Mathias Okey Chukwu[1]
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Faculty of Arts
Department of English and Literary Studies

DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER REPORTS ON PIPELINE VANDALISM

Abstract: *Scholarly works on pipeline vandalism have paid extensive attention to empirical questions of causes and consequences. But there remains a dearth of studies on the representation of the acts of vandalism in newspapers, which is necessary for evaluating what message about the problem is being disseminated to the citizens and how that could contribute to resolving the problem or sustaining it. This paper examines the identity construction for critical social actors in Nigerian newspaper reports on pipeline vandalism. Sixteen –news samples were purposively selected from three newspapers:* The Tide, New Waves, and The Guardian *published between 2015 and 2019. Theoretically, the study is anchored on a combination of Fina's (2011) identity process and van Dijk's (1995, 2006a, 2006b) in-group/out-group description. The analysis involved accounting for the deployment of group self-schemata (van Dijk, 1995, 2005) and ideological strategies (van Dijk, 2006) in realising the three identity processes of indexing, positioning, and local occasioning established by Fina (2011). The study finds that through a combination of media identity ascription and social actors' positive-self description in the news reports, each of the major stakeholders in the conflict assumes an identity of innocence and responsible entity while shifting the blame to others. It concludes therefore that this could be responsible for the difficulty in ending the conflict.*

Keywords: Discursive identity construction, pipeline vandalism, newspaper reports, media discourse, Niger Delta, conflict

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[1] mathias.chukwu@unn.edu.ng

1. Introduction

Despite established reservations about media news over their truth value (Fairclough, 1995; Cotter, 2015), media reports play crucial roles in modern societies. They are the major sources of information in society (Singh & Singh, 2017) with a capacity to reach a wide audience and influence their views on social issues. With their privileged access to the recesses of political power and leadership, their work projects them as custodians of knowledge and draws citizens to depend on them for knowledge of events and social actors in such events. In conflict situations, citizens' dependence on them increases as they become literally the sole reporters of the events with access to the actors involved in the conflict, and sometimes the conflict scenes.

As it is with discourses of all types, news reports are sites of meaning construction, transforming events and actions into multiple layers of stories, negotiated and delivered through language. While they are published as objective reports of actual events, they betray the writers' habits of thought involving personal interpretations of actions and actors that fit into the news writers' journalistic model which becomes a strong influence on society's social cognition (van Dijk, 1993). In these interpretations, the excerpts of social actors' speech on the particular event being reported are deployed to affirm the writer's view and angle to the story.

Pipeline vandalism is one of the major news items in Nigerian newspapers occurring virtually at all times across the year, but also increasing within certain periods that reflect the Nigerian election cycle (Newsom, 2011). Its constant presence in the news may be due to the Nigerian economy's dependence on crude oil production and sales. The implication of this dependence is that whatever leads to the disruption of oil production incidentally affects the entire nation and is, therefore, a matter of interest for the citizens.

Reporting the events of pipeline vandalism also involves, necessarily, the reports on the social actors who are stakeholders in the events; it involves each social actor projecting their own self-identity and what they perceive others to be (Fina, 2011). Since the conflict is human-induced and sustained, the roles played by the major stakeholders determine, to a large extent, whether there could be an end to the conflict. How the major actors represent themselves in the public site of news reports and how the media projects them to the public could be a way to see the habit of thought that sustains the conflict. This study, therefore, explores the identities constructed for and by the social actors in the newspaper reports of pipeline vandalism with a view to understanding how those affect the

resolution of pipeline vandalism and accompanying oil spills in the Niger Delta region (henceforth ND) of Nigeria.

2. The context of pipeline vandalism in Nigeria

Oil pipeline vandalism is a critical aspect of the general ND crisis in Nigeria that is connected to resource ownership and distribution. Prior to the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities in 1956, in the ND region of Nigeria, the nation's economy depended much on agriculture (Alley, Asekomeh, Mobolaji & Adeniran, 2014; Paul, 2014). But with increased oil production in the ND also came increased damage to the local environment and attendant dislocation of the people due to the destruction of means of livelihood for the locals. Oil spills due to operational challenges and ruptures were high and devastating. For instance, Aroh, Ubong, Eze, Harry, Umo-Otong & Gobo (2010) report that between 1970 and 1979, 880,500 barrels of oil spilt into the environment, polluting the air and the water, and damaging the farmlands. In 1980 alone, 400,000 barrels of oil spilt at Texaco Escravo Funiva due to operational failure. In the incident, about 321 communities were displaced while 18 people were killed instantly.

