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Textual Aesthetics: A Look at Nigerian Print Media News and Features

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Abstract - This article examines aesthetic components of print media news and feature stories and emphasizes on the need for present and upcoming journalists, particularly in Nigeria, to help protect the profession by always considering the aesthetic worth of their stories. This is in view of the fact that with the growing importance of textual component of an average newspaper and magazine, and continuous textual degeneration in most Nigerian newspapers and magazines, not enough research works have been carried out in the area. Of course investigations show that most of the research works on print media aesthetics in the country have been in the area of physical design and layout of newspaper and/or magazine pages, hence the article's emphasis that the aspect of news and feature contents needs commensurate concentration. The article posits that as is the case in electronic media, there are certain seemingly neglected inter-related variables that are by their nature considered as aesthetic fields in the written word (news and features). Accordingly, the work identifies and illuminates certain aesthetic fields that should be recognized, considered and applied by any journalist who, irrespective of the structure or form of his writing, aims at making reading a pleasurably rewarding exercise. A position of this discourse is that a news or feature story that takes cognizance of the interrelated aesthetic fields is a bestseller to any newspaper or magazine outfit or reader.

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Textual Aesthetics: A Look at Nigerian Print Media News and Features

Godspower Udoh [α] & Charles Obot [σ]

Abstract - This article examines aesthetic components of print media news and feature stories and emphasizes on the need for present and upcoming journalists, particularly in Nigeria, to help protect the profession by always considering the aesthetic worth of their stories. This is in view of the fact that with the growing importance of textual component of an average newspaper and magazine, and continuous textual degeneration in most Nigerian newspapers and magazines, not enough research works have been carried out in the area. Of course investigations show that most of the research works on print media aesthetics in the country have been in the area of physical design and layout of newspaper and/or magazine pages, hence the article's emphasis that the aspect of news and feature contents needs commensurate concentration. The article posits that as is the case in electronic media, there are certain seemingly neglected inter-related variables that are by their nature considered as aesthetic fields in the written word (news and features). Accordingly, the work identifies and illuminates certain aesthetic fields that should be recognized, considered and applied by any journalist who, irrespective of the structure or form of his writing, aims at making reading a pleasurably rewarding exercise. A position of this discourse is that a news or feature story that takes cognizance of the interrelated aesthetic fields is a bestseller to any newspaper or magazine outfit or reader.

I. Introduction

A visit to newspaper and magazine stands and shops in major cities in West African countries reveals that the launching of new titles is the order of the day. In Nigeria, the titles come in various colours, characters and with different political, economic, social and professional motives. Although this proliferation appears to be posing some dangers to professionalism in media practice, as it promotes mediocrity and quackery, it is an interesting development because it equally promotes competition in and adds colour to the media industry. Besides, it provides research avenues and challenges to scholars and professionals, especially those in the print media industry.

Even though there is no official record stating how many newspapers and magazines are in circulation in Nigeria due to seeming uncontrolled entries, one may not be justified to say that the newspapers and magazines are either too many, enough, or not enough. This is because the number that should be enough for Nigeria's population is not known. According to Udoakah (1996: 163), "if the newspaper market is assessed in terms of sex, age, educational level, economic status, cultural and religious background, interest and values, it could be said that there is still room for more newspapers and magazines in Nigeria".

Udoakah is perhaps of this view because these demographic variables keep changing with time and season. Therefore, neither plethora nor proliferation may be the major problem facing newspaper business in Nigeria today. Of course newspaper or magazine proliferation means adequate information for human beings who, by nature, need it for survival.

One significant issue that should keep worrying media commentators, researchers, scholars, and professionals in the West African sub-region generally and in Nigeria particularly, which of course appears not to have received adequate attention of professionals, researchers and scholars, is the style and form certain newspaper or magazine contents are presented to the reader for such a reader to improve on his present knowledge and awareness level. One of such neglected contents is the textual content. In other words, the issue should be whether the grammatical, lexical and semantic (stylistic) contents of news and feature articles in newspapers and magazines are presented aesthetically - in a style that actually communicates or brings out the intended meaning to the intended reader; or whether such contents add to the already existing lexical, semantic or syntactic confusion in the system. And while style addresses the issue of general message presentation according to rules and conventions of a language, form concentrates on the unit of presentation (news, feature, editorial, etc.).

II. Definitions of Key Terms

Textual Aesthetics : This is concerned with the presentation of the written word (news and features) in newspaper or magazine in such a manner that the reader finds both physical and perceptual pleasure, satisfaction and understanding from such a presentation. A news story is aesthetic if it gives pleasure and satisfaction to the reader.

