

# Adversative Conjunctions as Vehicles for the Communication of Stance in the *Vanguard* Newspaper Editorials

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**Abstract.** Communication is not done in isolation. Ideas, opinions, beliefs etc. shared during communication are presented as strands in a larger dialogue unit with other discourse participants and subjects. For a language user to communicate his/her opinion in a larger dialogue unit containing different subjects or opinions, the linguistic stance is deployed to either evaluate, position or align with the existing subject matters. However, how this is achieved has not been made sufficiently explicit by linguists. It is on this basis therefore that this study focuses on the deployment of linguistic stance in the editorials of the Vanguard Newspaper with a view to underlining the nature of communication through conjunctive adversatives. The study adopted the stance triangle framework of John Du Bois (2007) as the theoretical framework. The study used ten (10) editorials (from February, 2018 to April, 2018) of the Vanguard Newspaper as the population of the study. The editorials chosen were found to have deployed linguistic stance through adversative conjunctions. Each of these instances were analysed in line with the stance triangle. At the end, the study presents as part of its findings that linguistic stance helps the language user to implicitly communicate explicit messages of evaluation, position and alignment with the subject matter raised in a discourse. The adversative conjunctions enable editorials to shift or change focus from subject 1 to subject 2 before making the decision to align with any of them. Also, the subject 1 in the stance triangle is usually the popular opinion in the discourse but with the use of adversative conjunctions, the editorial is able to present another opinion of the discourse that might not be too popular. This second opinion then forms the basis for the subject 2 and a possible alignment.

**Keywords:** Language, stance, editorials, communication, discourse

## 1 Introduction

Communication stands as one of the major uses of the human language. There are many definitions of language which underscores this fact. One of such definitions comes from Thomas Pyles (1964, p.6) who says language is the arbitrary vocal symbol by means of which humans communicate. Through communication, we share meanings encoded in our beliefs, opinions, preferences, ideas etc. These communication acts are not done in isolation. They are presented in dialogues where other language users also communicate their own opinions and world views of the different subjects. For a language user to present his opinions, the linguistic stance is deployed.

Stance in language studies refers to the linguistic means through which users of the language communicate or present their views or opinions together with the discourse that precedes it and the ones to come. 'Although the term stance is widely used in linguistic research, it is hard to find a common definition for it' (Zeynep Erk Emeksiz, 2015, p.28). Generally speaking, it is used to refer to the manner in which language users display their attitudes, value judgments, feelings and knowledge towards the propositional content of their utterances and texts. This implies that at every point in time we use language to take a stance. In the literature, there are many kinds of stance. For example, Conrad and Biber (2000) see stance taking from the angle of evaluation and it has received considerable attention in recent years (cf Conrad and Biber 2000; Hunston and Sinclair 2000; Hunston and Thompson 2000; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Lemke 1998; Linde 1997; Macken-Horarik and Martin 2003; Thompson and Hunston 2000). Another view of stance is that which sees it as an assessment from the angle of conversation analysis from the works of Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) and Goodwin (2006). Studies of stance as a similar notion of appraisal has been done from the direction of the systemic functional

grammar (Martin, 2000). For this study, the direction would be in the line of stance as a discourse item as proposed by John Du Bois (2007) in his stance triangle model.

Du Bois (2007) recognizes the fact that language users express stance in three basic ways which can also be seen as one act having different aspects. According to him, stance can be expressed in the form of evaluation, positioning or alignment. When an individual makes a statement like: *I like those flowers*, he or she makes a stance of position (telling us what he/she thinks about the *flowers*) and at the same time evaluates the object of *flowers* to be good. Other discourse participants would align to the position of the first speaker either by being convergent or divergent. Also, the initial speaker would be aligning with the idea of the *flower* being good by having the options of following what comes before it or rejecting it. So, in this instance, alignment comprises of rejection or following.

Newspaper editorials are instances of language use and by extension points of stance taking. For a newspaper house like the Vanguard Newspaper, editorials provide a strong point for taking a stand on any issue which the editorial presents. There are usually many related opinions, views or beliefs on any issue which the editorial presents but the board of editors take a stand through linguistic means in the editorials. Through the linguistic means of stance the editorial is able to evaluate the concept under focus, position itself by telling the readers what should be done and at the end, aligns by either being convergent or divergent to some already held views of the concept. It is the linguistic means through which all these are achieved that we intend to study here. It is widely known and acceptable that editorials take stance but the linguistic through which these are achieved have not been clearly unraveled.

