

Morpho-Stylistic Analysis Of Crisis Motivated Words In Online Newspaper Headlines Of Kogi State Election Of 2019

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ABSTRACT

Words could both be an instrument of war and peace. Journalists could build a nation and at the same time destroy what has been built over the years by the means of language. This study, therefore, investigated the morpho-stylistics of crisis motivated words in online newspaper headlines of Kogi State election of 2019. The purpose of the study was to identify and explain morpho-stylistically the linguistic features dominant in such discourse that motivate or trigger crisis. The study was anchored on Halliday's (1984) aspects of Language Stratification of SFG. The corpuses of the study which comprised ten headlines were collected at random from ten online news platforms. The items were analyzed in accordance with the tenets of Language Stratification of SFG. The findings revealed that the morphological formations dominant in the headlines that are capable of motivating crisis were compounding and neologisms or coinages; and those formations mark the style of the editors/authors. It is concluded that words could indeed trigger crisis if not properly managed. It is, therefore, recommended that editors and authors should select their words carefully before publishing in order to avert the unforeseen crisis.

Keywords: morphostylistics, News headlines, Kogi Elections, language stratification and crisis motivated words.

INTRODUCTION

Language, they say, could be used as an instrument of war or peace; it all depends on how it is used. One's choice of words and manner of uttering them could trigger war or cause crisis if the content and form are not properly managed (Agu, 2015). This probably explains why some headlines in both print and electronic media are crisis motivated because of the editors' choice of words and manner of structuring them. It is true that euphemism helps to reduce tension in some news contents but editors or reporters prefer to often use the direct words of the users which, sometimes, provoke the other party being addressed. A language situation of this such, therefore, is worthy of study in order to identify and explain morpho-stylistically the linguistic features dominant in such discourse that motivate or trigger crisis.

Meanwhile, Lamichhane (2017) says that newspaper headline is a key element in newspaper as it conveys the main message to the readers and it works with the visual to get attention and communicate the creative concept. He goes on to add that the headline is one text which can carry the message of the body part of new story. The headline should persuade the readers that there is persuasive information in the body part of the text. Words that trigger crisis, just like the body part, attract readers' attention. Differently, Morpho-stylistics is a term that is coined from the analogy of morphology and stylistics. Agbedo (2015) defines morphology as one of the levels of linguistic analysis that seeks to study the internal structure of a word. Morphology, therefore, studies word structure and how words change their forms when they change grammatical function. On the other hand, stylistics as a branch of applied linguistics, has received different definitions from different scholars in language and literary circle. In 1909, Charles Bally's *Traite de Stylistique Francaise* had proposed stylistics an academic discipline. Roman Jakobson used 'poetic language' to designate the style of a literary text which is used to distinctively mark the language of literature from ordinary or everyday language. Currently, stylistics is understood to mean "a method of textual interpretation which the primacy of place is assigned to language" (Simpson, 2004, p. 2). Crystal and Davy (1969) view stylistics as a linguistic discipline that studies certain aspects of language variation. From the above scholarly definitions, stylistics in a nutshell, could be understood to mean the linguistic study of style. Morpho-stylistics, therefore, is the study of morphological features that are embedded in a text that mark the text producer's linguistic idiosyncrasies. In the context of this study, morpho-stylistics connotes the study of words and phrases that follow similar or different morphological processes preponderantly deployed in online news headlines that motivate crisis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent times, scholars have focused attention in stylistics to describe the operation of language across disciplines because stylistics has remained a valid tool in analyzing language operations. It is in the light of this that Ryzhkov (2010) and (2012) analyzed the morpho-stylistics of derivation in Korean language translated in Russian and Ukrainian. The studies suggested that prefixation is a valid method for deriving nouns which bears emotional or expressive coloration. Ali (2015), on his part did a morpho-semantic reading of the Glorious Koran translated in English. The study discussed the practical aspect in rendering some morphologically assimilated shift into English. It is found that there are context-bound morphologically shifts in the text. Also, the finding postulates that change in morphological patterns is due to some certain rhetorical considerations, driven from context, as a reliable criterion for determining the intended meaning. These studies are related the present work in terms of morphology; however, these scholars did not extend their works to cover online new headlines that motivate crisis. More closely, Pam (2012) Agu (2015), Hassoon (2016),

