

## **Ideological Perspectives in Editorial: A Critical Study of *Hallmark* Editorial**

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**Abstract:** *When news and events unfold, people turn to media for information, interpretation and, ultimately, analysis. Newspaper as a print organ of journalism becomes a point of reference especially for the elites. Interestingly, most readers dogmatically agree with newspapers' views than other media's because they are largely perceived to be neutral; little do they realise that these newspapers are also ideologically-driven. This paper examines an editorial of Hallmark newspaper using a multi-disciplinary approach of Critical Discourse Analysis as an analytical tool. The analysis established, among others, that editorial as an opinion-cum-identity discourse creates a distinctive "social identity" by positively evaluating the actions and behaviours of the in-group as against the negative evaluation of the out-group. The paper concludes that newspaper editorials are neither neutral nor objective. They are influenced by relation of power, and ideologically inclined.*

**Keywords:** CDA, ideology, discourse, editorial, Hallmark

### **1. Introduction**

The study aims at studying how the use of language which is lubricated with ideologies and made manifest through editorials functions as a media tool. Specifically, this paper investigates whether such editorial has any effect on language and style of the editorial and how, in effect, this affects readers' opinions.

Language is said to be both a major medium of communication and a social phenomenon, a means by which reality is socially constructed, (Hodge and Kress, 1993). That is perhaps the reason why Martin (2004) in Lagonikos (2005) states that "one text can change the world" (p. 342). This implies that a text is capable of creating and establishing social identity as well as influencing people; one of such is the newspaper.

A newspaper reports news and information and is made up of different parts: features, letters, announcements, advertisements, and editorials, among others. Editorial differs from all other contents in that it does not report news; it only relays opinions of the editorial board or the publisher. However, as van Dijk (1996) and Le (2002) cited in Lagonikos (2005) explain, "the editorial has so far been largely ignored by scholars

and is only now slowly being considered in need of critical analysis” (p. 2). They explain that editorials, to date, have been mainly studied in terms of their journalistic role. Hence, this genre deserves to be studied and analysed to examine its discourse properties and ideological significance.

This paper studies how the editorial constructs “a particular version of reality, a version which is ideologically compatible with the dominant ideologies subscribed to by the newspapers” (Jaworski & Galasinski 2002: 644). It further establishes how the editorial depicts a paper’s views, opinions and ideology which are usually dictated by the paper’s political and ideological affiliations, etc.

## **2. Methodology**

The editorial sample selected for this paper is the *Hallmark* newspaper. It is an English-medium newspaper published by the Patrioni Ltd., Port Harcourt, Nigeria. *Hallmark* newspaper has been selected because its editorial addressed a crisis, and it is observed that people do identify with actors in crises. In other words, an editorial, a constituent of a newspaper, reveals its affiliation through language use. Most importantly, CDA is not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena and that is where the study of editorial language and ideology is placed. The Editorial headline is: *Calling time for the nonsense in Port Harcourt* (published on Monday, September 23, 2013).

In order to investigate how ideologies have impacted on the language use, a multidisciplinary conceptual framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (using Systemic Functional Grammar and other theories) has been selected.

## **3. Literature review**

### **3.1 Editorial**

Editorial is one of the ways through which newspapers’ politics and ideology are enacted; it is a genre of media discourse belonging to the opinion discourse. Editorials are probably the widest circulated public opinion discourse, even if not read daily by all readers (van Dijk, 1996).

Editorial opinion is generally institutional, not personal. Even when written by a single editor, editorials count as the opinion of the newspaper. It is often said that “the posture of an editorial is influenced by the policy and philosophy of the newspaper, ownership structure and the political environment in which the newspaper is operating” (Ate, 2008:3). In other words, editorials do not reflect the personal views of a journalist but the views of the institution/officials whose positions are

being enacted; the position is usually dictated by the relationship of the paper with the dominant and the dominated groups. As an opinion discourse, an editorial tries to establish its newspaper's position on a matter with a view to convincing or persuading the readers to take such a position. Therefore, while other opinion pieces like articles, columns and essays are credited to individuals or joint writers, the editorial is credited to a social institution (Ukonu 2005). This often justifies use of the personal pronoun "we" or the name of the newspaper rather than "I" or the name of the writer.

