LEXICO-STYLISTIC CHOICES AND MEDIA IDEOLOGY IN NEWSPAPER REPORTS ON NIGER DELTA CONFLICTS

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Abstract
Media reports on Niger Delta (Henceforth, ND) conflicts have reflected a relationship between lexico-stylistic choices and media ideologies. The existing media studies on the discourse have predominantly utilised pragmatic, stylistic and discourse analytical tools in presenting and labelling discourse participants and/or their ideologies, but neglected how media ideologies can be revealed through lexico-stylistic choices made in the reports. This paper therefore examines the lexico-stylistic choices in the reports in order to establish their link to specific ideological goals of the newspapers in relaying the conflict news. Forty reports on ND conflicts, published between 2003 and 2007, sampled from two ND-based (*The Tide* and *Pioneer*) and two national (*The Punch* and *THISDAY*) newspapers, were subjected to stylistic and critical analyses, with insights from structural (relational) semantics and aspects of stylistics discourse. Two broad lexical stylistic choices are identified, including paradigmatic (61.8%—indexed by synonymous, antonymous, hyponymous, colloquial, and register items, and coinages) and syntagmatic (38.2%—marked by collocations, metaphors, pleonasms, and lexical fields) features. The features are utilised for three ideological ends; namely, picking out and framing participants as perpetrators of the violence in the discourse, evaluating specific entities and their roles in the conflicts, and reducing the impact of the activities of the news actors. Although there are overlaps, the evaluative ideology is largely associated with the national newspaper, the impact reduction ideology with the ND-based newspapers, while the framist ideology is observed in the two sets of newspapers. With these findings the study has added the lexical stylistics angle to the existing scholarship on ND conflict news discourse. Thus, the newspaper reports on ND conflicts are motivated by their ideological goals to change the reader's outlook on the issues relating to the conflicts.

Keywords: Niger Delta conflict; lexical semantics; stylistics; media discourse; media ideology

The news report, its structure and the issues it handles have attracted many studies in linguistics (Thomson, White & Kitley, 2008), but how these structure and issues are constrained by specific ideological interests maintained by the media has not yielded equal proportion of scholarship. In Nigeria, even as the oil-related crises in the Niger Delta (hereafter, ND) and the attendant recession have continued to affect the economic stability and social peace in the country, newspaper reports on the conflicts have observably reflected lexical stylistic devices through which the positions of the different media outfits are revealed.

This shows that there exists an observable relationship between the ideological positions of the media and the linguistic choices made in their reports of the ND conflicts. This relationship has, however, not been duly explored by linguistic studies on media discourse, thereby preventing full understanding of the group-induced motivations for the conflicts and reports.

In fact, from the survey of recent studies on the media and political discourses, the ND conflicts have rather yielded linguistic interests from pragmatic (e.g., Ayoola, 2008), sociolinguistic (e.g., Agbedo, 2012), critical linguistic (e.g., Ayoola, 2010; Chiluwa, 2011a, 2011b; Ononye, 2015a), and stylistic (e.g., Chiluwa, 2007; Ononye & Osunbade, 2015) perspectives. Ayoola (2008), for example, uses pragmatic tools in exploring the discourse strategies employed by news participants in fostering specific ideologies. Ayoola's (2008) focus on the discourse strategies of news participants takes it apart from the present study's emphasis on the lexico-stylistics of newspaper reports. Agbedo (2012) looks at the link between sociolinguistic cues and the militancy and terrorism associated with MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta) and Boko Haram in selected statements from each of the groups. The difference between Agbedo's work and the present one is the former's emphasis on sociolinguistic differences in news actors' speeches, which falls apart from the latter's focus on the lexico-stylistic choices made by news reporters to propagate their ideologies.

In the critical studies category, Ayoola (2010) employs CDA tools in presenting the ideological perspectives in the news discourse; Chiluwa (2011a) also uses CDA (but adds Corpus Linguistics in 2011b) in analysing the attitude of the press in representing the ND militia groups and their activities, while Ononye (2015a) takes a critical-

stylistic framework in examining the different labels in political news reports on ND crisis. These critical works, such as Ayoola (2008), can still be distinguished from this study particularly in terms of its focus on the lexical stylistic features alone. The closest works to the present study are those of the stylistic category. Here, Chiluwa (2007) investigates peculiar stylistic features used in news texts, but—unlike the current study—did not pay attention to ideological issues in the news reports.

