

Participant Roles in Selected Nigerian Newspaper Editorials

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Abstract: The study investigated participant roles in selected editorials in Nigerian newspapers. The data for the study were editorials. The editorials were taken from The Nigerian Tribune, The Punch and The Vanguard. Seven editorials were selected and each editorial was labelled T1, T2, ... T7 for proper analysis. Each main clause of the editorials was also numbered for accurate accountability and reference. The selected editorials were critically read and the participants were identified and their roles were interpreted and discussed. The findings revealed that most of the messages of the texts were realised by participants such as actor, carrier, attribute and goal. The study concluded that the dominance of participants such as actor, carrier, attribute and goal in the editorials showed that editorials were not meant to tell us what happened, but rather, how things were and should be.

Keywords: Editorials, Participants, Systemic Functional linguistics, Experiential Meaning



1. Introduction

Editorials are not only found in newspapers, they are also found in magazines, periodicals, journals, among others. Editorials are not about the writers but about events happening in a given context (Daramola, 1999; Hoffman, 2007). Thus, editorials are the ideas of the writers (Van Dijk, 1996). All ideas about specific events are being developed from contexts, rather than from the personal views of an editor.

An Editorial is the position of a media organization on a particular event which the public is interested in (Afolabi, 2012; Duyile, 2005). Thus, editors write on behalf of their organisations on issues that are of interest to the public. Similarly, Okoro and Agbo (2003:125) consider editorial as “a critical evaluation, interpretation and presentation of significant, contemporary events in such a way as to inform, educate, entertain and influence the reader.” Editorials, thus, shed light on trending issues, and at the same time, enlightens the reader with its succinct use of language. According to Ukonu (2005), a good editorial must be plain and unambiguous, always be exact, be rich in human interest, be well-researched, and be based on concrete facts, not speculations.

This paper, thus, examines participant roles in selected Nigerian newspaper editorials. The study tries to illuminate our understanding of how editors use participants (the nominal group) in driving home their ideas about specific events based on different contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics

The study focused mainly on the ideational metafunction, which is about the natural world in the broadest sense, including our own consciousness, and is concerned with clauses as representations (Eggins, 2004, Halliday, 1994). Although sharing the traditional view of transitivity that the focus is on the verb group (the Process), the system describes the whole clause (Thompson, 1994) and does not use the labels ‘subject’, ‘verb’ and ‘object’, seeing that ‘verb’ is a word class, while ‘Subject’ is a functional term. Instead, different functional labels are given to Participants

(realised by nominal groups), Processes (realised by verbal groups) and Circumstances (realised by prepositional phrases or adverbials signifying time, place or manner) of each process type.

The choices of participants for each process type (as exemplified by Halliday, 1994 and Eggins, 2004) are itemised below:

- a) Material process: Actor (obligatory), Goal, Range and Beneficiary (optional)
- b) Mental process: Senser and Phenomenon
- c) Verbal process: Sayer (obligatory), Receiver and Verbiage (optional)
- d) Behavioural process: Behaver (obligatory), Behaviour and Phenomenon (optional).
- e) Existential process: Existent
- f) Relational process: which is of three types: (a) identifying (b) attributive, and (c) possessive which involves roles such as Token and Value (obligatory) for Identifying, Carrier and Attribute (obligatory) for Attributive, and Possessor and Possesed for possessive.

3. Methodology

The data for the study were editorials. The editorials were taken from The Nigerian Tribune, The Punch and The Vanguard. Seven editorials were selected and each editorial was labelled T1, T2, ... T7 for proper analysis. Each main clause of the editorials was also numbered for accurate accountability and reference, and carry the label 'S' as in 'S1' meaning 'sentence 1'. The mathematical symbols '+' and '-' were used in the analysis to indicate the precense of a participant '+' or its absence '-'. The selected editirials were critically read and the participants were identified and their roles were interpreted and discussed. The analysis of the data was based on Halliday's (1994) and Haggins (2004) Systemic Functional Linguistics model.

