

Research Article

“We Only Came Home to Find His Body Dangling”: Voices and Practs in Selected Nigerian Newspapers Reportage on Suicide

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This study examined the voices and practs in Nigerian newspapers' reportage on suicide using three major Nigerian newspapers: *Nation*, *Punch* and *Vanguard*. Data were subjected to a qualitative analysis using the theoretical tools of pragmatic acts theory and polyphony. In selected reportage, two categories of voices were discovered anonymous or named, and male or female voices. The presence of the voices is linguistically indicated by relativisation devices and person deixis which are used to convey the perspectives of the voices. The findings of the study further elucidated that no significant linguistic correlation exists between gender and suicide as reported by Nigerian newspapers. The practs deployed in Nigerian newspapers' reportage on suicide are mainly practs of backgrounding the suicide incident, describing the suicide incident, informing the readers and confirming the suicide incident.

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1. Introduction

A harmful attempt committed with the motive of ending one's life is regarded as suicide. Since the past few decades, there has been a spate of suicides committed across the globe. According to the World Health Organization (2021), more than 700,000 people die due to suicide every year. Nigeria, based on the World Health Organization's (WHO, 2021) claim, has the highest rate of suicide and depression in Africa. Suicide rates in the country are currently at 9.50 per cent per 100,000 people (WHO, 2021). Low-income earners and those who are disempowered by poor socio-economic conditions account for 80% of suicides as revealed by the World Health Organization (2021). Studies have classified suicide into different types based on method (Abdullahi et al., 2020) and motivations (Durkheim, 2000). Based on the method, suicide has been classified into two: violent and non-violent. Hanging, stabbing and shooting oneself are forms of violent suicide while drowning, excessive consumption of hard drugs and drinking of poisonous substances belong to the non-violent suicide category. Based on the motivation of the suicide, Durkheim, cited in Pickering, Walford, and British Centre for Durkeimian Studies (2000), postulates four types of suicide, namely egoistic suicide, altruistic suicide, anomic suicide, and fatalistic suicide. While it is not encouraged in many tribes because of the stigma attached to it, suicide nevertheless remains a significant cause of death worldwide (Rataemane, 2008). Psychological factors such as depression, frustration, and the inability to fulfil the financial demands of a relationship have been discovered to be the main causes of suicide (Ejiga, 2000). Furthermore, suicide is prohibited legally in Nigeria. According to Nigeria's penal code, chapter 27, section 327, 'Any person who attempts to kill himself is guilty of a misdemeanour and is liable to imprisonment for 1 year' (Ekpendu, 2019). Nigerian law also criminalizes the abetment of suicide.

Newspaper reports on suicide may differ within and across countries, with the advent of technology; nonetheless, exposure to suicide incidents is no longer confined to print media alone. Through the internet and social media, the circulation of suicide news is now boundless. Dunlop et al. (2011) claim that the internet, and specifically the enhanced website model, is an important source of information for learning about suicidal behaviour. It has also been observed that suicide has a close link with inequity, social exclusion, and economic deprivation (Berk and Dodd, 2006). In their studies on suicide and the media, Pirkis and Blood (2001) and Stack (2000) confirmed that linguistic strategies employed by the media to report suicide can lead to imitative suicidal behaviour, as evidenced by statistical increases in completed suicide rates. For instance, saturating a suicide report with epithetic details relating to the quantity of poisonous substance consumed by a suicide victim could provide a hint for a reader who already has the intention of taking his or her life. This implies that media professionals must exercise caution lest, in their attempt to inform about suicide, they do more harm by indirectly encouraging it. Similar to rape, language deployed to report suicide may be complex as it is influenced by the environment and cultural and psychological beliefs associated with it. In some newspapers' reportage, this is reflected in the way some reporters veil victims or witnesses and background societal reactions in their reportage. Moreover, the language used could normalize suicide, sensationalize it, or present it as a solution to life problems for some individuals who access the reportage either in the newspaper or media (Stack, 2000). Heavy responsibility, therefore, lies with the newspapers' reporters because readers' responses to information differ.

The study of language use has proven that mere dependence on the structural properties of a text with a focus on word choices alone is inadequate to unravel the intended meaning of information in newspaper reportage. This is because there are underlying meanings embedded within a statement. The investigation of the menace of suicide in Nigerian newspaper reportage cannot, therefore, be successfully pursued without the tools of pragmatics. This study is, therefore, designed to investigate the voices featured and practs deployed in Nigerian newspapers' reportage on suicide. The specific objectives of this study are to: (i) identify the voices that contribute to the suicide reportage in Nigerian news reports, and (ii) discuss the practs deployed by the voices present in Nigerian news reportage on suicide.

