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Discursive Chain and Movement in Crisis-Driven Nigerian Political Discourse: Corpus Evidence from Herdsmen Newspaper Headlines

Abstract: A central tenet of critical discourse analysis spells that language in discourse meant for mass consumption is often permeated with a reproduction and/or a resistance of certain ideologies, assumptions, and knowledge characteristic of different social groups making up the society. One of such best scenarios is news headlines narrating crisis-driven national discourse in Nigeria, where almost all national discourses are driven by certain inherent ideologies and political power. In this paper, we propose a *discourse chain* principle uncovering the underlying socio-psychological idiosyncrasies of the participants (inclusive of agents and recipients) and processes in most national discourses in Nigeria. Combining concepts in corpus methods with critical discourse analysis, the paper shows a basic approach to operationalising ideologies in notational form. Applying corpus analytic method to 761 herdsmen news headlines extracted from Nigerian newspapers, the present paper nicely illustrates the extent to which these news headlines move the discourse-at-hand (i.e. herdsmen crisis) to discourse-around. Such movement is performed by reproducing institutionalised ideological patterns revolving around identity politics (ethnicity), religion, question of nationhood, corruption, citizenry distrust, and political power imbalance. The paper argues that this discursive movement is often driven by a chain of discourse that defines the existence of the nationhood.

Keywords: discourse chain, discursive movement, herdsmen discourse, corpus-based discourse analysis, Nigeria political discourse model

1. Introduction

While there exists a catalogue of different brands of discourse analysis extricating how different ideologies and knowledge permeate mass-consumed or political texts in Nigeria, no available study has put forward an empirical-driven model accounting for how this is done within the Nigerian political discourse. Also, there has been no available literature showing corpus-based or corpus-driven critical analysis of the Nigerian political discourse, a gap to which the present paper contributes. Responding to this gap, the paper will, among many other things, provide a model conceptualising the readings of Nigerian political discourse, using herdsmen news discourse as a reference point. It is well established in the literature that news language, most especially the headlines, is a subtle channel with which power and ideologies are constructed and deconstructed in the schemes of social structure. This practice has repeatedly been shown across different texts produced in almost all contexts in all societies. Given its powerful interpretative projection, news language is thus an important site for linguists to account for the extent to which power and dominant ideologies are (de)constructed.

In present-day Nigeria's political entity, there is an infinite number of ideologies. These ideologies come handy with inherent issues of conversation revolving around religion, identity politics, social and political corruption, citizenry's distrust of the government, political domination, political power imbalance, ethnicity, the question of nationhood and that of national unity. Since all of these ideological issues often form the basis of almost all national conversations in Nigeria, then media reportage of such a national crisis bordering on herdsmen could not but be an ideological reflection on each issue. In other words, the news reportage of such national crisis will not only reflect an ideological orientation but also be a consequential stance. That way, it can be conceptualised that media language in national crisis is an equivalent to the (de)construction of the ideological realities in the society to which it is contextualised.

The present paper combines concepts from corpus analytic framework with that of critical discourse analysis to answer a discourse central question; the extent to which text reproduces or resists ideologies and knowledge peculiar to conversation among different social groups making up the society (Van Dijk 1988; 2008; 2014; Fairclough 1995; 2001; 2014; Blommaert 2013). Showing a very basic approach with which corpus method can be applied to political discourse analysis in Nigeria, the present paper draws on corpus evidence showing the extent to which news headlines reporting the herdsmen crisis in Nigeria reproduce or resist inherent ideologies of identity politics (ethnicity), religion, the question of nationhood, corruption, citizenry distrust, and political power imbalance.

Given that these ideologies are themselves subtle discourse units in the herdsmen discourse, we propose a *discursive chain movement* model to navigate through them. Also, the principle of *discursive chain movement* allows for easy

identification of ideologies driving national discourse, as well as conversation across different social groupings making up Nigerian society. In other words, such a principle enables a generalised description of the Nigerian political discourse structure. Relying on the extracted data, we also report on a linguistic and discursive pattern in the news headlines. For instance, the herdsman news which is supposed to focus on the thrust of the conversation, i.e. *discourse-at-hand*, often moves the conversation in different directions, refocusing it on another *discourse-around* which itself is often characterised by the reproduction of the questions relating to political dominance, resistance, and political inequality, among many others.

By analysing a total of 751 news headlines, we provide corpus evidence for how the object of the discourse-at-hand (i.e. herdsman crisis) is formed and transformed by a way of *discursive movement*. Such *discursive movement* is volatile, multidirectional and thus almost always can be decomposed only by a member of society. For example, the headline “CAN Accuses Muslim Leaders of Endorsing Herdsman Killings” drives on the ideology of religious suppression, moving from discourse-at-hand (i.e. herdsman crisis discourse) to discourse-around (in this case, the question of the islamisation of Nigeria).

2. Mapping ideologies in Nigerian political discourse

Aspects of Nigerian political discourse have been extensively discussed (see, for example: Opeibi 2007; Taiwo 2008; Chiluwa 2012; Okafor and Alabi 2017; Alabi and Ayeloja 2019; Chiluwa et al. 2020; Chiluwa and Chiluwa 2020; Unuabonah and Oyeboode 2021, just to mention a few).

