

**ECOLINGUISTICS IN NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION:  
LINKING THE PRINT MEDIA REPORTS WITH THE DAILY PRESS REVIEW  
BROADCASTS**

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## **Introduction**

Ecolinguistics is a field that embraces a broad range of subjects including environmental discourse (Nadège, 2009; Steffensen and Fill, 2013). Such discourse may examine the use of ecological terms. This is necessary in environmental discourse because the ecosystem constitutes the immediate human environment. In fact, it is the most natural aspect of such environment.

This study discusses and highlights coverage by the Nigerian press on environmental challenges with a view to establishing appropriate channels that can sustain a viable environmental discourse that can educate and prompt the populace to take proactive decisions in ecological conservation. Three national newspapers were sampled, *The Punch*, *The Vanguard* and *ThisDay* each for each of the following months: February, June and August in 2013. It was discovered that the sampled Nigerian press concentrated more on politics, sports and entertainment issues than the ever-present environmental challenges in the country.

Environmental challenges in this paper were defined as those problems that have negative effects on the ecology. They include global warming, deforestation, air and water pollution and soil erosion.

## **Nigeria's depreciating environment**

Just like every other nation, Nigeria is not free from environmental hazards. Air pollution from the release of chemicals into the atmosphere is common. Water pollution through the release of waste products and contaminants into rivers and drainage systems are also seen, especially in the cities. Noise pollution is another environmental issue yet to be properly addressed (Nyakuma, 2012). Global warming and climate change and other global environmental threats facing mankind in the recent time are endangering many species and their habitats, and have negatively affected the once blissful ecosystem that existed over two hundred years ago (Hall, 1977:187; Usman and Adefalu, 2010:44). The gradual loss of the mangrove

forest in the Niger delta and the overflow of Lagos bar beach, industrial pollution of industries, carbon monoxide from cars, mining and environmental hazards from crude oil exploration are the evidence of Nigerian environmental depreciation which requires prompt attention.

Other areas to note include erosion, floods, deforestation and desertification. Deforestation and desertification are related, with the latter being the result of the former. Forests can disappear naturally as a result of broad climate change, fire, hurricanes or other disturbances; however, Nigerian deforestation came from logging and wood collection for fuel. Another challenge is the management of ever-increasing human waste in the mega cities (Adebola, 2006).

### **Nigerian press and environmental reporting**

The major issue in the literature is not only the ignorance of the people regarding these hazards, but also the need of information on how they can prevent or manage these issues (Ityavyar and Tyav, 2013). This is the major area where the effort of the press is needed. The print media, especially newspapers, have remained a major channel of information. The newspapers can initiate as well as discuss public opinions on environmentally-related issues through news, editorials and other means of communication. The news media are not necessarily a subfield of Ecolinguistics; the media have a wide area that definitely goes beyond Ecolinguistics. However, the press in Nigeria is very important in the sustenance of public opinions. Despite the fact that the literacy level is just a bit above average (UNICEF puts it at 51.8%), newspapers serve as a source of news for broadcasting media which are accessed by those who cannot read the newspapers. Therefore, newspapers have a very important influence in discussing the environment. They not only educate the literate regarding environmental issues, but will also bring environmental discourse to the illiterate through other media.

It is true that the press in Nigeria have been reporting environmental issues especially in recent times. Such reports include oil spillage, oil pipeline explosion, flooding, erosion and indiscriminate dumping of industrial and human waste. However, these reports usually come after a disaster has occurred. It has not been the trend to bring environmental discourse to the people in a way that the eventual hazards are averted.

Without doubt, the Nigerian press is not ignorant of the danger of environmental problems in the country. However, the argument of this paper is that their focus and involvement would yield better results if they could establish a stronger environmental discourse which involves every social stratum in the society. Already there have been calls for this in the literature. For instance, Aja (2005) calls on education of the masses regarding the implication of human actions on the ecology and the environment. Although he suggests various media, the press cannot be left out because the public has to be alerted of the call of duty. Odey and Okeyim (2014) call for active participation of the populace in the preservation of the ecosystem. Anijah-Obi *et al.* (2013) go even further, calling on educators and planners to take the awareness down to the curriculum in the schools.

