

A STUDY OF THE SEMANTIC IMPLICATIONS OF SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER HEADLINES ON HOMICIDES

Adama, Eleojo Hannatu

*Department of English and Literary Studies,
Faculty of Arts and Humanities,
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba.
E-MAIL: ele4able@gmail.com
08071644207*

&

Muhammed Badar Salihu Jibrin, PhD

*Department of English and Literary Studies,
Faculty of Arts and Humanities,
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba.
E-MAIL: jibrinmbs@ksu.edu.ng
08062904629*

Abstract

This paper examines the semantic implication of media reports on homicide in Nigeria using three Nigerian newspapers. The study premises on a combination of the Theta Theory by Noam Chomsky which tries to analyse a text using some parameters like agent, patient, location and instrument and The Critical Discourse Analysis which explores some elements of media discourse, paying attention to the semantic implication of some reoccurring lexical items. The data for the study were gathered from the homicidal headlines of three Nigerian newspapers namely; Vanguard Newspapers, Punch Newspapers, and The Nation Newspaper. A total of fifteen headlines were analyzed from the aforementioned newspapers. The findings show that every headline is made up of at least an agent (s), patient and location. The way in which the agent, patient, location and also some reoccurring lexical items are presented in the headlines of homicides in Nigerian newspapers all have certain semantic implications such as class expression, semantic ambiguity and semantic profiling. For instance, in stating the agents and patients of homicides in Nigeria, the writers of the headlines use their occupation. Instead of their name. E.g. "Labourer kills businessman." This implies that a poorman kills a rich man. There are so many other meanings that can be read in to such a headline as above. Eg. It might be the rich business man wanted to oppress the poor labourer, etc. The study concludes that the semantic implication of newspaper headlines on homicides in Nigeria, emanates from the way the reporter captures the agents and patients; the use of certain registers, semantic ambiguity and semantic profiling. In the end, it is recommended that there is need for clarity in the captions of newspaper headlines to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation and also, readers of Nigerian newspapers are advised to read the entire news before drawing conclusion. Many readers of Nigerian news do not

bother reading the body of the news, they rely on the headlines alone and this is most times misleading.

Keywords: Homicide, Semantics, Newspapers and Headlines.

Introduction

This paper is primarily concerned with the semantic implication of selected Nigerian newspapers' headlines on homicide. It investigates the choices of linguistic strategies in selected homicidal headlines in three Nigerian national dailies (*Vanguard*, *Punch* and *The Nation*) and the impacts of the writers' peculiar linguistic patterns on the receptive psyche of the reader. According to Halliday, While reporting an event, different news writers employ different lexis, forms and grammatical structures, so they depict variant worldviews of the same happening because when people use language, they have to select from the options available in the system – they have to make lexical, grammatical and sequencing choices in order to say what they want(14).

Semantically, the headline can be interpreted based on its literal meaning or based on the inferences that readers draw upon depending on their cognitive knowledge. In order to demonstrate the meaning in its full efficiency, reporters encode in the headlines the highlights or main ideas of news reports and readers are left with the cognitive task of demystifying the meaning potentials of the linguistic choices in the headlines. Kress says that language is given certain linguistic terms, like lexis, phrases and sentences by the one who uses it; so, language never appears by itself, the form in which it appears...is always given to it, and all this is done in a persuasive way (85). The newspapers use language very skillfully. They employ it to do their business by controlling the reader so that they may buy their product and help them earn profit. Newspapers groups do market research and are well aware of the profile of their readership Reah, cited in (Abass and Talaat 11). The language of the news influences and shapes their readers' perception.

Reports of *Homicide* are common trends of insecurity permeating most of today's human societies and Nigeria is no exception. In this study, selected reportage of homicide in three Nigerian newspapers – *The Vanguard Newspaper*, *The Punch Newspaper*, and *The Nation Newspaper* – were linguistically investigated with a view to demonstrating their negative implications on the Nigerian audience. Established on the principles of the theta theory and the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis, the researcher embarked on a semantic study of various lexical patterns of fifteen selected newspapers' headlines and simultaneously demonstrating, via in-depth analysis, their semantic implications on the receiving end.

