

Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies 8: 1
June 2016, 54-72

Graphological Foregrounding in Contemporary Yorùbá Newspapers

Olutọla Oşunnuga
University of London

Abstract

Yorùbá newspapers writers are language artists of a kind because of the way and manner they exploit the paralinguistic resources of the language. The malleability of the language exploitation is achieved through the symbiotic relationship between the language structure and language function. Employing the theory of foregrounding as analytical template, this study discusses graphological patterning of Yorùbá newspapers writers, as communicative tools. The study contends that the graphological techniques have pragmatic forces which are stylistically contrived by the writers to capture readers' attention and interest with a view to entertaining and informing them. The paper concludes that the techniques are products of intention.

Keywords: Graphology; Yorùbá Newspapers; Stylistics; Foregrounding.

Olutọla Oşunnuga, PhD.
Language Centre
SOAS, University of London, UK.
Phone: +44 744 047 7442; E-mail: to16@soas.ac.uk or tolaosunnuga@yahoo.co.uk

1. Introduction

Among the objectives of Yorùbá newspapers writers is to present a mass audience of different educational levels and interests with news items in simple, easy-to-understand, language. Largely due to the competition among the newspapers to attract readers, several headlines are splashed on the front page. This pressure, coupled with limitation of space on the front page, compels writers to compress their information while still making it clear, interesting and sustaining. The lack of space and the need to be compact, clear and sustaining require that the graphological design of headlines, paragraphs and sentences follow a peculiar arrangement to achieve directness and vividness of language. More so, the writers are much aware that readers focus on the headlines on a page and the few minutes' attention might ignite readers' interest to look at the first paragraph. If the first paragraph interests the readers, they go on to read the entire news story. To achieve the goals of entertainment and information dissemination, the Yorùbá newspaper writers take advantage of the elasticity and resources of the Yorùbá language.

This study employs the stratification method in the selection of the ten Yorùbá newspapers used. The newspapers are *Akéde Àgbáyé*, *Akéde Odùduwà*, *Alálàyé*, *Aláriyá Oòduà* and *Aláròyé*. Others include *Alóre*, *Àjorò*, *Ìròyìn Yorùbá*, *K'áyémò* and *Magasiini Àjorò*. Precisely, the following elicitation steps were taken: the researcher collected and sorted the Yorùbá newspapers that have circulation range between 2,000 and 20,000, and were on newsstands in at least two major cities of Nigeria's six South-Western states, namely Èkìtì, Lagos, Ògún, Òndó, Òṣun and Òyó. After the collection of the newspapers, the researcher read every section of the newspapers namely the news items, features, columns, editorials and advertisements. Thereafter, the data were sifted, and those that focus on the

study's objectives were compiled. The data utilised in this study are from the whole gamut of the selected ten Yorùbá newspapers. That is, they were taken from the editorial, news reports, features, correspondences, sports and advertisements. Having got enough data, the researcher applied the principles of the theory of foregrounding to investigate graphological features in every section of the newspaper and their effects on the message and the readers. In a simple fashion, with copious examples, the graphological features of Yorùbá newspapers are isolated and discussed. The thoroughness of the analysis results in most of the positions and claims made in this paper. Though the newspapers are written in Yoruba, the excerpts were translated into English. It is worth to mention that the data are reproduced in this work as they appeared in the newspapers; that is, there are no modifications whatsoever to the language and style of the newspapers. As important as autosegmental features are in Yoruba, being a tonal language, this paper does not attempt to reflect them where they are not reflected in the data. However, the translations are written to conform to English orthography. For example, the translations of the headlines in flush left, centred form, inverted pyramid and over line kickers are written in straight lines.

