

Epistemicity and Evidentiality with Pragmatic Strategies in Newspaper Headlines on Spousal Conflicts in Nigeria

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Abstract

The marriage institution is believed to be the smallest unit of society, although, it is at the same time one of the most conflict-ridden units, with consequences of the conflict affecting diverse aspects of human existence. This has attracted scholarly attention from scholars of different disciplinary perspectives. However, the linguistic insight into spousal conflict has been scarce. This study therefore seeks to analyse newspaper headlines on spousal conflict in Nigeria in order to determine the stance-taking and pragmatic strategies contained therein. Twenty newspaper headlines from four famous Nigerian online newspapers were downloaded from the websites of: Punch Newspapers, Vanguard News, The Guardian and Tribune Online Newspapers. The headlines were transcribed and subjected to linguistic analysis using a triangulation of the stance theory by Biber et al. (1999) and Hyland (2005) as well as Odeunmi and Oyelede's (2016) Pragmatic Strategies. The findings reveal two stance types: Epistemic and Evidential stances which were pragmatically realised through three pragmatic strategies: Reference to Facts, Evocation of Antecedence and Quoting/Naming Authority. The study concludes that newspaper headlines are projected from semantic defined stances realised through the pragmatic interests of the reporters.

Keywords: Marriage, Stance, Pragmatic Strategies, Spousal Conflict, Newspaper headlines

Introduction

Headlines of newspapers, also called 'caption' are attractively designed news summary intended to induce or attract the attention of the readers to desire reading the news contents. The headlines are purposely shaped to speak the mind of the presenter or publisher. The shape and structure of

a headline reflects the content, which is politically oriented and ideology-driven. The nature of the news headline can tell the whole story, can question issues or be questioned. According to van Dijk (1998), the discourse of newspaper headlines can be looked at from the position of the headline, the boldness of the headline, the vocabulary used on the headline, the use of punctuation marks, the syntax of the headline, the number of occurrences on the same event and above all, the power of the presenter. He also states that headlines serve three important functions. First, they provide a brief summary of the main news to the reader; hence, readers do not have to read the whole story to capture the point. Second, they attract attention. Headlines distract people's attention by various font sizes and vocabulary used. And third, they often provide an initial indicator of the content and style of the news value of the newspaper (van Dijk 1998). This shows various ways in which newspaper headlines appeal to its audience.

Some scholars have found this aspect of news reportage very interesting. Anyanwu *et al.* (2022) using content analysis carried an investigation on Nigerian newspaper coverage of Covid-19. The Guardian and Vanguard News newspapers were chosen for analysis. The aim of the study is to measure the level of awareness created by the newspapers and the attitude of government and citizens to the COVID-19 course. It was found that the headlines reflect indifference to the disease by both the government and citizens despite the level of awareness created by the newspapers in comparison with other countries. The current study, however, is not comparative and its focus is on spousal conflicts in Nigeria using both Semantic (stance) and pragmatic tools. Taiwo's (2007) is a Critical Discourse Analysis of Nigerian newspaper headlines. The study relied on three hundred Nigerian newspaper headlines randomly selected for its analysis, and the vocabulary and rhetorical features were examined as devices used which reflects the ideologies behind their constructions. The study concludes that "headlines have hidden ideological meanings, being divided along some ideological lines reflecting the views of those whose interest is being served and those whose interest is being undermined". Thus, headlines are a tool for shaping thoughts and perceptions on topical issues of society.

The language of newspaper headlines has been investigated from various perspectives as acknowledged by Shu and Wei (2022), but not much has been done on its representation of spousal abuse, and particularly on how stance and pragmatic strategies are interwoven into the headlines to engage and persuade readers. To undermine this gap is to overlook the linguistic-

mediatic representation of stances on spousal conflicts encrypted in the ‘objective’ use of language in news headlines, which has the potential to shape the thoughts and attitudes of readers towards spousal conflicts, or even their entire opinion on marriage. Thus, this paper seeks to unravel the use of language to create epistemic and evidential stances along with pragmatic in newspaper headlines on spousal conflicts.

