Review

Contextual beliefs in selected newspaper stories on crime in Nigeria

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This paper investigates the contextual beliefs in the reportage of crime stories in selected newspapers, with a view to identifying the shared knowledge that underlie communication between the writers and readers of such stories. The study is hinged on the model of contextual beliefs proposed by Odebunmi (2006), where contextual beliefs are categorised into the language level of beliefs and situation level of beliefs. The language belief emphasises that meaning interpretation can only be possible if interactants have access to the same linguistic code. The situation level of belief emphasises the relevance of the shared linguistic or non-linguistic codes and experiences. The study reveals that aspects of contextual beliefs operate between the writers of crime stories and their audiences. The analysis identified language level beliefs as well as situation level beliefs as core aspects which aid meaning interpretation in crime stories. While the language level beliefs emphasise the fact that the readers can make meaning out of the stories because they share knowledge of the same linguistic code used by the writer, the situation level beliefs point to the importance of having a shared knowledge of the topic of discourse, word choices and socio-cultural experiences before meaning decoding can occur and before communication can be successful. The study has established the relevance of context in meaning decoding of crime stories in Nigerian newspapers by the audiences. The writers of such stories appeal to certain contextual features to aid their reader's consumption of the texts.

Keywords: Contextual beliefs, crime, language level, situation level.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Newspaper stories typically form the bulk of content in newspapers. These contents could be on diverse topics ranging from politics to education, religion, crime, conflicts, economics, health among others. Crime features conspicuously in the news presented by the media to the public in every society. It has been a prominent part of the content of all mass media, including the newspapers. Amari (1999) notes that "the best crime stories have drama, conflict, good and evil". It is for these reasons that crime coverage has been institutionalized by the newspapers (Amzat et al., 2017). Crime stories have over time, formed an integral part of newspaper stories because it sells headlines and news publications to the public. "Crime and violence make news reports juicy; they are sensational, dramatic and at times, colourful" (Soola, 2003). Media owners simply feed on violence and

criminal activities that occur in the society, as it helps them to make profits and sales.

Crime is regarded as an act that brings about offences and which is usually punishable under the law (Oguntunde et al., 2018). The major crimes in Nigeria include rape, kidnapping, murder, burglary, fraud, terrorism, robbery, cyber-crimes, bribery, and corruption (Ibid, 2018). Crime is considered an important topic, because of its consequences on people and the punishment it attracts to the perpetrators. In every society, attempts are being made to stop criminal acts, but it is still widespread. Newspaper stories therefore thrive on the perpetration of crime as well as its punishment, to provide content for their audiences. To understand these stories, the writers and audiences rely on some readily available background information. These information helps the audience to understand the story being discussed and it forms the context of the discourse.

Ochis (1979) cited in Odebunmi (2006) sees context as "the social and physiological world in which the users' beliefs and assumptions about temporal, spatial and social settings; prior, on-going and future actions and the state of knowledge and attentiveness of those participating in the social interaction at hand". Certain features of context are visible from this definition such as the beliefs and experiences of the participants in the discourse, their assumptions and shared knowledge, the situation or locality in which communication takes place. Such shared beliefs and assumptions that the interlocutors hold prior to or during a communicative situation is called "contextual beliefs". Odebunmi (2006) points out that scholars have variously tagged such beliefs as "mutual contextual beliefs", "shared contextual beliefs", "shared assumptions" among others. These shared assumptions can operate at two levels, that is, at the level of language and at the level of situation. Meaning is realised through the interlocutors' access to the same language at the language level, while at the level of situation, meaning is decoded because of the interactants' shared code and experiences. Appropriate and adequate interpretation of the message in the crime stories therefore rely not only on the language used, but also on certain situational factors, such as identities and shared values of the writers and audiences. If the members do not share such values, interpretation crime stories and its consequences will be difficult. The language rules, use and patterns, as well as the cultural background of a society is contingent in understanding crime stories from such communities. For instance, there is a need to be familiar with how crime stories are reported and presented to the audience. The context around which the story is being narrated is important as this will aid the comprehension of the crime, and the punishment it deserves.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Crime and its perpetration have been in existence as far back as the period laws became institutionalized in every society. It is easily recognizable because every society has their laws (of good and bad) and thus, if anyone falls short, s/he must face the consequences. Unfortunately, as measures and techniques for detecting crimes and criminals advance, criminals also advance in their method of evading the law. The trend and degree of crime, the technique used by criminals and the punishment it attracts, is constantly being reported in the media. Due to the pervasiveness of crime, people are urged to stay up-to-date in order that they may discover the current trends and methods of crime. The newspaper thrives on this fear and ensures that crime stories form an integral part of the print media discourse.

Crime and its portrayal in the media have been studied from different perspectives as linguistic studies in form of pragmatic analysis, computer-mediated analysis, discourse analysis among others in earlier studies. Such works include Usaini and Akinsunlola (2012), Amzat et al. (2007), Chika, Asogwa, Iyere and Attah (2012), Soola (2007) among others. while all these are important contributions, studies on crime stories are not exhaustive. Thus, this study is presented as an addition to existing literature, and it investigates the contextual beliefs in the reportage of crime stories in selected newspapers, with a view to identifying the shared knowledge that underlie communication between the writers and readers of such stories. To achieve this, the study will be guided by the following objectives:

i.   To identify the shared beliefs between the interactants
ii. To uncover the socio-cultural factors that shape the structure and language of crime.

