

# A Lexico-Grammatical Study of Cybercrime Discourse in Crime-Related Newspaper Reports

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## Abstract

*Today, the internet and other information technology tools are now widely accepted and used to engage in personal communication and conduct business activities. As beneficial and useful these technological tools are, they also contribute to several Internets assisted crimes known as cybercrimes. Cybercrime is a threat to the development of a nation as it results in the loss of financial resources for the individuals, business organizations and government and also scares away foreign investors. The internet continues to pay a significant role both in encouraging people as well as in diverting attention away from usage of language. Since English language is considered as the major language in reporting the worrisome developments of cybercrimes in the various sectors in Nigeria Newspapers, it becomes imperative to investigate the language use in internet banking and cybercrime reports. This constitutes the main objective of this paper. In carrying out the analysis, the grammatical model of lexico-grammar was adopted for the study. In applying this method, a demonstration of how some lexico-syntatic items function as cohesive devices in the cybercrime report of Premium Times of Sept. 10, 2020 was carried out. Findings show that a linguistic analysis of the language of cybercrime discourse is capable of contributing to readers understanding of the message of such a report which will help in curbing this social menace threatening the economy of the country. Recommendations are offered on how to curb the rising incidents of this menace. The Paper concludes that the alarming rate at which cybercrime is increasing globally and its attendant negative consequences call for collaborative efforts of the individuals, business organizations, Nigeria government and the international community.*

*Keywords:* internet, cybercrime, threat, lexico-grammar, newspaper reports

## Introduction

In this era of technological advancement, the internet and other information technology tools are now widely accepted and used to engage in personal communication and conduct business activities. While these developments allow enormous productivity, efficiency and communication, they also create a loop-hole which may totally destroy an organization (Omodunbi, 2016:38). A recent statistics revealed that about 28.9% have access to the internet in Nigeria (Hassan et al, 2012:626). It was also proven that 39.6% African users of internet are

actually Nigerians, hence, the high increase in the rate of internet crime in the country (Hassan et al, *ibid*).

The cashless policy of Nigeria has made cybercrime one of the most dangerous crimes that are destroying the reputation of the country. Cybercrime is any crime committed with the aid of a computer network and exploits vulnerabilities of both electronic devices and their users. The term cybercrime can be used to describe any criminal activity which involves the computer or the internet network (Okeshola, 2013:98). Cybercrime includes bank verification number scams, fraudulent emails, hacking, cyber harassment, spamming, ATM spoofing, social media hi-jacking etc.

Cybercrime is a serious threat to the economy of a nation and also hinders foreign investments. The estimated annual financial loss in Nigeria due to cybercrime was put at N250 billion (\$649 million) in 2017 and N288 billion (\$800 million) in 2018. The high rate of unemployment and the quest for quick wealth are the two major factors which drive individuals towards cybercrimes. Cybercrimes are carried out by people of all ages ranging from young to old, but in most instances the young.

The first published report of cybercrime occurred on the mainframe computer in the 1960s (Matanmi, 2013:45). This was referred to as computer crime because the crime was not connected to the internet or with other computers. Cybercrime has become a strong issue that is reported almost every day in Nigeria newspapers. It is a serious crime that should not be overlooked by the government, corporate bodies and individuals.

The role of English language to print media writing in Nigeria is very significant. The modern media of mass communication like the newspapers are important source of information (Ademola-Adeoye, 2014:339). The print media use English as a medium of communication to send the ideas and thoughts of the people to a large number of audiences. This is anchored on the fact that English is the official language in Nigeria. Presently, a number of newspapers are written in indigenous languages like Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, over 90% are written in English language. A good knowledge of the language use in newspaper reports is a prerequisite to comprehend the meaning of the message contain therein.

Over the years, e-fraud or cybercrimes have continued to supply research efforts and abundant research materials. The extant literature consists of studies that have examined and investigated causes of frauds and their prevention strategies from the perspective of outsiders to financial instructions (John et al, 2021, Fernades, 2013); the perspective of the victims (Van Dijk et al, 2010); and E-fraud in Nigeria banks (Oladele et al, 2020) and with little scholarly attention on language of cybercrime discourse; especially considering the importance of

English in reporting the worrisome developments of cybercrimes in the various sectors in Nigeria. This study intends to fill this gap by examining the language use in writing cybercrime report in Nigerian newspapers.

