



# 'We are not terrorist, we are freedom fighters': Discourse representation of the pro-Biafra protest in selected Nigerian newspapers

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/das](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/das)**Ayo Osisanwo**

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

**Osas Iyoha**

Edo University, Nigeria

## Abstract

The recent pro-Biafra protest across Nigeria has become an important topic in the news media where it has been constructed in different ways. Existing studies on media construction of protest have examined framing, speech acts and rhetorical strategies. However, adequate attention has not been given to the discursive representation of the 2015 and 2016 pro-Biafra protest. This study therefore examined the discourse strategies and the ideological inclinations of news reports on the 2015 and 2016 Biafra protest. Van Leeuwen's representation of social actors and Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL) serve as the theoretical underpinning of the study. Data were purposively drawn from four widely read and circulated Nigerian newspapers, *The Punch*, *The Sun*, *The Vanguard* and *The Nation* which allocate sufficient space to the coverage of the protests. The period covered was between 2015 and 2016, a period where the protest was most intense in the country. Three representational strategies which include 'protesters as freedom fighters', 'protesters as economic saboteurs' and 'protesters as law-abiding citizens' were discovered in the study. Ten strategies in van Leeuwen's representation of social actors – passivisation, nomination, association, disassociation, exclusion, aggregation, functionalisation, differentiation, indetermination, collectivisation – were indexed in the representational strategies. These representations were also explicated by four processes which include material, verbal, relational and behavioural. The pro-Biafra protesters were

## Corresponding author:

Ayo Osisanwo, Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan 200284, Nigeria.

Emails: [ayosisdexus@yahoo.com](mailto:ayosisdexus@yahoo.com); [ayosisanwo@gmail.com](mailto:ayosisanwo@gmail.com)