2. The Yorùbá Newspapers

There is no argument against the fact of *lwe ìròyìn fún Àwọn ará Ègbá àti Yorùbá* being the first newspaper in Nigeria. According to Adebajo (1991), the *lwe ìròyìn fún Àwọn ará Ègbá àti Yorùbá* set the objective clearly when its founder and editor, Henry Townsend writes:

I have set on foot, a Yorùbá Newspaper. My first number is out. I am writing the second. My object is to get the people to read; i.e. to

beget the habit of seeking for information by reading. (p. 34)

Without ambiguity, Henry Townsend made clear what he wanted to achieve. He wanted to instil the habit of reading and seeking information in the Yorùbá people. This effort came at a time when a large number of Yorùbá people had not cultivated the practices of reading and writing; when British colonialists foisted their language and culture on the people against their collective wish. From the first experience in 1859, Yorùbá newspapers have grown and are now becoming stable because fifty-eight Yorùbá newspapers have been published between 1859 and 2015 (Osunnuga 2015, p. 90). It is worthy to note the concentration in 1999 and 2000 when 10 and 8 newspapers were established respectively. The reason why 18 newspapers were established within two years was the need to disseminate information to the teeming Yorùbá people who could not read the English newspapers. Those two years (1999 and 2000) were remarkable in the history of Nigeria because the nascent democratic government was firming up at the time.

3. Foregrounding and Graphology

The concept of foregrounding has its roots in Russian Formalism. According to the scholars of Russian Formalism at the beginning of the 20th century, the target of literary studies is "literariness" which lies in the special use of language within a literary work. Lisheng (2006) claims that "Defamiliarization or making strange is the device by which literary language differs from everyday language" (p. 23). Shklovsky (1965), a major speaker of the Russian Formalism holds the view that in daily life we are so accustomed to things around us that we cannot feel or even would not pay attention to their unique quality. Therefore, our feeling towards these things, including language,

becomes automatic. The purpose of art and literature is then to make people realise the world in a fresh way, to defamiliarise the familiar, and by defamiliarising a work of art or a text we make it stand out from the norm – it becomes foregrounded. Shklovsky (1965) posits that:

Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged (p. 20).

"Defamiliarization" and "deautomatization" as put forward by Shklovsky (1965) were widely hailed by formalists at that time, and the focus of literary studies at that period was mainly on form rather than content. One of the drawbacks of Russian Formalists' analysis is that they focus on the formal literary devices in isolation. Despite the shortcomings, Shklovsky's "defamiliarization" theory lies at the root of the theory of foregrounding. Meanwhile, in light of the weak points of "defamiliarization" theory, critics then started to study the interrelationships among various elements of literature, and the trend towards structuralism came into the fore.

The theory of foregrounding concentrates on the disruption of everyday communication and enables literary and non-literary texts to present new understanding and meanings wrapped in complexity and sometimes in an intricacy, which

does not occur in ordinary language. Consequently, foregrounding is a theory of language, which consists of analytical tools that are employed to evaluate texts and show their linguistic, literary, historical and cultural significance based on breaking rules and norms of language by implementing devices of deviation and parallelism with a view to yielding aesthetics. Furthermore, foregrounding refers to any attention-catching device in a text, which makes parts of the text to stand out within a specific context. In other words, foregrounding is the aesthetically intentional distortion of the linguistic components of a text. Therefore, the normal language patterning is the background while any deviation from the normal language patterning is the foreground because such deviation brings the message to the forecourt of the reader's attention (Yankson 1987:3). On the other hand, graphology relates to either graphical or orthographical features of a text. Such features include paragraphing, italicization, punctuation, arrangement of headlines and sub-titles, etc. These elements relate exclusively to the visual dimension of language use. These elements are manipulated by the writers to capture specific graphic senses in the text which ultimately guide the reader's sense of comprehension and interpretation.

