

FORENSIC LINGUISTICS AS A CATALYST FOR CRIME DETECTION AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS: A STUDY OF SELECTED POLICE INVESTIGATIONS AND COURT PROCEEDINGS

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Abstract

The rate of criminal activities among the youths is increasing everyday especially through the birth of new linguistic knowledge in human endeavours. These crimes are facilitated by communication, particularly, linguistic communication. The aim of this study is to ascertain the role of forensic linguistics in the detection of crimes among the youths. The study adopts descriptive/discursive design while the corpus consists of a transmitted video clip of suspects' confessional statements and three contemporary criminal cases investigated and published in online newspapers. The crime cases being studied include prevalent criminal cases among the young people such as cultism, kidnapping, robbery, rape, murder and fraud related issues. The analysis focuses on the lexical, syntactic and semantic features. The findings of this study show similar pronunciation, voice identification, accents of the accused persons, their use of personal pronouns/possessive determiner, suspicious/repeated lexicon, active sentences and thematic roles as significant forensic features. It concludes that forensic linguistics can be used as a resource to assist the law enforcement agents and the judges of high courts in investigations and interpretations of crime-related expressions. Thus, it is recommended that forensic linguistic approach should be featured in seminars, workshops, and articles on crime related issues, especially the ones that involve the youths.

Keywords: Forensic linguistics, crime detection, youth, suspect, police

Introduction

Zaidan (2017) defines linguistics as a science which investigates both written and non-written Language. It is a scientific study of language and how that language functions in different settings. Linguistics is compartmentalized into different branches of which forensic linguistics is one and the latest.

According to Cooper (2015), forensic linguistics is the application of linguistic knowledge, methods, and insight into forensic context or law language, crime investigation, trial, and judicial proceedings. The major aim of forensic linguistics is to provide a careful, systemic and credible analysis of language of the law and language used by the police during investigations.

The term forensic linguistics was birthed in 1968 by a professor of Linguistics called Jan Svartvik in his book "The Evans Statements: A case for forensic linguistics".

Svartvik analysed several statements made by Timothy John Evans who was accused of the murder of his wife and daughter in 1949. The accused was later executed in 1950. This study provides a reference for forensic linguistics. Thus, application of forensic linguistics includes voice identification, interpretation and analysis of expressions or statements made by the parties involved in criminal cases. It also includes the intended meaning(s) of legal terms in oral and written confessional or voluntary statements of complainants, witnesses, and suspects in criminal cases. In view of this, Labov & Fanshel (1977) assert that "in institutional interactions such as courtroom examinations or police interviews, there is the interesting complication of the issue of shared knowledge". To affirm this, Rock (2001) and Komter (2006) posit that statements are inter-textual and dialogic verse of spoken communication between the Investigating Police Officers (IPOs) and the complainant or the suspect.

This paper presents a close examination of key areas which are relevant to forensic linguistics. The focus is to examine the linguistic features of samples of statements of suspected criminals at the different levels- phonetics/phonology (voice identification), lexical, syntactic and semantics with the aim to show how the application of forensic linguistics can be used to assist law enforcement agencies in the identification and detection of culprits. This study also relates to applied linguistics as well as parts of dialectical aspects of sociolinguistics.

Forensic linguistics is divided into two key areas. The first area is the written language which includes the language used in regional, national and international laws, statements of police interviews or interrogations that involve complainants or suspects. The second area is the spoken language which is the language used by the interpreters when complainants or suspects are being interviewed or interrogated at the police station, court or other settings where investigation of crimes is undertaken. Spoken language is investigated by the forensic linguists through accent, dialect, pronunciation, tone of voice, speed of the speech etc. The judicial process is influenced by a whole range of prior texts and contexts (police interviews, statement making and taking, meetings with lawyers), both written and spoken, all of which centre on the law.

This study seeks to use samples of different crime cases (murder, kidnapping, robbery, raping, and fraud) through the application of forensic linguistic methods in the with the view to identify and distinguish the voice and sound effects, identify and discuss the lexical and syntactic imports of the confessional statements of the suspects and to highlight their semantic implications.

Methodology

This study focuses on how forensic linguistics could be used to detect and tackle criminal activities among the youths. Qualitative research tool is adopted. To Bryman (2008) cited in Hammersley (2013), qualitative analysis employs a type of reasoning that is analogous to riddle

solving. Therefore, this research is qualitative in nature as it uses descriptive/discursive design. The design is deemed appropriate since the study is corpus-based, it aims to identify and describe the forensic linguistic features of a recorded video clip and published newspaper confessional statements, court proceedings (judgments).

