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## Uncensored Language of Social Media News, Videos and Pictures as a Source of Insecurity in Nigeria: The Anambra State Example

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### Abstract

Uncensored language of the social media is a serious threat to the security and wellbeing of Nigeria and Anambra State in particular. Censorship is the art of editing and controlling the language that maybe used in the publication of any material (oral or written) for human consumption. This study investigates the dangerous effects lack of censoring the language of the social media thrusts on the security of Nigeria and Anambra State in particular, from the perspective of J. L. Austin's 1962 Speech Acts theory. The theory sees language as an activity in the context of Performative Acts which when applied can trigger a lot of either negative or positive social action. A lot of ills have taken place and several unhealthy groups have been formed due to uncontrolled use of language in Nigeria social media space. Prior to the existence of digital appliances as the mobile phones and use of social media; anger, hate, aggression, banditry, religious bigotry, agitations and violence were comparatively low. The prevalent insecurity is caused by the untamed use of misguided, raw and unedited language and digital manipulations to trigger violence in the society. The unguarded language of uncensored information has created various restive and aggressive groups such as IPOB, Fulani Herdsmen, Militants,

UnKnown Gun Men (UGM), Kidnappers, Yahoo boys, Ritualists e.t.c. that were never in existence but now unleashing mayhem and death in the society. Social media videos, pictures and news reportage can be censored through creating awareness, integrating the use of social media in the curriculum for our youths, government promulgation of rules to litigate offenders, redirecting our youths and empowering them financially among others. It is the belief of the researcher that if that had been done, the debacle at the inauguration of the Anambra State governor, H.E Prof. Chukwuma. C. Soludo could have been averted from the public domain.

Keywords: Speech acts, Social Media, Electronic Media: Video/news/ Pictures, Censor/Uncensorship, Insecurity.

## **1. Introduction**

A lot has been written on the increasing challenges of the social media; a fallout of the digital era, but less attention has been drawn to the effect the language of the social media has on insecurity in recent times. Prior to the advent of social media, information is critically edited by relevant authorities before it reaches the public domain. Information, according to Malcolm (1977: 70), which represents public opinions originate from two vital sources- the public at large and the Elite, is heavily laden with public emotions. Such information if not edited or censored will have “prejudice and tradition heavily into it, making it, not infrequently, unreasoning,

volatile, impulsive...” Information and communication are filtered to the society through language. Language is a psychological or cognitive property of humans (Carnie, 2007:3) which has far reaching effects on human communication and actions. It can be defined from several perspectives. However, each definition relates to vocal or non-vocal expressions, all aligning to human utterances and communication and the effects from each. In Mey’s (2006:6) opinion, communication in society happens chiefly by means of language. Communication is seen as a speech act in which utterances presupposes the speech action of the addresser to the addressee. Speech acts according to Mey (2006:95) is an activity that brings about a change in the existing state of affairs. In other words, the way we communicate has a lot of influence in the way we think or act. People’s thoughts are therefore activated by their culture and what they come in contact with. Language could thus be said to mirror culture and people’s way of life.

Communication on the other hand can be manual or electronic. In this paper, our concentration is on electronic art of communication as regards to news, videos and pictures. The influence of language on these media sources cannot be overemphasized. Communication consists of four fundamental elements according to Konkwo

(1997:5). They are the communicator, the message, the medium and the recipient. These four elements can positively or negatively influence the total output according to the language used. Presently, there are several sources of electronic media that are available to all ages. The most common denominator is the mobile phone, followed closely by television. However, between the two, mobile phone is the least censored. It is evident that without proper ethical standard or censorship, these sources can cause insecurity in the system through the choice of language in use. The choice of language in disseminating information is determined by the action of the Media practitioner and what he intends to achieve. Media practitioners according to Jubril (1985: 28) can influence and set our linguistic norms to a greater extent than they realize. Eze (2009:238) explains that some of these media especially Film/Video has immense power to influence the viewer to do either good or bad. A learning ethics thus says “what a child hears, he forgets, what a child does he knows/learns and what a child sees he remembers”. Then, is it not proper that what a child and even an adult see should be censored for him to learn positively and productively? This will automatically discipline the child and make him a responsible adult.

