

## Naming Strategies and Lexical Choices in Selected Newspaper Reports on Niger Delta Conflicts in Nigeria

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### **Abstract:**

The paper investigates the lexical choices in the newspaper reports on Niger Delta conflicts (NDCs) to establish their link to specific stylistic strategies used by the reporters in naming the entities in the discourse. Media studies on ND discourse have focused on the linguistic and contextual elements, neglecting the stylistic strategies that constrain linguistic choices in texts, thereby preventing a full understanding of how news texts are used to influence the readers' perspectives of the conflicts. Forty reports on NDCs published between 2003 and 2007 were sampled from four ND-based newspapers (*The Tide, New Waves, The Pointer* and *Pioneer*) and subjected to stylistic analysis, with insights from Jeffries' critical stylistics model and Osundare's concepts of style and aspects of stylistics discourse. Two entities (the news actors and their activities) are named in the discourse through two naming strategies; namely, labelling and nominalising. Labelling is characterised by two lexical choices: emotive metaphors and qualifying adjectives used in evaluating the entities named. Nominalising is marked by two lexical patterns: plain and converted nominal forms employed to reduce the impact of the news actors' activities. Thus, naming strategies in ND-based reports on NDCs, deployed through specific lexical choices and patterns, are motivated by reporters' covert goal to influence the readers' views of the conflicts.

**Keywords:** Niger Delta conflict, Newspaper report, Naming, Strategies, Lexical choices, Labelling, Nominalisation, Discourse

### **Introduction**

Naming (with its outcome, names) is the referential spine of identification in any language and culture (Odebunmi, 2008). That any person, activity, phenomenon, etc in a culture or discourse has a name or is conceivable within a description adds credence to the idea that

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naming is a universal linguistic practice. According to vom Bruck and Bodenhorn (2009), since names can, in many cultures, indicate such valuable information as gender, marital status, birthplace, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and position within a family, naming itself becomes a linguistic practice through which the underlying ideological processes behind names can be accessed.

It is particularly interesting how “neutral” newspaper reporters often attach referential information to entities in the Niger Delta conflict discourse using various naming strategies, which betray their ideological foci. Notably, the newspaper reports on Niger Delta conflicts being studied in this paper have reflected an interaction between the lexical patterns and stylistic strategies employed in naming entities in the news. However, earlier studies on Niger Delta news texts have focused on the influence of ideology on news reporting, using largely linguistic and pragmatic tools. These studies have provided valuable insights into the linguistic elements and discourse structures that betray the social and ideological persuasions of journalists (cf. Ogbogbo, 2005; Ayoola, 2008; Chiluiwa, 2011), but have neglected how specific choices of linguistic elements are constrained by specific stylistic strategies used by newspaper reporters. This gap has prevented a full understanding of group-induced motivations for the Niger Delta conflicts and reports.

This study is, therefore, aimed at investigating the kinds and patterns of lexical choices that have been used to characterize the participants in the conflict reports with a view to establishing their link with the naming strategies employed by the reporters, especially given that naming strategies are observed to be stylistically made more prominent through specific lexical choices and patterns made in the reports. Apart from complementing existing studies on Niger Delta conflicts, it will also provide new theoretical insights into the understanding of the stylistics of conflict discourse, thereby enhancing a better understanding of how news texts are used to influence the readers’ perspectives of Niger Delta Conflicts in Nigeria.

### **News Reporting and Media Discourse in Nigeria**

The news report is represented in the “inverted pyramid structure”, which typically makes two key claims; namely, that news reports begin by providing a summary of the event under consideration, and that, rather than providing a chronologically ordered reconstruction of what happened, such reports are arranged so that what is “most important information” comes first and what is less important comes after (Thomson; White; Kitley, 2008: 13). In English language news reporting, the opening is most typically constituted by the combination of a headline (sometimes headlines) and an opening sentence. These are

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similar to what Van Dijk (1991), in his schematic structure of news reports, calls “a headline element” and “a lead element”, which can be seen as representing a single unit.

