

# AN ANALYSIS OF PROCESS TYPES IN SELECTED DAILY TRUST NEWSPAPER HEADLINES ON BANDITRY IN NIGERIA.

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the application of Halliday's theory of transitivity in the representation of banditry in the Daily Trust Newspaper headlines. The research aims to identify the types of processes found in the headlines, the most dominant process as well as how the transitivity processes employed have added to the overall meaning of the headlines. Systemic Functional Linguistics was employed as a framework for its analysis. It identifies ideational meanings realised by processes, participants, and circumstance. Data was collected from 15 Daily Trust Newspaper headlines between the periods of 2022 to 2023. Data collected were divided based on the process type they entail. The dominant process was identified based on occurrence and then the processes employed were examined to show how they have added to the overall meaning of the headlines. The findings show that all the process types were identified. It also reveals that material processes dominate the other processes and also indicates that the whole process of banditry is concerned with actions and events. The analysis reveals that the transitivity processes employed have contributed to the construction of negative image of bandits. For example, in the headlines where bandits are the Actor, they are always the doer of violent and chaotic acts and causes insecurity and challenges to their victims.

**Key words:** Systemic Functional Grammar, Banditry, Transitivity, Daily Trust Newspaper, Headlines.

## Introduction

This study is a transitivity analysis of selected Daily Trust Newspaper headlines on banditry attacks in Nigeria. It focuses on how language develops in response to the demands of the society in which it is used. The nature of language is closely related to the functions it must serve. Language can be used in a variety of ways to strengthen and manipulate the message to the public.

Newspaper headline is one of the ways in which messages are passed to the public hence, they are designed to grab the reader's attention, provide a summary of the story and to entice readers to read the full article. This study analyses newspaper headlines on banditry in Nigeria. This is because prior to, and since the return to democratic rule, Nigeria has faced serious internal security challenges, the most critical ones currently being the Jama'a Ahl as-Sunna Li-da'wa waal-Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS); and the Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) insurgency, predominantly in the North- Eastern states; the Fulani Herdsmen attacks in states like Benue, Plateau, Zamfara, Taraba and Kaduna; Niger-Delta militancy and spates of kidnappings all over the country.

Another crisis that recently emerged in Nigeria's Northwest is the ongoing activities of armed groups referred to as bandits which has affected most of the population living in Kaduna, Katsina, Niger and Zamfara States. Largely unconnected to the terrorist activities in the Northeast. Banditry became noticeable in 2014 with cattle rustling activity. It became progressively worse in 2016 when the bandits started killing people in the focal states.

The Nigerian print media has covered these events under different headlines. The print media is chosen because newspapers are often assigned a very powerful role when it comes to having influence over their readers. It is therefore important to see how Nigerian

reporters represent banditry in the headlines. With this idea in mind, this study, examines the function of language as a powerful social practice in the newspaper headlines and the process types they are associated with as well as the process type that is dominant. The essence of this study lies in its attempt to show how Nigerian newsprint handles the problem of banditry using transitivity.

Most Nigerians read newspaper headlines daily and come across banditry headlines either manually or through electronic devices. Some of the headlines seem exaggerated, causing fear and panic to the reader and the reader may not understand the reason behind its presentation. It is with this in mind that the study intends to identify the different types of transitivity processes and the most dominant transitivity process in the headlines as well as bring to the fore how the transitivity processes have added to meaning and better understanding of the newspaper headlines.

This paper is significant because it identifies the transitivity processes which appear in the newspaper headlines thereby enriching readers' knowledge about linguistics especially in studying transitivity systems. Also, it identifies the most dominant process hence serving as a reference material for researchers who have interest in researching further on transitivity system. Again, it highlights how the transitivity processes deployed have added to the overall meaning of the headlines. This knowledge will help writers to write in a better way by understanding the rules for forming words and making sentences. Moreover, it shall serve as a supporting material for lecturers, especially in teaching transitivity systems.

The paper shall be limited to headlines on banditry attacks of Daily Trust Newspaper. Fifteen (15) headlines on banditry shall be selected randomly from Daily Trust Newspapers covering the periods of 2022 to 2023 because the attacks were more frequent in these years.

