

Adapting *Esu* Reportage Tactics in some Terrorism Media Reports in Nigeria

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Abstract. The activity of the media reporter in Nigeria is synonymous to the African traditional *Esu*, versatile, clever and witty. Previous studies on Media Terrorism Discourse have focused more on the bias and ideology of the media in such fields as linguistics, stylistics, critical discourse analysis and sociology but have largely neglected the socio-religious component of the media reportage on terrorism which would have facilitated useful cues in understanding and tackling the malaise of terrorism in Nigeria especially. This paper is therefore designed to investigate socio-religious strategies, ideologies and context in terrorism media reports with a view to establishing a connection between modern media terrorism reportage and African traditional belief of reportage. Odeunmi's Pragmatic Strategies together with *Odu Irete-Egutan* comprising socio-religious strategies such as false attraction, sympathy through fraudulent means, false impression of innocence and harmlessness was adopted as a theoretical framework for the study. Fifty recent Boko Haram terrorism texts in Nigerian Guardian Newspaper were selected and examined purposively. The analysis showed that three strategies utilized by *Esu* in the Ifa corpus of *Irete-Egutan* are evident in the modern media reportage. The work therefore concluded that the knowledge of traditional reportage would facilitate a better understanding of modern terrorism study.

Keywords: Irete-Egutan, pragmatic strategies, Ifa chronicles/corpus, terrorism media reportage, Boko Haram

1. Introduction

The African traditional report system, though archaic, has a predominant influence on the ways of lives of the Africans. This does not only involve language, culture, dressing but also sensitive situations as war

and conflict resolution. The media which are crucial part of conflict resolution in every nation; traditional and modern have their strategic ways of getting succinct information which are useful to the society. The role of the African traditional divinity *Esu* is to gather and report information to Olodumare.

Esu, the African trickster divinity is known for its witty and clever maneuvers in sensitive situations. He has even been known as the eye of Olodumare on earth (Dopamu, 2000). Idowu (1967) also believes that *Esu*, is known for its prowess as a neutral and successful traditional reporter. *Esu* is identified by Dopamu (2000) as the Yoruba trickster god whose role was to go to fro the earth to gather (pry into peoples' businesses) information for other gods and Olodumare. He is believed to be one of the primordial divinities, conspicuous, popular and occupies a prominent position among the numerous Yoruba divinities.

Idowu (1969) debunks the popular belief that evil is associated with *Esu* rather affirms strongly that *Esu* demands justice, fair play and rectitude. Dopamu (2000) on his part asserts that the Yoruba put almost every evil tendency and practice in man down to the agency of *Esu* and agrees that he over-empathizes with people by assuming a subjective stance or forming solidarity with the bereaved. This is evident in the Yoruba popular saying about him that: "The litigant died at home, Laaroye died outside; take help me with the load...the mediator received the cudgel on the head". These two seemingly separate claims corroborate the claim of Fortner (2009) about the modern media. He examines the difficult and often contradictory role of the media in terrorism reports. He analyses the media role as: "participants in evil; dupes in evil circumstances; signallers of evil; legitimizing evil; sensationalists" (Fortner, 2009, pp. 340-343).

The claim that *Esu* usually takes a neutral stance in evil circumstances and also could signal evil seems to describe the media reporters. It is based on this that the researcher intends to propose that the Nigerian media adopt some of the traditional systems or strategies of *Esu* to gather richer and authentic news that could foster a pragmatic understanding and resolution of terrorism.

2. The Media

The media is a powerful tool that disseminates information through various means: television, newspaper, radio, internet, and books. The media gathers, analyses, and interprets public affairs. It also entertains and serves as social contacts. The media uses language and signs for agenda settings and foregrounding of certain issues in the minds of the public (Hocking 1982: 88). Folarin (2002:75) observed that the press media predetermine issues that are regarded as important at a given time in a giving society, that it wants the peoples' mind to believe and this in turn affects what people talk about. Van dijk (1999:36) asserts that: 'the media and their socially constructed discourse are handed down as "the main source of people's knowledge, attitudes and ideologies'. It is the medium that links the ordinary citizens and the government in communication. Not only does the Media disseminate information, it also unites people across borders. Isola (2008) believes that the media performs social functions as upholding national solidarity, and reshaping conflicting social norms.

The prominence or recurring reportage of certain events leave lasting impressions on the minds of the citizenries and in turn affects their belief about happenings around their world. (Foucault 1990: 64, 66). Lewis (2008:4) opines that the media representation of any event depends on complex and institutional processes. The media is thus, best understood as a set of relationships through which meanings are generated and shared through a given social formation.

