International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

A Stylistic Analysis of Reported Threat Messages in Ibadan, Oyo State Nigeria

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A B S T R A C T:

Threat messages are designed to inflict harm and have been underexplored in forensic linguistics, particularly in Nigeria. This study investigates the stylistic features of threat messages in Oyo State, Nigeria, emphasizing their identification, interpretation, and resolution. Lexico-grammatical aspect of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar serve as the theoretical framework for the research. The research analyses fourteen purposively selected written threat messages from the Nigeria Police headquarters, Ibadan and google with necessary permissions secured. Qualitative methods were employed for data organization and analysis. Findings indicate that authors of threat messages utilise specific stylistic patterns such as coinage(4), borrowing(6), intensifiers(8), varied sentence types, future tense(8), aggressive expressions(5) and personal pronouns(6) to instill fear and manipulate recipients. Understanding these features aids law enforcement in gathering critical clues and identifying threat authors. Recognizing these patterns can also empower individuals to respond effectively and seek support when confronted with such messages.

Key words: Threat messages, Forensic Linguistics, Systemic Functional Grammar, Nigeria Police force, Online platforms.

1.0 Introduction

Forensic linguistics is seen as the interface between language and the law (Gibbons &Turell, 2008). Forensic linguistics is the application of linguistic knowledge and techniques to legal and criminal investigations. It involves the analysis of language and linguistic evidence in legal cases to provide insights and support to the judicial process. Forensic linguists may assist in areas such as authorship identification, plagiarism detection, threat analysis, and interpretation of ambiguous or disputed language. According to Cooper (2015), forensic linguistics is the application of linguistic knowledge, methods, and insights into forensic context or law language, crime investigation, trial, and judicial proceedings. The goal of a forensic linguist is to uncover evidence in the language that has been utilised to help prove the guilt or innocence of an alleged criminal.

The linguistic characteristics of threat messages is crucial for law enforcement agencies, forensic experts, and legal professionals who are involved in investigating and prosecuting cases related to threats, harassment, stalking, or terrorism. By analysing the language and discourse found in these messages, the researcher aims to extract valuable information that can aid in identifying the sender, assessing the level of threat, and predicting potential actions or behaviors. Forensic linguists can assist in authorship attribution, determining the credibility and seriousness of threats, assessing the mental state of the sender, and providing expert testimony in court. Additionally, this research contributes to the development of forensic tools and techniques that aid law enforcement agencies in efficiently processing and interpreting threat messages in Nigeria. The study of stylistics features of threat messages is crucial for understanding the language dynamics involved in threatening communication. Throughout this study, the focus is descriptive, as the researcher aims to describe how language is used rather than to prescribe how it should be used, specifically in the context of threat texts as being part of a language-based evidence and investigative linguistics. Since linguistic features are sometime the only clues left by a perpetrator (Gales 2010:23), it is important that the field of forensic linguistics be researched in more depth in order to fill the gap in investigating forensic texts. The current developments in this regard in Nigeria are still limited, with only a small community of linguists conducting research in this area.

1.1 Statement of the problem

In recent years, there has been interest in the field of forensic linguistics in the world. Attention is being given to threat message as a forensic material because of the nature of damage and harm it causes the society and the forensic linguist aim to help the law enforcement agencies in the identification, interpretation and addressing threat messages. This attention has led many researchers to embark on similar research work such as: Kelly 2018, "The Phonetic and Linguistics Features used by Speakers to Communicate an Intent to Harm"; MH Surmon,2020 "Towards a Framework for Accessing Written Threat Text For Forensic Linguistic Purpose". Also, Katsvara, 2021 worked on "Forensic Linguistics of the features of Threat Messages in the Windhoek High court from 2014-2019. In Nigeria, various types of forensic texts have been discussed, but there has not been a specific study of the

stylistic features of a threat text as a concept in itself . However, it became apparent during the literature survey that studies on stylistic features of threat messages have received limited attention in Nigeria

1.2 Aim and objectives of the study

This study aims to examine threat messages based on the style and discourse features to provide insights for threat detection, interpretation and prevention. The objectives of the study are to:

analyselexical choices of authors of threat messages; andexamine grammatical structures to understand how they shape reception of threat messages