3.1. Graphology as Technique

Graphological technique is an element of foregrounding which relates to deliberate selection of linguistic elements that are made to stand out. Apart from striking lexical items, the elements foregrounded carry semantic implication. When we pick any Yorùbá newspaper and look at its front page, we are attracted by the masthead or nameplate presented in Gothic style, a heavy-face type of printing with thick, pointed letters with variation in size and shape. Often, there are many headlines on the front page with an average of eight. The

headlines also have a variety of sizes and shapes. They appear in different colours. Photos are generously used on the front page. All these are used to catch the reader's eye and rivet his attention on what is most important and yet most attractive and easy to read. Through measurement, it is discovered that some headlines are printed in 16.5 mm high, heavy, and in lower case roman letters. Some headlines are short while some are long covering either one or two to three lines which is called as 'flush left' or a head that flush to the left margin without considering the margin on the right. For example:

- (1) Funke Akindele
Wọ wahala
Lori fiimu 'Ipadabọ Jẹnifa'
(*Aláriyá Oòduà*, 2012, March 12, p. 1)

Funke Akindele in trouble because of the
film titled 'Jenifer's Return'.

The above headline exemplifies a Yorùbá culture of reading and writing because we learn to read from left to right and from top to bottom of the page, an art which the Yorùbá acquired from the Western education imposed on them by the British imperialists. Yorùbá newspaper writers are aware of this and places important news story at the top left hand corner of the newspapers.

A headline could also be in drop form; that is, a headline occupying several lines with the end lines indented, each further inwards from left margin as could be seen in the next headlined written in lower case:

- (2) L'Eko Kansẹlo
tọwọbọ awọn

onidanfo lenu

(*Alálàyé*, 2004, November 17, p. 1)

In Lagos, councillor irks commercial bus drivers

Some headlines are in inverted pyramid form. This happens when a headline occupies several lines in which the top line is the longest, and the other lines are shortened in proper order so that it looks similar to an inverted pyramid. The inverted pyramid can be traced to the American civil war. Due to the fear that telegraph might break down before their transmission is complete, correspondents put the most important information in the first paragraph. Thereafter, they present the supporting facts in a descending order based on the value of the news. Examples of an inverted pyramid headline include:

- (3) Jonathan bura lati fi awon to
pa awon oyinbo akosemoşe
ni Sokoto jofin

(*K'áyémò*, 2012, March 3, p. 1)

Jonathan vows to prosecute those who killed
expatriates in Sokoto.

- (4) Gomina Alao-Akala şe ikilo
fun awon alaga ijoba
ibile titun

(*Alóre*, 2007, December, p. 12)

Governor Alao-Akala warns new
Council chairmen.

A Yorùbá newspaper headline could also be in a centre form; that is, a headline occupying several lines that are placed in the middle of respective lines as in the following examples:

- (5) Ọlọpaa mu Şegun
 Adisa atawon
 omooşe Gbenga Adeboye
 (*Akéde Àgbáyé*, 2004, November 18, p. 4)

Police arrest Segun Adisa and Gbenga Adeboye's staff

- (6) Asasi
 mú
 PDP
 (*Ìròyìn Yorùbá*, 2004, December 21-2, p. 1)
PDP is jinxed.

Another type of headline often used by Yorùbá newspaper writers is the over-line or kicker. Over-line or kicker is usually a short phrase set above the headline. In most cases, it is set in a smaller type. Yorùbá newspaper writers use this style to form a visual signpost that helps readers assess a story or report before committing to reading the whole piece. Beyond the assessment function, writers use kicker to afford the readers a small hint as to what he/she is to expect in the report. It is usually only a word or phrase in length. Examples are:

- (7) Ijoba apapo
 nlu aago lori ile Jerry Useni
 (*Àjorò*, 2000, April 17-23, p. 6)
 Federal government auction Jerry Useni's house.

- (8) Alaga Kansu
ati igbakeji re fiya peeta
(*Alálàyé*, 2001, October 17, p. 7)
Council boss and his Vice in a brawl

From examples (7 & 8), the kickers are the noun phrases *Ìjòba àpapò* and *Alága Kánsù*. These are called simple noun phrases that do not require huge mental processing from the readers to visually comprehend what the story could centre on. The use of kickers in headlines aids quick processing of information. However, the writers did not stop at using the two-word noun phrases as the kicker; they went ahead to provide riders. Example (8) is more apt in that *Kánsù* is a modifier, giving more information about what sort of Chairperson the headline refers to. The essence of the riders is to clear any sort of ambiguity because a reader who does not understand the subject matter might not fully understand the noun phrase alone.

