

Newspaper headlines on HIV/AIDS in selected Nigerian dailies: A critical discourse analysis

Tochukwu-Ngige, Sylvia & Mbagwu, D. Ugochukwu

Department of Linguistics

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Anambra State, Nigeria

E-mail: sylviangige @yahoo.com

Abstract

HIV/AIDS is a health problem that is considered seriously because of the difficulty it has posed over the years in defying a cure solution. Owing to this, management of the problem is highly required especially with the fact that many of the people living with it living below the poverty line and could hardly afford the medication deployed to its management. Besides, the management does not require the applicable medication only. There are responses that are required from those not living with it to support those living with it. The nature of its management demands sensitization and creation of awareness. This creates a tripartite relation involving the media, agencies vested with the responsibility of managing the scourge and the public in which those living with the disease exist. A power play relation is evident. Hence, this study takes up newspaper headlines, representing the media, in examining this

relation applying the basic tenets of CDA. The headlines are randomly selected from five selected newspapers: The Sun, Vanguard, This Day, Guardian and Punch. The major finding is that the headlines express condemnation, warning, recommendation, advice, and intervention. These have come in forms driven by lexical and grammatical choices, discursive and social practices that are prevalent in the society.

Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a field of study which has paved the way for linguists to find out the hidden ideologies behind seemingly simple and plain words. Language is no longer seen as merely reflecting our reality, but as central to creating reality. (Taiwo, 2007). A type of discourse analytical research, CDA primarily studies the way social power abuse; dominance and ingenuity are enacted, represented and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. The principal aim of CDA is to uncover the opacity in discourses which contribute to the exercise, maintenance or reproduction of unequal relations of power (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In the field of applied linguistics, CDA has been used enormously in various genres analysing the critical phenomena which lead to the emergence of a certain ideology, power relation and domination within a domain, inequality among races, genders, and social classes. It is perceived that the most

crucial aspect where power and domination are exercised is in the life of the public through media. Media is an explicit domain and public is exposed to various ideologies which influence and blind-fold their mind as certain ideology is enforced on them in their daily life.

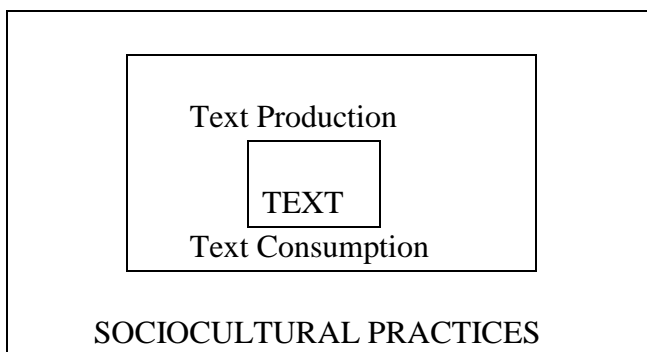
In the language use that accommodates people living with HIV in order to accept them and not to alienate them from society, there is a gap. Journalists do not remember that the words they use can evoke strong emotions and reinforce stereotypes that derive discrimination against persons infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and other vulnerable groups. They use inappropriate languages that discriminate and encourage hatred among society. The spotlight of this study therefore is to see how newspaper headlines are used to initiate, sustain and shape discourse on the views of readers on HIV/AIDS issues. Since CDA takes the side of the oppressed to scrutinize the language of the power elites, this study can be properly located in CDA. Fairclough CDA framework is chosen since the method is suitable for various text materials and can be an appropriate approach that best illustrates the purpose of our study. The main objective of the study is to analyze language use in headlines on HIV/AIDS in selected newspapers in the framework of CDA.

Five randomly selected newspapers, *The Sun*, *Vanguard*, *This Day*, *Guardian* and *Punch*, are used in this study. The newspapers online editions published

between January 2016 and December 2016 serve for the data collection with the principles of Fairclough's CDA are applied to the analysis of the data.