Linguistic Studies on Marriage and Marital Conflicts

Some linguistic studies have examined linguistic features in some spousal and spousal conflict discourses. Calderwood (2017) investigated the semantics of the narratives of Interpersonal Violence from the perspectives of linguistics and psychology using Reader Annotations and Physiological reactions. The linguistic result shows how readers process and label roles in IPV discourse such as when abuses are linked to violent actions and some affect states. This labelling was observed by the researchers through automated semantic role labelling. The study shows that certain affect states and semantic role labelling are often employed in IPV discourses. Eze et al. (2013), however, focused on a literary text. Using Grice’s Conversational Maxims, they aimed at exploring how knowledge and compliance to the “Conversational Maxim” can aid to foster marriage relationships in Nigeria. Using the play, "Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again" by Ola Rotimi, they find that there are certain ways couples should not converse in order to reduce conflicts and divorce. Similarly, Haryono and Winisono (2020), using Hymes’ “Ethnography of Communication” and Politeness Principle, interrogated the linguistic issues with cultural underpinning that trigger marital conflict leading to divorce. The data comprise non-participation and recorded interviews. They found that some sensitive matters that can trigger marital conflict include lack of inter-ethnic cultural understanding inputting on the violations of politeness and cooperation principles leading to conflicts.

Observably, there has been a growing interest in the study of spousal conflicts as observed in literature. While most of the non-linguistic studies (e.g. Frye 2018, Ali et al. 2022) have paid particular attention to the social and psychological effects of spousal conflicts, linguistic studies (Calderwood 2017, Haryono and Winisono 2018, Owu-Ewie 2019 etc.) have analysed the discourses of wedding/marital ceremonies, spousal conflicts in literary texts and the use of proverbs in spousal unions. Meanwhile, studies on media/ newspaper headline reportage on spousal conflicts have been largely neglected, with a rare use of the stance theory and

pragmatics. The newspaper headlines on spousal conflicts manifest the use of semantic and pragmatic strategies, but regrettably, enough scholarly attention has not been paid to this pervasive style of news reportage. This gap, if un-investigated, may undermine the role which the media plays in featuring and relating events regarding marital conflicts. Thus, this study examines how stance is realized through pragmatic strategies in newspapers' headlines on spousal conflicts in Nigeria using a triangulation of the stance theory by Biber *et al.* (1999) and Hyland (2005) as well as Odebunmi and Oyelede's (2016) Pragmatic Strategies.

Stance in Semantics and Pragmatics

Shi and Wei (2022) commented on the development of the field of stance-taking: from the 1970s, several studies on stance-taking have been carried out thereby developing the area into a tangible aspect of linguistics, with three main themes in the studies on stance-taking from previous scholars. According to the authors, the first theme focuses on the theoretical underpinnings and analytical methods on stance-taking, and an example is Biber & Finegan's (1989) proposing three categories of stance markers; Hyland (2005) has further created an analytical framework for stance markers from an academic discourse point of view, while Du Bois (2007) has developed the "stance triangle" from a dialogic perspective; the second theme, however, takes on comparative studies on stance-taking, including stance-taking expression between different genders, genres, cultural backgrounds or disciplines by linguists such as Neff *et al.* (2003) and Martínez (2005) contrasting the stance markers between users of native speakers and foreign language learners; and Coates (1996) who locates the similarities and differences in the use of stance markers by males and females; the third theme, lastly, focuses on the diachronic study of stance markers, and such includes Biber (2004), who examines the use of stance markers in plays, letters, medical articles, and newspapers between 1650 and 1990.

Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu (2022), commenting on the terminological differences between 'stance', 'perspective' and 'view point' argues that they are basically the same. According to him, stance-taking is inherent in verbal communication, and it comprises of both a subjective and an inter subjective side, as expressing a position on a certain matter is open to challenge or debate by others. He further argues that stance-taking is a multifaceted activity; it not only has a linguistic and discursive component, but includes sociocultural, epistemic, and psychological components. Englebretson (2007) also stressed that stance-taking has a cross-cultural, cross-linguistic,

historical, and a developmental nature. Some other notable works on stance were included in Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu (2022) volume; Hoinărescu (2022) interrogated the persuasive force of epistemic markers of certainty in a collection of debates from the British and the Romanian parliaments. She brought forward some functional similarities and differences, arguing that the markers express not only the speakers' discursive and rhetorical commitment, but also the political stance which they are engaged with.