## Literature Review

### Conceptual review

Internet banking is now widely accepted and used in conducting business activities and payments of all kinds. It provides easy access to one's account from anywhere in the world. However, the advent of the internet and global adoption of e-payment platforms as preferred means of payment have necessitated the upsurge of e-fraud occurrences in Nigeria. E-fraud which is also known as cybercrime is any act designed to dispossess others of financial resources (Oladele et al, 2020). It is a fraudulent collection of payment card details using typically a small electronic device called skimmer. Other various means through which e-fraud are perpetrated include phishing, pharming, SIM swap fraud, smishing/vishing and account takeover.

There is an increase in cybercrime occurrences by 33% between 2016 and 2018. Also, the actual amount lost to cybercrime increased by 84% between 2016 and 2018. (NDIC, 2018). More than six high profile cybercrime cases took place in Nigeria between February and July, 2021.

English language is considered as the major language in reporting the worrisome developments of cybercrimes in the various sectors in Nigeria Newspapers. The internet continues to play a significant role both in encouraging people as well as in diverting attention away from usage of language. This is why it becomes imperative to investigate the language use in internet banking and cybercrime report. Studying the emergent language of internet banking and cybercrimes will contribute to the understanding of the message of such a report and help in curbing this menace that has eaten deep into the fabric of our society.

### Theoretical Background

Lexico-grammar, in Halliday's view, is regarded as a combination of words and grammar for the realization of the desired meaning. (Halliday 1994: 336). The resources of lexico-grammar, according to him, are very significant in the creation and interpretation of a text. It is found that although the grammar does not extend its compositional organization beyond the rank of clause, the resources of lexico-grammar make two fundamental contributions beyond the upper grammatical units of the creation of logogenetic patterns and the marking of

cohesion. Halliday explains further that the lexico-grammatical selections create logogenetic patterns at all ranks while lexico-grammar has evolved textual resources for creating cohesive links that have the ability to transcend grammatical units and indicate semantic relationships in the unfolding texts. (Halliday, *ibid*).

In Halliday's consideration of the lexico-grammar and semantic strata, he considers the clause as the upper bound of the lexico-grammatical system (the stratum of wording) while the text is viewed as the upper bound of the semantic stratum (the stratum of meaning). This attests to the fact that language is stratified into an ordered series of levels or strata that are related by realization. These structures and functions of language constitute the core strata of what Halliday referred to as Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Cohesion, for Halliday, is in two folds: First, the system of conjunction for marking textual transactions in the unfolding text and second, the system of reference, ellipsis and substitution and lexical cohesion for manipulating textual statuses of elements in the flow of information. Cohesion refers to the relationship between elements of a text where proper interpretation and understanding of one element depends on another.

Lexico-grammatical items identified in the report being investigated and which help to hold the report as meaningful texts are categorized and considered under two broad headings: Grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion.

Grammatical cohesion, most importantly, is achieved through referential elements. In most cases, the relation of co-referentiality is realized by the devices of reference. These include anaphoric reference, cataphoric reference and exophoric reference. Others include substitution, conjunction and ellipses.

Lexical cohesion is described by Halliday and Hassan (1976: 381) as 'phoric' cohesion that is established through the structure of the Lexis, or vocabulary and hence (like substitution) at the lexico-grammatical level.

## Methodology

In carrying out the analysis, linguistic approach is employed as the primary methodological tool. The grammatical model of lexico-grammar is adopted for the study. In applying this grammatical model for the analysis of data, I demonstrate how some lexico-syntactic items function as cohesive devices in the cybercrime report of Premium Times of September 10, 2020. The overall objective is to conceptualize language use in cybercrime discourse and educate the public on cybercrime activities. Recommendations are offered on how to curb the rising incidents of this menace in Nigeria.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

### Data presentation

For effective analysis and interpretation of the report which serves as data for the study, the report is organized into clause structure as follows:

#### Premium Times--online report

#### Man Caught with 2,886 ATM Cards at Lagos Airport

1. The anti-graft agency, EFCC, says it is investigating a suspected fraudster caught concealing 2,886 Automated Teller Machine (ATM) cards and four SIM cards in noodles while on his way to the United Arab Emirates, Dubai.
2. In a statement signed by the EFCC spokesperson, Dele Oyewale, Thursday, he said the suspect, Ishaq Abubakar, was arrested by the Nigeria Customs Service at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos, and handed over to the EFCC Lagos zonal office for investigation and prosecution.
3. The commission quoted the Customs Deputy Comptroller, Enforcement, Abudulmumuni Bako, as saying the suspect came from Kano State and wanted to travel via an Emirate flight.
4. "The Customs Deputy Comptroller, Enforcement, Abudulmumuni Bako, who represented the Customs Area Comptroller, A. Ma'aji, said that the suspect, who claimed to have come from Kano to travel to Dubai aboard the Emirate Evacuation flight, was seen with someone who was assigned to facilitate his movement through the airport checks.
5. "Officers of the Customs service intercepted the suspect with 2,886 ATM cards and four SIM cards, which he carefully concealed in parks of Noodles.
6. "This raised the suspicion of the officers who insisted he should be physically and thoroughly checked after the scan machine had revealed he was carrying parks (sic) of noodles," he said.
7. Meanwhile, the Lagos zonal head, AbdulRasheed Bawa, who received the suspect on behalf of the commission, assured that the commission would investigate the suspect and others.
8. According to him, "we have taken over Ishaq and I can assure you that we

are going to investigate the matter thoroughly and unveil everybody involved in the syndicate.

9. “There are a number of possibilities. There is an element of conspiracy, foreign exchange (FOREX) malpractices and money laundering.

## Data Analysis

For the purpose of presenting an explicit and systematic description of the report being investigated, the various concepts that highlight the features of the report are identified and described. Here I concentrate on lexico-grammar as realized by grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion.

### Grammatical cohesion

Grammatical cohesion, most importantly, is achieved through referential elements. In most cases, the relation of co-referentiality is realized by the devices of reference. Others include substitution, conjunction and ellipses.

### Reference

Reference is the meaning relationship that links full lexical expression of an entity together or circumstance with the pro-form/substitutes which refers to it (Morley, 1985:76). Three main markers by which reference is achieved in the report are anaphoric, cataphoric and exophoric.

### Anaphoric reference

It makes reference back to something which has already been stated. It makes use of substitute pro-forms and other markers to establish identity with the lexical element(s) in question. It may refer back to variety of different sizes and types of element. (Morley, *ibid*). The following examples are taken from the report being analyzed:

*‘It’ for ‘EFCC’ in*

*The anti-graft agency, EFCC, says it is investigating a suspected fraudster...*

*‘He’ for ‘Dele Oyewale’ in*

*In a statement signed by the EFCC spokesperson, Dele Oyewale, Thursday, he said...*

*‘He’ for ‘the suspects’ in*

*“Officers of the Customs service intercepted the suspect with 2,886 ATM cards  
and four SIM cards, which he carefully concealed in parks of Noodles.  
‘Him’ for ‘AbdulRasheed’ in  
...the Lagos zonal head, AbdulRasheed Bawa, who received the suspect...  
According to him, “we have taken over Ishaq and I can assure you that...”*

In all the examples above, the pronouns ‘it’, ‘he’ and ‘him’ are anaphoric references as they refer back to the different nouns in the report. In text 1, ‘it’ is in anaphoric reference to ‘EFCC’. The pronominal item, ‘he’ in text 2 refers back to ‘Dele Oyewole’, the EFCC spokesperson. The pronoun ‘him’ in clause 8 points backward to ‘AbdulRasheed Bawa’, the Lagos zonal head of EFCC mentioned earlier in clause 7. All these anaphoric elements contribute significantly to the explication and understanding of the report even when the reader does not probe into the context as these pronominal items easily link them back to the referred entity.

#### Cataphoric reference

Cataphoric reference points forward to something which is going to be specified more fully. It is a relationship between the pro-form and forthcoming clauses or nominal groups; a referential item that can be retrieved later in the text. A typical example is used here for exemplification:

*The anti-graft agency, EFCC, says it is investigating a suspected fraudster...  
while on his way to the United Arab Emirate, Dubai.  
In a statement signed by the EFCC spokesperson, Dele Oyewale,  
Thursday,  
he said the suspect, Ishaq Abubakar, was arrested by the Nigeria Customs Service...*

In this extract, ‘his’ appears in clause 1 and refers to the suspected fraudster whose identity was not disclosed to the reader until he gets to the next clause. The delay in the manifestation of the suspect’s identity creates suspense and the curiosity to read on to find out the name of the suspect to which the pronoun refers. The use of cataphora in this extract foreground important issues in the text, that is, the main actor in the report. This device enables the reader to look forward for the details of the information suspended at the beginning of the text.

