

Headline Ambiguity as a Stylo-Semantic Device in Newspaper Texts

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Abstract: The paper assesses how ambiguous expressions in newspaper headlines relate intra-textually with the lead to resolve ambiguity and establish cohesion in the discourse. It argues that the preponderance of ambiguity in newspaper headlines stems from the economy principle that characterizes the genre and is hinged on calculations of contextual enrichment. The analyses of intra-textual relations between ambiguous fragments of headlines and their appertaining leads show that lexical choices are made from paradigmatically organized resources. The ambiguous lexical items inter-connect with their alternative expressions in the ensuing texts, with the latter clarifying and illuminating the former. This interconnection constitutes a network of cohesive relationships which manifest in form of repetition, synonymy, superordinates and general words. The formal relationships between lexical items in the headlines and their counterparts in the ensuing texts give readers ample opportunities to encounter the same expression in different forms with implication for better understanding of the texts and by extension resolution of potential ambiguities. The paper concludes that the deliberate equivocation in newspaper headlines and the subsequent resolution in the leads form part of the stylistic ploy for attracting and sustaining the reader's interest.

Key words: Headline ambiguity • Newspaper texts and stylistic ploy

INTRODUCTION

Newspaper headlines are captions of newspaper articles written with economy of words as the watchword. The scanty information provided in newspaper headlines is often supplemented with the lead, making the lead a very important part of a newspaper article. Bell conceives of the lead paragraph as a nucleus of evaluation as it focuses the story in a particular direction. The lead "summarizes the central action and establishes the point of the story" [1]. Given this crucial function, it could be inferred that copy editors craft headlines mostly from the content of the lead. Thus, the relationship between the headline and the lead is that while the lead summarises the article, the headline, taking a cue from this summary, summarises the lead. Consequently, the lead fleshes out the headline with implication for dousing the reader's curiosity and resolving potential ambiguity and vagueness. This expansion of headline in the lead engenders a close connection between the two phenomena and may constitute a network of discourse relation of coherence [2-6].

White underscores the role of ensuing texts such as the lead in supplementing the often insufficient message encoded in headlines. He believes that headlines and titles depend on cataphoric reference for their interpretation given that their textual position deprives them of any anaphoric reference with the result that difficulty of understanding often becomes inevitable. White thus recommends that cataphoric work must first be done before we backtrack anaphorically with our discovery from the ensuing text to disentangle the headline. Oftentimes the reader has to wait until the first or second paragraph to grasp the message. Therefore, the language of headlines is often designed in such a way that the message it conveys lends itself to imprecise meaning or delayed interpretation of writer-meaning. To borrow White's term, this prescribed "cataphoric work" has implication for the resolution of putative ambiguities in newspaper headlines.

The overarching argument in this paper is that headlines, geared towards cataphoric reference, unarguably exhibit some formal relationships with the ensuing texts. This anticipation of co-textual enrichment

highly influences the structure and content of headlines making headlines to be part of a larger pattern of texts. Azuike confirms these formal relationships, having noted that title-nodes (major words in a title) exhibit formal relationships with other words in the body of the text and considers these relationships stylo-semantic in nature [8-13]. The stylistic nature of the phenomenon arises from the fact that, in performing the textual metafunction of language, a writer is exposed to a vast pool of resources for making meaning, which he draws from, according to his idiosyncrasies and the functionality of the text. This is true considering that the function and purpose of language determines its structure while the choice of one syntagm over another within the same domain of meaning is the writer's prerogative. Thus, with respect to headlines, the editor may choose to repeat a word in the news story in the headline; he may also decide to replace an unambiguous word or phrase in the story with an ambiguous synonym or near-synonym, which he thinks may draw more attention to the discourse in order to manipulate the beliefs and opinions of the reader as well as propagate the marketing function of headlines.

Evidently, such choices induce ambiguity tension with the result that ambiguity is often traded off in favour of more crucial discourse goals, determined by the editor. However, the semantics of the phenomenon is derived from the fact that the editor's choice of words in headlines constitutes a network of meaning relations in the discourse as words in the headlines cohere with other alternatives in the leads. Thus, these meaning relations contribute to the unity and coherence of the text as a

whole in line with Toolan's definition of cohesion as "all the linguistic ways in which the words of a passage, across sentences, cross-refer or link up".

