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To cite this article: Limukani Mathe (2024) Analysing Discourse-Stylistics on Peripheral Journalism Platforms: A Context of Indigenous Language News Outlets on Facebook, African Journalism Studies, 45:2, 94-114, DOI: [10.1080/23743670.2024.2388640](https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2024.2388640)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2024.2388640>



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Published online: 19 Aug 2024.



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Analysing Discourse-Stylistics on Peripheral Journalism Platforms: A Context of Indigenous Language News Outlets on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

The evolving nature of journalism through digital platforms has prompted scholarly enquiry on the narratives, practices and outputs by non-traditional actors in Africa's communication ecology. Informed by interpretative community theory and discourse-stylistics, this article analyses stylistics in Indigenous language on non-mainstream or peripheral journalism platforms. A qualitative content analysis was applied on two popular Zimbabwean non-mainstream platforms on Facebook, namely *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* that publish in Shona language. Follow up in-depth interviews with the administrators of the pages were employed to extract perspective as the study answered two questions: What are the stylistic devices used by content creators in Indigenous language on non-mainstream platforms, and why do they employ such devices? The findings of the study show that *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* use street lingo in summative captions, code-mixing and switching, and satire to reinforce the voice of the community, somewhat circumventing the English algorithm. The article argues that Indigenous language news outlets reflect the ever-changing lingo in peripheral journalism and the cultural flexibility of citizen discursive communities.

KEYWORDS

discourse-stylistics;
Indigenous language;
facebook; peripheral
journalism; *iHarare.com*;
Hatirare263

Introduction

The impact of digital technologies has ushered in new forms of African journalism practice which were beforehand invisible in the mainstream. What has been known as journalism was limited to traditional practice of standard or professional news-making through the legacy media, namely print, radio and television. Although the advent of the internet enabled traditional media houses to adopt online platforms to keep themselves competitive in the digital market, the journalism field experienced non-traditional forms in news-making. Mainstream journalism practice became disrupted by “strangers” on digital spaces competing with and complementing the legacy media (Cheruiyot et al. 2021;

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Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018). The cultural and political shifts of the nature of journalism through digital spaces has prompted scholarly enquiry on what journalism is and what it should be. As non-traditional actors continue to make their presence known, scholars discuss how boundaries between “mainstream” and “non-mainstream” journalism practice continue to be contested (Cheruiyot et al. 2021; Eldridge 2019). Thus, these boundaries are being challenged by non-traditional actors labelled as peripheral actors in the African media ecology.

As a result, peripheral news outlets (non-mainstream) are becoming ubiquitous on social media (see Eldridge 2019; Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018; Mutsvairo and Salgado 2022). Although viewed as amateurish, peddlers of rumours and bad imitators of mainstream journalism (Goldstein and Rotich 2008; Nah and Chung 2020; Roberts 2019; Siegel 2008), these peripheral news outlets or non-mainstream news outlets sometimes provoke debates on socio-political issues and act as alternative spaces for whistleblowing or telling stories of corruption and abuse of power (Mare 2013; Mpofu 2015, 2016; Mpofu, Mutsvairo, and Matsilele 2023; Mutsvairo and Salgado 2022; Roberts 2019; Stephensen and Tréré 2020; Vos and Thomas 2023; Wall 2018). In Zimbabwe, the success of peripheral news outfits is often attributed to repressive media laws that indirectly cause citizen convergence and dissidentality via alternative internet spaces (Mathe and Motsaathebe 2024a; Matsilele 2019; Mpofu 2021; Mutsvairo and Salgado 2022). However, little has been done to examine how peripheral journalism practice in Indigenous languages continues to gain social media visibility. This article focuses on language as an important tool that determines the success of peripheral or non-mainstream news outlets. Scholars agree that language remains a powerful tool in the African language media (Mabweazara and Strelitz 2010; Mathe and Motsaathebe 2023a; Ndlovu 2011; Oso 2006; Pelinka 2007).

It is significant to note that African languages have survived many challenges under the hegemony of colonial languages (Mathe and Motsaathebe 2023a, 2023b). In former British colonies, English had colonial power as an official language in education, media and government (Wa Thiong’o 1986, 2000). There has been, therefore, limited scholarship on Indigenous language media due to the dominance of English in the media (Mabweazara and Strelitz 2010; Mathe and Motsaathebe 2023a, 2023b, 2024b; Mpofu 2023; Tshabangu and Salawu 2022). Zimbabwe has a modicum of print media, dominated by English language newspapers with the exception of two state-controlled newspapers, *uMthunywa* and *Kwayedza*, that publish in Ndebele and Shona. Thus, studies on Indigenous languages in journalism have been focusing more on these newspapers, *uMthunywa* and *Kwayedza* (Mabweazara and Strelitz 2010; Mpofu 2023). In this article, I take a different approach by analysing the role of Indigenous language stylistics on peripheral news outlets.