## 2 The Adversative Conjunction

The adversative conjunction is the type of conjunction that relates what is being said as different from what has been said. Adversatives present opposition to an earlier proposition. In the instance of this study, adversatives act as items that oppose an already established opinion and by extension present another idea that is different from the existing one or a modification of the previous. Adversatives are more like negating items against what has been. There are many examples of adversatives. Few are presented below: yet, though, only, containing: but, however, nevertheless, despite, in an case, in either case, whichever way its, etc. In this study, we look at how they aid in stance taking.

### 2.1 Du Bois' Stance Triangle

Du Bois did not stop at identifying the three aspects of stance only. He goes on to develop a framework for investigating stance in discourse. The framework operates on the basis of the stance triangle where the three aspects of stance operate in polar positions against the idea or concept being discussed. The three sides of the triangle represent vectors of directed action that organize the stance relations among these entities. While the stance triangle comprises the three subsidiary acts of evaluating, positioning, and aligning, these are not distributed evenly among the three sides, as in the expected one-to-one correspondence found in conventional triangular models. Rather, two of the three sides represent evaluative vectors directed from one of the two stance subjects toward the single shared stand object.

The first evaluative vector originates from the first subject, the second from the second subject. The third side of the triangle (the vertical line on the left) represents alignment between the two subjects. Significantly, each of the three stance act vectors is relational and directed, linking two nodes of the triangle. This means that for a language act that expresses stance, it evaluates the subject at hand (which is the first subject). Then, it makes a decision after evaluating to position himself. The position is the second subject and then this position aligns itself by either being in support or against the initial subject.

With such an explicit manner of analyzing discourse, the deeper meanings of utterances can be revealed looking at how it relates with larger dialogue units. This model of analyzing discourse has not been widely deployed and it still remains unclear what stance structure exists in different discourse contexts. It is on this basis therefore, that the present study presents a linguistic analysis of the communication of stance in the editorials of the Vanguard Newspaper.

## 2.2 Review of Related Literature

The most appropriate thing to be done in this section would have been to present past works where stance is studied in editorials but in the knowledge of the researcher none exists. There are however studies that have been carried on certain formal writings like academic researchers which by extent tries to communicate an opinion similar to editorials. We look at a few in this section because they are relevant to the present study and they represent part of the bulk of literature existing in the field. Attapol Khamkhien (2015) focused on the linguistic features of evaluative stance with emphasis on findings from research article discussions. The study looked at how researchers in applied linguistics employ linguistic methods to express their stance on the subject of the study which is usually in the findings and discussion session of the research. The results of Khamkhien (2015) study revealed that professional and experienced writers variably exploit stance markers including epistemic modality, extraposed 'it', communication verbs, and personal pronouns in terms of different functional types of evaluative stance. More findings from the examination highlight the importance of understanding the use of stance devices in academics, facilitating a better understanding of novice readers and writers when writing academic productions.

In another study, Zeynep Erk Emeksiz (2015) examined stance taking and passive voice in the Turkish academic discourse. The aim of the study was to describe the functions of passive voice and how authors reflect their stance through those functions in Turkish academic discourse. At the end, the study shows that there could be a counterpoint to functionalist views on the ground that passivization does not necessarily result in promoting agents in discourse, and it may not reflect the preference and perspective of writers when used under structural constraints. To solve this problem, Emeksiz (2015) proposes a source-based pattern for the use of passive voice in academic discourse. According to him, 'the distribution of the passive clauses show that writers use passive clauses for different purposes depending on the source of information in epistemic sense' (p.23). The study shows that when the source is the writers, they make use of passive voice in four contexts or situations which includes but not limited to referring to a phase of their research, guiding the readers to some part of the text, making claims, predictions and suggestions.

Also, Peichin Chang (2010) investigated the nature of the authorial stance in academic writing. The study focused on the inductive learning for second language writers using a stance corpus. Chang (2010) proved that the writers who participated in this study reported that, compared to the academic writing classes they had previously taken, the stance corpus tool promoted deeper learning as they explored multiple examples of stance meanings. By contrast, in those classes they had, instruction tended to be more general, focused to cater to a wide audience and covering a broader range of topics. This makes it difficult for the instruction to go deeper when mostly students only receive general guidelines about writing.