This study focuses on the effects language of the social media news, pictures and videos has on insecurity in the society using the theoretical framework of Speech Acts theory proposed by J. L Austin (1962) adopting the *performative utterance proposition*. Speech Acts is the activity or actions that go with our utterances. It is concerned with what utterances do, how they can be used and most importantly, with how we can use them in conversation (Wardhaugh 2000; Searle 1969; Levinson 1979; Verschueren 1999; Agbedo 2002). Wardhaugh (2000: 280) summarizes that speech acts “changes in some way the conditions that exist in the world.”

The researcher believes that the theoretical framework is apt for the analysis because, of the three propositional utterance analysis which borders on semantic-pragmatics interface - constative utterance, phatic utterance and performative utterance; the latter concerns itself with how a person is not just saying something but is actually doing something if certain real-world conditions are met. According to Saeed (2007:224), the action in performative utterances are identified by the first verb in the sentence. He notes further that performative utterances do not indicate true or false proposition but pragmatically seeks to find whether the utterances carry any force of action, whether the action works or not and if they constitute a successful

warning. When these conditions are met, Austin (1962) terms it to have met the felicity conditions and otherwise, it becomes infelicitious. It is evident as can be seen in the ‘declarations’ made by these insecurity groups that the choice of their language not only carry force of actions but are also intimidating, aggressive, violent, warning and prone to negative repercussions if not carried out.

## **2. Speech Acts**

Speech acts is a theory proposed by J. L. Austin (1962) and developed by Searle (1969). Speech acts supports the theory that most utterances carry with it some elements of force and compliance as its response. It revolves on how the hearer perceives a particular utterance and the force that accompanies such utterance. Saeed (2007: 223) describes the response in three related assumptions: that the basic sentence type in language is declarative, designate a state of affairs and the meaning of the utterance may have a true/false proposition. Searle (1969:23-24) notes that we ‘perform different types of acts when we speak’. Further, the utterances we make use locutions, that is, express intent from a speaker, such that the utterances can function when an illocutionary force is applied.

Speech acts according to Wardhaugh (2000:281) has three types of utterances in a proposition:-

- a. **Constative Utterance:** The utterance reveals happenings in a possible world. The proposition elicits true/false propositions. Example: ‘Are you sick?’, ‘Your dinner is ready!’
- b. **Phatic Utterance:** This has an Ethical type of proposition in which stative statements are made. It has an affective value. Example: ‘Do have a nice day’, ‘Thou shall not kill’.
- c. **Performative Utterance:** Utterances in this group demand a follow-up action. It could be a warning, an instruction to be carried out or a promise to be fulfilled. Austin notes that performative utterance must meet certain conditions for effect known as felicity or otherwise, infelicity conditions.

Austin (1975) further divides the Speech Acts into three categories of force which the social media aggression leverages on – the locutions. Locutions according to Searle (1969) in Wardhaugh (2000: 282) designate “some intents which a speaker has.” They are: Locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary acts.

- a. Locutionary force: This is the utterance the speaker makes from the addresser to the addressee. It has meaning according to the perception and understanding of the receiver.
- b. Illocutionary force: This is the type of force accompanying each utterance. It can come in form of a request, question or offer and can be versed with different degress of feelings, emotions, tones and attitudes.
- c. Perlocutionary Force: This implies the extent to which the speaker achieves with the utterance made. It is the change or effect of the locution on the addressee.

### **3. Social Media**

Social Media came into existence through the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT). The need for technological growth and ease of communication made possible the birth of electronic social media. Onwuchekwa (2021: 146) notes that social media is self-serving “*technoself*” and a change from traditional electronic media such as television and radio. He enumerated some social media applications as: WhatsApp, Zoom,



Telegrams, Chitchat, Xender, googles, Video players, Snapchat, TikTok, FaceBook, Instagram, e-mails, Camera, Twitter. Pinterest, Blogging, Networking, Linkedin, YouTube, Wikipedia, e.t.c. These social media appliances can be assessed by anyone from children to adult who has access to android mobile phones, laptops, palmtops or iPads. They are personalized and can be manipulated by any digitally literate person. Nwabueze (2009:170) describes social media as “media that use web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social dialogues”. In the author’s summation, social media is equivalent to ‘attention age’ in which information are *freely* and *instantly* created, consumed and shared with the social media community on the internet. This is why it is difficult to be censored and the urgent need for censorship.

