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The Evaluative Lexicogrammar Used to Depict the Uganda Police Force in Fire News Reports

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This study examines the depiction of the Uganda Police Force (UPF) in fire news discourse. It explains the evaluative lexicogrammar that news writers invoke to portray UPF response during fire emergencies. Consequently, the study analyses two news reports published on 26 February 2009 about a fire incident at the Park Yard Market, one of the largest markets in Uganda. Using a discourse analytical research design, it explores how New Vision and Daily Monitor journalists depict UPF in fire news discourse. The study is guided by the Appraisal theoretical framework, engaging two resources of Attitude (i.e., Judgment and Appreciation) in the analysis of hard news stories. The results across the two news reports demonstrate that the writers largely invoked material process verbs because crisis management requires more police actions than descriptions. The process verbs are followed by noun phrases, adverbs, adverbials, and patterns of reported speech. This study contributes to discourse analysis since it demonstrates how specific evaluative lexicogrammar constructs evaluative meaning in news reporting. It also illustrates the practical use of appraisal theory in analysing the conduct and performance of entities such as the Uganda Police Force. The study further advances appraisal theory by revealing that, alongside the established evaluative polarities (i.e., positive and negative), evaluators can also take on vague or neutral positions. This article is extracted from my PhD project. Further research on different fire categories should be conducted to explore the nature of language used to portray police performance. This will reinforce the current study by expanding the sampling frame and scope of content.

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INTRODUCTION

In this study, I examine the depiction of the Uganda Police Force (hereafter UPF) in fire news discourse. News media coverage of law enforcement officers during emergencies highlights how the public should view and construe the authority, responsibility, and competence of the policing institution. This expression is hinged on the argument that news reports direct the reader's thinking and alert them to what the world is and how it ought to be (White, 2025). News stories about fires in Uganda typically highlight public anxiety and perceived antisocial behaviour, such as uncontrolled emotions. In the process, news media usually report on how the UPF handles situations of catastrophe like these, sometimes positively, neutrally, and other times negatively. Even when these events remain relevant in public conversations, not much academic attention has been paid to the language used to describe the UPF, notably the evaluative lexicogrammar in media reports that illustrate the police's behaviour and performance.

While a plethora of studies have explored the news media's portrayal of law enforcers, for example, in terms of legitimacy, ethical conduct, performance and policing gear (Abubakar *et al.*, 2022; Curtice, 2021; Mauti, 2023; Ricciardelli *et al.*, 2024), few have taken an interest in the news media depiction of the police when handling fire incidents. In addition, few scholarships have engaged a linguistic approach, typically the appraisal framework, to scrutinise the language invoked in news texts to convey appreciation and judgment values concerning police response during emergency contexts.

This article, therefore, aims to address these gaps by exploring the evaluative lexicogrammar employed in the Ugandan fire-related news reports to portray the UPF. Using a discourse analysis of two selected newspaper reports, and centring on the appraisal framework, this article examines how linguistic choices, particularly relating to the judgment and appreciation subsystems, construct attitudinal values that depict performance, behaviour, and institutional responsibility of the police. Since appraisal theory notes that assessments of appreciation and judgment are often conveyed via external verbs, nouns, adverbs, and adjectives (White, 2025), we therefore explore the portrayal of UPF strictly following these four lexicogrammatical choices.

The study on news reportage about the depiction of the UPF is socially significant because it builds awareness of how news media shapes public perception, legitimacy and trust of the institution. So, the study offers an insight into how the law enforcement institution is framed in disastrous situations that demand the law enforcers' timely intervention. Examining police in fire-related incidents also offers proof that the news media fulfils one of its key conventional roles of holding state agencies accountable.

Journalists are constrained from exhibiting their attitudinal alignments when reporting, which, in some way, “dehumanises” them. Cognizant of this professional “injustice”, news reporters sometimes exploit explicit linguistic expressions to resist the “unfairness” or employ certain linguistic devices, such as quote constructions, to counter the restraint. Via these varied linguistic strategies, news reporters are enabled to convey their assessment of individuals, events, and entities.

While journalism studies have greatly increased in the last few decades, there has been a lag in researching emotions in news discourse, partly due to the journalistic ideal of objectivity (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). Scholarships relating to journalism have explored the display and influence of emotions in media practices and discourses. Particularly, Wahl-Jorgensen assesses how emotions, activated by digital and social media platforms, influence news production, texts, and audience engagement. He discusses an increasing scholarly engagement with the role of emotions in journalistic studies.