While the nation made a lot of money from crude oil exports, there was no consequential attention to the people of the ND and their living condition which was being destroyed through oil production (Douglas & Okonta, 2018; Inokoba & Imbua, 2010). The people protested against their situation, first through writings that called the attention of the world to the injustice. The protestation soon developed into armed struggle by the youths of the ND who began to kidnap oil companies' staff for ransom. Eventually, what began as protests against social injustice became a massive criminal enterprise with huge investments from local power brokers. Export crude oil pipelines are broken to siphon oil which the merchants sell in the black market on the high seas.

The devastating consequence of this situation is that oil spills, both from the operational failures of the multinational oil companies (henceforth MOCs) and from the sabotage breeches of the pipelines by the ND youths, destroyed the local people's livelihoods. The farmlands and water bodies are polluted, making it difficult for both crop farming and fishing which are the people's economic stay. The health of the people is also seriously jeopardised due to both gas flaring and scarcity of potable water (Ordinioha & Brisibe, 2013). In some instances, fire incidents erupt from ruptured pipelines and kill many of the residents, while wounding others who would need to travel for very long distances in order to access basic medical

services. The situation is made more complex by the blame game usually introduced by the stakeholders to shirk responsibility and leave the victims to a hopeless fate. This informs the necessity to examine the reports of different instances of pipeline vandalism and see what identities the major actors in the conflict bear that tend to inhibit any serious attempt to stop the humanitarian crisis.

3. Review of related literature

The causes and consequences of pipeline vandalism on Nigerians and their environment constitute the major focus of extant studies on pipeline vandalism. These studies often source their data through observation of the environment of pipeline vandalism and interaction with natives of the ND (Lawal & Ese 2012; Okpo & Eze (2012; Okoli & Orinya, 2013; Mmeje, Ayuba & Mohammed, 2017). While Lawal & Ese (2012) trace the cause of pipeline vandalism to a history of neglect of the ND people, Okoli & Orinya (2013) suggest that beyond a quest for social justice by the ND people, an unbridled quest for wealth by criminally minded individuals and corruption by state actors and officials of the MOCs are the root causes of the problem. They (Okoli & Orinya, 2013), however, note that there is a high level of poverty in the rural communities that make the people vulnerable to being involved in such a crime. In Okpo & Eze (2012), this poverty of the people is weaved into a cycle of cause and effect where the state and the MOCs' neglect of the people is said to cause poverty among the people, which in turn leads to pipeline vandalism. Meanwhile the more pipelines that are broken, the more lands and water bodies are destroyed and the more the people recede into poverty. Hence, the consequences are felt on the environment, economy, and security of the nation (Mmeje, Ayuba & Mohammed, 2017).

These studies relate to the present work by establishing the nature of pipeline vandalism in the ND in terms of the roles of various social actors. Nevertheless, their focus on causes and effects implies that they source their data by physical observations of the scenes and interactions with stakeholders. The present study moves further to examine how the social actors and their roles are represented in newspaper report discourse.

Extant studies on discourse and identity have examined identity as a phenomenon constantly under negotiation in people's speeches and writings. From the perspective of discourse participants' role in identity construction, Melefa, Chukwumezie & Adighibe (2017) and Jakaza (2020) establish that discourse participants use speech and writing to construct personal identities contextually. That is, the identity of

participants in a discourse is usually situated within the context of the discourse. This finding connects to a fundamental position in the present work which is that an analysis of the social actor identities in newspaper reports of pipeline vandalism could reveal certain covert issues about the conflict.

Another group of earlier studies also ascribe identity construction in the media to the media discourse producers. In John and Dumanig (2013), Mau, Taharab, and Farida (2019), and Liu and Jia (2020), it is suggested that what consumers of media discourse often see and understand about social actors represented in the discourse is as determined by the media's deliberate linguistic choices. For instance, Mau, Taharab & Farida's (2019) study of identity construction for rape victims and rapists shows that the media often describe the victims with pseudonyms to protect their identity while the rapists are described in some discreet details. This suggests that identity construction through discourse production could point to a writer's evaluation and tacit judgment on an event and the social actors involved. It is on the basis of this role played by the media that Sooben & Rawjee (2013) in their exploration of gender identity in an ethnic newspaper in South Africa posit that media reports on women is largely responsible for a wrong perception of their status in society. This position is also in tandem with Liu & Jia (2020) where it is established that Chinese English-medium newspapers capture and project to the world a specific Chinese national identity by means of transitivity processes.

