



## A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SOME SELECTED INSTRUCTION TEXTS

Emmanuel C. Sharndama ,Dr Innocent E.Agu

(Faculty of Humanities,Management and Social sciences,Department of English and Literary Studies,  
Federal University, Wukari)



Emmanuel C. Sharndama

### ABSTRACT

Products are normally accompanied by instruction manuals designed not to advertise the product but to guide use. It is monolithic communication as the undefined target audience passively receive commands/directives and advices. This paper attempts a stylistic analysis of selected of instruction texts to determine the language features. Crystal and Davy's 1(1985) and Leech and Short's models were adapted as method of analysis. The result revealed that instruction texts consist of graphitic features which have a lot of semantic significance. The major and sub-divisions of the instructions, for instance, are in bold print in order to draw the attention of the reader and at the same time achieve emphasis. At the lexical level, the analysis showed that the key words are mono-referential and subject specific. They ensure precision, objectivity and clarity so as to achieve practical purposes. The syntactic components are mostly characterized by simple surface structures such as imperative sentences which guide the user to be successful in operating the product.

**Keywords:** *Style, stylistics, lexis, syntax and manual.*



Dr Innocent E.Agu

### Article Info:

Article Received: 14/1/2015

Revised on: 20/1/2015

Accepted on: 29/1/2015

© Copyright VEDA Publication

### INTRODUCTION

A text is a product of either speaking or writing which encompasses the context of situation. Halliday and Matthiessen(2004)refer to text as any instances of language in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language. Instruction texts are designed to inform or educate the user of a product. The relationship between the writer of an instruction manual and the reader is usually informal. The writer is distant and assumes the position of an expert in the discourse. The reader is always obliged since the means of asking direct question or seeking clarification are not possible.(Thorne 1997). Though instruction manuals

have common characteristics with other technical texts, there are certain features that could possibly make them distinct. The style of language used in instruction manuals can be examined via the theory of special purpose language, because it is a language restricted to a particular product. This approach as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out has shifted attention away from defining the formal features of language to discovering the ways in which language is used in real communication. They further explained that traditionally. The aim of linguistics had been to describe the rules of language, that is, grammar. It is on this premise that, this study aims to investigate



the stylistic features of instruction texts in order to uncover the patterns of linguistic features that characterize them.

#### **METHOD OF INVESTIGATION**

Eclectic method was adapted to describe the linguistic features. Crystal and Davy's (1985) model of stylistic analysis was adopted. The model encourages investigation at all the major levels of linguistics-Phonetics and phonology, lexis, grammar (syntax) and semantics. Each of the identified levels of analysis was examined for linguistic features that characterize instruction texts with the aim of looking at what go on within the language of instruction texts and what linguistic patterns the style of language reveals. Leech and Short's (1985) check list of linguistic and stylistic categories which include grammar, lexis and rhetoric was also used alongside Crystal Davy's approach to stylistic analysis.

#### **CONCEPT OF STYLE AND STYLISTICS**

The word style is defined by different scholars from different perspectives. However, from general sense, style refers to the way something is made or done. In this sense, the way clothes, building or furniture is designed can be seen as style. Matthews (1997) states that in general, whatever is studied under stylistics constitute style. It is language appropriate to a specific genre of writing or characteristics of an individual. From etymological point of view, like many other English words, style metamorphosed from a Latin word "stylus" meaning a pointed object used for writing in those times. Ogidefa(2008) defines stylus as 'reed'. The word 'reed' according to Ogidefa is a stick used for writing. Similarly, Wikipedia refers to stylus as a pointed instrument for engraving, drawing or writing. It was a tool used in ancient times for writing on a wax tablet, which was pointed at one end and blunt on the other for erasing mistakes.

In computer science, stylus refers to pen-shaped device used on a displayed screen to input commands or hand written text. Style itself was referred to as a manner of writing or expression. In linguistics, style is used to describe the choice made by a language available to its users. This refers to the resource of a language that the user selects form based on his purpose of communication, context or

genre. Leech and Short (1989) are of the view that writers on style differ a great deal in their understanding of the subject matter, and that one source of agreement has been the question "To what or to whom do we attributed style?". Style from linguistic point of view is used to describe the way or choice that language makes available to its speakers. This means that there exist natural linguistic conventions that users of language select which can be identified in all forms of texts-spoken or written, technical or non-technical, professional or popularized etc.

According to short and Leech(1989),a text whether considered as a whole or extracted from a work,is the nearest we can get to homogeneous and specific use of language. Therefore, it is naturally the starting point for the study of style. Style means the language which is used "in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose" (Leech 1989). It is applied to the writer's individual characteristic manner of expression. It is applicable to the written and spoken, and literary and non-literary codes.