The corpus consists of a transmitted video clip of three suspects involved in cultism and three online confessional statements of suspects and witnesses in cases of kidnapping, rape, robbery, murder and fraud related offences selected. The data for this study were sourced from online newspapers publications and video clips of some prevalent criminal activities among the young people between the ages of 20 to 23 years old.

The research adopts two major criteria in the selection data which are accessibility and authenticity. To Nwogu (1997), accessibility is the ease with which texts that constitute the corpus can be obtained. That means the extent to which the texts were accessible to the researcher. Authenticity, according to Mongalakwe (2006), depends to whether the evidence is genuine and from an impeccable source. In similar vein, Given (2008) opines that, in establishing authenticity, researchers seek reassurance that both the conduct and evaluation of research are genuine and credible.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section of the study, the linguistic items derived from the data collected are presented and analyzed at the respective linguistic levels- phonetics, lexical syntactic, and semantics.

Forensic Phonetic Analysis

Forensic phonetics is an interdisciplinary research that aims to examine and compare speech characteristics of an individual. Below are excerpts from transmitted video clip of confessional statements of three suspects involved in cultism under police investigations.

SUSPECT 1

The last time wey I dey Konshisha eehn... Yes I just dey there de do all those things. As I come here Oga I

sweat since I come here ba! I no de do that. As I come meet my **glanmother**.

SUSPECT 2

Sir,sir, sir to be **flank**, before **eehn** the thing be the hungry me well well. I be, I, I, red cultist. Im be my **flend**. I de sell well well, sometimes im go come ask me for chop-money.

SUSPECT 3

I go dey see am. So my nigga

come tell me say dis guy na colo ooo. That's red colour. So I come trace am and know. **Eehn eeha**.

The above excerpts are confessional statements of the three suspects who used pidgin to state their involvement in cultism. The phonetic features used to detect their involvement in the crime are: pronunciation, accent and voice identification as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1. Phonetic features in the suspects' confessional statements.

SUSPECTS	ENGLISH WORDS- TRANSCRIPTION S/SPELLINGS	SUSPECTS' PRONOUNCIATION	VOICE IDENTIFICATION	ACCENT
SUSPECT 1	where /we?(r)/ swear /swe?(r)/ grandmother /grænm?ð?(r)/	wey /wei/ sweat /swet/ glanmother /gla:nm?da/	Eehn	Tiv
SUSPECT 2	friend /frend/ frank /fræ?k/	flend /flend/ flank /fla:?k/	Eehn	Tiv
SUSPECT 3	colour /k?l?(r)/	colo(kolo) /ko?lo?/	eeha.. eeha	Tiv

Based on the above table, the forensic linguistics analysts are interested in the pronunciations, voice identifications and accents of the suspects in order to detect the criminal conspiracy among the three suspects. It was uncovered that all of them used "**eehn**". It is also evident that suspect 1 and 2 had difficulties in pronouncing the alveolar approximant /r/ in the lexical items **grandmother**, **friend**, **frank** and therefore contrasting it with lateral approximant /l/ as common among the Tiv native speakers who replace the above words with /l/ [**glanmother**], [**flend**] and [**flank**] in their pronunciation. The third suspect pronounced **colour** as **colo/kolo** which also reflects the same accent.

Therefore, it can be concluded from the above phonetic indicators that the three suspects are cultists and they conspired among themselves to carry out criminal activities. Hence they have similar voice identification, similar pronunciations

problem and the same accent.

Lexical Analysis

In this sub-section, words that are of great significance to crime detection or criminal trials identified from the confessional statements of the suspect(s) and the final the judgments from court proceedings are selected and analysed as exemplified below.

SUSPECT 2

Sir, sir, sir to be flank, before **eehn** de thing be de hungry me **well well**. I be, **I, I**, red cultist. Im be **my flend**. I de sell well well, sometimes im go come ask me for **chop-money**.

SUSPECT 3

I go de see am. So **my nigga** come tell me say dis **guyna** colo ooo. dat's red colour. So I come trace am and know. Eehn eeha. (**TEXT "A"**)

Narrating how he killed her three years ago in his confession, Chukwudi, whose parents are farmers in Ayede-Ogbese community in the state, said: “I invited her from Owo to Akure and, after introducing her to my parents, I lured her into a bush and strangled her, leaving her body in the bush.

I made love to her in the bush before killing her. I am not a cultist. It was when I killed her that I realized I made a big mistake and I wept bitterly. “The devil pushed me into killing her”. Chukwudi was brought before the High Court sitting in Akure, the state capital, on May 22, 2017 on a four-count

charge of endangering life, kidnapping and abduction, rape and murder”.

