

A Discourse-Stylistic Study of Selected Online Crime-Related News Stories in Nairal and Nigerian Forum

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Abstract

The study examines the thematic foci of selected online crime-related news stories in Nairal and Nigerian Forum. It identifies and analyses the lexico-semantic and discourse features of the news stories. The study relates the identified lexico-semantic and discourse features to the situational context of the news stories. This is done with a view to examining the conundrum of crime as an impediment to national development in the post independence Nigerian nation. Data are analysed using the principles of Opara's model of Discourse Stylistics (2005). Four online news stories which were published in October, 2015 are purposively sampled for analysis. The paper reveals that lexico-semantic and syntactic features such as synonyms, antonyms and hyponyms are devices that account for meanings (i.e. interpersonal, affective, expressive attitudinal and ideational meaning, among others) in the data. The study further shows that discourse features for achieving cohesion and coherence such as reference, conjunction, repetition, collocation and substitution are devices that account for unity, sense and aesthetics/texturing of the selected news stories, as some of these devices delight the senses by producing auditory impacts on readers, while some generate strong linkage qualities which qualify the selected data as high discourses. The paper concludes that the language of online crime-related discourses is not only packed with meanings (i.e. attitudinal, affective and interpersonal) but aesthetics, which enhance the texturing of the discourses.

Keywords: Discourse-Stylistics, crime, online news stories and Nairal and Nigerian Forum.

Introduction

Crime remains a big concern in the Nigerian society today and it is increasing at an alarming growth rate, with no seeming pragmatic solution to the endemic disease. From the superstructure to the base, the Nigerian nation wallows in crime. Little wonder Igbinovia (2003:1) opines that the Nigerian society derives benefit from the existence of crime because the Nigerian climate works to maintain rather than to eliminate crime. To buttress this point, Akintunde says "almost all Nigerians are hangmen...we are all over the place" (1995). This explains the magnitude of crime in the country and how such has affected the growth and development of the nation. Nigeria is in the topmost position of countries with unenviable records of drug trafficking (Nigeria, US, 2002:2). The country tops the international chart in female trafficking and prostitution (Igbinedion, 2002:45). The 2000 corruption index indicated that Nigerians are the most untrustworthy people when it comes to transparency and integrity (Aderibigbe: 2000:19).

Vice and Visa (1991:19) assert that Nigerians flout Britain's immigration laws than any other country in the world. Route (2000:4) says Nigerians are perhaps the most organised criminals of all on a global scale. He posits further that Nigeria has the largest number of dummy corporations on the African continent; the largest number of business scams, and as a result, probably the largest number of fictitious government officers and officials anywhere on this planet (Route, 2000:4).

Nigerians are the worst perpetrators of financial crime in the world (The News, August 5, 2002:17). Under its punishment category, the *Guinness Book of Records*, reports that Nigeria has the record of most persons awaiting trial in the world, with some detained for more than ten years (A Tale: 1999:10-11). In his inaugural speech, Igbinovia (2003) concludes that crime is in every Nigerian.

It is against this backdrop the present article examines the lexico-semantic and discourse features that typify online news stories on crime-related issues/discourses in Nairal and Nigerian Forum, with a view to exploring the conundrum of crime as an impediment to national development in the post independence Nigerian nation.

Statement of Research Problem

Most studies on online crime-related news stories have basically focused on the impressionistic appraisal of crime in Nigeria without recourse to evidence-based lexico-semantic and discourse features such as synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, reference, conjunction, collocation, substitution and repetition. Studying online crime-related news discourses in terms of these linguistic features will enhance an understanding of the conundrum of crime in the post independence Nigerian nation.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to examine the thematic foci of the online news stories; identify and analyse the lexico-semantic and discourse features of the news stories and relate the identified features to context of situation.

Contributions to Knowledge

The study contributes to the linguistic characteristics of crime-related discourses. It also adds to the knowledge of the relevance and application of discourse stylistic theory to the study of crime-related discourses.