It can be deduced from the above views that though scholars defined style from different perspectives, the concept as a linguistic term refers to selection or choice of language by a speaker from his/her linguistic repertoire. The selection or choice is normally controlled by context of situation, profession or genre. Style then refers to the way language is selected appropriately to a given context, profession or genre.

Stylistics as a linguistic concept is also diverse because it can be looked at from different perspectives. However, common to the various definitions by scholars is the fact that stylistics is a discipline that studies different styles. As a discipline, it attempts to examine the varieties of language whose linguistic features make it distinctive and identifiable with particular context. Stylistics provides methods that can uncover particular selection of language made by an individual or social group in their use of language. In this sense, stylistics identifies the contextually distinctive use to which language is put. As a tool for investigating language used in a given context, stylistics can unveil language used in specific contexts such as sports, politics,



religion, education, advertising, music, law e.t.c In stylistic analysis, text is the object of analysis and can be manifested in either written or spoken modes.

Leech and Short (1985) define stylistics as the (linguistic) study of style, an exercise in describing what use is made of language Stylistics does not only assess the variation in language but also how effects are made. Osuji in Fakuade(1998 ) is of the view that linguistics presents a taxonomy of how language works while stylistics examines the way linguistic features are used to portray and reinforce the meaning of a text .Fakuade (1998) further opines that stylistics is a confluence between literary and linguistic rivers. This is because stylistics as a branch of linguistics makes attempt to uncover the varieties of a language, its properties, and principles of choice e.t.c. In literary studies, stylistic analysis concentrates much on complex and valued language within literature (deviations and abnormalities) rather than conventional structures found in a text. Stylistics aims to analyze the language habits with the main purpose of identifying from the general mass of linguistic features common to a given text. The features are usually restricted to certain kinds of social context so as to explain why certain features are used as opposed to other alternatives (Crystal and Davy 1985). It is against this background that this study attempts to examine the features of language used in laying down instructions for users of selected instruction manuals.

#### GRAPHETIC FEATURES

Analysis at this level is concerned with the layout of the texts and their semantic implications. The result of the analysis carried out at this level revealed that instruction texts have distinctive layouts that carry a lot of semantic implications. The titles of the texts subjected to analysis for example are presented in bold print in order to draw the reader's attention to the sequences of activities designed to produce the same result any time the instructions are properly followed. Abbreviations and acronyms are often used as shorthand that the reader can easily understand. In addition to the print, the instructions in paragraphs are numbered for easy recognition. The reader is always expected to follow the numbering of the paragraphs so as to

arrive at expected result. Sometimes the writer combines words with pictures order to enhance the reader's comprehension of the instructions .The above graphetic features are illustrated below.

#### REMOTE CONTROL HANDSET

Before you use the remote control handset, please install the batteries.

##### 1. POWER

Switch the set on from standby or off its standby

##### 2. NUMBER BUTTONS

Switches the set on from standby or directly selected a number.

##### 3. MENU

Selected a menu

##### 4. EYE/\*(OPTION)

Switches the eye function on or off.

(L.G Colour Television Owners' Manual P. 5)

The major instruction is on the use of remote control. There are four key actions that the user is directed to embark upon in order to successfully use the device. These are functions that the user performs one after the other with the aid of remote control device. Monolithic references are made to power, number button, menu and eye/\*options so that the user selects which action he/she wants to embark on.

#### LEXICAL FEATURES

This section analyses the vocabulary of instruction texts, that is, words commonly found or associated instruction texts. The analysis carried out revealed that most of the vocabularies of instruction texts are technical terms or jargons associated with particular instrument and the functions of the various parts. In other words, they are subject- specific. The vocabularies of instruction texts are also presented in acronyms and abbreviations. The acronyms or abbreviations normally become familiar even to the lay audience who may not know their full meanings. For instance, the acronyms *TV*, *CD* and *VCD* today are more popular than their full names- Television, Compact Disc and Video Compact Disc.

Other examples are:

**Acronyms/Abbreviations Full Meanings**

AVR	Automatic Voltage Regulator
AV	Audio Video
AVL	Audio Volume Leveler
PSM	Picture Status Memory
IAPC	Integrated Automatic

**PROTECTION CIRCUIT**

The vocabularies of instruction texts as observed from the above acronyms/ abbreviations are mono referential. Conciseness and semantic uniqueness are achieved as each word identifies a single object or concept. The words are mostly compounded; but ambiguity is highly reduced since they are mono referential. Examples of compounded but mono-referential words include: *Loudspeaker, output, input, handset, picture cut thunder storm, bathtub, wash bowl, play back, headphone, trouble shooting.*

There are other words / phrases used as jargons. They include: *power button, sockets, mute, system, channel, search, memory, play, block, remote, regulator e.t.c.* These words are everyday words but have specialized functions as applied in the instruction texts.

