

“We don’t know where they have taken him to”: An Experiential Metafunctional Analysis of Kidnapping News in Nigerian Newspapers

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Abstract

How are the experiences of the internal and external world of participants represented in news about kidnapping in Nigerian newspapers? How is the message in the clause organised to reflect information organisation and the construction of meaning in these news reports? These questions anchor this study. News reports on kidnappings published in three Nigerian newspapers, *The Punch*, *The Tide* and *Leadership* served as the data for this work and Michael Halliday’s Transitivity system of the Systemic Functional Grammar guided the analysis of news reports. Findings show that the news were developed mainly through material and verbal processes, implying the importance of actions and words of key participants in news on kidnapping. While action verbs were basically attributed to law enforcers and kidnappers, saying verbs were attributed to victims, their family members and other participants. Actors, Sayers, Sensors and Carriers were typically given thematic prominence through fronting, thereby showing them as entities that bear the real-life experiences as portrayed within the news clausal structures. Labelling of key participants played a key role in framing the news, with sociocultural contexts of the news determining the kinds of labels deployed by news writers. The study concludes that choices made in news reports from the lexicogrammatical resources of the language have implications for the interpretation of the news.

Key words: kidnapping, abduction, experiential, transitivity, processes, participants, circumstances

Introduction

Kidnapping and abductions are major national security concerns in Nigeria. In the last one and a half decades, kidnaping and abduction have featured extensively in the country’s news media. Insecurity has become the greatest challenge to the survival of Nigeria in recent times and it is connected with the poor socio-economic conditions of the citizens. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2019), 40.1% of the Nigerian population live in abject poverty (earning below one dollar per day). Of this figure, the larger percentage are youths, and people in these age groups are directly connected to crime and terrorism. Also, owing to a weak judiciary system, handling this challenge has not been easy. Insecurity manifests in different forms in different parts of the country; they include abductions and kidnappings, terrorism, banditry, militia group activities, farmers-herders clashes, and transnational organised crimes. The present study’s focus is on kidnapping, which has almost become a daily occurrence in the country.

Kidnapping has a long history, but it has featured prominently in recent times in Nigeria as a major social problem, in spite of its criminalisation by the laws of the country. Scholarship on kidnapping as a social menace abounds from sociological perspectives (Ene, 2018; Oketa,

2018; Demehin, *et al.* 2024), psychological perspectives (Bhatiya, 2018; Oludare, *et al.* 2021; Yakassai, *et al.* 2022), political perspectives (Oriola, 2016; Hamidu, 2022), economic perspectives (Ede and Okafor 2023) and legal perspectives (Obarisiagbon & Aderinto, 2018; Olujobi, 2021). Of particular importance to the present study is the linguistic perspective, which specifically looks at the language of news reporting of kidnap stories. While several studies have examined newspapers' coverage of kidnap news, many more have investigated the discourse perspectives (Rufai & Salawu, 2021; Ehigiator & Asemah, 2023; Osisanwo, 2024). However, a vital perspective of examining the grammatical choices and the experiential meanings in the news as they account for experience of the world of the people involved has not been given adequate attention. Although Tade *et al.*, 2019 investigate the experiences of the victims while in captivity, this was not done from the linguistic perspective, but from a sociological one. The present study investigates the framing of kidnap news through the choice of linguistic elements that portray the experiences of the participants and the process, as well as the circumstantial elements in the news reports.

Kidnapping and Abduction in Nigeria

The term kidnapping is derived from “kid” a slang word for a child and “nap” which means “to seize or steal”. It is the act of stealing or snatching either a child or an adult by force or deception (*Mobile System Dictionary*, 2007). *The Black Law Dictionary* defines kidnapping as “the crime of seizing and taking away a person by force or fraud”. *The Nigerian Criminal Code* in Section 364 regards kidnapping as “illegal imprisonment”. The word “kidnap” has been used since 1673 to denote the practice of stealing children for use as servants or labourers in the American colonies. However, in recent times, it has come to mean any illegal capture of a person or people against their will, regardless of age. According to Ngwama (2014), kidnappers, who can be erratic, have been found to engage in the criminal acts for many complex motives, such as unemployment, idleness, vengeance, rituals, monetary gains, political reasons, and so forth.