Van Dijk (1988; 2008; 2014) and Norman Fairclough (1995; 2001; 2014) have made significant intervention and contributions to the theory and practice of discourse analysis. Many of their works have shown a variety of methods uncovering the more important messages underlying social and political texts. These methods continue to influence how linguists approach and analyse discourse and texts, leading to the development of an infinite number of methodologies, theoretical frameworks, practices and textual understandings. Among many other contributions, van Dijk (1988; 2008; 2014) argued that texts produced by important social institutions such as the media, and politicians require careful mental interrogation in order to uncover their subtle messages. Contributing to the principles of discourse analysis, van Dijk asserted that a serious analysis of discourse should reveal and profile the mental processes of the person(s) that produced the texts.

Taking discourse analysis further, Fairclough (1995; 2001; 2014) added a blend of criticalness. In a similar vein, Blommaert (2013) made an important contribution to the question of method in discourse analysis, arguing for the discipline to be much more empirical in nature than being solely intuitive and introspective. Fairclough (2014) specifically showed how power, domination, social injustice, social struggles, resistance,

manipulation of the masses (by the political class via the media writings) run through such texts dedicated for mass consumption. Fairclough (1995; 2001; 2014) also highlighted the death and birth of ideologies that continually enshrine the political class in power. Following Fairclough's principles of critical discourse analysis, the present study shows how news headlines on the herdsmen crisis in Nigeria reveal and reproduce more subtle issues of dominance and resistance, power and its abuse, social and political inequality, and the consequential manipulation of the masses.

Of course, the strong arguments for the use of corpus method in discourse analysis had preceded Blommaert (2013). However, his proposal for a theoretic framework that accounts for a pattern showing how language is used to (de)construct socio-political contexts means that (critical) discourse analysis stands a better chance in fulfilling its primary objectives of uncovering the psychology underpinning the voice in a text. Following this line of thought, it can thus be argued that the brand, empirical/corpus-driven discourse analysis explicating different dimensions of the structure of society, is still largely missing in its application to Nigerian political discourse structure. In other words, the present paper intends to provide the very basic empirical approach to media discourse texts emanating from Nigeria.

Such a basic descriptive approach is expected to stimulate Blommaert's empirical practice of discourse studies within the Nigeria discourse domain. Although CDA does not clearly state the importance of using naturally occurring data in its analysis, the present paper, following the traditions of corpus-driven analytic method, mainly analyses naturally occurring herdsmen news headlines. This approach will allow us to show and itemise the spontaneity in the movement of issues being reproduced or resisted in the texts under investigation. With a blend of corpus method, the present paper thus stands a chance of contributing to the body of corpus-based discourse analysis works that show how much more penetrative analyses backed with quantitative measurement can be beneficial. Such analysis will greatly help to show the miniature details involving the profiling of the psychology, voice and persons producing these social texts.

Following the traditional method of discourse analysis, quite a large number of works focusing on Nigerian political discourse have examined the role of the media language in the (de)construction of political and social domination, manipulation, power and its abuses. Many of these works have identified underlying ideologies relating to social and political inequality as they permeate texts produced by the reserved elites (politicians, religious leaders, journalists, and leaders of the different socio-cultural groupings). Doki and Buhari (2013) interrogated media reportage in the context of Nigerian media laws and ethics, and found a catalogue of power abuse in which the reportage language reproduced mainstream ideologies manipulating the readers. Taiwo (2007) showed how language use in news headlines in Nigerian newspapers can serve as a veritable site for the (de)construction of ideologies and power in the national discourse. Tobechuckwu (2007) examined the media writings during the political crisis that characterised Obasanjo's administration and found in

these media writings the voice of biased participants armed with social power suppressing ideologies characteristically held by the masses. Unlike Doki and Buhari (2013) and Tobeckwuwu (2007), the present paper primarily applies corpus analytic method to corpus discourse data drawn from newspapers, with a view to showing institutionalised patterns of inherent ideologies and knowledge that manifest in nearly all Nigerian national discourses. It further shows how such inherent ideologies and knowledge serve as chain moving the discourse-at-hand to discourse-around.

3. Method: data extraction, discourse variables, and preliminary analyses

Data extraction: Since the primary concerns of the paper revolve around quantifying the *herdsmen crisis* and its representation in the reportage language, a very basic corpus analytic method is thus applied. We extracted only the news headlines reporting *herdsmen crisis* in all their different frames from three national dailies: *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *The Vanguard*. Relevant headlines were extracted searching each newspaper online via the keywords “herdsmen” or “Fulani herdsmen”. Sample extracted headlines included: “Herders/Farmers Clashes: Osun To Enumerate Cattle” and “School Shut over Herdsmen Attack – LG Boss”.

The initial extraction returned 872 tokens, of which after removal of irrelevant headlines such as “Fulani Will Not Vote for an Igbo President”, 761 were used for the analysis presented herein. A total number of ten variables were developed from a variety of sources in the literature ranging from Van Dijk’s (1998; 2008; 2014) discourse theoretic framework of *Agent*, *process*, and *recipient*, Fairclough’s (1995; 2001; 2014) concepts of *constructed personification* (the relationship between language use in such a carefully prepared discourse and the consumer of such discourse), Blommaert’s (2013) argument for empirical data and method in discourse studies and Akinlotan’s (2018a; 2018b) exemplary works showing how corpus method can be applied to a variety of Nigerian data ranging from the analysis of structure, to meaning process, to discourse.