The findings of the reviewed literature on media identity construction point to the fact that what is known or unknown about social actors in the media is largely determined by the writers. None of the studies, however, has accounted for the co-constructed identities of social actors in Nigerian newspaper reports on pipeline vandalism, as a way of trying to understand why the conflict appears intractable, and perhaps, as a way to begin the needed search for solutions. This study focuses on this by exploring the discursive processes of identity construction in newspaper reports on pipeline vandalism.

4. Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on a combination of Fina's (2011) Identity Process, and van Dijk's (1995, 2006a, 2006b) In-group/ Out-group description. Three of Fina's identity processes in discourse are found to be relevant to this study. These are indexicality, local occasioning, and positioning. The process of indexicality refers to the use of language in such a manner that the speaker is identified as relating to a known idea or social group. A typical example could be the level of formality in a

speaker's language. Local occasioning is tied to the local context of the discourse. It refers to the fact that when people speak, they speak in a context, and this context confines them to assume certain identities while attributing other identities to other people within the same context. In the case of positioning, a speaker assumes an identity or assigns one to others based on the position each occupies in the discourse. Hence it is also known as the relational process (van Dijk, 1995; Fina, 2011). This process is realised through what van Dijk (1995, 2005) calls group self-schemata which includes self-identity description, goal-descriptions, norm and value descriptions. These are value-driven identity perceptions often used by social actors in projecting an identity for themselves, but also used by other discourse participants like the media narrator in aligning with an identity presentation of another social actor.

In analysing the processes involved in identity constructions in the reports of pipeline vandalism, account is also taken of the deployment of discourse strategies in such processes. These strategies are known in van Dijk (2006b) as ideological strategies but are used here as discourse strategies on the basis that they can be present in any discourse whether ideology is the focus or not. They are found useful in this study as the basic linguistic blocks upon which the discourses are built, and through which the identity processes are demonstrated. In this study, fifteen of them are found to have been used, namely generalisation, presupposition, irony, hyperbole, national self-glorification, positive self-description, implication, evidentiality, actor description, topos, euphemism, categorisation, polarisation, disclaimer, and negative other-presentation. They are found to be useful in this study as they constitute the basic linguistic tools.

5. Data collection

The data for this study were obtained from three English-medium Nigerian newspapers: *The Tide, New Waves, and The Guardian*. While the first two are locally published in the ND where the conflict is domiciled and have limited circulation, the last one is published outside the ND and has a nation-wide circulation. These three newspapers were purposively selected for their consistency in reporting the ND conflict (Ononye & Osunbade, 2015)–which includes pipeline vandalism. In combining the two categories of newspapers, it was intended to find if there is any dissimilarity in the identities constructed for the stakeholders in the news reports. Sixteen samples published between 2015 and 2019 were purposively selected for the study as they were deemed sufficient for the needed analysis in line with the aim

of the study. These reports were downloaded from the websites of the newspapers and subjected to critical discourse analysis. The period 2015-2019 was a remarkable period of increased pipeline vandalism in the ND owing to the emergence of a militant group known as Niger Delta Avengers (Adeosun, Norafidah & Zengeni, 2016; Adishi and Hunga, 2017).

6. Findings and discussion

The analysis of identity construction in this study focuses on four major social actors in the reports who are given voice by the writers and could, therefore, be heard, namely the Federal Government, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, MOCs, and Host Community. They are able to speak and, therefore, self-describe themselves, just as they also receive identity ascription from the media narrator signaling that identity construction in newspaper reports of pipeline vandalism is a joint project between the social actors and the media narrators. The overarching projection from these characterisations is that they are all responsible stakeholders. Below is the analysis.

The Federal Government

The Federal Government is the central state authority in charge of oil mining and its proceeds. It issues licenses to the MOCs and collects royalties from oil mining on behalf of the regional (i.e. state) governments. Therefore, everything in the industry centres around it. When it features in the reports of pipeline vandalism, it is identified as a responsible entity. A typical example can be seen from excerpt 1 below.

Excerpt 1:

Every nation, **every successful government must listen to the agitations of the people. We must keep talking, listening to the people and making appropriate response** for sustenance of development and peace.