As we can see from the above section, studies have been carried out on the use of stance in different fields, none in the knowledge of the researcher has focused on the linguistic use of stance in editorials especially in the Vanguard Newspaper Editorials.

## 3 Data Analysis

In this section, we examined ten extracts in the line of the framework set out for this study. Each extract is presented then an analysis of the extract is presented. The extracts are highlighted with the title, date and time of publication.

### 3.1 Extract 1

**Where are the Senate invaders? On April 30, 2018 7:00 am**

**ALMOST** two weeks after the outrageous invasion of a plenary session of the Senate by a group of hoodlums, the Nigeria Police Force, NPF, and the Directorate of State Services, DSS, are **yet** to apprehend the perpetrators of what amounts to a coup against our democracy. The Police was **only** able to recover the Mace which they took away. Senator

Ovie Omo-Agege, the suspended legislator linked with the drama, **only** spent a brief moment with the law enforcement agents and was allowed to go home.

The issue here is that there was an invasion in the Nigerian Senate. This is the first subject. Using the pattern of the stance triangle, the first subject is known as subject 1. The subject 1 is evaluated as *outrageous* which is negative. Through the use of the adversative conjunction, *yet* in the extract underlined, the editorial evaluates Subject 1 in a more negative form by implying that subject 1 is more *outrageous* due to the fact that the Nigerian Police Force is still unable to arrest the invaders. This is not limited to the invaders alone but also the Senator rumored to have orchestrated the invasion. Through the adversative conjunction *only*, the editorial evaluates the fact that the said Senator spent brief moments with the Police as also bad. This position becomes the subject 2. It is now left with the editorial to align with either subject 1 or 2. With this, the editorial aligns itself with the fact that the invasion is not too bad but the fact that the Police cannot handle it is a worst situation which is captured in the second to the last sentence in the extract which says: We are outraged and demand the immediate arrest and prosecution of the culprits.

### 3.2 Extract 2

#### **That invasion of the Senate is unacceptable On April 25, 2018 8:00**

**...However**, several questions trail this event. How was it possible for just five individuals to infiltrate a hallowed national institution which has all the nation's security agencies on ground protecting it? Where were the security agencies when the thugs practically strolled in and left with the Mace? Why was a suspended Senator able to get into the plenary session unhindered?

The subject matter in the second editorial under focus, is a continuation of the subject in extract one which is the invasion of the Senate by some individuals. Similar to the stance taken in extract one, the editorial uses the adversative conjunction *however* highlighted in the extract above to present its stance by differing a little with the commentary running in the dialogue which is the fact that the invasion is wrong. It is in the nature of adversative conjunction to negate either partially or totally the information that precedes it as such, it helps the editorial to change the focus. In this case, the stance which represents the focus the editorial wants is done using *however* to raise certain question which would help unravel the mystery surrounding the invasion.

Still on the same editorial, the conjunctive adversative *but* is used to also take a stance in the sentences below used:

*When they go wrong we must reprimand them, recall or refuse to re-elect them, **but** the sanctity of the institution must be upheld at all costs. The perpetrators of that invasion must be visited with the full weight of the law.*

Here, there is another aspect of the narrative which forms the basis for subject 1 which is the fact that the Senators have not been up and doing hence justifying the invasion. The editorial presents the subject 2 in: **but** *the sanctity of the institution must be upheld at all costs*. This is done after evaluating the Subject 1. At the end, the editorial aligns with the subject 2 in: *The perpetrators of that invasion must be visited with the full weight of the law*. Which in a way would help preserve the sanctity of the legislature.

### 3.3 Extract 3

#### **Chibok girls: Four years and counting On April 17, 2018 7:00 am**

Many of the girls escaped or have been released through Federal Government-negotiated settlements, **but** 112 of them remain with their captors. The Boko Haram terrorists delivered another slap on the face of Nigeria on 19th February 2018, when they again abducted 110 schoolgirls from the Government Girls Technical College, Dapchi in Bursari Local Government of Yobe State. **Though** they returned most of the girls after another

round of negotiations, five of the victims reportedly died during their stay in Boko Haram custody **while the lone** Christian among them, Miss Leah Sharibu, remains in captivity.