2. Previous Studies and Problem Statement

Nigerian newspapers have attracted serious linguistic attention over the past few decades. While some of these works focused on the Nigerian newspapers' headlines (Chiluwa, 2005; Taiwo, 2007), a few others investigated the discursive representation of social actors (Osisanwo, 2016) in news magazines and newspapers' editorials. The issues examined in these studies mainly deal with language and ideology (Taiwo, 2007; Osisanwo, 2011), syntactic government (Jegede, 2015), and terrorism (Osisanwo, 2016). Attempts have been made to research suicide forms. Durkheim, cited in Pickering, Walford, and British Centre for Durkeimian Studies (2000), postulates four types of suicide, namely egoistic suicide, altruistic suicide, anomic suicide, and fatalistic suicide. Slavery and other forms of unwholesome practices that lead to ending one's life are examples of fatalistic suicides (Pickering, Walford, & British Centre for Durkeimian Studies, 2000). The correlation between suicidal behaviours and language has been a controversial linguistic subject since the twentieth century. Motto (1990), Blumenthal and Berger (1973) and Philips (1974) in their studies have proven that language in suicide reportage could cause an increase in suicide rate. Conversely, Sonneck et al (1990) and Jobes et al (1995), based on their studies, argued that media reportage on suicide could also reduce the risk of the Werther effect.

The relationship between suicide and media has also been explored in numerous studies (Stack 2000; Pirkis and Blood, 2001). The symbiotic relationship between suicide and media has also been established in Pirkis, Blood, Sutherland and Currier (2010). Based on their review of fifty-six ecological studies, it was discovered that the influence of television on actual suicidal behaviour is not as strong as that of newspapers. In Nigeria, attempts have been made to investigate suicide as reported in newspapers from the fields of psychology (Ejiga, 2000), statistics (Abdulai et al., 2020; Oyetunji, 2021), and religion (Uroko and Enobong, 2021). Studies have also shown that newspaper reportage on suicide in Nigeria and other death-related issues such as murder, money rituals, and fraud are believed to embody some sensitive socio-cultural beliefs associated with human lives (Olasukanmi, 2015). Among the Yoruba, for instance, such dignified beliefs are encapsulated in proverbs to make one realize how invaluable human life is. Acosta's (2020) study on the discourse of suicide in American hip-hop music identified three key themes: Addressing suicide, Coping with suicide and Transitioning through phases of suicide. The most recent linguistic work related to this current study was undertaken from the perspective of critical discourse analysis by Adebayo and Makwambeni (2020). Their research investigated the discourse frame used by selected newspaper reporters in Nigeria to describe suicide. The study analyses selected Nigerian newspapers from January 1- July 31, 2019, using *Punch* and *Daily Trust*. In their work, they identified three discourse frames used to represent suicide namely, suicide as politics, suicide as a consequence of failed relationships and suicide as a mental issue. Although the findings of the study locate suicide as reported in some Nigerian newspapers as a crime and mental problem, they do not account for the major types of suicide in the selected Nigerian dallies, nor the voices featured or the linguistic roles of the voices in Nigerian newspapers' reportage. This study is, therefore, designed to fill this gap by investigating suicide reportage in Nigerian newspapers through the lens of pragmatics to identify the voices in Nigerian newspapers' reportage and the practs they deployed as part of their contribution to readers' understanding of the incidents.

3. Theoretical framework

The pragmatic acts theory "is a speaker- or hearer-centred pragmatics," (Kecskes, 2010; 2894). The pragmatic act deals with explaining how language users adapt themselves to a context and also adapt the context to themselves. Pragmeme is an important notion in the pragmatics act theory and leads to the idea of practs. In other words, whereas pragmeme embodies possible interpretation in a locution, pract refers to a single and actualized meaning based on the situation. The Pragmatic Acts Theory is divided into two sections: the activity part and the textual part. The activity part has six options namely, psychological acts, prosody, conversational act, indirect speech act and speech act. The textual part deals with the contextual features that influence communication. These include inference (INF), reference (REF), voice (VCE), shared-situational knowledge, (SSK) and relevance (REL) which is the semantic significance of the proposition. The interaction between the activity part and the textual part brings about pract, which is the major aspect employed for the analysis of the data in this research. The textual and activity parts work together to help us know the intended meaning embedded in a text or utterance.