Hyun *et al.* (2024) explored the citizens' opinions on fake news and the anti-fake news bill in South Korea. The study revealed an elite polarisation, where the progressive leaders highly criticised fake news, arguing that fake news was hostile to the in-group members, hence supporting the bill, and the conservative leaders contested the anti-fake news bill. In turn, the polarisation was predicted to affect the citizens' attitudes and perceptions towards the legislation. The current research article contributes to the existing studies on emotions in journalism by adopting a linguistic lens to examine the evaluative lexicogrammar used in hard news to depict UPF. It assesses the overt and covert authorial attitudinal meanings conveyed in the fire news reports. The current study furthers the scholarly debate on the neutrality of the language in news discourse, emphasising that language, in many contexts, conveys evaluative values.

Overview of Fire Breakouts in Uganda

Fire breakouts are a category of disaster in which people's lives and livelihoods are at stake. Several incidents of fire in Uganda have been attributed to criminal acts (Annual Crime Report 2006), occupying a special position within the activities of the police. Mpaata (2008) notes that arson accounts for numerous fatalities and property losses in Uganda. The position of fire as a serious form of crime is affirmed through the creation of an autonomous directorate (the Directorate of Police

Fire Prevention and Rescue Services) responsible for fire-related operations. The existence of this directorate foregrounds the criticality of fire incidents in the routines of the police.

Severe incidents of fire outbreaks have been recorded in Uganda, including the 2008 Budo school fire that claimed 20 lives and property, the Kasubi Tombs fire in 2010, Nakivubo Parkyard Market fires in 2009, 2011, and 2013, and the Makerere Main Building fire in 2020. The districts dominated by fire breakouts include Kampala, Wakiso, Jinja, Mpigi, Mukono, Iganga, Rakai, Masaka, Tororo, Kasese, and Moroto (Musoke, 2009). Fire spates nationwide are attributed to numerous causes, including deliberate acts, power outages, negligence, and accidents. An investigation into the causes of school fires by the National Building Review Board (NBRB) pointed to "deliberate acts of arson" (Wafula, 2024), reinforcing the allegations by most victims that fire breakouts are masterminded. Owing to the news media's watchdog role on state entities, journalists usually report on the performance of the police in fire incidents as a means of holding them accountable. Thus, news reportage on police response to fire occurrences facilitates the public with information concerning institutional preparedness to safeguard the citizens and their property.

Theoretical Framework

The study is confined to the appraisal theory propounded by Martin & White (2005). Appraisal theory stems from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which develops the interpersonal meta function of language. This arm of SFL explains the interactions between users of language, and is grounded on three principles that is, Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement.

Attitude deals with the expression of a speaker/writer's feelings, attitudes, opinions, and evaluations. It is categorised into Affect (i.e., assessing how a speaker/writer reacts emotionally),

Judgement, and Appreciation. Graduation, another principle of the appraisal theory deals with “adjusting the degree of an evaluation” in terms of Force (i.e., “how strong or weak a feeling is”) and Focus (i.e., “adjusting the strength of boundaries for categories that are non-gradable”) which construct “core and peripheral types of things” by sharpening or softening meanings. Lastly, engagement involves locating “attitudes and the play of voices around opinions” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 35). Therefore, appraisal theory presents semantic tools that writers or speakers exploit to express their opinions, emotions, and evaluations.

However, to establish the lexicogrammar concerned with the depictions of the police in the news texts, the article draws on the subsystem of Attitude. “Attitude” pertains to expressions in texts that prompt the recipient to adopt either a negative or positive viewpoint about an action, entity, artefact, process, event, or situation (White, 2025). The principle of “Attitude” is classified into three broad sub-categories – Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation.

Affect represents positive or negative attitudes. It describes emotional reaction or state, for example, “I am **tired**”, “He is **sceptical**”. Affect applies to the author or the person or “thing” the author is talking about.

Judgment refers to the construed meanings relating to how people behave. It is categorised into social sanction and social esteem. Social sanction involves assessments drawing on institutional decrees, laws, rules, and guidelines realised through values of veracity (how truthful - credible, candid, deceptive) and propriety (how ethical - law-abiding, insensitive, cruel). However, social esteem addresses meanings that underscore the appropriate or inappropriate conduct. This assessment reflects communities’ shared values activated via values of normality (how usual or strange), capacity (an individual’s ability to carry out a task), and tenacity (the dependability of a person or an entity).

