A semantic evaluation of ideological positioning in awareness campaign against Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria and Iraq from appraisal framework perspective

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Abstract

The outbreak of novel corona virus known as covid-19 stimulates discussions across the mainstream and new media with underlying purpose to educate people to take precautionary measures against the pandemic. As scholars see ideology as an ingredient for all discourse, the present paper deploys the appraisal framework to evaluate the attitudinal positions in forming ideology through which the language users aligned themselves in what they are conveyed about the covid-19 to their audience to either favour or disfavour particular viewpoints. The study which generates ten texts on the covid-19 from mainstream media and equal number of texts from new media in Nigeria and Iraq reveals in its findings that 'interpersonal' mode of meaning-making dominates the covid-19 discourse when compared to the domains of attitudinal and dialogistic meaning-making using appraisal framework. The ideologically evaluation of the data shows that linguistic expressions on the Covid-19 regardless of the geographical location of the language users encourage solidarity on common issues or challenges about the pandemic by persuading people to take common action against these issues or challenges.

Keywords: ideology; appraisal framework; attitude; graduation; engagement

1. Introduction

For several decades, scholars see the term 'ideology' as complex that defies single linguistic definition because the concept has a whole range of useful meanings and not all of which are compatible with each other (Eagleton, 1991:1). The outbreak of novel Corona Virus Disease 2019 known as COVID-19 stimulates discussions across the globe with underlying purposes to educate people to take precautionary measures against the pandemic. Eccleshall et. al (2003) and Bedu (2016) see ideology as an ingredient that portrays the attitudinal positions in which the language users aligned themselves to what they convey to their audience in either favour or disfavour a particular viewpoint. In this regard, the discourse on covid-19 in both mainstream and new media can't be divorced from the ideological inclination that is the characteristic of all social issues.

From the principles of systemic functional linguistic theory of Halliday and his associates (Halliday, 1994), the concept of ideology falls within 'interpersonal' mode of meaning-making in the language use as one of the three 'meta functions' that include ideational and textual meta functions

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(Bedu, 2019). As put forward by Eagleton (1991) that ideology is an inquiry into the ways in which people invest in their own (un)happiness in discourse, the ideology as the interpersonal mode of language always encodes the subjectivity of writers'/speakers' in the texts by advancing their stances towards the material world as they present them in their communication. However, the ideology is the single concept that always links the text to social issues like politics. The evaluation of the ideological positioning in the text would help language users and consumers to understand the relations of meaning and power relations in the language (Lemke, 1995:2)

The present study therefore adopts the appraisal framework to semantically evaluate the ideological positioning in the campaign to create awareness against the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and Iraq. The evaluative meaning described by the adopted appraisal framework in this study can unveil linguistic mechanisms in which the interpersonal meta function operates in addition to revealing the feelings, tastes and opinions in construing all the propositions in the awareness campaign against the pandemic in the two countries in order to ascertain where the campaign aligns or dis aligns with the value positions of the current communicative context.

2. Literature Review

From the available related works on the appraisal framework, the proponents of the framework postulate three broad sub-domains to evaluate meaning-making in the text. All the three sub-domains that aids the analysis of the meaning-making of the appraisal framework fall within the ambit of semiotics which is the linguistic phenomenon that is widely regarded as interpersonal meta function of language. The three broad sub-domains that the appraisal framework utilizes in investigating the meaning-making are attitude, graduation and engagement.

2.1 Attitude: Positive/negative assessment

The term "attitude' in the literature is referred to the system of evaluating meanings of text in which the addressees are positioned to adopt a positive or negative view about the text content" (Martin and White, 2005: 26). Such positive and negative evaluations are embedded in the text through on the following three strands:

(a) emotional reactions which known as 'affect' in the appraisal framework;

(b) assessments of human behaviour and character by reference to some system of conventionalised or institutionalised norms that is known as 'judgement' in the appraisal framework; and

(c) assessments of artefacts, texts, natural objects, states of affairs and processes in terms of how they are assigned value socially, for example in terms of their aesthetic qualities, their potential for harm or benefit, their social significance which are all termed as 'appreciation' (White, 2015).

