EXPLORING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN HEADLINES OF CRISES AND EMERGENCIES IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

This qualitative study demonstrated the interrelatedness between print journalism and written language. It explored figurative language in the headlines of crises and emergencies in Vanguard and Daily Sun newspapers selected through the simple random sampling. The research adopted mixed methods comprising discursive content analysis and oral interviews in which reader opinion and experience were sought. It was anchored on Framing, semantic and pragmatic theories and covered the last four months of 2022. The choice of the selected months was purposive because it was the peak of crisis and emergency in 2022. The population of study comprised all the editions of the select newspapers published during the period. The sample size represented the number of manageable observations for the study. There was a total of 68 samples (Vanguard 34, Daily Sun 34). The multistage sampling technique was used to determine the actual sample size. The coding sheet was the instrument for data collection and guided the researchers to classify their variables in predetermined columns. The coding sheets were tested for validity and found to measure what they intended to measure. Findings revealed a total of 37 figurative expressions in the headlines. These were from the three categories of figurative language such as idioms (13), figures of speech (8), and phrasal verbs (16). It was also discovered that, apart from their ability to create special effects, Aesthetics, and narrative style, the connotation of the figurative language had hidden meaning, posed semantic confusion, expressed ambiguity, and comprehension difficulty in the headlines. This paper recommended that readers should understand figurative language of crisis and emergency headlines in relation to the context in which

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They appear; the Nigerian journalists should desist from uncontrolled use of figurative language in crisis and emergency headlines.

Introduction

The general language of communication (written or oral) in Nigeria is the English Language. The way the English Language (as well as other languages) is handled determines the way it is understood among the users. In news production, language management has grave implications for news comprehension. A simple language is easier to understand than an ambiguously complicated one. So, with a simple linguistic expression, meaning making becomes an easy exercise but difficult when the expression is complex. The complexity in this sense touches all aspects of language that makes it hard to understand in a communication process. Indeed Editorial Team (2025, December 2) provides the key elements of effective written communication. The team quips that "for written communication to be effective, ensure it is clear, concise, complete and courteous".

The language of newspapers can be formal or informal depending on the type of news. Straight news (e.g. hard news and editorials) usually adopt a formal language while soft news (e.g. opinion articles) are written in an informal language. The most important aspect of the newspaper is the headline. The headline determines whether the reader should go ahead reading the story under it or whether he should ignore it for other stories. If the headline supplies simple and concise information, then it will attract the reader's attention. If not, it will cause the reader to abandon it. Olumuji and Olufemi (2022) declare that "to catch the reader's attention, headlines need to be simple, easily readable and appropriate to the kind of paper in which they are printed".

Sarwary and Samsor (2024) revisit Francis Bacon's 7Cs of a good written communication. Such elements are conciseness, correctness, concreteness, completeness, courteousness, coherence, and clarity. Every newspaper is expected to abide by the foregoing linguistic and professional prescriptions. Furthermore, the newspaper headlines are built around certain modes of expression like phrases, sentences, subordinate clause, and figurative language. Each of these modes of expression has a grave impact on news readability and understandability.

The phrasal headlines (e.g. ("Strike fall-out!", Daily Sun, Nov. 30, p.27) does not express a full sense because it lacks an action word. Structurallly, the simple-sentence headlines are the easiest to understand than the compound, multiple, and complex-sentence headlines. This is because of

the presence of only one verb, one subject, one object (if any), and no coordinating conjunction. Consider the fact that "Flood submerges Ogbaru LGA" (Vanguard, Sept. 28, p.11); "Flood submerges 65 Ndokwa communities" (Vanguard, Sept. 29, p.7); "Flood takes over roads in Warri" (Vanguard, Sept. 29, p.7). Compound-sentence headlines do not only contain two verbal units, two subjects and a coordination, but they also pose complexity in understanding them. For example, "We don't abduct, terrorise citizens, DSS refutes AI reports" (Vanguard, Sept. 1, p.8); and "We don't trust FG, ASUU tells Gbajabiamila" (Daily Sun, October 25, p.26).

The most confusing, complicated, and ambiguous newspaper headline language is the figurative. Figurative headlines are expressed either as idioms, phrasal verbs, or figures of speech. However, most metaphoric figures of speech have straight-forward or literal meanings while others are purely figurative and difficult to understand. Some examples of metaphorical headlines with literal meanings are: "He's most destructive force of fourth republic - Fani Kayode" (Daily Sun, Oct. 27, p.28); "Banditry, kidnapping are expansion of Boko Haram activities - Ex-gov"; (Vanguard, September 22, p.32); and "Criminalisation of strike is unknown to law - ASUU FUONYE tells FG" (Daily Sun, November 29, p.18).

The following metaphorical headlines are not only idiomatic but purely figurative: "I stand with ASUU" (Sept. 1); "Cholera kills 10 in Gombe" (Daily Sun, Sept. 23, p.28); "Ngige accuses ASUU of using strike to mobilise votes against APC" (Daily Sun, Oct. 7, p.6); "Midnight power surge kills 11 in Kaduna" (Daily Sun, Nov. 22, p.5); "British envoy decries electoral violence" (Daily Sun, Nov. 24, p.28); "Crisis looms in Delta community over leadership position" (Vanguard, Sept. 6, p.28); "Strike: ASUU raises eyebrows over selective payment of medical lectures' salaries" (Vanguard, Nov 4, p.5).

Phrasal verbs, like idioms, have figurative meanings, and pose difficulties in meaning making when they appear in newspaper headlines. Idioms and phrasal verbs have connotative meanings and, therefore, should not be used indiscriminately in newspaper headlines especially in crisis and emergency stories. Vanguard and Daily Sun overuse idioms, literary tropes, and phrasal verbs in their stories on crisis and emergency during the last four months in 2022.

Apart from conveying a complex idea in a small space, the Nigerian print reporters have also been accused of decorating their headlines with reckless, ambiguous figurative language thereby hampering easy reading, understanding, and perception of the news (Mansor & Salman (2020). Crisis and emergency headlines and the stories under them should not be written with

indiscriminate figurative language. Caution and control should be applied and the language direct, simple, clear, and the meaning open.

Therefore, using the Vanguard and Daily Sun newspapers as samples, this study therefore explores the use of figurative language in crisis and emergency headlines in Nigerian newspapers.

Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to explore the use of figurative language in crisis and emergency reporting headlines in the September - December 2022 Vanguard and Daily Sun newspapers. The specific objectives are to:

(1). Identify the phrasal verbs in the crisis and emergency headlines.

(2). Discover the idioms in the headlines.

(3). Explore the figures of speech in the headlines.

Literature Review

Empirical Review

The newspaper headline is an important part of the news narrative referred to as the title of the story. Hayder & Khalid (2020) observe that "when readers want to take a look on what happens in the world, they go over the headlines of news … since they … grab their readers' attention …" This attention grabbing, attraction and retention, is one of the main functions of newspaper headlines. The language pattern and mode of headlines are quite distinct from the body. This is because the framing of headlines and the body of the story are done differently and with varying intentions. Headlines are framed to summarise the body of the entire news narrated under them, catch the attention of the reader, and introduce shapes and aesthetics in the entire text.

Many authors and newspaper experts (Bedrichova, 2006; Anjani 2020, April 3; Akpere, 2021) have summarised the general function of a newspaper headline as being the window to the accompanying story. It attracts the attention of readers, holds their interest, and tells them about the story. In summary, a good headline should not confuse the reader or difficult to understand. It should attract the reader's attention, summarise the story, depict the mood of the story, help to set the tone of the newspaper, and provide adequate typographic relief. Another significant feature of

newspaper headlines is that they are usually and traditionally presented in the simple present tense to enhance immediacy, urgency, and currency.

There is always a deviation and distinction in the style of newspaper headlines and the news body. One example of this, according to Mansor and Salman (2020), is found in the lexical choices such as strong verbal, epithetical adjectives, and adverbial elements. To Hussein (2017), "these short statements (that is, newspaper headlines) located at the beginning of an article frame the information that follows. They encapsulate a portion of the news, presenting a snapshot of reality".