Finally, Appreciation involves construing meanings that assess “things”, particularly the things people make and the performance they exhibit relating to aesthetics and values. The interpersonal meanings relating to Appreciation entail assessment via resources of reactions (the impact or quality - remarkable, fine), composition (balance or complexity - proportional, simple), and valuation (“was it worthwhile?” - long-awaited, ineffective, worthless) (Martin & White, 2005, p. 56)

The Evaluative Lexicogrammar in News Discourse

Language is among the key tools in news writing, affording news media a big influence on determining how people think and how society is constructed. Scholars have underscored the power of language in media, proclaiming that language not only mirrors but also constructs reality and characters (Bell, 1995; Richardson, 2007; Talbot *et al.*, 2003). The appraisal theory explains that communicators utilise language to evaluate individuals, entities, events, and objects, thereby arriving at specific semantic properties. This suggests that language is an indispensable instrument for news reporters during news writing.

Lexicogrammar denotes an interface between vocabulary/words and grammar - the regulations for using a language. So, evaluative lexicogrammar is the linguistic choices speakers or writers exploit to express their attitudes, opinions, and evaluations within a text. Evaluation entails “expression of the speaker/writer’s opinion or subjectivity” (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 138), and it serves three functions: i) expressing the speaker/writer’s opinions, harmonising the writer and reader as sharing a society’s system of values; ii) construing and maintaining relationships through manipulating the audience; and iii) organising the text in which evaluation is signalled (Hunston & Thompson, 2000). The scholars explicate that assessments about entities are usually attitudinal, entailing positive and negative feelings. Accordingly, they

suggest lexis, grammar, and text as conveyors of evaluations.

Several scholars (Alsaiani, 2025; Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Pounds, 2015) have established various linguistic choices employed in news discourse for evaluation. Hunston & Thompson (2000) state that evaluation is realised via lexis, grammar, and text. Comparatives (e.g., smarter) and superlatives e.g., smartest) (Hunston & Thompson, 2000); and “Intensifiers and quantifiers (such as very, highly, and many), negatives, questions, imperatives, subordinators, emphatics and modals” (Pounds, 2015: 3) constitute grammatical structures that express authorial attitudinal values. External verbs (i.e., verbs that show practical actions loaded with emotional connotations) also convey assessments (White, 2025). White notes that these forms of verbs blend empirical meanings with meanings arising out of social interactions (e.g., “the police **hijacked, confiscated, recovered, etc.**”). He further mentions that to characterise behaviour or action, a writer can also utilise nouns, adjectives, and adverbs.

However, while the mentioned grammatical structures are irrefutably evaluative, their appearance in news reports as authorial inscriptions may be limited, given the professed journalist detachment from values, unless they highlight external subjectivity. Besides, the previous studies differ from the present study in terms of geographical and institutional contexts. While the above studies engage Western media landscapes and do not focus on a specific institution, the present study is set in Uganda, centring on UPF.

The Depiction of Police in News Discourse

In many places of the world, law enforcement officers have been portrayed in news discourse in varied ways. In the United States of America, Lopez et al. (2017) studied news coverage on police performance during traffic monitoring. The findings included allegations of sexual harassment of women during traffic stops by some male traffic officers.

However, the Nigerian newspaper reports trilaterally represented the Nigerian police (i.e., negatively, positively, and neutrally) (Nwabueze *et al.*, 2014). In Uganda, news media have reported about the police’s involvement in inappropriate conduct, including corruption, hostility, repression, and incompetence (Kakumba & Krönke, 2023; Mugumya, 2013). The above studies provide a useful backdrop of the different ways the police have been construed in the media globally. However, the studies do not provide a comprehensive linguistic examination of the language used in news discourse to describe the law enforcers. Against this background, a question arises: Which evaluative lexicogrammatical properties are invoked in Ugandan fire news discourse to represent the UPF?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilises a qualitative research approach, rooted in the interpretivism paradigm. This paradigm explicates that language and social interaction are subjectively constructed, dependent on the readers’ independent perspectives. Using a discourse analytical research design, the study explores how the UPF is represented in Ugandan fire news discourse and construes the contexts that may have influenced the use of particular evaluative lexicogrammar.

Data Collection and Procedure

Two newspapers, *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor*, the most prominent newspapers in Uganda, were reviewed. The *Daily Monitor* is a privately owned daily newspaper renowned for its analytical reportage. Established in 1992, it is published by Monitor Publications Limited (MPL), and it is an affiliate of the Nation Media Group, headquartered in Kenya. Its counterpart in trade, *The New Vision*, is also a popular national newspaper, with 53.34% shares belonging to the government, hence government-leaning. Subsequently, the newspaper enjoys an intimate relationship with the government, and it usually expresses official

standpoints. Its editorial stance is characterised by more cautious and supportive language, especially in reports about government institutions, such as the police. The news accounts basically underscore national stability and the accomplishments of government agencies, while critically addressing incidents when and where necessary.