Abduction is also a taking away of a person by persuasion, by fraud or violence. It is often used in connection with unlawful taking away of underaged or minor against their consent or that of their parents. Obviously, the terms kidnapping and abduction are not mutually exclusive, they have similar motives of unlawful detention of a person or a group of persons against their will. The acts are often accompanied by violence or force, making the perpetrators criminals. The collection of ransom before the release of victims is determined by the circumstances surrounding the act. Certain kidnapping and abduction are motivated by financial gains, while others are not. For the purpose of this research, the terms will be used interchangeably.

Kidnapping has existed in Nigeria since its inception as a nation. In the earlier years of the practice, kidnapping was rare and was either for ritual or political reasons. Much later, political kidnapping became prominent in the Niger Delta part of the country, when militants started kidnapping and taking oil expatriates as hostage in order to negotiate with the government on their agitations. Despite the government's effort at curbing this societal menace, it has progressed and developed more terrifying *modus operandi*. Ngwama (2014) notes that at a [articular time, the volatile oil rich regions of the Niger Delta witnessed kidnapping on a large scale with the targets being mostly expatriates and Nigerians in the oil business.

In contemporary times, kidnapping and abductions have spread through the country, extending to the far Northern part of Nigeria. It has become a recurring terrorist act in the country being perpetrated initially mainly by the Niger Delta militants and the *Boko Haram* insurgents in the North Eastern part of the country. But today, it has attained an alarming dimension in which some groups have seen it as a lucrative venture through which they get ransom from the relatives and friends of their victims. The kidnapping of 276 school girls in Girls' Secondary School on 14 April, 2014 in Chibok, Borno State was the first large scale abduction in Nigeria. Almost four years later, on February 19, 2018, 110 school girls were abducted by the Boko Haram sect in Dapchi, Yobe State. These incidents brought the Nigerian state to the global arena. Although, after seven years, 82 Chibok girls, while after a month and a couple of days, 110 Dapchi girls were freed and reunited with their families. Since then, other school children have been abducted by terrorist for ransom.

On March 28, 2022, a Kaduna bound train from Abuja with 972 passengers on board was bombed at Katari, Kaduna State and several passengers lost their lives while 62 persons were abducted and taken into the bush by the marauding bandits. Describing the mode of operation of the kidnapers, Abugu (2009) and Okengwu (2011) assert that sometimes, kidnapers dress like security operatives, armed with fake identity cards, sometimes masking their faces and opening fire sporadically into the air to cause panic or chaos and then whisk their victims away in commando style attack.

Kidnapping as a criminal act and a threat to the nation's security is sometimes motivated by political and economic reasons, Turner (1998) asserts that kidnapping for money without any political motive has become rampant in Nigeria in the last decade. Kidnapping has been regarded as a social crime and threat to national security owing to corruption at all levels, unemployment and poverty (Ngwama 2014; Emanemua & Akinlosotu 2016; Wada, Wappa & Ishaya 2019). Socio-economic condition of the country traceable to poor governance brought about frustration, depression and aggression, abject poverty, joblessness coupled with poor security system, led to the increase in kidnapping (Muhammad, 2020; Yusuf & Abdullahi, 2020; Ngwama, 2014).

Language is regarded as a functional tool for describing the experiences of the people in the world, events, states and things involved in them. The functionality of language according to Halliday (1985) is divided into three, namely: the interpersonal metafunction, the experiential metafunction and the textual metafunction. The interpersonal metafunction describes the use of language to enact and maintain social relationship, the experiential metafunction deals with the use of language to construe and represent human experiences, while the textual function entails the use of language to organise texts. Experiential metafunction as a strand of language function, according to Halliday (1985), which entails the use of language to construe and represent human experiences, is expressed through the transitivity system. The transitivity system regards clause as encompassing three components namely, the process, participants and the circumstances associated with the process. News reports play a prominent role of keeping people abreast of the happenings around the world. News are media of information dissemination which inform readers, listeners or viewers about events of the day. This study set out to demonstrate how the lexico-grammatical structures

deployed in news reports of kidnapping derives from the representation of the experiences of the participants, processes and circumstances of the news.