and Lamichhane (2017) stylistically investigated newspaper reportages and headlines, respectively. These scholars found that print media used figurative, graphological, lexico-semantic, and syntactic features in the reports and headlines. However, the present study primarily concern itself with the analysis of crisis motivated headlines in online news platforms in Kogi election for 2019. From the review, it is evidently clear that as important as Kogi election was, and as important as media discourse and stylistics are in the domain of language, there seemed not to be an in-depth linguistic scholarship on crisis motivated words and phrases in online news platforms from the standpoint of morphology and stylistics. This gap is what the paper intends to fill.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts aspects of M.A.K. Halliday's (1985) Language Stratification of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). Halliday propounded the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) in early 1960s. Halliday's work has a foundation on the works of Ferdinand de Saussure, Louis Hjelmslev, Malinowski and the Prague School Linguists. In a similar way, Halliday drew insights from the works of American anthropologists Boas, Sapir and Whorf. However, Halliday's greatest inspiration came from J.R. Firth, the man who he owes the notion of language as a semiotic system. So, Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is an approach to linguistics that considers language as a social semiotic system. SFG is, therefore, a language theory centered around the notion of language function (Halliday, 1985). In other words, Halliday emphasizes how language functions in texts (spoken or written) and the nexus between language and what it is used for. Hallidayan theory describes a text as any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language. Meaning is reached through language but text is the process of making meaning in context.

Language Stratification

Halliday (1994) contends that language is a semiotic system, which consists of various strata or levels. He adds that the strata cover the sound system (phonology), the writing system and the wordings (orthography or graphology) and grammar (vocabulary, morphology and syntax). Here, we noticed that grammar and vocabulary are not different strata; they are poles of a single continuum known as *Lexicogrammar* (Hassan, 1987). In a like manner, morphology and syntax are not different strata; they are both part of grammar. Furthermore, Halliday expands the 'content' into two, a lexicogrammar and semantics (Halliday & Mathiessen, 1999). This is, therefore, what enables the meaning of a language to expand more or less indefinitely. The rationale for this expansion can best be explained in terms of the functions which language serves in the lives of humans (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014).

Halliday and Mathiessen (2014) emphasize that we use language in carrying out interaction with other people. This suggests that grammar has to interface with what goes on outside the language but at same time, it has to organize to interpret reality (experiential function) and to enact social processes (interpersonal function), so that they can be transformed into wordings (textual Function). This is achieved by splitting the task into two. In stage one, the interface part, experiential and interpersonal relationships are transformed into meanings; this is in the stratum of semantics. In stage two, the meaning is further transformed into wordings; this is in the stratum of lexicogrammar. These meanings are expressed from the viewpoint of the speaker or writer. Halliday (1994) posits that language is broadly organized into four strata _ semantics, lexicogrammar, phonology and phonetics. This organization is further reduced into 'content' and 'expression' strata. 'Content' is further reduced into lexicogrammar and semantics; while 'expression' is reduced to

phonology and phonetics. It is pertinent to state that the expression strata represents the actual mode of expression, that is, the use of sounds in sending messages across; while the content strata represents the words on the page and the sense they carry.

From the foregoing theoretical discussions, Halliday justifies that text (spoken or written) may be descriptively analyzed vis-à-vis language strata, since language is considered functional in the society. Therefore, in the analysis of the current study, we shall adopt Halliday's theory which cuts across some levels of language (lexicology and morphology).