For account of these three attitudinal categories of appraisal framework, consider the following discussions as presented in Martin and White (2015: 45).

1.   Attitude: affect (assessment as an emotion)
"Asked if he ever wished the coin toss had gone the other way, McCarthy gives an uncharacteristic –but still brief – pause before answering.
"No" he said. "I'm glad I got to do it. I'm glad [affect –positive assessment via emotional] I got to do what I was trained to do...."
2.   Attitude: judgement (assessment of human behaviour and/or character by reference to ethics and other social norms)

"The quick-thinking [Judgment—a positive assessment of human capacity] and incredible heroism [Judgement—positive assessment of human tenacity] of Secret Service agent Tim McCarthy probably saved the 70-year-old President Reagan from taking another bullet".

3.   Attitude: Appreciation (assessment of artifacts, entities, happenings, and states of affairs by reference to aesthetics and other systems of social valuation)

"Thirty years ago this week, Secret Service agent Tim McCarthy set out for work at the White House in a brand-new suit, the nicest [Appreciation—positive assessment by reference to aesthetic impact] one he'd ever owned".

The underlined constructions in (1), (2) and (3) above illustrate the basis for the various attitudinal assessments especially the nature of what is being assessed, what is at stake socially, and whether the attitude is conveyed explicitly or implicitly. Such evaluative variability can offer us adequate insight on what is at stake when we come across such attitudinal meanings in the data analysis.

2.2   Graduation: Force and semantic focus

A key parameter of variation in the interpersonal meaning-making is the degree of the speaker/writer's personal investment in the propositions being advanced in the text. In the appraisal framework, the graduation as the sub-domain of the framework deals with "grading phenomena especially where feelings of the text author are amplified and categories blurred" in form of "focus" and "force" (Martin and White, 2005: 35). This subdomain is specifically dealing with the notions of "force" that centred on meaning propositions to either strengthen or mitigate the meaning making in the text, while on one hand, "focus" deals with the meanings by which the boundaries of semantic categories can be blurred or sharpened.

A distinction in the two sub-domains of graduation is made between intensifications and mitigations where the scaling semantic is fused with another meaning in a single lexical item and those where the scaling is conveyed via an isolated term (White, 2015).

I.   Force as resources are used to indicate intensification/mitigation in the language use. This linguistic phenomenon in appraisal framework literature is considered as either fused or isolated that shows "adjustments" of the degree in the evaluations. In some literature, the force is subdivided into *raise* (e.g. better, best, yes-yes, yes! YES, really big, etc.) and *lower* (e.g. a little, a bit, somewhat, least bit, etc.). Consider the following:

1.   Force (intensification/mitigation): fused.

Agent McCarthy, in a superhero [intensified judgment] move, used his body as a shield.

2.   Force (intensification/mitigation): isolated.

"It was a very [intensified appreciation] new suit, so it wasn't one of those cheap suits I had."

II.   Focus (sharpening/blurring of semantic boundaries) as linguistic resources used in the non-gradable context, it "has the effect of adjusting the strength of boundaries between categories, constructing core and peripheral types of things" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 37). It is subdivided into *sharpen* (e.g. award-winning, all alone, etc.) and *soften* (e.g. sort of, kind of, somewhat like etc.). Consider the following example:

3.   Agent McCarthy has shifted his body into a wide stance and is literally [Focus—indicating a sharply focused concept of "shielding" applies here] shielding President Reagan.

