

*Research Paper*

# Focusing and Ideology in Political Media: An Investigative Study of Themes in Nigerian Newspaper Editorials on Political Issues in Nigeria

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The study examined how the messages in the editorials of three prominent Nigerian newspapers (The Punch, The Nation and The Guardian), on burning political issues between 2014 and 2016, were conveyed. Close attention was paid to the ideological implications of the choices of marked and unmarked themes in those editorials. The theoretical framework on which the work was anchored is the Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The findings showed that the use of unmarked themes was more prominent than the marked ones across the editorials. From the 313 thematic choices identified in the data, 193 were unmarked while the remaining 120 were marked. The marked themes were used by editors to place emphasis on crucial points relating to certain political issues, criticise and ridicule the corrupt practices of political leaders, capture the attention of readers and also help editors to present their views, opinion and suggestions in a way which may not attract criticism. The study concluded that the preponderance of unmarked theme was because editorials are meant to be presented as clear and succinct as possible.

**Key words:** theme, Nigerian newspapers, newspaper editorial, systemic functional linguistics, marked theme, unmarked theme.

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## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Language is structured like a system because linguistic signs and symbols are not chosen at random, they are carefully selected and organised into a system. Thus, these language structures are systematically put together to achieve the purpose of effective and meaningful communication. Recent developments in the study of language have proven that linguistic systems cannot be separated from meaning. Bloor and Bloor (2004) define language as a 'system of meanings' while Halliday (2002a) asserts that:

"an account of linguistic structure that pays no attention to the demands that we make of language (i.e. functions) is lacking in perspicacity, since it offers no principles for explaining why the structure of language is organized one way rather than another" .pg 173-174.

Thus, when language is used, either in speech or writing, the language act (that is, arrangement of linguistic units

into a system) is solely intended to produce meaning. This study focuses on how meaning is organised in the print media. Traditionally, the role of the print media is that of information and it is considered to be one of the oldest media of information dissemination to a large audience. Long before the advent of other mass media outlets like the broadcast media (film, radio, or television), the digital media (internet media and mobile mass communication) and the outdoor media (billboards), the newspaper which is a form of print media has been used in history. Tilley (2007) states that the earliest newspaper known as *Acta Diurna* appeared around 59 B.C. in Rome. Newspapers have always been a medium for expressing opinions on societal issues. Some of these issues may be political, religious, cultural, economic, social, educational, medical etc. This study, however, focuses on some political issues reflected in newspaper editorials. The print media performs a crucial role in the socio-political development of any society. As regards politics, the presence and freedom of the press in any society is crucial to the practice of a democratic government. The print media helps to foster political awareness by educating, enlightening and sensitising the masses on relevant political issues such as corruption, mismanagement, misappropriation of funds, injustice and a number of illicit engagements of leaders occupying political positions, in the case of Nigeria. Furthermore, it serves as a watchdog on the activities of the governing power to ensure transparency and accountability. The main responsibility of the press is to provide information in a simple, comprehensive and analytical manner. This can be achieved when the various linguistic units that make up newspaper columns are carefully selected to construct the intended meaning appropriately. Although, the newspaper has several genres: articles, opinion, columns, headlines etc., this study only focuses on newspaper editorials (and those which relate to political issues alone).

### Newspaper Editorials

A newspaper editorial is an article that presents a newspaper's opinion on an issue. It reflects the majority vote of the editorial board and the governing body of the newspaper. Ogunwale (2008: 22-23) defines an editorial as follows:

“An editorial may be defined as a presentation of fact and opinion in concise, logical, pleasing order for the sake of entertaining, of influencing opinions, or of interpreting significant news in such a way that its importance to the average reader will be clear”.

As a representation of the opinion of a newspaper

organisation, editorials are structured in a way to make for logical presentation of ideas. Editors adopt several writing styles to put across their points of view to the masses.