Stylistics recognizes that contextualization is a fundamental part of text interpretation. Wales affirms the notion that "the parameters of the situational context contributed to a text's meaning and that therefore contextualization needs to be part of the theory or model". Fredsted's view of context corroborates the foregoing: "Context delimits our interpretation, so as to obviate the possibility of semantic ambiguity". These views are significant in accounting for ambiguity in newspaper headlines, given the role of context in enriching meaning and facilitating disambiguation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper analyses the manifest relations yielded by the cataphoric work in resolving ambiguities. The analysis is limited to the first paragraphs of the news stories (lead paragraph), with ambiguous headlines. The second paragraph is also examined if the first bears no relation to the ambiguity in question. 15 ambiguous headlines drawn from four national dailies and their corresponding leads are presented in a table. The lexical ambiguity in each headline and the other words in the corresponding lead with which it relates cataphorically are underlined for easy cross-reference. The data presented in the table that follows are analyzed and discussed in terms of the acknowledged stylo-semantic relationships under the following headings: repetition, synonymy, superordinates and general words.

Ambiguous Headlines and Corresponding Lead Paragraphs:

S/N	SOURCE	HEADLINE VERSUS LEAD
1	<i>This Day</i> 3/11/13	Stay in the <u>shade</u> A <u>fashion accessory</u> that is always in vogue among women irrespective of their age is a pair of <u>sunglasses</u> . Useful <u>accessory</u> , <u>keeping your eyes protected from the harsh sun and pollution</u> .
2	<i>The Nation</i> 27/11/13	US varsity <u>promotes Nigerian</u> The President of the Faulkner University, Alabama, United States, Dr. Billy Hilyer has promoted <u>Nigerian born scholar</u> , <u>Dr Uduak Afangideh</u> , to full professor for the 2013/2014 academic session.
3	<i>This Day</i> 26/11/13	Osun school principal <u>attacked</u> for sending <u>hijab-wearing</u> student home The Ejigbo community in Osun State was yesterday thrown into a serious crisis when a secondary school principal in the town was <u>beaten</u> to a pulp by some hoodlums in the town. The principal has since been in coma after his ordeal.
4	<i>This Day</i> 26/11/13	Atiku Abubakar <u>cases</u> for launch tomorrow The American University of Nigeria and Legal Research Initiative will tomorrow host the public presentation of the book " <u>Landmark Constitutional Law Cases in Nigeria; 2004-2007 – the Atiku Abubakar Case</u> ".
5	<i>This Day</i> 14/11/13	A <u>cover</u> for ABU students In what can be described as a pilot scheme on <u>social health insurance</u> in tertiary institution, students of Ahmadu Bello University now receive <u>comprehensive medical services</u> without parting with cash on the spot.
6	<i>The Nation</i> 18/11/13	YCE to discuss ' <u>neglect of Yoruba</u> ' The Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE) has said the ' <u>neglect of the Yoruba</u> ' will be a central part of the Yoruba's agenda at the proposed national conference.

