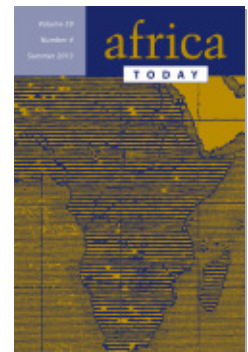PROJECT MUSE®

Twittering the Boko Haram Uprising in Nigeria: Investigating Pragmatic Acts in the Social Media

Innocent Chiluwa, Adetunji Adegoke

→ For additional information about this article

Citizens' reactions to the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria through the social media are widespread, as they apply pragmatic acts to express varied feelings and opinions, mostly condemning the activities of the terrorist sect, some demanding a total breakup of Nigeria.

Twittering the Boko Haram Uprising in Nigeria: Investigating Pragmatic Acts in the Social Media

Innocent Chiluwa and Adetunji Adegoke

This paper investigates pragmatic acts in the discourse of tweeters and online feedback comments on the activities of Boko Haram, a terrorist group in Nigeria. The tweets and comments illustrate acts used to express revolutionary feelings and reflect what people say and imply in times of crisis. Tweets about Boko Haram are speech and pragmatic acts that denounce the Nigerian government, reject Western education, and call for support. Tweets and reactions from non-Muslims and nonradical Muslims condemn terrorism and denounce the terrorist group. While some tweets simply offer suggestions on how to curtail the Boko Haram insurgency, others seek the breakup of Nigeria, granting political and religious independence to the north and the southeast of the country.

Several bomb attacks attributed to a radical Islamist sect known as Boko Haram appear to have held Nigeria for ransom in the last few years. Founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf, a Muslim cleric, in Maiduguri in northeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram has carried out a series of attacks on churches, the police, and public facilities in northern Nigeria. In June 2009, this group, also known as the Nigerian Taliban, carried out an armed uprising, which, according to its own statements, was an effort to rid the country of corruption and Islamize the northern states. This action was resisted by the Nigerian military, resulting in the death of more than seven hundred people, mostly members of the sect. During the uprising, Yusuf and other members, including Yusuf's father-in-law, were killed in police custody. For the group, this has meant a greater reason to pursue its objectives. Subsequently, the sect splintered into several groups and orientations and began a bombing offensive against Nigeria (Adesoji 2010; IRIN Africa 2011). Boko Haram—a name that in Hausa stands for "Western education is forbidden"—is actually a nickname for a group known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, meaning "people committed to the propagation of the prophet's teachings and jihad." Like the Taliban, its targets have been Christians, the police, and state officials; it is said to oppose the political elite of the country

and Muslim governors in northern Nigeria who are accused of compromising Islamic teachings. Adherents wear long beards and red or black headscarves and congregate in mosques in Maiduguri, Kano, and Sokoto states (*The Telegraph* 2011).

Boko Haram has built on preceding religious crises in northern Nigeria. A glaring example was the Maitatsine riots of 1980 in Kaduna, 1984 in Yola, and 1985 in Bauchi. These were the first attempts by an Islamic group to impose a religious ideology on the secular Nigerian state. Similar sectarian crises and riots followed at irregular intervals. The reasons given for these crises are to curtail the excesses of opposing groups or prevent them from being security threats; these were the causes of the Maitatsine uprisings (Adesoji 2010). Other reasons are conversion drives by one religious group and resistance by another. This, for example, was the case with the Kano riot of 1991, when Muslims complained of preferential treatment in the approval of a religious crusade for Christians and the use of Kano Race Course, which had not been approved for a similar event to be held by Muslims (Adesoji 2010:97; Albert 1999).

Boko Haram appears to take after Maitatsine in philosophy, objectives, organizational structure, and armed resistance, whose aims have been viewed as the cumulative consequences of insecurity, poverty, deprivation, and income inequalities (Adesoji 2010). Other reasons are closely linked with Islam and local disasters, including drought, the rinderpest (cattle plague) pandemic, and the impact of the success of the 1979 revolution in Iran (Adesoji 2010; Stock 2004). Boko Haram insists on a strict adoption of Islamic law (Sharia) in all parts of the country, particularly the north, where its activities have been most profound. It rejects everything Western, including education and a social lifestyle, and has carried out attacks on beer halls and pubs. According to Al Jazeera, one of its attacks—on a beer hall in Maiduguri in June 2011—left twenty-five people dead and fifteen others injured. There have been widespread speculations that Boko Haram has links to international terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and that it has the potential to link with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which operates in other African regions, such as Somalia. The group is said to have split into three factions operating in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger and to have links to terrorist groups in North Africa (Onuah and Eboh 2011). It has expanded its operations and influence beyond its initial ethnic and geographical base because some Nigerian militants have been engaged by Ancar Dine—an armed Islamist group in northeast Mail, called defenders of the faith—to teach members of Timbuktu's population the Salafi practice of Islam (Tanchum 2012). After the declaration of independence of Northern Mali in April 2012, Boko Haram was said to have joined forces with the Tuaregs. Reports in the media (for example, antiwarnews.com) suggest that the Nigerian Mujahedeen have joined forces with their Malian counterparts under the Tuaregs' control of the city of Gao (Ditz 2012). Boko Haram has been said to constitute the majority of a militant group that attacked the Algerian consulate in Gao, in which seven Algerian diplomats were kidnapped (*The Punch* 2012).

Most of the attacks carried out in Nigeria in 2011 and early 2012 by Boko Haram targeted Maiduguri in Borno state, Damaturu in Yobe state, and Jos in Plateau state. In 2011 alone, the sect was responsible for more than four hundred ninety killings (allafrica.com 2010). In the north before and after the general elections of April 2011, bombings that left many people dead were blamed on this extremist movement. On 16 June, the group claimed responsibility for bombing the police headquarters in Abuja. The attack was said to be the first suicide bombing in Nigeria's history. Ten days later, the sect carried out a bomb attack on a beer garden in Maiduguri. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, witnesses reported that militants on motorcycles had thrown explosives into the drinking spot, targeting people relaxing there. The next day, another bombing in Maiduguri attributed to the group killed at least two girls and wounded three customs officials. Similar bombings at beer gardens, banks, hotels, and police stations became frequent occurrences in Northern Nigeria throughout 2011, leaving many people dead and others injured. A Boko Haram spokesman told *The Daily Trust* that it had been responsible for the attacks and promised more. Additional attacks included the bombing of the UN headquarters at Abuja on 26 August, leaving at least twenty-three people dead and about one hundred sixteen wounded.

