

## Points of View and Modality in the Discourses of Homosexuality in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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### ABSTRACT

The practice of homosexuality has over time generated serious debates worldwide. Studies on homosexuality in the Euro-American context have focused on how this phenomenon is represented socially, psychologically, linguistically, etc. Though opinions diverge, but the central argument is of social justice and human right. Studies on the phenomenon in the Nigerian context have focused on Nollywood movies and other arguments centered on ethics, culture and religion, with little attention to points of view and their linguistic representations. This study, therefore, explores modality choices in the representation of points of view. This study adopts Uspensky's (1973) notion of point of view on the ideological plain and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics with special attention on Simpson's (1993) classification of modality. These approaches provide a method for studying language use and points of view. Two popular Nigerian newspapers (Vanguard and The Punch) within the period of three years (2013–2015), are critically examined and subjected to linguistic and qualitative methods of analysis. Data are purposively selected from editorials, open letters and comments based on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. The analysis reveals that modality is used by writers in questioning the anti-gay bill, resisting homosexuality as well as to incite the readers to rise to the occasion of radically opposing any culture that will destroy the African cultures, religions and the African worldview about sexuality and marriage.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of homosexuality/same-sex marriage has become national especially shortly before and after the passage of the anti-gay marriage bill in Nigeria. The United States recently legalised homosexuality and same-sex marriage and also made attempts to convince African nations that have criminalised the act to do same. These issues have elicited different reactions from individuals like the homosexuals themselves, their supporters, heads of religious bodies, politicians and private individuals. While some social actors have said there is nothing wrong with homosexuality, some, in fact majority reacted to it negatively. The issue has been argued from the religious, cultural, ethical, legal and moral perspectives. The different opinions about homosexuality and same-sex marriage are packaged into different sections of newspapers such as opinion column, viewpoint, comments, open letters, editorials, etc.

Point of view (henceforth POV) indicates a particular way of conceptualising the world. Stances, which are seen as expressing “personal feelings, attitudes, value Judgements, or assessments” (Biber et al., 1999: 966) are made using language. According to Thompson (2004:30)

We use language to talk about our experience of the world, including the worlds in our own minds, to describe events and states and the entities involved in them. We also use language to interact with other people, to establish and maintain relations with them, to influence their behaviour, to express our own viewpoint on things in the world, and to elicit or change theirs.

Language is an important tool in constructing stances and points of view in the discourses of homosexuality. Modality is a linguistic tool used by speakers/writers

to express opinion (Halliday, 1994). This study therefore examines modality as a tool for representing points of view.

In the Nigerian context, scholars have focused on the representations of homosexuality in some Nollywood movies (Lyonga, 2014; Abah, 2012), from the literary perspective. (Lanre-Abass, 2012; Onuche, 2013; Obidimma and Obidimma, 2013; Atoi and Ojedokun, 2013) have viewed homosexuality from the philosophical, legal and religious perspectives. They have argued that homosexuality is 'un-African', and not biblical. The linguistic representations, which are used in representing different points of view in the discourses of homosexuality, have not received adequate attention. This study examines how modality is used to foreground certain points of view on homosexuality in the Nigerian context. This study reveals the socio-cultural and ideological presuppositions that originate from the African worldview about the concepts of family, relationships and homosexuality. The paper therefore sets out to answer the following research questions:

- a. What are some of the points of view in the discourses of homosexuality in the Nigerian print/online newspapers and what are the grounds of arguments?
- b. How are these points of view expressed through modality in the discourses of homosexuality in the Nigerian context?
- c. What are the functions of the modality choices observed in the discourses?

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Different scholars have worked on the discourse of homosexuality from different perspectives. One of such scholars is Kuhar (2012) who examines the media representation of minorities which include Muslims, Roma and gays and lesbians, covering the period of February 2006. Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis is used in the analysis. The analysis covers eight print media. The researcher realised that the texts rely on secrecy, normalisation and eccentricity as thematic frameworks for the media representations of homosexuality.

