Corporate Advertising as an Index of Intertextuality in Death Discourse

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ABSTRACT In the mass media landscape of Nigeria, English-medium newspapers present intertextuality as an enduring feature of death discourse. This paper examines intertextuality as a key element of reactions of corporate or business communities to the phenomenon of death. Anchored to the theoretical framework of literacy as a social practice, the analysis in this paper shows how literacy practices can travel across and become incorporated into different discourses. The paper discusses indicators of intertextuality, using excerpts of a representative data from pieces of death discourse (obituaries and in-memoriam) in four English-medium Nigerian newspapers: the Daily Times, the Daily Sketch, the Sunday Sketch and the Guardian with a focus on corporate advertising in advertised obituaries and in-memoriam in the newspapers. Based on theoretical underpinnings of the concept of advertising, the paper examines corporate advertising as a veritable source of intertextuality, specifically in death discourse. The paper highlights the significance of intertextuality as a definer of the distinctive textual norms and practices of corporate institutions in Nigeria within the purview of death discourse.

Keywords: intertextuality, corporate advertising, death discourse, community of the bereaved

Introduction

In this paper, advertising is examined as an inter-textual component of death discourse, as evident in obituaries and in-memoriam published in English-medium newspapers in Nigeria. The examination of the intertextual nature of aspects of the discourse is a focus on the corporate or business community of the bereaved. The particular display of intertextuality in advertised or publicised death discourse shows that the community is simultaneously engaged in the publicity of death-texts alongside the promotion of its corporate interests. In essence, there is a convergence of more than one social practice in the literacy employed in death discourses. This paper asserts that the features of advertising in the discourse show the ubiquitous nature of advertising in the community in general.

Literacy is best understood as a social practice (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic¡, 2000, Ade-Ojo, 2015). Indeed, it has been argued that literacy is utilised for specific purposes (Ade-Ojo, 2015). Each social practice would, therefore, attract or reflect specific literacy features. However, the notion of inter-practice suggests that features of one

practice can be replicated in another social practice, thus promoting what might be referred to as intertextuality (Raj (2015 & Graham, 2005).

In this paper, we set out to explore two things. Fist, what are the features of death discourse as a social practice? Second, does this practice and, therefore, its literacy draw from other practices? Through this analysis, we expect to be able to provide further evidence of the nature of inter-textuality and inter-practice literacy. This might ultimately become a pedagogical tool for aiding the use of inter-practice and its literacy in the development of other literacy practices amongst adult language learners.

Death in the construct of social practice

Searle (1998) observes that the study of the human experience of death enables the understanding of some fundamental features of social life, highlighting that embodiment dictates basic parameters for the construction of culture, and that it is a basic motivation for social and cultural activity. He concludes that, within this social understanding and through a variety of practices, the fear of mortality is transformed into some human social activities, which orientate society towards the acceptance or recognition of existence, death notwithstanding. In the foregoing regards, the data for this paper show advertising as a corporate social and cultural activity thus demonstrating the intertextual relationship between these two discourses.

Parkes (1993) describes bereavement as a psychosocial transition, noting that human beings have the capacity to organise (or construct) the world that we experience. Parkes's view resonates with Prior's (1993) view that human grief is socially patterned and channelled. In this paper, we suggest that the patterns of the construction of corporate identities are the channels through which the reaction of the bereaved to death is projected, even through the medium of advertising. In arriving at this conclusion, we draw on Gee's (1999) view that cultures, social groups and institutions shape social activities. The kind of *onsite* language use that this paper examines portrays the textual construction of communal reaction, which involves the announcement and the remembering of deaths; and, resultantly, the construction of identities. The paper views the construction as social, in relation to Stewart's (1978) view that *discourse* refers to language as a social event, not language as some contained and abstract fact which is a product of some individual psyche, but rather language as discourse, accomplished by social process.

St Clair and Giles (1980) state that contexts of language usage portray the individual as an active participant in the social construction of reality. Therefore, one underlying assumption, in this paper, is that the presence of intertexts in death discourse published in newspapers is a reflection of attempts by the bereaved to cope with the social and psychological experience of losing a loved one by drawing on experiences and literacy practices from other social contexts and their associated discourses. In the context of this paper, the key discourses and practices relate to death and advertising. As such, the evidence we intend to analyse will emerge from the interaction between the text, literacy and practices across the two social domains.