Also of note were attacks on Christian churches. On 10 July 2011, the All Christian Fellowship Church in Suleja, Niger state, was bombed, killing many worshippers. Attacks in Jos killed thirty-two Christians and injured seventy-four. The St. Theresa Roman Catholic Church in Madalla, a town in Niger state, was bombed on 25 December 2011, killing at least thirty-nine worshippers after the morning mass. These killings stood alongside shootings of Christian worshippers, journalists, students, and politicians. The Madalla terrorist attack attracted widespread condemnations, locally and internationally.

This paper examines the reactions of people who twittered and commented on these events in Nigeria, especially Nigerians, including tweets by self-acclaimed sect members who twittered on the Boko Haram Twitter profile page. The main questions this paper addresses are what pragmatic strategies or acts are applied by tweeters and those who comment on media reports about the bombings and how knowledge of these strategies enhances our understanding of the functions of pragmatic acts in specific sociocultural settings, especially during crises.

Twitter and Twittering

Twitter is a type of microblogging that has been popular since 2006 and became the most rapidly growing Internet brand in 2010, with about fifty million tweets a day being posted during the first half of the year (Crystal 2011). Members may send and receive posts or tweets of up to one hundred forty characters. Often referred to as the SMS of the Internet, tweets are displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's followers

and may be read by anyone. As an Internet-based microblogging tool, Twitter enables users to comment on and share brief messages about social situations, report and respond to ongoing events, contribute to discussions, and share their interests and activities among friends and followers. People find Twitter easy to use because of the brevity of its messages and its multiplatform input method; since its emergence, twittering has served for conversational exchanges, collaboration among users with common interests and goals, coordination of events, and the dissemination of news and information (Ifukor 2010:401).

Scholarly studies have established the uses, linguistic contents, styles, and technology of twittering as one of the fastest-growing members of the new social media. Zanzotto, Pennacchiotti, and Tsioutsiouliklis (2011), for instance, investigate linguistic redundancy in Twitter and present four key results: the definition of the problem of redundancy detection in microblogs within the framework of textual-entailment theory; the provision of quantitative evidence of the pervasiveness of redundancy in Twitter; the presentation of a set of simple and effective machine-learning models for solving the task of redundancy detection; and the provision of promising experimental results that show that these models outperform baseline approaches. Similarly, Honeycutt and Herring (2009) emphasize the conversationality of Twitter as it supports user-to-user exchanges and as a tool for collaboration: the symbol @ followed by a user name identifies the history of a semantic thread, signaling a reaction to a tweet on the user's page; the syntax of @user directs conversations to other tweeters and addresses messages to them.

Subasic and Berendt (2011) investigate the role of social media in news reporting and conclude that social media do not necessarily create news, but extend news through comments. Thus, social media encourage citizen journalism. A citizen journalist is a person who reports or comments but is not paid for his or her work. Hermida (2010), however, argues that Twitter makes data available to parajournalists and can be situated within the trend in citizen journalism and as a system of communication with its own media logic, shapes, and structures. New forms of journalism are being created by the characteristic features of microblogging, emphasizing one of the influences of the Internet on journalism practices and changing the definition of journalism. Twitter is viewed as an awareness system like other forms of computer-mediated communication systems, intended to help people construct and maintain awareness of each other's activity, context, or status, even when they are not at the same location (Hermida 2010). Therefore, microblogging can be discussed in the context of citizen journalism, where individuals perform functions of professional journalists, which often include providing first accounts, images, or videos of an event (Ingram 2008). Twitter is suitable for five categories of real-time information: news, prenews, rumors, the formation of social media and subject-based networks, and molecular searching using granular data-mining tools (Leinweber 2009:204).

Twitter has been used to champion and mobilize offline social and political protests around the world, especially in the Arab Moslem world.

The Egyptian revolution, for example, has been described as a Twitter revolution because of the function Twitter served in it: primarily as an alternative press, "a place for emancipating bursts of self-expression" (Idle and Nunn 2011:139). Many tweeters saw themselves as citizen journalists, but professional journalists used Twitter to transmit news and pictures. Like other activists and protesters in the North African and Arab world's uprisings, planning discussions happened, and activists talked to each other, mobilized protesters, and announced new initiatives on Twitter; these activities boosted their collective morale with reports of other developments around the country. Hence, the evolution of the social media has marked the beginning of sociopolitical revolutions (Shirky 2009).

In Nigeria, political associations and social and civil-rights groups have utilized the Internet and networking sites as media for political participation (Chiluwa 2011b, 2012a). Ifukor (2010) investigates the linguistic construction of textual messages in blogs and Twitter in the Nigerian 2007 electoral cycle comprising the April 2007 general elections and the rerun elections in April, May, and August 2009; his study concludes that access to social media, both blogging and microblogging, enhances political participation of the citizens, who are also the electorates. In an article on social media networks and the discourse of resistance, Chiluwa (2012b) points out that the social media have been utilized by Biafra campaign groups to advance online activism so as to achieve sociopolitical and economic independence for the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. The current study focuses on tweets and how their discursive contents reveal pragmatic acts, explicitly or implicitly, in support or rejection of Boko Haram. Further, it focuses on comments posted on the Internet by readers of online reports about the uprisings and bomb attacks.