Review of Earlier Studies on Criminology

Igbinovia's (2003) inaugural lecture "The Criminal in all of us: whose Ox have we not taken" borders on the manner in which the Nigerian society derives benefit from the existence of crime because the Nigerian clime works to maintain crime. The paper argues that in Nigeria, crime seems to pay because the benefits far outweigh the costs, and often, there are even no costs at all. It asserts that Nigeria has become a society inhabited by criminals and their cohorts, who breed, recruit and maintain ready and reliable supply of deviants and criminals. Igbinovia claims that crime is not only a normal and consistent product of the Nigerian life, the impelling forces making for delinquency and crime are actually inherent deeply in the culture of the Nigerian society. The paper opines that crime not only pays in Nigeria but the country typifies a criminogenic and crime generating society. The perpetuity theory of crime (PTC) is developed to explain the causes of crime in Nigeria and why crime tends to stay in motion. Forecasts are also made about the future of crime in Nigeria and suggestions to stem the malaise are tendered. The paper concludes that there is criminal in every Nigerian because Nigerians covertly and overtly wants crime, need crime and gain definite satisfactions from crime.

In a related manner, Igbinovia's "Oil Theft and Pipeline Vandalisation in Nigeria" focuses on leakages in oil revenue through theft and vandalisation, which has now become a national shame and embarrassment. The paper presents a scholarly evaluation of the evolution, etiology, causes, nature, extent, characteristics, aspect, trend and rationale of the phenomenon in the country. It contains substantial information deployed to enhance readers' understanding of the challenges associated with and solutions to oil theft and vandalisation in Nigeria.

Marenin and Reisig's (1995) "A General Theory of Crime and Patterns of Crime in Nigeria: an exploration of Methodological Assumptions" analyses three categories of Nigerian crime, namely: normal, political-economic and riotous. Logical, empirical and theoretical shortcomings in the theory are identified and discussed. The paper posits that factually, many individuals who act imprudently and criminally in Nigeria do not seem to fit the low self-control characterization required under the theory. It asserts further that logically and theoretically, unacknowledged value assumptions built into the theory undermine its claim to universality. The paper submits that Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory is a theory about imprudent and impulsive behavior. The prudence and what is fraud and deviance are defined by the dominant value system. Imprudent individuals have failed to incorporate the dominant values of society into their psyche and motivations.

Aremu and Ahmed (2011) examine the various criminal activities in Nigeria and identify what can be done to minimize their spread in order to safeguard Nigerian Democracy from total collapse. The paper argues that crime is a universal phenomenon that is threatening the security of various countries in varying degrees. It posits that the causes of criminal activities also vary from one nation to another. It further asserts that political and business crime rate is on the increase almost on a daily basis, and it is difficult to point figures at the direction of the twin evils that left the country prostrate economically, politically, and socially.

The paper concludes that since crime has become endemic in the Nigeria System, government and decision makers must therefore as matter of urgency turn their focus to crime prevention. Government must also direct its policy-programme toward maintaining social and economic development in the rural areas and enhance effective management of the urban areas.

By and large, the literatures reviewed above have all done an impressionistic appraisal of crime in Nigeria without recourse to evidence-based linguistic study which our present paper aims at achieving. However, the studies still provide the needed theoretical background for the present study.

Methodology

The paper employs both primary and secondary data. The primary data includes selected online crime-related news stories on Nairal and Nigerian Forum. Four online news stories which were published in October, 2015 are purposively sampled for analysis. The secondary data includes books, journal articles and the Internet. The data are analysed using the principles of Opara's model of Discourse Stylistics (2005). The theory is adopted in view of its amalgamation of two theoretical parameters which are fundamental to the study of the communicative functions of linguistic constructs in specific socio-cultural and historical context.

Data Analysis

After the theoretical preliminaries above, the rest of this paper is committed to data analysis. We shall first present the data and this will be followed by a descriptive account of it. It is imperative to note that the data involves four online news stories, which are labeled **A**, **B**, **C** and **D** to enhance easy reference during analysis.

Data (A): Robbers Disguise as Beggars to Rob in Lagos- Crime [www.nairaland.com]

The yuletide season is quite around the corner and desperate measures have been devised by dare-devil **armed robbers** to **rob** their **victims** of their valuables in some parts of Lagos State. It was learnt that the **men of the underworld** now disguise as beggars to snatch valuables from their unsuspecting **victims**. **Their targets** are often lone occupants of **posh** and **exotic** cars, **they** dispose them of their most expensive **items** ranging from **laptops, phones, money and jewelries**. The **hoodlums**, who usually **operate** between the hours of 5-9 pm, are always armed to teeth with dangerous **weapons** such as **knives and shotguns** (carefully stuck in their dresses).

