
RESEARCH ARTICLE

What Is Las Gidi To You? A Discourse Analysis of Selected Poems on Lagos

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ABSTRACT

The founding fathers of Lagos could not have fathomed nor ever imagined what today's image of the city would be like. Birthed several centuries ago, Lagos today has become a megacity and a force to reckon with. Small wonder poets, using their imaginative abilities, have painted and are painting what everyday life in Lagos looks like, from issues of traffic jams to armed robbery, prostitution, overpopulation, and sundry matters. This paper, therefore, uses the analytical tools of the Speech Act theory tool of Discourse Analysis to decipher the messages of selected contemporary poets on Lagos and everyday life in the city, thus bringing to the fore the environmental issues of overpopulation, traffic jams, poor hygiene, and unemployment, among other matters that are typical of a mega city much in need of proper planning like Lagos.

KEYWORDS

LasGidi, Lagos, Discourse Analysis, poetry, environment

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1. Introduction

Lagos (Yorùbá: Èkó) is a city in the Nigerian state of Lagos. The city, with its adjoining conurbation, is the largest in Nigeria, as well as on the African continent. It is one of the fastest-growing cities in the world and also one of the most populous urban agglomerations on earth. Lagos is a major financial centre in Africa; the mega city has the highest GDP and houses one of the largest and busiest ports on the continent.

Poetry walks on the streets in Lagos. It is in the dynamics of life which seen, the moment of each living hour: it is in a sense by which, living in this city, a poet perceives a whole new form of life and an alternative way in which to experience it fully. This vast, tense, and bristling city and its social life reverberates in the poets she inspires (Nwakanma, 2020). Since poetry is a key aspect of human language, it is easily amenable to the linguistic tools of discourse analysis.

2. Discourse and Discourse Analysis

Simply put, discourse is 'language in use' (Brown and Yule, 1983:1). If that is the case, it will not be wrong to say that it covers both spoken and written forms of language. However, more attention is paid in discourse analysis to spoken language, especially conversation.

According to Brown and Yule (1983), the analysis of discourse is necessarily the analysis of *language in use*. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purpose or functions which their forms are designed to

Popular as discourse analysis is among modern linguists, coming up with a comprehensive and acceptable definition of the term has been a Herculean task. On his part, Stubbs (1983) observes that discourse analysis is a conglomeration of attempts to study the organization of language and, therefore, to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or text.

It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language in use in social contexts and, in particular, with interaction or dialogue between speakers. On the whole, one may say that discourse analysis is concerned with a thorough examination of the different aspects of conversations in different social contexts, how they are organized and how meaning is.

The analysis of discourse is necessarily the analysis of language in use. It is interesting to note that Sinclair & Coulthard (1975); Coulthard (1977) had earlier defined discourse analysis as the study of conversation. Stubbs (1995:1) says; The term discourse analysis is very ambiguous. He, however, uses the term to refer mainly to linguistic analysis as an attempt to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause and, therefore, to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts.

There is a concern for language in use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers. In essence, the discourse analyst is concerned with what language is used for and not the formal properties of a language. He is concerned with the different parts of a conversation. He has to pay attention to their different social contexts, their organization, and the process of encoding and decoding meaning in talks.

2.1 Functions of Discourse

Ingraham (1903), in his Uses of Language cited by Quirk (1968:41), states that language is used:

- To direct superfluous nervous energy;
- To direct motion in others, both men and animals;
- To communicate ideas;
- As a means of expression;
- To set matter in motion (as in charms and incantations);
- As an instrument of thinking;
- To give delight merely as sound.

If these are the uses of language, discourse analysis has a great deal to account for in terms of human behaviour and language use. We need to have a look at some other statements of use or function that are more recent.

There is a large corpus of literature that emphasizes that language serves different functions. Ironically, such discussions differ greatly in the level of abstractions that they propose. Specifically, Stubbs (1995:46) proposes these functions of language:

- Expressive/emotive
- Directive/conative/persuasive
- Poetic
- Contact (physical or psychological)
- Metalinguistic (focusing on meaning)
- Referential
- Contextual/situational

We can look at each of these functions briefly.

Expressive/Emotive Function: This occurs when language is used to express the speaker's inner feelings or state of mind – (Hurrah! It is a goal!!; Nonsense! I won't take that!!).

Directive/Conative/Persuasive Function: The speaker, in this use of language, directs the hearer to carry out an action (Audu, stop it!; Lock the door). The second aspect of this function is persuasive or pleading; that is, prayerful. (Give us this day, our daily bread); (O Lord, hear our prayers).

Poetic Function: The language user uses creatively to achieve the aesthetic purpose.