In addition, Shi and Wei (2022) carried out a small corpus-assisted semantic inquiry on the linguistic epistemic markers and attitudinal stance markers of English and Chinese news headlines discussing the feasible similarities and differences. Using Biber *et al.* (1999) theoretical framework, their results reveal that, in the Chinese news headlines, certainty stance markers and evidentiality markers are frequently used. But, in English news headlines, hedging stance markers and evaluation stance markers appear more. Stance has also been highlighted by some pragmatists. For example, studies have been carried out on pragmatic strategies employed by speakers to negotiate meaning in interaction. Odebunmi (2008) investigated the pragmatic strategies employed in diagnostic news delivery in the south western part of Nigeria. Following Meynard (2003, 2004 etc.), the study finds that pragmatic strategies namely 'asserting the condition', 'citing the evidence' and 'mitigating the blunt news through veiling and hedging' are utilized in diagnostic news delivery. Notably, there are pragmatic strategies in every sphere of human interaction not only in the health sector, but also in the news.

Ellah and Ekoru (2018) carried out an investigation of stance taking and pragmatic strategies utilized by editors in their editorials on herds-men and farmers' crises of Benue State. The researcher found out that the use of 'evocation of antecedent' (EA), 'strategic use of numbers' (SUN), 'quoting authority' (QA), 'appeal to emotions' (AE) 'indirect condemnation' (IC), blunt condemnation (BC), 'visual representation' (VR), and 'revelation of facts' (RF) are pragmatic strategies corresponding to the epistemic, evaluative, evidential and affective stances. Thus, the study concluded that editors take stances in their editorials that reveal their levels of certainties, value judgements, and affections to the events they write about. Also, Innocent and Odebunmi (2016) examined the stance and engagements in conversations on terrorist attacks on a social media platform called 'Nairaland'. Using the appraisal framework, they found out that negative evaluations are often associated with the group called 'Boko Haram', and the northerners are

often evaluated as 'evil'. The study concluded that these evaluations reflect the opinions of many Nigerian citizens, and they are capable of fostering disunity and unrest among the Nigerian citizens.

Thus, both semanticists and pragmatists have found some solid interests in the stance theory and some have attempted to merge both semantic and pragmatic models to the understanding of stance like the present study, but there are just few works that focused on media discourses let alone the mediatic representations of spousal conflicts.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical consideration for this study is the stance theory by Biber *et al.* (1999) and Hyland (2005) and an aspect of the 'Pragmatic Act' theory known as Pragmatic Strategies. The motivation for combining these approaches is to identify the semantic expression of stance used in the headlines and to reveal the pragmatic strategies through which the stances are realised. This provides a semantic inventory of newspaper headlines on spousal conflicts and the pragmatic intentions behind their creations. The data for the study contain twenty (20) purposefully selected news headlines collected between March 2021 and March 2023. This period marks the time span of the Guardian Newspaper report of March 2023 stating that 4,860 cases of spousal conflict has been reported. The headlines were collected from four different online newspapers in Nigeria: Punch Newspapers, Vanguard News, The Guardian, and Tribune Online. They were selected because of their wide coverage of readership across Nigeria and the reputation they have built over the years.

Methodology

The approach of the data analysis for this study is qualitative. This method is used to describe, interrogate and interpret the stance markers and the pragmatic strategies contained in the data. The headlines are carefully examined, and the words and expressions indicating epistemicity and evidentiality are categorised based on the stance theory (Biber *et al.* 1999, Hyland 2005) and subjected to pragmatic analysis. The two stance types for this study are the Epistemic and the Evidential, while the pragmatic strategies include: 'revelation of facts' (RF) 'evocation of antecedent' (EA) and 'quoting of authority' (QA) (Odeunmi and Oloyede, 2016; Ellah and Ekoru, 2018).

Data Analysis: Stance Types and Pragmatic Strategies

The table contains columns showing the texts (newspaper headlines), the stance markers, and the stance types from the data. The last column comprises the pragmatic strategies used to realize the stance.

TABLE SHOWING THE STANCE TYPES AND THE PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES THROUGH WHICH THEY ARE REALIZED

S/N	N/P Headline	Stance Marker	Stance Type	Pragmatic Strategy
1.	Court remands Lagos car dealer, Ogbonna, over wife' death.	Lagos, Car Dealer, Ogbonna	Epistemic (Certainty)	Reference to Facts
2.	Danish man sentenced to death for killing Nigerian wife, child.	Danish Nigerian		
3.	20-year-old wife stabs husband to death in Adamawa	20-year-old wife Adamawa		
4.	Ogun man kills wife, burns corpse with iron	Ogun man		
5.	Rivers: Wife stabs husband to death over misunderstanding	Rivers		
6.	Woman allegedly machetes husband to death in Rivers	Allegedly		