News : This is a report of happenings or developments in the society as carried on the news pages of

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newspapers or magazines, written in the common journalistic style and structure.

Features : These are continuous writing in newspapers or magazines which are neither straight news nor advertisements, but are based on issues of public importance.

Aesthetic forms : These are the lexical or verbal channels through which stories are presented in a manner that would satisfy the reader of newspapers or magazines. Such channels are news and features.

Print Media : These are newspapers and magazines in their hard copies.

III. Justification of Discourse

In journalism, two broad forms of practice are traditionally identifiable. They are print journalism and electronic journalism. While print journalism is made up of newspapers, magazines, bill boards, and by extension, books, and pamphlets; electronic journalism is made up of radio and television as their major tools. What may appear as the third form is online or internet journalism. Each of these journalism areas may have distinguishing operational qualities and attributes, but they generally correlate in concepts and professional principles. Apart from sharing the traditional functions of informing, educating and entertaining their respective audiences, they convey an appreciable quantity of their messages through text, the written word.

But while both share this principle, they differ in formats and operations. Whereas electronic media news, for instance, appears fleeting and may not give audience an easy access to instantaneous assessment, print media textual presentations afford readers ample opportunity to assess such contents easily. It must be pointed out that newspaper readers usually relax with their copies, take such copies home or to the office, and refer to such copies at will. This is why textual contents of a printed work are usually open to appraisal and criticism. But the question is how often do researchers assess textual contents of newspapers and magazines, and to what extent? We all know that written messages are made of sentences, and that sentences are made of words. There are words, and there are appropriate words. Equally, there are sentences and there are effective sentences. The same principle applies to paragraphs. The concern of this article, therefore, is with the textual presentation of news and feature stories contained in newspapers and magazines in Nigeria.

IV. Textual Aesthetics and Aesthetic Experience

Recent media aesthetic studies appear to be tilted towards non-textual aspects of the concept. Even in television aesthetics, which appears to be one of the most widely researched areas in media aesthetics, greater emphasis has usually been placed on non-textual fields such as lighting, sight, sound, and motion, and general directing and designing (Zettl, 2005; 2009; Nkana, 1996, 2003; and Akpabio, 2011). And in radio production, the basic aesthetic elements of sound and sound effect have usually been emphasized (Akpan, 1987; Akpan and Etuk, 1990). Print media aesthetics has equally suffered from this neglect as research in newspaper and magazine aesthetics has usually been in the general layout, planning and design aspects of print media production. In other words, recent aesthetic studies in newspaper and magazine have usually been focused on traditional design elements of page balance, contrast, dynamics, focus, proportion and so on (Udoh, 2010; Udoakah, 1996; Udoakah and Olise, 2009; Anim, 2003; Nwane ,2011; Batta, 2008).

Textual aesthetics is one area of media aesthetic studies that requires serious concentration, especially in Nigeria where English Language is primarily the second language, and where people who might have failed in their chosen careers tend to fall back on journalism and in the process adulterate the practice. So, textual items in all ramifications take greater space in any average newspaper or magazine professionally packaged anywhere in the world. Rather than publish pictures in most news pages, most newspapers and magazines in Nigeria prefer running most of their stories without relevant photographs. Though this may appear unprofessional, it in this context emphasizes the importance of verbal or textual elements in the print media business.

In the same vein, early newspapers anywhere in the world hardly used pictures to communicate their messages to their respective audiences, thus demonstrating the importance of the written word. The first newspaper to be written in Nigeria for instance, known as Iwe Irohin, edited and published by Henry Townsend, carried scanty photographs, illustrations or pictures in its first and many of its early editions. The newspaper was primarily textual. The only feature that competed with normal texts was headlines, which of course were falling short of comparative aesthetic requirements, perhaps due to the lack-lustre technological level then.

The foregoing demonstrates the importance of texts in both the ancient and the modern media production. To that extent, this article sees textual aesthetics as the style or manner in which certain elements in a written or printed language are arranged to give both satisfaction and pleasure to the reader; the written or printed language being sentences, clauses, phrases, words, letters or the specific semantic unit "through which mass media (aesthetic) forms such as news, features", and ancillary items are communicated, (Udoakah, 2000: 48-49) .

The guiding principle of this discourse is that for any media message to be effectively communicated, the style and form by which it is communicated must be

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effective too. For instance, the language or the text through which it is communicated must therefore be structured in such a way that it is not merely understood by the reader, but should importantly arouse particular feelings of the reader. It must, in other words, be structured, written or printed in a communicative language, a language that shares adequate and proper meaning, a language that gives the reader a pleasurable and profitable experience. This is the hallmark of textual aesthetics and textual aesthetic experience.