#### **4. Electronic Media: Video, News and Pictures**

These are some of the agents of communication and types of electronic media. Ofor (2012: 2) states that the three major types of electronic media are: radio (news), television (news, videos and pictures) and film (Movies). It is further noted here that even the News media associated more with the print media is now assessed electronically. He maintains that electronic media has the advantage

of wider publication and audience. Ofor and Obiorah (2014: 265) also note that its use as agents of communication in a civilized society are restricted by certain ethics which contains censoring the information disseminated to the public. Ethics therefore, are the rules, principles and moral values guiding individual or group conduct. The essence of these principles is that all information must be censored before release to the public.

### **5. Censor and Censorship**

Censor is an agent of control. Censorship can be seen as a weapon used by government and its agencies, organisations, companies, institutions, arms of government, religious bodies e.t.c., to control the dissemination of information to the public. It can also be summarized as a type of control measures of restricting, controlling, banning or deleting in part or in whole, of the press as it might infringe on the rights of the citizens for the purpose of security. Some countries employ censorship as a counterintelligence measure by which government control any information in the public domain that could be destructive or adversely affect the citizenry through outright deletion or ban. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2015:236) defines censor as a person whose job is to

examine books, films/movies etc. and remove parts which are considered to be offensive, immoral or a political threat. No wonder most films/videos are usually seen with an inscription from the foreign or Nigerian Censorship Board (NBC) as; “above 18” or “for adults above 18 only” or “for those below the age 13 or 16”. At other times, the social media censor also go with the warning “viewer’s discretion is advised”!

### **5.1 The Importance of Censorship and Censoring Social Media Materials**

The Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists (1988), Section 5 states; “A journalist should not present lurid details, either in words or picture of violence, sexual acts and abhorrent or horrid scenes”. This section of the Nigerian constitution restricts some information from entering the public domain advertently or inadvertently, failure of which, it is litigable. This is done to among other things:

1. Respect the citizen’s privacy
2. Reinforce civilization and civility
3. Protect children and minors from ugly exposure
4. Reduce marital problems
5. Create good and responsible citizens
6. Reduce abuse and trauma

7. Create an enabling environment for rearing and training our young ones

### **5.2 Some of the censored issues are based on:**

1. Family unity spearheaded by husband and wife
2. Issues on Rape
3. Minors/Underaged
4. Amoral reports

### **6. Insecurity**

Insecurity is an after effect of violence in the system. Violence is any action intended to hurt, maim or kill somebody. Violence could come in form of physical abuse, verbal or mental abuse. Insecurity is an expression of lack of confidence, anxiety, instability, uncertainty in ourselves and our environments. According to Eze (2009:239), human beings express violence either as a result of biological disposition, psychological or socio-economic dispositions. Insecurity therefore, is a state of fear motivated by physical, emotional, mental and domestic violence. It is intended to suppress, intimidate and instill fear in others through the act of violence. Insecurity could be perpetrated by an individual, group of individuals, military, civilians, protesters, thugs and molesters.

## **7. Data Presentation and Analysis**

Uncensored social media is a documentary without rules or ethics and which choice of language could constitute serious threats to security in any country. Information and communication technology (ICT) is an elitist profession where information and language of dissemination are censored and graded according to the age, maturity, intellectual capability and relevance to the culture and language of the reading public. Information includes, video coverage, pictures, data, interviews, dialogue and press briefings of both public, private official and personal information which otherwise ought to be private. In Anambra state, since the information technology of the Android phones was birthed into existence, vile information such as pictures, video clips of killings, rape of her women and children, pornography (child and adult), threats to life and properties, mental abuse, incessant destruction of homes, crops, agricultural farmlands have become causes of aggression and violence in the hands of the amateur. The provocations caused by this exposure have done more harm than good in the society. The inability to moderate the information causes retaliation and compounded insecurity. The digitally literate ones in

the society manipulate people's emotion using these uncensored means by changing and recreating at will, the environment in the direction of most provocative videos and pictures thereby inflicting and unleashing mayhem even war could not create.

Research indicates that television and radio stations whose language, videos, news and pictures are ably censored are controlled by the government. Even, private Media Station's information dissemination is also censored by the government Censorship Boards and any offensive language could cause sanction or closure. It is no news that all government press releases, circulars, memoirs, pictures and videos are censored. As a matter of fact, to avoid the invasion of privacy and the nascent uncontrolled use of social media, coverage of events in government establishments especially governor's offices, lodges and meetings are strictly and adequately censored. Recently, the need for censorship played out at the inauguration of the current Anambra State Governor, His Excellency, Prof. Charles Soludo. The altercation between the former First lady, Mrs Ebelechukwu Obiano and Amb. Bianca Ojukwu, the wife of the late Anambra state warlord, Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, is a case study. The inauguration witnessed government approved photographer and video cameraman covering the event.