The theory of polyphony is premised on the notion that multiple voices can be embodied in a single text (Bakhtin, 1993). One of the goals of this framework is to distinguish the voice of the characters from the authorial or narratorial voice. Bakhtin argues that characters and narrators in a text are known by

their voices, rather than by any other features, within a text, and it is how these voices are arranged that determines whether or not it is polyphonic. Grammatically, voices are represented with the names of specific people and pragmatic tools of deixis. Voices can be identified linguistically through the deployment of matrix clauses introduced by “that”, indirect reports and quotation marks. They are used to express involvement in issues or events, seek other people’s views, and keep someone’s action in view (Odebunmi and Olaniyan, 2007). The polyphony framework is, therefore, suitable for this paper as it allows one to account for the multiplicity of perspectives on eyewitnesses’ involvement in suicide reportage (Odebunmi and Olaniyan, 2007). The current study adopts Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony to examine the voices or witnesses that shape the narrative of suicide incidents in Nigerian newspapers while the pragmatic act theory was employed to investigate the roles allocated or performed by these voices and how their contributions modified the interpretation of the suicide reportage.

4. Methods and data

The study was carried out using a qualitative descriptive analytical approach. This choice is premised on its suitability for content and interpretative analysis of texts--- fictional or non-fictional in electronic and printed form. The data source adopted for this study is the electronic version of Nigerian newspaper reportage on suicide. Out of over twenty newspapers’ reportage on suicide declared within 2020–2022 including attempted suicide cases, fifteen Nigerian newspapers’ reportage that consist of committed suicide and homicide-suicide cases were used for this study. The data sources were gathered from the official websites of three Nigerian newspapers namely, *Punch*, *Vanguard* and *Nation*. These newspapers are suitable for this study because they are national newspapers with national coverage. Moreover, they are credible sources of news on all national matters. The suicide reportages in the above-named newspapers are the ones recorded to have taken place between January 2021 and December 2022. This period was marked by an alarming rate of suicide occurrences across the country, hence their preference for this study. Extracts used in this study cover the combination of relevant statements made by the reporters as well as the ones sourced from anonymous witnesses that feature in the suicide reportage. The data were subjected to the theoretical and analytical paradigms of Mey’s Pragmatic Act Theory and Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony.

Newspapers	Selected Suicide Reports
<i>The Nation</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Odunare’s suicide 2. Man commits suicide in Kwara over impotence 3. Pastor kills wife, commits suicide 4. Ex-militant commits suicide in Delta 5. Final year student commits suicide over failed relationship
<i>Punch</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Osun artisan hospitalised after drinking insecticides, die co-tenants suspects indebtedness 2. Boy hangs self in Edo, neighbours blame incest allegation 3. Man commits suicide after losing company’s 150, 000 on betting 4. Abuja woman commits suicide, corpse, baby found in bush 5. Lagos Telecoms accountant commits suicide, friend blames depression
<i>Vanguard</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Man commits suicide after sleeping with minor in Delta 2. Poly student in Edo commits suicide 3. Man hammers wife to death over 800, 000 in Bayelsa, commits suicide 4. Man commits suicide on Bayelsa flyover 5. Man, 38-years-old commits suicide in Ibadan
Total	Fifteen (15)

Table 1. List of the selected Suicide Reports

5. Analysis

5.1. Pragmatic acts and voices

Mey's pragmatic acts theory was employed to identify seven pragmatic acts deployed in these newspapers. The practs include the pract of backgrounding, pract of informing, pract of description, pract of condemnation, pract of confirmation, pract of invalidation and pract of blame. Bahktin's theory was utilised to identify the voices which are categorised into named or anonymous, male or female. The voices and practs are explained in the section below.