All the variables developed and analysed in the present work are on the basis of the arguments in these aforementioned works, which affirmed the fact that there is indeed a strong relationship between discourse, its structure, and the syntactic structures that lend and constitute the voice in the transmission of their ideologies, knowledge, and political power abuse. In other words, accounting for the internal and external linguistic variables that underlie the internal structure of any discourse can provide significant insights into the herdsmen discourse. More specifically, when such analysis is juxtaposed with essentially discursive variables, we can then arrive at a propertied, comprehensive and infinite profiling of the agents, processes, and recipients in the discourse. Such understanding can as well provide inputs as to how the reader/listener is expected to process such discourse. Following the methods of variable selection and operationalisation in Akinlotan (2018a; 2018b),

the present paper operationalised the selected variables in simple terms, which are described below.

Discourse variables and their operationalisation: The following is a list of variables, together with their operationalisations in the study. (1) *Presence/absence of intensifier* which identifies usage of certain words such as the use of the adverb *again* (for example, “Again, Fulani Herdsmen Kill One, Injure Three Policemen in Delta”), *another* (for example, “Another Five Die in Fulani Herdsmen, Natives’ Clash in Niger”), choice of stronger verb such as *kill* (“Pastor Tells Security Aides to ‘Kill Fulani Herdsmen’”), and stronger noun/adjective such as *hack*, and *blood* (“Blood Bloodbath in Benue as Fulani Herdsmen Hack Eight to Death Again”). All of these intensifiers *again*, *another*, and *kill* are deliberate (rhetorical) choices made in the text to trigger a certain psychological response from the audience. Such intention perhaps leads to the manipulation of the mind. (2) Variable representing *animacy of victim* identifies whether there is a victim or no victim. If there is, what type of victim (human or non-human, i.e. property) is reported? For instance, while no victim is reported in “Delta Youths Warn Fulani Herdsmen against Attacks”, there is a human victim in “Two Killed as Fulani Herdsmen Attack Benue Communities”, and a property victim in “Benue Livestock Guards Killed 207 of Our Cows – Herdsmen Allege”.

Furthermore, (3) *discourse fragment* is another variable that classifies every headline as either being *advisory*, *narrative*, or *escalative* in its discursive function. For instance, “Allay Fears of Nigerians on Fulanisation, Alao Tells Buhari” is advisory, while “Herdsmen Attack Passengers on Ife-Ibadan Highway, Kill One” narrates an instance of the crisis discourse. Meanwhile, “Expose Killer Herdsmen, Sanusi Tells Miyetti Allah” is escalative in nature because it accuses another person Miyetti Allah of harbouring “killer herdsmen”. (4) Similarly, we further classify every sentence on the basis of *conversationality*. News headlines are categorized as conversational when they are reported as conversation exchanges. In other words, we classify as conversational headline reports where participants or citizens are commenting on the Fulani herdsmen crisis, or speaking to the authorities on managing the crisis, such as “Our Training Helicopters Not Dropping Weapons for Herdsmen in Enugu – NAF”, which are perceived to be replying to an accusation. Non-conversational headlines are classified as informational, which means that such headlines contain no conversation, no participant or citizens exchanging views with, talking to or replying to another participant in the discourse. An example of a non-conversational headline is “Herdsmen on Rampage in Delta Community”. (5) The fifth variable is described as *discourse effect*. It classifies every headline as creating an effect of *fear* (e.g. “2018 Herdsmen Attacks: 500 Killed, One Million Persons Displaced in Benue in 6 Months”), of *hope* (e.g. “We Have Brought Herdsmen Issue under Control in Benue – Ortom”), or of *divisiveness* (e.g. “Fulani Herdsmen are Jihadists, Say Christian Elders”).

Variable (6) *length/heaviness* accounts for the length/heaviness of every headline. We measure the length by counting the content words constituting each headline. For example, “APC Wants End to Killings by Fulani Herdsmen” consists

of six words (“APC”, “wants”, “end”, “killing”, “Fulani”, and “herdsmen”). Variable (7) *focus argument* accounts for whether or not the keywords “Fulani herdsmen” or “herdsmen” function as the focus or argument of the headline (i.e. being placed in the subject position in the construction). For instance, in “Herdsmen Burn Plateau Village Houses, Kill 100-year-old Man”, the focus argument is “herdsmen”, whereas this is not the case in “Planned Cattle Ranches, Ploy to Create Havens for Herdsmen – MASSOB”. While the emphasis is placed on “herdsmen” in the first headline, it is not the case in the second headline where the emphasis is on the discursive subordination “planned cattle ranches”.

Variable (8) *discourse landscape*, accounts for the different regions of the events being reported and/or persons speaking in the headline. For instance, the speaker Miyetti Allah in “Cattle Colonies not Practicable in South-East – Miyetti Allah” is classified as a northerner, and Amaechi as an easterner in “Fulani Herdsmen Plotting Total Islamisation of Nigeria – Amaechi”. Another linguistic variable (9) identifies the *modification* of the keyword “herdsmen” as either used as a noun (e.g. “Herdsmen Clash in Imo Over Missing Cows, Many Left Injured”), or as an adjective (e.g. “Suspected Herdsmen Kill Hunter in Plateau”). The last variable (10) *discourse weight* classifies headlines as reporting: (1) loss of lives, (2) serious but no loss of lives but loss of property, and (3) no loss of lives or property but commentaries which might be escalating or de-escalating the crisis. In order to answer the research question of the extent to which these news headlines reproduce or resist different ideologies inherent in herdsmen crisis discourse, all of the headlines are classified as either reproducing or resisting an ideology. That is, each headline is tagged to an ideology reproduced or resisted.