It is expected that this study adds to the existing literature on the study of mutual contextual beliefs, as well as the study of language use in crime-related stories in the print media in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

Crime reportage generally can take different mediums, such as written or verbal. When written, it could be in the form of posters and publications in Newspaper columns; and when verbal, it could be presented as a broadcast on radio or television. This paper studies the crime stories presented in four major Nigerian Newspapers – The Punch, The Nation, Nigerian Tribune, and The Guardian – between September 2019 to December 2019. The study investigates how shared beliefs influence language choice and how they aid the comprehension of the crime stories and the consequences of criminal actions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Context

Context refers to situations around which a word is meaningful. When words occur in isolation, they have their individual meanings; however, when they are used in a particular context, they bear new meanings in relation to the co-text and other factors considered in that communicative situation such as participants, topic of discourse, purpose, and mediums. Context is therefore very significant for the realization of the meaning of words and how they are used. Mey (2000) defines context as "the totality of the environment in which a word is used and as such it is usually constructed in interaction". Context therefore is central to meaning encoding and decoding as well as meaning realization and interpretation. It plays a significant role in communication. Trauth and Kazzazi (1996) notes that context has a particular influence on people's use of language because it encompasses all elements of a communicative situation and the relationship between the speaker and hearer, their knowledge, and their attitudes. Odebunmi (2006) defines context as "the spine of meaning". This definition underscores the importance of context to meaning interpretation. Without context, words are not meaningful. In other words, meaning does not exist outside context. This view is also buttressed by Thomas (1995), who notes that meaning is not inherent in words alone and not determined by what a speaker produces or what a hearer perceives alone, he asserts that meaning making is a process which can also involve "the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance (physical, social and linguistic)" (p22).

Language users are expected to be sensitive to the immediate context of language use so as to understand what words are employed to do in any given situation (Adeoti&Filani, 2016). This goes in line with Odebunmi's (2006) view that a communicator remains perpetually unintelligible if his/her images and intentions are restricted to him/her. Intelligibility can only be attained if the context in which such words are used aid understanding. While some scholars view context as relevant to meaning interpretation, some others view context as tangential or irrelevant to meaning. Palmer (1996) cited in Odebunmi (2006) opines that "the world of experience must of necessity include the sum of human knowledge". The basis of their argument is that since people must know the meanings of words before using them, word meaning can be perceived in isolation. While this is a valid claim, it does not however negate the fact that word meanings are best and appropriately realized in context.

Models of Context

Context has been described by scholars in different

ways and they have proposed different components of context. However, the first person to use the term "context of situation" was Bronislaw Malinowski who argued that "language was mainly a form of action" (Bloor & Bloor, 1995, p248). He emphasized that understanding the "concrete" context of situation is essential to understand an utterance; hence the meaning of an utterance is to a large extent determined by the social context in which it is uttered (Kamalu, 2018). Malinowski (1923) classifies context into the Verbal and non-verbal context. The non-verbal context is further divided into Context of situation and Context of culture. While context of situation refers to the configuration of activity, topic, mode of communication, relationship between participants and purpose in communicating, the cultural context contains the background assumptions and values of the community within which the texts are embedded or from the way they arise (Toolan, 1988). Firth's (1957) idea of context is similar to that of Malinowski as both scholars perceive meaning as function in context. Firth describes the context of situation through headings such as the participants in the situation, the actions or roles of the participants, the purpose of communication, the effects of verbal action and other relevant features of situations including surrounding objects and events.

Drawing on insights from Malinowski and Firth, Halliday (1978) explores the sociological perspective of language and sees language as a social semiotic tool that has social significance. For him, shared knowledge and context of situation helps to discover meaning in discourse. Halliday recognizes three components of context which are the field of discourse, the mode of discourse and the tenor of discourse (Halliday, 1978, p10). The field involves the setting and the topic, the tenor involves the nature of the participants and their roles, while the mode refers to the medium used as the channel of communication.

Hymes (1972) proposed a range of tools that can be used to analyze language used in a particular communicative situation, with the acronym SPEAKING. Each letter of the acronym has specific functions in the analysis of any speech event. They are Setting/Scene: which refers to the time and place; Participants: which includes those involved in the communication; Ends: which refers to the expected outcomes of an exchange; Acts sequence: referring to the actual form and content of what is said; Keys: which refer to the tone or manner in which a particular message is conveyed; Instrumentalities: referring to the choice of channel; Norms: which refers to the specific behaviours that are attached to speaking ; Genres referring to the type of utterances used.

Odebunmi (2006) classifies context into linguistic context and social context. While meaning is realized within the frame of a text in linguistic context, it goes beyond the text in the social context (p38). In the linguistic context, meaning is gotten from the words

surrounding a particular word. In other words, the co-text of a word determines its meaning. The social context on the other hand considers other factors relating to the socio-cultural, religious, and historical features of interaction for proper interpretation of meaning.

Contextual Beliefs

Contextual beliefs refer to assumptions that are taken for granted in a communicative situation. They are said to be information taken for granted because such information is assumed to be accessible to the interlocutors in that communicative situation. Odebunmi (2006) notes that contextual beliefs are the beliefs or assumptions held prior to or during occasions of interaction which come into and facilitate the communicative process (p38). Contextual beliefs are also called 'mutual contextual beliefs', 'shared contextual beliefs', 'shared assumptions' based on the perspective it is being viewed. The idea emphasised in contextual beliefs is that participants in an interaction must share some common grounds about the topic, ideas and experiences that relates to that communicative situation. These shared beliefs are expected to aid the understanding of the message of such communicative context and facilitate effective interpretation or decoding of the message. Different scholars including Bach and Harnish, Mey, Adegbija, Gumperz, Lyons, Odebunmi have studied contextual beliefs in relation to speech acts, presupposition, entailment, inferencing, and cross-cultural communication. Some of the models presented by these scholars will be discussed.

Bach and Harnish's Model of Mutual Contextual Beliefs

What was previously known as shared knowledge between Speaker and Hearer has been redefined by Bach and Harnish (1979) into what is now popularly called Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs). Bach and Harnish adopt "an intention-inference based approach to their study of speech acts" (p4). Their argument is that listeners in a communicative event must understand the illocutionary acts through the MCBs for it to be performed successfully. They emphasize the fact that linguistic communication is basically an inferential process (Bach &Harnish 1979, p4) and the inference made by the hearer during a communicative situation depends on the contextual knowledge shared by the interlocutors. Mutual Contextual Beliefs are significant to understanding and interpreting utterances and they help to decode the inferences made by the hearer. The intention-inference based approach to the study of speech acts built on the works of earlier scholars like Austin (1962). Austin has earlier proposed the speech acts theory to capture how words are used to perform actions.