Scholarship on the exploration of news reports on kidnapping from the Functional Grammar perspectives, especially using transitivity are just unfolding. Enyi and Ugwu (2019) investigate transitivity processes in news about Boko Haram in online news. While transitivity is an important semantic dimension for revealing people's experiences, perceptions and feelings towards things expressed through language, few studies have approached kidnap-related news reportage from its perspective. Such studies focus specifically on *Boko Haram* (Enyi & Ugwu 2019, Oganyi and Umeh 2019). Herdsmen-Farmers crisis (Alfred & Oyebola, 2019), and Bakassi Peninsula crisis (Taiwo & Igwebuikwe 2016). The present study is significant because of its ability to explicate the deployment of grammatical resources to reveal human experiences as well as the semantic implications of the use of grammatical resources in the news reports. The study demonstrates how the processes, participants and circumstantial roles in the selected kidnapping news reports relate to the socio-cultural context of the news. The study provides an understanding of the semantic imports of the deployed grammatical resources, thereby broadening knowledge of language use in media reportage.

Methodology

The primary data source for this study comprised thirty purposively selected news reports on kidnappings published in *The Punch*, *The Tide* and *Leadership*. These newspapers were selected based on the national spread as well as wide and regular reportage of kidnap cases. The news reports selected were published between 2018 and 2023, being a period characterised by extensive reportage of kidnappings in Nigerian newspapers. The news reports were closely read and analysed to show how the clauses reflect the grammatical elements used for expressing experiential meanings. The secondary data sources for the study included books, journal articles and the Internet. The analysis of the data was guided by the Transitivity system as explicated in Systemic Functional Grammar.

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is an approach to grammar propounded by Michael. Halliday that focuses on the functionality of language. According to Halliday (1994, p. 16), Systemic Functional Grammar regards language as a resource for making meaning as situated in a context of situation and culture. The approach deals primarily with the function of structures and their constituents and their meaning in context. This theory consists of three kinds of meaning which are the ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning. These meanings are termed 'metafunctions'. The ideational metafunction also known as experiential metafunction involves the use of language to construe human's experiences of the world. The interpersonal metafunction enables people to use language to enact social relationships and this is influenced by tenor while the textual metafunction enables people to use language to construct logical and coherent texts. Halliday (1967, p. 38) argues that "transitivity is the name given to a network of system whose point of origin is the "major" clause, the clause containing a predication. Grammatically, clauses are means of expressing experiences. The situation types consist of processes, participants and circumstances. The transitivity systems are concerned with the types of process expressed in the clause, with the participants in this process and with circumstances. According to Halliday and Mathiessen (2004), participant is usually formed as

a noun and a sentence can have more than one participant. Process is represented in the verbal, while circumstance is realised by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases. Transitivity specifies the different types of processes that are recognised in the language and the structures by which they are expressed (Halliday, 1985, p.101). Clauses represent events and processes of various kinds. Transitivity seeks to foreground how the action is performed, by whom and on what. Hence, the relevance of this theory to this study.

5 Data Presentation

Table 1: A Comparative Overview of Process Types in *The Punch*, *The Tide* and *Leadership* Newspapers

Process types	Punch	The Tide	Leadership	Tot
Material	104 (33%)	97 (42%)	91 (45%)	292 (44%)
Verbal	88 (38%)	73 (32%)	74 (37%)	235 (35%)
Relational	17 (7%)	40 (17%)	24 (12%)	81 (12%)
Mental	18 (8%)	19 (8%)	8 (4%)	45 (7%)
Existential	7 (3%)	2 (1%)	4 (2%)	13 (2%)
Total	234	231	201	666