Editorials perform certain functions, according to Ate (2008), which include: criticizing or attacking socio-political, economic and moral dilemmas of the society; throwing more light on complex issues; bringing to the fore debatable issues and providing an intellectual compass for society to discuss and resolve burning issues; and persuading the readers to accept the status quo of an issue, etc. An editorial must be the vanguard for the formation and crystallization of public opinion (Okoro and Agbo, 2003). Van Dijk (1996) explores how editorials often express ideologies to change public opinion, in setting the political agenda, influencing social debate, decision making and other forms of society and political action. All these link the opinion in editorials to ideologies.

MacDougall (1973) also in Lagonikos (2005) describes editorial as having three-part structure as the Subject or News peg, the Reaction and the Reasons. According to van Dijk (1996), editorial is today characterized by the categories: Summary, Evaluation and Pragmatic Conclusion. He explains that, firstly, a brief summary must be presented in order to remind the readers of the issue at hand. Secondly, the editorial must give an evaluation of the issue at hand. Lastly, it must attempt to answer the questions "what next?" and "what are we going to do about this?"

### **3.2 Ideology in discourse**

To Hall (1996), ideology encompasses "the mental frameworks-the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representative-which different classes and social group deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (p. 26). Hackett and Carrol (2008) define ideology as "the power to shape the very perception and decision of subordinate groups, so they do not think to challenge existing social relation" (p. 20). Oktar (2001) defines ideology as "presentations of who we are, what we stand for, what our values are and what our relationships with others are" (p. 314). This definition seems particularly relevant as it focuses on the role

ideology plays in the formation of “us” and “them” groups in society. Hence, discourse is an important means of expressing opinions and ideologies on a massive scale and it is “by way of” opinion that the relation between ideology and discourse can be understood. Van Dijk (1996) believes that opinions are located in our minds and are a type of belief. Beliefs are held to be about what we know to be true or false and what we like or dislike. To him, “opinions are usually regarded as subjective evaluations by which someone thinks something to be true yet might be regarded as false by someone else”. Lagonikos (2005) points out the following:

... those who occupy managerial positions in the media or gain status within them as commentators, belong to the same privileged elites and might be expected to share the perceptions, aspirations, and attitudes of their associate, reflecting their own class interests as well (p. 8).

Therefore, the media naturally reflect the ideological interests and perspectives of those in powerful positions, i.e. the elites. This is in line with van Dijk’s assertion that groups, in the contemporary world, are able to keep power but through implicit use of persuasion in discourse that leads to consent.

Hence, there are different modes through which ideologies are expressed in discourse. Thompson (2004) identifies five modes used to promote ideology. They are legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification.

### **3.3 Critical discourse analysis (CDA)**

CDA, according to Rahimi & Riasati (2011), “views language as a powerful means through which specific ideologies, identities and culture become dominant in a society” (p.1). Although Halliday’s (1994) theoretical linguistic framework has become the foundation of a variety of discourse analysis models, it is believed that CDA does not have a rigid framework. By implication, CDA is not a closed paradigm. It is in consonance with this that Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2010) reviewing van Dijk (2000) states that “there is no unitary theoretical framework or methodology for CDA because it encompasses a range of possible approaches of analysis” (p.36). Henry and Tator (2002) in Izadi (2007) consider CDA as

... a tool for deconstructing the ideologies of the mass media and other elite groups and for identifying and defining social, economic, and historical power

relationship between dominant and subordinate groups (p.141).

Perhaps one of the most outstanding definitions of CDA is the one given by van Dijk (2001) in Schiffrin, Tannen and Hamilton (2001) that

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context (p. 352).

CDA intends, as Wodak (2011) puts it ‘to demystify discourse by deciphering ideologies’ (p. 52) through “...the insight from social psychological theories and political science in order to establish interpretative links between social cognition, action and linguistic structures” (Kopytowska 2012:iv), and to examine “how exactly ideology shapes text and talk, and conversely how it is formed, acquired or changed by discourse and communication” (van Dijk 1998:vii).

