

Linguistic and Discourse Strategies in Nigerian Media Representations of *Coup d'Etats* in West Africa

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Abstract

The paper identifies the linguistic and discourse strategies deployed by the Nigerian media in representing successive coups in West Africa. Norman Fairclough's socio-semiotic model of Critical Discourse Analysis, otherwise known as Discourse as Social Change, has been adopted for the study. For data, six e-newspapers were purposively selected, namely, *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Leadership*, *Business Day* and *Premium Times* Newspapers. The selection was primarily intended to minimise geo-political bias rather than to make comparisons between the newspapers. Editorials, Opinions, and News Reports were purposively sampled from the newspapers between July, 2023 and February, 2024. In all the reports subjected to analysis, four representational strategies were discovered and the implications of those constructions on Africa's democratic experience and civic engagements were unraveled in the study. The representational strategies were developed by the newspapers with about seven linguistic strategies and seven discourse strategies. The deployment of these strategies was a manifestation of the newspapers' alignment with different strands of ideological divide. The paper concludes that the linguistic and discursive construction of coups in West Africa illustrates the significance of ideology in constructing events in the discourse of media in Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigerian media, representations, coup, West Africa, linguistic strategies, discourse strategies

1. Introduction

The wave of military coups in West Africa between the year 2020 and 2023 raises serious concerns regarding the long-term stability of democratic governance in the region. The political instability occasioned by these incidents between the year 2020 and 2023 has exposed the fragility of democratic institutions and weakened democratic structures in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The Nigerian media, reputed for its leading role in the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria and its commitment to entrenching democratic ideals in several African countries, has been in the vanguard of assessing the causal factors and effects of the coups in the West African region with the resultant effects of influencing perception of the public on the situation. According to McQuail (1994, p.327), the media are tunnels that convey mass communication and almost all research into its activities "is based on the premise that the media have significant effects". The Nigerian media has played this influential role since 1859 when the first newspaper, *Iwe Irohin*, was published. It has been credited in the area of surveillance and correlation especially in covering and assessing political developments in Africa (Kalejaiye, 2009).

No doubt, the media occupy a strategic position in the hallowed process of disseminating information and influencing perception on critical issues of governance and leadership in societies. They play important role in shaping beliefs and prejudice and their dominance of the social context tends to minimise others and (mis)interpret an event. Language, in news reports, is not a mere instrument of communication but it is imbued with power; it is action-oriented; it can influence or control reader's thoughts and actions (Alo & Ogungbe, 2012). Pasirayi (2017) posits that through selecting certain topics over others and providing coverage to people or events, the media set an agenda on issues that they want the public to debate, how to debate and what they consider the most significant. This exemplifies the dimension of power that the media express in mobilising the masses for change.

Media representations are the means through which the media, in their language use, portray particular groups, experiences, societies, ideas, or events from a particular ideological perspective. The media produces "fields of definitions and association, symbols and rhetoric, through which ideology becomes manifest and concrete" (Gitiin, 1980, p.2). This ideological load in media discourse often creates a new reality which makes the media very powerful in terms of influencing ideas and attitudes. The sourcing and construction of news are both linked to the opinions and ideologies of the media organisations or owners (Asiru, Ogutu & Orwenjo, 2018, p.85). This is why the news domain has been described as the site for ideological struggles. Under political transitions (such as coups), the media play the role of a 'marketplace of ideas'. The range of perspectives and arguments of news media are however streamlined as the interest of the public would now be focused on the set agenda.

Historically, the mass media has been a vanguard of social struggle and change in the African continent. It played a major and active role in the anti-colonial struggle and was pivotal in the eventual attainment of political independence of many countries on the continent. During the colonial period, the mass media was particularly instrumental in exposing the misrule, exploitation and evil of colonial rule to the international community. It mobilised the civil society groups to mount pressure on the colonial government which eventually culminated in the independence of African colonial territories (Adesoji, 2006, p.38). All across the continent of Africa including Tanzania, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia, Gambia, Nigeria, and South Africa, the achievements recorded by nationalists such as Julius Nyerere, Obafemi Awolowo, Kwameh Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Nelson Mandela in their struggles against the colonial governments were very much tied to the resilience and vibrancy of the anti-colonial press.