(*The Tide,* Oct. 3, 2016. http://www.thetidenewsonline.com/2016/10/03/ dialogue-best-option-to-end-pipeline-vandalism-minister/)

Excerpt 1 is part of the speech of the Niger Delta Affairs minister at an opening ceremony of a retreat for top state actors in his ministry. In the speech, he constructs an identity of responsible governance for the Federal Government which he represents. He does this through local occasioning and positioning.

Within the context of the ND conflict which centres on the people's agitations for fair treatment and government's response or lack of it, the minister assumes a position that is expected to free his government of blame. To achieve this, he deploys the discourse strategies of generalisation and presupposition with which he constructs a syllogism that makes the feature he wants his government to be known for salient. This syllogism enables him to describe his government in a very positive frame without using direct expressions that say so. In talking about every successful government and the qualities that mark them in such light, the minister presupposes that, unquestionably, there are such governments and measuring gauge in existence, and that the reader should know him as one with the knowledge of such indices of success, with the implication that the reader should trust him and, by extension, the government he represents, as those who know what they are saying.

Having introduced what happens in every successful government, the minister moves to what happens in his own government as a member of a successful government. In it, they do not only listen, they talk, and respond to the people appropriately. This is a practice already enshrined in his government. They are not learning it from elsewhere. Hence "we must keep talking …." It is to be seen here, that the minister has deployed both hyperbole and irony, for the positive responsive image of his government backgrounds the fact that the conflict which necessitates his comments is fueled by the people's mistrust of the government. But the hyperbole is strategically needed as a background for the deployment of national self-glorification implied by the minister's positive comparison of his government with other successful governments. This is heightened by the compulsive modal auxiliary verb "must" which modifies the indicated positive actions. In other words, the minister's government models a successful one, and does this obligatorily.

It is also important to note that as part of the positive self-description that has been seen as national self-glorification, the verb "keep" does not only imply *retain,* it has been used together with other activity verbs: "talking" and "listening" deployed in their progressive forms to imply ongoing activities. This is value and norm description for the Federal Government. That is, the verb phrase is used to suggest that the act of engaging the citizens in discussions is one thing that the government has been doing, and which it intends to continue because it is a mark of success for the government.

Furthermore, the binary pair of *talking* and *listening* introduces positioning and projects government's interaction with the people as dialogic. Here the minister draws on the discourse tool of implication to say that what his government does is not just listening, but engagement with the people. It is in this engagement that the

locus of power is clearly revealed to be with the government. Ordinarily, listening precedes talking as language skills and acts. The two also occur in that order in the context of a conflict where one appears as the peace maker while the other is the trouble maker. But the minister foregrounds the talking which they do. This suggests that it is the government that initiates these engagements and, therefore, dictates the terms. So they talk to the people, before listening to them. In this situation, talking to the people is not a response but an originating action. This is why there is something else in the positive acts of the government known as "appropriate response". By virtue of this positioning, *appropriate response* is to be seen as the government's practical action serving the discourse function of evidentiality for the identity of a responsible government deeply interested in the affairs of the people. By the reason of this identity construction, the government does not only clear itself of any guilt, with respect to the economic loss, and the environmental damage due to pipeline vandalism, it erases the fact that pipeline vandalism in the context of which it speaks is a protracted conflict.

Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)

The NNPC together with its subsidiaries constitute a crucial state actor in the oil and gas industry. It is the official representative of the Nigerian state in the industry and, therefore, a major stakeholder in the ND conflict. Indeed, apart from the occasional speeches of the ministers and other state actors, it is the major voice of the Nigerian state in terms of policy direction and interests. Excerpt 2 below shows the response of one of the subsidiary companies to a fire incident. It demonstrates how the combination of media narrator's reporting and the company's deployment of the discourse strategy of actor description constructs an identity of responsible and responsive corporate organisation for the company, mainly through the process of indexicality.

Excerpt 2:

Sambo said **even though the fire incident occurred far away from the NPDC oil well head, safety personnel of the company successfully extinguished the fire in a record time of three weeks**.

"What happened was that **the oil that was being vandalised came** out from the ground (sic). **The most interesting thing** is that **we took care of it in record time without any fatality**," he said. Sambo explained that "it took **the resilience and professionalism of NPDC personnel** and **professional divers from indigenous**

contractors to **contain the inferno within three weeks**. Putting out fire of that magnitude **usually takes up to seven months**, but in this case **NPDC achieved the feat in record time**, despite the challenging environment," he added. The Managing Director pledged that the **company will continue to uphold best global (sic) acceptable safety measures** in its operations.

