

Culturalism and Religious Fundamentalism: Lexicalisation of Counter-ideologies on same-sex Sexualities in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

Olubunmi Funmi Oyebanji*

Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of cultural conservatism and legal restrictions on same-sex relationships, this study examines how language use foregrounds cultural and religious ideologies surrounding same-sex sexualities as depicted in selected Nigerian newspapers. Drawing on Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA), the study explores how language is used to construct, represent, and perpetuate specific ideologies regarding same-sex sexualities within the Nigerian context. A total of 40 opinion articles on same-sex sexualities were randomly sampled from four purposively selected Nigerian newspapers (*Vanguard*, *The Punch*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Sun*). The newspapers were selected based on their preponderant coverage of the discourses on same-sex sexualities between 2013 and 2015. Data were subjected to critical discourse analysis and qualitative method of analysis. Findings reveal that different lexical strategies, such as lexical relations, repetition, and negative evaluative adjectives foreground different ideologies. Synonyms such as *taboo* and *abomination*, show pro- and anti-culturalist ideologies, Holy Book-related words such as *bible* and *scripture*, emphasise religious fundamentalism and derogatory labelling of religious books foregrounds secularism. The study reveals the conflicting ideologies surrounding same-sex sexualities in the Nigerian context. The negative use of language in the public space has implications for continuous homophobic reactions towards sexual minorities.

Keywords: Cultural ideologies, Heteronormativity, Nigerian newspapers, Religious ideologies, Same-sex sexualities, Sexual ideologies.

1. Introduction

Same-sex sexualities in Nigeria exist within a complex socio-cultural and legal landscape marked by deeply rooted traditional values, religious beliefs, and legal prohibitions. Same-sex sexualities, along with other forms of non-heteronormative sexual orientation and gender identity, face significant stigma, discrimination, and even criminalisation within Nigerian society. This is because same-sex practice is often viewed as deviant behaviour contrary to cultural norms and religious teachings. Nigeria has laws criminalising same-sex relationships, with the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act of 2014 prohibiting same-sex marriage, civil unions, and any form of public display of affection between individuals of the same sex. Additionally, some states in Nigeria have

* Corresponding Author: olubunmiadegbola@gmail.com

implemented Sharia law, which imposes severe penalties, including death by stoning, for same-sex sexual activity. As a result, LGBTQ+ individuals often face rejection from their families, harassment, violence, and even persecution from the broader community. The combination of societal stigma, discrimination, and legal prohibitions creates significant barriers for LGBTQ+ individuals in Nigeria (Mapayi, et al., 2016). Many are forced to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid persecution and violence, leading to psychological distress and social isolation (Okanlawon, 2020; Ukah, 2018).

The intersection of culture, religion, and sexuality is a complex and often contentious terrain, particularly in contexts where traditional values and religious beliefs strongly influence social norms and behaviours. Nigeria, a country known for its cultural diversity and religious pluralism, grapples with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity within the framework of deeply entrenched cultural norms and religious teachings. Within the Nigerian context, where cultural conservatism and religious adherence hold significant sway, discussions surrounding same-sex sexualities are frequently imbued with ideological undertones and linguistic nuances that reflect prevailing societal attitudes and values (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2016; Nwaubani, 2017; Oduah, 2014). Therefore, there is a need for a critical examination of how culture and religion intersect with language use to lexicalise ideologies on same-sex sexualities in selected Nigerian newspapers. Rather than the usual assumption on the ideologies on same-sex practice in Nigeria, this study provides concrete evidence via the lexicalisation analysis.

The primary and essential function of a newspaper is, of course, the publication of a tolerably complete record of the world's activities, sensations, and happenings. Several scholars have recognised the tremendous influence and importance of the newspaper as an organ of public opinion, and some of them have gone further and adverted to the press as the director and moulder of such opinion. Against this backdrop, newspapers in Nigeria play a crucial role in representing public perceptions, attitudes, and policy debates surrounding LGBTQ+ rights, since portraying public opinion still plays a major part in journalists' function in democratic societies (Gans, 2011). Through the media, both elites and citizens learn about public opinion. On the one hand, political elites use public opinion to legitimise their policies and make them congruent with what the public wants (Soroka & Wlezien, 2010). On the other hand, citizens glean from the media information about other citizens' perspectives on issues (Gunther, 1998; Mutz, 1992).

Language is central to any form of discourse and lexicalisation analysis helps to unearth ideologies in discourses. Certain lexical items are chosen to express specific meanings, such that, the choice of one option from available sets of options constitutes a choice of meaning and ideological bias (Fairclough, 1995). The power to manipulate opinions, perceptions and attitudes is often reflected in the choice of particular words to represent social issues. For instance, the labelling of same-sex identified people as 'miscreants', 'criminals', 'bandits', 'terrorists', among others. is crucial to the

reading of the public's evaluation of the articles and their perception of the identity of the social actors involved. This study adopts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to interrogate the lexical strategies and ideological underpinnings present in media discourse on same-sex sexualities within selected Nigerian newspapers. By examining the lexicalisation of ideologies—how specific language choices reflect and reinforce prevailing cultural and religious ideologies—the research seeks to elucidate the complexities of how culture and religion intersect with language to shape public discourse on same-sex sexualities.