V. Theoretical Framework

It may be true that most of the things taught in classrooms, are theory-based. In as much as this may be true, it should equally be true that theories, especially the functional ones, drive practice. Nwane, (2011: 4) agrees thus, "some of the things we teach in the classroom look like theory, but some of my students know I always say there is nothing as practical as a good theory". Successful applications are therefore based on good theories.

Two theories, namely agenda setting theory, and pleasure theory appear to be adequate to explain communication generally and textual aesthetics in particular. The two theories address the role of the source who decides the aesthetic worth of newspaper content, for instance. The two theories are equally apt because while the former is drawn from the general media perspective, the latter is a theory of aesthetics.

The basic assumption of agenda setting theory is that the mass media have an obligation to set agenda for the people and the people usually respect and follow such an agenda. To Severin and Tankard Jnr (1979: 253), agenda setting "is the capability of the mass media to select and emphasize certain issues and thereby cause those issues to be perceived as important by the public". This means in essence that if members of the public must benefit from the mass media messages, which could either be textual, graphic or pictorial, they must first be exposed to them in an effective manner, hence the need for aesthetic consideration by media professionals. It is not enough for the media to set agenda; such agenda must be set in a manner that hits the audience at the midriff and yanks him by the hair of his head, even when the agenda content or story in question does not carry any form of sensationalism. It, in other words, must command the audience's serious attention and arouse his interest almost immediately such an audience is exposed to the message. And as it affects this discourse such agenda (news or feature) should be set in a language, pattern or grammar that immediately communicates to concerned audiences.

Hedonism, otherwise known as the Pleasure Theory, treats the aesthetic as something, object or situation that is capable of producing an outstanding feeling of pleasure or satisfaction. The pleasure itself is artistically created and satisfaction aesthetically experienced. In relation to textual aesthetics, it can be said that for a particular news story to be effectively assimilated, it must contain some acceptable aesthetic features. It must be well written and structured to bring out the needed reading pleasure or satisfaction. It therefore stands to reason that those entrusted with the production of "media meal" must prepare and present it in such a style that wets the appetite of the media consumer.

VI. Aesthetic Fields in News and Features

Udoh (2010) and Johnson (2004) believe that aesthetics lends itself to many subject areas and scholars in those areas. According to them, this significantly depends on the depth of knowledge of the scholar or researcher in the affected areas about the subject matter of aesthetics. Udoh and Johnson explain further that in many cases, what is interpreted as an aesthetic element or field of an area of study clearly arises from the operational mechanics of the area, subject matter or discipline under consideration. In other words, what constitutes an aesthetic element in Theatre Arts is so-called because of the workability and relativity of the items of aesthetics chosen.

With this understanding, this article now attempts to highlight and discuss textual aesthetic fields and their elements in print journalism news and feature stories with the major aim of bringing out a correlation between those elements and the operational definition adopted. Issues raised in the working definition therefore provide the categories for the explanation of the aesthetic fields. These fields can be effectively integrated in the news writing if the writer writes about what he knows, as a requirement for this kind of writing is that the writer must importantly consider the reader's interest as paramount. Since the essence of writing basically is communication, the writer should begin with that which is familiar or which he thinks is familiar to him and his readers. He should equally use concrete examples to illustrate his supposition, and respect the reader's point of view. The seemingly interrelated fields in textual aesthetics which should be taken into consideration in news and feature story writing are now to be discussed.

VII. Coherence/Logic-Related Field

Ordinarily, when two or more elements cohere, they appear to stick together and have inseparable relationship. Sentence is one of the most important parts of writing, especially journalistic writing. The coherence or logicality of a piece of writing begins with the parts that make up each sentence sticking or working together. A sentence that lacks coherence is not

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aesthetic. For example, there is an apparent lack of coherence in the following statement: *News writing is a compulsory course for all Mass Communication students but we are not soon to start an I.C.T. programme.* There is no direct relationship between the desirability of making news writing compulsory for all Mass Communication students and not starting an I.C.T. programme soon. The two independent clauses making up the compound sentence do not cohere. The sentence by extension lacks unity and logic which are related fields. Coherence is better noticed within sentences and sometimes clauses. Therefore any section of the journalist's news or feature sentence that stands apart both in terms of violating a sequence, logic and reasoning is not aesthetic and as such should be quickly revised to achieve the desired effect. And that is why any careful writer should ask himself questions bordering on whether what he writes follows a natural or reordered sequence and whether such a sequence makes sense.