Adelekan's (2009) study of two national newspapers on their coverage of environmental issues in Nigeria between 1999 and 2003 shows that the papers gave more attention to energy reports than climate change -- a very critical issue then. It was also noted that most of the environmental issues were reported merely as news. Perhaps some degree of alarm regarding potential of disasters should have preceded some the reports.

A similar study by Ogunjinmi *et al.* (2013) on the coverage of five print media on Nigeria National Parks and Environmental Programmes between 2003 and 2007 also reveals the need for proper orientation in nature conservation and protection of the ecosystem. It implies that the

emphasis has been on reactive reporting rather than being proactive. In that study, about 88% of the press reports on environmental issues were based on ecological loss and pollution with just 10% on conservation. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Media coverage on Nigeria National Parks and Environmental Programmes 2003-2007. Ogunjinmi *et al* (2013:690).

Item	Number of articles in the selected print media					Total	Percentage
	The Punch	Nigerian Tribune	The Nation	The Vanguard	The Guardian		
Loss of biodiversity (wildlife, forests, fisheries)	6	5	2	0	60	73	23.1
Pollution of water resources	4	1	2	0	37	44	13.9
Air pollution	1	1	3	1	43	49	15.5
Waste management	4	1	2	2	37	46	14.6
Nature conservation and protection (national parks, game reserves, wildlife sanctuary, etc)	1	4	3	1	20	29	9.2
Soil and agricultural pollution	4	4	3	4	60	75	23.7
Total	20	16	15	8	257	316	
Percentage	6.3	5.1	4.8	2.5	81.3		

According to Agba (2002), environmental communication requires full exploration of nature through information and enlightenment. Ozohu-Suleiman (2010) reiterates the need for such environmental communication as follows:

... it can be argued that education and awareness are central to sustainable environment, because the latter is very much tied to the levels of education and awareness people have about their environment. It therefore means that the mass media, one of whose basic function is education and awareness creation, occupies the center stage of environmental sustainability. However, a meaningful discussion of media's role in environmental campaign should begin with what environmental communication means. Ozohu-Suleiman (2010:3-4)

The scope of environmental communication should go beyond professional circles and be extended to the masses. Reports of professional conferences and academic discourse on environmental issues should be brought to the public. As has been noted by Adelusola (2013), some environmental hazards associated with electromagnetic fields, exposure to increased radiation, toxic chemicals and toxic metals are not even well known to the literate. This ignorance is evident in the way telecommunication towers were erected in residential areas. See Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. A telecommunications tower in front of residential buildings. Adelusola (2013:20).



### **Current analysis**

The present paper examines how three newspapers report environmental challenges in Nigeria. Examination was based on frequency, prominence and space allocation for news, features, editorials, and pictures. These three newspapers were randomly sampled from the most widely read leading national newspapers. Their archival repository was explored and copies were made available for the researchers. A total of 267 editions of *The Punch*, *The Vanguard* and *ThisDay* were used. The research covered three months chosen at different times of year 2013. The first batch was in February, the second batch was in June, and the third batch was in August of the same year. The data collection covers all the editions of the sampled newspapers in each of the months. The selection of the months was randomly done; however, restricting the survey to the first three quarters of the year should be noted here. This kept the last quarter of the year (the 'ember' months) out of the survey. The 'ember' months usually have many tragic events in Nigeria especially in the number of road accidents that usually occur (Ojo, 2013). Using this period in the study may provide a false impression of the press because different kinds of disaster are usually reported. Most of them are beyond the scope of this paper. Taking the period off the

analysis will provide an objective assessment of the press on environmental issues without necessarily lumping them with the usual 'ember' months' tragedies.

Data from the three newspapers were collected and analysed so as to determine the frequency of news items, the frequency of features and editorials, and the amount of space allocated to news reportage, features and editorials on environmental challenges in Nigeria.

