<215>

12

A cognitive stylistic analysis of covid-19 representations in newspaper headlines

Isa, Joy & Abdullahi, Adam Al-Amin

ABSTRACT

Language and cognition are intertwined and share a significant relationship. In information exchange, language is of utmost importance in conveying news headlines and these headlines contain triggers that needs interpretations. Therefore, the media is a powerful information source people rely on during health crises in Nigeria. This paper presents a cognitive stylistic analysis of COVID-19 representations in newspaper headlines. The study examines how journalists craft texts that resonate emotionally and intellectually with audiences, thereby shaping public discourse and opinion. The research examined language used in newspaper headlines and its profound impact on readers' cognitive and emotional responses, particularly as they relate to COVID-19. In carrying out the research, all data were sourced from the selected Nigerian newspaper headlines. Schema Theory introduced by Richard C. Anderson (1977) and Text World Theory by Paul Werth in the late (1980s) were used for the analysis of the data. The analysisrevealed that, through the lens of cognitive stylistics, the study elucidates the cognitive processes underlying caption comprehension, revealing how these headlines evoke vivid imagery, convey complex emotions, and elicit profound experiences. The study concludes that cognitive stylistics in newspaper headlines enhances reader engagement through the use of stylistic devices that influence perception and interpretation.

Keywords: Cognitive Stylistics, Schema Theory, Text World Theory, Newspaper Headlines, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Language and cognition are intimately linked, sharing a significant and symbolic relationship. Language development is influenced by cognitive and socio-cognitive abilities, and language itself plays a vital role in various cognitive processes such as perception, memory, anticipation, meaning and emotions as opined by Stockwell (2016). The study of language is, in essence, to understand a part of the human mind and how it processes information.

No wonder Berwick, Friederici, Chomsky and Bolhuis (2013) suggest that we cannot separate language and the mind.

Language is of great importance in conveying news headlines that contain triggers in information exchange. This exchange of information does not only convey messages but also influences the behaviour of individuals, guiding them to act in accordance with particular patterns. Language serves as the medium through which individuals assign roles to one another in conversations, with interlocutors/interactants acting as both givers and receivers of information.

In language use, style emerges as a distinguishing factor, reflecting the individualized encoding and dissemination of artistic messages by writers worldwide (Aworo, 2017). Style is regarded as a choice made by writers from the different language components of grammar, words and sounds in particular. It encompasses the unique manner in which writers express themselves, shaping the formal beauty and distinctiveness of their works. On the other hand, stylistics is the approach to the analysis of texts, which undertakes the substantiation of this concept of style in practical terms. Thus, it can be referred to as a borderline disciplinebetween literature and linguistics according to Owolabi and Magaji (2018).

Cognitive stylistics draws on cognitive scientific insights into the relationship between the mind, language, and the world, going beyond traditional method of stylistics accounting for literary interpretation through linguistic models. It deals with clear connections between texts, reactions and interpretations. Reading is an active process and readers play a unique and active role in the construction of the meaning of literary texts (Patil, 2014).

In times of health crises, the public depends heavily on media for crucial information, just as it was in the case of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Cognitive stylistics in newspaper writing enhances reader engagement through the use of stylistic devices that influence the readers perception and interpretation of text. By understanding cognitive processes, through articles that engage readers emotionally and cognitively, journalist play a key role in forming how the public discusses and thinks about issues. This research examined language used in newspaper headlines and its profound impact on readers' cognitive and emotional responses, particularly as they relate to COVID-19.

News headlines, in particular, serve as condensed summaries of events, requiring interpretation to grasp their full meaning within the context they are presented. Both the structural and contextual aspects of grammar contribute to the interpretation process, shaping how readers understand and respond to text as explained by Fairclough (1995). Given the significance

of news headlines and their stylistic variations, there is a need for a focused study on headlines on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Studies have been conducted by stylisticians on the analysis of COVID-19 related texts, which includes personal narratives, public awareness banners, news headlines including print and media talking about the outbreak, Facebook postings and many others that gave information on the pandemic, creating a massive campaign on safety measures and precautions, and also how to help reduce the spread of the disease in the country.