The article delves into the convergence of stylistics in Indigenous languages and alternative journalism, specifically in the realm of peripheral journalism in Zimbabwe. It offers a distinctive perspective on the utilisation and relevance of stylistics in African language media as it drifts away from existing research that predominantly centers on Indigenous language newspapers. I analyse the role of Indigenous language stylistics on non-mainstream or peripheral news outlets *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare26*, mainly publishing in Shona language. The *iHarare.com* page has 67 400 followers while the *Hatirare263* page has 30 100, and these numbers keep on increasing. I grapple with the following questions: What are the stylistic devices used by content creators in Indigenous

language on non-mainstream platforms and why do they employ such devices? I further explore the discourses reinforced by Indigenous language stylistics.

Stylistics refers to the study of text, unpacking distinctive styles of literary genres and writings (Owojecho, Emmanuel and Anthony 2016). Thus, the study of discursive text on non-mainstream platforms can reflect the Indigenous language of journalists and audiences (Jaffe 2009; Zelizer 1993). Discursive communities can produce text reflective of users' daily discourses (Mathe 2020, 2023; Mathe and Motsaathebe 2022). Several scholars have shown how media continually adjusts to accommodate the ever-changing language of the community (Jaffe 2009; Zelizer 1993). In this light, Indigenous language media, namely newspapers, are also abandoning the standard language by transmuting to eccentric code-switching, slang or colloquial language of readers' everyday discourses (Chan 2018; Mpofu 2023). Thus, the community's discursive text in Indigenous languages can be made manifest on social media through journalism (Nip 2006, 212–216). The term "platform" generally refers to digital spaces as public spheres for user deliberation on news websites or social media pages such as Facebook or Twitter, commentary forums and similar (Esau, Friess, and Eilders 2017; Mathe and Caldwell 2017; Mathe and Motsaathebe 2022), and non-mainstream platforms serve as journalism entities (Allam and Dhunny 2019; Sunstein 2018). I interpret non-mainstream Facebook news pages as peripheral news outlets.

Non-mainstream/peripheral journalism

The literature has shown that non-traditional actors are becoming more active on digital platforms, creating news content, competing with and complementing legacy media (Cheruiyot et al. 2021; Cheruiyot, Baack, and Ferrer-Conill 2019; Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018). The disruptive nature of these non-traditional actors challenges the "boundary work" of "mainstream" journalism. Legacy media such as print, radio and television has always been considered "mainstream" mass media, although the margins of mainstream and non-mainstream remain contested. The contestation of what is mainstream and non-mainstream prompts the debate on "boundary work" of what journalism should be. In this article, I use the terms peripheral and non-mainstream interchangeably to refer to non-traditional news outlets manifesting the new stylistics in news-making. Scholars discuss the disruption of traditional journalism boundaries (Cheruiyot, Baack, and Ferrer-Conill 2019; Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018), noting that non-traditional actors are redefining and introducing new journalism boundaries by their own style of news reporting (Mabweazara and Mare 2021; Mutsvairo and Salgado 2022). The non-traditional actors continue to transgress and supplant traditional boundaries of legacy journalism practice, resulting in scholarly enquiry on what journalism is and what it should be (Cheruiyot, Baack, and Ferrer-Conill 2019; Eldridge 2019).

These non-traditional or peripheral actors, such as citizen journalists and bloggers, are sometimes considered interlopers (Cheruiyot et al. 2021; Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018); they create content on their own social media pages, challenging the standard, traditional way of news reporting with new discursive styles of news production. Thus, the objective reporting of "standard journalism" practice (Novo 2011, 34; Yarmohammadi 2010) has been disrupted by discursive participatory variants of journalisms. It is, therefore, necessary to interrogate the discourse stylistics of these peripheral or non-mainstream

journalism practices, especially in digital spaces. While many studies discuss the disruptive nature of peripheral journalism (Bosch, Wasserman, and Chuma 2018; Cheruiyot et al. 2021; Mutsaairo and Salgado 2022), little has been done to investigate the discourse stylistics of peripheral news outlets in Indigenous languages.

Some scholars dismiss non-mainstream news as “amateurish”, “phony” and a “bad imitator” of mainstream journalism (Goldstein and Rotich 2008; Siegel 2008). Siegel (2008) views the journalistic practice of citizen journalists as social media rumours, lies and fabrications promoting tabloidisation. On the other hand, non-mainstream/peripheral news outlets are considered complementary to legacy media although they involve a form of tabloidisation that is slippery in nature (Cheruiyot et al. 2021; Mabweazara and Mare 2021; Sparks 2000). Uribe and Gunter (2004, 390) posit that tabloid reflects a “range, form and style” of text signified by entertainment and other soft news items. Perhaps the first feature of tabloid is that there is more soft news based on sensationalism, private issues and personalisation, as opposite to hard news (Fiske 1992; Garcia 2005; Machin and Papatheoderou 2002; Norris 2000; Örnebring and Jönsson 2004; Sparks 2000). Tabloid offers a form of visual presentations such as colourful photographs, graphics and headlines, while style refers to the way of writing such as a “personalised angle of coverage” (Uribe and Gunter 2004, 390). According to Uribe and Gunter (2004, 390), the personal angle of coverage has a conversational tone that mirrors the “colloquial language of readers”. Colloquial language refers to informal language such as street lingo or slang. Since peripheral journalisms have a form of audience engagement particularly on social media, it is significant to analyse how non-traditional actors exploit language and stylistics in their news-making.