**SYNTACTIC FEATURES**

The analysis carried out on the three instruction manuals revealed that they are characterized by simple syntax and complex noun phrases as a result of pre-modification. Pre-modifications make the sentences lengthy but are still simple as one they contain one instruction.

The analysis has shown that imperative mood is used predominantly. The imperatives normally instruct, command or warn the users of a given product. The target audience or readers are required to carry out or perform some actions or tasks. In instruction manuals, the subjects of the imperative sentences 'you' (second person pronoun) are always implied in order to make the instruction generic. The writer aims at precision and clarity so that the reader can use a product successfully. The imperatives which are of different forms are sampled below.

- **IMPERATIVES WITH IMPLIED SUBJECTS**

These have marked themes as they make generalized and objective statements. The writer's emphasis is not on the user but on action expected of

the user to perform—they specify what the user should do to operate an instrument. Examples of these imperatives are:

1. Connect the electrical appliances to the regulator
2. Make sure all the appliances are turned off.
3. Press the main power button to switch the set on.
4. Press the POWER BUTTON again, the switch then sets off.

**(b) NEGATIVE IMPERATIVES**

This is another form of imperative used in instructional manuals. In this type, the user is warned or cautioned against performing an action. These are actions that may have negative effect on the instrument if carried out.

The following are examples:

1. Do not try to roll a stand with small casters across thresholds or deep pile carpet
2. Do not add accessories that have not been designed for this T.V.
3. Do not bring magnetic devices such as magnets or motors near the picture tube
4. Do not use the regulator beyond its minimum output power.
5. Do not damage the power cord by disassembling, bending, pulling or heating up, it can cause fire or electric shock.

All the five negative imperatives warn the user against carrying out a task or action. Carrying out such prohibited actions will result in negative outcome.

- **IMPERATIVES WITH SUBJECT**

The second person pronoun "you" is the only subject of the imperative that is used in the three texts e.g.

- *You* may find some blue programs. They have been set up to be skipped by auto programming or in the programme edit mode.
- *You* can set your preferred sound setting, that is music, movie or speech and *you* can also adjust the sound frequency or equalizer.



'You' as used in the subject position refers to the user or users of an instrument. The actions are not obligatorily as obtained in the preceding imperative forms.

#### THE USE OF INITIAL CONDITIONAL CLAUSES

This study revealed that if-conditional clauses are employed in laying down instructions to offer the user, first, the situation or circumstance that warrants embarking on an action. The writer assumes the user to act only based on the circumstance in the initial clause.

Samples from the texts are:

- If you want to reach the point forward, press button, each time the button is pressed, speed is changed as follow: FB-play.
- If you want to reach the point reverse, press button, each time the is pressed, speed is changed as follow: FB-play
- If your set is in standby, mode, press the power, TV/AV or NUMBER buttons on the remote control handset to switch it on fully.
- If you want to select the skipped programme directly, enter the programme number with the NUMBER buttons or select it in the programme edit or table menu.

The writer as observed in the four sentences gives conditions in the subordinate clause and tells the reader vividly how to achieve the desired end in the main clause.

#### THE USE OF INFINITIVE

In written instruction texts, infinitives are used to express intellectual or perceptual response. The main clause in this case is used to represent event that acts as a stimulus. The assumed action to be carried out by the target reader is brought to the initial position, while the main action follows.

- To stop auto programming, press the menu button
- To store another programme, repeat with numeric '0' in front of it, i.e '05' for 5.
- To return to TV mode, press NUMBER buttons.
- To repeat play, press REPEAT button again.
- To cancel this function, press DIGEST (VIEW) button again.

As demonstrated by the five sentences, the user is presented with actions/tasks that he /she is to

embark on. In the second part, which is the main clause, the user is provided with specified action to be taken for him to carry out the required action in the initial subordinate phrase.

#### COMPLEX NOUN PHRASES

The obligatory elements of a sentence usually consist of one of the four major classes of words viz: noun, verb, adjective and adverb. A group functioning as an element of a sentence generally consists of one of these words as the head and modifiers. The nominal group may consist of a noun, pronoun or noun equivalent as head, with or without its modifiers preceding or following it.

The nominal groups found in instruction manuals consist mostly of two or more pre-modifiers, though there are some that are pre-modified by single pre-modifiers. The pre-modifiers function as attributes of the noun head, thus defining it clearly. The analysis carried out shows that the Major and Minor headings of the instructions are presented in highlighted prints with no predicators following them. The following five phrases are example:

- **Turbo picture sound** *button*
- **Automatic voltage** *regulator*
- **Connecting of** external equipment
- **Troubleshooting** *check-list*

The nouns in italics each of the four phrases is the noun head of the phrases. Phrases one and two consist of a noun head pre modified by other nouns. The third phrase has a noun as the head post-modified by a prepositional phrase "of external equipments", while the fourth phrase consists of noun head pre modified by an adjective. These verb less constructions are used in instruction manuals to present the major headings and subheadings of instructions. Their presentation in bold prints serves the purpose of drawing attention and achieving emphasis.