Findings on the use of the process types in news reports in the three newspapers show that material and verbal processes were the most predominantly used process types in news about kidnappings in Nigerian newspapers. Also, relational, mental and existential processes were represented, but not as prominently as the material and verbal processes. The preponderance of material and verbal processes indicates that kidnapping news reports were constructed to reveal the actions perpetrated by kidnappers to their victims, as well as projecting the verbal reports of the key actors, such as victims, their relatives, and law enforcers. This corroborates Ong'onda (2016) and Riris' (2019) submission that material and verbal processes typically dominate narratives, portraying entities, their actions and their words as the most vital aspect of the genre. Relational process is identified with "being", "possessing" and "becoming" and in news reports, it either identifies someone/something or attributes something to an entity, such as the actors or their actions. Mental process deals with the cognitions or mental actions of participants. Issues surrounding the "beingness" and "mental activities" of participants in kidnappings are less reported in news when compared with their "actions" and "sayings". Paucity of mental activities indicates that they are not primary means of developing news reports in spite of their narrative nature. News reports are more about actions, sayings and beings of people than their mental states. Behavioural process did not feature in the news reports, possibly because it is intransitive in nature. News typically takes cognizant of not just the behaviour of a news personalities, but also the participant affected by the action. For instance, news about kidnapping will necessarily report the actions of the key actors – the kidnappers and their targets, the victims; as well as the law enforcers and their targets, the kidnappers.

Findings also show that the lead sentences are typically about the actions of kidnappers or law enforcement agents (policemen) with the former abducting/kidnapping or releasing and the latter arresting kidnappers, rescuing victims or foiling kidnap attempts

Data Analysis

The Material process types in the data

The description of the actors in the clause is significant because it shows the point of view from which the news reporters want the readers to understand these key participants in the material process. In Excerpt 1 the actor's description is anchored on the weapon (*gun*) wielded during the operation. The word, *Gunmen*, which is a common way of describing the kidnappers in news reports usually conflates with the theme of the clause, making it an unmarked topical theme because it describes what the clause is all about. It is deployed to make readers understand the nature of the kidnappers and what characterises their operations.

The adverb *reportedly* is deployed to hedge the framing of the report in order to express the writer's belief that the information given is not necessarily ascertained. The complex appositive noun phrase, *the wife and a child of Mr. Eugene Edeoga, younger brother of the Enugu state commissioners for commerce, Hon Chijioko Edeoga* identifies the Goal of the action of the kidnappers. In order to properly identify the victims, their description is tagged on their relationship with a prominent politician in Enugu State, where the incident occurred and did not leave out any important information needed to identify the victims. This also shows that the kidnappers purposely targeted the victims because of their relationship with the politician. The circumstance surrounding the kidnappers' operations showed that they perpetrated the act on a weekend and at night.

Excerpt 1

Gunmen (ACTOR) have reportedly kidnapped (MATERIAL PROCESS) the wife and a child of Mr Eugene Edeoga, younger brother of the Enugu State Commissioner for Environment, Hon Chijioko Edeoga [GOAL] on Saturday night [CIRCUMSTANCE]. (*The Punch*: 2022).

Unlike what we have in Excerpt 1, in Excerpt 2, the police were the Actors, and the material processes describes their ascertained action – *have arrested*, and the Goal - *a 36-years old suspected kidnapper Osagie Felix*, while two others (unnamed) escaped. Key information in the Goal here includes the age and specific names of the kidnapper arrested. The Circumstance provides detailed information, describing the exact location (town, local government area and state) where the incident occurred.

Excerpt 2

The police [ACTOR] have arrested [MATERIAL PROCESS] a 36-years old suspected kidnapper Osagie Felix as two others [GOAL] escaped [MATERIAL PROCESS] along Ibori road in Oghara, Ethiope-West local government area of Delta State [CIRCUMSTANCE]. (*The Tide*:2022)

In Excerpt 3, the circumstantial information (*Again*) is fronted (thematised) to depict the recurrence of kidnapping in Kaduna State. Thematizing this circumstantial element is significant for meaning, because it foregrounds a vital information about kidnapping in Kaduna State – its intermittence, which is due to non-deterrence. For instance, *Daily Trust*, a Nigerian newspaper published on August 30 2024 a report that 7,568 persons were kidnapped between July 2023 and June 2024. The report also indicated that Nigerians have paid N1.048 billion as ransom to kidnapers. With few prosecutions of kidnapers, the venture has become a lucrative one for them.

The second circumstantial information spelt out the community, local government area and state where the kidnapping occurred.

Excerpt 3

Again [CIRCUMSTANCE], *no fewer than 13 persons* [GOAL] *have been kidnapped* [MATERIAL PROCESS] *in Ungwan Gimbiya community of Sabo in Chikiau local government area of Kaduna State* [CIRCUMSTANCE] (*Leadership*, August 13 2021)

Providing details of the circumstances that surround the news makes it more authentic and verifiable for anyone who cares to verify the facts. In excerpt 4, the clause is passive with the Goal thematised and the Actor becoming part of the Rheme. This structure arranges the key elements in an order different from the earlier excerpts.