Furthermore, newspaper headlines are beautified with figurative and graphological features, lexical items, syntactic structures and semantics. The lexis of headlines refers to such content words as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. The syntactic elements include phrases, sentences, and clauses, while their semantics contain the meanings of the words, sentences, and other expressions. Phrasal headlines could be simple, compound, participial, or gerundial. Sentences could be structured in simple, compound, complex, or in a (subordinate) clause form. Figurative language has also been discovered in newspaper headlines. These language levels and linguistic forms in the headlines have various implications for message fidelity and understandability.

The newspaper headlines have recently come under criticism. Many newspaper critics (Infantidou, 2009; Research Guide, 2022, August 17) have written severally against the social, lexical and semantic dysfunctions of the newspaper headlines. Infantidou (2009) poses a critical question on whether "appropriate headlines from the writer's perspective converge with "effective headlines" from the reader's perspective. After studying 137 responses from his research participants, Infantidou (2009) discovers the impossibility of explaining in "psychological plausible terms" the way newspaper headlines are selected and interpreted by readers. In its final submission, the study accuses that "newspaper headlines rivet the attention of readers in terms of creative style …". This indirectly forces readers to ignore the headlines' undermining of semantic considerations and standard norms such as length, clarity and information.

Research Guides (2022, August 7), discovers biases and errors in the headlines of newspapers in the United States. It finds out, among other things, that "newspapers are the must-read part of a news story because they are often printed in bold fonts". They can also be "misleading,

conveying excitement when the story is not exciting, expressing approval or disapproval". In addition to the foregoing criticism, tragic newspaper headlines such as on crisis and emergency have also been accused of frightening their readers and entire society through the use of exaggerated expressions, frightening metaphors and hyperbolic personifications, fear, and panic frames.

Based on the above exposition, the following headlines in the Daily Sun and Vanguard of September - December 2022 must have thrown readers into more panic than the tragedies they reported: "Ending the year in tears" (Daily Sun, Dec. 29); "Terror returns to Taraba" (Daily Sun, July 29); "Terror alert in Abuja" (Daily Sun, October 31); "ISWAP is coming" (Daily Sun, February 7); "23 dead, 104 communities sacked, 116,084 displaced as floods ravage Benue" (Vanguard, September 28); "32,617 lives lost to road accidents in 6 years" (Vanguard, September 28); and "Tension in Enugu as gunmen attack army checkpoint, kill 2 officers" (Vanguard, September 28). The above headlines vividly depict situations where newspapers collaborate with crises and emergencies to throw the readers and entire society into more panic and trepidation than the tragedies they reported.

Newspaper headlines on crisis and emergency have also been accused of using difficult language to confuse readers and make them unable to understand what is presented. They usually achieve this through careless and uncontrolled use of figurative expressions such as idioms, literary tropes, and phrasal verbs. Olumuji & Olufemi (2022) discover in their study that newspapers can play negative roles, if they carelessly manage their language and their words wrongly selected to "cast caution to the wind and by over-sensitizing their stories with complementary wild headlines". With this, they conclude that those headlines deviate from their contents leading to incongruity and non coherence of ideas. Adeniran (2023) strongly disagree with Infantidou (2009), Olumuji & Olufemi (2022) that newspapers produce negative headlines. He debates that if newspapers, as "a two-edged sword" can instigate crises, they also provide an avenue for resolving them. He strongly avers that it all depends on the mode of direction and use.

Theoretical Review

Pragmatic and Semantic Theories

Pragmatics and semantics are two subfields of linguistics that study meaning in language. Pragmatics studies how language is used in context to convey meaning, taking into account factors like *speaker intention*, *audience*, and *social context*. So, it tries to find out the actual

meaning of words in a text, and their arrangement or structure (Ismail, 2016; Hurford & Smith, 2007 quoted in Ismail, 2006). On the other hand, semantics examines the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences, focusing on the relationships between linguistic elements and their meanings.

Meaning can be implied (connotative and figurative), lexical (denotative and literal) or contextual (according to construction) However, though pragmatics and semantics deal with meanings of human utterances, Lyons (1977) offers a clearer difference between the two. He argues that pragmatics focuses on intended or contextual meaning. In other words, what does the speaker or writer mean? On the other hand, semantics looks at meaning according to lexis. In other words, what does the dictionary say?

However, ambiguity is a problem in meaning making - a situation where an expression, when critically examined, contains more than one meaning at a time. Semantic ambiguity can be explained using the below examples:

Sentence 1: "Soldiers destroy 81 illegal refiners in N'Delta, arrest 81, kill terrorists" (Daily Sun, Dec. 2, p.5).

Sentence 2: "Troops kill 103 terrorists, arrest 40 others, destroy 57 refineries" (Daily Sun, December 23, p.4).

In the first headline (Sentence 1), "refiners" is ambiguous because it can mean "people who refine" or "the equipment for refining". What actually do the soldiers "destroy" – the people refining, the equipment for refining, or both? Daily Sun should explain this. After three weeks of reporting the above ambiguous headline (1), Daily Sun comes up with a clearer report that "troops kill 103 terrorists, arrest 40 others, destroy 57 refineries" (December 23, p.4). It is now obvious that troops specifically destroy the facilities and or the place where crude oil is refined. It is not human beings that are destroyed as implied in headline 1.

There is also ambiguity in "Kwara police nab 23 suspected robbers, ritualists (Daily Sun, October 28). Who does the Kwara police arrest alongside robbers? Do they round up those engaging in some solemn religious performance; or do they arrest those harvesting human organs for money and or for fetish sacrifices? Now, who actually does "ritualists" refer to?

The headline, "incessant coups in Africa" (Daily Sun, October 28, p.12), is another ambivalent expression. "Coups" stands for feats, triumphs, successes, or military overthrows. It is said that a

good headline should summarise the body of the news. The question now is whether "incessant coups in Africa" summarises the body of the story without going through the news? No. This is because the headline "incessant coups in African" can ambiguously be rephrased to mean "incessant feats in Africa", "incessant triumphs in Africa", "incessant victories in Africa", or "incessant military overthrows in Africa".

What are the killers of the murdered soldiers to pay, if Governor Soludo of Anambra State insists that "killers of soldiers must pay .…"? (Daily Sun, September 30). If they are to be fined monetarily, how much are they going to "pay" to be free? On the other hand, if the reader never (mis) understands the word "pay" to mean a monetary fine, then he must have (mis) understands it to mean "suffer" or "be punished".

If due to "insecurity: Orton hits back at Shehu" (Vanguard, Sept. 2, p.15), does it mean that Ortom retaliates by punching or hitting Shehu with the fist or a stick? If that is not the intention of the reporter then it may mean that Governor Ortom verbally replies aggressively, or angrily ("hits back") to Shehu's criticism or remark.

Decoding writer intention is the duty of the reader, and a problem in communication process. The headline contains the summary of the intention of the writer. To discover this intention, the reader should identify the meaning of each of the words in the headline through contextual analysis. Experts (De Gree & Stearns, 2023, December; Fiveable, 2024, August 21) agree that this is because the meaning of a word in a headline largely depends on the meanings of other words surrounding it.

In the present research, the meanings of the figurative expressions in the headlines (idioms, tropes, phrasal verbs) are determined from other words around them. This at least helps to decipher writer intention.

Framing theory

Framing is one of the theories of media effects. Wogu (2008, p.93) clears that media effect theories are used "to explain the impact of the media of mass communication on the audience". Every medium of mass communication influences the audience and makes them behave or react in a certain way, as may be prescribed or persuasively suggested by the said medium. This influence is enhanced by the individual characteristics of the media and the way and manner communicators skillfully manipulate the media, media content, communication codes, and

language elements. The entire process of mass communication is anchored on the belief that the mass media is full of significant effects (McQuail, 1994, p.327).

Gamson and Modigliano (1987) quoted in Scheufele (1999) define a frame (or media frame) as a central organising idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. A frame is a perceived reality in a news item. For example, any news about war is expected to be full of fear, horror and anxiety. In this study, crisis and emergency stories are narrated with fear, panic, confusion, and connotative frames. Framing, therefore, is the act or process of selecting some aspect of perceived reality and making them more pronounced and salient in a text. It is purely the decision of the reporter, not that of the reader.

