

A LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POSTS AND COMMENTS ON POLICE BRUTALITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Language plays a functional role in human societies and human existence would have been almost impossible without a unique means of communication. Recent studies on lexico-semantics focus on the examination of political and electioneering lexemes and slangs and neologisms on social media, whereas the 2026 Nigeria police brutality discourse has received little or almost no significant scholarly engagement. It is against this backdrop that this paper embarks on a lexico-semantic analysis of Nigeria police brutality discourse on social media. The work adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar as its framework. The qualitative research design was adopted, and relevant Instagram and Facebook posts and comments were purposively selected based on their relevance. The study reveals that the lexical items used by participants in police brutality discourse are not mere social media lexemes but expressions which show creativity and depth in meaning projection. Additionally, most of the words produce illocutionary force required for a positive change in policing system in Nigeria, while others raise concerns over citizens' safety and the administration of justice for victims of police brutality in Nigeria. The study also shows that the language of Nigeria police brutality discourse reflects the prevalent predatory policing in Nigeria, and the consequential public distrust of the Nigerian police. The work concludes that the intersection of text, context and meaning in police brutality discourse in Nigeria reflects the dynamics of language use, meaning generation and assigning of meaning in discourse context.

Keywords: Lexico-semantics, police brutality discourse, social media, Michael Halliday

Introduction

Language is a critical tool for human communication, an exclusive mark of man and a veritable means of interaction among persons and groups of persons. Aligning with this, Etuk and Umoh (2024, pp. 365-366) posit that "The medium of communication in most fields of discourse is language. Language makes communication easy; it provides the medium by which an oral exchange or written text can be achieved." It suffices to state that there is always a shared experience or common knowledge among discourse participants or interactants in any discourse. People who participate in discursive events do not only belong to the same speech community but also have similar discourse context, as most likely expressed in their choices of lexical items. Additionally, Etuk and Akpan (2023) maintain that humans express their views on various subjects, such as security, politics, gender, religion, economy and cultural ideologies through language. This means that how people use language depends on the discourse field: discourse field detects what is talked about, where, when and the people involved in the discourse. Most often, the choice of words reveals not only the ideological underpinnings but also the attitude of interactants in the discourse.

Nowadays, with human reliance on technology, language use has gone beyond traditional spoken and printed communication. Social media is one area where this change is most obvious. According to Mbede, Jacob, Andrew-Essien, and Enang (2024), social media is a new type of media that has

emerged in the digital age. It lets users participate in various activities such as uploading, sharing, tagging, and liking posts and content. Social media is like a form of self-media, where users have control over the content they share and consume. The rise of social media has changed the way we communicate because the internet has enabled people to connect from all over the world.

Furthermore, on social media, individuals primarily experience the communicative behaviours of others through communicative interactions forming the basis of online conversations. These conversations are natural, emerging, reciprocal interactions among individuals who adapt their actions to situational circumstances. The interactions are non-linear, occur simultaneously, and are multiple and interdependent (Mbede & Etuk, 2026). Online conversations usually take the form of communicative interactions where contents are interdependent and adapted to the communicative situation, as well as to the unique features of the social medium. While not all communicative interactions turn into conversations (Urujzian, 2020a), some do, particularly those happening in dedicated online forums and conversational groups (like Facebook chat groups). According to Valentini (2015), content creation is a crucial element of social media conversations, and these conversations generate interactions among the public and between the public and organisations.

Recent developments in the Nigerian security architecture have received a great deal of responses on social media, the platforms which most Nigerians resort to in the face of worsening security of the nation. Additionally, the rising violation of the fundamental human rights of citizens by some unscrupulous officers of the Nigeria police has gained popularity on social media, as evident in the many posts on the Nigerian police brutality and the comments on these posts. Thus, no one can deny the role of social media in amplifying public concerns on specific public issues, including police brutality in Nigeria. However, it is important not to ignore the place of language in the ongoing discourse on police brutality in Nigeria. Consequently, the use of English as the medium of communication on social media deserves immense consideration in the police brutality discourse. This is mainly because language does not only convey information but also reveals the attitude of language users regarding different discursive acts (Utin & Akpan, 2024). English is the language of the media in Nigeria, and the variations on lexico-semantic choice of social actors cannot be taken for granted because differences in the choice of words enhances the understanding of diverse views on specific subjects (Urujzian & Etuk, 2024).