7	Daily Trust 18/11/13	Firm unveils two <i>tablets</i> Asustek has entered into the Nigeria's <i>information and communication technology market</i> with the unveiling of its two latest in <i>shelf devices</i> , namely <i>Asus Fonepad 7</i> and <i>Asus Transformer Book T100</i> .
8	Daily Trust 22/11/13	Widow <i>sleeps with</i> dead husband's corpse for a year A woman had been <i>sleeping next to</i> her dead husband's decomposed corpse for one year until local authorities made the grisly discovery this week.
9	This Day 25/8/13	A tale of two <i>parties</i> celebrating creativity Time is around 2:30pm and two <i>parties are scheduled to hold</i> in two different <i>halls</i> of the same swank <i>hotel cum event centre</i> .
10	Daily Trust 29/7/13	Abdullahi <i>tips</i> Okagbare for world championship title Sports Minister, Mallam Bolaji Abdullahi, yesterday <i>predicted</i> that Nigeria's sprint queen Blessing Okagbare would emerge the world champion in the women's 100m race at the forthcoming IAAF World Championship in Russia if she maintains her current form.
11	Daily Trust 10/11/13	<i>Sociology 101</i> for Ben Nwabueze The provocative <i>paper</i> by Professor Ben Nwabueze on "The North and South Divide as an obstacle to the creation of a Nation and National Front" has attracted a lot of commentaries and <i>criticism</i> for its ahistoricism, demagoguery and blatant subjectivity – coming from a learned gentleman and academician who ought to know better. His major puzzle and antagonism against the continued existence of Northern Nigeria, as a power bloc in Nigerian politics, deserves a <i>rejoinder</i> by the means of some <i>elementary lessons on the Sociology of Northern Nigeria</i> . This is to assist Prof Nwabueze in unraveling the apparent puzzle.
12	Daily Trust 10/11/13	Boys can take the <i>heat</i> , too! From the bedroom to the boardroom, the battle of the sexes always rages; what a man can do, a woman can do better – and all the jazz. Chinonso Michael turned that jazz on its head mid-October, beating eight contestants – seven of them female – to clinch the winning prize in a <i>cooking</i> contest.
13	The Nation 27/11//13	History on Kelani's <i>canvas</i> Over the past five years, Kelani Abass' <i>artistic</i> journey has led to his third solo <i>exhibition</i> which held at Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) in Lagos titled: <i>Asiko: Evoking personal narrative history</i> .
14	The Nation 18/11/13	Ex-militant leader deplores <i>calls</i> for Kuku's <i>sack</i> Ex-militant leader Augustine Ogedegbe yesterday warned those <i>urging</i> President Goodluck Jonathan to <i>sack</i> the Special Adviser to the President on Amnesty, Mr. Kingsley Kuku, to desist from such act.
15	Daily Trust 30/11/13	<i>Rivers of Blood</i> There is no doubt about it; the bloody crisis in <i>Rivers State</i> is linked to the 2015 presidential election. Even though President Goodluck Jonathan has not disclosed his intention to seek re-election, he is clearly interested in remaining in the job.... <i>Rivers State</i> , under Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, has become a testing ground for a campaign for the presidential ticket as well as the election proper....

Analysis of Headline Ambiguity and Patterns of Lexical Cohesion with the Lead: The analyses made in this section spotlight the patterns of cohesive relationships which the ambiguous fragments of headlines establish with other words in the appertaining lead paragraphs. These lexical relations operate in four ways: repetition, synonymy, hyponymy and general words.

Repetition: As the name implies, repetition entails a repeated occurrence of certain words, phrases or even sentences within a text usually for stylistic effects. Repeated expressions emphasize the point either positively or negatively and foreground the word. Beaugrande and Dressler add that besides giving emphasis and emotive heightening to a repeated meaning, recurrence, which is a form of repetition, could also be used to: 1. Assert and re-affirm one's view point; 2. Convey surprise that seems to conflict with one's viewpoint; 3. Repudiate; 4. Overcome irrelevant and relevant interruptions to one's statement or speech. This

feature of lexical cohesion is examined using the data presented in the preceding section to ascertain if ambiguous terms in the headlines are repeated in the body text and, if they are, what stylistic effects are created by the recurrence.

Instances of repetitions are found in the table as follows:

- US varsity promotes *Nigerian*: (*Nigerian* born scholar)
- Atiku Abubakar *cases* for launch tomorrow: (the book "Landmark Constitutional Law *Cases* in Nigeria; 2004-2007 – the Atiku Abubakar *Case*")
- YCE to discuss 'neglect of *Yoruba*': ('neglect of *the Yoruba*' will be a central part of *the Yoruba*'s agenda)
- Widow *sleeps with* dead husband's corpse for a year: (*sleeping next to*)
- A tale of two *parties* celebrating creativity: (two *parties* are scheduled to hold)

- *Sociology 101* for Ben Nwabueze: (the *Sociology* of Northern Nigeria)
- Ex-militant leader deplores *calls* for Kuku's *sack*: (... to *sack* the Special Adviser....)

In example 2, the ambiguity revolves around whether a US varsity promotes a Nigerian varsity, in which case the second varsity is elliptical, or whether the object of the promotion is 'a Nigerian'. Both meanings are plausible because 'Nigerian' can function as an adjunct (as in the 1st meaning) and as a noun (as in the 2nd interpretation). The repetition of 'Nigerian' in co-text provides the needed cataphoric enrichment for disambiguation which selects the second interpretation. A critical comparison between the information in the headline and that of the lead suggests that this ambiguity may be a deliberate ploy to attract readers. If not, why should the headline read 'US varsity promotes Nigerian', which as a matter of parallelism anticipates 'Nigerian varsity' and the lead has '...has promoted Nigerian born scholar'? Note that the full phrase the reader is expected to supply in the headline is not exactly as the preceding one. The ellipsis-induced ambiguity is further intensified by the lexical ambiguity in 'promote'. The meaning possibilities such as 'to support or encourage something to develop,' 'to move someone to a job at a higher level' (usually passive) and 'to attract people's attention to a product or event' are all semantically probable.