Headline according Ungerer, describes the essence of complicated news story in a few words. It informs quickly and accurately and arouses the reader's curiosity

(48). Van Dijk opines that News headlines are particularly important to the way readers comprehend a news text; they are markers that orient attention, perception, and the reading process (88). Headlines depict the unity of discourse as a source of information; and the readers with their own beliefs and ideas generally adopt the suggested media definitions of how important and capacious the published information about an event is. Kress argues that the defined statements not only express but also organizes for a definite ideological purpose (99). Newspaper headlines act as a forerunner to news reports in the sense that, headlines expose the social, cultural, and national representations of plethora of homicidal cases in a country or of a nation. More often, headlines are considered by the audience more essential than the news articles. Their humongous impact is likely to be more upon the readers due to certain linguistic features which make them memorable and effective.

Olugbenga stresses that journalists have special methods of using words in captioning headlines so as to capture the interest of the readers, or to exhibit the editorial policy of the media outfit they represent. Newspaper reporters tactfully use words either to uphold the policy direction of their employers or to skillfully use lexical items to project an ideology, to promote an idea, and either explicitly or implicitly to convince the unsuspecting masses to accept their garnished thought (22).

Abochol and Adegboye assert that ‘the interpretation of the influences of mass media depends on the meanings the people hold for various words as strongly influenced by their exposure to the content of the media’ (215). Those meanings in turn, shape their understandings of the actions and situations in which they have to cope with in the real world. Arguably, it can be deduced that what is usually reported in the media shapes people's perception of things or events in the real world. People get to know the magnitude or meanness of violent attacks through the reports of the media. These diverse interpretations require researchable attention and hence, form the basis upon which this study of semantic implications of media reports on homicide in Nigeria is situated.

A study of semantic implication affords the linguist the avenue to unravel the hidden meanings of words and sentences. A word or a sentence might mean more than what is revealed at the surface level. That means, news writers encode in words’ implicit meaning in the headlines which can best be studied through the semantic instruments of implicature or presupposition. It is this semantic implication of peculiar registers on homicidal headlines that the researchers unravel in this study.

It sufficed to emphatically say that to infer or deduce meaning from written and spoken utterances occupies a central place in human communication. The linguistic codes that are employed to pass across messages to the audience or the

general public ought to be carefully selected so as to curb misunderstanding and misinterpretation. When people are not properly informed about the happenings in the society, it will certainly affect their responses to such happenings. Words in some cases do not convey meanings expressly. They could breed ambiguity. It is this fact that gives semantics a primacy of place in language studies. Hence, the study is partly inspired by the need to investigate and analyse the meanings of words, phrases and sentences employed in newspapers' headlines of homicide cases in Nigeria so as to enhance the reader's understanding of the messages beyond literal senses.

Semantics: An Overview

Semantics is the study of meaning. Many scholars have put forward different definitions of semantics. According to Lyons "semantics is the study of meaning in language"(77). In the words of Saeed (97), semantics is 'the study of meaning communicated through language'. Lobner (22) defines the concept as the part of linguistics that is concerned with meaning. Frawley (19) is of the opinion that 'semantics is the study of literal, decontextualized grammatical meaning'. Kreider (38) holds that 'semantics is the study of how languages organise and express meanings'.

From the above definitions, it can be seen that there is no complete agreement of scholars on definition of semantics. For some, semantics concerns the study of meaning as communicated through language, while for some others, semantics studies all aspects of meaning and they have to add the label "linguistic" to arrive at a more precise definition. The word "meaning" is common to all the definitions. This distinction however is not generally given much importance and leaving aside special formulations, probably all authors would agree with Kraider's definition: 'semantics is the study of how languages organise and express meanings'. This then, leaves us with a second question: what do we understand by "meaning"? What is that "meaning" that is organized and expressed by languages?

Sometimes, we hear people say that a particular linguistic item (word or expression) has no meaning or have similar meaning with another or have different meanings, etc, (E.g. "the in man blue) as expression can be said to have no meaning while 'good' 'mad' and 'insane' can be said to be similar in meaning) but it is often not clear what sort of thing or entity that meaning really is. To define a particular word, we often end up using other words in that definition. For instance, 'boy' could be defined with the following semantic properties or features: (+ human), (+ male) and (+ young). One will still want to know the meaning of 'human', 'male' and 'young', so the quest for meaning continues without an end.

