

# Chapter 1

## Tweeting the 2011 Bombings in Nigeria: Pragmatic Strategies in Nigerian English

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### Abstract

This study examines public reactions in tweets and comments on the 2011 bombings in Nigeria attributed to the Boko Haram radical sect in the north. The data comprise 250 tweets and comments analyzed within the framework of Pragmatics. Findings reveal that the data not only express opinions of the writers on the state of security in Nigeria but also perform pragmatic acts of accusing the Nigerian government of being indirectly responsible for the Boko Haram attacks. Some other pragmatic acts condemn and denounce violence blamed on Islam as a religion, while some accuse the Western world of indirectly supporting Islam for economic reasons. Some of the tweets simply advise Muslims and the government to cooperate and promote efforts to develop the country rather than sponsor violence directly or indirectly. The tweeters demand the break-up of Nigeria and the creation of a complete Islamic state in the north. Findings also reveal that tweets and comments in the data reflect features of Standard Nigerian English, such as direct translation of local languages, reclassification of grammatical categories, utilization of loan words from local languages, and infrequent use of the Nigerian pidgin.

### Introduction

A spate of bomb attacks attributed to a radical Islamist group known as *Boko Haram* has devastated some northern parts of Nigeria in the past couple of years. Founded in 2002 by a Muslim cleric (Mohammed Yusuf) in Maiduguri, Northeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram, which in *Hausa* stands for 'western education is forbidden' has carried out a series of attacks on churches, the police and public facilities (Chiluiwa & Adetunji, 2013). In June 2009 for instance, the fundamentalist group carried out an armed uprising in an effort to Islamize the entire northern Nigeria. This action was resisted by the Nigerian military in July 2009, which resulted in the deaths of over 700 people, mostly the sect members. During the uprising, the group's leader and several other members were killed; some died in police custody. For the group, this has meant a greater reason to pursue its objectives. Subsequently, the sect splintered into several groups of different orientations and began a series of bombing offensives in Nigeria (IRIN Africa 2011; Adesoji, 2010; Chiluiwa & Adetunji, 2013).

According to news reports (e.g. *The Telegraph*, December 26, 2011), the sect is agitating for a strict adoption of Sharia, (Islamic laws), in all parts of the country, particularly the north, where its activities have been most profound. Boko Haram rejects everything Western, including education and social lifestyle, and has carried out attacks on beer halls and pubs. One of the attacks at a beer hall in Maiduguri in June, 2011, according to Al Jazeera, left twenty-five people dead, and fifteen others injured. The group is also said to be against the political elite of the country and Muslim governors in northern Nigeria; the latter are accused of compromising Islamic teachings. Boko Haram is said to have links with international terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, and has the potential to link up with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) which operates in nearby regions, such as Somalia. The group is also said to have split into three factions operating in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Mali (see Chiluiwa & Adetunji, 2013).

### Bombings in Nigeria in 2011

2011 was a year to be remembered for the most heinous and brutal bomb attacks ever witnessed in Nigeria since the Nigerian civil war. Most of these attacks were carried out by *Boko Haram* mainly in Maiduguri in Borno state, Damaturu in Yobe state and Jos in Plateau state. In 2011 alone Boko Haram was responsible for more than 490 killings in Nigeria (see *allAfrica.com*). A series of bombings in the north before and after the general elections of April, 2011 that left many people dead were blamed on this extremist movement. On June 16, the group also claimed responsibility for the bombing of the police force headquarters in Abuja. The attack was said to be the first suicide bombing in Nigeria's history.

On June 26, the sect carried out a bomb attack on a beer garden in Maiduguri. Witnesses reported that militants on motorcycles threw explosives into the drinking spot. On June 27, another bombing in Maiduguri killed at

least two girls and wounded three customs officials. A similar bombing in a beer garden in Maiduguri killed at least twenty people on July 3. Other attacks were carried out on the Maiduguri International Hotel, the First Bank and Union Bank in Gombe. On July 10, a bomb attack occurred at the All Christian Fellowship Church in Suleja, Niger State. The following month the group again blew up the UN headquarters in Abuja by a suicide car bomber on August 26, leaving at least twenty-three people dead and about 116 people wounded; a Boko Haram spokesman later claimed responsibility. Further coordinated bombings occurred on November 4, in Borno and Yobe states, killing over sixty-seven people: a new police headquarters was destroyed and government offices were also burned. A Boko Haram spokesman later told *The Daily Trust* newspaper that it was responsible for the attacks and promised more. On 25 December 2011, Boko Haram also claimed responsibility for bomb attacks on churches across Nigeria. On Christmas Eve, a series of bomb blasts in Jos killed thirty-two people, seventy-four others were injured; some died in attacks on two other churches. Explosions on Christmas Day struck St. Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla, a town in Niger state, killing at least thirty-nine worshippers after the Christmas morning mass. These various killings were besides many others that resulted in the direct targeting and shooting of Christian worshippers, journalists, students and politicians (see Chilwa & Adetunji, 2013).

This chapter examines the reactions of people who commented on and tweeted these events in Nigeria, particularly Nigerians themselves. It also examines tweets by tweeters who claim membership of the group and pledge their allegiance to it. What are the pragmatic strategies or 'acts' that were applied by tweeters in these reactions and how do these reflect Nigerian English?