Following guidance that “The manual analyses demand the use of a small-scale corpus” (Bednarek, 2006: 8), due to its rigorous work, two news reports about the fire that gutted Owino Market on February 26, 2009, were purposively selected. The news stories have been selected for analysis due to their richness in evaluative semantics regarding UPF representation. This fire breakout at Owino Market was popularised by newspapers and other media outlets.

The decision on the choice of data was formed following the procedure Bell (1991) proposed regarding studying media language. Bell stresses the need to identify the genre of the content, the carrier of the content (outlet), the particular content (output), and the period to be covered. Accordingly, the article zeroes down on hard news reports about the fire that burned down Owino Market - one of the most popular markets in Kampala City, Uganda - published on February 26, 2009. The period between 2000 and 2020 featured numerous fire incidents in commercial premises around the country (Mpaata, 2008), most of which were attributed to arson. The process of selecting the news stories was guided by three criteria: the stories had to address the theme of fire; the UPF had to be registered as the main news actor, and the news stories had to encompass prevalent appraisal tokens aligning with police conduct.

Analytical Approach

The study invokes the appraisal theoretical framework to analyse the two selected news reports regarding police response to the fire that blazed the Owino Market on 26 February 2009. The

framework is favoured because it offers comprehensive semantic resources through which the interpersonal meanings imbued in texts (e.g., news stories) are recognised. It also highlights the lexicogrammar that realises the attitudinal meanings (particularly verbs, nouns, adverbs, adjectives, and grammar of reported speech – cognisant of the professional limitations to news reporters’ overt evaluation).

While the approach comprises several resources, including those that concern the gradability of meaning and those by which the communicator negotiates meaning with the audience, this study particularly underscores appraisal tokens construing human actions, behaviour, and performance. Thus, this article relies on the appraisal values of Judgment and Appreciation to construe the portrayal of UPF in the news reports. The study explores the evaluative lexicogrammar that describes the law enforcers and the institution of police, highlighting the implications of the respective portrayals. The evaluative expressions are categorised under the respective resources of Judgment and Appreciation.

The analysis is based on the appraisal analytical key that demonstrates the realisation of particular interpersonal meanings. The expressions carrying evaluative values are marked by **bold-type face**, and the corresponding appraisal type(s) are indicated in the square brackets. Where the expressions exemplify evoked attitudinal values, the text is **bolded and underlined**. To distinguish evaluation polarity, the symbols of minus (-), plus (+), (+- or -+) are written alongside the appraisal type in the square brackets to signify the negative, positive or vague assessments, respectively. (*We have used ellipses to elide some information that lacks evaluative expressions relating to UPF*). Below is the analytical key used to mark the evaluative expressions found across the two selected news stories.

Table 1: Modified Analytical Key from Martin & White (2005)

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Bold | Inscribed Attitude |
| <u>Bold Underlined</u> | Invoked Attitude |
| + | Positive attitude |
| - | Negative attitude |
| + - | Equivocal attitude |
| Judgment sub-categories | |
| [norm] | judgment: normality |
| [cap] | judgment: capacity |
| [ten] | judgment: tenacity |
| [ver] | Judgment: veracity |
| [prop] | Judgment: propriety |
| Appreciation sub-categories | |
| [val] | Appreciation: valuation |
| [t] | Attitudinal token |

FINDINGS

Text 1: Thousands weep as fire guts city market (*New Vision*, 26 February 2009)

| | |
|-----|---|
| 001 | THOUSANDS of vendors wept after a monstrous fire gutted their merchandise at the Nakivubo Park Yard, a makeshift market in downtown Kampala. The blaze, whose cause had not yet [been] established, broke out at about 4:30 am on Wednesday. The park yard is adjacent to St Balikuddembe (Owino) market, the city's biggest market.... |
| 005 | "Maama Nnyabo, Maama Nnyabo", moaned Vincent Kirabira, whose venture was worth sh 5m. An unidentified woman cried as she raised her hands above her head. Her two stalls and merchandise were destroyed. By daybreak, thousands of people had gathered on Nakituho road, many in tears. |
| 010 | The market mainly sold second-hand items, like shoes, bags, electronics, tarpaulins and textiles. The yard was originally used as a parking area for Nakivubo Stadium. In the 1980s, the parking was taken over by the market vendors. |
| 015 | The Police said the inferno started from a section next to the stadium before spreading to the other parts of the market. |
| | The market had 3,000 stalls with 25,000 registered traders. <u>Most of the stalls were made out of canvas, polythene, and wood</u> [t]. |
| | <u>A fire brigade team from the nearby headquarters, which rushed to the scene shortly after the fire broke out</u> [+j: prop], <u>could not contain it</u> [-j: cap]. |
| 020 | <u>Despite the fire brigade's efforts</u> [+j: prop], the raging fire spread to the nearby building, the market [sic]. |
| | <u>Efforts to put out the fire were in vain</u> [-ap: val] <u>until a team from Entebbe Airport, about 21 miles away, arrived</u> [+j: prop]. |
| 025 | <u>Onlookers shouted at the security people, accusing them of not acting promptly to quell the fire</u> [-j: prop]. |
| | <u>Under the Inspector General of Police, Maj. Gen. Kale Kayihura's supervision and that of the former chief fire officer, Joseph Mugisa</u> [t], the firefighters subdued the fire shortly after 1:00 pm [+j: cap]. |
| 030 | The vendors were twice restrained from attacking Kayihura, <u>whom they taunted as he assessed the extent of damage</u> [-j: prop] [sic]. |