Pragmatic Acts

The word *pragmatics* can be defined as "the investigation into that aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words, but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered" (Leech and Short 1981:290). Hence, pragmatics basically deals with inferred content, an add-on to semantic content, or what Yule (1996) calls invisible meaning. Inferred content, as the definition highlights, is the meaning that depends not just on the grammar or the lexicon, but on the context in which the message occurs. For example, if we tell someone who has just entered our office "The door is open," he or she is likely to interpret our message not as mere information about the door, but as a request to close the door. Second, advice such as "Throw out those old shoes" is unlikely to mean "Just throw the shoes out the window," but "Put the shoes in the trash" or "Give the shoes away to the needy." In this manner, pragmatic messages usually have more than one interpretation, mostly depending on how relevant the hearer or reader perceives the information communicated. According to Sperber and Wilson (1995), the hearer or reader can pick out the most relevant

pragmatic message when given the exact situation, what is known about the speaker or writer, and what has already been said or written. Pragmatic messages depend on background information as part of the context—that is, what the speaker or writer and hearer or reader knows about the society involved and what has happened in the past.

When individuals communicate using language, they perform acts (or actions) at the same time, serving the functions of ordering, pleading, promising, or inviting (Searle 1969). Utterances or written expressions do not merely provide information for the hearer or reader: they perform pragmatic acts, usually not explicitly stated, such as implicit identification with certain people, implicit denials or denunciations of a group, projection of identity, and so forth (Mey 2001). In the examples given above, the acts of requesting and advising (or ordering) are performed. Pragmatic acts are usually performed in all contexts where human beings interact with one another in speech or writing and do not have to include any specific act of speech, such as those proposed by John L. Austin (1975), to be understood as act or action. For example, soliciting an invitation or a compliment can be done without saying anything that may be identified as a direct speech act (Mey 2001:213). Mey proposes "a theory of action (for the study of pragmatic acts) that specifies, for any given situation, the limitations and possibilities of the situation" (2001:214). Pragmatic acts are then viewed in two dimensions: the agent and the act. In considering the agent, factors such as class, gender, age, education, and so forth become important because they are "the resources that people dispose of as members of the community[,] often referred to as background knowledge" (2001:214). These resources may be characterized as "constraints and affordances imposed on the individual in the form of necessary limitations on the degree of freedom that he or she is allowed in society" (2001:214). In other words, individuals do not just perform speech acts on their own without reference to the context and the level of freedom or affordances that are allowed by the society to perform such acts. The act is the language used in performing the pragmatic act with reference to specific acts in specific contexts (from the individual's perspective) and the language that may be used to create the conditions for performing a pragmatic act (from the perspective of the context).[1] In sum, "the pragmatic acting can be considered as adapting oneself linguistically and otherwise to one's world," and "all our acting is done in that world and within the affordances it puts at our disposal" (2001:215).

In our analysis of the data in this study, we adopt a methodology that identifies pragmatic acts such as identifying with or coopting, denouncing, rejecting, or implicitly denying, performed by tweeters and responders within the context of reactions to the bombings in Nigeria. Our analysis begins by systematically categorizing the data according to kinds of pragmatic act; however, some objective speech acts or indirect speech acts are identified and analyzed to achieve a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the goal of discourse of tweeters who are themselves the direct or indirect victims of the bombings.

Table 1. Speech and pragmatic acts.

Speech and Pragmatic Acts	Occurrences in the Corpus (%)
Accusing & blaming the Nigerian government	16.4
Condemning & denouncing Islam (and violence)	18.0
Accusing & blaming the West	2.6
Demanding splitting the country	8.0
Supporting & identifying with Boko Haram & Islam	40.0
Solution proffering (advice to Muslims and the govt.)	3.0
Neutral	2.1

Categorization of Samples and Analyses

The corpus comprises two hundred ninety-one tweets and comments or reactions that are categorized and analyzed. The data are broken down as follows:

Tweets from Boko Haram Twitter profile page	140
Comments on *Daily Telegraph* reports of the bombings	109
Individual tweeters	25
Comments and reactions on *Mail & Guardian Online* reports of the bombings	17
Total	**291**

For the limited space of this paper, selected tweets and comments from each group that aptly capture the common goal or act of the group are reproduced. Table 1 enumerates pragmatic acts performed in the tweet samples in the corpus. Tweets on the Boko Haram tweeter profile, for example, include tweeters sympathetic to the Boko Haram struggle. At the time of this research, there were a total of one hundred forty tweets, with many tweeters being self-styled or self-acclaimed members of the sect, but it is not certain that these tweeters were real members of the sect. Their tweets celebrate the activities of the terrorist group and call on Nigerian youths to join the struggle. In the analyses, *Twt* stands for "tweet," while *Cmt* stands for "comment.

This categorization is similar to Searle's (1969) categorization of speech acts into representative (describing, asserting, claiming, reporting, suggesting), directive (commanding, requesting, inviting), and commissive (challenging, promising, threatening, offering, vowing, warning). In this research, however, the identified pragmatic acts are not overt speech acts, since most of the acts are implied and are deducible from the context as the writer's intention.[2] Most of the tweets and comments in the data were responses to the Boko Haram uprising; however, many that condemned and denounced Islam and those that supported the breaking up of Nigeria resulted from the bombing of the Roman Catholic church at Madalla on Christmas day in 2011.

Acts of Accusing and Blaming

The acts under this category are explicit and implicit accusations that the Nigerian government was the cause of the crises; hence, the failure of political leadership is blamed for the crimes and insecurity in the nation. In other words, the Boko Haram attacks are a reaction to suffering and unemployment of the youth because of the government's failure to improve living standards for its population. **Cmt2** below, for example, uses a strong metaphor (killers) for Nigerian leaders. **Cmt7** explicitly accuses the government of sponsoring the terrorist sect, with the use of a direct speech act of accusing, equivalent to Searle's (1969) commissive act of warning or threatening.