Advertising as an Element of the Social Construction of Corporate Culture

Our understanding of advertising in this paper draws on the construct offered by Cook (1992). Cook states that advertising is a ubiquitous phenomenon. This feature of advertising serves as the basis of an influential assumption underpinning this work, that

corporate advertising is an index of the enduring intertextual nature of corporate death discourse in English-medium newspapers in Nigeria. The intertextual nature of the advertised discourse depicts the cultural and semantic value of the discourse of the corporate community's simultaneous practices of giving publicity to death while at the same time enhancing the promotion of business interests. Cook states further that it is not only the medium of advertising that matters, but also its social meaning, which is equally significant. Therefore, we assume in this paper assumes that the value, as well as social practices from which advertising draws, makes it one of the principal features of intertextualised death discourse.

The Concept of Intertextuality

Graham (2005) views text as an intervention in a cultural system. Also, examining the concept of intertextuality, Raj (2015) states that text is not a unilinear entity, but a heterogenous combination of texts. Raj highlights Kristeva's (1980) notion of *intertextuality*. Kristeva (1980) examines the potential dynamics that characterise intertexts, and the point that a text is not a unilinear entity but a heterogenous combination of texts. Raj argues that any text is simultaneously literary, social, creative and cultural; and, therefore, culturally and institutionally fashioned. The foregoing views about the concept of intertextuality relate very closely to the focus of this paper, which examines the corporate community of the bereaved as an organ of the intertextualisation of advertised death discourse. Raj states that intertextuality deals with the materialisation of a text from the social text and its perpetual existence within society and history. In the data for this paper, the corporate bodies that have produced the death discourse are perpetual sources of institutional or corporate advertising; and, therefore, producers and manifestations of death discourse as an inter-text product. Raj adds that texts are not isolated personage but culturally fashioned discourses, ways of institutional speaking and saying. He concludes that text is a practice and productivity.

Lemaster (2012) sees intertextuality as the reference to or application of a literary, media or social text within another literary, media or social text. This converges with the views of literacy as a social practice and encourages the possibility of practices interacting and, therefore, texts interacting. Lemaster states further that intertextuality asks us to think about why the author is choosing this particular social text and why the features of a particular social text and its associated practices might be present in another social text. The discussion of corporate death discourse in this paper draws on Lemaster's views in this context

Mebuke (2011) asserts that intertextuality is responsible for the evolution of text types as classes of texts with typical patterns of characteristics. She adds that intertextuality is one of the central standards of text construction, which determines how we perceive a definite text and the principles of its function. Mebuke states further that the fundamental concept of intertextuality is that no text is original and unique in itself, and that texts are generally a tissue of inevitable references to and quotations from other texts and practices. Therefore, she concludes that intertextuality can be seen as the concept of texts borrowing of each others' words and concepts, as well as the signifying of practices of a culture.

Mebuke's assertion echoes the views of Lotman (1994), who argues that culture can be considered as a text. Advertised corporate death discourse in the data for this paper depicts a culture which engenders the resultant intertextaul discourse. Mebuke and Lotman's views are very true of the existence of intertextuality in advertised cor-

porate death discourse as found in the data for this paper. The discourse shows distinct typical patterns that characterize intertextuality as a form of death discourse. All of this reinforces the argument of Kilbride (2016) that intertextuality acknowledges the fact that no text is an island.

Indicators of Intertextuality in the Social Construction of Corporate Culture

The genre of advertising in the death discourse that forms the data for this paper is characterised by detailed information, such as business names, addresses and logos, which make the resultant death discourse a combination of death discourse and other texts. This paper establishes the view that corporate advertising in death discourse published in English language newspapers in Nigeria is dependent on the primary purpose of publicising death events, specifically death notices (obituaries) and remembrances (in-memoriam), rather than on the normal culture of business advertising. The dependency engenders the dual function of advertising in which the primary function of death publicity subsumes the secondary function of business advertising.