Moreover, the selection of lexical items in comments and posts on police brutality is consciously done to reflect or convey the intended semantic effect by the interactants or social actors. The implication is that the lexico-semantic properties chosen for discourses, such as police brutality discourse, also reveal the socio-cultural context of the discursive act and the shared meaning or social stance among social actors. The deliberate use of some words by interactants in any discursive event is usually borne out of the desire to convey meaning in the most convincing and peculiar way possible (Urujzian, 2020b; Etuk & Urujzian, 2024). This is why lexico-semantics is very important in both linguistic and stylistic studies because it focuses on the choice of words and how they are used, and the meaning such words convey in context. Bala and Kefas (2025, p.28) posit that lexico-semantics “... studies word meanings and how they are constructed and interpreted....” Hence, the police brutality discourse on social media can be understood by exploring the lexico-semantic properties in the posts and comments on the subject.

Lexical semantics has lexis (word) and semantics (meaning) as the two key domains of interest. By connections and compositions, context becomes very important in the study of words and their meaning (Urujzian, 2018; Etuk & Urujzian, 2018). Therefore, a lexico-semantic analysis of posts and comments on police brutality in Nigeria yields to understanding words in the established context of

violation of citizens' rights, oppression and violence by some officers of the Nigeria police force. Thus, a lexico-semantic analysis of a text primarily focuses on the examination of word meaning, especially the meaning of words in context.

According to Urujzian (2013), language is a dynamic system of communication, which keeps evolving in response to social and technological innovations. Thus, word meaning changes according to context of discourse and channel of expression. This gives a hint to the possibility of differences in meaning of words in different contexts, as well as the creative coding or mapping of word meaning on social media. Recognising the shift in meaning based on context and channel of communication, Ezue (2025) argues that neologism is an important aspect of creative use of words whose meaning defies orthodox interpretation and understanding. Consequently, lexical semantics goes beyond the study of word meaning to the unmasking of embedded meaning of words in context. Aligning to this, Etuk and Okon (2025, p.142) note that lexico-semantics not only studies word meaning but also focuses on "...decomposition of word meaning". It is against this backdrop that this paper undertakes a lexico-semantic analysis of social media posts and comments on police brutality in Nigeria, with a view to identifying the lexical items used in police brutality discourse on social media, examining the meaning of the used words and expressions, and investigating the semantic implication of such words and expressions in the police and security discourse in Nigeria.

Relevant Literature on Lexico-Semantics and Social Media Discourse

Uwen (2019) examines the meaning of creative words used during the 2019 electioneering campaign on campaign grounds and the social media. Approaching the analysis from the Contextual Theory of Meaning, the study notes that the use of creative lexical items by political actors and institutions, such as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the INEC ad hoc staff and electorates reflect a dynamic communication influenced by the political atmosphere. The scholar argues that most lexical items, such as inconclusive election, duress result, destruction of reversed logistics, server result, INEC result, ICCES, fake result, federal might, your sins are forgiven, militarisation, uncommon defection, et cetera, have limited semantic value. This implies that meanings attached to each of these words and expressions are restricted to the language situation: the 2019 Nigerian election process. The study concludes that such a creative use of words gives insights into the political jargons in Nigeria and that the understanding of such words requires shared situational knowledge. Uwen's (2019) work is relevant to the current study, particularly in terms of its examination of the relationship between words and meaning in context. Nevertheless, Uwen's study focuses on the lexico-semantic analysis of political lexemes in Nigeria. Obviously, it does not give priority to expressions used in police brutality discourse. The most important difference between the current study and Uwen's work is that this paper is interested in the lexico-semantic analysis of words and expressions used in the 2026 police brutality discourse in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Ezue (2025) focuses on the lexico-semantic analysis of neologism of social media communication. He examines the morphological processes of creating words, such as blending, compounding, affixation and other forms of neologism, while also investigating the semantic shift accompanying the formation and use of such words. For Ezue, lexical semantics entails the intersection of word meaning and the relationship that exists among words in context. Therefore, meaning changes when words are used in relation to other words in a particular context. The implication is that new meanings emerge as a result of the context in which words are used in relation to one another. The study notes that the social media is a platform where creativity and identity meet. Among words examined in the lexical and semantic domains are "metauniverse", "doomscrolling",

“ghosting”, “quaranteam” and “zoombombing”. Ezue’s (2025) study concludes that these words used reflect not only the rich lexicon of English but also the cultural evolution and the advancement of discourse in the technologically advanced society.