It was also gathered that some of **them** had formed the habit of disguising as a **handicapped and beggars** to deceive their **prey** and **rob** them in the process. Areas in **Lagos state** that are well known for such ugly activities are **Mile Two Bridge; Coconut and Apapa, all on Oshodi-Apapa Express way**.

Recalling, how he escaped death by the whiskers in the hands of beggars- turned armed robbers, Mr. Lucky Uduikhue, a managing director of an information and computer technology firm **said he was robbed three times within one month in the same Oshodi-Apapa area**. Disclosing their modus operandi, Uduikhue said the robbers usually threaten their victims saying, 'I need N5, 000. If you respect yourself, bring the money. **They** will point gun at you.' **And** failure to grant their request **would** incur their wrath; **they would** either vandalism the car of the victim or physically attack their target leaving him or her with injuries.

"For many months now, motorists who drive through Mile 2 lose valuable items to robbers. As from 5pm, **they** have become kings of the road. Funny, **they** pretend as people **begging** for **money** but they end up **robbing** motorists of their valuables. If **one** fails to give them **money**, they **would** break one's side screen **and** take whatever they lay their hands on **and** flee.

This is a daily occurrence starting from Auto Wharf to Mile 2 Bridge up to Mile 2/Oshodi junction. Their target is always on big **money**, phones and laptops and they focus on big cars and vehicles whose drivers are alone. I have been a victim several times.

I have **reported** several times to the policemen on duty at the Mile 2 bridge **and** have also called 112 **police emergency** number for the same **complaint** with both the police **and** the receiver of the **police emergency** number promising to take **urgent** action, yet nothing seems to have been done as the **hoodlums** are still operating uncaught and unhindered."

Data (B): Anambra Prostitutes Threaten to Go on Strike and Reveal the Names of Government - Crime – [www.nairaland.com]

[Anambra Prostitutes Threaten To Go On Strike And Reveal The Names Of Government](#) by [vanessaRN](#)(f): 5:48pm



According to the Sun, at least 2,000 prostitutes in southern Anambra state threatened to go on strike on Wednesday after local government officials demolished **brothels** where they lived next to a cattle market in the state capital of Awka, and the prostitutes are accusing the officials of destroying their business without notice. The Anambra State Urban Development Board allegedly stormed the brothels near the border community of Amansea on Monday afternoon with more than 50 armed police officers on the suspicion that the structures there were being used as hideouts for kidnappers and other criminals. Shortly after authorities demolished their **homes**, the angry prostitutes set the cattle market ablaze.

In an interview with Punch magazine, the leader of the **prostitutes** who identified herself as Rachel said: **We** are decent **people**. **We** do our business and go our way. **We** don't harbor criminals. **After all**, most of the people that visit **us** are government officials. **They** want me to expose **them**? **They** destroyed our **center** and left behind other **huts, kiosks and canteens** that belong to the Hausa cattle traders. Is that justice? Don't those **one** harbor **kidnappers and criminals**? The prostitutes also said they would go on a four-day strike starting on Wednesday to protest the local government's actions. "**We** want to tell **them they** are the people patronizing **us**," Rachel told Punch.

Demolishing the **brothels** was part of an overall effort to drive out crime from the southern state, said the general manager of the Anambra State Urban Development Board. The brothels were illegal buildings in Amansea that have allegedly become safe havens for kidnappers and armed robbers, said Nathan Enemu, who led the operation at the cattle market. The operation will extend to other urban areas within the Nigerian state, where prostitutes run their businesses in illegal structures, according to Enemu.

Speaking to Vanguard, Enemu said: A lot of prostitutes live around Amansea cattle market, spoiling our children and constituting nuisance in the area and you know that anywhere there is brothel, criminals and kidnappers hover around there. In my capacity as the Anambra State Urban Development Board general manager, I will ensure that **this** does not exist anymore in the state and our activities are in line with our amiable governor's policy on zero tolerance to crime and kidnapping in the state.

