

**STANCE AND ENGAGEMENT IN *E-PUNCH* NEWSPAPER READERS'
COMMENTS ON FORMER PRESIDENT GOODLUCK JONATHAN
ADMINISTRATION'S WAR AGAINST BOKO HARAM TERRORISM IN
NIGERIA**

AYO OSISANWO, PhD

ayosisdelexus@yahoo.com

**Department of English,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria**

Abstract

Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria has lingered on for almost a decade. The terrorism has had some effects on Nigeria, and the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan condemned the act, and declared a total war against the group. Linguistic studies on terrorism with bias for *Boko Haram* have largely dwelt on other areas but the examination of the online readers' comments on the war against terrorism. Yet, it is capable of revealing the public perception of the government's success or failure in the war against *Boko Haram* terrorism, the media intents, and the *Boko Haram* operations. This study, therefore, examines the discourse strategies deployed by readers, taking different stances on former President Goodluck Jonathan administration's fight against *Boko Haram* terrorism, through their comments on the *e-Punch newspaper* reports. For data, 751 comments, constituting a corpus of 22,512 words on six purposively selected news items on the 2014 *e-Punch Newspaper* website were sampled. Guided by stance and engagement theory on interaction, the readers' comments by participants were subjected to discourse analysis. The online readers' comments on the war on *Boko Haram* terrorism implicated and condemned the administration while some suggested solutions. Some of their stances were fuelled by religiosity, ethnicity and partisanship. Nevertheless, they deployed different engagement techniques, including questioning, shared knowledge, personal asides, directives, among others, to convince other participants or call the administration to order. It is recommended that *e-Punch* and other media outlets be proactive in moderating what participants post online in order to curb avoidable crisis.

Keywords: *Boko Haram*, *e-Punch newspaper*, Readers' comments, Goodluck Jonathan, War on terrorism, Stance and engagement, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The *Boko Haram* terrorism has greatly negatively affected Nigerians, especially since 2009. The activities of the group, especially in the northeastern part of the country have had adverse physical, social and psychological effects on the people of the region, on Nigerians and the people of the West African sub-region. In response to the terrorist attacks, the Nigerian government, during the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan (henceforth GEJ), attempted series of unyielding and unsuccessful peace-pacts with the group. Eventually, the administration condemned the group and declared war against it on May 14, 2013. In response to the activities of the group and the interventions from GEJ, the traditional, electronic and social media in Nigeria have widely reported both the terrorist acts and the war on terrorism. They have covered the actions of the terrorists, and the efforts of the government in combating terrorism. Meanwhile, beyond the traditional media where the audience only consumes news items without having an appropriate forum for feedback, the electronic and social media give appropriate forum for the audience to give feedback. They do not only give feedback, they also have an avenue to participate in a continuous educating and enlightening conversation with other members of the forum. This paper is, therefore, interested in readers' comments on the website of the *Punch Newspaper*, that is electronic-Punch (henceforth, *e-Punch*) to news items on GEJ's war against *Boko Haram* (henceforth, BH) terrorism in Nigeria.

2. Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria

Boko Haram is a Hausa version of "Western education is forbidden". It is a militant Islamic group which is otherwise known as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad*. It is argued to be the group of the people committed to the propagation of the Prophet Mohammed's teachings and Jihad. '*Boko Haram*' is derived from a combination of the Hausa word '*boko*' (book) and the Arabic word '*haram*' (unlawful). Therefore, *Boko Haram* means 'Western education is unlawful' or 'Western culture is forbidden'. Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in the city of Maiduguri with the goal of establishing sharia government in Borno State (Adesoji 2010), the BH group, especially since 2010, has engaged in endless attacks on the Nigerian State. The group has equally taken responsibility for the consistent attack on the northern part of Nigeria, including bombing institutions, shooting the innocent, and kidnapping the unarmed (Osisanwo 2016). The group has created fear in Nigerians; rendered thousands of people homeless; and forced many to flee their homes. Out of the numerous activities undertaken by the sect in almost a decade in Nigeria, some of the specific and documented ones between 2009 and 2014 include:

- July 26, 2009 – Police allegedly killed the sect's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, in police cell after soldiers, who arrested him, handed him over to the police alive
- April 22, 2011 – *Boko Haram* attacks prison in Yola, Adamawa, frees 14 prisoners