However, while remaining relevant to the current study, particularly in the aspect of examining word meaning, Ezue (2025) focuses mainly on social media discourse on various subjects between 2020 and 2025. The lexical items and expressions in the currently trending discourse on police brutality in Nigeria have not been examined, neither have previous discourses on victimization of Nigerians by the police been investigated. Therefore, the current study is embarked on to fill this gap through its examination of the words and expressions used in the ongoing police brutality discourse in Nigeria. It particularly concerns itself with identifying the lexical items, analysing their meaning and examining their semantic implication on security.

Additionally, Ogbukwo (2025) undertakes a lexico-semantic study of selected Gen Z expressions on social media platforms, such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and X. Ogbukwo’s concern is on meaning shift and meaning change in the Gen Z words and expressions on selected social media posts and interviews. Ogbukwo analyses the contextual, figurative or connotative meanings of the Gen Z expressions understudied. The study notes that Gen Z language and meaning are influenced by social media trends, pop culture and memes. The meaning is laced with metaphors and hyperboles. Ogbukwo’s study concludes that Gen Z linguistic characteristics reveal the dynamic nature of Nigerian English, a blend of local variety with international creative communication in contemporary societies. However, Ogbukwo’s work does not accommodate the analysis of the lexico-semantic properties of the current police brutality discourse in Nigeria: the focus of the current research.

In addition, Etuk and Okon’s (2025) study is a lexico-semantic analysis of “No Gree for Anybody” the 2024 Gen Z slang on X, and its social implication. According to the scholars, every language use has a social function ranging from identity, ideological introjection, resistance and humor. They study holds that the 2024 Gen Z slang, “No Gree for Anybody”, serves as a motivation for resistance, and a linguistic tool for the expression of both seriousness and humor in the face of internal and external pressure. The scholars explore the linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic implications of the slang. From the linguistic point of view, “No Gree for Anybody” is regarded as discursive tool for conveying various shades of information, including motivation and resistance to suppression. From the sociolinguistic perspective, the slang serves as an identity marker for young people who share similar social values. The pragmatic implication of the slang quickly points to the call for personal strength in time of weakness and courage in the reign of oppression.

Although Etuk and Okon’s study is relevant to the current study, particularly in its exploration of the social implication of the slang, the current research is quite different because it focuses on the analysis of the 2026 posts and comments on police brutality in Nigeria. It is important to state that apart from the differences in date, the data set and focus of the existing lexico-semantic study are different. Police brutality in Nigeria, although not a new phenomenon, has become a sensational topic between late April and May 2026. Therefore, data set for the current study positions it, among other things, as a peculiar study. The current policing system in Nigeria has been under the court of social conscience for quite a long time. Hence, the examination of social media posts and comments on police brutality from a lexico-semantic perspective is pertinent in order to explore the linguistic choices, meaning of words and expressions, and the social implication of the choice of words and expressions.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts Systemic Functional Grammar (henceforth SFG) as its framework. Regarded as a radical shift from the traditional language description, the SFG is a theory propounded by Michael Halliday (1985) (Bavali & Sadighi, 2008). It is a language model which recognises language as a system of meaning creation. Language is said to be systemic (Etuk, 2021) because users choose an array of lexical and syntactic choices available to them. In addition, the SFG regards language as having a social function. Whenever a choice is made from the pool of linguistic properties available, it is done in order to achieve a communicative goal. Invariably, in the paradigm of the SFG, language is not just a system of rules but regarded as having a social function (Chappell, 2013). Considering text and context, Chappell (2013) argues that cultural or social context influences speakers or language users' choice of lexical items in discursive acts. Therefore, the lexical choices of participants of the police brutality discourse on social media are influenced by the social and cultural contexts of the discourse. The SFG, thus, becomes very crucial in the lexico-semantic analysis of words and expression used by participants in the 2026 police brutality discourse in Nigeria.

Moreover, Etuk and Okon (2025) opine that the SFG is functional in approach. This implies that language is rather examined based on its functionality rather than its grammaticality. It is important to state that the functional perspective to language is intrinsically linked with meaning and interpretation of meaning of expressions in context. Within this purview of the SFG, the function of language in its context is considered more important than its grammaticality. The framework is very suitable to this work because it encourages the investigation of the meaning and implication (function) of language in a context. It is at this point that the field, tenor and the mode in a discursive event, such as the 2026 police brutality discourse in Nigeria, can be fully appreciated. Hence, the SFG provides insights into the understanding of the participants choice of words, the meaning of such words or expressions, and their social implication in the milieu of discourse.