Another problem with meaning is that it has several functions and meanings. For instance, the following words or phrases can be used to refer to what something means: 'stands for', 'signifies', 'denotes', 'symbolises', 'means', 'implies', etc. Cherry

(57) (as cited in Omachonu, 2011) considers meaning as “a harlot among words...” (204). This means that meaning is not a constant phenomenon; it is amendable to series of variables. The meaning of an expression to the receiver of a message is the selection of a particular response which the hearer actually makes, but to the sender, it is the selection of a response in the receiver which the sender intends to achieve. Speaking on the problem of meaning as a concept, Cherry's study (as cited in Omachonu, 204) observes that:

... the meaning of an utterance is a descriptive phrase. Indeed, to speak of utterances and their meaning is almost to make a dualism like 'body' and 'soul', 'substance' and 'form'. The meaning and the utterance form a unit: a meaningful utterance. A meaning is not a label tied around the neck of a spoken word or phrase. It is more like the beauty of a complexion which lies altogether in the eye of its beholder (but changes with the light).

"Meaning" as used in the English language may therefore, have equivalence in some languages, while it may not have in some other languages. The meaning of 'meaning' or 'to mean' or any other word must be approximately the same not only in some contexts but in lilt contexts within other languages. If it is not possible, then attempting to provide any comprehensive semantic theory will be a futile enterprise.

There are, however, two popular ways in which the meanings of expressions can be conceived. They are the naturalist view of meaning and the conventionalist point of view. The naturalist view of meaning holds on the belief that the meaning of a word is the thing or entity that it represents in the physical world. This means that there is a connection between sound and meaning. The problem with this view is that there are quite a number of words in human language without a physical representation. Such words include 'love', 'sympathy', 'feeling', etc.

The second view of meaning is that of the conventionalists. Proponents of this view are of the opinion that the connection between sound and meaning is arbitrary and never direct. For every word, there is an associated concept. It is this concept which is formed in the mind of the users of the language that links the sounds associated with the word to the actual thing or entity represented by the word. There are also roles which words and expressions carry out in order to produce meaning. Akase quoted in (Omachonu, 2011) explains that:

There are role types that are found in human language. This is because the meaning of words in human language cannot be adequately explained. Consequently, the roles that these words play in sentences have been studied. These roles are known as semantic roles. For instance, in a simple sentence, the role describes the action, while the noun phrases describe the different semantic roles involved in the action.

The roles include: agent, force, patient, experiencer, instrument, benefactor or possessor, location, source, goal, object and maleficiary.

Newspapers and their Headlines

Newspaper is a series of printed paper consisting of the report of important event and advertisements, which are commonly published daily or weekly. The earliest publication of newspaper dates back to the 17th Century when it is used to be an information sheet written for businessman in England. In the present, most news is published online on website and some have even abandoned the old- fashioned way because publishing online is not only more practical but also easy to be accessed anywhere.

A number of most widely-known web-based newspapers are *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)* which is a government-run company. They usually cover news relating to sports results, important information and weather forecasts. Thus, one of the things that they have in common is that they are used to creating headlines in a likely similar style. According to Ehineni (14), “The headlines are often constructed to capture the interest of the readers since they determine whether people eventually read the stories in the newspaper”. While in another view, Tabula (15) defined that “the headlines’ primary goal is to articulate ideas by using as few words as possible without causing misleading and misinterpretation on the headlines’ semantics”.

Generally, the headlines of newspapers have basically been given two functions. The first is to summarize the article (story) in which it belongs or attached to Van Dijk (88). According to Bell (21) and, Nir (13), this function is performed either by being an abstract of the full article or by highlighting the main points of the article or story. In connection with this function, Dor (48) notes that headlines are designed to optimize the relevance of their stories for their readers.

The second function of the headlines is to attract the attention of the readers and to provoke them to read the article Bell (31), Nir (43). Research findings have revealed that readers realistically prefer headlines that are creative even if it makes the headline longer, more confusing or less informative Ifantidou (97). He further states that readers seem to value headlines for what they are, i.e. under- informative, creative etc.