In a similar vein, Ononye and Osunbade (2015) explore naming strategies, privileging the stylistic method, but in contrast to this study, do not provide an exhaustively account of lexical stylistic features except for those deployed for naming in the sampled texts. The studies reviewed have generally provided insights into the linguistic and contextual dimensions to media reports on ND discourse. However, what is strikingly absent in the discourse is a full attention to the interaction between media ideology and linguistic strategies (particularly, lexical stylistic devices) used by newspaper reporters in relaying information on ND conflicts; and this informs the objectives of the present study; namely, to account for the lexical stylistic devices used in the newspaper reports on ND conflicts; and discuss their ideological implications with regard to the conflictual events in the region.

The Niger Delta is in the South-South portion of Nigeria covering some 70,000 kilometres (Rowell, Marriott & Stockman, 2005). Despite its small size (with respect to the Nigerian territory), it yields an estimated two million barrels of crude oil daily, which "harbours over 95 per cent of Nigeria's crude oil and gas resources, accounting for 90 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings" (Ogbogbo, 2005, p. 169). While the oil resources have attracted the world's top oil companies and huge corporate investment, there has been a legion of environmental problems resulting from the intense exploration for and exploitation of these non-renewable resources in the region. The massive environmental degradation of the area, which contaminates its people's bodies and reduces their supply of food from fishing and agriculture, cannot be overemphasized (for detailed statistical facts on the effects of oil spills in the ND region, see Kadafa, 2012).

With this state of affairs, including lack of jobs and infrastructure, non-citing of industries, the Niger Delta has become synonymous with squalor and mass poverty (Rowell, Marriott & Stockman, 2005). These seem to be responsible for the people's feeling of utter neglect, relegation and discrimination. Therefore, in order to address the peculiarities of the problems confronting their region, the ND peoples have embarked on a long and continued struggle for self-determination and to control the resources from their 'fatherland'. The struggle, as Ononye and Osunbade (2015) categorise

it, bifurcates into intellectual articulation (creative writers, musicians and griots, media communicators, radical religious clerics and patriotic politicians who have demonstrated the same resistance through different idioms and semiotics) and physical conflict (involving the gun-wielding category of the advocates) against the injustice perpetuated by the successive Nigerian governments.

Many intellectual groups have pointed out that the economic recession that Nigeria is facing today is largely hinged on the physical struggle of the ND youths to take back what belongs to them or to twist the government's arm into giving their people a better recognition in the scheme of things in the country (Darah, 2008). In corollary, the physical conflicts have enjoyed much media coverage. In fact, the increasing protest by several ethnic and political groups in the region and the resultant violence, including the vandalisation of oil facilities, kidnapping of expatriate oil workers, and clashes with the Nigerian military (Joint Task Force), has consistently been reported in the newspapers and other media within and outside the region. An analysis of the lexical stylistic choices made in these reports promises to reveal the positions taken by the news reporters on the events. I therefore turn to describing the aspects of the theories to be used in the analysis on the newspaper reports.

METHOD
To achieve the objective of the paper, forty (40) editions of newspaper reports on the ND conflicts, published between 2003 and 2007, were purposively sampled from two ND-based newspapers (namely, *The Tide* and *Pioneer*; labelled TEXTS 1—20) and two national newspapers (namely, *THISDAY* and *The Punch*, labelled TEXTS 21—40), and subjected to quantitative stylistic and critical analyses. The rationale for the period selected was based on the fact that President Olusegun Obasanjo's second tenure (2003-2007) was when ND conflicts gained momentum, while the two sets of newspapers were chosen because of their comparative consistency in reporting the conflicts over the period. Also, because previous studies, as observed in all the ones reviewed above, have unduly slanted their analysis of the ND conflict discourse to the national newspapers, the present study goes a step further in including some ND-based newspapers in order to balance the news reporters' views on the conflict events. The sampled newspaper reports were analysed through insights from two theories/ concepts; namely, the structuralist idea of lexical relation, and aspects of linguistic-stylistics (specifically, text-linguistic, socio-linguistic, and critical stylistics) discourse. The concepts are reviewed accordingly.