In the extract above, subject 1 is on the release of the many of the kidnaped Chibok girls through the Federal Government's negotiations. After evaluating the above subject, the editorial adds caveat to this supposedly cheering news that over 112 of the girls are still under captivity. This is done using the adversative conjunction *but* to introduce the subject 2. On that basis of an evaluation is done to take a stand on the issue. The stand here is implied especially when you look at the entire theme of the editorial. The editorial is not out to praise the authorities for the release of some of the girls but to point attention or take a stand with the ones still in captive. This is also done in the second aspect of the editorial. In the second aspect, the adversative conjunction *though* is used to take a stand with the fact that, Miss Leah Sharibu has not been released by the Boko Haram group despite the fact that others have been released.

### 3.4 Extract 4

#### Mantu's poll-rigging confession On April 5, 2018 6:03am

**Though** the PDP has already disavowed Mantu's confession of rigging for it, there is nothing about his disclosure that is new, apart from the fact that he owned up to it voluntarily with very little prompting by his interviewer. ... There have been calls from several quarters for Senator Mantu to be arrested and prosecuted by the security agencies. **That may be an option. But** we dare any politician who has won elections, whether serving or out of office, to cast the first stone.

The extract above is a response to an ongoing dialogue or narrative then that Ibrahim Mantu the former member of the PDP confessed to have helped the party rig elections in the past. On this ongoing conversation then, the editorial in focus presents two stand points using linguistic stance of adversative conjunction. Here, *though* is used to introduce the first stand point which is the fact that it is surprising that Mantu voluntarily discloses this unlike most politicians who would hide such an act. In line with this, many persons were calling for his arrest. Using the adversative conjunction *but* the editorial rejects the second narrative and at the same, takes a stand daring any politician to throw the first stone. It therefore becomes obvious that a new stand can only be taken after considering the previous stands people hold in the process of evaluation.

### 3.5 Extract 5

#### We must handle ACFTA with care On March 30, 2018 7:00 am

We should have consulted thoroughly during the planning stages before deciding. If we had been thorough in our preparations, we would have saved ourselves the embarrassment of pulling back at the last minute. Nigeria can still drive the process of a renegotiated ACFTA, **but** we must first ensure it will give our products a healthy access to the African market. **Otherwise**, no deal.

Two adversative conjunctions (*but* and *otherwise*) are deployed to express the editorial stance of the extract above. The first stance taken here is that Nigeria should not be in a hurry to sign every trade agreement or free trade agreement if the interest of the Nigerian market is not protected. This is against the popularly held belief that a country like Nigeria should go into bilateral agreement with international organizations to promote the nation. The editorial stance here through the conjunction *but* is that of caution on these agreements. The other conjunction, *otherwise* as used in the extract is used to reinforce the earlier stand. This resonates the fact that if the trade agreement would not benefit Nigerians, there should not be any deal as business is out to make profit unlike doing it to please the more advantaged nation which most third world nations like Nigeria do.

### 3.6 Extract 6

#### As herdsmen turn “landlords” in Delta State On March 23, 20187:00 am

The atrocities of armed herdsmen across the nation are well-documented daily affairs, but the situation in Delta State stands out in its own way.

Again in the extract above, the subject 1 one is the on-going narrative or the well documented atrocities of the herdsmen. The subject is evaluated then a second subject arises. For the editorial, the subject 2 is communicated through the adversative conjunction *but* and on that basis, another evaluation is done which the editorial aligns with. So, the current stance becomes the reason why the editorial is written. To do this, the opinion of others or what has been the belief on the subject matter is first examined or evaluated.

### 3.7 Extract 7

#### INEC’s 36-year election timetable On March 15, 20187:00 am

Today, arguments are building up in favour of a pragmatic attitude to election dates as the American society has changed drastically since 1845 when the decision for a fixed date for the general elections was taken. Besides, the Electoral Act has always been tinkered with in every transitional period to accommodate new developments in the polity.

In the extract above the other narrative is that INEC is right to have created a 36 year long election time table. This forms the basis of subject 1. The editorial evaluates this subject and amends it to create the subject 2. The subject 2 is introduced with the adversative conjunction *besides*. With this, the editorial presents a stance that there should not be any long time table (for as long as 36 years) as things keep on hanging which might warrant an amendment on a continuous basis. As such, there should be a short term approach to the time table creation.

### 3.8 Extract 8

#### State police is clearly inevitable On March 8, 201811:15 am

THE call for the establishment of state police is getting more strident, and continued opposition to it no longer makes sense. However, the fear that state governors might use them to feather their political nests can be addressed through dialogue and power sharing as we have in the health and education sectors.