Newspaper headlines have their own linguistic features. There are lexical, structural and stylistic characteristics of the discourse of newspaper headlines. Being thoroughly compressed, condensed and foregrounded in half-understood forms, newspaper headlines are generated and maintained as a source of information about the society in which the papers are being circulated. They create new frontiers of meanings with complex ambiguities. Very often, the fractured language and idiosyncratic vocabulary of English newspapers headlines challenge

the understanding of what they represent. This is what Fairclough (95) calls grammatical oddity. In dealing with newspaper headlines, readers are to be involved in seeking out and translating meaning.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is a combination of The Theta Theory propounded by Noam Chomsky in 1981 in "Lectures on Government and Binding" and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Fairclough and Wodak. The major principle of theta-theory is the theta-criterion. In Government and Binding theory, the theta criterion states that in any grammatical sentence, each argument must be assigned to one theta role and each theta role must be realized by some argument. Consequently, in a grammatical sentence, all predicates, meaning verbs, have a thematic structure. This means that thematic roles, or theta roles (θ -role), describe the relation between predicates and their arguments. As a result arguments stand in different semantic relationships with the verb.

The theta roles includes:

AGENT: the one who intentionally initiates the action expressed by the predicate.

PATIENT: the person or thing undergoing the action expressed by the predicate.

THEME: the person or thing moved by the action expressed by the predicate.

EXPERIENCER: the entity that experiences some (psychological) state expressed by the predicate.

BENEFECTIVE/BENEFICIARY: the entity that benefits from the action expressed by the predicate.

GOAL: the entity towards which the activity expressed by the predicate is directed.

SOURCE: the entity from which something is moved as a result of the activity expressed by the predicate.

LOCATION: the place in which the action or state expressed by the predicate is situated.

INSTRUMENT: Is a thing or entity with which an action is carried out. The instrument is usually an inanimate object.

Furthermore, there are roles which words and expressions carry out in order to produce meaning. Akase quoted in Omachonu, 11, explains that:

‘There are roles that are found in human language. This is because the meaning of words in human language cannot be adequately explained. Consequently, the roles that these words play sentences have been studied. These roles are known as semantic roles’.

Those roles are what have been described above and they will serve as guides in the analysis of the data for this research.

On the other hand, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Fairclough and Wodak (1995) is employed to describe, interpret, and explain the language and power. It lays its focus on discourse and society. Then discussing the discursive features to reveal the ideologies reflected in the headlines by using Fairclough's sociocultural approach that provides a three-dimensional framework for the analysis of text and discourse: (a) the linguistic description of the formal properties of the text; (b) the interpretation of the relationship between the discursive processes / interaction and the text, and finally, (c) the explanation of the relationship between discourse and social and cultural reality. Critical discourse analysis of headlines can contribute to uncovering ideologies hidden in the words chosen by media practitioners.

Methodology

Through a purposive random sampling technique, the researchers selected fifteen headlines from three newspapers namely: *the Punch*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard*. These papers were published between February 2022 and July 2023 and these papers formed the data and are excerpts from the newspaper headlines. The researchers analyse the Linguistic patterns and their semantic implications.

Data Analysis

Datum 1: labourer allegedly stabs business man to death in Onitsha market. (June, 27th 2023 Punch)

In the above datum, the agent (the entity responsible for the action) is denoted with 'labourer'. It means that the headline describes the occupation of the agent instead of mentioning the labourer's name. This does not state whether the agent is male or female.

In the above data also, the patient is a 'businessman'. A 'businessman' is the entity that is affected by the action of the agent. Instead of mentioning the names of the agent and patient, the writer of the newspaper uses their statuses. The semantic implication is that a lowly placed man killed a highly placed man. In other words, 'a nobody' killed 'a somebody'. This is a possible meaning which the reader can read into the headlines.

The word 'stabs' entails the instrument used in committing the act. It means that the writer of the newspaper is sure that the businessman was killed by the labourer with a knife or a sharp object.

Furthermore, in the headline, the adverb 'allegedly' is used for the labourer. This is a popular register in journalism borrowed from law. This implies that the agent (labourer) is presumed innocent until proven guilty of the crime by a court of law.

The location is also stated in the above headline and it has a semantic implication. The location is 'Onitsha market'. This connotes that the person killed was not a

local trader but a rich businessman because Onitsha market is known to be a place for importers and bigwigs in the business world.