There are positive (constructive) and negative frames. War, conflict, fear, horror, anxiety, denial, abuse, blame, uncertainty, etc. are some negative frames. Peace, hope, unity, boldness, solution, etc. are some examples of positive frames (Syeda, 2022). There is also cause and effect frame, consequence frame, conflict of opinion or idea frame, morality frame, etc. Framing is a tool to manipulate and control the audience "to the extent that it tends to alter the process of the opinion formation in the audience" (Syeda, 2022). Framing is not without weaknesses.

First, framing does not have a universal language and approach because a given story could be framed in different ways. Second, framing does not represent or express a general thought other than the reporter's own. It is full of personal choices, styles and intentions. Third, there may be a reversal or twist of meaning resulting from the irony of a situation, where the audience (reader) interprets or understands a frame differently from the writer's intended meaning. This is one of the problems discovered in the present study. For example, a negative frame to a reporter or a given reader may turn out to be positive to another reader, vice versa.

Fourth, framing is impact-oriented. It impacts the reader. That is, it can cause a newspaper to lose readership due to negative impact. The style and or direction of coverage and framing may cause the reader to detest the newspaper. For instance, the use of figurative language in the headlines of crisis and emergency, as found in this research, poses a difficulty to meaning and understanding of the headlines. Consequently, the reader may withdraw his readership and loyalty for the newspaper. This may also affect the reader's perception of life, himself and society. These are also the parts of the factors investigated in this study.

In summary, pragmatic, semantic and framing theories are both relevant to this study. While the pragmatic and semantic frameworks allow the researcher to subjectively and linguistically

analyse the meanings of the headlines in the select newspapers, framing offers him the opportunity to use his judgment to dig out salient themes and aspects of perceived realities from the stories.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection Procedure

The multistage sampling (with four levels or stages) were used to determine the actual sample for the study:

Stage 1: A list of the 24 available national newspapers in the country during the period of study was made. This gave equal chances of selection to the national dailies. Using the simple random sampling, Daily Sun and Vanguard were selected.

Stage 2: The purposive sampling method was used to select the months for the study. The last four months (September, October, November, and December) qualified for selection because they contained the characteristics that supported the aims of the study. The four months were significant because September marked the beginning of the 2022 floods; October and November were the peak of the floods as well as the period when insecurity gathered momentum in the country; Naira redesign alongside its harsh economic conditions was initiated in December, 2022. In addition, the 2023 presidential election and its resultant political brouhaha initiated by Muslim-Muslim tickets and antagonistic campaigns were at their apogee from December, 2022.

Stage 3: The researchers further adopted the composite method to arrange the months into weeks and weeks into days (Riffle et al., 1993). There were only five days affected (Monday - Friday). Saturday and Sunday editions were not included during the coding because they were not readily available at the library where the study was conducted. This process yielded 34 editions of each of the two dailies (a total of 68 editions). Wimmer and Dominick (2011) confirm that the composite method is the most suitable when dealing with newspaper and magazine contents.

Stage 4: The simple random method was finally applied to select the first and the last weeks of each of the four months through a blind draw.

Oral Interviews: The researchers interacted with a cross section of 50 adult newspaper readers (25 males and 25 females) in Imo and Anambra States. Those research participants confessed that, in addition to other newspapers, they also frequently read the hardcopies of Daily Sun and

Vanguard especially in 2022. The available demographic information on the participants revealed that there were 20 civil servants, 10 traders, 10 retirees, 5 undergraduates, and 5 artisans. The researchers asked the respondents questions based on the three objectives of the study, the implications and impacts of the headlines decorated with figurative language. Most relevant responses were chosen and incorporated in the discussions and analyses.

Days/Weeks/Months Considered During Selected

MONTH	DAILY SUN	VANGUARD
SEPTEMBER	1, 2, 6, 7, 22, 23, 27,28, 29, 30	1, 2, 3, 7, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30
OCTOBER	4, 5, 6, 7, 25, 26, 27, 28	4, 5, 6, 7, 25, 26, 27, 28
NOVEMBER	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30	1, 2, 3, 4, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30
DECEMBER TOTAL DAYS	1, 2, 5, 7, 22, 23 34	1, 2, 6, 7, 22, 23 34

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Objective 1: To identify phrasal verbs in the crisis and emergency headlines.

Phrasal Verbs in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

A phrasal verb results when a verb takes up a particle (preposition, adverb, or both) so that the combination will assume a meaning different from the lexical meaning of the verb and its particle(s). Our samples utilised various kinds of phrasal verbs in their related headlines of crisis and emergency reporting. We discovered two categories of phrasal verbs during the coding: literal and figurative. The latter type of phrasal verbs are more relevant due to the objectives of this study. However, we coded all the categories. Generally, there are 16 phrasal verbs across the headlines of the two select newspapers: Vanguard (10), Daily Sun (6).

In this study, phrasal verbs are also treated as the expressions of collocations. This is because in phrasal verbs, actions and their corresponding particles must agree to blend naturally as in collocations. Therefore, phrasal verb and phrasal-verb-collocation are used interchangeably in the study.

Phrasal Verbs in Vanguard Headlines of Crisis and Emergency

(i). Using Tucano jets, military wipes out 63 terrorists in Sambisa Forest, Kaduna (Sept. 2, p.9).

Meaning: The military completely destroys the terrorists.

(ii). Surging ocean slowly swallows Bayelsa community. Over 50 houses eaten up, natives live in fear (Sept. 6, p.22).

Meaning: The houses are consumed or submerged in the water.

(iii). Gully erosion cuts off A'Ibom community (Sept. 6, p.23).

Meaning: The erosion separates the community from the rest of the locality.

(iv). Why court ordered ASUU to call off 7-month long strike (Sept. 29, p.13). **Meaning**: It aims to reveal why the court commands ASUU to cancel the strike.

(v). Experts thumb down FRSC on road traffic crashes eradication (Sept. 30, p.23). **Meaning**: Experts disapprove of FRSC's traffic activities.

(vi). NUCFLANMPE fumes over loss of 20,000 workers to govt policies (Sept. 1, p.28).

Meaning: It expresses indignation on the loss.

(vii). 2023: Nigeria'll break up if APC wins - Obaseki (Oct. 25, p.12).

Meaning: Obaseki believes that Nigeria will disintegrate if APC wins the 2023 election.

(viii). CLOSURE OF IDP CAMPS: Starving Bayelsa IDPS fall into depression, cry out (Nov. 29, p.26).

Meaning: The IDPS suddenly become depressed, and complain loudly.

(ix). Rescued Chibok girls cry out: "We want to return to school" (Dec. 1, p.8). **Meaning**: The girls complain bitterly and demand to go back to school.

(x). POLITICAL VIOLENCE: Rein in your thugs, NSA tells govs (Dec. 2, p.8). **Meaning**: NSA warns state governors to bring their thugs under control.

Phrasal Verbs in Daily Sun Headlines of Crisis and Emergency

(i). Vandals blow up Agip pipelines in Bayelsa (September 22, p.5).

Meaning: The vandals completely destroy Agip pipelines in Bayelsa.

(ii). Step-up battle at terrorists' camps, commander urges MNJTF troops (Oct 27, p.5).

Meaning: The commander urges the military to intensify the battle against terrorists.

(iii). Security agents'll soon go after political thugs - NSA (Dec 2, p.27).

Meaning: The security agents will soon pursue to arrest political thugs during the 2023 elections.

(iv). IPOB: Court orders security operatives to <u>fish out</u> killers of aide to Nnamdi Kanu's lawyer (Dec 2, p.4).

Meaning: Court simply instructs the security operatives to discover and punish the killers.

(v). Before EFCC <u>gets off</u> executive apron strings (Dec 22, p.16).

Meaning: Before EFCC escapes executive control. This is a satirical sarcasm suggesting that the EFCC is under the control of the executive arm of government, and may not escape soon.