Sometimes, subhead, a usually smaller head under the main head is used. The subhead uses more words but still relates to the caption. Examples include:

- (9) Wahala Amerika
Ija bere ni Larubawa
(*Aláròyé*, 2001, October 9, p. 1)
America's crisis, fights erupt in Middle East.
- (10) Ija repete ni soosi
Joshua ati Okotie koju ija sira won
(*Akéde Àgbáyé*, 2001, November 8, p. 1)
Intrigues in Church
Joshua and Okotie fight each other.
- (11) Ogun amokole

gbe Oşere tiata de Osibitu
Use of Viagra lands theatre practitioner in hospital.
(*Ìròyìn Yorùbá*, 2004, December 21-27, p. 1)

The subhead gives more information about the article and does not just repeat what the headline says. Together with the headline, the subheads in (9-11) answer question such as why; thus bridging a gap and reducing the chances of misconstruing the headlines. The Yorùbá newspaper writers sometimes use jump head, which is a headline that is continued on other pages such as:

- (12) Ominra Naijiria Àti (p.12)
Awon Agba Ti Ko Şee Gbagbe (p.13)
(*Magasîni Àjorò*, 1999, October 4-31, pp. 12-13)
Nigeria's independence and
The unforgettable heroes

This technique is deliberate and purposely used to compel the readers to read the story to the end. It is used when news reports are lengthy.

The varieties of techniques adopted by Yorùbá newspaper writers to cast headlines are primarily meant for eye-catching and easier-to-read effect. Using variety of headlines with different colours entices the readers and presents them with choices of stories and reports from which to choose.

Another graphological feature which Yorùbá newspaper writers use for eye-catching and easier to read effect is the way in which a news story is spilt into smaller units. This involves the use of subheadings, very short paragraphs (sometimes one-sentence paragraphs of a few lines each). In a news story titled:

(13a) BIQDUN iyawo DURO LADIPO
tu aşiri ti ẹnikan ko gbọ ri
'o ni bi DURO LADIPO şe di olokiki kaakiri agbaye, işe
ọwọ mi ni'

(*Aláriyá Oòduà*, 2012, March 5, p. 10)

Duro Ladipo's wife, Biodun
reveals how she made Duro Ladipo famous.

The news story consists of four subheadings and twenty-four paragraphs. The subheadings are:

Bi mo şe bẹrẹ (How I started)

Işe to wu mi lati şe (The career I wanted)

Bí mo şe mọ Duro Ladipo (How I met Duro Ladipo)

Ohun to mu mi gba lati fẹ Duro Ladipo (Why I agreed to marry
Duro Ladipo)

The news story about Duro Ladipo consists of twenty-four paragraphs, and they vary in length as shown in Table I.

Table I

No. of Paragraphs	No. of sentences
1	4
1	5
1	7
2	1
3	3
16	2
Total	24
	59

Table I shows how the entire story is divided into paragraphs and how many sentences are contained in each of the paragraphs. Splitting news story into smaller units under several subheadings is used when the news story is quite long and there is possibility of the reader getting bored. To avoid boredom and lack of interest, the writer devices a technique of splitting to guide and direct the reader to specific information that will sustain the reader's interest. In such a situation, the reader might chose to skip and quickly jump to any subheading that strikes him the most or he is anxious to read. In the above example (13a), and several others that we examined, it is discovered that when a whole paragraph is made up of a sentence, the writer wants reader to pay more than usual attention to the paragraph because it contains information central to the news story. From (13a), the 13th paragraph goes thus:

- (13b) Loooto, ki i ṣe pe emi gan-an nifeṣ si ohun to jọ mọ ere naa, tabi mo fẹ mu un bi iṣe, sugbon ife temi kan ni si orin ni mo ṣe maa nlọ sibẹ, ki n si tun lọ woran wọn.
Truly, it wasn't as if I had interest in theatre or I wanted to make it a career but the love I had for music prompted me to watch the plays.