Backgrounding of suicide incidents

- **P1:** "According to the deceased's father, Malam Muhammad Idris, his son graduated from Muydeen College of Education (Gwanara Campus), Kwara. He said the deceased had made several attempts in the past, to end his life before the unfortunate incident. (*Nation*, 30 October, 2021).
- **P2:** "His girlfriend recently broke up with him and the news devastated him, and on Friday, when he could no longer endure it, he drank a brand of insecticide and died." (*Vanguard*, 11 September, 2021)
- **P3:** "A co-tenant with the deceased, who spoke on condition of anonymity told *The PUNCH* on Monday said Samuel had confided in him that he was in huge debt. He said, "I saw him early on Sunday and we had a brief conversation. He did not tell us he would be travelling, but for a few weeks, he didn't come home. "When I asked why he was away for so long, Samuel told me he was indebted. He said owed many people. Not long after our conversation, I heard him grunting in his room and I raised the alarm. (*Punch*, 9 November, 2021)Backgrounding, as used in this study, has to do with explaining previous experiences that led to a current, positive or negative event. The pract of backgrounding is found in the reportage of both male and female suicide incidents. Two voices: anonymous and named are revealed. We have the voice of the victim's father in P1, the voice of the victim's friend in P2 and the voice of the victim's neighbour in P3. The presence of these voices in the reportage is indicated linguistically with male person deixis 'He' and 'his'. The preponderance of these reference items shows that the voices in this male suicide are all men. These voices performed the pract of backgrounding suicide incident in Nigerian newspapers reportage. The actor that performs the pract of backgrounding is usually someone who has a close relationship with the deceased: the deceased's father, as seen in P1. The textual activity tools deployed to backgrounding suicide incidents are reference (REF) and voices (VCE). In the above, the voice employs referential devices like "his" to establish his familiarity with the victim. The declaratives that reveal the past situations that caused the suicide incidents are presented through direct speech uttered by people (VCE) close to the suicide actors while the identity of the suicide actor is represented by deixis items which show that the voices are familiar with the suicide actors.

P2 concerns a woman who died by suicide, and the pract of backgrounding was performed by a named witness. In this case, the backgrounding pract's function is to explain explicitly the previous experience that orchestrated the suicide committed by the deceased. This intention is signalled by the repeated use of past tenses and also the textual activity tool of REF and SSK. By using the male person deixis "He" and "His" in a reported speech, the named witness demonstrated that he has a close relationship with the victim. The inference (INF) here is that the victim could have died as a result of the psychological agony she went through during her breakups. The shared situational knowledge (SSK) of the victim's past failed relationships made this pract functional. The relevance (REL) of this pract is that it confirms the belief that the inability to deal with separation involving love matters could lead to depression and consequently suicide. The relevance of the pract of backgrounding is not only in its illocutionary force to provide information about the pre-suicidal tendencies of the victim, but also gives readers logical insights into the socio-cultural or economic circumstances that make people frustrated to the extent of accepting suicide as the only solution to their problems. As seen above, it can be deduced that the inability to refund huge debt can frustrate people to take their lives. Given this, the pract of backgrounding is essential in every Nigerian newspaper's reportage on suicide because it supplies plausible perspectives on the varying factors that lead victims to commit suicide.

Pract of informing readers

- **P4:** "TRAGEDY struck in the early hours of Thursday at Edepie, a suburb of Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital, when a 46-year-old man, identified as Patrick Markson, reportedly killed his wife and then took his own life." (*Vanguard*, 29th November 2022).
- **P5:** "A middle-aged man simply identified as Chikordi has allegedly committed suicide after killing his wife, Prophetess Chikordi, *The Nation* has learnt. The deceased was the General Overseer of the Ancient of Days Healing Church, Umunede in Ika North East LGA of Delta State, it was learnt." (*Nation*, 5 December, 2021).
- **P6:** "A yet-to-be-identified nursing mother has committed suicide, abandoning her child in a bush where her corpse was discovered along Suuka Airport road, in the Federal Capital Territory" (*Punch*, 23 November, 2022).Informing involves enlightening others about an event. An informing pract is conveyed to communicate the occurrence of the suicide. An informing pract contains only one voice which is the authorial or reporter's voice. This

voice is distinguished from the other voices as it contains a reference to the name of the newspaper itself, and is latent with the implicature that the knowledge of the incident was sourced from witnesses. The pract of informing is performed mostly through the voice (VCE) of the newspaper reporters. Structurally, it tends to appear at the beginning of the reportage. As seen in P4, P5 and P6, the pract of informing discloses the name of the deceased, the occupation, location and date of the suicide incident, and sometimes, an explicit description of the suicide method is included. Nigerian newspapers' reportage relies on shared situational knowledge (SSK) to produce the pract of informing. This stance is premised on the belief (SSK) that newspapers only report what is brought to their attention. This knowledge makes this pract important. The relevance (REL) of this pract is to bring an awareness of a suicide incident to its readers in a concise manner which is in conformity with the roles of a newspaper. Evidence from P4–P6 shows that informing pract may be marked with factual presupposition which is indicated by the lexical items “allegedly”, “reportedly”, and “gathered”. The inference (INF) supplied to readers here is that the newspaper reportage is acting on a reported version of the narrative. However, through this pract also, newspapers' reportage on suicide further entrenches the notion that suicide is criminalised in Nigeria.