The consideration of the patterning and meaning-related properties of lexical items in text

gave rise to the concept of lexical semantics, although what is included in the field is likely to vary from scholar to scholar. In Cruse's (2006, pp. 163-64) view, lexical relation was originally taken from the viewpoint of structural semantics to include sense relation and other lexical nuances in text. In this study, regarding the lexical manifestations in the ND newspaper texts, the focus of the review will however be on sense relation. The sense of a word is the sum total of its sense relations with other words in the language; and this bifurcates into the Saussurean distinction between paradigmatism and syntagmatism (Ononye, 2015a, p. 370).

Paradigmatic relations are concerned with associations of similar categories, where the words involved stand in complementary distribution (Geeraerts, 2010, p. 58). They hold between items which can occupy the same position in a grammatical structure. This is similar to what Lyons (1968, p. 431) calls "off-line similarity", which typically "involve[s] words belonging to the same syntactic category" (Cruse, 2000, p. 148). Paradigmatic sense relations commonly manifest in terms of synonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and different kinds of opposition. Synonymy, according to Saeed (2004, p. 65), is the lexical relation involving different phonological words with similar meaning, which are derived from a number of parameters, *viz.* different dialects (e.g., *tap* and *faucet*), different registers (e.g., *wife* and *spouse*), collocational restriction (e.g., *boy* and *lad*), and portraying positive/negative attitude of the user (e.g., *activist* and *militant*). Hyponymy (derived from Greek: *hypo-* meaning 'under') is the lexical relation of class-inclusion described in English by the phrase 'kind / type / sort of'. "A chain of hyponyms defines a hierarchy of elements" (Riemer, 2010, p. 142), where for example *hibiscus, tulip,* and *rose* are co-hyponyms of *flower*, which is their hyperonym. Meronymy (Greek *meros*: 'part') is the relation of part to whole, where the part (e.g., *eye*) is referred to as a meronym of *face*, while the whole (e.g., *face*) is known as the holonym of *eye* (*ibid.*).

The notion of oppositeness embraces several different types of relation, the most common of which is antonymy. Antonymy is characterised by a relationship of incompatibility between two items with respect to some given dimensions of contrast. Some words, for example, may be associated with more than one antonym, with respect to the dimension of contrast involved; e.g., *girl* has both *boy* and *woman*, depending on whether the dimension of contrast is sex or age; *sweet* has both *bitter* and *sour* (Murphy, 2003). Ideally, words that stand in paradigmatic relations should be of the same grammatical category, but sometimes they are not. For instance, there is no hyperonym of which the following adjectives are hyponyms: *round*, *square*, *oval*, *oblong*, and *triangular*. However, they are all related in a hyponym-like way to the noun *shape*. Relations of this type are sometimes called "quasi-relations" (Ononye, 2014a, p. 182); the commonest of these is quasi-hyponymy.

Syntagmatic sense relations hold between items in the same grammatical structure. There is the possibility of a lexical element in a text to co-occur in larger wholes with other elements of the language in terms of, for example, compounds and derivations in the morphological realm, and constituents and sentences in syntax (Geeraerts, 2010). Here, relations between individual items are not usually given names on the lines of hyponymy, antonymy, and so forth, but certain effects of putting meanings together are recognised, such as anomaly (e.g., *a light green illness*), pleonasm (e.g., *dental toothache*), and meaning extension, such as metaphor (e.g., *move mountain*) and metonymy (e.g., *nice wheels*). The requirements for a 'normal' combination are described as selectional restrictions or selectional preferences. For instance, it is by virtue of syntagmatic sense relations, in this case between verb and noun that *Fred ran across the field* is normal, whereas *The field crawled across Fred* is odd. As opposed to paradigmatic relations, syntagmatic relations constitute "on-line co-occurrence" (Lyons, 1968, p. 431). For Cruse, syntagmatic sense relations are "an expression of coherence constraints" while paradigmatic relations are "an expression of such structuring" (Cruse, 2000, p. 149). One relevant insight from this review to our study is that paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations function concurrently in informing the stylistics of language use in ND newspaper reports.