VIII. Conciseness-Related Field

Conciseness is another element of good journalistic writing, especially in news writing. News editors or managers have a duty to discourage their writers from the slippery path of verbosity, circumlocution, tautology and needless elaboration. The quality of news or feature writing is never dependent on its length (quantity), except where such is a condition given to the writer. Great writing often comes not only in simple but also in short sentences, thus:

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light, and there was light.

There are no wasted words in the above quoted passage as taken from Holy Bible (King James Version). There is no rambling and obfuscating sentence. Feature and even some news stories may not achieve this poetry, but they must strive for something approaching luminosity and conciseness (Stephens, 2005). As a field, conciseness has a lot in common with simplicity. Many news or feature writers often draw as their models, the highly bombastic and tautological writings of some political heavyweights and other public figures who revel more in the sound than in the substance of what they try to put across to the masses. Even though this is common in personal articles such as newspaper columns meant for specified readers or audiences, it should be discouraged in journalistic writing generally.

"Ozumbaism", a pompous word used more for its sound than for its effect; a high-sounding neologism of a political nature used to delight, surprise and intimidate, made popular by Dr Kingsley Mbadiwe, is an example of or type of verbose writing commonly found in Nigerian newspapers. Being concise or brief calls for a writer's ability to say or write what he wants to write in a concise or precise manner without recourse to such violation as stated above. A point of view that is explicit needs no elaboration. It is the failure to recognize this fact that leads some writers into making unnecessary repetitions. The following statements illustrate aspects of a lack of conciseness:

1) The building formerly housing the National Assembly was utterly and completely razed by fire.
2) The tall and gangling Malian striker was awkward in moves.
3) The professor is a sophistic rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity.
4) When the local government chairman searched everywhere, he practically gave up hope of finding his kidnapped wife.

As a note of caution to young writers or writers in the making, "never use a long word or long sentence or long paragraph where a short one will do" (Orwell, 1962: 22)

IX. Synergy/Unity-Related Field

The necessity for synergy and/or unity in media writing is quite obvious. Ideas which are related need be presented in related circumstances, rather than pitched against unrelated ones. Confusion may be averted if the writer is conscious of his reader's possible limitations, but the fact remains that the reader may not necessarily see the issues in the same light with the writer. As an aesthetic field, unity has almost an inseparable relationship with coherence and synergy. While coherence concentrates on sentences and their component parts, and unity exists mainly between sentence and paragraph, synergy addresses the "wholeness" of the whole body of writing; without that the writer may be viewed as lacking in control of thought. Even though Akpan (1987) explains synergy in relation to broadcast programming, the same definition of synergy can be adapted to newspaper news or feature writing. According to Akpan (1987: 71) the application of synergy can be seen in soup preparation where all ingredients (salt, water, oil, fish, crayfish, etc) "blend", for the *soupness* of the preparation to be "experienced".

The following statement lacks unity of ideas: *My son gets a regular measure of discipline in the home and I am nauseated with him.* How does the writer relate his being nauseated to his regular application of disciplinary measures against the child? The sentence lacks unity and even elicits some ambiguity which further complicates issues. A journalistic sentence has unity if segments or units making up the sentence are, by common sense, relevant to one another and can link well with other paragraphs under the same topic or headline.

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X. Clarity/Accuracy-Related Field

Generally, no one wishes to be bothered by a foggy piece of writing. Readers of newspapers or magazines are not an exception. Therefore, clarity of expression becomes an important element in news and feature writing. Since a journalist's principal reason for writing is that of communication of ideas, thoughts and feelings with others, it becomes a necessity for all forms of writing to eschew those things that may make their messages obscure to their various audiences. In this regard bombastic, ambiguous statements and equivocations have no place in effective journalistic communication. Most bombastic expressions have meaning which of course may be outside the context of the user. This is not aesthetic.

In most cases, the language used by some news magazine columnists require an average reader to use a dictionary so as to be able to understand what certain words or phrases mean or stand for. It must be pointed out that many readers of *The Guardian* newspaper made similar complaints in the early days of the newspaper – the problem of readability of the paper's feature stories in particular, though the usual excuse was/is that the newspaper is for the elite. The same complaints were recorded when *The Nation* newspaper introduced its back page columns. But it makes sense for a careful writer to be guided by the fact that as a mass medium, the newspaper can be stumbled upon by any reader, who should have a measure of pleasure or enjoyment with the articles therein. Perhaps the issue of clarity is better expressed using the advocacy of a journalist, novelist and essayist, Orwell (1962:151-152): "A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What image or idiom will make it clearer? What words will express it? Is the image fresh enough to have an effect?" And in the opinion of Harold Evans (2000: 17), "a writer should write to ensure that every news word must be understood by the ordinary reader, every sentence must be clear at one glance, and every story must say something about people." Clarity also covers issues or rule of identification and attribution (properly mentioning the name of the source of information used in the story, except where the information is given off record or in confidence). It equally covers the font size used. The more attractive and legible a news font size, the more enjoyable the piece may be.

