

## LINGUISTIC PATTERNS OF NEWS HEADLINES IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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### **Abstract**

Newspaper headlines play crucial roles in summarizing the contents of newspaper articles and attracting the attention of readers. The language of headlines is unique, powerful and sometimes provocative. The peculiarity of the language is achieved through discursive devices and patterns which influence readers. Sometimes, headlines are spectacular, hyperbolic and subjective. Also, some writers present headlines in ambiguous manner in order to create suspense and persuasion. Therefore, this study examined the linguistic patterns in newspaper headlines often employed by writers to present different ideologies. The paper unraveled the unique linguistic and discursive patterns in newspaper headlines. The paper also examined the different ideologies in the contemporary society often presented in newspaper headlines. The syntactic patterns of the clause/sentence structure used in the headlines were analysed through the Theme/Rheme structure in Systemic Functional Linguistics. Thus, the researchers drew theoretical insights from Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse analysis in the analysis of newspaper headlines. Based on the analysis, it was discovered that linguistic patterns such as clauses, phrases, imperatives, modality, questions and passives were used to state opinions, evoke suspense, and attract attention and present ideologies in the headlines. The researchers also discovered the prevalence of the simple present tense used by writers in staking opinions. Furthermore, in the syntactic analysis, the writers preferred using the unmarked theme for headlines. The study concludes that the newspaper headlines are concise summaries of ideologies used by writers to create suspense and attract the attention of readers.

## Introduction

Journalists rely on professional practice, linguistic and textual conventions to present authentic and accurate ideologies in newspapers. In a bid to convey various socio-political and national ideologies, they employ different linguistic patterns too. One of the textual conventions and linguistic devices used by journalists is the newspaper headlines. Headlines summarize the contents of articles in newspapers. They are attractively designed news summary intended to induce or attract the attention of readers. (Tabe and Fieze, 2018).

Hence, headlines are designed to be short and catchy. Journalists exploit them in expressing their ideological views of the news stories they represent (Van Dijk, 1988). Newspaper headlines act as forerunners to news reports and they specifically reveal the socio-cultural and national representations circulating at a given period of time (Taiwo, 2007). Van Dijk (1988) states that headlines serve three significant functions: they provide brief summaries of the main ideas to the reader; they provide initial indicators of the contents and styles of the news values of newspapers and they attract attention. Thus, they are functional parts of news texts with tactical meaning potentials (Chiluwa, 2005).

While writing headlines, editors deliberately go for eye-catching expressions, emotive vocabulary, rhetorical and graphic devices to make impact on readership (Taiwo, 2004). Newspaper headlines are operational sections of news stories that are pragmatically encoded to underscore some special types of social meaning other than the mere encapsulation of the body of news stories (Chiluwa, 2005). Also, Tabe and Fieze (2018) have reiterated that the shape and structure of the headlines reflect the content of articles which are politically and ideologically driven. Despite the critical nature of headlines, some writers use linguistic devices which may exaggerate the message of the headlines. Some of the hyperbolic headlines do not match with the contents of the article. Sometimes writers give sensational headlines to catch the readers' attention. (Zhin and Barnette, 2000).

Furthermore, some headlines can be difficult to understand especially when the reader cannot recognize the field, allusion, issue and cultural references necessary to decode the content (Taiwo, 2007).

Also, some headlines are subjective, flowery, and ambiguous. Thus, Rafiu (2015) asserts that the nature of language in newspaper headlines indicate that writers conceal their opinions in linguistic forms in order to create persuasion for ideological support. It is, therefore, imperative to explore the linguistic patterns used by writers in newspaper headlines. Language plays crucial roles in the construction of ideologies in newspaper headlines. Fowler (1999) asserts that language is pivotal in achieving socio-political goals and it is a highly constructive mediator in

the press, as it reflects social construction of reality. Also Rafiu (2015) rightly maintains that newspaper headlines contain linguistic as well as ideological information encoded by media practitioners in their bid to communicate ideas, feelings, or information to the public.