- May 29, 2011 – *Boko Haram* attacks several communities in northern Nigeria
- June 16, 2011 – *Boko Haram* claims responsibility for attack on Abuja police headquarters
- June 26, 2011 – *Boko Haram* bombs beer garden in Maiduguri, 25 killed, 12 injured
- July 11, 2011 – University of Maiduguri closed down over *Boko Haram* threats
- August 26, 2011 – The Islamic sect bombed the UN Building, Abuja, killing workers and visitors
- August 12, 2011 – *Boko Haram* shoots dead Liman Bana, prominent Islamic cleric
- December 25, 2011 – Sect bombed the Catholic Church, Madalla, killings several worshippers
- Feb 8, 2012 – *Boko Haram* claims responsibility for Kaduna army headquarters bombing
- March 8, 2012 – Efforts to free Italian, British captives abducted by BH fails as they're killed before they could be rescued in Sokoto
- April 26, 2012 – Bombers hit ThisDay office in Abuja
- June 17, 2012 – *Boko Haram* suicide bombers attack 3 Kaduna churches, 50 killed
- Sept 19, 2012 – Nigerian army arrests BH militants, says it killed Abu Qaqa
- March 5, 2013 – Sultan calls for Amnesty for *Boko Haram* members
- Mar 18, 2013 – Suicide bombers attack Kano bus stop, kill 22, 65 injured
- Apr 5, 2013 – Jonathan sets up *Boko Haram* Amnesty committee
- Apr 17, 2013 – Jonathan sets up amnesty implementation committee to engage BH
- July 6, 2013 – *Boko Haram* attacks Government Secondary School, Mamugu, killing 29 students
- Sept 29, 2013 – BH attacks College of Agriculture in Gujba, kills 40 male students
- April 24, 2013 – Jonathan sets up *Boko Haram* amnesty committee
- May 14, 2013 – Jonathan declares state of emergency in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa states over BH attacks
- August 2013 – Abubakar Shekau said to have been shot and deposed by members
- Chief of Defence Staff said the military would wipe out *Boko Haram* by April, 2014 – Jan, 2014
- April 14, 2014 – BH kidnaps Chibok schoolgirls at Govt. Sec. School, Chibok, Borno

- April 14, 2014 – BH suicide bombers attack Nyanya bus station in Abuja, 90 killed
- May 1, 2014 – Car bomb attack in Nyanya area of Abuja, 19 killed, scores injured
- May 18, 2014 – BH suicide bomb attack in Kano, five killed
- May 20, 2014 – Twin bomb explosions in Jos, 118 killed
- September 17, 2014 – Nigeria military claims it killed Abubakar Shekau ‘again’
- September 2014 – Australian Stephen Davis names some alleged ‘sponsors’ of *Boko Haram*
- Sept 2014 – *Boko Haram* captured some towns –Damboa, Gwoza, Bama and most Nigeria’s border towns with Cameroon in Borno State and Mubi, Madagali and Michika in Adamawa State
- Sept 2014 – Nigeria’s military fought back *Boko Haram*’s attack to retake Konduga, killing about 115 of the militants, several insurgents surrender their weapons
- September 2014 – The sect claimed it shot down a Nigeria military jet and capture one of the pilots alive. It released the video of how it beheaded one of the pilots
- October 17, 2014 – VOA reports a meeting of a delegation of the Federal Government and *Boko Haram* members on Saudi Arabia

There are many other attacks till date. However, the time-bound restriction of our work is 2014. The present study is also focused on readers’ comments on 2014 news items because the period is witnessed an avalanche of activities by the sect and different attempts by the GEJ administration to combat BH.

3. Extant Literature and Statement of the Problem

Linguistic studies on terrorism with bias for *Boko Haram* have largely dwelt on other areas but the reportage of the readers’ comments on the war against terrorism. Such studies have only centred on aspects of pragmatics (Chiluwa and Oyegoke 2012, Odebunmi 2014), lexis (Ogungbe and Alo 2014), aspects of grammar and discourse (Aghedo, 2012; Ayoola and Olaosun, 2014; Yusha’u 2012) and a few others. The most related study to the present is Chiluwa and Odebunmi (2016).

The study examines discourses on terrorist attacks in Nigeria on *Nairaland* online forum. While both studies dwell on online forum as data sources, the present study emphasises readers’ comments and reactions to news items on *e-Punch*, Chiluwa and Odebunmi concentrate on *Nairaland*, where participants raise and react to issues. Again, while the present study focuses on participants’ responses to GEJ’s war against BH terrorism, Chiluwa and Odebunmi’s work centres on terrorism (*Boko Haram* and MEND – Movement for the Emancipation for Niger Delta) with emphasis on terrorists and not government as the present study. Yet, our attempt is capable of

revealing the public perception of the government's success or failure, the media intents, providing clearer insights into the *Boko Haram* operations, and bringing out the government efforts in combating terrorism. This paper, therefore, examines the readers' comments, their stance and the engagement elements deployed to argue out their stance on GEJ's war against BH terrorism in Nigeria.

