



A Rhetorical Analysis of Selected Editorials of *Newswatch* and *Tell Magazines*

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Abstract

Editorials are comments on news items that are of national interest and which attract the attention of the editor. Such news items may be political, economic, educational, religious or general socio-political issues that border on the welfare of the people. An editorial expresses a personal opinion of the editor on such matters and it is like an essay written by an individual editor, during which the editor exhibits his personal creative style. This variety of style that is commonly exhibited in journalese is known as House Style. This paper belongs to a significant aspect of the English language study known as Stylistics. Stylistics is a central component of Rhetoric which is a linguistic activity that treats the devices that convey meaning in language. It studies the persuasive and emotional effects of language and attempt to understand how linguistic devices create these effects. It emphasizes essentially the linguistic devices, the social aspect of language and its impact in a particular context. Rhetorical Stylistics identifies and isolates the linguistic features that constitute the style of a text. This paper uses stylistic models to examine the rhetorical devices in *Newswatch* and *Tell Magazines* which constitute a House Style that is different from other forms of writing. The paper concludes that rhetorical devices are essential components for embellishing thought and to reflect the local colour of language.

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INTRODUCTION

A plethora of definitions have been given to the journalistic concept, “Editorial”. However, a few of them may suffice in this discussion on a rhetorical analysis of some editorials of *Newswatch* and *Tell Magazines*. Editorials are comments on news items of national concern which attract the attention of the editor. Such news items may be political, economic, educational, religious or general socio-cultural issues that border on the welfare of the people. These written comments are published in the national dailies or magazines and are collectively known as “editorials”. According to Butler (2011) all dailies have editorials which may not be published in the same page for all magazines and it is always obvious that an article is in fact and editorial... editorial is one part of the paper which is based more on personal opinion than facts and for this reason the article may deliberately support one rather than another of the argument. Ogunsiji (2001) asserts that editorial is the view of a magazine on a particular public issue. An editorial may criticise, praise or merely discuss the actions of some public functionaries or group.

Magazine editorials usually discuss problems of national interest and an editorial is much like an essay written by an individual, during which the individual exhibits his personal creative style. The variety of style that is commonly exhibited in journalese is known as House Style. Agbese (2006) defines a house style as an essential guide to the professional, if not the moral conduct of the journalist. House style enables the journalist codifies the rules that guide writing and planning for a particular purpose. It imposes order on a profession which thrives on chaos. House style refers to the uniform style of design peculiar to a given magazine. It refers to the writing style which makes it unique from other magazines based on ownership and management of the magazine in question. This paper therefore belongs to a significant aspect of the English language study-Stylistics.

WHAT IS STYLISTICS?

With the development of subjects such as Semiotics, Semantics and Pragmatics in the twentieth century, an interest in Traditional Rhetoric was revived and new areas of Rhetoric such as Stylistics developed (Wales, 1984). According to Bradford (1997), Stylistics, a notable predecessor of Rhetoric,

Can tell us how to name the constituents parts of a literary text and enable us to document their operations, but in doing so, it must draw upon the terminology and methodology of disciplines which focus upon language in the real world. The study of metre and narrative prose is founded upon the fundamental units and principles of all linguistic usage: phonemes, rhythmic sequences, grammatical classes, forms of syntactic organization and so on. But these same fundamentals of communication also underpin the methodology of pure linguistics, structuralism, semiotics, discourse theory, sociolinguistics, linguistic philosophy and a whole network of disciplines which involves the context and pragmatic purpose of communication.

