



THE PRAGMATIC ACTS IN SELECTED NIGERIAN PRINT MEDIA REPORTS ON THE ABDUCTED CHIBOK SCHOOL GIRLS

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ABSTRACT: *A news report is a form of writer-reader negotiated meaning and contextual consideration of language, structure, and verbal codes. Thus, the study explored the various pragmatic acts performed in news reports on the abducted Chibok girls in Nigeria, especially the construction of acts or meaning through verbal codes. Using Mey's (2001) aspects of pragmatic acts as the theoretical framework undergirded the study, a total of thirteen (13) verbal reports were purposively selected from three Nigerian newspapers (The Nation, Daily Trust & The Punch) and analysed from the points of pragmatic acts, Searle's (1969) classification of Speech acts, implicature and presupposition. The study revealed that instantiated acts (practs) are pragmatically patterned to perform some acts of informing, reporting to the audience, stating the fact in the news reports on the abducted Chibok girls and playing some roles in social change. The study also revealed that The Nation, Dail Trust and The Punch deploy their news reports through implicit practs of castigating the spate of insecurity and condemning the ineptitude of security agents towards rescuing the abducted Chibok girls. The study also showed that the preponderant occurrences of factive presupposition were due to the fact that the assumptions being made about the news of the abducted Chibok girls are actual, real and easily embedded in the news report. The study concludes that Nigerian newspapers play a role in setting the boundaries of what is talked about; shaping social issues happening around the nation and exposing them to their readership.*

KEYWORDS: Media Reports, Pragmatic act; Implicit Allopract; Explicit Allopract



INTRODUCTION

Meaning is communicated by using signs or symbols in specific contexts. This can be done by various means, including linguistic and visual signs. A red flag behind a truck loaded with iron rods has different significance from a red flag held by supporters of a political party protesting election rigging. A simple cross (+) can be negative or positive, depending on the context. When made on a student's assignment or test script by a teacher, it can indicate an error, but when the same cross is made by the same teacher on a ballot paper in an election, it may indicate the selection of the candidate. In each of the cases, the selection of the sign, its placement and its meanings are all determined by human intervention (Bloor & Bloor, 2007).

When language is considered a carrier of meaning, a complex picture emerges. An example of its complexity can be seen in what is called a pragmatic act. A pragmatic act is an act characterized by a deliberate choice of various kinds of codes: verbal, nonverbal, visual, and emotive, for the performance of certain acts, including speech acts, psychological/affective acts, conversational or communicative acts, and visual acts, which are engaged in contexts in order cause the desired effect (Tseng, 2010). Put in another way, some acts are performed by using words, pictures, colours, gestures, and emotions. This idea implies that text creators perform acts (or do many things) with their deployment of linguistic and visual resources as well as framing or discourse strategies. They may assert, persuade, inform, threaten, invite, rebuke, accuse, counsel, or condemn. Since pragmatic acts are an integral part of the meaning, critical pragmatists need to look at the encoders' goals, especially how there could be some bias concealed in language.

Newspaper reports constitute important sources of information and attitude formation for the public (Melkote, 2009). The press may not be effective in telling the readers what to think but it is effective in telling them what to think about. This hidden power of news reports and the capacity of power-holders to exercise the power depend on systematic linguistic patterning, picture cropping and captioning in news reporting and news framing strategies. As Watson and Hill (2006) argue, framing constitutes a news narrative strategy. News framing strategies, therefore, refer to the ways in which news media organize, treat and present issues, events and newsmakers. Media frames have been defined as the central storyline or organizing idea that attributes meaning to issues, events and the actors involved. Framing strategies can influence how audiences think about issues (attitude priming), not only by making aspects of the issue more salient but also by invoking interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of information (Entman, 1993). All these are part of non-conventional interpretation matters which can be best accounted for in pragmatic terms.

Meanings in media reports may be literal or pragmatic. Literal meanings are primary, explicit and truth-conditional. On the other hand, pragmatic meanings are secondary, implicit, and naturally inferred based on human rational thinking and inference drawing abilities. Pragmatic meanings are inherently context-sensitive and complement literal or grammatical meanings (Mey 2001). They add non-linguistic nuances and interpretations.

A news report is examined not only as a product of a particular ideology but also as a mechanism to reproduce that ideology (Yin, 2005). Media scholars recognize the fact that the power of discourse lies in its ability to articulate particular practices and meanings and to provide an intertextual experience for the audience to consume news reports. Hay (1989, p.139) argues that media discourse should be understood as "a site 'intersected' by many discourses,



where discursive and cultural literacy is actively engaged within the concrete, historical situations and where meanings are constructed, negotiated and contested". The signifying function of the media discourse does not "simply naturalize; it robs the object/signifier of its meaning in a more common, privileged, or accepted context" (Hay, 1989, p.148). As a result, although signs and symbols are polysemous or multi-accentual in nature, the representation process tends to reduce meaning to one direction by suppressing other meanings (Yin, 2005). Audience members could restore the polysemy or multi-accentuality in critical reading; they, however, often need to realize the referential and connotative/evaluative dimensions of the "primary" meaning before they could apply a different frame of reference to the discourse. Critical linguists or discourse analysts, such as Fowler (1991), Fairclough (1995), and van Dijk (1995, 1998) maintain that although social-political factors are important subjects for analysis, news reports also should be closely examined for their role in the implicit (re)production of discrimination, tyranny, control, biases, and dominance.

News stories can be seen as an important arena for implicitly performing pragmatic acts because they regularly bring in and discuss both people and events. As the news enjoys the status of a truth-like representation of the world, news representations are particularly influential, and to have a favourable representation of oneself in the news is much desired. According to Pietikainen and Hujanen, (2003, p.256), media representation is not always "neutral but is always produced from a particular angle: at the same time, it is a product of choice and therefore, always leaves something out". Media representations are among the most familiar, widely known and appreciated representations. It is, therefore, illuminating to critically examine the ways in which people, events, and policies are linguistically, discursively, and visually constructed or deconstructed for performing some pragmatic acts and achieving some goals

Language of News Reports

The language of newspapers is quite different from, for instance, business language or academic language. As mentioned by Crystal and Davy (1969, p.173), "everything that happens to be printed in a newspaper or written by a journalist is not going to be linguistically homogenous". Crystal and Davy (1969) also assert that there is no reason to expect such a "homogeneity" since a newspaper is always very eclectic from the stylistic point of view. We come across a number of "journalese" on the pages of various daily newspapers, and as a striking fact, while they are dealing with the same issue, their overall styles are very different.