4. Goodluck Jonathan Administration and the War against *Boko Haram* Terrorism

The former President Goodluck Jonathan administration has adopted, mainly, two approaches to respond to the BH terrorism. The first approach when the attacks seem unending was dialogue. The administration attempted to negotiate or dialogue with the group as it was done for the Niger-Delta militants earlier. Therefore, GEJ established a 26-member amnesty Committee, headed by Nigerian Special Duties Minister, Kabiru Tanimu. The Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North was given an ultimatum of three months within which to convince *Boko Haram* to surrender its arms in exchange for a state pardon and social integration (IRIN 2013). However, Shekau, the leader of the BH group turned down the offer; instead, the BH increased its attacks. Following the rejection of the negotiation or the amnesty offer, BH launched two devastating back-to-back attacks in the north of the country. This led to the May 15, 2013 declaration of a state of emergency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe by President Goodluck Jonathan. In his address, the President said 'What we are facing is not just militancy or criminality, but a rebellion and insurgency by terrorist groups which pose a very serious threat to national unity and territorial integrity...it would appear that there is a systematic effort by insurgents and terrorists to destabilize the Nigerian state and test our collective resolve.' According to GEJ, 'These actions amount to a declaration of war and a deliberate attempt to undermine the authority of the Nigerian state and threaten [its] territorial integrity. As a responsible government, we will not tolerate this'. When the negotiation and dialogue attempts failed, the government resorted to the second approach, which was the use of force. The administration pointed out the second approach was borne out of the need to put an end to impunity. Hence, GEJ vowed to 'take all necessary action... to put an end to the impunity of insurgents and terrorists,' (IRIN, 2013). All the activities have been noticed and reported by the traditional, electronic and social media in Nigeria. The electronic and the social media have also given room for the readers to interact based on their views and perceptions of the BH group and the activities of the government in combating terrorism.

5. Media, E-Newspaper and Terrorism

Generally, the mass media function to inform, influence, entertain, and educate among others (Osisanwo 2011:1). The media, therefore, shape the opinions of the audience by presenting a particular version as reality. The role of the media,

therefore, is to give information and provide a context of meaning, which can be represented through different forms – graphic or pictorial to the audience. In the print media, the ability of a language user to select the appropriate lexical and structural items for effective communication at either the word, phrasal, clausal, sentential or textual level, comes to the fore when a critical examination is carried out on the constructions (Osisanwo 2011:2). Discourses are represented in relation to the professional responsibility of news reporters in communicating newsworthy discourses to news consumers (Osisanwo 2013). The BH attacks, which have been used as a weapon of social and political destabilisation, and the efforts of the government in combating BH have been extensively reported in the Nigeria traditional, electronic and social media. It is obvious that the traditional media only gives its audience or readers an opportunity to consume the reported news items without having an appropriate forum for feedback. The arrival of the electronic and social media gives appropriate forum for the audience to give feedback. They also have an avenue to participate in an educating and enlightening conversation with other members of the forum. Hence, this paper is interested in readers' comments to news items on GEJ's war against BH terrorism in Nigeria.

6. Stance and Engagement

Hyland's (2005) stance and engagement theory guides the study. *Stance*, according to Hyland (2005:176), expresses a textual 'voice' or community recognized personality. Stance can be seen as an attitudinal dimension and includes features which refer to the ways speakers or writers present themselves and convey their judgements, opinions, and commitments about a particular topic. It is the ways that writers intrude to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments. According to Biber and Finnegan (1989:124), stance is 'the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgements or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message.' Specific word choices are made to convey such judgements and opinions. Others scholars have used words such as appraisal, attitude, evaluation, among others, to represent the concept. Stance, therefore, gives the speaker an opportunity to present his views on a propositional content. In relation to our data, the reader is able to read a news item and present position to fellow online interactants on his perception of the administration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (henceforth, GEJ). The four elements of stance as identified by Hyland include Hedges, Boosters, Attitude markers, Self-mention.

Engagement, according to Hyland (2005:176), is "an alignment dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognising the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their argument, focusing their attention, acknowledging their

uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to interpretations. Hyland acknowledges that stance and engagement overlap; they are two sides of a coin and contribute to the interpersonal aspect of discourse. The four elements of engagement as identified by Hyland include Reader- pronouns, Directives, Questions, Shared knowledge, Personal asides. This study identifies lexical choices and labels that reflect negative and positive stance by interactants on the administration of GEJ on the war against Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria. While some of such words show likeness and support for his approach at tackling the menace, others express anger, distrust, and dislike towards GEJ's approach.

7. Methodology

The data for this study were retrieved from *e-Punch* site, being the newspaper with a very wide coverage in Nigeria, and a newspaper whose news items receive numerous comments. The text corpus for this study consists of 751 comments, constituting 21,514 words on six purposively selected news items credited to President Jonathan and his administration in 2014. The year, 2014, was a period marked with an avalanche of Boko Haram attacks, including the kidnap of the Chibok girls, and period when GEJ had so much to combat with in relation to fighting BH terrorism. The analysis of data was guided by Hyland's stance and engagement theory of interaction. Emphasis is placed on the elements of stance and engagement in the data. 'COM' in the samples represents 'comment', that is a reader's comment. Meanwhile, only very few samples, from the corpus, are reproduced in the analysis. The samples are representative of the larger data. Meanwhile, some of the focal points in their comments have been italicised for emphasis.