Datum 2: Man chains, starves children to death in Ogun (April, 4th 2023 Punch)

Agent: man

Patient: children

Location: Ogun state

The agent 'man' implies that the perpetrator of the crime is a male adult. What the writer of the headline wants to emphasize is that the killer of the children is a male adult. The writer specifies that the agent 'starves' the children to death. This implies that the man is a cruel man. For the fact that he starved the children to death means that the crime was not just committed in a single day.

The location of the crime is Ogun state. In Newspapers, so many cases of homicide are recorded in Ogun state. The mention of Ogun state to many Nigerians implies 'the usual place'.

Datum 3: Abuja man kills colleague, buries corpse. (December, 31st 2022 Punch)

Agent: Abuja man

Patient: colleague

Location: Abuja

The agent of the headline is denoted as 'Abuja man'. This is semantically ambiguous because 'Abuja man' could mean 'a man from Abuja' or 'a man who is based in Abuja'. The patient is 'colleague'. This implies that agent and the patient worked in the same place, the use of colleague here amplifies the closeness which existed between the agent and the patient. One is expected to be friendly with his colleague but in this case, the reverse is the case. The writer of the headline adds that the agent went further to bury the remains of the patient. This implies that the man committed two crimes; killing his colleague and burying his body. Definitely, the way people would have reacted if the news read 'Abuja man killed his colleague' will be different from the way they react to the headline above. Burying his colleague after killing him heightens the level of his wickedness.

Datum 4: Enugu woman accuses husband of murdering their daughters, dumping bodies in deep freezers. (February, 14th 2022 Punch)

Agent: husband

Patient: children

From the headline, the writer of the Newspaper Headline tries to evade reporting the incident directly. The use of the word 'accuses' indicates that there are no evidences that the agent actually committed the homicide. From the tone of the headline, the writer wants the reader to see the accused as being presumed innocent until proven guilty by a court of law. The woman is the accuser and she is

alleging that her husband committed a crime. This sets up a conflict between the husband and the wife. The murder of the daughters evokes a sense of horror and disgust, and also raises questions about the husband's motive and mental state. Also, the use of 'Enugu woman' implies the location and the base of the accuser.

Datum 5: Enugu police arrest youth for alleged rape, murder of 16 year old. (June, 16th 2023 Vanguard)

Agent: youth

Patient: 16 year old

Location: Enugu

The agent of the headline is simply denoted as 'youth'. It is not clear whether the police arrested one youth or two youths. Also, it is not stated whether the people arrested are males or females. The writer of the headline assumed that the reader should know that when 'rape' is involved, then it must always be perpetrated by a male youth.

The patient is denoted with '16 year old'. Here, the writer implies that the patient was a helpless innocent victim. The register 'alleged' is used in the headline to imply that the arrested youth had not been declared guilty by a court of law.

Datum 6: Suspected herders murder labour party's ward chairman in Benue. (April, 23rd 2023 Vanguard)

Agent: Suspected herders

Patient: Labour party's ward chairman

Location: Benue.

The agent is stated to be 'suspected herders'. This implies that those who committed the crime had not been caught. It is just a speculation that herders committed the murder. This is based on the fact that herders have been committing similar crime in Benue and so most of the killings are attributed to them.

The patient is denoted as 'Labour party ward chairman'. This implies that the attack was not just on an individual but on an entire political party. The mention of Labour party in the headline would definitely attract the sympathy of Labour party members. Some would also see the killing as a politically motivated killing.

The location of the incident is given as 'Benue state' which has become synonymous with herders' killings.

Datum 7: three stoned to death over alleged abduction, murder of 8-year old. (February, 19th 2023 Vanguard)

Agent: Mob

Patient: Three.

8-year old

The semantic implication of the above headline is that, a mob carried out jungle justice on three persons suspected to have abducted and killed an eight years old

child. The agent of the headline is not included in the headline but it is implied. The use of the word “alleged” means the three persons killed by ‘stoning’ were still being presumed innocent. What the mob carried out is portrayed as barbaric through the use of the word “stoning”. This implies that the three suspects were brutally killed with stones. Therefore, the instrument. Used for committing the crime was a stone.

