



## GLOBAL MEDIA, LOCAL CONFLICT: BBC AND AL JAZEERA'S JOS 2010 COVERAGE

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the ideological function of language in shaping the crisis, as reflected in the headlines of the 2010 Jos crisis from BBC and Al Jazeera. Using van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis as its theoretical framework, the study employs a qualitative method to analyze 30 purposively selected headlines from BBC and Al Jazeera websites. Findings in the study identify five discursive strategies—negative labeling, evidentiality, numerical framing, lexicalization, and metaphor language—used in BBC and Al Jazeera's news headlines of the 2010 Jos crisis, in constructing social divisions, animosity, and bias. The study highlights that these discursive techniques shape audience perception by reinforcing specific ideological narratives. The headlines consistently categorise subjects into two religious groups attacking each other, -fight between Muslim and Christian communities, Hausa-Fulani herders massacred more than 100 Christians, Jos City, Divided Into Muslim And Christian Areas-, further dividing them and fanning the flame of disunity among them. Ultimately, the study reveals a recurring pattern of bias in the deadlines, demonstrating how language is strategically used to influence public understanding and reinforce societal divisions. It also reveals that, in the action-oriented narrative presented by both media headlines depict Muslim actors as strongly associated with violent actions, while Christian goals are predominantly portrayed as victims. Furthermore, the structural choices within BBC and Al Jazeera's headlines deliberately obscure information regarding agency in the crisis.*

**Keywords:** Global Media, Local Conflict, Jos Crisis, language choice, discourse analysis

### **Introduction**

The Jos crisis of 2010, a violent conflict that erupted in the city of Jos, Nigeria, serves as a stark reminder of the complex and often volatile nature of local conflicts in the modern era (Ostien, 2009; Higazi, 2011). As global media outlets increasingly turn their attention to such conflicts, how they frame and narrate these events can have profound implications for public perception, policy responses, and the conflict's trajectory. The 2010 Jos crisis, often referred to as the "Jos riots" or "Jos violence" in media reports, was framed differently by the BBC and Al Jazeera. Research suggests that the BBC's coverage tended to focus on the humanitarian aspects of the crisis, highlighting the plight of displaced persons and the role of Nigerian security forces in responding to the violence (Adebayo, 2011). In contrast, Al Jazeera's reporting was more likely to contextualize the crisis within broader themes of religious and ethnic tensions in Nigeria, drawing attention to the historical antecedents of the conflict (Higazi, 2011). Notably, some media outlets, including Al Jazeera and BBC, prominently used the term *justified* to describe the crisis, instead of opting for more general terms like "violence" or "clashes" (Ostien, 2009). This disparity in framing reflects the different editorial priorities and audience expectations of the two outlets, shaping public perceptions of the crisis in distinct ways (Entman, 1993). The phrase *jostified* aptly demonstrates the dynamic and versatile nature of language, which can be shaped and molded to convey nuanced shades of meaning.



Language serves as a fundamental tool for human communication, enabling individuals to convey thoughts, emotions, and ideas (Chomsky, 1965). The prime use of language lies in its capacity to facilitate social interaction, foster relationships, and construct identity (Halliday, 1978). Through language, individuals can express their needs, desires, and intentions, thereby negotiating meaning and creating shared understanding (Grice, 1975). Furthermore, language plays a crucial role in shaping cultural norms, values, and beliefs, influencing how individuals perceive and interact with the world around them (Whorf, 1956). Effective language use enables individuals to convey complex ideas, persuade others, and negotiate social hierarchies. Moreover, language is dynamic, constantly evolving to reflect changing social contexts, cultural norms, and technological advancements (Bourdieu, 1991). Hence, the linguistic choices of a particular expression over other choices privilege one viewpoint over others. It is no news that the media is known for exploiting these language potentials in promoting personal interests. As a result, Malcolm X holds that, "The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses" ([www.brainquote.com](http://www.brainquote.com)). This emphasizes the need for scrutiny of news stories before they are embraced and influence decision-making. Malcolm X highlights the profound impact of language in shaping and reflecting human experiences, as language serves as a tool for strengthening connections within the realm of power.