It is significant, therefore, to unravel the linguistic patterns in newspaper headlines. This would highlight the peculiarities of language usage in this form of media discourse. This study explores the linguistic patterns succinctly used by writers to present newspaper headlines. It unravels the different ideologies captured in the linguistic patterns. It also captures the syntactic patterns employed in the headlines through the theme and rhyme patterns in Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Thus, this research is guided by the following research questions:

- What linguistic patterns are employed in Nigerian newspaper headlines?
- What ideologies are manifested through the linguistic patterns?
- What are the syntactic patterns employed in the headlines?

### **Different Perspectives on Newspaper Headlines**

Different scholars have examined the features of newspaper headlines. Adriano and Montejo (2018) have remarked that in the world of media, headlines are important parts of news just as titles are in books or essays. They are often the most important element on pages of newspapers as they give overall pictures of news and through them, readers may determine whether to read the entire article (Adnano and Montejo, 2018). The authors have reiterated that the words used in the headlines present the articles' content in the story.

Javed and Mahood (2011) have stated that headlines are the most significant portions of the news for they deliver fast modes of information to those who have no time to read the complete details of news items. Khanjan, Amouzadeh and Rasekh (2013) have stressed that news headlines are usually written on the basis of the main points of the story by or under the supervision of an editor and are sometimes seen as the hardest task of journalistic writing. The authors have maintained that readers often scan news title and choose among them the desirable materials on the basis of their attractions or relevance to their own thoughts. Headlines are significant in evaluating and prioritizing news event and they reflect the most important points of stories briefly and clearly. (Khanjan, Amouzadeh and Rasekh (2013).

Ghannam (2011) states that a reader goes through the headlines for a quick overview of what is entailed in the news of the day. Also, the headlines occupy textual space that restricts the author in terms of lay out and size of texts and a minimum number of words is used in order to capture

the attention of the reader. (Ghannam, 2011) Ehinemi (2014) asserts that Headlines are often constructed to capture the interest of the readers since they determine if people will eventually read the stories in the newspaper. So newspaper readers look at the headlines before they read the news details of the events captured in the newspapers. (Ehinemi,2014). Linguistic structures in newspaper headlines often have great influence on the readers and factors such as house style of the publishing industry, and the intention to inform quickly influence the way linguistic expressions are constructed. Hence, the writers deliberately reduce the full syntax of the structures (Ehinemi, 2014). Taiwo (2007) states that the role headlines play as precursors to news makes them be constructed in such a way that they usually evoke readers' emotions and most editors ensure that the choice of expressions in headlines reflects the feelings, opinions and attitudes of people about issues in the news. Furthermore, newspaper editors deliberately go for eye-catching expressions. The headlines are used strategically by the editors who choose emotive vocabulary, rhetorical and graphical devices to make an impact on the readership (Taiwo, 2000)

Rafiu (2015) stresses that the nature of language in newspaper headlines indicate that writers conceal their opinions in linguistic forms in order to create persuasion for ideological support. Chiluya (2005) remarks that headlines are discourse units that are analyzable as independent texts and as pragmatically relevant discourse type, they are interpreted in terms of their relationship to information in the social context. The author also states that headlines perform acts in the way they attempt to mediate the socio-political experiences. Therefore, news headlines perform illocutionary functions as socially-oriented discourse and are critical strategies employed by journalists to denounce social malaise. Chiluya (2005) also asserts that grammatical elements in news headlines are structured on the basis of what news items are considered as the focal points. The most prominent include noun phrases, verb-less clauses, prepositional phrases. The simple clauses are sometimes presented without agents. (Chiluya, 2005). Furthermore, Chiluya (2005) stresses that news headlines are influenced by personal bias of the journalist and the overriding professional and social ethics of the news magazine itself. Thus, the author sees headlines as a pragmatic medium of motivating and gathering mass support towards emancipation.

Tabe and Fieze (2018) have remarked that headlines are purposely shaped to speak the mind of the presenter or the publisher and the nature of the headlines can tell the whole story; can question issues or be questioned. The language of the headlines is powerful as it affects people's thoughts and results in diverse opinions about the crisis and actors. Reah (2002) sees a headline as a kind of text that is unique and which consists of a series of functions that precisely dictates its content, shape and structure. Only the key ideas of the entire news story is presented as the headline and it is placed over-head the news story. Duzzet (2011) affirms that the headlines both

sell and tell specifically: they tell the readers what the news is all about and persuade them that the story is worth reading.