It is unsavoury arguing the impact of media coverage in Africa's conflicts. Nwosu (1987) asserts the notion that media coverage contributes significantly to starting, continuing, and terminating a conflict. Based on their surveillance function, media formations are always on the lookout for events and happenings that would be of interest to their audiences (Olomjobi, 2017). One of such events is conflict, which indicates disagreement between one group and another. The current study investigates the linguistic and discourse strategies deployed by the Nigerian media in representing successive coups that occurred in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger between the year 2021 and 2023. It adopts the method of CDA to interrogate linguistic and discursive tools that were used in representing the coups ideologically. The various representations of the coup are conceptualised as the set agenda by

the Nigerian media in its attempt to help construct democracy in African context. This has implication for shaping journalism practice in Nigeria.

2. CDA and Media Discourse

The thrust of CDA is to unravel ideological assumptions hidden in a given text (spoken or written) so as to counter and denigrate all power indices or to revel in the assumption that we ourselves are exercising "power over" (Fairclough, 1989). With CDA, we can systematically investigate often obscure synergies between texts and events, discursive practices and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes. It attempts to scrutinise how the influence of these opaque synergies become a factor in generating power and hegemony, and it draws attention to power disequilibrium, social inequities, undemocratic practices, and other injustices with the aim to spur people to corrective actions (Fairclough, 1993). In plain language, CDA makes visible the way in which institutions and their discourse shape us. One key principle of CDA is that the way we write, and what we say, is not arbitrary—it is purposeful whether or not the choices are conscious or unconscious (Sheyholislami, 2001). Also, CDA can focus on gestures, imageries and images, and other embodiments of semiosis (symbols and signs) as means of discourse (Fairclough, 2002) including written language.

With the debate on globalisation gaining momentum in recent years, "the principal frame reference when we try to explain new political, economic and cultural phenomena...[and] the spread of the Internet..., media and communication are ascribed a significant part in the process of change" (Hjarvard, 2003, p.15-17). The imposing role of the mass media in influencing and impacting people's lives through perception engineering reflects our mass-mediated world and the emergence of the network society (Castells, 2000, 2011). In CDA, the media constitute public space and may be studied as sites of social struggle and power, particularly in terms of their language. Although, media are observed to be purportedly neutral, in the sense that they make space for public discourse, present state of affairs seemingly disinterestedly, and convey the perceptions and arguments of the newsmakers, they often have hidden sociopolitical agenda that occupy the central place in the matter (e.g. Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Herman & Chomsky, 2008; Miller, 2004). Major issues that are reflected in the agenda include sexism, war reporting, anti-semitism, identity politics, racism, capitalism, climate change, nationalism, and democratisation. The appropriation of these issues has ideological implications and demonstrates the hegemony of the media in influencing people's perceptions and worldviews thereby advancing, advocating and championing social change.

3. Perspectives on Nigerian Media Coverage of African Conflicts

Studies have advanced the reason why the media of a particular country would tend to report news of certain countries more than others. Mowlana (1985) connects the reasons to economic, political, socio-cultural, infrastructural and extra-media. His argument tilts in various directions. Firstly, the buoyancy of a nation and its media reflects in the quantity, quality and distribution of foreign news in the media. Secondly, the political interests of a country inevitably betray the behaviour of the national media. This can be exemplified in the way the foreign policy of a country influences the direction of the media coverage to reflect national

political interests. Thirdly, socio-cultural factors like language, culture, religion and similarities and differences in traditional beliefs between nations will betray the interest of the press in the coverage of foreign news. Explaining specifically in the African context, da Costa (1980) submits that in several African countries, international news is covered as it affects the reporting country's psycho-political security, community of interests and imperatives of national politics. Nordenstreng (1984) affirms that regionalism is the dominant factor in the coverage of foreign news. He reports that the media have a tendency to focus on foreign affairs which occur in or relate to their own respective regions. Based on this submission, it is mostly natural for the national media to pay less attention to regions outside their own.