One of the systems in language which can be used to reflect how opinions are structured or conveyed in editorials is the system of theme. Theme is a relevant concept in grammar which stems from Halliday's Textual function of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Halliday (1994) asserts that the thematic structure gives the clause the character of a message. The author further explains this by stating that a clause attains the character of a message as a result of its organisation. This organisation is such that a part of it, called the theme, which is assigned a special status combines with the other parts of the clause (rheme) to form the message contained in a clause. It generally refers to the internal organisation of syntactic elements as strings of message.

It is widely presented in works of scholars that the thematic system consists of two major constituents which are the Theme and the Rheme. Rahim and Askari (2014) assert that the theme essentially comprises everything placed initially in a sentence right up to the first finite verb. The theme typically comes first in the clause because it is considered a pointer in a clause system. Concerning the constituents of thematic systems and the position thematic elements occupy in those systems, Downing and Locke (2006:223) state that:

“Theme and Rheme are two components which together make up the organisational construct that is the thematic structure of the clause. The theme comes first and is identified as the first constituent in the clause. What follows is the Rheme”

Buttressing the above authors, Halliday and Mathiessen (2014:89) add that

“the speaker chooses the Theme as his or her point of departure to guide the addressee in developing an interpretation of the message; by making part of the message prominent as Theme, the speaker enables the addressee to process the message.”

In plain terms, therefore, the theme is the beginning of the message contained in a clause while the rheme bears the rest of the message. The choice of a theme is significant for both persuasive and interpretive effect on a message. The theme basically points to that aspect of the message in a clause that the speaker wishes to portray as more important.

### Existing Studies on Themes across Various Texts

There exists a set of invaluable scholarship in the study of thematic relation across a large array of genre. For instance, Taiwo (2001) asserts that the study of themes has been used in the analysis of scientific reports, advertisements, simultaneous interpretation and e-mail messages. The author examined the textual organisation of newspaper reports by investigating how news writers structure and develop their texts through the thematic system. The study identified 435 thematic choices in the data out of which 405 were unmarked. Also, 368 were simple themes while 67 were multiple themes. The study concluded that the method of structuring newspaper reports is important for both the writer and the reader. For the writer, it enables him/her to be able to cluster so much information in the lead sentences and this avails the readers the opportunity to know what the column is about, without having to read through the entire report.

Akindele and Taiwo (2016) conducted a thematic analysis of speeches of Nigerian presidents made on the nation's Independence day anniversaries. The authors analysed the speeches made by three Nigerian presidents: Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Yar'Adua and Goodluck. The analysis focused on the choices of simple/multiple themes and marked/unmarked themes. The findings of data analysis revealed that unmarked themes and simple themes were frequently used in the speeches while marked and multiple themes were few. The study reached a conclusion that the knowledge of how thematic prominence is realised from arrangement of syntactic structures is significant for packaging information in speeches.

All these researches have made significant contributions to the study of thematic systems in various texts using different methodologies and approaches. Despite this corpus of scholarship, there is a lacuna in the analysis of themes in Nigerian newspaper editorials on burning political issues. This paper intends to extend the frontiers of knowledge in the field of grammar and an analysis of this nature will enable a study of recurrent thematic choices across different Nigerian newspaper editorials on political issues and how such help to convey the messages contained in newspaper editorials on political issues.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are to:

- (a) identify thematic patterns in the political editorials of the selected newspaper editorials;
- (b) analyse the identified thematic patterns in the selected political editorials of these newspaper editorials; and

- (c) relate the choices of thematic patterns to how political issues are conveyed in the editorials.

### DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on the investigation of thematic patterns in editorials of Nigerian newspapers on political issues between April 2014 and August 2016. The emphasis on political issues within this period is borne out of the fact that this period marks a phase for the widespread disenchantment for the highly inveighed Jonathan regime and the clamour for a change in government which was manifested in 2015 general election. The mass expectations from the new government which have been met and those yet to be achieved also generated serious political issues in 2016. Data samples for this research are drawn mainly from secondary sources. A total of nine editorials that dwell on political issues are drawn from *The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *The Nation*. The three national Nigerian Newspapers are selected on the basis of wide coverage among Nigerian elites and plebeians. So, they maintain a wide readership in the country. Another reason for the choices of these papers is their strong influence on public opinion. One editorial each in 2014, 2015 and 2016 is selected across the three (3) papers. The study adopts a purposive data sampling technique. The editorials are chosen from specific months between 2014 and 2016 across these three newspapers. While 2014 editorials centre on the Osun State Gubernatorial election; 2015 editorials are on the 2015 general elections and 2016 editorials relate to the issue of budget padding.

The framework employed in this study is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). In systemic linguistics, language is seen as a network of system. Hence, language (as well as grammar) is considered to be a system because language speakers have the opportunity to choose from several available options depending on the context of situation. Systemic functional linguistics is not only based on written language, it is a theory that focuses on both written and spoken language. Apart from the fact that it focuses on both forms of language, the spoken and written language forms which are studied are those employed in actual usage. This is why systemic functional linguistics is described by most scholars to be concerned with the study of text (an instance of language use - spoken or written). In a bid to make up for the flaw of structural grammar and transformative generative grammar, systemic functional linguists included meaning in the study of language structure, thus, leading to the study of the functional aspects of language.

Systemic functional linguistics has two aspects which are systemic grammar and functional grammar. Systemic grammar relates to the internal relationships in language as a system of network or meaning potential. The

functionality of grammar aspect deals with the functions (basically meaning) that grammatical structures serve in social interactions. Butt *et al* (1995) explains that systemic functional grammar is concerned mainly with the choices that grammar makes available to speakers and writers and these choices relate the intention of communicators to the form of language used. Thus, unlike several other approaches to the study of grammar, it is the grammar of systemic functional linguistics that makes it possible to account for the use and meaning of linguistic units. Also, Martin and Rose (2007) state that:

“SFL is called systemic because compared with other theories it foregrounds the organization of language as options for meaning and it is functional because it interprets the design of language with respect to ways people use it to live ”

According to systemic functional linguistics, every form or structure that language takes is aimed at achieving a specific function. Halliday (2002a) states that language simultaneously performs three functions: the ideational metafunction, the interpersonal metafunction and the textual metafunction. This study has more to do with the textual function. The textual function relates to construction of text and this is mainly realised by the system of theme. This theoretical approach to grammatical analysis is appropriate for this work as it gives the researcher the opportunity to describe language structures through the study of choices of thematic patterns in newspaper editorials written by different editors. Also, using this framework, it is easy for the result of data analysis based on choices of thematic patterns to be related to the intentions, and leanings of the media on the aforementioned political issues.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The table 1 presents the frequency of occurrences of the different thematic choices made in the selected editorials. It serves as a reference for interpretation of the implications that the choices of marked and unmarked themes have on the messages conveyed in the editorials on political issues under study. The texts are labeled PED (The Punch Editorial), NED (The Nation Editorial) and GED (The Guardian Editorial).

### The Implication of Thematic Choices on Political Issues as Conveyed in the Editorials

Table 1 shows that the unmarked themes occurred more than the marked themes in the editorials on political issues across the three Nigerian newspapers. In order to avoid ambiguity, ensure clarity and avoid obscurity in the ideas communicated in a newspaper editorial, it is necessary to maintain a straightforward and simple

sentence structure which can be realised when unmarked themes are used. In the political editorials analysed, the unmarked themes identified were used by editors to perform a number of functions.