The second phase of the typical news report is the body, which follows the headline/lead and serves to specify, elaborate and comment on the various strands of information presented in the opening. This, van Dijk (1991: 119) splits into three terms, namely, “an event element” providing a chronologically-ordered reconstruction of the event; an element giving “verbal reactions” to the story, and a “comment element” providing consequences and/or assessments. It should be noted, however, that this generic specification and elaboration is typically presented non-chronologically and discontinuously (Iedema; Feez; White, 1994). In other words, events are seldom presented in continuous step-by-step sequence in the order in which they occurred. When dealing with particular aspects or other related issues, for example, the news reporter typically attends to these at different points in the body of the report, rather than dealing with it exhaustively in a single section. This arrangement leads to a conceptualisation of such texts as involving a relationship between a central “nucleus” (the headline/lead) and a set of dependent sub-components of the body, which can be thought of as “satellites” to that “nucleus” (Thomson *et al.* 2008), especially in media reports.

Media reports and the issues they address have attracted many scholarly attentions in linguistic scholarship. Traditional, often content analytical approaches in media studies, which focused on the partisan use of language, have revealed biased, stereotypical, sexist or racist images in texts, illustrations, and photos. Critical dimension was later brought in with the coverage of various media issues by Roger Fowler and other scholars on media discourse (see Fowler, Hodge, Kress, Trew, 1979; Agger, 1992; Davis, Walton, 1983; Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 1995). The contributions of these scholars on media studies have, in various degrees, continued to influence the media discourse in humanistic scholarship globally. In Nigeria, scholars have largely applied different perspectives on media discourse in interpreting a plethora of media processes (especially, news reporting) and products (the news texts). The bulk of these work has focused the linguistic and/or contextual features of news headlines (e.g. Chilwa, 2005), news articles (e.g. Chude, 2003), news editorials (e.g. Odebunmi, 2007), with only few studies being devoted to news reports (e.g. Alo 2007; Chilwa 2007, 2011; Ayoola, 2008).

Alo (2007) focuses on the structural patterns and the linguistic mechanisms employed by news reporters to track people and their identities in the print media; and reveals that “complex nominal groups function to give details concerning the situation and position of persons

in the news” (Alo, 2007: 110). With a pragma-linguistic framework of CDA, Ayoola (2008) examines the setting, topics and participants that were projected in the content and context of reports on the Niger-Delta in selected Nigerian newspapers, revealing that “Niger-Delta discourse participants also resorted to...the use of figures and percentages, the persuasion of science, interdiscursivity and intertextuality, rumour mongering, name calling, dysphemism, obfuscation and flattery” (2008: 18) to achieve their aims of featuring in the news. While Chilwa (2011) toes the theoretical line of Ayoola (2008), it adds Corpus Linguistics in analysing the frequency of the lexical items used by the press to represent the militia groups and their activities. Chilwa (2007), however, adopts a stylistic method to the investigation of Niger Delta conflict discourse, but it does not pay attention to the strategies used for naming in the news report. It rather attempts to show the discourse devices that are engaged in news texts, revealing that the news discourse relies more on contextual and linguistic processes to communicate effectively to the Nigerian reader. The present study also approaches Niger Delta conflict discourse from stylistic perspective, adopting insights from the critical stylistics theoretical approach which offers an exhaustive but systematic toolkit for exploring the naming strategies and the lexical choices they are indexed by.

#### **Niger Delta Issues and Nigerian Politics**

The Niger Delta (ND) has been defined in two ways – geographical and political, with population varying “between 12 and 27 million,” respectively (Rowell; Marriott; Stockman, 2005: 8). Geographically, it comprises nine states of the country: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. In this sense, these states are considered sufficiently proximate enough to the Atlantic Ocean to fall within its delta zone. From this perspective, the population of the area would approximate the 27 million estimated. But in the political sense of the ND, it would comprise the following six states of southern ethnic minorities only: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers. In this case, Rowell *et al.*'s (2005) population estimate of 12 million would suffice. In this paper, much of the focus would be on the narrower, political sense since the crisis in the region seems to be politically motivated, as will be shown in our analysis.