The qualitative analysis uses more of the features of Hyland's stance and engagement with a little amendment. While the elements of engagement are fully deployed for analysis, the elements of stance are moderated in order to accommodate lexical choices and labels that reflect negative and positive stances by interactants. The comments are based on six news items relayed by *The Punch*, including

Nigeria winning Boko Haram War – Jonathan	(35 comments)
Jonathan orders total war against Boko Haram	(122 comments)
FG rejects B'Haram prisoner swap offer	(92 comments)
Boko Haram war worse than civil war – Jonathan	(255 comments)
Boko Haram war affecting economy – Jonathan	(79 comments)
Again, Jonathan meets Chadian President over insurgency	(168 comments).

8. Analysis and findings

Generally, readers respond to the news items with their various comments. However, it is not all the comments that are relevant to us. Some of the interactants use the forum as an avenue to castigate one another based on the comments made by others. Therefore, comments sometimes depend on ethnic or religious affiliation to GEJ while others just pass their positive comments and defend the president because of their liking for the president or the need to revere the office. When a participant makes a proposition, asks a question and or takes a stance on a news item, others also make theirs or respond to the existing proposition. These and some others make the forum quite interactive, dialogic and participatory. Beyond passing comments on the news items, participants also educate and enlighten one another, others run down other participants for their comments. Hence, elements of conversation including questioning, topic initiation, topic negotiation, among others abound in the comments.

Most of the comments in the data mostly construct GEJ negatively. The lexical labels fraught with negative judgments about GEJ include adjectives, nouns, verbs and adverbs. The labels include the use of words such as *foolish, thoughtless* in **COM 1** where the participant feels that that the BH did not attack anywhere in one week is not a sufficient reason for the president to celebrate. He further describes GEJ as someone who is unguarded in his utterances. In another comment, **COM 2**, the participant describes him as *lacking political will* and *not bold*. **COM 3** describes him as talking senselessly, especially because of his reference to the civil war. He regards GEJ's comparison between BH war and civil war as *senseless, drunken, irrelevant and rather irresponsible*. Likewise, **COM 4** feels that GEJ has not done enough to revive the economy, and goes forward to suggesting solution. Others describe GEJ as an *imbecile* and *a calamity any nation should pray against* having as a president, and changing his name from Jonathan to *Jonothing*.

COM 1: Can u imagine!!!! Just ONE week and GEJ is declaring victory. We indeed have *a very foolish and thoughtless president.....* Considering the recent ceasefire debacle, one would have thought that our C-in-C *would have become more guarded in his utterances*.

COM 2: The President *lacks political will* and without will there is no way. Jonathan is trying to please everybody at the same time and his enemies seeing this weakness are using it to advantage. You see, *Mr. President is not bold*.

COM 3: whatever concoctions you get drunk on that causes your *senseless talks*, just stop comparing a war that cost Ndigbo 3 million lives with

your PDP-induced terrorism... Stop insulting the sensibilities of Ibos with your *drunken, irrelevant and rather irresponsible comparison*. It is callous and criminal if you think that the office you occupy today is at the detriment of Ndigbo. Ingrate! ... stop pouring salt on the wound Ibos are still struggling to forget...

- COM 4:** Oh yeah, BH is definitely causing *all kinds of problems for Nigeria*, we have displaced citizens, the fear of moving around, local economy of the NE have become zero, then it has it's international effect too. If our Executive (Federal Government) wanted to do more they could have easily done that long time ago. The political undertone to BH is still a puzzle to me, the gains and loss is not worth embarking on. *Am a patriotic Nigeria and killing each other is what I cannot understand*. We have different groups blaming themselves but that will not solve the issue in our hand. *I will urge the Executive to be proactive*. We need peace in this nation. *I hope Fed government wake up and deal with this ugly situation once and for all*.

Meanwhile, some of the comments support, praise, encourage and defend GEJ, although such positive comments are not as much as the negative comments. **COM 5** is a reaction to the post by **COM 4**, where the participant praises GEJ as the best Nigerian president since the oil boom. This is the interactive part of some of the comments. Nevertheless, the comments sometimes display ethnicity, religiousity and partisanship. Hence, they should have been properly screened by the newspaper outlet before being allowed to go online in order to curtail tribal crisis. **COM 6** is another example where a participant defends GEJ and directs his fellow participant to stop condemning GEJ. In **COM 7**, the participant defends GEJ and accuses *Punch* of ideologically positioning itself to speak against GEJ, implying that another verb, which will not reveal their position could have been used in place of 'boast'. The participant exclaims *President boast. Hmmmmmmmm*.

- COM 5:** Even in the midst of all this crisis, the Nigerian economy under GEJ is the best ever since the oil boom. Tell me if u know, how would the economy have done if ur likes, ur party APC and BH was not this idi*tic? Banku head! Ewu hausa/fulani. Continue to urinate and wash ur man hood instead of taken total bath. Ur mama toto.
- COM 6:** If you were to be the President of Nigeria, how will you go about it? Please give us an honest and polite answers, and if you can't give any reasonable answers then you should better shut your mouth and stop condemning the president like that...