In example 4, the ambiguous lexical item *cases* is repeated twice: first in the plural and second in the singular. The two repetitions form part of the title of a book, which isolates the relevant meaning of *cases*. Thus, *cases* in the headline means a book on legal cases. However, the repetition presents an incongruity between the headline version: 'Atiku Abubakar *cases*' (Plural) and the lead version: 'Atiku Abubakar *case*' (Singular). The writer seems to have intended that the reader should retrieve the plural from the other repetition 'Landmark Constitutional Law *Cases*'. By so doing, he succeeds in drawing cohesive links between the title and the body text using the ambiguous lexical item. Halliday and Hasan concur with this claim: a lexical item "coheres with a preceding occurrence of the same item whether or not the two have the same referent or indeed whether or not there is any referential relationship between them".

Yoruba in example 6 is also repeated twice in the lead. However, the word is preceded by the definite article *the* in the lead as opposed to the headline context which has zero article, permissible in the style of headlines. It is the zero article that creates the ambiguity between the

meaning of *Yoruba* as a language and as an ethnic group, with the headline favouring the former. By supplementing the insufficient semantic input, the repetition in the lead conveys surprise, having conflicted with the reader's initial surmise that *Yoruba* in the headline means the language. This analysis agrees with Beaugrande and Dressler's claim that recurrence conveys surprise that seems to conflict with one's viewpoint.

Sleeps with in example 8 has one meaning in standard English: to have sex with someone. However, in Nigerian English, this phrasal verb is also used for 'to lie down with eyes closed and the mind at rest'. This confusion in meaning is therefore resolved via a repetition of the verb in the lead in co-occurrence with an adjunct that reinforces the intended meaning: *had been sleeping next to*. Arguably, the use of *sleep with* in the first place seems to suggest that one is permitted to entertain a sexual innuendo as well. Similarly, the ambiguous lexical item *parties*, in example 9, is repeated in the lead in an exact form. However, the verb that agrees with *parties* in the lead narrows down the four potential meanings of *parties* to just the first of the four: 'a social event', 'an organized group of people with similar ideas', 'a group of people going somewhere together or involved in the same activity' and 'a person or group of persons in a contract or legal case with another person or group'. Thus, the repetition of *parties* in a different semantic environment not only resolves the ambiguity but enables the writer to assert and re-affirm his view point.

Sociology 101 in example 11 is ambiguous between the literal meaning as one of the basic courses offered by first year students of the faculty of social sciences in Nigerian universities and a non-literal meaning which is metaphorically derived: an elementary sociological fact. The repetition of *Sociology* in the lead as 'the *Sociology* of Northern Nigeria', where co-text rules out the literal meaning, enables the reader to extricate the writer-intended meaning. This exercise is in consonance with White's suggestion that cataphoric work must first be done before we backtrack anaphorically with our discovery from the ensuing text to disentangle the headline.

In example 14, the repetition of the noun *sack* in the lead as the verb *to sack* as well as the surrounding texts narrows down the two semantic possibilities encoded in the lexeme *sack* from 'a large bag' to 'job dismissal.' The two meanings are semantically probable in the headline. However, we can go beyond the text to draw from background knowledge. Encyclopedic knowledge about news worthiness tells the reader that this meaning

is very unlikely pragmatically. Besides, the writer has taken it for granted that Kuku is a public figure occupying a prominent position as Presidential Adviser on Amnesty and thus readers should be able to isolate the relevant meaning: dismissal from job. In this second meaning, *sack* is usually preceded by the definite article. People who are dismissed from their jobs get *the sack* not *sack*. This ambiguity could have been avoided if the editor had used *dismissal*.

All in all, the recurrence of an ambiguous lexeme in the headline in the lead enables co-textual enrichment which is necessary for ambiguity resolution. This enrichment in form of repetition provides a cohesive link between not only the repeated word but also other words that collocate with it in the discourse context. Repetition of an ambiguous lexical item in the lead reinforces the importance of the item to the encoded message and leaves a longer impression on the reader. It emphasizes the point made and re-asserts the actual viewpoint of the writer in the face of meaning possibilities. Cutting buttresses this observation thus: repetition pounds through a text to emphasize a point and can be exploited for stylistic effects (13). In addition, Azuike stoutly holds the view that “Formal recurrence is an effective relational feature that fosters discourse unity by constantly stressing the theme” (73). Thus, the link between an ambiguous expression in the headline and the co-textual repetition not only resolves ambiguity by establishing the writer-intended meaning but also engenders coherence and unity in the discourse.