## Twitter and Tweeting

Twitter is a type of microblogging that has been popular since 2006 and became the most rapidly growing Internet brand in 2010 with about fifty million tweets a day being posted during the first half of the year (Crystal, 2011). Members may send and receive posts or tweets of up to 140 characters and up to 160 if they are tweeting with a mobile phone. As an Internet-based microblogging tool, Twitter enables users to make comments and share brief messages about social situations, report and respond to ongoing events, contribute to discussions or share their interests and activities with a network of friends and followers. 'Since its emergence in 2006, Twitter (or twittering) has been used for conversational exchanges, collaboration among users with common interests and goals, coordination of events, and for the dissemination of news and information' (Ifukor, 2010:401). According to Idle (2011), the Egyptian segment of the 'Arab Spring' of 2011 has, for example, been described as a 'Twitter revolution,' due to its unique function during the revolutionary struggle. Twitter was primarily used as alternative press and 'a place for emancipating bursts of self-expression,' (p.139). Many Tweeters saw themselves as citizen journalists, while professional journalists also used Twitter to transmit news and pictures. Like other activists and protesters in the North African and Arab world's uprisings, planning, discussions and mobilization happened on Twitter and activists talked to each other, mobilized protesters and announced new initiatives; these boosted their collective morale, especially with reports of other developments around the country. Studies in Nigeria have revealed that blogs and Twitter have been used for civic engagement and political participation (Ifukor, 2010; Chilwa 2011a). The current study focuses on tweets that were submitted through the web; some appeared as responses to online journalism. The analysis of data however, includes the study of some comments by readers to online reports about the bombings.

## Nigerian English

Nigerian English is one of the world's new Englishes, and it is still in the process of being entirely indigenized. Certain features resulting from the process of nativisation/domestication have been identified and extensively discussed by Nigerian language scholars (cf. Adetugbo 1977; Awonusi 1987; Adegbija, 1989; 2004). These features are marked by new words and expressions that reflect new ways of perceiving and constructing the host environment. They include the insertion within sentences of lexical items with local colouration (i.e. coinages/loan words); inclusion of local idioms; hybridization (i.e. combination of a word or sense of a word in English with that in the indigenous language (Adegbija 2004); direct translation/transliteration of the indigenous language; semantic extensions and culture bound expressions, which at the level of pragmatics are identified as inevitable in modern Nigerian English (NigE). The reasons for these are not far-fetched. English like any other language is inherently culture sensitive and, with its constant contact with local languages, is bound to respond to the features of these languages. Again, nativization of a language demands a total integration of the features of that language into the culture of the host society, or the integration of the cultures of the society into the system of the foreign language (Adamo 2007). Apart from natural contact, English was deliberately and consciously imposed on the Nigerian society as a matter of colonial policy (Ogu, 1992) and in the process, learners of English forced (and still force) certain nuances and peculiar Nigerian expression into English.

Some Nigerian scholars have established the existence of standard and non-standard Nigerian English (e.g. Ubahakwe 1979; Bamiro, 1991). However, Okoro (2004) argues that there is merely the existence of two distinct usages of the same variety, i.e. standard and non-standard, which often vary on the basis of the education, status and social exposure of the users (cf. Chiluiwa, 2010a). The non-standard variety of NigE is a mixture of English and the Nigerian pidgin. Standard/educated NigE on the other hand shares common grammatical 'core features' with British and American English (Jibril 1982; Egbe 1984). They also exhibit lexical items with local 'colouration,' i.e. elements with peculiar Nigerian expressions and those with local Nigerian 'flavour' (Awonusi 1987; Adebija, 1989). At the syntactic level, there is usually no attempt to vary the length of sentences for rhythmic or stylistic effect, so they lack flexibility and are characteristically bookish (Egbe, 1984). Very often, there is also the substitution of Nigerian language vowels and consonants for English ones; replacement of stress with tone; pluralization of some non-count nouns; the use of culture-specific vocabulary items, back formation, semantic shift, different verb-preposition combinations and some local language induced structures. These are features associated with non-standard Nigerian English. According to Jowitt (1991) category shifts such as reclassification of grammatical categories, insertion of categories and deliberate omissions of some items are some of the features of NigE grammar, while spelling pronunciation, stress shifts or localization of stress/tones are other features of its phonology. These variations or 'errors' are due to 'over-generalization' and mother-tongue interference, which deviate considerably from the Standard British English (SBE) (Chiluiwa, 2010a).

Studies on the manifestations of NigE in Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) have established the presence of some definite features of both the standard and non-standard varieties of NigE in text-messages (Chiluiwa, 2008a; 2010b; Taiwo, 2008), informal email messages (Chiluiwa, 2010a), blogs and bulletin boards (Ifukor, 2011) written by Nigerians. This 'Nigerianness' of text-based online communication has since established the 'discursive practice and the Nigerian identity' on the Internet (Chiluiwa, 2010b). For instance, at the lexical and phonological levels, Ifukor (2011) demonstrates evidence of spelling and 'phonological shibboleths' in Nigerian English, most of which is manifested as elements of transfer from the local languages (e.g. Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa). Chiluiwa (2010b) and Ifukor (2010) also show evidences of code-switching, coinages, loan words and local idioms that are peculiarly Nigerian in both informal email messages and social networking sites written or hosted by Nigerians.