Everything that is written in a newspaper is transmitted through the medium of language. Language, therefore, encompasses both emotional and cultural loading. The content of this loading, on the other hand, is determined by the nature of the culture or sub-culture in which the language exists (Reah, 1998). Moreover, as exemplified by Reah (1998) that if a particular culture has little respect for certain groups, concepts or beliefs, then the language for expressing ideas about those groups, concepts or beliefs will reflect that attitude. Therefore, when news is written about, people reading the text will have their attitudes reinforced by the way the language presents these things to them.

The purpose of a news report is usually to give the reader information in an interesting but objective way. To do this, journalists often use the passive voice and words which are near-synonyms. Using the passive voice makes the report sound more formal. By putting the object of the verb at the beginning of the sentence, readers' attention is taken away from the subject.



For example, “Eighty-seven students were abducted by the Boko Haram” and “Boko Haram abducted eighty-seven students”, have the same meaning, the reporter is focusing on the result of the action instead of the people doing the action in the former. News reports often use the passive voice to avoid saying directly that someone has done something. In this way, they try to remain impartial.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mey’s (2001) Theory of Pragmatic acts

Mey’s main criticism of speech act theory is the basis for his development of the theory of the pragmeme. According to Mey (2001, p.218), speech acts, to be effective, must be situated, that is, they both rely on, and actively create, the situation in which they are realized.” Unlike speech acts conditions and rules for individual acts, pragmatic acts entail a characterizing of a general situational prototype, capable of being executed in the situation- this is what Mey calls “pragmeme”.

Mey’s pragmatic act theory involves a total user involvement and has two things that are involved in his explanation of context:

1. The user involves the situation, by being an active (co) participant and language user
2. The situation involves the user by defining what he or she can say in the situation.

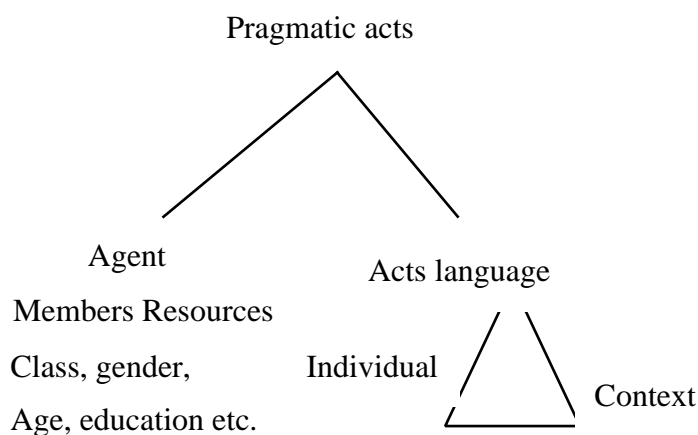
Most importantly, Mey is not only concerned about users but also about how the users within the confines of their environment are able to utilize their language resources to communicate, that is, ‘what the empowerment of the participant is grounded in?’. In essence, Mey (2001, pp.226) observes that whenever people communicate, society is the ‘silent’, but by no means ‘sleeping’ partner. In other words, the social construction is subject to societal constraints but the way individuals find their way around such constraints is of importance in Mey’s pragmatic theory- pragmatic acting/pragmeme. Pragmatic acting is defined basically as using language on common ground”.

The pragmatic act takes care of the question: given the situation and social conditions of the speaker and hearers, what can be said and done? As such, constraints provide a creative linguistic impetus for the individuals in their social interactions. This is explicated in the theory of pragmeme discussed below.

Mey (2001) explains that a typical pragmatic outlook of human communication involves the “language users” performing pragmatic acts. For any situation to “count as” a particular pragmatic act, these three criteria are expected:

1. The circumstance (the setting up) must be right
2. Context determines the nature of the pragmatic act and not any speech act
3. Uptake needs to be secured. Without uptake, there cannot be a pragmatic act (by uptake we mean an understanding or comprehension of what is said)

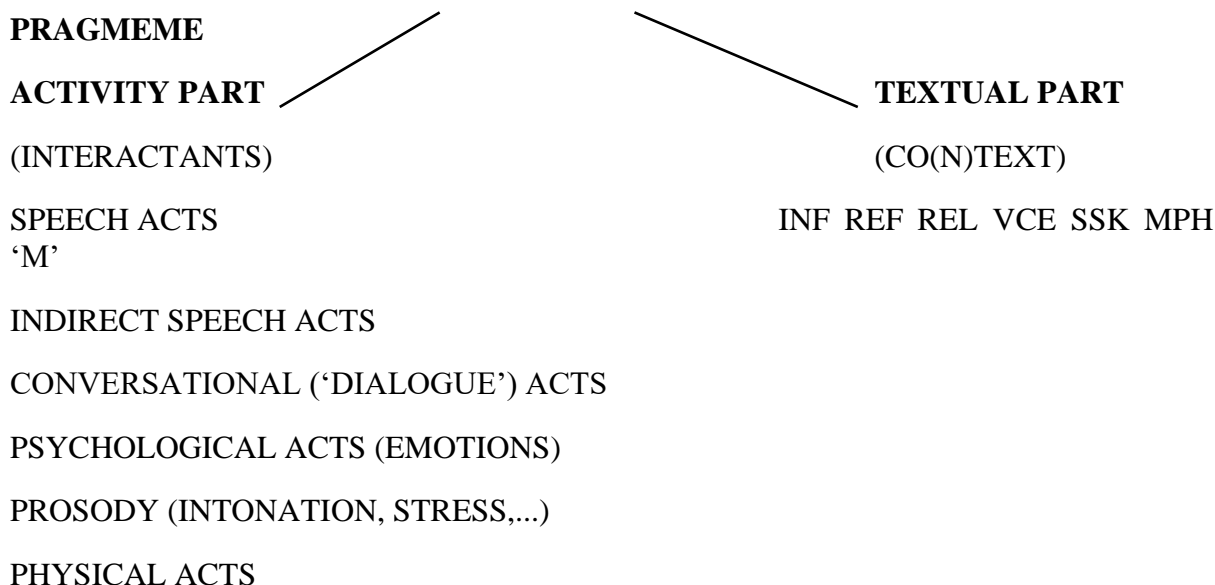
We present below, the interpretation of Mey’s pragmatic acts in the diagram below:



The diagram shows that individuals in any communicative encounter consider the MR as it influences their choice of language use and try as much as possible to adapt their language use for the ongoing interaction. In essence, pragmatic acting is about adapting linguistically and otherwise, to one’s world. Mey (2001, p.221) explains:

Conversations are seen as a pragmatic interaction (pragmatic act) and as a form of social behaviour that emphasizes the user’s possibilities in a given situation. In pragmatic acts, the focus is on the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as what is actually said.

A well-outlined structure of a pragmatic act is represented as follows





BODY MOVES (INCL. GESTURES)

PHYSIOGNOMY (FACIAL EXPRESSIONS)

(BODILY EXPRESSIONS OF) EMOTIONS

...Ø (NULL)

PRACT

ALLOPRACT

Pragmeme, Pract, Allopract

Mey's (2001) pragmeme

The diagram shows that there are two broad categories in analyzing a Pragmeme: activity part and textual part. The activity type encompasses possible acts: speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational acts etc that can be performed by interactants. However, not all the types of acts will be used in any given communicative event. As such, an analyst needs to decide which acts are relevant for his/her own research foci. The right side indicates the textual part which covers both textual and contextual considerations. These are captured in the features: (inferencing), REF (reference), REL (relevance), VCE (Voice), SSK (shared situational knowledge) and MPH (metaphors). M refers to any 'metapragmatic' element that surfaces on the text and that directs our attention to something beyond the text- something on the 'metapragmatic plane' (Mey 2001, p.221). Mey's theory has been criticized by Kecskes (2010), who is of the opinion that, because Mey's emphasis is on the environment, the individual's initiative is limited. He explains that in Mey's opinion, human activity is not the privilege of the individual. Rather the individual is situated in a social context, which means that s/he is empowered as well as limited by the conditions of his/her social life. This is quite a deterministic view that gives limited space for individuals 'initiatives' (Kecskes 2010, p.1).

Contrary to Kecskes' view, it is believed that this same consideration for societal perspectives and its influence on language use serves as an impetus for individuals' creative use of language strategies. But we agree with the fact presented by Kecskes (2010) that the situations are also important in utterance meaning. Mey's (2001) and Kecskes's (2010) positions on human communication are right in their own ways. According to Mey (2001, p.219)

The theory of pragmatic acts does not try to explain language use from the inside out, from words having their origin in a sovereign speaker and going out to an equally sovereign hearer (...). Rather, its explanatory movement is from the outside in: the focus is on the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said about the situation, as well as on what is actually being said.

Tseng (2010) explains that the notion of pragmatic acts is more useful and applicable than speech act theory especially when a stringing together of utterances longer than a sentence is under scrutiny." Because of its adaptability to different contexts, pragmeme offers a more explanatory capacity than the speech act theory. Tseng (2010, p.1984) asserts that the pragmatic act theory points to the subtlety and not covert action implicit in much communication, which the theory of speech act has not fully considered or cannot explain.



METHODS

The study involves qualitative critical content analysis of selected news stories from two Nigerian newspapers (*The Punch, The Nation and Daily Trust*). The two newspapers were selected as representatives of national newspapers because their circulation cuts across the six geo-political zones in Nigeria and they are known for moulding enlightened public opinion, pungent editorialising on issues of national interest and informed feature articles and news on national issues (Ogungbe, 2014). The newspapers were also part of the most widely read newspapers in Nigeria and they share similar features in terms of circulation, coverage and fame. A total of thirteen (13) News reports were purposively selected for the analysis. The theoretical appurtenances of Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory complemented with implicature and presupposition were used for the analysis of the selected texts.

Theoretical Model for the Study

A purely pragmatic analysis can neither explain the concepts of language nor the wide range of contextual factors necessary for a comprehensive understanding of news reports. Hence, the in-depth pragmatic analysis which explores the direct and indirect linguistic and pragmatic devices has to systematically explore explicit and implicit meanings in Nigerian news reports. Therefore, the model for analyzing pragmatic acting in Nigerian newspapers which has inputs from other theoretical and methodological models (Such as Mey's 2001 and Searle's 1969 theory) is adopted for data analysis. The model caters for a critical analysis of pragmatic acts performed through various textual resources in the newspaper as a multimodal text. The analytical model is represented in the figure below:

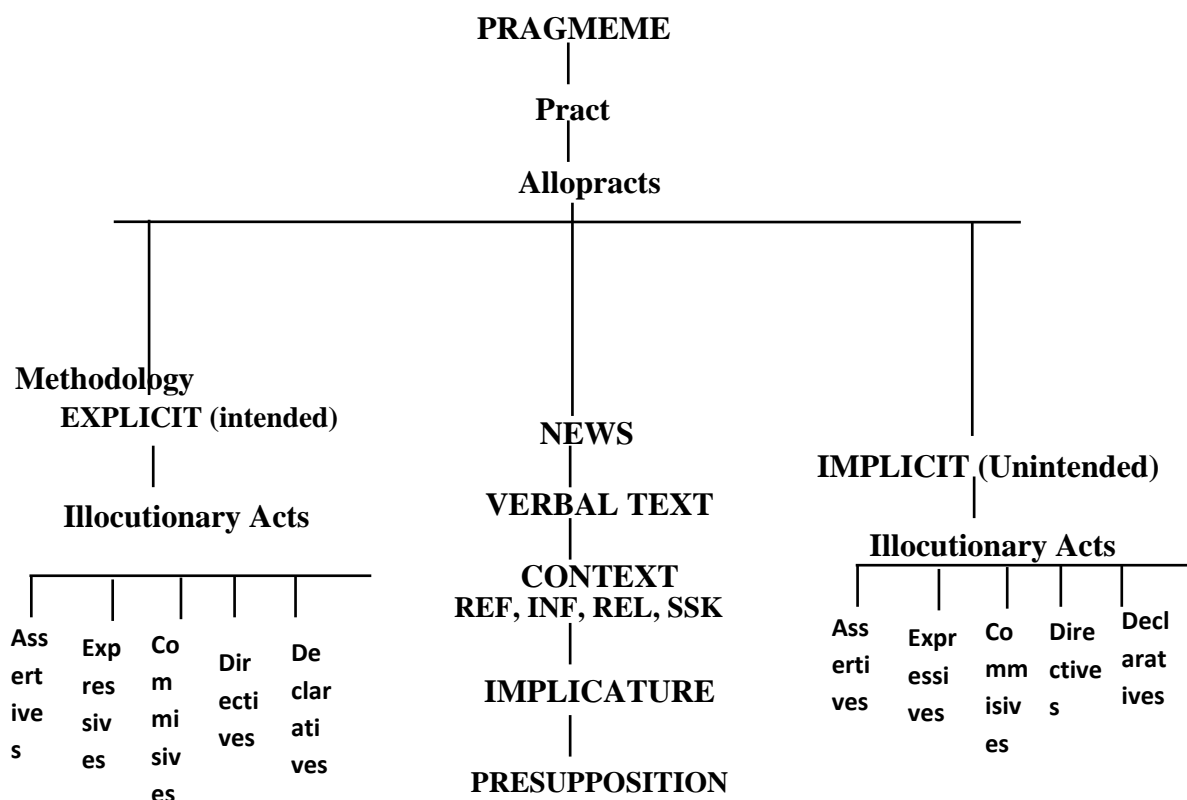


Fig 2. Model for the Study



The study involves qualitative critical content analysis of selected verbal news stories from three Nigerian national daily newspapers (*The Nation, The Punch and Dailytrust*). The three newspapers were selected as representatives of national newspapers because their circulation cuts across the six geo-political zones in Nigeria and they are known for moulding enlightened public opinion, pungent editorializing on issues of national interest and informed feature articles and news on national issues (Ogungbe, 2014). The periods cover April 2014 to April 2015.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Datum 1

B' Haram Kidnaps 100 girls in attack on hostel

Nigerians, who were struggling to free themselves from the horrific hangover of Monday's suicide bombing, yesterday got another piece of bad news- the abduction of 100 girls at the Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State.

The Nation, Wednesday April 16, 2014

Explicit Allopracts: Assertive acts of reporting and informing

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive acts of condemning and sensitising

Pragmeme: Based on shared situational knowledge (SSK), the insurgent group, Boko Haram has been causing mayhem in Nigeria, North East to be specific. Their nefarious act of kidnapping 100 girls in a hostel attack is hereby reported in this news report. The news report, therefore, informs readers about the latest havoc Boko Haram has caused. This informs the two explicit allopracts of *informing* and *reporting* in the pract of the news report. Elsewhere, the implicit allopracts of *condemning* and *sensitising* can be indirectly inferred. The report condemns the group for its abominable activities. Not only these but it is also aimed at warning or rather sensitising about the need to be security conscious as Nigeria is under Boko Haram siege and that our schools, especially the ones in the Northeast (the locus of insurgency in the country) are not secured.

Implicature

This news report adheres to the Gricean maxim of quantity. It gives adequate reports in relation to the abduction of the girls, i.e. the number of girls kidnapped (100); where the kidnapping took place (Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno state) as well as those behind this dastardly act (Boko Haram). The maxim of quality is also adhered to as the report is presumed truthful. Newspaper reports are mandated to give true reports. The report is clear and concise, thus, the maxim of manner is obeyed. Is the news report relevant? Yes, it is: Boko Haram has been a thorn in the flesh of the federal government of Nigeria in particular and Nigerians in general, as such, any news report on them is deemed newsworthy.



Presupposition

The news report presupposes that there exists a sect called Boko Haram; as such we have an existential presupposition. Leaving that aside, it also pragmatically presupposes that Nigerians are disjointed and vexed with Boko Haram activities in the country.

Datum 2

B' Haram abducts 100 schoolgirls in Borno

No fewer than 100 female students of the Government Girls' Secondary School, Chibok in Borno State were on Monday night, abducted by members of the outlawed militant Islamic sect, Boko Haram.

The Punch, Wednesday, April 16, 2014

Explicit Allopract: Assertive act of reporting

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive acts of challenging and condemning

Pragmeme: In this datum, at least three instantiated pragmatic acts are implied. These are explicit allopract of *reporting*, and the implicit allopracts of *challenging* and *condemning*. The activity part of the pragmeme is actually from the stream of consciousness of the kidnapped Chibok girls which is brought to the fore via INF of the allopracts being performed. The news report condemns the attack on the school girls. In contrast with datum 1 which is homogenous with datum 2 but with different lead stories, hence the varying means journalists sell news to the public are discovered. Thus, it implies that journalists differ in their reportorial news but relate to the peculiar style of the news report to arouse the interest of the public to buy the newspaper. Aside from that, the metapragmatic joker *kidnap* in datum 1, sends fear to the readers than the word *abduct*. Therefore, this news report challenges the government to proffer a lasting solution to the incessant kidnapping in the country.

Implicature

The news report flouts the maxim of quantity: do not give more than or less than required information. The information given is not enough to deduce the number of girls that were abducted. However, the maxim of quantity is flouted so that the maxim of quality is obeyed. The implied meaning of the news story is that the reporter is not sure of the number of girls missing. As such he hedges with the expression: *No fewer than 100*. The news item is relevant as it tells the story of the latest ignoble act of the Boko Haram sect which has been terrorising the Northern parts of Nigeria. In other respects, the news story is clear, perspicuous and unambiguous. Hence, the maxim of manner is unsurprisingly obeyed. Conciseness and clarity are some of the key features of a news report.

