
A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Language of the Media

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Abstract. This study explores the sociolinguistic analysis of the media. The paper subtly demonstrates how everyman's/writer's language varies according to the extent of his knowledge. Sociolinguistics therefore provides more insight into the place of language in the society, details of interactions and their relation to the social context of linguistic diversity. The study adopts multimodal interaction analysis for analysis. It is discovered that the nature of interaction in media is multimodal. Secondary data were used to establish the arguments of researchers on the subject of discussion. This involved critical review of relevant works published in scholarly journals, books, proceedings of conferences. The study concludes that adequate and effective principles, features concepts are sinequanon or germane in a sociolinguistic analysis of the language of the media.

Key words: Language, Journalese, Headlines, Grammar, Internet

Introduction

In an effort to satisfy their quest for knowledge, information and entertainment, human beings have over the years developed strategies through which they acquire and share information on issues affecting their day-to-day affairs. Investigating into media and language is quite expensive, emanating not from the field of linguistics, but also from socio-sciences (Ogunjobi et al., 2021).

The primary objective centres on language, and the media provide relevant data for linguistic analysis and the testing of theories about language. You must not mistake the object with the phrase in the realm of the media. There are newspapers, radios, and televisions to keep you up to date. However, there is no such thing as a newspaper, radio, or television language variation. Every facet of human life is represented in the media, which makes available to the general public a wide range of linguistic varieties already well-known in other contexts, such as those linked with religion, politics, science, and literature (e.g. discussion, interviews, debate, argument, letter). In order to understand how media products (such as newspapers, radio stations, and television channels) use language, we must consider how the medium itself has shaped the language used within each product and how that language is being used to take advantage of the medium's features and capabilities. And here, the art of conveying and presenting information reigns supreme.

The paper will therefore, explicate the significance of sociolinguistic variables (poetic language, Journals, Headlines language, News report, Sport communities, language of the internet etc.) milieu in generating the media episteme in the global knowledge economy. For clarity of language and logicity, this paper has been subsequently segmented under sub headings and component.

Some Related Works

Several studies have been conducted to provide empirical evidence on the diversity and peculiarities of the language of the media.

Crystal (1969) opines that the media use language humorously, musically, metaphorically, colloquially, romantically and conically. Akinfeleye (2010) asserts that everyman's language has first its individualities and class to which he belongs. Halliday (1982), Gee (1991), Bloor (1995), Omojuyigbe (2004), are of the opinions that media can use language to achieve different purposes such as information, education, mobilization and

entertainment among others. Asemah (2011) claims that media use language elegantly and pompously. Duyide (2005) noted the content, context, situation and societal mood dictate the language of the media.

Through research, we have been able to establish that media offer range of programmes and proactively deploy suitable linguistic tools/ choices that readily appeal to various listeners, readers, audience respectively. Sociolinguistics therefore, provided more insight into the place of language in the society.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Multimodal Interaction Analysis [MIA] which is an analytic approach that relies on mediated discourse analysis and is organized by three main principles of social action, communication and history. The fact that the theory is anchored on mediated discourse analysis makes it suitable for the analysis of any mediated action such include conversations and basic principles.

Sociolinguistics provides more insight into the place of language in the society, details of interactions and their relation to the social context of linguistic diversity.

A Sociolinguistic Analysis

Understanding the Language of the Media

Writing is an art and a means of effective communication. Writing involves brain and brawn. Whenever writing is essentially involved, language is also involved, even though writing is a secondary medium of communication. Language is creative, social, interactive, and productive. It acquires new vocabulary everyday. The press therefore occupies a unique position in the communication business. The journalist writes for people to read and understand, not withstanding the differences in the readers social and academic backgrounds.

Of course everybody should be able to read a newspaper and understand its message. A newsman does not have to sound ambiguous and bombastic. Simple language will definitely suffice. Your mastery of English is not measured by your ability to speak big grammar but by your ability to break your big grammar unto simple components for people to understand. When unfamiliar words or expressions are used there is always a sharp break in communication. Deliberate efforts should be made to avoid clumsy, dangling sentences or whatever sentence structures that can impair lucid understanding. There should be simplicity of words, expressions or sentences rather than verbosity.

Though every writer, when immersed in writing, is tempted to be influenced by emotions that may affect the flow of the write-up. The mass communicator or journalist should endeavour to make his writing conform to rules and style. All newspaper readers, including the semi-literate ones, know by intuition how a story should flow. If there is a deficiency in the pattern, they are obviously distracted and may be discouraged from continuing the reading and appreciating the fun.