With reference to Nigeria, Edeani (1994) reiterates the sensitive interest of Nigeria in view of her leadership position in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Africa-centered foreign policy on socio-economic and political stability of the region. It would, therefore, be expected that Nigeria would be in the vanguard to provide media coverage of Africa's conflicts. Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy is clearly reflected in the preponderance of news about African countries in the media. Indeed, previous studies of Nigeria's coverage of foreign news have revealed that the country's foreign policy and socio-cultural links strongly influence foreign news reporting (Ansah, 1979; Nwuneli and Dare, 1979; da Costa, 1980). The role of the Nigerian newspapers has been very significant in reporting conflict situations in Nigeria and beyond. Osisanwo (2016) identifies the linguistic and discourse strategies deployed by selected Nigerian e-newspapers in representing the Boko Haram and other social actors. Chilwa (2010) applied Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) and Corpus Linguistics to analyse certain frequently used lexical items by the Nigerian press to represent the Niger Delta militia groups and their activities. Kalejaiye (2009) examined the role of the press in military coups in Nigeria. It found that the press played a strategic and significant role before, during and after military coups and in the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria. Daramola (2013) states that Nigerian newspapers pay more attention to political and governmental activities than other issues; and that government officials and political stories dominate most stories. It can be deduced that the coverage of political activities in Nigeria and other African countries is central to the focus of the Nigerian media.

In terms of the nature of the Nigerian media reportage of conflicts in Africa, Enwefah (2010) in a study on media ownership and direction of editorials in four selected Nigerian newspapers discovered that Nigerian newspapers act as the conscience of the society by freely expressing their approval and disapproval of government decisions on issues calling governments' attention to the consequence of its actions and making recommendations for solutions. In its role as an agent of information dissemination and a perception manager, Nigerian media's framings and reportage of conflicts can lead to escalation or de-escalation of the conflicts though their coverage can be perceived as a veritable instrument for conflict resolution. According to Olomjobi (2017), a conflict situation is bound to escalate when media frame and disseminate information about conflict issues and the identities of conflicting parties in such a way that entrenches polarization. Despite this grey affirmation, Nigerian media, through reporting and framing of conflicts, shape the public perception, understanding, views, and opinions about conflict situations in Africa.

4. Methodology and Theoretic Orientation

The study analyses linguistic and discourse strategies in the construction of coups in West Africa by Nigerian media. For data, six e-newspapers are purposively selected, namely, *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Leadership*, *Business Day* and *Premium Times* Newspapers. The selection is primarily intended to minimize geo-political bias rather than to make comparisons between the newspapers. Editorials, Opinions, and News Reports which focus on the coups in West Africa are purposively sampled from the e-newspapers between July, 2023 and February, 2024. The study uses CDA as a method to operationalize ideological struggles taking place in the construction of the successive coups between 2021 and 2023. The method was chosen because of its critical aim. This approach has proven to be particularly relevant for the qualitative analysis of print media texts (Fairclough, 1995b; Mautner, 2008; Richardson, 2007). Critical Discourse Analysis (with bias for Fairclough's Socio-Semiotic model) mainly guided the analysis.

Norman Fairclough's socio-semiotic model of CDA, also called Discourse as Social Change, has been deployed for the study. Fairclough's model is most appropriate to this study because it bothers itself with current processes of social change. The model formulated a three-dimensional framework for analysing discourse with the aim to string three separate forms of analysis into one another: analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice (Jombadi, 2019). Significantly, he combines micro, meso and macro level interpretations. At the micro level, analysis entails the text's syntax, metaphoric structure and certain rhetorical devices. The meso level features the text's production and consumption, detailing how power relations are demonstrated. At the macro level, analysis captures intertextual understanding, trying to decipher the broad, societal currents that are affecting the text being analysed. Following this model, ideological representations of coups in West Africa were investigated. In exploring the ways these coups were ideologically constructed, attention was paid to both linguistic resources and discourse strategies, as they were both used to project ideology in the data. Fairclough's first dimension, analysis of language text, guided the linguistic level of analysis, which makes provision for the language organisation of the discourse. His second dimension, analysis of discursive practices, guided the analysis of the discourse strategies, which describes the extra-linguistic resources that do not only aid the production of text, but importantly determine its consumption and the kind of interpretation that readers ascribe to it, and the effect such interpretation has on them. The ideological representations were investigated at the third dimension, analysis of discursive events exemplifying sociocultural practice. This dimension asserts that "ideology and other social enactments such as power play and social identity are properties of the discourse" (Christian-Achinihu, 2021, p.122). Analysis of ideological representations of coups was catered for by this dimension.