COM 7: Punch you people are making ur writeups so incite full, ur position is so obvious on this Nigerian situation. *President boast. Hmmmmmmmm.*

Pronouns are used in the comments to give different constructions and representations. Depending on the intention of the participant, first, second or third person, singular or plural pronoun can be used to achieve different purposes. 'I', that is self-mention is 'a conscious choice by writers to adopt a particular stance and disciplinary-situated authorial identity' (Hyland 2005:181). It is used in the comments to make propositions. For example in **COM 8**, the participant presents a discursual self to project his personalised beliefs, trusts, distrusts and disappointments in GEJ.

COM 8: There is only one single thing that GEJ will say and *I* will agree with him instantly without doubt and that is; GEJ to come and tell me the meaning of GEJ is Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Any other thing that GEJ will say aside the full meaning of GEJ is CONUNDRUM.

Participants also use the first person plural pronoun, *we*, to show solidarity and oneness. The oneness could be among the online participants or Nigerians in general. In **COM 9**, *we* is used ten times to show the different postures that *we*, as a people, as directed by GEJ, have taken within a short time. He evaluates the inconsistency in the decisions as showing to the enemy that *we* are distabilised. According to Hyland (2005), in addition to claiming solidarity, these devices also set up a dialogue by weaving the potential point of view of readers into the discourse; hence, as observed in **COM 9**, the interlocutors anticipate the readers' objections, voice their concerns, and express their views.

COM 9: I agree, first *we* said *we* will negotiate, then *we* said *we* won't, then *we* said all options are on the table, and finally *we* hear *we* won't negotiate! What this does is to signal to the enemy that *we* are in disarray! Negotiating with terrorist is akin to appeasement by Neville chamberlain. It does not work, for one reason these people have no honor! *We* should have fought them to the point of extinction and then negotiate but now no matter what "agreement" *we* reach with them, they will not honor it

The use of the second person singular or plural *you* is the way a participant acknowledges the reader's presence. While *you* could refer to online participants or Nigerians, it sometimes refers to GEJ, where the interlocutor assumes to be

addressing him directly. In **COM 10**, 'You' addresses either other online participants or GEJ himself about his thinking of the statement by GEJ. Meanwhile in **COM 11**, the discussion is assumed to strictly be between the writer and GEJ. He addresses GEJ in the second person *you and your government*.

The use of the third person is also motivated for meaning. In **COM 12**, the writer uses *him* to refer to GEJ. Therefore, GEJ is seen as a third person in the interaction. Meanwhile the use of the third person plural, *they*, which dissociates the participant or writer from the referent, is to refer to GEJ and his cabinet or to members of the BH group, as in **COM 13**. Therefore, pronouns are used by writers and textually construct membership participants with similar understanding and goals.

COM 10: You see i don't see this kind of statements as wise statements really, bcoz it may only provoke the sect to go on rampage. Actions speaks louder, why not just finish up the job first, this is not wise at all.

COM 11: Haba! Oga presido when will u and your government stop this blame game. From unknown enemies of the country to the opposition APC. Then it was the US and South Africa who will not sell arms to us and now, its a section of the press. In any case what do you expect when the men u employed and are paid with tax payers money, only chun out lies, conflicting reports and insult all who dare question your style of governance. One more thing sir, it is the hunters who are winning the war not your government. So please, stop boasting

COM 12: Do the people around *him* have the capability for rational and strategic reasoning and are they giving him the benefit of such? Or is there something Mr. Jonothing knows about the whole thing that the public do not know? How can citizens be calling for actions against the same person our President insist on winning and dinning with?

COM 13: It's like you're taunting *them*, and because of that, *they* may go ahead and seize another town. Also, it's been almost 7 months, with Christmas around the corner, and there's still no word on the missing Chibok girls!

Another engagement element that is used in the online interaction is the use of personal asides. The participants deploy the use of *Personal asides* in order to address readers directly by briefly interrupting the argument to offer a comment on what has been said. While asides express something of the writer's personality and willingness to explicitly intervene to offer a view, they can also be seen as a key

reader-oriented strategy. By turning to the reader in mid-flow, the writer acknowledges and responds to an active audience, often to initiate a brief dialogue that is largely interpersonal. Such comments often add more to the writer–reader relationship than to the propositional development of the discourse. In **COM 14**, the participant takes an aside and uses boosters with indicative sentences which show certainty to mark his assurance of the status of things regarding the BH insurgency. Most often, individuals speak very authoritatively on the social media, especially when their identity is hidden.