METHODOLOGY

The study is a descriptive survey. Data for the study were collected from ten Online News platforms: (i) tribuneonlineng.com (ii) punchng.com News (iii) guardian.ng News, (iv) naijaloaded.com.ng News (v) thecable.ng News (vi) peoplenpolitics.com News (vii) nigerianbulletin.com News, and (viii) pmnewsnigeria.com. (ix) sunnewsonline.com News (x) legit.com News. These media platforms, just like the conventional print and electronic media, disseminate latest information on Nigerian political issues. News items concerning Kogi Election that preceded the election, the items on the Election Day and post Election news items were collected for analysis. In other words, news items that come one month before the election and one month after the election were gathered. Using a simple random sampling technique, ten headlines were collected randomly from the ten Online News platforms mentioned above. A total of ten headlines were used for the analysis. The analysis was done in accordance with the tenet of aspects of language stratification of SFG. Specifically, morphological features that mark the styles of the editors/authors of the News platforms were selected for study.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSIONS

Text 1: *punchng.com__ Congratulating Smart Adeyemi Same as Celebrating an Armed Robber (1/12/2019)*

The word "**Armed Robber**" is a word formed through the morphological process of compounding. This involves the combination of two or more words. The combined words can be with a hyphen or without it. The author's choice of this word was to capture the attention of readers but the word itself is crisis motivated. For example, Adeyemi's supporters might likely find this headline provoking thereby resorting to violence. However, there are other ways of rendering the same message without using the word "**Armed Robber.**" According to Agu (2015), it is undisputable that journalists build nation or even contribute in destroying what has been built over the years through the medium of words.

Text 2: *guardian.ng__ Dino Melaye, Smart Adeyemi Fight Dirty after Kogi West Senatorial Election (2/12/2019)*

Text 2 above contains the word "**Fight Dirty**" which is formed through the morphological process of open compounding. This word is not only impolite but harsh and crisis motivated. Such a word could ignite an unquenchable fire between the political supporters of the flag bearers of these parties. However, the article would have a wider readership because of this choice of words but they may induce crisis.

Text 3: *tribuneonlineng.com* __ *I Will Challenge Temporal, Evaporative and Short-lived Victory of Adeyemi At Tribunal* _ Melaye (1/12/2012)

In the text above, there are two key words that capture the attention of readers. They include 'evaporative' and 'short-lived'. These words are provocative and could induce violence. The word 'evaporative' is derived from the word evaporate which means to transition from a liquid state into gaseous state. Using this adjective to describe the victory of Adeyemi is very provocative because those who stand to gain from this victory will fight. In the same way, the hyphenated compound "short-lived" describes the Adeyemi's victory as tentative. No political figure will be happy with such description. He may encourage his supporters to resort to violence in order to scar the opposition.

Text 4: *thecable.ng* __ *Adeyemi Remains my Political Wife* _Dino (2/12/2012)

The word "**political wife**" is a neologism coined from the word "politics" and "wife". Dino Melaye had used this same word previously because he had defeated Adeyemi severally in politics. The word "political wife" is really derogatory because in Nigerian context women are subordinate to men. By implication, Adeyemi is subordinate to Dino. Adeyemi as well as his supporters would find this word annoying and provocative thereby it may trigger crisis.

Text 5: *naijaloaded.com.ng* __ *Dino Melaye is my Political Houseboy* _Smart Adeyemi (30/11/2019)

Just as Dino addressed Smart as his 'political wife', in response, Smart called him his 'political houseboy.' This coinage could trigger Dino's supporters to resort to uncivilized ways to retaliate. By this action, a full blown crisis may ensue. However, using such a neologism could encourage high patronage of the new item thereby increasing sale. But in reality, words of such negative magnitude is indeed crisis inducing and should be avoided if possible.

Text 6: *peoplenpolitics.com* __ *Adeyemi is a 'thief' Dino Heads to Tribunal* (2/12/2012)

The morpheme '**thief**' is too blunt to be used to describe the victory of Smart Adeyemi. One is innocent until proven guilty by law. However, the outright use of this word is capable to disrupting peace. This is what we call politics of calumny or outright defamation of character which is punishable by law. Anybody that is addressed as a thief may react to that extent that it might breach the peace people enjoy. In a similar way, the supporters of the two parties might clash because of such a word published in news headlines. This clash might take a bad turn and result to loss of lives and property.