The Use of Prose and Poetic Language

This is regarded as literary style which enhances colour, embellishment and musicology. In journalism, poetic language is occasionally used while prose language is commonly used. Poetic language is intense. It is especially organized to have certain effects on the reader. It preserves the qualities of melody and rhythm. It also makes a single word have different meanings.

Whereas prose language is the language that describes, informs and subtly discusses. It is as near to everyday or conversational language as possible. And this is what print journalism does. Meaning is not hidden in journalism, the intention of every writer and the

purpose of every published work are to communicate. Journalists therefore engage prose language in narrative, descriptive, argumentative, imaginative, analytical and expository writings. In general terms, these types are called creative writings.

The Concept of *Journalese* in Mass Media

Journalese can be described as a peculiar style of language that is thought to be typical of that used in newspapers and mass media. It can also be defined as an informal, often pejorative term for a style of writing and word choice found in many newspapers and magazines.

Speaking quite frankly, it is a guilt of instant words patched together out of other parts of speech. For clear thinking on the subject, as well as to explain the concept of *journalese*, this happens, for example, when “Adjectives” are used as *nouns* (*greats notables*) Nouns are used as verbs (*to host or to pastor*” *to showcase*” *or they are chopped off to form verbs* (*‘enthuse’, emote’*), *or they are padded to form verbs* (*beef up*” *put teeth into*) *This is a world where eminent people are “famed” and their associates are staffers where the future is always “up coming” and someone is forever “firing off” a note*”.

Furthermore, it is the language of the label and instant “metaphor” drawing its inspiration from space-starved newspaper headlines. *Journalese* is usually used when inspiration runs dry, especially as a deadline approaches. In this connection, journalists often fall into a sloppy style of generalities and overwriting. This style for example says temperatures ‘soar’. Cost ‘skyrocket’ fires ‘range’ and rivers ‘rampage’ projects are ‘kicked off’ opponents ‘weigh in’. Buildings are “slated for demolition” or perhaps they are “tagged”. In *journalese*, people get a “go-ahead” and projects get a “green light”. Real people don’t talk that way, so its best to avoid such trite writing. Few aspects of the variety of the language of the media shall be discussed below.

The Language of Headlines

News reporting has a number of different language characteristics. In most cases, the “who,” when, where, what, how, and why of a storey can be easily traced back to the journalistic process. Short summaries of the main points of a news item occur in the headline of a radio or television news programme, or above articles in a newspaper or on a website. Critical, summarising, and attracting attention to the tale are its primary functions. News reporting is recognised for its telegraphic style, which sums up as well as begins to explain the narrative in the first “lead” paragraph. A sub-editor writes the headline, which is based on this paragraph and not the source journalist.

As a byline or in the text itself, a link to the original source of the article is provided. The participants are grouped, with their names generally preceded by a generic phrase (champ, refugee or official) and adjectives (handsome, Nigerian pop singer etc). Other features include explicit time and space locations (in Nigeria yesterday...) facts and figures (80 people were killed by Boko Haram bomb blast) and direct or indirect quotations (PMB fires says special Adviser) e.g. PDP chief: Jonathan gave Fayose \$ 37m for Ekiti poll Army moves 1,000 soldiers from Lagos EFCC raids ex-up Sambo’s office Chibok school girls parents blast Jonathan.

The Grammar of Headlines

Parts of speech: The aim of a new headline is to grab attention. Therefore, any “unnecessary” words are often left out. These include: “Articles” *The* police station has been hit by a bomb blast. Auxiliary verbs: (Has been) should be omitted. The police station *Has been* hit by a bomb blast. Auxiliaries verbs make the headline long and detract from

immediacy. Possessive Adjective: PMB has pinned *his* hopes on the loot recovered from the looters.

Use of Verb Forms

Present simple: PMB PINS hopes.

The present simple tense in the headline replaces the “present perfect sample” or *the past simple tense* in the news story. The effect is to say that the story is happening *now* rather than in the very recent past. “Past participles” GOVERNOR ATTACKED over the workers’ salaries. The full form of this headline should read. The Governor *was attacked* over the workers’ salaries. When the passive voice is used in the headline, it is usually just the PAST PARTICIPLES form which appears

“Infinitives” PMB *to reject* \$5 billion World Bank loan when the story refers to the future plans of the subject, the headline usually uses a verb in the infinitive form. The headline above is a shortened form of the sentence. *President Muhammed Buhari* is going to reject the \$5 billion World Bank loan. Other grammar usages are:

The use of incomplete sentence: Dasuki arrested.