In a communicative situation, the ability of the hearer to effectively decode the speaker's intended meaning is contextually determined, where context includes everything linguistic, non-linguistic and/or extralinguistic. Bach and Harnish (1979) identify what is loosely called context as "mutual contextual beliefs", which plays a major role in the interpretation of meaning. According to them, in every speech event, the speaker (S) has an intention (something that s/he wants to communicate) and the Hearer (H) is expected to draw inferences from the speaker's presupposition to interpret what is said accurately. In other words, what is said in a communicative event and how it is interpreted depends on certain facts known to the participants. There is therefore a need for both speaker and hearer to be familiar with the background information of a speech event to communicate effectively. In the words of Bach and Harnish (1979), "the contextual beliefs that figure in speakers' intentions and hearers' inferences must be mutual if communication is to take place". Mutual Contextual Beliefs could be social, cultural, religious knowledge, knowledge of the specific speech situation or knowledge of relations between the two parties. In addition to MCBs, Bach and Harnish (1979) introduced three presumptions which facilitate communication between the speaker and the hearer. These presumptions are regarded as mutual beliefs, but these beliefs are not only shared between S (speaker) and H (hearer) but shared among members of the linguistic community at large. They are linguistic presumption, the communicative presumption, and the presumption of literalness.

Odebunmi's Model of Mutual Contextual Beliefs

Odebunmi (2006) model of contextual beliefs derives insight from the works of Bach and Harnish, Ochis, Gumperz, Lyons, Mey, Thomas, and Adegbija (p27). His model, like those of other scholars emphasises the role of language and situation in the interpretation of meaning in a speech event. Two levels of beliefs are identified in this model: the language level and the situation level. The language level beliefs express the idea that meaning is potentially possible if interlocutors in a communicative event have access to similar linguistic codes. Odebunmi (2006) notes that "it is assumed by X that Y understands language L when he communicates with him or her using L, he expects a response R therefore because Y understands L.No matter how simple the linguistic choices of X are, if Y does not understand L, no meaning will be achieved" (p27). This level of belief points out that meaning is only possible in interaction when interactants have knowledge of the same language. Meaning cannot be realised if participants in an interaction do not share the same linguistic codes. For instance, in a speech event that has two monolinguals, with one of the participants speaking English language and the other speaking Yoruba language, communication cannot take

place because both interlocutors are using different linguistic codes. However, if both participants share knowledge of either English or Yoruba, communication will become possible.

Another level of belief identified by Odebunmi (2006) is the situation level. He notes that "assumptions are held on the basis of interactants' shared code (linguistic or non-linguistic) and experiences" at the situation level of belief. At the situational level, the varieties of language and the diversity of circumstances and experiences are used to achieve meaning. Meaning interpretation therefore relies not only on the linguistic code of communication, but also on other situational variables. An example is cited below. A conversation between a primary 4 pupil, an SS3 student and her friends.

> *Pupil: playing*
> *(closes her eyes and intentionally walks into student 1)*
> *Student 1: (in a stern voice) so, you can't see, right? I can see you are very playful.*
> *Pupil: (looks at the student)*
> *Student 1: come on, apologise right now!*
> *Pupil: (keeps staring)*
> *Student 1: (getting agitated) can't you hear me? I said apologise!*
> *Pupil: looks confused*
> *Student 2: (to her friends) are you sure she understands your grammar?*
> *(to the pupil) tell her sorry*
> *Pupil: sorry ma.*
> *(All disperses)*

The lack of communication here is because of the word 'apologise', which the pupil does not understand. Hence, her failure to react appropriately to the speech act uttered. The pupil does not know the meaning of the word 'apologise', which leads to failure in communication. In this case, the level of belief is language.

Odebunmi notes that both linguistic and situational levels of beliefs can either enhance the whole communication process or hinder it. If participants in interaction share both linguistic and situational beliefs, then communication can be realised. However, if the beliefs do not converge, there is the possibility for communication to break down. Odebunmi's (2006) model of Contextual beliefs is diagrammatically represented below. The diagram reveals that contextual beliefs rely on interactants' experience of the world. This experience of the world could be acquired individually or as a group. In addition, the model identifies three aspects of situation level beliefs, which are: Shared knowledge of the subject/topic; Shared knowledge of word choices, referents and references; and Shared socio-cultural and situational experiences, previous or immediate.

i.Shared knowledge of subject/topic

Being aware of the topic of discourse helps a participant to contribute meaningfully to an on-going discourse. The shared knowledge of topic facilitates appropriate responses and reactions in a communicative event. It ensures that meaning interpretation takes place. Odebunmi (2006) notes that "knowing the discourse topic or subject of interaction enables participants to contribute without hitches and gain a good knowledge of the linguistic items engaged in discourse" (p28). People who join conversations at the middle of it may find it difficult to relate to the subject of the talk, because they do not have knowledge about whom or what is being talked about.