On the basis of the previous works explicating Nigerian political discourse (Taiwo 2007; Chilwa 2007; Ayodele 2010) and patterns that emerge from the annotation of all the 751 headlines, 5 ideological groups representing *religion, ethnicity, power, identity politics, and citizenry distrust* are developed. For example, the headline “Govt Compensated Fulani for Losing Two Cows, but Ignored Farmers Whose Farmlands Were Destroyed – Teneke, Adamawa First-class Chief” drives on the ideology of identity politics and accentuates the question of social and political inequality. In addition to these five ideological groupings, we also identified headlines that are clearly neutral, i.e. headlines that do not clearly reproduce or resist any crisis-related ideology. Additional information relating to the different ideological groupings is provided in the analysis section.

Having analysed the headlines on the basis of the ten variables discussed, the results of the distributional patterns are presented in the following section. All of the variables are treated as categorical variables for statistical analysis purpose. Of course, we are well aware of the complex nature of ideologies, yet the binary operationalising of these ideologies ensures that multiple interpretations are still obtainable. A critical qualitative analysis is also provided explicating on such complexities and that of patterns that emerge from the quantitative measures.

4. Results: a distributional analysis

In this section, the results of the distributional patterns of all the variables analysed in the preceding section are presented. A statistical significance test showing what kind of relationship exists between the ideological groupings and discourse variable is conducted. As can be seen, Table 1 shows an overview distribution of all the ten variables operationalised. The distribution shows a comprehensive ideological classification into five ideological groupings, where the first one (1) is *identity politics*, which refers to headlines reproducing (p) or resisting (r) the ideological orientation that a particular group of people (who can be characterised by their religion, race, or any other social label) forms a restrictive and exclusive group, and that this exclusive group motivates the deadly activities of the herdsmen.

The next one is (2) *religion*, which refers to the headlines reproducing (p) or resisting (r) the religious ideological interpretation that the herdsmen crisis is essentially a subtle battle between Islam and Christianity. *Citizenry distrust* (3) refers to headlines reproducing (p) or resisting (r) the ideology that masses should not trust the government on bringing the crisis to an end. Such citizenry distrust implies that people should take up arms, and “defend themselves” as the security institutions of the government, particularly the police and the military will, as usual, fail to defend them against the “killer herdsmen”. *Power* (4) classifies those headlines reproducing (p) or resisting (r) the ideology that the herdsmen crisis is a reflection of abuse of political power by the politically powerful North. In other words, the powerful North subjugates the politically weak South and the West. Also, such ideological interpretation will include headlines asserting that President Mohammed Buhari, himself a Fulani, shields the perpetrating herdsmen from political justice.

The last ideological grouping is *ethnicity* (5), and this classifies those headlines conceptualising the herdsmen crisis as a subtle game of ethnicity in which one ethnicity (i.e. Fulani, or the Northerners) dislikes the other ethnicities and would therefore “go to war” fighting them. Of course, not all the headlines are constructed in a way that they can be clearly operationalised in a binary form as reproducing or resisting inherent ideologies prevalent in the national political discourse. Such headlines are classified as *neutral*. Neutral headlines are then the ideal news headlines, especially in crisis-driven national political discourse. On the other hand, given that these ideologies are so tied to the social fibre and cognition of the Nigerian political discourse, then news writers, who are themselves stakeholders in any given crisis, could not but reflect a stance. Hence, neutral headlines are expected to be rare compared to ideology-loaded headlines. As Table 1 shows, there is an infinite movement of ideology underpinning the conversation in the news headlines.

Table 1 provides a two-way dimension of the ideological distribution. It shows the different communicative purposes that these headlines set to achieve. For

instance, the headlines “Buhari Not Shielding Killer Herdsmen – Osinbajo” and “Police Say They Can’t Arrest Herdsmen Sponsors – Ex Naval Chief” reflect on the questions of political power and support characterising the herdsmen. While the latter headline reproduces the assumption that herdsmen enjoy political power, the former resists such an assumption. Such a two-way distinction allows us to clearly identify what kind of question is being asked in relation to the ideology underlying these different headlines. Furthermore, as can be seen in Table 1, of all the questions relating to ideological construction, the headlines reproducing ideologies of ethnicity (p.14%), and the headlines resisting ideology of power (r. 14%) are the most frequent, whereas the headlines reproducing ideology of power (p.13%) and the headlines resisting citizenry distrust (r.11%) are more likely to occur than the headlines resisting the ideology of religion (r.7%) and those reproducing the ideology of identity politics (p.4%). Surprisingly, we had expected that reproducing the ideology of religion would emerge the preferred or the strongest choice. Such expectation is driven by the fact that religion plays a crucial role in almost all spheres of Nigerian society, including the fact that the activities of the herdsmen have been understood as a two-way crisis with actors divided along the lines of Christianity and Islam.

More specifically, such expectation is clearly dismissed by the fact that the headlines reproducing religious ideology are significantly deselected (0%). Rather, a small percentage (7%) of religious-driven headlines actually resists the belief that the herdsmen crisis is a subtle crisis between Islam and Christianity. Such deselection of religious ideology reproducing headlines could be a deliberate choice by the news writers to avoid moving the representation of the herdsmen crisis to a more sensitive and volatile national debate bordering on religion. In other words, rather than move the discourse to such a sensitive question, the news writers would move the discourse to those of power, ethnicity, and citizenry distrust. Such a careful selection of headlines between those that reproduce and resist religious ideology (0% versus 7%) does not only provide insights into the underlying rhetoric of media texts (such rhetorical strategy is often associated with a possibility of manipulating the masses), but also conversely shows that ideologies reproducing religious animosity rank very highly in the discourse paradigm characterising Nigerian national political discourse structure.

