

# Language, Terrorism and Media: A Study of the Representation of Boko Haram in Cameroonian and Nigerian Newspapers Between 2014 and 2015

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**Abstract:** This paper is a study of the representation of Boko Haram phenomenon in Cameroonian and Nigerian newspapers between 2014 and 2015. The main problem of this work is to examine the language and some discursive strategies used by the written press and online media to represent Boko Haram phenomenon in Cameroonian and Nigerian media, and see whether it contributes to the construction or deconstruction of the phenomenon. The data for this work are collected on Eden Newspaper and the Guardian Post in Cameroon; the Cable Alert and THISDAYLIVE in Nigeria. This study is undertaken within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis drawing especially from Kress and Van Leeuwen Multimodal discourse approach to identify topics, macro and micro discourses. It regards discourses as “appearing in very many modes known as semiotic resources” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001:24). The results of this analysis indicate that despite the different ways of using language by the four newspapers, they tend to denigrate, denounce Boko Haram phenomenon and intensify to fight against it and show also the deconstruction of Boko Haram phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, Discourse, Terrorism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Multimodal Discourse Approach, Language, media.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 19th century was marked in Cameroon and Nigeria by colonisation. These two countries were under the domination of German, French and British. The British-controlled southern part of Cameroon which she further divided her own portion into British Southern and Northern British Cameroons attached to East and North Nigeria respectively. After, Boko haram phenomenon came. A range of conflicting narratives have grown up around the phenomenon. As a real problem in the society, Boko Haram phenomenon has captured the attention of the media of the world. We are going to deal with Cameroonian written presses: *The Guardian Post* and *Eden Newspaper* and Nigerian online Newspapers: *The Cable Alert* and *THISDAYLIVE* especially with seventeen articles. The four newspapers are edited in Cameroonian press and in Nigerian internet sites. Each newspaper has its own way of talking about Boko Haram phenomenon and how the fight against it. This dissertation makes an analysis of language and discursive strategies used to talk about the Islamist sect in the selected newspapers between 2014 and 2015. We are going to solve the problem of this topic through the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) especially Multimodal discourse approach of Kress and Van Leeuwen.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have done their studies on the field of research link to Boko Haram Phenomenon. Political expert ; journalists like Amindeh Blaise Atabong (2014), Hamadina Hamza (2014) ; linguists like Adagba Okpaga, Ugwu Sam Chijioke, Eme, Okechukwu Innocent, Olaide Ismail Aro, Oluwaseun Bamidele, Sean M. Gourley ; historian like Haddabi zakariaou Tonga Hamadou (2002-2013). None of these works have touched the area of media discourses on Boko Haram phenomenon in Cameroonian written presses and Nigerian online newspapers. Therefore, we can say that this is the main focus of our preoccupation.

### **3. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theory applied to this work is critical discourse analysis, especially multimodal discourse approach which is an approach to CDA, outline by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen in 2001. Multimodal discourse approach regards discourses as “socially constructed Knowledges of some aspect of reality” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001: 4). These authors emphasize on the fact that: “...discourses appear in very many modes which are known as semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realization of discourses (2001)” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001:24).It is very important because it helps linguists to understand and differentiate the distinct levels of mass communications and their interactions. This approach is applicable to our topic to show how modes such as images on terrorists and arm forces of the two countries; colours;framing; and text play an important role in the discursive situation. To analyse the data, we have used the four levels or methods of multimodal discourse approach: discourse, design, production and distribution.

### **4. ANALYSIS OF TEXTS AND TYPES OF MEDIA IN THE REPRESENTATION OF TERRORISM**

The documents of the corpus are made up of images, especially photographs which follow the texts or which precede texts. Since many journalists choose to associate texts to photography, it is undeniable that two discourses should be combined and be clarifying reciprocally. In that case, they have to be analyzed one another so that the gathering of their meanings should lead us to the possibilities of best interpretation.