This kind of engagement builds a relationship between participants which is not dependent on an assessment of what needs to be made explicit to elaborate a position or ease processing constraints. It is an intervention simply to connect: to show that both the writer and the readers are engaged in the same game and are in a position to draw on shared understandings. The participant deviates from what other participants have been discussing, takes an aside to give a proposition on the purported politician(s) behind the BH terrorism. This way, he tries to acknowledge the belief of some Nigerians and shares the knowledge of some readers and participants on the sponsors of BH. He begins by laying a premise *Jonathan said boko haram are in his government. Azzazi said PDP is boko haram & boko haram is PDP*, before going ahead to insist on who is BH. The attitude of the participant markedly shows from his proposition that he has come to the conclusion that BH is sponsored by GEJ's party, People's Democratic Party (PDP) thus: *I insist PDP is boko haram. No APC member as be linked with boko haram*. Aside can also be seen as a key reader-oriented strategy (Hyland 2005) to offer his personal view on the sponsors of BH.

COM 14: *Jonathan said boko haram are in his government. Azzazi said PDP is boko haram & boko haram is PDP. I insist PDP is boko haram. No APC member as be linked with boko haram while several PDP big shots as been caught Ndume is the latest.*

The participants, in giving their opinions and stances on GEJ's combat against BH terrorism deploy *appeals to shared knowledge*. This engagement element is deployed by interlocutors to seek to position readers within apparently naturalized boundaries of disciplinary understandings. It is a bit similar to what a participant may offer in an aside, but it depends on how the participant offers an aside to appeal to shared knowledge. In **COM 14**, the participant invokes the notion of 'sharedness' by smuggling in the argument on the much contested sponsors of BH. In **COM 11** too, the participant tries to bring the readers to agree with him by building on some kind of implicit contract concerning all the different people or groups that GEJ had blamed at a time or the other for BH insurgency. With this, the participant constructs solidarity by explicitly involving Nigerians and other online participants to identify with the view that GEJ only seeks who to blame for failure on containing the BH

violence without finding a solution to the problem. By doing so, participant actually construct readers by presupposing that they hold such shared beliefs, thereby assigning to them a role, believing they hold a collective position.

COM 15: I have read people's opinion here and I must say that everyone has contributed base on various angles they view this occurrence. I want to say this, as a person who has studied Revolutionary Warfare aka guerrilla warfare. This is a guerrilla issue and many of opinions may not work because they are base on ethnic and religious sentiments. Even the FG is also making it difficult for themselves to win this guerrilla because they are not talking in one direction. For instance, we hear "we will negotiate" on the other hand we hear "we won't negotiate".

In **COM 15**, the participant also makes a proposition to the readers and the perceived audience using shared knowledge. Positioning his readers within an apparent historical understanding, he cites the *Revolutionary Warfare aka guerrilla warfare* as the basis for the reliability of his propositional contents, he submits that the BH war is a guerilla issue. The participant shifts to hedge his next opinion thus: *This is a guerrilla issue and many of opinions may not work because they are base on ethnic and religious sentiments*. He cites ethnic and religious sentiments as reasons why the suggestions from other participants may not work for GEJ. Nevertheless, he goes further to invite the readers to trust in his position by acknowledging and castigating the GEJ government as inconsistent in its decisions.

The *e-Punch* interactants also employ the use of *directives*, as an element of engagement to reveal their opinion. According to Hyland (2002a), *directives* can also be seen as directing readers to engage in three main kinds of activity, including textual acts, physical acts and cognitive acts. In our data the participants deploy *directives*, especially the *physical acts* to instruct GEJ to perform an action, see things in a particular way, or act on the BH insurgency in a suggested way. Imperatives are mainly used in this regard to order, instruct, or direct the addressee, for example in **COM 3**, where the participant instructs GEJ to *just stop comparing a war that cost Ndigbo 3 million lives with your PDP-induced terrorism...* and in **COM 11**, where the participant also commands *Oga presido to stop this blame game and also stop boasting*. *Directives* are also signaled by modal auxiliaries of obligation, which the participants addressed to GEJ as in **COM 16**, where the participant becomes quite judgmental and declared that *Jonathanmustgo*, that is Jonathan must go. The stance of the participant here is attitudinally marked by frustration. It depicts the participant's affective attitude to the proposition, thereby proposing that the solution is that GEJ must leave.

COM 16: #Jonathanmustgo

Participants in our data deploy *textual acts* to metadiscoursally guide readers through the discussion on the war on BH terrorism. For instance, in **COM 15**, the participant steers the reader, other participants and especially GEJ through a recourse to another war that is similar to BH insurgency, that is the *Revolutionary Warfare aka guerrilla warfare*. The textual reference to the warfare here suggests to GEJ that the matter at hand be approached as the *guerrilla warfare*. The use of the *cognitive acts* in the data guide readers, participants and GEJ through a line of reasoning. This is mainly achieved by a predicative adjective which expresses the participant's judgement of necessity or importance, as exemplified in **COM 17**. The participant instructs GEJ on his perceived way out of the problem. To the participant, a threat and call for the splitting of Nigeria should be sufficient to scare the northerners to find immediate solution to the BH menace. The participant's line of reasoning shows that he has prejudged the northerners and concluded that they are the brains behind the menace. As argued by Hyland (2005), *cognitive acts* are potentially the most threatening type of directives, even as seen in **COM 17**.