With an estimated two million barrels of crude oil produced daily from it, “the area harbours over 95 percent of Nigeria’s crude oil and gas resources, which account for 90 percent of the country’s foreign exchange earnings” (Ogbogbo, 2005: 169). While the oil-rich ND has attracted the world’s top oil companies and huge corporate investment,

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there has been a legion of problems resulting from the intense exploration for and exploitation of crude oil in the area. Apart from the massive environmental degradation of the area, the minority status of its peoples seems to have led to their political and economic marginalisation in the larger Nigerian federation. These have, over time, bred in the people feelings of utter neglect, relegation and discrimination. Therefore, in order to address the peculiarities of the problems confronting their region, the ND peoples have embarked on a long and continued struggle to control the resources from their fatherland. This has led to a series of conflict between the oil bearing communities of the ND and the oil companies, on the one hand, and between the communities and successive Nigerian governments, on the other. These conflicts, in turn, have resulted in random violence, human rights violations, death and mass internment of the parties involved.

The ND conflicts have enjoyed much media coverage, given the region's relevance to the economic sustainability of Nigeria which impacts on the country's political strength. In fact, the increasing protests by several ethnic and political activist groups in the region and the resultant violence, including the kidnapping of expatriate oil workers and clashes with the Nigerian military (Joint Task Force), have consistently been reported in the newspapers and other media within and outside the ND. It is therefore necessary to investigate how newspaper reporters employ various stylistic strategies in their description of the participants in discourse.

### **Methodology and Design**

The paper is essentially a descriptive analytic study, which covers the six ND states of the south-southern minority ethnic groups in Nigeria (mentioned above), chosen because of their rampant cases of violent conflicts (mainly between the ND youth activists and the Federal Government of Nigeria's (FGN) law enforcement agents). The data comprised 40 reports on the conflicts published between 2003 and 2007, which were purposively sampled from four ND-based newspapers (NDNs), namely, *The Tide* (from Rivers State), *The Pointer* (Delta State), *New Waves* (Bayelsa State), and *Pioneer* (Akwa Ibom State). The NDNs were selected not only for their comparative consistency in reporting the conflicts over the period selected, but also because of their neglect by previous studies, which have mainly concentrated on national newspapers. The data were subjected to stylistic analysis, with insights from Jeffries' (2010) critical-stylistics model, Osundare's (2003) classification of style and aspects of stylistics discourse.

## **Theoretical Perspectives Style and Stylistics**

The term “style” has proven elusive and complex to define considering the historical schisms surrounding the development of stylistics. In fact, from the earliest practices of stylistics to the most recent fusion with aspects of pragmatics and discourse analysis, “style” has been defined in different ways. For instance, the ancient rhetoricians saw style as the adornment added to language; the formalists limit style to objective linguistic features making up a particular text; the functionalists define style as a significant choice; the generativists view style as the deviation in applying “grammatical transformations or syntactic rules”; the pragmatists perceive style in relation only to its context lest it overlaps with other interpretations, and so on. The disharmony in the various points of view has not only yielded different concepts of style, but has also made it difficult to arrive at a reference point for the term “style” (Ononye, 2014).

Out of the many approaches to the study of style, Osundare (2003) has condensed three broad perspectives; namely, the choice perspective, the individualist perspective, the difference perspective. The choice perspective, as author-oriented, is the most popular view of style. The view, which provides an answer to the dichotomy between stylistic and non-stylistic choices (Enkvist; Spencer; Gregory, 1971: 19), is anchored on the simple idea that a language user chooses the most appropriate items (that will suit his/her message, medium, situation and purpose) from the linguistic possibilities in his/her repertoire. The individualist perspective sees style as a set of recurrent linguistic habits by which an author’s style can be predicted. This can manifest in phonological, lexical, grammatical and rhetorical forms, which can be quantified in frequencies (Osundare, 2003: 30). The difference perspective encompasses the deviationist and variationist views of style. Style as deviation from the norm “is hinged on the notion that language is both a rule-governed behaviour and an accumulation of norms” (Lawal, 2003: 28). A writer’s style in this regard is measured against the selections made in violation or tinkering of language rules without loss of meaning. Style as variation proves “the status of language as a tool which owes its utility and survival to its variability” (Osundare, 2003: 19). Variation has been associated to what is referred to in functional stylistics as “context of situation”.