(Aláriyá Oòduà, 2012, March 5, p. 10)

The one-sentence paragraph contains the key information that the entire story revolves around because the news story discusses how and why Olóyè Bíódún Ládiípò, the wife of late Dúró Ládiípò, took to acting at a time when everyone wanted a white-collar job in Nigeria. This tactic/technique of splitting is generously used in all segments of Yorùbá newspapers and it

aids easy reading, comprehension and 'fast-forwarding' reading to any part of the story as desired by the reader.

Furthermore, it is observed that there is characteristic use of punctuation in Yorùbá newspapers. Inverted commas are frequently used for direct or indirect quotation as exemplified in the next excerpt taken from a news story about inefficiency and arbitrary charges of the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) which incurred people's wrath to the extent of consumers placing curses on the staff of NEPA. The writer assumes that these curses have impact on the performance and service delivery of the organisation. Thus, we read:

- (14a) Loooto, nigba ti eeyan ba n şe aisan ti a ko şadura fun, ti o je epe ni tomode-tagba n şe le aisan naa, ona ti yoo fi san da? idi ree o ti mo fi so pe 'nigba ti epe ba ti papoju, alaisan ko ni san'. Beę bi alaisan ko ba san, ki lo maa gbeyin?.

(*Ajorò*, 2005, February 14-20, p. 3)

Honestly, if someone is sick and we keep placing curse on him instead of praying for his recovery, how will he get well? That is why I said 'where a sick person is always cursed he would not recover. And if he does not recover what will eventually happen to him?'

The use of inverted comma as in the above example is employed to spotlight the clause '*nigba ti epe ba ti papoju, alaisan ko ni san*' for particular attention of the reader. The writer wants the reader to know that, beyond a typical organization's technical hindrances, NEPA has actually not been performing to

expectation because of frequent curses people placed on the organization. The writer infers and wants his readers to share same thought because both the writer and the reader share same Yorùbá worldview on curses and their potency. The Yorùbá believe that when curses are placed on an individual or organisation, they have negative effects and make the targeted individuals miserable. The writer then implores the public to desist from cursing NEPA and spotlights what needs to be done by using inverted comma as in:

(14b) Ṣugbọn ẹbẹ ti mo fẹ bẹ ẹyin eeyan ni pe, 'ẹ ma ṣepe fun NEPA mọ lati oni lọ, adura ni ki ẹ jẹ ki a maa gba fun wọ́n'. Bi a ba n gbadura fun NEPA daju-daju aisan ara wọ́n a kuro ... mo bẹ yin lorukọ Olodumare Ọba alaaanu, ẹ ma ṣepe fun NEPA mọ adura lo yẹ ki a maa gba fun wọ́n.

(*Ajorò*, 2005, February 14-20, p. 3)

But I plead with you 'not to curse NEPA again as from today, let's pray for them'. If we keep praying for NEPA, certainly their sickness will heal up... I plead with you in the name of merciful God to stop cursing NEPA instead we should be praying for them

Again, to buttress and reinforce his message, the writer forms an acrostic with the acronym NEPA. Acrostic is series of line where first letters in each line form a word or name when read in sequence. It is a popular form of entertainment that serves as a memory enhancing device as well as a type of verbal play as shown in (14c).

- (14c) Nigba ti
Epe ba ti
Papọju
Alaisan ko ni san
(*Ajorò*, 2005, February 14-20, p. 3)

The technique is contrived in the above example to forcefully drive a message into the memory of the readers in order to stem the tide of cursing NEPA. In (14a-c), the writer uses two different techniques – inverted comma and acrostic to intensify his intention. Thus, the writer foregrounds the elements of the text that he wants readers to focus on because those elements are central to understanding the text. The expressions in inverted comma in (14a and 14b) are the motivated prominence because they are related to the subject matter or the theme of a text. This harmonises with Halliday (1973) who asserts that a feature that is brought into prominence will be "foregrounded" only if it relates to the meaning of the text as a whole.