Table 1, below, reveals that *The Punch* recorded the highest amount of space allocated to news reportage with 289 paragraphs representing 37.6% of the total paragraph-allocation, followed by *The Vanguard* with 243 paragraphs representing 31.6% of the total paragraph-allocation, while *ThisDay* has the lowest space allocated to news reportage on environmental challenges with 237 paragraphs represented by 30.8% of the total paragraph-allocation.

**Table 1. Amount of space allocated to news reportage on environmental challenges**

NEWSPAPER	PARAGRAGHS
THE PUNCH	289 (37.6%)
THE VANGUARD	243 (31.6%)
THIS DAY	237(30.8%)
TOTAL	769 (100%)

The table below shows the frequency of features and editorials on environmental challenges. It is clear that *ThisDay* newspaper recorded the highest number of features stories (23), while both *The Vanguard* and *The Punch* each had 11 feature stories.

**Table 2. Frequency of features articles on environmental challenges**

Prominence	The Punch	The Vanguard	ThisDAY	Total
FEATURES	11(24.5%)	11(24.5%)	23 (51.1%)	45 (100%)

The next table reveals that *ThisDay* takes the lead of frequency on editorials on environmental challenges in Nigeria.

**Table 3. Frequency of editorials on environmental challenges**

Prominence	The Punch	The Vanguard	ThisDAY	Total
EDITORIALS	0	0	2	2

The picture-placement on newspaper pages showed that less prominence was given to environmental issues by Nigerian press. In this regard, *The Punch* had the highest number of pictures accompanying news items for the 3 months, followed by *ThisDay* and *The Vanguard*, respectively. While the placement of pictures to accompany news items showed that only 28 pictures were used by *The Punch* newspaper for the 3 months in review, *ThisDay* and *The Vanguard* used 20 and 15 pictures, respectively. This is summarized in Table 4, below.

**Table 4. Frequency of pictures on environmental challenges**

PROMINENCE	The Punch	Vanguard	ThisDay
PICTURES	28(44.4%)	15 (23.8%)	20 (31.8%)

Pictures can be used at least in two major ways. First, they can be used in photo-journalism where the pictures tell the story. Second, the picture can be used to support the story. Both styles can be effectively used in disseminating environmental news considering the illiteracy level and language barrier that can easily hinder print media in the country.

Meanwhile, as rampant environmental issues keep emerging in various communities in Nigeria, coupled with the climate change globally, *The Vanguard* – which had the highest frequency of news – could only record 42 environmental news items for the months in review. *ThisDay* newspaper, with 41 news items, is almost at the same range in environmental news reportage, with *The Punch* newspaper having 40 environmental news stories. Table 5, below, represents the frequency of news and placement of pictures on environmental challenges in Nigeria by *The Punch*, *The Vanguard* and *ThisDay*.

**Table 5. Frequency of news on environmental challenges**

PROMINENCE	The Punch	Vanguard	ThisDay
NEWS	41(33.3%)	42 (34.1%)	40 (32.6%)

The space allocated to feature stories was not encouraging. *ThisDay* had 200 paragraphs for the months in review, followed by *The Punch* with 109 paragraphs, and *The Vanguard* with 100 paragraphs. Table 6, below, reveals that *ThisDay* recorded the highest amount of space – as measured in paragraphs – allocated to features on environmental challenges by a Nigerian newspaper, with 200 paragraphs (representing 48.9%), followed by *The Punch* with 109 paragraphs (representing 26.7%), while *The Vanguard* had a total of 100 paragraphs (representing 24.4%).

**Table 6. Amount of space, in paragraphs, allocated to features articles on environmental challenges**

<b>NEWSPAPER</b>	<b>SPACE (PARAGRAPHS)</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE (%)</b>
<b>THE PUNCH</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>26.7%</b>
<b>THE VANGAURD</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24.4%</b>
<b>THIS DAY</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>48.9%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>100%</b>

On the space allocation for environmental coverage in editorials, only *ThisDay* allocated space for editorials for the months under review. The analysis is presented in Table 7 below.