The review of relevant studies on COVID-19 above shows that the pandemic has received scholarly attention through stylistic studies. However, there is little or nothing that we know of any cognitive stylistic analysis that engages the readers emotional responses from the pandemic. Considering the gravity of the situation, marked by loss of life and property, a cognitive stylistic approach that examines how readers construct mental models and make meaning based on the linguistic elements in COVID-19 newspaper headlines becomes imperative. How the audience read, comprehend and interpret the COVID-19 headlines and their emotional engagement to the text is what this study seeks to fill. The aim is to explore how COVID-19 headlines capture readers' attention and evoke emotions, examining the meanings embedded in each headline and their implications as crafted by the writers.

COGNITIVE STYLISTICS

As a sub-discipline in the field of applied linguistics, cognitive stylistics is a multidisciplinary field that explores the relationship between language, cognition, and literature. It is the application of cognitive science to stylistics. It enables one to examine how people think in written works such as poems or stories. Stockwell (2016) suggests that when stylisticians explain the notion of 'style', they mention the textual pattern which is the result of choices made by writers so they look at the text as the location of meanings and forms that the reader considers as the place where the effects of meaning and emotion happen. He further stresses that language is natural in origin rather than artificial, it is not separated from human experience, which is substantial to it. Language shows that we all share the same human shape, condition and experience, so it is not surprising to encounter the same language structures or metaphor across the world's languages. Language description has to include not only the habitual patterns of the system, but also flexible imagination to create something unique (2016). The link here is that, language is fundamental to human experience that allow readers engage in creative reconstruction and imaginative construction when reading any text. Scholars have given their views on what cognitive stylistics is and they are briefly discussed below.

Stockwell (2002) observes that "cognitive stylistics provides a new way of thinking about literature involving the application of cognitive linguistics and psychology to the literary texts". The study also states that cognitive stylistics looks at people as cognitive human beings who depend on their background knowledge and experiences to understand literary texts. Woldemariam (2015) explains that cognitive stylistics looks not only at the text, but also at the mind's contribution to reading. What this entails is that cognitive stylistic explores how certain types of metaphorical images can only be understood by using the reader's knowledge, beliefs and inferences. Gavins and Steen (2003) also state that cognitive stylistic is more concerned with presenting a descriptive and detailed account of linguistic features of a text in a mechanistic and non-evaluative way in confirming the connection between literature and psychology.

Moreover, cognitive stylistics takes into account the cognitive processes by which readers respond to particular aspects of texts, (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010). It attempts to capture how readers make use of their real-life schematic knowledge in the interpretation of texts. These two scholars also confirm that literary texts contain triggers which stimulate aspects of readers' prior knowledge to allow them to construct a mental representation of the world of the text. Therefore, cognitive stylistic view and analyse styles as a cognitive process of the mind as explained by (Isa, 2024). Well, by using different theories such as schema theory, conceptual metaphor theory, text world theory, blending theory, mental space theory, scholars who work in the field of cognitive stylistics have expanded the boundaries of linguistic analysis of literature. These theories provide frameworks for the analysis of literature and focus on reading and cognition.For the purpose of this research, special focus will be given to schema theory by Richard C. Anderson (1977) and text world theory by Paul Werth in the late 1980s and 1990s for the analysis section.

The importance of media in the coverage of the Coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria was examined in a study by Apuke and Omar (2020) whose research concerned the question of how Nigerian newspapers report COVID-19 pandemic and its implication for awareness and prevention. This study examined media coverage of COVID-19 in Nigeria with attention to the frequency and depth of coverage, story format, news sources, media tone and themes. Four widely read newspapers were content analysed between February 2020 and April 2020. Focus was on Daily Sun, Vanguard, Daily Trust and Leadership. Results indicated that the Nigerian media performed well in terms of covering the pandemic, which in turn created awareness. However, the coverage was not in-depth as most of the reported stories were short and were predominantly straight news. It was also observed that the media cited