One of these is that the unmarked themes were used in stating facts. In presenting views on political issues, editors use facts about certain political news as bases for their discussions, criticisms or evaluations. In doing this, there is a need for the provision of accurate statements regarding names of political leaders involved, organisations, and places that are crucial to the subject matter. In stating such news, these pieces of information occur in unmarked positions. Some instances include the following:

### Unmarked Themes Illustrating Names of Political Leaders:

**T001: President Goodluck Jonathan** owes it a duty to provide an environment that is conducive to a fair, free and credible election. (*The Punch*, Concerns over Osun Governorship Polls, 07.08.2014)

**T002: The President of the Senate, Dr. Bukola Saraki**, has been standing trial before the code of conduct tribunal on a charge of perjury and has sought every opportunity to turn it into a circus, without vacating his exalted chair, and without the senate requesting him to do so in keeping with the best practices. (*The Nation*, Chambers of Scandal, 03.08.2016)

The use of these names in the unmarked positions serves as attention-getters, giving the readers a foreknowledge of the persons being referred to. In this case, the names mentioned belong to well-known and influential personalities in Nigeria and would naturally spring up attention in the readers. Readers do not have to wait till the mid or end of the discourse before getting a cue on the persons being talked about. This thematic structure therefore affords news organisations the logicity needed to persuade the audience and make them agree with the news paper's stance.

### Unmarked Themes Indicating Names of Bodies or Organisations:

**T003: The Independent National Electoral Commission's (official) listing of offences** puts the tally at 66 after the March 28 presidential and April 11 governorship/state assembly polls. (*The Guardian*, 2015 and the Future of Elections, 28.04.2016)

**T004: The security agencies** are expected to serve the general interest of people; not that of the ruling party. (*The Nation*, Osun 2014, 28.08.2014)

In the examples above, names of organisations handling

**Table 1:** A Table Showing the Frequency of the Various Realisers of Marked and Unmarked Themes as Used across all the Editorials

Type of theme			PED	NED	GED	Total	%
Marked	Adjunct	Adverbial	36	25	27	88	73.3
		Preposition	14	5	12	31	25.8
	Complement	0	1	0	1	0.8	
Total of marked themes			50	31	39	120	100
Unmarked	NG in declaratives		66	53	57	176	91.2
	Wh-word in Wh-question		0	3	5	8	4.1
	Clause as theme		4	0	2	6	3.1
	Finite verb in yes/no question		0	0	2	2	1.0
	Predicator in imperatives		1	0	0	1	0.5
Total of unmarked themes			71	56	66	193	100

sensitive issues are mentioned. Since the editorials understudy are those relating to corruption, budget padding and elections which naturally triggers some level of interests to Nigerian readers especially, the occurrences of these bodies are placed at strategic points ( the theme) where the purpose of the editorials could be achieved.

#### **Unmarked Themes also Make Reference to Specific Places and Concepts:**

**T005: Rivers states** became the worst scenario where no fewer than six lives were lost in what came close to a war; gunshots were freely exchanged among other infractions. (*The Guardian*, 2015 and the Future of Election, 28.04.2015)

**T006: A budget** is a financial framework of revenue estimates and expenditure which only the executive arm of government is in a better stead to appreciate. (*The Punch, Dealing with Reps' Budgetary Sore*, 11.08.2016)

Unmarked themes are also used in editorials when details are needed to be divulged about certain places and concepts. In such cases, like T005 and T006 above, the terms to be discussed are made to appear as unmarked themes since they are the points of focus. This is intended to capture the attention of readers and to eventually lead them to the views of the editors. Furthermore, editors, who represent the voice of the news organisation on political issues, use unmarked themes to put forward their stance in relation to those issues. It is discovered that, often times, the first person plural pronoun "we" is used as the unmarked theme in clause structures that present the viewpoints, stance and opinions of news organisations on political issues. In this sense, "we" attains the focus of the message suggesting ultimately the unanimous opinion and view of a body of

people, even when the view was single-handed put up by an individual. In the editorials analysed, some of these instances include:

**T007: We** insist that the military should have no place in a civil election. (*The Punch, Concerns over Osun State Governorship Poll*, 07.08.2014)

**T008: We** restate our position that the military has no role in the civil process of electioneering. (*The Nation, Osun 2014*, 08.08.2014)

While expressing concepts which are considered to be generally known and widely acclaimed, editors also make use of unmarked thematic structures. In cases where the news agencies intend to provide their own stance to these widely-acclaimed views, the thematised element is considered "given" and not "new". While the theme points in the direction of the rheme, the rheme position is actually the message intended to be projected. Ideologically, the thematised element functions as a "pointer". Instances include:

**T009: Violence** is an anathema to democracy which is predicated on the expressed will of the majority. (*The Nation, Plug the Holes, Please*, 10.04.2015).

