

1 Textual Aesthetics: A Look at Nigerian Print Media News and 2 Features

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6

7 **Abstract**

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

25

26 **Index terms—**

27 **1 Introduction**

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

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

41 Udoakah is perhaps of this view because these demographic variables keep changing with time and season.
42 Therefore, neither plethora nor proliferation may be the major problem facing newspaper business in Nigeria

43 today. Of course newspaper or magazine proliferation means adequate information for human beings who, by
44 nature, need it for survival.

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

55 2 II.

56 3 Definitions of Key Terms

57 Textual Aesthetics : This is concerned with the presentation of the written word (news and features) in newspaper
58 or magazine in such a manner that the reader finds both physical and perceptual pleasure, satisfaction and
59 understanding from such a presentation. A news story is aesthetic if it gives pleasure and satisfaction to the
60 reader. News : This is a report of happenings or developments in the society as carried on the news pages of A
61 newspapers or magazines, written in the common journalistic style and structure.

62 4 Features :

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

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

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

68 III.

69 5 Justification of Discourse

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

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

87 6 IV.

88 7 Textual Aesthetics and Aesthetic Experience

89 Recent media aesthetic studies appear to be tilted towards non-textual aspects of the concept. Even in television
90 aesthetics, which appears to be one of the most widely researched areas in media aesthetics, greater emphasis
91 has usually been placed on non-textual fields such as lighting, sight, sound, and motion, and general directing
92 and designing (Zettl, 2005;2009;Nkana, 1996Nkana, , 2003;and Akpabio, 2011). And in radio production, the
93 basic aesthetic elements of sound and sound effect have usually been emphasized (Akpan, 1987;Akpan and Etuk,
94 1990). Print media aesthetics has equally suffered from this neglect as research in newspaper and magazine
95 aesthetics has usually been in the general layout, planning and design aspects of print media production. In
96 other words, recent aesthetic studies in newspaper and magazine have usually been focused on traditional design
97 elements of page balance, contrast, dynamics, focus, proportion and so on (Udoh, 2010;Udoakah, 1996; ??doakah
98 and Olise, 2009;Anim, 2003;Nwane ,2011;Batta, 2008).

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

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

112 The foregoing demonstrates the importance of texts in both the ancient and the modern media production.
113 To that extent, this article sees textual aesthetics as the style or manner in which certain elements in a written
114 or printed language are arranged to give both satisfaction and pleasure to the reader; the written or printed
115 language being sentences, clauses, phrases, words, letters or the specific semantic unit "through which mass
116 media (aesthetic) forms such as news, features", and ancillary items are communicated, ??Udoakah, 2000: 48-
117 49) .

118 The guiding principle of this discourse is that for any media message to be effectively communicated, the style
119 and form by which it is communicated must be effective too. For instance, the language or the text through which
120 it is communicated must therefore be structured in such a way that it is not merely understood by the reader,
121 but should importantly arouse particular feelings of the reader. It must, in other words, be structured, written
122 or printed in a communicative language, a language that shares adequate and proper meaning, a language that
123 gives the reader a pleasurable and profitable experience. This is the hallmark of textual aesthetics and textual
124 aesthetic experience.

125 V.

126 **8 Theoretical Framework**

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

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

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

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

154 **9 VI.**

155 **10 Aesthetic Fields in News and Features**

156 Udo (2010) and Johnson (2004) believe that aesthetics lends itself to many subject areas and scholars in those
157 areas. According to them, this significantly depends on the depth of knowledge of the scholar or researcher in the
158 affected areas about the subject matter of aesthetics. Udo and Johnson explain further that in many cases, what

13 SYNERGY/UNITY-RELATED FIELD

159 is interpreted as an aesthetic element or field of an area of study clearly arises from the operational mechanics of
160 the area, subject matter or discipline under consideration. In other words, what constitutes an aesthetic element
161 in Theatre Arts is so-called because of the workability and relativity of the items of aesthetics chosen.

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

172 11 VII.