(vi). DHQ denies soldiers' attack on Enugu village, vows to <u>fish out</u> perpetrators (Dec 23, p. 4).

Meaning: DHQ makes a solemn promise that it will discover and punish the killers.

Research Objective 2: To discover idioms in the headlines of crisis and emergency

Idioms in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

Abid et al. (2016) explain that an idiomatic headline is "a polysemic expression whose meaning cannot be concluded from the meaning of its parts, despite the fact that its extensive definition is based on popular examples". Many linguists (Hsu, 2020; Guzikova, 2022) agree that idiomatic headlines are metaphorical expressions with hidden meanings and, therefore, should not be approached literally. Our search reveals a total of 13 idiomatic headlines across the two national dailies: Vanguard (4), Daily Sun (9).

Idiomatic Headlines in Vanguard

(i). Building collapse: Sanwo-Olu <u>goes tough</u>, Commissioner quits (Sept 6, p.3).

Meaning: Gov Sanwo-Olu is aggressively determined to deal with those responsible for the collapse.

(ii). Expert <u>thumbs down</u> FRSC on road traffic crashes eradication (Sept 30, p.23).

Meaning: The expert disapproves of FRSC safety measures.

(iii). Flood <u>on rampage</u> in Plateau, Anambra, Bayelsa (Oct 5).

Meaning: The flood moves with full force and out of control in these areas.

(iv). Strike: ASUU <u>raises eyebrows</u> over selective payment of medical lectures' salaries (Nov 4, p.5).

Meaning: ASUU expresses its surprise over and disapproval of the payment method.

Idiomatic Headlines in Daily Sun

(i). Beware! Fake soldiers <u>on the sprowl</u> (Sept 2, p.14)

Meaning: Fake soldiers are out hunting for illegal deals and victims.

(ii). <u>Sons of Dogs</u> in Kaduna forest (Sept 22, p.5)

Meaning: Dishonest and badly raised men inhabit Kaduna forest for evil activities.

(iii). N8.8bn tramadol: NDLEA <u>gets court's nod</u> to detain suspected billionaire drug baron (Oct 7, p.5)

Meaning: Court consents and supports court to detain the drug baron.

(iv). 2023: security agencies <u>talk tough</u> as political parties sign accord in Kwara (Oct 6, p.12)

Meaning: Security agencies threaten to punish parties that fail to adopt the peace deal.

(v). EFCC <u>talks tough,</u> targets politicians over vote buying (Oct 28, p.26)

Meaning: EFCC thratens to punish parties that may buy votes during the 2023 election.

(vi). ASUU: ACF urges FG to <u>shift ground</u> (Oct 6, p 27).

Meaning: ACF wants FG to have a change of mind in favour of ASUU.

(vii). Strike fall-out! (Nov. 30, p.27).

Meaning: Argument and misunderstanding over strike.

(viii). Iwuanyanwu <u>blows hot over</u> herdsmen killing in S'East (Dec 2, p.4).

Meaning: He speaks angrily against it.

(ix). Before EFCC <u>gets off executive apron strings</u> (Dec 12, p.16).

Meaning: The allusion here is that the EFCC is controlled and supported by the executive arm of government.

Discussion on Significance and Implication of Phrasal Verbs and Idiomatic Headlines

Idioms and phrasal verbs are not only collocative but also part of a figurative language. Phrasal verbs, on the other hand, are idiomatic in nature because both phrasal verbs and idioms have connotative meanings. In this study, phrasal verb headlines are also treated as idioms and collocations.

Guzikova (2022) notes that idiomatic headlines are used with "the aim of creating a specific imagery and special effects while writing newspaper materials." However, there is inherent confusion associated with figurative headlines (idiomatic and phrasal verb headlines) since their meanings are figurative, hidden, and not open. Readers, especially those below average, will surely find it difficult to comprehend certain idiomatic or figurative expressions in newspaper

headlines. In their research, Challenges and Strategies in Understanding English Idioms: English as a Foreign Language Students' Perception, Anjarini and Hatmanto (2021) report that there is difficulty foreign language students encounter while faced with idioms.

It is stating the obvious to mention that communication has not taken place if the parties involved - the sender and the receiver - fail to understand their codes and communicative elements. This will therefore cause reporters of crisis and emergency events (including during the period investigated) to lose a certain percent of readership, and fail in their surveillance, education, and information functions. This is so because, on certain occasions, they use certain idioms and, therefore, fail to strike a chord or establish a common frame of reference with their audience.

Another problem associated with idiomatic and phrasal verb headlines is the possibility of ambiguity. This is because every idiom and phrasal verb is likely to have both literal and figurative implications. To deal with this likely semantic problem, experts (Ta'amneh, 2021; Cain & Townsend, nd) proffer that idioms in newspaper headlines should be understood in relation to the context in which they are used in the captions.

A male undergraduate of about 25 years old declared that "I don't prefer reading newspaper stories whose headlines use difficult words, ambiguous items, or uncommon expressions. This is the problem with phrasal verbs and idioms when they are used in headlines."

Research Objective 3: To explore figures of speech in crisis and emergency headlines

Figures of speech are literary tropes. Brewer (2022, April 16) defines literary tropes as "common plot devices within various genres of writing." This definition is not comprehensively captured because it excludes speech acts and recognises literary tropes as the ingredients of only textual communication. However, tropes are more salient, overt, copious, and pronounced in written communications or visual semiotics than in speeches. Many scholars (Campbell, 2017; Leyenaar, 2022, May 1; Khan, 2024) believe that the application of tropes in writing is an artful deviation from the ordinary or principal signification of words.

From our newspaper samples, a total of 636 tropes are scattered across nine figures of speech such as Personification (29), Metaphor (65), Irony (40), Allusion (8), Sarcasm (7), Repetition (446), Rhetorical Question (4), Hyperbole (18), and Litotes (19). Our search indicates that the two newspapers (Vanguard and Daily Sun) use more metaphorical headlines than other figures of

speech to report crisis stories over the period investigated. It is also discovered that a given headline can represent more than one literary trope at the same time. For instance, "APC's Muslim-Muslim Ticket: Lalong is a coward and lapdog, Dagora camp replies Dati" (Daily Sun, September 29, p.28) represents metaphor, allusion, and sarcasm.

Personification in Crisis and Emergency Reporting Headlines

Personification is the act of giving human attributes to nonhuman beings. Personification is "humanisation" because inanimate or nonhuman agents are given human behaviours and attributes. For example, in our samples, agents of environmental hazards or crises (e.g. wind, flood, climate change, building collapse, etc) are personified on certain occasions and in some headlines. Inflation, stagflation, naira redesign, economic recession, and hardship are personified in some headlines under economic crises. In health crises and emergency st+,ories, words like diseases, drugs, drug abuse, and brain drain are given human qualities. ASUU Strike and salary issues are personified in education stories. In political crises, human attributes are ascribed to the nonhuman agents as Muslim-Muslim tickets, campaign, violence, assembly, and rally. A perusal of the instances below paints a picture on the use of personification in the affected headlines:

Personifications in Vanguard Headlines

i). Adamawa cholera outbreak kills 2, others in critical condition (September 1, p.6).

ii). Narrow escape for Taraba residents as heavy flood sweeps through community (September 2, p.15).

iii). Surging ocean slowly swallows Bayelsa community (September 6, p.22)

iv). Gully erosion cuts off A'Ibom communities (ibid).

v). Ekiti residents in despair as flood destroys houses, property (September 22, p.9).

vi). Flood submerges Ogbaru LGA (September 28, p.11).

vii). Flood submerges 65 Ndokwa communities (September 29, p.7).

viii). Flood takes over roads in Warri (September 29, p.7).

vix). Flood renders hundreds homeless in Asaba (September 30, p.6).

x). Flood on rampage in Plateau, Anambra, Bayelsa (October 5).

xi). How micronutrient deficiencies rob Nigerian children optimal health (Nov. 22, p.26)

xii). Poisoned food claims 11 lives in Benue (November 22, p.6).