Text 7: *nigerianbulletin.com* __ *Thunder Fire You, Never Come To Our House Again, Senator's Daughter Blast Melaye*__ Smart (5/9/2019)

The neologism "Thunder fire you" is coined using the combination of three words: 'thunder', 'fire' and 'you'. This phrase is mostly used in Nigerian parlance to mean that "thunderbolt and its lightening should strike anyone who is considered an enemy". Here, Adeyemi's daughter considers Dino as her father's political enemy, therefore, she evoked thunderbolt to kill him. This phrase is capable of triggering war or at least crisis. How on earth could she wish somebody death because of politics? The author and editor of this article should have euphemized the content of this headline in order to avert the pending crisis that it might trigger. Dino as well as his supporters might overreact through some overt and physical means; so, the choice of this phrase is inappropriate.

Text 8: legit.com __ Nigerians attack Buhari for Describing Yahaya Bello's Emergence as "Victory well won" (18/11/2019)

The headline above contains an open compound word 'Victory well won' which spurred wide condemnation from members of the public. Although the compound word, structurally, does not constitute a threat to people's peace but the meaning that it carries is what makes it look bad. Electorates and other election observers believed that the victory of Bello was manipulated but for a number one citizen of a country to support such a victory with the use of this compound adjective portrayed him as a bias personality. The compound word, therefore, stands binary opposite to what the structure means. Using it by President Buhari is a call for crisis. This perhaps explains why Nigerians reacted angrily when he used that phrase to describe the victory of Bello in Kogi Governorship Election. The editor should have found another way of structuring the phrase or compound for it not to motivate crisis.

Text 9: pmnewsnigeria.com __ Kogi mayhem: PDP Woman leader burnt Alive, APC Supporter Stabbed to death (19/11/2019)

Here, through the use of open compound, the editor and author of this article exposes the political fight between PDP and APC during and after Kogi governorship election. The compounds "woman leader" and "burnt alive" were used by the editor to describe the PDP woman who was unjustly murdered immediately after the election. This ungodly act created a lot of tension in Kogi but some of these media outlets made the tension to grow uncontrollably with the choice of words used in headlines. For example, the phrasal verb "burnt alive" is in itself an emotional compound word that could induce crisis which would further deteriorate the relative peace enjoyed. However, with this kind of words making the headlines of national dailies, it would encourage high patronage because readers would be curious to know what happened next. Aside this, the damage this word could cause is, to say the least, unimaginable.

Text 10: sunnewsonline.com __2019 Election: BELLO MUST GO __ Wada Campaign Council 12/11/2019)

In the text above, "Bello Must Go" is a neologism coined from the famous phrase "Ghana Must Go" used in Nigerian context. This coinage may not sound well to the supporters of Bello and as such, it may resort to crisis. The choice of this word is inappropriate in time and space because at a period like that, it is capable of motivating or inducing crisis.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Compounding and neologisms or coinages were found to be the dominant morphological processes deployed by editors and authors of news articles on these media platforms. These morphological formations were deliberately used in order to attract the attention of the general public on the pressing political issues on the Kogi Elections. However, the editors' and authors' choices of words seemed inappropriate because words of that nature have tendency of triggering crisis. In fact, the supporters and the figures being addressed might misunderstand the intent of the news and overreact thereby disrupting the relative peace people in the area enjoy. In the words of Agu (2015), Journalists have the power to declare war or to pronounce peace by the means of language. This study, therefore, confirms Agu's position on the use of language by mass communicators. The study also concludes that compounding and neologies are the two formations dominant in online media used in the dissemination of information of whatever magnitude. Finally, these morphological formations mark the style of these editors and authors that create these News

headlines. We have, therefore, demonstrated that News headlines could read morpho- stylistically in the analysis of crisis motivated words through the instrumentality of Language Stratification of Hallidayean SFG.