Contact Function: What Stubbs calls contact function is also called the phatic function of language. This is the use of language for brief social or psychological interaction, usually displayed in short greetings or opening up a channel of or for communication.

A: Hello, how was the office today?

B: Well, not bad; how about yours?

A: Hope your Boss was not difficult today?

B: Thank God, he was better today.

Metalinguistic Function: A language performs this function when it draws attention to the code itself for the purpose of clarification. A good example is "The Grammar of Yoruba Language".

Referential Function: The language user, in this function, ensures that the meaning of a word or expression is the physical object that the utterance stands for. It is denotative.

Contextual/Situational Function: Here, the language user, in his utterances, is relating to others his experience with regard to the immediate environment; physical or psychological. A closer look at Halliday's tripartite division of language functions is also necessary, as we are going to find his proposition useful later in this text.

Ideational Function: A language user falls on this function when he is expressing his experience of the real world, including the inner world of his own consciousness. When language is used to give structure to experience, it is an ideational function that is being performed.

Interpersonal Function: Language could be used to establish and maintain social relations. Such relations include conversations and getting things done. Through this function, social groups get going, are identified, and reinforced. It is used by individuals to achieve social cohesion.

Textual Function: With this function, language is used to provide links with itself and with features of the situation in which it is used. The language user is enabled to construct "texts" that are situationally relevant. By the empowerment of this function, the speaker or writer is able to establish cohesive relations from one sentence to the other in discourse.

We should conclude the issue of the function of language by presenting Brown & Yule's (1983) position. They identify two functions of language; transactional and interactional. The transactional function is concerned with the expression of content. On the other hand, the interactional function is concerned with the expression of social relations and personal attitudes. While we accept and consider all the functions stated earlier as very useful and relevant, we feel the one proposed by Brown and Yule is broader and more discourse-oriented.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is J.L.Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory (SAT), a Discourse Analysis compliant theory. The SAT contends that every discourse is characterized by a number of speech acts performed by both the discourse participants and the discourse types. Although pragmatists are inconclusive about how many acts are performed by speech, Austin (1962) and later Levison (1980) identified 3 main acts. First is the *locutionary act*, which represents the utterance made by a speaker. This act is comprised of the phonetic (phonological) component, phatic (syntactic) component, and rhetic (semantic) component. Second is the *illocutionary act* which represents the intention(s) of the speaker's mind and how the hearer's perception of the intention(s). Such intention-perception may be in the form of an assertion, a denial, a prediction, a confirmation, or a warning, among other acts. Finally is the *perlocutionary act*, which is the effects of an utterance on the hearer.

Osisanwo (2008) explains that such acts include "stating a fact, stating an opinion, confirming or denying something, making a prediction or a request, asking a question, issuing an order, giving a permission, giving a piece of advice, making an offer, making a promise, thanking somebody, or condoling somebody" (p. 60). This paper discusses how the discourse speech acts can illuminate Las Gidi.

4. The Concept of Las Gidi

The source of the name is unknown, but it is a synonym for Lagos. An online source (Nairaland) reveals that Las Vega is a funky name for Lagos like Las Vegas, especially by none Lagos residents at that time who considered the place both mystic and notorious. Las is derived from Lagos and Gidi (Yoruba word), which means original, genuine, authentic, and flawless. Lag – Lagos Gidi – Agidi: Someone who is strong-headed. In all, it means the hustling city. Gidi means real: So, LasGid would mean 'the Real Lagos'.

LasGidi is a language from old Bendel State (now Edo and Delta). 'Gidi' is a corruption of the Urobo word 'Ogidi' Which means hustling, while Las in itself means city (e.g., LasVegas). Most people then traveled from Bendel to Lagos to carry out their trade-in typical Bendel fashion coined the name Las Gidi for the city of hustle. A Nigerian from all stated above, it is crystal clear that the name refers to Lagos; it is a creation for which the source now appears unknown or unclear.

Using the speech act theoretical analysis, the data for this study, the two selected poems about Lagos analyzed in this study constitute the *locutionary act*. They are analyzed with attention paid to their environmental relevance and significance and identified human factors, as both aspects –human and environmental factors –lurk ethnolinguistic horns in unveiling the readers'

understanding of the most populous African state –Lagos. First, we present the poems. Next, we add readers’ responses to them on Nairaland. Then, we do a discourse analysis of them.