Consequent upon this, Rhetorical stylistics or just Stylistics is caught between two disciplinary imperatives. On the one hand, it raises the question regarding the relation between the way language is used and its apparent context and language as an active element of the real world. On the other, it seeks to define the particular use of linguistic structures to create facsimiles, models or distortions of the real world. Stylistics is basically a linguistic activity which examines language use in the real world. It is a theoretical device which differentiates one piece of writing from another. According to Finch (2000) Stylistics is concerned with using the methodology of linguistics to study the concept of style in language. It is the method of linguistics that a stylistician uses to differentiate between writers. Chris (2010) also sees stylistics, as a branch of linguistics, but especially that of modern linguistics. *The Definitive English Dictionary* (2000) claims that stylistics is a branch of linguistics that concerns with the characteristic choices in the use of language especially literary language as regards sound, form or vocabulary made by different individuals of social groups in different situations of use. Another scholar that identifies Stylistics as a branch of linguistics is Fabb (1997) and he perceives Stylistics from the functional approach. According to Fabb, Stylistics can be seen as the use of linguistics in the analysis of particular a literary text, to reveal functions, including the communication of particular meanings. The functionalist tradition in linguistics is particularly associated with M. A. K. Halliday who is believed to be the master stylistician. According to Turner (2003), an apostle of Halliday, Stylistics is that part of linguistics, which concentrates on variations in the use of language often, but not exclusively, with special attention to most conscious and complex uses of language in literature. Turner identifies the relationship between Stylistics and Linguistics, and perceives Stylistics as an exercise in the choice of words which according to him is variation in the use of language.

Crystal and Davy (1969) summarised the role of Stylistics in literary activity thus,

...the aim of stylistics is to analyse language habits with the main purpose of identifying from the general mass of linguistic features common to English as used on every conceivable occasion, these features which are restricted to certain kinds of social context, to explain, where possible why such features have been used as opposed to other alternatives, and to classify these features into categories based upon a view of their function in the social context.

Crystal and Davy's assertion informs our choice of functional stylistics as an ideal theoretical framework in this discussion. The functional model emanated from a pluralist position that language performs a variety of functions that any piece of language is likely to be the result of choice made at different levels. As a reaction to the controversy between the monists and the dualists' attempt to define the actual relationship between the content (meaning) and expression (form) projected into literary criticism by the New Critics and Stylistics, a pluralist approach resulted in the functional stylistic model. The monists believe that manner or expression and matter or content are like body and soul: the alteration of form entails a change of content. The dualist on the other hand, bases his argument on the strong tradition which regards style as involving choices of manner or expression rather than matter or content (Belsey, 1998). Adekunle (1985) further avows the functionalist approach to stylistics when he asserts that "this model to stylistics is idea of (a) functional varieties of levels of languages and (b) the application to the study of style of the idea of the multifunctional nature of the units of a languages: the simplest utterance is capable of conveying more than one kind of meaning-referential, directive or social. The pluralist element of the functionalist approach makes it possible for many extra-linguistic communicative factors to be related to the structure of the language in the process of stylistic analysis of all types of texts. This approach would be used to examine how editors of *Tell* and *Newswatch Magazines* use language to function in variety of ways.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The concept of Rhetoric originated in Greece in the wake of the Greek democratic activities. The rhetorical theory is defined as a linguistic activity which treats the devices that convey meaning in language. It studies the effect of language and as Davies (2000) assert effect of persuasion, emotional effect and clarity and attempts to understand how linguistic devices create those effects. It emphasizes essentially the linguistic devices, the social aspect of language and its impact in a particular context. Rhetoric according to Halloran (1975) is divided into two components: The trivium and The quadrivium. The trivium has three divisions: Grammar, Oratory and Logic.

Stylistics belongs to the component of grammar (Lawson-Tanced, 2003). Rhetorical Stylistics (Wales, 1984) or just Stylistics is the task of identifying and isolating the linguistic features that constitute the style of a text. A variety of these linguistic features are known variously as figures of speech, rhetorical devices or rhetorical tropes. Figures of speech constitute devices that are often seen as ornaments used by authors to achieve certain linguistic effects. Rhetorical devices which Leech and Short (2000) described as “dress of thought” are the most effective means of decorating narrative prose. Corbett (2005) acknowledges that classified rhetoricians did not look upon figures of speech as being primarily decorative devices. This is because the metaphor which constitutes part of figures of speech is a means of giving clarity and liveliness to the way thinking is expressed. By classifying the ideas expressed, figures of speech provide avenues for the reader to distinguish between the covert and the overt arguments presented by the author. Todorov (1991) suggests that figures of speech are deviation from the normal way of speaking or writing. Yankson (2002) and Dada (2004) separately described figures of speech as foregrounding devices. Any deviation from the norm – the code – is the foreground because it brings the message to the forecourt of the reader’s attention. Figures of speech according to Corbett (2005) can render thought vividly concrete. They help to communicate with our audience clearly. They can carry truth and because they elicit admiration for eloquence of the speaker or writer they can exert a powerful ethical appeal. Figures of speech in speech or writing illustrate the versatility of the writer or speaker and exhibit the user’s craft of language. Shipley (2002) asserts that figures of speech pass various functions they may be used to classify, to illustrate, to energise, to animate objects, to stimulate association, to raise laughter, to ornament, more importantly, they have aesthetic function. Figures of speech are used to perform all these functions in the editorials of *Newswatch* and *Tell Magazines* which we have selected for study.