Quanprankhon (2012) states that headlines have their own style of writing structure and the words used have to be concise and meaningful in order to catch the attention of the readers. Headlines expose social, cultural and national representations. The language of headlines reinforces the news and the most outstanding feature of the language of headlines is the vocabulary: it is typically short and effective. (Quanprankhon, 2012). The author remarks that some linguistic devices employed to effectively create headlines are analytical/textual tools, lexical choices, metaphoric usage, existential processes and verbal processes.

Ulum (2016) asserts that plain headlines addresses to simple statements related to a social issue in written media. The author states that some headlines come in the form of questions which can be categorized as interrogative headlines. Ulum remarks that the use of headlines can be beneficial in advanced reading classes. The headlines can help students to get the gist of the text/article. Through focusing on the headlines of the reading texts, the reader can activate their schemata and may discover required points in the texts.

Van Dijk (1998) reiterates that the discourse of the headlines can be seen from the position of the headline, the boldness of the headline, the vocabulary used in the headline, the use of the punctuation marks, the number of occurrences in the same event and above all the power of the presenter. Also, Van Dijk (1998) states that headlines are the overall coherence or semantic unity of discourse which readers memorize best from a news report. Headlines express the most important information in the cognitive model of journalists, that is, how they see and define the news event.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employed the Critical Discourse Analysis and the Systemic Functional Linguistics as analytical models to examine the linguistic patterns of headlines in Nigeria newspaper. Critical discourse analysis focuses on the relationship between discourse and society. It studies discourse and its functions in society and the ways society and especially forms of inequality are expressed and represented in text (Van Dijk, 1995). It also focuses on properties of language and discourse and emphasizes the relevance of power, dominance in studying text or of social arrangement and the social order in their relation to language use and communication. (Van Dijk, 1995).

Therefore, critical discourse analysis studies the dynamics of language usage in a given community (Tabe and Fieze, 2018). Tabe and Fieze (2018) have reiterated that the dynamics is read through social forms of society such as inequality, dominance, social power, marriage,

insecurity, marginalization and political related actions. Thus, CDA looks at how these forms are enacted and reproduced by text in the social and political context. Furthermore, Van Dijk (1988) asserts that CDA is concerned with studying and analyzing written texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias. Therefore, in critical discourse analysis, meaning is created or reproduced from language use, that is language is used consciously or unconsciously to express ideologies.

The Systemic Functional Linguistics states that language occurs in a context and it is related or linked to a number of contexts which are the context of culture and the context of situation. Thus, Mathiessen and Halliday (1997) have remarked that aspects of the context of situation relate to the language used in creating text. The three strands involved in this context are:

- i. **Field** – this gives an indication of the topic.
- ii. **Tenor** – this gives an indication of those involved in the communication.
- iii. **Mode** – the role of language in the interaction and the form it takes (written or spoken)

Furthermore, Eggins (2004) states that human language makes three generalized kinds of meanings: the experiential meanings, the interpersonal meanings and the textual meanings. The experiential meanings are concerned with the way reality is represented and the grammatical resources for presenting the experiences in the world. The interpersonal meanings are concerned with the interaction between the speaker and the listeners.

The textual meanings are concerned with the creation of text and the way language is organized to achieve meaning and to produce a cohesive text. Matthiesen and Halliday (1997) have stated that one of the main textual systems is Theme and Rheme. Thus, Matthisen and Halliday have stressed that the Theme is the element which serves as a point of departure of the message. The Theme comes first and whatever is placed in initial position is the Theme. It provides the ‘local context’ for the development of the clausal meaning. The Theme introduces the main information to be conceived later by the Rheme, which is the remaining part of the message. A clause consists of a Theme accompanied by a Rheme; and the structure is expressed by the order: whatever is chosen as the theme is put first. (Halliday and Matthiesen, 2004) The authors use the term ‘unmarked Theme’ to refer to the mapping of Theme onto the subject. Therefore, Halliday and Matthiesen (2004) have stressed that the ‘Unmarked Theme’ is the logical subject of a verb while the ‘marked Theme’ is any linguistic device other than the logical subject in a declarative clause. So, a ‘marked theme’ can be ‘an adverbial group, a prepositional phrase, an adjunct or a complement.