Headlines often contain string of three, four or more nouns; Fasola disappoints his critics.

Newspapers use the contracted form of the verb “be” infinitive: PMB to visit London.

Passive sentences are constructed with no verb, just the past participle: Man held by police in murder hunt(a man is being held); Nuns killed in explosion; Kidnapper nabbed etc.

Vocabulary usage: short words are economical. These words could sound unusual in ordinary language and because they sound dramatic. For example: blaze – fire; clashing – disagree; curb – to restrict; drive – to urge; gems – replace; pact – agreement, threat – danger etc.

Obviously, grammar deals with all these places where there is a choice that has to be made between a small and limited number of possibilities. In other words, grammar deals descriptively where the choice is between passive or active verbal groups, between positive and negative. Nominal groups between singular and plural, between declarative and imperative or interrogative sentence. Grammar of course can also indicate where and why SIT differ from BE SEATED from TO BE for NOT TO BE.

The Language of News Reports

A news report clearly gives the details of a news story. A reporter goes out to nose or search for news. He finds a newsworthy event and plans to report it. The reporter needs to choose the word he or she uses carefully to make the story clear and unbiased. In the process of gathering more information about the event, he speaks with some people. He returns to the newsroom to convert the bits of information gathered into a flowing story.

The language which the reporter employs in such a situation is that of a reporter employs in such a situation is that of a reported or indirect speech. There are rules governing this method but journalists often flout them. When the rules of reported speech are violated, confusion sets in and meaning is automatically distorted.

Newsmen have a peculiar way of writing but the peculiarity does not necessarily permit disobedience to grammatical rules. Journalism is influential and has a mass appeal. Many newspaper readers take every word and expression found in a new paper as the standard form. That is why journalists, believably, can either help advance the standard usage of English or expedite its deterioration. For clear thinking on the subject, as well as to explain clearly what the language of news reporting means. Let us examine the following grammar of news reports.

The purpose of news report is usually to give the listener information in an interesting and stimulating but objective way. To do this, they often use the passive voice (passivization) and words which are NEAR SYNONYMS, that is words which have nearly the same meaning.

Passive Voice: Using the passive voice makes the report sound more formal. By putting the object (sufferer) of the verb at the beginning of the sentence, they take our attention away from the subject (Doer). So, although for example: Ten militants were arrested and police arrested Ten militants have the same meaning, the reporter is focusing on the result of the action instead of the people doing the action. News reports often use the reported speech or passive voice to avoid saying directly that someone has done something. In this way, they try to remain impartial.

Synonyms: using words with similar meanings in a news report keeps it interesting. As there is a lot of information in a very short time, it is important that the listener pays attention. If we hear the same word being repeated more than once or twice we might get bored and stop listening. By using near-synonyms (*e.g. beautiful elegant*) the reporter can keep us interested in the whole story.

Use of present tense: Some Journalists occasionally use the “present tense” form of the reporting verbs in feature writing then one finds expressions like: she explains, observes, reiterates, notes, emphasizes, states, expatiates, affirms etc. But the most important change in a reported speech occurs in the verb phrase. When the present tense form of the reporting verb is used, the assumption is that the message being projected by the original speaker still holds for the present time.

The Language of Sport Commentaries

A commentary is a detailed account of a current event. In order to help the audience understand what is going on, a commentator simply explains to him or her the most significant aspects of the event.

Sporting events are the most prevalent subject for commentary.

One of the most unique features of the English language is its use of commentary. Besides broadcasting (where it will be heard at fashion shows, race – course meetings and cooking demonstrations), its application in broadcasting extends well beyond athletic events; it will be heard accompanying public events such as funerals, inaugurations and processions.

But sports and game-related commentary is the most common type of commentary. A distinction must be made between the "play-by-play commentary" and the "colour – adding comments" in this instance. Aside from the fact that it offers an audience with pre- and post-event context, post-event appraisal, and within-event interpretation, the latter is of little interest aesthetically. The play-by-play aspect of sports commentary piques stylistic attention the most.

Commentary differs from other forms of narrative in that it is an oral report on ongoing events (which are typically reported in past time). It's a unique circumstance for a speech, to say the least. Radio sports casting is a "monologue or dialogue on – stage directed at an unknown, unseen, heterogeneous mass audience who voluntarily choose to listen do not see the activity being reported and provide no feedback to the speaker," according to Charles Ferguson, a US linguist. If this strange activity is to survive, it needs a special linguistics feature.