(a) Simile: A simile like metaphor is a comparison between two unlike things. While metaphor makes implicit comparison, simile is the explicit comparison of two things. Oni (1982) points out that a simile is generally used to make a passage clear and rigid because the figure in a simile draws a picture in your mind so that you see the description as if it were a drawing or photograph in front of you. The passage makes better meaning and has greater impact on the reader. A simile is one of the figures of speech used in the editorial of *Newswatch* and *Tell magazines* to bring an image close the reader’s imagination. In describing Chief Abiola’s death, the following extract conveys vividly the impression of the editor to the reader,

Yet death came not like a petty thief at night but like an armed robber in a broad day light to snatch away the symbol of June 12 (Tell, July 20, 1998, p. 9).

The stylistic significance of the simile used here allows us to see vividly the manner of Abiola’s death. He was snatch away in broad day light, hence creating an image of a physical combat which led to his defeat. Another important use of a simile identified in *Newswatch* succinctly compares the hurdles in which Buhari encounters in the course of his politicking to become the speaker of the National Assembly to the slope of sex,

If the high and might do not tumble down the slippery slope of sex as in John Profumo, they stumble over the hills of their duplicity as in Nixon (Newswatch, August 2, 1999, p. 5).

The aesthetic value that is derived from the above simile implicit in the extract is that the experiences of Buhari and those of leaders like John Profumo and Nixon are implanted in the readers’ minds. The next extract presents a homourous use of simile to further compare the experiences of Buhari and Clinton,

Of course, politics being a funny game, some survive their own strangulation, as in Clinton (Newswatch, August 2, 1999, p. 6).

Buhari did not survive the heat of Nigerian politics and left the National Assembly disgracefully.

(b) Personification: Personification is a special kind of metaphor, in which an object, place or abstract idea in turn into a person with human attributes so that we can talk about it intelligently or vigorously. Perinne (2005) observes that personification is closely related to apostrophe, which consists in addressing some absent or something non-human as if it was alive and present, and can reply to what is being said. Personification is effective in the sense that it adds vigour, clarity and freshness to a prose passage as is the following extract,

Since then Tell has known no peace (Tell, January 19, 1998, p. 11).

Tell Magazines is used here to represent the entire organization and it typifies the general lack of peace which characterized the Abacha regime.

The general’s left eye does not trust the right on (Tell, January 19, 1998, p. 11).

Abacha’s suspicion of his countrymen was heightened by the distrust between his left eye and the right eye as illustrated by bequeathing human attributes on the eyes. The example is,

Some of the deals beg to be believed (Newswatch, May 10, 1999, p. 7).

The sound of money has a pleasant way of kicking the legendary official lethargy into high gear in Nigeria (Newswatch, May 10, 1999).

The rhetorical effect of the use of personification in the above examples is that they bring to focus the unbelievable figures usually given as contract sums in relation to the projects that sometimes executed.