Presupposition

In the datum, two existential presuppositions are observed. First, there is an assumption about the existence of an Islamic sect called Boko Haram which has been carrying out infamous activities in the country. Secondly, there is also an assumption about the existence of a state called Borno state.



Datum 3

Jonathan summons govs, service chiefs over attacks

President Goodluck Jonathan has called for a meeting of governors and service chiefs over the abduction of school girls in Chibok, Borno State. The meeting is expected to deliberate on how to rescue the school girls from Boko Haram.

The *Punch*, Thursday, April 17, 2014

Explicit Allopracts: Assertive acts of stating and reporting

Implicit Allopract: Expressive acts of assuaging

Pragmeme: Through SSK and background knowledge that Boko Haram kidnapped some girls in Borno State, the president, as the number one citizen of the country, and who has legitimate power to summon anybody hence his summon of governors and service chiefs to a meeting to deliberate on how to rescue the Chibok girls. This implies that the president wants quick action to be taken to ensure that the abducted girls regain freedom. The news report, therefore, aims to report this latest report to readers as well as inform them about the latest development regarding the Chibok abduction through an assertive allopract of *stating* and *reporting*. In any case, there is a covert allopract being performed in the report. This is the expressive allopract of *assuaging*. Inter alia, the report is aimed at relieving tension accumulated as a result of the abduction of the girls. It also aims to inform the public that its government is not as sleep and is really working hard to ensure the freedom of the girls.

Implicature

This news report violates the maxim of quantity. It does not state the state governors that were summoned. Some readers might infer that the governors in this context comprise the 36 state governors in the country; others might surmise it is just the governors of the affected state(s). The implication of this is that the maxim of manner is also violated. This is because the exact number of governors summoned as well as the kinds of service chiefs is not explicitly stated. Other Gricean maxims: quality and relevance are however adhered to. The news report is truthful; otherwise, it will be a libel against the number one citizen of the country, which itself is treason. As such, reporters ensure they get their facts right before reporting any news about the presidency. The significance of the news lies in what is expected from the government. When such terrorist act occurs, it is expected that government officials come together to develop countermeasures.

Presupposition

The prominent assumption made in the news report is existential presuppositions. The following expressions: *President Goodluck Jonathan, Boko Haram, Borno State, Chibok, governors, service chiefs*, presuppose the existence of the entities and places implied. The second expression: *The meeting is expected to deliberate on how to rescue the school girls from Boko Haram* is a lexical presupposition. It presupposes that the meeting has not taken place.



Datum 4

Boko Haram: Eight girls still missing as troops rescue 80

The Defence Headquarters said yesterday that only eight of the 129 students abducted by Boko Haram from the Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok in Borno State are still missing.

The Nation, Thursday 17 April, 2014

Explicit Allopract: Assertive act of reporting

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive acts of assuaging and appreciating

Pragmeme: The activity part of the pragmeme is acted on reference to the news of the abducted girls through direct and indirect pragmatic acts; put differently, explicit and implicit allopracts. The explicit allopract being performed, which is indeed secondary is that of *informing* the audience about the effort of the military to rescue some of the missing girls. Based on the existing background knowledge that some girls are missing, this news report on hand implicitly praises the military for rescuing 129 girls as well as encouraging them to rescue the remaining girls without further delay. On the other hand, the report is also aimed at mitigating the palpable tension in the country in relation to the fight against terrorism.

Implicature

The news report is clear and perspicuous; it contains enough information; as the information is supposedly coming from a reliable source, *The Defence Headquarters*, it is expected to be true; the news is also related to topical events in the country. Therefore, this news report obeys the four Gricean maxims of manner, quantity, quality and manner.

Presupposition

There are existential presuppositions in this datum. The existence of the following entities and places: *The Defence Headquarters*, *Boko Haram*, *Government Girls Secondary School*, *Chibok*, *Borno State*. In order to fully understand and make the correct inferences in the news report, it is assumed that readers already have foreknowledge about the existence of the presumed entities and places. Leaving that aside, there is also a lexical presupposition. The word *still* lexically presupposes that the girls are missing.

Datum 5

Military lied about schoolgirls rescue -principal, parents

The principal of the secondary school in Chibok, Borno state where over 100 girls were abducted by Boko Haram insurgents has described as false, the claim by the Defence Headquarters that only eight of the pupils yet to regain their freedom.

The Punch, Friday, April 14, 2014



Explicit Allopracts: Assertive acts of debunking and reporting

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive acts of defaming and condemning.

Pragmeme: This report apparently contradicts the preceding report i.e. datum 4 which claims that 80 girls were rescued from Boko Haram. This is debunked in this report. Thus, the direct allopract being performed in this news report is *debunking* the previous news report that some girls have been rescued. The REF here is the real stakeholders: those directly affected by the kidnapping i.e. the principal of the school and the parents of the abducted girls. They categorically came out to tell the public that the military had lied over the rescue of the girls. From a critical perspective, the news report is implied to be performing at least two indirect allopracts: *defaming* and *condemning*. The expression “*Military lied...*” is a metapragmatic joker which defames the integrity and honour of the (Nigerian) military. This puts their reputation in tatters and competence in doubt. Not only this, but it also *condemns* the military for playing political shenanigans with the rescue of school girls.

Implicature

This report was made on April 14, 2014, just four days after the abduction of the Chibok Girls. This makes every report in relation to the event, auspicious or inauspicious, relevant. The report is also concise and clear, providing necessary information about the latest development on the abduction of the girls. The news report, therefore, adheres to the Gricean maxims of relevance, manner and quality. The same, however, cannot be said for the maxim of quality. The Gricean maxim reiterates the fact that language users should not say that for which they lack evidence. To the point, as this report is a contradiction of the preceding data which stated that 80 of the abducted girls have been rescued, then one of them: datum 4 or datum 5 is ostentatiously flouting the maxim of quality. The truthfulness of the report hangs in the balance.