Data (C): Police Uncovers Goat Thieves In Delta, Recovers Arms - Crime – [www.nairaland.com]

[Police Uncovers Goat Thieves In Delta, Recovers Arms \(photo\)](#) by [lalasticlala](#)(m): **1:38pm**

The Police authorities in Delta state last Monday bursted a **criminal syndicate** that specialized in **stealing goats** from the **communities** and **selling them** to **restaurants** and **hotel** operators in the big **cities**. The Command Public Relations Officer, DSP Celestina Kalu said in a statement Wednesday in Asaba, that three members of the **syndicate fled** and abandoned their loot during a **stop and search** operation by the police recently. She said: "On October 15, 2015 at about 8pm, a police highway patrol team on stop and search duty along Sapele/Benin expressway accosted a Toyota Camry Salon car with Reg. No. Edo 782 AP with three occupants. "When the **vehicle** was flagged down to stop, the driver refused, so the police team pursue the **car** towards Benin road, where the suspects abandoned the **car** and **escaped** into the bush. "When the vehicle was searched, ten **live** and one **dead** goat suspected to have been stolen were found inside the **car booth**."

Kalu said that the car was subsequently impounded and the goats recovered, adding that investigation has commenced to apprehend the fleeing suspects. In a related development, the police in the state have also recovered **arms and ammunition** from suspected armed robbers who abandoned their vehicle and **fled** after police **burst** a robbery operation in Warri. The police spokeswoman said the incident happened on August 17, 2015 after a police patrol team attached to Ugorikoko Division received a distress call that a gang of armed robbers was operating along NNPC Housing Complex road, Warri.

She said: “**Consequently**, the police team moved to the scene and on sighting the Police patrol vehicle, the three hoodlums in a red Vento salon car, with Reg. No. Delta EFR 11 DE jumped out of the vehicle and took to their heels. “The police team promptly searched the vehicle and recovered one AK 49 rifle, No.1969, 805536 with five rounds of live ammunition, a pair of plate number.” Kalu said that all the recovered items and the abandoned Vento car have since been registered as exhibits, while the police has intensified efforts to apprehend the fleeing suspects.

Data (D): NDLEA Arrest Businessman with 225 Grammes of Cocaine inside His Anus - Crime - Nairaland

Men of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency have arrested 46 year old businessman Tochukwu Prosper Nzom who inserted 225gm of cocaine into his anus while preparing to board an Air France flight to Paris from the Muritala Mohammed International Airport yesterday June 4th.

According to a statement by the spokesperson of NDLEA, Mr Mitchell Ofoyeju, two other drug traffickers, identified as Idehen Prince Henry and Ilemena Chinedu Peter were also arrested with 915 grammes and 1.225kg of cocaine as they arrived Nigeria from Brazil on an Emirates flight. When interrogated, 46 year old Nzom who hails from Anambra state and is married with two children, said he would have made \$1, 500 if he had succeeded in trafficking the banned substance.

“I was drinking with friends when I heard them talking about drugs. I actually volunteered to smuggle drugs because of my financial situation. They agreed to pay me \$1,500 because it was only three wraps weighing 225 grammes. I am from a poor home,” he said. On his part, Idehen Prince Henry said he was promised \$2,500 by the people who sent him to traffic the drug.

“I am from Enugu State. I am married to a Brazilian lady and we have a child. I work as a sales boy in a supermarket. I dropped out of school in Junior Secondary Class 3. I overheard some of my friends discussing about drugs and I indicated interest. That was how it started. The drug was packed in a bag for me and they promised to pay me \$2,500. I am so sad, disappointed and ashamed of myself.” He said the suspects will soon be charged to court. MAY GOD HELP US.

Analysis and Discussion

Synonym

This occurs when a word or phrase means exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language. It is extensively explored in the data. For example in **paragraph 2 of Data A**, “armed robbery” is variously located as “hoodlums”, “men of the underworld” and “criminal” to describe crime rate in the country. In the Nigerian context, each of these synonyms has attitudinal meaning. For instance “armed robbery” is a general name for “theft (equipped with weapon)”. It carries more weight than every other synonym because virtually everybody in the Nigerian society will attribute robbery to theft. “Hoodlums” and “men of the underworld” are more refined and could be seen as the choices of the elite for the word “theft”. The attitudinal meaning emanating from the deployment of these synonyms is that the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong, the lower class and the upper class, the oppressed and the oppressors, the capitalists and the masses, among others in the Nigerian nation, are victims of robbery. Hence, robbery cuts across sections of the Nigerian society.