Synonymy: Yule defines synonymy as “two or more forms with very closely related meanings, which are often, but not always, intersubstitutable in sentences”. This definition implies that close relatedness between two lexemes does not imply a capability for the lexemes to adequately substitute for each other in all contexts. Consequently, total synonymy is often unrealistic. Lyons supports this view thus: “It is generally recognized that complete synonymy of lexemes is relatively rare in natural languages and that absolute synonymy ... is almost non-existent”. Therefore, what suits one context may be inappropriate in another. The ubiquity of synonyms in language is one of the features of the creativity which is integral to language and enables an account of style as choice. Synonyms allow writers to express the same denotation in different ways, which are not perfect or exact but are at best near-equivalents in some contexts.

Welleck and Warren affirm that “a word carries with it not only its dictionary meaning but an aura of synonyms and homonyms. Words not only have a meaning but evoke the meanings of words related either in sounds, or in sense, or in derivation or even words which are contrasted or excluded” [3]. This observation expands the scope of synonyms to capture other lexical relations which draw attention in one way or the other to the applications of the word. Welleck and Warren’s view has more direct implication for the explication of style as choice. It broadly implies that writers are open to a myriad of lexical choices with related meanings in their art and the way they exploit the meaning resources within the same domain in the construal of experience makes for variety. Being stylistic in approach, this study therefore looks at synonymy in both narrow and broad senses as words and expressions having similar or related meanings. Thus, expressions larger than words are included as being capable of exhibiting this relatedness of meaning.

The expressions in the lead that relate synonymously with ambiguous lexemes in the newspaper headlines are presented below in brackets:

- Stay in the *shade*: (... a pair of sunglasses ... keeping your eyes protected from the harsh sun and pollution)
- Osun school principal *attacked* for sending *hijab*-wearing student home: (... school principal ... *beaten* to a pulp)
- A cover for ABU students: (*social health insurance*, ... *medical services*)
- A tale of two *parties* celebrating creativity: (*to hold* in two different *halls* of the same swank *hotel cum event centre*)
- Abdullahi *tips* Okagbare for world championship title: (Sports Minister... *predicted*)
- History on Kelani’s *canvas*: (*artistic journey*, *Contemporary Art*)
- *Rivers* of Blood: (the bloody crisis in *Rivers State* ... *Rivers State*)

Shade in example 1 is deliberately ambiguous. The word has two relevant meanings in the context: ‘a slightly dark area where the light from the sun does not reach because it is blocked by something,’ and ‘a screen or cover that protects something from the sun’. The meanings suggest that the verb *stay*, used in the headline, is best suited for the first meaning while *wear* or *use* may be preferred in the second meaning. Alternatively, the plural form *shades* means ‘a pair of

sunglasses'. As unfolded in the lead, *shade* is used synonymously with 'a pair of sunglasses'. The use of *stay* in the headline plays one meaning against the other while the endophoric referent of *shade*, *sunglasses*, resolves the ambiguity by way of synonymy. Also identified in the lead is another form of synonymy which Azuike [3] identifies as expanded equivalence: *keeping your eyes protected from the harsh sun and pollution*. The expanded equivalence is a periphrastic expression describing the ambiguous lexeme *shade*.

Example 3 is a simple case in which the relevant meaning of the ambiguous item *attacked* is supplied in the synonym *beaten*. One wonders why the polysemous *attacked* should be used in the headline if the equivocation is not deliberate. The headline could have unequivocally read: *Osun school principal beaten for sending hijab-wearing student home*. Perhaps, besides the equivocation created, *attacked* may have other associative penumbra the writer wishes to convey, which *beaten* may not capture aptly. The writer wields the stylistic license for making such choices from his linguistic arsenal.

Among the possible meanings of *cover* in example 5 are 'something you put over something else in order to hide it, protect it, or close it'; 'insurance agreement'; 'place for shelter/hiding'; 'protection from attack'. All these meanings of *cover* can apply semantically and pragmatically to ABU students. The picture of a building housing students preceding the headline, rather than providing an extra-linguistic constraint on meaning, further distracts the reader from the operative meaning and paves the way for intra-textual improvement. Thus, the cohesive link between *cover* in the headline and *social health insurance* in the lead brings about unity of thought and rescues the reader from potential difficulties in the construction of meaning from many possibilities. Another expanded equivalence is also provided to help the reader operationalize the meaning: *medical services without parting with cash on the spot*.