The objectives of the study include: examining the lexical choices utilised in the opinion sections of Nigerian newspapers and identifying and analysing the underlying ideologies and value systems that inform representations of same-sex sexualities in Nigerian newspapers. This study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics shaping public opinion and policy discourse on LGBTQ+ rights in Nigeria. Moreover, it underscores the importance of critically engaging with media representations as sites of ideological struggle and contestation, with implications for social justice, human rights advocacy and inclusive representation within the Nigerian media landscape. It investigates how these ideologies are constructed, reinforced, and contested through language use.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly attention to the language of homophobic discourse within the field of language and sexuality has increased (Milani, 2014; Peterson, 2016; Russell, 2019). Ellece (2020), for instance, presents a critical discourse analysis of journalistic reports and online commentary regarding a gay wedding in the Botswana media. Labelling and rationalisation strategies are approached as analytical tools that reveal how authors and readers ideologically position themselves in relation to same-sex relations. It is argued that sexual identities are constructed in complex ways that simultaneously challenge and reinforce heteronormativity.

Extant literature on public opinions on same-sex sexualities has mainly been sociological (Adamczyk & Liao, 2019; Nolan, 2019; Gonta et al., 2017). For example, Gonta et al. (2017) evaluate the relationships between media exposure, age, and attitude on non-heterosexual relationships. Using a non-probability sample of 198 participants (100 young adults, 49 middle-aged adults, and 49 older adults) in a cross-sectional, quantitative online survey, they found that higher media exposure levels foster more accepting attitudes, young participants are more accepting of same-sex practice, and news media participants have more accepting attitudes compared to entertainment media participants.

In Nigeria, several scholars have also considered opinions on same-sex practice in the Nigerian context. However, many of these studies were carried out from a sociological perspective (Bankole, et al. 2023, Ukonu, et al., 2021). Ukonu et al. (2021), for instance, attempt to ascertain users' willingness to express opinion, directions of opinion, and factors affecting opinion formation. Within the purview of social integration paradigms, the study reviews perspectives in global queer

narratives. Using descriptive and hermeneutic analysis, it examines data from 323 Facebook users selected through the snowball sampling technique as well as 300 comments purposively selected from “verified” Instagram accounts. The study finds a significant willingness to express opinions, propelled by “rising interest in the topic.” Within a persisting climate of negative opinion, the study locates subsisting influences of socio-cultural institutions on opinion formation. Bankole, et al. (2023) also submit that religiosity affects the attitudes of Nigerians towards same-sex practice, which were mainly negative.

From the linguistic perspective, scholars have also attempted to analyse discourses on sexual minorities in the Nigerian context (Adegbola, 2018, 2022; Gaudio, 2014; Oyebanji, 2023, 2022). Gaudio (2014) draws on various texts (interactional, literary, journalistic and cinematographic, among others) by and about the ‘yan daudu – Gay men’. He pays particular attention to how they use grammatical and rhetorical resources to claim, attribute, mitigate, or deny kinds of agency concerning sex and economic exchange. A sociolinguistic study of news reports on sexual minorities in Nigerian newspapers shows that the Nigerian media sometimes take a moralist stance in their reports on same-sex sexuality, strategically supporting the institutional order against the practice (Adegbola, 2018). However, adequate attention has not been paid to cultural and religious ideologies indexed by linguistic strategies in the discourses on same-sex sexualities in the Nigerian context. This study, therefore, considers language use and ideologies about culture and religion in selected Nigerian newspapers. Rather than the usual generalisations as to the acceptance or non-acceptance of same-sex relations, this study provides concrete evidence of the contending ideologies surrounding the discourse of same-sex sexualities.

3. Theoretical framework

This study draws on Fairclough’s approach to critical discourse analysis. The concept “Critical Discourse Analysis” (CDA) refers to the aspect of applied linguistics, linked with scholars such as Roger Fowler, Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk and Ruth Wodak. These scholars have suggested different analytical approaches for studies on Critical Discourse Analysis. For instance, Fairclough is associated with the socio-semiotic approach, Wodak, the discourse historical approach and van Dijk is known for his socio-cognitive approach to CDA. These different approaches have come together to make up what is called CDA. According to Weiss and Wodak (2003:12), “studies in CDA are multifarious, derived from quite different theoretical backgrounds and orientated towards very different data and methodologies”. Critical Discourse Analysis is a cross-disciplinary approach and a branch of Discourse Analysis. Both critical discourse analysis and discourse analysis are concerned with how language is used. CDA emerged by the influence of the social theories of Foucault, Bordieu, and Habermas as well as Halliday’s linguistic theories (Burns, 2001:138; McCarthy, 2006:5).