Thus, this study critically examines the ideological functions of language in shaping the BBC and Al Jazeera's representation of the 2010 Jos conflict. Specifically, it addresses two fundamental areas: First, it examines the representational strategies these media outlets employed to define the actors, their actions, and the material processes central to the conflict. Second, it explores how language is manipulated to construct a favourable self-image while depicting others in a negative light within their reporting.

## **Concept Clarification**

### **Global Media**

Global media refers to the interconnected system of communication and information dissemination that spans national borders. It includes various forms of mass communication such as television, radio, newspapers, and the internet, shaping public opinion, cultural exchange, and the spread of news and entertainment worldwide. The globalization of media has transformed how information is produced, shared, and consumed, enabling instantaneous communication and access to diverse content. While it offers opportunities for cultural exchange, it also raises concerns about media imperialism, cultural homogenization, and the digital divide. The dominance of Western media corporations in global media flows has raised concerns about cultural homogenization and media imperialism (Herman & McChesney, 1997). Thus, the BBC and Al Jazeera have significantly impacted the global media landscape, offering diverse perspectives and challenging traditional Western dominance in news dissemination.

The BBC's role as a public service broadcaster grants it significant power in shaping public opinion and discourse. Its mission to "inform, educate, and entertain" has been the guiding principle since its inception, with a focus on providing impartial news and information (BBC Charter, as cited in Document 2). This mission has enabled the BBC to become a trusted source



of information, playing a crucial role in bringing the nation together during times of crisis and celebration. The BBC's use of power also raises questions about accountability and representation. Critics argue that the BBC's coverage and programming do not adequately represent diverse perspectives or communities, which can limit its appeal and relevance to certain audiences, just as it named the 2010 crisis, *Jostified*. The BBC's use of power in broadcasting is complex, influencing various aspects of society, culture, and the media landscape (El-Nawawy & Powers 2010).

Al Jazeera's launch in 1996 marked a significant shift in global media dynamics, providing an Arab perspective on global issues and challenging Western dominance in news dissemination. Nevertheless, Al Jazeera's use of power in broadcasting is particularly significant in the Arab world and beyond. This challenge to Western media hegemony has been seen as an exercise of power, allowing Al Jazeera to shape public opinion and influence discourse in the Arab world (Seib, 2008). Al Jazeera's coverage of international news has been praised for its diverse perspectives, offering insights into the complexities of global issues. By providing a platform for diverse voices and opinions, Al Jazeera has exercised its power to shape public opinion and influence discourse in the Arab world (Lynch, 2006). Al Jazeera's use of power has also been seen in its ability to influence policy and shape public opinion (Seib, 2008). By providing a platform for diverse voices and opinions, Al Jazeera has exercised its power to shape the narrative on key issues, influencing policy and public opinion in the world; just as it named the Jos 2010 crisis *Jostified*, and it remained.

### **Local Conflict**

Local conflict refers to disputes or tensions that arise within a specific geographic or social context, often involving local communities, groups, or individuals (Autesserre, 2010; Krause, 2018). These conflicts can be driven by various factors, such as resource competition, cultural or ethnic differences, or power struggles (Ostby, 2016). Local conflicts can take many forms, including communal violence, land disputes, or resource-related conflicts (Rustad & Binningsbø, 2018). They can also be characterized by their intensity, duration, and impact on local communities (Raleigh, 2018). In some cases, local conflicts can be linked to broader national or international issues, such as political instability or economic inequality (Cederman et al., 2017). The causes of local conflict can be complex and multifaceted, involving historical, social, economic, and cultural factors (Ostby, 2016). The consequences of local conflict can be severe, including displacement, injury, or loss of life, as well as damage to infrastructure, livelihoods, and social cohesion (Fjelde & Ostby, 2020). Jos, the capital of Plateau State in Nigeria, has faced numerous serious crises over the years, with the 2001 and 2010 conflicts standing out as the most severe. These local clashes left lasting impacts on the region, shaping its socio-political landscape.