Stylistics, as the study of style, is a sub-field of applied linguistics, which is in itself laden with different approaches based on the theory that is adopted. As a result of this broad scope and approach, scholars (e.g. Fowler, 1991; Zyngier, 1994; Sandig, Selting, 1997) have discussed five classes of the manifestations of stylistics; namely,

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traditional stylistics (concerned with the structure of literary language), pragmatic stylistics (which studies certain pragmatic features and their situation of use), text-linguistic stylistics (that involves a descriptive and comparative study of stylistic conventions of text types), sociolinguistic stylistics (studying styles in registers and the factors determining the use in cultural situations), and interactional stylistics (concerned with the exploration of the choices made of those aspects of language use that are under the control of interactants).

Considering the utmost importance of textual and systematic analysis to the present study, which the stylistic approaches above do not fully provide, it becomes necessary to consider other critical studies of language, such as Critical Stylistics. This somewhat corroborates Blommaert and Bulcaen's observation that there is "a new critical paradigm now observable in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, applied linguistics, and other fields... and one of the surprising features... is the scarcity of references to this plethora of work" (2000: 456). Critical stylistics is, no doubt, one of the offshoots of the new critical paradigm.

### **Critical Stylistics**

Critical stylistics (henceforth, CS) is a developing new area of applied stylistics, which incorporates "critical" perspectives to the mainstream stylistic methods. Essentially, the dependency on linguistics influences the approach employed in CS. With the primacy of linguistic analysis, revitalised "by importing ideas from psychoanalysis, structuralism and deconstruction" (Simpson, 1993: 3), CS seeks to establish *what* a text (and hence its producer) is doing, *how* it is done, and *which* linguistic elements are used in doing what. Therefore, it particularly aims at providing an objective methodology and linguistic framework to textual analysis. This unique role of CS, according to Weber (1992: 12), makes the "procedures of analysis and interpretation explicit", thereby providing "a critical metalanguage" that can help readers formulate intuitive reactions to texts.

Jeffries (2010) proposes 10 critical stylistic tools to approach texts, which, when compared with other critical language approaches, offer clearer methods of establishing *what* a text is made to do and *how* it is designed to do it (see Jeffries, 2010, for details). He argues that the tools "cover not only the ground suggested by Fairclough, Fowler, Simpson and others but also include new tools which seem... to work... in a similar way to the more traditional tools [of stylistics]" (Jeffries, 2010: 15). He further maintains that the tools are capable of supporting a textual analysis, which

can illuminate the stylistic strategies (whether conscious or not) used by a text producer, and help the reader discover the ideological content.

Naming and describing being focused in this study, especially to examine the naming strategies (and their lexical indices) used in our data, is one of the 10 tools proposed by Jeffries (2010). It is adapted in this paper. The concept of naming and describing in ideological terms tasks the analyst’s knowledge of the structure of the English noun phrase or nominal group, because it is the part of the sentence that typically “names” an entity. Stylistic consideration of nominal entities usually reveals that a choice of noun does not only make reference to something, but also shows the text producer’s opinion or assessment of the referent, given that the chief ideological importance of noun phrases is that “they are able to ‘package up’ ideas or information which are not fundamentally about entities but which are really a description of process, event or action” (Jeffries, 2010: 19). Fowler (1991: 79) also supports that the nominal part of English clauses are less prone to dispute or questioning than other clausal elements, thereby ideologically including some information which would not offer the reader the attitude to contest the relationships that are named by the nominal element in the clause. With insights from the theoretical tool of critical stylistics, therefore, we investigate the various strategies and lexical choices employed in our data for naming entities in the ND conflict discourse in the next section.