Similarly, the underlined words in '*to hold* in two different *halls* of the same swank *hotel cum event centre*' delimit the meanings of *parties* in example 9 from four semantic possibilities to one: 'a social event'. Although *tale* and *celebrating* in the headline suggest the other meanings that refer to people, the occurrence of the verb phrase *are scheduled to hold* in the lead rules out the meaning outright. These findings support Brown and Yule's observation that the words which appear in discourse are constrained by their co-text. Furthermore, the ambiguity in *tips*, example 10, is obviated by the occurrence of *predicted* in the first sentence of the lead

while the ambiguous lexeme *canvas*, in example 13, is resolved in the lead using the word *art* and the adjectival derivation *artistic*. Lastly, *Rivers* in 15 is replaced by an expanded equivalent *Rivers State*, which cancels the other semantic alternative: 'a large flow or stream of something.' This discovery from the lead may surprise the reader who would naturally select the meaning of *rivers of blood* to favour 'a large flow of blood' somewhere. The play on the potential meanings of the headlines and the relevant meaning situated in the lead, which often conflicts with the reader's initially chosen meaning, seems to suggest that the initial equivocation and the subsequent resolution with synonyms form part of the stylistic strategy of editors in their art. The findings also underscore the fact that lexical choices are made from paradigmatically organized resources.

The analyses show that lexical items in the news stories inter-connect with their synonymous counterparts in the headlines to clarify and illuminate the latter. The use of synonyms in the texts creates different stylistic effects from the use of repetition. While repetition may give room for monotony if excessive, the use of synonyms makes for variety, which is a criterion of good style. Apart from monotony, the overuse of an ambiguous word or phrase in the lead may heighten the confusion induced by equivocation. Other expressions nearer or nearest in meaning are used to shed more light on the lexical item and to spice up the discourse. This exercise gives interlocutors ample opportunities to encounter the same expression in different forms with implication for better understanding of the text and, by extension, resolution of potential ambiguities. Additionally, the variety of similar expressions created by the use of synonyms makes a text more interesting to the reader.

Lexical ambiguity in newspaper headlines results from the editors' choice of words. The choice of a word, rather than another closely related one, in headlines may not be accidental. Similarly, between two synonyms, the one that is ambiguous in one headline context may be unambiguous in another. These findings are supported in Akwanya using the lexemes *begin* and *start* as paradigm cases. To 'begin a book' is ambiguous between starting to read a book and starting to write one while to 'start a book' is more likely to mean to start writing a book. Thus, synonymous words provoke nuances of meaning modulated by context. Thus, since the function of headlines may be the shaping agent in lexical choices, where ambiguity encroaches on functionality and purpose of language, the former is easily traded off to sustain the latter.

Superordinates: The term superordinate is domiciled in the lexical relation of hyponymy in which words that are related in some generic sense are said to be the hyponyms of a higher word known as their superordinate. It occurs when the meaning of one term is included in the meaning of another, for example owl – bird. Thus, the meaning of ‘owl’ is included in ‘bird’, making owl a hyponym of bird. Hyponymous relations demonstrate the hierarchical organization of the lexical system. In this relationship, the hyponyms have meanings which are encapsulated in the broader superordinate term. Lower elements that share the same superordinate term are called co-hyponyms. A few examples in the data will suffice.

- Atiku Abubakar *cases* for launch tomorrow: (public presentation of the *book*)
- Firm unveils two *tablets*: (*Asus Fonepad 7* and *Asus Transformer Book T100*)
- *Sociology 101* for Ben Nwabueze: (some elementary *lessons*)

In 4, ‘Atiku Abubakar Cases’ is the hyponym of ‘book’ while ‘book’ is its superordinate. The presence of *book* in the lead as its referent is the first clue given to the reader as to what *Atiku Abubakar Cases* means. Yule affirms that “It is often the case that the only thing some people know about the meaning of a word in their language is that it is a hyponym of another term” (120). Yule’s assertion underlines the importance of this lexical relation to the understanding of word meaning. Thus, ‘Atiku Abubakar Cases’ marks a cohesive link with ‘book’ in a generic sense, which resolves the ambiguity of ‘cases’. Next, ‘Asus Fonepad 7’ and ‘Asus Transformer Book T100’ are specific brands defining the meaning of *tablets* in example 7. They, therefore, constitute the hyponyms of their superordinate, *tablets*. The two terms ‘Asus Fonepad 7’ and ‘Asus Transformer Book T100’ also relate cohesively with each other as co-hyponyms.