## **Pragmatic Acts**

Utterances or written expressions do not merely inform the hearer/reader; they also perform 'pragmatic acts,' usually not explicitly stated, such as implicit identification with certain people, implicit denials or denunciations of a group, projection of identity etc, (Mey, 2001). Austin's speech acts (1962) suggested certain explicit acts such as pronouncing a man and woman husband and wife, sentencing a convict to imprisonment or offering someone a place in a car, which must occur in some particular contexts. However, pragmatic acts are usually performed in all contexts where human beings interact with one another in speech or writing and do not have to be limited to any specific act of speech in order to be understood as 'act' or action. For example 'soliciting invitation or compliment' can be carried out perfectly without saying anything that may be identified as 'speech acts,' (Mey, 2001:213). It is true that speech act usages often occur as 'indirect acts,' which may be confused with pragmatic acts. To solve this confusion, Mey (2001:214) proposes 'a theory of action that specifies, for any given situation, the limitations and possibilities of the situation.' According to Mey, what is wrong with speech act theory in general is its lack of a theory of action, and even if it does have such, it is still too individualized in scope, since human beings live within social contexts that control their lives and how they use language is often governed by social values and norms. Therefore, a personalized theory of speech act that views language as a tool that individuals manipulate at will is grossly inadequate (see Fairclough, 1989).

In order therefore, to expand the scope of 'speech acts' from its earlier individualized focus, pragmatic acts are viewed from two dimensions, namely *the agent* and *the act*. In considering the agent of the act, factors such as class, gender, age, education etc., become important because they are 'the resources that people dispose of as members of the community often referred to as background knowledge' (p.214). These resources may also be characterized as 'constraints and affordances imposed on the individual in the form of necessary limitations on the degree of freedom that he or she is allowed in society' (op. cit). In other words, individuals do not just perform speech acts on their own without reference to the context and the level of freedom or 'affordances' that are allowed by the society for the performance of such acts. The 'act' is the language used in performing a 'pragmatic act' with reference to specific acts in specific contexts (from the individual's perspective), and the language that may be used to create the conditions for performing a pragmatic act (from the perspective of the context). (See Mey, 2001:214-215 for details). In sum, 'the pragmatic acting can be considered as adapting oneself linguistically and otherwise to one's world' and 'all our acting is done in that world and within the affordances it puts at our disposal' (p.215).

In the analysis of the data for this study, various pragmatic acts are identified, such as identifying with or ‘co-opting’, denouncing, rejecting or implicitly denying, performed by tweeters and responders within the context of reactions to the unpopular bombings in Nigeria. Thus, our analysis will begin by a systematic categorization of the data into their various pragmatic acts. However, some indirect speech acts are also identified and analyzed in order to achieve a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the goal of discourse of the tweeters who are themselves the direct or indirect victims of the bombings. The corpus comprises 250 tweets and responses/comments that are categorized and analyzed in this chapter. For the limited space of this chapter however, only a few from each group that appears to represent the common goal or ‘act’ of the group are selected for analysis.

## Categorization of Samples/Analysis

Categorization of the data samples as shown on Table 1 is based on the assumed pragmatic acts performed by the categories of tweets and comments in the corpus (see Chilwa & Adetunji, 2013). For example, the study reveals that tweets on the Boko Haram tweeter profile are written by tweeters who were sympathetic to the Boko Haram cause. As at the time of this research, there were a total of 140 tweets. Many of the tweeters were presumably members of the sect, and their tweets celebrate the activities of the terrorist group and call on the Nigerian youth to join them.

**Table 1. Speech and Pragmatic Acts**

Speech and Pragmatic Acts	Occurrences in the Corpus (%)
Accusing & blaming the Nigerian government	16.4
Condemning and denouncing Islam (and violence)	18.0
Accusing & blaming the West	2.6
Demanding splitting the country	8.0
Supporting and Identifying with Boko Haram & Islam	40.0
Solution proffering (advice to Muslims & the govt.)	3.0
Neutral	2.1

This categorization is similar to Searle’s (1969) categorization of speech acts into ‘representative’, (i.e. describing event, asserting, claiming, reporting, suggesting), or ‘directive’ (i.e. commanding, requesting, inviting etc.), or ‘commissive’ (i.e. challenging, promising, threatening, offering, vowing or warning). In this research however, the identified pragmatic acts are not overt ‘speech acts’, since most of the acts are implied and are deducible from the context of interaction.

### Acts of accusing and blaming

The acts under this category are both explicit and implicit accusations of the Nigerian government, accused of being the root cause of the crises in the country. In other words, the failure of the political leadership could only breed crime and insecurity in the nation. Hence, the Boko Haram attacks are viewed as reactions to suffering and unemployment in the ranks of the youth. For instance, **comment2** below uses a very strong metaphor (i.e. killers) for the Nigerian government. **Comment7** explicitly accuses the government of sponsoring the terrorist sect. This is achieved through the use of a direct speech act of accusing, which is equivalent to Searle’s commissive act of challenging, warning or threatening.

**Comment2.** Now we are talking about bomb blast which we dont know the source and where this blast is coming from, though i know we NIGERIA dont have Leaders but we only have KILLERS as a leader to rule us. Those that only care about themselves and their family, in these same Nigeria we are unemployed up to 90% graduates have no job after graduating from their various schools...