> **Cmt2**. Now we are talking about bomb blast which we dont know the source and where this blast is coming from, though i know we NIGERIA dont have Leaders but we only have KILLERS as a leader to rule us. Those that only care about themselves and their family, in these same Nigeria we are unemployed up to 90% graduates have no job after graduating from their various schools . . .
>
> **Cmt7**. I don't think the BOKO HAMA should be blamed for this instead the GOVERNMENT who are financing the boko haram should be blamed and the so called Mr. President GOODLUCK. No good amenities, no standard way of living in Nigeria but instead of the government to do the right thing by providing security and social amenities but they are speaking on how to increase fuel prices and speaking about removal fuel subsidiary

Nigeria's underdevelopment has often been attributed to corruption and incompetent political leadership. According to a World Bank report (2010), Nigeria earns more than $10 billion annually; however, the population living on less than $1.40 a day rose to 67.1 million in 1996 (up from 17.7 million in 1982). The country witnessed growth of the GDP from $170.7 billion in 2005 to $292.6 billion in 2007. GDP per capita rose from $692 per person in 2006 to $1,754 in 2007 (Chiluwa 2011b; economist.com 2012). Unfortunately, the economy is still far from improving the living standards of the people, mainly as result of social politics, corruption, and a lack of sincerity by those in power. This state of affairs has provided the main argument and strong point for the apologists of Boko Haram resistance. The writers of **Twt50** and **Twt52,** for example, are probably members of the sect who see themselves as heroes. Attacks on public facilities and the police are implicitly viewed as revolutionary efforts to rescue the people from an oppressive political system. The government is viewed as the terrorist, while Boko Haram members have come to the rescue and are viewed as freedom fighters.

> **Twt50**. @Boko_Haran. How many jets does the president have? How many jobs would that have created? Boko Haram to the rescue (#wherewedarethread)
>
> **Twt52**. @Boko_Haran. The government is the terrorist. When last did you have light for 24 hrs? Boko Haram are the freedom fighters.

Twt7 represents the widespread speculation that Boko Haram must have been sponsored by certain interests in the government, possibly the northern political elite, who are said to aim at destabilizing the country and discrediting the Jonathan government. Later events in Nigeria lent credence to this assumption. A member of the Nigerian parliament (a northerner) was named a sponsor of the sect by the accused mastermind of the Madalla bomb blasts. At the time of this research, the accused persons were still standing trial for their involvement in terrorist attacks. This tweet, while performing an overt speech act of accusing, represents a pragmatic act of dissociation from the Nigerian government and full identification with the Nigerian people. This is clearly implied in **Twt50**: "how many jets does the president have? How many jobs would that have created?"

Among these accusations are those that blame the government for its tardiness in handling Boko Haram. According to many tweets and comments (e.g., **Cmt1** and **Cmt 3** below), the government has been neither proactive nor radical in confronting Nigeria's security challenges. Many tweeters believe that Boko Haram could have been dealt with decisively by the Nigerian government, but the government is slow to protect certain interests, or simply incompetent.

> **Cmt1.** . . . new colonizers are already destroying and ripping our countries apart, as the authorities look idly, and our politicians fear reprisals and losing votes, never attempting to confront and destroy this evil cancer called Islam . . . (Cruzado7)
>
> **Cmt3.** There is a lot for our so called Govt to know about because if NIGERIA as a whole cannot control the citizen of their country, then we are not safe. Look at the bomb blast during election period where most people lost their lives, most especially the corps during their services and follows by the bomb blast by BOKO HARAM killing the Christians. (festy1)

The pragmatic act of denouncing the Nigerian government and Islam can be deduced from the two strong metaphors for Islam in **Cmt1:** "new colonizers" and "this evil cancer." The tone is that of anger and frustration. In the two comments, the government is said to "look idly" for fear of "losing votes" in subsequent elections, thus unable to "control the citizen [*sic*] of their country." The consequence of inaction is the loss of lives in the bomb blasts.

Cmt4 attributes the Boko Haram insurgency to poor handling of the terrorist challenge by the government of Yar'Adua. As pointed out in the

introduction, the Nigerian military carried out indiscriminate attacks on the sect members in 2009, killing hundreds of them. Rather than curb the activities of the terrorist group, this action fueled its growth. The tweeter here blames the government for failing to bring the sect members to justice, rather than killing them. This tweet implies that the Muslim radicals were fighting not only for the Islamization of the north, but also to exact revenge for their members who had been killed, especially their founding leader, killed in police custody. This was followed by widespread rumors that the Boko Haram leader had secretly been murdered because he was about to make important revelations about the insurgency's operations and sponsors; these revelations would have exposed the group's political sponsors and implicated government officials said to be directly or indirectly involved in acts of terrorism. The writer of **Cmt4** appears to have some sympathy for the Islamic radicals and is perhaps a Nigerian passionate about the revitalization of the Nigerian judiciary.

> **Cmt4.** I think the problem was when the crisis of boko haram first began the late government didn't handle it well, reason it allowed the killings of many boko haram fighters in public and let the video been shown to the whole world, so instead of bringing them to justice the late government go other way and that led to the crises, may god help Nigeria

Pragmatic acts of accusing and blaming thus attribute the Boko Haram insurgency to poor government, which has left citizens with no choice but to revolt. This is not different from the Northern African revolution and the so-called Arab Spring, which stand on the verge of achieving major political changes by withdrawing power from despots. The implication of this social interpretation of events in Nigeria stems from the assumption that social events are the products of the society itself: crime is a direct consequence of suffering, and so the Boko Haram terrorists represent suffering Nigerians who cannot fight for themselves.

