ARTICLES

Albert L. Oyeleye
University of Ibadan
ORCID: 0009-0009-9970-0253

Adesina B. Sunday
University of Ibadan
ORCID: 0000-0002-5317-9513

Ibijoke O. Omole
Thrivebridge Initiative for Social Development
ORCID: 0009-0006-8379-648X

Pragmatic strategies in the crime narratives of accused rapists in Agodi Custodial Centre, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

Abstract

Existing linguistic studies in Nigeria have focused on investigator's communicative acts in coercive investigative discourse, with little attention given to non-coercive investigative discourse involving accused rapists (ARs) in correctional centres. This study addresses this gap by analysing the pragmatic strategies ARs employ in crime narratives within Agodi Custodial Centre, Ibadan, Nigeria to offer insights into evidential cues that could impact justice administration. Using Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory as framework, the study adopts descriptive design and purposive sampling to select thirty-nine ARs for

interviews. Findings revealed that the ARs deployed identity-framing, identity-reframing, attention-seeking, information-controlling, crime-relabelling and attention diversion strategies to influence investigator's interpretation. The involvement of minors in the rape cases underscores the severity of the crime and the need for effective justice mechanisms. Additionally, cultural assumptions about intimacy and relationships, driven by patriarchal norms and misconceptions about consent, significantly influence crime narratives. Recognising these contexts is crucial to preventing justice perversion and enhancing forensic discourse in Nigeria.

Keywords: Agodi Custodial Centre, accused rapist, crime narratives, investigative discourse, pragmatic strategies

1. Introduction

Sexual violence against women and girls, particularly rape, is alarmingly prevalent and deadly in Nigeria (Ezeilo, 2020; Amnesty International, 2021), with minors often being victims. The violent rape and murder of Vera Omozuwa, Barakat Bello and Azeezat Shomuyiwa in 2020 sparked global outrage, demanding urgent action against sexual violence against women and girls (*Punch*, 2021). Recent statistics by Lagos State Government and UNICEF revealed that one in four Nigerian girls is sexually abused before the age of 18 (*Vanguard*, 2021). Also, in 2020, United Nations Women reported 11,200 rape cases, including those involving children (*Punch*, 2021). The culture of impunity due to stigmatisation and victim-blaming contributes to this surge (Ezeilo, 2020; Amnesty International, 2021), with inadequate investigations and flawed legal proceedings (*Premium Times,* 2016; Amnesty International, 2021; Joseph & Bamigboje, 2022), thus hindering justice. These statistics, especially those on the involvement of minors, as well as systemic issues, point to the urgency for combative intervention against sexual violence, in order to create a safe environment for women and girls in Nigeria.

Linguistic studies on crime narratives emerged from recognising the role of language in criminal investigation. Language is crucial in interpreting linguistic behaviour of participants during investigation. Scholars have examined power asymmetry, confessions, deception and credibility (Sadiq, 2011, after Kebbell & Daniel, 2006; Masip & Herrero, 2013; Sunday & Akinrinlola, 2017; 2021), providing a framework to understand the dynamics of the language employed in investigative interrogation and investigative interviewing discourses.

Investigative interrogation is adjudged coercive and risky for suspects, prompting some Western countries, like the UK, the Netherlands, Australia and Canada, to adopt investigative interviewing, a non-coercive and ethical technique

to enhance justice administration (Bull & Rachlew, 2020; Chung, Ng & Ding, 2022). However, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) continues to use interrogative techniques despite criticisms, the information so obtained is still admitted in courts, without any other substantial evidence (Maliki, 2009; Amnesty International, 2014). Investigative discourse studies, like Sadiq (2011, 2016), Farinde, Olajuyigbe and Adegbite (2015), and Sunday and Akinrinlola (2016; 2017; 2021), attest to this. These studies focused on investigator's communicative behaviour through the identification of power play, questioning, deception and negotiation strategies in police/suspects interrogation, with little attention paid to investigative interviewing of accused rapists (ARs) in correctional facilities.

This landscape emphasises the need to engage investigative interviewing with ARs to show it as a more effective alternative to interrogation utilised perpetually by the NPF. This is because interviewing techniques have the components to enhance the identification of suspects through crime narratives. Conversely, language manoeuvring poses a risk when engaging suspects like ARs with investigative interviewing, as ARs can use their crime narratives to achieve implicit selfish goals.

Societal stigma, limited witnesses, scant medical evidence and justice perversion are reasons that could propel ARs to strategically weave language to create divergence between their expressed intentions and their true motives. Therefore, this study applies Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory to ARs' crime narratives, with a view to determining the pragmatic strategies employed by ARs, including those involving minors, to influence investigator's perception and interpretation of the narratives. This endeavour will contribute significantly to the broader context of forensic discourse studies and justice administration in the fight against sexual violence against women and girls in Nigeria.