The caption of the headline reverses the roles of the nouns: ‘Three’ are supposed to be the agents but they are presented as patients. Attention shifts a little bit from the main patient eight years old to the action of jungle justice meted out on the three suspects. While some people would condemn the barbaric act of jungle justice, some would say, “it serves them right for killing an eight years old. The headline certainly would generate mixed reactions from the way people interpret it.

Datum 8: Tragedy: Apprentice murders master, dumps corpse inside well in Ondo. (February, 2nd 2023 Vanguard)

Agent: Apprentice

Patient: master

Location: Ondo

First of all, the writer of the news captions the entire incident as a tragedy.” This implies that it is a horrifying event of high magnitude which definitely will get the attention of the readers.

The agent is identified as “apprentice”. This means that he was learning a skill or trade under the deceased (patient). The writer establishes the relationship between the agent and the patient by using “apprentice” and master. The agent is portrayed as a very wicked person”; he did not only killed his master but also dumped the corpse inside a well.

The location of the incident is given as Ondo which is a proof that it actually happened.

Datum 9: Suspected ritualist murders 7-year old girl in Ogun. (November, 25th 2022 Vanguard)

Agent: - suspected ritualist

Patient: -7 year old girl

Location: - Ogun

The agent is identified as ‘a suspected ritualist and it has some semantic implications:

It implies that the identity of the killer is not yet known or revealed, even though he has been arrested.

It also implies that nobody has been arrested for the crime but because the victim's vital organs were missing, then it is suspected that a ritualist would have done that. The caption of the agent also implies that the agent has been arrested, he has confessed to the crime but has not been declared guilty by a law and so the writer still sees the culprit as a suspect.

The patient of the headline is given as a '7-year old girl and this implies.

The patient was an infant.

The patient was an innocent victim.

Infants also fall victims of homicide in Nigeria.

The location is given as Ogun state and this implies that the story is verifiable since it happened in a particular place in Ogun State.

Datum 10: Man allegedly murders pregnant wife, stabs self - Badagry. (June, 10th 2022 Vanguard)

Agent: - man

Patient: - pregnant

Location: - Badagry

The agent is denoted as man and it has the following semantic implications:

The person who committed the crime is an adult male, not a woman.

The agent is a husband.

The identity of the suspect is not known. The use of 'man' for the agent seems as though the writer of the news just heard the news from someone that a man killed his pregnant wife in Badagry.

The patient is denoted as a pregnant wife and it has the following semantic implications:

The patient was an adult female.

The patient was married to the agent.

The patient was pregnant when she was killed by the agent.

It is important to point out that the agent is also a patient of his own action. He murdered his pregnant wife and uses a knife to take his own life.

The use of the word "allegedly" makes it look as if the reporter is not sure about the news. The question is if the agent allegedly killed his pregnant life did he also allegedly stab himself to death? The headline makes it seem as though thorough investigation hadn't been done before it was reported.

The location of the event is Badagry and this implies that the horrible incident took place in Lagos and that the news is real.

Datum 11: 2 convicted over murder of sex worker in Onitsha. (February, 3rd 2022 Vanguard)

Agent: 2

Patient: sex worker

Location: Onitsha.

The agent is identified as '2'. This is a usual way by Nigerian newspaper writers. There is no noun subject in the headline but the noun is subsumed in the adjective 'two'. The semantic implication is that 'Z' are two criminals or murderers. The use of the legal word "convicted" implies that the 2 actually committed the crime. They have been tried by a law court and found guilty of the crime. This is the first headline in which we are told that the people arrested for homicide were convicted. From the reports so far, we have always seen that the people arrested were only seen as suspects.

The patient is identified as 'sex worker'. The implication of this is that the writer of the newspaper has engaged in profiling. Nigerian newspaper writers are good at profiling people even the dead. Some readers would say "it serves her right" while others would say "even if she is a sex worker, she still shouldn't have been killed." The location of the incident is stated as 'Onitsha'. This implies that the story is true.

Datum 12: Man kills wife in scuffle over affair with another woman. (July, 6th 2023 The Nation)

Agent: Man

Patient: Wife

The agent of the headlines is given as man and it has the following semantic implications:

- a. The identity of the killer is undisclosed. Man can refer to any adult male.
- b. The killer is a husband.

The headline does not refer to the man as a husband to the wife. It is therefore not clear if the man killed another man's wife in scuffle. Another semantic ambiguity is seen in the adverbial phrase 'over affair with another woman'. The question is, who was having an affair with another woman?