Acts of Denouncing and Condemning Islam and Boko Haram

Expectedly, the second-highest number of tweets and comments in the data are those that denounce Islam and Boko Haram. Many of the tweets contain strong words and highly negative metaphors to describe the Islamic religion and the radical sect. **Cmt1,** as pointed out above, describes Islam as an evil cancer—which implies that the writer could not have been a Muslim. In this group are tweets sent by tweeters who perhaps are direct victims of the attacks or whose loved ones were. The pragmatic act of denouncing Boko Haram is performed with many obvious emotional Christian voices in the tweets, with the usual ideological assumption that Islam is bad and Christianity is good, where Islam represents "them" and Christianity is "we" (van Dijk 2005). Undoubtedly, this is a plausible argument, following the massive

shootings and bombings of churches and Christian assemblies in northern Nigeria in 2011. These events prompted a warning issued by the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria to the bombers and the instruction to Christians to defend themselves against further attacks. Tension rose, and people began to fear an imminent breakup of the nation. In some of the tweets, *we* and *us* refer to Christians, while *they* and *them* refer to Islam and Boko Haram. **Twt10,** for example, referring to Nigeria, says: "it is not a Muslim country, the south is mainly Christian and peaceful." The pragmatic act here assumes that a Muslim country is expectedly nonpeaceful, going by the Nigerian experience. **Twt18** argues "there is no such thing as a good Muslim . . . just good hypocrites," thus denouncing Muslims. This does not, of course, imply that the writer is a Christian or an African traditional religionist; he or she might be a free thinker who intended to express an opinion. Other tweets or comments in this category (for example, **Cmt7**, **Cmt12,** and **Cmt13**) perform similar acts of denouncing Islam. **Cmt7** is feedback from online reports of the attacks.

> **Cmt7**. Islam is totally to blame for this. Muslims admit it. LEAVE Islam, leave the hatred, the lies, the denials, the subterfuges, the lame excuses behind your back and join mankind as our equal brothers and sisters. Stop killing us and stop destroying yourselves. If there is a hell all devout Muslims will burn there surely. It is time to ACT as a true human civilized human being and stop with this madness, insanity and satanic way of thinking/acting...it is time to stop Islam totally and eternally.
> **Cmt12**. I have read the Koran and Hadith and have studied the bible for more than 20 years. . . . I can tell you without reservation that Mohammed was simply a warlord who wanted to take over Mecca and used a mixture of Paganism, Judaism and Christianity to get his followers to kill and be killed
> **Cmt13**. I despise Islam and everything related to it. It is the most inhuman, anti-God, anti-love, anti-science BS poison EVER! It must be fought and eradicated worldwide, so mankind can evolve and prosper.

The writers of the above comments and others in this category are no doubt non-Muslims who blame the Boko Haram insurgence on Islam. They therefore reject the explanation that Islam is a peaceful religion. **Cmt12,** for example, attributes the religious intolerance of Muslim terrorists to a culture of killing that stems from the founder of Islam. Interestingly, **Cmt15** argues that Muslims themselves are killed by the so-called Jihadists—which again raises the question as to who the Jihadists really are.

> **Cmt15.** Jihadists kill more Muslims than anyone. Muslims everywhere should stalk and kill Jihadist like animals. Apologists for Jihad should serve as each other's virgins.

While many tweeters in this category denounce Islam as the breeder of terrorists, others sympathize with Muslims who are themselves victims of some of the attacks. The writers therefore urge well-meaning Muslims to denounce the attacks and quit Islam. **Twt23,** for example says: "enough lies my friend . . . If you want to become truly peaceful and civilized, you have to leave Islam now, before it's too late."

Acts of Supporting and Identifying with Islam and Boko Haram

Surprisingly, about 40 percent of the corpus comprises tweets that directly or indirectly support the Boko Haram uprising. More than 90 percent of the tweets on the Boko Haram profile page pledge support and celebrate the terrorist group's activities. It is uncertain, however, whether all the tweeters on this page are Boko Haram members; some may just be youths bragging about the sect's radical approach and making fun of the incidents. Many tweets attempt to defend the Islamic religion and project its positive contributions. Many comments or tweets seem to promote Islam as a peaceful religion, whose real attributes have been undermined by terrorists who are not real Muslims. Most of the tweets below perform the pragmatic acts of associating and identifying with Islam; some of the comments excuse the activities of Boko Haram.

> **Twt36**. Majority of people here talking about Islam has no clue about this religion . . . if they found a dead penguin in the north pole they will blame it on Islam . . .
> **Twt37**. The sum of all victims of Boko Haram and Al Qaeda over the past decade is less than what US killed in IRAQ in one year
> **Twt38**. I hate Christianity
> **Twt39**. Islam is a religion of peace, these people does not represent the thousands of millions of Muslims, we are also feelings bad when innocent people are dying!!
> **Twt40.** Suicide is forbidden in Islam. Islam is the religion of peace. Those who does killing by act of suicide will go to hell
> **Twt41**. Mohammed is Allah's apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another" Quran 48:29.

The tweets quoted above merely attempt to represent the positive side of Islam; the pragmatic message they carry is that the activities of Boko Haram do not represent true Islamic principles. While promoting Islam as "the religion of peace" (**Twt40**), an Islamic apologist claims that real Muslims

actually feel bad when innocent people are killed (**Twt39**) and that those who kill by suicide will "go to hell" (**Twt40**). **Twt41** appears as a contradiction to the Maiduguri bombings, in which Christians and Muslims were killed; it carries the pragmatic message that the agents of the Maiduguri bombings could not be good Moslems. In contrast, **Cmt15** (above) admits that the bombers were jihadists (Muslims) who kill Muslims.

Tweets in this category consist of the radical claims of Boko Haram tweeters as they define their mission (for example, **Twt70**) and showcase positive results of the attacks and bombings in the north and Abuja (for example, **Twt80**). This suggests that their mission has been achieved to some extent. The tweets demonstrate defiant and unrepentant voices of anger and contumacy, justifying their actions and urging youths passionate about Nigeria's future to join their struggle.

> **Twt70**. @Boko_Haran. We love Nigerians; it's only the Nigerian polis, Nigerian army, drunkards, prostitutes, politicians, usurers, teachers, touts we can't stand.
> **Twt71.** @Boko_Haran. Army people you are hungry, polis you are tired. Go home.
> We are your friends. Our enemies are the infidels at Aso Rock **#gaskiya**

Twt70 appears to explain the indiscriminate bombings of pubs and social gatherings in the north. **Twt80** through **Twt84** catalogue the so-called achievements of the radical group: the restoration of social sanity and quietness in cities, the restoration of marriages or family reunions, a reduction in alcohol consumption, and an improvement in the people's general well-being.