Stylistics itself can more or less be defined as a field of study, "which seeks to uncover and discuss the effective uses of certain language features and methods in a text, to create certain effects to a particular audience…" (Ononye, 2014b, p. 215). From this general picture, Akinbiyi (2007) distinguishes between "linguistic stylistics" and "literary stylistics" (p. 221). Linguistic stylistics deals with the linguistic peculiarities of literary texts and non-literary varieties of language (register), while literary stylistics has the goals of describing the formal features of literary texts and relating their literary effects to linguistic causes where relevant. This study favours linguistic stylistics in that it analyses non-literary texts – newspaper reports. From this perspective, stylistics may be seen as the "study of any situationally distinctive use of language and of choices made by individuals and social groups in their usage in all linguistic domains" (Crystal, 1999, p. 323). Furthermore, Sandig and Selting (1997) have discussed five classes of manifestation of linguistic stylistics; namely, traditional stylistics, pragmatic stylistics, text-linguistic stylistics, sociolinguistic stylistics and international stylistics. Text-linguistic stylistics and sociolinguistic stylistics are relevant in this study.

While text-linguistic stylistics involves a descriptive and comparative study of stylistic conventions of text types, sociolinguistic stylistics is done on the basis of social categories in registers. To supplement text-linguistic stylistics and sociolinguistic stylistics, I have added Jefferies' (2010) critical stylistics to handle the ideological aspect of the analysis. Critical stylistics is one of the offshoots of the new critical paradigm, a developing area of applied stylistics, which focuses on how the linguistic choices and strategies in texts can be identified, and how the background ideologies which inform the style can be reconstructed (Jefferies, 2010).

Style is the primary object of stylistics. By style is meant "a consistent occurrence in the text of certain items and structures, or types of items and structures, among those offered by the language as a whole" (Malmkjaer, 2002, p. 510). Among the many concepts of style that have sprung up in the literature, some relevant ones to the purpose of the present study include: style as choice, style as uniqueness, style as frequency, and style as deviation from the norm. Style as choice is author-oriented and about the most popular view of style, where an author chooses particular linguistic items over and above the other alternative offered by the language in transiting her/his message to the audience. Osundare (2003) distinguishes between "conscious choice" and "unconscious choice", demonstrating that the former explains the rhetorical preferences (e.g., lexical patterns) of an author, while the latter takes care of the stylistic options (e.g., syntactic patterns) made by the language user in a text. The uniqueness perspective is an expression of distinctiveness which also tallies with Lawal's (2003) "style as idiosyncratic and constant forms".

Among the numerous definitions of style, Crystal and Davy (1969) see this as "some or all of the language habit of a person…the occasional linguistic idiosyncrasies which characterize an individual's uniqueness" (p. 8). They believe that style resides in those expressions that mark the individual or their professional use of language as different from others. The frequency view of style may also be related to Osundare's (2003) "style as iteration"; the focus here is on the language user, who by "constant practice" or "habituality" (p. 29), manifests a   pattern of use by which their style can be predicted. The common method of analysis of stylistic frequency is statistical, sometimes called "stylo-statistics" or "quantitative statistics" (McMenamin, 2002, p. 109), which is germane to the study. The deviationist approach to style is anchored on the "notion that language is both a rule-governed behaviour and an accumulation of norms" (Lawal, 2003, p. 28). Lawal further explains that the two main ways language norms can be realised are 'accuracy' (grammatical correctness), and 'appropriateness' (social acceptability). Although this view of style was championed by the generative stylisticians (with poetry as their tangent text), it has manifested in other genres of language use such as advertisement and media reports. All the perspectives of style reviewed above have manifestations in the data; hence, I turn to the analysis of data in the next section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The lexical stylistic features are considered with regard to the way enter into paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships in the data. On the paradigmatic plane lexical items such as, sense relation (e.g., synonyms and near-synonyms, antonyms, and hyponyms), register, colloquiallism, and coinage are identified, whereas lexical field, metaphorisation, pleonasm, and collocation are found on the syntagmatic axis. The distribution of these features as found in the data are summarised in Table 1.

As table below shows, collocation (with 401 instances amounting to 35.5%) is the most prevalent lexical stylistic feature found in the data. This is followed by register (31.1%) and synonymy (17.3%), while lexical field (0.5%) and pleonasm (0.8%), respectively, take the least proportion. The statistics further reveals that on the whole, the paradigmatic features (61.8%) dominate the syntagmatic ones (38.2%). They will be discussed successively.