Excerpt 4

Three persons [GOAL] *have been kidnapped* [MATERIAL PROCESS] *by some gunmen* [ACTOR] *in the Iwo of Iwo Local Government Area of Osun State* [CIRCUMSTANCE]. (*The Punch*, 2023)

It is clear that the styles of reporting in the four excerpts are different. This indicates that reporters are at liberty to choose what to foreground, and thematise in the news, based on the angle from which they want readers to understand the news. In Excerpts 1 and 2, the Actors were thematised, while the Actor in Excerpt 1 is *Gunmen*, in Excerpt 2, it is *The Police*. However, in Excerpt 3 the circumstantial element (*Again*) is thematised, while in Excerpt 4, the thematised element is the Goal (*Three persons*). Essentially, the key experiential elements - the actors, their actions and the circumstances in which the actions were performed were represented in the reports, but using different structural patterns.

Quite significant in the material process is the description of the key actors, variously depicted as “kidnappers”, “gunmen”, “bandits”, “abductors” “terrorists” and “herdsmen”. Sometimes news reporters adopt a neutral expression - *kidnappers* rather than specific labels. Labelling is deployed to construe these key actors from the points of view of the reporters. Labelling helps the reporter paint pictures of the participants in the news based on their perceptions. There are strong stereotypes attached to labels and such stereotypes can impact how readers view the news actors.

The Verbal process types in the data

Verbal perspectives of key participants also featured extensively in the news reports as depicted in excerpt 5 and 6 below:

Excerpt 5

The state Commissioner for Information, Culture and Tourism, Yakubu Lawal, [SAYER] said that [VERBAL PROCESS] since the incident occurred, the government had been on its toes to ensure that the pupils were rescued unhurt [VERBIAGE]. (The Punch: 2023)

Excerpt 6

Yaro [SAYER] urged [VERBAL PROCESS] the principal of the school and the Parents [ADDRESSEE] to remain “calm as joint efforts of the police and other security agencies will lead to the successful rescue of the students” [VERBIAGE]. (The Tide: Feb 26 2021)

Excerpt 7

The source [SAYER] said [VERBAL PROCESS] “All I can tell you is that life is more than money. Thank you all for your prayers, encouragement and support [VERBIAGE] (Tide, January 3, 2022)

In any news event, a Sayer is a key participant who is seen as an authoritative source meant to validate the news through their verbal expressions. Sayers are also potential actors in the material process in other contexts. As can be seen in Excerpts 5 -7, the Sayers were stakeholders, such as, *The state Commissioner for Information, Culture and Tourism, Yaro, the Zamfara State Commissioner of Police, and a source.* In excerpt 5 above, the Sayer is the *Commissioner for Information, Culture and Tourism*, whose ministry is expected to give accurate information on the school children who were the victims. His reported verbal expression is an assurance that the kidnapped children will be rescued without being hurt. Describing the government as being *on its toes* expresses alertness and determination on the part of the government to rescue the kidnapped pupils. On the other hand, the verbiage in excerpt 6, gives an assurance to the principal and parents of kidnapped pupils of the efforts of security agents at rescuing the kidnapped pupils. Excerpt 7 reflects the culture of silence when it comes to payment of ransom for kidnapped victims. The source, a spokesperson for the community, whose traditional ruler was abducted was unwilling to disclose any information about ransom payment. The culture of silence is prevalent in the discourse of kidnapping due to the fear that victims and their families may be exposed through information released to the public.

Verbal processes is presented typically through direct and indirect reporting style of what key actors have said about the kidnappings. The Sayers in Excerpts 5 and 6 were reported, while the one in Excerpt 7 was quoted. Sometimes, quoting the Sayer verbatim lend credence to the news and makes it more authentic to the reading public.