173 Coherence/Logic-Related Field Ordinarily, when two or more elements cohere, they appear to stick together
174 and have inseparable relationship. Sentence is one of the most important parts of writing, especially journalistic
175 writing. The coherence or logicality of a piece of writing begins with the parts that make up each sentence sticking
176 or working together. A sentence that lacks coherence is not aesthetic. For example, there is an apparent lack of
177 coherence in the following statement: News writing is a compulsory course for all Mass Communication students
178 but we are not soon to start an I.C.T. programme. There is no direct relationship between the desirability of
179 making news writing compulsory for all Mass Communication students and not starting an I.C.T. programme
180 soon. The two independent clauses making up the compound sentence do not cohere. The sentence by extension
181 lacks unity and logic which are related fields. Coherence is better noticed within sentences and sometimes clauses.
182 Therefore any section of the journalist's news or feature sentence that stands apart both in terms of violating a
183 sequence, logic and reasoning is not aesthetic and as such should be quickly revised to achieve the desired effect.
184 And that is why any careful writer should ask himself questions bordering on whether what he writes follows a
185 natural or reordered sequence and whether such a sequence makes sense.

186 12 Conciseness-Related Field

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

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

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

203 "Ozumbaism", a pompous word used more for its sound than for its effect; a high-sounding neologism of a
204 political nature used to delight, surprise and intimidate, made popular by Dr Kingsley Mbadiwe, is an example
205 of or type of verbose writing commonly found in Nigerian newspapers. Being concise or brief calls for a writer's
206 ability to say or write what he wants to write in a concise or precise manner without recourse to such violation
207 as stated above. A point of view that is explicit needs no elaboration. It is the failure to recognize this fact that
208 leads some writers into making unnecessary repetitions. The following statements illustrate aspects of a lack of
209 conciseness: 1) The building formerly housing the National Assembly was utterly and completely razed by fire.

210 2) The tall and gangling Malian striker was awkward in moves.

211 3) The professor is a sophistic rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity. 4) When the
212 local government chairman searched everywhere, he practically gave up hope of finding his kidnapped wife.

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

215 13 Synergy/Unity-Related Field

216 The necessity for synergy and/or unity in media writing is quite obvious. Ideas which are related need be
217 presented in related circumstances, rather than pitched against unrelated ones. Confusion may be averted if the

218 writer is conscious of his reader's possible limitations, but the fact remains that the reader may not necessarily
219 see the issues in the same light with the writer. As an aesthetic field, unity has almost an inseparable relationship
220 with coherence and synergy. While coherence concentrates on sentences and their component parts, and unity
221 exists mainly between sentence and paragraph, synergy addresses the "wholeness" of the whole body of writing;
222 without that the writer may be viewed as lacking in control of thought. Even though Akpan (1987) explains
223 synergy in relation to broadcast programming, the same definition of synergy can be adapted to newspaper news
224 or feature writing. According to ??kpan (1987: 71) the application of synergy can be seen in soup preparation
225 where all ingredients (salt, water, oil, fish, crayfish, etc) "blend", for the soupiness of the preparation to be
226 "experienced".

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

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

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

255 14 XI.

256 15 Simplicity-Related Field

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

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

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

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

285 Some examples of foggy sentences as taken from some newspapers in Nigeria are the following: 1) Barrack
286 Obama is well known throughout the universe.

287 **16 2) The come-backing Super Eagles defender, Joseph**

288 Yobo, played his heart out in the last Nations Cup.

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

293 **17 XII.**

294 **18 Concreteness/Candidness-Related Field**

295 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
296 features. But in writing generally, the story teller will usually do better if he uses apt words and expressions
297 that conjure the proper picture in the mind of the reader. Writers write with nouns and verbs mostly because
298 the essence of writing is to tell or say something about a thing, a person or a situation. Writing with concrete
299 nouns and active verbs in most cases helps in achieving concreteness in writing and it is aesthetic. Active voice
300 sentences, rather than passive voice expressions, tend to achieve a higher level of concreteness. Concreteness is
301 closely associated with candidness. The aesthetics of writing may be enhanced if a writer uses words or expressions
302 with some measure of sincerity. By projecting concreteness and candidness, certain words and expressions, on
303 account of their vividness, leave a lasting impression on the reader (Nwane, 2011).