- They suspect that the fire was deliberately started by the bus company, which wants to build a terminal on a nearby patch of land.
- Kayihura, however, differed with the vendors, saying the cause of the fire was yet to be ascertained.
- 035 **Initial investigations, he said, established that the fire spread quickly because of the combustible material and lack of access routes in the market** [t]
- Moments after Kayihura's departure, the traders stormed the stadium and looted sodas, chairs, and metallic poles...
- 040 They smashed empty soda bottles against the concrete terraces in the stadium **until the Police dispersed the crowd with teargas** [+j: cap/prop]...
- Many accused Kampala City Council of ignoring the wrangles between the bus park operators and the park yard management...
- The vendors said they had drawn the attention of the authorities to their wrangles, but nothing had been done** [-j: prop].

The Analysis of the Evaluative Lexicogrammar

Although some elements of neutral and positive language regarding the UPF depiction are traceable in the text, the news report above primarily uses negative evaluative lexicogrammatical forms that critically portray the institution's fire department. The linguistic choices align with both Judgment and Appreciation Values. The evaluative language is discussed below under the respective appraisal values.

Judgment: Propriety

As a starting point, the aforementioned story constitutes material processes and noun phrases that provide the impression that the police are being portrayed vaguely. The reporter records the police officers' responsive character as well as their exhibited efforts to combat the fire, both signalling the police's accountability. This is illustrated by the verbs "**rushed**" in "**A fire brigade team from the nearby headquarters, which rushed to the scene shortly after the fire broke out** [+j: prop] (line 018-019) and "**arrived**" in "**...until a team from Entebbe Airport, about 21 miles away arrived** [+j: prop] (lines 022-023); the noun "**efforts**" in the phrases "Despite the fire brigade's **efforts** [+j: prop]" (line 020) and "**Efforts** to put out the fire were in vain [+j: prop]" (line 022). The examples consciously acknowledge the firefighters' willingness to counter the emergency, manifesting a form of social responsibility towards the citizens.

However, the expressions simultaneously point out the fire team's failure since the police did not salvage the traders' property. The preposition "*despite*" lowers the productivity of the fire team's efforts since the fire continued to spread. The textual environment acknowledges the efforts of the police via the reiterated abstract noun "efforts", the verbs "arrived" and "rushed" that reflect the fire brigade's sense of responsibility, but also highlight the eventual poor outcome.

However, the mention of combustible materials should be carefully scrutinised. By mentioning them, the reporter sets a context that mitigates the blame for the fire brigade's inefficiency. The reporter catalogues materials such as "**canvas**", "**polyethene**", and "**wood**" (lines 016- 017) that fuelled the fire. This information implicitly invites readers' sympathy for the police. So, the inscription of the fire team's defeat and the fuelling materials cause neutrality in the reporting. This neutral representation of the police poses a challenge to the appraisal framework, which does not formally recognise neutral attitudes within the core Attitude System – attitudinal meanings are evaluated either positively or negatively.

Additionally, the author engages reported speech to portray the UPF's loss of trust, respect and inept conduct. The expressions "**Onlookers shouted at the security people, accusing them of not acting promptly to quell the fire** [-j: prop]" (lines 024-

025) and “The vendors were **twice restrained from attacking Kayihura, whom they taunted as he assessed the extent of damage** [-j: prop]” (lines 029-030) implicitly censure the police. These expressions introduce heteroglossic involvement, which represents the viewpoint of the afflicted public. While these propositions are non-authorial evaluations, an attack on the police chief signifies the police’s loss of legitimacy. Still, the alleged police’s delayed response suggests the police’s neglect of social responsibility. Attributions are conduits for author-constrained evaluation and ideological positioning, where the writer determines the particular sources and expressions to present to the readership. The use of quotations to introduce into texts criticisms, accusations, demands, and contentious claims against experts, community leaders, political figures, among others, is characteristic of news reporting (White, 2006). Therefore, attribution has been invoked to question the police’s acceptability, thereby positioning the reader to view the police suspiciously.