(c) Hyperbole: The rhetorical figure “hyperbole” which comes from Greek for “an overshooting casting, an excess” is a form of comparison using exaggeration

or obvious overstatement for comic or dramatic effect. Of all figures of speech, hyperbole is the most used and usually abused by journalists by means of extravagant and obvious expressions that are used in the editorials of *Newswatch* and *Tell* to win the reader's support for a particular course of action suggested in the editorials. Hyperbole is used in the following extract to capture the mood of the public after the announcement of the death of Chief M.K.O Abiola,

Hell was loose (Tell, July 20, 1998, p. 9).
Lagos, Ibadan, Ede, Ile-Ife, Akure, Ado-Ekiti went up in flames and rivers of blood through the streets (Tell, July 20, 1998, p. 9).

The editor has painted in the minds of the readers the mayhem which characterised cities in the western part of Nigeria after the announcement of the sudden death of Abiola. In presenting the indecorous and deceitful promises usually made by politicians, the editor used the following exaggerations;

...I will bail out water of ocean using a teaspoon (Newswatch, December 2, 1997, p. 7)
I promise to flatten the mountain using my fingernails (Newswatch, December 27, 1998, p. 7).

The aesthetic and rhetorical value of hyperbole when effectively used is its ability to serve as useful poser to the reader especially when a difficult task is made to appear easy.

(d) Rhetorical Question: Rhetorical question also known as "erotema" comes from Greek for questioning. It is a figure of emotion that asks a question not for the purpose of soliciting and answers but for the purpose of asserting or denying something, e.g. Who cares? It is also a positive question which is understood as if it is equivalent to a negative statement. It is also used to express intense conviction of a certain view, e.g. If God be for us who can be against us (Roman, 8:31). Leech (1969) believes that it is a question which does something that is known to the addressee and cannot be denied. A rhetorical question is used in editorials for focus and thought provoking. A comparative study of *Newswatch* and *Tell magazines* reveals that rhetorical questions are more often used in *Tell* than in *Newswatch*. In the following extracts rhetorical questions are used to achieve focus, provoke thought and logically pass a message to the reader.

...will he or will he not (Tell, October 19, 1998, p. 9)

This is used to present the contemplation that preoccupied the mind of Obasanjo before he contested the 1997 presidential election. Next example,

Will it not lead to the kind of situation that enabled Abacha to so corruptly enrich himself and members of his family, his officials and cronies (Tell, September 7, 1998, p. 11).

The use of this figure of speech carries with it a subtle note of caution or warning. The writer achieves this by throwing the question to the reader to consider an appropriate answer to it. The rhetorical importance is that it introduces a

lot of presupposition into the mind of the reader.

Will June 12 be interred with Abiola's body (Tell, July 20, 1998, p. 9).

The uncertainty inherent in the extract is a pregnant one. The writer poses a question to his readers on whether or not they will allow June 12 the mandate of the people to be forgotten after the death of Abiola.

What did we get in return (Tell, June 22, 1998, p. 7).

The editor uses this rhetorical question in order to lead his readers into understanding the difficult times that the *Tell magazine* and staff encountered with Abacha for daring to query his health.

But should he continue in power? (Tell, January 19, 1998, p. 11).

Apart from the note of warning embedded in this rhetorical question, it serves the purpose of alerting the critically minded reader of what will become of them should Abacha continue in power.

Why were these amendments effected at so much cost to Nigerian tax payers? (Newswatch, May 10, 1999, p. 7)
Why does the sun rise in the east (Newswatch, May 10, 1999, p. 7).

These rhetorical questions are used to ask pertinent questions about the award of contracts. The figures are so outrageous that the writer invites his readers to tell him why the sun rises from the east. By so doing he arouses in the readers some level of suspicion.

(e) Cliché and Idioms: Clichés are trite or worn out jaded expressions. They are expressions that have been used for long and so frequently that the critically minded readers are tired of them. Clichés are used in editorials probably because they save the writer the trouble of thinking up new ways of saying something. Idioms on the other hand, are linguistic expressions that are peculiar to a speech community, social or professional group. The meaning of such expressions is not usually determined by the linguistic forms or components parts that make up the expression but the context of usage. Linguistic idioms usually denote phrases or string of words which are idiosyncratic in that they are language specific, not easily translated into any language (Wales, 1984) and their meanings are derived outside their grammatical components. The meaning of idioms is fixed due to their opacity and sometimes overuse. The opaqueness of idioms is taken for granted by men in the society who alone appreciate the aesthetic value of this type of language use (Adegbija, 2003). Idioms (and proverbs) are discourse types peculiar to elders and their use is often perceived as a mark of responsible and mature writing. The Nigerian media discourse thrives significantly on idioms (and proverbs) in order to give such publications some local colours. The idioms are a reflection of the socio-political practice and culture, which addresses tradition applies the rich resources of language and its aesthetics in its appeals to the ordinary Nigerian reader.