**T010: Good governance** is the key to fulfilling all expectations of Nigerians. (*The Guardian*, 2015 and the Future of Elections, 28.04.2015)

When an unmarked theme is used, no special meaning is intended as the structure is presented in its default form. It is however observed in the course of analysis that unmarked interrogatives function as relevant ideological tools in the editorials. Editors, in addition to using them to persuade readers, use these unmarked interrogatives to actively involve the audience in the political issue of

discussion. This way, readers are made to look like co-discussants while trying to persuade or lead them to buying their views. This can be seen in the example below:

**T011:** What is happening to our lawmakers? Why is it not surprising that it is only when issues of allocation of funds are raised that we find lawmakers in this show of shame? Why is it that only matters relating to rabid material quest do we feel the vociferousness of the lawmakers? Who amongst them has come up with any insightful idea, or any quotable quote demonstrating high intellect and moral virtue? Who amongst them has stood so high in dispassionate acknowledgement of a ground breaking act of selflessness and sacrifice? (*The Guardian*, Legislators, Scandals and Distractions, 12.08.2017)

An editorial contains a critical discussion of pressing issues in the society. When criticisms are done, editors tend to challenge certain authorities perceived to be responsible for some societal mishaps. One of the linguistic means used to achieve this is the use of interrogatives especially the thematised WH-word. In the example above, the editor criticises a prominent political scandal which occurred in the legislative arm in Nigeria in 2016. The editor raises questions on this political malice as a means of challenging the legislators. The unmarked WH-words not only serve as a tool of criticism in political editorials, they also serve as persuasive tools. The editor uses the thematic choice to persuade readers to agree with his opinion. The interrogative probes prompt the readers to think in line with what is being discussed in the editorial. The WH-words further reinforce how editors try to involve their readers in political issues of discussion. Readers, while on the editorials, are made to ask themselves questions and provide answers to them. This thereby enforces readers' active participation in making a decisive stand (usually that of the editorial) on the issue being discussed in editorials.

Marked themes on the other hand, are significant for passing across special information. Clausal elements other than the subject are given thematic prominence, in the editorials, to enhance the presentation of editors' ideas on political issues. For example, the fronting of adverbials occurred more across the editorials. Adverbials, generally, give circumstantial information about a verb. An adverbial thus provides information about the time, place, reason, or conditions under which an action was performed. Editorials are not written without enough evidences. When editors write on political issues, they must have been able to garner sufficient and accurate information relating to the political issue. Editors are expected to give premise to their arguments

using certain circumstantial information surrounding the political issue being discussed. Adverbials are fronted in news editorials on political issues to give originality and authenticity to the claims of news editorials. This is necessary if readers would ever take such writings serious. Adverbials generally supply more or additional information in a clause structure. When ideas contained in editorials are perceived to be credible and original, it will in turn make the readers trust the editors' judgment and also to some extent help to convince readers. The dominant use of adverbials as marked theme in political editorials confirms editors' frantic effort to assure readers that their judgment is premised on accurate facts. Examples from the analysed texts are listed below.