2. 0 Literature review

2.1 Threat

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), threat messages can be defined as stimuli or communication that elicit a perception of danger or harm, triggering an individual's stress response system. Threat messages may activate feelings of fear, anxiety, or a sense of vulnerability, potentially leading to cognitive, emotional, and physiological reactions associated with self-preservation and defense mechanisms. Gales (2015:3) defines a threat as "a social practice wherein the act endows one actor with power over the other". Since threat is a speech act which takes place between two or more person. At their core, threats are socially construed linguistic acts of power between two parties: the threatener and the threatened" (Gales, 2014:8). This is because it can be inferred that the idea of a threat is socially constructed. The analysis of threats can be conducted from a functional linguistic perspective because of its emphasis on "meanings that are expressed and the ways in which those meanings are expressed" (Thompson, 2014:7). This approach asserts that language is used to create meaning.

According to Solan and Tiersma (2005:224), threat frequently contains an "intention to personally commit an act" from the author. Threat is intentional criminal conduct, indicating a degree of personal responsibility for the act that will be committed or has already been committed (Solan&Tiersma, 2005:224). This is accomplished by foreseeing some sort of negative event. By providing knowledge about the conduct that the offender wants to commit, the author demonstrate intimidation by holding the victim inconvenient or uneasy. The warning is this potential for discomfort and injury (Solan&Tiersma, 2005:226). Threats are also made against prominent targets like politicians (Clullen et al., 2008; Dietz et al., 1991). Additionally, it is stated that users of social media websites like Facebook and Twitter use threatening language (Kwan and Skoric, 2013; Ronson, 2015).In studies about intimate relationship violence, threats are also frequently reported behaviours (Burczycka and Conroy, 2018).Surprisingly, threats are among the crimes that are least reported to the police (Van Kesteren et al., 2000), despite the fact that victims of threats frequently report these offences in person-based crime surveys (van Dijk, 2012).

2.1.1 Types of threat messages

2.1.1.2 Ransom notes

Ollyson, (2004) posits that ransom notes are accompanied by a demand. Ransom notes are a type of threat text that typically involve a demand for payment or some form of concession in exchange for the release of a hostage, the return of stolen property, or the restoration of compromised data. These notes are designed to instill fear, anxiety, and a sense of urgency in the recipient, compelling them to comply with the demands of the sender. Ransom notes can take various forms, ranging from letters to digital communications, and they have been used throughout history in different contexts. Physical ransom notes were commonly sent by mail or left at a predetermined location. These notes were typically composed of cut-out letters from magazines or newspapers to avoid identification by handwriting analysis. Physical ransom notes often included specific instructions on how to fulfill the demands, such as where to leave the demand or how to communicate further. Ransom note is a specific type of threat message that is typically used in criminal activities involving extortion. It is a written communication sent by an individual or a group demanding a ransom payment in exchange for the release of a person, or sensitive information.

2.1.1.3 Blackmailing notes

Solan and Tiersma (2005:223) remark that "[t]hreats are also an intimate part of the crimes of extortion and blackmail, where the victim consents to give money or property to the extortionist, but only because of his threat to do something bad to the victim in the future". Blackmailing notes are a form of threat message that involve the use of intimidation and coercion to manipulate individuals into complying with the sender's demands. This comprehensive note aims to explore the nature of blackmailing notes, their potential consequences, and the steps individuals can take to protect themselves. Olsson (2004:158) warns that one should be aware of the amount of harm that can come from blackmailers as "there is no limit to what blackmailers can and will demand of their victims".

2.1.1 4 Bribery

(Lindgren, 1992:169) states that bribery is usually referred to as "extortion under cover of office", where someone abuses his/her power with the intention of "a benefit" to "influence an official action". Bribery is defined as "the offering, giving, receiving or soliciting of something of value for the purpose of influencing the action of an official in the discharge of his or her public duties" (Black, 1990:191). This type of crime can include two types of language crimes and includes both the offering of the bribe and the acceptance of the bribe (Gibbons, 2003:263). A common way in which bribery is committed includes payments made in order to control the actions of the person receiving the payments. These payments are generally concealed by disguising it as a "commission", "reward", "finder's fee", "gratuity" or "a thank you" (Tillen&Delman, 2010:12).