(*New Waves*, Nov. 7, 2019. https://www.today.ng/business/energy/npdc-imo-oil-pipeline-fire-caused-vandals-261909)

This excerpt is from the report of a speech by the Managing Director (MD) of the Nigeria Petroleum Development Company (NPDC), one of the subsidiaries of the NNPC. The context of the speech is an event organised for environmental safety, which he found suitable to address a recent case of fire explosion due to oil spill. In the first part of the excerpt, the media narrator leverages the strategy of actor description to project the company as a compassionate organisation which deploys its professional capacities to address problems that do not even concern it. This is achieved by the media narrator through perspectivation wherein the narrator first foregrounds a point of view which is delivered in an eye witness narration format, and then draws pieces of quotation from the actual speech in order to justify the point of view.

As a form of argumentation necessary to fully realise the identity being constructed, the narrator introduces pieces of information that are spatial in nature to express the relationship between the fire and the company. This is what is meant by the combined effect of the initial concession introduced by "even though", and the announcement that the fire disaster occurred far from the company's location. The phrasal concession *even though* is a kind of disclaimer that is intended to highlight the positive character of the company. It is as though to say: *ordinarily, the company should have nothing to do with the fire because it did not happen around their location and they were safe. But they had to deploy their resources to quell the fire because they are naturally compassionate.*

It is this sense of going outside of *their* responsibility to intervene in *other* people's problems that accounts for the preference for the verb "occurred" used to describe the fire incidence. This choice is a strategic use of euphemism aimed to serve two related discourse functions: to firmly locate the fire incidence away from the company so as to emphasise that the company was not personally threatened by it, and to signal a movement of erasure, of the quantum of damage arising from the fire so as to focus the discourse on the *heroic* deeds of the company.

An alternative to *occurred* in the context of the incidence would be *started*, which could bear such other pieces of contextual information as the fact that a fire incidence of such magnitude does not concentrate in just one place until it is contained. Even though *occurred* can also be used to report an event of close proximity, its choice over an alternative *started* in the context of fire incidence of the magnitude being reported tends to localise the incidence to limited (specific) apace which may be impossible with the verb *start*. This is because it could suggest that the fire only *started* far away, but could still get to the company's location, since it cannot be determined how far a raging fire could go, if allowed to go on burning, particularly in an environment like the ND with oil pipelines criss-crossing the entire environment. This is to say that in this positive actor-presentation for NPDC, the media narrator represents the raging fire as belonging to the *other* who has now received the company's benevolence.

While the media narrator uses actor description to project the positive identity of the company, the actual speech of the MD utilises the strategy of positive self-presentation. In the first sentence of the quoted speech, it can be seen that the MD has deployed the ideological square of Us/Them polarisation earlier signaled in the media narrator's voice, so as to show clearly the positive identity of the company. The only discourse necessity for the sentence is to suggest that the fire is traceable to an act of vandalism, such that even though there is no mention of who the vandal is, the reader is expected to know the usual culprit. Hence this is a deployment of topos; that is, a taken-for-granted position within the ND conflict on the basis of which the reader is to further see how responsibly humane the company is. Hence in speaking of oil as coming out from the ground due to a pipeline being vandalised, the MD performs a tacit negative-other description as a background against which his company's good work is to be seen. A further proof that this is the sole target of the MD's speech could be seen in the gap between the narrative information content of this sentence and the next one which occurs consecutively with it as a part of the speech. Immediately after announcing that oil came from the ground due to a pipeline being vandalised, the MD quickly announced that his company was able to contain it. In narrative chronology, one would have expected other details of what transpired between the bursting of oil from the ground to the beginning of the fire, particularly since it is possible to have oil burst from the pipeline without a consequent fire incidence. But since the main intention of the MD is to project the bravery and expertise of his company as a process of indexing an identity of being responsible, he leads the reader to quickly see the effectiveness of his company in timely containing the fire, describing it as "the most interesting thing".

Like in the media narrator's construction of positive identity for the company, the MD's indexing of his company's identity as both humanitarian and professional is achieved through strategic layers of euphemism. One of these is seen in the phrase "took care of" with which he describes his company's handling of the fire. In deploying this phrase, the MD draws from the semantic field of love the images of attention, provision, and maintenance of good order, ultimately erasing the devastation arising from such inferno. It is in this erasure that the euphemism is made clear, for in order to praise the expertise of the company, the huge task of extinguishing an oil-sustained fire incidence that lasted for three weeks is described as a very easy work. This connects to the second layer of euphemism where the MD reports that there was no fatality. It is not imaginable that a three-week fire had no casualty, even if the meaning of *casualty* is delimited only to human victims, for it could be said that all environmental damage will ultimately affect humans. What the statement means, however, is that there is no immediate human fatality arising from the fire incidence. This is to guarantee, for the company, that the reader appreciates the great rescue function of the company, since acknowledging casualties would have undermined the high praise sought after by the company.