The 2001 Jos crisis erupted in Jos, the capital of Plateau State, from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001 (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The conflict was fueled by longstanding tensions between different ethnic groups and between those labeled "indigenous" or "non-indigenous" inhabitants of the area (Ostien, 2009). According to Human Rights Watch, the dispute was more political and economic than religious, stemming from a battle for control of political power and economic rivalry (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The violence resulted in the deaths of over 1,000 people, with many more injured, and tens of thousands displaced (BBC News, 2001). Homes, businesses, and places of worship were destroyed, leaving deep scars on



the community (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The crisis was marked by attacks on both Christians and Muslims, with both sides suffering significant losses (Ostien, 2009).

The 2010 Jos crisis was yet another violent conflict that erupted on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2010. The conflict was fueled by longstanding tensions between different ethnic groups, particularly between the Hausa/Fulani Muslims and the indigenous Christian communities, over issues surrounding political power and resources (Adeleye, 2017). The violence resulted in the deaths of over 265 people, with some reports estimating the death toll to be higher. Many homes were burned, and thousands were displaced. The conflict took on religious dimensions, with churches and mosques being targeted (International Crisis Group, 2012). The crisis highlighted deep-seated issues of identity, belonging, and resource control. In reporting this crisis, some media outlets, including BBC and Al Jazeera, simultaneously called it *Jostified*, with JOS in white and TIFIED in red. In the context, BBC and Al Jazeera might be using this term and semiotics to paint how critical the violence and bloodshed were (Jos is Bleeding) due to the complex historical, ethnic, and religious tensions underlying the conflict. Beyond the symbolic significance of its colors, the word subtly evokes notions of chaos and bloodshed. This thoughtful coinage demonstrates the flexibility of language in shaping and conveying meaning.

### **Empirical Review**

A substantial body of research (Akpan et al. 2013; Adam 2018; Adediran 2023; Owolabi et al. 2023) has explored the impact of the media reportage on society. Akpan, et al. (2013) explored the role of the media in Nigeria's crises in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram and the Jos crises; specifically examining the impact of the reportage on the environs, while Adam (2018) examined the implications of media reportage in local communities in Nigeria. Adediran (2023) studied the role of mass media in crisis management in Nigeria, while Owolabi et al. (2023) examined the patterns of media reportage of security threats in Nigeria. The above reviewed paper has in one way or another studied the input of the media in either the Jos conflicts or Nigeria's crises as reported by the media. However, these investigations were not carried out from a linguistic perspective, which the present study addresses.

Other scholarly studies (Krause 2011; Segun & Ebenezer 2013; Nwagbaga et al. 2015; Abdullahi et al. 2015) characterised the conflicts in Jos and its surrounding areas as ethnic, religious, or a combination of both. While Krause (2011) states that poor conflict resolution in Jos escalated political tensions into widespread violence, causing trauma and weakening peace efforts, Segun and Ebenezer (2013) emphasise that Jos conflicts require a multifaceted approach, including policy reforms, interfaith dialogue, and youth employment. Nwagbaga et al. (2015) on the other hand posit that the Jos crisis endures as *Jasawa* demands for shared control clash with the indigenes' inflexible values, though past recommendations might ease tensions while Abdullahi et al. (2024) believe that the Nigerian press, driven by commercial and political interests, exacerbated conflicts instead of promoting peace. These studies primarily addressed non-linguistic issues but also examined the Jos crisis and media coverage, which align with this paper's focus and contribute to its analysis.

Some scant linguistic attention (Ambe-Uva 2010; Tian 2018) was given to media reportage. Ambe-Uva (2010) examined identity, politics, and the Jos crisis, while Tian (2018) analysed





*The Guardian* news reports of China's military parade that marked the seventieth year of the Second World War from a discursive viewpoint. Ambe-Uva's (2010), through interviews and content analysis, links the Jos conflict to an indigene-settler dynamic mingled with ethnic, religious, and political factors, suggesting that improved governance and a robust democracy are key to resolving the crisis while Tian's (2018) study reveals that there is bias in media reportage and this media bias in both reporting and Western criticism of China's parade underscores the importance of critical thinking for English majors. These, also not too linguistic, but they bordered around predilection in media reportage, which is also an area the present paper is interested in.