In order to find out the extent to which the discourse variables and the different ideological orientations are related, which allows us to argue that the presence of a certain variable will influence the ideological direction to which a certain headline goes, we conducted a chi-square test of independence for every variable operationalised. We summed up each distribution in p & r (for example in intensification, $p_9 + r_1 = 10$). In addition, we excluded the headlines reporting a neutral ideological stance from the chi-square test because our primary concern is to find out the relationship between ideological rhetoric underlying the texts and also that of different ideological orientations. A chi-square test of independence showed

Table 1. An overview of the distribution of ideologies reproduced and resisted by discourse variables

	Identity politics		Neutral	Religion		Citizenry distrust		Power		Ethnicity		Total
	p	r		r	p	p	r	p	r	p	r	
INTENSIFIER												
Intensify	9	1	90	11	0	15	14	12	28	16	2	198
(%)	(5)	(0)	(45)	(6)	(0)	(8)	(7)	(6)	(14)	(8)	(1)	(100)
Not intensify	19	6	95	43	1	55	73	83	80	87	17	559
(%)	(3)	(1)	(17)	(8)	(0)	(10)	(13)	(15)	(15)	(15)	(3)	(100)
ANIMACY OF VICTIM												
human	3	0	103	3	0	9	6	9	10	4	0	147
(%)	(2)	(0)	(70)	(2)	(0)	(6)	(4)	(6)	(7)	(3)	(0)	(100)
nonhuman	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	11
(%)	(0)	(0)	(82)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(9)	(9)	(0)	(100)
no victim	25	7	73	51	1	61	81	86	97	98	19	599
(%)	(4)	(1)	(12)	(9)	(0)	(10)	(14)	(14)	(17)	(16)	(3)	(100)
DISCOURSE FRAGMENT												
declarative	9	3	157	20	1	38	50	60	56	40	6	440
%	(2)	(1)	(36)	(5)	(0)	(8)	(11)	(14)	(13)	(9)	(1)	(100)
advisory	2	2	20	5	0	16	24	15	22	18	6	130
%	(2)	(2)	(15)	(4)	(0)	(12)	(18)	(12)	(17)	(14)	(4)	(100)
escalating	17	2	8	29	0	16	13	20	30	45	7	187
%	(9)	(1)	(4)	(16)	(0)	(9)	(7)	(11)	(16)	(24)	(3)	(100)
CONVERSATIONALITY												
conversational	19	5	20	40	1	30	27	28	42	61	12	285
%	(7)	(2)	(7)	(14)	(0)	(11)	(9)	(10)	(15)	(21)	(4)	(100)
Informational	9	2	165	14	0	40	60	67	66	42	7	472
%	(2)	(0)	(35)	(3)	(0)	(8)	(13)	(14)	(14)	(9)	(2)	(100)
DISCOURSE EFFECT												
Fear	4	1	109	8	0	21	11	35	31	9	0	229
%	(2)	(0)	(48)	(3)	(0)	(9)	(5)	(15)	(14)	(4)	(0)	(100)
hope	18	5	7	25	1	12	11	12	19	49	8	167
%	(11)	(3)	(4)	(15)	(1)	(7)	(7)	(7)	(11)	(29)	(5)	(100)
narrative	2	0	15	6	0	12	53	10	45	2	2	147
%	(1)	(0)	(10)	(4)	(0)	(8)	(37)	(7)	(31)	(1)	(1)	(100)
preventive	4	1	54	15	0	25	12	38	13	43	9	214
%	(2)	(0)	(25)	(7)	(0)	(12)	(6)	(18)	(6)	(20)	(4)	(100)

	Identity politics		Neutral	Religion		Citizenry distrust		Power		Ethnicity		Total
	p	r		r	p	p	r	p	r	p	r	
HEAVINESS												
short	23	7	175	49	1	60	79	82	99	99	17	691
%	(3)	(1)	(25)	(7)	(0)	(9)	(11)	(13)	(15)	(14)	(2)	(100)
Long	5	0	10	5	0	10	8	13	9	4	2	66
%	(8)	(0)	(15)	(8)	(0)	(15)	(12)	(20)	(14)	(6)	(2)	(100)
FOCUS ARGUMENT												
active voice	17	3	156	39	1	55	72	72	66	72	12	565
%	(3)	(1)	(28)	(7)	(0)	(9)	(13)	(13)	(11)	(13)	(2)	(100)
passive voice	11	4	29	15	0	15	15	19	46	31	7	192
%	(6)	(2)	(15)	(8)	(0)	(8)	(8)	(10)	(24)	(16)	(3)	(100)
DISCOURSE LANDSCAPE												
eastern	5	2	5	4	0	1	4	6	9	16	1	53
%	(9)	(4)	(9)	(8)	(0)	(2)	(8)	(11)	(17)	(30)	(2)	(100)
southern	14	3	135	48	0	25	0	15	0	12	3	255
%	(5)	(1)	(53)	(19)	(0)	(10)	(0)	(6)	(0)	(5)	(1)	(100)
northern	9	2	45	2	0	2	5	8	7	16	8	104
%	(9)	(2)	(43)	(2)	(0)	(2)	(5)	(8)	(7)	(14)	(8)	(100)
none	0	0	0	0	1	42	78	66	92	59	7	345
%	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(12)	(23)	(19)	(27)	(17)	(2)	(100)
MODIFICATION												
noun	5	5	117	36	1	28	51	67	81	68	16	475
%	(1)	(1)	(25)	(8)	(0)	(6)	(11)	(14)	(17)	(14)	(3)	(100)
adjective	23	2	68	18	0	42	36	28	27	35	3	282
%	(8)	(1)	(24)	(6)	(0)	(15)	(13)	(10)	(10)	(12)	(1)	(100)
DISCOURSE WEIGHT												
loss of lives	3	2	99	1	0	10	4	26	17	5	0	167
%	(2)	(1)	(60)	(1)	(0)	(6)	(2)	(16)	(9)	(3)	(0)	(100)
no loss of lives	0	0	30	0	0	10	10	14	12	14	2	92
%	(0)	(0)	(33)	(0)	(0)	(11)	(11)	(15)	(13)	(15)	(2)	(100)
commentaries	25	6	56	53	1	50	73	55	79	84	17	499
%	(5)	(1)	(11)	(11)	(0)	(10)	(15)	(11)	(16)	(17)	(3)	(100)
TOTAL	28	7	185	54	1	70	87	95	108	103	19	757
%	(4)	(1)	(24)	(7)	(0)	(9)	(11)	(13)	(14)	(14)	(3)	(100)