A clause is ‘marked’ if it has an unusual form in the subject slot and ‘unmarked’ if it has the usual form of subject in a clause (Opara, 2009).

## Methodology

Through a random sampling technique, the researchers selected 300 headlines from six secular newspapers and one ecclesiastical Nigerian newspaper namely: The Punch, The Leader, Vanguard, The Nation, Nigerian Tribune, The Guardian and This Day. These papers were published between April and May, 2020. Thus, the data analyzed were excerpts from the newspaper headlines. They were randomly selected and copied verbatim. The researchers analysed the linguistic patterns in the newspaper headlines and their ideologies. The researchers restricted the analysis of the data to the linguistic patterns in the newspapers and their ideologies using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In order to generate data, the researchers adopted the frequency count and percentages. The descriptive analysis was also presented in the data analysis.

## Analysis of the Headlines

Different linguistic patterns were employed in the newspaper headlines to portray different socio-political, health, economic / business academic, sporting, and religious ideologies. The linguistic patterns discovered in the newspaper headlines were in the forms of clauses with dynamic verbs in the simple present tense, imperatives, phrases, questions, clauses with modality and passives.

**Table 1: Classification of Headlines According to Ideologies**

S/N	Ideology	Number	Percentage
1	Socio-political	80	26.7%
2	Economic/Business	59	19.7%
3	Health	66	22%
4	Academic	34	11.3%
5	Religious	36	12%
6	Sports	25	8.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 shows that 26.7% of the ideologies found in the newspaper headlines are socio-political. 19.7% of the ideologies are economic / business. 22% are health ideologies; 11.3% are academic

ideologies; 12% are religious ideologies and 8.3% are sports ideologies. The table also shows that the socio-political ideologies are most prevalent in the news headlines.

**Table 2: Number of Occurrence of Linguistic Patterns in the Headlines with Different Ideologies**

Ideologies	Linguistic Patterns						
	Clauses in the simple present tense	Imperatives	Modality	Questions	Phrases	Passives	Total
Socio-political	45	8	5	4	16	2	80
Economic/business	44	5	3	1	2	4	59
Health	38	11	6	5	3	3	66
Academic	25	2	4	1	2	0	34
Religious	27	1	1	1	6	0	36
Sports	14	1	5	0	0	5	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>300</b>

Table 2 shows the breakdown of the ideologies with the different linguistic patterns. The summary of the linguistic patterns and their percentages are given in table 3.

**Table 3: Summary of Total Number of the Linguistic Patterns in all the Headlines**

S/N	Linguistic Patterns	Number	Percentage
1	Clauses in the simple present tense	193	64.3%
2	Imperatives	28	9.3%
3	Modality	24	8%
4	Questions	12	4%
5	Phrases	29	9.7%

6	Passives	14	4.7%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3 shows that 64.3% of all headlines are expressed in the simple present tense. 9.3% of the headlines are imperatives. 8% shows cases of modality. 4% of the headlines are questions. 9.7% of the headlines are phrases and 4.7% of the headlines are passives. Therefore, the simple present tense is commonly used in presenting news headlines in newspapers.

### Clauses with dynamic verbs in the Simple Present Tense

Most clauses discovered in the headlines were clauses with dynamic verbs containing the simple present tense. These clauses conveyed different ideologies and perspectives: socio-political, economic, academic, religious, sporting, and health. Some of the examples of the ideologies discovered in the newspapers are:

#### Socio-Political Ideologies

1. FG inaugurates Ajaokuta Presidential Project Implementation Team.
2. Governor Uzodinma swears in acting President, Customary Court of Appeal.
3. Ekiti Assembly resumes sitting today.
4. Northern governors mourn Rano Emir, ex-Borno governor.
5. Community rejects Buhari's Anambra FCC nominee.
6. Ex-Rep seeks FG, Rivers collaboration against COVID-19.
7. Adeyeye seeks support for government.
8. Kwara intercepts 50 Zamfara youths.
9. N43.4bn W' Bank grant: APC, PDP bicker over A' Ibom's exclusion.
10. Imo Government denies payment of N8m to herdsmen.
11. More states reopen churches, mosques
12. Former NUJ chairman condemns alleged payment of N8m compensation to herdsmen in Mbaise.
13. Enugu Governor intercepts 17 suspected herdsmen hidden in vehicle conveying cattle.
14. Education commissioner inspects on-going projects at IMSU.
15. Olukoyo supports Lagos Government with ambulance.
16. Trump defends firing watching appointed by Obama.
17. PDP rejects curfew extension.
18. Edo/Ondo polls: INEC meets, takes major decision today
19. Osun National Assembly members cash over LG parliamentary system.
20. Tribunal dismisses Apoti's petition against Bello's Government victory.