Pract of describing suicide incidents

- **P7:** “He was a very quiet boy, who took his academics very seriously. He doesn't go out and never showed any sign of depression whatsoever,” he said. (*Vanguard*, September 11, 2021)
- **P8:** “He said that the deceased hanged himself inside his father's farm, located at XX, with the aid of a rope and one jerry can.” (*Nation* October 30, 2021.)
- **P9:** “Late ____X____ X is somebody who is not free with people to tell who he is. We call him pastor because we felt he is one....and now he has ended his life out of shame.” (*Nation* 20 July, 2021)
- **P10:** “A student of the institution, ____-X, described the deceased as an intelligent student who was full of life and energy, adding that his grade point was close to distinction.” (*Nation* 20 November, 2022)

The pract of describing suicide incident most often features only one voice whose identity may be disclosed or anonymised in the newspaper. The spatial context of the suicide incident determines the voice behind this pract. In P10, the suicide happened in a Nigerian university and the anonymised voice was a student. Describing pract is a stretch of utterances spoken by a named or anonymous source to provide a vivid explanation of what was seen or observed at the scene. This pract is technically deployed by people who have a close relationship with the deceased such as family members or colleagues at work. Describing pract gains relevance (REL) based on the shared-belief that most suicides are committed in isolated places before they are eventually discovered by individuals who live with the deceased. Given this, the describing pract gives readers vivid details of the personality of the deceased or the things that happened at the suicide scene. Supplied by either anonymous or named sources, this piece of information abounds in Nigerian newspapers' reportage on suicide to authenticate every suicide incident. Linguistically, this pract is indicated with the use of a declarative structure and works with the textual activity element of reference (REF) to show that the voice is someone familiar with the victim. As seen in the extract above, a pract of describing suicide events tells readers about the personality of the deceased. In P7 above, this is indicated with the expression “quiet”, and the matrix clause, “who took his academic seriously”. The inference (INF) presented in this extract underpins the traditional assumption that people who commit suicide usually act strangely or are depressed before they eventually take their lives. In P8, this pract divulges the place of the incident as well as the instrument employed by the victim to take his life. Also, in P9, we can deduce that this pract is not limited to the victim alone. It could be used to reveal whether or not the environment knows enough about the victim. This possibility is captured in the utterance, “We call him ‘pastor’s because we felt he is one”.

Pract of confirming suicide incidents

- **P11:** Contacted, the spokesman of the state Police command, Mr ____X, confirmed the development. He said: “Preliminary investigation reveals that one ____Y 46, a native of Onopa, Yenagoa, attacked and killed his wife, ____Z, with a hammer.” (*Vanguard* 26 August, 2021)
- **P12:** Delta Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP ____X, confirmed the incident. (*Nation* 5 December, 2021) Confirmation has to do with ascertaining the validity of a piece of information. Evidence from the analysis reports that only one voice conveys the pract of confirming suicide. The occurrence of *police* as subjects performing the illocutionary act of confirmation in P11 and P12 showed that these voices are mostly represented by the Nigerian police. In P11, the speaker was the spokesman of the police, while in P12, the speaker was the public relation officer of a state police. The similarity in the utterances of the two agents attests to the possibility of a single voice performing this corroborative role in a typical Nigerian newspaper reportage on suicide. A pragmatic analysis of the newspapers' reportage reveals that the Nigerian police performs the role of confirming whether the death of an individual is suicidal or not. The shared-situational knowledge (SSK) that suicide is criminalised in Nigeria makes this pract relevant (REL). This is because the involvement of security agencies is crucial at the suicide scene to determine whether the incident is deserving of suspect investigation or not. In P11, the pract of confirming suicide is deployed by the state police spokesman. The textual tool of reference (REF) is

employed to project his identity in the quoted speech. The pract of confirmation as seen in the above affirms the name of the deceased and the weapon with which he ended his life. By making reference (REF) to preliminary investigation, it can be inferred that the police report is neither based on sentiment nor hearsay. In P12, the authorial voice ended his reportage by stating that the police PRO confirmed the incident to be a suicide case. Moreover, since many Nigerian newspapers' reports hardly conclude with the police expressing suspicion of homicide, the inference (INF) from the above extract is that they indirectly confirm that the deceased died by taking his or her life. Therefore, based on Mey's theory of pragmatic act, a practice of confirmation is achieved with the use of indirective and is mostly performed by the spokesman of the Nigerian police.