**Comment7.** I don't think the BOKO HAMA should be blamed for this instead the GOVERNMENT who are financing the boko haram should be blamed and the so called Mr. President GOODLUCK. No good amenities, no standard way of living in Nigeria but instead of the government to do the right thing by providing security and social amenities but they are speaking on how to increase fuel prices and speaking about removal fuel subsidiary

Nigeria’s underdevelopment has often been attributed to corruption and incompetent political leadership. This has also served as the main argument of the supporters of the Boko Haram resistance. For example, the writers of **tweet50** and **tweet52** below (probably members of the Islamic sect) see themselves as heroes. Attacks on public

facilities and the police are implicitly viewed as revolutionary efforts to rescue the people from the oppressive political system. The government is viewed as ‘the terrorist,’ while the Boko Haram have come ‘to the rescue,’ and are viewed as ‘freedom fighters.’

**Tweet50.** How many jets does the president have? How many jobs would that have created? Boko Haram to the rescue ([#wherewedarethread](#)).

**Tweet52.** The government is the terrorist. When last did you have light for 24 hrs? Boko Haram are the freedom fighters.

**Comment7** represents the widespread speculation that the Boko Haram sect must have been sponsored by certain interests in the government, possibly the northern political elite, who are accused of planning to destabilize the country and discredit the Jonathan government. Later events in Nigeria almost vindicated this assumption. For instance, a member of the Nigerian Legislature (a northerner) was named by the mastermind of the Madalla bomb blasts as one of the sponsors of the radical sect. As at the time of this research, the accused person was still standing trial for his involvement in the various terrorist attacks. While performing an overt speech act of accusing, this tweet also represents a pragmatic act of dissociation from the Nigerian government, which implies a complete identification with the people. This is clearly implied in **Tweet50**, which questions: ‘how many jets does the president have? How many jobs would that have created?’

However, among several accusations are those that blame the government of lethargy in handling the Boko Haram menace. According to many of the comments, (e.g. comment 1 and comment 3 below), the government has neither been proactive nor radical in confronting Nigeria’s security challenges. Many of the comment writers believe that Boko Haram could have been dealt with decisively at the very beginning; some attribute the government’s tardiness to political reasons or outright administrative incompetence.

**Comment1** ...new colonizers are already destroying and ripping our countries apart, as the authorities look idly, and our politicians fear reprisals and losing votes, never attempting to confront and destroy this evil cancer called Islam... (Cruzado7)

**Comment3.** There is a lot for our so called Govt to know about because if NIGERIA as a whole cannot control the citizen of their country, then we are not safe. Look at the bomb blast during election period where most people lost their lives, most especially the corps during their services and follows by the bomb blast by BOKO HARAM killing the Christians (festy1).

The pragmatic act of denouncing Islam and the Nigerian government is implied in the two strong metaphors for Islam in **comment1**, i.e., ‘new colonizers’ and ‘this evil cancer,’ and the government is also accused of ‘looking idly’ for fear of ‘losing votes’ in subsequent elections. The consequence of their inaction is the many lives that were lost in the numerous bomb blasts. A tone of anger and frustration is expressed in the two comments.

**Comment4** below blames Nigeria’s security problems on the previous government of Yar’Adua. In the introduction of this chapter, it is noted that the Nigerian military carried out indiscriminate attacks on the sect members in 2009, killing hundreds of them; rather than deter the group, such uncoordinated reprisals enhanced its growth. The writer implicitly blames the military for illegally killing the sect’s members instead of prosecuting them; hence, from his or her own point of view, the Islamic radicals were not only fighting for the Islamization of the north but were also on a revenge mission for their members who had been killed, especially their founding leader. The leader’s death had been attended by widespread rumours that he was strategically murdered because he was about to make important revelations that could have led to the arrest of the sect’s sponsors. The writer of **comment4** also makes an indirect call for the revitalization of the Nigerian judiciary.

**Comment4.** I think the problem was when the crisis of boko haram first began the late government didn’t handle it well, reason it allowed the killings of many boko haram fighters in public and let the video been shown to the whole world, so instead of bringing them to justice the late government go other way and that led to the crises, may god help Nigeria

The pragmatic acts of accusing and blaming thus attribute the Boko Haram insurgency to the suffering caused by poor government; this has left the citizens with no other option but revolt. This is not different from the Northern African situation and the so-called Arab Spring, which is on the verge of achieving some new lease of life for its people. Crime in the Nigerian context is generally viewed as a direct consequence of poor governance; thus, the Boko Haram terrorists represent the aggregate of suffering Nigerians who cannot fight for themselves. Interestingly, most of the tweets and comments in this category reflect aspects of Standard Nigerian English, which is close to British and American Standard English in terms of syntax and lexical features.