304 **19 XIII.**

305 **20 Consistency/Concentration-Related Field**

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

314 A journalist or professional writer should be conscious of these varieties of spellings (which usually come as
315 nouns or verbs) as well as the context in which they can be applied. All news organizations have a concept of
316 textual house style; that is the language in which stories should be written. Why? This is because consistency in
317 matters of detail "encourages a reader to concentrate on what his writer is saying" ??Hicks and Holmes, 2002:19)
318 Apart from sticking to the house style adopted by the media Organization for which he is writing, such a writer
319 should importantly realise that most Nigerian writers and readers tend to be more comfortable when words are
320 written in their original forms, that is in Standard English forms or spellings, which is British. This position is
321 clearly supported by (Udoh, 2010) in his work on which of the two broad English spellings that are preferable by
322 average English newspaper readers in Nigeria. According to the result of Udoh's survey, most of the respondents
323 were more comfortable with spelling consistently fashioned after the British. Most of the respondents said they
324 found pleasure in their newspaper reading when they found out that there were no spelling variations in words
325 used in news and feature writing. Of course the Pleasure Theory of aesthetics has it that a work (including
326 textual works) becomes aesthetic if it gives pleasure to the beholder (reader, viewer, etc).

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

333 Consistency in spelling and language where necessary has a lot of correlation with an already discussed aesthetic
334 field, which is unity. A piece of journalistic writing that is consistent in spelling is a united whole and is more
335 easily understood by readers, most of whom might not be exposed to the reasons for these differential spellings.

336 It must of course be pointed out that in most mass communicated messages, the writers or senders of signals may
337 not be at the reading point to explain certain things or any variations in spellings to the readers or audiences.
338 In fact this is one of the reasons why issues of clarity and simplicity are always stressed when it comes to news
339 and related journalistic writings. Of course consistency also correlates with clarity and simplicity because an
340 inconsistent piece of prose can be unclear and what is unclear can be difficult to comprehend.

341 The following are some of the English words that have different spellings and are capable of encouraging
342 inconsistency in written communication; they are arranged first in their British versions; and latter in their
343 American versions of spelling: 1) British: favour, colour, neighbour, harbour, labour, practice, programme,
344 realize, emphasize, centre, fulfilment, kilometre, etc. 2) American: favor, color, neighbor, harbor, labor, practice
345 (spelt the same way whether as verb or noun) program, realise, emphasise, center, fulfillment, kilometer, etc. It
346 must be pointed out that most of these words which originally are in noun forms do not significantly change their
347 forms when used as either a verb or an adjective. And one word that is usually used inconsistently by writers is
348 the word, practice, which American English accepts both as a noun and as a verb; whereas to a Standard user,
349 practice is a noun, practise is a verb. A consistency-minding writer should note this and stick to one form where
350 necessary. A similar rule should apply to language use. News or feature stories are better appreciated if they are
351 written in a particular language. If a writer has a reason to introduce a foreign language somewhere in script,
352 an aesthetic way of doing that is for such a writer to interpret such a language and ensure flow and consistency
353 with the main language used.

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

363 **21 XIV.**

364 **22 Correctness/Decency-Related Field**

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

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

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

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

393 The enormity of power naturally and constitutionally reposed on journalists calls for moderation, because their
394 stock-in-trade, words, is powerful. According to Mustapha and Abdulbaqi (2012: 130 -131), words have power
395 to make and mar; to build and destroy; to instigate or mitigate; and to cause or solve problems. Writing in the

396 same vein, Johnson (1992) says words can kill and can also enlighten, comfort, uplift and inspire. All these views
397 stress the need for decency in word choice which a journalist should uphold.

398 23 XV.