XI. Simplicity-Related Field

Communication is associated with meaning, if at all it is not meaning itself. And meanings are arrived at when simplicity is the watch word. Meanings are shared when the sender and the receiver of messages or signals enjoy similar fields of orientations or experience. This being the case, the news or feature writer fails in his duty as a communicator if he cannot present his message in such a way that his reader, whoever he might be, understands it firsthand. To ensure proper understanding of any information put across, news or feature writers owe their readers a duty to use symbols that are within the horizon of theirs and that of the reader. Even though simplicity may be relative, it is aesthetically questionable to use symbols that will compel anticipated news or feature story reader, for instance, to consult a dictionary, or thesaurus in order to understand a particular word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph of a journalistic story.

Instead of confusing readers and compounding their textual problems, news writers should seek to use simple words to explain the lead, neck, body and tail of the story. In news writing for instance, the traditional five-Ws and single H, which determines the success of a well written story, should be wrapped in simple straight forward language. Since news is generally written for the masses, the language commonly understood by those masses should be used. Technical words in the news should be explained without necessarily violating the professional news writing rules and format. This should be carefully followed especially in specialized reporting. Scientific reports, which by nature has its own language structure and tone, can be made interesting, attractive, and rewarding to a lay-reader when the reporter takes pains and time to explain such technical or scientific words or symbols, if he must be understood.

A Nobel Prize winner, Schumacher, wrote a book, entitled, Small Is Beautiful, and it became such a big success that it earned him accolades the world over. Its practical philosophy is expounded in the need for Third World countries to start small economic projects before going into gigantic ones. From this, one acknowledges the need for the news or feature writer to write relatively simply, because "simple is beautiful".

Simplicity, it must be restated, is the quality of a knowledgeable writer. Journalists should be knowledgeable writers. Importantly too, there is a need to differentiate between being simple and being simplistic. While the former is an enduring quality, the latter is a condemnable style. Failure to abide by this principle leads to the charge of being pompous and obscure. According to Wilson (2000) an aspect of lack of simplicity involves the use of overworked phrases or hackneyed expressions, exaggerations or hyperbole, journalese, officialise, commercialese, dialect, slang and other forms of expression which do not aid the understanding of a piece of writing.

Some examples of foggy sentences as taken from some newspapers in Nigeria are the following:

1) Barrack Obama is well known throughout the universe.
2) The come-backing Super Eagles defender, Joseph Yobo, played his heart out in the last Nations Cup.

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Again, the quality of a piece of journalistic or extra-journalistic writing is not determined through its ability to mystify the reader or obfuscate the meaning of the message. History of course always remembers writers whose works were simple, clear, coherent, concise and united in thought and expression. Such great writers were never known to be poor, but better communicators.

XII. Concreteness/Candidness-Related Field

In news writing it is always better to hit the nail on the head. It is equally aesthetic. It may not be so in most features. But in writing generally, the story teller will usually do better if he uses apt words and expressions that conjure the proper picture in the mind of the reader. Writers write with nouns and verbs mostly because the essence of writing is to tell or say something about a thing, a person or a situation. Writing with concrete nouns and active verbs in most cases helps in achieving concreteness in writing and it is aesthetic. Active voice sentences, rather than passive voice expressions, tend to achieve a higher level of concreteness. Concreteness is closely associated with candidness. The aesthetics of writing may be enhanced if a writer uses words or expressions with some measure of sincerity. By projecting concreteness and candidness, certain words and expressions, on account of their vividness, leave a lasting impression on the reader (Nwane, 2011).

XIII. Consistency/Concentration-Related Field

One major problem faced by most Nigerian writers is the inability or failure to be consistent in word use. The problem becomes more complicated when it comes to spellings of words that are either spelt, recognized or used in different ways by different English speaking countries all over the world. For instance there are so many English words that are differently spelt by the Standard English Language users, which is the British. There are equally other sets of words that are spelt, recognised and used differently by American English writers or speakers. British English (B.E.) and American English (A.E.) are therefore sources of textual confusion when it comes to news and feature writing in newspapers and magazines in Nigeria. This is one of the "cold wars" in communication world.