The author’s employment of the verb phrase “**dispersed the crowd with teargas** [-+j: prop]” (line 040) reveals the police ambivalently, leaving the interpretation to the reader. The use of tear gas could be interpreted as an attempt to fulfil the police’s constitutional duty of maintaining order. So, to a pro-police reader, the police are depicted as having acted decisively to control the worsening crowd’s behaviour. Yet, to a reader from a divergent standing, the police’s action raises the question: Were the smashing of empty soda bottles and the firing of tear gas equal in measure? On this ground, the use of tear gas reflects the police’s lethal force because smashing the bottles did not exhibit direct violence from the traders. Thus, the predicate construes imprecision, allowing the formation of conflicting assessments of police behaviour.

Judgment: Capacity

The verb phrases “**could not contain**” (line 019) and “**subdued**” (lines 029) highlight the police’s incompetence and competence, respectively. The

evaluative function of the phrase “*could not contain it*” is powerful, bearing in mind that the physical distance from the Uganda Police Fire station to Park Yard Market is barely two kilometres. This factor accentuates the police’s failure and incompetence, while subtly criticising institutional readiness and poor supply of resources. However, the verb “**subdued**” attempts to correct the police’s image. Despite the delay in stopping the fire, the author explicitly lauds the leadership of the police chief by demonstrating that the fire team ultimately restrained the fire. Having continued to fight the inferno, the fireteam is construed as persistent.

However, the flaw may not be absolutely overlooked because the duration taken to contain the fire was remarkably excessive (i.e., approximately eight and a half hours). Timeliness is a critical factor when responding to emergencies, especially in the market setting where potentially significant property damage may exist. The prolonged achievement time and the registered property losses question the efficiency of the police performance. Therefore, the expressions “could not contain” and “subdued” generate the author’s double-sided reporting, a strategy invoked to negotiate both the reporter’s objectivity and ideological stance.

Appreciation: Valuation

The author employs an adverbial element that assesses the process of stabilising the emergency by the police as futile. While the police put up a performance to extinguish the fire, they were not successful, as inscribed in line (022) via the adverbial “in vain” in “Efforts to put out the fire were **in vain** [-ap: val]”. The lexical token “in vain” is a negative Appreciation of the value of the police’s firefighting efforts, regardless of the quantity or quality. In other words, the action of firefighting is devalued because it does not yield the expected results. Therefore, the fire team’s performance is positioned as lacking worth.

Therefore, the *New Vision* reporter consciously avoids taking a specific stance by inscribing and evoking police failures and incompetence, while simultaneously offsetting the negative criticism through indecisive language. Subsequently, the

newspaper's ideological position is negotiated ambivalently. However, the Daily Monitor largely invokes negative linguistic descriptors to represent the police, as discussed below.

Text 2: Headline: Harsh Wednesday, Owino Market up in flames, Fire Brigade 90 minutes late [-j: prop] (*Daily Monitor*, 26 February 2009)

001 As Christians yesterday celebrated Ash Wednesday to mark the beginning of the lent season, for thousands of traders at Owino, Kampala's largest market, it was a harsh Wednesday as they woke up to the sad reality that their market had been burnt to ashes.

005 The day, later punctuated by scenes of frustration, confrontations, rioting and **tear gassing** as accusations, from Police Fire Brigade's alleged **incompetence** [-j: cap] to conspiracy theories on the cause of the fire, ended with the thousands of traders resorting to constructing their stalls, as they faced the grim reality of the early-morning fire.

Government reacts

010 Government yesterday instituted a cabinet sub-committee to look into the cause of the fire. "The sub-committee will wait for the Police to finish investigations. It will make its recommendations to the cabinet," said Information Minister Kabakumba Matsiko. Ministers Adolf Mwesige (Local Government), Prof. Tarsis Kabwegyere (Relief). Matia Kasaij (State Internal Affairs) and Ms Kabakumba are the other members of the committee.

015 The fire destroyed property worth millions at the market, with some traders losing millions of cash, kept in the stalls.

020 **Angry traders demanded to know why it took the Police Fire Brigade more than an hour to arrive at Owino, which is 300 metres away from the main fire station** [-j: prop].

The fire, whose cause has not yet been identified, is believed to have started after 3 am on Wednesday. Fuelled by gusty winds in an early morning thunderstorm, the fire swept through the wooden stalls, turning assorted merchandise at the city's largest market into smouldering debris.