2.2 Systemic functional grammar

During the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, Halliday conceptualized his approach to Systemic Functional Linguistics. His University of London professor, J. R. Firth, had a significant impact on his work. The "London School" of linguistics was established as a result of Firth's theories' widespread acceptance (Butler, 1985). The emphasis that was then widely held on Saussure's universal grammar was very different from Firth's work (Butler, 1985; Martin &Rothery, 1993). According to Saussure (1995), linguistics cannot possibly explore all of the meanings that a single speaker can make. In place of individual meaning creation, the emphasis needed to be on the rules of the language system (Bakhtin, 1986; Fairclough, 2003; Volshinov 1994). Systemic linguists are curious about how people use language on a daily basis to make social claims. Language is used for practical purposes, and one of those purposes is to convey meaning. These exchanged meanings are influenced by social and cultural circumstances. The term "semiotic process" refers to this method of determining meanings (Eggins, 1994,p.2)A "semiotic system" is how language is viewed by the systemic functional linguistics theory (SFL) (Halliday, 2007, p. 2). The theory is referred to as "systemic" because language is effective in creating a vast network of coordinated decisions that are expressed as system networks (Halliday, 2007). System networks present a 'tool-box' or resource for constructing meaning through lexical and grammatical decisions (Droga& Humphrey, 2003, p. 1). Consequently, linguistic decisions are made in order to convey meaning. SFL is utilized in practice as well as in theory (Droga&Humphrey, 2003).This enables people to complete tasks and many of their personal and social goals. Mode, field, and tenor are the three features that SFL highlights. They influence language usage in believable and predictable ways. In terms of practice, people often choose their language to accomplish three tasks at once: discourse about a specific subject (field), interact with others (tenor), and formulate a cogent thought (mode) vocally or in writing. Consequently, the register was attained (Butt et al., 2000; Martin, 2009).

Halliday (1973) pointed out that language is structured through the meanings it realize, which is composed of three kinds of meanings: interpersonal meaning, ideational meaning and textual meaning. He separated language's roles into three meta-functions based on these three categories of meaning: interpersonal meta-function, ideational meta-function, and textual meta-function. SFL linguists like Halliday and Matthiesen (2004) and Halliday and Hasan (1989) explain how the distinctive characteristics of a particular text differ and relate to a more general language system, whereas some SFL theory focuses exclusively on the three register metafunctions and how linguistic choices vary according to context. The analysis of data in this paper is based on the lexico-grmmatical aspect of systemic functional grammar.

3.0 Methodology

The research data comprised written threat messages reported to security agencies and shared on social media, including ransom notes and life threats. Data collection involved obtaining records from the Nigerian police and gathering messages from various online platforms with 14 messages selected purposively. The analysis utilized qualitative design, examining their lexical and grammatical features through Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. Challenges included limited online data and difficulties in accessing police records, as many threats go unreported. The researcher manually copied the messages to preserve their linguistic integrity. Data collection occurred from October to December 2023.

4.0 Data presentation and analysis

4.1 Lexico-grammatical features

Following Systemic Functional grammar (SFG), lexico-grammatical aspects refer to the ways in which meaning is realized via the mixture of words and the grammatical constructions in a language. These facets include both the preferences of particular phrases (lexical choices) and the corporation of those words into phrases, clauses, and sentences (grammatical choices). SFG emphasizes that both the lexical and grammatical options are prompted by the communicative reason of the language users. In SFG, lexico-grammatical elements are analyzed primarily based on three foremost metafunctions: the ideational metafunction, the interpersonal metafunction, and the textual metafunction. Each of these metafunctions is associated with special factors of that means and language use.

4.1.1 Lexical features

The analysis of the lexical features is examined in this section.