From the legal perspective, Obidimma and Obidimma (2013) explore the statutes of same-sex marriage relation in Nigeria by analysing provisions of various laws including the Nigerian Constitution. The paper also discusses the contents of the Nigerian law passed by the National Assembly prohibiting same sex marriage and compares it with the practice in other jurisdictions. The paper concludes with the view that the law is inconsistent with the fundamental rights

guaranteed by the Constitution, and that Nigeria could borrow a leaf from countries that have legalized same-sex marriage. This study has only considered homosexuality from the legal perspective, neglecting the linguistic representations of the phenomenon.

Otunba (2014) also examines how the LGBT right is enhanced in Africa, using Nigeria as the case study. He explores the impediments to LGBT (Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) rights in Nigeria and how they can be addressed. Data are from semi-structured, formal, open ended interviews with individuals well-informed of the discourse in Nigeria. The research found that religious beliefs and the existence of LGBT knowledge gaps are the major impediments to LGBT rights in Nigeria. This study takes a sociological stance, neglecting the linguistic. Looking at these previous studies, attention has not been paid to the linguistic representation of views on homosexuality especially in Nigeria, hence the need for this study.

### 2.1 Studies on Points of View

The issue of POV in literature has received much attention in recent years, with literary scholars, stylisticians, structuralists, linguists and even cognitive psychologists converging on the topic from their respective theoretical positions. Examples of scholars who have worked on point of view in prose fiction include Booth 1961; Uspensky 1973; Chatman 1978 and 1990; Genette 1980; Fowler 1986; Simpson 1993; Bal 1997), relatively little attention has been paid to point of view in other discourses.

In the context of narrative fiction, POV refers generally to the psychological perspective through which a story is told. It encompasses the narrative framework which a writer employs, whether this be first person or third person, restricted perspective or omniscient perspective, and accounts for the basic viewing position which is adopted in a story. According to Rasley (2008:9), 'a point of view is the perspective from which the reader experiences the action of the story'. Narrative POV is arguably the very essence of a story's style, what gives it its 'feel' and 'colour' (Simpson, 1993:4). To Moore (1997:6), points of view include points in space, points in time, frames of reference, historical and cultural contexts, different roles in personal relationships, points of involvement of other kinds, and the sensory apparatuses of different species.

Uspensky (1973) asserts that point of view exists on four 'planes', these being the spatial and temporal plane, the ideological plane, the phraseological plane and the psychological plane. Spatial POV refers to the position in space from which a scene is viewed. Temporal POV refers to the presentation of events in a fictional world from a particular position in time.

Uspensky (1973:8) explains that point of view on the ideological plane is concerned with whose POV the author assumes when he evaluates and perceives ideologically the world which he describes. POV on the phraseological plane concerns the viewpoint effects that can arise as a result of an author's choices with regard to the presentation of speech and thought. POV on the plane of psychology concerns the choices an author makes with regard to the various ways in which a story might be narrated. In these works, POV is generally considered to be a narratological phenomenon.

In the media context, some scholars have also considered POV in relation to language. Sierra (1994) has considered point of view of political discourses in the Spanish media, using Fowler's (1986) and Simpson's (1993) idea of psychological and spatio-temporal points of view. He explored how these perspectives of point of view influence ideologically the angle from which written media presents events. Simpson (1993) used newspaper discourse to illustrate the relationship between ideological point of view and the transitivity system. Iwamoto (1998) explored points of view and modality of war time discourses in Japanese newspapers. He considered POV to be classified into both internal and external. This paper tries to reveal the relationship between the ideological points of view and modality in the discourses of homosexuality in the Nigerian context.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study takes its root in systemic functional linguistics, a grammatical model developed by Michael Halliday in the 1960s. The term *systemic* refers to the view of language as "a network of systems, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning" (Halliday, 1994:15); whereas the term *functional* refers to the view of language as a means of communication in different social contexts. Thus, SFG does not focus only on how language is structured but it also deals with how language is used. According to Eggins (2004: 11), 'the overall purpose of language then is a semantic one. Each text we participate in is a record of meanings that have been made in particular context'. Language is structured to make three kinds of meanings simultaneously: The ideational or experiential function, the textual function and the interpersonal function. In Halliday's system, modality is primarily located in the interpersonal component of the grammar.