2.3   Engagement: Resources of dialogistic positioning

Under the appraisal framework, engagement is "directed towards identifying the particular dialogic positioning associated with a given meaning and towards describing what is at stake when one

meaning rather than another is employed" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 97). This sub-domain is made up of the following:

    a.   "Monoglossia –no reference to other viewpoint in the text as in the following statements:

    i.   The sky is blue

    ii.   The earth goes round the sun

    b.   Heteroglossia –reference to other viewpoints as illustrated below:

    i.   According to astronomers, the earth goes round the sun

    ii.   Astronomers say "the earth goes round the sun"

    iii.   The astronomers convinced that the earth goes round the sun

    iv.   The astronomers confirmed that the earth goes round the sun"

(adopted from Martin & White, 2005, p. 97)

In the above formulations, the mechanisms by which speakers/writers adopt different stances vis-à-vis the attitudinal propositions being advanced are accordingly dealt with as instances of dialogistic "engagement."

3. Appraisal Framework

The principles of appraisal theory were developed by Martin and White (2005) as an elaborate system that is largely drawn from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to allow linguistic analysis of a text from the perspective of the evaluative properties of the text. The framework is concerned with three fundamental issues:

    a.   How text producers (writers or speakers) construe particular authorial identities for themselves.

    b.   How authors align/disalign themselves with actual or potential respondents of their text

    c.   How these writers or speakers construct an ideal audience for their texts

The centrality of the appraisal framework and its application are based on three broad sub-domains of evaluative meaning that include:

    i.   values of the positive and negative view points in the name of 'attitude' within the appraisal framework;

    ii.   values of the intensity or force of propositions that is raised or lowered through 'graduation'; and

    iii.   values of the speaker/writer where (s)he engages with the other voices and alternative value positions that play role in the communicative context through 'engagement' sub-domain.

Appraisal framework, as one of the most sophisticated tools, is oriented towards uncovering the author's attitude and the way in which the text aligns with a potential or real readers or listeners. In this regard, the framework is worthy for analysing the expressions in order to explain both the overt and covert attitude of the language users in creating awareness against covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria and Iraq for the benefit of its targeted audience. The general overview of the appraisal systems is captured and presented in figure (1) below:
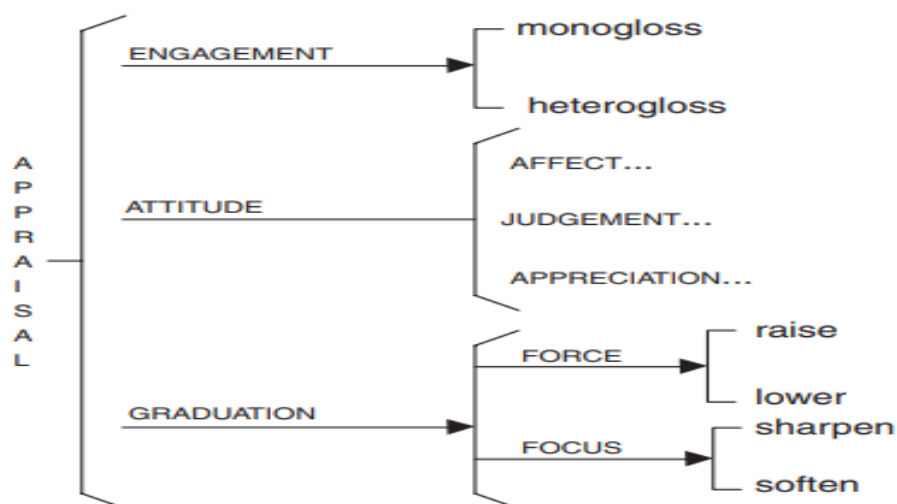
Figure 1. An overview of appraisal resources (Martin & White 2005: 38)

In view of the above assumption, the study of media discourse on covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria and Iraq on the basis of the appraisal systems will be more fruitful as you can see in section 5.0.

4. Data Collection and Methodology

There are several media texts on ConoraVirus (Covid-19) since the outbreak of the pandemic in Wuhan Province in China in December 2019. The spread of the plague across different countries in the different continents prompted discourse in both mainstream and new media on possible measures to avert or slow down the spread of the pandemic. In this regard, the study generates ten main stream media texts on Covid-19 and equal number of texts from new media in Nigeria and Iraq that form the data of the present research. The study adopts 'qualitative' method of the appraisal framework to interpret and evaluate the ideological positioning in the media campaign against the pandemic. Ten media texts of equal proportion were generated from Nigerian and Iraqi mainstream and new media. The analysis tries to explore the relevance of the three broad sub-domains that the appraisal framework utilizes in investigating meaning-makings that are attitude, graduation and engagement with a view to exploring and analyzing range of semantic and pragmatic interfaces in the ideological reproduction and persuasion in the Covid-19 awareness texts.