The nominal phrases in the instruction texts, especially, the imperative sentences mostly occur in the object and complement positions. This is because the actions depicted by the imperative verbs are always applied on an object e.g:

Press *the menu button* to select the menu station.



- Change *the setting* of an item in the sub or pull down menu.
- Connect *the aerial cable* to the RF aerial in the socket of VCR
- Press *the O.K. button* to return to normal TV viewing
- Select *a desired programme* with the button or number button

The subjects of the five sentences are all elided. The nominal phrases in italics are objects of the imperative verbs beginning the sentences. The nominal groups immediately after them are direct objects and those after Him are indirect objects functioning as object complement.

The occurrences of the direct objects in instruction manuals indicate the inter-connection of different parts or events, which lead to successful function of an instrument. The indirect objects normally function as complements of the direct objects.

#### PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

In some circumstances, passive sentences are used in instruction texts to help establish detachment and impersonality. The actor is always detached because the required emphasis is not on the actor but the action and the result of the action. Like in other scientific or technical discourse, the passive voice is associated with the rhetorical function of describing procedures. See the following examples:

- When NICAM mono is received, you can select ICAM MONO or FM MONO
- When NICAM stereo is received, you can select NICM STEREO or FM MONO. If the stereo signal is weak, switch to FM mono.
- When NICAM dual is received, you can select NICAM STEREO DUAL I. NICAM DUAL II or NICAM DUAL I+II or mono

When FM mono is selected, the display MONO appears on the screen. The above sentences describe the procedures of NICAM (Near Instantaneous Compounding Audio Multiplex) reception (Option). In order to lay down a generic instruction, the actor is detached in the subordinate clause and the neutral second person pronoun "you" is selected in the main clause. The action in the main clauses of each of the sentences depends on the concluded action deemed to have taken place in the

subordinate clause. The obscuring of the actor in passive constructions as shown in the instruction manuals depicts the fact that the result of an action is more important than who carried out the action.

#### CONCLUSION

This study showed that the linguistic features of instruction texts are lexically and syntactically simple. Except for the technical names which are mostly acronyms, the vocabulary is simple, mono referential, concise and unambiguous as the aim of the writer is to present precise information.

The graphic presentations of the major and minor headings of instructions in highlighted prints help to draw the attention of the user of a particular product. There are numerous diagrams illustrating how to use a given product, that is, the instructions are accompanied by diagrams.

Syntactically, the texts are characterized by elementary surface structures and very simple syntax. Most of the sentences are in the imperatives as the writer issues instructions in form of commands, advice or warnings on how to use the product. There are many verbless constructions especially the major and minor headings, which are mostly nominal phrases. Finally, the study reveals that procedures for describing the function of a product are presented in the passive. The generic instructions generally are in different imperatives and passive voices. The use of mono referential lexical items helps to give precision, concision, and objectiveness in instructional manuals.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Akmajian, A. Demers, R. Farmer, . and Harnish, R. (2004). *LINGUISTICS: An introduction to Language and Communication*. New Delhi, Hall of India Private Limited.
- [2] Fakuade, G.A(1998), *Studies in Stylistics and Discourse analysis*. Yola:paraclate publishers
- [3] Grabarczyk K (1989). *Scientific Discourse against the Background of Standard Language" Special Language*. From Human Thinking to Thinking Machines. Clevedon :Philadelphia Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- [4] Gotti M. (2003). "Specialized Discourse: *Linguistic Features and changing conventions*" Teaching English as a second or Foreign Language. TESL-EJ Vol. 8. No.1.
- [5] Halliday,M.A.K and Mtthiessen (2004) *An Introduction to functional Grammar*. London:HodderEducation.
- [6] Hutchinman T. and Waters. (1987) *English For Specific Purposes. A Learning Centred Approach*. Cambridge University Press.



- [7] Knowles M. (1989). *Some characteristics of specific Language: The Language of Tourism*. Philadelphia multilingual matters Ltd.
- [8] Leech, G and Short, M.H(1985) *Style in fiction :A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. London and NewYork
- [9] McArthur, T. (1996). *Oxford Companion to the English Language*. Oxford University Press.
- [10] Thorne.S(1997), *Mastering Advanced English*. New York:Cromwell Press limited.
- [11] Yule G. (2006). *The study of Language Cambridge University Press*.
-