SUGGESTIONS

We suggest that editors and authors should select their words carefully before publishing in order to avert an unforeseen crisis. In other words, they should apply the euphemistic technique in the presentation of sensitive issues in news headlines. That alone will go a long way to preventing crisis. Having said, we suggest also that scholars should carry further studies on the same topic using Halliday's Transitivity or Language Meta-functions.

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APPENDICES



I Will Challenge Temporal And Evaporative Victory Of Adeyemi At Tribunal – Melaye

LATEST NEWS

By Yekini Jimoh - Lokoja — On Dec 1, 2019



L-R: Smart Adeyemi and Dino Melaye



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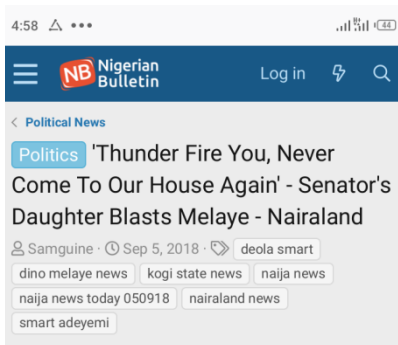
Politics

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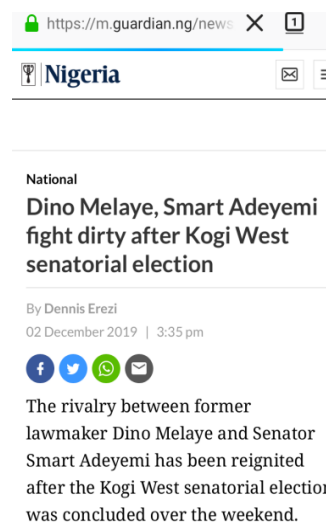
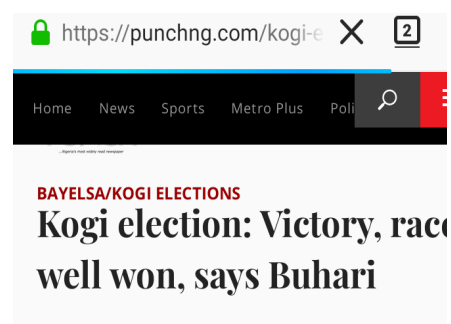
Sen. Dino Melaye has vowed to contest the results of the Kogi West



Dino: Adeyemi remains my political wife | Smart: Melaye is my political houseboy



Sunday, December 1, 2019 3:05 pm | Daily News Headlines | 10 Comment(s)



National

Dino Melaye, Smart Adeyemi fight dirty after Kogi West senatorial election

By Dennis Ezeji
02 December 2019 | 3:35 pm

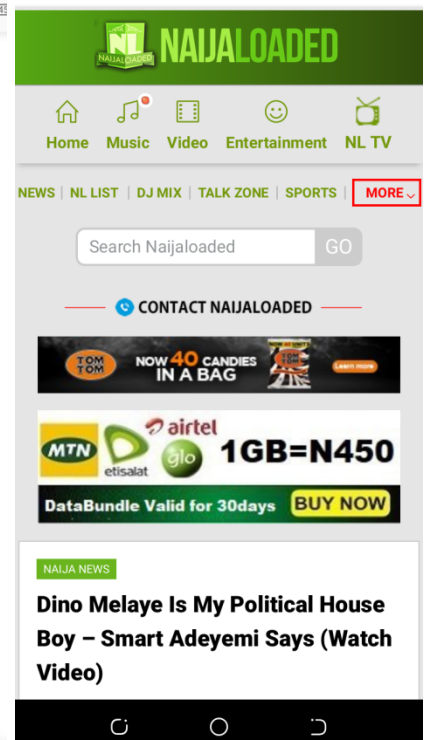
The rivalry between former lawmaker Dino Melaye and Senator Smart Adeyemi has been reignited after the Kogi West senatorial election was concluded over the weekend.



Kogi 2019: Bello must go, Wada campaign council

•We'll recover Kogi from clutches of violence, poverty, hunger

12th November 2019



NAIJA NEWS

Dino Melaye Is My Political House Boy – Smart Adeyemi Says (Watch Video)