5. Data Analysis

The characteristic of appraisal study entails discourse-semantics that focuses on three interacting domains which the present paper, in this section, attempts to explore some of their ideologically positions in the data that elicited from traditional and new media in the two countries.

Attitude form of appraisal is a semantic indicator that is concerned with text producer's feelings which include emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour and evaluation of things through the discourse. The Attitude as a domain in discourse-semantic is divided into three regions of feeling, i.e., 'affect', 'judgement' and 'appreciation'.

Affect concerns with resources for construing emotional reactions, for example, feeling of shock in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic:

4. With closure of work due to Coronavirus, those with salaries and regular incomes will merely feel the deficit, <u>it's saddened that those dependent on cash coming in every day will not have the money to buy food. How many hundreds will come out of the lockdown without food, and will the</u>

food only come to them when there are food riots? <u>Where will these riots take place – the urban slums, in the congested heart of cities, on the streets where pay day labourers are struggling hard and desperately to stop dying of hunger?</u> (Facebook Nigeria text 1)

The proposition of the underlined structure in example (4) above, <u>it's saddened that those dependent on cash coming in every day will not have the money to buy food</u>. semantically depicts emotional state of the language user about the lockdown and restrictions of people's movement due to the pandemic and the resultant makes people especially low income earners to loss their source of livelihood.

Similarly, the language users in Covid-19 discourse express such attitude of affection across various communities in Nigeria where over seventy five percent of its 200 million population are low income earners. There is also a similar proposition relates to attitude of affect in the data that were elicited from media news on Covid-19 in Iraq as provided in (5) below:

5.   For decades, Iraq has been ravaged by war and unprecedented level of destruction that has decimated its infrastructure, governance and most importantly its people. <u>On sad note, unlike many developed countries around the world, the Iraqi health care service that once an envy of Middle Eastern nations cannot adequately test its citizens for the coronavirus pandemic nor does it have the capacity to treat large numbers of the sick and dying.</u>

The excerpt in (5) above not only indicates attitude of affection but it also contains the attitude of judgement where the writer hinges his assessment on the good infrastructure and effective system of governance of the country; some years back, Iraq according to such attitude of judgement can handle such emerging challenges like the covid-19 plague unlike now when the country needs critical health facilities and latest technology to deal with the pandemic in the Iraq.

From the construal of attitude of judgment and its ideological standpoint, the language user in underlined structure in the above excerpt (5) utilizes linguistic expression that its function is purely interpersonal in meaning to achieve his/her judgment by using negative epistemic modality '**cannot**' which in many scholarly researches argue that such linguistic phenomena has to do with the knowledge and belief of the author. In this regard, the use of negative epistemic modality reflects the negative judgments and assumptions of the text writer towards Iraqi capacity to adequately protect its citizen against the covid-19. The text producer further emphasizes this judgment by using a negative comparative reference of cohesive device **'nor'** to re-assert his judgment that the pandemic can overwhelm Iraq's health service capabilities.

Another attitudinal meaning in the covid-19 related texts in Nigeria and Iraq is that of appreciation. According to Martin and White (2005: 43) appreciation involves evaluations of semiotic and natural phenomena in showing value of the certain in the discourse. In one of the speeches of President Buhari of Nigeria on covid-19 that gains huge social media trending contains evaluative expressions that indicated the appreciation as you can see in excerpts (6) and (7) below:

6.   Indeed, the Director-General of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) was one of ten global health leaders invited by the World Health Organisation to visit China and understudy their response approach. <u>I am personally very proud of Dr Ihekweazu for doing this on behalf of all Nigerians</u>.