COM 17: The president should tell the northern politicians, that the threat of different nationalities in Nigeria declaring self-determination is too real to be ignored. If they don't put a stop to Boko Haram, he won't hesitate to call for referendum for splitting of Nigeria. He should be bold enough to say this to their face. Let's see who will lose.

Another element of engagement that is used in our data is *question*. *Questions* are the strategy of dialogic involvement in discourses. Participants deploy direct and indirect interrogatives to engage interlocutors or GEJ and bring them into an arena where they can be led to the writer's viewpoint (Hyland, 2002b). As commonly found in the data, the participants raise rhetorical questions in order to arouse the interest of the interlocutors. They explore an unresolved issue by addressing the other interlocutors or GEJ as an equal, a conversational partner, with whom they share their curiosity and invite the other to follow their arguments. The participant, therefore, position other interlocutors at the receiving end by immediately or simultaneously supplying an answer to the question; they initiate and close the dialogue. In **COM 18**, the participant vehemently opposes GEJ's trip to Lake Chad again by saying, *Am I missing something here? What are you discussing with Chadian President?* This is based on the belief that the Chadian President has been supposedly identified as one of the sponsors of BH. In other samples like **COM 19**, the participant only throws up the rhetorical question to counter GEJ's claim of success. **COM 20**, by another participant, openly disagrees with the claim by GEJ that the war was being won thus *Winning which war? Why do we parade all this fake PhD holder-turned imbeciles as leaders?* **COM 21** is an instance of a rhetorical comment meant to get the readers

and GEJ alike thinking. It is meant to cognitively task Nigerians on the questions GEJ should be helped to answer.

- COM 18: *Am I missing something here? What are you discussing with Chadian President? He fooled you into a fake ceasefire and as if that is not enough, his relative was caught recently with weapons meant for Boko Haram. Don't you understand that Chad and Cameroon are interested in the resources around Lake Chad and are active participants in the militancy? Up until recently, Cameroon did not disturb Boko Haram as long as they did not launch attacks in their country. Does Mr President and his advisers not learn from having their fingers burnt? I tire for this matter oooo!!!*
- COM 19: Did Jonathan tell the people that it was the hunters or locals that have been defeating the Boko Haram and that he's been the unseen hand behind the insurgent?
- COM 20: Winning which war? Why do we parade all this fake PhD holder-turned imbeciles as leaders?
- COM 21: *Do the people around him have the capability for rational and strategic reasoning and are they giving him the benefit of such? Or is there something Mr. Jonothing knows about the whole thing that the public do not know? How can citizens be calling for actions against the same person our President insist on winning and dinning with?*

9. Findings and Conclusion

This study has found out that the readers' comments platform has been a forum where readers, participants and interlocutors engage one another to explore, expose and pour out their mind on the state of the nation, Nigeria. In this case, participants have used it as an avenue to express their opinions and stances on the GEJ administration's fight against BH insurgency. To achieve their stance(s), they have deployed different engagement elements for specific purposes. Comments sometimes depend on ethnic or religious affiliation to GEJ while others just pass their positive comments and defend the president because of their liking for him or the need to revere the Office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. When a participant makes a proposition, asks a question and or takes a stance on a news item, others also make theirs or respond to the existing proposition. These and some others make the forum quite interactive, dialogic and participatory. Participants use lexical labels, fraught

with negative judgments, to describe and construct GEJ negatively. Other participants support, encourage and defend GEJ; in fact, one praises GEJ and positively labels him as the best Nigerian president since the oil boom. Where participants ideologically disagree with one another, they resort to verbal abuse which obviously shows their affinity by displaying ethnicity, religiousity and partisanship. This is where the interjection and intervention of the newspaper outlet in controlling the comments that should be allowed to go online becomes very important. Truly, there are cases where they often delete some when it is observed to be very highly offensive. Nevertheless, there is the need for a stronger intervention in order not to allow online comment degenerate into physical ethnic, religious and partisan crises, if not war.

The *e-Punch* interactants deploy the use of pronouns to give different constructions and representations. They have used the first, second or third person, singular or plural pronoun to achieve different purposes. *I* is used by the participant to present a discursal self to project his personalised beliefs, trusts, distrusts and disappointments in GEJ, *we* is used to show solidarity and oneness. The second person singular or plural *you* is used to acknowledge the reader's presence, and in some cases, directly refers to GEJ or other participants. The third person singular, *him* is also used to refer to GEJ. Therefore, GEJ is seen as a third person in the interaction. Meanwhile the use of the third person plural, *they*, dissociates the participant from the referent.