4. Analysis of Data

4.1 Categorisation of Participants

Table 1: Participant Options in the Selected Texts

S/N	Participants	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	Total	% 100
1.	+Actor + Goal	10	08	06	02	07	06	10	49	15
2.	+Actor -Goal	03	06	04	04	05	05	09	36	11
3.	+Actor +Range	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	01	0.3
4.	+Actor +Goal +Range	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.3
5.	Beneficiary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6.	+Senser +Phenomenon	01	0	0	01	01	0	02	05	1.5
7.	+Sayer +Receiver	03	0	0	01	01	0	01	06	1.8
8.	+Sayer Receiver -	01	0	0	0	0	0	01	02	0.3
9.	Verbiage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10.	+Behaver +Behaviour	0	01	0	0	0	0	0	01	0.3
11.	Phenomenon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12.	Existent	01	01	0	0	0	01	0	03	0.9

13.	+Token +Value	0	06	05	04	06	03	0	24	7.2
14.	+Carrier +Attribute	05	18	10	03	05	02	02	45	14
15.	+Carrier -Attribute	04	08	06	04	05	04	03	34	10.3
16.	+Possessor +Possessed	0	01	0	0	0	0	0	01	0.3
	Total	44	81	52	30	49	32	41	329	

Table 1 above shows that 25.8% of the messages of most of the texts, T1, T2, T5 and T7 are realised by the ‘actor’. T1 has 13 actors realising its message, T2 has 14; T5 has 12; while T7 has 19.

Another participant that realised the message of the texts is ‘carrier’. ‘Carrier’ significantly realises the messages of T2, T3 and T5. “Attribute” (13.6%) and “goal” (14.8%) also help in realising the message of T2, T3, and T1, T2, T5, T7 respectively. Other participants serve as supports or assistants in the realisation of the message of the texts. These participants, in order of significance, include value (7.2%), token (7.2%), senser (1.5%), phenomenon (1.5%), sayer (1.8%), existent (0.9%), receiver (0.6%), range (0.3%) and behavior (0.3%). Some participants do not exist in the texts at all. They are represented with ‘0’ in table 2 above. They include beneficiary, verbiage, behaviour and phenomenon.

4.2 Participant Roles

In this section, the participant roles are illustrated and interpreted.

A. +Actor +Goal

Example 1

1. ... we treated it as a national emergency ... (T1, S9)
2. ... heavy vehicles observed these provisions ... (T1,S13)
3. Their compliance with the law saved the heavy build up of traffic on the highways ... (T1, S15)

The processes in the examples above are carried out by certain participants, such as actors (Their compliance with the law (15), heavy vehicles (13), we (9), on certain other participants, goals, (it (9), these provisions (13), 70 percent (10)). These two participants help in realising the message of the text.

Example 2

1. ... he had to adopt an “anecdotal figure” of 40 million ... (T2, S3)
2. ... unemployment affects the entire economy ... (T2, S14)
3. The global economic meltdown has caused job losses in many countries ... (T2, S17)

The actions in the above examples are carried out by actors (he, the global economic meltdown, unemployment) on other participants, goals (‘an anecdotal figure’, ‘job losses’, ‘the entire economy’), telling us the role certain people and events have played in the battle against unemployment in Nigeria.

Example 3

1. ... this should worry all those who have the interest of the country at heart. (T3, S6)
2. The prosecution has worsened matters. (T3, S21)

The material processes in the above examples are carried out by certain participants, actors (‘the prosecution’, ‘this’), with certain goals (‘matters’, ‘all’). These participants also make us understand the message of the text further. They reveal that there is no sector of the country’s life that is

exempted from corrupt practices and this should worry all those who have the interest of the country at heart. They also emphasize that the prosecution has worsened the matter. They make the readers understand that corruption thrives because those engaged in it are no loser because they are the nation's greatest statesmen.

Example 4

1. ... we abandon our women ... (T5, 6)

Material processes (abandon) in the example above talk about the tangible action carried out by the actor 'we' on the goal 'our women'. These two participants reveal how we abandon our women, sometimes to their fate. It also tells us the warning of obstetricians and gynaecologists about the ravaging cervical cancer that is prominent among Nigerian women.

Example 5

1. Some banks lobby states ... (T7, S4)
2. We commend the bank ... (T7, S14)
3. ... the states had been exploring funding opportunities (T7, S15)

The action clauses in the examples above describe processes of doing concrete, tangible actions by certain actors ('some banks', 'we', 'the state') on certain goals (states, the bank, funding opportunities), to realise the message that some banks lobby states into doing business with them, while already the states had been exploring funding opportunities in banks following their shrinking revenues from the statutory allocation from the federal government.

B. + Actor –Goal

In the selected texts, some actors do not have goals. The following are some of them.

Example 1

Corruption thrives. (T1, S24)

This participant, despite the fact that it has no goal, still helps in realising the message of the text because corruption thrives in all the sectors in the country.