Language and stylistics in journalism

Most studies that analyse the role of language in journalism focus on English news outlets. As a colonial language, English can be understood by the literate. In Zimbabwe, English as a language dominates in mainstream print media, namely the privately owned and state owned newspapers *NewsDay*, *Daily News*, *The Standard*, *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, and popular online news outfits such as NewZimbabwe.com, ZimLive and others. Likewise, there have been several studies on stylistics in English language media (Carpenter and Sosale 2019; Ghassemi and Hemmatgosha 2019; Jenkins and Tandoc 2017; Novo 2011; Yarmohammadi 2010; Zelizer 2012). Analysing Indonesia’s largest English language news outlet, Carpenter and Sosale (2019) note that English as dominant foreign language permeates the stories of the *Jakarta Post*. Ghassemi and Hemmatgosha (2019) argue that media often manipulate public opinion through the use of different vocabularies. There is a scholarly consensus that language in the media reflects the discursive text of journalists and audience (Gee 2008; Jaffe 2009; Zelizer 1993).

Usually, the linguistic forms in journalistic writing tactfully or stylistically form the language of media (Chan 2018; Ghassemi and Hemmatgosha 2019). However, the well-known writing style of the press as “standard journalism” (Yarmohammadi 2010; Novo 2011, 34) has been disrupted by peripheral journalisms. Giving an example of an English-American pattern of writing and the French culture, Ghassemi and Hemmatgosha (2019) show that the former uses descriptive introductions with discussion-based style, unlike the latter which exploits a “writing with no introduction” method. However,

non-traditional actors' discursive strategies now challenge the authority of mainstream news outlets through audience interaction (Jenkins and Tandoc 2017; Zelizer 2012). In another audience engagement study, Hanusch and Tandoc (2019) confirm that audiences, through online commentary forums, influence journalists' reporting styles. Studying how audiences engage on the NewZimbabwe.com news outlet, Mathe and Caldwell (2017) note that news-making on the online portal is enhanced by audience engagement. In their study of *uMthunywa* newspaper, Mabweazara and Strelitz (2010) argue that the tabloid newspapers provide marginalised readers with an alternative public sphere to discuss socio-political and economic realities. Journalisms on alternative media are also considered "embedded within the everyday lives of citizens and media content is both driven and produced by those people" (Atton 2009, 267). The exploitation of tabloidisation and sensationalism in peripheral journalisms is often likened to the use of satire and memes as communicative styles through interactive public commentary forums (Mathe 2023; Mathe and Motsaathebe 2024a; Msimanga, Tshuma, and Ndlovu 2021). Mpofo (2023) argues that the Indigenous language newspaper *Kwayedza* is no longer using the standard language but has adopted an eccentric style of writing through code-mixing which resonates with readers' everyday discourses. Code mixing refers to language deviation and hybridisation opposite to the well-known standard writing (Chan 2018), while satire incorporates laughter, metaphors and elements of humour such as memes. A meme is a video, text or image stereotypically humorous in nature. Some scholars view the use of satire online as a strategy to evade authoritarianism (Mathe 2023; Matsilele 2019). This means the audience directly or indirectly shapes the stylistics of the interpretative community (Jenkins and Tandoc 2017).

Moreover, language of the media is an important discursive element in the newsroom or media's interpretative community (Zelizer 1993). The opinions and beliefs in the news story can reflect the ideological processes of the journalists, government, media houses and audiences (Gee 2008). Zelizer (2012, 181) argues that the interpretative community "retains a collective and authoritative voice" in different journalism contexts. Using the interpretative community theory, Zelizer (1993, 402) argues that the language of the media contributes to the discourses that journalists use to "make their professional lives meaningful and unite themselves". Language can convey shared beliefs that inform how people identify themselves with certain ideologies, identities and stances (Jaffe 2009). Through the shared collective beliefs, language "underpin[s] not only linguistic form and use, but also the very notion of the person and the social group" (Woolard 1998, 3). Thus, the linguistic collective interpretations form discourses that "provide a basis for shared values, practices, and ideologies of journalism" (Carpenter and Sosale 2019, 284). Such discourses are described as "a marker of how journalists see themselves as journalists" (Zelizer 1993, 28) to reinforce or legitimise their roles as they "tell society its news" (Robinson and DeShano 2011, 964). This article, therefore, navigates the stylistics of discursive Indigenous language platforms on Facebook. The article further uses discourse-stylistics to examine the discourses on *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263's* Facebook pages.