The third sentence of this excerpt which the media narrator conceives as an explanation introduces the identity process of indexicality, and raises further up, the identity of the company as humanitarian and responsible. The MD gives details that negate the euphemism of his previous comment. Here, it is seen that the constituents of the pronominal referent "we" that put out the fire also include another group: "divers from indigenous contractors". Using the discourse strategy of categorisation, the divers are separated from the company. That is, although they helped in the task of putting out the fire, they did their own work for pay, since they are "contractors". This is unlike *us* (NPDC) who laboured solely for the love of the people.

By means of goal description, the responsible actor identity for NPDC piques in the final part of the excerpt as the report returns to the media narrator's voice. Here, the MD is reported to have given the company's commitment to upholding the "best global (sic) acceptable safety measures in its operations". This pledge is a norm expression, implying that this is what the company is already known for. Nevertheless, what constitutes these globally accepted practices are presented as a given. The speaker does not see any need to include it as part of his *explanation.* Since it is something which the company is already doing, the reader is expected to see it as something good, considering that the identity already carved out for the company is as a thoroughly good and responsible group.

What emerges from the actor descriptions of NPDC by the media narrator in the reports, and the positive self-presentation from the MD is an identity of a committed player. The company is committed to the good of the environment and the people in whose environment the company does its business. This identity presupposes that NNPC and its subsidiaries are only part of the solution and never part of the problems, and shifts the blames of the conflict to the unnamed *other* who breaks pipelines and endangers the people's lives. By this the company erases completely its contribution to oil spills through operational errors, and presents the reader with an identity story where all that can be seen in an incidence of huge inferno that rages for weeks is the expert handling of the fire and nothing of the destruction.

Multinational oil companies (MOCs)

The MOCs constitute another major block of stakeholders in the Nigerian oil and gas industry and, therefore, the ND conflict. They are partners with the government in oil production and are affected by pipeline vandalism. Like the NNPC and its subsidiaries, they are also projected, not as capitalist business entities, but as very responsible humanitarian organisations interested in the well-being of the ND people and the Nigerian state. A typical example of this can be seen in excerpt 3 below.

Excerpt 3:

"**We are concerned about the lives and safety** of **those involved in pipeline vandalism and crude oil theft** as well as **the environment. SPDC puts safety first** and have constantly made **appeals to those involved** to **stop destroying their lands and heritage** from the **spills and pollution arising from their activities.** We are calling on government, communities and other stakeholders to stem the **incessant attack on our oil assets** in the Niger Delta," he appealed. The general manager said that such illicit activities by **criminals had denied the company and country the needed revenue to drive business and development**. (*The Guardian,* Sept. 9, 2019. https://guardian.ng/energy/shell-loses-n202m-daily-to-vandals-oil-thieves-gm/)

Excerpt 3 is culled from the report of a media workshop organised by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) on pipelines right of way, encroachment and vandalism. The excerpt contains mainly the quoted speech of the General Manager (GM) of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC).

In it, the identity process of positioning is effectively deployed to portray the company as being caring and responsible. The positioning processes are mainly achieved through the discourse strategy of polarisation linguistically indexed in the binary personal pronouns and possessive adjectives deployed to reference actors and actions in the discourse. There are the "we" and "our" against the "those" and "their", some of which are used more than once in the excerpt. The inner circle represented as *we* and which includes the speaker and the company he represents is characterised with a certain unique attitude and actions in contradistinction to the *other,* as referred to in the speech to the ND people. In the first sentence of the excerpt, the GM represents the company as one with great interest in ecological well-being. Therefore, they are worried about the effect of pipeline vandalism on both the people who vandalise pipelines and the environment. This expression of concern is a form of value and norm description, positioning the company at a high pedestal of care, against which the *other* is to be seen as the norm violator. It is also a deft compassion move which serves to derogate those accused of vandalism as not knowing that they are harming themselves and their land. While the *other* is referenced in this sentence as one against whom the good qualities of the *we* are to be seen, the reference is initially vague, in that it is not clear who in particular is referred to as those who break pipelines and steal oil. But by means of value description enacted for the company, the particulars of the *other* are made clearer through the discourse strategy of implication.