On the other hand, Omolabi (2023) and Ayeni (2024) carried out a critical discourse analysis on print media and social media, respectively. While Omolabi (2023) studied the discourse techniques used in insurgent reports of Nigerian newspapers, Ayeni (2024) examined the ideological underpinnings of the language used by Boko Haram terrorists. These two reviews are significantly relevant to the present study as they are linguistically based and were carried out with the same theory as that for the present study. However, the studies failed to articulate the dynamics of social power and its effect on lexical choices. Secondly, they ignored the discourse patterns/strategies used in their data, which constitute the main concerns of this study.

### Theoretical Framework

Van Dijk's (2006) social cognitive model provides the theoretical underpinning for this study. As a leading figure in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly in media discourse, van Dijk explores how dominant groups shape perceptions of marginalized communities. His (2001) CDA model comprises three interrelated dimensions -**discourse, cognition, and society**- which together demonstrate how discourse both reflects and reinforces ideological structures. Van Dijk's analysis integrates sociological and discourse perspectives, focusing on syntactic patterns, lexical choices, semantic structures, and textual organization. His method combines **interpretative** (textual) and **social** (contextual) approaches to provide a comprehensive framework for studying media discourse in media education. A key aspect of his **CDA** is cognitive analysis, which examines the relationship between personal and social cognition, including comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation in discourse. van Dijk's approach explores the **link between discourse and social inequality, dominance, and ideology**, with cognitive processes acting as a crucial bridge. His **top-down CDA** method reveals systemic injustices within discourse. He extends his study to include cognitive aspects of **news comprehension, retention, and reproduction**, examining how media shapes understanding. His analysis highlights the **interconnections between structural composition, production processes, and cognitive comprehension** within their wider social framework. van Dijk's study examines discourse at two levels: **microstructure** and **macrostructure**. The **microstructure** focuses on the semantic, syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical elements that ensure coherence in a text, including quotations and reporting styles that establish factuality in news stories. The **macrostructure** explores the thematic and organizational patterns of news articles, reflecting broader ideological strategies. These strategies involve **positive self-presentation**, where writers depict their group ("us") favorably, and **negative self-presentation**, which positions the "out group" ("them") negatively. Through semantic macro-ideological approaches, discourse reinforces divisions such as "good" vs. "bad" and "superior" vs. "inferior," shaping in-group favoritism and out-group derogation (Igwebuke, 2018).



### Methodology

This study utilizes qualitative content analysis to investigate the form and function of global media cooperations. It examines materials from two globally circulated media outfits, -BBC and Al Jazeera. Using a purposive sampling technique, twenty news articles from the period of January to March 2010 were selected from the BBC and Al Jazeera websites. These articles were chosen based on criteria such as accessibility, availability, regularity, distribution, and content relevance to the study. The data were coded for easy reference/identification and then analysed using van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

Media coverage on crisis in Nigeria employs a range of discursive techniques, including eye-catching headlines with: negative labelling, evidentiality **and authority references**, numerical framing (often referred to as *the number Game*), lexicalisation, metaphorical language, hyperbolic commentary, victimization narratives, the use of euphemism and a host of others.

#### a. Negative Labelling

Broadcasters often use negative labeling as a strategic tool to frame news narratives in a way that is immediately attention-grabbing and emotionally charged. They strategically choose specific negative descriptors -as seen below- to create a memorable, though simplified, narrative that influences public perception (Entman, 1993).

**Text 1:** At Least 13 People Killed In Attack By **Muslim Herdsmen** On Byei Village,  
30km South Of Jos.

**Al Jazeera, March 17, 2010.**

**Text 3:** Hundreds of People are Reported Killed after Clashes between **Muslim and Christian Gangs** in Jos.

**Al Jazeera, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2010.**

**Text 15:** **Muslim Hausa-Fulani Herders** Massacred more than one Hundred Christians  
in Dogo-Nahawa village near Jos.

**Al Jazeera, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2010.**

**Text 22:** **Nigerian Ethnic Violence** 'Leaves Hundreds Dead'.

**BBC, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2010.**

**Text 25:** **Nigerian Religious Riots** 'Kill 200' In Jos.

**BBC, 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.**

Each of the above text's headline emphasises lethal violence -*killed, massacred*- to create an immediate impression of brutality and threat. For instance, Text 1 states, *At Least 13 People Killed In Attack By Muslim Herdsmen On Byei Village*, embedding violence as the central idea. This not only captures the reader's attention but also assigns a lasting negative identity to the group mentioned -*Muslim Herdsmen*- by associating them with extreme violence rather than describing a more nuanced event.