that there is no relation between intensified news headlines and construction of ideological tenets. The relation between these variables was insignificant, $X^2(4, N = 572) = 3.66, p < .45$. In other words, herdsmen news headlines which clearly deployed intensifiers such as “again”, “another”, “severe”, might not necessarily be (re)producing or resisting a certain ideology in its communicative purpose.

As can be seen in Table 1, headlines bearing ideologies relating to citizenry distrust, power and ethnicity were constructed without the use of intensifiers (23%, 30% and 17% respectively). It implies that while intensifiers can indeed strengthen the focus of news headlines, they might actually fail to do one of the things they were to do, which is to drive out an ideology. Nevertheless, we can observe in Table 1 that the headlines not consisting of intensifiers are more likely than those consisting of intensifiers to construct ideologies relating to citizenry distrust (23%), power (30%), and ethnicity (18%). Such a pattern shows that the detection of ideology in news writing might, to some high extent, be inherently related and predicated on the basis of the intensity of the language with which the writer constructs the text, even though a network of the social structure, their sensibilities, membership, and idiosyncrasies are required.

Similar insignificant results emerged for animacy of victim, which shows that the relation between animacy of victim and ideology construction was insignificant, $X^2(8, N = 572) = 7.04, p < .53$. The analysis shows that the rhetoric behind referencing the victim in news headlines reporting no victim or non-human victim for 74% of the distribution might be more related to another communicative purpose than the construction of a crisis-driven ideology. However, in a study of this nature, whose focus is to objectively report crisis-driven discourse, a 26% reference to the human victim is rather surprising, given that loss of lives should rank higher than loss of property. One assumption associated with the Nigerian media and the police reporting crisis-driven events is that they both are more likely to report lesser than actual number of human casualty (e.g. report a loss of five when there is a loss of fifteen). Our distribution might be related with such reductionist reportage assumption. If news headlines are what they are, then in a crisis-driven discourse many more headlines are expected to report human casualty. As Table 1 shows, headlines reporting no victim are more likely than those reporting human or non-human victim to construct ideologies relating to citizenry distrust (24%), power (21%), and ethnicity (19%). This probably shows a negotiation by the writer in terms of what is preferred: a construction of ideology or reportage of human casualty.

Another discourse variable found insignificant is that of the heaviness/complexity of the news headlines. It thus implies that the length of the headline, be it short or long, simple or complex, is not related to the ideological function being performed by the headline. Chi-square showed an insignificant relation, $X^2(4, N = 572) = 3.09, p < .54$, which did not meet our expectation that longer

(or more complex) headlines are purposely long because they have more to say. Although having more to say is not necessarily selling ideology to the audience, the essential characteristic of news writing which is brevity means that only the more important words, phrases, and ideas make it to the headlines. As can be seen in Table 1, 90% of the headlines are short or simple, while just only 10% are long or complex. Meanwhile, irrespective of the complexity of the headlines, be it short/simple or long/complex, they are more likely to construct ideologies relating to citizenry distrust and power (20% and 27% for citizenry distrust, and 28% and 34% respectively). Nevertheless, there is a stand out pattern: construction of ethnicity ideology is more likely to occur in short/simple news headlines than in long/complex ones (16% versus 8%), whereas construction of power ideology is more likely to occur in long/complex news headlines than in short/simple ones.

Unlike heaviness, animacy of victim, and intensifier, all other discourse variables representing discourse fragment, conversationality, focus argument, discourse landscape, modification of keyword, and discourse weight are found significant, showing how the writers manipulate the impression given to the readers by driving the news headlines on a wide range of ideologies. A chi-square result shows that the relation between discourse fragment and construction and detection of ideology in the news headlines is significant, $X^2(8, N = 572) = 44.94, p < .00$. In other words, discourse fragment, i.e. whether the headlines serve advisory, escalating, or declarative purpose, can indeed uncover whether headlines are underpinned with an ideology, and also to some extent, what kind of ideology it is. As in this case, Table 1 shows that escalating headlines (27%) are more likely than advisory (18%) or declarative (10%) headlines to express ideology relating to ethnicity, whereas advisory (30%) headlines are more likely than escalating (16%) or declarative (19%) to express ideology relating to citizenry distrust. In the same vein, a chi-square result shows that the relation between conversationality of headlines and expression of ideology is significantly related, $X^2(4, N = 572) = 51.33, p < .00$.