In the value description, the MD states that the company prioritises "safety". This is presented as a trademark solely associated with the company, and in relation to which any other of the company's interest comes secondary. For this reason, the company is consistent in pleading with the *other,* who obviously does not share this value priority. Hence they are not only "involved in pipeline vandalism and crude oil theft", they also destroy "their lands and heritage", as a direct consequence of "their activities". It is in the expression: *their lands and heritage* that the specifics of these destroyers are implicated. While *lands* are general and could be purchased by just anybody, *heritage* is ancestral and, therefore, suggests that the referent is the host communities. But because the event where the speech was made is a workshop mainly for journalists, the reference could as well refer to the ND people in general. *They* are the destroyers of pipeline and thieves of oil who pollute *their* environment through *their* activities.

Nevertheless, the professed interest in the people is not the only interest, it is only primal. So in the last sentence of the excerpt, another interest is mentioned, though represented structurally as being a lesser one for the company. The representation

of this interest is also anchored on the Us/Them ideological square. While the GM has earlier presented the attack as being on *their lands and heritage*, it is seen here that it is on "our oil assets". That is, the lands belong to the people but the oil assets are those of the company. In this way, the GM represents the company as being in legitimate business which is being hindered by the "illicit activities" of "criminals". The ordering of the company's interest in the people and the environment and interest in business respectively is strategically meant to elevate the overly good character being constructed for the company; for while the mentioning of only the company's interest in the human ecology would have made them appear hypocritical, juxtaposing the two announces them as ethical business people whose interest in profit making comes second to human and environmental welfare.

Oil-host communities

The oil-host communities constitute one more critical stakeholder in the general ND conflict to which pipeline vandalism is a part. Apart from what has been seen in the speech of the oil companies in a relational description, their major representation in the reports is through self-identity descriptions. In these, they acquire the identity of responsible stakeholders with a major responsibility in ensuring that there is no disruption in oil production. Excerpt 4 below exemplifies this.

Excerpt 4:

The people of the Olo community in the Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State **have vowed to fight acts of pipeline vandalism and illegal bunkering in the area**. ... The address disclosed: "We affirm **to abstain from and not to indulge in any acts of vandalism, kidnapping and any other uncouth and unscrupulous behaviour** that is capable of hampering the peace and development of the communities."

(*The Tide*, March 5, 2018. http://www.thetidenewsonline.com/2018/03/05/community-vows-to-fight-pipeline-vandalism/)

Excerpt 4 is a part of a speech made by a leader of an oil host community who represented the community in a public event. The major processes of identity construction in this excerpt are local occasioning and indexicality in which the identity of the host community relies heavily on the context. The first thing to note here is the detailed description by naming, of the Olo community, as different from the reference to host communities in excerpt 3 above. The significance of this is that rather than reference by generalising, the referenced community is

presented as one which has definite existence and can, therefore, be traced. The next is the media narrator's report of the community's commitment to a position of abstaining from oil pipeline sabotage as taking a vow to fight oil sabotage. The discourse function of this is to project the community as a partner with the state in securing the oil installations. This is further validated in the actual speech of the community leader through the deployment of implication to state a value position of abstinence from crime. Hence the verb used by the leader is "affirm", and what he affirms is that the community will stay off criminal acts that would damage the peace and development of the community.

Even though the community's avowed value of staying off oil-related crime would agree with the interest of other stakeholders in the oil and gas industry, it is a value driven by the interest of the oil host communities to ensure personal peace and development, and not to please or serve any other interest in the ND. Put differently, there is something already existing as "the peace and development of the communities" which the people do not want to lose. This connects in cohesion with the implication of using the verb *affirm*. The story it presents is that the community has upheld a value of not being part of crimes and that this has resulted in peace and development for the community. By presenting *peace and development of the communities* as normative in the host communities, the leader strategically activates evidentiality wherein they intensify the positive self-description of the host communities. The move is meant to interact with and repudiate what could be seen as a global negative identity ascription to the host communities within the ND conflict discourse, as in excerpt 3 above. It is a typical case of the dialogic nature of identity construction about which Fina (2011) notes that even in monologues, a speaker's identity could be signaling *another* (whether physically present or temporarily absent), either in complementary alliance, or in repudiatory opposition. The use of the evidentiality of normative peace and progress of the host community here, therefore, marks the construction of identity through the process of local occasioning where both identity and context meet and influence each other. In it, the positive self-presentation as a responsible social actor in the report is done within a context of threat, the threat of negative identity ascription, the threat of condemnation.