## Literature Review

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a theory that was developed by Machael Halliday. SFL approaches language from a different perspective by focusing on the functions. Halliday posits that a language is interpreted as a system of meanings, accompanied by forms through which the meanings can be realised and answer the question, “how are these meanings expressed”? Halliday’s theory is constructed around some basic concepts, one of which is the concept of “metafunction”. Considering the clause as a unit in which meanings of three different kinds are combined, the clause serves as a pivot around which metafunctional discussions centre. Halliday and Matthiessen (1997) divide the way we use language into three different metafunctions. The textual metafunction of the clause portrays it as having a theme and a rheme – clause as a message. The interpersonal metafunction of it however portrays it as having mood and residue – clause as an exchange. And finally, the ideational metafunction of the clause portrays it as having process, participants(s) and circumstance(s).

## Transitivity

Transitivity is a core of SFG. It refers to the way meaning is represented in a clause. Through transitivity theory, language is viewed as a meaning making system with an emphasis on choice (Neale, 2002). Moreover, according to Halliday (1969), language is a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning. Transitivity belongs to the experiential metafunction and therefore is a resource for construing our experience in terms of configurations of a process, participants, and circumstances (Martin, Matthiessen & Painter, 1997). Transitivity functions to provide a theory of human experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) further explained that reality is made up of processes of going on, happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming. Thus,

transitivity shows how the writer of text uses the participants, processes, and circumstances to represent different kinds of meaning.

### **Newspapers**

Newspaper is simply, a printed unbound paper that contains news about current political, economic, socio-cultural, educational, environmental, scientific-cum-technological, and sundry affairs as well as other relevant sales information (Nwodu, 2006). A typical newspaper should therefore contain a blend of editorial contents (news, features/news commentaries, articles, letters-to-the editors etc.); advertorials (advertisements, supplements, and other paid commercial contents) and pictorials (pictures and illustrations that complement the news contents). Newspapers are powerful in influencing the perception of the reader.

Newspaper language reflects and reinforces social norms, displays agendas, and develops identities, actions that are accomplished through language and the interaction necessary to live their daily lives. The newspaper advertisement gives readers information about products ranging from books to patent medicines, and advertisements for things like the academy also inform readers about the institutions in their community. Moylan & Stiles (1996). It is with this view that Daily Trust Newspaper is chosen. Due to insecurity in the country, the newspaper carries many information that are cable of influencing public anxieties. Therefore, the research aims to examine the processes found and how transitivity has added to their overall meaning.

### **Newspaper Headline**

Headlines are the most often responsible elements for stopping and enticing readers into advertisements. A great visual might also do this, but it is the main headline that makes the biggest and most lasting impact. Of course, the visual element must be aligned with the headline and its contents. A good title also offers a promise to the reader. The

headline should be complete by itself. A reader should know who made the statement briefly. The news headline is a medium which describes an image rather than waiting to summarise the complete story. For example, a headline encourages us to read a story, a description from a publisher encourages us to buy a book, and an advertisement is designed to promote a product.

The fundamental function of the headline is to attract the reader's attention, get them interested, and lead them in the entire advertisement message. One popular technique to capture the attention is to occupy the entire top half of the ad with a headline written in large letter. Hkazmi and Batra, (2008). Also, Javed and Mahmood (2011) are of the opinion that headlines act as a forerunner to the news reports.

### **Empirical Review**

Some transitivity studies have been conducted on several research topics. Olufunke (2022) used transitivity to analyse practical instructions in selected Nigerian senior secondary schools Biology textbooks. The aim of the research was to describe and find out the most dominant process and its effect in the biology practical instructions. The research found out four types of process that occurred in the textbooks. Material, mental, relational, and existential process. The dominant process is material process. The benefit that can be gained from analysing the transitivity in the text could help stimulate comprehension of ideas and information from the text which is one of the aims of this research. Olufunke's focus in this research is on the dominant process only.

Like the foregoing, Ifeoma (2020) used transitivity to analyse proverbs in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The study revealed that the transitivity system can analyse clauses as expressed in proverbs effectively and to clarify the meaning of proverbs beyond a literary work. Also, the study shows that action words were mostly used. Ifeoma's study is in line with the current paper because this paper seeks to

analyse the processes found in the clauses of newspaper headlines. Ifeoma's research only looked at how the transitivity process employed have added to the meanings of the proverb and the dominant process but neglects the different process types found in the proverbs.

More so, Isiah et. al. (2019) researched on transitivity process in president Buhari's "My Covenant with Nigerians". The study revealed that President Muhammadu Buhari utilised mental and verbal process to appeal to the masses and commit himself to serve Nigerians. He equally used material and relational processes to encode his ideology, persuade the people and achieve political victory. The goal of the research was to uncover different process types and main participants in the speech and to explain the functions which these processes perform in the speech in helping the speaker to convey his ideology to Nigerians and convince them to support him. Isiah et. al's research is similar with the concern of this paper.