### 2.2.1 Modality

Modality as a linguistic device encompasses a variety of forms, including (but not limited to) modal auxiliaries, modal verbs, modal adverbs, and modal adjectives. There are grammatical modality and lexical

modality. Modality is generally defined as the grammaticalisation of speaker's attitude and opinions. This position is further corroborated by Palmer (1986:14) who describes it as the expression of the speaker's attitude or opinion regarding "the contents of the sentence" and Lyons (1977:452) that sees it as the expression of the speaker's attitude or opinion regarding "the proposition that sentence expresses." Thus, modality may be regarded as the —grammar of explicit comment (Simpson 2004:124).

Therefore, modality is viewed as a major exponent of the interpersonal function of language. It can be said that language is not merely used for conveying factual information; a writer may wish to indicate the degree of certainty with which he makes a statement, or try to influence others in various ways, exercise authority or signal submission to somebody else's authority, give permission or ask for permission, make people do things or stop them from doing things. As such, modality covers all semantic categories underlying all these uses of language.

Although there are broad categories of modality recognized by all scholars in the field, there are nevertheless differences in the ways in which modalities are classified and categorized. For example, Halliday (1985) examines modality within propositions which is called modalization and modulation within proposals. Palmer (1986) focuses on epistemic and root modalities. Simpson's (1993:47) classification includes deontic, boulomaic, epistemic and perception.

**Deontic modality** is the modal system of "duty" as it concerns itself with writer's attitude to the degree of obligation attached to the performance of certain actions. The deontic modal auxiliaries realize a continuum of commitment from permission; a system which is highly associated with the strategies of social interaction, especially with tactics of persuasion and politeness. **Boulomaic modality** is lexico-grammaticalized in English through expressions of "desire" which is closely associated with deontic modality. Modal lexical verbs, indicating the wishes and desires of the writer, play important role in this system. **Perception modality** refers to the fact that the degree of commitment to the truth of a proposition is predicted on some reference to human perception, normally visual perception.

**Epistemic modality** refers to the judgments about possibility, probability etc. in the sense that something is or is not the case.

The present paper focuses specifically on Simpson's categorization. This is because it focuses not only on the types of modality used in a text, but also on how

this modality determines the essence of the ‘feel and colour’ a text has (Iwamoto, 2007). These modals reveal writers’ attitudes to the issue of homosexuality in Nigeria.

### 2.2.2 Points of View

There can be no thought of the world without a particular point of view. My approach to the study of points of view is based on the ideological plain of points of view identified by (Uspensky 1973), developed in Fowler (1986) and Simpson (1993). To them, ideological point of view provides criteria to analyse how the use of language highlights certain values in a narration. Point of view is “the way in which a text mediates a set of particular ideological beliefs through either character, narrator or author” (Simpson 1993: 78). Fowler (1996) explains that point of view on the ideological plane concerns the set of beliefs and values a person has, and the categories by which they comprehend the world.