Pract of blaming suicide victims

- **P13:** "His wife, _____X, revealed that "he had been acting strangely for some days before his death. I complained about his strange behaviour to his parents but they ignored it until he died." (*Nation* December 31, 2021)
- **P14:** "Orji said: "He's currently in his IT days, a student of Public Administration. He decided to stay in Ojo for his one-year industrial training, (but) instead of focusing on his training he decided to search for true love. "His girlfriend recently broke up with him and the news devastated him, and on Friday, when he could no longer endure it, he drank a brand of insecticide and died." (*Vanguard* 11 September, 2021)
- **P15:** "A source from the community, who spoke on condition of anonymity yesterday evening, said the deceased had been suffering depression for about a year." (*Nation* 25 October, 2021)

Blaming is declaring that someone or something is directly or indirectly responsible for a wrong. In most of the suicide incidents examined in the selected newspapers, a single voice performs the pract of blaming. The pract of blaming is a pragmatic act which is mostly performed by a close relative to the suicide victim. In P13, the voice is the wife of the deceased, while in P14, the voice was a friend to the deceased, whereas in P15, the voice is anonymous. As exemplified in P13-P15, the voices in pract of blaming tend to have causative roles because they suggest reason(s) the victim tried to take their life. In other words, these voices reveal what they know or perceive to be the reason for the suicide act. For example, in P15, the voice associated suicide with depression. The target of blaming pract could be the relatives of the deceased, or the deceased himself which is represented with the referential (REF) tool of deixis. A pract of blame operates with the shared situational knowledge (SSK) of the abnormal behaviours that suggest that an individual has a possibility of taking his or her life under some negative circumstances. From P13 above, the parents of the deceased are blamed. This pract is signalled with an indirect speech act which is conveyed through the utterance, *I complained about his strange behaviour, but they ignored until he died*. The inference (INF) here is that the suicide might have been prevented if her in-laws had done something about her husband's strange behaviour. In P14, the voice in the reportage blames the suicide of his colleagues on the latter's pursuit of romantic relationship which was to the detriment of his academics, thus experiencing serious emotional damage as a result of the breakup. Given the fact that suicidal feelings could be induced by internal and external factors, the pract of blame is adopted by the eyewitnesses to suggest what they perceive to be the possible warning signs of suicide.

Pract of invalidating suicide stereotypes

- **P16:** "The source said, "She had been suffering from depression for years and her death has nothing to do with loneliness or lack of a husband or sex. Within the last seven years, I know she was in a relationship twice. She ended those relationships on her own because of depression. She said she did not want to bring someone else into her life when she could not take care of herself. She was going through extreme depression, but people that did not know what she was going through have been posting rubbish online." (*Punch* 17 December, 2021)

Invalidating means to disapprove a claim, making it look erroneous. The pract of invalidating stereotype is a pragmatic act that addresses wrong opinions against a suicide victim. The statement in P16 is one of the two suicide cases involving women in Nigerian newspapers' reportage on suicide. The excerpt here contains only one voice who is a female, and the context of the incident is premised on the issue of love relationships. It is possible that lack of a companion can disturb a woman emotionally. When a woman takes her life, some individuals tend to attribute this kind of suicide to a failed relationship which may not always be the case. This shared knowledge (SSK) makes the pract of invalidating stereotypes relevant (REL). Also, by making reference (REF) to the viral rumour circulated on social media about her friend, the (VCE) in this reportage demonstrated her awareness of the stereotypical assumptions people have about the deceased, which according to her was not completely true. The intention to disapprove this stereotype on moral grounds is signalled by a reference (REF) to the relationship history of the suicide victim. The anonymous source revealed that the victim had been in two love relationships within the last seven years but ended the affairs herself because of the chronic depression she experienced. The inference (INF) here is that the deceased did not commit suicide because she was starved of love and affection from men. The pract of invalidation is, therefore adopted by the eyewitness to debunk the stereotype that women commit suicide because of loneliness or a lack of a marriage partner.