Discourse stylistics

Discourse and stylistics are slightly different linguistic disciplines which, nonetheless, share some inseparable methods or tools of analysis. The concept of discourse is broad

and embodies stylistics as method and theory to linguistic studies. In fact, discourse-stylistics is an innovative approach that combines discourse and stylistics methods or tools for textual analysis (Owojecho, Emmanuel and Anthony 2016, 2–4). The concept of discourse in practice incorporates some stylistic analytical methods (Aziz and Gheni 2023, 549). In other words, discourse focuses on what is communicated, while stylistics examines how it is communicated (Yeibo 2011, 197). In this article, I use discourse-stylistics to investigate how peripheral news outlets *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* disseminate content in Indigenous languages, unpacking the discourse within the given linguistic framework of discursive text.

Discourse-stylistics became popular in the 1990s, having been introduced in 1989 through Cater and Simpson's work beyond discourse-orientated approaches, feminist and sociolinguistics approaches. Today discourse-stylistics is often used to illuminate literary works and expose discourses that need to be explained within them (Hoey 2005, 120). Simpson and Hall (2002, 136) note that "discourse stylistics views literary texts as instances of naturally occurring language use in a social context, where discourse analysis should reveal as much about the contexts as about the text". Stylistics analysis is more interested in the "originality of the text" while discourse analysis focuses on "demonstrating how a text analysed is not unique" (Aziz and Gheni 2023, 549). In many instances, stylistics has been used as an instrument in discourse. (Emmanuel and Anthony 2016).

Stylisticians treat the language of texts as "axiomatic" or reflective of the unified linguistic construct of text to identify the bases of meanings (Halliday and Hasan 1976). Stylistics can be used to explore issues of language, ideation and representation through the study of language patterns and discourse peculiarities within the contextual linguistic framework (Anasiudu 2020). Stylistics communicate "diverse meanings to their readers or viewers" within a context because "knowledge and experience of the world are words and meanings mediated by language" (Anasiudu 2020, 3). Since language is the central focus of stylistic analysis, attention is given to "levels of language: lexis, grammar, semantics, phonology, the sound patterns and graphology" (Anasiudu 2020, 2). Using a functionalist approach, Halliday and Hasan (1976) refer to cohesive devices to explain that no text stands alone. By cohesive devices Halliday and Hasan (1976) refer to grammatical devices reflecting elements of reference, ellipsis, lexical devices (reiteration and collocation), substitution and conjunction (Aziz and Gheni 2023; Halliday 2003, 1978; Halliday and Matthiessen 2006, 2014).

Discourse-stylistics also exploits figures of speech, focusing particularly on the significance of personification, simile, metaphor, symbol, synecdoche and paradox (Perrine 1969). A synecdoche "is a figure of speech in which a whole is represented or typified by one of its parts" (Baysha and Hallahan 2004, 235) and creates wordplay (Al-Qudsy 2016, 13). The figures of speech are reflective of language in "varied discourse modes that imbricate main currents, trends, literary ideals and ideological thrusts prevalent in every society and age" (Anasiudu 2020, 1). In a nutshell, discourse-stylistics can be implemented through cohesive devices and figures of speech (Wales 2014, 136; see also Kamalu and Tamunobelema 2015). In this article, I focus on cohesive devices, figures of speech and similar to unpack news disseminated on *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* as peripheral news outlets. I use the stylistic devices to explain the relevance of social media news in relation to contextual discourse and explore the originality of text and how messages are communicated.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative methodological triangulation based on a qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews with administrators of the *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* Facebook pages. I followed *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* non-mainstream news outlets that publish in Shona language through a Facebook researcher's account. There are many non-mainstream platforms or Facebook pages within the Zimbabwean discursive community—*ZimboLive*, *Zimbabwe Reports*, *Zimceleb* just to mention a few. *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* were purposively selected on the basis of their visibility or popularity via the algorithm on the researcher's newsfeed. I purposively chose Shona language platforms because Shona is widely spoken in Zimbabwe and commands social media visibility (Mathe and Motsaathebe 2024c). From the perspective of political economy of Indigenous language media, languages spoken by majorities thrive easily on social media due to audience social capital (Mathe and Motssathebe 2023a, 2023b; Ndlovu 2011). However, this study does not aim to generalise findings from an analysis of *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* platforms.