more of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and government officials. Further findings disclosed that most of the stories were alarming and induced panic. Most common topics were coverage of cases in Nigeria, death rates and concerns about Nigeria's preparedness. Public sensitization and education were sparingly covered.Ethics healthcare workers could adhere to received minimal attention. The study concludes that the media should focus more on sensitizing and educating the public on the necessary steps to take in curbing the virus. They should refrain from over usage of alarming and panic tone in presenting the stories of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Also, Ebenezer, Oreyomi and Ogunlayi (2021) conducted research on the stylistic study of the headlines of COVID-19 reports in selected Nigerian newspapers. The paper examined newspaper headlines captions of COVID-19 update. The headlines were critically analysed at two levels of linguistics analysis, graphological level and syntactical level. The findings showed that journalists do not use full stop at the end of headlines and they use declarative sentences more than any other type of sentences. Olajide (2022) researched on a Discourse Analysis of Online Newspaper Reports on COVID-19 in Nigeria. This study explored a discourse analysis of the online newspapers' reportage of the news about COVID-19. An online search was conducted using keywords: 'Coronavirus in Nigeria', 'updates on Coronavirus in Nigeria', 'COVID-19 in Nigeria from November to December 2021'. The search in total retrieved 91 articles consisting of 'news', 'feature', 'opinion' and 'column' articles over a period of two months - November and of December 2021 from Vanguard and The Punch newspapers. This study concludes that mass media plays a fundamental role in disseminating information, influences the public behaviour which can curtail the spread of the pandemic. The way the media craft and present their messages in the headlines and leads especially during the COVID-19 pandemic has a long effect in ameliorating the challenges of the pandemic or aggravating it.

Similarly, Adaobi and Justice (2022) examined "Sociocultural Relations: Perspectives from COVID-19 Newspaper Headlines". The authors investigated selected COVID-19 newspaper headlines in order to ascertain how newspaper headlines have been used to illuminate hidden sociocultural ideologies. COVID-19 newspaper headlines selected from five Nigerian Newspapers namely the Guardian, Daily Trust, Nation, Tribune and Punch newspapers are analysed thematically in a bid to ascertain how the choice of words by the editors have been used to reveal hidden ideologies. The study further shows that COVID-19 newspaper headlines perform myriads of functions from the perspective of the readers as they have implications on the social, political, economic and religious lives of the readers. It is concluded

that these headlines reshape the readers' mind-set.

The reviews above are similar to the current study as they involve the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic as the various Nigerian newspaper headlines captures the attention of the audiences with different constructions and interpretations of the happening during the crises. Notwithstanding, the current study is different in another dimension as it looks at how authors stylistically arranged headlines that generate cognitive responses from the masses who must have been affected in one way or the other during the pandemic. How the audience read and interprets these headlines is what this research seeks to find.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Purposive sampling was used for the collection of data. The basis for the use of purposive sampling was informed by the need to identify the headlines that are eye-catching and are capable of generating cognitive responses considered resourceful for this study. In line with the above, the under listed newspapers were selected: *Daily Trust, Sahara Reporters* and *Premium Times.* Headlines bothering on COVID-19 as reported in these newspapers form the data. A total of fifteen (15) headlines between March and August of 2020 were selected. The period covered what can be described as the early days of the pandemic in the country. These headlines are seen as metaphors as they create mental pictures in the minds of the readers.

The work adopts the descriptive research design as it focuses on the relationships that exist between phenomena in order to describe, compare, contrast, analyse and interpret series of events that took place during the pandemic. This design is analytical and interpretative in nature. This choice is informed by the researcher's quest to analyse and interpret the choice of language used in the selected newspaper headlines in order to drive home the central messages.

SCHEMA THEORY AND TEXT WORLD THEROY

In 1957, Jean Piaget who was credited with the first cognitive development theory schemas, popularized this ideology. By 1977, it was expanded into schema theory by educational psychologist Richard C. Anderson. Since then, other terms have been used to describe schema as a frame, script or scenario according to Emmott and Alexander (2009), as it contains common default information which aids comprehension by allowing a reader to recall details which are either not mentioned at all in a text or which are not fully specified. The authors stipulate only some elements, and readers easily comprehend such texts by uniting these elements with their appropriate generic knowledge

from schemata. These elements, therefore, provide cognitive support for the default inferences readers make when they process language and they enable a reader to fill gaps in the information given in the text (Emmott, Alexander & Marszalek 2014).