CDA is a useful approach in the explication of social identities, ideologies and power and how they are enacted in discourses through the instrumentality of language. These scholars corroborate the importance of context in the interpretation of texts in CDA and the notion that it addresses social problems. For the purposes of this study, CDA is chosen because it is able to offer not only an explanation as to why specific choices of language are made in discourses but also how specific choices of language are categorised within ideologies to construct textual personas which are used for the intention of reproduction via interaction to maintain power.

In media discourses, CDA has been recognised as a useful analytical tool in understanding the bias posturing and subjectivity in news reports. Research on news reports and other aspects of the media has established that various ideologies are embedded in media content. For instance, McKay (2006:77) recognises that the reporter's "attitude of mind" or subjectivity which contributes to "the shape of the final story" is inevitable in news writing. Furthermore, he opines that bias is absorbed in the news writers (McKay, 2006:78). CDA helps to unearth such biases embedded in news reports and other segments of the media. This points out the need to deploy Critical Discourse Analysis in this study in order to uncover the ideologies and power relations in the discussions of same-sex sexualities as represented in the selected Nigerian Newspapers.

Fairclough (1989:10) identifies his approach as an "alternative orientation" and not as another method of language study. His attempt to "bring together linguistically – oriented discourse analysis and social and political thought relevant to discourse and language" is what he describes as a "social theory of discourse" (Fairclough, 1992a:92). However, he believes that a close analysis of language contributes to the understanding of power relations and ideology in discourse. He works towards developing "a method of language analysis which is both theoretically adequate and practically usable" (Fairclough, 1992:1). In recognising that language is part of the society, that linguistic phenomena are a type of social phenomenon and that social phenomena are partly linguistic, Fairclough conceptualises discourse as a three-dimensional concept. He identifies the discursive event, discursive practice and an instance of social practice as forming discourse. Fairclough (1989) prescribes three stages of CDA as description, interpretation and explanation.

- Description stage: This stage is concerned with the identification of the formal features of texts, such as vocabulary and sentence structure.
- Interpretation: At the interpretation stage, the relationship between text and interaction is foregrounded. The stage emphasises the conception of text as an outcome of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation.
- Explanation: The explanation stage focuses on the relationship between interaction and social context. It is at this stage that the identified formal properties, linked with their interpretations are viewed in relation to the social context.

Fairclough's approach is considered relevant to the study because of its emphasis on how language is used to construct, negotiate, and contest meanings surrounding same-sex sexualities, shedding light on the complex interplay of power, ideology, and social practices in shaping discourse in this domain. He emphasises the importance of analysing discourse within its broader social, cultural, and political context. Same-sex sexuality discourse is deeply embedded in social norms and power structures. The approach also focuses on power relations embedded in discourse, including how language constructs and reflects power dynamics. In the context of same-sex sexualities discourse, power relations manifest in various ways, such as through heteronormativity, stigma, discrimination, and resistance. Fairclough emphasises the importance of analysing linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, as well as discursive strategies and rhetorical devices. Specifically, in this study, the researcher considers how lexicalisation strategies reveal ideologies and power relations.

4. Methodology

Four purposively selected Nigerian newspapers—*The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Sun*, and *Nigerian Tribune*—are the subject of the study. These have been specifically chosen for this investigation due to shared characteristics. In terms of language use, popularity, content, and online visibility, among other things, they are comparable. These Nigerian newspapers have given social actors a platform to express their varying opinions regarding same-sex sexual practices. Throughout the period under investigation, they have concentrated on the discourses surrounding same-sex sexualities. The newspapers used for this study cover the period of three years, January 2013- December 2015. The choice of the period was influenced by certain reasons. The "Same-sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill" was adopted by the Nigerian Senate on November 29, 2011, and it was passed by the House of Representatives on May 31, 2013. The measure was immediately forwarded to President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who was in office at the time, for his signature. The President signed the law on January 13, 2014. In the U.S. on June 26, 2015, it was claimed that the United States could not outlaw same-sex marriage because of the US Constitution's guarantees of due process and equal treatment under the law. Following this decision, same-sex unions were permitted in all 50 US states. Nigerians feared that the U.S. might want to influence Nigeria to take similar action. All these provoked reactions from Nigerians and these were represented in the newspapers. This follows the assumption that a major part of the social debate is transferred to the media especially when a legal measure is adopted. In the weeks before, or after, the passage of these sexual-related legislations, a sort of serious debate on the subject emerged. Newspapers in Nigeria covered the reactions that Nigerians had to these events.

A list of terms linked to same-sex sexualities was generated in the process of producing the sample. Following that, the list was narrowed down to eight items (homosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and same-sex sexualities) that had at least one mention in any of the publications.

Following that, every article in each of the four chosen newspapers was searched for any mention of one of the terms. This produced a total of 167 articles: Eighty-seven news reports, 10 editorials and 70 opinion pieces (opinion articles and letters to the editors). Forty opinion pieces and letters to the editor (10 from each of the newspapers) that reflect readers' responses to the topics of same-sex sexualities and marriage were analysed using the purposive sample technique.