A journalist or professional writer should be conscious of these varieties of spellings (which usually come as nouns or verbs) as well as the context in which they can be applied. All news organizations have a concept of textual house style; that is the language in which stories should be written. Why? This is because consistency in matters of detail "encourages a reader to concentrate on what his writer is saying" (Hicks and Holmes, 2002:19)

Apart from sticking to the house style adopted by the media Organization for which he is writing, such a writer should importantly realise that most Nigerian writers and readers tend to be more comfortable when words are written in their original forms, that is in Standard English forms or spellings, which is British. This position is clearly supported by (Udoh, 2010) in his work on which of the two broad English spellings that are preferable by average English newspaper readers in Nigeria. According to the result of Udoh's survey, most of the respondents were more comfortable with spelling consistently fashioned after the British. Most of the respondents said they found pleasure in their newspaper reading when they found out that there were no spelling variations in words used in news and feature writing. Of course the Pleasure Theory of aesthetics has it that a work (including textual works) becomes aesthetic if it gives pleasure to the beholder (reader, viewer, etc).

A reason behind preference for consistency in Standard English by Nigerians for instance is that the country was colonised by Britain and of course the word, English, is an adjective form of the proper noun, England, a country forming the southern and largest part of the United Kingdom. This does not however mean that American form of English or its spelling pattern cannot be adopted by Nigerian writers, especially those writers who are influenced by Americanised computer sets found everywhere in the country. What matters is consistency in use of words and particularly, spellings.

Consistency in spelling and language where necessary has a lot of correlation with an already discussed aesthetic field, which is unity. A piece of journalistic writing that is consistent in spelling is a united whole and is more easily understood by readers, most of whom might not be exposed to the reasons for these differential spellings. It must of course be pointed out that in most mass communicated messages, the writers or senders of signals may not be at the reading point to explain certain things or any variations in spellings to the readers or audiences. In fact this is one of the reasons why issues of clarity and simplicity are always stressed when it comes to news and related journalistic writings. Of course consistency also correlates with clarity and simplicity because an inconsistent piece of prose can be unclear and what is unclear can be difficult to comprehend.

The following are some of the English words that have different spellings and are capable of encouraging inconsistency in written communication; they are arranged first in their British versions; and latter in their American versions of spelling:

1) British: favour, colour, neighbour, harbour, labour, practice, programme, realize, emphasize, centre, fulfilment, kilometre, etc.

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2) American: favor, color, neighbor, harbor, labor, practice (spelt the same way whether as verb or noun) program, realise, emphasise, center, fulfillment, kilometer, etc.

It must be pointed out that most of these words which originally are in noun forms do not significantly change their forms when used as either a verb or an adjective. And one word that is usually used inconsistently by writers is the word, practice, which American English accepts both as a noun and as a verb; whereas to a Standard user, *practice* is a noun, *practise* is a verb. A consistency-minding writer should note this and stick to one form where necessary. A similar rule should apply to language use. News or feature stories are better appreciated if they are written in a particular language. If a writer has a reason to introduce a foreign language somewhere in his script, an aesthetic way of doing that is for such a writer to interpret such a language and ensure flow and consistency with the main language used.

As a field, consistency also covers such other aesthetic issues such as facts, opinions, comments and reasoning. In news writing, care must be taken when presenting facts. This is because most readers tend to enjoy stories whose facts are consistently presented. It is a violation of factual consistency if a straight news writer presents unexplained contradictory facts on an event covered by him. This is because news thrives on facts basically. In the same vein, opinions, comments and analysis, which are free, should be presented in their logical formats. No reasonable feature writer should violate the rule of logical reasoning because of the open nature of feature writing styles. A feature writer must bear in mind that what he writes may be accessed by any reader, who should be able to follow his line of reasoning without much guide. No writer has ever been given an award over inconsistency.

XIV. Correctness/Decency-Related Field

As a field in textual aesthetics, correctness covers areas such as grammar, punctuation or mechanical accuracy and again, facts. A news or feature story is aesthetic or is pro-aesthetic if the writer sticks to the grammar of the language in which it is written. News or feature writing is an intellectual undertaking, which requires the undertaker to have a full grasp of the rules of the language applied. It will be anaesthetic for a writer not to follow, for instance, the first rule of the grammar of English Language which states that a verb agrees with its subject in number. It is equally anaesthetic if a writer regards uncountable nouns as if they were countable.