**Table 7. Amount of space, in paragraphs, allocated to editorials on environmental challenges**

<b>NEWSPAPER</b>	<b>SPACE (PARAGRAPHS)</b>
<b>THE PUNCH</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>THE VANGUARD</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>THIS DAY</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>

It is evident from the table that *ThisDay* alone took the lead in space allocated to editorials on environmental challenges.

After the critical perusal and analysis of the contents of the three newspapers, the study has the following findings. The Nigerian press concentrates more on politics, sports, and entertainment, even dedicating pages to such issues, and focuses less on environmental

challenges in the country *The Punch* newspaper gives more space to news reportage on environmental challenges in Nigeria. *ThisDay* newspaper had more frequency of features coupled with pictures and editorials compared to *The Punch* and *The Vanguard*. *ThisDay* allocated more space to features and editorials on environmental challenges. However, *The Punch* newspaper had the highest frequency of news about environmental challenges compared to *The Vanguard* and *ThisDay*. It seems the sample newspapers had chosen different sections of their publications in reaching the masses. However, the question to ask is the number of the people reached, and this shall be addressed in the following section.

### **Environmental discourse utilisation of ‘the press review’ broadcasts**

This study was able to identify only 769 paragraphs of news, feature articles, and editorials on environmental issues from 269 issues of the selected newspapers within three months. As shown here, the attention given to environmental discourse has not been as elevated as those of sports and politics, although we do not intend to compare that in this paper. This may reflect the high tempo in the transition process of country politics at the time, and the enthusiasm that always heralds each sports event. However, it is not likely environmental issues will ever receive that prominence due to the high frequency of occurrence of events from politics and entertainment.

The need to discuss the environment even when hazards have not been reported requires more attention in the country. This paper is not really interested in the wide, unfavourable margin between environmental items and other items in the press, even though that margin is the case. However, the major issue here is how to make the few environmental reports accessible to the public so that they can be available for environmental discourse.

Although the level of literacy in Nigeria is still very low, it has not totally prevented the newspapers from reaching the masses. It is true that newspapers are not as widely used as the radios which are even now accessible on mobile phones; however, the newspapers usually give Nigerian populace the news from public discourse on a daily basis. It happens this way. Most indigenous broadcasting outfits in Nigeria (both on radio and television) regularly review the news reported by the newspapers especially in the morning. This has been popularly known as 'press review'. This 'press review broadcast' usually ends with sports news. It is sad to note that prominence is not given to environmental issues except those that occur as disasters. The editorials, features, and pictures are hardly read because press review broadcasts are usually based on the headlines of newspapers. With this trend, we can always project what happens to the environment related issues that do not occur as headlines. Many youths usually listen to the press review broadcasts because of the added sports news. Although few broadcasting houses do read the editorials as press review broadcasts, the broadcasts usually come without sports news. It is usually termed 'editorials today'. As good as this may sound, many young people will not listen to it because it does not come with the trending sports episodes.

### **Conclusion**

Without doubt, the environmental problems that look harmless today may prove dangerous tomorrow. Therefore, to be less concerned about them than other matters in life can pose a great danger to the survival of the human race. Hence, the press, especially the newspaper, must be concerned about it. The issue of desert encroachment is still very worrisome. Petroleum-based cooking fuel is not very accessible to the poor masses at the time of this research. The trees/wood that would have helped the fragile ozone layer are still the major fuel in rural areas of Nigeria. The smoke oozing from many badly managed vehicles is a terrible thing

in the cities. While there are state functionaries trying hard to reduce the damage to these difficult-to-replace environmental protectors, the impact of the effort put into environmental issues is not as felt as the one put into politics. The loss of exotic species does not seem to bother the public. Only expert zoologists and botanists are aware. If they should raise any alarm, how would they reach the masses when the press would not make that a headline? In fact, the ecosystem is truly suffering. The press will have to speak louder with a section that speaks to the people better than the editorial and feature. We need the screaming headlines.

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