The Grammar of Commentaries

Throughout the course of a sporting event, continuous or progressive tenses are prevalent. Because comments describe events in real time, they must utilise the 'present simple and present continuous tenses,' therefore pay attention to the tenses and the length of

your sentences. As a final note, the commentators will often use 'present perfect tenses' to describe the game as it nears its conclusion, indicating that the action has just occurred. The commentators tend to utilise brief lines when the event is taking place. The audience will be more enthused as a result.

Finally, and unusually in radio and television broadcasting, you will often hear "exclamations" of the excitement e.g. that's it! Mercy has done it again! What a wonderful goal!.

Other Features

The language of sports commentary may be found in other places, such as news reports and ordinary conversation. Other characteristics stand up more clearly. Keeping up with the activity's tempo is no problem at all. A constant flow of words is evident, and there are no pauses, meaningless words, or other characteristics of spontaneous speech (though these may be found in the colour episode).

The prosody is appropriate for the sport since it captures the energy and tension of the action. Many unique prosodies and articulation rates that are both slower and quicker than those heard in normal discourse can be heard. Horse racing and snooker are two examples of sports where monotone speech is acceptable. Others employ a wide range of pitches (as in football or baseball). It is possible for a pundit to have an idiosyncratic method of making a point, and this may be quite powerful.

Using the present tense, the omission of elements of sentence structure (Gooch in close), inverted word order (over at third is Smith), and additional modifiers are all examples of distinctive grammar. When (Texan Tommy John delivers and Smith, who's been on a roll this season, sprints back, the quiet Tommy John delivers. As a means of delaying disclosing the name of a player, commentators frequently employ the passive voice in order to avoid giving away the player's identity (His shot is blocked by Jone).

Cricket, tennis, and baseball are all examples of games that have repeating activity sequences or activity options, and racing is even more simple, with each loop of the cycle introducing its own formulae to inform listeners of which competitors are in which order. The cyclicity here informs listeners of the varying order in which the competitors are competing. Anyone who is just tuning in or has just lost track of what's going on will find this quick recap of the overall strategy quite helpful.

The Language of the Internet

Because computers and the World Wide Web have only lately become commonplace, a new vocabulary has emerged to describe these technical advancements. You'll learn some of the language you'll need to comprehend radio stories about the internet in this course.

1. There are no managers or owners on the internet, so you have to use your imagination to grasp the concept. A university or a commercial corporation serves as your internet service provider, which is how you go online at home. Direct access to computers across the world with millions of options and the ability to communicate with individuals directly or debate any topic imaginable is now at your fingertips..
2. One hour of surfing the Internet at any Cyberia cyber-café in Nigeria costs N150. If internet calls were charged at a set rate instead of an hourly cost, this café and many others like it would lower their rates and give an increase to e-commerce.
3. Reminder: All of this and more may be found at Home Truths. To access the internet, enter www dotgoogle dot codot or forward slash home truths or any other internet facility, for example, hot dog.

The Vocabulary of the Internet

Old world terms and phrases are being utilised in a new way to talk about the internet, while new words and phrases have been coined for the purpose of discussing the internet.

Nouns: Aside from internet, the net and web (a.k.a. www) are other names for the internet. A representation of how information on the internet is linked using the terms "network" and "web" is depicted. Although information is connected together, there is still a void between the linkages, allowing webs and nets to morph and move as needed.

Adjectives: It is perhaps the most suitable adjective to describe something that can be accessed over the internet, such as an online store. Our physicians and instructors will be able to work from the comfort of their own homes thanks to the internet.

Prefixes: The prefixes e-, as in e-mail and e-commerce, and cyber, as in cyber-spare and cyber-café, allow us to invent new terms. E- before a noun signifies electronic, thus email is e-mail or electronic mail.

Cyber: According to these definitions, "cybercafé" refers to the world of electronic communication networks and communities that are accessible via computers, hence the cafe serves as an Internet access point. Prefixing an item with web shows that it may be located on the internet. For the time being, this is all we've got.

Verbs: To describe the act of connecting to the internet, we utilise new phrasal verbs, verbs with prepositions. While browsing the internet, we may either search for a specific piece of information or simply peruse a wide variety of websites for our own personal enjoyment.

Figurative Writing: Columns and Language

Newspapers have different columns which feature among others, opinion articles, editorial comments and feature stories. The language of news report is concise, simple, straight forward and without comments. That is not the case with feature stories, opinion articles and editorial comments whose writers utilize the power of language to persuade readers to admit their argument. Writers use different linguistic devices to achieve that.