5. The Poems

5.1 Lagos:

Lagos drags herself to work.
She wakes, and she burns
Sleep-drunk, her belly churns
With footfalls on her tired back

Fumes rage from cars and trucks
Chimes in traffic hiccup
After rainfall, her guts brim up
With clouds of dust and heat

Traders sell from window shops.
Hawkers shout their goods and wares.
In the bustle, no one cares.
As Lagos buries her face in the din

Money makers march around.
With gaping holes in their smiles
Waiting quotes from a thousand miles
Like eager miners of coal
Area boys in nooks and crannies
Unemployed lungs roaming the streets
Perpetrators of criminal feats
By-products of greed and corruption

The politician’s pensive mood
Surmise a swell time in the House
Passings of bills for a little grouse
And time to loot the nation’s fund

Black beauties stroll past nightclubs.
Delicate bronze bodies in brocades
Outlines like silhouettes of sunshade
Waiting for Lagos’ filial embrace

Lagos drags herself to sleep.
She sleeps, but she burns.
In perpetual mirth, she churns
While footfalls die away
(By Jude Chukwuemeka – from the online poem – Poetry Soup).

5.2 New Lagos

After amala and ewedu,
And after the round two of egusi and fufu.
Na im my eyes come dey pinch me,
Small small i dey close am.
Before i know i don dey doze,
Wetin we dey talk? I don sleep.

I see two big molue,
Wey be like aeroplane.
I come see people wey line up,
dey enter one by one.

'Yeeh!', dey no even rush,
Im be like magic for my eye.

Me too come dey near dem,
But fear kon dey catch me.
I notice sey na oju elegba we dey,
Everywhere clean like Oyinbo water.
Na only me kon dey confuse,
Becos i know understand again.

No mo agbero for road,
No more Olosho for road.
No more Iya eleko for the road,
Even those Malaam no dey.
'Hey! be careful with it', i dey hear
One man wey be like conductor dey talk.

Shu! "Wonders shall never end",
Na so Oyinbo dey talk am.
You need to see wetin i see,
You, too, no go fit, believe am.
The conductor wear cloth like pastor,
Even passengers sef serious like wheelchair.

Eno teyl, we reach Okoko,
Guy 'Eda ko la ro pin o' -
You no fit under estimate people oo.
As the motor dey go jejeli,
I no see any 'Where is you particular'.
Even gala sellers no dey there.

I kon dey wonder if dey go strike.
'Cos for Nigeria anything fit happen.
Those allah ba musa house no dey there
again,
E kon be like small London.
Na im i mellow dey look,
Dey expect wetin i go see next.

Eno teyl as the motor dey go,
Na im i see 'Where is your particular.'
dey smile stop the motor-
E be like sey i dey for heaven dey watch
film-.
I kon dey use eye look for
The guy we get P.O.S for hand.

'How are you today?', one inside
dem dey blow the driver grammar.
I dey expect sey e go ask for money,
But my people, e no ask for shigbanyi.
I come dey imagine sey,
Shey na like dis things dey change?

Lagos wey i no before;
Alata, elepo, mallam, aboki, all over.
Gala seller go dey pursue you,

People wey run pass your motor.
Oga police go block you before you stop,
Den you go know "Survival of the fittest".

You go dey hear "brother Chukwudi,
The pioneer, Chief founder, President
Of 'Healings wings int'l missionary clinic".
Agbero go dey drag money
With the conductor.
You go see Nigerian wey be like Indian.

E go dey tell you sey,
E new for Nigeria and e
no sabi our money wella.
He go kon collect your money,
Dupe you and even dupe your conscience.
Only you go kon dey cry.

You go kon carry Soldier go,
But before you reach there.
He don carry your money go.
Na then you go kon see preacher,
Wey go tell you sey;
'Let by gone be by gone!

I no forget, Alaba boys,
Wey go sell phone for you--
phone wey get fufu engine.
You don dey happy sey
You don by new phone-techno L8.
Na wen you reach house, you go
kon know sey na fufu you buy.

You go kon carry soldier go,
Before you come, he don go.
Na im friend you go see,
But if the soldier hold the friend,
Na den he go call am.
Den e go kon give you, your money back.

But this new Lagos,
No, be like dat again.
The road be like paradise own,
the people sef be like Angel.
The people and the road ehn;
I no even know wetin to talk.
Even Ajagbandi student dey
speak konk pho-ne....
The teacher no dey hold
Long cane wey be like pole again.
The school even get plenty computer,
Even every pikin get laptop.

Shu!, If Lagos be like dis,
Den, how Zaria go be?
Those Oselu* no dey chop money again,
Even, dem no dey lie again.

Only me kon dey imagine sey.
Dis place na Lagos or another place?