Register takes the highest portion among the paradigmatic features found. This is one of the key devices utilised in the two sets of newspapers in conveying the seriousness of the ND conflict and the different issues prompting them in the discourse. Register items abound which reflect the activities of the various news actors involved in the conflict. The treatment of register here will focus more on their patterns of occurrence as a way of determining the stylistic choices made of them in the data over other possible lexical alternatives. There are two categories of register found in the data; namely, restricted items (2.3%) and unrestricted items (97.7%). Restricted implies meanings that are restricted to particular communicative discourse, while unrestricted register items come in everyday conversational usage, but mean something far more defined than they do to the layman (Ogbulogo, 2005, p. 66). As the register statistics shows, very few of the restricted items are found in the data, especially with regard to the field of armed forces (the Joint Task Force). Some important examples include, "balloon" meaning 'to surround' (TEXT 12), "drone" meaning 'a surveillance chopper' (TEXT 19), "pin-point" meaning "to shoot at sight"

Table 1. Lexical stylistic features in the ND newspaper reports

s/n	Lexical stylistic features		Distribution	Example
1	Paradigmatic 698 (61.8%)	Synonymy or near-synonymy	195 (17.3%)	militant groups-restive youths-armed youths; Ateke Tom-militia leader-warlord-gang leader, etc.
		Antonymy	19 (1.7%)	Local youths, rather than militants
		Hyponymy	11 (1.0%)	rocket launchers, gun boats, bullets (WEAPONS)
		Register	351 (31.1%)	Source, eyewitness, operation, etc.
		Colloquialism	93 (8.2%)	My brothers, wetin, wahala, etc.
		Coinage	39 (3.5%)	Hurricane Piper Alpha, etc
2	Syntagmatic 432 (38.2%)	Collocation	601 (35.5%)	host communities, fresh violence, hostage taking, etc.
		Metaphor	16 (1.4%)	The ceasefire...broke down yesterday
		Pleonasm	09 (0.8%)	expatriate foreign oil workers
		Lexical Field	06 (0.5%)	...militants can't keep dribbling innocent oil workers, we need to mark them out and shoot down their nets before they achieve their goals.

(TEXT 7). Let us consider how these (un)restricted register items reflect the fields of journalism and armed forces in the data:

EXCERPT 1 (TEXT 4)
Our correspondent says kidnapping of oil workers and vandalization of oil facilities have become a common occurrence in the south of Nigeria. (*Pioneer* July 21, 2004)

EXCERPT 2 (TEXT 21)
... JTF spokesman, Colonel Rabe Abubakar, said that JTF troops have since taken the operation into the area, and extended the security surveillance on the vandals.
(*THISDAY* January 4, 2006)

Such lexical items as "correspondent", "kidnapping", "vandalization" "oil workers/ facilities" (in *EXCERPT* 1), "operation", "surveillance" and "vandals" (in *EXCERPT* 2) above are some of the many register items that the ND discourse is indexed by. While items like "operation" and "surveillance" are restricted to the armed forces, "correspondent" is common with journalism. Others are unrestricted but peculiar to the ND conflict discourse. "Source" (in TEXT 1) and "informant" (in TEXT 9) are other unrestricted items that are found to be variously interchanged with "correspondent" elsewhere in the data. When the restricted items are compared with other likely plain lexical alternatives, it may be observed that the reporter may deem it inappropriate to use, for example, 'man', 'person', or even 'colleague' (which are not technical) in place of "correspondent." With the technical detail provided by the use of different register items restricted to armed forces to relay information on the conflict events, the reader cannot help but genuinely realise the magnitude of infrastructural destruction and the attendant economic effect, on the one hand, and the struggle going on (between the ND youths and the government JTF) as that involving military expertise and weaponry, on the other. This strategy confirms van Dijk's (2005) submission that the media and their socially constructed discourse are passed on as the main source of people's knowledge, attitudes and ideologies.

Aside register, colloquialism and coinage also take a reasonable percentage in the data. They are largely found in the national newspapers and are associated with one group of news actors; namely, the various local groups of the ND youths. The ideological purpose for which these lexical features are employed is to pick out and frame specific participants in the news as the executors of the violence in the region. Two major types of colloquialism have been identified: Popular Nigerian English words using Jowitt's (1991) term (PNE—92.5%), and group slang (7.5%). The PNE words are further divided into two: those of non-standard Nigerian English (NNE) and those of Nigerian Pidgin (NPg). Out of the 86 instances of the PNE, more of the NPg are however found (76.1% against 23.9%). Therefore, among the entire colloquial words, the NPg items are found to considerably cut across the language of other news actors aside the ND youths; hence the dominance it has over the other types of colloquial words. Some examples may be relevant:

EXCERPT 3 (TEXT 36)
... President Yar' Adua said ... "It has always pained me to see my brothers and sisters in Nigeria taking up arms against fellow Nigerians and ready to live in the creeks...."