3. Terrorism Media Reports

Chika *et al* (2006) opines that terrorism and the media provide for each other necessary conditions necessary to thrive. Fortner (2009) corroborates this assertion by affirming that the role of the media, especially in crises are such as: participants in evil, dupes in evil circumstances, and legitimising evil. Like him, Schmid (1989:540) considers the media to be the terrorist's "accomplices" while Hoffman (2006:183) refers to the media as the terrorist's "best

friend". As such, terrorists and the media seem to be in a symbiotic relationship. In that, terrorist deploy the news media to strengthen their campaigns of terror. Bassioni (1981) confirms this position when he avers that terrorists are drawn to news media coverage because they desire maximum publicity for their messages and symbolic actions. The terrorist carefully put up activities suitable for the news. Jenkins (1975) observes that "terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the international press." Usually, the terror acts put up are for the public views rather than the victims.

MacDougall (1973) and Hulteng (1973) when commenting on the structure and function of editorial reporting, opine that as prominent as the Media are in mobilising heroic success in a struggle, so also can they be used as objects of disunity. These scholars agree that terrorism and the media are in symbiotic agreement. Because through the media, the terrorists get their terror acts air.

Given that the media in reflecting 'reality' according to Carter and Steider (2004:4) gather information on terrorism news from different sources in constructing a hegemonic definitions of what reality is; Idowu's (1967) opinion that the source of African traditional reportage is hinged on the leverage of reality constructed by *Esu*.

4. Studies on Terrorism Media Reports

Studies on media report on terrorism have enjoyed a wide range of attention in scholarship. At the moment, most of these interests have emanated from linguistics, core journalism and social sciences. However, there are growing attention on the contagion between media and terrorism framing in related disciplines.

Falola (1998:178-180) studied the Kaduna State riot of 1987; gathering his data from the Southern region of the state. He states that the media is capable of playing negative role in violence reports. He gathered his data from print in broadcast media in six northern states in Nigeria. The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria(FRCN), the Guardian, the Standard and the Punch newspaper. Between March 9 and11, 1987 the FRCN is reported to have broadcasted regular bulletins (in both Hausa and English) concerning the massacre of Muslims and burning of mosques in Kafanchan, while they failed to report details on the counter-attack on Christians. *The Guardian* of March 14, *The Standard* of March 13 and *The Punch* of March 14 reported damage to the Christian

communities while ignoring that of the Muslims. Largely, Falola 1998 based his study on cursory survey of public broadcast information, video and cassettes, literature, magazine, print media, radio and television broadcast. The current study differs in that it compares two terrorism news reports in Nigeria; the MEND movement and the Boko Haram insurgent in Nigeria. Mainly, this work is based on a cursory survey of public broadcast information, video and cassettes, literature, magazine, print media, radio and television broadcast.

In the field of core Journalism, Arrese & Perucha (2006) conducted a research on the evaluative and engagement in journalistic commentary and news report. It presented an analysis of the newspaper across a range of different article types and languages to show their linguistic pattern in expressing certain opinions in the media. There focus was on the description of writer-oriented features in interaction in journalistic commentaries and public blogs. The work reveals the presence and patterning of various linguistic resources for the expression of evaluation and engagement in journalistic discourse. The work reveals various positions expressed by textual voices and means through which writers implicitly or explicitly state certain opinions.

Existing studies on the Nigeria terrorism media reportage in linguistics have focused majorly on Boko Haram (BH) terrorism. These include stylistic analysis (e.g. Agbedo 2012); critical analysis of language variation and ideological representations (e.g. Chilwa 2011, Chilwa and Adegoke 2012); pragmatic roles of affective stance (e.g. Chilwa and Ifukor 2015); Discourse investigation of the ideological implication of BH framing in Nigerian news discourse media reports of *the Punch and the Nation*; with insights from CDA and Pragmeme (Yushu'a 2012; Odeunmi 2014; Ayoola and Olaosun 2014).

The current work differs from the previous linguistics studies in that it combines African traditional reportage to Modern Media.

5. Theoretical Framework

The popular Odu Irete-Egutan in Dopamu (2000) describing Esu antics was used for studying the traditional African beliefs, while Odeunmi (2013) Pragmatic Strategies was adopted for studying the modern terrorism media bias.

The Odu corpus called *Irete-Egutan* shows how *Esu* uses his treacherous skills to bring truth to the limelight through the use of such linguistic strategies

as: false attraction, sympathy through fraudulent means, false impression of innocence and harmlessness.