Example 2

... the owners of the pictures have admitted. (T4, S2)

Their actions carried out by these two actors help to realise the message that the nude pictures of some members of the Ogun State House of Assembly published in the papers truly belong to the owners and the owners had sworn to a different oath from the one in the Nigerian constitution.

Example 3

... no suspect ... has been duly convicted ... (T6, 14)

The actor 'no suspect' in the above example helps to realise the message that many accused persons standing trial in anti-graft cases have, through their lawyers, systematically devised effective means of whittling down and undermining the effectiveness of the courts in the speedy disposal of the cases against them. Also, some members of the executives manipulate some anti-graft cases in favour of some former state governors and high personalities.

C. +Actor +Range

Example

... Obstetricians and gynaecologists warn about the ravaging cervical cancer ... (T5, 10)

The two participants 'Obstetricians and gynaecologists' (actor) and 'about the ravaging cervical cancer' (range) reveal how we abandon our women, sometimes to their fate. They also tell us the warning of obstetricians and gynaecologists about the ravaging cervical cancer that is prominent among Nigerian women. According to PACA, this cancer is the commonest that affect women in the northern part of the country.

D. +Actor +Goal +Range

Example 1

... we treated it as a national emergency ... (T1, S9)

The three participants in the examples above 'we' (actor), 'it' (goal) and 'a national emergency' (range) realize the message that corruption is a major problem in Nigeria and the problem is so great that it has to be seen as a national emergency.

E. +Carrier +Attribute

The examples described in this section both have carrier and attribute.

Example 1

1. It is an offence ... (T1, S1)
2. The road remains uncompleted (T1, S22)
3. A starting point could be education of road users (T1, S25)

The relational clauses in the text are determined by certain carriers (it, The road, A starting point) which are assigned certain attributes (an offence, uncompleted, education), which establish a relationship between the carriers and the attributes in the process of disseminating the message of the text.

Example 2

1. That honest admission is commendable ... (T2, S2).
2. The minister's anecdotal figure is depressing ... (T2, S8).
3. ... its social cost is also high (T2, S12).

The above examples have clauses which are of the relational (attributive) type. This relational process is carried out by certain participants, carriers (The honest admission, the minister's anecdotal figure, its cost). These participants are given certain attributes (commendable, depressing, high) to drive home the message of the text.

Example 3

1. ... the legislature is a close circuit system ... (T3, S9).
2. This seems a ploy to free suspects. (T3, S23).

In the above examples, carriers (the legislature, this) are given certain attributes (a close circuit system, a ploy) to drive home the message of the text. The message being that the legislature is a close circuit system that covers up the corrupt practices of its members. The judiciary on their own part worsens the matter by ruling that the prosecutors have no substantial evidence to convict the accused legislators, which the editor of the article describes as a ploy to free suspects.

Example 4

1. Nude pictures of some members of the Ogun State House of Assembly ... are minor indices ... (T4, S1).
2. Allegiance is to Nigeria ... (T4, S15).

In the examples above, carriers (Nude pictures of some members of the Ogun State House of Assembly, Allegiance) are ascribed certain attributes (minor indices, to Nigeria) to realise the message that elected officials don't take to the oath they swear when being sworn in into their offices seriously but instead, opt for oaths sworn at a shrine as evidenced in Ogun State House of Assembly. This is the central message of the text.

F. +Token +Value

In text two, relational identifying options are used to assign certain participants (token) some identity (value). The attributive clauses used are shown in the following sentences, e.g.,

Example 1

1. The unemployed represent 32 percent of the population. (T2, S4).
2. Unemployment equals to higher levels of family breakdowns, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide and crime. (T2, S13).

The clauses in the above examples are used to assign certain participants, token (the unemployed, unemployment) some identity, value (32 percent of the population, higher levels of family breakdowns, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide and crime). The value helps us understand the message that '32 percent of the population in Nigeria is unemployed and unemployment is the reason why we have higher levels of family breakdown, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide and crime in Nigeria'.

Example 2

1. Suspects include federal, state and local government officials. (T3, S4).
2. Their responsibilities range from electricity to education ... (T3, S5).

In the same way, the relational (identifying) clauses in the examples above are used to assign certain tokens (suspects, their responsibilities) some values (federal, state and local government officials, from electricity to education (5)). The message being that those who engage in corrupt practices are federal, state and local government officials, with more incidents in the power and education sector.

G. +Possessor + Possessed

Example

Government has an obligation to create job opportunities (T2, S35).

The attributive possessive clause helps in encoding meaning of ownership and possession between clausal participants, such as possessor (Government) and possessed (an obligation) in the text. The interpretation of this is that government owns the obligation to create job opportunities for the youths in the country. In other words, Government need not be told to provide these opportunities since it is its obligation.