In CDA, Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is an influential grammatical model because, as Martin (2009) puts it, ‘systemic functional linguistics...has a long standing interest in discourse analysis’ (p.154). Explaining the model, Halliday states that language has three metafunctions: the *ideational*, the *interpersonal* and the *textual*. The ideational metafunction involves looking at the processes in a text to understand the predominant events or relationships between participants in the processes, and how this representation contributes to the reader’s world experience. The interpersonal metafunction involves communication between people, the roles they assume as they express themselves and the attitudes they express towards one another and their subject matter. The textual metafunction has to do with the actual organisation of the text itself (Lagonikos 2005; Bloor and Bloor 2004).

Wang (2010) asserts that through the ideational function, the speaker or writer embodies in language his experience of the real world, reactions, cognitions, and perceptions. Ideational function conveys information and communicates content (that is unknown) to the reader or hearer and “reflects the events and experience in both objective and subjective worlds” (Wang 2010:255). The ideational function mainly consists of “*transitivity*” and “*voice*”. The transitivity system includes the processes such as material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal and existential processes, (Boor and Bloor 2004).

Mood and Modality are often used to express the interpersonal function. Mood shows what role the speaker/writer adopts in a situation

and what role he assigns to others. Modality, on the other hand, refers to the intermediate range between the extreme positive and the extreme negative. It can express the speaker's judgment towards the topic and shows the social role relationship, scale of formality and power relationship. The attitudes and opinions of the writer are realised through modality; through modal auxiliaries such as *can*, *should*, *must*, *may*, *ought to*, and so on. This is a very important system in our analysis because it reveals the degree of strength of opinions in the editorial as informed by the modal used. For instance, *must* and *should* are considered high modality while *may* and *could* are considered for low modality.

The last is called textual function. This refers to the fact that language has mechanisms to make any stretch of spoken or written discourse a coherent and unified text and make a living passage different from a random list of sentences. Every clause is organised as a message related to an unfolding text. That is, texts consist of the organisation of information made up of various themes, and the development of themes within a text is called *thematic structure*. Almost every clause, according to Bloor and Bloor (2004), has a thematic structure and this means a clause is broken into two components: *theme* and *rheme*. The theme of the clause is typically the information regarding what the clause is about while the rheme is whatever left in the clause and contains new information.

### **3.4 Representation of social actors in discourse**

Henry Tajfel's greatest contribution to psychology was social identity theory, developed in 1979 in conjunction with Turner (McLeod 2008). It explains the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination. The central concept of this theory is social identity. According to McLeod (2008, para.1), "social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s)". The proponents divide the world into "us" and "them" based on a process of social categorisation. This is known as in-group and out-group respectively. To enhance one's self-image, one promotes the status of the group to which one belongs. The central thrust of this theory is that group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group thereby enhancing their own self-image.

It is in contribution to this that Fairclough & Wodak (1997) assume that "any part of our language text, spoken or written, is simultaneously constituting representations, relations and identities" (p.275). This means that discourse represents particular social relations between people and particular social identities. The general idea is that text producers communicate particular representation of social actors groups, including



beliefs and knowledge about them, the attitude towards them and the emotions that accrue to them (Koller 2012). Hence, representing social actors entails evaluating them.

There are various ways by what social actors are represented in discourse. According to van Leeuwen (1996), the categories through which social actors can be represented include the *Inclusion, Exclusion, Activation, Subjection, Beneficialisation, Functionalisation, Possessivation, Classification, Formalisation, Objectivation, Genericisation, Individualisation, Nomination, Participation*, etc.

#### 4. Data analysis and findings

##### The Editorial: "Calling time for the nonsense in Port Harcourt"

#### 4.1 Representation of social actors

This editorial strongly draws the division between the 'us' and 'them' groups. The 'us group' is constituted by the presidency, those who are in support of its actions including the newspaper. On the other hand, the 'them group' includes Governor Amaechi and his followers including those Nigerians who pity him and condemn the President and presidency. The editorial does not expect the readers to be 'troubled' to identify members in the two camps: the *in-group* and the *out-group*. The participants in the event (crisis) are explicitly stated and represented. For instance, the in-group members include *the police, the president, Jonathan insiders, Patience Jonathan*, etc. and *Governor Rotimi Amaechi, Bukola Saraki, Amaechi's handlers, Yar'adua*, etc. represent the out-group.