21. Oshiomole inaugurates Bulama as APC acting national secretary.
22. Governors meet over economic sustainability plan, control of infectious disease bill.
23. Ondo 2020; Senator Tofowomo knocks PDP aspirants in Ondo south.
24. Buhari asks Senate to confirm Lamido Yuguda as SEC DG
25. Delta PDP leaders bicker over chairman's second term bid.
26. Osun PDP elders' caucus wants Adagunodo reinstated as chairman.
27. Edo government intensifies campaign on self-reporting, social distancing, others.
28. Kastina impounds 159 vehicles, 106 motorcycles.
29. Senator asks PDP to pick candidate from Ondo South.
30. Sokoto PDP exco dissolves into caretaker committee.

### **Economic/Business Ideologies**

1. Afrinvest unveils dollar funds
2. UBA rewards 100 customers
3. Unity Bank resumes forex sales
4. Afrexim bank cancels AGM
5. DMO releases borrowing guidelines for F.G, States, FCT, others.
6. NNPC records N2.5m from petrol sales in one year.
7. Trump rules out renegotiating China trade deal.
8. Property firm gives support to 5,000 homes.
9. Group raises N1bn COVID-19 fund
10. FG retains N125/litre petrol price despite crude oil crash.
11. Oyo launches digitized certificate of occupancy.
12. NNPC, partners construct 200-bed hospital in Yenagoa
13. Unilever lever palliatives to Abuja residents.
14. FG raises operating surplus to N196.87bn
15. Coca-cola foundation supports Red Cross, Red Crescent to combat COVID-19 spread in Nigeria.
16. Israeli firm raises GM for tech to recognize mask-covered faces.
17. White House aims to zero in on further stimulus to help battered economy
18. Japan's MUFG bank plans mere staff cuts, totaling 8,000 by 2023
19. COCOVID Fund hits N27.16 billion.
20. Inventors gain N37bn on blue-chip firms
21. FG targets five million jobs from 995m agric programme
22. Toyota predicts 79% drop in profit
23. IG orders probe of E-money, withdraws police escort.
24. Equities investors lose N133bn as market chases negative.

25. Equities market bows to profit-taking, declines by 0.39 percent.
26. NSE All-share index sheds 1.00% on continuing profit taking.
27. **Lockdown:** Commodity Association leaders express fear over future of agriculture.
28. Prince Interior begins production of N95 face masks. Naira appreciates to N386.94/ & in widow
29. Sovereign Trust pays N2.76bn claims

### Health Ideologies

1. **COVID-19:** Ekiti discharges 5 patients, expands isolation centre
2. Doctors flee as gunmen attack Afghan hospital
3. COVID-19: Tambuwal's aide appeals for FG support in Sokoto
4. FUTO produces sanitizer
5. Ogun doctors begin three-day warning strike.
6. Red Cross Society carries awareness campaign to Ihitte Uboma communitie.
7. Enugu records three new COVID-19 cases, total now is 15
8. US drugmaker reports progress on COVID-19 vaccine trial
9. Scientist lists herbs to treat stomach ulcer
10. Virus symptoms multiply as pandemic deepens
11. Mainstream donates COVID-19 medical equipment to National Hospital, Abuja.
12. Dangote Foundation engages 54 Gene lab to conduct 1,000 test per day in Kano
13. Lafarge deploys N500m for food, medical infrastructure, others
14. **COVID-19:** Panic as pregnant woman dies at FMC Abeokuta
15. Russia reports over 10,000 new infections
16. Lagos doctor tests positive for COVID-19 in Osun
17. Lecturer accuses LUTH of negligence after brother's death.