#### **4.1. Analysis of Pictures**

Here, we will focus on these « messages visuels » (Joly, 1994: 131)<sup>1</sup> and on “visual communication” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001)<sup>2</sup>. We will use semiology of image apprehended by the aforesaid author to study the pictures of the corpus. According to Martin Joly

<sup>1</sup>L’analyse sémiologique des messages visuels (ou la sémiotique appliqué à l’image) consiste à repérer les différents types de signes mis en jeu et à déduire, à partir de leur organisation réciproque, une interprétation globale [...] La sémiologie appliquée à l’image se préoccupe donc en priorité des processus de production de sens, pour ensuite proposer des interprétations plausibles (Joly, 1994: 131-132).

Among the elements mentioned above by Martine Joly as component of photographic image, we will focus on the framing; visual composition; colors and pictures lighting. The visual discourse which is made in our corpus conveys or exposes important information on Boko Haram phenomenon. Multimodal discourse <sup>2</sup>(Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001) constitutes multiple modes of communications such as colors, lighting, texts, etc., which carries important information on Boko Haram phenomenon. Its inform audience or the citizens of the two countries touched by the phenomenon, on the seriousness of the situation. All those elements also make sensitive on the unification of efforts in the battle against terrorism.

### **5. DISCOURSE STRATEGIES AND LANGUAGE USED BY THE MEDIA IN FIGHTING AGAINST TERRORISM**

#### **5.1. Media Discourse on Terrorism**

Media discourse is related to texts and talks produced in relation to terrorism. Claude Jamet and Anne-Marie Jannet (1999: 15) claimed that: “Toute communication s’inscrit dans un cadre ou les discours trouvent, avec cohérence, à s’actualiser”. In other terms, it refers to the interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to a non-present reader, listener or viewer. Through a data processing, Journalists introduce these discourses to point out the Boko Haram Phenomenon and to make sensitive the target audience on the unification of efforts in the battle against terrorism. Written in a lively style, the information discusses on what precisely is represented in the newspapers, who gets to do the talking, what knowledge people need to share in order to understand it, and how power relations are reinforced between the

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<sup>1</sup>Martine Joly in, *L’image et les Signes*, approche sémiologique de l’image fixe, Nathan, 1994.

<sup>2</sup>Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: the Modes and Media of contemporary communication*, New York, University Press.

journalists and the readers or the audience. For examples the titles of the newspapers or system of alert are main discourses because through it the journalists alert the readers about what is happening. This can be illustrating with the following titles: Text2: Biya vows Boko Haram will be crushed like „maquisards“, Bakassi pirate Text3: 3 Boko Haram members „die in Cameroon“

Text4: Cameroon honours 38 soldiers killed in Boko Haram fight

From the observation of the titles above, we realized that the main ideas outlines are death and battle. Through these titles, the media are alerting the Cameroonian and Nigerian public about the terror group that is causing damages in both countries and also put them in the battle spirit.

## **5.2. Discourse Exposing Boko Haram Phenomenon**

The discourses denouncing the Boko Haram phenomenon in Cameroon and Nigeria is based on the portrait of that group doing by the journalists and on the emotions of the journalists themselves, the victims and readers. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001; 4-5) stipulate that “discourses are socially constructed knowledge of some aspect of reality”<sup>3</sup>. Jean Peytard goes further by saying that : «Toute “mise en mots” du Tiers-parlant, comme acte de discours “relaté”, comporte une attitude évaluative de la parole relatée» (1992 : 75). As far as Boko Haram is concerned, the judgment of the journalists is pejorative as we can observe it through the expressions used by those authors to name the phenomenon. These expressions referring to the referent “*Boko Haram*” varied from one name to another, in one paragraph to another one, and from one text to another. This variation is used according to the degree of damages caused by the terrorists in one or more localities. These terms following by pejorative adjectives such as “*terror, faceless*” and nouns like “*sect, terrorists*” connote the disasters that the group has caused in the society. It also refers to the dangerousness, wickedness of that unknown group toward innocents. They are “*faceless enemy*” because they are unknown; their face is always covered so that they should not be recognized. The word “*terror*” which also connotes “*fear*” inculcates in the populations’ mind of both countries due to their constant attacks and also to the instability caused by them in those societies. The use of all these expressions is due to the vagueness of the terminology of that referent and also because the group itself is unknown. Therefore, the hyperbolic characteristic of the term “*terror group*” used by to author emphasize on societies destroyed, destabilized, and people exterminate by that group. However, the discursive character of this phenomenon is far from it apology. This is presented by four newspapers with have different ideologies through the use of linguistic features, grammatical structures, etc.