## Acts of denouncing and condemning Islam and Boko Haram

Expectedly, many of the tweets and comments in the data denounce Islam and Boko Haram. Some of the tweets comprise strong words and highly negative metaphors to describe the Islamic religion and the radical sect. For example and as pointed out above, **Comment1** describes Islam as an 'evil cancer,' a metaphor which implies also that the writer could not have been a Muslim. In this group are tweets and comments written by people who perhaps are direct victims of the attacks, or their loved ones. The pragmatic act of denouncing Boko Haram is performed with many obvious emotional Christian voices in the tweets, with the usual ideological assumption that Islam is bad and Christianity is good. Undoubtedly, this is a plausible argument following the massive shootings and bombing of churches and Christian assemblies in northern Nigeria in 2011. This had prompted a warning issued by the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to the bombers, and the instruction to Christians to defend themselves against further attacks. This had also raised tension in the country, with the fear of an imminent breakup of the nation. In some of the tweets and comments, 'we' and 'us' refer to Christians while 'they' and 'them' refer to Islam and Boko Haram. For example, **Tweet10**, referring to Nigeria says: 'it is not a Muslim country, the south is mainly Christian and peaceful.' This of course implies that a Muslim country is expectedly non-peaceful, going by the Nigerian experience. **Tweet18** also argues that 'there is no such thing as a good Muslim...just good hypocrites,' thus denouncing Muslims, and by implication accepting Christians or the African traditional religionists. Other tweets and comments in this category (e.g. **comment11**, **comment12** and **comment13**) perform similar acts of denouncing Islam. **Comment11** is a response to an online report of the attacks.

**Comment11.** Islam is totally to blame for this. Muslims admit it. LEAVE Islam, leave the hatred, the lies, the denials, the subterfuges, the lame excuses behind your back and join mankind as our equal brothers and sisters. Stop killing us and stop destroying yourselves. If there is a hell all devout Muslims will burn there surely. It is time to ACT as a true human civilized human being and stop with this madness, insanity and satanic way of thinking/acting...it is time to stop Islam totally and eternally.

**Comment12.** I have read the Koran and Hadith and have studied the bible for more than 20 years..... I can tell you without reservation that Mohammed was simply a warlord who wanted to take over Mecca and used a mixture of Paganism, Judaism and Christianity to get his followers to kill and be killed.

**Comment13.** I despise Islam and everything related to it. It is the most inhuman, anti-God, anti-love, anti-science BS poison EVER! It must be fought and eradicated worldwide, so mankind can evolve and prosper.

The writers of the above comments and others in this category are no doubt non-Muslims who blame the Boko Haram insurgency on the Islamic religion. Hence, they reject the explanation that Islam is a peaceful religion. For example, **Comment12** attributes religious intolerance of the Islamic terrorists to a culture of killing that was founded by the founder of Islam. Interestingly, **tweet15** below argues that Muslims themselves are killed by the so-called Jihadists, which again raises the question as to who the 'Jihadists' really are.

**Tweet15.** Jihadists kill more Muslims than anyone. Muslims everywhere should stalk and kill Jihadist like animals. Apologists for Jihad should serve as each other's virgins.

So, while many of the tweeters in this category denounce Islam as the breeder of terrorists, some others sympathize with Muslims who are themselves victims of some of the attacks. The writers therefore urge well-meaning Muslims to denounce the attacks and quit Islam. For example, **tweet23** says: 'enough lies my friend... If you want to become truly peaceful and civilized, you have to leave Islam now, before it's too late.'

## Acts of supporting and identifying with Islam and Boko Haram

Surprisingly, about 48% of the entire corpus comprises tweets and comments that directly or indirectly support the Boko Haram uprising. The Boko Haram twitter page, for example, is made up of more than 90% of the tweets that pledge support and celebrate the activities of the terrorist group. It is not certain however, that all the tweeters in this group are Boko Haram members; some may just be youths who tend to brag about the radical approach of the sect and get a kick out of the whole debacle. Significantly, many of the tweets attempt to defend the Islamic religion and project its positive contributions. Many of the tweeters promote Islam as a peaceful religion, whose real attributes have been undermined by terrorists that are not real Muslims. Most of the tweets below perform the pragmatic acts of associating and identifying (with Islam). Some of the tweets justify the activities of Boko Haram.

**Tweet36.** Majority of people here talking about Islam has no clue about this religion... if they found a dead penguin in the North Pole they will blame it on Islam... lol

**Tweet37.** The sum of all victims of Boko Haram and Al Qaeda over the past decade is less than what US killed in IRAQ in one year

**Tweet38.** I hate Christianity

**Tweet39.** Islam is a religion of peace, these people does not represent the thousands of millions of Muslims, we are also feelings bad when innocent people are dying!!

**Tweet40.** Suicide is forbidden in Islam. Islam is the religion of peace. Those who does killing by act of suicide will go to hell.

**Tweet41.** Mohammed is Allah's apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another. Quran 48:29.

As highlighted above, the above tweets merely attempt to represent the positive side of Islam, and pragmatically denounce the activities of Boko Haram. While promoting Islam as a 'religion of peace' (e.g. **tweet40**), the Islamic apologists on Twitter claim that real Muslims actually feel bad when innocent people are killed (**tweet39**) and that those who kill by suicide would 'go to hell.' **Tweet41** however appears as a contradiction to the Maiduguri bombings, where both Christians and Muslims were killed at beer halls. **Tweet41** similarly claims that followers of Mohammed 'are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another. On the other hand, **Tweet15** admits that the bombers were 'Jihadists' (Muslims) who also kill Muslims.

Tweets in this category comprise radical claims of Boko Haram tweeters as they define their mission (e.g. **tweet70**) and showcase some positive results of the attacks and bombings so far in the north and Abuja (e.g. **tweet80** etc.) This suggests that their mission has been achieved to some great extent. The tweets demonstrate defiant and unrepentant voices of anger and contumacy, justifying their actions and urging youths who are passionate about Nigeria's future to join their struggle.