It is further revealed that conversational headlines (25%), a sort of headlines that engage the readers, or expect to generate a conversation at the community or national level, on the one hand, are more likely than informational headlines (7%) (i.e. a sort of headlines which simply report events) to express ideology relating to ethnicity. Similarly, conversational headlines (14%) are also more likely than informational headlines (3%) to construct religious ideology. On the other hand, informational headlines (28%) are more likely than conversational headlines (25%) to construct and express ideology relating to social or political power. The emerging pattern shows that the writer is very much aware of the important ideologies in the national political discourse, which range from those of political power, dominance, ethnicity, and citizenry distrust, and would therefore manipulate the readers into activating a national discourse that moves the herdsmen discourse-at-hand to more central issues of discourse-around which always revolve around the questions of political power imbalance, domination of one ethnic group over the other, citizenry

distrust of the government and all its institutions. Moving the herdsmen discourse to those questions implies that the ideologies upon which the herdsmen headlines are constructed are more of institutionalised patterns of knowledge and discourse that often become manifest in national political discourse.

According to a chi-square test of independence, the relation between focus argument and expression of ideology is significant, $X^2(4, N = 572) = 12.03, p < .02$. As can be seen, the headlines constructed in active voice (21%) are more likely than passive voice ones (16%) to express ideologies relating to citizenry distrust, whereas passive voice headlines (34%) are more likely than active voice headlines (24%) to express ideology relating to power. This pattern validates the argument that discourse crafted for mass consumption, such as news writing, is often carefully prepared with a thoughtful selection of different rhetorical strategies for different purposes. Of course, the news writer, or indeed any other writer of discourse meant to be consumed by the masses, must appear objective so that the audience do not expressly detect such linguistic manipulation. Similarly, with regards to focus argument, there is a significant relation between discourse landscape and expression of ideology in the headlines, $X^2(12, N = 572) = 272.53, p < .00$. This implies that the political region of the participants brought into the herdsmen conversation by the news writers represents deliberate choices which aided the expression of different ideologies. As Table 1 shows, participants/politicians from the Eastern region of the country correlated with the expression of ethnicity and power.

In other words, the news writers use more contributions of politicians from the Eastern part of Nigeria (29% and 32%) than from the Northern (6% and 6%) or Southern parts (15% and 22%) to express the ideologies of political power and ethnic dominance respectively. As can be seen, Southern politicians are the least to express ideologies relating to political power and ethnicity. The pattern partly validates the political realities in Nigeria, in which the Eastern region of the country has been deprived of the coveted presidency of the nation for many decades. The Eastern region has never enjoyed federal power as there has always been a coalition between the South and the North, which is also the present reality. It may therefore be right to assume that the Eastern politicians would expectedly avail themselves of the opportunity, in a national political discourse, to resist the continuing political power imbalance, and domination of one ethnicity over the other.

The variables representing discourse weight and modification of the keyword “herdsmen” are also found explaining what kind of ideology we expect to find in our news headlines. Modification of the keyword “herdsmen”, i.e. being used as a noun or as an adjective, is rather a more linguistic variable than a discourse variable which helps to see how the linguistic choices made by the writer contributed to the ideological function of the headlines. Complete emphasis and focus on the keyword “herdsmen” is altered when the keyword is used as an adjective (e.g. “Suspected Herdsmen Kill Five”), whereas the opposite is the case when it is used as a noun (e.g. “Herdsmen Kill five”). A chi-square test shows that indeed

the usage of the keyword as a noun or as an adjective is significant for explaining where the construction of ideology is located in the news headlines, $X^2(4, N = 572) = 39.18, p < .00$. The distribution in Table 1 shows that writers put all emphasis on the keyword “herdsmen” (i.e. using it as a noun without a pre-modifying element) to express ideology relating to power.

On the other hand, the keyword is pre-modified (i.e. the keyword “herdsmen” is used with an adjective before it) for the communicative purpose of expressing citizenry distrust. Also, the significant relation between discourse weight and expression of ideology, $X^2(8, N = 572) = 46.03, p < .00$, shows a clear manipulation of the impression given to the readers. It is also revealed that the news headlines reporting no loss of lives are crafted in such a way that they express ideologies relating to citizenry distrust and ethnic dominance though it would have been expected that headlines reporting loss of lives are a perfect fit resisting political abuse and all different means of social inequality. However, an explanation for such a choice could be the assumption that politics should not be played with loss of lives. Another explanation might be that given Nigeria’s politicians’ idiosyncratic practices of political power abuse, domination, and subjugation, headlines reporting a loss of property may rank higher than headlines reporting loss of lives in constructing ideologies of identity politics, power, citizenry distrust, religion, and ethnicity. In other words, some headlines can exhibit more creativity than others. That can thus imply that the writer of the news headlines ranks selling of ideology to the audience higher than just doing an objective reportage of loss of lives associated with the herdsmen crisis. This pattern reaffirms our earlier findings in the animacy of victims which shows that, for the purpose of moving the herdsmen discourse to the centre and constructing a wide range of ideologies that correlate with national political discourse, the news writers of these headlines deliberately deselect headlines reporting loss of lives, and carefully choose those headlines reporting loss of property (or those merely commenting on the loss of lives and broader events bordering on the crisis).