Schemata represent knowledge about concepts like objects, events, situation and actions; therefore, all humans possess schemas. These schemas can be used not only to understand something but also to predict situations occurring in our environment. Information that does not fit into schema that exists in our mind may not be comprehended. This is why readers have difficulty in comprehending a text on a subject they are not familiar with. Based on the parameters of the theory, meanings are built through the interaction between the text and the interpreters' knowledge. The theory also provides a frame for literature that examines the interaction between the text and the reader's knowledge and the way in which a particular reader will perceive a text depending on his or her schemas. For example, a script on COVID-19 or a conversation with a waiter allows readers to predict the possibility of our replies. He went further to suggest that scripts are arranged toward plans and goals so also headlines are arranged to give insights of possible dangers and the measures to be taken to be on the safe side during the pandemic (Stockwell, 2006).

The significance of the theory to this study suggests that people understand a text by comparing them to mental representations or schemata stored in their memories based on past experiences. When reading a news headline, the reader activates relevant schemata to make sense of the information. For example, a headline about COVID-19 may activate the reader's schema for that type of event, thereby influencing their interpretation.

TEXT WORLD THEORY

Text World Theory was originally developed by Paul Werth in the late 1980s and 1990s. Text World Theory in general is very much influenced by this linguistic approach. It can be summarised as the study of how speaker/writer and hearer/reader manage to communicate via texts. Werth's work in the period prior to his development of Text World Theory was already concerned with the study of language in context. Text world theory is a cognitive tool that enables us understand how and even why mental representations are constructed by readers or hearers. It is an approach that allows connecting different disciplines such as stylistics, cognitive linguistics and psychology. This text world that a reader creates with an author is not a fixed representation. It is a conceived working tool that readers use as a substantial means of reading. Text world theory is used to discuss the emotional engagement of

readers with the literary world, the theory has furthermore been applied to political discourse and newspaper articles.

This theory is relevant to the study as it builds on schema theory by proposing that readers construct text worlds in their mind when processing language. These mental representations are shaped by the linguistic features of the text and the reader's background knowledge and experiences. In the context of news headlines, the concise wordings and structure of the headlines provide a framework for the readers to build a text world.

The two theories are connected in that schema theory explains the role of pre-existing knowledge in comprehending a text, while text world theory describes the dynamic process of constructing meaning from language. Together, they suggest that news headlines prompt readers to draw upon relevant schemata to build a mental representation of the story, which is then refined as they read further details. Therefore, the two theories provide cognitive frameworks for understanding how readers process and make sense of news headlines by activating prior knowledge and constructing mental pictures of events as they unfold in the text.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section identifies and presents the selected news headlines suitable for the analysis of the study in this order of presentation: *Sahara Reporters*, *Daily Trust* and *Premium Times*.

Sahara Reporters:

> *- Coronavirus: WHO Warns Africa to Prepare for Worst (March 19, 2020)*

Nigeria, in 2020, witnessed the wave of COVID-19 pandemic that swept across the world. The mention of 'Coronavirus' and 'WHO' activates the readers existing knowledge related to pandemics, health crises, and global warnings. This means that expectations about the severity of the situation and potential outcomes are what the 'WHO' warned. The phrase 'prepare for worst' triggers urgency and danger, prompting readers to adjust their expectations about the pandemic impact on the African continent. The headline creates a world that is foreboding, evoking a sense of panic, fear and danger. This world (words) is constructed based on the reader's understanding of global health crises and the role of 'WHO'. The reader, therefore, comprehends the message by connecting it to their prior knowledge, creating a meaningful interpretation of the warning based on their understanding of similar situations that might have taken place.

> *- Nigeria's Christian Association Declares National Prayers*
> *Over Coronavirus (March 19, 2020)*

The headline creates a split world between the reader and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). By using a previous knowledge to understand the context of national prayer during the pandemic, the reader, here, build a world involving religious practices and responses to crises to help curb the problems. The mentioned of 'national prayers' evokes schemas related to communal prayers, and the role of religious organisations in public health issues in Nigeria. By so doing, the reader is engulfed with the situation at hand and that the prayers of Nigerians will help solve the national outbreak.

