proper before the eyes of the public to have such a relationship. Through this confession, Obado's image is tarnished before the public. The readers can't fail to link him to the murder. The author therefore uses this language to frame Obado culpable of the committed crime; an ideology that could be in line with the concerned media house. Through this confession, Obado also manages to ask the public and more particularly his wife and children to forgive him for keeping the relationship.

The STD captures the same story by reporting that the governor **proclaims** innocence. The choice of the word **proclaims** shows that he declared publicly that he never murdered Sharon. Through the use of the word denial the author disassociates Obado completely from the murder case.

13. DN Article 13 (2018)
Governor struggles to show that there was animosity between him and his girlfriend
14. STD Article 14 (2018)
Governor denies any link to the murder of student, says he planned to support her.

The use of the word **struggles** by the author properly captures the difficulties faced by the governor to prove his innocence. He may have really labored to show his innocence amidst the lots of evidences available pointing to a possible conflict between him and Sharon. The word **girlfriend** is appropriately deployed in the place of either university student or Sharon only after the governor confesses to the 'sin of being in a romantic affair' with the slain student. This usage cements allegations leveled against the governor thus making the readers more contempt with him.

The STD reports this more directly. It uses the word **denies** to dissociate Obado from the murder case. The use of the word **planned** further alienates the governor from the murder case since it captures a set of actions he had intend to make in favor of the slain student. For that matter, he meant well for her hence could not have gone ahead and murdered her. This language use thus frames him innocently.

15. DN Article 15 (2018)
Obado arrested, to be charged with murder
Migori governor will be arraigned in court on Monday. His lawyer says they will challenge the charges as the DNA results is not proof of the crime committed.
16. STD Article 16 (2018)
Arrested Obado to be charged with murder
In a dramatic day, police arrest Migori governor - who becomes the fifth suspect in custody - and announce that he will be charged in court on Monday

There is same choice of lexical items on the headings of both news items; the only difference is in the positioning of the first words in each headline.

In STD, the word **dramatic** implies that a series of actions took place before the arrest of the governor. This could also imply that it was not an easy task to arrest him. The use of the term

Monday specifies the date of charge. The use of the word **charged** reports Obado to be an accused person who is guilty of the crimes leveled against him.

The DN reports the same event using the word **arraigned**. This is a more official lexical item to imply a court procedure. It implies that the governor is yet to go through the court procedure before being charged. It thus implies that the governor is not guilty until this is proven. A fact which is supported very first by the governor's lawyer who says they will **challenge the charges**. The lexical item **challenge** indicates some form of protest over the allegations leveled against the governor.

17. DN Article 17 (2018)

Bleak days ahead of governor

Ten more days: Governor accused of murdering his girlfriend walked into court a bullish man yesterday highfiving friends and looking forward to his freedom - The judge had other ideas.

18. STD Article 18 (2018)

Obado is not special

Governors Shock: Judge rejects Migori county chief's bail application, says his release could pose threat to witnesses. She also rules that he should not be given special treatment in remand prison.

These two stories talk about the agonies the governor continued to be subjected to during his custody. The choice of the lexical item **bleak** accurately denotes the miseries the governor is going through; a situation which is yet to last for some time. By dwelling so much on the manner in which the governor appears in court the opening statements become subjective and speculative. The choice of the words **bullish man** and **highfiving** reveals the confidence and pride with which the governor walked into the court. He was optimistic that he would be released then but was meted by an equally rude shock which is implied in the long pause separating the judge's ideas which are different from Obado's expectations. The contrast of ideas is well captured by juxtaposing Obado's ideas and expectations which are presented in a long complex clause with judge's idea which is presented briefly in a short clause after the pause. The text doesn't introduce the readers to the judge's story right away, a technique used by the author of the text to make the readers more curious to read on.

On the other hand, the author of the STD text pre-empts the details of the judge's ideas in the opening statement thus quenching the readers thirst on the story. The standard version is factual and straight to the point. It doesn't appeal to Obado's character traits.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The choice of words is of importance in news articles. The study observes that the use of one word as opposed to the other can change the tone of the sentence and create a totally different connotation for the reader and consequently. As such, different representation of the same event is created. The study thus realizes that some articles use some highly biased choices of words that are subjective while others are objective: a more neutral choice for "man holding the trump card in the killing of Sharon Otieno" would be "the main person in the killing of Sharon Otieno". Instead of "a quiet man with intimidating physique", one might say "a reserved man with a strongly built body" which are more objective formulations. Likewise, the phrase "walked into court a bullish man yesterday highfiving friends" has the subjective adjective **bullish** and the verb **highfiving**. "walking into court yesterday greeting friends" would have been a more objective choice. This means therefore that lexical choice has a certain effect on the impression that the readers receive from an article.

The aforementioned observations about the nature of language use and effects of lexical choices on news consumers concern only the news murder articles analyzed and as such, they cannot be generalized to apply to the representation of events in other news genres like commentaries, letters to the editors, political discourse etc in the said newspapers or other newspapers not handled in this study.

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