7.	Police arrest Nnewi North LG Chairman, who allegedly killed wife	Allegedly	Epistemic (Hedging)	Evocation of Antecedence
8.	Husband allegedly killed wife in Edo, as deceased family seeks justice	Allegedly`		
9.	Kuje: Osinachi's husband still in Custody– Correctional service	Kuje Correctional service	Evidentiality (Marking the source of knowledge)	Quoting/ Naming of Authority
10.	Oyo police arrest woman for stabbing husband to death	Oyo police		
11.	I mistakenly crushed my wife with car, killer husband tells police	Police		
12.	Man arraigned for burning wife, brother-in-law to death	Arraigned	Evidentiality (using words from the law register)	Reference to Facts
13.	Lawyer backs arrest of Osinachi's husband, demands justice	Lawyer Arrest Justice		
14.	How my wife dumped	_ Julius Agwu		

	me_ <i>Julius Agwu</i>		Evidentiality	
15.	How husband caught with side chick announced wife's death– <i>Brother</i>	– Brother	(Tracing statement to an individual)	Reference to Facts
16.	My wife abandoned me for 12 years, man tell court	, man		
17.	My husband threatened to kill me – Divorce-seeking woman	–Divorce-seeking woman		
18.	How I killed my wife with axe, cut off daughter's hand–	I My	Evidentiality	
19.	I left my husband because I thought I could do better	I	(Use of personal pronouns)	Quoting/Naming Authority
20.	My husband's second wife doesn't know I exist	My I		

Discussion of Findings

This section comprises the discussion of findings emanating from the analysis of data. As could be seen from the table, Epistemic and Evidential stance types are found in the analysed headlines, along with pragmatic strategies through which they are realized.

A. Epistemic Stance Denoting Certainty or Hedge

An Epistemic stance reveals the level of certainty, doubt or the degree to which a speaker or writer commits himself to a proposition. A proposition is a statement or assertion that expresses a judgement or opinion. It is also often interchanged as 'sentence'. Epistemic stances are used in different contexts i.e. when a spousal conflict case has undergone trial and sentences are declared as well as when the suspects are still on trial. From its usage in the analysed headlines, the epistemic stance can be further subdivided into *certainty* and *hedging*. The prominent pragmatic strategies used for the realization of the Epistemic stance type are the Revelation of facts (RF) and Evocation of Antecedent (EA).

i. Certainty Explicating Assurance

Certainty markers are words that show the stance taker's degree of assurance towards a particular proposition. Certainty markers are often used to show the writer's commitment to some information with linguistic devices such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc. Below are texts from the data with certainty markers:

Text 1: Court remands *Lagos car dealer, Ogbonna*, over wife' death (1st Feb. 2023, *Vanguard News*)

Text 2: *Danish* man sentenced to death for killing *Nigerian* wife, child (20th May, 2022, *Punch Newspapers*)

It is observed from the texts above that reporters oftentimes express certainty towards an information in order to enhance its credibility and acceptability to readers. In Text 1, the writer demonstrates the knowledge of the incidence with linguistic devices that express certainty ('Lagos' 'car dealer', 'Ogbonna'). To ensure the credibility of the news, a known place is indicated with the proper noun, "Lagos" which functions as an adjective in the text. The occupation and name of the alleged suspect are also stated (car dealer, Ogbonna). The use of such linguistic elements adds some sense of credibility to the headlines as they appear factual to readers. Also, the national adjectives "Danish, Nigerian" in Text 2 appear to demonstrate the reporter's certainty towards the death of a woman and a child as well as the identity of the killer. With no further ado of checking the details of the news, many readers (as observed in literature) will go on with a perception of belief on the news because of the certainty portrayed through selected linguistic devices such as proper nouns and adjectives. These devices suggest the fact

that the writers of the news headlines have the knowledge and information and are certain of what and who they are writing about in the society. The pragmatic strategy used here is Reference to Facts showing the writer's knowledge of the incidence while resonating the (epistemic) knowledge of readers for alignment. With the use of 'factual' adjectives as "Nigerian", "Danish" and nouns as "Ogbonna" and "Lagos", the headline writers align readers to the position that these statements are true and reliable. Thus, the reporters employ Reference to Facts to engage with their readers and express their certainty towards stories of spousal conflicts collected from the Nigerian society.

ii. Hedging Signifying Doubt or Enclosure

The use of hedges is common in news reportage (Biber et al.1999) as reporters sometimes, try to avoid directly accusing suspects who have not been prosecuted in the court of law. The frequently used hedge contained in the data is "allegedly."