> **Twt80**. @Boko_Haran. Pls come to Maiduguri to see the good job we have done. quiet. no siren. no thieves only us, polis and army. #tourism
> **Twt81**. @Boko_Haran. Wives and children now see their husbands in the night in Abuja and Maiduguri. Countless marriages have been saved #collateraleffect
> **Twt82.** @Boko_Haran. Rate of alcoholism has reduced in Abuja and Maiduguri because of our good work #collateraleffect
> **Twt83.** @Boko_Haran. Maiduguri looks better with our fireworks. roads look more even and streets quieter #collateraleffect
> **Twt84.** @Boko_Haran. Also, none of those horrible music again from dbanj, terryyg, wbanky, wande coal and duncan might . . . dan maraya jos rules #goodmusicisbliss

They project some of their goals, among which are the complete banning of cigarette smoking and replacing it with *sheesha*,[3] which they claim is

healthier and has more vitamins (**Twt87**). Second, there would be a complete ban on wearing jeans, T-shirts, and Tmlewin shirts, to be replaced with Jelabia,[4] which they claim is more suitable for the Maiduguri sun (**Twt88**). Most of the tweets denounce the police and the Nigerian government and promise further attacks; some appeal to the police and security agents to defect to the Boko Haram. They describe the government as the real terrorists (**Twt42**). More significant is the redefinition of *terrorism* or *terrorist*, which the sect gives to this term: rather than view a terrorist as someone who commits a criminal act intended to provoke terror in the general public or who for political, religious, ethnic, or ideological purpose in unjustifiable circumstances causes harm or destroys people's lives (Chiluwa 2011a), Boko Haram defines terrorism from a moral and religious perspective in which "terrorists are those who drink all day and don't take care of their families [and] women who sell their bodies" (**Twt62**), or "those who go to western schools to learn how to thief money [and] learn to bribe from there" (**Twt63**), or those "who steal government funds [and] refuse to maintain roads" (**Twt65**). Thus, the Nigerian government is described as infidels who kill people by fraud and corruption (**Twt66**), and Nigeria is called a joke: the government, the police, and the army are jokers because "they kill more innocent people everyday than Boko Haram has done in a year" (**Twt67**).

> **Twt42**. @Boko_Haramm.The government is the terrorist. When last did you have light for 24 hrs? Boko Haram are the freedom fighters.
> **Twt44**. @Boko_Haran. MEND is after money, we are after ideals. Ideas that come at the right time flourishes. #deadideals
> **Twt87.**@Boko_Haran. Boko Haram thinking of replacing cigarettes with sheesha . . . Helthier and with more vitamins. #PROGRESS
> **Twt88**. @Boko_Haran. We are thinking of banning jeans, Tshirt and Tmlewin shirts . . . Jebabia is more suitable to the Maiduguri sun and for banks. #1STEPAHEAD

Boko Haram claims it is in pursuit of ideals, rather than money, unlike some rebel groups in Nigeria (**Twt44**), and it tends to provide ideological and logical arguments for its resistance against the Nigerian state. But the question remains: must the realization of these ideals, no matter how logical they sound, justify the reckless destruction of lives and property like those characteristic of the bombings of Christian churches and public property?

Acts of Accusing and Blaming the West

The Boko Haram tweets, like other tweets and comments in the corpus, not only accuse the Nigerian government of responsibility in the social problems of Nigeria, but accuse, condemn, and blame the Western world, especially the United States, in Nigeria's underdevelopment and security challenges.

Two of the responses or comments are reproduced below. These summarize the other comments and tweets in this group, which accuse the West of selfishly pursuing its own interest in Africa, and not being interested in stabilizing African democracy.

> **Cmt26** . . . The reason why the West supports Islam is because it favors the West's agenda of dominating the region, without Islam Arabs would be "free thinker." West does not need anybody to think free, the whole idea of democracy is a scam. Please people open you eye already, and instead calling Obama and the West Muslims, call it what it is, INTEREST. We are not kids. (49fiori)
>
> **Cmt27**. Partly true, the western politicians indeed only care about our minerals, resources. and they fake they defend democracy, using the media, to brainwash the public opinion and advance obscure materialistic, greedy interests of the corporations that support them. Their alliance to Islam is purely material, not ideological because all they care about is money and power. If Islam helps getting it, they will side with Islam, but if Islam fights it, they will try something else. (cruzado7)

The arguments advanced by the writers of the above comments are not saying anything new, because this has been the popular thinking of many scholars who critically examine the philosophies of materialism and the global economy and how they are being pursued in Africa and the Arab world (Rodney 1973), but calling to mind this argument at such a time when an Islamic sect is terrorizing Nigeria is indirectly or pragmatically denouncing and accusing the West of supporting or abetting terrorist acts. While this sounds like a baseless accusation, **Cmt26** insists that the "West does not need anyone to think free": in other words, if Obama and the West sincerely mean to isolate Islam, they will be weakened, and their power and influence (including terrorism) will diminish; hence, Islam is powerful today because it enjoys Western support. **Cmt27** argues that the West supports Islam because of its money and economic power; similarly in Africa, it pretends to defend democracy, whereas it cares "only about our minerals resources . . . using the media to brainwash public opinion and advance . . . greedy interest of the corporations that support them." But again the question is why writers express anger against the West when Boko Haram is bombing Nigeria. Two implications here are clear: (1) Boko Haram terrorists are Islamists, and there is something the West, as a world power, ought to do to curb Islamic power, which the West is not doing for fear of jeopardizing its economic interests; (2) the West is singing the song of democracy and freedom, but Islam is engaged in acts of terrorism, which violate not only people's freedom but their fundamental right to life, yet the West appears not to be doing enough to enforce and sustain global freedom. The pragmatic acts of dissociating from the West are quite obvious from the

acts of accusing and condemning the West, especially the United States, for its failed role as global watchdog.