Furthermore, Bavali and Sadighi (2008) argue that in the SFG, language is the resource for unmasking of meaning, rather than a set of rules. When the lexico-semantic properties of a text are examined, the concentration is not on the grammaticality or otherwise of such texts but priority is given to the embedded meaning which can be mapped out. Concretising the invaluable role of the SFG in extracting meaning from every discourse, Halliday (1985, p. xiv) states that:

The theory behind the present account is known as 'systemic' theory. Systemic theory is a theory of meaning as choice, by which a language, or any other semiotic system, is interpreted as networks of interlocking options...whatever is chosen in one system becomes the way into a set of choices in another, and go on as far as we need to, or as far as we can in the time available, or as far as we know how.

From Halliday's point of view, the SFG concentrates on language as a system of meaning derived from context of use. In this sense, meaning or the functional role of language becomes integral to the SFG. Similarly, Urujian (2022) states that lexical items stretch their semantic values beyond the immediate or first value meaning to accommodate social implication of their choice, as influenced by discourse field, tenor and mode. It is through the contextual meaning of lexicons and expressions that other shades of semantic values, such as personal or collective ideologies, can be retrieved. This is corroborated by Etuk and Okon (2025) who note that the SFG is primarily concerned with the social function of language. Their application of the theory in the examining of the 2024 Gen Z slang, "No Gree for Anybody", proves its applicability in the lexico-semantic study of social media discourse. Given this background, the current study adopts the SFG as its framework for a lexico-semantic analysis of police brutality discourse in Nigeria.

Methodology

This work adopts a qualitative research design. This design allows researchers to get deeper insights into non-statistical data for research. Most often it is used in the Arts and Humanities. Qualitative design permits scholars to draw inference from the data sets available for study. According to Tenny et al. (2022), qualitative research explores real-life challenges, and open-ended questions. Such questions help to generate responses which may not be easily quantified. Perhaps, this is why Lim (2025) argues that qualitative research deepens the understanding of human complex experiences and phenomena. Therefore, qualitative design is not only a methodology but a means through which researchers can effectively and ethically research into human social phenomenon and interpret complex data therein.

Posts and comments on police brutality in Nigeria on Facebook and Instagram constitute the primary data for this study, while secondary data comprise relevant textbooks, journal articles and Internet materials. Four Instagram posts and two Facebook posts and comments were purposively selected owing to their relevant themes and access. Also, the choice of Facebook and Instagram as the social media platforms for the data collection was informed by their popularity and accessibility to average Nigerians. The study specifically focuses on the 2026 police brutality posts and comment because of the significant resurgence of extrajudicial killing of Nigerians by the police, particularly the killing of Mene Ogidi, a 28-year-old young man from Effurun, Delta State on April 26, 2026. Analysis of data is conducted through the lens of Halliday's SFG.

Lexico-Semantic Analysis, Nigeria Police Brutality: Unmasking Text, Context and Meaning

The choice of words and expressions in discourses is very crucial in conveying information, feelings or ideologies in a discursive event. The social media, especially platforms like Facebook and Instagram have witnessed a trend of discourse on the extrajudicial killing of Oghenemine Ogidi, a twenty-eight-year-old indigene of Effurun, Delta State. The disturbing incident has since April 2026 remained a major concern to Nigerians. The concerns are expressed in both social media posts and comments. Therefore, data are presented and analysed through the lens of the SFG.

Most social actors have considered the Nigeria police officers as terrorists and murderers on account of the continuous killing of innocent Nigerians by men of the force. Although Ogidi's incident has trended in recent times, most social actors raise concerns over the brutality of the military and police personnel, which has seated deeply in the consciousness of an average Nigerian. This can be deduced from the language used by most discourse participants in the 2026 police brutality discourse in Nigeria. In one of the posts, an Instagram user labels the police as murderers, as can be seen in his use of the word "killer" to describe the unscrupulous police officers who shot at a very close range and killed Ogidi, a suspect whose limbs were already bound with strong ropes.

Excerpt 1



From Excerpt 1, It Can Be Seen That The Photo Attached To The Post Has Both The Inspector General Of Police (IGP) In Nigeria And The Killer Of Ogidi. Though “Killer” In The Context Of This Discourse Refers To Nuhu Usman, The Officer Who Killed The Suspect, However, The Term Rubs Off On The Entire Police Force. Consequently, The Nigerian Police Force Understood To Have The Constitutional Obligation To Protect Lives And Properties Of Nigerians Are Presented In This Discourse As Terrorists And Murderers Whom Nigerian Masses Must Be Careful With.