Overview of Fairclough's CDA

CDA drives this study. The theory argues that language should be studied as discourse, both in speaking and written forms. Through studying language, the ultimate purpose is to raise people's consciousness towards exploitative social relations. Fairclough proposes that every instance of language use is a communicative event consists of 3 dimensions: Text, Discourse practice and Social practice.



Fairclough three dimensional-model (Fairclough, 1992a:73)

In the diagram, the Inner Square is the first dimension representing the discourse fragment, i.e., the

‘object of analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts). The middle square is the second dimension representing the place where struggles over power relations in discourse happen. The outer square is the third dimension of discourse described as ‘power behind discourse’ or as social practices, because it contains ‘the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes of production and reception’ (Janks 1997:26). Each dimension requires a different type of analysis: the first dimension, ‘text analysis’ or description; second dimension, ‘processing analysis’ or interpretation; and the third dimension, ‘social analysis or ‘explanation’.

Fairclough’s framework on CDA is chosen for this study because it goes beyond the lexical and grammatical relations of a text, and acts as a possible agent of understanding the attitudinal and social interaction underlying the composition of a certain discourse and as a means of social change.

Data presentation and analysis

A total of thirty headlines on HIV/AIDS have been collected from the five selected newspapers. The headlines have been analyzed using the principles of Fairclough’s CDA.

Lexical and grammatical choices

Certain lexical and grammatical choices are evident in the headlines. Identification of the choices is very key to

providing insight into the dimensions of meaning the headlines text display. Some of the following lexical items appear in the headlines:

1. NACA *holds* conference on HIV prevention. (<https://issuu.com/vanguardngr>, *Vanguard* Nov. 15, 2016: 15)
2. I slept with 6 other ladies, *says* man accused of infecting girlfriend with HIV. By Evelyn UJsuman. (*Vanguard* Oct. 17, 2016:60)
3. USA *reduces* aid to 1.9m Nigerians living with HIV over gay support. By Emma Ovuakporie&JohnboscoAgbakwuru. (*Vanguard* February 25, 2016:11)

The choice of verbs positions the headlines in expressing urgency attached to HIV. More so, attention is created about interventions and occurrences related to the disease in real time. This is occasioned by the form of the verbs, present tense: see *holds*, *says* and *receives*.

Some of the headlines are questions:

- 4 Where are Nigerians infected with HIV/AIDS?
- 5 Ending AIDS in 2030: How achievable for Nigeria?
- 6 Can WHO's new 'text and treat' HIV policy reach those who need it most?
- 7 How many Nigerians are living with HIV?

The choice of these question headlines is to engage readers in an interactive communicative instance while

achieving the objective of presenting HIV/AIDS as a scourge that requires the attention it is receiving and even much more.

Inverted word orders have been observed:

- 8 HIV/AIDS: we're dying, patients cry out (the *Sun* newspaper)

See also 2. The inverted ordering is evidently deployed to creating captivating headlines as well as capturing more concrete pictures of the real situations. Let's compare:

- 9 Man accused of infecting girlfriend with HIV says I slept with 6 other ladies; and
- 10 HIV/AIDS Patients cry out, 'we're dying'.

The order of 2 is corrected as 9 while the order of 8 is corrected as 10. They point to the truth of innovation in newspaper headline drafting. Beside the grammatical deviation of ordering, we see the mechanical deviation of treating a direct speech as not one: 'we're dying' and "I slept with six other ladies". These cases of deviation describe the newspaper headlines as stylistic innovations and the goal is usually to win readers' attention and lead them into the introduced report.

There is considerable display of numbers in many of the headlines.

- 11 USA reduces aid to 1.9m Nigerian living with HIV over gay support.

- 12 WAD: 72000 adolescents living with HIV in Lagos.
- 13 Lagos records 9, 579 fresh HIV cases in 6 months.
- 14 1.8 m Nigerians risk HIV/AIDS death in 2016.
- 15 Two million people get HIV annually, says UNAIDS.
- 16 HIV infecting 2million more people every year, warns UN.