### Academic Ideologies

1. Nile University holds virtual seminar on role of additive manufacturing in fight against COVID-19.
2. Foundation disburses N17 million scholarship to 4000 students.
3. **On-line School:** Rivers debunks allegation of sale of materials
4. Ex-Campus life correspondent trains students on blogging
5. Delta warns private schools against 3<sup>rd</sup> term resumption
6. Jamb remits N7 bn to FG for 2020 UTME

### Religious Ideologies

1. Church supports home for the elderly
2. Pope urges prayers to Mary during hard times
3. Church varsity gifts hand sanitizers to government
4. Bishop donates 30-room isolation centre to government
5. Orlu diocese gives fresh guidelines on liturgical celebrations
6. **COVID-19:** KSM Owerri Archdiocese assists vulnerable members, others
7. Archbishop Martins wants reopening of churches
8. Bishop calls for attention to suffering citizens
9. Bishops promote solidarity pact to eliminate hunger
10. Catholic schools laud distant learning program
11. Archbishop of Onitsha doles out more palliatives to the less privileged.
12. Parishioners express fears over abandoned vehicle in church
13. COVID-19: catholic Bishops donate hospitals
14. Hospitalized cardinal calls for collaboration against COVID-19
15. Caritas readies palliatives for vulnerable
16. High court overturns cardinal Pell's conviction
17. Bishops reiterate need for government to address challenges
18. Catholics celebrate Holy week through live radio, T.V broadcast
19. Holy Land prepares new liturgy for Holy week.
20. President urges Priests to help prepare slums for COVID-19.

### Sports Ideologies

1. **COVID-19:** Minister leads sports campaign
2. Premier league gets chance to finish season in Perth, Australia.
3. Kanu makes substitutes in Henry's best 11 team
4. Enyeama dreams career relaunch in EPL
5. CAF celebrates Afcon legends Keshi, El Gohary
6. Ikeme auctions Eagle's jersey to help motherless babies
7. Eagles' captain denies contracting corona virus
8. Madrid star makes strong donation gesture
9. **COVID-19:** Liverpool boss cries out over players absence
10. Super Eagles Coach agrees to sign new contract
11. **Boxing:** Fury throws Jibe at Joshua, Wilden, others
12. **COVID-19:** FIFA cancels the best awards
13. **Arsenal:** Wenger names Kanu as best January signing of his time
14. **Boxing:** Wilder lists demands to step aside for fury.
15. **Bundesliga:** German Chancellor gives nod to May 15 restart

#### 16. Expert cautions against resuming sporting activities without COVID-19 vaccine

From the excerpts, it was discovered that while conveying socio-political, economic, academic, health, sports, religious and relationship ideologies, writers employed mostly the simple present tense to express general statements, fixed arrangements and factual events in headlines. Some of the events had already taken place but the writers presented their information in the simple present tense. Thus, headlines were written in the historical present tense.

Williams (2003) explains that the use of the present tense for past events helps to emphasize the action happening rather than its completion. Scholars have reiterated that the essence of news coverage is its immediacy. Thus, the use of simple present tense is prevalent and conventional in headlines. It is a feature of the register of newspaper headlines (Hameed, 2008, Fowler, 1991, Halliday, 1985). Baum (2019) stresses that using the historical present tense in headlines draws in readers and creates a sense that the action in the headline is fresh since readers have more interest in something perceived to be currently happening. Thus, the use of present tense headlines provides an element of freshness. One would not feel the news is stale (Saxena, 2013).

Also, Sridhar (2015) asserts that the present tense is used to create immediacy. This peculiar style is also present in drama and sports comments. Furthermore, Sridhar (2015) states the reasons for the use of present tense in headlines:

- To highlight the urgency and topicality of the news story which contribute to worthiness and value.
- To provide an element of freshness so that the news doesn't seem stale.
- To give the reader a sense of urgency and excitement that is assumed to be more enticing to the reader just like relaying a match coverage in the present form. Though, the events are technically in the past, news headlines are presented as it is occurring in the present (Sridhar, 2015).

Furthermore, Hameed (2008) maintains that the canonical use of the present tense to report past actions is a feature of headlines and the use of the present tense also plays a role as an internal evaluation device in narratives. It is also lending support to the interpersonal function of headlines (Hameed, 2008).