5. Discourse chain and movement: discourse-at-hand vs discourse-around

As the preceding analyses have shown, there is clearly a movement and a flow of discourse from discourse-at-hand to discourse-around. As evident in the data, the discourse-at-hand is that of herdsmen crisis, which is often conceptualised and juxtaposed with more central and national issues of religion, identity politics, ethnicity and domination, political and social power and its abuse, and citizenry distrust. In other words, herdsmen discourse is just a fraction of the discourse adequate enough to allow a transition to more crucial issues and questions relating to the national political discourse. In other words, the national issues of religion, identity politics, ethnicity and domination, political and social power and its abuse, and citizenry distrust are

more permanent in the cognition of the different groups making up the society than transient discourses such as herdsmen talk. This implies that almost every transient discourse in such a society as Nigeria will almost always be driven by its more permanent and inherent ideological questions, which means that outsider analysts (i.e. non-members of the society) trying to find significant social meaning in such discourse-at-hand using a different network of framework apart from those peculiar to the cognitions of the discourse-around and of the social members who live out the contours, would have failed to account for the totality of the text.

As we have shown, the chain of movement between discourse-at-hand and discourse-around is driven by motivations in discourse-around, which is often a desire to return to the centre the questions of political imbalance, domination, etc. In other words, motivation for participation in herdsmen talks, which is a periphery discourse fragment, should be found in the issues and ideologies relating to the centre discourse or discourse-around. If discourse, be it peripheral or central, at hand or around, is a totality of texts produced by people who share the same language and sensibilities (Koteyko 2006), then a small text will almost always find its meaning of the realities within the bigger text. In other words, given the different shades of the meanings of its realities, the herdsmen talk has not only shown how periphery discourse drives centre discourse but also how issues in the centre discourse create the discourse in the periphery. More specifically, in such a Nigerian socio-political entity where conversation around issues and ideologies in centre discourse can often turn violent (e.g. religion is so tied to the people and the government at all levels that discourse around religion cannot be sustained without a quick flow to ethnicity, the question of nationhood, social oppression, etc.), then they often do not form an object of national discourse in themselves but through any periphery discourse-at-hand.

Following our line of argument, it can thus be contended that a generalised discourse movement model for the identification, classification and interpretation of ideologies and its inherent dimensions would follow: (1) a creation of centre discourse, which is often a range of issues and ideologies that define the membership of the different social groups constituting Nigeria; (2) a current socio-political reality interpreting the centre discourse in (1); and (3) a fine-grained distinction of the different texts making up the periphery discourse, as to whether they reproduce or resist ideologies in the centre discourse. We assert that finding out the reality of the social meaning in a periphery discourse, i.e. discourse-at-hand, can only be reasonably done by moving the periphery discourse into the centre.

6. Concluding remarks

The present study has been able to achieve its two-fold purpose: (1) to provide a model for corpus-based discourse analysis of Nigerian political discourse, a sort of

political discourse that could not be sufficiently accounted for with only qualitative means, but with corpus method, which allows the data to speak rather than relying on all-intuitive assumptions, and (2) to show the extent to which crisis-driven discourse or periphery discourse drives on broader social ideologies to move the discourse away from transitory issues to a broader perpetual concern. We have shown that such transient herdsman discourse drives on a chain of ideologies relating to identity politics, religion, citizenry distrust, power and its abuse, and ethnicity. We have also argued that in order to adequately and relevantly produce insightful realities into the way such transitory discourse is formed, structured and negotiated, then a recourse to the inherent ideologies that move the centre must be properly identified, classified, and interpreted.

As the distribution shows, there are emerging institutionalised patterns of ideologies, assumptions, and knowledge that are crucial for understanding the news headlines or any other such texts produced for mass consumption in the Nigerian political space. In other words, the paper has been able to show how any such transitory text can shed light on the broader social structures, together with the socio-psychological tendencies of the people involved in the texts. More specifically, the variable representing discourse landscape allows us to see into the inner make-up of the Nigerian political space, so that insights into the reality of socio-political co-existence of the Eastern, Southern, and Northern politicians and their people are provided. Furthermore, we have shown that indeed news headlines are either driven by ideology or driven by the journalistic objective principle of writing (i.e. neutral headlines), at least as shown by our data.

Of course, the degree to which such a distinction can be made is more a matter of the analyst. However, we have certainly shown that ideologically-driven media writings are usually drivers of centre ideologies. Also, we have shown that such reproduction or resistance of these centre ideologies can be predicted on the basis of linguistic and social variables. We have also shown how such variables can be derived, developed, and operationalised within a discourse theoretic framework. We have shown that discourse analysis can indeed gain so much from empirical practice; which allows us to develop hypotheses with which further studies can be tested.

For instance, the present paper has, among many others, hypothesised that any crisis-driven discourse in Nigerian political discourse will be motivated by centre ideologies such as identity politics, power, citizenry distrust, religion and ethnicity. Such hypothesis thus requires further replicability which intuitive-based approaches would not afford. On the basis of chi-square results, we can scale the variables tested in the study in this order of importance: discourse landscape, discourse effect, conversationality, discourse weight, and focus argument. In other words, discourse landscape is the strongest variable that explains the variability in our data, followed by discourse effect, and so on. The emergence of discourse landscape as a very strong variable is a true reflection of the reality of political

conversation in Nigeria, which often views the contributions of the people from the Eastern region of Nigeria as reproducing dissent, resistance of power, and reproduction of identity politics or ethnicity. As usual with empirical analysis, the findings in the present study remain tentative and should be tested in a logistic regression with a view to building a model which can more reliably provide us with a fine-grained profile revealing the socio-psychological tendencies of all the people involved in the discourse.

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