**T012: Soon after the Ekiti governorship election held in June**, another opportunity has come to test the credibility of the election process in the country. (*The Nation*, Osun 2014, 08.08.2014)

**T013: Barely two weeks after the election that produced a new president and members of the National Assembly**, voters head to the polls once again on Saturday to elect those who will govern them at the state level. (*The Punch*, INEC: Getting it Right this Time, 09.06.2015)

**T014: After meeting with President Muhammadu Buhari last Friday**, he said that budget padding was not an offence. (*The Punch*, Dealing with Reps' Budgetary Sore, 11.08.2016)

**T015: So far**, in this eighth National Assembly, attempts at surpassing the vices and impunity of actions committed by earlier parliaments have been relentless as this scandal over 'budget padding' demonstrates. (*The Guardian*, Legislators, Scandals and Distractions, 12.08.2016)

Instances of the use of adverbials stated above relate to the exact time of an action. In T012- T015, attempts were made to substantiate time-related information provided in the editorials by fronting adverbs of time. The inclusion of the exact time of the incidence is crucial to how such information would be embraced by readers. The adverbials are thematised because the editors want the readers to get hold of the period before the message. This is also used to initiate logicity and eventually lead the readers to accepting the views of the news.

Apart from giving specific information about time, adverbial clauses are used in editorials to draw a conclusion, as in T015. After several premises have been made, an adverbial clause is used to introduce the editorial's final submission. This is in a way hedging the conclusions made in order to guide against criticism. Because the editorial is a sensitive write-up and the

editors may be held responsible for any outrageous conclusion, the use of thematised adverbials in these editorials on political issues often serve to mitigate the power of the statements made. It presupposes the fact that editors make conclusions based on a widely acclaimed, known, or stated fact in the early part of such an editorial. The use of certain adverbial clauses to introduce conclusions in editorials discussing political issues therefore serves as shield for protecting editors from attacks or hostility from super political powers.

**T016: Given the high level of consciousness of the Osun people**, it would be disastrous to take them for granted and seek to impose a candidate on them. (*The Nation*, Osun 2014, 08.08.2014)

**T017: Given this controversy**, it is obvious that the very issue many politicians seek to gloss over has now been made the crux of the matter: the moral question in Nigeria's governance. (*The Guardian*, *Legislators, Scandals and Distractions*, 12.08.2016)

**T018: As can be observed**, it is not any alien who is destroying Nigeria but Nigerian themselves. (*The Guardian*, *Legislators, Scandals and Distractions*, 12.08.2016)

**T019: Given the way the projects are conceived and executed**, the contracts bypass all known indices of transparency and due process as encapsulated in the Public Procurement Act passed by the parliament. (*The Punch*, *Dealing with Reps' Budgetary Sore*, 11.08.2016)

Editorials are considered to be social tools for wielding changes in the society. For this reason, editorials on political issues point out the weaknesses of certain governing processes, electoral practices, and so on. Across editorials analysed on the budget padding scandal in Nigeria in 2016, it is discovered that adverbial clauses and phrases are marked in the clause structures of some sentences to place emphasis on the corrupt acts of legislators in order to criticise them.

**T020: Although many have argued that the revelation arising from this shameless act, of legislators washing their dirty linens in public, is a rite of passage for any virile legislature**, there is no sense in turning personal animosity and misunderstanding into statecraft. (*The Guardian*, *Legislators, Scandal and Distractions*, 12.08.2016)

**T021: As if that is not stain enough on the honour of the National Assembly**, Drsaraki and the Deputy Senate President, Ike Ekweremadu, have been arraigned before another court along with other officials charged with forgery. (*The Nation*, *Chambers of Scandal*, 03.08.2016)

**T022: Just to satisfy their selfish interests**, the lawmakers inserted #40 billion worth of the so-called constituency projects in the budget. (*The Punch*, *Dealing with Reps, Budgetary Sore*, 11.08.2016)

The marked adverbial clauses accentuate the shameful acts of legislators being criticised by the newspaper editorials. The fronting of these elements affords editors the opportunity to emphasise the object of criticism. In addition, this strategy makes it easy for reader to identify editors' objects of criticism.