Journalists have, on many occasions, twisted English language to suit their own purpose. For example, communication is more effective when the proper register is used. But one observes that the rules of register are often violated. The intention of the journalists may not be negative but may be an attempt to drive home their points in an apparently more descriptive manner. But often, meaning is lost in the process.

Using "customer" instead of 'patient' in a hospital environment may be figurative if the context of usage can prove it. A reader could deduce that the "customer" is so frequent in the hospital that he is not qualified to be called a patient any more but a customer. It could also mean that the hospital has been feasting on the finances of the helpless patient whom the journalist now chooses to call a "customer". How effective a writer's use of English it depends on how proficient and creative the writer himself is in the language. One could find in journalism some coinage which appear like the poetic license granted poets. Such words are called "journalese", meaning that they are peculiar to journalism profession. That ought not to be since the language of journalism in this area of study is English which has rules and standard.

Opinion Articles: The language of the opinion articles is personal and, most times, impressionistic. Writers employ the use of idioms, anecdotes, rhetoric's and satire to express their thoughts. Most opinion articles are written from the first person point of view, hence the frequent use of personal pronouns such as "I" "me", "my", and "mine".

On many occasions, opinion articles writers fail to communicate in some sentences and paragraphs while attempting to impress readers with the use of bombasts and threadbare.

Opinion article writers may be and may not be journalists. But many of them are journalists who have regular columns in newspaper and magazines.

Features: Features could comment on events of public interest. Sometimes features could originate a news story and use flowery language to arrest readers' attention. A feature writer is at liberty to utilize the linguistic repertoire at his disposal for effective communication.

Whatever approach a feature writer chooses for the presentation of his story, he has to be mindful of the necessity to sustain readers' interest because the letter has a long story to read. The writer may choose the narrative approach, or the descriptive or the analogous. But whatever style is applied, language clarity is important. The message of the write-up must not be obscure. It is important to note then that the impact which a feature story can make is dependent on the linguistic prowess of the writer.

Editorial: Editorial is the comment of a publication on an issue. It is the publication's official position or opinion. Newspaper editorial board members may not necessarily be journalists but often, they are well educated and are specialists in their various fields. That background reflects in the language of editorial which has summaries few aspects of the variety a phenomenon that is so complex of many different 'varieties' of language in use in all kinds of situations.

Denotation: Denotation use of language refers to a word or phrase having an ordinary or basic meaning. "Man", when used denotatively, means an adult male with all the accompanying features of man. So, when a word is used without having beyond the dictionary meaning, such word has been used denotatively.

Connotation: Connotation looks at language beyond its surface or ordinary meaning of a word or expression. "The man is empty, financially", for example, is saying indirectly that the man is poor. Connotative language then means an indirect use of language. Connotation condenses sentence and helps to sharpen man's imagination.

Cliché/Threadbare: This refers to over used phrases that have become uninteresting and valueless. Examples are: like a colossus, dire need, drastic action, battle royal, acid test, blasé and trail, at this juncture, with flying colours, ups and downs etc. Journalist should avoid clichés and look for new expressions to make their stories interesting.

Anecdote: This refers to a short, amusing story. Writers are advised to be careful in the use of anecdote because it can distract reader's attention.

Analogy: Analogy is drawing similarities between two different things. Writers use analogy to paint a clearer picture of their intention. Analogy is comparing the similarities between two different things for better understanding of the message.

Quotation: Quotation is repeating what somebody has said or written before to support a statement. Quotation makes a story stronger but writers should be careful not to quote overtly. Also a writer takes responsibility for whatever is quoted in support of an argument.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, we have been able to explicate that the media reflect all aspects of human conditions and make available to the public many varieties of language already. Thus, the beauty of language is not what you say but how you say it. This underscore the phenomenon of clarity of language rather than ambiguity as a fundamental of effective communication. Obviously, the language of the media is variety of language suitable, appropriate, acceptable to media situations, occasions and social context. The situation helps users of language to select appropriately from the total linguistic options offered by language diversity. This study has succinctly attempted to show case the power of language in media. It has subtly demonstrated how media register features could readily inform, educate, influence readers, entertain and instruct, protect public interest (socialize and mobilize)

Consequently, the concept of *Journalese* language peculiar to the media as a style and being regarded as a grammatical circumlocution, and unfashionable is best avoided in every day conversation.

The study concludes that whatever and wherever direction one wishes to express oneself the medium is at one service because one choice of words and the use of language enhance the beauty and import.

Finally, without pretending to be exhaustive, this study claims to indicate and summarize few aspects of the variety a phenomenon that is so complex of many different 'varieties' of language in use in all kinds of situations.

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