2. Literature review

Investigative discourse, particularly police-suspect interrogation, has garnered significant scholarly attention, resulting in diverse studies with varied goals and findings. For instance, Sadiq's (2011) study analyses communication strategies in criminal investigations, revealing patterns in discourse acts through question/answer sequences. These sequences control the flow of discourse, showcasing the power and control investigative police officers (IPOs) have over the suspects. Sadiq emphasises the significance of considering cultural and sociolinguistic factors in analysing language of interrogation. However, his study did not fully address the cultural diversity in Kano and how sociolinguistic factors influence

interrogative communication, suggesting a need for a more comprehensive analysis.

Farinde, Olajuyigbe and Adegbite (2015) examined discourse control strategies in police-suspect interrogations, highlighting the inherent power imbalance favouring IPOs. They argue that police interrogative discourse is a peculiar genre marked by power asymmetry and dominance. However, the study does not offer comparative analysis of different types of interrogations across various police departments, which could have provided deeper insights into how discourse-control strategies may differ based on crime severity.

Akinrinlola (2017) investigated deception in police-suspect interrogation in Ibadan, revealing how IPOs manipulate suspects to assert dominance. The study provides valuable insights but suggests that a larger sample size could reveal a wider spectrum of deceptive strategies used in various crime-related interrogations. This insight into deception as a tool of dominance calls for further examination of how different contexts and crime types influence deceptive tactics.

Negotiation tactics deployed during police-suspect interrogations in Ibadan were analysed by Sunday and Akinrinlola (2017). They identified communication strategies such as persuasion, threats, denial, deflection and justification. The study highlighted the complexity of negotiation in these interactions and the role of power dynamics. However, exploring negotiation tactics in interactions between police and suspects can vary, depending on the specific city or cultural context within the country.

In their study, Hartwig, Granhag, Stronwall & Kronkvist (2006) investigated the effectiveness of strategic disclosure in detecting deception. They argue that deceptive suspects respond differently to strategic disclosures than truthful ones. The study's reliance on controlled laboratory experiments and simulations might limit its applicability to real-world deception complexities. There is a need for real-world application and testing to better understand how strategic disclosure operates in practical forensic settings.

Leahy-Harland & Bull (2017) focused on real-life serious crime interviews, showing that rapport, empathy and open-ended questions increase the likelihood of confessions, while trauma descriptions and negative queries reduce it. The study revealed varied suspect responses, from denial to full confession. However, situational factors affecting these responses were not explored deeply. Investigating the reasons behind diverse response patterns, like resistance or compliance, could provide valuable insights into interview dynamics, highlighting the need for more situational analyses in future research.

Deception through student simulations was investigated by Colwell, Hiscock-Anisman, Memon, Woods & Michlik (2006). They differentiated between deceivers and truth-tellers. Deceivers relied on cooperation, excessive details and emotional expressions, while truth-tellers provided consistent, accurate information. The study assessed credibility through behavioural cues and verbal strategies, but its controlled setting limits capturing the nuances of real-life deceptive situations. Examining these strategies in actual forensic contexts would enhance practical implications.

Masip & Herrero (2013) examined how serious crime suspects might manipulate their behaviour to appear innocent during behaviour analysis interview. The study's findings revealed that guilty respondents used evasive tactics, while innocent ones provided detailed, consistent responses. However, the hypothetical scenario limits real-world applicability. Additionally, the study overlooked factors, like personality and culture, which may influence suspects' responses.

Selepe, Lindegger & Govender's (2020) study explored the toxic discourses of sex offenders in Limpopo Province, South Africa, by showing how sex offenders invoke cultural norms that erroneously equate relationship status with sexual entitlement. The results revealed that most of the offenders often believed in the right to have sex, particularly with women they were in relationships with; they considered themselves victims of wrongful arrest. They employed discursive strategies such as denial, justification, victim-blaming and minimising their responsibility. Cultural assumptions about intimacy and relationships significantly influence crime narratives. In many African societies, patriarchal norms and misconceptions about consent perpetuate sexual violence. Therefore, understanding these cultural contexts is vital for investigators to navigate the complex narratives presented by ARs and to challenge the harmful beliefs that underpin sexual violence.

The works reviewed underscore the significance of understanding the pragmatic strategies employed by ARs, the socio-cultural and religious contexts, and the influence of power dynamics on investigative discourse. Addressing these gaps is crucial for preventing justice perversion and enhancing forensic discourse in Nigeria.

3. Theoretical framework

Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory served as the theoretical anchor. Mey emphasises the vital role of situational context for effective speech acts. In this theory, a pragmatic act can be a speech act, but not all speech acts are pragmatic acts due to their multi-dimensional nature. Similarly, Mey's pragmatic