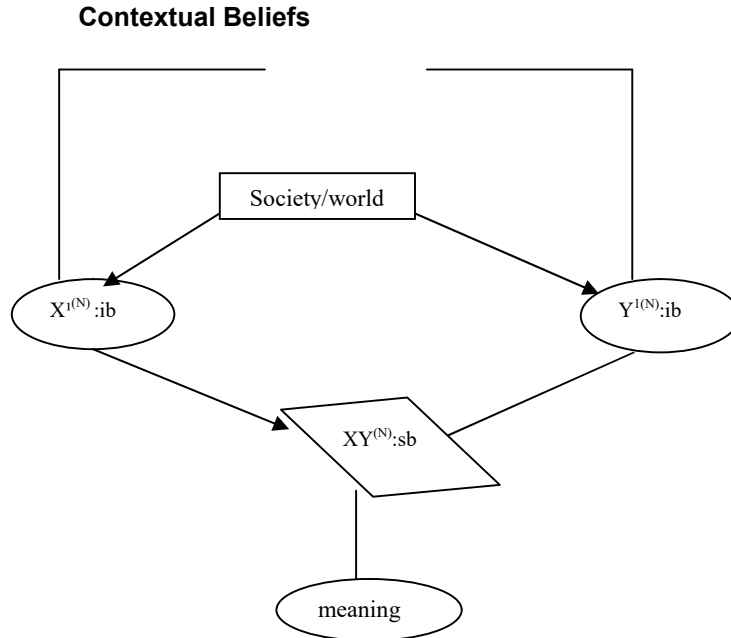ii.   Shared knowledge of word choices, referents, and references

For communication to be successful, there is a need for the participants to be familiar with all the linguistic choices used in the communicative event. If the participants are not familiar with the word choices used, it is possible for such communication to break down. The inability to process the word choice in a communicative event will affect such participant's location of referents and references within the context of speech. Often, participants in occupational contexts use some technical jargon or register to exclude others from the subject of discourse. Odebunmi (2006) notes that this is particularly widespread in the doctor-patient discourse, where the doctor uses medical jargon so the patient would not understand the severity or otherwise of his/her illness. "If the lexical choices made in an interaction are known to all the parties, no problem will occur in understanding utterances" (Ibid, 2006, p28). If the knowledge of word choices is not shared, meaning making will be impossible.

iii.   Shared knowledge of socio-cultural and situational experiences, previous or immediate.

Odebunmi (2006) notes that "interactions move on smoothly when participants have common socio-cultural and situational experiences" (p29).it is therefore important for interactants to share the same or similar cultural background as this will aid meaning interpretation greatly. The knowledge of the cultural background and knowledge of the situation of the utterance are important for communication to be successful. As Odebunmi notes, the socio-cultural knowledge and situational knowledge may converge. Interactants must have shared knowledge of culture including values, lifestyles, and taboos. People who share the same cultural background may use proverbs without explanation with the assumption that the hearers have shared situational knowledge which form the background for the proverb. Through the shared knowledge of the situation that surrounds proverbs,

hearers can reach intended meaning. Therefore, individual members of a culture who speak a language draw on their shared knowledge of the world in relation to their culture to interpret utterances in context.

Odebunmi's Model of Contextual Beliefs

Contextual Beliefs

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                    ┌──────────────────────────┐
                    │      Society/world        │
                    └──────────────────────────┘
            X^{1(N)}:ib                          Y^{1(N)}:ib
                        XY^{(N)}:sb
                          meaning
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Contextual Beliefs
Key:
N= many interactants (speakers or hearers)
X^1= one speaker
Y^1= one hearer
XY= speaker and hearer
ib= independent belief
sb= shared belief

(Odebunmi, 2006, p29)

Crime and the media in Nigeria

The prevalence of crime in the Nigerian society has resulted in fear and anxiety. The country is perceived to be beguiled with security challenges which emanate from this widespread perpetration of crime. This has taken a negative toll on the populace, the country, its economy, politics, and social life. Even more, crimes are being perpetrated anywhere including sacred places of worship, official gatherings, and institutionalized settings. Nwosu (2001) notes that "the threat to our lives and properties posed by crime is so palpable and real that we become so paranoid that we now sleep with one eye open…That is, even after many of us have so barricaded our compounds, houses and rooms as if we are in prison yards. Yet we do not feel safe at all" (p3). This shows the extent of insecurity caused by crime and the deep-rooted fear it evokes in people. The perpetration of crime leaves a tale of woe and anguish in the society (Soola, 2003). "They are an ill-wind which blows nobody any good, as both perpetrators and victim suffer severe consequences" (Ibid, 2003, p3).

Media operators therefore feed on the fear and anxiety exhibited by people as regards crime to generate revenue. "Reporting on crime and violence has been a staple in newspaper diet since before the penny press" (Dorfman& Thorson, 1998). The media therefore thrives on stories related to crime and violence to sell their headlines and news programmes. Such stories add variety to news reports to make them more exciting and

interesting. Media owners like other businesspersons are in the business to make profits, and since crime stories help them sell fast, media operators ensure that crime reportage is part of their publications. Soola (2003) notes that "crime and violence are not only attractive, but they are also tempting to media operators" (p4). Stories on crime and violence are not only attractive to the media operators and the media, but also to the consumers of these media productions for different reasons. It can be said that the excitement of the consumers is more related to fear and anxiety. Through the media, people come to learn of the common trends in the perpetration of crime and can stay informed on how best to avoid being victims of these criminals. Reading crime stories help people to stay on guard and learn of the methods through which criminal activities are being initiated. The media has played a significant role in keeping people informed on the trends of crime and criminal activities. Cited in Soola (2003), the West Australian observes that:

> "It would be failing in its obligations to the readers if it did not report crimes and reflect community anxieties about them. At one level, such reports send unequivocal messages to people to take measure to protect themselves and their properties."

Amzat, Abodunrin and Okunola (2007) carried out a research on the values and issues in the reportage of crime by the print media with a view to examining how the fear of crime is created, identifying the amount and sources of crime in the print media and the patterns of crime reporting. The paper takes the position that the print media's reportage of crime is epidemic and gives suggestions that would help to elevate the values of the press in crime reporting. The paper concludes that the print media plays a significant role in shaping the public perception of risk-factors in criminality, crimes, stimulate public awareness and impact on criminal justice system.

METHODOLOGY

The Data

The data is gotten from some selected crime stories in four Nigerian newspapers between September 2019 to December 2019. The newspapers from which the data is derived are The Punch, Nigerian Tribune, The Nation and The Guardian. Interpretation and understanding crime stories depend on certain linguistic and situational factors which the writers and users share. Without such common ground between the interlocutors, understanding crime stories may become problematic. This research is geared towards uncovering common grounds otherwise called contextual beliefs that aid the understanding of such discourses. The stories were purposively selected to show how contextual beliefs manifest at various levels.