Moreover, Olubummi and Festus (2023) looked at the transitivity analysis of English in written HND research project abstracts in Public Administration Discipline. The aim of the study was to study the kind of transitivity processes that were used by the students in their research abstracts and why the processes were realized the way they were in the abstracts. The study concluded that five processes were used namely, material, mental, relational, verbal and existential processes. The dominant was the material process. The research did not explain how the processes added to better understanding of the abstracts.

Isti'anah, Olufunke, Ifeoma, Isiah, and Olubummi's research differ from the paper in question because they all focus on ideational metafunction on other topics instead of ideational metafunction on banditry which the research in question aims to analyse.

It is pertinent to note that transitivity is functional in the sense that language performs limitless practical functions in a variety of situations. These functions are ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

As far as this study is concern, it will only investigate the ideational meta-functions in newspaper headlines on banditry attacks in Nigeria.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study hinges on Halliday’s ideational metafunction. The ideational meanings (IM) are the meanings about how we represent experience in language. The Ideational metafunction is concerned with ‘ideation’ which is about the content or proposition of message (Halliday, 2014). Therefore, ideational metafunction accounts for world experience realised through process, participants, and circumstances.

**Process types, their meaning and key participants, (Halliday, 1994: 143)**

Process types	Meaning	Participants
Material: Action, Event	Doing, Happening- e.g., run kick, repair, paint, burn, send	Actor, Goal
Behavioral	Behaving	Behaver
Mental: perception, Affection, Cognition	Sensing, Seeing, Feeling, Thinking- e.g., see, hear, know	Sensor, Phenomenon
Verbal	Saying- e.g., say, tell, warn, argue, ask	Sayer, Target, Verbiage
Relational: Attribution, Identification	Being, Attributing, identifying e.g., be, have, become	Carrier, Attribute, Identified, Identifier, Token, Value
Existential	Existing	Existence

To relate the realities of the headlines with its language and give the accurate meaning, it is essential to deal with the ideational functions of language. By this way, we will have a deep knowledge of how these

headlines are seen and what their processes are. This choice is made because of its relevance to this study and for the sake of feasibility.

### **Research Method**

The study applies qualitative research because the study focuses on the contextual analysis of a written material. Qualitative research design provides description of situational environment and the actions of the participant in the form of sentences rather than numerical details. Qualitative studies do an extensive summarisation of certain events experienced by individuals or groups of individuals. Qualitative approach is used in this research to identify the transitivity processes which appear in the newspaper headlines, to identify the most dominant process type found in the newspaper headlines as well as to see how the transitivity processes employed have added to the overall meaning of the headlines. |The data required for the research are selected headlines on banditry attacks from 15 Daily Trust Newspapers ranging between 2022 to 2023. The data were conveniently selected based on their availability. The Daily Trust Newspaper was chosen because of its popularity in Nigeria while the headlines chosen deal with the subject matter of banditry in Nigeria.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysing the newspaper headlines in terms of process types highlights the ways banditry is represented in Daily Trust Newspapers: what they are represented to be doing and to who. The following analysis is in terms of processes.

### **Material Process**

Material process basically involves a participant (the actor/agent) doing something to another participant (the goal/object). Headline (H) will be used hence.

**H.1 How NAF airstrike killed Zamfara bandits’ leader, others**  
**Table 1.**

Circumstance	Actor	Process	Goal
How	NAF airstrike	Killed	Zamfara bandits’ leader, others

H 1 is from 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022 and it consist of a material process. It begins with a circumstance of manner “HOW” to describe how the action of the headline was carried out. Following the circumstance is the actor “NAF airstrike”, the entity performing the action. Next is the process “killed” to show what the NAF airstrike has done and to depict action of taking lives and the effect of this action is realized by the goal “Zamfara bandits’ leader, others”, implying the people affected by the action. Headline 1 suggests that the NAF is actively engaged in combating banditry in Zamfara because this airstrike claimed the lives of two notorious bandit kingpins and about a dozen other bandits.

**H.2 vigilantes execute 11 “informants” in Zamfara**  
**Table 2**

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance
Vigilantes	Execute	11 informant	In Zamfara

In H.2 from January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the actor is the “Vigilantes” who carried the action “execute” on the goal “11 informant” while the circumstance provided us with additional information as to where the action took place.

### H.3 Insecurity: Bandits abduct 17 in Niger in Zamfara.

Table 3

Circumstance	Actor	process	Goal	Circumstance
Insecurity	Bandits	Abduct	17	In Niger

H.3 begins with the circumstance “insecurity” to depict the reason behind the abduction. The actor is the “bandits”, the entity performing the action “abduct” which is realised by the process. The goal is realised by “17”, the victim of the abduction or the entity affected by the action of the bandits and the circumstance “in Niger” states where the abduction takes place.