Ateke...said: "I met with Defence Minister them come our camp, ask us say <u>wetin</u> be our problem, we tell them our problem. The problems this Niger Delta <u>get no be new story</u>, <u>na story wey</u> the whole world know. (*THISDAY* October 2, 2007)

EXCERPT 4 (TEXT 28)
The purpose of this celebration ... is to prove to the armed forces of the Nigerian state that we are <u>the bum</u>, we can take on them anywhere, anytime, and anyhow....
(*THISDAY* October 3, 2006)

In *EXCERPT* 3, words such as "my brothers" and "[my] sisters" belong to the NNE type of PNE. Here, there is a case of semantic extension which Nigerian English is characterised by. The words, as used by the president of Nigeria, are used in the strict Nigeria English semantics of 'one-Nigeria', regarding every Nigerian citizen as brothers (for males) and sisters (for females). There are several other instances of NNE items found in the data. Some notable examples are: "light" to mean 'electricity' (TEXT 15), "big men" to mean 'high-profile government officials' (TEXT 30), "local boys" to mean 'community youths' (TEXT 2), etc. Also in the excerpt, words like "wetin", "get", "them[dem]", used by Ateke (one of the youth leaders in the ND region) belong to the NPg word stock. That such vocabulary items are found principally in the language of the ND youths betrays the fluency of the variety of PNE as lingua franca in the region. In *EXCERPT* 4, in comparison, the item "the bum" is a slangy expression belonging to the ND group, with which it refers to its members as 'strong' or 'indomitable'. The few other slangy expressions in the data comprise, "wahala" to mean 'resistance', and "bob" to mean 'my friend' (TEXT 3). These PNE features are largely found with the ND-based newspapers, and are chiefly utilised to present the social lives of the militants thereby reducing the impact of their activities.

Two patterns of coinage are noticed in the data: coinages that are produced in allusion to events in history, and coinages that are formed from immediate local realities. While the historical events alluded to are found to be cases related to oil crisis, the local realities are hinged on the environmental advantages. Some examples from the data will buttress these points:

EXCERPT 5 (TEXT 33)
MEND tagged its armed campaign against oil and gas infrastructure "<u>Hurricane Piper Alpha</u>" after the North Sea oil platform that blew up in July 1998 – the worst offshore oil disaster in the history of global oil and gas operations.
"<u>Piper Alpha</u> unleashed its fury today ... leaving in its wake two battered oil installations. Thanks to the <u>creek power</u> of the <u>Hurricane</u>," the group said in statement on Sunday....
(*The Punch* March 17, 2006)

In *EXCERPT* 5, therefore, the expressions "Hurricane Piper Alpha", "Piper Alpha", and "Hurricane" are coined by the ND group (MEND) from 'Piper Alpha'. Piper Alpha is a North Sea oil production platform in the UK, which exploded on 6 July 1988, killing 167 oil workers, with only 61survivors. The total loss was then estimated to be £1.7 million (about four hundred and twenty-five million of current-day Naira). The expression "creek power", on the other hand, is taken from the realities of environmental advantage. It is coined by the ND youths from the idea that living in the creeks gives them the advantage of manoeuvring their way to achieve anything they want. The national newspapers are replete with many of these coinages from the ND militants, which are most times presented as disdainful in order to frame the militants as unrepentant.

Synonymy is another significant paradigmatic feature, which appears as, action indicators, activity/event indicators, condition indicators and references/appellations. Two patterns of synonymy are generally identified in the data; namely, clustered synonyms (6.2%) and distant synonyms (93.8%). Operationally, clustered synonyms are synonyms which occur together in form of lexical sets (Ononye, 2015b). "Visitors" and "strangers" in "...we are tired of being visitors or strangers to Shell offices" (TEXT 39), for example, are some of the few clustered synonyms in the data. Distant synonyms are those that are interchanged with each other in the data, but are not brought together (Ononye, 2015b). Synonymy of both patterns generally manifest in the data. Some examples can be considered:

EXCERPT 6 (TEXT 27)
<u>Two communities in Rivers State, Idu Obosiukwu and Osobile</u>, have shut down oil facilities belonging to Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC), alleging employment marginalization.
<u>The communities</u> are also angry with the oil firm for its refusal to sign a new memorandum of understanding with them.
<u>Over six hundrend persons</u> ... stormed the company's oil facilities on Thursday morning and shut it down.
<u>The disgruntled protestors</u> have <u>resolved and vowed</u> not to reopen the facilities until the company accedes to their demand. (*The Punch* September 3, 2005)

In *EXCERPT* 6 above, distant synonyms such as "The communities", "Over six hundred persons" and "The disgruntled protestors" are interchanged for the "Two communities in Rivers State, Idu Obosiukwu and Osobile". Whereas these are distant synonyms, "resolved" and "vowed" (in the last paragraph of the text) are clustered synonyms. Also while the distant synonyms here are found to indicate reference the clustered ones indicate activities of the news actors. Synonymy, like other sense relations, is an observably effective

ideological tool utilised for providing more information on the stories being narrated (Ononye, 2016). For instance, the distant synonyms identified in the national newspaper (in *EXCERPT 6*) more or less negatively evaluates the two communities' manner of approach. By choosing "over six hundred persons" and "protesters" instead of 'the community members', on the one hand; or by reporting that the two communities "resolved" and "vowed" instead of 'agreed', on the other hand, the reader is lead to believe that the ND community was out to cause trouble. It is even more interesting how other sense relations have been used for this end.

Other sense relations found to have been employed for specific ideological purpose include antonymy and hyponymy. The 19 instances of antonymy found in the data are lexical opposites. Two patterns are discovered of the lexical opposites; they are: replacive opposites and negated opposites. More instances of the former are however found. Let us examine the behaviour of these features in the data:

> *EXCERPT 7* (TEXT 17)
> The insistence by the JTF that <u>saboteurs, rather than militants</u>, masterminded the latest attack might not be unrelated to the pipeline runs through an area ... (*The Tide* March 2, 2004)

> *EXCERPT 8* (TEXT 13)
> The legal adviser to the militants ... charged the committee not to abandon the boys. ...
> He claimed that they [the ND militants] are <u>not criminals</u> but should be seen as <u>freedom fighters</u>, fellow Nigerian citizens who fought to register their displeasure to the Federal Government. (*The Tide* April 10, 2007)

In *EXCERPT 7*, the words "Saboteurs" and "militants" are replacive opposites. A two-part structure is used here to set up an opposition between two apparently unrelated entities. In the same vein, the antonymous set "criminals" and "freedom fighters" (in the second paragraph of *EXCERPT 8*) is based on negated opposition. Here, a negative/positive pair of structure is set up with a negator "not" to link them in opposition. These are powerful ideological strategies used mainly by the ND-based newspapers the foci of which are to debunk the negative labels given to the ND youths or justify their actions (as in the case of *EXCERPT 8*) and/or to reduce the effect of their actions (in *EXCERPT 7*).

Collocation (35.5%) is the most significant syntagmatic feature that immediately calls for the reader's attention. It is observed to have one ideological use; namely, it comes handy for use (both by the news writers and the news actors) especially in evaluating the news actors, their roles in the conflicts, and their environment. Three broad manifestations of collocation have been observed: those describing activities/events (50.4%), news actors (38.9%), and news actors' roles (10.7%). That

the collocations describing activities and events going on in the ND dominate in the data is not surprising considering the volatility of the region. The activities/events category is further reduced into three; namely: collocations portraying the actions in the activities (e.g., "massive attack"), collocations describing the materials involved in the activities (e.g., "gun battle"), and collocations expressing the effects of the activities (e.g., "fire disaster"). Some more examples of these collocation items are examined:

> *EXCERPT 9* (TEXT 11)
> As <u>fresh violence</u> hits the oil-producing Niger Delta region, Chevron Texaco officials yesterday claim that they have uncovered plans by <u>militant youths</u> to vandalise the Escravos crude oil pipeline ...
> The <u>militant youths</u> said to number about 500, had invaded the Escravos Oil Export Terminal last Friday before being dislodged by <u>security operatives</u>.
> Reuters quoting community leaders, reported that <u>security forces</u> shot dead about six protesters, while 13 others with <u>gunshot wounds</u> ... (*The Tide* May 13, 2005)

In *EXCERPT 9*, collocations such as "fresh violence" and "gunshot wounds" (and many similar instances of lexical items that stylistically co-occur in the data) describe the activities going on in the discourse. However, where "fresh violence" reflects the actions involved, "gunshot wounds" relates to the effects of the activities being described in the text. Other collocations in the excerpt such as the distant synonyms, "security operatives" and "security forces", illustrate the roles played by the news actors in the discourse, while "militant youths" describes the news actors themselves. The stylistics of matching words—which do not ordinarily go together with remarkable frequency in the data—to describe the entities in the discourse has underlying motives of exposing the conflict activities in the region (especially observed with the national newspapers), and framing the government security agents as the perpetrators of the violence (especially for the ND-based newspaper as in the case of *EXERPT* 9 above).