Theoretical framework

The research work is anchored on Odebunmi's (2006) model of contextual beliefs. Every discourse type is grounded in the context in which it is produced. As such, crime stories in newspapers also rely on certain contextual factors for meaning to be realised. This model categorises contextual beliefs into the language level of beliefs and situation level of beliefs. The language belief emphasises that meaning interpretation can only be possible if interactants have access to the same linguistic code (of communication). In the crime stories reported in newspapers, the understanding and decoding of meaning hinges on the readers' knowledge of the English language. The situation level of belief emphasises the relevance of the shared linguistic or non-linguistic codes and experiences. Odebunmi (2006) classifies the situation level beliefs into: shared knowledge of topic/subject which captures the fact that meaning can be realised when participants in the discourse have access to the topic being discussed; shared knowledge of word choices, referents and references which foregrounds the need for participants to be aware of the lexical choices, referents and references used within the discourse for meaning interpretation; shared socio-cultural and situational experiences which focuses on the need for participants in a discourse to share the same cultural background and other situational experiences.

DATA ANALYSIS

Shared knowledge of Linguistic forms

When a newspaper report or story is published in a particular society, it is expected that the readers of the reports and stories, together with the writers of the stories have a common ground. The common ground could be in terms of linguistic expressions, socio-cultural and situational experiences. It is suggested that the absence of such background information will hinder successful communication. Odebunmi (2006) emphasises the significance of shared linguistic code of communication by interactants in a communicative situation. Interlocutors in a conversation must share knowledge of the same linguistic forms which could be verbal or written, as this will help to not only understand the content of discourse, but also interpret the discourse as appropriately as each participant can. For newspapers publications, the media operators write for a specific group of audience and as a result, they use a language that is accessible to that group of people. For the publications in the newspapers to reach the target audience, the linguistic code used must be familiar to them. These audience and writers must therefore share knowledge of the same linguistic code to facilitate effective communication. It is only when there is a shared knowledge of language that communication will take place. From the data gathered,

elements of language that make up this level of beliefs include the use of acronyms, use of lexical borrowing, use of conventional symbols, name-calling strategy and the use of Nigerian coinages.

The use of acronyms

Acronyms are generally considered to be group of words formed from the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word. Acronyms are of two types; those pronounced as a sequence of words. This is called alphabetism. And those pronounced as words, also called lexicalisation (Adegbite, Adekoya&Adegoju, 2013 p80). Acronyms constitute a high percentage of the shared knowledge of linguistic code exploited by writers. This feature cuts across all the newspapers considered for analysis. The acronyms used often stand for institutions, associations, political parties, titles among others.

Extract 1:

> *It was gathered that Nwachukwu, 48, was arrested on Christmas day in an operation coordinated by the SARS commander, CSP Victor Godfrey, in Onitsha, the commercial hub of Anambra state. (The Punch; Dec 31, 2019)*

In newspaper reports, it is noted that there is the prevalent use of acronyms to capture titles, offices as well as institutions. In excerpt 1, the writer utilises acronyms to capture both an institution and a title. 'SARS' is an acronym for Special Anti-Robbery Squad. The squad is an extension of the Nigerian Police Force and are directly headed by the Federal Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department (FCIID). They are tasked with the resolution of crimes related to robbery, kidnapping, firearms, cattle rustling, car theft among others. The writer has taken advantage of the fact that everyone in Nigeria must be familiar with the acronym 'SARS' and the readers are also able to relate with the text because they know exactly what the acronym stands for. A common ground has therefore been established between the two interlocutors. Another use of acronym taken for granted is 'CSP'. Anyone familiar with SARS is expected to be familiar with the titles associated with it. Hence, the Chief Superintendent of Police is abbreviated to CSP. This, the writer expects the readers to the familiar with. The understanding of this acronym contributes to the understanding of the message.

Extract 2:

According to the EFCC spokesman, Rowly was allegedly relieved of his appointment with the bank as a result of his involvement in the money laundering scheme. (Nigerian Tribune; Nov 5, 2019)

The shared knowledge of the acronym EFCC is exploited by the writer in this extract. EFCC is the short form for the 'Economic and Financial Crimes Commission'; a commission charged with getting rid of economic and financial related crimes in Nigeria. Appropriate interpretation of the acronym is significant to understand the story, as the readers get to understand the functions and duties of the EFCC officials. The writer therefore takes the knowledge about the EFCC for granted. Hence, the use of its abbreviated form. It is taken for granted that the readers are familiar with the commission. The writer therefore establishes a common ground between themselves and the readers through the use of acronyms.

Extract 3:

> *The EFCC alleged that the defendant, a lecturer in Accounting department at the institution, had at different times in 2019 defrauded may job seekers, majorly couples under the pretence of helping them to secure employment at the institution. (The Guardian; Oct 30, 2019)*

Similar to the extracts above, the writer of this particular crime story also assumes that his/her readers are familiar with the acronym, EFCC. The use of this acronym is taken for granted as the interlocutors are expected to know the meaning of this acronym in relation to crime. The EFCC is a commission set up in Nigeria to combat crime and everyone in Nigeria, who is conversant with events is expected to know what it stands for especially in the context of use.

Extract 4:

> *Similarly, IEDs planted by ISWAP operatives in Layi Koura area of Nguigmi in Niger Republic were discovered and defused by troops. (The Nation; Sep 3 2019).*

Since this crime story discusses terrorism and attempts by the task force to foil terrorist plans, the writer has also exploited the use of acronyms, to not only capture the terrorist group but also to refer to certain war devices. ISWAP is an acronym for Islamic State West African Province, a group renowned for terrorist activities, while the acronym IEDs stand for Improvised Explosive Devices. The writer has been able to leverage on the common grounds between himself/herself and his/her audiences. The readers of the crime story are able to understand the information contained in it because they are familiar with the usages and meanings of the acronyms used. The language level of belief is operative here because both interlocutors share knowledge of the context-based use of acronyms.