Esu in the Yoruba cosmology is the enforcer of the will of Olodumare. In the Yoruba philosophy, *Esu* emerges as a divine trickster, a disguise-artist, a mischief-maker, a rebel, a challenge of orthodox, a shape-shifter, and an enforcer deity. *Esu* is the keeper of the divine authority with which Olodumare created the universe; a neutral force who controls both the benevolent and the malevolent supernatural powers. As a neutral force, he straddles all realms and acts as an essential factor in any attempt to resolve the conflicts between contrasting but coterminous forces in the world. The role of *Esu* as a portal opener of the past and present corresponds with the role of modern media reportage. The current study therefore adapts *Esu* tactics and strategies in the Boko Haram news report in Nigeria.

Fortner's (2009) proposition that the media play difficult and often contradictory role in terrorism reports corresponds to the activity of *Esu* in the African traditional religion. *Esu* is known as a freewill god that stays neutral(objectivity of the media) in the activities of humankind yet mediating between humans(populace) and *Olodumare* (government). The claim of Fortner(2000) that the media are: "participants in evil; dupes in evil circumstances; signallers of evil; legitimizing evil; sensationalists" (Fortner, 2009, pp. 340-343) are also similar to scholastic representations of *Esu* as a trickster versatile, clever and witty divinity. He is also known to put other people's activities upon himself just as the media. In the words of Dopamu (2000), the Yoruba put almost every evil tendency and practice in man down to his agency.

Odeunmi (2013) Pragmatic Strategies identified eight strategies peculiar to framing terrorist in the media. These include: unshielded exposition through evocation of antecedent, recourse to antecedent, appeal to emotions, blunt condemnation, negative labelling, identity assertion, strategic management of critical voices, specification through setting and location mention, negative impact narration, overlexicalisation and underlexicalisation, and indirect condemnation.

Unshielded exposition is used to bluntly assert a proposition to be either true or false. Recourse to antecedent means referring to the past in order to foreground a current happening or situation. Appeal to emotions is used to appeal to the senses of the audience for empathy. Blunt condemnation is used to evaluate or castigate a group. Negative labelling is used to describe a perceived negative attitude. Identity assertion means identifying a character or

participant of an action. Strategic management of critical voices is used to open a dialogic space in which the audience is guided towards believing that a situation is bad. Indirect condemnation is a politeness strategy in form of euphemism. Overlexicalisation and underlexicalisation like exaggeration and litotes; the media use them to gratify or reduce the magnitude of an action.

These theories are used in the analysis of fifty samples of data on Boko Haram terrorism, which have been purposively selected from the Guardian Newspaper.

6. Analysis

The contextual beliefs and pragmatic strategies deployed by the media reporters are explicated in explaining the agency of the media actor in the news relating to terrorism. Samples from the fifty extracts selected from the Guardian newspaper are explained below:

Text 1:

Boko Haram has claimed to be fighting for an Islamic state in Africa's most populous Nation and largest oil producers. The group also claimed responsibility for the February 19 kidnapping of a French family of seven over the border in Cameroun. Their whereabouts remain unknown ...Members of the group had on November 1 last year said they were ready to ceasefire and listed conditions. The conditions included the arrest and prosecution of a former governor of Borno State, and also the dialogue must take place in Saudi Arabia. They also demanded that all their member, who were arrested and under the custody of security agencies be released immediately, just as their wives and children who were displaced during the crises should be rehabilitated into the society to allow room for dialogue with the federal government ("Boko Haram declares ceasefire, gives conditions for peace," *The Guardian*, Tuesday, Jan 29 2013, pg1)

The media used a false impression of innocence (ignorance) in asserting the identity of the BH terrorist. This is buttressed by the media in their use of such verbiage and phrases in form of hedges such as *claimed*, *said*, and *to be fighting* in '...Boko Haram has claimed to be fighting ...', '...Members of the group had on November 1 last year said ...', and '...to be fighting for an Islamic state...' to describe the terrorists in order to create social distance between them and the self-acclaimed terrorists. Their use of hedges above contradicts the attitude marking foregrounded through recourse (evocation) to antecedent used by the media in, '...

Members of the group had on November 1 last year said they were ready to ceasefire and listed conditions...' The strategy of evocation of antecedent is used to close the dialogic gap the media tried to create in the beginning of the proposition and made it evident that the media is aware that the BH terrorists exist. This is further buttressed by the fact that the media began its introduction of the group as a group known for fighting for an Islamic state in Africa, the clear use of identity assertion which further described them as fundamentalist and extremist close the social gap. The media in the above extract used false impression of innocence (ignorance) and harmlessness in withholding a known terrorist reality in order to appear to be opening a dialogic space.