The *e-Punch* interactants deploy the use of *personal asides* to address readers directly by briefly interrupting the argument in order to offer a view. They have also given their opinions and stances on GEJ's combat against BH terrorism by deploying *appeals to shared knowledge*, in order to invoke the notion of 'sharedness' with the readers and other participants. There is also the employment of the use of *directives* in directing readers to engage in any of the three main kinds of activity, including textual acts, physical acts and cognitive acts, at a particular time. With the *physical acts*, they instruct GEJ to act on the BH insurgency in a suggested way, and they use the modal auxiliaries of obligation to judge and make declarations on GEJ. With the *textual acts*, the participants metadiscoursally guide readers through the discussion on the war on BH terrorism; and with the *cognitive acts*, they guide readers, participants and GEJ through a line of reasoning. The participants also use *questions* (direct and indirect interrogatives) to engage interlocutors or GEJ and bring them into an arena where they can be led to their own viewpoint; and they raise rhetorical questions in order to arouse the interest of the interlocutors.

In conclusion, the *e-Punch* online readers' comments on the former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan administration's war on *Boko Haram* terrorism implicated and condemned the administration while some suggested solutions. Some of their stances were fuelled by religiousity, ethnicity and partisanship. Nevertheless, they deployed different engagement techniques, including questioning, appeal to shared

knowledge, personal asides, directives, among others, to convince other participants or call the administration to order. Meanwhile, it is recommended that *e-Punch* and other media outlets be fervent and proactive in their role of moderating what participants post or the comments they pass online in order to curb avoidable crisis.

References

- Adesoji, A.O. 2010. The *Boko Haram* Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria. *African Spectrum*, 45(2),95-108.
- Aghedo, C.U. 2012. Linguistic Determinants of Military and Terrorism in Nigeria: The Case of M.E.N.D. and *Boko Haram*. *Development Country Studies* Vol 2(11).
- Ayoola, Kehinde A. and Olaosun, Ibrahim E. (2014). "Media Representation of *Boko Haram* in Some Nigerian Newspapers", *International Journal of English Linguistics*, Vol 4 No 3, 49-58
- Biber, D., & Finnegan, R. 1989. Styles of stance in English: Lexical and grammatical marking of evidentiality and affect. *Text*, 9, 93–124.
- Chiluwa, I and Oyegoke, A. 2013 'Twittering the *Boko Haram* Uprising in Nigeria: Investigating Pragmatic Acts in the Social Media': *Africa Today*. Vol 59(3). 82-102
- Hyland, K. 2002a. 'Directives: Power and Engagement in Academic Writing', *Applied Linguistics* 23(2): 215–39.
- Hyland, K. 2002b 'What Do They Mean? Questions in Academic Writing', *Text* 22(4): 529–57.
- Hyland, K. 2005. Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies*, 7, 173–192.
- IRIN 2013. 'Nigerians on the Run as Military Combat *Boko Haram*'. Integrated Regional Information Networks. May 22. Available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/98076/analysis-nigerians-on-the-run-as-military-combat-boko-haram>.
- Ogungbe E.O. and Alo M. 2014. A critical study of verbal-visual news in Nigerian e-newspapers. In: Adekoya S, Taiwo Ayoola RT and Adegoju A (eds) *Current Linguistic and Literary Issues in Digital Communication in the Globalised Age*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolwo University Press, pp. 51–80.
- Osisanwo, Ayo. 2011. *Language and Ideology in News Magazines' Representation of Nigeria's 2003 and 2007 General Elections*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan. xiv+243
- Osisanwo, Ayo. 2013. "Discourse Representation in News Stories on Obasanjo's Third-term Plot in *TELL* and *THE NEWS*. *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*. Vol. 23. pp 115-141.
- Osisanwo, A. (2016). "Discursive representation of *Boko Haram* terrorism in selected Nigerian newspapers" *Discourse and Communication*. DOI:

10.1177/1750481316638149. Accessed on May 2, 2016 at <http://dcm.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/1750481316638149v1.pdf?ijkey=IPYcP7Zgn1!ONDB&keytype=finite>

Punch. 2014. Ikeja-Lagos: Punch Nigeria Limited.

Yusha'u, Muhammad Jameel (2012). Representation of *Boko Haram* Discourses in the British Broadsheets. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 5(1), 91-108. DOI:

Author biography

Ayo Osisanwo (PhD) lectures in the Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. His research interests are media discourse, (critical) discourse analysis and stylistics. He is also interested in English phonology. He has published several papers in journals and books within and outside Africa. He is a 2015 AHP/ACLS Fellow and this article is a product of the funding received from AHP/ACLS. The author is grateful to Professor Fred Hendricks and Juanita Fuller, his hosts at Rhodes University, South Africa; Professors Jeanne Prinseloo, Obododimma Oha, Akin Odebunmi, and Ian Sieborger of Rhodes University, South Africa and University of Ibadan, Nigeria for going through and offering advice on the initial manuscript. He also appreciates the blind reviewer.