Text 6: Woman *allegedly* machetes husband to death in Rivers (28th Oct. 2021, *Vanguard News*)

Text 7: Police arrest Nnewi North LG Chairman, who *allegedly* killed wife (17th Aug. 2022, *Tribune Online*)

The use of hedges (written in italics) as seen in texts 6 and 7 above, shows the reporter as an objective viewer of the scene or a distant but trusted informant. In Text 6, the hedge 'allegedly' offers the reader a transient view of the incident i.e. the woman who is still a suspect, at least temporarily, is not declared accused in the law court yet, but she could have done the killing. However, it is noted that the epistemic stance of certainty sometimes overshadows the hedge or doubt by giving the reader a firm perspective, while narrowly escaping the tendency to render the suspect as guilty of the offence. For instance, the certainty expressed by adding the state where the crime was committed (Rivers State) gives the reader more information on the incidence and this can ensure the believability that the incidence of *macheting* is true despite the use of a hedge (allegedly). This is also observed in Texts 7 where nouns indicating known names, 'Nnewi North LG Chairman', alongside 'allegedly' is employed in the creation of the headlines. Nonetheless, it is 'safer' for headline writers or reporters to write this way using a hedge to avoid accusing a

suspect who may be later tried and found ‘not guilty’ in the court of law and consequently be found culpable of publishing false news.

The pragmatic strategy that commonly follows a hedge is the Evocation of Antecedence. The event that leads to the death of the victim, ‘husband’ in sample 6 was the *macheting* which is an antecedence to the present event_ the death of a man. Also, in text 7, the antecedence -death of a woman was pronounced through the hedge, ‘allegedly’ before the present event_ arrest. Therefore, the antecedence is required in the headlines to balance the previous scenario to the present event and to give readers a sense of factual representation of an event while giving some space for variant interpretations through the use of a hedge.

Hedging is important for society because of the manifold implication involved in producing false statements meant for public consumption. In fact, if caught publishing false news, the news company can lose its license subsequently. Thus, it is ‘harmless’ to include a hedge such as ‘alleged’ in crime writing especially on spousal conflicts.

B. Evidential Stance Denoting Factuality

An evidential stance refers to the writer's provision of the source of knowledge or reverential facts to support his stance. The pragmatic strategies employed here from the data are the quoting of authority (QA) and revelation of facts (RF). Journalists or news writers assume this stance to provide a legal or factual backup to support their statements. This is evident in the following headlines:

Text 9: *Kuje: Osinachi's husband still in Custody– Correctional service* (12th July 2022, *Punch Newspapers*)

Text 10: *Oyo police arrest woman for stabbing husband to death* (25th Nov. 2022, *The Guardian*)

Text 11: I mistakenly crushed my wife with car, killer husband tells *police* (2nd June, 2022, *Punch Newspapers*)

Text 9 evidentially provides information contrary to the opinion of many Nigerians about the escape of Osinachi's husband from prison. At the event of prisoners' escape from Kuje prison which happened on the 5th of July 2022 coinciding with the case of a gospel singer's death

attributed to her husband as culpable homicide, rumours had it that the late singer's husband joined the other prisoners in the escape. However, the headline here informs citizens of a contrary information about the whereabouts of the culprit_ he is still in custody. The evidential marker used here comprises the name of the prison 'Kuje' and the name of the authority, 'correctional service' which was preceded by a hyphen. By adding such evidences or source of knowledge, alarmed citizens may be rest assured that the proposition of the headline is true and factual. In Texts 10 and 11, the names of legal authorities (court, Oyo police, police) are inherently stringed with other words in the statement. Though different in structure from Text 9, they serve the same function which is to authenticate the fact of the proposition contained in the headline.