Obviously, the news report in datum 5, flouts the Gricean maxim of quality and quantity. First, the news report that the *military lied about school girls' rescue* is a total disgust for the country that relied much on the military for protection. As such, the principal did not explain why the military lied or maybe it implies that she had not seen the girls claimed to have been rescued by the military. Also, the reports fail to account for the reasons or provide enough information on how the principal got to know that the military lied over the rescue of the Chibok girls.

Presupposition

In the headline, the lexical entry *lied* precipitates a lexical presupposition. This assumes that a statement had been made earlier, whether the statement is true or not is entirely a different issue. Elsewhere, in the report, there are existential presuppositions. The proper noun lexical entries *Chibok*, *Borno state*, *Boko Haram*, and *Defence Headquarters* are assumed to exist, and readers are supposed to know about them.

Datum 6

Parents join soldiers in bush search for 99 girls

Anxious parents of some of the girls abducted from the Governments Girls Secondary School, ChibokBorno State, have headed for the forest in a desperate search for their daughter.

The Nation, Friday, April 18, 2014



Explicit Allopract: Assertive act of informing

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive acts of challenging (security agents, government), and sympathising

Pragmeme: Based on REF, REL and SSK of the abducted Chibok girls, this report subtly condemns the Nigerian security agents for failing to rescue the abducted girls. Invariably, it is the duty of the security agents in particular, but the government in general to protect the lives and property of every citizen. As such, with the obvious failure of the Nigerian government in the rescue of the Chibok girls, coupled with its ineptitude as well as the frustration and agony they have endured, the parents of the abducted girls join the soldiers in search for their children. Thus, it is implied that the news report project the trauma these parents are going through that has led them to join the search for their children.

In other respects, it also presupposes the kind of danger these armless parents are likely to encounter peradventure they come in contact with their children's armed abductors. Above all, the datum implicitly challenges the Nigerian security agents to forcefully reposition itself and its efforts in protecting the lives of its citizens.

Implicature

This report relates issues regarding the abduction of the Chibok Girls which is a topical issue during this period. As such, the report is relevant. The report is given in an unambiguous and perspicuous style as well as providing adequate information on the entities involved and what they are actually doing. It, therefore, adheres to both the Gricean maxims of manner and quantity. Leaving those aside, it is imperative to note that this is a news report. In a news report, the WHO is very crucial in authenticating the authenticity of a report. In this report, the message, at any rate, is not coming from the WHOs. It is a related report. One cannot categorically say that the maxim of quality was ostentatiously adhered to as known anxious parents have really come out to affirm that they trudged into the dreaded Sambisa forest to look for their abducted daughters.

Presupposition

The news story firstly presupposes that *some girls* were indeed *abducted*. This is a lexical presupposition. *The forest* is an existential presupposition which predicates the existence of a particular forest. Even though the exact forest is not mentioned, it is assumed that readers, through shared situational knowledge and Spatio-temporal factor, are aware that it is Sambisa, in Borno state. Other existential presuppositions in the report include *Governments Girls Secondary School, Chibok* and *Borno State*, which signpost their apparent existence to readers

Datum 7

Abduction: 14 more girls escape

Total of 44 girls flee Boko Haram's terror zone:

Fourteen more students of grieving Government Girls' Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State are out of danger in Boko Haram's camp.

The Nation, Saturday, April 19, 2014.



Explicit Allopract: Assertive act of reporting

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive acts of soothing and pacifying

Pragmeme: The prima facie allopract performed in this news report is assertive acts of *reporting*, i.e. to inform the reader about the latest development regarding the missing Chibok girls. On the other hand, there is also an implicit allopract of a *soothing* and *pacifying* report. This implies that the war against terror is not lost and all the missing girls might yet be rescued and as such, it will go a long way to calm the masses.

Implicature

The news report in the datum flouts the maxim of quantity and quality. First, it fails to provide adequate information on whom and how the girls escaped. Also, there is no basis for truth on the escape of girls. With reference to what was established before that some girls escaped, and was later debunked, hence it is more or less the same news story the same. The maxim of relevance is, however, obeyed because the news story is topical. In addition, the story is reported in a clear and concise manner, thereby adhering to the maxim of manner.

Presupposition

There are three existential presuppositions in this datum. These are brought via the nominal expressions *Boko Haram*, *Government Girls' Secondary School Chibok*, and *Borno State*. These affirm the existence of the stated nominal expressions. Apart from these, there is also lexical presupposition. This is signposted with the word **more** which (lexically) assumes that some of the girls have escaped earlier. The news report, therefore, banks on this prior back knowledge by the reader to make the right inference.

Datum 8

Nigeria extends search to Cameroon, Chad borders

The Nigeria military has begun a deployment of soldiers along the country's northern borders as part of the efforts to rescue school girls who were kidnapped by the Boko Haram sect on Monday night.

The Punch, Sunday, April 20, 2014

Explicit Allopracts: Assertive act of informing and reporting

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive acts of reassuring and assuaging.

Pragmeme: In this datum, several allopracts are performed. Prominent among them is the explicit allopract of *informing*, and *reporting* and the implicit allopract of *re-assuring* and *assuaging*. Based on REF (reference) that Boko Haram kidnapped some school girls and efforts have been made to rescue them, this news report updates the masses about the latest development by the Nigeria government regarding the search for the missing girls and the war against terrorism which has been taken to neighbouring countries i.e. Cameroon and Chad, in search for the missing girls. Through this, implicit allopract is covertly stated and it is aimed at *reassuring* the public that the Nigerian government is leaving no stone unturned as they aim at



finding the *missing goods*. Also, thus news reports will go a long way to assuage the spirit of the readers that all hope is not lost.

Implicature

This news report in this datum obeys all the Gricean maxims i.e. quality, quantity, manner and relation. There is truth in the report and it gives adequate information on what the Nigerian military intends to do within Cameroon and Chad borders. Equally, the news report is simple and straightforward and related to current events taking place in Nigeria. It, therefore, obeys the Gricean maxims of manner and relevance respectively.

Presupposition

There is a factive presupposition. The news report presupposes that the Nigerian military has been making effort to rescue Chibok, a priori. At any rate, the frontier of this effort is extended beyond the realm of the country to neighbouring states. Also, another factive assumption that can be deduced from the report is that the girls or to be precise, not all the girls have been rescued.