5. Analysis and Findings

The representations of the coup phenomenon are characterized in all the newspapers by strong discursive closure, which is crucial to fixing the meanings of the coups. By constructing the situation as injurious to Africa's social, political and economic experience, the coups fit well

into a major factor affecting the region in its quest to measure up to the standard of enviable governance and leadership competence of the first and second world countries. All across the data, the coups are represented as *an anti-democratic development, an offshoot of homegrown tension and leadership failure and an affront to constitutional order, a threat to economic prosperity and a conduit for insecurity*. Several linguistic and discursive strategies are presented that structure such constructions, which serve to help delineate the coup's implications for democracy.

5.1 Coups as anti-democratic development and threat to constitutional order

The dominant construction of the coups is their representation as an anti-democratic development, a phenomenon that is strange to and unsettling of the democratic experimentation in Africa. Through the referential strategy of substitution, *The Punch* constructs the coups as a serious “concern” to “the future of democracy”. This representation suggests that Africa has imbibed democracy as an ideal system of governance and has embraced it as an established political culture. In this vein, a sheer disruption of political process in form of a coup is considered anti-democratic. *Leadership* newspaper maintains that if allowed to persist, the coups portend “ominous signs of a gradual abandonment of democratic ideals”. The construction of these coups as a disturbing political rupture lays the foundation for representing the overthrows as danger to the future of democratic governance and constitutional order in Africa:

Text 1:

The initiative is sequel to the concern over the recent wave of military coups across West Africa that threaten the future of democracy and political stability amidst persistent and growing economic hardship... (The Punch, February 26, 2024)

Text 2:

The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, in condemning the coup, frowned at any effort to seize power by force that would undermine democratic governance, peace and stability in Niger. (Leadership Newspaper, July 8, 2023)

Text 3:

Nigerian government has said that the surge of military coups in the West Africa is fast becoming a threat to the democratic culture in the region. (The Guardian, December 9, 2023)

The intensification of the negative consequences of the coups, not only reveals a rather disturbing view of this development by the newspapers and their assessment of the roles of regional and world bodies like the Economic Community of the West Africa States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations (UN), but is also an important strategy for establishing closure around the meaning of these occurrences. According to *The Punch*, it would seem rather possible that the threat to democracy caused by this rupture through successive coups will have ripple effects all across Africa and beyond politically:

Text 4:

The fact is that ECOWAS isn't the only member of the international community that will bear the consequences of not putting a stop to military incursion into politics in the region. Democracy everywhere will be under siege. (*The Punch*, 25th August, 2023)

Text 5:

He warned against describing the unconstitutional change in government in West Africa as solely a regional problem. (*Vanguard*, 6th December, 2023)

The ideological importance of lexicalising “unconstitutional change of government” as a substitute for ‘coup’ is the need to say that whatever tampers with the democratic structure of the region will affect her constitutional order. Constitutional order is a vivid component of any democratic structure and process. The ability of the coup to affect democratic practice, therefore, impedes on constitutional order hence its representation as unconstitutional change of government. This referential strategy is a blunt description of the development as injurious to democratic sustenance in Africa. According to *The Punch*, therefore, it must be tackled by concerned authorities and bodies in Africa:

Text 6:

Regional Citizens’ Dialogue Programme, an initiative for preventing and responding to unconstitutional changes of government in West Africa, opens in Abuja today. (*The Punch*, 27th February, 2024)

Text 7:

The RCDP is also an attempt by CSOs to support efforts by the African Union and its partners in the implementation of the main outcomes of the AU Accra Declaration on Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa (March 2020) and the Malabo Declaration on Terrorism and Unconstitutional Changes of Governments in Africa, adopted at the 16th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union Head of States on May 22, 2022. (*The Punch*, 26th February, 2024)

Text 8:

The letter stated that the regional programme would complement and support the implementation of the main recommendations from the African Governance Report 2023, which focused on the unconstitutional change of government in Africa, published by the APRM. (*The Punch*, 26th February, 2024)

The above extracts report the efforts made by various regional bodies to address the menace of coups in Africa. The thematisation and foregrounding of “Regional Citizens’ Dialogue Programme” pinpoints the unpopular view and perception of the coups by Civil Society

Organisations, the African Union and other development partners and accentuate their concerted efforts in tackling them. Christian-Achinihu (2021, p.126) punctuates the essence of thematisation as “fronting at the initial or significant position an aspect of the clause that the discourse participants perceive to have semantic implication on the entire discourse”. The thematic prominence accorded the Regional Citizens’ Dialogue Programme by the *The Punch* suggests that the agency is strategically positioned as a major player in “preventing” and “responding” to the incidents. This implies the reality that coup is unpopular, inglorious and unceremonious in Africa. The various strategies deployed to portray it are ideologically important for emphasising the implications of coup, highlighting the socio-political problems surrounding it and encouraging a stern and timely move to discourage and nip it in the bud.

5.2 Coups as offshoot of homegrown tension and leadership failure

The mass media as the fourth estate of the realm is responsible for reporting and analysing incidents anywhere in the world with the compelling onus of holding all strata of societal leadership accountable for good governance and standard deliverables. In reporting the phenomenon of coups under consideration, *BusinessDay*, *Leadership* and *Premium Times* journalistically represent them as offshoot of homegrown tension and leadership failure in Africa:

Text 9:

Security experts say developments in the land-locked country point to the deep fissures in the country and a military that has not fully embraced democracy. (The Punch, 3rd August, 2023).

Text 10:

Military intervention and political unrest are filling the hole created by the failure to prioritise democratic values, combat corruption, care for the young, and promote unity. (BusinessDay, September 4, 2023)

Text 11:

The implementation of the anti people’s policies of the foreign forces has continued to increase the poverty of the entire people of the region. Out of frustration with civilian governments, unemployed youths and victims of human rights abuse usually troop to the streets to celebrate coup plotters. (Leadershp, July 14, 2023)

Text 12:

The rights activists also noted that the immediate and remote cause of unconstitutional change of governments is the manipulation of constitutions and referenda by elected governments to extend the tenure of Presidents. (Leadershp, July 14, 2023)

Text 13:

The plotters insist that the coup was carried out to stem ‘the gradual and inevitable demise’ of the country. (Leadership, July 14, 2023)

Text 14:

Until African leaders hear the cry of their people, military coups will continue to occur and receive the support of citizens desperate for developmentally oriented leaders who consider their aspirations.(Premium Times, October 5, 2023)

The preponderant usages of certain lexical items in *BusinessDay*, *Leadership* and *Premium Times* construct the wave of coups in West Africa as a solemn consequence of leadership deficit. Pervasive failure of leadership in African countries accounts for some homegrown issues that fertilise persistent military overthrows. In text 9, *The Punch* constructs a strong authorial value around the depiction of coup in West Africa as a reaction to growing discontentment among the populace. The thematisation of the phrase “security experts” is a deliberate attempt to append the mark of authorization to the report. van Dijk (1998) submits that people of different ideologies cite different authorities as a strategy to justify actions of ingroups and a tool to negatively represent others (cited in Jombadi, 2019). To validate its claim of a general discontentment among the populace as a breeding ground for coups, therefore, *The Punch* activates “security experts” (being the people who have a broad and deep understanding and competence in the field of security) as source of its affirmation. The pervasive disgruntlement is lexicalized as “deep fissures”, a perennial socio-economic and political gap.