Furthermore, *Sociology 101* for Ben Nwabueze is ambiguous between its literal meaning as a basic course which the University Academic Prof. Emeka Nwabueze teaches and a non-literal meaning as some elementary lessons which the distinguished lecturer ought to have known. In each case, *Sociology 101* is the hyponym of a superordinate term *course* and *lessons* respectively. However, this ambiguity is resolved in the lead with the occurrence of the phrase *some elementary lessons* as the superordinate of *Sociology 101*.

General Words: Cutting sees general words as higher level superordinates, the former being an umbrella term that can cover almost everything (15). General words are like superordinates in referring to a word in a broad sense, but the broadness of the reference in the former is wider than the one obtained in the latter. For example, every place is a place. So, terms such as *room*, *university*, *toilet*, *bed*, *window side*, *doorway* and the like are all subsumable under *place*. However, being general, such words do not make explicit reference and are best suitable in contexts where their referents can be conveniently inferred. Examples in the data are

- Stay in the *shade*: (*fashion accessory*, *Useful accessory*)
- Firm unveils two *tablets*: (*information and communication technology*, two latest in shelf *devices*)
- Boys can take the *heat*, too! : (*a cooking contest*)
- History on Kelani’s *canvas*: (*solo exhibition*)

In example 1, *accessory* is related to *shade* in a general sense. In a similar vein, *information and communication technology* and *devices*; and *heat* are higher level superordinates for *tablets* and *cooking* respectively while *exhibition* is a general term in association with *canvas*.

The use of the superordinate of an ambiguous hyponym in co-text or vice versa has implication for the resolution of any inherent ambiguity. The obvious reason is that an ambiguous lexical item which actually has at least two denotations will naturally have different superordinates. For example, in another meaning, *tablets* can have *drugs* as its superordinate while *Sociology 101* can have *course* as its superordinate. Thus, the superordinates in the texts are pointers to the operative meaning of the corresponding expressions in context. This argument underscores the pertinence of the absurdity noticed by Cutting in the rhyme that follows: “The elephant is a bonny bird; It flits from bough to bough; It makes its nest in a rhubarb tree; And whistles like a cow” (14). The first line of the rhyme is obviously absurd as a result of the lack of generic congruence between the hyponym *elephant* and its superordinate *bird*. This oddity is further heightened by the occurrence of other lexemes such as *bough*, *nest* and *tree* in the rhyme, all of which are applicable to *bird*.

In sum, hyponymic and general word relations establish a network of inclusive reference between a term and another and thus is exploited for stylistic effects to achieve cohesion and unity in the texts.

CONCLUSION

Headlines do not manifest themselves in isolation but are always associated with their appertaining stories in a discourse of some kind. Thus, it becomes natural that there may be formal relationships between lexical items in the headlines and their counterparts in the ensuing text. The analyses show that intra-textual influences on an ambiguous headline are required for accounting for how the headline means what it does. Such influences unarguably narrow down the referential possibilities. Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate that the semantic value of a lexical item at each point in time is underlyingly affected by its context, requiring that any reliable interpretation of the word should emanate from a bipartite interface between the compositional meaning and discourse context.

Ambiguity in headlines arises from the writers' systemic choices which in turn are shaped by the contexts and functions of the headlines. The anticipation of contextual enrichment highly influences the structure and content of headlines making them part of a larger pattern of texts. The stylistic choices constitute a network of meaning relations in the discourse as words cohere with one another, making the choices a semantic event also. Thus, these meaning relations between ambiguous headlines and other words in their corresponding stories contribute to the unity and coherence of the text as a whole. The established network of cohesive relationships, which provide contextual enrichment to the ambiguous headlines, manifests in form of repetition, synonymy, super-ordinates and general words. The inter-relationships give readers ample opportunities to encounter the same expression in different forms. These inter-relationships have implication for better understanding of the texts and by extension resolution of potential ambiguities. The paper concludes that the initial equivocation in newspaper headlines and the subsequent resolution form part of the stylistic strategy of headlining.

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