Personification in Daily Sun Headlines

i). NAFDAC raises alarm over banned tomato paste (September 1).

ii). When angry flood visited Kano (September 2, p.22).

iii). Cholera kills 10 in Gombe (September 23, p.28).

iv). Wicked flood ravages Benue communities (September 28, p.14).

v). Floods wreak 154 places, transport infrastructure worth N80bn - FG (October 27, p. 27).

vi). Peace returns to Niger after fears of massacre, abduction, rape (ibid, p.14).

vii). Landslide kills 2 farmers in Kaduna (November 4, p.4).

viii). Fire destroys goods worth N700m in Onitsha market (November 29, p.4).

Discussion on Significance and Implication of Personification in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

Personification adds clarity to a piece of writing. It also helps to create imagery and makes descriptions more interesting. Giving human qualities to nonhuman actors can also enhance the feel or atmosphere of a piece. Furthermore, personification can also help to make an abstract concept easier to understand by using a character to represent it. For example, "Fire destroys goods worth N700m in Onitsha market" (November 29, p.4). Here, "fire", a nonhuman agent, is given human capability to "destroy" the goods. In another case, "Wicked flood ravages Benue communities" (September 28, p.14). "Flood" is not only "wicked" but it also "ravages" a whole community.

In newspaper headlines and indeed other narratives, personification is "a powerful tool that, when used skillfully, can create vivid images and deep subconscious connections in the reader's mind" (Donnchaidh, 2024, April 15). For instance, there is an image of destruction, disaster, and wastage depicted in "Fire destroys goods worth N700m in Onitsha market" (November 29, p.4).

The use of personification in newspaper headlines has received scurrilous criticisms. According to Donnchaidh (2024, April 15), "many common examples of personification are so clichéd as to be almost invisible to the naked ear." That is, most personifications have been overused to the point of boredom and insipidity. For example, "Peace returns to …" (Daily Sun, October, p.14); "Flood submerges … communities" (Vanguard, September 29, p.7); "Poisoned food claims … lives" (Vanguard, November 22, p.6); "Flood takes over roads …" (Vanguard, September 29,

p.7). With clichés in the headlines, the reader can guess the writer's next line of report, and this foreshadow will not only help comprehension but also introduce lack of interest in the story.

Furthermore, in the evidence of Moore (2008), John Ruskin propounds the theory of *Pathetic Fallacy* in which he flaws the idea of attributing human emotions to inanimate objects because it is an error in the writer's judgment, a sign of an overactive or distorted emotional state in the writer.

Moore (2008) quips that Dorothy Sayer's, in her essay on allegory, declares personifications as tedious and unreal. That is, no matter the verisimilitude, there is nothing that will make an inanimate actor (e.g. flood) to become a real human actor in the news of crisis and emergency.

A medical doctor at St Nicholas Hospital, Uli, Anambra State, expressed his dislike for personifications in the news captions of crisis and emergency stories. In his words, "I personally detest over-amplified expressions especially in news headlines. They make issues seem more than they appear in real life due to unnecessary exaggerations. In most cases, in trying to make nonhumans act like humans, reporters end up making them act more than humans themselves".

An artisan whose workplace was situated near Nkwo-Ogbe Market opposite First Bank, Ihiala, Anambra State, stated that "To me, the use of personification is not only a show of the mastery of language but also it can also scare the life out of the reader especially in crisis stories. I am not always comfortable reading crisis stories where inanimate objects act more than human beings. And I know that it is so with many other readers."

A Principal at Ohakpu Commercial Secondary School, Imo State, demonstrated what he called "exaggerated diction" in crisis and emergency headlines. The school head opined that "exaggerated choice of words leads to overstated actions in the headlines, imputing overblown actions on nonhuman agents". To drive his point home, the Principal stood up, went to his archive, and pulled a September 2022 Vanguard. He flipped the pages and saw the headlines he was looking for. He therefore read them aloud: "Flood submerges Ogbaru LGA" (September 28, p.11); "Flood submerges 65 Ndokwa communities" (September 29, p.7); and "Flood renders hundreds homeless in Asaba" (September 30, p.6). That flood "submerges" communities and "renders" many homeless are frightening actions that seem to be beyond human perpetration.

Metaphor in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

Metaphor is a figure of speech that directly compares one thing with another by saying that one is exactly the other but not like the other. Most metaphors usually take the SVC-structure in which the subject (S) is separated from its complement (C) by a verb (V) which is usually a be-verb (am, is, was, are, and were). Some examples of the headlines from our samples with the foregoing structure are:

i). APC's Muslim-Muslim Ticket: Lalong is a coward and lapdog, Dagora camp replies Dati (Daily Sun, September 29, p.28;

ii) .… He's most destructive force of fourth republic - Fani Kayode (Daily Sun, Oct. 27, p.28)

iii). Criminalisation of strike is unknown to law - ASUU FUONYE tells FG (Daily Sun, November 29, p.18).

iv). Banditry, kidnapping are expansion of Boko Haram activities - Ex-gov (Vanguard, September 22, p.32).

v). It's doubtful herders wilfully destroy farms - FG (Vanguard hi, November 29, p.3).

Furthermore, Kovecses (2002) also recommends that metaphors must not always follow the SVC-format. He argues that metaphors must not base on the similarities of the persons or things involved. All statements of fact and eternal truths are also metaphorical.

The following instances from Vanguard depict the above examples: "Crisis looms in Delta community over leadership position" (Sept. 6, p.28); "Police arrest 3 suspected kidnappers in Delta, victim rescued" (Sept. 22, p. 6); "Herdsmen invade, destroy farms worth N50m in Enugu" (Sept 30, p.6); "Ondo Amotekun arrests 45 criminals within 2 weeks" (Sept. 22, p.6); "Edo police arrest 7 for cultism, killing" (Nov. 29, p.6).

The following examples are found in Daily Sun: "I stand with ASUU" (Sept. 1); "Cholera kills 10 in Gombe" (Sept. 23, p.28); "Ngige accuses ASUU of using strike to mobilise votes against APC" (Oct. 7, p.6); "Midnight power surge kills 11 in Kaduna" (Nov. 22, p.5); "British envoy decries electoral violence" (Nov. 24, p.28).

On certain occasions, in addition to sentences, noun phrases also form metaphorical headlines. For instance, "Showers of sorrow" (Daily Sun, Sept. 7, p.18); "The "NDLEA's great feat" (Daily Sun, Sept. 29, p.11); " (Daily Sun, Oct. 4, p.12); "Spell of tears, sorrow" (Daily Sun, Nov. 23, p.18); "Severe hunger in Abuja" (Daily Sun, Nov 30, p.18); "The $500m loan for power sector" (Daily Sun, Dec. 23, p.11); "The bourgeoning Kidnapping industry" (Vanguard, Sept. 27, p.16);

"The politics of Boko Haram and the arithmetic of 2023" (Vanguard, Sept. 28, p.16); "National honours for the academia in the face of ASUU strike" (Vanguard, Oct. 6, p.18); "Avoidable catastrophes" (Vanguard, Nov. 2, p.18); "Insights about inflation and CBN's policy options" (Vanguard, Nov. 29, p.16); "Nigeria's 35 years of economic hypothesis without benefits" (Vanguard, Dec. 1, p.15); "Bitter home truth" (Vanguard, Dec. 2, p.16).

Discussion on Significance and Implication of Metaphor in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

Metaphors in the headlines of crisis and emergency express statements of fact and eternal truths which can be positive, as in "Severe hunger in Abuja", "incessant coups in Africa", "Criminalisation of strike is unknown to law", etc; or negative, as in "War without end in PDP" (Daily Sun, Sept p.6), "ASUU strike won't stop sale of UTME forms in 2023", "Nigeria @ 62: So far, not far" (Daily Sun, October 4, p.2), "We don't abduct, terrorise citizens, DSS refutes AI reports (Vanguard, September 1, p.8), "ASUU strike: Never again!" (Vanguard, Nov 2, p.18), etc.