Apart from adverbials which appeared most as marked themes, prepositional phrases functioning in the grammatical slot of adjuncts are also used widely as marked themes across the political editorials. Prepositional phrases may at times function as adjuncts in a clause structure. Instances of prepositional phrases identified in this analysis is limited to syntactic structures that has a prepend(P), followed by a completive (C) which has been given thematic prominence in a clause structure.

Generally, prepositional phrases that are marked in the editorials analysed are used to achieve emphasis. This way, they are used to call the attention of the readers to certain key or important issues relating to the political issue being discussed. When marked for theme, they are used in editorials to call readers' attention to information relating to place, time, and so on.

**T023: By now**, the police should have devised a system of guaranteeing that travelers use the major highways in a state holding an election. (*The Punch*, *Concerns over Osun Governorship Poll*. 07.08.2014)

**T024: In Abia North**, the case is even clearer. (*The Nation*, *Plug the Holes, Please*, 10.04.2015)

In order of presentation of ideas in editorials, when prepositional phrases on circumstantial information appear at the initial position (as in the instances above), editors use this to reflect the importance of the fronted idea to the issue being discussed. In T024, for instance, the editor, while making claims about how electioneering practices should be made authentic, cites an example of the election process in Abia state. In essence, the fronting of the prepositional phrase "In Abia North" accentuates the relevance of the information contained in that phrase to the totality of opinion expressed in the editorial of 2015 general elections. Fronted prepositional groups therefore, are hints or clues to crucial information related to the political issues discussed in an editorial.

The fact that most prepositional phrases are apt makes them capture the attention of the readers. Prepositional phrases are not semantically independent, so, they arouse the readers' consciousness to read the remaining part of the clause attached to it. In a sense, prepositional phrases used in these editorials create a kind of suspense in the readers to find out the content of the

other syntactic element attached to them. In a way, prepositional phrases are used by editors as captivating devices to sustain the interest of the reader as in the examples below:

**T025: Before now**, we had noted that the constituency project was a veritable conduit for pillaging the public treasury. (*The Punch*, Dealing with Reps' Budgetary Sore, 11.08.2016).

**T026: In the first round of the 2015 general elections**, glaring shortcomings were observed in Rivers and Abia North. (*The Nation*, Plug the Holes, Please, 10.04.2015).

Across the editorials analysed, apart from placing emphasis on certain information, thematised prepositional phrases are used to introduce or hint readers about editors' judgments or verdicts on political issues as seen in the examples below.

**T027: By any standard**, this represents a pass mark. (*The Punch*, INEC: Getting it Right this Time, 09.04.2015)

**T028: In the main**, the 2015 exercise passed on well and the indications now are strong enough to change negative impressions etched in the minds of the world about a people and their predilection for failed or flawed elections leading to abortion of democracy. (*The Guardian*, 2015 and the Future of Elections, 28.04.2015)

Editorials on political issues present opinions of news organisations on prominent political issues in the society. In doing this, editors pass value judgments and verdicts on certain political processes after a critical evaluation of such processes have been done. In writing an editorial however, editors guide against giving erroneous judgments. Thus, they try to introduce their judgments or verdicts with certain general statements to support them. In T027, the prepositional phrase "by any standard" suggests that the editors base judgments on available standards for declaring an electioneering process successful. Also, in T028, "in the main" is a hint to the fact that the election was not perfect but to a great extent, it was credible. This gives weight to their judgments. Also, this may save the editor from several critics as to some aspects of the election which was not credible. When prepositional phrases are used in this manner, they serve as hedges to over generalised judgments and avoid the fallacy of hasty generalisations.

Also, thematised prepositional phrases are used in editorials on political issues to introduce suggestion or opinions.