4.1.1.1 Coinages

Coinage refers to the creation of new words or expressions within a language. It is a process by which speakers generate novel lexical items to fulfill specific communicative needs or to describe new concepts, objects, or phenomena. Coinage occurs through various linguistic mechanisms, such as derivation, compounding, blending, borrowing, or back-formation

Coinages can be created spontaneously by individuals or intentionally introduced by language innovators, such as writers, poets, or advertisers. They can also arise as a result of cultural, technological, or social developments.The adoption and acceptance of coinages within a language depend on factors such as the linguistic community's familiarity with the new term, its usefulness, and its compatibility with the language's phonological, morphological, and semantic patterns.

Excerpt 1

"Ghana must go bag"

Excerpt 2

"Backyard"

Excerpt 3

"Scapegoat"

Excerpt 4

"Yeyebrity"

From excerpts above, authors of threat messages make use of coinages to create terms or phrases that are unlikely to be recognized or understood by others. This uniqueness can make it more challenging for law enforcement or investigators to identify or track down the origin of the threat, adding a layer of anonymity and protection for the authors. Also, it may be used to encrypt or code some messages that only they and the intended recipient understand. This can make it more difficult for others, such as law enforcement or third parties, to decipher the true meaning of the message and potential actions that may be required.

4.1.1.2 Lexical Borrowing

Borrowing is a process by which words or expressions are adopted from one language and incorporated into another. It involves the transfer of vocabulary from a source language to a recipient language, typically due to cultural contact or linguistic influence. In linguistics, borrowing is a process by which words or expressions are adopted from one language and incorporated into another.

Borrowed words can also undergo morphological changes, such as the addition of affixes or modifications in word formation processes. They can also undergo phonetic changes to align with the recipients language sound system.

Excerpt 1

"Oloshioloriburuku"

Excerpt 2

"Nimcimpoop"

Excerpt 3

"Agidigbo"

Excerpt 4

"Gbagi"

Excerpt 5

"Ayo ayoola"

Excerpt 6

"Beatrice Adogba"

From the excerpts above, authors of threat messages incorporate borrowing into their writing for different reasons. One may be to lend an air of authenticity to the threat message. By utilizing local dialects, idioms, or specific linguistic markers, the authors may attempt to convince the recipient that they have a deep understanding of their cultural context, increasing the perceived legitimacy of the threat. Authors of threat messages may also use

borrowing to cover up their identity or origin. By adopting linguistic elements associated with a different region or culture, the authors may attempt to confuse or misdirect investigations, making it more difficult for law enforcement agencies to trace the source of the threat.

4.1.2 Grammatical features

From the selected threat messages, the identified grammatical features are analysed.

4.1.2.1 Impolite/Aggresive expressions

Aggressive language refers to the use of words, phrases and sentences that are intended to provoke, intimidate or attack someone verbally. It involves hostile forceful expressions. Agressive language and time is used as a means of gaining control , asserting dominance or getting their point across forcefully.

Excerpt 1

Just know your children are gone.

Excerpt 2

I've very been paid to kill you ...or anyone else you die.

Excerpt 3

I'll kill you and your whole family.

Excerpt 4

We can assure you that you would regret ever taking a loan from Nairaplys.

Excerpt 5

I won't only kill him, I will make sure I snatch him completely

From excerpts above, aggressive language and time is implored by writers of threat messages to create a sense of fear and intimidate the recipient. The usage of aggressive words also involes emotions like fear and anxiety in the recipient. Authors of threat messages also use aggressive language and time to exert psychological control over the receiver thus making the recipient feeling trapped and helpless.

4.1.2.2 Sentence types

This classification focuses on the different sentence types from the data. Sentence type can be classified according to structure and according to function. Simple sentence, compound sentence, complex sentence, and compound-complex sentence are classified according to structure while declarative sentence, interrogative sentence, imperative sentence, and exclamatory sentence are classified according to function.

Simple sentence

A simple sentence consists of just one independent clause . It contains just one single idea. There is only one subject ,one predicate and one finite verb in a simple sentence.

Excerpt 1

We have the custody of your two children here hale and hearty.

Excerpt 2

I will find you.

Excerpt 3

I've been paid to kill you.

Excerpt 4

Your details have been sent to the necessary quarters for actions.

Excerpt 5

Watch your back.