In addition, the SVC-sentence metaphors present the two parts of headlines where the subject and its complement are the same and support each other for sense making (e.g. "Banditry, kidnapping are expansion of Boko Haram activities - Ex-gov", Vanguard, Sept 22, p.32; "Criminalisation of strike is unknown to law - ASUU FUONYE tells FG", Daily Sun, November 29, p.18).

Finally, the use of metaphorical headlines removes uncertainties and speculations not only from the headlines but also the stories under them. Certainty is thereby guaranteed.

Irony in the Headlines of Crisis and Emergency Reporting

Irony in our headlines is a situation that presents the opposite of what is supposed to be the normal. It is also a rhetorical contradiction between appearance and reality, or a deviation from what is normal (Lwin, 2020). Linguistic and literary scholars (e.g. Lwin, 2020) admit that there are three categories of irony: verbal, situational, and dramatic. Verbal irony involves the use of words of mouth. Situational irony involves the expected result and the actual result, especially when the unexpected happens. On the other hand, dramatic irony concerns a theatrical performance or dramatic arrangement where the audience understands the present and or future actions that are misunderstood by a character or a group of characters.

In this study, we propose situational irony because it typically describes the textuality and contextuality of headline ironies, their expected results and reversals. Laurinavicius (2024, April 15), in his examples, funnily quips that it is ironic to hear or see "a fire station in flames, a car racer being afraid of speed, a police officer being arrested, and a cardiologist having a heart attack". There are 40 sampled situational ironies for the study. Consider the report that "Gunmen kill 4, 1 civilian in Anambra (Daily Sun, Sept. 29). It is an irony that trained soldiers, instead of killing gunmen, are rather killed by the same gunmen - not even one criminal is gunned down in the fusillade. Similarly, "gunmen kill 3 soldiers, injure 4 in Enugu, Katsina" (Vanguard, Sept 2, p.6); "Tension in Enugu as gunmen attack army checkpoint, kill 2 officers (Vanguard, Sept 29); "Killers of soldiers must pay, Soludo" (Daily Sun, Sept 30, p.4); "Gunmen attack police patrol team, kill 2 officers in Kogi" (Daily Sun, Dec 22, p.4).

Other situational ironies portray occasions where the federal government, army and or police go wild and start killing the innocent citizens they are supposed to save from terrorist attacks. For example, "We don't abduct, terrorise citizens, DSS refute AI reports" (Vanguard, Sept, p.8); "Police, major perpetrators of attack against journalists - MRA" (Vanguard, Nov 4, p.7); "Blame Nigerian army for killing in Enugu, Rivers - IPOB" (Vanguard, Nov 29, p.7); "Illegal abduction: Court orders FG to pay Kanu N500m damages, return him to Kenya (Daily Sun, Oct 27, p.4); "FG apologises over dozens killed in Zamfara airstrikes, Senator seeks probe" (Daily Sun, Dec 22, p.6).

Gunshot and machete-cut protection charms usually prepared by witch doctors and mostly won by criminals are believed to save the life of the user. However, it is ironic that a "native doctor kills client in Enugu as gunshot protection charm fails" (Vanguard, Nov 30, p.6). Additionally, the church is a place of worship, moral teachings, inculcation of etiquette, and the discouragement of antisocial behaviours. On the contrary, there is rather a case of "rape in the church" (Daily Sun, Sept 22). It is also expected that life in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, like other countries' capitals, should be far better than life in the rural areas.

However, the irony that the reader cannot fathom is the "severe hunger in Abuja" (Daily Sun, Nov 30, p.18). "INEC under attack over voter registration, accused of bias against some zones" (Daily Sun, Sept 7, p.26) is another literary deviation from an expected outcome. It is expected that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), should be highly objective and neutral in election matters. On the contrary and to the chagrin of readers, they see "INEC under

attack over voter registration, accused of bias against some zones" (Daily Sun, Nov 7, p.26). INEC's alleged bias is a sudden reversal of responsibility.

Discussion on Significance and Implication of Irony in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

The employment of irony in the headlines of our newspaper samples plays both positive and negative roles. Positively, the irony-laden headlines make the stories dramatic, funny, and give a sense of amusement even if the irony is wry and sinister (Laurinavicius, 2024, April 15). Negatively, sarcasm and satire are the dysfunctions of ironic headlines in our samples. Mocking victims indirectly can be immoral. Therefore, the ironic headlines, instead of showing pity, mock the victims, players, and actors (e.g. "Gunmen kill 3 soldiers, injure 4 in Enugu, Katsina", Vanguard, Sept 2, p.6); Again, those headlines that contain ironic elements can be offensive and inciting (e.g. "INEC under attack over voter registration, accused of bias against some zones", Daily Sun, Sept 7, p.26). Finally, ironic headlines could scare the reader (e.g. "Severe hunger in Abuja", Daily Sun, Nov 30, p.18).

Hyperbole in Crisis and Emergency Reporting Headlines

Hyperbole is an overstatement or exaggeration for the sake of emphasis (Aljadaan, 2018, October). From the select samples available for the study, we found 18 hyperbolic headlines. Most of the hyperboles, for example, exaggerate the menace and extent of damage by floods and fire outbreak:

i). Surging ocean slowly swallows Bayelsa community (Vanguard, September 6, p.21).

ii). 23 dead, 104 communities sacked, 116,084 displaced as floods ravage Benue (Vanguard, September 28, p.7)

iii). 23 die, 116,084 displaced as flood submerges Benue (Daily Sun, September 28, p.5)

iv). Flood submerges Ogbaru LGA (Vanguard, September 28, p.11)

v). Flood renders hundreds homeless in Asaba (Vanguard, September 30, p.6)

vi). Floods render thousands homeless in Yobe (Vanguard, September 27, p.6)

vii). Flood submerges 65 Ndokwa communities (Vanguard September 29, p.7)

viii). Flood renders hundreds homeless in Asaba (Vanguard, September 30, p.6)

vix). Floods wreak 54 places, infrastructure worth N80bn - FG (Daily Sun, October 27, p.27)

x). Flood: 51 dead, 254 communities submerged in Adamawa (Daily Sun, November 7, p.4)

Fire outbreak and its outrageous damage are also hyperbolised. Vanguard exaggerates that "goods worth millions of naira destroyed as fire guts shops in Onitsha" (November 29, p.6). Similarly, on the same issue, Daily Sun reports that "fire destroys goods worth N700m in Onitsha market" (November 29, p.4). Again, that "tanker explosion guts property worth millions of naira in Aba" is another overstatement (Vanguard, December 23). Political crises stories are also blown out of proportion by Daily Sun by reporting about "War without end in PDP" (September 12, p.6) and "PDP and endless battles within" (October 27). The expressions "without end" and "endless" are indicators of overstatement in the headlines. Vanguard hyperbolically headlines a boat accident in "Niger State: How hundreds perished in boat mishaps, courtesy of bandits" (October 7, p.20). Furthermore, Vanguard's headline of an "unending fight against drug abuse in S'West" (September 1, p.36) is an obvious overstatement due to the use of the adjective "unending."

Discussion on Significance and Implication of Hyperbole in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

Hyperbolic headlines may seem innocuous in the narrative, but they help to highlight or emphasise distinct events or experiences and make them fit the narratives. Again, the exaggerated headlines indicate the seriousness of the crises such as floods, kidnapping, rape, killing, accident, climate change, banditry, general economic and political imbroglios. However, the strength of hyperbolic newspaper captions is also their weakness. The problem with hyperbole in our samples is that it can mislead the audience by emphasising not only on its meaning but also its false information. This is because the meaning of the information is already blown out of proportion.

A communication expert, Neumann (2020, July 14) suggests that "to improve communication and get to the heart of the matter, we should eschew hyperbole and the distortions it allows us to hide behind". Rainer (2021, October 6) directs that "whenever possible, we should use precise, direct language — and, if possible, identify the impulse that's leading us to want to exaggerate". Based on the foregoing argument, Rainer (2021, October 6) proposes that "exaggeration is a known enemy", and that reporters should "learn to slow down and say what they really mean instead of using hyperbolic language".