Data collection from the *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* Facebook platforms occurred between 1 March and 31 May 2023. This means the analysed Facebook posts used in this article were collected within the given timeframe. I consider the period of data collection representative of peripheral journalism content from non-mainstream platforms. I essentially observed Indigenous language discursive text and collected altogether more than 400 Facebook posts from the *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* timelines. I discuss text from a discourse-stylistics perspective and use some of the Facebook posts as illustrations. I used discourse-stylistics as a method and theory to analyse text, particularly focusing on levels of language such as lexis, semantics, grammar, sound patterns, phonology, and graphology. The data analysis also highlights the cohesive devices and figures of speech in terms of personalisation, metaphor, simile, symbol, synecdoche and paradox in discourse-stylistics. Ethically, I exercised self-censorship by screening off sensitive pictorial graphs such as images including children. It is noteworthy that most of the top news discussed on *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare262* was already in the public domain.

Follow-up interviews with the administrators of *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* were then conducted after a qualitative content analysis. The interviews occurred between 31 May and 15 June 2023. I contacted the *iHarare.com* administrator through a WhatsApp contact posted on their Facebook profile and contacted the *Hatirare263* administrator through a WhatsApp contact collected from Facebook Messenger. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) as informed by a qualitative content analysis. Perspectives from the interviews were transcribed and thematically presented in the findings. The article does not reveal the identities of the administrators for the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality.

Findings

As mentioned, this article focuses on the stylistic devices used by content creators on *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* and why they were used. The article further explores the contextual discourse communicated through Indigenous language stylistics. The article

analyses stylistic devices and divides them into three sections: “street” language in summative captions, code mixing and switching, and satire in colloquial language.

“Street” lingo in summative captions

From the qualitative content analysis, this article notes that there was frequent use of summative captions in Shona language on both the *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* Facebook pages. The writers used summative captions to succinctly mirror a story. The discursive tone in the captions had a form of inflammatory continuity provoking audience reaction. Figure 1 shows a caption in (Shona language) about a music artist called Winky D whose show was disrupted by police because he sang an anti-government song. A cohesive device was exploited: “tichiti minamoto kuGaffa”, meaning we are praying for the “Gaffa”, with a few emojis conveying some consolation. “Gaffer” means a person in charge but it was expressed as “Gaffa” in colloquial Shona language. A follow-up interview with the administrators revealed that the use of street lingo appeals to the context of the reader:

Shona ghetto language, like “Amapedza masports” or “Gaffa”, create a sense of familiarity and relatability with our audience. The language resonates with many Zimbabweans who use it in their everyday lives, thus our content has to be more authentic and reflective of community voice.



Figure 1. Caption in Shona with a photograph of the artist. Source: *iHarare.com* (webcam screenshot).

the appeal of the mother language to Africans is a grossly underrated superpower. It is better to use the modern colloquial lingo that the reader can easily identify with which, on the other hand, increase traction and traffic towards the website or platform.

This article argues that the summative captions in Indigenous language acted as a marker; as shown by Zelizer (1993, 28), interpretative community discourses are “a marker of how journalists see themselves as journalists”. The article finds that *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* used street lingo known as ghetto language in Zimbabwe to tell stories of their society. The administrator of *Hatirare263* confirmed that the street lingo “identifies with the majority and attracts good traffic and circumventing the algorithm dominated by English”.

Other stylistic devices used were reflected in the story of Bona Mugabe (the daughter of the former president, Robert Mugabe) who divorced her husband. Figure 2 reflects the lingo “Hapana munyama unodarika apa kurambwa nemukadzi akanaka uye ane tsika nemari” (no badluck equal to this one that a man should be divorced by such a beautiful woman with money and manners). Humour was exploited in the text. A “personalised angle of coverage” was somewhat tabloid (Uribe and Gunter 2004, 390).

Content on *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* platforms was largely entertainment news and celebrity news and less hard news. Attached to images, the summative captions had satirical visual or axiomatic text. On the other hand, the hard news stories reflected a hard tone often posted in a Facebook marker. Soft news in street language seemed to be