Having identified the various social actors as represented in the *Hallmark* editorial, it is thus necessary to see *how* they are presented. The in-group is represented through collective and generic terms such as *those in the know, this newspaper*, etc. The group is also represented through its function and authority as in *President, First lady*, etc. You see, you started to use different terms in the analysis; terms other than those used in the literature review. Consistency or explanation seems to be needed.

The appraisal of the out-group shows a negative representation. The actors are portrayed as the group responsible for fuelling the crisis. Rather than portraying them implicitly, the editorial identifies them (explicitly). According to the editorial, this group is fighting the President! This out-group seems 'well known' to the editorial as the members are identified as both the past and the present *Chairmen of the Nigerian Governors' Forum, Governor Bukola Saraki and Rotimi Amaechi* respectively.

Ideological inclination seems to be the driving force in the conception and perception of the *Hallmark* editorial in this circumstance based on the manner in which the out-group is represented. The paper brands the group ‘the wrong’ group:

*lightning rod of the anti-Jonathan movement his conduct  
his utterances are not only embarrassing but reprehensible*

*it is incomprehensible that a Governor of the Niger-Delta  
would be the rallying point and indeed, the standard  
bearer of the anti-Jonathan movement etc.*

So, appraising the social actors, the in-group members are represented as having predominantly positive actions while the out-group members are portrayed as having negative emotions and actions. For instance, the choice of verbs below indicates a negative attitude;

*Governor Rotimi Amaechi alleged that a detachment  
of policemen refused him entry...*

*Amaechi’s handlers have deftly manipulated the  
media, dominated and controlled by the opposition  
political parties*

#### 4.2 Transitivity process

Transitivity is the configuration of a function through the participant and processes. For instance, The material processes dominate the editorial and are employed to indicate the various actors’ actions, concrete or abstract, in the crisis, describe or reveal the crisis as being more of material event than others, and the events as perhaps being ‘confrontational’.

*Policemen **refused** him entry.*

*He **contested** and **won**.*

The material processes are important here to demonstrate what the actors have done (that might have been part of the crisis). In addition, we need to note that in material processes, there are usually two participants (Actor and Goal), and the clause can either be in **active voice** or **passive voice**. Except in *passivisation* such as

*He was elected Governor of Rivers State.*

*He was **duely** elected in a credible election.*

The dominant voice is *activation*. This may not be unconnected with the fact that *Hallmark* editorial is trying to present an image of certainty. Even the idea behind the scanty passivisation can be interpreted



to mean that perhaps the writer is not happy with the fact, because it concerns the out-group.

Also employed are the relational processes which are processes of being, usually achieved through verbs such as **is, was, are, were, seem, feel**, etc. and some other verbs that linguists describe as **linking verbs**. They are used mostly to account for the relationship among the actors to show their attitude and role in the event.

*His rendition of fact **was** not exactly factual.*

*it **is** time to call time and draw the curtain.*

*This **is** important for factual clarity.*

*The crisis in Port Harcourt **is** basically a personality clash between Governor Amaechi and President Jonathan*

Hence, the relational processes are used to relate the state of affairs between different actors in the event.

#### 4.3 Representation and appraisal of the events

Of importance in the representation of the events are the circumstances of time and place. The editorial uses past tense to provide background information for the current happenings and as a rationalisation strategy while urging Amaechi on what is expected of him:

*...Dr. Bukola Saraki **worked** assiduously on behalf of the hailing Yar'adua. He never **sought** to supplant, undermine or ridicule him. He **never used** the NGF as a platform to mobilize against Yar'adua.*

It then uses present tense to expose current reactions and attitude of the actors to the events:

*He **has sold** a captivating narrative of victimhood (present perfect)*

*Hallmark **insists** that Governor Amaechi should call himself to order (simple present).*

The various tense types help to link and connect the events together.