<sup>3</sup>Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: the Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, 2001, 4-5.

## **5.3. Battle Discourse against the Islamist Sect**

The discourses on the battle against Boko Haram phenomenon are focused on the strategies used by the media to fight against the phenomenon. Patrick Charaudeau (2005 : 71) declares that:

La visée d’information consiste à faire connaître au citoyen ce qui s’est passé ou ce qui est entrain de se passer dans le monde de la vie social. L’instance médiatique tente de réaliser cette visée en mettant en oeuvre deux types d’activité langagière: La description narrative plus qu’ils agit de rapporter les faits du monde ; l’explication plus qu’ils agit d’éclairer le destinataire sur les causes et les conséquences de l’apparition de ces faits.

In other words, the purpose of the media here is to inform the citizens of both countries on the nature of battles against Boko Haram through the use of descriptive narrative and discursive strategies.

Those discourses are extracted from the four newspapers and are centered on the hope by the social actors, victory of the social actors, and the defeat of the enemies. The journalists are informing the readers that both they and the social actors were seriously engaged in the battle against the terror group. It was not an easy task to achieve victory but they finally succeeded and now the situation has changed. There are also some measures put in place by the Nigerian law to prevent futures attacks.

## **6. BATTLE DISCOURSES AGAINST BOKO HARAM IN CAMEROON AND NIGERIA**

### **6.1. Discourses on the Implication of the Government in Boko Haram Phenomenon**

The discourses on the implication of the government imply the actions undertaken by the government to stop the phenomenon. The media present this in the newspapers through strategies that make the

reader to understand that there is time for battle. CDA is considered as being light shed on the linguistic discursive dimension of social and cultural phenomena and processes of change in late modernity (Jorgenson and Phillips 2002, 63). This means that it is with the help of CDA that we can interpret and understand the meaning of those discourses. The linguistic items are just representation because many things are hidden behind them (Tandia, 2011). CDA will be placed as an instrument to follow our analyses. Beyond the articles on the government battle, it is put in evidence the political discourse and the strategies used by the government to killed, captured or imprisoning the terrorists.

## **6.2. Political Discourse in Battle Against Boko Haram**

The study of political cognition largely deals with the mental representations people share as political actors (Teun van Dijk, 1998). Our knowledge and opinions about politicians, parties or presidents are largely acquired, changed or confirmed by various forms of texts and talks during our socialization, formal education, media usage and conversation (Merelman, 1986). Thus political information processing often is a form of discourse processing, also because much political actions and participation are accomplished by discourse and communication. The political discourse in most of our articles is based on the speeches of Cameroonian and Nigerian presidents (Paul Biya and Ahmadou Buhari) like the headlines. They are of great importance in mass media in general and in written press in particular. This is due to the fact that it is the title of an article that captures the attention of a reader. To succeed in these newspapers, editors used use striking headings as the above ones and caption to conquer more readers. The impact of the headlines on the readers is likely stronger because the linguistic features of titles make them memorable and affective.