> *- Coronavirus: NCDC Accused of Carrying Out Selective*
> *Testing, Concentrating on Prominent Nigerians (April 3,*
> *2020)*

Readers construct mental representations based on the headline, using their knowledge about the NCDC and COVID-19 testing which is already a known crisis across the world. The mention of 'selective testing' and 'prominent Nigerians' triggers knowledge related to health inequality, corruption, and perceived favouritism towards prominent individuals. This knowledge, therefore, influence how readers interpret the headline and form opinions about the NCDC's actions. The readers here engaged in psychological projection, where they imagine themselves or others in the mist of the pandemic, who are probably sick and want to know their status, this can evoke emotions such as outrage and disappointment due to the perceived injustice and favouritism. Words like accused and selective testing triggers world-switches, shifting the reader's perspective to consider ethical implications and potentially intensifying emotional responses from the crowd.

> *COVID-19: Patients Protests, Threaten to Abscond Over Poor*
> *Treatment in Niger State (May 6, 2020)*

The above headline paints a picture where readers imagine a scenario of dissatisfaction and conflict. The use of 'protests' and 'threaten to abscond' indicates a tense situation, while 'poor treatment' evokes feelings of neglects and injustice, if it were to be a very prominent Nigerian, it would not be so. The headline triggers schemata related to healthcare crises, patient rights, and government's responsibility. Readers draw upon existing knowledge of similar situations to interpret the headline's meaning. The headline prompt readers to create a mental picture of unsatisfaction, creating emotions like anger or

concern due to the mention of protests and poor treatment. Words such as protests and threaten creates a sense of urgency and tension, engaging readers emotionally by drawing on their existing knowledge of healthcare crises. The geographical setting (Niger State) provides a specific context, influencing how readers interpret the situation and potentially triggering empathy or outrage based on their prior experiences or beliefs about healthcare in that region. This indicates how some victims of the COVID-19 were being treated during the pandemic.

> *Twenty-Four Health Workers Test Positive For COVID-19 In Bauchi (May 16, 2020)*

A mental picture is been created by the readers of health workers in Bauchi contracting COVID-19, drawing on past experiences with similar news that is existing already. The headline activates schemas related to health crises, COVID-19, and the impact on healthcare workers. This entails that readers update their existing knowledge with new information about the specific case in Bauchi, integrating it into their broader understanding of COVID-19 outbreaks. The use of specific numbers (twenty-four) and a location (Bauchi) can bring about emotions like concern and fear, especially if the reader has a personal connection to the area or healthcare workers. The context in which the headline is read, for example, during the pandemic, can amplify emotional responses by linking to existing fears or anxieties about health crises as at that time.

 Daily Trust:

> *FACES OF KANO'S MANY DEATHS (May 2, 2020)*

An image representation of Kano is being constructed here by the reader, likely drawing on past experiences of knowledge of the city. The phrase 'many deaths' evokes a knowledge related to mortality, tragedy, crises and possibly political or social unrest in Kano. The headline might prompt readers to switch between different mental scenarios such as imagining various causes of death or the impact on Kano's community. The word 'faces of 'suggests personal stories of human impact, connecting the reader's schema of tragedy with individual experiences or narratives. This headline makes readers to have a picture of Kano in its entirety, associating it with tragedy and or crises, which can evoke emotions like sadness, worry and concern. The faces personalise the story, and increasing emotional resonance by making the tragedy more relatable and human.

- Lack of protective equipment: Doctors absconding from hospitals over COVID-19 (May 6, 2020)

Mentally, images are constructed based on the headline's linguistic stimuli. The phrase 'lack of protective equipment' evokes a world of scarcity and risk, while 'doctors absconding' suggests a world of crises and abandonment. The word COVID-19 triggers a switch to a broader global health crisis world, connecting the local issue to a larger pandemic context. The headline informed knowledge related to healthcare, safety, and crisis management. Words like protective equipment triggers a schema of medical safety protocols. The unexpected actions of doctors absconding modify the reader's schema of healthcare professionals' roles and responsibility during crises. Readers create a world that reflects a crisis situation, evoking emotions like fear, danger and concern due to the mention of COVID-19 and doctors absconding. The use of phrases like 'absconding' and 'lack of protective equipment' creates a sense of urgency and impending danger ahead, engaging readers emotionally and cognitively. This shows that even the medical health workers are not saved from the deadly disease, therefore, everyone is not safe.