The use of Lexical Borrowing

In reporting crime stories, there is also an extensive use of lexical borrowing. Lexical borrowing involves the use of loan words from either a foreign language or an indigenous language. The loan words used in these crime stories are in reference to the names of states, names of God, titles of leaders, objects of possession among others. Examples of these are given in the extracts below:

Extract 5:

*On December 25, 2019, at **UmuolukaAwarra** in the **Ohaji/Egbema** local government area of **Imo** state around 5pm, a SARS operation led by CSP Victor Godfrey arrested one of the most notorious criminals of our time, Charles Ojeoru-Eluke, aka K1.*
*The suspect, who had been on our wanted list, was arrested for heinous crimes committed in the **Ohaji/Egbema** area of **Imo** State as well as in **Rivers**, **Bayelsa** and **Delta** states.*
(The Punch; Dec 31, 2019).

In this extract, the writer exploits the use of lexical borrowing with reference to the names of places. The use of lexical borrowing here is in reference to the name of a particular place. By using the names, the writer assumes that his/her readers will be familiar with the names of the location and know precisely where the action had occurred. In the event that the reader does know where Ohaji/Egbema local government is, the writer uses the state where the local government is situated to aid the readers understanding. The assumption here is that most Nigerians knows all the states within the country, even if they do not know the towns within each state. The writer therefore takes this information for granted.

Extract 6:

*Gunmen stormed the **Gindiri** district of the local government area on Sunday and abducted **Alhaji**HashimuMantu before he was killed and his body dumped at a nearby bush. The state chairman of MACBAN, **Mallam**Nura Mohammed confirmed the killing of **Mallam** Tilde to the Nigerian Tribune. (Nigerian Tribune; Nov 22, 2019)*

In this extract, the writer utilises lexical borrowing in reference to location and titles of people. This also forms part of language-level beliefs taken for granted by the writer. The writer assumes his readers will be familiar with the use of borrowed lexical words from the indigenous languages within Nigeria. The reader is able to understand the use of such titles and the meanings

attached to them. 'Mallam' is a title that either suggests the person being spoken about is from the northern part of the country or an Islamic cleric. Similarly, 'Alhaji' indicates that the referent is a Muslim. The readers and writers therefore share the knowledge of such use of language.

Extract 7

*…it was between **okesuna** and **patey** boys. People ran in different directions. The **Egungun** festival started today but there has been tension in the area since last weekend… before this **Oke-Arin** fight this evening, there were attempts to attack the **Agarawu/Idumagbo** group early in the morning but security operatives prevented it. But they continued at **Apongbon** and killed done Junior… (The Nation; Sep 3, 2019)*

The use of lexical borrowing in extract 7 is in reference to locations, names of groups and names of festivals. 'Egungun' is the name of a very popular religious festival of the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria. 'Oke-Arin' and 'Apongbon' are names of places or locations where the actions stated occurred. Similarly, 'okesuna', 'patey', 'Agarawu/Idumagbo' are used to reference the names of the groups of people involved in the scuffle. The writers and readers share the knowledge of the use of these borrowed expressions. Hence, communication has effectively taken place.

Extract 8

Two of the suspects, Ojomeje and Ogeh were caught in Mobile Police (MOPOL) vest and police vest trying to escape after collecting an 'okada' from a rider. The trio, operating on Micheal's 'okada' in the area had around 10:00pm, accosted another 'okada' rider, stopped him and dispossessed him of his motorcycle.(The Guardian; Oct 14, 2019)

Similarly, the use of lexical borrowing is exploited by the writer here. 'okada' refers to motorcycle in Yoruba language. Rather than use motorcycle, the writer has consistently used 'okada' so that his readers can understand the story better. The use of this borrowed word is taken for granted as both writers and readers are familiar with its meaning and referent. Lexical borrowing from the first language into English occurs in crime stories because both writers and readers are situated within the same socio-cultural background, and they share knowledge of their indigenous languages.

Use of Nigerian Coinages

A lexical item is considered as coinage when the word,

which is peculiar to Nigerian English and denotes Nigerian English experiences is also present in in native English. While these words maintain their original meaning in native English, they have been modified to mean something different in the Nigerian context. In the crime stories considered, the use of coinages was also visible, constituting an aspect of the shared language-level beliefs by both writers and readers.

Extract 9

Owolabi, who was arrested by men of the Ogun state Police command in Ikoyi-Ile, Osun state, was said to have confessed to the police that he sought Philip's help for **money ritual***. (The Punch; Dec 31, 2019)*

In the extract above, the words 'money rituals' is considered a coinage in Nigerian English from native English. This is because the meaning of this expression can only be understood by someone who is familiar with the socio-cultural experiences in Nigeria and some indigenous Nigerian languages. Although 'Money ritual' is a direct translation from Yoruba language 'OgunOwo'. It is considered a coined terminology used to describe the use of black magic or supernatural elements to create wealth for the person involved. The writer and readers are aware of the meaning of this expression; thus, the shared knowledge of the concept is exploited to create and aid appropriate interpretation.

Extract 10

The police boss said immediate search was conducted in the **native doctor***'s shrine which led to the recovery of the gang's weapons: one double barrel gun cut to size, one locally made single barrel gun, one live cartridge and one expended cartridge. (The Nation; Sep 30, 2019)*

In the extract above, the words 'native doctor' can only be understood by someone who shares certain socio-cultural experiences of Nigerians. The word 'native doctor' is not meaningful in native English. In the Nigerian parlance, it refers to "an herbalist who uses black magic to achieve people's request or a person who has command of certain supernatural forces and can use it to benefit those who seek their help". It is therefore considered a coinage. The writer similarly takes this knowledge for granted and assumes that his readers would be familiar with the use of the expression. Meaning is communicated through the use of this expression because both writers and readers share the knowledge of the expression.