This vast gap between political leaders and the plight of the people increases the conditions conducive to military coups or armed rebellions. This construction by *The Punch* is corroborated by *Business Day*. In text 10, the newspaper lexicalizes the rationales promoting coups in Africa as “the hole” which “military intervention and political unrest” purportedly try to fill. Both newspapers construct the overthrows as being a direct consequence of the failure of government and an express reaction to citizens’ plights. This construction of citizens’ negative perception of their leaders is ideologically important because it accentuates the ironic popularity that trails every successive overthrow while obliterating the rejection that normally should have characterized people’s responses to the coups. In text 11, *Leadership* foregrounds neo-colonial tendencies as a causative factor for coups in the expression “The implementation of the anti-people’s policies of the foreign forces”. The main picture here is one in which the acceptance of the coup by the generality of the people is motivated by their increased poverty triggered by policies that are sponsored by foreign powers. This condition of citizens’ dissatisfaction occasioned by unpopular neo-colonial portrayal in governance activates the people’s ironic responses to coups which is the reason they normally “troop to the streets to celebrate coup plotters”.

In text 12, *Leadership* further constructs the coups as a consequence of leadership quagmire and disrespect for constitutional order. The reporter evokes the voice of the human rights group, “the rights activists” to authenticate the claim that African leaders contribute indirectly immensely to the recurrence of the ugly incidents of coups having failed to play by the tenets of democratic engagement. This is lexicalised through collocations such as

“manipulation of constitutions” and “extend the tenure of Presidents”, both of which have been used to construct the theme of leadership deficit in Africa. The lack of leadership effectiveness, as reported by *Leadership* newspaper, is so gripping and momentous that the coup plotters, in a twist of logic, use it to justify and legitimise their actions leading to the overthrows of democratically elected governments. In text 13, the reporter lexicalises the masterminds of the coups using a word like “plotters”. This presupposes that a coup is a rigorously-orchestrated, painstaking enterprise. He then activates and thematises the plotters and their motivation for instigating the coups blaming it on prevalent socio-political degradations pervasive in African landscape framed as “the gradual and inevitable demise of the country”. The reporter detaches himself from this excuse fronted by the coup plotters by allocating the source of the information directly to them. This fact is illustrated by the verbal process “insist” in “the plotters insist”.

In text 14, *Premium Times* uses the imagery “the cry of their people” to refer to various socio-economic and political malaise bedevelling the African people. The description of the people as being endemically wretched is constructed as an incentive for perpetuating coups and for making it to be popular among the people. The reporter foregrounds the adverbial clause of condition “Until African leaders hear the cry of their people...” to state that coups will remain popular in Africa until African leaders address the huge concerns around their leadership style. This strategy is ideologically significant for emphasising such exigency as upholding the rights of the people as a necessary condition to guarantee sustainable democratic order within the African society.

5.3 Coups as threat to economic prosperity of Africa

Describing events around the coups, reporters make important use of referential strategies that construct the coups as thoughtless endeavours capable of endangering the economic prosperity of the continent. The lexical choices “sanctions”, “these boys”, “worse economic state”, “destabilise the region”, “boys in khaki”, and “a Mount Everest of economic sabotage” are used by *The Punch* as exemplified in texts 14 and 15:

Text 14:

With sanctions imposed already, these boys might leave Niger in a worse economic state than they met it and this could destabilise the region
(The Punch, 25th August, 2023)

Text 15:

So when boys in khaki take over power in West Africa, there’s a need to search behind the needle and you see a Mount Everest of economic sabotage that they commit. (The Punch, 25th August, 2023)

In texts 14 and 15, the *Punch* reporter constructs a coup as an event that attracts a backlash. It is then construed that any mastermind of such an enterprise is not thoughtfully profound, hence, the relegated depiction of the military personnel who fomented the overthrows as “these boys” (in text 14) and “boys in khaki” (in text 15). This representation reveals the journalistic move to berate the perpetrators and weaken any excuse they might give for the coups. This fixation

of the meaning constructed around the coups renders fundamental criticisms of the coups consequential and relevant. Remarkably, the reporter metaphorically depicts the crime of the perpetrators as gargantuan – “you see a Mount of Everest of economic sabotage that they commit”. This discursive strategy is consistent with the construction of the coups as being a threat to the economic interests of the African region.