From extract 8, we see clearly that the information that comes after the adversative conjunction is usually the stance of the editorial. In this case, the conjunction *however*, negates the subject 1. Subject 1 opposes the establishment of state police. After, evaluation, the editorial brings in Subject 2 which provides the solution to the fears held by the proponents of subject 1. At the end, the editorial aligns with the subject 2 which is actually the rationale behind the write up as shown in the title.

### 3.9 Extract 9

#### Siren abuse must stop On February 20, 20187:00 am

Ambulances, fire trucks and the gamut of emergency responders are among those whose movements should be heralded by sirens when in traffic. Besides these emergency responders, the police have listed out ten categories of public office holders who are entitled to sirens while on official convoys. They include the President, Vice President, Senate President, Deputy Senate President, House of Representatives Speaker, State Governors, Service Chiefs, Inspector-General of Police, General Officers Commanding (GOCs) and Deputy Inspectors-General of Police (DIGs). However, the reality is that several other public office holders and wealthy private individuals illegally mount sirens on their convoys bringing serious discomfort to other motorists and pedestrians.

In the extract above, the conjunction *however*, introduces us to the main issue which the editorial wishes to present to the public. The subject 1 is the fact that there are specific group of persons and institutions that should use siren on roads. The editorial evaluates the initial subject and comes up with subject 2 which is a modification of the first. Subject 2 which is introduced through the adversative conjunction *however*, borders on the fact that though there are constitutional provisions for sirens and the users, the reality is quite different as individuals not listed are all using sirens. It is the second subject that the editorial aligns with in line with title of the editorial.

### 3.10 Extract 10

#### **Time to end the fuel supply fiasco On February 15, 2018 7:00 am**

The Ministry and virtually all its subsidiaries, have over the years failed to fulfill their missions. They have **instead** become mere opportunities for top government officials to corruptly reward their cronies, feather their political nests and gratify their political associates... Twice Jonathan had the opportunity to get the Petroleum Industry Bill, PIB, passed but failed to muster the political will. We can no longer continue this way. Buhari and his party promised three million jobs. **Instead** eight million jobs have been lost.

In this last extract, we see the deployment of linguistic stance through the adversative conjunction *instead*. The subject 1 is the fact that the Ministry of Petroleum has been unable to stop the incessant fuel scarcity in the nation. The subject 1 is evaluated and an amendment is made using the adversative conjunction *instead* to introduce the amendment. Subject 2 in this instance becomes the fact that the ministry has not been able to stop fuel scarcity but has even increased the level of corruption which the scarcity creates which more like an additional information to the subject 1 that deals on scarcity.

Also, using the adversative conjunction *instead*, the editorial is able to amend the preceding subject 1 which contains the fact that

## 4 Findings

- 1) The study found out that the linguistic stance helps the language user to implicitly communicate explicit messages of evaluation, position and alignment with the subject matter raised in a discourse.
- 2) The adversative conjunctions enable editorials to shift or change focus from subject 1 to subject 2 before making the decision to align with any of them.
- 3) The subject 1 in the stance triangle is usually the popular opinion in the discourse but with the use of adversative conjunctions, the editorial is able to present another opinion of the discourse that might not be too popular. This second opinion then forms the basis for the subject 2.
- 4) We see from the editorials examined that there is a greater possibility of aligning with the subject 2 as all the editorials examined all alignment with the second subject after evaluation.
- 5) The stance subject introduced by the adversative conjunction usually has a resemblance in the theme and focus of the title and the last line of the editorials. This in our opinion helps in enhancing the focus of the editorials though it would require more study to proof that the absence of resemblance or relatedness in theme and focus would affect the unity.
- 6) Lastly, we present that the various stages of the stance triangle especially the evaluation and alignment stages as proposed by Du Bois (2007) are not explicit steps taken by language users during discourse. They are only made explicit if we go through this kind of analysis.

## 5 Conclusion

What we have done in this study is to examine the use of linguistic stance through the adversative conjunctions in the Vanguard Newspaper. The study applied the principles of the stance triangle as proposed by Du Bois (2007). We investigated the use of adversative conjunctions in ten editorials between the months of February to April, 2018. The study presents as part of the discovery that there might be no clear indication in the editorial of the various stages of stance taking as they implicit but

an investigation such as the one we have done reveals that the process of evaluation and alignment are done but not explicit.

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