- COVID-19: 20 STATES YET TO HAVE A TESTING CENTERS (May 20, 2020)

The headline builds a world by using specific words like COVID-19 and testing centres, which create a schema related to public health crises, COVID-19, and medical infrastructure. The mention of testing centres draws the reader to a previous knowledge of diagnostic facilities, which the reader associates with controlling the spread of diseases. The phrase 20 states yet to have testing centres adds function- advancing elements, highlighting the lack of resources. The 20 states might trigger a world switch, shifting the reader's focus from a general understanding of COVID-19 to a more specific issue of resource distribution across the different regions thereby evoking feelings of urgency and concern on the spread of COVID-19, which some states are yet to have a testing facility. No one knows how many people have been affected, and no one can tell the numbers of death that might be associated to the pandemic. The situation was alarming and calls for serious attention.

- Job cuts displace workers as COVID-19 hits employers (June 8, 2020)

Mental constructions are built through the use of deictic elements (e.g., job cuts, workers, COVID-19). The terms 'job cuts' and 'displace workers' activate schemas related to economic hardship and employment instability,

while COVID-19 triggers a global health crisis. These existingknowledge influence how readers interpret the situation described; by so doing, they understand the broader context of economic challenges exacerbated by a global pandemic, leading to job losses. The language used to describe job cuts creates a mental construct that evokes emotions of anger and frustration. The emotional impact arises from how readers connect their own experiences and schemas to the text world, fostering empathy and understanding of the economic hardship described. This connection can lead to a more immersive and emotionally resonant experience for the reader thereby imagining how the masses would have coped without jobs during these hard times.

> *- Coronavirus kills 587 persons in Kano in 5wks- FG (Tuesday, June 9,2020)*

The mental representation here is based on the situation in Kano and the information provided. This includes the number of deaths and the time frame. The mention of Kano might create world-switches, as readers shift between various mental spaces related to geographical location and authority. '587 persons' and '5wks' add to this schema by providing specific details about the severity and rapid spread of the virus and number of deaths. Readers create mental image of the situation in Kano, which can suggest feelings of sadness, pity and fear. The use of specific number and locations can increase emotional engagements by making the event more tangible and personal, most especially if readers have loved ones in that location.

Premium Times:

> *Nigeria's COVID-19 cases double in the past week (April, 5 2020)*

At this period, the pandemic had become a global issue causing damages across different continents. The mental representations here are constructed, using the headline's information, drawing on the reader's background knowledge of COVID-19 and its impact. The headline activates schemas related to health crises, statistical increases, and temporal changes, influencing how readers interpret the information. Readers integrate new information into existing schemas about COVID-19, updating their understanding based on the doubling of cases. This integration affects their perception of the pandemic's severity and progression. The emotional impact arises from the switches, such as the temporal shift to 'the past week', which can evoke feelings of urgency and concern patterning the crisis which has enveloped the world. Readers' emotional responses are influenced by the discourse world,

which includes their personal experiences and emotions triggered by the topic of COVID-19.

> *- Coronavirus: Nigeria to test 2 million people in three months-*
> *NCDC (April 28, 2020)*

Towards the end of April, Nigeria is actively addressing the coronavirus by testing a large number of people. The mental space here is defined by the deictic elements like "Nigeria" and "NCDC" which provide context and authority. The mention of coronavirus and testing activates schemas related to health crises and public health measures. Readers draw on their background knowledge of pandemics and testing protocols to understand the situation. What this entails is that Nigeria is taking a proactive measure to control the spread of the virus, and they might assess the effectiveness of such measures based on their past experiences on health crises.

> *- COVID-19: FMN Concludes Donation of 400 million Worth*
> *of Relief Food Items across Nigeria (April 30, 2020)*

The hardship intensifies and losses of lives, property and jobs increase in the country. The phrase "COVID-19" triggers a schema related to global health crises. 'FMN concludes donation' suggests a positive action, while 400 million worth of relief food items quantifies the effort, creating a mental image of extensive aid. The mention of "across Nigeria" shifts the spatial perspective, indicating a nationwide impact. The headline activates related schemas to corporate social responsibility, pandemic response, and food relief provision.