Below are certain applied uncountable nouns which are often misunderstood and misapplied in newspapers and magazines in Nigeria: (a) The minister of information and communication, Mr Labaran Maku, has given an information that he would soon commence a good governance tour of the country. (b) The President, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, has given an advice against the use of terrorism to settle political scores. It is not in any way aesthetic for a writer to describe or modify an uncountable noun such as information and advice with an indefinite article, an. This is because there is nothing like informations as the plural of information, and advices as the plural of advice in the grammar of English. These and other grammatical flaws are rampant in news and feature pages of some Nigerian newspapers. Poor grammar can repel a reader from a piece of reading material no matter the quality of paper, ink, or font used in printing such a material. This appears to be the trend in news and feature presentations in newspapers and magazines.

Besides paying attention to grammar, writers should also pay attention to minute details in writing. Such details come in the areas of punctuation and spellings. Since we do not in our normal speech habit speak without a break, care must be taken to insert all the relative punctuation marks while writing because they will finally be read. Well punctuated news or feature stories are easy to follow and as such are aesthetic. Also, writers, whatever is their language orientation, should strive to spell words correctly. That is both American and British spellings and registers should be handled according to the rule of the language. It makes for easy reading and pleasurable assimilation.

Apart from this, news or features are always written in nouns, pronouns and such other parts of speech. Nouns in particular have types which include proper nouns. Good writers should be able to recognize proper nouns or descriptions and begin them with capital letters irrespective of their positions in story. They should know generally, when, where and why to begin certain letters of words with capital letters, bearing in the universality of their decision. This is both aesthetic and instructive.

The enormity of power naturally and constitutionally reposed on journalists calls for moderation, because their stock-in-trade, words, is powerful. According to Mustapha and Abdulbaqi (2012: 130 - 131), words have power to make and mar; to build and destroy; to instigate or mitigate; and to cause or solve problems. Writing in the same vein, Johnson (1992) says words can kill and can also enlighten, comfort, uplift and inspire. All these views stress the need for decency in word choice which a journalist should uphold.

XV. Completeness/Wholeness-Related Field

A piece of writing can be clear, concise, coherent, concrete, and logical and correct without

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being complete. When a writer is at work, it is important that he uses all the relevant information necessary for expressing his experience. News writers for instance should try as much as possible to write in such a way that all the questions that would bother the reader are answered after all. A way of going about this, especially in news writing, is to build the story round the traditional five Ws and one H of news writing. The same approach may guide a feature writer, depending however on the type of feature. A story appears complete once all the questions surrounding it are fairly answered. Writers should avoid the temptation of allowing their reader to ask: What does he really want to say? Where did it happen? How did it happen? Is this supposed to be the end of the story? It addresses the story sequence, including the traditional introductory, neck, body, tail or conclusion of the story. As an aesthetic field, completeness is the summation of other aesthetic elements earlier discussed under other fields, as it emphasizes on the overall wholeness of the writing or story, be it news or feature.

XVI. Content Analysis Data

This article took a step further to check the level at which Nigerian newspapers adopt the above explained aesthetic categories. Three newspapers were selected based on their frequency and spread. The three newspapers are: Daily Sun, Nation and The Punch of May 20, 2013. The choice of common date was to ensure uniformity and accuracy. These newspapers carry normal news stories on their front and inside pages, and full page features on their back pages in most of their editions. Based on the aesthetic categories discussed above, the aesthetics of the front page news stories and the back page feature stories of a particular edition of the two newspapers were therefore assessed. The front page news stories and the back page features were because these pages are the windows to and mirrors of the selected newspapers. Aesthetic scoring was carried out using a five point scale to bring out the aesthetic categories and their units of analysis as follows: very aesthetically good = 5 points, good = 4 points, fairly good = 3 points, fair = 2 points; and poor aesthetics = 1 point.

The aesthetic performances of the front page news of the Daily Sun, Nation, and The Punch newspapers were assessed, using the nine aesthetic categories, and reconciling them with the structural and stylistic demands and realities of straight news writing. Even though none of the three newspapers scored up to four or five points on the scale used, Daily Sun and Nation scored three points in most of the aesthetic categories, meaning those newspapers are fairly good in their straight news writing aesthetics. This is presented in Table No. 1 below.

Table 1 : Aesthetic Assessment of Front Page News of Three Nigerian Newspapers

Unit of Analysis	Newspapers	Aesthetic Categories								
		Coherence	Conciseness	Synergy	Clarity	Simplicity	Concreteness	Consistency	Correctness	Completeness
Sentence harmony Word economy Paragraph relationship Transparency Complexity reduction Exactness Maintenance of chosen standard Error reduction Wholeness of work	*Daily Sun* May 20, 2013.	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3
	Nation May 20, 2013.	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
	Punch May 20, 2013.	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2

Similarly, the aesthetic worth of feature stories on the back pages of the three newspapers were analysed. Using the aesthetic categories, it was discovered that Daily Sun and Nation newspapers were average in the presentation of feature stories. Each of them scored three points in most of the aesthetic categories. Table No. 2 below shows the analysis.