The prosecutor, Jumoke Ogunjebi, told the court that the accused person abducted the deceased and took her “to a farm near Alayere, Ogbese, raped her and then snuffed life out of her by choking and strangulating her to death”. (TEXT "B")

The excerpts above are confessional statements of suspects of the cases of cultism, kidnapping, rape, and murder. To detect the involvement of each of them, the forensic linguists considered the following lexical items: the personal pronouns in the statements, suspicious lexemes, repetitions, legal/ technical words.

Table 2. Personal pronouns/possessive determiner and technical words

SOURCES	PERSONAL PRONOUN/POSSESSIVE DETERMINER	SUSPICIOUS/IMPLICATING LEXEMES	REPETITIONS	LEGAL/ TECHNICAL WORDS
TEXT "A"	I, my	chop-money, nigga, guy	sir, I, well	
TEXT "B"	I, my	bush, strangled, lured, killed,	I	four-count, court, kidnapping, abduction, rape, murder, accused, prosecutor

The table above shows clear indications that forensic linguistics experts are good detectives since they observe, compare and detect both written and spoken language of the accused person(s) using the knowledge of linguistic rules.

The personal pronoun "I" or possessive determiner "my" were identified from the two texts. In TEXT "A", the accused persons confessed their involvement in cultism. The use of "I" either their individual involvement in the acts or their personal defense. This is applicable to TEXT B, where a suspect indicated his involvement in kidnapping, raping, and murder using the personal pronoun "I"

more than eight times in a statement. Hence, it could be concluded by a forensic linguist that there was no conspirator rather, the offense was committed by the accused person alone.

In TEXT A, suspects 2 & 3 used words which are common among the ruffians and Hooligans. Such words are chop-money, nigga, and guy. Having examined such lexical items, a forensic linguistics expert can determine the conduct of the accused person. Similarly in TEXT B, there are inculpatory lexemes used by one of the suspects which determined his involvement in the case of murder. Such lexemes are: bush, strangled, lured, killed, my trousers, sex.

Also, repetitions occurred in both TEXTS A & B when the suspects were giving their

statements. The personal pronoun "I" was used repeatedly, and so were "sir" and "well".

Finally, in TEXT B, legal or technical words such as **four-count charges, kidnapping, abduction, rape, murder, suspect, accused, prosecutor and court** are used as the judge passed his final verdicts on the suspect. Thus, in legal profession, legal dictions or phrases are extracted from the Penal Code Law of Northern Nigeria and Criminal Code of Eastern, southern and Western parts of Nigeria. The codes are used by the Police officers during investigation and judges during court proceedings.

Syntactic analysis

Syntax is the arrangement of words in sentences, clauses, and phrases. It is generally referred to as the study of sentence formation. In this analysis, key syntactic features such as parallel structures, active sentences and other sentence structures or expressions (statements) used by hooligans and ruffians are presented and analysed. The following excerpts contain some examples shown in bold type faces.

SUSPECT 1

The last time wey I dey Konshisha **eehn...** Yes I just dey there the do all those things. As **I come here** Oga I sweat since **I come here** ba I no the do that. As **I come** meet my glanmother. (TEXTA)

I invited her from Owo to Akure and, after introducing her to my parents, **I lured her** into a **bush** and **strangled** her, leaving her body in the **bush**.

I used a stone to hit her head repeatedly and she died immediately. **My** parents became curious when they did not see her and **I** was arrested by the police. I did not remove any part of her body; **I** only **killed** her for the fun of it.

"I saw her passing in front of my house, **I called her** to buy pure water for me, **I then lured her** and had sex with her. " The second time, **I called the girl** to the **uncompleted building**

and I was about removing my trouser to urinate before the act when I was caught," he said. (TEXTC)

"I can **hack** into some banks which do not have security with ease as well as customers" accounts after stealing their Automated Teller Machine (ATM) cards. **I always share it with my members** and the person who taught me how to use the software application. "**I regret my actions. Police should forgive me and give me a second chance. I will definitely stop it if I am set free. I am tired of my actions,** Ayoola said. (TEXTD)

The table 3 above shows the syntactic forensic features used by the suspects in their confessional statements. In texts A-D as indicated in the table, all the accused persons used either anaphoric or cataphoric parallelism in their statements such as "**...killed her..., I called her..., I will...** Thus, the accused persons used parallel structures to convey similar ideas, link strong action, and make reference to himself or to the victim of his actions. It is noted that, during investigation, a forensic linguist gives adequate attention to the sequence of words, phrases and clauses used by the suspect to ascertain whether he is an accomplice or should be exonerated.