From the excerpts above, the usage of simple sentences by authors of threat messages imply directness and clarity. It is also used for emphasizing the main point of the author. Simple sentences are regularly easy and concise, conveying clear and direct message from the sender to the receiver. Authors

of threat messages favor their messages to be without problems. To be well understood and interpreted. Also, authors of threat messages deliberately use easy sentences to keep away from providing giant small print or can serve to add an air of mystery, leaving the recipient unsure about the specifics of the hazard and doubtlessly growing their anxiety or fear.

Compound sentence

A compound sentence contains at least two independent clauses. It consist of two simple sentenecs. The two independent clauses are joined together with a a comma and a coordinating conjunction or with a semicolon.

Excerpt 1

I've been paid to kill you but wish to spare you.

Excerpt 2

You better not try to take any funny step or inform the police about this.

Excerpt 3

I will make sure I deal with you and make you regret ever existing.

Excerpt 4

How can you borrow money and stop picking calls when its time to pay back?

Excerpt 5

Mr man not everybody is a fool and you've done it to the wrong person today.

Excerpt 6

You cant go scot free and I will make sure I deal with you.

Excerpt 7

You owe us your life big time and we will kill you

From the excerpts above, the usage of compound sentences by authors of threat messages suggests that the authors are attempting to express multiple ideas or provide additional context for their threats. It indicates a desire for coherence and organization in their message. Also, by structuring their message with multiple clauses, the authors try to convey a sense of intentionality, controlling and balancing of ideas. This can contribute to the perception of a calculated and serious threat.They also use compound sentence to emphasize their threat and highlight their demands. Compound sentence also enhances the manipulative power of the message.

Complex sentence

A complex sentence contains at least one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. This type of sentence has at least two ideas expressed, one is the major while the others are supplementary. If a sentence begins with an independent clause there is no comma separating the two clauses. There is one main clause and one or more subordinate dependent) clauses in a complex sentence. The subordinating conjunction indicates time, place, manner, reason, conditions or concession and provides a link between the clauses.

Excerpt 1

Await the next directives when you are done with this.

Excerpt 2

You have the audacity to tell people that I killed my husband.

Excerpt 3

I know you are the one that transferred the company's fund to an unknown account.

Excerpt 4

You know it's a week since you refused to pick my calls

Excerpt 5

If you don't pay it, a couple from your family will lose their lives.

Excerpt 6

Do well by following the instructions to the best of your knowledge so you can have your kids back.

Excerpt 7

We can assure you that you would regret taking a Loan from NairaPlus.

From the excerpts above, it can be deduced that authors of threat messages use more of complex sentences in threat messages to conceal their identity. They do this to make it difficult to discover their writing styles or patterns. They also make use of complex sentence to avoid identifications by law enforcement agencies. Authors of threat messages also use complex sentences to make the message sound more serious, believable and life threatening potentially increasing the fear and intimidation on the recipient.

Compound-complex sentence

This type of sentence contains at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

Excerpt 1

I wont only kill him, I will make sure I snatch him completely from you and then drain life out of him gradually...

Excerpt 2

Don't try to block or ever turn off your phone because I have your address.

From the excerpts above, it is noted that authors of threat messages use compound-complex sentences in writing threat messages to be able to express ideas more precisely and avoid misinterpretation. They use compound complex sentences to give detailed instructions and demands clearly. Some authors also use compound complex sentence to demonstrate their writing poweress, to show how well educated he is and how he is intellectually superior to the recipient.

Declarative sentences

These sentences make a declaration in the form of a statement, an opinion, a suggestion, a proverb or a universal truth. These can be positive or negative but always end with a full stop.

Excerpt 1

Due to irresponsible actions on your loan repayment, we have been forced to commence actions.

Excerpt 2

Your details have been sent to the necessary quarters for actions.

Excerpt 3

We have the custody of your two children here hale and hearty

Excerpt 4

You owe us your life big time and we will kill you.

Excerpt 5

I know you are the one that transferred the company's fund to an unknown account.

From excerpts above, authors of threat messages use declarative sentences to assert their authority and control over the situation. By making definitive statements, they aim to convey a sense of power and certainty, reinforcing their position as the one issuing the threat. Authors of threat messages also use declarative sentences to make their demands or intentions non-negotiable, signaling that compliance is expected without question.