Equally in the same **Data A**, “posh” and “exotic” are synonymous to foreground luxury and the desires of everyone to get it, which must have led a group of people to robbery. The deployment of this synonym is suggestive of social stratification where a section of the society is rich while a section is wretched. The attitudinal meaning in the choice of the synonym is that the society must be balanced if robbery should be minimised or eliminated. Similarly in **Data B**, “brothels” is synonymous with “homes”. “Home” is a place where a person, family or household lives while “brothel” is a place where people pay to have sexual intercourse with prostitutes. Sardonicly, If home is meant to provide shelter, brothels also provide shelter for some oppressed masses who might decide to go into prostitution because of the country’s sociopolitical and economic woes.

This synonym is deployed to explain the fact that brothels are also homes perhaps to certain frustrated individuals in the Nigerian society. So also is the word “prostitute” used synonymously with “people” in the same data to show that prostitutes are not animals; they are human beings who need the essential things of life as well. In paragraph 2 of **Data C**, “vehicle” is used synonymously with “car”. The latter is commonly used than the former in the Nigerian context. And so, “car” carries more weight than “vehicle”. The synonym is deployed to explicate the means with which crime is practiced in Nigeria.

Antonym

This is the concept of oppositeness; a relationship that holds between a proposition and its negation. Instances of antonyms are not many in the data as they are deployed to emphasise the contrasts within which criminals operate in Nigeria. For instance in paragraph 4 of **Data A**, “begging” is deployed as the antonym of “robbing” to show the contradiction that exists in the acts of robbery. Equally in paragraph 2 of **Data C**, “live” is seen as the antonym of “dead” to emphasise the fact that thieves steal both living and non-living things in Nigeria so as to survive. The affective meaning here is that the country has become a hell for the oppressed masses that seem to take to crime as a result of the country’s socio-economic disintegration.

Hyponym

This refers to a relation of inclusion holding between words. Hyponyms are used judiciously in the data to stress affective meaning. For instance in paragraph 1 of **Data A**, “knives” and “shotguns” are included in “weapons” to foreground warfare. The affective meaning from the deployment of these hyponyms is that life has become a survival of the fittest for the commoners who rather take to crime in order to survive. Equally in the same paragraph, “laptops”, “phones”, “money” and “jewelries” are all included in “expensive items”. This is done to echo those essential things of life which everyone (regardless of class or tribe) dreams of having. These things, which make life pleasurable and interesting, are only possessed by a few privileged individuals in the Nigerian nation. This reality leads some members of the society to robbery in order to take hold of those good things of life. Similarly in **Data B**, “huts”, “kiosks” and “canteens” are all included in “center”. This is done to show that the brothels, which were demolished is as well a center where activities take place, like other centers such as huts, kiosks, and canteens where people sell and buy. Also in paragraph 2 of **Data C**, “booth” is included in “car” to stress the specific part of the car where stolen items are usually kept.

Reference

This is a relationship between a grammatical unit (usually a pronoun) that refers to (or stand in for) another grammatical unit (usually a noun or noun phrase) to signal cohesion. The data are highly unified. They have strong linkage qualities which qualify them as high discourses. For instance in paragraph 1 of **Data A**, the third person plural pronominal “they” makes an exophoric reference to “armed robbers”. This is done to magnify the phenomenon of armed robbery in Nigeria. Also in paragraph 3 of the same **Data A**, “they” makes an exophoric reference to “armed robbery”. In **Data B**, the personal pronominal “we” is deployed trice to refer exophorically to “prostitutes”. This enhances the cohesiveness of the data as this pronoun is used in three successive sentences. It stresses the fact that the prostitutes have the right of existence and freedom of expression in the country.