> *- COVID-19: Nigerians govt releases new guidelines for*
> *resumption of schools (July 13, 2020)*

The expressions 'COVID-19', 'Nigerian government' and 'guidelines for resumption of schools', construct mental representations of the situation. This creates schemas related to health safety, educational recovery, and government interventions, influencing how readers understand the context and implications of the guidelines. Therefore, the readers interpret the headline by using their prior knowledge about COVID-19, school closures and government responses. The mention of new guidelines might prompt a world-switch, shifting the reader's focus from the past policies to current developments, thereby enhancing the beginning of activities in the country. This will give the readers a sense of assurance that normalcy is gradually returning.

> - *Weekly Review: Nigerians records fewer coronavirus cases,
>   more deaths (July 26,2020)*

The phrase 'fewer cases' might evoke a schema of improvement, while 'more deaths' could evoke a schema of danger or crisis. The contrast between 'fewer cases' and 'more deaths' triggers a world-switch, where readers adjust their mental representation to reconcile these opposing trends, potentially evoking mixed emotions such as relief and concern. It is a relief because of the fewer cases that was recorded which entails that people are aware and taking safety precautions; and a concern because those who were already affected are not getting better instead, they were dying. The headline activates schemas related to health crises, statistical trends, and possibly economic or social impacts. Readers integrate these schemas with their existing knowledge to understand the implications of the headline, such as the effectiveness of health measures and the severity of the pandemic.

DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The findings show that journalists do not use a full stop at the end of headlines. This is to make easy the assimilation and understanding of the headlines without any hitch for the audience, why because, full stops can disrupt the flow of a reader's eye movement, halting their engagement with the text and reducing their intention to continue reading. Headlines are designed to lead readers into the main article, and a full stop might signal completion, discouraging further interest on the text. The study also show that journalists often use declarative sentences in headlines more than any other type of sentences when writing because they are direct, concise, and effectively pass essential information. Declarative sentences state facts or statements, making them ideal for summarising news article succinctly and clearly. This is one of the primary goal of headlines: to inform readers quickly while capturing their attention. Lastly, declarative sentences reduce ambiguity, ensuring that the message is easily understood without requiring additional context.

The data gathered clearly showcase the level of coverage the Nigerian press gave to Coronavirus in the country. It is obvious that the Nigerian newspapers give much attention to Coronavirus in Nigeria; it is an issue that is detrimental to the wellbeing of all citizens. The media therefore, is expected to give prominence to the issue of COVID-19 so that the whole nation can call for awareness and solution on how to eradicate this deadly pandemic.

Most of the headlines used for the analyses captured the word COVID-19. This means that the disease had really taken a toll on and in Nigeria, causing a lot of damage to life and property which led to a total lock-down of the nation

in other to avert the spread. The implication of this frame is that it added to the fear, panic and tension already created by the newspapers through captions, which could indirectly help in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

The study also finds out that readers activate their schemata, by relying on their background knowledge in interpreting headlines and constructing meanings from the language used. Therefore, before interpreting any headlines, readers use their prior knowledge as back up for understanding current situations as they keep unfolding.

Lastly, the study discovered that even without reading the full article, headlines can heighten emotions, influencing reader's well-being and engagement with the content. This emotional connection can drive readers to share the content or take action based on their emotional responses. Emotional headlines are designed to evoke feelings such as joy, sadness, anger or fear which can increase engagement and interest in the story.

CONCLUSION

The media plays a vital role in providing information during health crises, making it a trusted resource for many. Newspaper headlines prompt readers to draw upon relevant schemata to build a mental representation of the stories they come across, which is then refined as they read further contents. Nevertheless, headlines provide cognitive frameworks for understanding how readers process and make sense of news headlines by activating their existing knowledge and building mental pictures of event as they are presented in the text. The schema and text world theory helps in the interpretations of these headlines via existing knowledge.

This study concludes that Nigerian newspapers effectively performed their social responsibility by frequently reporting on the outbreak, focusing on awareness and prevention of the disease. They prioritized local events over similar foreign outbreaks, reflecting the importance of proximity in news selection.