Imperative sentences

These sentences are made to communicate orders, issue a command and give instructions.

Excerpt 1

You better not try to take any funny step or inform the police about this.

Excerpt 2

Don't try to block or ever turn off your phone because I have your address and your family too

Excerpt 3

kindly inform him now to repay or cancel you as emergency contact to avoid affecting your credit score, thereby giving you a bad credit history nationally and internationally.

Excerpt 4

Tomorrow morning 14ᵗʰ of January, you will simply take a sum of 2million naira in a Ghana must go bag and put it at the backyard of the primary school in your next street.

From the excerpts above, authors of threat messages use imperative sentences to convey a sense of urgency and importance. Imperative sentences show forceful commands and requests from authors of threat messages thereby creating a sense of immediacy and compelling the recipient to take the threat seriously.

Interrogative Sentences

These sentences ask questions. 'Wh' and a verb are used to frame an interrogative sentence. A question mark comes after such a question

Excerpt 1

"Do you think you are smart?"

Excerpt 2

"Who do you think you are?"

Excerpt 3

"Why do you think you can pokenose into peoples affairs?"

Excerpt 4

"Were you not at FirstbankGbagi branch on friday?"

Authors of threat messages make use of interrogative sentences to control or influence the recipient's behavior. By asking threatening questions, authors attempt to make the recipient doubt themselves, their actions, or their decisions, ultimately seeking compliance or submission. The use of interrogative sentences in threat messages is a manipulative tactic and a form of abusive behavior towards the recipient.

Exclamatory Sentences

These sentences express strong emotions or feelings such as joy, surprise, wonder, regret, etc. An exclamatory sentence ends with an exclamation mark. Exclamatory sentences express strong emotions, excitement, or surprise. They convey a sense of exclamation or emphasis. Exclamatory sentences typically end with an exclamation mark.

Excerpt 1

"YOU HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED IGNORANCE WILL NOT BE AN EXCUSE!!!

Excerpt 2

"Hey you!"

Excerpt 3

"You!"

Excerpt 4

"Watch out!

From excerpts above, authors of threat messages seek to achieve passing of strong emotions, frustration, anger and even urgency by using exclamatory sentences in threat messages. Exclamatory sentence is also used to create a strong impact on the reader and to grab the recipients' attention. The heightened emotional intensity conveyed through exclamatory language can instill a sense of urgency and apprehension, making the threat appear more credible and alarming.

4.1.2.3 Personal pronouns

These are of three types, first person, second person and third person. The first person is the person speaking, the second is the one spoken two and the third is the one spoken about other than the first and second persons. This seems to be a pertinent feature of threatening texts in general. It also tells us if the text is more involved or information, as high use of pronominal features corresponds to Dimension 1 (involved vs informational discourse) of register variation from Biber (1988). Gales (2010) attributes the use of personal pronoun to "a heightened sense of personalization or focus placed on the victim of the threat"(p.100).

Excerpt 1

I don't know...

Excerpt 2

I killed my husband…

Excerpt 3

...about ME...

Excerpt 4

I have specific instructions...

Excerpt 5

WE have the custody of your..

Excerpt 6

YOU will simply take a sum…

From extracts above, authors of threat messages make use of first person personal pronoun more often than other personal pronouns followed by second person personal pronoun. The use of first-person personal pronouns in threat messages by authors helps in establishing authority. The writer position himself as the source of the threat and asserts their power over their recipient and to intimidate the recipients. The use of personal pronoun also makes the threat more personal and it creates a sense of direct connection between the writer and the recipient.

Writers of threat messages explicitly identify themselves as the source of the threat and dare to take responsibility for the consequences mentioned in the message. Authors of threat messages also make use of second person personal pronoun to directly address the recipient making the threat more personal and immediate thereby creating a sense of direct confrontation and to increase the impact of the message on the recipient. Authors of threat messages also use second person personal pronoun to play on the recipients emotions,to elicit feelings of guilt, fear and anxiety and also increasing the likelihood of compliance.

4.1.2.4 Tense

The different types of tenses are identified and examined.