The function of business advertising as a cultural element relates to Harris and Seldon's (1962) view that the practice and excesses of advertising are universal and essentially the same in commercial, political, cultural, aesthetic, literary, professional and other non-commercial activities. In this paper, we examine the phenomenon of business advertising in death notices as an intrusion into the primarily non-business related activity of announcing or remembering the occurrence of death. Importantly, the intrusion depicts the intertextual nature of corporate death notices; and reflects the strong influence of the demands or features of business on the corporate community of the bereaved, to the extent that the community considers it normative to promote its businesses as an integral element of corporate death publicity. Cook (ibid) states that the context of communication focuses on the following elements: the communicator, the receiver, the purpose of communication, the kind of society, the situation and the medium of communication.

Day (1999) claims that corporate advertising may be created to gain consumer acceptance, overcome an image problem, or promote the company name as a brand. Therefore, in this paper, we hold the view that the corporate culture of advertising in death notices aims at making the consumer or reader of the advertised death notices accept the dual personality of the corporate advertiser as the bereaved, as well as the supplier of advertised products or services.

The contents of the corporate death discourse in the data for this study provide the basis for the view that aspects of advertised corporate death discourse are designed to promote the advertisers' business or corporate interests. Dyer's (1982) view that textual analysis of one sort or another is based on the meaning ascribed to a text by an analyst, or interpreter, justifies, in this paper, the analysis of corporate advertising in corporate death discourse. Dyer argues further that advertisers claim that advertisements are one of the most important influences in people's lives; and they advance and perpetuate the ideas and values which are indispensable to a particular economy. Therefore, I assume that providing information about a business, within a death notice, provides the suitable ground for touching the feelings of the reader, who is made to see the information as an integral part of the notice.

Also, Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) discuss the phenomenon of social needs in advertising. They reason that people do not exist in isolation, and that we need love, friendship and recognition from our fellows; we need to belong to groups and to feel

that we belong, and we need to be aware of ourselves as persons in relation to surrounding social groups. To examine the issue of corporate advertising in death notices, we assume in this paper that the corporate advertisers, being a social group, do not exist in isolation; but attempt to interact with other people and other practices, including in death-related matters. We assume in this paper that the incorporation of advertising in death discourse suggests the existence of the corporate group seeking recognition by another social group consisting of newspaper readers. According to Cook (ibid), the recognition can be indicative of the advertiser's personality or social and ideological position. Essentially, corporate advertising in death discourse presents an element of the identity of the corporate community of the bereaved.

Aspects of the data for this paper exemplify three indicators of corporate advertising in death discourse. The first is the presentation of the corporate advertiser's identity, which includes information about name, location and route(s) of communication. The second is the presentation of product or service. The third is the incorporation of clients or customers into the corporate expression of loss or sorrow. Excerpts A, B, C and D below are used to illustrate these indicators in the reality of death discourse. In discussing these exemplifications, we draw on linguistic frameworks and categories to illustrate the features of texts across discourses and practices.

The Presentation of the Corporate Advertiser's Identity

Excerpt A
Ladokun Feeds Ltd, Km 6 Old Lagos Road, Podo Industrial Estate, Ibadan, Nigeria. 2 years in mind. The Chairman, Directors, Management and Staff of Ladokun Feeds Ltd recall today, 6th November 1988 our late chairman...who passed to the world beyond on 6th November 1988. Chairman, Management and entire Staff, Ladokun Feeds Ltd..."Grow with the best, use Ladokun Feeds"

In Excerpt A, a number of features are prominent and help to illustrate the phenomenon of intertextuality. First, the identity of the advertiser is made specific and detailed through the following features:

    a.   Proper nouns signifying specificity: In the excerpt, proper nouns are used to provide specific information. For example, 'Ladokun Feeds Ltd', 'Old Lagos Road', 'Podo Industrial Estate', 'Ibadan' and 'Nigeria' are all proper nouns. These are usually features of corporate advertisement and have now occurred within the literacy practice and textual reality built around the discourse of death, thus clearly illustrating the notion of intertextuality.