The Modality process in the editorial shows up in strong modals of obligation. It (**the editorial**) uses the strong positive modals to add force to its opinion:

*A few home truths **must** be told*

*...that he **must** not be re-elected.*

*They **should** follow due process*

*Amaechi **should** call himself to order*

*All these **should** serve as morality tales for Amaechi*

Hence, the predominant use of the obligation modals ideologically indicates that the writer wants to present the argument as being the only credible alternative to all other possible arguments, claims and counter claims. One needs to note, however, that all the attitudes and opinions as expressed in the editorial are the paper's. There is no inclusion of 'outer' voices through explicit projection of source. The only explicit source through manifest intertextuality is that of Achebe.

Either deliberately or non-deliberately, the editorial uses *subjective resource* to present the event as well as the actions of the social actors. For instance, it states that

*With as many as sixteen Governors declining to recognize his leadership...*

Here, the editorial describes **sixteen** as being **many** without mentioning the remaining number of the forum membership who supported 'his leadership'. This may suggest an intention to hide the number in order to easily portray the in-group as the majority (whereas there are thirty six governors).

The use of **concession** enables the editorial to counter any expectation or view from the reader. It employs the concessive conjunction '**But**' predominantly to counter any other views.

*But in order to do that...*

*But his victory sparked off a crisis*

*But it is also a truism that democracy...*

Connected with the use of *but* is the use of 'however', 'all the same', 'nevertheless', etc. to recognise and oppose any contrary views. The editorial tries to read mind and then contradict what it believes may come out of it. It says: *Of course we recognize that in a democracy...But* In all, this editorial contracts alternative voices so as to legitimate and assert its own point of view.

#### 4.4 Theme and rheme

One of the predominant features of the *Hallmark* editorial is the extensive use of *marked theme*. The motive, probably, is to shift readers' attention, in most cases, to the events that led to the current one and most importantly to establish its opinion. Most of the paragraphs and sentences start with 'circumstances' as the theme:

*In what must rank as an incredulous display of politicking...*

*All the same, the incident touched off...*

*But in order to do that effectively, a few home truths...*

*Even more importantly, ...*

*Even though Amaechi supported Jonathan's quest for presidency...*

*With those in the know, the crisis in Port Harcourt....*

The overall effect of the dominant marked theme is to channel the readers' attention to the 'hidden' fact that led to the event (crisis).

#### 4.5 Structure of the editorial

Employing van Dijk's (1996) schema, the *Hallmark* editorial is structured into three parts: **summary, evaluation and pragmatic conclusion**. Firstly, it gives a brief summary account to remind the readers of the issue at hand. This is through historical reference to past events that led to the present discussion and the opinions being expressed. By this, the editorial awakens the readers' awareness to the issue at stake. The summary is contained in paragraphs 1-3.

Secondly, the editorial gives an evaluation of the events. This is exactly where opinions and attitudes are greatly expressed. The editorial, here, presents the views of the out-group with their 'facts' and tries to persuade the readers that their reasons notwithstanding, the members should not have risen against the president.

*Whatever may be the truth in all these issues, the event should not have been allowed to degenerate to that extent.*

Lastly, the editorial having evaluated the issue, gives a pragmatic conclusion. It provides answers to questions such as "what next?", "What should be done?" etc. This is exactly where the opinions are finally established. In this regards, this editorial concludes saying that the paper

*is not persuaded that Rotimi Amaechi wants to be remembered in history as the Niger Delta Governor who **betrayed** the first Niger Delta president of Nigeria.*

All the while, this is where the writer is driving at with all the claims and counter claims in the evaluation.

#### 4.6 Modes of ideological operation

With the discussion on the formal properties of the text, it is evident that *Hallmark* aligns with the in-group by expressing a strong reaction towards Amaechi's behaviour. Here, we consider other determinants such as socio-historical contexts on which the paper's ideology is based. Its origin is in the South (precisely South-South) of the country; hence, its support for the president, being "the first Niger Delta President of

Nigeria”. This socio-historical context coupled with the birth tie make the president enjoys the support of the publisher. We also note that the president emerged from the region

*after decades of agitation and crusade by Niger Delta  
indigenes for equity, justice and fairness*

We can therefore understand the ideology on which the opinion is based.