### **Naming Strategies and Lexical Choices in the ND Conflict Newspaper Reports**

Naming, as a linguistic practice, has been observed to be extensively used to indicate referents in our data. It covers two broad categories of referents in the data, namely, the news actors and the activities going on in the conflict discourse that they are engaged in. The categories are presented in the table below with some examples from the data:

s/n	Naming Categories	Examples
1	News actors	arrowhead, kingpin (Text 20), hoodlums (18), “Operation Restore Hope” (11), aggrieved compatriots, big fishes (26), Tompolo’s lieutenant (25), gang leader (40), big guns (34), troublemakers (5) etc.
2	Activities	battle of supremacy, encounter (Text 16), all-out war (19), offensive (1), exchange of gun battle, exchange of gun fire (23), confrontation (30), oil war (26), battle, engagement, operation (5) etc.

Table 1: Categories of referents named in ND conflict discourse



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The news actor category involves the two opposing groups in the ND conflict discourse, *viz.* the security officials, normally referred to as Joint Task Force – JTF, which are mandated by the FGN to protect innocent lives including the oil-working community in the ND region (as one group), and the different camps of the ND youth activists and their supporters (as the other group). For convenience, these shall be represented here as the “JTF” and the “ND youths”. The activity category embraces the series of conflict activities, involving weaponry, between the two opposing groups of the news actors. The various kidnappings/abductions, reprisal or rescue clashes, arrest attempts, etc, which bring the two groups into violent contact, belong to this category.

Two strategies have been identified through which the categories are named in the data: labelling and nominalising. Labels, according to Chilwa (2011: 203), are specific lexical items “that sort out persons or a group [or their activities] into specific social categories that determine how members of the public should understand and judge their actions”. Labelling in the data is indexed by two lexical choices – emotive metaphors and qualifying adjectives – which are utilised beyond their conventional English alternatives, to indicate the news actors. In this way, the labelling strategy provides opportunity for the news reporters to evaluate the referents, thereby betraying what their newspapers are ideologically designed to do.

The occurrences of metaphors and adjectives have also been observed to fall into two lexical patterns in the data, *viz.*, single nouns, and collocations. While the nouns relate largely to the emotive metaphors used to identify the kind of referents (e.g. arrowhead, push, etc.), the collocations affect the qualifying adjectives employed to evaluate the degree of seriousness of the referents (e.g. battle of supremacy, all-out war, etc.). Some illustrations of the metaphorical choices and their noun pattern in the data can be considered:

### *Example 1*

The Nigerian Army Headquarters in Abuja yesterday confirmed the exchange between its men and the militants in the Okerenkoko area, Delta State. It said that three of its soldiers were wounded in the offensive.

(Text 21 – *The Pointer*, March 10, 2006)

### *Example 2*

The assault which began at Oporoza with little resistance, later moved to Camp 5 where there was battle with the militants.

According to a security source, the militants gave a feeble resistance but cave [sic] into the fire power of the JTF. There is no doubt that about 200 of them must have died in the engagement.

(Text 09 – *Pioneer*, January 4, 2004)

Such nouns as “exchange”, “offensive” (in Ex. 1), “assault”, “battle” and “engagement” (in Ex. 2) are emotive metaphors, which are also chosen to not only label by describing the referents, but also to potentially allow access to multiple source domains involved in the ND conflict. The metaphors are sourced from the various domains, which allow the reporters to evaluate the degree of involvement (of the parties) and seriousness of their conflict activities. For instance, such metaphors in the texts above as “exchange”, “engagement” and many others in the data conceptualise the ND conflict in terms of physical deal, weighing the groups’ levels of involvement in the violent encounters. Metaphors like “offensive”, “assault” and “battle” are sourced from the domain of crime, which are used to assess how the conflict activities have affected the humans (both military and civilian) and their rights involved. Generally, by the choice of these metaphors in naming the activities, the ‘neutral’ idea of the reporter is to relate to the reader and the outside world the bloody and lethal nature of the military encounters with the ND youths. This could possibly commit the reader to finding out what reasons would motivate the (civilian) ND youths to expose themselves to such encounters.