**Tweet70.** We love Nigerians; it's only the Nigerian polis, Nigerian army, drunkards, prostitutes, politicians, usurers, teachers, touts we can't stand.

**Tweet70** appears to explain the indiscriminate bombings of pubs and social gatherings in the north. **Tweet80-84** catalogues the achievements of the radical group, i.e. restoration of social sanity, quietness in the cities; restoration of marriages and family reunions; reduction of alcohol consumption and general well-being of the people.

**Tweet80.** Pls come to Maiduguri to see the good job we have done. quiet. no siren. no thieves only us, polis and army. [#tourism](#)

**Tweet81.** Wives and children now see their husbands in the night in Abuja and Maiduguri. Countless marriages have been saved [#collateraleffect](#)

**Tweet82.** Rate of alcoholism has reduced in abuja and maiduguri because of our good work [#collateraleffect](#)

**Tweet83.** Maiduguri looks better with our fireworks. roads look more even and streets quieter [#collateraleffect](#)

**Tweet84.** also, none of those horrible music again from dbanj, terryyg, wbanky, wande coal and duncan might...dan maraya jos rules [#goodmusicisbliss](#)

In addition, such tweets project some of the goals of the Boko Haram sect in future attacks, among which are complete banning of cigarette smoking and replacing it with 'sheesha', which they claim is healthier than cigarettes (**Tweet87**). Secondly, there would be a complete ban on the wearing of jeans, T-shirts and TM Lewin shirts and replacing them with 'Jelabia' (a traditional long gown), which they also claim is more suitable for the Maiduguri weather (**Tweet88**). Most of the tweets denounce the police and the Nigerian government and promise further attacks; some appeal to the police and security agents to defect to the terrorist group. They describe the government as the real terrorists. More significant is the redefinition of 'terrorism' or 'terrorist,' which the sect gives to this term; rather than view a terrorist as someone who commits a criminal act intended to provoke state terror in the general public (see Chilwa, 2011b), the Boko Haram sect defines terrorism from an interesting moral and religious perspective. Hence 'terrorists are those who drink all day and don't take care of their families. Terrorists are women who sell their bodies' (**tweet62**). 'Terrorists are those who go to western schools to learn how to thief money; they learn to bribe from there' (**tweet63**). 'Terrorists who steal government funds in Aso Rock we know you; terrorists who refuse to maintain roads' (**tweet65**). Thus, the Nigerian government is described as 'infidels' who kill people by fraud and corruption (**tweet66**), and Nigeria is referred to as 'a joke.' The government, the police and the army are 'jokers' because 'they kill more innocent people everyday than Boko has done in a year' (**tweet67**). Boko Haram claims they are in pursuit of ideals rather than money, unlike some rebel groups in Nigeria (**tweet44**). This category of tweeters and their tweets tends to provide both ideological and logical argument for the armed resistance of the Boko Haram movement.

## Acts of accusing and blaming the West

The Boko Haram tweets, as well as other tweets in the corpus not only accuse the Nigerian government of responsibility in Nigeria's social problems, they also accuse, condemn and blame the western world, especially the United States, for Nigeria's underdevelopment and security challenges. **Comment26** and **comment27** attempt to summarize the other comments and tweets in this group that accuse the West of selfishly pursuing their own interest in Africa.

**Comment26**...The reason why the West supports Islam is because it favors the West's agenda of dominating the region, without Islam Arabs would be "free thinker" West does not need anybody to think free, the whole idea of democracy is a scam. Please people open you eye already, and instead calling Obama and the West Muslims, call it what it is, INTEREST. We are not kids. (49fiori)

**Comment27**. Partly true, the western politicians indeed only care about our minerals, resources. and they fake they defend democracy, using the media, to brainwash the public opinion and advance obscure materialistic , greedy interests of the corporations that support them. Their alliance to Islam is purely material, not ideological because all they care about is money and power. If Islam helps getting it, they will side with Islam, but if Islam fights it, they will try something else (cruzado7).

The arguments advanced by the writers of the above samples are not saying anything particularly new, because this has been the popular thinking of many scholars who have examined the philosophy of materialism and the global economy, and how it is being pursued in Africa and the Arab world. But calling to mind this argument at such a time when an Islamic sect is terrorizing Nigeria amounts to indirectly (or pragmatically) denouncing and accusing the West of supporting the terrorist acts. While this sounds like a grave accusation, **Comment26** above insists that the 'West does not need anyone to think free...' In other words, if the Obama administration and the West sincerely mean to isolate Islam, they can weaken Islamic power and influence. Is Islam powerful today because it enjoys Western support? **Comment27** argues that the West supports Islam because of the wealth and economic power wielded by Islamic nations; the same argument may apply to Africa, where the West pretends to defend democracy whereas they 'care only about our minerals resources...using the media to brainwash public opinion and advance...greedy interest of the corporations that support them.' But the question is: why blame the West for Boko Haram's attacks in Nigeria? The implications here are quite clear, namely (i) Boko Haram terrorists are Islamists, and there is something the West can do about it, which they are not doing for fear of jeopardizing their economic interest (ii) America is singing the songs of democracy and freedom, but these Islamic terrorists not only restrict people's freedom but also violate their fundamental rights to life; yet the West appears not to be doing enough to enforce and sustain global freedom. The pragmatic act of dissociating from the West is sequel to the acts of accusing and condemning the U.S. and Europe for their failed role as the assumed global watchdog.