A qualitative method of data analysis was used. This method helps in examining the lexical choices as well as identifying the underlying ideologies and value systems that inform representations of same-sex sexualities in Nigerian newspapers. After reading various remarks and viewpoints from the various sections, points of view are created to express the conclusions drawn from them. This makes it easier to identify the underlying ideologies of each viewpoint. According to Fairclough, a thorough examination of language helps us comprehend the ideologies and power dynamics that exist within discourses. This study views lexicalisation as significant because language users carefully choose lexical elements to communicate particular meanings in the texts. While the qualitative analysis helps to consider the context of language use, it does not enhance objectivity because the occurrence of lexical items is not quantified.

5. Data analysis and findings

This study examines how same-sex sexuality ideals are lexicalised in selected Nigerian newspapers. The identification of the main social actors in the discourses and their different points of view begins the analysis. The researcher goes on to pinpoint the underlying ideologies that are present in each of the various viewpoints that are identified, as well as the linguistic choices that highlight them. The goal of the analysis is to pinpoint and elucidate the many ways in which lexical choices are employed to carry out distinct tasks and highlight various cultural and religious ideas. Participants in the discourses being studied are known as social actors. The primary social actors involved in the discussions surrounding same-sex sexualities in the chosen newspapers include politicians, lawmakers, religious figures, international organizations, individuals who identify as same-sex, activists for homosexual rights, professionals in the medical and legal fields, heterosexuals, and private citizens. These social actors have argued from different perspectives, either for or against same-sex sexualities. The social actors are further classified and named according to their ideological inclinations. The social actors are classified as culturalists, anti-culturalists, religious fundamentalists and secularists. Specific lexical choices have been made by actors to foreground certain ideologies. These are investigated because a writer's choice of words reveals his/her ideology. Here, ideologies are identified and explained, with relevant excerpts and the lexical choices that foreground them.

5.1. Pro-culturalists' view/Culturalism

Pro-culturalists are individuals or groups who believe in the adherence to cultural practices and beliefs. According to Regelski (2000:9), the culturalist perspective accounts for culture in terms of the 'symbols, artefacts, and intellectual products that embody the shared values and habits of a group'. Culturalists believe that certain norms are peculiar to different societies and are often passed down from one generation to the other. The culturalists in the discourses of same-sex sexualities argue that same-sex sexuality is against the Nigerian cultures and, therefore, an abomination. For them, heterosexuality is the norm. Culturalism, which is the adherence to traditional beliefs or practices, is the ideology underlying this viewpoint. The ideology does not make any provision for a meaningful discussion about how to advance the society, improve its institutions or confront the changes that are taking place, because all deviations from tradition, glorified as the manifestation of divine principles, are opposed. Culturalists believe that same-sex sexualities had been a taboo or an abomination from time immemorial and should remain like that, an idea that has been developed over time and passed from one generation to another. Certain lexical choices have been deployed by these actors to foreground their views.

5.2. Synonymic nouns and adjectives showing pro-culturalists' view

The consistent employment of nouns and negative evaluative adjectives, along with collocational and synonymic relationships, highlights the viewpoint of pro-culturalists. These lexical terms include "taboo" and "abomination," as examples. They are employed in an attempt to appeal to readers' cultural sensitivities. It is thought that the majority supports the new anti-gay law because it is ingrained in culture, which devalues same-sex relationships. Almost all newspapers contain the ideology; some instances of texts that do so are provided below:

*Excerpt 1: ...same-sex sexualities was a **taboo** among the entities that made up Nigeria, even before colonialism, Christianity and Islam. The Punch, January 27, 2014.*

*Excerpt 2: It is totally a **taboo** or an **abomination** in most parts of Africa, including Nigeria, for an individual to get married to another person of the same sex. Nigerian Tribune, Aug. 26, 2015.*

*Excerpt 3: Our rejection of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)nonsense is total and unequivocal. It is rooted in our **cultural, religious and social values** as a people. It is **taboo, abominable and repulsive**. Vanguard, July 30, 2013.*

*Excerpt 4: The gay lifestyle which is being promoted in the Western world was **alien to the customs, lifestyles, and the belief of Africans** and the church The Sun, July 14, 2015.*

The word "taboo" is used frequently in the passages above. This illustrates how same-sex sexualities are not acceptable in Nigeria. A taboo is a restriction that has a cultural background. "The behaviour which is believed to be supernaturally forbidden, or regarded as immoral or improper; it deals with behaviour which is prohibited or inhibited in an apparently irrational manner" is the definition of taboo, according to Trudgill (1974: 29). In a cultural context, an atrocity that carries