7.   <u>I will take this opportunity to thank all our public health workforce, health care workers, Port health authorities and other essential staff on the front lines of the response for their dedication and commitment.</u> <u>You are true heroes</u>

Based on Bedu (2019), the boldface expressions in the above excerpt are ideologically motivated as the language user personally involved himself in the discourse. Such typical form is what scholars dub as personal metadiscourse marker as in 'I am personally very proud of' and 'I will take this

opportunity to thank' in (6) and (7) respectively, to reflect his attitudinal meaning of appreciations to for his 'reactions' to things to not only please but winning the heart of the frontline workforce to do more to contain the spread of the disease as seen in the structure (7). The appreciation is amplified where Mr. Buhari extols the 'value' of the frontline personnel about their innovative, authentic and timely efforts and dedication to slow the spread of the pandemic in his country.

In this regard, appreciation as a form of attitude within appraisal framework contains personal markers which are elements that reflect the degree of text-producer presence in contributing to the varying issues in the tenor of a text. This justifies our earlier assumption that appreciation is always interpersonal mode of metafunction of language.

As the dominant feature in both oral and written discourse is the dialoguing that scholars see as the main function of the language in facilitating communication (Heine, 1997: 3), the dialogic perspective of language forms what Martin and White (2005) term as engagement in the appraisal framework. The data equally reveal dialogic exchanges in covid-19 related texts by making it people-oriented discourse to accomplish their purposes and goals to make people prepared against the pandemic as you can see below in one of the Facebook posts:

8.   The stay at home order helps in two ways. First it averts or slows the spread down of covid-19 in Nigeria and secondly when you stay at home it gives one's mind a sense of normality. When people are at home it keeps them mentally more balanced because they are basically living life as they always have in their house things that are pretty much the same and it can help them to stay out of panic mode.

From its formulation, the above extract on the Corona is 'monoglossia' in nature as it doesn't reveal the influence of, refer to, or to take up in some way, what has been said / written before. In this case, the language user didn't make any reference to someone's viewpoints but rather it shows high degree of the personal concern and mobilizes people to see the importance of staying at home order to avert or slow down the spread of the pandemic in Nigeria. However, the data from Iraqi mainstream media show the degree to which writers acknowledge the source of their information which the principle of appraisal called as 'heteroglossia' in the sense of Martin and White (2005) that Bakhtin (1986) named as intertextuality. Consider the excerpt in (9) as the way of engagement.

9.   The Iraqi Health Ministry on Tuesday reported 4,576 new COVID-19 cases, the highest daily increase since the outbreak of the disease, bringing the total nationwide infections to 184,709. It also reported 82 fatalities during the day, raising the death toll to 6,036, while 2,895 more patients recovered in the day, bringing the total number of recoveries to 131,840.

 The underlined words 'reported' are attributed elements as in 'the Iraqi Health Ministry on Tuesday reported 4,576 new COVID-19 cases' and 'it also reported 82 fatalities during the day'. These attributed elements indicate not only the way in which the text producer makes reference to other viewpoints but is giving face value to the text to convince the readers to accept the content of the text.

In this sense, the heteroglossia in the appraisal framework is typical form of Bakhtin's (1986) intertextuality where text-producers craft the texture of their discourse by blending prior texts with their own ideas in new ways for communicative and ideological purposes (Thamer and Bedu, 2019: 60). Intertextuality refers to connecting discourse to other discourses which were produced earlier and harmonized them in a single text (Bakhtin, 1986; Fairclough, 2003; Wodak, 2005). From appraisal perspective, engagement deals with Heterogloss and Monogloss expressions. In the data analysis, hetero-gloss means dialogue involving multiple actors and mono-gloss refers to monologue.