However, by the time the show of shame erupted, the moderator could only control the government approved news, video and pictures. Within a twinkle of an eye, the whole world has witnessed the unedited, raw and uncensored information from private mobile phones.

The uncensored information in our social media appliances have become serious security challenges to the people more than the actual aggression itself. The result of the uncensored social media creation is the rise of sectional, economic, regional and religious monsters in Anambra state. These are the IPOB, Miyetti Allah, Amotekun, herdsmen, Unknown Gunmen, cult groups, bandits, kidnappers, cultists, Yahooboy, yahooplus and ritualists. The author believes that until censorship laws are made and promulgated, there might not be calm.

This study looks at the properties we introduce when we make utterances and the force of the language we introduce so that actions can match utterances in a conversation. The study applies the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a qualitative methodology which is apt in dissecting the different performative utterances of the social media in propagating aggression in the society. It also adopts the Speech Acts theory by J. L. Austin (1962) as the

theoretical framework. Data are obtained from the various unedited, unregulated, uncensored on-line video clips, news and pictures by the various groups to the public. These groups introduced the language of violence as a resort to achieving their aims through social media videos, voice notes and pictures. Below are some of the many ‘declarations’ and ‘utterances’ which were made by the groups and carried out by the public out of fear by the masses and even the government unofficially.

### **The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)**

#### **Video and News Declarations/Utterances:**

Indigenous People of Biafra popularly known as IPOB is a separatist group founded by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu of Igbo origin, with the aim of realizing the independence of the Republic of Biafra in the southeast geopolitical zone. They have made declarations and utterances at various times in sync with the militancy of the group. Below are some of the performative utterances:

#### **a. Sit – at - home**

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) declares every Monday Sit-at-home starting from Monday, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2021 until Nnamdi Kanu



is released from prison. The group Media and Publicity Secretary, Emma Powerful declares:

- i. “..We the global family of IPOB, wish to announce that every Monday has been declared a **ghost Monday**. ”
- ii. “This declaration takes effect from Monday, August 9, 2021. From that day Biafraland will be on lockdown every Monday from 6.00am to 6.00pm until our leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu who was unlawfully abducted in Kenya and illegally detained by the Federal Government is released”
- iii. “Nobody should attempt to flout this directive as doing so may come with huge consequences. Anybody flouting this order is taking a big risk”

**b. Warning to Politicians from South-East against Sabotage:**

Our leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu is not a criminal and has rights to be visited in their custody;

- iv. “This is a call for Biafran leaders, politicians especially those mentioned as those behind his abduction and extradition to Nigeria, if anything happens to our leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, all of them should prepare never to come back to Biafraland because it will not accommodate us together.”

**c. No Nigerian Flag on any South-Eastern Establishment (Biafraland) and October 1<sup>st</sup> Declaration:**

IPOB declares not only sit-at-home but also none identification with the Nigerian Independence Day celebration of 1<sup>st</sup> October and removal of the Nigerian Flag in any institution such as government establishments, companies, banks, schools, churches e.t.c in any South-Eastern States (Biafraland) as from 25<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

- v. “IPOB has declared 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2021 total shutdown in Biafraland as a sign of our rejection ...and there shall be no movement in Biafraland on this day”
- vi. “Also IPOB has *declared* from today, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2021, that all Nigerian flags mounted anywhere in Biafraland must be brought down...before we do it in our own way ... everybody must strictly adhere to this directive...we want the world to know that Biafraland is not Nigeria and shall not be. Don’t say I don’t know, a word is enough for the wise”.

**Miyetti-Allah (Cattle Breeders Associations of Nigeria) Videos, News and Pictures**

Miyetti Allah, brief for the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) is a fulani/Muslim local organization of the cattle breeders that is in charge of the herder’s welfare, protection, justice and politics. They cater for the migrant herdsmen and their relationship with the communities in which they

migrate to. This group has been unheard of and the relationship between the herders and their host communities has been managed cordially by the government until the advent of social media.

#### **Declarations/Utterances**

**d. On Politics:** Bello Badejo, the President of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore says the association would not support a Southern candidate for the presidency in 2023:

vii. “Even though Nigeria is one, we are not going to support a southerner as president. A president from the North is better because northerners are better managers of nation than southerners.”