serious implications for the defaulter is considered taboo. It is behaving contrary to the regulations of a specific location. This indicates that in the Nigerian setting, same-sex sexualities are considered taboo or atrocities because of cultural norms. In excerpt 3, same-sex sexualities are described with negative evaluative adjectives ‘abominable and repulsive’. These two lexical items have synonymic relations, being a strategy used by the writer to foreground the culturalists’ ideology. By using the pronoun "our," the author of the passage further establishes an in-group and out-group category and distinguishes between those who oppose and those who accept same-sex sexualities. In particular, pronouns can indicate membership in an ideological group. The phrase "our" is used in the passage to denote a social or community consensus regarding the subject under discussion. This viewpoint, according to the author, is not individualistic. The practice is described in excerpt 4 as being outside of African customs. This implies that the colonial masters' influence and encroachment must have been the reason behind any instances of same-sex sexualities in Africa. This idea highlights the African heterosexual mentality. The use of the phrase ‘alien to the customs, lifestyles, and belief of Africans’ appeals to the cultural consciousness of readers to fight against the phenomenon for cultural reasons. Culturalism holds that the value system, traditions, resources and biases of a particular culture are often determined by the values of dominant groups in the society. These cultural principles are transferred from one generation to another as received knowledge and values. Culturalists in the Nigerian context contend that heterosexualism is the norm and anything different from this is contra-culture, hence the use of negative expressive words such as ‘taboo’ and ‘abomination’. In the examples above, lexical devices such as reiteration of ‘taboo’ and ‘abomination’, collocations of culture-related terms and negative evaluative synonymic adjectives such as ‘repulsive’, ‘abominable’, among others, can be noticed, suggesting the ideological principle of culturalism.

5.3. Borrowed lexical items showing pro-culturalists’ view

Also, different lexical items borrowed from the indigenous languages have been used to show the resistance against same-sex sexualities. For instance, in the excerpt below, the use of ‘Tufiakwa’ which means ‘God forbid’ in the English language can be seen.

*Excerpt 5: Now you want **our** men to sleep with fellow men AND women with fellow women so that God would visit **us** like Sodom! **Oyinbo**, we say **tufiakwa!** If you like keep your aids. As Nigerians we say **NO to GAY** relationships. *The Sun, February 3, 2014.**

Culturalists believe that same-sex sexuality is the culture of the Whites, which is totally external to the African/Nigerian culture. Same-sex sexualities is named as one of the immoralities blamed on the effects of colonialism. The writer of the excerpt above uses these lexical items ‘Oyinbo’ and ‘tufiakwa’ which are borrowings from the indigenous languages, to emphasise the unacceptability of same-sex sexualities in relation to the culture of the Igbo people and Nigerians in general. The lexical item ‘oyinbo’ is used to create a form of mockery to the international bodies trying to influence

Nigerians to accept what is not allowed in their culture- same-sex sexualities. When same-sex sex was criminalised in 2014, it was believed that the U.S. and some other international bodies made attempts to persuade the Nigerian government to change its stand. Many Nigerians believed that same-sex sexuality was the idea of the whites. However, the writer of the above excerpt alludes to this as s/he directs his/her statement to 'oyinbo' (the whites). Also noticeable in the excerpt above, is the capitalisation of the lexical item 'NO'. This is used emphatically to reflect the absolute refusal of same-sex sexualities in Nigeria, coupled with the use of 'tufiakwa'. The meaning of 'tufiakwa' is culturally situated. This lexical item is an exclamatory remark used by the Igbos to vehemently refuse something. Its use in the excerpt is to emphatically reject same-sex sexualities. However, there are other instances of the usage in the discourses of same-sex sexualities in the newspapers under consideration.

In these discourses, the ideology of cultural nationalism can also be noticed. For woods (2014:1), cultural nationalism focuses on the ideas and practices that relate to the intended revival of a supposed culture of a national community. The ideology of cultural nationalism is reflected in the idea of Nigeria as a nation whose culture is against the practice of same-sex sexualities. The use of "we", "us" and "Nigerians" emphasizes group identity and solidarity among all the ethnic groups in Nigeria in opposing gay relationships. In public debates on same-sex sexualities in Nigeria, reference is often made to the notion that same-sex sexuality is 'unafrikan', and critics of this notion have based their arguments on the notion or concept of change. Many of those who argue for the recognition of sexual minorities ascribe to this notion, tailoring it to their ends.

5.4. Anti-culturalists' view/ Cultural dynamism

Anti-culturalists believe that culture is not static, emphasising "the invention of tradition –that is, the manufacture or at least simplification of ideas about traditional practice in order to serve the interest of particular groups, or to provide a politically convenient and sanitized reading of history and of the nature of specific communities" (Dunton and Palmberg, 1996:34). For them, therefore, same-sex identified people and same-sex sexualities should be acceptable in Africa. They have argued that cultures do change and Nigerians should be receptive to change. This view is supportive of same-sex sexualities, premised on the ideology of cultural dynamism. Cultural dynamism as an ideology holds that culture is dynamic and thus complex. Here, it is believed that culture is fluid, not static, which means that culture changes all the time, every day, in subtle and tangible ways. Every day, the society is being transformed. It changes exactly the same way as human beings change. Murdock (1971) notes that culture cannot be portrayed as being a consistently fixed entity. For him, culture is dynamically enacted and constituted differently by different culture-enacting agents but with results that are comprehensible, if not acceptable, to other agents. This ideology has made the anti-culturalists in the discourses of same-sex sexualities opine that the only constant thing in life is change. This means that the orientation of people towards same-sex identified people and same-sex

sexualities must change from being negative. The viewpoint emphasises that even if same-sex practice was not part of the cultures in Nigeria at its inception, nothing stops it from being incorporated. This notion is particularly found in the *Punch Newspaper* and different lexical choices make it clear.