## Demand of splitting the country

One of the main objectives of the Boko Haram is to create an independent Islamic state out of northern Nigeria. An assertive statement such as 'Nigeria is a joke' (**tweet 67**) or 'we have left Nigeria; we are in boko republic of arewa; the infidel Nigerian government and Kafiri army should leave us,' ([@melifew213](#)) (**tweet91**), not only performs a pragmatic act of dissociation but also an assertive claim or a representative speech act (Searle 1975). A reported recent negotiation between the Nigerian government represented by the Supreme Council for Sharia and a Boko Haram spokesman broke down following what the radical sect described as insincerity on the part of the government. While a faction of the group – the late Mohammed Yusuf's immediate followers – was willing to negotiate and had presented its demands (e.g. punishment of Yusuf's killers, restoration of seized Boko Haram property, and release of Boko Haram members in jail), the other strain - the more radical Islamic anti-government force, demanded a more radical introduction of the Islamic law in some parts of Nigeria, which the government could not accept (Campbell, 2012).

The call for the breakup of Nigeria has also been made by other non-Muslims tweeters. This demand also brings to mind previous agitations by the Biafra campaign groups who still seek a separate state for the Igbo of the southeast, (Chiluwa 2012d). The Boko Haram's demand for the 'Arewa Islamic state' appears to have revitalized the Igbo dream for political independence. Some of the comments are apparently Biafran voices reiterating the Biafran earlier demands. A few examples are listed below:

**Comment28**. More death for innocent Christians; that will teach them to be different in a Muslim country (original11319)

**Comment29**. Sick nation, dysfunction country. Separation the only solution to Nigeria's problem (OLU1973)

**Comment30.** This Uprising will bring out the BIAFRA in us... To achieve a great nation everybody is expendable. This is a path to a new Nation. BIAFRA (ILLuminatik)

**Comment31.** The mission of Boko Haram is crystal clear, imposing Islam on all Nigerians. The question is, must the Muslims and Christians be forced to live under one country? Let U.N. divide the country into two, one for Christians and the other for Muslims. Otherwise, for any soul lost, Ban Ki Mo should be held responsible (shinayode)

**Comment32.** There is no alternative to the splitting of Nigeria. it is an artificial unity anyway..Christians have the right to have safe lives and live in peace and prosperity, without being subject to constant mass-murdering attacks by their Muslim henchmen (Cruzado7)

**Comment33.**Nigeria has no identity of true nationhood.... if the UN is truly a global institution, let UN show concern about murders in Nigeria....Ban Kimoon is just seating there as a puppet, reading speeches given to him - like the same speech Hamid Karzai read out loudly on occasional basis.....Once Nigeria gets it right by breaking up like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the region will know peace and progress, (alvidor).

In **Comment28**, Nigeria is referred to as a ‘Muslim country’ when in reality, it is not. This again reveals the kind of sarcastic reactions from a people that appear desperate for the breakup of Nigeria. To the writer, the death of innocent Christians should teach them (the southern Christians) to be different. The writers of **comment31** and **Comment33** blame the United Nations for its ineptitude towards the crisis in the country. The writer again advocates the breakup of Nigeria. This clearly shows that both a section of the Moslem north and a section of the Christian south demand political independence.

## Solution proffering

Tweets under this category are those that attempt to proffer solutions to the crisis in form of suggestions and advice, to Boko Haram and to the Nigerian government. In other words, the advice is to Moslems who are told to support secular governments and to demonstrate their loyalty to ‘a just God who does not discriminate against non-Moslems’ (e.g. **comment43**).

**Comment43.** Good Muslims, please consider what you believe in...If you believe in a just God, support secular governments that do not discriminate against non-Muslims. You're not doing non-Muslims a favor by doing this, but only serving YOUR God by supporting a secular state... (HugoCorv)

Other tweeters and writers of comments believe that the Nigerian government has not been decisive enough in tackling the Boko Haram challenge. They recommend that they should be more proactive and drastic (e.g. **tweet44**). For instance, **Comment45** also recommends that the government should strengthen the country’s security operations and establish special anti-terrorism agencies to address security problems.

**Tweet44.** [#Nigeria](#) ACF on Boko Haram: “We call on the government to be more proactive, more decisive and engage in less lamentation.” Very correct!

**Comment45.** What I'm saying is, he hasn't done enough yet. I have a question? Is there any department responsible for fighting terrorism in Nigeria yet? If it's just the SSS, I think that's not enough... (gbesky007)

## Neutral acts of dissociation

The very few tweets and comments in this group are ‘neutral’ in terms of their writers’ positions on religion and the real causes of the uprising, yet they perform pragmatic acts. One of the tweets (i.e. **tweet47**) simply says: ‘I hate religion’, probably due to the numerous sectarian and religious crises that have occurred in Nigeria in the recent past. While performing the pragmatic act of dissociation (from Nigeria and Boko Haram), this tweet also implicitly blames religion for being responsible for the present and past crises. **Tweet49** on the other hand, argues that ‘it is too early to link the attack with anyone...there are a lot of dynamics in any region; there cannot be only one reason.’ This tweet is intertextually related to some previous comments by some groups who believe that ‘Boko Haram’ is a mere camouflage of a more complex political mafia operating in the federal capital. Others argue that Boko Haram is ‘faceless’ and used as a political weapon by some powerful politicians to fight their enemies, both Christians and Moslems. Another school of thought believes that Boko Haram is sponsored by certain northern enemies of the Jonathan administration, who are out to destabilize the country and incite mass uprising against the government. What all these views have in common is that Boko Haram is not an Islamist terrorist group. But again, this argument cannot easily explain away the existence of a complex and powerful organization that has terrorized the nation for some time now. Therefore, the claim that Boko Haram is not a terrorist group is hardly satisfactory.