Gani Fahnmi is waiting at the other end of the tunnel (*Newswatch*, October 4, 1999, p. 9).
...he is also ruffling feathers (*Newswatch*, June 14, 1999, p. 11).
Tell's running battle with the junta started when it published a cover story (*Tell*, January 19, 1998, p. 11).

The cliché and idioms are used to embellish the editorials as well as succinctly express meaningful messages. Their meanings are not dependent on the words that they represent but on what they represent over time.

(f) Graphology: The term "graphology" refers to the writing system of a language as manifested in the hand writing and typography, and to other related features noted in the spelling, italicization (Wales, 1984) and with the size of the print character and its semiology. Graphology reveals patterns of the writing that distinguishes varieties of language. Graphology features include distinctive use of punctuation, capitalization, and spacing. Graphology is often exploited extensively to give a distinctive journalistic characteristic in media writing generally and *Newswatch* and *Tell* magazines editorials in particular. In *Newswatch* magazine, the editorials are always placed either at the 7th, 9th, or 11th page of every publication.

This depends on the page limit and the weight of the content of the publication. The editorial print type is found to have almost the same character with the print type in the other pages of the magazine. It is placed in a page conspicuous enough to attract the attention of the reader, while the editorial headlines are usually written in a bolder print size as exemplified in "from the editorial suite". The editorial in *Newswatch* is usually placed on the same page with the list of the staff of the magazine. *Newswatch* italicizes either names of the other magazines or the cover headings that are cited inside the editorials.

He reports his finding in "Bola Ige fails the National" (*Newswatch*, August 2, 1999, p. 11)
He called Timi, the law to intimidate The *Newswatch* Magazine (*Newswatch*, August 2, 1999, p. 12).

The typology of paragraphs in *Newswatch* editorials contains four paragraphs each, with the last paragraph depicting a different theme from that of the other three paragraphs. The spelling system used in *Newswatch* editorials is strictly of the British system and a few misspelt words in a few instances. Capitalisation is found to conform to journalistic conventions. However, one unique stylistic feature of capitalization is the use of capital letters in the first line that begins the editorials as in the following examples,

A WORD OR TWO ABOUT THE package (*Newswatch*, October 4, 1999).
"THE NEW MAN IN TOWN is of colour..." (*Newswatch*, August 2, 1999, p. 8).
IT DID NOT BLOW OUT THE scandal (*Newswatch*, August 2, 1999, p. 8).

This system of capitalization is discovered to be peculiar to only *Newswatch Magazine*. Capitalization in the editorial of *Tell* conforms to journalistic conventions.

Some unique stylistic features of capitalization are viz; that *Tell Magazine* unlike *Newswatch reports* its cover headlines in capital letters in the body of the editorial as in the following examples;

"RACE FOR PRESIDENT OBASANJO GAMBLES" (*Tell*, October 19, 1998, p. 8).

"ASO ROCK ASSASSINS THE MEN WHO KILL FOR ABACHA" (*Tell*, September 7, 1998, p. 11).

The name *Tell* is also written in capital letters anywhere in the editorials. Capitalization as feature of graphology is also used in the editorials of *Tell* for emphasis as in the following;

...because he is the ISSUE (*Tell*, January 19, 1998, p. 11)

"The NATION story on the new cabinet provides some insight into this" (*Tell*, September 7, 1998, p. 11).

As a stylistic feature, capitalization in the editorials is used normally except in a few cases where it is intentionally used to achieve a particular effect.