Furthermore, the texts intentionally highlight religious and ethnic identifiers (*Muslim, Christian, Hausa-Fulani*) as essential qualifiers for the act of violence. For instance, Text 3 uses *Muslim Hausa-Fulani Herders Massacred...* to foreground the ethnic affiliation, thus contributing to a narrative that frames these groups as inherently violent. This kind of



identification encourages audiences to associate certain groups with deviant or extremist behaviour, reinforcing pre-existing biases and stereotypes.

Also, the headlines present intricate socio-political conflicts in a highly simplified manner. By labeling events as *riots*, *clashes*, or *violence* with a focus on the death tolls, reducing multifaceted causes -historical, economic, and political- into a binary of good versus evil. This simplification aligns with negative labeling practices by portraying one side, often the religious or ethnic minority implicated in acts of violence, as the *other* or the *threat*, without addressing contextual complexities.

In essence, these texts serve as examples of negative labeling by using charged language and group identifiers to portray specific groups as violent and dangerous. The choice of words and simplification of events contribute to a narrative that marginalises these groups, reinforcing social divisions and pre-existing biases. This approach highlights how media framing can be leveraged to shape public opinion by constructing an image of *otherness* around the labeled actors.

#### **b. Evidentiality**

Evidentiality is a discursive strategy used by broadcasters to indicate the source and reliability of the information reported. By employing evidentiality, broadcasters can build credibility, manage uncertainty, and frame narratives in a way that subtly guides audience perception, as can be seen in Text 1, Text 3, and Text 23 below.

**Text 1 :** **At Least** 13 People Killed In Attack By Muslim Herdsmen On Village Of Byei,  
Just 30km South Of Jos.

**Al Jazeera, March 17, 2010.**

**Text 3 :** Hundreds of People are **Reported** Killed after Clashes between Muslim and  
Christian Gangs in Jos.

**Al Jazeera, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2010.**

**Text 23 :** Central Nigeria Attacks Lead to 'At Least 100 Deaths.'

**BBC, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2010.**

The phrase *At Least* in Text 1 serves as an evidential marker by qualifying the number of fatalities, indicating that the reported figure is a minimum estimate. This signal of uncertainty implies that the actual toll could be higher, inviting the audience to consider the possibility of additional, unconfirmed casualties. Also, by using *at least* in the same text, the broadcaster is managing the presentation of factual information while subtly communicating caution about the precision of the data. This reinforces the credibility of the report by acknowledging informational limits.

The word *Reported* in Text 3 shifts responsibility for the information, indicating that the deaths are based on accounts from sources rather than the broadcaster's direct observation. This marker introduces a level of remoteness or uncertainty regarding the details and proper verification of the information. The use of *Reported* not only helps delegate the sourcing of the claim but also allows the broadcaster to distance themselves from the absolute certainty of the figure. This technique enhances the report's transparency by signaling that the information is conveyed indirectly and may be subject to confirmation.



Similar to Text 1, the use of *At Least* in Text 23 qualifies the death toll, marking the figure as an initial approximation. Again, this evidential marker functions to create a sense of provisionality regarding the death toll. It indicates that while the reported figure is significant, there might be more casualties that have not yet been verified. This careful presentation underscores the uncertainty inherent in disaster reporting and helps maintain the broadcaster's credibility.

Across these texts, evidentiality is deployed through markers like "at least" and "reported" to manage and communicate the certainty of the reported information. These phrases signal that the numbers given are approximations or based on external reports, which subtly influence the audience's reception by emphasizing both caution and reliability. This strategic use of evidentiality not only shapes how the events are understood but also reinforces the authenticity and transparency of the broadcast narratives.

### c. Numerical Framing

Numerical framing, otherwise known as the number game is a broadcasting strategy that involves presenting data and statistics in ways that shape audience perception. Broadcasters achieve this by selectively choosing figures, manipulating scales, providing comparisons, and using rhetorical anchoring, which are seen in the texts below.