Datum 9

CAN, Amaechi declare fasting for abducted school girls

The Christian Association of Nigeria in Borno State has declared fasting and praying from Monday (today) to Wednesday to seek for divine intervention over the abduction of school girls in Borno State.

The Punch, Monday 21 April 2014

Explicit Allopracts: Assertive acts of reporting and informing

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive acts of *encouraging* and *imploring*

Pragmeme: Based on REF (referencing) via deictic of the person i.e. Amaechi, the news report relies on shared situational knowledge on the gory attack on the Chibok school girls. This is done through the explicit allopract of *reporting* and *informing*. The news report informs the public that CAN, the Christian Association of Nigeria and the then governor of Rivers State, Rotimi Amaechi, has declared that people (especially people in their faith and state respectively) should fast and pray for God Almighty's intervention for the missing girls to be released by their captors. This is implicitly performed by the expressive acts of *encouraging* and *imploring* the public to do the fasting and follow the declaration made by the group (CAN and the Rivers State governor, Amaechi). Meanwhile, a critical look at the news report implies that attempts to rescue all the girls have proved futile. Human efforts seem to be failing, thus the clarion calls to turn a supreme being for his intervention becomes imperative.

Implicature

The news report flouts the maxim of quantity which in turn breaches the maxim of manner. The report is ambiguous: it does not explicitly state whether it is the whole of Nigeria (both Christians and Muslims), Christians in Nigeria or just the Christians in Borno that should



participate in the fasting exercise. However, the violation of the maxims of quantity and manner can only be seen as an attempt to rope well-meaning Nigerians into fasting and praying to their maker. Apart from this, the news report adheres to other maxims. If it flouts the maxim of quality, then slanderous lawsuits await *The Punch* newspaper. The report is relevant because Nigerians are anxious to find a lasting solution that will lead to the safe return of the girls.

Presupposition

The headline as well as the ancillary report has an existential presupposition. It assumes that there exists a Christian group called the Christian Association of Nigerians (CAN) and also an entity called *Amaechi*. The same report also has a presupposition. The expression declared fasting presupposes that fasting is a way to seek God's divine.

Datum 10

190 schoolgirls remain missing, not 77- Principal

About 190 school girls remain missing after being abducted last week by Boko Haram insurgents, their head teacher, Asabe Kwabura, told the British Broadcasting Cooperation on Monday.

The Punch, Tuesday, April 22, 2014

Explicit Allopracts: Assertive acts of informing and reporting

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive acts of condemning and exposing

Pragmeme: the practs performed in this pragmeme are based on the shared background knowledge that the Nigerian military had earlier confidently established that they had rescued some of the girls. This statement is, however, recriminated by the parents of the missing girls who vehemently denied that no girl was rescued. In the news report, this is brought to via the explicit act of *informing* and *reporting* in the report. Not only this, the implicit allopracts of condemning and exposing are also implied in the news report. The news report implicitly condemns the Nigerian government for playing dirty politics with the abduction of the girls and deceiving the public that they are waging war against the Boko Haram sect. In addition, this news report demands from the government a lasting solution to the problem of insecurity in the country.

Implicature

This is a recriminatory news report. The report ostentatiously violates the maxim of quantity and manner. It fails to provide adequate information on the exact number of the missing school (the headline says 190 schoolgirls but the news story seamlessly contradicts this by saying *About 190 school girls...*) neither does it refute categorically that some of the girls were indeed rescued. This lack of adequate information and incongruity in the report violates the maxims of quantity and manner. The maxim of quality can be said to have been unostentatiously adhered to as the information is coming from a reliable source i.e. the principal, Asabe Kwabura. As the head teacher of the affected school, it is believed that whatever information



comes from her can be *taken to the bank*. In other respects, the maxim of relevance is maintained as the report is related to topical issues in the country.

Presupposition

The news report presupposes the existence of Boko Haram and the missing girls. As such, there is an existential presupposition. This same report also establishes the fact that about 100 girls are still missing, hence factive presupposition.

Datum 11

REVEALED: WHY BOKO HARAM IS KEEPING 234 GIRLS

The islamist sect, Boko Haram, is believed to be desperate to use over 100 students of Government girls' Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State it abducted last week as human shield as planto rescue them by the militaryintensifies.

The Nation, Saturday, April 26, 2014

Explicit Allopracts: Assertive acts of exposing, stating

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive acts of condemning (Boko Haram), cautioning.

Pragmeme: Four kinds of pragmatic acts can be implied in this news report. These are explicit allopract of *exposing* and *stating*; implicit allopract of *condemning* and *cautioning*. Through the explicit allopract, it exposes the reasons why Boko Haram abducted the missing school girls. Nevertheless, other acts of *condemning* and *cautioning* are implicitly performed in the report. In datum 13, the news report craftily condemns the Boko Haram sect and cautions people against handling the situation with a view to saving the lives of the girls. Based on shared situational knowledge, the new report mediates the reality of why Boko Haram abducted the girls and at the same, manipulates the audience into taking on a role or stance they may not otherwise have taken.

Implicature

The news report flouts the maxim of quality, quantity as well as manner. Firstly, the maxim of quality is not adhered to because the news report aims to reveal why *Boko Haram is keeping 234 girls*. However, the complementary news story is narrated in a speculative manner with the metapragmatic joker word *believe* used to hedge the implication of the report. Put differently, the report was packaged in such a way that it ought to reveal particular information but the subsequent news story was written in a speculative form, riddled with ambiguity, and in the end, revealed NOTHING.

On the maxim of quantity cum manner, the headline stated

WHY BOKO HARAM IS KEEPING 234 GIRLS.



However, the complementary report stated over 100 students... which is in stark contrast to the headline. Simplicity and clarity are the soul of a news report. These seem to have been sacrificed on the altar of sensationalism. This is Yellow Journalism at its best. The headline was lurid to attract the attention of the reader. The complementary report contradicts the headline which makes the report confusing rather than being informative.

Despite these, the maxim of relation is obeyed. The report is germane to the prevailing socio-political event in the country. This news report emanated twelve days after the abduction of the girls, as such, Nigerians are still keen to know the fate of the girls.