Moreover, the ‘killer-murderer’ label given to the police is revealed in the symbolic representation of the pleading of Ogidi before

his captor shot and killed. Excerpt 2 below is an Instagram post, which clearly shows the shared understanding of the Nigeria police as murderers.

Excerpt 2



The excerpt above is not just a symbol but a vehicle of communication. The expression “officer no kpai me” can be seen as emanating from a victim of police brutality. The expression is Nigerian pidgin

English which literally means “Officer, do not kill me”. It is worthy to note that Nigerian Pidgin English has assumed the status of a lingua franca in the multilingual and multicultural Nigerian society (Tasie & Brown, 2024). This validates its usage in most trending discourses on social media and off the internet. Balogun (2013, p.91) states that “Nigerian Pidgin as a marginal language used among Nigerians to facilitate communication needs a certain interaction context”. Therefore, in the context of this expression, “officer” is a noun and subject of the sentence. It clearly refers to the officer of the Nigerian police on mufti. “...no” is an adverb of negation, a direct substitute for “do not” in standard English. “...kpai” means to kill or death, depending on the context. In this context, it means “kill”. The word is a popular Nigerian pidgin English slang, which refer to a sudden violent death or the violent act of killing someone, as such murdering by gunshot. “Kpai” itself is equally onomatopoeic because it suggests the sharp sound of a gunshot.

At the contextual level, the expression reflects a desperate appeal for mercy and the victim’s plea for the protection of his fundamental human right to life. Indeed, the police officer is represented as a violent, unlawful, dangerous person whose professionalism and integrity are questionable. “Kpai” is embedded with a strong, visceral connotation of violent death. The use of the word strips standard English words, such as kill and murder, of the euphemistic coding. It presents the direct and raw act of violent murder, one that Oghenemine Ogidi became a victim of. The sociolinguistic implication of the “officer no kpai me” reflects an asymmetrical power relation between suspects and Nigeria police officers, extortion, oppression, suppression and prevalent extrajudicial killing of innocent Nigerians. It shows a society under siege by the police who, instead of protecting the citizens, terrorise them for pecuniary gains.

One striking thing about this language is not just the creativity and semantic value shared by the discourse participants but the affirmation that most members of the Nigeria police force are frequent violators of the fundamental human rights of Nigerians and also murderers. The unconscious reference to killing by suspect, who fears and pleads for his life, reflects the murderous attribute of most officers of the Nigeria police encountered by Nigerians on daily basis. The pleading is accompanied by sadness and heartbreak, which the emojis used project to the readers’ consciousness. Mbede and Etuk (2026) argue that in the current digital age, the deployment of multiple communication modes in a discourse provides a significant level of depth and a special appeal to human consciousness. The emojis used in the expression of sadness and heartbreak in the face of the police officer explains why Nigerian youths regard the police as terrorists and murderers. Additionally, a displeased Instagram user uses “kpai” to mean “die” in the context of seeking justice for the dead victim of police brutality.

Excerpt 3



In the expression “These criminal police must kpai too”, the Instagram user literally says that the police who killed Ogidi must die too. The illocutionary force in the expression reveals the call for urgent justice against the draconian police officer who murdered Ogidi. This call does not only suggest Nigerians’ longing for justice and the protection of the fundamental human rights of citizens but also creates a perlocutionary effect strong enough to gain public condemnation of police brutality and the demand of justice for victims.

Beyond the pragmatic implication of the expression, there is also semantic shift from the meaning generated from “kpai” in excerpt 2 above. However, this does not erase the embedded violent death in the lexicon “kpai”. In fact, the wish of the social actor is that the murderer of Ogidi be subjected to the same violent death suffered by the victim of police brutality, Ogidi. This is a mark of creative use of language and assignment of meaning to words as used in context. In line with Halliday’s (1985) SFG, the function of the word and the entire expressions is more paramount than their grammaticality. Also, since context gives meaning to most lexical items and expressions used in discourses, it suffices to state that the use of “kpai” in the two instances demonstrates the dynamics of text, context and meaning. Consequently, “kpai” is not only innovative in the discourse of police brutality in Nigeria but a suitable lexeme that clearly conveys the intended meaning without going against social media ethics of language. This aligns with Goshu and Ridwan (2025) who argue that social media has significantly influenced linguistic innovations in contemporary times. This influence, however, does not hinder the flow of communication. Rather, creativity and depth are explored by social actors in social media discourses, such as the police brutality discourse in Nigeria.