### H.4 Bandits burn farms in Niger, impose levies, drop contact number

Table 4

Actor	Process	Goals	Circumstance	process	Process
Bandits	Burn	Farm	In Niger	Impose levies	Drop contact number

This headline is from November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023. H.4 has three processes. The material process is shown by the actor “bandits” whose action had a tangible effect on the goal “farms”. The circumstance further states the location of the action. Moreso, the next process is a relational process, and it establishes a relationship between the bandits and the levies. It is not a physical action, but rather an action that attributes something (levies) to someone (in this case the farmers which is implied). The last process is a material process because it involves a physical action of dropping a contact number.

#### 4.2 Verbal Process

Verbal processes involve a communication between a Sayer and an Addressee, where some message, the Verbiage, is communicated. Specifically, the process includes that of saying, commanding, asking, and offering.

**H.5 How I will expose those behind Zamfara banditry- Gov. Matawalle.**

**Table 5**

Verbiage	Sayer
How I will expose those behind Zamfara banditry	Gov. Matawalle

Gov. Matawalle in H.5 above is represented as the Sayer while what he declared is the Verbiage. To expose those behind banditry, Matawalle could potentially release confidential documents revealing the identities of those involve in banditry, including any government officials or traditional rulers who may have collaborated with the bandits. Although, Matawalle’s statement is quite intriguing, especially given the recent allegation against him. His statement could also mean a way of clearing up his name.

**H.6 Banditry: Defend yourselves, FG tells Nigerians**

**Table 6**

Circumstance	Verbiage	Sayer	Process	Target
Banditry	Defend yourselves	FG	Tells	Nigeria

H.6 also represent a verbal process. The process is realised by the verb tell, the sayer is the FG, the entity giving the instruction or advise, the target is Nigerians, the people being advised and then the verbiage, the content of the instruction, Defend yourselves. The statement implies that the government may not be able to protect citizens from banditry.

### H.7 Royal father narrates ordeal in kidnappers’ den for 5 days

**Table 7**

Sayer	Process	Verbiage
Royal father	Narrates	Ordeal in kidnappers’ den for 5 days

In H.7, the verbal process is realised by the verb “narrates”, indicating sharing of experience to an implied audience, the sayer is the royal father while the verbiage is the content of the narration. The royal father is sharing a personal experience which implies that he suffered physically and emotionally during the ordeal. From the narration, he is believed to have been kidnapped and held captive for 5 days.

#### **Mental Process**

Mental process enables language users to express opinion, thoughts and tastes that help to identify their definitions of reality. This process type tends to be realised using verbs like think, know, feel, smell, hear, see, want, like, hate, please, repel, admire, enjoy, fear.

### H.8 Panic grips Zamfara communities over resurgence of attacks

**Table 8**

Phenomenon	Process	Senser	Circumstance
Panic	Grips	Zamfara communities	Over resurgence of attacks

In H.8 the mental process is identified by grips, a metaphorical process indicating a strong emotional response specifically panic. The senser is Zamfara communities, the entities experiencing the emotion due to resurgence of attacks. The headline implies the resurgence of attacks is a significant and threatening event, worthy of attention and concern.

**H.9 Fear heightens over bandits’ alliance with terrorist groups**

**Table 9**

Phenomenon	Process	Circumstance
Fear	Heightens	Over bandits’ alliance with terrorist group

In H.9, the sensor is implied, and the process is heightening, suggesting an increase in fear by the sensor. The phenomenon is the emotional state being experienced due to the alliance. The headline highlights the emotional process of fear and its intensification due to the perceived threat of an alliance between bandits and terrorist groups.

**Existential Process**

Existential processes are processes of existence. These represent that something exists or happens. It involves existential constructions which are introduced by an empty ‘there’ in subject position (this is sometimes called an expletive ‘there’). The typical verb that is used is the "be" verb.

**H.10 Katsina residents live under kidnappers’ siege**

**Table 10**

Participants	Process	Circumstance
Katsina residents	Live	Under kidnappers’ siege

The process live in H.10 shows that katsina residents are still living under the circumstance of kidnappers’ siege because as at 2023, it was reported that 23 local government areas were under siege by bandits with frequent attacks, kidnappings and rustling. Although, in 2024 the Katsina State Police Command rescued 319 and neutralized 40 bandits.