025 Although the main fire station is **only around the corner from the market** [-j: ten], angry traders said it had taken firefighters **one-and-a-half hours to arrive at the scene** [-j: prop/ten]. The fire was **eventually** [-j: prop] put out **after six hours** [-j: prop].

Witnesses told Daily Monitor that firefighters **had turned up at the scene with empty fire trucks** [-j: ten/prop].

030 "They came late to the scene and parked the fire tender claiming that they were waiting for an order from their bosses to extinguish the fire [-j: prop/ten/ver]." Mr Abubaker Mulinde, a local councillor who lost four stalls in the market, said.

035 He said the firefighters continued to look on as the fire spread, **until fire engines from Entebbe International Airport and two private fire-fighting firms arrived and started battling the blaze** [+j: ten].

Defending [-j: ten] Fire Brigade

The Inspector of Police, Maj. Gen. Kale Kayihura said his fire-fighters had arrived at the scene on time but could not gain entry to the market due to "crazy congestion.

040 "We have new cars, but it was difficult to reach there," Maj. Gen. Kayihura said. "There were no access roads to enable our fire tenders to reach where the fire was. We tried to pass through St. Balikuddembe Market, but it was the same case."

Gen. Kayihura said there were no fire hydrants nearby to refill the trucks; He added that they had not established the cause of the inferno.

045 Several hundred market stalls were destroyed, leaving thousands of traders jobless. Market stall owners, many in tears, looked on helplessly as the firefighters **battled** [-j: cap] the blaze, before a few brave ones flung themselves into the fray to try and salvage whatever they could.

| | |
|-----|--|
| | <u>The Wednesday morning fire raises questions about the Police force's ability to fight fires in the country, despite millions of dollars spent on re-equipping the Fire Brigade</u> [-j; cap] ahead |
| 050 | of the November 2007 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. It also follows a spate of fires across the country, including recent ones in Mbarara and Jinja, as well as a spate of school fires last year, many of which the police attributed to arson. Although no official cause has been given for the fire, traders said yesterday that they suspected |
| 055 | arson. The market secretary, Ms Harriet, said the fire started at around 2 am through a hole in a wall separating it from Nakivubo Stadium... Internal Affairs State Minister Matia Kasaija said the police would swiftly investigate the arson claims. Police had sealed off [+j: prop] the area and some of the roads leading to Owino, including |
| 060 | Nakivubo Mews, which connects Ben Kiwanuka Street and Allen Road, were cordoned off [+j: prop] ... |

The Analysis of Evaluative Lexicogrammar

Judgment: Propriety

The noun phrase “**more than an hour to arrive**” and the adverbial “**300 metres away from the main fire station**” (lines 019-020) are both negative appraisals of the police’s ethical conduct. The two linguistic expressions suggest the police’s insufficient readiness, lack of punctuality, and inefficiency. Particularly, the adverbial specifies the distance, considered relatively short vis-à-vis the time taken for police to appear at the crisis scene, to invoke attitudinal assessment of the police’s insensitivity and indifference towards critical matters pertaining public’s livelihoods.

Additionally, the grammar of reported speech is a key evaluative lexicogrammar used to evaluate the police firefighters. The author juxtaposes external voices in the above text to subtly question the police’s integrity. In line 031-032, a local leader – a councillor discloses his dissatisfaction with the police conduct: “**They came late at the scene and parked the fire tender claiming that they were waiting for an order from their bosses to extinguish the fire** [-j: prop/ver].” Via this pattern, the police officers’ performance is faulted, highlighting the insensitivity of the police fire team via the adverb “**late**”, and demonstrating distrust for the firefighters, thereby questioning the officer’s integrity through the lexical token “**claiming**”. Although the police are evaluated by an external source, hard news reporters invoke quotations and

attributions to express their emotions and opinions with relatively greater latitude (Nádraská, 2017).

On a positive note, the police fire team is lauded for acting professionally by securing the crisis venue to protect human life. This is expressed by two phrasal verbs, “**sealed off** [+j: prop/cap]” and “**cordoned off** [+j: prop/cap]” (lines 059-061). These actions of the police inscribe the police’s professional obligation of ensuring public safety and also demonstrate that the police are in control.

Judgment: Capacity

The text also comprises other noun phrases that censure the character of the police fire team. The noun “**incompetence** [-cap]” (line 005) entails an evoked negative social esteem, which hints at the police fire brigade’s incapacity to safeguard the trader’s merchandise. While the reporter distances themselves from full commitment via the words “**accusations**” and “**alleged**” (line 005), the noun phrase, nevertheless, portrays the police firefighters as professionally inept, hence questioning their performance in crisis.