### 2.2.3 Modality and Points of View

Modality and point of view have a close relationship. Simpson systematized the relationship between these two topics by developing Fowler’s original model of point of view. According to Simpson (1993), ‘much of the ‘feel’ of a text is attributable to the type of point of view or authorial interests it exhibits’. Modality is generally defined as the grammaticalisation of speaker’s attitude and opinions.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on both the print and online newspapers. Two Nigerian newspapers are purposively selected. These include: *The Punch and Vanguard*. The selected newspapers are part of the most widely read newspapers in Nigeria and they share similar features in terms of circulation, coverage, and fame. Using the purposive sampling technique, articles, editorials, comments, opinions and letters to the editor on issues of homosexuality and same-sex marriage are searched in the newspapers. These are sections where the opinions of individuals are reflected. The newspapers used for this study cover the period of three years, January 2013- December 2015, being period when the anti-gay legislation was made in Nigeria. On 29th November, 2011, the Nigerian Senate (Upper Legislative House) passed the “Same-sex, Marriage (Prohibition) Bill 2011” and on May 31, 2013, the House of Representatives (Lower Legislative House) approved the bill which was immediately sent to the then president, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan for him to sign into law. On January 13, 2014, the bill was signed by the president. On June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the US Constitutional provisions of due process and equal protection under the law actually means that

States cannot ban same-sex marriage. With this ruling, same-sex marriage became legal in all the 50 States of the US. These events provoked reactions from Nigerians and these were represented in the newspapers.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Different points of view have ensued from the discourses of homosexuality and same-sex marriage in the Nigerian newspapers. Some of these points of view include: the passage of the anti-gay law as hypocritical, the dynamic nature of culture which Nigerians must understand, the holy books as un-ideal basis for reasonable arguments, homosexuality is against the will of God and nature, among others. These points of view are further classified based on the grounds for the arguments for better understanding. These include religious, cultural, moral, legal and health grounds. However, specific modality choices have been made as regards these points of view. These points of view are identified and explained below, with relevant excerpts and the modality choices that foreground them.

### 1. Arguments on Homosexuality on Cultural Grounds

Homosexuality and same-sex marriage have been argued based on culture in the Nigerian newspapers. To Payne (1996), culture “is about values, and developing systems and symbols that reinforce and perpetuate those values, so that people behave reliably and predictably to achieve the culture’s purpose.” From this definition, it is realized that culture includes the basic assumptions and values of a group of people. Since culture forms an important aspect in the society, it becomes a ground on which arguments are based. The points of view relating to culture in the discourses of homosexuality in the Nigerian context are identified and discussed vis-à-vis the modality choices:

#### a. Culture is dynamic and Nigerians should be receptive to change

This point of view argues that cultures do change and that Nigerians should be receptive to change. It is supportive of homosexuality which is seen by many people as ‘un-African’. Some modal items are used to foreground this. This POV is particularly found in the *Punch Newspaper*. The excerpts below reveal this:

#### Excerpt 1

The point is, culture does not mean people **should** be stuck in a time warp. Societies advance and that is why even the most vociferous campaigners for “African values” **will not** forsake their European/Arabia-gifted religion for *Amadioha* or *Sango*; **will not** give up their

cellphones (and other forms of western technology) ...  
*ThePunch*, January 16, 2014.

### Excerpt 2

I see that tradition **can** sometimes be good and beneficial to society (the tradition of sitting down to talk with a gay person and look them in the eye before one condemns them to a life marred by illegitimacy, **would** be very helpful here), but when tradition is wrong, it **must** change. *ThePunch*, August 10, 2014.

In the excerpts above, both the deontic and the epistemic modality are used to perform different functions. The POV points out the need to be receptive to change in terms of culture, using modal auxiliaries 'should and must'. These deontic modals indicate necessity and obligation towards the change in the culture of not accepting homosexuals. 'Should' emphasizes the writer's expectation for change in the people. 'Must' portrays Compulsion or lack of choice. Therefore, the writer tries to influence the readers to change the wrong tradition of discriminating against homosexuals. The epistemic 'will', 'can' and 'would' are used to perform different functions, that of prediction and possibility. 'Will not' in the first excerpt emphasizes the reality that things, including culture, do change and the notion that people are always willing to change with civilization. It emphasizes the certainty that Nigerians would not want to go back to the old ways of doing things and therefore, should embrace homosexuality. The epistemic meaning of will/would indicates a high degree of confidence in the truth of the proposition, that is, they are used to express what we believe or guess to be true. Although they lack the assertive force of must and can't, they do not necessarily indicate any less certainty on the part of the writer. 'Can' conveys the ability of culture to be good when it is beneficial to the society. It reflects the personal conviction of the writer. It also shows possibility. Here, more of the epistemic modality is used.