## **6.3. Discourse on the Government's Strategies to Challenge Terrorists**

Beyond the speeches of the heads of states, there are certain strategies adopted by the government such as reinforcing the army to kill, capture, arrest and imprison the terrorist Boko Haram. President Paul Biya and Ahmadou Buhari as heads of states cannot stay static when both countries are on fire. Therefore, President Paul Biya in most of his speeches boosted expressions to fight against Boko Haram as we can observe in the following speeches extracted from *The Guardian Post, and Eden newspaper*: He declared that

after last Sunday's deadly attack in Kolofata, there has been a remarkable reinforcement of Cameroonian troops deployed to the northern regions of Cameroon to combat the Nigerian terror group. "A few weeks ago, our military force demonstrated its superiority over Boko Haram. It's a long battle... we have to fight against this group of individuals who strike at night and slaughter people," the president said. Biya also added: "I have sent the defence chief of staff, (Major General Rene Ze Meka) to the Far North with more reinforcement in human and material resources. I call on Cameroonians to maintain confidence in the army" (Mbom Sixtus in Yaounde, *The Guardian Post*, Monday, August 4, 2014, text 2).

During a ceremony to receive New Year wishes from representatives of diplomatic missions accredited to Yaounde on Thursday 8 January 2015, President Paul Biya decried terrorism. He noted that

Boko Haram that has recently been carrying out raids into Cameroon have same goals like the terrorist groups who tried to install a chaotic Islamic state in the Sahel region of Africa to establish what he described as obscurantist regime therein (By Ndi Eugene Ndi, *Eden newspaper* Jan, 2015, text 11).

The Cameroon defense and security forces have defeated several incursion attempts by the Nigerian Islamist sect Boko Haram during the night from Wednesday to Thursday, APA learns from security sources. In anticipation of New Year's Eve celebrations on Thursday, the terrorist group tried several incursions into Cameroonian territory, all of which resulted in a miserable failure. "In the morning, terrorists tried to attack Fotokol, Kerawa, Dabaga localities but we managed to repel their assaults", the security sources said. In its response, the Cameroonian military killed 20 militants while others recrossed the border to take refuge in Nigeria (*Eden newspaper*, March 2015, text 10).

We observe from these discourses that, President Paul Biya during his address to the nation on May 7, 2014 in Paris heads of state summit and Thursday 8 January 2015 during the ceremony to receive New Year wishes from representatives of diplomatic missions accredited to Yaounde, insisted on the fight against terrorism. His speeches are marked by engagement and determination to combat the terrorists group through the strategies that he put in place so that its objective should be achieved such as "reinforcement, adding human and material resources and the call for population to maintain confident" (text 2).

Boko Haram has become a worldly issue that troubled most countries of the world, particularly Cameroon and Nigeria and has also become the subject of media. The four newspapers on which we are working are the examples of the media which portrayed the phenomenon in the two countries and also fight against it. We have to notice that the media mobilize all its strategies to combat the Islamist sect and sensitize the readers; Cameroon and Nigerian population and all the States of the world about the “global *fighting against Boko Haram because the phenomenon has become a global threat*” (Paul Biya speech: 2015 text 10). In addition, the government of both countries, other states and international institutions are playing an important role in the eradication of the sect.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

In sum, we were working on discourse analysis of the media representation of the terrorism Boko Haram within the period of 2014 and 2015 in Cameroon and Nigeria newspapers. The aim of this study was to analyze the discourses and language used in the Cameroonian written press such as *The Guardian Post*, *Eden newspaper* and Nigerian online newspapers like *The Cable Alert* and *THISDAY LIVE* and see whether it contributes to the construction or the deconstruction of the phenomenon. Our analyses were based on the quantitative analyses of attacks and the media coverage, how the media types are used to represent the terrorism, the use of discursive strategies, and language by the media, the government in order to fight against the Boko Haram phenomenon. We applied Critical Discourse Analysis approach known as Kress and Van Leeuwen Multimodal discourse analysis with semiotic so as to solve the problem of our work. All the hypotheses that I formulated at the beginning of the work were confronted and clarified with the results I obtained. However I realized that there were some weaknesses faced by the media, the government and the international organizations in the fighting against the terrorism. That is why I proposed some recommendations so that in the future, Cameroon and Nigeria should be better secured and should better combat the terrorists. For further research, we proposed: “the study of the discourses denigrating the participation of the government in the fighting against the terrorism” because some time in the field we notice some failure from the armies or soldiers which lead to the intensification of the situation.

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