**T029: At the same time**, we urge the public to watch out for attempts to undermine the ballot. **For this type of high stakes contest**, politicians must have mastered all the types of plots to rig the result. (*The Punch*, Concerns

over Osun Governorship Poll, 07.08.2014 )

**T030: Amidst the celebrations**, however, no one must lose sight of the big room for improvement and the need to build on the current successful outing. (*The Guardian*, 2015 and the Future of Elections. 28.04.2015)

Newspaper editorials do not always only contain criticisms, evaluations and assessment. Editors also give valuable suggestions to the public as regard certain issues. In the political editorials analysed, varying suggestions of such were identified. It is however discovered that advice or suggestions contained in the main clause were sometimes introduced by prepositional phrases. This is to prevent a feeling of imposition on the readers. Editors would not like to be perceived as too overriding as readers have rights to their own personal opinions too. When suggestions in these editorials are introduced with a marked theme of prepositional phrases, the tone of the editors is more polite and less imposing on the readers. As in T030 above, a reader will find the sentence construction more polite and less imposing compared to "no one must lose sight of a big room for improvement..." Thus, prepositional phrases are marked by editors to present suggestions or opinions in a polite and less imposing manner. It is a means of working on the psyche of the learner to persuade rather than compelling them. It also may be said to serve as a convincing tool for readers to adopt the opinion expressed in the editorial.

Finally, in editorials on budget padding scandal, it is discovered that prepositional phrases are marked for theme in order to place emphasis on the ridiculing legislators.

**T031: From certificate forgery to sundry financial improprieties**, the country has been grizzling to no end. (*The Punch*, Dealing with Reps' Budgetary Sore, 11.08.2016)

**T032: By their shameless activities**, these lawmakers are destroying Nigeria inside and outside. (*The Guardian*, *Legislators*, Scandals and Distractions, 12.08.2016).

In the instances above, editors use prepositional phrases marked as theme to make the object of criticism prominent. In these editorials, editors try to express their dissatisfaction towards the shameful acts of legislators a regards the unlawful inclusion of fake budgetary allocations in the 2016 budget planning. The fronting of prepositional phrases in T031 and T032 above are used to make the ideas (corrupt activities of leaders) which are subject of criticism prominent in the editorials.

Prepositional phrases are also used to acknowledge the sources of information contained in an editorial, otherwise called evidentials (Hyland, 2005). They serve



as evidences for the information being subjected to discussion in an editorial. This further reinforces the fact that editors do not use unproven facts. Investigations are properly carried out before conclusions are drawn.

**T033: According to them**, this is in addition to the #4.78 billion worth of capital project he sited in his constituency, out of the #9.23 billion provided for the entire state. (*The Punch*, Dealing with Reps' Budgetary Sore, 11.08.2016) Generally, the use of prepositional phrases across these editorials are of high significance as their emphatic effects help to capture the mind of readers and also serve as pointer to key issues in editorials. Sparingly used in these editorials is the marked complement. It occurred the least in all the editorials analysed as it appeared only once in *The Guardian* newspaper.

**T034: Not, the least**, are the high hopes of Nigerians. (*The Guardian*, 2015 and the Future of Elections, 28.04.2015)

Since the aim of most editors is to accommodate a good number of readers or maintain wide readership, the use of clause structure with the complement marked is seldom used except in cases where important message contained in the complement has to be projected. In T034 above, the marked complement is used to place emphasis on the "quantified hopes" of Nigerians as regards to election processes.

## CONCLUSION

The study has demonstrated the way newspaper organisations order and re-order clausal elements to suit their intentions on political issues. The findings show that the media tilt more towards the use of unmarked themes than the marked themes because it affords the opportunity to express issues clearly and unambiguously so as to get readers to agree with their points. The preponderance of the unmarked theme is also in line with the findings of Taiwo (2001) and Akindele and Taiwo (2016), who observed that news discourse is usually dominated by unmarked themes. In the study, it was observed that marked themes, however, are used by editors to achieve special purposes which help to project varying ideologies of editors on political issues. The study concludes that the thematic position is crucial to the understanding of what editors intend to communicate and how such is passed across. Also, choices of thematic structures in editorials have impacts on how readers perceive the opinions presented in this kind of writings.

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