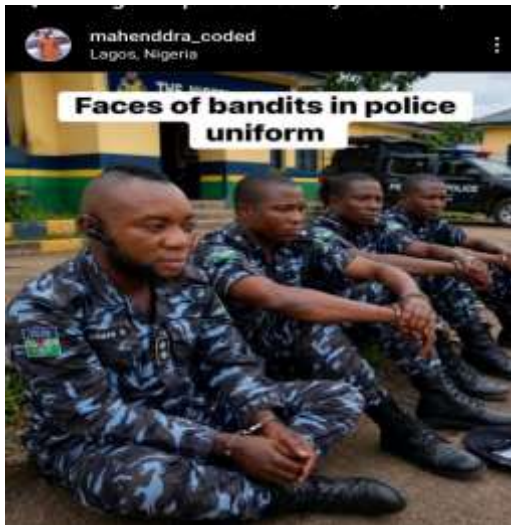
“Bandit”: Semantic Cross-Fertilisation of Predatory Policing and Terrorism

Furthermore, the Nigeria police is considered as ‘bandits’ from the perspective of their ruthlessness when dealing with unarmed and innocent Nigerians. In excerpt 3 above, the word “criminal” is used to qualify the police, an agency which is responsible for fighting crime and sustaining security of lives and property. “Criminal” in this context does not mean illegal or wrong police; rather, it means corrupt, unprofessional and dangerous policing. Edun et al. (2025) argue that in spite of their constitutional obligation to maintain public peace and security, the police in Nigeria have frequently resorted to excessive and unlawful application of force in their dealings with innocent civilians in Nigeria. The police have become organised criminals and dangerous gangs who do not spare the lives

of ordinary Nigerians. This has attracted public outcry and loss of confidence in the police force, as officers are believed to lack any modicum of respect to fundamental human rights of citizens, morality and professionalism in the discharge of their duties.

Thus, discourse participants express their concern in various social media interactions, the most effective means of giving public opinion the necessary audience. In excerpt 4 below, the text reveals the perception of the Nigeria police force through the choice of lexemes.

Excerpt 4

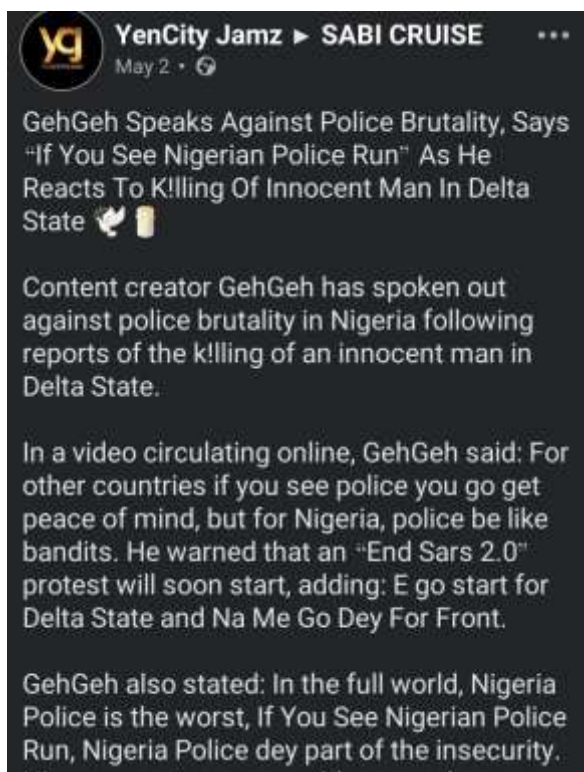


In this excerpt, the Instagram user describes the police as bandits: “Faces of bandits in police uniform”. Bandits are literally people who rob others of their belongings, in lawless societies. Bandits are generally lawless. In addition, it is important to understand that in Nigeria, some Islamic terrorist groups are described as “bandits”, a term used to decorate the repugnant meaning associated with words such as “terrorists”. Bandits terrorise every part of Nigeria, maiming, killing, looting and stealing with impunity. Hence, addressing the Nigeria police officers as bandits is a linguistic strategy of toning down the offensive semantic implication of directly referring to the police as terrorists in security uniforms. That notwithstanding, there is an underlying transfer of meaning from context of world terrorism to the police

as organised terrorists based on their pattern of operation, a predatory policing which is akin to that of terrorists causing havoc in Nigeria. Thus, the semantic implication is that the police are destructive and predatory to Nigerians in Nigeria. Their description as “bandits” gives a strong signal to why Nigerians prefer to run away at the sight of the police than stay and lose their lives and property, as is always the case in every encounter with bandits in Nigeria. Apart from this, the use of “bandits” in this context resonates with synonyms, such as thieves, outlaws and robbers, words that most Nigerians use to describe the true nature of the Nigeria police officers. The social implication is that the police are considered armed robbers disguised in the paramilitary uniforms; therefore, the police are not trustworthy as far as ordinary Nigerians are concerned.