The Relational process types in the News Reports

Relational process has to do with the process of being in the world. It exists between two participants associated with the process. It is about attributing something or identifying something. Instances are given in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 8

Government [CARRIER] has [RELATIONAL PROCESS] the power to end the agony of these innocent victims in one day [ATTRIBUTE] (Leadership, 2002)

Excerpt 9

The Osi community [CARRIER] was [RELATIONAL PROCESS] in pensive mood [ATTRIBUTE], following the unfortunate incident [CIRCUMSTANCE] (Leadership, Oct 13 2021)

As can be seen in the Excerpt 8 above, relational processes can be used to relate key participants to their responsibilities, such as the government and its power (attribute) to put in place security measures that will end kidnapping in the nation. In the excerpt, relational process was used to amplify the capacity of the government to put an end to the menace of kidnapping. Excerpt 9 relates the news of kidnapping of a traditional ruler to the mood of the community. This means that news reports do not just provide a narrative of the actions, but also relate the feelings of the participants to the actions.

The Mental process types in the data

News reports on kidnappings also depict the cognitive understanding of the news from the perspectives of some key participants. The mental process refers to the reflections of the inner experience of world of the participant as expressed in a clause. It has to do with the “thinking”, “feeling” and “perception” of the participants, as can be seen in Excerpts 10 - 13.

Excerpt 10

You [SENDER] know [MENTALPROCESS] that investigations [PHENOMENON] have been ongoing [MATERIAL PROCESS]. (The Punch: 2022)

Excerpt 11

We [SENDER] don't know [MENTAL PROCESS] where they have taken him to [PHENOMENON]. ... I [SENDER] learnt [MENTAL PROCESS] that the kidnappers called the family members through the phone number of the son and demanded N100 million ransom which they later reduced to N50 million [PHENOMENON]. (The Punch, 2022)

Excerpt 12

*Justice Ajayi, [SENER] in her judgment, **found** [MENTAL PROCESS] the six accused persons guilty and sentenced them to life imprisonment [PHENOMEON]. (The Punch, 2022)*

Excerpt 13

*I [SENER] **think** [MENTAL PROCESS] of the children [PHENOMENON] day and night [CIRCUMSTANCE] (Punch March 10 2022)*

The cognitive verbs deployed in the mental processes, *know*, *learnt*, *found* and *regret* describe the cognition of the Seners who are either individuals or a group, in the reports. Depiction of the feelings of key participants in a news report is a method of framing and legitimising news, thereby making readers gain insight into the minds of participants in the news stories.

In Excerpt 10, the mental process points the attention of the public to the knowledge of the ongoing investigation by the police, which prevents them from pre-empting anything. In Excerpt 11, the verbal process depicts the lack of knowledge of members of the family of where a victim has been taken to by kidnappers. It also reveals the spokesperson's understanding of what later transpired between the kidnappers and the family of the victim – the demand of N100 million, which was later reduced to N50 million. In Excerpt 12, the mental process “found” shows the cognitive state and ultimate verdict of the judge on the kidnappers. This cognitive expression puts a stamp of judicial authority on the prosecution. As revealed in Excerpt 13, the feelings of major actors were captured, such as that of a mother of three children who were abducted by their “home lesson teacher”. Chronicling kidnap events in such a way to reflect the inner experiences of victims brings emotional angles to their narration to captivate readers and possibly make them identify with the feelings of the victims and their relations. Emotional framing evokes specific feelings and influence audience perceptions, thereby shaping how the audience interprets the information. While the effect of the news on readers is outside the purview of the present study, it should be recognised that linguistic choices in clausal structures in news reports are deliberately made to construct the experiences of participants and influence news readers.

The Existential process in the news reports

Existential processes represent that something exists or happens and the clauses in which they appear typically have the verb *be*, or some other verbs expressing existence

Excerpt 14

This [EXISTING] is [EXISTENTIAL PROCESS] a clear case of kidnapping [ENTITY] (The Punch Dec 19 2021)

Excerpt 15

There [EXISTING] was no [EXISTENTIAL PROCESS] official confirmation yet [EXISTENCE] from the state or the police as of the time of the filing this report [CIRCUMSTANCE]. (Punch, 2021)

Excerpt 16

There [EXISTING] was [EXISTENTIAL PROCESS] a military checkpoint [EXISTENCE] before penetrating the forest (CIRCUMSTANCE). (*Leadership*, 2022)

In excerpt 14, the Police Commissioner established a clear case of kidnapping, which can then be prosecuted by the law. This is significant because the job of the police is to prosecute criminals and a case has to be established before suspects can be prosecuted. This kind of statement coming from a police commissioner is a validation of the crime and a kind of assurance from the police to the public.