The location of the incident is not indicated and this has the capacity of stirring up anxiety in the readers in a bid to find out where the incident took place.

In the above headline, the writer not only presents the agent as a killer but also as a cheat.

Datum 13: Terrorist kills five hostages in Niger. (May, 26th 2023 The Nation)

Agent: Terrorist

Patient: five hostages

Location: Niger

The agent of the above headline is denoted as 'terrorist'. This implies that the identity of the killer is not yet known. The killer is presumed to be a terrorist. This

is believed to be so because terrorists have been carrying out such acts in the state. They referring to the agent as a terrorist, has ruled out the possibility of kidnappers carrying out the acts.

The patients are denoted as ‘five hostages’. This implies that the patients were previously kidnapped by the agents and subsequently killed. However, there is semantic ambiguity in the above headline. It is not clear whether the terrorists were responsible for the kidnap of the patients or the terrorists just killed five people kidnapped by other people and kept hostage.

The location of the incident is indicated as Niger and this implies that the event actually took place.

Datum 14: Man kills baby mama over allowance (August 18th 2022 The Nation)

Agent: Man

Patient: Baby mama

The agent of the headline is denoted as “man” and by this; there is no specificity about the killer. The semantic implication of the headline is that all men have been implicated. This means that everyman is capable of killing his baby mama. The emphasis here is on the gender who committed the crime.

The patient is described as “Baby Mama.” This means that the deceased was not married to the killer before she was killed. This is done to attract more sympathy for the dead and present the killer as a callous man.

Datum 15: gunmen kill three, abduct seven in Kaduna attacks. (April, 3rd 2022 The Nation)

Agent: Gunmen

Patient: Three

Location: Kaduna.

The agent of the headline is denoted as “gunmen” and this implies the following:

- a) The identity of the killers are not known
- b) The crime was committed by men bearing arms.
- c) It seems the reporter is certain that men and not women carried out the attacks.

The patients of the attack are denoted with “three.” This implies three human beings were killed. Their identities are not disclosed. This implies that they are not really important. But in a situation where for instance, a medical doctor or a professor is killed, their profession will be described as “professor” “Doctor” and so on to show their class.

The location of the incident is implied in “Kaduna attacks.” It means there was an attack in Kaduna and that’s where the incident took place.

Summary/ Findings

This study explores the semantic implication of selected Nigerian newspaper headlines on homicides. The focus of the study is on the deeper meanings that are conveyed through the use of words, phrases and sentences in the headlines. Through the analysis of the collected data, it can be stated that the words, phrases, and sentences used in reporting cases of homicides in Nigeria have so many semantic implications.

In the course of this study, certain intriguing findings were made which include:

Every newspaper headline contains at least, three thematic roles; agent, patient and location.

Also, in stating the agents and patients of homicides in Nigeria, the writers of the headlines use their occupation. Instead of their name. “Labourer kills businessman.” This implies that a poor man kills a rich man. There are so many other meanings that can be read in to such a headline as above. It might be the richbusiness man wanted to oppress the poor labourer, etc.

In addition, the register “allegedly” is a common word in the headlines on homicides in Nigeria. This is in line with the legal statement that an accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty by court of law.

Furthermore, there is class expression in homicidal headlines in Nigeria. When the poor are the patients; there is away it is reported but when the rich are the patients, there is also another way in which it is reported. For instance, when the poor are killed by bandits or gunmen, it will be reported as ‘thirty killed in Kaduna attacks’. The question would be a thirty what? Humans or animals? But when the rich are the patients, it will be reported as “a medical doctor, a professor and one other killed in an attack.” That “one other” in the headline is usually a poor person.

There is semantic ambiguity in some newspaper headlines on homicides in Nigeria. Another finding of the study is that there is semantic profiling of the dead patients in the homicidal headlines.

The writers of the headlines on homicides try as much as possible to indicate the locations of the cases of homicides they report. Location is a very important thematic role in that it makes for verifiability and authenticity. It makes the reader believe that the event actually took place. Some places in Nigeria are synonymous with certain cases of homicides in Nigeria. For instance, once, the reader sees “ritualist kills; the person would be bearing Ogun state in mind. When the reader sees “bandits kills; the person would be thinking of the states in the northwest.