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Table 2 : Aesthetic Assessment of Back Page Features of three Nigerian Newspapers

Unit of Analysis	Newspapers	Aesthetic Categories								
		Coherence	Conciseness	Synergy	Clarity	Simplicity	Concreteness	Consistency	Correctness	Completeness
Sentence harmony Word economy Paragraph relationship Transparency Complexity reduction Exactness Maintenance of chosen standard Error reduction Wholeness of work	*Daily Sun* May 20, 2013.	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3
	Nation May 20, 2013.	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
	Punch May 20, 2013.	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2

XVII. Discussions of Findings

The aim of content-analyzing the news and feature contents of the three daily newspapers, in this discourse-based article, was to find out the extent of their compliance with the article's aesthetic, using a particular news day or edition of the selected newspapers. Of course the content analysis gives this work some empirical backing.

The nine aesthetic categories and nine units of analysis which are the practical basis of assessment are clearly identified in each of the two comprehensive tables. For instance, coherence as an aesthetic category has sentence harmony as its unit of analysis, while conciseness has word economy as its unit of analysis. A sentence whose component parts do not sensibly agree, as earlier explained, lack coherence and as such lack aesthetics. The remaining aesthetic categories or fields equally have their clearly defined units of analysis, which are self explanatory.

A careful assessment of the performances of each of the three newspapers in relation to the carefully delineated aesthetic units of analysis and aesthetic categories shows that the newspapers on the average follow the aesthetic rules or prescriptions discussed in this article. None of the three national newspapers scored more than three points on a scale of five points, hence it would not be out of describe them as aesthetically average as far as news and feature articles are concerned. And to be average in aesthetic performance may not be enough to win a newspaper a space in what may be described as comity of aesthetically ranked newspapers in the society. An average performance is not a good performance, even outside the aesthetic domain. In other words, an aesthetically packaged newspaper should strive to be aesthetic in all departments of the assessment, not scoring a high point in one department and scoring zero, thus leaving the reader with the choice of enjoying one aspect and suffering his way through the other. There is hardly any way a reader would feel satisfied after struggling to understand of follow particular news or feature story line as published.

This finding takes us to the underpinning theories of this work. One of the aesthetic theories adopted in this discourse is the Hedonistic or Pleasure theory, which prescribes that an aesthetic object (news or feature story), is that which gives pleasure or satisfaction to the audience or reader, besides commanding the audience's serious and satisfactory attention. The finding explained above clearly contradicts the pleasure theory. This is because of the state of displeasure and lack of satisfaction experienced while assessing the aesthetic worth of the three newspapers. Equally, the agenda setting theory used as another framework has a bearing on the result of the findings. For the newspapers to be said to have set aesthetic agenda for the readers, such agenda should be set in the most coherent, concise, synergistic, unified, concrete, clear and complete textual presentation. But the findings here do not conform to the contextual and aesthetic demands and prescriptions of these two theories. That is why Nigerian newspapers

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should sit up aesthetically and realize the fact that for them to be relevant in today's competitive media world they must pay serious attention to textual aesthetics.

XVIII. Conclusion

It has been established that aesthetics is not and should not be centred on design aspect of the newspaper or the print media generally; it should not be concentrated on the pictorial or graphic beauty of the front page; it should not be all about the position of headlines and photographs and mastheads and colour separation. Beaming aesthetic searchlight on the stories themselves – how such stories are written to command the serious attention of the reader, is also of importance. This is one way of striking an aesthetic balance in the print media industry.

However, this discourse, which examined the ways and manner in which a piece of journalistic writing can be handled to create the needed aesthetic effect on the reader, is a timely discourse in view of the level of degeneration suffered by the journalism profession in the hands of invading quacks in West African countries generally and in Nigeria in particular. After taking time to point out aesthetic areas of concern, and accordingly discussing the need to follow the rules of the game, the discourse stresses that words are the tools of a journalist's trade and, in common with any craftsman; he should keep them clean and well-polished, using them appropriately.

Because of its aesthetic tilt, this work sees writing as an art, and advises that, since a piece of writing can drone or it can splutter or it can mumble or it can sing, writers should aim for the singing kind – as the singing writing has life, rhythm, harmony, style – and will never lose a reader. However, a piece of writing is aesthetic and journalistic if it is clear, united, concise, simple, consistent, complete, concrete, correct, and coherent.

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