Sometimes, the writers highlight the major character of a report and motivate the character into prominence by emboldening some constituents in a text. For example:

- (15) O yẹ ki ẹ ti gbọ kẹ, ani wọn ni o rẹ **Aare**
ologun ana, iyẹn
Ibrahim Babangida, wa ninu aisan bayii
wọn ti gbe ọkunrin ẹlẹrin eye ọhun lọ si
ọsibitu kan ni orilẹ ede Germany nibi ti o lọ
gba itọju...
(*Akéde Odùduwà*, 2011, November
20, p. 12)

You should have heard that former Military President, that is, the ever-smiling Ibrahim

Babangida is sick and has been taken to a hospital in Germany to receive treatment.

The highlighted words are deliberately motivated into prominence and used as attention-getters. The writer shifts the attention of the reader to a few words in the body of the paragraph by employing extra bold prints to highlight the unconventional title **Ààrẹ** which Ibrahim Babangida adopted for himself against the traditional title Head of State that most military rulers use when they seize power through coups. It is interesting to note the creativity of the graphological device used here. While the writer does not want to support the title (which he does by inserting **ológun**), he still highlights it and the names such that if they are brought together, it will read '**Ààrẹ Ibrahim Babangida**'. The foregrounding of the title and names is unique and semantically significant because the reader will naturally pay attention to the words inserted between **Ààrẹ** and **Ibrahim Babangida**. In the process of paying attention to the words, the reader will begin to impute meaning into the sentence and will eventually come to conclusion that the title **Ààrẹ** (president) is a mismatch within the context of a military regime.

4. Conclusion

This study has attempted a lucid stylistic analysis of a few graphemic resources contrived by Yorùbá newspapers writers in their attempt to achieve aesthetics and information dissemination. It copiously demonstrated that graphological techniques play essential role in communicating the message of a particular text because such techniques allow the writers to bring into prominence parts of a text that are crucially important to its overall meaning. The study also highlighted the fact that meanings that are generated by the readers through the graphological patterning of Yorùbá newspapers are easier to

comprehend and more memorable. Beside these, the study demonstrated the usefulness of foregrounding theory to stylistic analysis of Youbá newspapers.

References

- Adébàjò, O. 1991. Àgbéyèwò Iṣẹ̀ Àwọn Aṣiwájú Ònkòwé Yorùbá láti Odún 1848 sí Odún 1938. PhD Thesis, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
- Daramola, A. 2012. 'A Stylistic Study of Metaphors in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart'. Makokha, J., O. Obiero, and R. West Pavlov (eds.) *Style in African Literature: Essay on Literary Stylistics and Narrative Style* 163-188. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi.
- Dare, S. 1997. *English for the Mass Media*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.
- Halliday, M. 1973. *Exploration in the Functions of Language*. London: Arnold.
- Haghshenas, A. M. 1995. 'Poetry, Verse, Prose: Three Literary Types'. Emadi, A. (ed.) *Proceedings of 2nd Conference on Linguistics*. Tehran: Allameh Tabataba'i University.
- Harker, W. 1996. 'Toward a Defensible Psychology of Literary Interpretation'. Kreuz, R. and S. MacNealy, (eds.) *Empirical Approaches to Literature and Aesthetics*, 645-658. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Kalyva, E. 2014. 'Conceptual Art and Language: Introducing a Logico-semantic Analysis'. *Social Semantics*, 24, 3, 283-301.
- Osunnuga, O. 2015. Stylistic Techniques in Selected Contemporary Yoruba Newspapers (1999-2012). Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria.
- Peer, W. 1986. *Stylistics and Psychology: Investigations of*

- Foregrounding*. London: Croom Helm.
- _____. 2007. Introduction to Foregrounding: a State of the Art. *Languages and Literature* 16, 2, 99-104.
- Yankson, K. 1987. *An Introduction to Literary Stylistics*. California: Pacific Publishers.
- Reah, D. 2002. *The Language of Newspapers*. London: Routledge.
- Richardson, J. 2007. *Analysing Newspapers: an Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*. New York: Plamgrave Macmillan.