When the reader sees “unknown gunmen beheads....’ the person will immediately think of the southeast.

However there are cases of homicides that cannot be associated with a particular location such as “husband killing his wife” etc. can happen anywhere. Most of such cases are reported without locations. This is done deliberately by the reporters to create suspense in the readers.

Conclusion

From all that has been stated in this work, we can see that Nigerian newspaper headlines on homicides are pregnant with meanings. There is authorial intentions behind the words and expressions used in the headlines and if they are to be grasped, then the semantic implication of those words and expressions needs to be studied. One effective way of exploring semantic implication is examine the thematic roles of the different parts of the sentences. Every sentence is made up of parts or elements. The parts are agent, patient, experiencer and location. The way and manner in which the writers of the newspapers captures the agents, patients and locations have deeper meanings, (implications). When a newspaper writer chooses to identify an agent as “a drunk driver” the reason could be that the writer wants the readers to know the state of mind of the driver. When a newspaper writer chooses to identify a patient as “a sex worker” the implication of this is that the writer of the newspaper has engaged in profiling. When he or she chooses to identify the patients as “four”; “ten” etc. the reason behind that could possibly be to show the degree of crime. When the words “alleged” or “allegedly” are used in crafting a headline, it makes it look as if the reporter is not sure about the news. In all, the semantic implication of newspaper headlines on homicides in Nigeria, emanate from the way the reporter captures the agents and patients; the use of certain registers, semantic ambiguity and semantic profiling. There is also a meaning behind the use and non-use of locations in certain news headlines on homicides.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher suggests the following to the concerned bodies: There is need for clarity in the captions of newspaper headlines to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation. I suggest that future researchers can look into ways of disambiguating news headlines. Readers of Nigerian newspapers are advised to read the entire news before drawing conclusion. Many readers of Nigerian news do not bother reading the body of the news, they rely on the headlines alone and this is most times misleading.

Works Cited

- Abochol and Adegboye, Semantic Implications of Media Reports on Violence in Nigeria. *I. manager's Journal on English language Teaching*. [2015] Vol.5. No.1. Pp. 35-44
- Agu, I.E, "A Linguistic-Stylistic Analysis of Newspaper Reportage". *Ospoly Journal of Language and Communication* (2010) Vol 3(1), 164-182.
- Cherry as cited in Omachonu, [2011]. The Semantic Implication of Media Reports on Violence in Nigeria.
- Develotte, C., &Rechniewski, E. *Discourse analysis of newspaper headlines: A methodological framework for research into national representations*. *Journal of French Media Studies*, 4. (2001).
- Dor, S. "On Newspaper Headlines and Relevance: Ad Hoc concepts in Ad Hoc contexts". *Journal of Pragmatics*. (2003). 35 (5): 695-721.
- Ehinemi, T.O. A Syntactic Analysis of Lexical and Functional Leads in Nigerian English Newspaper Headlines, *International Journal of Linguistics*. (2014) 6 (5), 1-3
- Fairclough, N. *Media Discourse*. London: Arnold. (1995).
- Hall C. J., *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, London: Continuum, (2005).
- Halliday, M.A.K. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, London: Arnold, (1985).
- Hurford, J. And Heasley, B, *Semantics: A Coursebook*. Cambridge university press. [1983].
- Ifantidou, E. *Newspaper Headlines and Relevance: Ad Hoc Concepts in Ad Hoc Contexts*. *Journal of Pragmatics*, (2009) 41 (4), 699-720.
- Kraider C. *Introducing English Semantics*. London: Routledge. [1998].
- Kress, Gunther. *Ideological Structures in Discourse*, in T. V. Dijk (ed), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, 4, London: Academic press. (1985)
- Lobner, S. *Understanding Semantics*. London Hodder Arnold. [2002]
- Lyons, J. *Semantics Vol. 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [1977]
- Sheyholislami, J. *Critical discourse analysis* (Unpublished manuscript, Carleton University, Ottawa). . (2001).
- Tabula, R. V., & Agbayani, R. S. *Syntactic Patterns of News Headlines in Philippine and American*, (2015)
- Van Dijk, T.A. *News as Discourse*. Hillsdale: Laurence Erlbaum Association, (1988)