Repetition

This is the reiteration of the same lexical items to signal connection. For instance, the word “victims”, as repeated in paragraph 1 of **Data A**, illustrates the cohesive phenomenon of repetition. This is deployed to emphasise the plight of those who are at the receiving end of crime in the country. Similarly “money” is repeated in the same **Data A** to foreground the most essential need of everyone (i.e. both rich and poor) in the country and to explain the main push for crime in Nigeria. In **Data B**, the personal pronoun “we” is repeated a number of times to stress the strong solidarity that exists among the prostitutes whose brothels were demolished. Still in the same data, the third person plural pronominal “they” is repeated twice to denounce the personalities of those government officials that demolish the prostitutes’ brothel. Also, in paragraph 1 of **Data C**, the word “syndicate” is repeated to emphasise crime and the people associated with it (i.e. association of gangsters). On the whole, the use of repetition in the data makes them somewhat musical or poetic and enhances the cohesiveness of the data.

Collocation

This is a habitual co-occurrence of words such that the mention of one brings to mind the other one or members of their group. It is extensively employed in the data to facilitate cohesion. For instance in **Data A**, “handicapped” and “beggars” collocate to explain the different tricks of armed robbers in Nigeria.

In **Data C**, “stop” and “search” are free collocates that explicate the different ways the police operate to detect culprits. Still in **Data C**, “arms” and “ammunitions” collocate to describe warfare. This explicates the fact that life has become warfare for the commoners who must survive in a country that cares less for the masses. On the whole, the deployment of collocation in the data enhances connectivity of the various propositions of the data.

Conjunction

This is an explicit marker of meaning connection between two clauses. Conjunctive elements express certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other components in the discourse. For instance in **Data C**, the causal conjunction “so” in the second paragraph and “consequently” in the fourth paragraph perform strong linking functions. The conjunctions join events as they unfold in the extract especially with regard to the criminal syndicates who specialize in stealing goats and selling them to restaurant and hotel operators. Equally in paragraph 3 of **Data A**, the additive conjunction “and” joins two related ideas together. It signals the relationship between the criminals’ demands and subsequent actions that follow such.

Substitution

This is the replacement of one item by another in a text. It is different from reference in the sense that while reference is a relation between meanings, substitution is a relation between words. Certain significant lexical items are replaced by another in the texts. For instance in paragraph 4 of **Data A**, nominal substitution occurs as “one” is substituted for “robbery victims”. This is done to avoid unnecessary repetition that could make the text boring. Equally in paragraph 3 of **Data B**, “one” is substituted for “government officials”. Here, nominal substitution takes place to downplay the status of those government officials that visit the prostitutes. Also in paragraph 4 of the same data, “this” is substituted for “illegal structures for prostitutes” to undermine the significance of brothels in the Nigerian society.

Findings

The analysis shows a number of findings such as the preponderance of synonyms to express attitudinal meaning, emphasising the fact that everyone in Nigeria is a victim of crime; preeminence of antonyms, stressing the contradictions with which criminals operate in Nigeria; wide use of hyponyms, foregrounding how life has become a battle ground for the less privileged in Nigeria; extensive use of substitution, particularly nominal to prevent undue repetition of words and to downplay the status of those government officials that visit the prostitutes; preponderance of conjunctions, especially “temporal”, “additive” and “causal” to link two successive sentences together as a unit and as well emphasise the reactions of criminals to their victims’ defiant attitudes; Preeminence of exophoric reference, generated through cohesive ties as personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and definite articles, to bind sentences together and to magnify the phenomenon of crime in Nigeria; wide use of free collocation to create textual unity and explain the different ways the police operate to detect culprits in Nigeria; judicious deployment of repetition/reiteration to produce aesthetic effects and as well emphasise the plights of those who are at the receiving end of crime in the country.

Conclusion

The paper reveals that lexico-semantic and syntactic features as synonyms, antonyms and hyponyms are devices that account for meanings (i.e. interpersonal, affective, expressive attitudinal and ideational meaning, among others) in the data. The study further shows that discourse features for achieving cohesion and coherence such as reference, conjunction, repetition, collocation and substitution are devices that account for unity, sense and aesthetics/texturing of the data, as some of these devices delight the senses by producing auditory impacts on readers, while some generate strong linkage qualities which qualify the data as high discourses. The paper concludes that the language of online crime-related discourses is not only packed with meanings (i.e. attitudinal, affective and interpersonal) but aesthetics, which enhance the texturing of the discourses.

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