Aside the nominal emotive metaphors, the qualifying adjectives have also been significantly employed in attaching labels on the referents; and as earlier stated, the adjectives fall into collocation patterns. Some examples from the data may also be relevant here:

*Example 3*

Nigeria’s main militant group declared “all out war”... yesterday after the security forces used gunboats to try to flush its fighters out of the creeks.

According to reliable Agip source from the area, who witnessed the gun duel, the militants were using heavy weaponry in their invasion and that at the end of the shootout, there were some casualties on the side of the military personnel.

(Text 26 – *New Waves*, May 14, 2007)

*Example 4*

As fresh violence hits the oil-producing Niger Delta region, Chevron Texaco officials yesterday claim that they have uncovered plans by militant youths to vandalise the Escravos crude oil pipeline...

The militant youths said to number about 500, had invaded the Escravos Oil Export Terminal last Friday before being dislodged by security operatives.

(Text 18 – *The Tide*, May 13, 2005)

(The adjectives are italicised in the analysis). Such collocations as “*main...group*”, “*all out war*”, “*reliable...source*”, “*gun duel*”, “*heavy weaponry*” (in Ex. 3), “*fresh violence*”, “*militant youths*” (in Ex. 4), “*feeble resistance*”, and “*fire power*” (in Ex. 2 above) contain qualifying

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adjectives, which are used to evaluate the referents (head nouns). With the adjectives made to co-occur with the nouns, the reporters create an avenue to include their personal opinions of the noun-referents being described. What immediately strikes the reader is that while describing the referents in the conflict discourse, such qualifying adjectives have also been carefully chosen to change the reader's world view. For instance, the preference of patterning such adjectives as "main" and "all out" with such nouns as "group" and "war", respectively (instead of other neutral options), is an evaluative strategy of naming the entities involved, which lures the reader to believe that the particular ND group is the most terrible and are set for serious war with the JTF/FGN.

Apart from labelling (realised with emotive metaphors and qualifying adjectives, respectively patterned in terms of single nouns and collocations) utilised in evaluating news actors and their activities, another stylistic potential for actualising the textual practice of naming is nominalising. This involves naming prototypical processes, thereby forming nouns from such prototypical process-indicating verbs. This has been observed to occur in two patterns: many in converted forms (involving the addition of morphemes, e.g. operation, abduction, etc.), and some in plain forms (used without addition of morphemes, e.g. raid, attack, etc.). The following samples from the data can be used to demonstrate the strategy and its lexical patterns:

### *Example 5*

They also want the court to declare that the destruction of lives, property and mass displacement of innocent persons including women and children by the military bombardment of the communities in the state was a gross violation of their fundamental rights and humanitarian protection conferred on them by the constitution, and the Geneva Conventions, Act Cap G3 Laws of the Federation, 2004.

(Text 30 – *The Tide*, July 24, 2006)

### *Example 6*

Walter explained that the surrendering of arms and Tom's eventual exit from Okrika was achieved after series of peace talks and negotiations aimed at bringing lasting peace to the crisis-ridden community.

(Text 40 – *Pioneer*, July 16, 2004)

### *Example 7*

Despite the widespread condemnation of incessant kidnapping and hostage taking in the Niger Delta region, 64 more Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) workers were last week taken hostage by some militant youths from Isokoland.

(Text 29 – *New Waves*, July 26, 2005)

The lexical items underlined in the texts above (Exs. 5–7) are cases of nominalisation, which contribute to the identification and understanding of the underlying motivations as well as the stylistic imports of the lexical items nominalised. The sentence in Ex. 5, for example, has a complex SVO structure, with the Object (starting from “the court”) including subordinate clauses. However, the interesting part is the embedded clause (from “the destruction” to the end), which is more or less the basis of the proposition of the sentence. The Subject of this clause, made up of a coordinated pair of NPs (NP1: “the destruction of lives, property”; and NP2: “mass displacement of innocent persons...” (ending with “state”), is linked by a copula (“was”) to the Complement, which is also a complex NP with post-modification involving a relative clause. Looking at this large clause in detail, we have:

SUBJECT		
NP1	Conj.	NP2
the destruction of lives, property	And	mass displacement of innocent persons including women and children by the military bombardment of the communities in the state
COMPLEMENT		
NP3	RELATIVE CLAUSE	
a gross violation of their fundamental rights and humanitarian protection	conferred on them by the constitution, and the Geneva Conventions, Act Cap G3 Laws of the Federation, 2004.	