    b.   A second exemplifier is the specific use of the adverb 'in mind'. This can be seen as signifying a mental perspective of a corporate feeling in a corporate mind which has been transferred across texts and practices.

    c.   Another feature represented in Excerpt A is the use of adjectives. There is the use of 'entire', signifying a sense of completeness or totality and 'best', which shows the use of superlative terms. There is also the use of the possessive pronoun, 'our' signifying a collective body of advertisers. The superlative term and the possessive pronoun are usual features of corporate advertisements.

d. Another feature of intertextuality in the excerpt is reflected in the use of imperatives: 'Grow with the best'. 'Use Ladokun Feeds.' Advertisements are meant to persuade potential consumers; the use of imperatives is a usual feature of such persuasion. This again is a reflection of the intertextual nature of death discourse.

In summary, the information in Excerpt A strengthens the presentation of the corporate advertiser. Therefore, this indicates that some intertextual and inter-practice movement had occurred, leading to the generation of the death-related but intertextual text.

Excerpt B

The Board of Directors, Management and Staff of…Ltd wish to express our deeply felt sympathy to the family, relations and the entire management of Crown Trust Limited for the untimely loss of their illustrious chairman and chief executive…which sad event took place in the late hours of Tuesday, 18th June 1991…Management, C.L… Limited, Building & Civil Engineering Contractors, 5 Ring Road, Ibadan, Oyo State, Tel:- (022) 313983

Excerpt B also exemplifies corporate details as in Excerpt A above. Also, it contains two additional and usual features of advertisements which provide evidence of intertextuality: The first is the detailed specification of location: "5 Ring Road, Ibadan, Oyo State". The second is the inclusion of telephonic information: *'Tel:- (022) 313983'.*

Excerpt C

The Board of Directors, Management and the entire staff of Guinea Insurance Company Ltd remember and treasure always the evergreen memory of our dear friend and colleague…who died on Sunday, the 18th October, 1987…Management…Guinea Insurance Company

In Excerpt C, an additional feature is the subtle advertisement of the advertiser's service: insurance. The presentation of the service as an element of death discourse is significant, particularly with the corporate name '*Guinea Insurance Company*' occurring two times in the text, an instance of repetition for emphasis, which is a feature of advertising.

Excerpt D

We wish to use this medium to express our profound gratitude to all our numerous customers, bankers and organisations who stood by us during and after the period of our terrible loss.

Excerpt D exemplifies another feature of business advertising, where clients or customers are presented as participants with the advertiser. The excerpt shows the following features of a collective presentation of feelings:

> ***We*** *wish…*
> ***our*** *profound gratitude*
> ***our*** *numerous customers, bankers and organisations*
> *all* ***our*** *numerous customers, bankers and organisations*

*who stood by **us***
***our** terrible loss*

The use of the three pronouns '*We*' (subject pronoun), '*our*' (a possessive pronoun used four times in the excerpt) and '*us*' (an object pronoun) shows the construction of a corporate identity in the advertised text. The excerpt contains clear features of corporate advertising. The features exemplify Dyer's (1982) identification of advertisement text as part of a flow or pattern of culture, as well as Vestergaard and Schroeder's (1985) description of the culture of advertising as performing the directive function, in which language is oriented towards the addressee, where language is used to influence the actions, emotions, beliefs and attitudes of the addressee, referred to in the excerpt as '*numerous customers, bankers and organisations*'.

Conclusion

As shown in excerpts A, B, C and D, the phenomenon of corporate advertising in corporate death discourse reveals the conflation of the boundaries of the social contexts of death publicity and business promotion. In other words, literacy and, therefore, texts have moved across practices. In this paper, the analysis and discussion of indicators of advertising in death discourse has characterised advertising as an indicator of corporate social and cultural reaction to death. It shows an element of the culture of business communities in Nigeria, who use death discourse as an avenue to advertise business interests, and exploit their existence in a consumer-oriented environment. Because of this culture, features of advertisement have been seamlessly incorporated into death discourse. This embedding of textual features across discourses provides further evidence of intertextuality, and shows how texts can evolve as carriers of the practices with which they are associated.

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