Obviously, the Nigerian masses have lost confidence in the Nigeria police and would consider having no contact with police officers when it is possible. Consequently, in one of the posts on Instagram, a popular social media content creator and influencer known as GehGeh is quoted to have advised Nigerians to run away whenever they see police officers whom he also describes as “bandits”, owing to their murderous nature. A critical examination of the excerpt below helps to decompose the semantic value of “bandits” as used by the influencer.

Excerpt 5



In this excerpt, the police are represented as robbers and terrorists, the most dreaded criminals in Nigeria. “If you see Nigerian Police Run” implies not only the destructive nature of the Nigeria police force but also the loss of confidence in the police. In the context of the murder of Ogidi from Effurun in Delta State, the text “For other countries if you see police you go get peace of mind, but for Nigeria, police be like bandits”, expresses the contrast between professional policing in other climes and the despicable and predatory policing system in Nigeria. This contrast is very important in the discourse participant’s expression of police brutality in Nigeria. For instance, the expression, “... for Nigeria, police be like bandits”, is a Nigerian Pidgin English expression which means that the Nigeria police act like bandits. Invariably, Nigeria police are bandits who should be avoided. Thus, “bandits” have assumed an extended meaning in the Nigerian social media police brutality discourse lexicon whereby the label is not only exclusive to Islamic terrorists in Nigeria but also to some

members of the Nigeria police who are corrupt, criminally-minded and murderous.

A Facebook post reveals the preponderance of ‘terrorism’ and ‘banditry’ by most Nigeria police officers. The poster deploys a graphological device to draw readers’ attention to the prevalence of abuse of power among officers of the Nigeria police force.



Excerpt 6

The text “NIGERIANS IN UNIFORM AND ABUSE” immediately calls readers to examine everyday abuse and harassment of Nigerians by officers of the Nigeria police. In the middle of the text, the poster refers to the police officers as “... animals in uniform....” Here, “animals” assumes different semantic properties. Instead of +animate, +non-human, “animals” possesses the semantic properties, +animate, +human and +mammal. This indicates semantic shift and extended meaning, whereby the officers are not literally said to be animals but assume the status of animals based on their rascality, insensitivity, lack of conscience, intelligence and human sympathy. “... uniform” denotes state authority, responsibility, discipline and legality. Invariably, police brutality persists in Nigeria because the officers are like

animals, lacking intelligence and professional skills to operate in modern democratic Nigeria.

Moreover, the juxtaposition of “animals” with “uniform”, highlights the behaviour of officers of the Nigeria police as unrefined, grotesque, savage and cruel, while pretending to be acting on the State’s behalf and lawful authority. The sociolinguistic implications of “... animals in uniform....” are that the

police are stripped of their humanity and are regarded as wild beings who should not be found in a civil and human society that is based on law and order. Explicating Halliday's SFG, Okafor and Nwode (2022) posit that words can be understood in a context. Hence, the expression "... animals in uniform" functions in the context of police brutality in Nigeria to refer to the police as crude, rude and the base form of human being. This is concretised in the expression in the excerpt, "... Nigeria and Police and their penchant for brutality na 5&6". The expression simply means that the Nigeria police and lawlessness, violence and abuse of citizens' rights are the same. "... na 5&6" is a creative way of saying that one thing is the same as the other or that a person and another have something deep in common. Therefore, for the Nigeria police to be described as being "5 & 6" with brutality, means that they are not only crude but also cruel, violent, lawless, destructive and uncivilised.

A further unmasking of meaning of the text reveals that the officers of the Nigeria police force and brutality are the same. The context of discourse gives impetus to this interpretation, and also makes known the functional role of the expression in the ongoing police brutality discourse in Nigeria. Thus, the police are gangsters, oppressors, rogues, and should never be trusted. This can also be deduced from the Facebook comment in Excerpt 7 below.