### b. Homosexuality negates the Nigerian culture, it is a taboo and an abomination

This POV holds that homosexuality is against the Nigerian cultures and therefore, an abomination. This is evident in the constant use of the lexical items 'taboo and abomination' in the discourses of homosexuality. It is believed that the new anti-gay law is supported by the majority based on culture and therefore unacceptable. The POV can be found on virtually all the papers. Examples of texts showing this POV are shown below:

### Excerpt 3

Homosexuality is not our culture. Every society has its own values and **should** grow with those values. Nigeria has her own values and we **must** stick to our values and tradition. *ThePunch*, July 19, 2015.

### Excerpt 4

So, there is **need** for everybody **to** shout it out that gay, lesbianism, and all what not, is just the beginning of the destroying of the fabric of our heritage. *Vanguard*, January 18, 2014.

Considering the excerpts above, the deontic modality is commonly used. Modal auxiliaries such as 'must', 'should', 'need to' are used to point out the obligations of Nigerians to stick to their own values and cultures and fight homosexuality, which is viewed as unafrikan. In the first excerpt, 'should' which reflects a weak obligation is used in relation to the values of the general society, but the strong deontic 'must' is used when reference is made to Nigerians sticking with their values and traditions which is against homosexuality. 'Must' in this context is used as a command. Declerk (1991:378) asserts that while 'should' expresses weak obligation, it also points at some doubt as to whether the situation referred to will happen. The obligation of 'should' is not as binding as with 'must'. It may be unfulfilled. However, 'should' and 'need to' have been used in the discourses to point out the obligation of individuals and the society at large to war against homosexuality in Nigeria.

## 2. Arguments on Homosexuality on Religious Grounds

Religion is a form of social order influencing social attitudes and behaviours. Religion is belief in God and leading a good life. The arguments for and against homosexuality are also based on religion, and what the religious books say about homosexuality. The points of view in this category are shown below:

### a. Holy books are unreasonable basis for arguments

The holy books (Bible and Koran) are believed to be unreliable references for reasonable arguments especially on the issue of homosexuality. This opinion is based on the notion that the holy books cannot be used as the basis for passing a particular bill or constitution. It is argued that the Bible, for instance, does not vividly state that homosexuality is evil. It is also argued that even if it is stated in the Bible, the Bible or the Koran should not be the basis for the passage of a bill that will affect members of a society since everyone does not believe in both books. Examples of this point of view are found below:

### Excerpt 5

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

#### Excerpt 6

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

It is discovered that under this POV, modality is not used. This is probably in a bid to be objective because of the sacred nature of religious books. Neutral shading is characterised by the absence of modality or modal judgment that exhibits an uncommitted and detached connotation (Iwamoto 2007:181) in discourse. In this respect, they are epistemically non-modal.

#### b. Homosexuality is sin against God

Homosexuality is also perceived as sin against God. This POV has been hinged on religion especially the Christian religion and Bible passages have been used to support the claim. Here, it is argued that the Bible and the Koran unequivocally states that homosexual behaviour is wrong. This view is evident in all the newspapers. Examples of excerpts showing this point of view are below:

#### Excerpt 7

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

#### Excerpt 8

The Bible **expressly** condemns same-sex relationships...The fact that God also intended marriage to be between a man and a woman, is **clear** from the following references — Gen 2:24; ... *The Punch*, January 29, 2014.

Under this category, it is noticed that the perception modalities are mostly favoured. It is used to support the stand against homosexuality. The modal adjective ‘clear’ and modal adverbs ‘clearly and expressly’ are used to make reference to the Holy Books. The use of these modal items points to the clarity of the statements in the religious books; these statements are believed to clearly portray homosexuality as a sin against God, that is, God’s view about homosexuality. The basis of the religious arguments in the excerpts above is that heterosexuality should be the norm in any decent society. Therefore, it is obvious that God has not created homosexuality, and consequently the phenomenon works against the plan God has for humanity. A natural implication of these arguments is that people cannot be gay by birth. If God did not create homosexuality, it cannot be inherent in people.