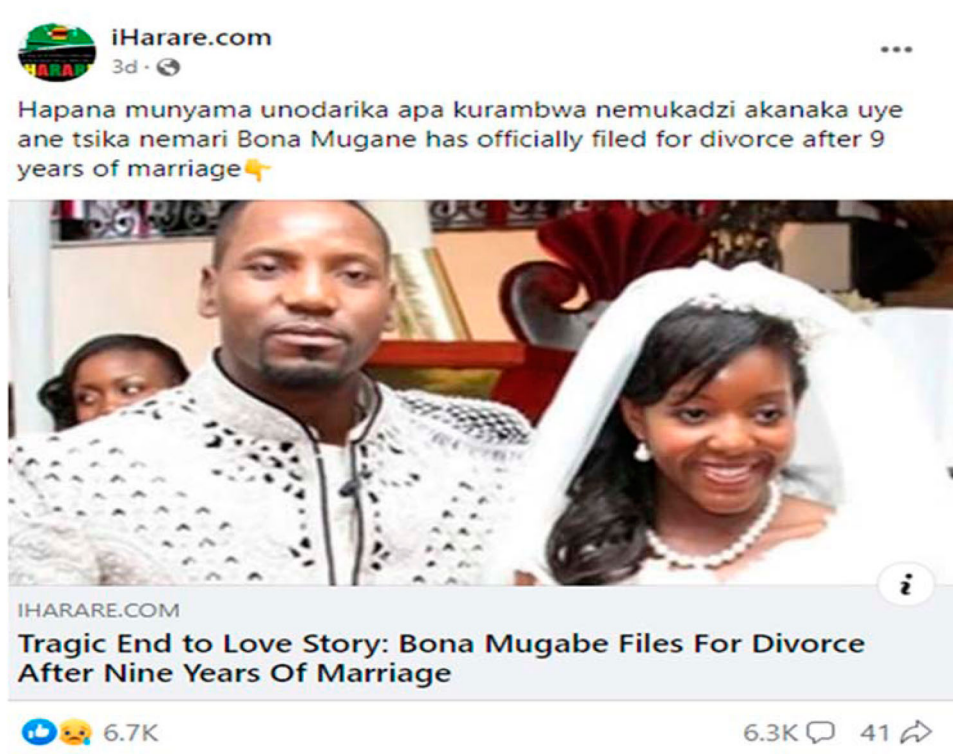


Figure 2. Bona Mugabe files for divorce. Source: *iHarare.com* (webcam screenshot).

audience attractive and sensationalised on private and personal stories, another form of tabloid (Fiske 1992; Garcia 2005; Machin and Papatheoderou 2002; Norris 2000; Örnebring and Jönsson 2004; Sparks 2000). The administrator of the *Hatirare263* page noted that “It is easier to get carried away by likes which can make the platform a scandal-based tabloid and relegate important less ‘likeable’ content”.

This poses a challenge to non-mainstream platforms as scandal-based tabloid stories seem to attract more audience reaction somehow, making their journalism tabloid. However, Mabweazara and Strelitz (2010, 113) have shown that tabloidisation and sensationalism give readers the opportunity “to articulate issues pertinent to their lived social, political, and economic realities”.

Figure 3 shows another scenario of laughter in summative Indigenous language caption. It was a story of the National Arts Merit Awards (NAMA) where artists attended in their best clothing. The writer used the street language “sorry kuita kunge takukudzoserai shure, tauyawo nechi late entry” (sorry for taking you back we have come with the late entry at Nama Awards). The writer used a cohesive device in the plural “tauyawo” which means “we have come”, inviting the reader to imagine the NAMA event and the dressing up by an artist in Figure 3.

The stylistic aspect of the language presents an interesting concept in peripheral journalism, code-switching: “nechi” (Shona language) and “entry” (English) reverberate sound patterns of code-mixing relevant to the context of the reader, as defined by



Figure 3. National Arts Merit Awards (NAMA) . Source: *iHarare.com* (webcam screenshot).

Chan (2018) who stated that code mixing reflects the hybridisation of language writing opposite to “standard journalism”.

Code-mixing and switching (Shona and English)

The code mixing and switching on the *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* was between two languages, Shona and English. *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* used Shona language in summative captions attached to news images and website links or YouTube links mostly in English, as shown in the figures. Shona language was used for strategic captioning while English was used in the full story through a website link or YouTube link. *iHarare.com* used website links while *Hatirare263* used YouTube links. In a follow-up interview, one of the page editors noted that

we revert to English as a default medium communication to be inclusive as we know that page followers are not just Shona speaking or Harare domiciled. Excessive use of Shona captions may seem to alienate non-Shona speakers.

[M]any of our articles are sent through from citizens and then we follow up and make proper articles for our website and YouTube channel.

In other words, the code-switching between the Indigenous language and English on digital forums works as an art of convergence connecting summative captions, images, website links and YouTube links to the full story. This article argues that the code-mixing and switching resonates with the readers’ sociolinguistics; as shown by Mpofu (2023), journalists have reverted to an eccentric style of writing, fitting in with the everyday discourses of the readers. In other words, non-mainstream platforms function as a discursive community, reflecting relevant discourses on social news ranging from sports to crime, celebrities, entertainment and politics. This means peripheral discourses are produced by citizens themselves as they directly or indirectly shape the news-making through audience engagement (Jenkins and Tandoc 2017).

Figure 4 tells a story of socialite whose case was in court for illicit money deals and her bank statement was revealed as proof of crime. The summative caption reads “tadzifambira nyaya dzacho ...” (we have verified this issue). There is a language pattern of reference to citizens’ curiosity about the issue as a follow-up to a trending story in the media. Written in a colloquial language, “tadzifambira nyaya dzacho ... (we have verified this issue)” shows some elements of reference, linking the bank statement as proof of a crime.