Text 2:

Tears flow freely from their eyes. Others sobbed and wept uncontrollably. As survivors of the recent sectarian crisis in some Northern states narrated their ordeal and escape from the Boko Haram's den, even the most stoic among them broke down. The scene was the cemetery of the Goodnews, Church of Christ, Maiduguri where its pastor, George Orji, killed during the crisis by the fundamentalists, was buried yesterday in Maiduguri, Borno State capital. Three pastors and 15 other Christians were allegedly killed by the sect members during the violence. But Northern Elders under the auspices of Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) yesterday attributed such crisis in the country to *the prevailing poverty and deprivation* which they said the Federal Government has failed to address. The Arewa Leaders said Nigerians should see the Boko Haram mayhem in Bauchi, Yobe, Borno and Kano states, with the agitation by Niger Delta militants as protests by "those who feel aggrieved by the prevailing conditions in the country," noting that "this attitude is agitated by the widening gap between our affluent and ostentatious leaders and the broad masses of the poverty stricken and deprived people." ("Survivors on escape from Boko Haram crisis," *The Guardian*, October 8, 2009, p.2)

Through the use of appeal to emotions in text 2, the media described the emotional display of the survivors of BH incident who cried uncontrollably for their loss in the tragedy. Like *Esu* in the *Irete-Egutan* corpus, the media used sympathy through fraudulent means by acting on the emotions of the citizenries to appeal to the government to pardon the BH terrorists. Explicitly, the media prioritize the loss of the victims but implicitly blamed the government for bad leadership. This is evident when the media asserted the poverty stricken nature of some Nigerians

Northerners who engage in the acts of terrorism in, ‘... noting that **“this attitude is agitated by the widening gap between our affluent and ostentatious leaders and the broad masses of the poverty stricken and deprived people...”**’ Through impact narration, the media appealed to the emotions of the already hardened government who were determined to deal with the BH terrorists. The Arewa Consultative forum as intravocalised by the media like *Esu* redirects the attention of the survivors and government from the havoc wrecked; to the predominant situations that caused it. The negative impact narration was underplayed by advancing the economic deprivation in Northern Nigeria, indexing poverty. Through appeal to emotions, they explained that the sectarian crisis was to show the BH agitation against the government. Through labeling, the media succeeded in framing the government as insensitive to the suffering of the people thereby advocating that the killing was to alert the government to boost the economic situation of northern Nigeria.

Text3:

Rev. Musa Asake told journalists yesterday in Abuja that about 1,250 Christians had been killed and more than 200 churches burnt in the last three years by Boko Haram. He said: ”statistics released by International Agencies show that more Christians were killed in Nigeria in the year 2012 alone for their faith than the rest of the world combined. In the last three years behind the isolated bombings in Abuja, the Boko Haram members have bombed over 200 churches and killed over 1,250 Christians worshipping in their churches, burnt and destroyed whole villages, targeted specific communities/individuals and have made good every threat they published at inception, to wit the elimination of all Christians from Northern Nigeria and the total Islamisation of the north by imposition of strict sharia rule”...(**“CAN says more Christians killed by insurgents in North,”The Guardian, wed, April 17, 2013,pg2)**

In text 3, like text 2 above, the media used sympathy in describing the Christian religion as the most attacked religion. The media showed subjective or evaluative stance in accounting for the record of the number of people killed as foregrounded as Christians and places of worship burnt were reinforced against the importance of lives wasted. The media use of sympathy strategy was borne out of subjective ideology for the religion rather than the people killed and property destroyed. The intravocalisation of a religion authority in, **“CAN says more Christians killed by insurgents in North...”**is a strategic extrajudicial way of rousing the sentiments of the public (especially Christians);

implicating that the attack is an idealistic killing based on the principles of Jihad. The attacker premised the attack on religious context indexed by such features as holy war in, **“...and have made good every threat they published at inception, to wit the elimination of all Christians from Northern Nigeria and the total Islamisation of the north by imposition of strict sharia rule...”**

This is evident in the unshielded exposition through evocation of antecedent used by the reporter to expose the church as a place of incessant attack. The use of specification through setting and location mention is a pointer of sympathy strategy in, **“...the Boko Haram members have bombed over 200 churches and killed over 1,250 Christians worshipping in their churches, burnt and destroyed whole villages, targeted specific communities/individuals.** The claim by the BH terrorist to have made good every threat they published at inception, **“...to wit the elimination of all Christians from Northern Nigeria and the total Islamisation of the North by imposition of strict sharia rule...”** indexes Jihad (a form of holy war that declares the extermination of infidels) depicting extra-judicial killing and execution as a way of fulfilling religious obligations.