Numbers in the headlines are either figures or in words. They properly count in the order of the context of the headlines which have the reference of a disease and require estimation of cases and values of financial engagements.

Expressions of the conceptualization of HIV/AIDS in the headlines

In conceptualizing HIV/AIDS in the headlines, basic indications are evident. They include among others condemnation, warning, recommendation, advice, and intervention. The indications are usually obvious.

A good number of the headlines express the problem associated with stigmatization and discrimination against HIV/AIDS patients. This is driven to cover all the indications pointed out here. For instance,

- 17 As world marks HIV/AIDS: Stigmatization, discrimination remain bane in efforts to stop scourge
- 18 Film tackles HIV/AIDS stigmatization on stage.
- 19 HIV/AIDS and the cost of stigma.

The data items 17-18 express *condemnation*, such as why stigmatization and discrimination are not acceptable; *warning*, to dissuade people from exhibiting such behaviour; *recommendation*, *advice*, and *intervention*, all geared towards addressing these issues that are connected with HIV/AIDS patients and the infection itself. In all of this, the disease is conceptualized as deadly but there is the indication of confident expectation that there are measures of mitigating the precarious spread identified with the deadly disease.

Interpretation of the discursive practice in the headlines

Discourse practice is the second dimension in Fairclough's three-dimensional model. Headlines on the text imply a critical point of view. The headlines reflect the ideological background of the writer and the newspaper as well.

- 20 Nigeria: Only 45 percent Nigerians are aware of their HIV status –NGO
- 21 NACA, NCDC fault claim of HIV cure

22 HIV/AIDS: Nigeria facing antiretroviral drugs shortage, says UN

There is evident belief of the writers that the situations as reported are true. Hence, the headline statements are affirmative. This practice is advanced to stimulate interest and start a conversation towards resolving implicit and explicit issues emerging with the reports the headlines introduce. More so, the power play of who has done what; to what degree what is done is adequate; and, who will change or what will change the status quo, is prominently displayed? In other words, headline discursive practice is fundamentally drawing an attention to an existing situation and motivating a conversation to stimulate an intervention response or action.

Social practice indicated by the headlines

Social-cultural practice is the third dimension in Fairclough's CDA. Three aspects of the socio-cultural context of a communicative event are identified, economic, political and cultural. The headlines reveal political, economic and cultural values placed on HIV/AIDS. For instance, 3 repeated here as 23 and 24.

23 USA reduces aid to 1.9m Nigerians living with HIV over gay support

24 Ending AIDS in 2030: How achievable for Nigeria?

The evidence in 23 and 24 is that Nigeria is economically incapacitated to manage the scourge. Hence, there is worry about the reduction of USA aid to Nigerians living with HIV/AIDS. Beyond this, it is indicated that economic incapacitation may not just be the case. There are political and cultural dimensions to it. The politicians who should promote interventions in this regard are more interested in amassing wealth from public funds by siphoning such funds into their personal accounts. Leadership is therefore not provided by the politicians in terms of coordinating programmes relevant for ending AIDS as the question in 24 indicates and this is the more reason 23 sends a worrisome message.

Moreover, a cultural fact is identified with interest shift from supporting those living with HIV/AIDS to gay support. The social value the US places on gay wins attention in 23. The question about why is the case is unnecessary, particularly because an aid provider has a choice to give or not to give. Usually, there is a return expected from any aid granted. Gay support carries with it political, economic and cultural considerations which HIV/AIDS support does not include. Besides, reduction is not withdrawal and this is indicative of a gap which the aid receiving nation should fill to enable the aid-giving nation provide intervention in another area of interest.

Surface structural categorization of the headlines

Headlines have different structural forms which have implications for what they express. Some of these structural forms have been described. They are as follows: Plain headlines, speech headlines, headlines with pointers and question headlines.