5.4 Coups as conduits for insecurity in Africa

The *Vanguard* newspaper constructs the coup as an enabler of insecurity. This is lexicalised with the use of expressions like “the gravity of the insecurity to which the military coups contribute”, and “fuelling insecurity”.

Text 16:

To drive home the gravity of the insecurity to which military coups contribute from January 1 – October 23, 2023, the President said, “In just Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, a total of 4.8 million people face food insecurity, 2.4 million people are internally displaced, and close to 9,000 schools remain closed. (Vanguard, 6th December, 2023)

Text 17:

The Economic Community of West African States said the military coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are fuelling insecurity in the region. (Vanguard, 6th December, 2023)

The reporter in texts 16 and 17 references the military as the sole culprit of the coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger by means of which the security situation in Africa has been exacerbated. Different discourse strategies are deployed to construct the phenomenon as being inimical to the peace and security of the region. In both samples culled from the newspaper, the reporter detaches himself from taking responsibility for the report by managing the voice of the leadership of the ECOWAS Commission, using the strategy to authenticate the construction of coups as catalyst for worsened security situation in the region. In text 16, a discursive sanction is placed upon the military for fomenting the coups. This is achieved through collocation in the expression “military coups”. The reporter then proceeds to reel out statistical information to substantiate the claim of wanton insecurity occasioned by the coups. The source of the information is credited to the head of ECOWAS Commission, Omar Touray. The importance of this discursive strategy is in two folds. First, it distances the claims from mere speculation. Second, it authenticates claims about the alarming figure: “4.8 million people face food insecurity; 2.4 million people are internally displaced; and close to 9,000 schools remain closed”. The mentioning of the figures, no doubt, as foregrounded in text 16, emotionally appeals to the public. The *Vanguard* reporter foregrounds the figures of those affected by the coups and allocates the source of information to the leadership of ECOWAS Commission in order to vividly construct the coups as stimulus for deepening security challenges in Africa.

6. Conclusion

The paper has analysed the Nigerian media representations of the coups in West Africa and its implication for democracy and civic engagements. Six Nigerian newspapers, *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Leadership*, *Business Day*, *Vanguard* and *Premium Times* take a variegated posture to negatively represent the phenomenon. They pervasively set the agenda on the negative perception of the coups using different discourse and linguistic strategies. In the newspapers' representations of the coups, four representational strategies were discovered and the implications of those constructions on Africa's democratic experience and civic engagements were unraveled in the study. The coups were constructed as *an anti-democratic development and threat to constitutional order*, *an offshoot of homegrown tension and leadership failure*, *a threat to economic prosperity of Africa* and *a conduit for insecurity in Africa*. The representational strategies were developed by the newspapers with about seven linguistic strategies and seven discourse strategies. Some of the linguistic strategies include substitution, thematisation and foregrounding, irony, collocation, imagery, metaphor and direct quotation. The deployment of these strategies was a manifestation of the newspapers' alignment with different strands of ideological divides. For instance, substitution reinforced various patterns of the constructions of the coups; the use of direct quotation validated and justified the representations of the coups by the newspapers; the adoption of imagery was useful to control perceptions of the public; negative collocation intensified the negative consequences of the coups; the use of irony reported the coup as being popular among the people; and thematisation described the concerted efforts of regional bodies in tackling the development.

The representations of the coups were also reinforced using some discourse strategies. Some of the strategies include claiming validation through authorisation (supporting claims with relevant voices), blaming, indicting and berating coup masterminds, affirming positions, controlling audience perceptions, sanctioning coup plotters, appealing to emotions of the public, and enumerating the victims. These various strategies were ideologically important for emphasising the causes and implications of coups in West Africa, highlighting the socio-political problems surrounding them and encouraging a stern and timely move to discourage and nip them in the bud. In all, the discursive construction of successive coups in West Africa illustrates the significance of ideology in the construction of events in the media discourse in Nigeria.

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