5.5. Repetition, antonyms and synonyms foregrounding cultural dynamism

The reiteration of some synonymous lexical items and phrases is used to foreground the anticulturalists' view, as revealed in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 6: *The point is, culture does not mean people should be stuck in a time warp. Societies advance and that is why even the most vociferous campaigners for "African values" will not forsake their European/Arabia-gifted religion for Amadioha or Sango; will not give up their cellphones (and other forms of western technology) and return to the villages to communicate with drums and smoke signals. The Punch, January 16, 2014.*

Excerpt 7: *I have analysed the situation, and the only thing holding people back from giving gays all rights is a vested interest in tradition. I see that tradition can sometimes be good and beneficial to society (the tradition of sitting down to talk with a gay person and look them in the eye before one condemns them to a life marred by illegitimacy, would be very helpful here), but when tradition is wrong, it must change. The Punch, August 10, 2014.*

The excerpt above emphasises the dynamic nature of culture, using lexical items representing the old means of communication such as 'drums' and 'smoke signal' and modern means of communication, such as the use of 'cellphones'. The writer tries to foreground this point of view by comparing the old ways of doing things with the use of modern technologies. The writer also compares the worship of deities such as 'Amadioha and Sango' to the acceptance of Christianity and Islam which many Nigerians now perceive to be better than the worship of deities. The writer deploys the comparison of these lexical items to drive home the point that cultures do change and when people find better ways of doing things, they simply change. This means that culture should not be the basis for arguing against the practice of same-sex sexualities in Nigeria, because Nigerians have accepted some changes in the past. They should also see same-sex sexualities as a form of change to be embraced. Cultural practices that are no longer in vogue emphasise this point of view. The use of the lexical verb 'advance' can also be noticed in the excerpt. 'Advance' here connotes moving forward and change. The writer of the excerpt also uses the synonyms of 'forsake', 'return' and 'give up' to emphasise the quest for change.

In the excerpt 7, culture is substituted with tradition and the writer says a wrong tradition, such as the discrimination against same-sex identified people, should change. The use of the lexical items 'tradition' and 'change' here foregrounds the dynamic nature of culture and the need for Nigerians to change their perception and embrace same-sex sexualities. The text is likely intended to persuade the

audience to reconsider their stance on gay rights by appealing to reason and logic. It acknowledges the importance of tradition but challenges the audience to question traditions that are harmful or discriminatory. The example provided (sitting down to talk with a gay person) serves to humanize the issue and encourage empathy and understanding. The writer positions themselves as someone who has analyzed the situation objectively and is offering a rational argument for change.

5.6. Religious ideologies on same-sex sexualities

Religion is a form of social order influencing social attitudes and behaviours. Religion is belief in God or gods and leading a good life. The arguments for and against same-sex sexualities are also premised on religion, and what the religious books say about same-sex sexualities. Nigeria is a very religious nation and it is therefore expected that a controversial issue such as same-sex sexualities will be hinged on religion. Under this category, there are two main classes of participants – Religious fundamentalists (religious leaders, individuals) and Secularists (gay rights activists). The social actors, underlying ideologies and lexical indices under this category are shown below:

5.7. Religious fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalists believe in the strict adherence to scriptural principles. They usually use the media to propagate their political and religious agenda (Lobo, 2009:150). Ideologically, “they believe in moral dualism- dividing the world into black and white, right and wrong, absolutism and inerrancy in their interpretation of the scriptures and belief in core fundamentals and in the end of time and victory for the faithful and just” (Thomas 2008:5). In general, fundamentalists are considered to be extremists, retrospective and static by their opponents. Encyclopedia Britannica (1973) describes them as “a motley group of theologically conservative communities which emphasize total and even literal inspiration from the Holy Scriptures and their absolute authority in matters of faith and works.” In the discourses of same-sex sexualities considered in this study, same-sex sexualities are perceived as a sin against God by these religious fundamentalists, who are mainly religious clerics (Christian and Muslim). A sin is an offence against God or a moral law. This argument has been hinged on religion especially the Christian religion and Bible passages have been used to support the claim. However, the ideology underlying this view is religious fundamentalism, which demands a strict adherence to certain theological doctrines, the belief in scriptural inspiration and the infallibility of scriptures. Here, the religious fundamentalists have argued that the Bible and the Koran unequivocally state that homosexual behaviour is wrong.