Demanding That the Country Be Split

Some tweets reflect one of the main objectives of Boko Haram: that an independent Islamic state of northern Nigeria be created. An assertive statement such as "Nigeria is a joke" (**Twt67**) or "we have left Nigeria; we are in boko republic of Arewa [and the] infidel Nigerian government and Kafiri army should leave us" (**Twt91**) is not only a pragmatic act of dissociation but an assertive claim. Recent negotiations between the federal government, represented by the Supreme Council for Sharia, and a Boko Haram spokesman broke down, following what the radical sect described as insincerity on the part of the government. One faction, consisting of the late Mohammed Yusuf's immediate followers, was willing to negotiate, and it had presented its demands (the punishment of Yusuf's killers, the restoration of seized Boko Haram property, and the release of jailed Boko Haram members), but the other faction had demanded the introduction of Islamic law in parts of Nigeria—a demand that the government could not accede to (Campbell 2012).

The call for the breakup of Nigeria has been made by other non-Muslim tweeters. It brings to mind previous agitation by Biafra campaign groups that still seek a separate state for the Igbos of southeastern Nigeria (Chiluwa 2012b; Ojukwu 2009). Boko Haram's demand for the Arewa Islamic state appears to have revitalized the Igbo dream for political independence. Some tweets or comments are apparently Biafran voices reiterating Biafran demands. Here are a few examples:

> **Cmt28**. More death for innocent Christians; that will teach them to be different in a Muslim country. (original11319)
> **Cmt29**. Sick nation, dysfunction country. Separation the only solution to Nigeria's problem. (OLU1973)
> **Cmt30**. This Uprising will bring out the BIAFRA in us. To achieve a great nation everybody is expendable. This is a path to a new Nation. BIAFRA. (ILLuminatik)
> **Cmt31.** The mission of Boko Haram is crystal clear, imposing Islam on all Nigerians. The question is, must the Muslims and Christians be forced to live under one country? Let U.N. divide the country into two, one for Christians and the other for Muslims. Otherwise, for any soul lost, Ban Ki Mo should be held responsible. (shinayode)
> **Cmt32.** There is no alternative to the splitting of Nigeria. it is an artificial unity anyway. Christians have the right to have safe lifes and live in peae and prosperity, without being subject to constant mass-murdering attacks by their Muslim henchmen. (Cruzado7)

> **Cmt33.** Nigeria has no identity of true nationhood . . . if the UN is truly a global institution, let UN show concern about murders in Nigeria. . . . Ban Kimoon is just seating there as a puppet, reading speeches given to him—like the same speech Hamid Karzai read out loudly on occasional basis. . . . Once Nigeria gets it right by breaking up like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the region will know peace and progress. (alvidor)

In **Cmt28**, Nigeria is called a Muslim country when in reality it is not. This again reveals the kind of sarcastic reactions from people who appear desperate to break Nigeria up. To the tweeter, the death of innocent Christians would teach the southern Christians to be different—performing the pragmatic act of warning. The writers of **Cmt31** and t**weet33** blame the United Nations for the killings in Nigeria on account of the UN's ineptitude in responding to the crisis in the country, and the only action that these writers advocate is the breakup of Nigeria. This shows that both a section of the Muslim north and a section of the Christian south demand political independence.

Solution Proffering

Tweets under this category, probably from Christian writers, offer a solution to the crisis in the form of suggestions or advice to the Boko Haram sect and the Nigerian government. The advice is to Muslims, who are asked to support secular government and demonstrate their loyalty to "a just God," which does "not discriminate against non-Muslims" (**Cmt43**):

> **Cmt43**. Good Muslims, please consider what you believe in . . . If you believe in a just God, support secular governments that do not discriminate against non-Muslims. You're not doing non-Muslims a favor by doing this, but only serving YOUR God by supporting a secular state . . . (HugoCorv)

Others believe that the Nigerian government has not been decisive enough in tackling Boko Haram; they recommend proactive and drastic actions (**Twt44**), including strengthening the country's security operations and establishing special antiterrorism agencies (**Cmt44**):

> **Twt44. #Nigeria** ACF on Boko Haram: "We call on the government to be more proactive, more decisive and engage in less lamentation." Very correct!
>
> **Cmt45**. What I'm saying is, he hasn't done enough yet. I have a question? Is there any department responsible for fighting terrorism in Nigeria yet? If it's just the SSS, I think that's not enough . . . (gbesky007)

Neutral (Acts of Dissociation)

The very few tweets in this group are neutral in terms of their writers' position on religion and the real causes of the uprising, yet they perform pragmatic acts. One tweet (**Twt47**) simply says: "I hate religion," probably because of the numerous sectarian and religious crises that have occurred in Nigeria in the recent past. This tweet performs a pragmatic act of dissociation from religion generally, but also that of implicit blame on religion for being responsible for the present and past crises. **Twt49,** in contrast, argues "it is too early to link the attack with anyone . . . there are a lot of dynamics in any region. There cannot be only one reason." This tweet reflects the views of some schools of thought in Nigeria about the Boko Haram crisis. Some people even deny the existence of Boko Haram and argue that, indeed, the so-called Boko Haram camouflages a more complex political mafia operating in the federal capital. Others argue that Boko Haram is faceless and serves as a political weapon, which powerful politicians deploy to fight their opponents, both Christians and Muslims. Another school of thought believes that Boko Haram is sponsored by northern enemies of the Jonathan administration, who are out to destabilize the country and incite a mass uprising against the government. These schools have been recognized in the Nigerian media. What they have in common is the belief that Boko Haram is not an Islamic terrorist group, but this argument cannot easily explain away the existence of a complex organization that has terrorized the nation for some time and that has sent representatives to make its demands public. This study has highlighted some of Boko Haram's claims of success in northern Nigeria in combating crime and immoral behavior, but the claim that Boko Haram is not a terrorist group is hardly satisfactory.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that pragmatic acts may be used to express emotions both mild and intense, such as anger, delight, rejection, acceptance, and denunciation. The selected tweets show how people can reveal their attitudes about significant events by expressing themselves through an informal means of communication. The Boko Haram sect applies both speech and pragmatic acts to project its position and call for support. Individuals and groups express their feelings as victims who have been attacked, directly or indirectly. Other tweeters and commenters express their views on how the uprisings may be put down. Most of these views are expressed through pragmatic acts when what needs to be said may not easily be expressed explicitly, either by choice or for lack of appropriate words. In times of stress, emotions can vary and escalate with the crisis, and in such cases explicit and implicit acts are performed to give vent to what people feel.