Extract 11

*Dugum said: "In furtherance to the acting Chairman's directive to the zones, we have launched intensive investigative actions against this infamous '***Yahoo Yahoo*** Boys', culminating in strategic raids and onslaught on their hideouts.   (The Nation; Sep 4, 2019)*

Another word peculiar to the Nigerian context used here is 'Yahoo'. 'Yahoo' is a term used to describe internet fraudsters, who partake in internet related crimes. The writer and readers similarly are familiar with the meaning of the word; hence, appropriate interpretation of the text is guaranteed. The participants here share the knowledge about the word which aids the understanding of the text.

Extract 12

The chairman of Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers state, Samuel Nwanosike, has said that those who attacked the palace of the **traditional ruler** *of Elele community, Eze Jonathan Amadi, and the residence of the chairman of the Community Development Committee (CDC) in Elele, Amos Ezekiel would be punished.*
(Nigerian Tribune; Nov 12, 2019)

The expression 'traditional ruler' is also a coinage from native English to Nigerian English. In this context, it refers to "a person who by virtue of his ancestry occupies the throne or stool of an area and who has been appointed to it in accordance with the customs and traditions of the area and has traditional authority over people in the area" (Mthandeni, 2012). Each ethnic tribe in Nigeria has a leader who heads their monarchical system. There is therefore a level of shared language usage between the writers and readers as regards the meaning of the expression. The writer exploits this shared knowledge between both participants in this extract.

Other aspect of shared knowledge of linguistic forms includes the knowledge of Nigerian English which includes transfer, semantic shift, coinages, and semantic contrast.

Shared Knowledge of Situation

The shared knowledge of situation points out that "assumptions are held on the basis of interactants' shared code (linguistic or non-linguistic) and experiences" (Odebunmi, 2006). And it is further categorised into a) shared knowledge of topic b) shared knowledge of word choices, referents, and references c) shared socio-cultural experiences, previous or immediate.

In the reportage of crime stories in Newspapers, the page is usually tagged with expressions to indicate that the reader has reached the crime section. While most

newspapers use conspicuous tags like "crime" and "court" like The Punch, Nigerian Tribune, The Guardian, others use even more glaring tags like "crime news" like The Nation. Such tags are used to inform the readers about the content of the section. That way, they are fully aware of the subject matter of each section before reading it. If the reader is aware of the subject matter of each section, there is a shared knowledge between the writer and the readers because whoever reads the section already has knowledge about the content of the section. People are aware that the stories there will discuss crime and criminal activities. For the readers of crime stories, there is a shared knowledge of the topic between themselves and the writer and that allows for accurate decoding of meaning.

Additionally, the titles of the crime stories give the readers an idea of what the story entails. It is noticed that the writers in their title include key details of the story. This way, the reader is well-informed about the topic of the story. Titles from the newspapers analysed include:

Extract 12

One killed, four arrested in foiled Abuja bank robbery   (The Punch; Dec 29, 2019)
2 village heads, 3 others killed as gunmen attack Taraba villages (Nigerian Tribune; Nov 28, 2019)
Five suspects arrested for allegedly hijacking Taxify car   (The Nation; Sep 2, 2019)
FRSC officials allegedly beat man to death, bury body in shallow grave   (The Guardian; Oct 23, 2019)

Shared knowledge of word choices, referents, and references

The shared knowledge of word choices in an interaction enables the participants involved to understand the message being conveyed. It also helps them to identify the people or places or things to which reference is made as well as the referents in such situation. In newspaper stories, aspects of shared knowledge of word choice, references and referents would relate directly to the diction used by the writer and how well it portrays crime and criminal activities. Another significant aspect of word choice found in Newspapers is the use of Nigerian English expressions in these stories.

Use of crime vocabularies

One of the features of the newspaper crime stories is the use of crime-related vocabulary. Such word choices are prevalent in crime stories. This is identified from the newspapers analysed.

Extract 13

*About eight **robbers** entered the bank premises and attempted to **rob** a staff member who came to load money in the ATMs. On seeing them, the security officer on duty hid and called for police reinforcement. The police came and after some time, soldiers arrived to support them. But during a **shootout**, a soldier was **killed** while one of the **robbers** was also **gunned** down.*
(The Punch; Dec 29, 2019)

In the extract, certain words have been identified as crime related lexical items. Such words include robbers, killed, gunned, and shootout. These ranges of vocabularies can be found predominantly in crime stories. The writer assumes that his readers are familiar with the use of this set of vocabularies. Also, the choice of vocabulary enables readers to identify the referents in the extract. Here, the robbers are identified as the perpetrators of the crime. In other words, there is a shared knowledge of crime-related registers, hence, the reader's ability to comprehend the discourse.

Extract 14

***Tragedy** struck in Ilesha, Osun State, on Monday, when one LabakeOlowokere of Ido-Ijesha area allegedly **stabbed** her lover, SeunKomolafe (40) to **death** for dating another girl.*
(Nigerian Tribune; Nov 27, 2019)

As seen from the previous extract, words related to violence and crime are mostly found in crime stories. The writer similarly exploits the use of these vocabularies in this extract too. Some crime-related lexis includes tragedy, stab, and death. Similarly, reference is made to the person who committed the crime as well as the victim of the tragedy. The use of lexis related to crime helps the writer to convey his message and also aids the readers in comprehending the message.

Extract 15

***Gunmen** suspected to be **kidnappers** have reportedly **killed** an Islamic cleric, identified as MallamGambo, in Jalingo, Taraba state. The **killers** were said to have also **abducted** several persons whose whereabouts were unknown at the time of going to the press.*
(The Guardian; Oct 30, 2019)

The range of crime vocabularies used here helps the readers to identify the criminals and the victims. They include gunmen, kidnappers, kill, and abduct. From the lexis used, the readers are aware of the type of crime

perpetrated. For example, kidnapping accentuates that

someone was abducted, and killers already signals that someone was killed. Crime-related vocabulary therefore gives the readers a clue of the actual event being described. Reference is also made to the location of the attack. The writer and readers share knowledge of these words and this makes meaning decoding possible.