Litotes in Crisis and Emergency Reporting Headlines

Literary litotes is an understatement for the sake of emphasis. Borrowing his definition from the Oxford English Dictionary, Shovel (2015, March 26) says that litotes is "an ironical understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of its contrary." Rather than magnify situations, actions, or conditions as hyperbole does, litotes chooses to reduce or play down their severity or seriousness. Litotic expressions, such as in newspaper headlines, employ the form of a double negative to pass their message. The negative words used by litotes are "no", "not", "never", "non", "neither … nor", or "none." Litotes can also use the negative prefix "un-" . Consider the positive headline "We declared 5-day sit-at-home in Biafra land - IPOB". The normal version of this headline in our sample is the denial that "We never declared 5-day sit-at-home in Biafra land - IPOB" (Vanguard, December 7, p.9). Other litotic crisis and emergency headlines from our samples are:

i). We don't abduct, terrorise citizens, DSS refutes AI reports (Vanguard, September 1, p.8).

ii). Insecurity: Election may not hold in 3 Imo LGA's (Daily Sun, September 7, p.28).

iii). Nigeria @ 62: So far, not far (Daily Sun, October 4, p.2)

iv). Nigeria can't keep borrowing to fund agencies with duplicated functions - Reps (Vanguard, October 28, p.6).

v). Make sure terrorists don't threaten Nigeria's sovereign integrity (Daily Sun, October 7, p.6).

vi). No improvement in Nigeria's healthcare since 2017 (Daily Sun, October 27, p.17)

vii). We don't trust FG, ASUU tells Gbajabiamila (Daily Sun, October 25, p.26).

viii). Flood: Nigerians must not experience food shortage - Buhari (Vanguard, November 3, p.8).

vix). Bayelsa not among 10 most flood hit states - Humanitarian Minister (Vanguard, Nov 4)

x). ASUU strike won't stop sale of UTME forms in 2023 (Vanguard, November 7, p.26).

xi). Oil theft: We didn't indict NNPC - Navy (Vanguard, December 6, p.8).

Discussion on Significance and Implication of Litotes in CER Headlines

The use of litotes in the headlines of crisis and emergency happenings allay the adverse effects of the reported negative incidents. This is where hyperbole and litotes draw their line of distinction. Whereas hyperbole heightens crisis-induced fear and tension by blowing them out of proportion, litotes allays them through the negation of understatement. Litotes, we know, relying on

negation, refutation and denial, uses exaggerated language to the opposite effect, in order to understate the effect of a phenomenon such as crisis and emergency.

Another function of litotes in the crisis and emergency reports is that rather than magnify the crisis situations, actions, or conditions, litotes reduces or plays down their severity or seriousness. In furtherance of the argument on the merits of litotes, reporters as well as other writers choose litotes when they wish "to compare a situation to its opposite extreme, thereby emphasising how far away the two things actually are" (Yamasaki, 2023, January 6).

There are dysfunctions in litotes. In a bid to reduce the fear inherent in tragic events, litotes also hides important aspects of the tragedy that would have saved society. In addition, Yamasaki (2023, January 6) quips that "litotes aren't the most straightforward way of writing". In fact, it can be pretty complicated that if a reader is not careful, he may be frustrated and lost in semantic convolution, as he struggles to know what exactly the reporters are saying in their stories.

Furthermore, there is also vagueness or ambiguity associated with litotes, though this may not be intentional. For instance, if reporters do not want to express their true feelings toward or the seriousness of a crisis incident, they employ litotes to euphemistically circumvent the issue. For example, Vanguard writes that "Bayelsa not among 10 most flood hit states - Humanitarian Minister" (November 4). Here, Vanguard is "litoticising", "euphemisticising" and understating the fact that Bayelsa, one of the riverine states, is among the Nigerian states hit by flooding.

Sarcasm in Crisis and Emergency Reporting Headlines

Sarcasm is an indirect use of irony to mock or convey contempt toward a person or thing. Therefore, sarcasm is a form of irony that is directed at a person or thing with the intent to criticise them. This is why sarcastic headlines say or do the opposite of what they really mean in order to mock or insult policies, actions, actors or players. A thin line separates sarcasm from irony: sarcasm mocks, criticises and conveys contempt but irony (especially verbal irony) must not mock, criticise or convey contempt.

Seven headlines from our samples are fully sarcastic (Vanguard 4, Daily Sun 2). Daily Sun releases a sarcastic headline on strike by saying that "ASUU mocks FG over CONUA recognition" (Oct 5, p.30). A similar headline, "ASUU: Deconstructing a government of anti-intellectuals", released the next day, mocks that the federal government is against the country's intellectuals, the pride of the nation. Vanguard's sarcasm is salient in the article "ASUU strike

and it's grim comedies" (September 30, p.18). In like manner, the newspaper pours contempt on the federal government for refusing to pay ASUU while accusing it of destroying the nation's education system through industrial actions.

Funnily, the same federal government goes as far as honouring ASUU with "National honour for the academia in the face of ASUU strike" (October 6, p.18). "Despite challenges, Buhari liberated more Nigerians from poverty - FG". This sarcasm is used by Vanguard to mock President Buhari and his administration during the period for pushing Nigerians into untold hardship. In Nigeria, among traditionalists and superstitious natives, it is believed that certain charms have the power to resist bullets and other piercing objects and make them unable to penetrate the body. Vanguard reports two cases that annul this hypothetical proposition by reporting that a "boy shoots 12-year-old brother to death while testing 'bullet-proof' charm" (October 4, p.4); and a "native doctor kills client in Enugu as gunshot protection charm fails" (Vanguard, Nov 30, p.6).

Discussion on Significance and Implication of Sarcasm in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

The use of sarcasm in our newspaper headline samples invokes humour, demonstrates cynicism, and adds variety to the texts. In addition, the sarcastic headlines mock policies, the government, individuals, and other actors involved in the story. This can be offensive to some readers. However, usually, the tone of a headline determines its slant or direction of intention; that is, whether it mocks or not.

Our search also reveals that most of the ironic headlines are equally sarcastic. However, at some points, the sarcasm is wrongly directed because victims of tragedies are mocked on the process. For instance, Vanguard, mocking bullet-proof charms, reports that "boy shoots 12-year-old brother to death while testing 'bullet-proof' charm" (Oct. 4, p.4); and a "native doctor kills client in Enugu as gunshot protection charm fails" (Nov 30, p.6). A deconstruction of the foregoing headlines reveals that the victims whose lives are lost in the process are also mocked in the headlines. This is throwing out the baby with the bathwater!

Repetition in Crisis and Emergency Reporting Headlines

Repetition is the act of writing or saying a thing more than once for the sake of emphasis. The lexical units that are repeated in the headlines of each edition of the dailies are mostly verbs and nouns. We discover that the reporters prefer using a particular register and vocabulary for crisis

and emergency. Under armed and violent crises, for example, the chosen main verbs are used 121 times while nouns (human and nonhuman agents, actors, or players) appear 325 times.

Most of the verbal lexical units for crisis and emergency registers are used in their present forms – 1151(98%) – such as kill (Vanguard 23, Daily Sun 120), abduct (Vanguard 8, Daily Sun 12), kidnap (Vanguard 3, Daily Sun 2), invade (Vanguard 2, Daily Sun 1); etc. There are only 25(2%) lexical verbs that are past tense. The repeated nominal lexical units are troops (Vanguard 3, Daily Sun 6), soldiers (Vanguard 4, Daily Sun 8), victims (Vanguard 5, Daily Sun 8), gunmen (Vanguard 19, Daily Sun 8), etc. Our search does not show any headline that is repeated more than once in a single edition.

Discussion on Significance and Implication of Repetition in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

The function of repetition in the headlines of a whole newspaper edition cannot be ignored. The emphasis placed on words attaches importance on the words thereby making readers have a better focus. Use of repetition in the headlines enhances the readers' retentive memory, and helps them to recall the crisis and emergency stories they have read. Contrarily, repeating or using a given word severally in different headlines of a newspaper edition may be boring and insipid. For example, using "arrest" more frequently than its near-synonyms such as "nab", "bust", "apprehend" or "round up" could be highly tasteless.