The pragmatic strategy employed here is the quoting or naming of authority which is done to point readers to social authorities associated to the news. 'Naming authority' happens when the words in the newspaper headlines are not direct quotes, but with events that can be traced to a specific authority. This happens as a result of the space limitation in the writing of newspaper headlines; many reporters prefer not to quote, but to add the names of the authority in the headline for authentication. Again, for space limit, some reporters prefer to use some terms in the register of law as a legal backing to the statements presented in their headlines. Such words include, 'arrested', 'arraigned', 'remanded', and so on as observed in the texts below:

Text 12: Man *arraigned* for burning wife, brother-in-law to death (7th Feb. 2023 *Punch Newspapers*)

Text 13: *Lawyer* backs *arrest* of Osinachi's husband, demands *justice* (11th April 2022)

The words, "arraigned", "lawyer", "arrest" and "justice" in the texts above are from the law register indicating that the propositions have some legal backing, thereby presenting the information as factual. However, in the following texts, the stance takers do not name any authority, but they provide evidences through the pragmatic strategy, revelation of fact. This is done by tracing the event of the proposition to an individual that is related to the event or scene of the spousal conflict. So, to mark the source of knowledge or information, reporters on spousal conflict news sometimes prefer to report victims' utterances or people related to the event often

without the use of quotation marks and usually with a hyphen or comma to indicate the source of the statement. Example:

Text 14: How my wife dumped me_ *Julius Agwu* (11th Dec. 2022, *Punch Newspapers*)

Text 15: How husband caught with side chick announced wife's death–
Brother (24th Sept. 2022, *Punch Newspapers*)

Similar to the above texts is another type of evidentiality demonstrated with the use of the personal pronouns, "I", "me", "my" and so on as seen in the following texts:

Text 18: How *I* killed my wife with axe, cut off daughter's hand– (11th March, 2023, *Punch Newspapers* **derived from an interview**).

Text 19: *I* left my husband because *I* thought *I* could do better (13th March, 2022, Vanguard News).

Text 20: *My* husband's second wife doesn't know *I* exist (2nd February, 2022, Vanguard News).

The difference between the above texts and the previous is that the writers attach no source to the statements (if at all they were made) except for Text 18 containing a hyphen which indicates an unknown source. This style is perceivably, an invitation by the reporters for readers to click in and view the details of the news, which also means spending more time on the news sites. However, it is observed that most of these statements are paraphrased by reporters who prefer to use the active reporting voice instead of the passive voice (e.g. "how I killed", instead of 'Wife killed by...' and so on) to further increase the density of the incidence and to align the subject to directly participate in the crime committed. For instance, Text 18 is a headline derived from an interview with the suspect who admits to killing the wife. However, the expression of the news headline was not found verbatim in the statements of the interviewee captured in the news story (though this is not the focus of the present study). The pragmatic strategy employed here is the Reference to Facts. The pronoun "I" associated with a statement increases the believability of an expression and it is often interpreted in association with the supposed speaker. Reporters utilize this method to show that the event is true and can be traced to an individual who admits to the spousal crime or stands as a victim of the conflict.

Thus, evidential stance is useful in the writing of news headlines through the pragmatic strategies of Quoting of Authority and Reference to Facts because information attached to a source in the society is often viewed as true. This, perceivably, helps the news writers or reporters to be 'invisible' and to avoid being socially 'entangled' with the information presented in the news.

Conclusion

This study has accounted for stance types that mark epistemicity and evidentiality and has detailed the pragmatic strategies through which the stances are deployed with some implications for society. Selecting newspaper headlines from four widely recognized online newspapers in Nigeria and analysing them through the stance theory and pragmatic strategies, the study establishes that spousal conflicts newspaper headlines are not disconnected from the reporters' points of view or perceptions. The study also reveals that the stance types evident in the newspaper headlines are associated with three pragmatic strategies namely: Reference to Facts, Evocation of Antecedent and Quoting/naming of Authority.

In sum, the arguments of this study are to further the claim that news writers or reporters express their stances in newspaper headlines especially on spousal conflict as well as to establish the link between stance and pragmatic strategies_ which are rare adventures in linguistic studies. It is quite succinct to note that reporters also make stances in the creation of news headlines for epistemic and evidential purposes, and their verbal selections contribute to readers' interpretations. Nonetheless, the account of this study is necessarily a partial one, representing only a fragment of newspaper headline (spousal conflict). Also, the stance and pragmatic methods selected for the analysis are not broad enough to encompass linguistic and non-linguistic items such as font type and font size, boldness, space, structure, style, context etc. This calls for further research which may investigate these areas. Thus, it is hoped that this study has demonstrated that stance and pragmatic strategies are interwoven in the way reporters carve new headlines on spousal conflicts in Nigeria. The models used here show how news writers anticipate and control their readers responses towards the event contained in the news headlines.

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