### Exophoric reference

Exophora is a reference that takes us look outside the text. We have exophoric reference when the information required for interpreting some element in the text is not to be found in the text at all, but in the situation. “The interpretation of an implant device is said to be exophoric when the source for its interpretation lies outside the context and can only be found through an examination of the context” (Halliday and Hassan 1976:382). In my discussion of anaphoric reference in the previous section, I demonstrated how the use of pronouns such as *it*, *his* and *him* function in the report and operate on the shared knowledge of the context between the reporter and the reader. These cohesive devices help in achieving unity within the text using the context of situation as exemplified below:

*‘We’ in*

According to him, “we have taken over Ishaq and I can assure you that we are going to investigate the matter thoroughly...

In the above extract, the pronominal word ‘we’ performs dual exophoric roles. For example, it could refer to EFCC as an agency responsible for handling cybercrime and other related cases. In another sense, it could refer specifically to the officers in the department of the agency saddled with the responsibility of carrying out investigation of such crime. The effective interpretation of this text depends largely on the consideration and examination of the context of situation of the report.

### Substitution

Substitution is a formal relationship; it is the structural mechanism for signalling the connection between the full lexical expression and the pro-form/substitute. It should be noted that referential items, especially anaphora also perform the function of substitution; nevertheless, substitution helps to give another form of anaphoric cohesion in a text. Reference is thus a semantic relationship, whereas substitution is the relation of lexis and grammar. The following are examples of this cohesive device in the report:

*‘Fraudster’ in the first clause is substituted for ‘suspect’ in clauses 2, 5 and 7*

*‘EFCC’ in clauses 1 and 2 substituted for ‘the commission’ in clause 3*

*‘Syndicate’ in clause 8 substituted for ‘foreign exchange’ and ‘money laundering’ in clause 9*



### **Lexical cohesion:**

As earlier mentioned, lexical cohesion is described as ‘phoric’ cohesion that is established through the structure of the lexis, or vocabulary at the level of lexico-grammar. Two forms of lexical cohesion- Reiteration and Collocation are found prominent in this report.

#### **Reiteration**

Reiteration involves the stating of a word again and again in the same or different forms. This is achieved through repetition, synonyms and near synonyms. In the report being examined, the writer used reiteration as a cohesive marker to make his report accessible and meaning to his reader. This device operates both at the word and/or clausal levels. Examples of reiteration in the report are as follows:

#### **Repetition**

Words/ phrases repeated in the report include:

*‘EFCC’ - Clauses 1 and 5*

*‘ATM cards’ and ‘SIM cards’ – Clauses 1 and 2*

*‘The suspect’- Clauses 1, 3 and 7*

*‘Airport’ - Clauses 2 and 4*

*‘Investigate’- Clauses 1, 2 and 7*

The repetition of some words/phrases as indicated above is a linguistic choice of the writer for the purpose of laying emphasis on the subject of discourse. For instance, the repetition of ‘ATM cards’ and ‘SIM cards’ emphasis the devices being used by fraudsters to steal people’s money through the internet. ‘Suspect’ is repeated to emphasis the perpetrator. There is reiteration of ‘airport’ to indicate where the suspect was arrested while the repetition of ‘investigate’ shows that due process of law is being followed in the matter. ‘EFCC’ is repeated as point of emphasis indicating the government agency empowered by law to deal with such criminal case.

#### **Synonym or near synonym**

Synonym is a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language. It could also refer to a person or thing closely associated with a particular quality or idea that the mention of their name call it to mind.

Consider the following examples:

*Investigation is a synonym of prosecution.*

*Caught is closely associated with arrested*

*Reveal has the same meaning as unveil*

All the synonyms and near synonyms identified above indicate the dogged determination of the two government agencies, Nigeria Custom Service and EFCC to stop cybercrime in the society and deal with cybercrime criminals in Nigeria.

### Collocation

Lexical collocation is the semantic relation which certain words have with one another because they keep an identical environment. Lexical elements that collocate in a discourse relate harmoniously with lexical repetition or reiteration to give the effect of cohesion. Lexical collocation contributes significantly to the understanding of a discourse. These lexical items include whole/part and converses.

The lexical elements of whole/part and converses involve the natural grouping of words together, which help in transmitting and reinforcing the message in an aesthetically appealing manner. The following examples from the report will suffice.