Future tense

Future time is indicated in a number of ways since there are no formal changes in the verb that signal future: by using the modal auxiliaries "shall and will" by using infinitives; by using the present progressive; by using shall or will; by using "be about to"; by using be+to+infinitive.

Excerpt 1

I WILL find you and collect my …

Excerpt 2

...you WILL simply take a sum …

Excerpt 3

I WILL need …

Excerpt 4

...Ill kill you and your whole family…

Excerpt 5

...I WILL make sure …

Excerpt 6

...I WILL make sure I deal with you...

Excerpt 7

...I WILL deal with you...

Excerpt 8

...we ARE GOING to fuck...

Future tense in threat messages is used to show that the author intends to carry out a particular action in the future. Authors of threat messages use future tense to create a sense of urgency and immediacy in the recipient informing them that the threat is imminent and will happen very soon thereby

increasing the seriousness of the threat and prompting the recipient to take action. Future tense is also used by authors to keep the recipient on edge and heightened their fear and anxiety.

4.1.2.5 Intensifiers

Intensifiers are words that make adjectives and adverbs stronger. Intensifier is used to describe any word that intensifies another word's meaning, including adjectives and adverbs modifying verbs. There are three types of intensifiers namely: emphasizers, amplifiers and downtoners. Emphasizers heightened attention to a modifier either an adjective or an adverb.Amplifiers escalates the intensity of the quality of a word while downtoners scale down the quality of a modifier.

Excerpt 1

...The ONLY thing I will need from you

...**Excerpt 2**

...you will SIMPLY take a sum of 2million naira...

Excerpt 3

...Don't try to block or EVER turn off...

Excerpt 4

I have your address and your family TOO...

Excerpt 5

If you REALLY think...

Excerpt 6

 I will make sure I snatch him COMPLETELY from you.

Excerpt 7

Youve REALLY got effrontery...

Excerpt 8

we've got MUCH information...

From excerpts above, it can be seen that authors of threat messages make use of intensifers for different reasons. One is to convey the intensity and seriousness of their message. Since their is no physical interaction between the recipients and the sender,the sender seeks to use intensifer to cover up for some non-verbal cues which would have been present in physical communication like serious tone and body language to show the seriousness of the threat. They want to make sure that the receiver understands the gravity of the text. Senders of threat messages also use intensifiers to project power and dominance over the recipient. They also use it to show control over the situation.

5.0 Conclusion

The conclusion of the study is that there are ways authors of threat messages write threat messages to recipients to elicit fear, get immediate response, manipulate and control their behavior. Recognizing these patterns can help individuals respond appropriately and seek help and support when faced with a threat message. Knowledge of these patterns and features would also help individuals recognise and respond to threat appropriately. By analysing the language, tone, and content of threat messages, investigators can also gather crucial clues, identify potential motives, and determine the identity or location of the sender. This information can aid in the identification and apprehension of individuals involved in making threats.

APPENDIX

1. You !if you really think I don't know what you have been telling people about me you are joking. You think you are all knowing. You have the audacity to tell people that I killed my husband. Who do you think you are? And why do you think you can poke nose into peoples affairs? for your information, your husband is next. I won't only kill him, I will make sure I snatch him completely from you and then drain life out of him gradually too . you idiot!

2. We have the custody of your two children here hale and hearty. Now, if you want your children back I have specific instructions for you. Do well by following the instructions to the best of your knowledge so you can have your kids back. Tomorrow morning 14th of January, you will simply take a sum of 2million naira in a Ghana must go bag and put it at the backyard of the primary school in your next street. We are monitoring your every movement and if you involve the police just know your children are gone. Await the next directives when you are done with this.

3. To even think you have the mind to dupe me of my hard earned money. Well mr man not everybody is a fool and you have done it to the wrong person today. I am an hired assassin and I will find you and collect my money back in full then kill you to avoid you duping other people . watch out! cos I'm on your tail. Oloshioloriburuku.