Extract 16

> *Police have **arrested** a native doctor and five **robbery** suspects in different locations in Imo state. Two of the **suspects** sustained serious injuries during a **gunfire** exchange with police. (The Nation; Sep 30, 2019)*

In the extract here, the choice of words used by the writer also indicates the occurrence of criminal activities. The words arrest, robbery, suspects and gunfire are crime related vocabularies that the readers must decide to make meaning of the text. These words are strategically used by the writer as it is expected that readers understand their meanings. The knowledge of these words is therefore shared by the writers and readers of the story.

The Use of Nigerian English Expressions

There are certain features of Nigerian English expressions that is found in newspaper stories. Such features include transfer, analogy, acronyms, semantic shift, semantic extension, neologisms, translations, loaning, code mixing and code switching. Extracts from the selected news stories which reflect the usage of Nigerian English expression are given below.

Extract 17

> *The chairman of the council told the Channels Television in Taraba that about 30 gunmen invaded two communities and killed the **village heads** of Bailango 1 and Bailango 2 in old muri chiefdom, on Monday night. (Nigerian Tribune; Nov 28, 2019)*

The use of 'village head' in the extract above signifies the use of a Nigerian English lexeme. The phrase 'village heads' is an instance of analogy, where new words are formed on the basis of potential likeness with existing words in English. The phrase 'village-head' reflects the socio-cultural experiences of Nigerians, and the writer exploits the knowledge of this word. Simply, a village head is the one who heads a village in a rural area. The writers and readers both understand and share this knowledge.

Extract 18

> ***Suya** seller stabs man to death over bread. (The Punch; Dec 2, 2019)*

In the extract, the writer exploits the use of the word 'suya', as a shared knowledge of word choices between himself and the readers. Suya is a popular word for grilled meat seasoned with pepper within the Nigerian context. It is a direct borrowing or loaning from the Hausa indigenous language into the English language. Borrowing occurs when a word in the source language is used originally as it is used in the target language. Most Nigerians know what suya refers to and the writer has leveraged on this shared knowledge to make meaning easily accessible.

Shared knowledge of socio-cultural and situational experiences

This aspect of shared beliefs emphasises the importance of having knowledge of the same socio-cultural and situational experiences. The writers as well as the readers in crime stories share knowledge of the Nigerian socio-cultural and situational experiences, hence, their ability to make meaning out of these stories. Extracts relating to the exploitation of this aspect of shared knowledge is given below.

Extract 19

> *The **Baale of Cardoso area** of Ipaja, a lagos suburb, Chief MoroofOwonla, aka kaka, on Thursday, denied any involvement in land grabbing activities within the Ayobo-Ipaja Local Council Development area of the state. (The Nation; Sep 28, 2019)*

The use of the traditional title 'baale' relates to the knowledge of the socio-cultural experiences of Nigerians. Baale is a traditional title in Nigeria used to describe the head of a particular regional area. The writer and his audience are therefore familiar with the use of the title and the socio-cultural status attached to such rulers. This is an aspect of meaning that is also negotiated by the writer.

Extract 20

> *It was learnt further that the **Oro** adherents were incensed on sighting some Muslims and Christians outside, attacked them for alleged noncompliance with the curfew during performance of the **Oro ritual** which was at day-break.   (The Nation; Sep 11, 2019)*

Nigerian newspapers. The aspects of language level beliefs that occur include use of acronyms, lexical

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The Oro festival is usually performed by some traditional Yoruba religious groups in Nigeria. According to history, females and non-natives are not expected to witness this festival and are otherwise advised to stay indoors because the 'Oro' must not be seen by these groups. As a result, the Oro adherents impose curfew on people and anyone who flouts that will be severely punished. The cause of conflict in this story is as a result of noncompliance with the curfew. The writer therefore assumes that his audience is familiar with this cultural history of the Oro festival, hence his usage of the term repeatedly. The audience are also able to relate with the content of the story because they share the same socio-cultural experiences with the writer.

Extract 21

> *Police in Ogun state have arrested one AbiodunMakinde, a suspected 'one-chance' robber upon being sighted and identified in public by two lady victims.   (The Nation; Sep 23, 2019)*

Because of the insecurities pervading the Nigerian society, a lot of tags have been given to certain crimes. Such is the case of 'one-chance'. It is a situation where unsuspecting victims enters a vehicle filled with armed robbers, who eventually strips him/her of valuable possessions. The writer dwells on the shared knowledge of events and situations, which he assumes the readers are aware of too. The shared knowledge of the situation is therefore exploited here.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

From the data analysed, it was discovered that aspects of contextual beliefs operate between the writers of crime stories and their audiences. It is important to note that various levels of beliefs were identified, and they functioned to aid effective decoding of the message or meaning of the story. Following Odebunmi's model, the analysis identified language level beliefs as well as situation level beliefs as core aspects of meaning interpretation in crime stories. While the language level belief emphasises the fact that the readers can make meaning out of the stories because they share knowledge of the same linguistic code used by the writer. Thus, a monolingual individual who does not speak any of the indigenous languages in Nigeria will be unable to make meaning out of the crime story because there is no shared knowledge of linguistic code between the writers and the readers. While a multilingual individual who understands at least one of the indigenous languages in Nigeria will find it easy to understand crime stories in

borrowing and Nigerian coinages. In addition, the situation level beliefs point to the importance of having a shared knowledge of the topic of discourse, word choices and socio-cultural experiences before meaning decoding can occur and before communication can be tagged successful. Various instances of these are found in the extracts of the newspapers analysed and these include use of conspicuous headings and titles, crime vocabulary and Nigerian English expressions. Odebunmi's (2006) model provided a comprehensive framework used to uncover the level of beliefs operating in the reportage of crime stories in newspapers between writers and their audiences.

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