#### **The Imperatives in Headlines**

Some headlines were also in the form of imperatives. Crystal (2004) states that an imperative usage refers to verb forms, sentences, clause types that are typically used in the expressions of

commands. In some newspapers, the headlines appeared as commands, instructions, directives and requests.

**Some of the excerpts from the newspapers are:**

1. Leave our area in peace, we don't want trouble – Can tells herdsmen
2. Treat those who divert palliatives as criminals.
3. Include us in palliative, old citizens tell F.G.
4. Leave South East region now, Massob tells terrorist herdsmen
5. Return to work, Ayade orders civil servants
6. Stop telling lies, our members don't carry AK-47
7. **COVID-19:** Don't cry for Africa
8. Don't be careless, COVID-19 is real
9. **COVID-19:** Convert stolen assets into isolation centres, SERAP tells Buhari
10. **ULC to FG:** Set up all-embracing post COVID-19 economic recovering think tank
11. Don't ease lockdown now- PDP reps tells Buhari
12. Slash public officials' salaries privileges – HEDA
13. Cut interest rates to boost economy, says Tinubu
14. Slash taxes, adjust repayments, CITN advises F.G.
15. Don't forget about the women who make up most of our informal economy.
16. Introduce national policy on on-like, education to salvage fate of 1.2 billion Nigerian students
17. Apologise to Nigerians for denying links with Chinese doctors
18. Sheathe sword and accept the choice of Olusola Oke
19. Prepare for the worst; Come fight me
20. Recind decision now, JOHESU, NUAHP urge FG.
21. Decontaminate premises before resumption.
22. Panic not!

From the excerpts on the headlines appearing as imperatives, it is obvious that writers use imperatives to give lucid and straight forward instructions, commands and to express displeasure, to beseech, to beckon or to beg. Therefore, diverse speech acts can be attributed to the imperatives such as directing, threatening, beckoning, commanding ordering, instructing and the like.

**Modality**

The writers employed modal auxiliary verbs such as ‘may’, ‘can’ will, should, must to express modality in the headlines. Modality is concerned with the assessment of attitudes towards the potentiality of state of affairs.

Cameroon (2001) states that writers resort to modality to state different kinds of claims like assertions, opinions, hypothesis and speculations.

Some of these excerpts showing the use of modal verbs were discovered in the headlines:

1. COVID-19 will worsen Nigeria’s debts
2. Lockdowns may spark rise in HIV infections
3. Men should drink coconut water to boost their fertility.
4. Why Nigeria should avoid Madagascar’s COVID-19 drug
5. SMES must re-invent to remain competitive
6. **COVID-19:** We won’t reopen economy fully until.
7. We will continue to prepare, support countries to respond to COVID-19.
8. Pubs could open from July with social distancing.
9. 1500 schools could refuse to reopen
10. COVID-19 will worsen hunger in Africa
11. Liverpool may not get EPL trophy presentation
12. **Flooding:** LASG will proffer lasting solution
13. Corona Virus won’t stop our programme for Ondo
14. Nigerians should ignore trump on Hydroxychloroquine.
15. NNDC forensic audit will be concocted
16. Corona Virus will reach every state in Nigeria
17. Eagles, others may not play this year.
18. **Super Eagles:** I will never abandon my country
19. **UEFA League:** Season could be lost
20. Corona virus should now take centre stage
21. FCC Chair nominee will face thorough screening
22. Twitter employees can work from home forever

From the excerpts containing modals, the writers of news headlines expressed ideologically their views on health matters, business, economy, sports and the like. In the bid to do this, they expressed their attitudes towards the issues presented. In excerpts ‘3’, ‘4’, ‘14’, ‘20’, the writers showed that certain actions should be taken. So ‘should’ was employed to portray necessity.

In excerpts '1', '7', '10', '12', '15', '16', '17', '21', the headlines were predicting, future events. In excerpts '2', '8', '9', '17', '19', '22' the headlines portrayed diverse, angles of possibility through 'can' and 'could'. Excerpts '5' showed obligation of an event.