Table 2: Modification of noun head

Through nominalising strategy, the Subject here is not asserted. The nominalised items (the NPs 1, 2, and 3) are merely assumed without any contention that the occurrence of the destruction of lives, property and the consequent mass displacement of persons (which in themselves are simple phrases referring to an immensely recurrent set of activities happening in the ND conflict discourse) was caused by the military bombardment of the communities in question. A notable stylistic strategy therefore is the fascinating reiteration of the words “destruction”, “displacement”, “bombardment”, or even “violation” (in the Object position), which are nominalisations of the verbs *to destroy*, *to displace*, *to bombard*, and *to violate*, respectively. If the text had read *lives were destroyed and innocent persons displaced when the military bombarded the communities*, the reader would have been encouraged by such a structure to question the relationship between the parts of the structure. But engaging the nominal equivalents of these verbs has changed the focus of the clause from destruction, displacement, and

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bombardment (which have stylistically been named to be part of the NP, which are already settled as having been in existence) to the proposition of the sentence; namely, the question of these occurrences being a huge violation of human rights or not. The nominalisation of “violation” (which is the head noun of the Complement) itself also stylistically serve to make it a non-issue; assumed to be the settled (documented) judgement if the proposition were to be true.

In example 6, the engagement of the noun phrase “surrendering of arms” (with surrendering as the headword), as well as the nouns “exit”, “talks”, and “negotiations” serves to make the event and activities described stylistically less- foregrounded, thereby only contributing to the expression of the propositional content of the expression. Whereas, if not nominalised, the verbal forms of the lexical units would have contributed to the narrative depiction of the actions performed by Tom; hence making them prominently significant to the understanding of the peace-indicating undertone of the text. Resorting to nominalization strategy in this example, therefore, merely contributes to the understanding of naming as a stylistic descriptive practice with respect to identifiable activities in Niger Delta conflict media report.

Example 7 manifests the stylistic use of the nominalized words “condemnation”, “kidnapping” and “hostage taking” to name reported activities and phenomena. Condemnation names the attitudinal perception of the Niger Delta people with respect to the devilish activities being topicalised in the report. These topicalised activities too are named as kidnapping and hostage taking, with the aid of verbal nouns. Naming them by using nominalization strategy thus makes them stylistically salient in the understanding of the nature, dimension and people’s perception of the Niger Delta conflicts being reported. The whole point about the analysis of naming in this study, therefore, is that the nominal items that achieve naming effects in our data are not overtly presented as opinions, or even as main propositions, but are merely reduced to stylistic labels or nominalised in the description of Niger Delta conflicts in the newspaper reports.

### **Conclusion**

The paper investigated the lexical choices in ND conflict newspaper reports to show how they relate to specific stylistic strategies used by news reporters in naming the entities in the discourse. It maintains that naming strategies are significant to revealing reporters’ professional trick of influencing readers’ views on Niger Delta conflicts; and identified two stylistic strategies through which the reporters name news actors and their activities toward influencing the readers’ views, *viz.*, labelling and

nominalising. Labelling is used in evaluating the entities named and is characterised by two lexical choices: emotive metaphors and qualifying adjectives. Nominalising is employed to reduce the impact of the activities of the news actors and is marked by two lexical patterns: plain and converted forms. The paper concludes that naming strategies are critically understood as a means of including the subjective views of the reporters in the process of relaying information on the conflicts. Thus, ND-based news reports on ND conflicts are motivated by the reporters' ideological goal to influence the readers' views on the conflicts.

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