Presupposition

There is a lexical presupposition. The word “keeping” presupposes a way to pacify people that Boko Haram is demanding something and they only keep the girls. The new report avoids the use of “abducted” or “kidnap”.

Datum 12

Boko Haram leader says, “I will sell the girls”

Nigeria’s Islamic extremist leader is threatening to sell the teenage school girls abducted from a school in the remote north east three weeks ago, in a new video tape received on Monday.

Daily Trust, Tuesday, May 6, 2014

Explicit Allopract: Assertive act of informing

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive act of challenging and the commissive act of vowing.

Pragmeme: The allopracts being performed here are an explicit act of *informing* and implicit acts of *challenging* and *vowing*. This is precipitated by the shared situational knowledge that Boko Haram abducted school girls. In this, an implicit act of challenging the security agent to speedily arrest and rescue the missing girls is performed before they are sold off as claimed by the Boko Haram leader.

Implicature

The news report flouts the maxim of quality and quantity. First, it fails to give adequate information on why he would sell the girls off to. Also, the report tactically flouts the maxim of quality as there is no basis of truth from the leader of Boko Haram who was claimed to have been killed by the military.

Presupposition

There is existential presupposition though it is not authenticated whether the wanted Boko Haram leader who had been reported to have been killed still exists. However, in this news report, it presupposes that Shekau, the Boko Haram leader still exists. Aside from that, there is



also a lexical presupposition which presupposes that the girls may be sold off as claimed by the Boko Haram leader.

Datum 13

World remembers Chibok school girls UN, UK,

It's been one year since over 200 girls were abducted from Chibok, Borno state by Boko Haram insurgents. The girls were taken on April 14, 2014, as they prepared for exams at the Government Girls Secondary in the community.

Daily Trust, April 15, 2015

Explicit Allopract: Assertive act of reporting

Implicit Allopracts: Expressive act of mourning, challenging and urging.

Pragmeme: Based on SSK, RFF, and INF, the new reports explicitly report and commemorate the gory abduction of the Chibok girls who were abducted on April 14 2014. So this news report marks the exact year, in essence, this news report reminds the public that the world remembers the school girls. The implicit act performed is thereby *urging* the government on the need to tighten up security so as to ensure the girls are released.

Implicature

The news report is massively exaggerated. It is hyperbolic, as such it violates the maxim of quality. It does not necessarily imply that the whole world *stood still* to remember the girls. The memorial was only commemorated by the United Nation and the United Kingdom. Perhaps, because the United Nations is a prima facie global organization, it is assumed that any event marks is a world event. Elsewhere, the maxims of quantity, manner and relevance are ostentatiously obeyed.

Presupposition

UN, UK, World, Chibok, Borno state and *Boko Haram* trigger existential presupposition. It is assumed that readers are aware of their existence as well as the full meanings of the acronyms UN (United Nation) and the United Kingdom. Apart from this, there is also a factive presupposition. This factive presupposition undergirds the idea that the abduction of the girls is an event that took place in the distant past, one year, to be precise. It is expected that readers have this background knowledge in order to fully understand the intended meanings projected in the news report.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study has exhibited non-detachability of the activity part of the pragmeme under which the practs and allopracts generate meaning vis-a-vis some traditional roles of Nigerian journalists in the print media. With the application of aspects of Mey's pragmatic act theory, presupposition and implicature, the study has revealed some startling findings. Specifically,



the study revealed that *The Punch* and *The Nation* deploy many highly sensational, controversial, emotive and confrontational news reports in their attempt to mediate between the public and the government. They fearlessly deploy their news reports to perform some pragmatic acts and play severally social roles. *Daily Trust* as the name implies, pattern its news towards unveiling the political ideologies in the reports of the abducted girls. Although more often than not presented in slanted or biased manners, all the three selected newspapers deploy their carefully worded and patterned news reports to castigate the spate of insecurity and condemn the ineptitude of security agents

The study revealed that the instantiated pragmatic act (practs) is concrete to the instantiation of each particular pract. Two types of allopracts were observed: explicit and implicit allopracts. The implicit allopracts are overtly used to perform specific acts such as *informing* and *reporting*. This is because most newspapers inform or report to the public about the happening in the society as in the case of the abducted Chibok girls in Nigeria. The study has equally revealed that news reports are structured in different ways to perform some explicit pragmatic acts of reporting, and asserting facts about the news reports on the abducted Chibok girls. Nevertheless, the explicit practs pave way for the performance of implicit (Expressive Pract) such as condemning, challenging, urging, inciting, shaming etc. This is in consonance with the findings of Chiluya (2007) that the pragmatic values of news reports are implied or invisible.

The study has also sought to reveal that out of four Gricean maxims, only the maxim of relation was not flouted. The maxim of quality, quantity and manner were mainly flouted in the news report which was due to one reason or the other as they failed to give enough information and also where the information that was given lacks evidence or it is untrue. There are also instances of news reports that were ambiguous and largely, the information relating to the news of the abducted girls was not clear. This can be found in datums 9 and 10. However, the dearth of violations of the maxim of relevance was due to the need for the news reports to be relevant and situated within the context of the study. Finally, the study has equally sought to reveal that some acts performed by the news reports match some traditional roles of the press, including serving as a watchdog, focusing attention, challenging, alleviating anxiety, criticising the government and canalising the right attitude.

CONCLUSION

A news report is a form of writer-reader negotiated meaning and contextual consideration of language, structure and visual codes. Thus, news reports are the functional parts of stories in Nigerian newspapers which journalists deploy to perform such pragmatic acts as informing, reporting, urging, inciting, condemning, accusing, blaming, challenging shaming, sensitizing, and acknowledging. The acts mirror the intentions of the journalist and these social goals that are anticipated. With the exploration of bias and ideologies in the reportorial language in Nigerian newspapers, the study can contribute to more informed, responsive and reflective journalism practice in Nigeria. Thus, as well as making theoretical advances in media and communication studies, the finding of this study will engender critical reading and deeper interpretation of news items in Nigerian newspapers and could also engender liberation from media control.



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