### Phrases

Writers of headlines also used a lot of phrases to make their headlines, catchy and concise. Such headlines attracted the readers' attention a lot as they presented sharp summaries of events.

Some of the phrases discovered in news headlines are:

1. The 'Almajiri Question'
2. The 'New normal in learning'
3. Restrictions on inter-state movement
4. UBA's investment in safety
5. NDCD and needless distraction
6. Issues in Kano COVID-19 fight
7. Art of self love for a healthy relationship
8. Ways to save struggling relationship
9. Relationship problems all couples experience
10. Easter bombings, senseless tragedy
11. Surmounting the challenges of house to house testing
12. The Emmaus of life
13. Rare philanthropy with passion at Isiala Mbandi
14. May devotion during COVID-19
15. Open letter to Nigerian Governor
16. Sequela Christ (following Christ)
17. Returned Abacha loot and anti-graft war
18. Of new debts and economic priorities
19. The coming anti-Christ and the Africans
20. The conversations on Agboola Gambari
21. 'Almajiri' and violation of lockdown order
22. The infections disease bill
23. Government and the COVID-19 billions
24. Akwa-Ibom's five years with Udom Emmanuel
25. Alleged distribution of expired rice by FG as palliative
26. Coming in from the cold
27. Lagos, COVID-19 and fake news

27. Tribute to tony Oladipo Allen, master drummer
28. Portrait of survivalists in Selvon's The lonely Londoners
29. **FCG:** Upholding federal character principle

Newspaper headlines, therefore, are concise summaries of ideologies presented in newspaper reports. Chen Xu (2009) reiterates that a news headline typically shaped around a phrase or a sentence lends the leader towards the news content and represents the essence of the news.

### Questions

It was also discovered that some newspaper headlines were in the forms of questions. The questions were answered in the news content found below the headlines in the newspapers.

### Some excerpts found in the newspapers are:

1. **COVID-19:** Can Africa afford lockdown?
2. Where is the power/technology?
3. **Back Pain:** Any remedy to the ageing?
4. **Re: Bishop Mathew Kukah:** A politician dressed in clinical robes?
5. What ails Wike?
6. Who is Prof Ibrahim Gambari, President Buhari's new Chief of Staff?
7. Why should feeding programme continue despite school closure?
8. **NDDC:** Who is afraid of forensic audit?

Legarraga (2018), asserts that question headlines arouses the interest of the reader to read the article and the reader is prompted to read the article to get the author's view. An urgent question relates to critical trending on coming issues since it builds one's interest to know more about the topic. (Legarraga 2013). The writer reiterates that question headlines are appealing to readers. They make excellent headlines since they quickly attract attention (Legarraga, 2013).

### Passive Voice

It was also discovered that some of the headlines appeared in the passive voice. Thus, according to Ulum (2016) headlines written in this form create curiosity among the readers making them form assumptions about the views. Some of the examples found in the data are:

1. APC aspirants shadow primary postponed.
2. FIFA technical trainings postponed indefinitely.
3. Ighalo's permanent man utd switch threatened.
4. 40 trapped in collapsed 8-storeys building in Imo state.

### **Theme/Rheme Analysis of some Newspaper Headlines**

The researchers employed the Theme-Rheme structure by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 65-97). It was discovered that most of the writers used the unmarked theme. The marked theme was rare.

Therefore, the theme serves as the point of departure of the message. It orients the clause within its context. The remainder of the message, the part which the theme is developed is the rheme. The use of marked theme in newspaper headlines is very rare.

### **Conclusion**

Newspaper headlines give captivating summaries of the articles found in newspapers. They also present catchy information which is educative and concise. Headlines persuade readers to read contents of articles and most of them arouse reader's curiosity and interest. Most of the headlines are in the form of clauses/simple sentences, phrases, questions, imperatives and modality. These headlines portray socio-political, academic, health, economic/business, sports ideologies while the ecclesiastical newspaper portray religious issues and secular events in the form of health, educational sporting political ideologies. Therefore, Tabe and Fieze (2018) have maintained that the language of headlines is powerful as it affects people's thoughts and results in diverse opinions about crises and actors. It is concluded that newspaper headlines are concise summaries of ideologies which are often very powerful provocative in attracting readers' attention to articles in the newspapers.

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