Additionally, the verb phrase “**raises questions**” in “**The Wednesday morning fire raises questions about the Police force's ability to fight fires in the country...** [-j: cap]” (lines 049-051) evokes negative judgment of the police’s capacity. This indirectly challenges the police’s competence in effectively handling a fire crisis. The phrase is also a rhetorical construction that implicitly invites

doubt, loss of public trust in the institution, and dissatisfaction. While it does not directly accuse, it evokes concern, thereby inviting the readership to adopt a viewpoint.

Judgment: Tenacity

The text constitutes inscribed adverbs and classic noun phrases that question the vigilance and promptness of the fire brigade. The adverb phrase, “**90 minutes late**” (headline), “**eventually**”, and “**only**”, and noun phrases, “**one-and-a-half hours**” and “**after six hours**” (lines 025-028), convey disappointment emerging from the police’s delayed response. The assessment in this particular context is both inscribed, where the reporter uses the words “only” and “eventually”, and evoked, where the author presents the traders’ concerns. In both instances, the fire team is assessed negatively. While it is evident that the fire brigade team considerably persevered (suggesting positive value of tenacity and propriety) to ensure the fire was extinguished, the team’s adequate emergency response capacity is subtly questioned, subjecting the efficiency of the fire brigade team to scrutiny. The use of adverbs and nouns as evaluation instruments has been discussed in the previous literature (Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Pounds, 2015), and their particular function in the context of the above report is to emphasise proximity and the prolonged delay in extinguishing the fire, respectively.

In addition, the noun phrase “**empty fire trucks**” in “Witnesses told Daily Monitor that fire fighters had turned up at the scene with **empty fire trucks** [-j: ten/prop]” (lines 02-030) further suggests the incompetence and unethicity of the police: The officers are reported to have turned up at the crisis scene insufficiently equipped, demonstrating their insensitivity to crisis and a lack of preparedness.

The temporal adverbial “**by last night**” in “Police had **by last night** [+j: ten/prop] sealed off the area and some of the roads...” (line 064-065) appraises the police as persistent, committed, and diligent.

Subsequently, the descriptions demonstrate the law enforcers’ reliability. The same expression can also connote the law enforcers’ timeliness and dedication to duty.

Drawing on the above analysis, it is evident that the *Daily Monitor’s* 2009 news report on the Owino Market reveals a range of explicit and implicit negative evaluations of the performance of the UPF’s fire brigade. The evaluations are drawn from both social sanction (judgments of veracity and propriety) and social esteem (assessments of competence and tenacity), and a few instances of appreciation. Instances of positive assessment, although limited, are also established.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the evaluative linguistic devices (lexicogrammar) invoked in the Ugandan print news media to characterise the UPF and to explain the contextual factors that may have influenced the news reporters to use particular linguistic choices in the depiction of the UPF. It adopted the appraisal theoretical framework because it offers valuable and comprehensive semantic resources by which speakers/writers’ opinions, feelings, attitudes, and evaluations can be analysed. Drawing on the appraisal theory’s subsystem of Attitude, particularly Judgment and Appreciation, the study examined the news report (published by *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor*) about a fire that gutted Owino Market on February 26, 2025. This was intended to establish the linguistic devices employed to depict the character of UPF personnel during fire emergencies.

Concerning the evaluative lexicogrammar invoked to assess the conduct of UPF, the key findings include verb phrases, noun phrases, adverbs, and adverbials expressed via prepositional phrases and reported speech. While these choices, in the *Daily Monitor*, conjure up negative social sanction and social esteem, depicting the police as ineffective and unreliable in handling crises, a more context-sensitive and mitigated critical language is

employed in the *New Vision* news story, demonstrating ideological constraint, thus sanctioning reader interpretation.

Together, the reports reveal how powerful language is, not only in critiquing or defending entities but also in mediating complex realities that surround the UPF's service delivery during emergencies. The assessments largely target the institution of police rather than individual police officers. Noteworthy, the performance of the police fire team is primarily construed in line with the police duties outlined in Chapter 12, Article 212 of the Ugandan Constitution and the Uganda Police Act, Chapter 303.

However, since the study concerns only the language used in Ugandan print news media to depict the country's policing institution, the results might not be generalised to news outlets from other contexts, nor to other categories of fire. (e.g., Road accident fires and fires at school premises). Therefore, I recommend that further research be conducted on different fire categories emerging from other contexts to explore the language used to portray the performance of the police. This will strengthen the current study by expanding the sampling frame and scope of content.

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