Excerpt 7



In this excerpt, the second and third comments agree to the description of the Nigeria police as dangerous murderers. The comment reads: "If u see police for Nigeria Run for ur life police na bandit dey be", meaning that if you see the police, run to safety because they are terrorists. The lexical item "bandit" has repeatedly been used to describe the police in Nigeria, implying prevalence of their dangerous and criminal disposition and activities in Nigeria. "Bandit" has become synonymous with predatory police officers in Nigeria, a linguistic development borne out of police brutality discourse in Nigeria. Aborisade (2021) informs that the global human rights organisations cited cases of human rights violation by the Nigerian police, especially in the Covid-19 lockdown era. The scholar emphasises that even before the enforcement of lockdown, there had been incessant cases of human rights abuse by the Nigeria Police Force. These violations include physical violent attacks on innocent people, such as commuters and market women, extortion of large sums of money

from citizens, threats to kill, and the actual murder of innocent Nigerians.

More so, the public has lost confidence in the capacity of the police to provide protection or ensure peace and order in Nigeria. Another social implication is that the police are regarded as enablers of crime, chaos, murder, theft and all forms of unwholesome practices in Nigeria. Therefore, ordinary Nigerians feel seriously endangered and at risk of losing their lives wherever the police are found in Nigeria. Ike and Jidong (2022) buttress this position by stating that the Nigerian public often regard the police as predatory. Hence, the option of running remains crucial, as the agency which is supposed to protect citizens rather orchestrate or supervise the murder of same citizens, as can be seen in the murder of Ogidi and many others. The discourse participant's position in Excerpt 7 resonates with GehGeh's view in Excerpt 5. Thus, the lexeme "bandit" as used in the police brutality discourse assumes deeper layers of meaning, including the masses' reference to the police as abductors, extortioners, armed robbers and murderers. The discourse provides the word extended meaning, making it not just a filler of a grammatical slot in the expression but also a performer of social function.

Furthermore, discourse on police brutality in Nigeria has come with its resistance and justice lexemes. Some of the words used in the discourse are echoes of immediate resistance against abuse by the police and the demand of justice for the victims of this brutality. For example, Nigerians on social media have increasingly called for the immediate administration of justice in order to avenge the death of Ogidi who was murdered by the police. In the excerpt below, the social actor expresses the pain of loss of a promising young man like Ogidi. However, the text ends in a conscious desire for justice for the deceased, as implied in the illocutionary force in the text.

Excerpt 8



The expression “... and may the killers know no peace” is reference to justice. It reflects a direct curse on the police, especially the officer who murdered the suspect. “May” is a modal verb used to express a wish or desire. In this context, the sentence is not a statement but an invocation and plea to a higher authority — creator of the universe. The tense in “may the killers know no peace” does not specify the duration of punishment for the killer. It seems to suggest continuous penalty. Udoka, Umoh and Etuk (2020, p.58) assert that “Tense is a category that locates the action of a verb on a timeline in relation to the time of speech relating to the action in question”. In addition, “his” in the excerpt is a possessive pronoun and also an anaphoric reference to the deceased, establishing the link between the victim and the perpetrators. “Killers” are the agents of death, and

the use of the plural noun infers both the direct perpetrator of the murder and the accomplices.

From the perspective of semantics, “...know no peace...” reflects the speaker’s intensive invocation of psychological torment, restlessness, lack of stability, and a haunted conscience on the killers of Ogidi. The expression has a locutionary force of enacting a spiritual decree to deliver judgment against the murderers of Ogidi: the police. Felecan and Bughesiu (2016, p.25) note that malediction (curse or swear words and phrases) expressions are performative acts whose “... addresser’s subjective attitude is intentional and focused” Hence, the call for justice in this text is not a coincidence but an intentional advocacy for justice for the oppressed Nigerians.

Conclusion

The study attempted a lexico-semantic analysis of social media posts and comments on police brutality in Nigeria. The words and expressions used by discourse participants give a deeper insight into the functional role of language in conveying meaning. Words and expressions such as “kpai”, “bandits”, “faces of bandits in police uniform” and “animals in uniform”, among others possess deeper semantic values, as can be seen in meaning shift, extended meaning and meaning change at various contexts. The study notes that the lexical items used by participants in police brutality discourse are not mere social media lexemes but expressions which show creativity and depth in meaning projection. Additionally, the paper holds that most of the words used give illocutionary force required for a positive change in policing system in Nigeria, while others emphasise concerns over citizens’ safety and the need for justice for victims of police brutality in Nigeria. The study asserts that the language of Nigeria police brutality discourse reflects the prevalent predatory policing in Nigeria, and the accompanying social implication of distrust of most Nigerian police officers. Therefore, the work concludes that the intersection of text, context and meaning in police brutality discourse in Nigeria reflects the dynamics of language use, meaning generation and assigning of meaning in discourse context.

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