A teacher who claimed that she was an expert in the English Language accused Vanguard and Daily Sun of unnecessary repetitions that suggested dearth of vocabulary. She revealed that the two newspapers used more of *kidnap* than *abduct* to the point of boredom. For instance, Vanguard used *kidnap* 8 times, and *abduct* 3 times while Daily Sun used *Abduct* 12 times, and *kidnap* 2 times. According to the respondent, "there should be a balance in the use of words in a single report because overusing a word against others amounts to imbalance and tasteless narrative.

Rhetorical Questions in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

A rhetorical question is an apparent interrogation - a question that does not need an answer, or an immediate reply. In the study, rhetorical questions give rise to interrogative headlines. There are four rhetorical-question headlines in Vanguard. Daily Sun does not publish any rhetorical-question headline on crisis and emergency during the period investigated. Below are the

Vanguard rhetorical question headlines on CER between September 1 to December 31, 2022: "No way out of misery for Nigerians? (Sept. 23, p.18); "Do campaigns have to be bloody to win?" (Sept. 23, p.22); "Who're those responsible for insecurity in S-East?" (October 5, p.28); "Are the Abuja terror alerts a Western conspiracy?" (Nov. 2, p.17).

Discussion on Significance and Implication of Rhetorical Question in Crisis and Emergency Headlines

From the above data, questions 1, 2, and 4 are Yes/No rhetorical questions while question 3 is a "Wh-question". In all, no matter the kind of questions asked in these headlines, they never need (immediate) answers. Rhetorical questions arouse the readers' curiosity. Sugarman (1998) recommends that readers should be lured with "seeds of curiosity" and, artistically, rhetorical questions are one of the "seeds of curiosity."

Rhetorical questions raise uncertainty and introduce the unknown, and newspaper readers want to unravel the unknown by going through the story from the beginning to the end. Curiosity is a drive for information – the drive to find the answers to the questions asked in the headlines. That very drive makes readers turn the pages of the newspaper minute after minute. Readers want to explore, and find the missing link. They want to fill in the gaps. These reasons, among other factors, are the merits of rhetorical-question headlines.

A retired civil servant and avid newspaper reader in Owerri opined that "there are occasions when the answers to the questions raised in the headlines may not be sufficiently supplied in the body of the news. And this keeps readers in suspense. And you know that suspense hangs the reader's hope, and keeps him expecting for more explanations." He cited an example using the October 5 Vanguard publication with a rhetorical headline "Who're those responsible for insecurity in S-East?" (2022, p.28). He accused that "reporters simply begged the question in stead of sufficiently answering it. They should not raise questions they can't answer."

Discussion of Findings

Vanguard and Daily Sun are formal media; therefore, their use of figurative and informal words is an incompatible combination of formality and informality. Kenwood (1969) infers that, generally, newspapers adopt standard language devoid of informality. So, the use of the metaphors such as *okada*, *japa*, *agbero*, and *mkpurummiri* in the crisis and emergency stories of Vanguard and Daily Sun is incompatible with the standard or formal newspaper language. The

demerit is that Vanguard and Daily Sun must have failed in their communication thereby leading to loss of readership, loyalty, and patronage. If this is the case, then, Vanguard is the worst for it. This is because it produces more headlines with figurative language than Daily Sun. The two newspapers should therefore be more careful not to employ uncontrolled figurative language not only in crisis and emergency but also other leitmotifs of news reports.

The employment of figurative language (phrasal verbs, idioms, tropes) in their headlines has similar semantic implications for understanding Vanguard and Daily Sun narratives on crisis and emergency. These similar demerits are ambiguity and communication gaps. Since their meanings are figurative, hidden, and not open, readers, especially those below average, must have found it difficult to comprehend the news on crisis and emergency. Therefore, the national dailies must have lost a certain percent of readership, and failed in their surveillance, education, and information functions. This was possible because of their failure to strike a chord or establish a common frame of reference with their readers. The danger is that the audience fails to take the proper precautionary actions for their safety due to language barrier and linguistic confusion.

The figurative headlines expressed as tropes have drastic semantic implications for understanding and meaning making in the crisis and emergency narratives. The reason is that the figurative metaphorical headlines (not literal) pose semantic confusion when directly expressing positive or negative statements of facts and eternal truths. For instance, hyperbolic headlines blow the stories out of proportion; litotic headlines underestimate the impact of the cases; personified headlines confusedly and, in most cases, hyperbolically attribute human qualities to inanimate objects; ironic headlines say the opposite of the activities of the crisis and emergency, the actors and the government. All these negatively impact the meanings and understanding of the actual situation.

Scary Vanguard and Daily Sun headlines of crisis and emergency, collaborating with hyperbolic headlines and uncontrolled personification, blow the tragedies out of proportion, scare the readers and then introduce or worsen fear and trepidation in society. The headline "Lagos records 4,860 cases of rape, domestic violence, others in 10 months" (Daily Sun, Sept. 1, p.5) is as highly alarming as it is frightening. Others are "tension in Abuja over US terror alert" (Daily Sun, October 25, p.4); and "Severe hunger in Abuja" (Daily Sun, Nov. 30, p.18). This tension and hunger, following the way the headlines are framed, create more tension among Abuja residents and their neighbours. Travellers and investors must have avoided Abuja. In the story

"Benue killings: Death toll hits 20" (Daily Sun, Nov. 7, p.4), the readers must have been afraid of who the victims are, and who the next victim(s) may be.

The report about "travellers kidnapped in Rivers" (Vanguard, Nov. 4, p.2) must have scared their readers inside and outside Rivers State and those intending to travel to the state for ordinary visit, investment, business, or other reasons. Vanguard and Daily Sun should be more careful with their diction, report crisis and emergency news objectively, and avoid painting pictures on words.

Framing of headline is the major factor that leads to all the above cases. For instance, it is the way Vanguard and Daily Sun frame their headlines that either purges their audience of fear and tension or throw into more confusion, trepidation, and misunderstanding. However, both Vanguard and Daily Sun demonstrate this ability more in the negative dimension by using framing as a theoretical framework to construct a greater percentage of the headlines of the tragic events with fear frames. For example, "terror returns to Taraba" (Daily Sun, July 29, 2022) and "flood renders hundreds homeless in Asaba" (Vanguard, Sept. 8, 2022). A plethora of other examples exist.

The subjects of the above headlines ("terror" and "flood") are not only personified but also given lexical intensification and exaggeration by using such active and transitive verbs as "returns" and "renders". They, therefore, have the tendency of worsening the fear and worry already existing in society. Many dwellers in these places mentioned in Taraba and Asaba must become unnecessarily panicky and decide to migrate. Again, those from these places but live outside may not wish to return due to the wrong notion that "terror" and "flood" have already destroyed those at home. In addition, these affected places may be avoided by wary visitors and investors without knowing that the intensity of the reports is not as overemphasized.

To exculpate the reporters, we may conclude that the major issue that leads to the misunderstanding of the reporters' message, triggering of fear and panic in the audience and society, is dramatic irony. If this is the case, then the reporters do not intentionally induce trepidation because the intention reversal is unintended - resulting in a situation where the reporters' intention is misinterpreted because they have one thing in mind while their audience understand another. However, the damage has been done.

Conclusion

This discursive study is an investigation to find out if the Nigerian newspapers (represented by Vanguard and Daily Sun) used figurative language in their headlines of crisis and emergency stories during the last four months of 2022. The period investigated was the peak of environmental, political, social, religious, economic, educational, and armed crises and emergencies. Phrasal verbs, idioms, and figures of speech are the categories of figurative language discovered in the headlines of our samples.

It is discovered that, apart from their ability to create special effects, aesthetics, and narrative style, the figurative language in the headlines has a hidden meaning, poses semantic confusion, expresses ambiguity, and presents difficulty in understanding.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that readers should understand figurative language in crisis and emergency headlines in relation to the context in which they are used. In addition, the Nigerian journalists should desist from an indiscriminate use of figurative language in their headlines of crisis and emergency stories.

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