(g) Tone: The tone of a piece of writing could be said to be the general mood and sound of the write-up with aspect to the issues handled in the text. The editorial comments are meant to be critical, analytical, forceful and ideally through the exploitation of relevant resources of language. Editorials in *Newswatch* and *Tell Magazines* are analytical on topical issues of the time and they cover such as themes as fraud, scandal, and political issues and with various tones as confidence, anger, pity sadness, arrogance, disapproval, empathy, reprimand etc. Tone is often occasioned by diction. This is because it is through the use of appropriate choice of words that we get to understand the attitude and mood of the writer towards a given subject matter which in turn gives the tone of the write-up. The overriding tone in this extract is of empathy as well as reprimand,

So no matter what you think of and feel about the general you cannot but admire him for his doggedness and sometimes his single mindedness in a cause he believed in and sticking to positions he has persuaded himself to accept as correct (*Tell*, October 19, 1998, p. 9).

The tone here is that of disappointment and sadness. The next example,

The military junta prize political hostage is no more (*Tell*, July 20, 1998, p. 9).

Yet death came not like a petty thief at night, but like an armed robber in broad day light to snatch away the symbol of June, 12 (*Tell*, July 20, 1998, p. 9).

The tone suggests disapproval and despair,

It was a year full of human tragedies, economics woes and political calamities (*Tell*, January 19, 1998, p. 11).

Since then Nigeria has been accelerating on the lane of despair, stumbling from one political blunder top the other (*Tell*, January 19, 1998, p. 11).

The tone here is that of disapproval and failure. The next example,

For once whipping the press is not likely to save an important man who spun his own web of tattered self-importance, from going down the road taken by (*Tell*, January 19, 1998, p. 11).

And Ibrahim Salihu Buhari, whose healthy and legitimate

ambition to get to the top of the political totem pole in a blaze of youthful glory, will have lasted much less than (Newswatch, August 2, 1999, p. 16).

The tone of the editorials in *Newswatch* and *Tell* clarifies meaning and makes the message more accessible to the critically minded readers. The editors of the magazines use the device of tone to bring to bear their position and attitude towards topical issues.

CONCLUSION

We postulated in this paper that we were going to do a rhetorical analysis of some editorials in *Newswatch* and *Tell* Magazines. Rhetoric was defined as a linguistic activity for the analysis of the devices in a prose passage. The paper dwelt extensively on figures of speech as aspects of stylistic components of rhetorical study and the methodology adopted for the study was a careful reading of some copies of *Newswatch* and *Tell Magazines* within a given period and such figurative expressions were identified and analysed as they reflect the Nigerian writer's thought process. The paper posits in conclusion that in Nigeria like other African societies, figurative expressions are essential components for embellishing a thought, a factor which derives directly from especial use of language. In African traditional society where much importance is attached to competence in speech and writing, such rhetorical devices are not only prominent but extremely used. Such a high degree of competence is required of any user of figures of speech especially as they constitute a significant aspect of linguistic activities. The competence of a writer on a matter is measured by his ability to use figures of speech perfectly, competently and appropriately to buttress his points. A write-up that is intermingled with figurative expressions is heralded by readers as having expressed a universal truth and local colours. Such circumstantial speech acts occur involuntarily as result of the writer's competent reflection on his immediate phenomena and cultural experiences which are of common knowledge to the readers. Majority of the African folk in non-literate society demonstrate a great passion for language in which figures of speech express some universal truth and philosophical thought. The aesthetic force of these figures of speech that are used circumstantially derives from the life experiences and environment-cultural, political, and social life of the writer who has coined them. Hence, the writer of editorials used language to demonstrate sufficient resilience in mediating local thoughts and providing viable linguistic platform for projecting social thoughts and cultural ideas. This generates the abundance of metaphor, metonymy, allusion, personification, parallelism, paradox, parable, simile, irony, innuendo, to mention but a few. From the analysis of figures of speech in the language of the press, it is

obvious that editors of *Newswatch* and *Tell Magazines* have demonstrated competence in language use in their proficient handling of figurative expressions and not just the grammar or semantics.

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