REFERENCES

Adaobi, N. O.,& Justice, E. A. (2022). Sociocultural Relations: Perspectives from Covid-19   Newspaper Headlines. *UJAH* Volume 23 No.2.

Anderson, R. C. (1977). The Notion of Schemata and the Educational Enterprise. In R. C. Anderson, R. J. Spiro, & W. E. Montague (Eds.), *Schooling and the acquisition of knowledge*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Alexander, M.,& Emmott C. (2009)." Schemata" In: Huhn, Peter et al. (eds*):*

the living handbook of narratology. Hamburg: Hamburg University.

Aworo, J. O. (2017).*A Practical Guide to Stylistics*. Lagos: Nirpri Publishers.

Apuke, O. D.,& Omar, B. (2020). "How do Nigerian Newspapers Report COVID-19 Pandemic? The Implication for Awareness and Prevention". *HEALTH EDUCATION RESEARCH*. Vol.35 no.5. Pp, 471–480. doi:10.1093

Berwick, R. C., Friederici, A. D., Chomsky, N., & Bolhuis, J. J. (2013). *Evolution, Brain, and the Nature of Language*. Trends Cognitive Science. Pp, 89-98.

Ebenezer, D. O., Oreyomi, M. A.,& Ogunlayi, Z. B. (2021)."The Stylistic Study of the Headlinesof Covid-19 Reportsin Selected Nigerian Newspapers". *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development.* ISSN:2630-7065(Print)2630-7073.Vol.4No. 6.

Emmott, C., Alexander, M., & Marszalek, A. (2014). Schema Theory in Stylistics. In: Burke, M. (ed). *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics*. Pp, 268-283. London: Routledge.

Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., & Hyams, N. (2007). *An Introduction to Language*. (8th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Gavins, J.,& Gerard, S. (2003). *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*.London: Routledge.

Gavins, J. (2007). *Text World Theory: An Introduction.* Edinburgh University Press.

Isa, J. (2024). A Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of Oswald Mtshali's "Men in Chains". *Ahyu: A Journal of Language and Literature*. Pp. 14-26. DOI: doi.org/10.56666/ahyu.v7i.193 ISBN 2636-5839 (print) ISSN 2814-2446 (online)

Jacobs, A. (2015). *Cognitive Stylistics: Language and Cognition in Text Analysis.* De Gruyter.

Jeffries, L.,&Mclntyre, D. (2010). *Stylistics*: Cambridge Text Books in Linguistics. London.

Marszalek, A. (2012). Humorous Worlds: A Cognitive Stylistic Approach to the Creation of Humour in Comic Narratives. M Phil(R) thesis http://theses.gla.ac.uk/4156/ 5.8. 2015.

Olajide, E. A. (2022)."A Discourse Analysis of Online Newspaper Reports on COVID-19 in Nigeria". *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*ISSN 2321 - 9203 www.theijhss.com. Vol10 Issue 5 DOI No.: 10.24940

Owolabi, B. A., & Magaji, M., Y. (2018). Analysis of Stylistic Functions of Figurative Language in Tunde Kelani's *Arugba. Ahyu: A Journal of Language and Literature (AJOLL).* Vol 1, No. 2.Pp. 21-29. ISSN 2636-

5839.

Steen, G., & Gavins, J. (2003). Contextualizing Cognitive Poetics. In: J. Gavins and G. Steen, G. (eds.) *Cognitive poetics in practice.* Pp.1–12. London and New York: Routledge.

Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students.* Psychology Press.

Stockwell, P. (2002). *Cognitive Poetics:An Introduction.* Routledge: London.

………….. (2006) Schema Theory: Stylistic Applications. In: Brown, K. (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Language & Linguistics*, Second Edition, volume 11, Pp, 8-13. Oxford: Elsevier.

…………… (2016) Cognitive stylistics. In Jones, R. (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Language   and   Creativity*Pp.218-230. London:Routledge.

Werth, P. (1999). *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse.* London: Longman.

Woldemariam, H.M. (2015). The Teaching and Learning of Poetry at Postgraduate Level: *A Cognitive Stylistics Approach.* PoN (NUST), Polytechnic of Namibia, Department of Communication Windhoek, Namibia.