**e. On Grazing rights (RUGA) and the Governor of Benue State,** His Excellency Samuel Ortom accented to the House of Benue Assembly bills against Herders right to graze in the State:

viii. “Ortom wants to be a hero by force. After the end of his tenure, even to be a councilor in his village, he can’t get it. He is doing politics with the Fulani.”

ix. “We cannot oblige any self-centered regulations with primordial sentiments based on injustice, intolerance and infringement of people’s fundamental rights... if you attack a cattle herder and collect his cattle, he has no choice than to attack...” (Punch Newspaper, 2018)

A cursory assessment of the language of utterance by the two groups above has the effect of introducing fear into the masses. Added to the performative utterances is the fact that these warnings are matched with accompanying actions of violence to effect compliance. For instance, there are no Nigerian Flag hanging in any government, bank, school or religious institution property in the South-East. Again, in most cases, lives, properties, farmlands are lost due to non-compliance in sit-at-homes. A lot of politicians and prominent wealthy persons of Igbo extraction, the army and police officers has been murdered for daring the utterances. As well many Muslims and Christians have been killed in counter offensive as retaliation for defying their utterances. In May 2022, it was alleged that 14 civilians were killed in series of attacks in southeast, Nigeria. Also, in Dec 2022, it was reported that no fewer than ten (10) persons were murdered because of non-compliance of a 5-day sit-at-home and lots of properties especially cars were razed between Anambra, Enugu and Imo States.

### **7.1 Negative Effects of UnCensored Language of the Social Media Videos, News and Pictures**

- Proliferation of violence e.g. daily killings, brigandage, arson
- Cultism e.g human rituals, senseless beheading and burning the corpse
- Proliferation of sexual abuse as rape, violent sex habits and homosexuality
- Disrespect for elders and authorities
- Psychological Trauma and stigmatization
- Unquenchable greed for financial autonomy and thuggery
- Misinterpretation and misrepresentation of news items
- Fear
- Insecurity
- Wrong dress attitude
- Increased abuse
- Lack of privacy

### **7.2. Negative Creations of Uncensored Social Media**

The creations of the groups identified below are often started as a mechanism to check and protect the very essence of living. While

some are economical in outlook, others are sectional, religious as well as social.

Proliferation of Some of the Security threatening Outfits in Anambra State include:

- Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)
- Fulani Herdsmen
- Militants
- UnKnown Gun Men (UGM)
- Kidnappers
- Yahoo boys and Yahoo+ groups
- Ritualists
- Drug barons
- Fake currency buyers and sellers
- Bank thieves/Robbers; Commando style for ransom
- Vandals
- Examination misinformation
- Political thuggery

## **8. Strategies for Censoring the Language of the Social Media**

- i. Inbuilt designs in phones, Palmtops/Laptops/iPads for censorship.
- ii. Promulgating laws for censorship and profiling it.
  - i. Controlling Social Media through the Internet builders.
  - ii. Litigating the source of the uncensored materials.
  - iii. Creating public awareness on the need for privacy and censoring information.
  - iv. Using the church and religious as sources of social justice.
  - v. Integrating the essence of censorship in school curriculum especially secondary schools  
as the foundation for the amateur.

## **9. Summary and Conclusion**

The need for censoring information in the society is to create sanity in the system. Individual criticism of the government and society may be ideal but when it is left in the hands of amateurs, severe danger is inflicted on the society. Before the event of mobile phones and appliances, news dissemination are left in the hands of the prudent, educated and civilized professionals who knew the essence of sanity, privacy and relationship in the wider society. In such a

situation, the temperament of the citizens are controlled and monitored. There are less violence and crimes. The existing ones could not be easily circulated and learnt by the gullible ones. Decorum was sustained in the society. Language of manipulation by the internet users through the use of social media appliances was not rampant, so the security situation was under governmental control. We are not however, advocating for the return of the traditional method of information dissemination. Rather, a sanitized system of control will be more appropriate.

The advent of ICT materials exposed a lot of managed and censored secrets in crime and violence. Social media might have its advantages though, but the ills far outweigh the good. If, for example, the imbroglio between the wife of the immediate past Governor of Anambra State, His Excellency Chief Obiano and the wife of the late Dim Emeka Odimegwu Ojukwu at the inauguration of His Excellency, Prof. Chukwuma Charles Soludo in Anambra State had been censored, the damage control could have been effective. Finally, proliferation of the evils in the society especially among our youths in Nigeria and Anambra State in particular, could have been averted if standardized, censored use of digital communication devices are put in place.



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