**H.11 Hunger looms as insecurity scares farmers away**

**Table 11**

Participants	Process	Circumstance
Hunger	Looms	As insecurity scare farmers away

In this headline, the participant hunger exists as it looms due to insecurity that affected farming activities by farmers. The headline proposes that the farmers are essential for food production and that their absence has led to hunger. It also implies that insecurity is severe enough to scare farmers away, leading to a potential food shortage hence, hunger.

**H.12 Despite containment measures, bandits continue violent campaigns in Kaduna, Katsina**

**Table 12**

Circumstance	Participants	Process	Circumstance
Despite containment measures	Bandits	Continue violent campaigns	In Kaduna, Katsina

In H.12, the existential process is identified by the process continue violent campaigns to shows that the containment measures have been ineffective in stopping the bandits’ violent campaigns hence, the action is still occurring.

**Behavioural Process**

Behavioural Processes are processes of physiological and psychological behaviour, like breathing, dreaming, snoring, smiling, hiccupping, looking, watching, listening, and pondering (Gerot and Wignel, 1994). These processes are often a source of confusion, because they border on other processes: they are similar to material processes in that they can include physical manifestation (e.g., cough, dance); they usually include the physical manifestation of verbal processes (e.g., talk, yell); and the physical manifestation of mental processes (look, listen, worry, etc.) and mental states (cry, laugh, smile). The main participant is Behaver but may sometimes involve Behaviour.

**H.13 Residents flee Zaria neighbourhoods over kidnappers’ rampage**

**Table 13**

Behavior	Process	Circumstance	Circumstance
Residents	Flee	Zaria neighbourhoods	Over kidnappers’ rampage

In H.13, the behavioural process is established by the process flee to show the reaction of the behavior residents to kidnappers’ rampage, the reason causing the residents to flee. The headline implies that the residents are reacting to the kidnappers’ rampage (stimuli) or the kidnappers rampage is severe enough to cause them to flee in fear.

**4.6 Relational Process**

Relational processes on the other hand relate two terms in a variety of ways (like how the verb “to be” is used in English). Relational processes construe the relationships of being and having between two participants.

**H.14 How Katsina became hotbed of banditry**

**Table 14**

Circumstance	Carrier	Process	Attribute
How	Kastina	Beacame	Hotbed of banditry

In H.14, the relational process is identified by the process “Became”, the transformative relational process that describes the transformation of Katsina which is the carrier is, the entity undergoing a transformation while the attribute is the state that Katsina has become (hotbed of banditry). The headline is inquiring on how Katsina went from being a normal place to becoming a hotbed of banditry.

**H.15 Abduction dip by 28% in Aug. as troops scale up operations**

**Table 15**

Carrier	Process	Attribute	Circumstance
Abduction	Dip By	28%	In Aug. as troops scale up operation

Dip in H.15 is the relational process that describe the change in the abduction rate. Abduction is the entity that has the attribute or quality of decreasing while 28% is the extent or degree of the decrease. The implied cause or reason for the decrease in abduction rate is the troops scaling up operation as introduced by the subordinating conjunction “as”.

### **Findings**

This research has analysed process types in Daily Trust Newspaper headlines on banditry in Nigeria. The analysis has helped to identify the different types of processes that are associated with banditry in Daily Trust Newspaper headlines. The analysis also revealed the predominance of material processes as shown by 4 headlines. The material processes associated with bandits belong to the semantic field of violence and chaos: kill, abduct, execute, and burn. The analysis, thus, shows that all the material processes are related to violence, destruction, and damage. The analysis has shown predominance of the material process which signifies the negative representation of the bandits and the positive representations of the victims as peaceful people. Furthermore, the processes employed such as actor, goal, senser, sayer, verbiage, behavior, carrier, attribute, and existent have indeed added to the overall meaning of the headlines as they highlight the negative images associated with banditry. In the headlines where bandits are the Actor, they are always the doer of violent and chaotic acts and cause insecurity and challenges to their victims.

This research studied how meaning is manipulated on Daily Trust newspaper headlines on banditry in Nigeria. 15 headlines are selected and subjected to a transitivity analysis. The study concludes that each headline out of the 15 is analysed based on its features and belongs a particular process type. Secondly, material process dominates all other processes. The research shows that all the material processes are related to violence, destruction, and damage which signifies the

negative representation of the bandits. Finally, the analyses shows that the transitivity processes employed have indeed added to the overall meaning of the headlines. For example, in the headlines where bandits are the Actor, they are always the doer of violent and chaotic acts and cause insecurity and challenges to their victims.

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