H. +Senser +Phenemenon

Example 1

we forget the promises to mitigate the factors (T1, S24)

In this example, the senser (we) forgets the phenomenon (the promises).

Example 2

We thought the days allegiance to individuals were through ... (T4, S9)

In this example, the senser (we) thought the phenomenon (the days allegiance to individuals) is gone. The phenomenon being the days allegiance to individuals were through with incidents at the Okija shrine six years before.

Example 3

... PACA believes that cervical cancer is comparable to something more than HIV. (T5, S23)

Here, the mental process option is cognitive, where the senser (PACA) believes the phenomenon (cervical cancer) is comparable to something that is more than HIV/AIDS.

I. +Sayer +Receiver

Example 1

1. NEMA Assistant Zonal Coordinator Apollos Jediel said this ... (T1, S7).

2. 70 percent of the accidents, he said, could be avoided ... (T1, S10).

3. The oath-takers said oath was a forced Pledge of their allegiance to the governor ... (T4, S6).

In sentence 1 and 2, sayers ('NEMA Assistant Zonal Coordinator, Apollos Jediel', 'he') carried out the verbal process on the receiver (this, 70 percent of the accidents) to whom the verbal process is directed. In sentence 3, the verbal process (said) employs a sayer (the oath-takers) who relates the process to the receiver (the oath) which the sayer later describes as a forced pledge of their allegiance to the governor.

J. +Sayer –Receiver

Example

1. Accounts say that over 500,000 women die of maternal mortality ... (T5, S16)

2. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) said ... it would limit business of Banks (T7, S1)

In the first example, the verbal process (say) employs an unconscious participant, sayer (accounts) who is responsible for the verbal process, telling us the fact that over 500,000 women die of maternal mortality, of which cervical cancer is said to be responsible for 300,000 deaths annually worldwide. In the second sentence, the sayer (The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)) relays the message that the CBN will limit business of banks with their preferred customers in the public sector, which will make some more room for the private sector that had been crowded out of the banking halls.

K. +Behaver +Behaviour

Example

... governments all over the world worry about rising unemployment ... (T2, 6).

The behavioural process (worry) in the example above is used to show the psychological state of the behaver (government all over the world), the behaviour (about rising unemployment) being what leads to the psychological state of the behavior. This means that unemployment is a critical issue worldwide that governments all over the world worry (are affected psychologically) about the rate at which unemployment is rising.

L. +Existent

Examples

1. There are occasional mentions of this fact ... (T1, S4).
2. There is a strong correlation between unemployment and poverty ... (T2, S9).
3. There should be responsible criminal investigation and prosecution. (T7, S18).

In example 1, the existent (there) shows that corruption exists in Nigeria. In the second example, the existent (there) reveals the fact that unemployment has a strong correlation with poverty, both of which are very high in Nigeria. In the third example, the existent suggests that a responsible criminal investigation and prosecution agency or body should be in Nigeria to curb corrupt practices in Nigeria.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that some of the participants include human beings, who are involved in certain processes of acting, saying, describing, thinking, believing, worrying and non-human participants. Some participants are also used to make appeal to relevant authorities to proffer solutions to certain problems such as unemployment, bad roads, the failing judicial system, partisan politics, economic instability and the poor health system. These appeals are both cognitive and verbal. They are also used to expose the ills of the society and give information about both past and current events in the nation.

Editorials also share important cultural assumptions, values and ideas. The impact of thoughts and culture cannot be underestimated in the study. The root of ideology is in thoughts and culture. The issues raised in the editorials have their roots in the participants' thoughts - participants being the editors, the readers and those referred to in the editorials. There can be no ideology if certain participants have not thought about something, which in some cases require some processes such as material (action), verbal (spoken), behavioural or mental. All these reactions occur together in the context of a particular culture. Stronger ideological opinions and experiential meaning are expressed when the issue being discussed contravenes the cultural expectations of the society where the issues are raised. Thus, editorials help us understand news, by using language carefully and skilfully to articulate thoughts and ideas about burning issues.

5. Conclusion

This study presents Halliday's (1994) and Haggins (2004) Systemic Functional Linguistics as useful tools for the analysis of newspaper editorials. In particular, the participant option of the ideational metafunction helps us understand the roles participants play in the construction of texts. Participants helps us determine what action is performed, what/who receives the action, what is said, what/who gives certain information, what exists and behavioural or mental action or state are adopted in editorials.

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