Pract of condemning suicide actor

- **P17:** “It’s sacrilegious for Henry Jegbe to have taken his life by hanging. The deceased was suspected to have ended his life as he could no longer bear the shame of allegedly having a carnal knowledge of his neighbour’s female child (minor) which was discussed at the community level.” (Vanguard, July 20, 2021)

Condemnation is the practice of blaming, disapproving or declaring something to be wrong, or unacceptable. The pract of condemnation is not present in all Nigerian newspapers on suicide. Whereas most witnesses try to give information related to the background of the suicide, few witnesses featured in Nigerian newspapers’ reportage on suicide employ their discourse space to condemn or denounce the act. Evidence from P17, in a context of sexuality, reveals the involvement of only one male voice in this pract. The victim committed suicide after he was allegedly reported to have defiled a minor. The pract of condemnation is performed by an anonymous witness in this particular report. The anonymous witness’ VCE acts on a socio-cultural knowledge (SSK) of the dignity attached to chastity to condemn the actions of the rapist who committed suicide. The pract of condemnation in this extract is explicitly captured in his statement, “*It’s sacrilegious for Henry Jegbe to have taken his life by hanging*”. The deixis device – “his” – is repeatedly employed as a reference (REF) tool to represent the rapist as male. He is further reported as a corrupt paedophile who lacked respect for his neighbour’s daughter. The intention to condemn the victim by the anonymous witness is also stressed with a judgemental statement that the rapist resorted to suicide because he could not bear the shame after the matter was brought to the attention of the community leaders. The illocutionary act tendered by the anonymous witness gains relevance (REL) based on the fact that rape is a serious offence punishable by law in Nigeria. Given this, the inference (INF) that flows from this pract is that, in some situations, suicide is employed as an escapist strategy by men to avoid grievous penalties or public shame. The pract of condemning suicide is, therefore, deployed by an eyewitness to criticise people who took their lives to escape public shame, or punishment for a crime.

6. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that most of the suicide cases in Nigerian newspaper’ reportage between 2021 and early 2022 occurred as a result of extreme psychological disturbance which was orchestrated by sudden and unexpected changes in the socio-economic situations of the victims. Durkheim cited in Pickering, Watford and British Centre for Durkheimian Studies (2000) classified this form of suicide as the anomic type of suicide. This form of suicide is caused by job loss, financial loss and violent conflict. Evidence from the analysis of the data identifies homicide-suicide as a typical form of suicide that validates this typology. Also, a critical reading of the suicide narrative reveals that the men and women who commit suicide resort to the act because of the frustration and depression they are dealing with. Durkheim’s typology of suicide also includes egoistic suicide, altruistic suicide and fatalistic suicide (Durkheim, 2000). Five out of the fifteen newspaper reports represent egoistic suicide since the narratives reveal through the reported speech of the witnesses that the suicide victims perceived themselves to be socially ostracised and disintegrated. Based on the findings of the study, people suffering from impotence or accused of unethical sexual conduct resort to suicide as an expedient escapism tool against shame and reproach, even though this is irrational. This study argues that a suicide case linked to sex issues such as impotence and incest are examples of egoistic suicide since the victims commit suicide to escape stigmatization from society.

The pract of backgrounding performed by the suicide witnesses confirms Olasunkanmi’s (2015: 29) claim that “in some cultures, suicide is often viewed as an honourable way to escape reproach or hopeless situations.” This appears mostly in suicide cases involving sexuality. Its possibility is underscored by the shared socio-cultural knowledge of the shame that accompanies impotence and the disapproval of incest that exists especially in the African social mainstream. In Africa, suicide is believed to be metaphysical because the death of the individual leaves many questions in the mind of the people. Some of the voices in the reportage also expressed this sentiment in their statements.

Worthy of mention from the findings of this study is that the grammar of Nigerian newspapers’ reportage headlines on suicide conforms to a good extent with the WHO’s recommendation on the reporting of suicide in the media. Clause-complex structures are deployed in Nigerian newspapers’ reportage headlines. This appears to be the norm when the headlines provide suicide warning signs and risk factors which are recommended by the WHO to replace oversimplifying or speculating on the reason for the suicide (WHO, 2008). In addition, the victims of suicide are represented as actors with the material process. The method deployed to achieve suicide is explicitly stated in the finite position of the declarative clause. The linguistic relevance of this syntactic choice hinges on its potential to appeal to the cognitive faculty of readers. It gives an impression that the suicide was carried out intentionally by the deceased as confirmed by the narratives supplied by the voices in the reportage. While the names of the suicide victim are not usually mentioned for men, a stylistic variation is observed in the phrases employed to represent the males. “Man” is commonly used to represent the deceased; in a few cases, also, the name of the deceased is mentioned. Generally, for female and male suicide, the profession, occupation or educational level of the person who committed the suicide may also be stated on the headline. This representational strategy is echoed in the WHO Recommendation on Best Practices and Recommendation for Reporting on Suicide (2008), which specifies that the information about the deceased be kept general, not specific.