Gays choose to be gay, and it is because of their choice that they are condemned.

### 1. Arguments on Homosexuality based on Legal Grounds

Arguments on the issue of homosexuality in Nigeria have also been based on legal grounds. While some have said the passage of the anti-gay law is unconstitutional and unjust, others have said it reflects the wish of the majority, therefore, constitutional. Points of view hinged on legal reasons are shown below:

#### a. The passage of the anti-gay bill is hypocritical and unjust

The passage of the anti-gay bill by President Jonathan is seen as hypocritical by some social actors, especially gay activists. These people believe that the bill was passed not because of the value for morality but to gain political offices and support. This view is further enhanced by the constant neglect of other vices such as corruption by the government. This group of people is of the opinion that the government should have focused on other pressing issues in Nigeria than the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage that do not affect anybody. The excerpts below reveal this point of view:

#### Excerpt 9

I had **hoped** Jonathan would at least refrain from touching the bill and concentrate on the corruption crippling his government; he **would** have focused on providing electricity...That is the sort of moral responsibility that President Jonathan **should** have displayed rather than take the populist route of offering up gays as scapegoats to be slaughtered to one of the gods we worship in Nigeria –hypocrisy...*ThePunch*, January 16, 2014.

In the excerpts below the law is regarded as unjust.

#### Excerpt 10

Where, in Nigeria, whose constitution defines marriage as being between a man and a woman, has any homosexual asked for same-sex marriage? This is an **unjust** law. It **should** be repealed. *Vanguard*, February 19, 2014.

The above excerpts show the use of the boulomaic, deontic and evaluative adjectives. ‘Hoped’ in the first excerpt reflects the writer’s desire. This desire is that the then president should have avoided the signing of the anti-gay bill into law. The writer believes that he should have concentrated on some more important issues instead. The deontic ‘would’ points out other aspects that the President should have focused. This serves as a form of belated advice. The use of evaluative adjective ‘unjust’ further foregrounds this

POV. This is to emphasize the view that the law that promotes discrimination against homosexuals is unfair. The deontic ‘should’ in excerpts 9 and 10 also plays an important role in this POV. It is used to point out the obligations and duties president Jonathan was expected to have carried out and to show the desire of the writer that the anti-gay law should be repealed.

#### **b. Anti-gay law is in line with the people’s preference**

Contrary to the view that the passage of the anti-gay bill is unjust, some other persons are of the opinion that the law is a just one since it represents the opinion of the majority. This POV justifies the passage anti-gay law in Nigeria as it is in line with the desire of the majority. Different modality choices have used to foreground this viewpoint. Examples are below:

##### **Excerpt 11**

And I **think** that this law is made for a people and what (the) government has done is consistent with the preference of its environment.” *Vanguard*, January 13, 2014.

##### **Excerpt 12**

The new law is therefore **certain** to please most people in Nigeria, where anti-gay sentiment is rife. *ThePunch*, January 27, 2014.

##### **Excerpt 13**

The position of the government on this matter **must** remain in tandem with that of the people under whose mandate it derives its authority. *Vanguard*, July 15, 2015.

The subjective view of the writer is presented with the use of ‘I think’ in the first excerpt. This justifies the viewpoint that the anti-gay law is just and right, because it is supported by the majority. In another instance, this viewpoint is foregrounded with the use of the modal adjective ‘certain’, performing an epistemic function. The writer expresses confidence in the notion that the law is supported by most people. This epistemic modal indicates that the writer is certain and sure about the proposition and that he is committed to the truth of the utterance; he believes that the proposition is true in his opinion. ‘Must’ in excerpt 13 indicates the obligation of the government of not shifting grounds as regards the passage of the anti-gay law, if it is to remain in the good book of the people, that is, the majority.