- **Plain headlines:** these are headlines that express a single idea or more. They are presented in simple sentences. A good number of headlines use here belong to this category. Other examples are,

- 25 Economic crises hit Nigerians living with HIV/AIDS
- 26 1.8 M Nigerians risk HIV/AIDS death in 2016

It is important to note that some plain headlines lack a verb predicate or the verb is derived covertly by stylistic deviation usually with the goal of economy of words in presentation. See 27-28,

- 27 USA HIV/AIDS partnership with Nigeria
- 28 HIV/AIDS, Gender and Vulnerability

- **Speech as headlines:** These headlines use either direct or reported speech of a person and the name is put in front to show the person who made the statement. Examples are,

- 29 Nigeria on fast track to end AIDS by 2030 –
NACA DG
- 30 Nigeria: Only 45 percent Nigerians are aware of
their HIV status –NGO

➤ **Headlines with pointer:** these are headlines that have one or more words that create in the reader the awareness of the context in which the comments that follow are being made. There are two parts to the headline: the given information and the comment that follows (Taiwo, 2004: 326). The following headlines are representative of this category,

- 31 Agents of AIDS: How Nasarawa native surgeons
spread HIV without knowing
- 32 Nigeria: Only 45 percent Nigerians are aware of
their HIV status- NGO
- 33 As world marks HIV/AIDS Day: Stigma,
discrimination remain bane in efforts to stop
scourge.

As obvious, these headlines involve the use of a colon to mark out the information part from the comment part.

➤ **Question as headlines:** as the name indicates, these are headlines in the form of a question. The question could be rhetorical, carrying with it an

obvious answer or presented to lead a reader into a report where the answer is provided. Some examples are,

- 34 Ending AIDS in 2030: How achievable for Nigeria?
- 35 Where are Nigerians infected with HIV/AIDS?
- 36 Can WHO's new 'test and treat' HIV policy reach those who need it most?
- 37 How many Nigerians are living with HIV?

It is worthy of note the question headline could be a content question or polar question. While 34, 35 and 37 are content questions 36 is a polar question. Whatever type of question is involved operates with the intention to make readers seek or derive the answer.

Conclusion

With 30 selected headlines from five national dailies, this study has determined how discourse on HIV/AIDS is shaped. Fairclough CDA has been applied. The reason for this is the need to understand the relation that exists between the people living with HIV/AIDS and agencies vested with the responsibility of providing help to them on the one hand and the general public with whom they relate on daily basis.

The study identifies the expressions that dominate the headlines, which are condemnation, warning,

recommendation, advice, and intervention. The newspapers by this are ideologically driven to sensitize the public on issues that relate with the disease, people living with the disease and promote interventions in controlling the scourge or denounce inaction of those with the mandate of support and administration of programmes for handling the scourge. This activity of the newspapers controls the drafting of the headlines and in this the discursive practice that pertains to the headlines is determined. More so, being that responses to social issues are controlled by social practice, the headlines implicitly and explicitly capture this by the consideration of three aspects of the socio-cultural context of a communicative event, which are economic, political and cultural. Here, it is evident that economic, political and cultural factors reflect in the forms and meanings of the headlines and reveal the social structure promoting or undermining the control of the scourge.

The headlines as pointed out come in forms. By this, the structural categorization is determined and the relevance of each form in initiating a conversation or discourse in which the relations of social structure is expressed.

References

- Fairclough, N. 1992. *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press & Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Fairclough, N. and Wodak, R. 1997. "Critical Discourse Analysis" In Van Dijk, T. (ed.) *Discourse as Social Interaction*. London: SAGE

Janks, H. 1997. Critical discourse analysis as a research tool. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. 18(3), 329-342.