**Text 4:** 464 Die In 4 Days Of Nigerian Ethnic Clashes.

**Al Jazeera**, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2010.

**Text 6:** Hundreds Of People Died In Fresh Clashes In Jos.

**Al Jazeera**, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

**Text 14:** Up To 300 Feared Dead After Fighting Between Muslim And Christian Communities.

**Al Jazeera**, 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

**Text 23 :** Central Nigeria Attacks Lead To 'At Least 100 Deaths.'

**BBC**, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2010.

**Text 25 :** Nigerian Religious Riots 'Kill 200' In Jos.

**BBC**, 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

**Text 30 :** Nigeria Charges 49 Over Jos Killings.

**BBC**, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

Text 4 -464 Die in 4 Days of Nigerian Ethnic Clashes- relies on precise, concrete numbers - 464 and 4 days- to immediately communicate scale and urgency. Presenting an exact death toll over a short period emphasizes the rapid escalation and intensity of the conflict, framing the clashes as both severe and time-critical. The specificity lends an appearance of accuracy and gravitas while driving home the magnitude of the tragedy. Also, the time-frame -4 days- in this headline amplifies the sense of urgency and rapid development.

In text 6, -*Hundreds Of People Died In Fresh Clashes In Jos*, the use of the quantifier *Hundreds* provides a less precise but still substantial indication of casualties. This general number, though vague, creates a sense of significant loss and widespread impact. The lack of an exact figure may serve to underscore uncertainty or variability in the available data, yet it still functions to intensify perceptions of disaster and prompt emotional responses from the audience.





The phrase, *Up to 300* in **Text 14** frames the casualty count as a maximum potential toll. This implies that the number could have been lower, but might also be a warning of a worst-case scenario. This phrasing introduces a conditional quality, suggesting uncertainty while still emphasizing the potential for high loss. It casts the event as one with severe -and possibly escalating- consequences, intensifying concerns about the conflict's development.

By employing the phrase *At Least 100 Deaths* in **Text 23**, the headline conveys that the reported number is a minimum threshold, implying that further casualties might have occurred but remain unconfirmed. This use of qualifiers not only introduces an element of uncertainty but also serves to stress that the actual impact could be greater, thus drawing additional attention to the seriousness of the situation. Phrases also frame the number as a provisional estimate, hinting that the situation might be worse than reported, thereby heightening public concern.

**Text 25 -Nigerian Religious Riots 'Kill 200' In Jos-** uses a specific figure -200- to communicate the scale of the fatalities directly. The precise number, in contrast to more tentative phrasing, presents an assertive and definitive snapshot of the event. This can convey both finality and high impact, influencing the audience to perceive the riots as an unequivocal and significant episode of violence.

The headline in **Text 30 -Nigeria Charges 49 over Jos killings-** shifts the focus from the event's casualties to an official legal response, using the precise number 49 to indicate the extent of governmental action. The numerical detail here not only quantifies accountability but also frames the narrative around a measurable legal outcome. In doing so, it presents the state response as both targeted and proportionate, suggesting that the problem has been addressed to some degree.

Ultimately, numerical framing is employed here to structure the audience's interpretation of the conflict. The chosen numbers and qualifiers are not merely factual details; they are carefully selected to frame the news in a way that guides the viewer's understanding, emotional response, and perception of the severity of the conflict and the effectiveness of responses

#### **d. Lexicalisation**

Lexicalisation involves the deliberate choice of specific words and phrases to frame stories in a particular way. In lexicalisation, language with strong connotations is used to influence how the audience perceives an event. The use of these charged lexical items helps in establishing a strategic narrative framework that may reflect underlying ideological biases as seen in the texts below.

**Text 5: Tension** Remains in Nigeria, Jos.

**Al Jazeera**, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

**Text 9: Deadly Clashes** Rock Nigeria's City.

**Al Jazeera**, 18<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2010

**Text 12: Massacre** Leaves Nigerians **On Edge**.

**Al Jazeera**, 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2010

**Text 19: Jos Crisis: When Will The Killings** End?

**BBC**, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2010.



**Text 20:** Nigeria Text Messages ‘**Fuelled Jos Riots.**’

BBC, 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2010.