Following up on the use of such stylistic colloquial Shona captions and the code-switching in English website links, the administrator of *Hatirare263* noted that

Shona driven captions have proven to draw more traffic than English ones. The whole idea of social mediums is a challenge to the mainstream media. It is a natural disruptor. Mainstream media no longer has monopoly on news, setting narratives or access to public audiences.

it is easier to catch the attention of traffic by using their mother language. But the overriding theme in our case is to circumvent the Facebook algorithm sensitivities.

In others, the editors as citizen journalists believed that they set the narratives through exploitation of readers’ everyday language. The code-mixing between unconventional



Figure 4. Discussion of comedian Mai TT's bank statement. Source: *iHarare.com* (webcam screenshot).

Shona language and English captures reader's everyday language, as noted in the submission from one of the administrators:

[The] Facebook page serves as a platform for journalism, enabling individuals to share news, opinions, and stories from their communities. We provide a space for ordinary citizens to contribute to public discourse, shed light on local events, social issues, and political developments that might not receive adequate coverage from mainstream media outlets.

Another argument is that the code-mixing and switching communicates the socio-cultural and economic context of the reader. Anasiudu (2020) has shown that language within a text represents the knowledge and experience of the world while communicating the diverse meanings within the context of readers and also relaying the ideological processes of the journalists and audiences (Gee 2008; Zelizer 2012). Figure 5, for instance gives a scenario of public transport in the country, portraying taxi drivers' socio-cultural relations. The caption reads "kuchemwa kwaTaxi driver muHarare, hamusati mambozviona zvakadai" (you surely have not experienced how taxi drivers mourn their deceased) and is but a metaphor reflecting the hard work and the struggles of taxi drivers in a third world country. The graphics attached to the text also exhibit the environmental context or socio-economic conditions.

Thus, code-switching and mixing of languages not only echoes the readers' language, as shown by Mpofu (2023), but also reiterates the socio-cultural discourses of the communicated language within a specific environmental context. Street language in Zimbabwe relates more with the marginalised people like taxi drivers.



Figure 5. Taxi drivers mourn their deceased colleagues. Source: *Hatirare263* (webcam screenshot).

Satirical tone and use of memes

It is evident in the findings that summative captions were posted with a satirical tone. The dressing of an artist in [Figure 3](#), the story of taxi drivers in [Figure 5](#) and the use of street language expose satire in play, affording the uniqueness of non-mainstream new platforms in news-making. The literature has shown that satire in peripheral journalism is always exploited to evade state censorship (Matsilele 2019; Mpofu 2021); this article argues that satire not only evades authoritarianism but also is used as a device to draw readers' attention. Perspectives from interviews recognised that

Memes as satire are modern way of packaging hitherto "hard-hitting content" into more digestible and less abrasive content to avoid unnecessary provocation of some readers' sensitivities.

[W]e reinforce community discourses by amplifying the concerns, experiences, and opinions of the local community through satire, fostering a sense of belonging and unity among our audience with a sense of humour.

The *iHarare.com* administrator noted that sometimes audience participation on the platform's commentary forum influence content creation. The gossip from the readers' comments usually forms the interpretative community of peripheral journalism, producing satiric phrases like "amapedza sports" (it is done) and "vamwe vanhu vari rough" (some people are bad); as shown by Jenkins and Tandoc (2017), everyday audience discourses are fundamental. The *iHarare.com* editor noted that "audience reactions, including likes and comments, play a significant role in inspiring more stories".



Figure 6. E-creator meme. Source: *Hatirare263* (webcam screenshot).

Although featuring petty stories which could be viewed as amateurish (Siegel 2008), this article confirms that peripheral journalism is “embedded within the everyday lives of citizens and media content is both driven and produced by those people” (Atton 2009, 267). The administrator of *iHarare.com* argued that their non-mainstream journalism also offers marginalised voices the opportunity to make news as they cover stories usually overlooked or underrepresented by media, such as gossip and social affairs. For example, Figure 6 shows a meme about a Chinese national alleged to have defrauded unsuspecting members of the public of more than US\$1 million through a ponzi scheme called E-Creator. Figure 6 is a meme written “Muridzi we E-creator right now” (“the owner of E-creator right now”) showing an image of a man running away from crime.

Another form of satire is illustrated in Figure 7, which communicates a violent political incident but in a satiric tone. The story notes that the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) closed the public market called Mbare. The writer used the common Indigenous term “musangano” to refer to the political regime, ZANU–PF. Politically, here the author uses a synecdoche. The whole picture of ZANU–PF using force is not new in Zimbabwe’s political discourse.

The administrator of the *Hatirare263* platform noted that “satire can attract more audience reactions as it taps into shared experiences and vernacular expressions, generating a stronger response and engagement”. More comments were:

More serious content can be delivered as a joke in the form of a meme or be put out in a satirical clothing to make it more widely acceptable by the audience while also sublimely delivering the intended message at its core.

We have noticed that our audience loves such kind of style. It also increases engagement on posts.