Besides, the frequent use of active voice indicates incidences of criminal conspiracy which is an offence in Section 97 Of Penal Code Law of the Northern Nigeria. The following statements in text A & D are typical examples **I invited her ... I lured her..., I invited her..., I made love..., I called her..., I always share**, The suspects did not indict any innocent individuals directly in the active crime rather confessed his involvement and other accomplice who were not directly involved in the actual crime that led to their arrest.

Some criminals have peculiar expressions common to them when they are arrested. Identified in the texts are: **I made a big mistake..., The devil pushed me into killing her..., I regret my actions... Police should forgive me and give me a second chance... I will definitely stop it if I am set free...** These remorseful expressions were made during

their confessional statements to stir empathy and to indirectly demand for prerogative of mercy from the authority. From the examples above, it can be stated that forensic linguistics involves expert investigation with the aid of the knowledge

of linguistic structures, in particular syntactic structures such as parallel structures derived from active statements of the accused persons and some peculiar expressions common to habitual criminals.

Table 3.Syntactic Features of forensic linguistics

SOURCES	PARALLEL STRUCTURES	ACTIVE SENTENCES	EXPRESSIONS PECULIAR/COMMON AMONG THE CRIMINALS
TEXT A	"As <i>I come here</i> Oga I sweat" "since <i>I come here</i> ba I no....		I won tell police say make <i>them forgive me</i> any day wey they carry my come here ...
TEXT B	<i>I only killed her</i> for the fun of it. ...before <i>killing her</i>when <i>I killed her</i>	<i>I invited her</i> from Owo to Akure. <i>I lured her</i> into a bush and strangled her, <i>I made love</i> to her in the bush...	<i>I made a big mistake...</i> "The devil pushed me into killing her".
TEXT C	<i>I called her...</i> <i>I called the girl...</i>	<i>I then lured her.. I called her ...</i>	
TEXT D	<i>I will</i> copy the security number... <i>I will</i> definitely stop it if I.am set free.	<i>I always share</i> it with my member	<i>I regret my actions.</i> <i>Police should forgive me and give me a second chance.</i> <i>I will definitely stop it if I am set free.</i>

Semantic Analysis

In this section, semantic or thematic roles that are of forensic significance are analysed Thematic role is the underlying relationship that a participant has with the main verb in a clause such as the **agent, patient, instrument, source, location,** and **recipient** as exemplified below.

Agent

This is an entity that intentionally carried out the action of the verb. The following words in bold in the excerpts below show the role of agent.

I invited her from Owo to Akure and, after introducing her to my parents, **I lured** her into a bush and strangled her, leaving her body in the bush.

I used a stone to hit her head

repeatedly and she died immediately. My parents became curious when they did not see her and I was arrested by the police. I did not remove any part of her body; I only **killed** her for the fun of it. (TEXT B)

I **called** her to buy pure water for me, I then **lured** her and had sex with her. "The second time, I **called** the girl to..." (TEXT C)

The agent "I" performed or initiated all the actions indicated by the verbs "invited", "lured", "used", "killed" and "called". The agent is usually the subject of a transitive or ditransitive verb.

Patient

The patient is the entity that received the effect of some actions. The words in bold type faces in the excerpts below show the entity that received the effects of the actions of the agents.

I used a stone to hit **her head** repeatedly and she died immediately. I did not remove any part of her body; I only killed **her** for the fun of it.

I made love to **her** in the bush before killing her. I am not a cultist. It was when I killed **her** that I realized I made a big mistake and I wept bitterly.

(TEXT B)

The word in bold face "**her**" underwent the effects of the actions by the agent as shown in the excerpts above. Therefore, patient is the participant of a situation upon whom an action is carried.

Instrument

Instrument is the entity by which the action of the verb is performed or carried out. The words in bold type faces below are examples of the role of semantic instrument in the statements or expressions. I used a **stone** to hit her head repeatedly ... (TEXT B)

In the above excerpt, "**stone**" is the instrument used by the agent to carry out his action against patient.

Source

The source is the entity from which something moves. This is shown below through the words in bold type faces.

I invited her from **Owo**... (TEXT B)

I saw her passing in front of my **house** (TEXT C)

The words in bold type faces "**Owo**" and "**house**" show the direction from which the action originates.

Location: This is the place where the action of the verb takes place. The following locations are identified in the texts.

I lured her into a **bush** and strangled her, leaving her body in the **bush**. I made love to her in the **bush** before killing her.

(TEXT B)

"The second time, I called the girl to the **uncompleted building** and I was about removing my trouser to urinate before the act when I was caught," he said.