Conclusion

This study has examined the discursive construction of identity in Nigerian newspaper reports on the conflict of pipeline vandalism. The analysis revealed the

four major stakeholders identified in the newspaper reports of pipeline vandalism assuming the identity of a responsible entity, both through positive self-presentation and the media narrator's identity ascription. By presenting themselves as overtly responsible in their roles in the conflict through norm, value and goal descriptions, these social actors signal their reluctance to seek effective ways of ending the massive destruction arising from the conflict. This is because in all the instances of norm description as presented by the social actors themselves, what is implied is that they are doing well already and that they intend to sustain their actions, even when the said actions have not helped in any way to reduce the conflict.

The role of the media narrators in attributing innocence to the social actors makes them complicit in the conflict. In this, the present study aligns with Sooban & Rawjee (2013) on the role of the media in creating social cognition that is not true to material reality. By constructing an identity of innocence for these social actors, the blame for the lingering conflict is shifted to another who is usually absent in the discourse. Consequently, whatever any of the mentioned social actors does is projected as a great act of benevolence and goodwill. By this also, all of them who are in a position to take drastic actions towards ending the conflict are freed by their sense of innocence, while tremendous acts of economic and environmental crimes continue, and the conflict endures. These projections of innocence could then be said to encourage ecological destruction and attendant economic loss being suffered by the nation. Interestingly, not even the newspapers published in the ND have a different approach to identity for these social actors. As a result of this, there is no way to differentiate between the two categories of newspaper with regards to social actor identity construction in newspaper reportage on pipeline vandalism in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria.

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Матијас Океј Чукву
Универзитет Нигерије у Нсуки
Факултет умјетности
Одсјек за енглески језик и књижевне студије

ГРАЂЕЊЕ ИДЕНТИТЕТА У ДИСКУРСУ У ИЗВЈЕШТАЈИМА ИЗ ДНЕВНИХ НОВИНА У НИГЕРИЈИ О ВАНДАЛСКОМ УНИШТЕЊУ НАФТОВОДА

Резиме

Овај рад представља студију грађења идентитета у дискурсу. Познато је да учесници у комуникацији током размјене информација обично чине и много више од самог тог процеса. Њихов говор садржи још и информације о томе како они виде сами себе и своје поступке, као и то како виде остале учеснике у погледу предмета говора. Ова студија истражује грађење идентитета у извјештајима из дневних новина у Нигерији о вандалском уништењу нафтовода, при чему је циљ да се открије како би такви идентитети и ставови могли да допринесу необузданој природи вандалских чинова према нафтоводу.

Студија користи податке из извјештаја објављених на интернет страницама трију дневних листова у периоду између 2015. и 2019. године. Ради се о сљедећим дневним листовима: *The Tide*, *New Waves* и *The Guardian*. Прва два штампају се у делти ријеке Нигер (Нигерија), гдје се вади сирова нафта и гдје долази до вандалског уништења нафтовода, док се потоњи штампа ван наведеног подручја. Поред тога, прва два листа намијењена су локалном становништву, док се Гардијан продаје у цијелој Нигерији и један је од десет листова с највећим тиражом у земљи. Одабрали смо ове двије категорије дневних листова како бисмо утврдили да ли постоји разлика у типу идентитета који се гради у чланцима који се објављују у њима, а укупно се ради о шеснаест извјештаја које смо анализирали.

Анализа података, извршена помоћу споја Фининих (Fina, 2011) идентитетских процеса и Ван Дајкових (van Dijk, 1995, 2005) шема типа у групи / изван групе, открива да сви битни друштвени актери наведени у извјештајима преузимају идентитет невиних и одговорних учесника у конфликту. Овакав идентитет гради се у поменутим извјештајима уз помоћ 'позитивног самоописивања и приписивања идентитетских карактеристика које чине наратори у медијима (новинари)'. Током овог процеса, сваки друштвени актер одбацује кривицу за озбиљна оштећења нафтовода и приписује је неком другом, док се представља као онај

Mathias O. Chukwu

који вуче исправне потезе да би се осигурао мир у наведеном подручју. Закључак је, стога, да је тврдња о невиности главних актера у сукобу, уз коју иде одговарајући став да се понашају одговорно и исправно, главни разлог зашто се овом сукобу не види крај.