On the other hand, non-mainstream platforms communicate contextual discourses. For example, Figure 8 satirically talks of electricity cuts in the country. Although the text



Figure 7. Ridiculing Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). Source: *Hatirare263* (webcam screenshot).

concerns socio-economic challenges, the stylistics behind the message invites readership to view an already known Zimbabwean problem of electricity shortages. Aziz and Gheni (2023, 549) have shown that a stylistician is interested in the “originality of the text” while discourse analysis demonstrates why a “text analysed is not unique”. Figure 8 reads “magetsi anogona kunetsa zvekutodaro” (can electricity be a problem like this), which is but a rhetorical question urging the reader to rethink the known situation of electricity crisis, and at the same time inviting the reader to the scene of water shortages at the Kariba dam, an important national treasure for hydroelectricity.

Feedback from the interviews reveals that the content on non-mainstream news platforms resonates with the interests of the audience. The editor of *iHarare.com* argued that “these are the stories that social media users enjoy and therefore we are here to serve them”, confirming Zelizer’s (1993, 28) perspective that interpretative community discourses are “a marker of how journalists see themselves as journalists” and legitimise their role as journalists who tell society its news (Robinson and DeShano 2011).

Discussion and conclusion

This study answered the following questions: What are the stylistic devices used by content creators in Indigenous language non-mainstream news outlets, and why do they employ such devices? It further explored the discourses reinforced by language stylistics as it unpacked the stylistics used on non-mainstream or peripheral journalism platforms, namely street lingo in summative captions, code-mixing and switching between Shona and English, and use of satire. The findings of the study reflect key



Figure 8. Kariba South Gorge. Source: *Hatirare 263* (webcam screenshot).

issues such as the ever-changing lingo and the use of satire in the form of meme, sensationalism and tabloidisation. The ever-changing lingo is reflected in the code-switching and colloquial language or street language that employs English and Shona while satire is in the form of sensationalism or tabloid journalism. Similar to this study are the findings of Mpfu's (2023) study of stylistics in *Kwayedza* newspaper, which employs eccentric language to keep its readers engaged. This article argues that non-traditional actors, via peripheral news outlets, engage readers through their daily discourses.

The findings of the study show that the use of colloquial language and the conversational tone on Indigenous language platforms resonate with the discursive community's everyday social culture. The street lingo in Shona reflects a context of hybrid or ever-changing indigeneity, as shown; that language represents the knowledge and experience of the community within the context of readers and also relays the ideological processes of the journalists and audiences (Zelizer 2012). What advantages online non-mainstream journalism platforms is their direct engagement with the audiences who directly or indirectly influence the language of the media. The challenge now and then is that scandal-based stories tend to attract more audience reaction, making platforms look somewhat tabloid. Tabloid or sensational journalism online seems to frequently be driven by satire in the form of memes, metaphor and other satirical items. Thus, peripheral journalism is fluid on online platforms, reactive to audiences.

The code-switching and mixing, on the other hand, not only echo the readers' language, as shown by Mpfu (2023), in the Indigenous language newspaper but also reflect the socio-cultural discourses within a specific environmental context of citizens.

Street language in Zimbabwe is related more to the marginalised people like taxi drivers. Thus, the hallmark of peripheral journalism is its participatory nature and the socio-cultural influence of the citizens themselves. This means non-mainstream journalism can be reflective of contextual discourses since stories are not presented outside the readers' scope of discursive participation. In other words, the way stories are presented reflects a discursive satirical tone in summative Indigenous language captions, arousing readers to engage or discuss the topic within the interface of the Facebook commentary forum. The use of satire on *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263* not only evades authoritarianism (Mathe 2023; Matsilele 2019; Mpofu 2021) but also spices content to attract readers' attention. As argued by the editors of *iHarare.com* and *Hatirare263*, such trends of peripheral journalism disrupt mainstream journalism (Jenkins and Tandoc 2017; Zelizer 2012).

In a nutshell, I argue that digital platforms afford content creators flexible opportunities to exploit language stylistics as non-traditional actors. However, stylistics in news production may be context based. This study is limited to the non-mainstream Indigenous language platforms in the context of peripheral journalism in Zimbabwe. Future studies should continue to explore the ever-changing journalism stylistics in the field of journalism. It is worth pondering whether this evolving language dynamic within stylistics represents a subtle form of self-censorship (evading algorithms and authoritarianism) practised not only in Zimbabwe but in Africa as a whole.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix

- (a) Why do you adopt Shona language on your social media pages in captions or short descriptions of your stories?
- (b) How effective are stylistics devices in indigenous language such as starting a story with an introduction?
- (c) Why do u use Shona ghetto language on social media and in what way is it effective in attracting more audience reaction?
- (d) What role does you social media pages play in journalism?
- (e) Does the audience reaction inspire your stories?
- (f) Why do you satire and memes and what is the effect?
- (g) Do you think you challenge the mainstream journalism or do you reinforce community discourses?