Taiwo, R. 2007. 'Language, Ideology, and Power Relations in Nigerian Newspaper Headlines'. In Taiwo, R.Odeunmi, A., and Adetunji, A. (eds.) *Perspectives on Media Discourse*. Muenchen: LINCOM, pp 7-16

Appendix

1. NACA holds conference on HIV prevention. <https://issuu.com/vanguardngr>, *Vanguard* Nov. 15, 2016: 15
2. Nigeria on fast track to end AIDS by 2030-NACA DG. By Sola Ogundipe. *Vanguard* Dec. 13, 2016: 21
3. Agents of AIDS: How Nasarawa native surgeons spread HIV without knowing. *Punch* Nov.20, 2016: 58
4. Economic crises hit Nigerians living with HIV/AIDS. By Bukora Adebayo. *Punch* April 30, 2019:74

5. I slept with 6 other ladies, says man accused of infecting girlfriend with HIV. By Evelyn UJsuman. *Vanguard* Oct. 17, 2016:60
6. USA reduces aid to 1.9m Nigerians living with HIV over gay support. By Emma Ovuakporie&JohnboscoAgbakwuru. *Vanguard* February 25, 2016:11
7. Prince had AIDS and was preparing for death. By Shola Ogundipe. *Vanguard* April 30, 2016:28
8. WAD: 72000 adolescents living with HIV in Lagos. By ChiomaObinna. *Vanguard* Dec. 1, 2016:72
9. Lagos records 9, 579 fresh HIV cases in 6 months. By MonasunaOlowoopejo. *Vanguard* Nov. 24, 2016:56
10. 1.8 M Nigerians risk HIV/AIDS death in 2016. By John Ameh. *Punch* Feb. 25, 2016:69
11. Where are Nigerians infected with HIV/AIDS? By guest writer Dimos Sakellaridis. *Punch* Dec 1, 2016:8
12. HIV/AIDS: we're dying, patients cry out. By Murphy Ganagana, Rose Ejembe, LayiOlanrewaju. *The Sun* November 6, 2016:61
13. As world marks HIV/AIDS Day: Stigma, discrimination remain bane in efforts to stop scourge. By AzomaChikwe. *The Sun* Dec. 1, 2016:45
14. Film tackles HIV/AIDS stigmatization on stage. *Vanguard* May 3, 2016:59

15. Kano village head rapes, infected 13-year old with HIV. <https://issuu.com/vanguardngr>, *Vanguard* February 24, 2016:10
16. Ending AIDS in 2030: How achievable for Nigeria? *Vanguard* January 7, 2016:81
17. Only 45 percent Nigerians are aware of their HIV status-NGO. *Vanguard* May 13, 2016:45
18. Mother claims 7-year-old daughter healed of HIV/AIDS at crusade. By WoleBalogun*The SUN* June 30, 2016:51
19. Two million people get HIV annually, says UNAIDS. <https://issuu.com/punchngr>, *Punch* Nov. 30, 2016
20. USA HIV/AIDS partnership with Nigeria remains on track. *Vanguard* February 26. 2016:44
21. HIV/AIDS and the cost of stigma. www.thisdaylive.com *This Day* December, 1, 2016 p. 36
22. HIV/AIDS, Gender and Vulnerability. *This Day* December 1, 2016 p.38
23. US, Nigeria Partners to end HIV/AIDS. *This Day* December 1, p.3
24. UN calls for urgent action to protect young women from HIV/AIDS in Africa. By Sarah Boseley. *Guardian* November 21, 2016
25. HIV infecting 2m more people every year, warns UN. By Sarah Boseley. *Guardian* July 12, 2016

26. Why women are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, by NACA. By ChukwumaMuanya. *Guardian* December 15, 2016
27. Can WHO's new 'test and treat' HIV policy reach those who need it most. By Linda Nordling. *Guardian* August 3, 2016
28. NACA, NCDC fault claim of HIV cure. *Punch* Feb. 6, 2017
29. HIV/AIDS: Nigeria facing antiretroviral drugs shortage, says UN. *Punch*, October 17, 2016
30. How many Nigerians are living with HIV? *The Sun* June 14, 2016

Tochukwu-Ngige, Sylvia is a postgraduate student of the Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Mbagwu, D. Ugochukwu is a professor of Syntax and Applied Linguistics in the Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.