NOTES

1. For a detailed explanation, see Mey 2001:214–215.
2. In this paper, the texts of tweets and online feedback comments are reproduced exactly as they appeared on Twitter or the other listed sites; all deviations from standard style are in the originals.
3. Sheesha is a type of local tobacco pipe that Hausa men smoke, especially during the cold season
4. Jelabia is a long gown that touches the toes worn by Hausa women
5. 'Maitatsine' is a nickname for Mohammed Marwa, the late rebel Islamic scholar in northern Nigeria. Maitatsine in Hausa stands for 'the one who damns' referring to Marwa's speeches against Nigeria.

REFERENCES CITED

Adesoji, Abimbola. 2010. The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria. *Africa Spectrum* 45(2):95–108.

Albert, Isaac. 1999. Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Kano. In *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution, and Transformation*, edited by Onigu Otite and Isaac Albert. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

allafrica.com. 2010. *Attack on Bauchi Prison: Boko Haram Frees 721 Inmates.* allafrica.com/stories/2010009090034.html.

Austin, John L. 1975. *How to Do Things with Words.* The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Campbell, John. 2012. *Nigeria: Boko Haram Negotiations Break Down.* Africa in Transition, March 23. http://blogs.cfr.org/campbell/2012/03/23/nigeria-boko-haram-negotiations-break-down.

Chiluwa, Innocent. 2011a. *Labeling and Ideology in the Press: A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Study of the Niger Delta Crisis.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

———. 2011b. On Political Participation: Discursive Pragmatics and Social Interaction. *Nolitics: Studies in Literature and Language* 2(2):80–92.

———. 2012a. Citizenship, Participation, and CMD: The Case of Nigeria. *Pragmatics and Society* 3(1):61–88.

———. 2012b. Social Media Networks and the Discourse of Resistance: A Sociolinguistic CDA of Biafra Online Discourses. *Discourse and Society* 23(3):3–28.

Crystal, David. 2011. *Internet Linguistics.* London: Routledge.

Ditz, Jason. 2012. *Boko Haram in Northern Mali City of Gao: Nigerian Militants Blamed for Attacks on Algerian Consulate.* http://news.antiwar.com/2012/04/09/officials-boko-haram-in-northern-mali-city-ofgao.economist.com. 2012

Hermida, Alfred. 2010. Twittering the News: The Emergence of Ambient Journalism. *Journalism Practice* 4(3):1–12.

Honeycutt, C., and Susan Herring. 2009. "Beyond Microblogging: Conversation and Collaboration via Twitter." Paper presented at the forty-second Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Los Alamitos, California: IEEE Press.

http://news.antiwar.com, 2012

Idle, Nadia, and Ales Nunn. 2011. *Tweets from Tahrir: Egypt's Revolution as It Unfolded in the Words of the People Who Made It*. New York: Or Books.

Ifukor, Presley. 2010. Elections or Selections? Blogging and Twittering the Nigerian 2007 General Elections. *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society* 30(6):398–414.

Ingram, Mark. 2008. *Yes, Twitter Is a Source of Journalism*. http://www.mathewingram.com/work/2008/11/26/yes-twitter-is-a-source-of-journalism.

IRIN Africa. 2011. Understanding Nigeria's Boko Haram Radicals. http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportID=93250.

Leech, Geogry,and Mick Short. 1981. *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. London: Longman.

Leinweber, David. 2009. *Nerds on Wall Street: Math, Machines, and Wired Markets*. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley and Sons.

Mey, Jacob. 2001. *Pragmatics: An Introduction.* 2nd ed. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.

Ojukwu, Chris. 2009. Igbo Nation, Modern Statecraft, and the Geopolitics of National Survival in a Multiethnic Nation. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations 3*(5):182–190.

Onuah, Felix, and Camillus Eboh. 2011. Boko Haram Explodes Five Bombs in Nigeria. www.reuters.com/.../2011/.../us-nigeria.

The Punch. 2012. April 10.

Rodney, Walter. 1973. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.

Searle, John. 1969. *Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shirky, Clay. 2009. How Social Media Can Make History. TED Talk. http://www.ted.com/talks/clayshirky.

Sperber, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson. 1995. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

Stock, Robert. 2004. *Africa South of the Sahara: A Geographical Interpretation*. 2nd ed. New York: The Guilford Press.

Subasic, Ilija, and Bettina Berendt. 2011. *Peddling or Creating? Investigating the Role of Twitter in News Reporting.* http://people.cs.kuleuven.be/~bettina.berendt/Papers/subasic_berendt_2011.pdf.

Tanchum, Michael. 2012. Al-Qa'ida's New West African Map: Ancar Dine, Boko Haram, and Jihadism in the Trans-Sahara. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 6(3): 1–4

van Dijk, Teun. 2005. Opinions and Ideologies in the Press. In *Approaches to Media Discourse*, edited by Alan Bell and P. Garret. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.

Yule, George. 1996. *The Study of Language.* 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zanzotto, Fabio, Marco Pennacchiotti, and Kostas Tsioutsiouliklis. 2011. *Linguistic Redundancy in Twitter*. http://arnetminer.org/publication/-3195166.html.