**Text 28:** Africa - **Violence** In Jos, Nigeria.

BBC, 19<sup>h</sup> January 2010.

The word *tension* in Text 5 is deliberately neutral and ambiguous. Rather than describing an active conflict, it suggests an ongoing state of unrest or unease that may or may not escalate. This lexical choice softens the immediacy of potential violence while still alerting the audience to instability. Also, by emphasizing tension instead of violence or conflict, the headline sets a cautious tone that invites the reader to expect further developments. The geographic marker *Jos* localizes the effect, implying that while the situation is serious, it might be contained regionally.

**The lexicon**, *deadly* in Text 9 immediately suggests fatal consequences, instilling urgency and emotional weight even before additional context is provided, while *clashes* depict conflicts in an active, albeit ambiguous, manner, allowing audiences to envisage violence without pinpointing exact causes. Here, the headline constructs a more dramatic and urgent narrative, distancing itself from a mere report of an incident to creating an image of a significant and unsettling upheaval. Together, the words prime viewers to interpret subsequent details as part of a severe, ongoing conflict, thereby subtly molding public understanding and emotional response.

*Massacre* in Text 12 is one of the most potent and charged lexical items available in a broadcast context. It implies a large-scale, indiscriminate loss of life and carries strong emotional and moral weight. The phrase “leaves Nigerians on edge” suggests that the event has pervasive psychological effects, instilling fear and anxiety throughout the population. This headline not only presents a factual account but also aims to shape the audience’s emotional response, conveying urgency, shock, and a deep sense of insecurity.

The use of “crisis” in Text 19 frames the situation as exceptional and exigent, while the inquisition “When Will The Killings End?” personalizes and dramatizes the event. It implies recurrence and unresolved violence, which in turn can heighten public concern and imbue the crisis with an air of hopelessness and moral urgency. This text invites the audience to reflect on the socio-political dynamics at play by questioning the duration of the violence. It compels the public to seek accountability and resolution, thus nudging discussions towards systemic and political responses.

The term *fuelled* in Text 20 is particularly strategic as it suggests that the riots were not spontaneous but were stoked by deliberate actions, via text messages. It attributes causality to a specific medium -text messages- which can invoke debates around the role of media and technology in inciting or controlling unrest. By focusing on *fuelled*, the headline shifts the narrative from one of merely describing violence to one of investigating its origins. This invites audience members to question the mechanisms of influence and control in modern society, potentially laying the groundwork for broader discussions on media responsibility.

**In Text 28**, placing *Africa* at the beginning of the headline serves to broaden the context: while the event is localised in Jos, situating it within Africa can evoke wider regional connotations



and stereotypes. The straightforward use of “violence” leaves little ambiguity about the nature of the incidents. This headline uses general but powerful lexical items to standardize the understanding of the event. It may also contribute to certain continental narratives where Africa is often associated with instability, thereby influencing readers’ predispositions before they even read the detailed content.

Across these texts, the broadcast strategy hinges on the selective use of emotionally charged and ideologically loaded words. The differences in lexical choices -from *tension* and *crisis* to *massacre* and *fuelled*- indicate an underlying intention to mold public perception in line with varying degrees of severity and causality. While some headlines adopt a more measured tone (as in Text 5), others use vivid, dramatic language to both inform and mobilise, aiming to elicit a strong emotional response.

#### e. Metaphorical Language

Metaphorical language in broadcasting is a strategic tool used to frame events, evoke emotions, and simplify complex information. It is used to shape narratives by making issues more relatable, emotionally engaging the audience, and subtly influencing public opinion. Below are examples of the use of metaphorical language.

**Text 2:** A Church is burned and Eight People **are hacked to Death** in an Attack by Muslims in Mazzah village, located 14km from Jos.