Another appraisal device that the data exhibits in this study is the graduation. The graduation device enables author of a text to strongly align or less strongly align with the value position being

advanced in the text and in addition to reveal his shared value and belief associated with those positions. Consider the following:

10. Power outage denies us enjoying the charity of Covid-19 The COVID-19 pandemic in its charitable manner has forced many of us to <u>drastically</u> adjust our daily lives and restrict them at home. As part of precautionary measures, people are modifying the way they work to prevent transmission of the virus in our communities and to protect the health and safety of ourselves and families. Schools and business premises are <u>temporarily</u> closed and public events are on hold until further notice. In some parts of the world, such operations continue virtually, with all those responsible working from home. Unfortunately, electricity (power) outage in Maiduguri has <u>crippled</u> the ability of people like me to utilize the technology and its flexibility to continue most of our work from home despite our commitment even before the outbreak of the pandemic to demonstrate how adaptable we are in difficult situation.

Here the adjectives '*drastically'* and '*temporarily'* are employed as the authorial voice for degree of evaluation and investment in the proposition being advanced in the text. The reference of the adjectival lexical item '*drastically'* is to indicate a graduation of '*force'* in which the meaning of the proposition is strengthened while that of '*temporarily'* is a force in which the meaning of the proposition is mitigated. Another form of the graduation in the above text is the focus where the author utilizes the past tensed verb '*crippled*' for preciseness and sharpness of focus to emphasis a sufficient condition to influence the readers to believe the proposition of the text from evaluative point of views.

Apart from lexical induced focus of graduation, some of the text authors in the data precisely achieve the focus by using a part or whole structure as you can see in the information drawn from Iraqi data in (11) below:

11. <u>Inexplicably, one of Iraq's largest cities and Daesh's former stronghold of Mosul</u> has only recorded five new corona cases despite having a population of 1.5 million. New cases are few and far between, and <u>this can likely be explained by the fact that Mosul's health infrastructure was almost destroyed during operations to recapture the city from Daesh militants between 2016 and 2017</u>.

This kind of graduation is called 'force' for intensification or mitigation in the clause '*Inexplicably, one of Iraq's largest cities and Daesh's former stronghold of Mosul*' and the structure '*this can likely be explained by the fact that Mosul's health infrastructure was almost destroyed during operations to recapture the city from Daesh militants between 2016 and 2017*'. Such are typical type of non-gradable resources that form graduation through phrasal or complete structure which in turn has the effect of adjusting the "strength of boundaries between categories which known as 'focus'" in the appraisal framework literature.

6. Discussion

A glimpse at the data analysis, it is clear that language users depend completely on their psychology and feelings as well as their general knowledge, background knowledge, and shared knowledge to arrange and present their thought in the text production. The three properties of appraisal framework (attitude, graduation and engagement) indicate the roadmap in which the text producers utilze to build his/her assumptions and ideas in relation to the topic of the communication.

The data analysis indicates that interpersonal mode of meaning-making is crucial devices in all discourse which the langauge users can utilize to not only engage and influence readers but also direct and signal to them the propositional content and organization of information of the texts so as to make the readers/hearer to have easy understanding and interpretation of the actual issues in the discourse.

7. Conclusion

The discussion of the data and the findings reveal that texts on COVID-19 are unified by common linguistic phenomena. The findings show that the authors' propositions in all text can be ideologically evaluated using the appraisal framework. The paper, which utilizes the research tools of appraisal framework to investigate the evaluative meaning developed in both mainstream and new media text on covid-19 in Nigeria and Iraq, discovers that the 'interpersonal' mode of meaning-making in the covid-19 discourse in the domains of attitudinal and dialogistic meaning-making provides a roadmap on how the different meaning-making options are employed and related to each other to promote common issue that the corona virus pandemic is a threat to humanity regardless of the linguistic or geographical differences. The appraisal framework accordingly makes the present study possible to offer explanations on the evaluative workings of the various individual texts and provide their evaluative arrangements in the meaning-making about the pandemic to lime light. The paper finally offers new insights into how ideologically evaluation of the discourse can help to x-ray the roles of linguistic resources in covid-19 texts regardless of geographical location in encouraging solidarity and awareness against common the challenges of the pandemic and at same time persuading people to take common action against these challenges due the ravaging nature of the pandemic.

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