## **2. Arguments on Homosexuality on Health Grounds**

Arguments have been raised against homosexuality on health grounds. However, it is discovered that there is

no counter argument for homosexuality under this POV. Gay rights activists have not argued on the negative health implications of homosexuality.

#### **a. Homosexuality is a threat.**

This point of view holds that apart from the general notions that homosexuality is a sin against God and morally wrong, it also has negative health implications. The view is that homosexuals are usually victims of HIV, STDs, depression, etc. Apart from the negative health implication of homosexuality on homosexuals, they are also considered as a threat to the economic well being of the society. They are seen to be affecting the general health of people and the society at large. The anti-gay rights activists describe homosexuality as dangerous. They attribute sicknesses to homosexuality and by so doing draw attention to the threat gay rights pose to society. Examples are seen in the excerpts below:

##### **Excerpt 14**

**Economically**, Nigeria **can** ill-afford the additional strain which increased HIV infections, STDs and other health-related issues **will** put on our resources on account of acceptance of homosexual acts. *ThePunch*, January 29, 2014.

##### **Excerpt 15**

Homosexuals are five times more **likely** to have Hepatitis B than heterosexuals. *ThePunch*, January 29, 2014.

##### **Excerpt 16**

Homosexuals are **more likely** to suffer from depression. *Vanguard*, January 20, 2014.

Looking at the excerpts above, one would notice the use of viewpoint adjuncts by writers to express their views about homosexuality. ‘Economically’ foregrounds the health implication of homosexuality on the economy and individual homosexual. Another common modality choice in the portrayal of homosexuals as sick people is the use of the modal adjective ‘likely’. The use of ‘likely’ is common when the negative health implications of homosexuality are pointed out. Epistemic ‘will and can’ also reflect the possible negative effect of the practice of homosexuality on Nigeria, if accepted.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing, it is realized that the issue of homosexuality has elicited deep and often extreme reactions in Nigerians. Homosexuality is argued on cultural, religious, legal and health grounds in the Nigerian context. Conflicting but relating points of view have been identified under these grounds, representing arguments for and against homosexuality. The viewpoints presented in this study

demonstrate that homosexuality remains a controversial issue in Nigerian society and politics. Also unveiled are the modality choices made by writers to foreground these points of view. The study revealed that modal auxiliaries 'must, should, have to' have been used to perform the deontic function, portraying writers' desires and the need to carry out certain obligations. They are used to emphasize the need for Nigerians to allow and fight homosexuality. Writers have used these modalities to point out the obligation of the state, religious institutions, heterosexual and homosexual individuals. Epistemic modality reflects the knowledge and beliefs of Nigerians about homosexuality. Other modal verbs have revealed writer's perception about the issues of culture, religion, etc. Viewpoint adjuncts have also been used as grounds for different arguments. These newspapers, in a bid to be objective and balanced, publish articles that reflect both positive and negative attitudes to homosexuality. It is also discovered that modality choices in relation to the different viewpoints are similar as represented in the newspapers.

The analysis reveals that modality as a linguistic device is widely used by writers in questioning the anti-gay bill, resisting homosexuality as well as to incite the readers to rise to the occasion of radically opposing any culture that will destroy the African cultures, religions and the African worldview about sexuality and marriage. This study avers that modals are not just linguistic elements, but most importantly, devices and ideological tools in the discourses of homosexuality. They are used to accentuate specific aims and points of view in the Nigerian context. It seems safe to conclude, then, that modality and points of view are closely related, as shown by the above analysis of these illustrative texts.

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**Olubunmi Adegbola** just completed her PhD in the Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. Her research interests include media discourse, critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, syntax and stylistics. She is a 2016 African Humanities Program/American Council of Learned Societies (AHP/ACLS) Fellow and this article is a product of the funding received from AHP/ACLS.

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