To present its opinion on the events, the editorial relies on certain modes of ideology. The editorial predominantly employs *legitimation* through *narrativisation* and *rationalization strategies*. It relies heavily on *legitimation* to make readers accept that the only option is for Amaechi to call himself to order. Doing this, it *rationalizes* that during the presidency of Obasanjo, no Yoruba governor opposed him even though they belonged to different political parties. So, why should Amaechi’s case be different? This is a line of thought which the paper is canvassing for.

The editorial also uses intertextuality quoting from Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* to legitimate its claims and opinions. Through the reference to Achebe, it appeals to Amaechi’s sense of “Niger-Delta citizenship” to legitimate its recommendation for soberness, self-control and support for Jonathan. Similarly, the editorial tries to legitimate its opinion by appealing to readers through *unification* and *fragmentation* strategies. Here, it attempts not only to unite the *in-group* but also break up the *out-group*. It says

*Jonathan is Amaechi’s kinsman from South-South geopolitical zone*

The out-group and their actions are described using terms that have strong affectives;

*his rendition of facts was not exactly factual*

*Amaechi’s handlers deftly manipulated media, etc.*

Though the editorial recognises the role of the president in Nigerian Governors’ Forum election as a factor in the crisis, it does not want the reader to see it as the main factor. The paper believes that Amaechi is being used as he was *recruited* by the opposition. It hence calls on him to remember that he is a Niger-Delta citizen just like the President as against the Yoruba and Hausa tribes who are using him; a fragmentation strategy! It is through *differentiation* and *expurgation* of the out-group that the editorial fragments the individuals who may challenge those in power (the president, the first Lady, etc.).

Finally, by presenting the historical facts in form of ethnicity, the editorial is employing *reification* mode through *naturalization* and *externalization* strategies. The facts are presented by the editorial to show

that the socio-historical state of affairs presented so support its opinion is natural, permanent and unchanging.

So far, this work has revealed how editorial constructs reality by promoting the ideologies of the in-group. It was thus found that editorial, rather than establishing the writer's position as an individual, tries to represent the ideological position of the newspaper as an institution. It has thus been revealed that the editorials entail beliefs, values, etc.

Similarly, this work shows that through the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', the editorial persuades the readers to identify and align with the in-group and to support its ('us') ideologies. It does this by positively evaluating the 'us' group and its actions and ideologies thereby encouraging the readers to think and reason in their ('us') line of thought and identify with the group. The readers are further discouraged from associating with the out-group (them) through the representation and appraisal of the group in a negative manner.

Through the examination of socio-historical context in the editorial, it was found that editorial cannot be treated as an objective piece but rather as an opinion-cum-identity discourse representing the paper's ideologies dictated by the publisher, owner, region of publication, historical events, political inclination, etc.

It was also revealed that editorial writers employ various modes of ideological operation in order to legitimate their viewpoints. Our analysis revealed that the editorial employed modes like *legitimation*, *unification*, *fragmentation*, *reification* and *dissimulation* (as given by Thompson, 2004) in order to further establish their stance and to add extra force.

## 5. Conclusion

The relationship between language and discourse has received so much attention in the humanities and social sciences. The belief has been that ideologies of speakers and writers can be made known through close reading and systematic analysis. Doing such an analysis has always been a central focus of Critical Discourse Analysis. One of the claims in CDA is that discourse is not produced without context and therefore cannot be understood without taking into account the situational and wider contexts. As such, texts can be interpreted from the standpoints of backgrounds, knowledge, and power position. After all, 'the right interpretation does not exist', (Fairclough 2002) quoted in Todoli, Labarta & Dolon (2006:10). Hence, through the critical discourse study of editorial, this work has further foregrounded the links between discourse and ideology.

It thus needs to be stated that ideologies are not restricted to groups that seek dominance, power as we have professional ideological scholars,

institutional ideologies, etc. And finally, CDA, according to Khosravini (2009), does not take the relationship between language and society to be simply deterministic, “it attempts to account for the mediation between language and society” (p.479). CDA is thus not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena and that is where the study of editorial language and ideology is placed.

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