### Whole/part

Examples:

*Crime: investigation*

*Flight: travel*

*Syndicate: malpractices*

*Foreign exchange: money laundering*

### Links

*We: EFCC*

*He: spokesperson.*

*Suspect: prosecution, investigation*

*Travel: flight, airport*

*ATM cards/SIM cards: cybercrime, suspect, fraudster*

**Converses**

*Conceal: unveil*

The natural grouping of all the lexical items of whole/part, links and converses identified above foreground and reinforce the message of the report.

**Implications/Conclusion**

As earlier stated, a good knowledge of the language use in newspaper reports is a prerequisite to comprehend the meaning of the message contain therein. The analysis carried out in this study has shown that a linguistic analysis of the language of cybercrime discourse is capable of contributing to readers understanding of the message of such a report. Comprehending the message of a cybercrime report will no doubt help in curbing this social menace threatening the economy of the country.

The impacts and negative effects of cybercrime are so grievous that drastic decisions and steps are needed to be taken to minimize and possibility eradicate this menace. Cybercrime affects the lives of the individuals as victims lose huge amount of money and personal information. Much start-ups businesses; small and medium-sized enterprises find it difficult to survive because of the unfavourable business environment as a result of cybercrime activities. At the nationally level, cybercrime destroys the economy of a nation and hinders her progress and development. Internationally, it discourages international investors and damages the reputation of a country in the committee of nations.

In view of the negative effect of cybercrime enumerated above, there is need for the individuals, corporate bodies and the government to take proactive steps in order to combat cybercrime in Nigeria. Individuals and the general public need to be educated on the mode of operations of cyber criminals. Awareness should be created for simple security tips such as having updated and recognized anti-virus software and ignoring emails or calls requiring financial details to help unblock cards or accounts.

Another step that can be taken to minimize this menace is the establishment of a risk-based cyber security framework and guidelines for deposit money banks and payment service providers. This framework which was introduced by the central Bank of Nigeria lays out proactive steps to secure critical information assets including customer information that is accessible via the internet. Additionally, a cyber-threat intelligence platform can be set up in partnership with relevant agencies such as Telecommunication Regulatory Agency (TRA), Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC), and Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC). Such platform will harbour an ecosystem that encourages information exchange and offers enhanced cyber threat intelligence solutions.

This will enhance cyber security and reduce the information asymmetry in the economy. Increased international law enforcement cooperation, tougher cyber security laws in several countries and penalties for nations that harbour cyber criminals will also go a long way in curbing cybercrimes in our society.

The alarming rate at which cybercrime is increasing globally and its attendant negative consequences calls for collaborative efforts of the individuals, business organizations and government. The economic growth of a nation and national security largely depend on a stable, safe and resilient cyberspace. There is therefore the need to take proactive steps to curb the menace before it consumes the entire nation.

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## Appendix

### Premium Times - Online



#### Man caught with 2,886 ATM cards at Lagos airport

By Kunle Sanni. September 10, 2020

The anti-graft agency, EFCC, says it is investigating a suspected fraudster caught concealing 2,886 Automated Teller Machine (ATM) cards and four SIM cards in noodles while on his way to the United Arab Emirate, Dubai.

In a statement signed by the EFCC spokesperson, Dele Oyewale, Thursday, he said the suspect, Ishaq Abubakar, was arrested by the Nigeria Customs Service at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos, and handed over to the EFCC Lagos zonal office for investigation and prosecution.

The commission quoted the Customs Deputy Comptroller, Enforcement, Abudulmumuni Bako, as saying the suspect came from Kano State and wanted to travel via an Emirate flight.

“The Customs Deputy Comptroller, Enforcement, Abudulmumuni Bako, who represented the Customs Area Comptroller, A. Ma’aji, said that the suspect, who claimed to have come from Kano to travel to Dubai aboard the Emirate Evacuation flight, was seen with someone who was assigned to facilitate his movement through the airport checks.

“Officers of the Customs service intercepted the suspect with 2,886 ATM cards and four SIM cards, which he carefully concealed in parks of Noodles.

“This raised the suspicion of the officers who insisted he should be physical-

ly and thoroughly checked after the scan machine had revealed he was carrying parks (sic) of noodles,” he said.

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“There are a number of possibilities. There is an element of conspiracy, foreign exchange (FOREX) malpractices and money laundering.