The textual activity part of Nigerian newspapers reportage on suicide confirms that males commit suicide more than females in Nigeria. The reference (REF) tool that confirms the preponderance of males as major voices in Nigerian newspapers is the male person deixis which is deployed with the pronominal 'he' and 'his'. This correlation lends credence to Oyetunji et al's (2021) position on the statistics of reported suicide cases in Nigeria between 2019 and 2020 which they claimed to be 80 per cent. The inference here is that men are more prone to suicide than women. Therefore, young men need to pay serious attention to their psychological health when going through tough times to avoid considering suicide as the only solution to their predicaments. Furthermore, given the avalanche of backgrounding pract in Nigerian newspapers' reportage on suicide, it is apparent that the occurrence of suicide is still deemed metaphysical by people in society. A shared socio-cultural knowledge of the priceless value of human life clearly indicates that suicide begs for a metaphysical inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the man's life because no reason is persuasive enough to justify a man taking his life. Against this backdrop, there is a good reason to propose the need for religious-based collaborations in raising awareness among young people about the consequences of suicide, as argued by Uroko and Enobong (2021) can be useful for tackling suicide. This approach is effective in assisting people to deal with suicide. This study recommends that a synergy between religious organisations, schools, media, government, counsellors, psychologists and medical practitioners is a seriously needed programme for curbing suicide.

The analysis of the practs deployed by the anonymous witness and a critical reading of the reportage clearly evinces that many Nigerians commit suicide because of socio-economic hardship and complicated psychological problems. These factors have been represented in Uroko and Enobong (2021) as "frustration, poverty, family problems, ego and emotional wounds". Homicide suicide, for instance, appears to be triggered by family problems and ego, while committed suicide cases are based on a combination of frustration, depression and poverty at varying degree. In addition, the inability to deal with emotional hurt leads some people to commit suicide as seen in the context of the victims who took their lives because of relationship problems. This correlates with Adebayo and Makwambeni's (2020) findings on the discursive frames used to represent suicide in Nigerian newspapers' reportage. Two of their discursive frames were identified in this present study namely, suicide as a consequence of failed relationship and suicide as mental issue. However, while their study argued that forty percent of the suicide cases reported in 2020 were represented as a consequence of failed relationship, the higher number of anomic suicide cases recorded in the data used for this current study elucidates that suicide incidents of 2021-2022 were framed mostly as a crime as well as a mental issue. This position is based on our inference that suicide victims in Nigeria during this period resort to suicide to escape the internal and external conflict they are going through at the moment.

7. Conclusion

Guided by Bakhtin's theory of polyphony, the study identified the presence of varying voices in Nigerian newspapers reportage on suicide. These voices can be categorised based on gender or identity disclosure. It is important to note that the kind of voice in the reportage found in Nigerian newspapers' reportage on suicide is often determined by the context of the suicide. The application of Mey's pragmatic acts theory shows that seven practs are mainly deployed in Nigerian newspapers' reportage on suicide: practs of informing readers, backgrounding suicide incidents, describing suicide incidents, confirming suicide incidents, blaming suicide actors, condemning suicide incidents, and invalidating stereotypes. The common practs performed are practs of backgrounding, description, informing and confirming. The activity part of the reportage reveals the use of direct speech act to report the suicide incident through the element of declaratives. The textual part of the suicide reportage unveils that the tools of reference (REF) are deployed in the reportage to represent the victim and confirm the familiarity that existed between him or her as well as the voices in the reportage. This enhances the credibility and authenticity of the reportage. A shared-situational knowledge (SSK) is deployed by the anonymous and named voices to make readers deduce the context or situations that could have provoked the suicide. The shared-situational knowledge (SSK) is influenced by the voices' perception of the prior conflicts experienced by the victims; their handicaps and the consequences of depression.

This paper concludes that, while men are the most common victims of suicide, little linguistic correlation exists between gender and suicide in Nigerian newspapers reportage. Given the SSK reflected by the voices and the practs deployed, the paper emphasises the need for men to pay more attention to their emotional health in the aspect of dealing with suicidal tendencies. Finally, having explored the pragmatics of Nigerian newspapers reportage on the menace of suicide in this current article, future areas of enquiry can attempt a politeness or stance analysis of online comments on video caption of those who attempted suicide. This kind of research will broaden the understanding of the perception and attitude of different voices (witnesses) to the menace of suicide in the country.

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Ethical Statement

The Ethical Statement is not applicable to this paper.

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