In Excerpt 15, there is an affirmative statement that portrays the poor communication between the security agents and the media. This underscores the importance of communication in the entire process of crime and its reportage. Excerpt 16 is a deliberate presentation of one of the perceptions of the public about security agents and the curbing of crime in Nigeria - the view of security agents as “lame ducks”. This is sometimes linked to their corrupt tendencies. There are military check points everywhere in the country, yet there is an increase in kidnapping. The circumstantial information provided in the clause further indicts the military because it shows that a military checkpoint before “the forest” where kidnappers take their victims should have curbed kidnapping, but it did not in any way, as reported.

Discussion of Findings

In news reports, writers frame their news based on the angle from which they desire readers to understand the story. This determines their choices in the lexicogrammatical resources of the language. Actors, Sayers, Sensers and Carriers are typically given prominence through fronting, because they are entities that bear the real-life experiences as portrayed within the news clausal structures. They, therefore typically serve as the points of departure of the message in the clauses (theme) and provide the focus and emphasis the writer intends to make in the clause.

Actors in the news reports on kidnapping typically include security agents, (the police and other armed forces), kidnappers/abductors, victims of kidnapping, relatives and members of the community of the victims. These people could also be Sayers, expressing their opinions about the kidnap; sensers expressing feelings, thinking and perceptions. So, they are also typically in the same category of people who are actors in the material process. Carriers are also typically human participants.

Where none of the participants identified above is given prominence through fronting, and other elements are, such elements become marked (unusual themes), and this implies that the news reporter has deliberately done so to make readers understand the news from the angle of whatever is chosen in place of the typical element.

A general picture from the analysis of the data showed that the processes, participants and circumstantial roles across the three newspapers were used to express the experiential meanings in the clauses. Table 2 below shows the typical participants and actions associated with them in the data.

Table 2: Participants and verbs in the processes

Police	Kidnappers	Family members and others
arrest	kidnap	demand
recover	abduct	report
confirm	attack	lament
act swiftly	whisk away	pay
assure	escape	plead
rescue	confess	confirm
investigate	release	call on
parade	escape	disclose
secure	demand	urge
capture	lure	call on
kill	threaten	protest

The processes indicated different actions of the key participants such as, *arrest, investigate, rescue, parade* by the police; *kidnap, abduct, attack, demand, threaten* by the kidnappers; and *lament, report, plead, urge*, From this table of the verbs in the processes associated with the key participants, family members and others engaged more in expressing themselves verbally, than acting, while the police acted and spoke at the same time. However, kidnappers were mainly actors, and they rarely spoke. The circumstantial roles gave detailed information about the location, time, means and manners of carrying out the actions that characterise the incidents.

Also significant for experiential meaning is the labelling of the kidnappers. The neutral word deployed to describe them is “kidnappers”, but this is often used interchangeably with the word “abductors”. Other labels include: *armed men, hoodlums, gunmen, bandits, terrorists*. For the northern newspaper, *Leadership*, linking banditry and terrorism with kidnapping is easy when reporting kidnapping in that part of the country, the line of distinction is blurry. Groups with ideologically motivated intentions engage in kidnappings and banditry. However, kidnapping for ransom is what is generally prevalent in the southern part of Nigeria. This implies that the location and circumstances surrounding the act may determine the label given to the perpetrators. It is however clear that labelling itself is a strategy for framing the news in order to evoke a particular interpretation or reaction from the audience.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the deployment of grammatical resources in news reports of kidnapping in Nigeria relies on experiences in the external as well as the internal world of the projection of the participants in the news, their roles and the circumstances that surround the news. The study shows that key participants were typically given prominence by thematising them in order to foreground them as the points of departure of the messages in the clauses. While the material and the verbal processes were mainly used to develop news on kidnapping in Nigeria, relational, mental and existential processes play varying roles. Furthermore, labelling of key participants play a key role in framing the news, but sociocultural contexts of the news being reported determine the kinds of labels deployed by news writers.

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