Text 4

Boko Haram, which in Hausa loosely translates to mean “western education is sinful” said they were fighting to impose the Islamic laws on Nigeria. At least 2,800 people have died in the North and Abuja since the group unleashed their violence in 2009. Its most lethal attack killed at least 186 people in Kano in January 2012 in coordinated bombings and shootings. ...the group has repeatedly struck churches during services, at Christmas and Easter killing scores of people. A bomb attack on St. Theresa’s Catholic Church in Madalla on Abuja’s outskirts during a packed Christmas mass in 2011 killed at least 37 people. Last Easter Sunday, a bombing at a church compound in Northern Kaduna during service killed at least 36 people. In other major attacks, gunmen killed at least 19 people in two attacks on Christian worshippers in the Nigerian city of Kano and in the North-eastern town of Maiduguri on April 29,2012. In June, three gunmen sprayed bullets at a congregation of a church in Biu town, in northeast Borno State. (“Boko Haram announces ceasefire with conditions,” (The Guardian Tuesday January 29, 2013 pg 6)

Through the use of false impression of innocence and harmlessness, the media explained the disdain the group has towards not only western education in

‘...“western education is sinful”...’ but everything western like civilization, Christianity in, ... **the group has repeatedly struck churches during services, at Christmas and Easter killing scores of people...**’ and democracy in, ‘...” **said they were fighting to impose the Islamic laws on Nigeria...**’ practiced in the country.(said, at least, since the group unleashed their violence- evocation of antecedent, implicitly inviting the western countries, elites, and government against the extremists. Through the strategy of harmlessness also as a working term (ignorance), the media created a dialogic gap in the use of verbiage and extraocalisation in ‘...Boko Haram, which in Hausa loosely translates to mean “western education is sinful” **said** they were fighting to impose the Islamic...’ and in the extravocalisation of, ‘... **Boko Haram, which in Hausa loosely translates to mean “western education is sinful”** to redirect the readers’ attention to the BH terrorists are all indexes of false impression of innocence and harmlessness depicted by the media reporters.

Text 5

A top security source confided in our correspondent that the police authorities got a hint of a plan by the group of bomb the building as part of its violent campaign against the Federal Government. The group followed the attack on the police headquarters with another on a drinking joint in Maiduguri, Borno State Capital, two weeks ago, twenty-five people were killed in the attack. A riot policeman on duty at the NNPC towers (name withheld) told our correspondent that the security personnel at the building were hurriedly deployed. (**Boko Haram: Police Foil Plot to Bomb NNPC HQ,** *The Guardian*, Monday, July 4, 2011, page 2.)

In text 5, the media also used false attraction by directly bringing in a public participant which is described as a top security in order give credibility to their claim yet refusing to mention his identity. The intravocalisation is used to raise the authenticity and confidentiality of the information gathered. Thereby, attracting the public. Another recourse to the media’s use of false attraction is seen in the uses of verbiage and adjectives such as *confided*, *violent campaign* and *riot police*.

The study revealed that the three strategies of *Irete-Egutan*: false attraction, sympathy through fraudulent means, false impression of innocence and harmlessness together with the eight pragmatic strategies identified by Odeunmi are fairly evident in all the excerpts. In all, the commonest of the *Esu* strategies was sympathy through fraudulent means depicted in the media’s use of appeal to emotions,

strategic management of critical voices, unshielded exposition through evocation of antecedent, and identity assertion. False attraction was manifested through the use of appeal to emotions, identity assertion and negative labelling. False impression of innocence and harmlessness were prevalent and these were depicted by unshielded exposition through evocation of antecedent, recourse to antecedent, blunt condemnation, negative labelling, identity assertion, strategic management of critical voices, specification through setting and location mention, negative impact narration and indirect condemnation.

7. Conclusion

The paper examined the strategies of *Esu* in the traditional African reportage and compared it to the linguistic cues of modern terrorism media reportage to show that implicitly the modern media reportage takes cue from the African tradition.

Odeunmi’s Pragmatic Strategies was adopted as a theoretical framework for the study while the data include Boko Haram terrorism reports in Nigerian Guardian Newspaper. The analysis showed that three strategies utilized by *Esu* in the Ifa corpus of *Irete-Egutan* are evident in the modern media reportage. Hence, the knowledge of traditional reportage would facilitate a better understanding of modern terrorism study.

In future, other African beliefs will be explored in terrorism media discourse study.

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