(TEXT C)

The thematic locations of the incidents are indicated in the excerpts above through the words in bold face "**bush**" and "**uncompleted building**". This is called the scene of crime.

Beneficiary

The entity for whose benefit the action was performed. Below is the excerpt that exemplified it.

I **always share it with my members** and **the person** who taught me how to use the software application. (TEXT D)

The above expressions in bold type faces indicated that, the suspect confessed to have shared the proceeds from the crime he committed with his members and the person who taught him how to carry out the criminal acts. This has clearly shown that all of them are beneficiaries.

Traditionally, linguistic semantics is the study of meaning that is used for understanding human expression like connotations as expressed by the suspect in TEXT A "**red colour**" which connotes **danger**. However, based on the above semantic analysis, it can be concluded that a forensic linguistics can use thematic or semantic roles to investigate the action or inaction of each of the participants in the event. The focus of a forensic linguistics experts is usually on these questions: Who performed the action? Who suffered the action? What entity used to carry out the action? Where did the action take place? What was the direction of the action? Where did the action take place? Who benefited from the

action

Findings and Discussions

This study revealed the phonetic, lexical, syntactic and semantic components of forensic linguistic analysis using the confessional statements of the accused person(s) in the cases of cultism, kidnapping, raping, and murder. The study critically looked at how the analyses of the linguistic features of the texts can be used in crime detections to identify the culprits and their accomplices.

Information from this study also revealed that, at the phonetical level of analyses Suspect 1 and 2 in TEXT A have difficulty in pronouncing consonant clusters in words where alveolar approximant /r/ occurred, they replaced the sound with lateral approximant /l/ in words like grandmother, friend, frank. The study also revealed that in TEXT A, all the three suspects have the same voice identification by using "eehn". This linguistics habit was peculiar among the suspects who are of the Tiv ethnic group.

At the lexical level, the study highlighted that, all the accused persons in TEXT A and B used personal pronoun "**I**" or possessive determiner "**my**" which clearly indicted each of them and reflected their roles in the crime. The personal pronoun "**I**" expresses personal responsibility or personalized action while possessive pronoun "**my**" used in the texts indicates a claim of ownership. This study also revealed how the suspects in all the texts used inculpatory words such as: **strangled, killed, lured, chop-money, nigga, bush, guy, uncompleted building, sex** etc. which implicated them in the criminal acts. Those words are self-indictment and the suspects cannot be exonerated on the basis of what they uttered in their confessional statements. Besides, the lexical analyses of the data revealed the use of legal or technical words such as four-count charge, kidnapping, abduction, rape, murder, and prosecutor for the purpose of legal jurisdiction and action on the offences committed.

Findings from the analyses at the syntactic level revealed that almost all the suspects used parallel sentence structures, active

sentences and some emotional or sensational expressions to invoke empathy as seen in TEXTS A, B, C, and D such as: "**forgive me**", "**give me a second chance**", "**I made a big mistake**", "**I regret my actions**". The use of parallel structures is a strategy devised by the suspects to say almost the same thing in different words for self-defense. This is indicated by direct or indirect repetition of a key lexical items in the structures.

Information from the data analysed at the level of semantics revealed the participation or involvement of the suspects in the crime in terms of what they did, to whom, through which means, where it happened (scene of crime). The suspects played the roles of agents, having confessed being responsible for actions. The recipients of the actions (patients) have been the victims in each case. The study identified different locations (**bush, uncompleted building**) where the suspects used particular instruments (**stone**) in carrying out their criminal acts.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

This study focuses on the forensic linguistics as a scholarly tool which can be used to detect crime among youths. The model employs different tools and involves different levels of linguistic analyses of data. At the level of phonetics, it employs voice identification and accent to detect and identify the actual culprit(s) from the samples of their utterances. It also involves the use of personal pronoun or possessive determiner, legal/technical words in lexical analysis of data. At the syntactic level of analysis, it uses linguistic structures such as parallel sentence structures and active sentences to examine the semantic or thematic roles of the agents, patients, beneficiaries, sources, instrument, and the locations of the incidents with the aid of the corpora provided. Therefore, it can be concluded that forensic linguistics is a resource in crime detections and legal trials as it provides the linguistic means for adequate identifications and examinations of suspect(s) and accomplices with clear evidences in criminal cases under investigation at the police station or in the court during trials.

Thus, it is recommended that forensic linguistics approach should be featured in

seminars, workshops, and articles to assist the relevant personnel who are charged with the responsibilities of law enforcement, crime detection and related legal matters

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