399 24 Completeness/Wholeness-Related Field

400 A piece of writing can be clear, concise, coherent, concrete, and logical and correct without being complete.
401 When a writer is at work, it is important that he uses all the relevant information necessary for expressing his
402 experience. News writers for instance should try as much as possible to write in such a way that all the questions
403 that would bother the reader are answered after all. A way of going about this, especially in news writing, is to
404 build the story round the traditional five Ws and one H of news writing. The same approach may guide a feature
405 writer, depending however on the type of feature. A story appears complete once all the questions surrounding
406 it are fairly answered. Writers should avoid the temptation of allowing their reader to ask: What does he really
407 want to say? Where did it happen? How did it happen? Is this supposed to be the end of the story? It addresses
408 the story sequence, including the traditional introductory, neck, body, tail or conclusion of the story.

409 As an aesthetic field, completeness is the summation of other aesthetic elements earlier discussed under other
410 fields, as it emphasizes on the overall wholeness of the writing or story, be it news or feature.

411 25 XVI.

412 26 Content Analysis Data

413 This article took a step further to check the level at which Nigerian newspapers adopt the above explained
414 aesthetic categories. Three newspapers were selected based on their frequency and spread. The three newspapers
415 are: Daily Sun, Nation and The Punch of ??ay 20, 2013. The choice of common date was to ensure uniformity
416 and accuracy. These newspapers carry normal news stories on their front and inside pages, and full page features
417 on their back pages in most of their editions. Based on the aesthetic categories discussed above, the aesthetics
418 of the front page news stories and the back page feature stories of a particular edition of the two newspapers
419 were therefore assessed. The front page news stories and the back page features were because these pages are the
420 windows to and mirrors of the selected newspapers. Aesthetic scoring was carried out using a five point scale to
421 bring out the aesthetic categories and their units of analysis as follows: very aesthetically good = 5 points, good
422 = 4 points, fairly good = 3 points, fair = 2 points; and poor aesthetics = 1 point.

423 The aesthetic performances of the front page news of the Daily Sun, Nation, and The Punch newspapers were
424 assessed, using the nine aesthetic categories, and reconciling them with the structural and stylistic demands and
425 realities of straight news writing. Even though none of the three newspapers scored up to four or five points
426 on the scale used, Daily Sun and Nation scored three points in most of the aesthetic categories, meaning those
427 newspapers are fairly good in their straight news writing aesthetics. This is presented in Table ??o Similarly, the
428 aesthetic worth of feature stories on the back pages of the three newspapers were analysed. Using the aesthetic
429 categories, it was discovered that Daily Sun and Nation newspapers were average in the presentation of feature
430 stories. Each of them scored three points in most of the aesthetic categories.

431 27 Discussions of Findings

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

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

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

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

463 **28 XVIII.**

464 **29 Conclusion**

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

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

476 Because of its aesthetic tilt, this work sees writing as an art, and advises that, since a piece of writing can
477 drone or it can splutter or it can mumble or it can sing, writers should aim for the singing kind -as the singing
478 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. ¹



Figure 1: ©

479

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1

Unit of Analysis	Newspapers	Aesthetic Categories							
		Coherence	Conciseness	Synergy	Clarity	Simplicity	Fluency	Consistency	
Sentence harmony									
Word economy	Daily	Sur2	3	3	3	3	2	2	3 3
Paragraph relationship		May 20, 2013.							
Transparency									
Complexity reduction									
Exactness		Nation							
Maintenance standard	of chosen	May 20, 2013.	3	3	3	3	3	2	2 2
Error reduction									
Wholeness of work		Punch							
		May 20, 2013.	2	3	3	3	2	2	2 2

Figure 2: Table 1 :

2

Unit of Analysis	Newspapers	Aesthetic Categories							
		Coherence	Conciseness	Synergy	Clarity	Simplicity	Fluency	Consistency	
Sentence harmony									
Word economy	Daily	Sur2	3	3	3	3	2	2	3 3
Paragraph relationship		May 20, 2013.							
Transparency									
Complexity reduction									
Exactness		Nation							
Maintenance standard	of chosen	May 20, 2013.	3	3	3	3	3	2	2 2
Error reduction									
Wholeness of work		Punch							
		May 20, 2013.	2	3	3	3	2	2	2 2

XVII.

Figure 4: Table 2 :

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