5.8. Reiteration of holy books-related words and negative evaluative adjectives showing religious fundamentalists’ view

Lexical items relating to either the Bible or the Koran foreground religious fundamentalism in the discourses on same-sex practice in Nigerian newspapers. The view is that same-sex relationships are sins against God. Negative evaluative adjectives, such as ‘unscriptural’, ‘unbiblical’, ‘sin’, and

‘satanic’ are also found in the description of same-sex sexualities by the religious fundamentalists. Phrases such as ‘fighting against God’, ‘abomination to God’, and ‘against the scriptures’, among others can also be seen. This view is evident in all the newspapers and examples of excerpts showing this are below:

*Excerpt 8: Homosexuality is **against the scripture**. We cannot be party to any doctrine that is **against the Scripture**. We have looked at **the Bible**. **Bible** abhors it; we cannot be part of it. *The Sun*, July 23, 2015.*

*Excerpt 9: **The Bible** states clearly that homosexuality is **an abomination to God**. *Vanguard*, March 22, 2014*

*Excerpt 10: Homosexuality is **satanic**. **The word of God** on it is clear. This is not an issue of human rights. Anybody that supports such is **fighting against God**. It is a fearful thing to **oppose God**. *Vanguard*, January 18, 2014.*

*Excerpt 11: Thank God, President Buhari is a devout Muslim, who believes in Allah. He knows that his fellow countrymen and countrywomen - Christians, Muslims and traditionalists - **abhor that sinful and unnatural act of sodomy**. *Nigerian Tribune*, July 25, 2015.*

In the excerpts above, ‘against the scripture’, ‘satanic’, ‘abomination to God’, ‘sin of Sodom’ are used to emphasise the notion that same-sex sexualities are sins against God. These lexical items and phrases are used to draw the attention of readers to the stand of God on same-sex sexualities. In excerpt 8, the writer uses the reiteration of the phrase ‘against the scripture’ to emphasise the view of the religious book against the phenomenon. S/he further reiterates the stance of members of his religious group using two synonymous statements ‘We cannot be party to any doctrine that is against the scripture’ and ‘We cannot be part of it’. The first person plural pronoun ‘we’ in these statements shows the in-group and out-group categorisation. The writer uses this to show that the resistance against same-sex sexualities due to religious reasons is a unanimous one. In excerpt 9, reference is also made to the bible as describing same-sex sexualities as an abomination. This pattern runs through the examples shown as references are often made to religious books by religious fundamentalists. In excerpt 10, a negative evaluative adjective ‘satanic’ is used in describing same-sex sexualities. The adjective ‘satanic’ is a religion-related word and it connotes extreme evil; using this in describing same-sex sexualities means that the speaker believes same-sex sexualities are extremely evil or as a result of demonic influence; therefore, Nigerians should run away from it. In other instances, scriptural passages are quoted. It is common to see names of bible passages in these discourses, for instance, Romans, Corinthians, and others. It is also referred to as that sinful act in excerpt 11; therefore, whoever engages in the act is a sinner in reference to the three main religions practised in Nigeria. The support for same-sex sexualities is also described as fighting against God in excerpt 10, which the writer describes as a fearful thing. God is seen as the Supreme Being, who has

so much power to do anything; therefore, fighting this Supreme Being means death. Also, in excerpts 11 and 12, same-sex sexualities are described as the ‘sin of Sodom’. This is a biblical allusion to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in the religious books. The religious books record that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of same-sex sexualities. The usage of this term appeals to the religious sensitivity of the reader on the havoc the practice of same-sex sexualities could cause. These terms are intentionally used by writers to instigate the people to fight the practice of same-sex sexualities so that the destruction that occurred in Sodom and Gomorrah will not be repeated in the nation. The use of lexical reiteration can also be observed in excerpt 12, emphasising this view. The ideological implication of the use of these lexical devices is to emphasise religious fundamentalism. The argument of Thomas (2008: xiii) is that religious fundamentalists belong to a global umma and they nurse the idea that every human becomes religious, either as Christians or as Muslims (2008: xv). These religious fundamentalists may not use physical violence; they are experienced in using the media and other means to propagate “symbolic violence”.

5.9. Secularism

Secularists accentuate separation of religious injunctions from state laws. They believe that the holy books (Bible and Koran) are unreliable references for reasonable arguments especially on the issue of same-sex sexualities, which is in opposition to the view of the religious fundamentalists. The opinion of the secularists is founded on the ideology of secularism. Secularism is the principle that emphasises the separation of government institutions and matters of the state from religious institutions and religious personnel (Lobo, 2009:151). Secularism is manifested in the assertion of rights and freedom from religious injunctions and teachings. It emphasises the neutrality of the state on matters of belief, as state decisions and impositions on the people should be void of religious affiliations. This view is based on the notion that the holy books cannot be used as the basis for passing a particular bill, particularly in this discourse, the criminalisation of same-sex sexualities by the Nigerian government. It is also argued that the Bible, for instance, does not vividly state that same-sex sexualities is evil. In the same vein, it is argued that even if it is stated in the religious books, the Bible or the Koran should not be the basis for the passage of a bill (anti-gay marriage bill) that will affect members of a society since everyone does not believe in both books. The social actors with this view include same-sex identified people, gay rights activists and international bodies. Collocations have been used to foreground this view

5.10. Collocations expressing secularists’ view

Secularists have particularly deployed collocates in emphasising the view that state laws should be separated from religious injunctions. Examples of excerpts showing the use of this lexical strategy in relation to the point of view are found below:

*Excerpt 12: In Nigeria, when people bring out their holy books during an argument, **good luck to reason**. It was not surprising the debate did not go far. *The Punch*, January 16, 2014.*

*Excerpt 13: And then, **without battling an eyelid, they quote from the Bible or the Koran – as if Christianity and Islam were African religions!** *Vanguard*, January 29, 2014.*

*Excerpt 14: **The Christian argument also has a loophole**. Since God did not categorize sin, and our righteousness is like a filthy clothe before him, then in the sight of God, adultery, and fornication, is just the same as same-sex sexualities. *Nigerian Tribune*, July 12, 2015.*

‘Goodluck to reason’ and ‘without battling an eyelid’ are collocates used to foreground the illogicality of basing an argument, especially that on same-sex sexualities on statements in the holy books. These secularists are of the opinion that arguments should be based on sound judgement and logical reasoning instead of quoting from some religious books. Writers refer to ‘holy books’, ‘Bible’, and ‘Koran’ as the basis of argument for people who cannot think logically. In Nigeria, where there is a diverse religious landscape with Christianity and Islam being the dominant faiths, the use of holy books in arguments can be a common practice. This cultural context shapes the way discourse unfolds and the types of arguments that are considered legitimate or persuasive. These collocates reflect a broader societal trend where appeals to tradition, authority, or religious belief may take precedence over logical reasoning or evidence-based discourse. As a result, debates may become stymied or unproductive, as the focus shifts away from reasoned analysis towards entrenched beliefs or dogma. This normalisation of religious authority within discourse reinforces existing power structures and may perpetuate inequalities by privileging certain voices or perspectives based on religious affiliation.

5.11. Labels expressing secularists’ view

Another lexical strategy used by secularists in emphasising their view about the illogicality of making religious books the basis of arguments against same-sex sexualities is the labelling of religious books and religious fundamentalists negatively. Different negative labels have been used, as can be seen in the examples below:

*Excerpt 16: Why do folks start frothing at the mouth whenever they hear about gay marriage? They become master quoters of scripture. Deuteronomy, Corinthians, Romans, etc. why can they not argue logically without recourse to citing. **Palestinian bronze age texts?** *The Punch*, July 21, 2014.*

*Excerpt 17: But in blaming the West for something that has been present in every human society and in the animal world as well, **the self-righteous army of God** forgets that the West persecuted same-sex identified people until quite recently. *Vanguard*, January 29, 2014.*

Excerpt 16 foregrounds the viewpoint that holy books are an unreasonable basis of argument when it comes to the issue of same-sex sexualities. In fact, the writer of the excerpt labels these holy books

as ‘Palestinian bronze age text’, meaning that they are out of fashion, that is, no longer in vogue. Some have also said that God did not categorise sin, which makes ‘adultery’ and ‘fornication’ in the same group as same-sex sexualities. Therefore, if people who commit adultery and fornication are not crucified, there is no reason why same-sex-identified people should be crucified.

In another example, people who have a negative attitude towards same-sex sexualities and supporters of the anti-gay bill, especially the religious fundamentalists are labelled ‘self-righteous army of God’. Critics of same-sex sexualities are labelled ‘self-righteous army of God’ by some secularists because many of these critics have tilted their arguments toward religion. They have argued that same-sex sexuality is against the will of God and therefore, a sin. The term ‘self-righteous’ has a negative connotation as it means being haughty, pompous, self-satisfied or sanctimonious. It is clear from this example that the writer uses this label as a way of criticising the negative attitude towards same-sex sexualities and same-sex identified people. Generally, collocations, references to Bible-related terminologies and labelling have been engaged by the secularists to emphasise their secularist sentiments.

Conclusion

This study has shown the prevalent cultural and religious ideologies in the discourses on same-sex sexualities in the selected Nigerian newspapers as well as the lexical items and devices used in foregrounding these ideologies. The different classes of social actors identified included the Pro-culturalists, Anti-culturalists, Religious fundamentalists and Secularists. The different ideologies in the discourses were also identified vis-a-vis the points of view and explained. Pro-culturalists emphasised culturalism, while Anti-culturalists expressed cultural dynamism. Religious fundamentalists accentuated religious fundamentalism, while secularists upheld secularism. The analysis also showed the different lexical items and devices that have been deployed by writers to foreground the identified viewpoints and ideologies. Synonymic nouns and adjectives, and borrowed lexical items foregrounded the culturalists’ views; reiteration of holy books-related words and negative evaluative adjectives, such as ‘unscriptural’ and ‘unbiblical’ emphasised Religious fundamentalists’ view; collocations and labelling of religious fundamentalists and religious books derogatorily expressed Secularists’ view. Generally, this study points the finger at discursive practices that sketch out heterosexuality as the norm and ‘*homosexuality*’ as non-normative, bad and unacceptable and how these views are contended. Future research may consider the use of quantitative approaches in analysing the same data set to achieve some objectivity. Again, other sections of the Nigerian newspapers can be considered to understand how the media represent the sexual orientation.

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