## Nigerian English in the Boko Haram Tweets and Comments

As highlighted above, the Standard Nigerian English (SNE) shares a great deal of similarities with the Standard British English. However, certain grammatical forms are unique to Nigerian English (NigE), especially those that express local thoughts and are simply translated into English; thus giving such expressions some local flavour. According to Kellerman (1978 cited in Dadzie, 1986:82) this is referred to as 'strategy transfer,' where a learner within a given native language may use that language to make predictions about the target language. Because there is a relationship between English structural forms and the structures of some Nigerian languages (e.g. Igbo and Yoruba), certain expressions that convey local culture are usually 'clothed' in English words in an attempt to transfer the native language into English (Dadzie, 1986). This discourse strategy generally results in category shifts (e.g. reclassification of grammatical categories, insertion of categories and omission of some items) (Jowitt, 1991). The following expressions in the data are good examples: 'now we are talking about bomb blasts, which we don't know the source;' 'in these same Nigeria we are unemployed,' (**tweet2**); 'when last did you have light for 24 hrs?' (referring to power supply), (**tweet52**); 'look at the bomb blast during election period where most people lost their lives,' (referring to a previous event) (**comment3**); 'I think the problem was when the crisis of Boko Haram first began, the late government didn't handle it well,' (didn't handle it properly or carefully) (**comment4**). These examples and others in the data feature often in educated NigE, even in literary writings.

Another feature of NigE evident in the corpus is its bookishness (Egbe, 1984). **Tweet 90** and **Tweet91** are two examples from the corpus:

**Tweet90.** If in d course of our ethereal struggle we conciliate & adjudicate wt decadent infidel pestiferous rulers of Nigeria, we then r both wrong **#nowayout**

**Tweet91.** Matters of urgent importance, coordinating the routing of infidels from Arewa land. No time **@melifew213** Kafiri, ubankashege danbanza.

Chiluwa (2010a) also observes that features of formal written English are used in informal email messages written by Nigerians. An average Nigerian user of English often believes that the best way to demonstrate his competence in English is by using 'big' words; this thinking stems from the general social notion that speakers of high sounding English words are better educated than others. Interestingly, such speakers sometimes enjoy some respect, attention, and opportunities in the Nigerian society. As pointed out above, both the standard and non-standard NigE varieties borrow words from the local languages, especially those that lack direct English translations, such as idioms, coinages, local proverbs or imprecations. This often results in some forms of code-switching (**tweet99**; **91**). In the tweets, (as illustrated below) words that name local drinks, e.g. 'kunu,' (**tweet94**); local wears e.g. 'Jelabia' (**tweet97**) and local tobacco e.g. 'sheesha' are evident in the data. There are also a few manifestations of Nigerian pidgin, for example, 'na thieving be dis donkey (referring to the Nigerian government) (**tweet95**). 'Koboko' (a Hausa word for a whip made from animal hide) is also used in **tweet95**.

**Tweet94.** The federal government has guns, we have time. All the Kunu sellers seem to have left Maiduguri

**Tweet95.** Another reason to close universities, Na thieving be dis donkey. You need some koboko on your thick hide. **@qafro**

**Tweet97.** Boko Haram thinking of replacing cigarettes with Sheesha...healthier and with more vitamins **#progress**

**Tweet98.** We are thinking of banning jeans, tshirt and tmlwin shirts...jelabia is more suitable to the Maiduguri sun and for banks **#1stepahead**

**Tweet99.** Some have bombs but cannot use, we have bombs and we can use; Kafiri, ubankashege danbanza **@melifew213**

On the whole, this study shows that NigE in the data do not reflect much of syntactic or lexical deviations from the standard British/American English. This suggests that Nigerian youths who utilize the Internet are fairly competent in English. In Nigeria, as in other African countries, English is still considered as the language of the Internet, and users endeavour as much as possible to use acceptable English.

## Conclusion

We conclude that writers of tweets and comments in the data not only express their opinions on the state of security in Nigeria but also perform pragmatic acts of accusing the Nigerian government of being indirectly responsible for the Boko Haram insurgency. The government's failure to develop the economy and eradicate youth unemployment is said to invariably breed insecurity. Some other pragmatic acts condemn and denounce

violence blamable on Islam as a religion, while some accuse the West for indirectly supporting Islam for economic gains. Some of the tweets simply offer advice to Muslims and the government to cooperate and promote efforts to develop the country rather than sponsor violence directly or indirectly. Interestingly, over 90% of the tweets in the Boko Haram twitter profile and about 40% of the entire corpus support and celebrate the activities of the sect. The tweeters demand the break-up of Nigeria in order to create a complete Islamic state in the north. Significantly, the tweeters and writers of comments write in a variety of English that reflect features of standard Nigerian English, such as direct translation of local languages, reclassification of grammatical categories, insertion of categories and the use of loan words from local languages. Some of them write in the Nigerian pidgin.

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