Aside collocation, other syntagmatic features, which may not hold much promise of stylistic relevance considering their low occurrences in the data, are metaphorisation, lexical field and pleonasm. The lexical items here are basically used in both the national and ND-based newspapers to create a picture of the activities going on in the discourse. In terms of metaphorisation, three patterns are identified; namely, metaphors used as emotive adjectives, those used as lexical nouns, and those used as lexical verbs. The adjective category is however predominant. Some notable examples can be considered here:

> *EXCERPT 10* (TEXT 6)
> Nigeria's main militant group declared "<u>all out</u>

war" in the <u>heart</u> of Africa's biggest oil and gas industry yesterday after the security forces used gunboats to try to <u>flush</u> its fighters out of the creeks.
According to reliable Agip source from the area, who witnessed the gun <u>duel</u>, said that the militants were using heavy weaponry in their invasion and that at the end of the <u>bloody</u> shoot-out, there were some casualties on the side of the military personnel.
(*Pioneer* May 14, 2007)

EXCERPT 11 (TEXT 2)
Ogbotobo community in Ekeremor ... Bayalsa State was allegedly turned into a war <u>theatre</u> yesterday when security personnel and armed youths <u>played out</u> their confrontation...
(*The Tide* January 18, 2006)

EXCERPT 12 (TEXT 24)
<u>Hostage taking</u>, <u>kidnapping</u>, <u>bombing</u> and other militant attacks have cut Nigeria's production by around a million barrels of oil per day. (*The Punch* June 4, 2003)

Such lexical items as "all out", "heart", "flush", "duel", "bloody" (in *EXCERPT 10*), "theatre", "played out" and even "confrontation" (in *EXCERPT 11*) are instances of metaphorisation. However, "all out" and "bloody" function as emotive adjectives, "heart", "theatre", and "duel" are used as nouns, while "flush" and "played out" belong to the verb category. With this textual practice of describing something with a name that belongs to something else (Goatly, 2007), the ideological goal here is to relate the seriousness of the ND conflicts to the audience. The metaphorical details are brought in to foreground the issues that can drag the ND youths into an "all-out" war or "gun" duel with the military task force in the region. In the same vein, such lexical items as "hostage taking", "kidnapping", and "bombing" (in *EXCERPT 12*) are all co-hyponyms of the "militant attack", as the reporter rightly added, in the ND. "Militant attack" may be seen as a general term while the co-hyponyms are more specific terms. One important ideological insight here is that the co-hyponyms are deployed to underscore the seriousness of the oil issue (and the accruing control struggle) to all participants involved: the federal/state government and its security officials, the various oil-bearing and oil-working communities, and the ND insurgents.

CONCLUSION
In this paper, I have accounted for the lexical stylistic choices used in the newspaper reports on ND conflicts, and discussed their ideological implications with regard to relaying information on the conflictual events in the region. Specifically, the lexical stylistic choices, which bifurcate into paradigmatic (61.8%—including synonymous, antonymous, hyponymous, colloquial, and register items, and coinages) and syntagmatic (38.2%—embracing collocations, metaphors, pleonasms, and lexical fields) features, have largely been used to achieve three ideological ends. They include: picking out and framing participants as perpetrators of the violence in the discourse, evaluating specific entities and their roles in the conflicts, and reducing the impact of the activities of the news actors.

Although there are overlaps, the evaluative ideology is largely associated with the national newspaper, the impact reduction ideology with the ND-based newspapers, while the framist ideology is observed in the two sets of newspapers. With these findings the study has moved the existing media scholarship on ND conflict discourse a step forward. Thus, I submit that newspaper reports (especially on a sensitive issue) are motivated by specific ideological goal to change the reader's view on the issue to suit theirs.

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