Al Jazeera, **March 17, 2010.**

**Text 10:** Nigeria Cracks Down After Attack.

Al Jazeera, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2010

**Text 16:** They **Killed Them, Cut Their Bodies, Put Fire On Them and Their Babies.**

**BBC, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2010.**

**Text 27:** Jos City, **Divided** Into Muslim And Christian Areas.

**BBC, 19<sup>h</sup> January 2010.**

**Text 2** uses vivid, emotionally charged language phrases like *burned* and *hacked to death* to intensify the portrayal of violence. This figurative language not only reports the tragic events but also symbolises an attack on community identity and values, particularly by invoking images of a sacred church and brutal killing methods. This language, while emotionally powerful, can reduce complex situations to simplistic narratives and further embed harmful stereotypes by tying violent acts directly to a specific religious group.

The metaphor *cracks down* in Text 10 employs metaphoric language to convey a forceful and decisive response by the authorities. It is used to describe the state's response to an attack. The metaphor encapsulates the state's response to an attack by highlighting its urgency and severity. It paints a picture of a decisive government action while suggesting that this response is deeply intertwined with underlying social divisions and tensions.

The excerpt in Text 16 uses intensely graphic and emotive language to transform a factual account of violence into a profound metaphor for moral decay. Each phrase detailing *killings*, *dismemberment*, and *burning* is deliberately evocative, intended to shock and engage readers deeply. This vivid imagery not only describes brutal acts but also symbolises a broader



breakdown of human decency and society, thereby amplifying the narrative to evoke strong moral and emotional responses.

Text 27 utilizes the metaphorical term, *divided*, to frame Jos City as not merely a geographically separated area but as a space marked by deep ideological and social fault-lines between Muslim and Christian communities. This succinct phrasing encourages audiences to visualise entrenched segregation and potential tension, subtly influencing interpretations of local social dynamics.

The above texts employ metaphorical language—whether through explicit metaphoric phrases or through vivid, evocative descriptions—to create strong visual images and emotionally charged narratives. Such strategies shape public perceptions by linking specific incidents to broader societal and political themes, thereby guiding the audience's understanding and emotional response to the events.

## Findings

The analysis reveals that news writers predominantly use specific discursive techniques to enhance information delivery and increase audience acceptance of news reports. Journalists use catchy headlines to capture attention, frame narratives, simplify complex information, guide readers' focus, and a lot more. They employ some strategies in framing their headlines to send coded messages to their audience. The key strategies identified in the analysis include negative labelling, evidentiality, numerical framing, lexicalisation, and metaphoric language. For instance, negative labelling in the headlines tactfully described specific agents -*Muslim Herdsmen, Nigerian Riot, Muslim Hausa/Fulani Herdsmen*- negatively. With the use of evidentiality and authority references, Al Jazeera and BBC reporters managed their uncertainty by using, *at least*, and *reported*. Through the use of numerical framing seen in the data, the reporters emphasize the severity of killing and death tolls in Jos by selectively choosing figures of the killing to shape audience perception. Meanwhile, with lexicalisation, the reporters deliberately chose words and phrases with strong connotations -*tension, violence, crisis, deadly clashes*- to influence the audience's perception of the crisis. Also, with metaphorical language, -*hacked to death, divided, killed them, cut their bodies*-, the reporters framed the crisis to emotionally engage the audience and subtly influence their opinion. Finally, the study highlights the above five key discursive strategies used by Al Jazeera and BBC in reporting the Jos 2010 crisis, showing how the journalists consistently employ these techniques to shape narratives and guide public perception of the crisis. Also, it reveals that both media headlines depict Muslim actors as strongly associated with violent actions, while Christian goals are predominantly portrayed as victims.

## Conclusion

This study critically examines language, as used in news headlines by Al Jazeera and BBC in reporting the Jos 2010 crisis. Despite journalists' claims of objectivity, findings in this study reveal that Al Jazeera and BBC news-headline reports are shaped by specific linguistic ideologies that subtly reflect the writers' perspectives rather than presenting events as neutrally occurred. Hence, the mass media plays a significant role in shaping readers' viewpoints, influencing public perception, and exerting control over collective thought. Using van Dijk's





socio-cognitive approach to CDA, the study explores how various discursive strategies used by BBC and Al Jazeera to frame the Jos 2010 crisis. Through some linguistic tools, *-negative labelling, evidentiality, numerical framing, lexicalisation and metaphoric language-*, the language used in reporting the crisis highlights the extent of the death-troll during the crisis, reinforcing a dichotomy between regional and religious groups.

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