4. I know you are the one that transferred the company's fund to an unknown account. This not just an ordinary threat and I'm not just bluffing can confirm it for example were you not at firtbankGbagi branch on Friday at 11am? and you met with their manager there and is this not your wallet id……. The only thing I will need from you that can keep this a secret between us is a 1/3share of the entire fund on or before this weeksFriday and if you think you are smart by ignoring me then be prepared to hear the entire story on agidigbo onthat same Friday cos im already workimg on it Friday. Here is an untraceable wallet id you should send the money to …..

5. I've been paid to kill you. But i wish to spare you. Inform the police or anyone else you die, to be spared contact ysdky@gmail.com immediately via email

6. I'm Jason Mayor boss of the girl you contacted for a service…if you don't make the payment ill kill you and your whole family. Last chance are you gonna pay or not ?you just pay 600,000

7. My name is Ayo A yoola ,I have been calling you who Hs been talking to one of my girls who offered her service and you simply waste her time. I impose a fee that you must pay before 10pm on Thursday. If you don't pay it ,a couple in your family will lose their lives .Don't try to block or ever turn off your phone because I have your address and your family too. Call me to solve it in a good way.

8. Hey you! Never think you can escape this shit. You can't go Scot free. I will make   sure I deal with you and make you regret ever existing. Watch your back. Come to think of it youve got effrontery. How dare you? do you think you are smart ?i will deal with you till my last breathe you nincompoop

9. Do you know that none of the steps you take this pass few days pass me by and for your information we've got much information about you ,where you stay, who you visit, your best friend and even your favorite food and we are definitely going to fuck your entire life up and mess you up big time. You better not try to take any funny step or inform the police about this. You owe us your life big time and we will kill you

10.Good morning. You know it's a week since you refused to pick my calls. How can you borrow money and stop picking calls when its time to pay back?it seems you really want me to go to tweeter and drag you. we both know you do form big girl on social media and you will definitely be dragged by everybody .yeyebrity calling herself celebrity

11.See, even if you are hiding your location. I will find you. You will continue to live in fear as long as I'm alive. Don't think you are safe at all because you are not. You think you are wise? in case you haven't forgotten, your nudes are on my phone and I have your fathers numbe just play the game right!

12. This is to notify you that your friend/ relative; Beatrice Adogba with Phone:

BV223*****689 ,Email adogbabeatrice22@gmail.com is an INCONSIDERATE PERSON, THIS PERSON has PROVEN to be a CRUEL/ HARD HEARTED DEBTOR, also we DISCOVERED that this PERSON IS A PERPECTUAL/UNREMORSEFUL DEBTOR known ALL over FINTECH COMPANY IN NIGERIA, This DEBTOR goes around COLLECTING MONEY from different fund COMPANY without repaying. This person has CURRENTLY REFUSE to REPAY the companys money (FORNAIRA) and has refused pick our calls,SHE IS CURRENTLY ON THE RUN. Please contact us if you have any information about this person as soon as possible, else the company will be FORCED to take LEGAL ACTION to RECOVER THIS fund, Kindly be INFORMED that this person provided us with all your details IN ORDER FOR HIM TO ACCESS LOAN FROM FORNAIRA LOAN APP... if you are not aware of this LOAN fund you can as well call the person to delete your information on the APP NOW, because SHORTLY the person DETAILS along sides yours will be PUBLICLY PUBLISHED THROUGH MASS MEDIA as an aider and abbetor IF SHE FAILS TO PAY TODAY.

13.Hi this is LCredit, your FRIEND (REJOICE OLAIDE ADEOYE} Chooses you as the emergency contact, kindly inform him now to repay or cancel you as emergency contact to avoid affecting your credit score, thereby giving you a bad credit history nationally and internationally... If at end of today all effort to get customer to repay proves abortive, we will involve newspaper report, police arrest and court proceeds. It is of great interest to make customer pay immediately.Action commences in less than 24hrs DO NOT TAKE THIS LIGHTLY.

14. Due to irresponsible actions on your loan repayment we have been forced to commence actions. Your details have been sent to the necessary quarters for actions. You would be sorely embarrassed that you would rush to make payment and even sell off some of your properties to offload the loan. We can assure you that you would regret taking a Loan from NairaPlus. Customers like you would serve as a scape goat to other defaulters.YOU HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED IGNORANCE WILL NOT BE AN EXCUSE!!!

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