All the beta beta thing wey i see,
Agbero kon become soldier friend.
But na dreama sha!
(By Adeyemi Joshua – from online poem, Poetry Soup)

5.3 About Poetry Soup

PoetrySoup is a huge international community of over 30,000+ poets. Poetry soup also houses over 500,000+ poems written by a wide variety of amateur, professional and famous poets. It offers many services through its website, while its members promote and manage frequent poetry contests.

PoetrySoup is known for its loyal, strong, welcoming, and growing community of poets (called Soupers). It is also known for featuring published and unpublished poets weekly.

It welcomes content from external sources like public and private educational institutions, teachers, writing organizations, publishers, and similar resources. Any collaboration that Poetry Soup deems will benefit members is welcomed.

While PoetrySoup's database of famous poets is relatively small, it does feature famous poets including Maya Angelou, Ben Jonson, William Black, Walt Whitman, Shel Silverstein, Emily Dickinson, Lewis Carroll, Robert Frost, William Shakespeare, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and more.

PoetrySoup is a very small privately-owned website. It is not a huge corporation, and while we are not a non-profit organization, our primary means of support come from revenue generated by advertising. Thus, since PoetrySoup is a free website (and we want to keep it that way).

5.4 Context of the Poems

This refers to the setting of the poems and may be physical (time and place) and sociocultural (beliefs, habits, value systems).

Linguistic – How words/use of language reveal the environment and psychological –state of mind of the poets/characters in the poem.

Physical Context– Both poems are set in Contemporary Lagos. We read of traffic, hawking, the dirty nature of the state, the existence hardened of hardened/frustrated residents, issues of unemployment, restlessness among the residents, and the existence of rude conductors and corrupt politicians and police officers.

Socio-Cultural Context The beliefs, habits, and value systems are revealed in both poems. We see issues of corruption, the dirty nature of the residents, money consciousness, hatred and hardness of heart, prostitution, etc.

Linguistic Context. The choice of words and use of language. We aptly suit Lagos have the likes of 'Molue', 'Ojuelegba', 'amala and ewedu', 'Agbero', 'Okoko', "Where is your particular?", 'alata', 'elepo', 'Alaba boys', 'Ajangbadi', 'oselu', 'Eda ko la ro pin o' – interpreted as 'You no fit underestimate people o' and the use of Nigerian pidgin in the poem 'New Lagos'.

Psychological Context. This refers to the state of mind of the characters and poet. What is portrayed here is the impatience with the residents' uncomfortable atmosphere – heat, dust, dirt, and lack of love and peace.

5.5 Coherence/Cohesion in the Poems

The poets ensured coherence in 'Lagos'; we see the use of repetition of 'Lagos' and 'She' to refer to Lagos (reference), and the context is properly situated in Lagos. The same applies to 'New Lagos' where the context refers to different areas of Lagos – Ajangbadi, Alaba, Ojuelegba, etc. repetition of 'Lagos', 'soldier', 'New Lagos', etc.

Cohesion is also ensured in the poems as the texts are neatly held together, and ideas flow from one stanza to the other and end beautifully in the conclusive parts. For example, in 'New Lagos', we see that the poet began with his sleep and dream and ends with waking up to realize that there is no New Lagos as he was just dreaming.

In 'Lagos', we see in stanza one that 'Lagos drags herself to work', and in the last stanza, 'Lagos (still) drags herself to sleep—depicting the fact that Lagosians do not really enjoy themselves or stay in the city.

5.6 The illocutionary Act

Poets' Messages/Intention: The intention of the poets is to portray/project what obtains in Lagos. 'Lagos' by Jude Chukwu refers to the issues of traffic jams (stanza 2), Dirty environment (stanza 2), money consciousness of the residents (stanzas 3 and 4), prostitution in Lagos (stanza 8), issues of unemployment (stanzas 5 and 6).

'New Lagos' by Adeyemi Joshua indirectly refers to the dirty areas in Lagos (stanza 3), issues of miscreants and Molue bus conductors (stanzas 4 and 5), bribe-taking/rude police officers (stanzas 6 and 9), presence of swindlers (stanzas 14 and 15), and poor standard of education (stanza 17).

5.6.1 The perlocutionary act.

These relate to the attendant responses of the audience to the poems.

6. Readers' Response to the Poems

for poetry soup weekly contest. Apart from congratulating Jude for attaining the feat, some of the responses are:

..... A brilliant poem – a true portrayal of Lagos City. I have lived in Lagos for nearly 6 years and have first-hand knowledge of the city. - its go slows-its glories and its failures. I had the opportunity of rubbing shoulders with the high and mighty.

I have known both haves and have not. Your poem presents its vivid description.

Great!

Muhammed Yawn

Beautiful yet sad poem

Michael Jordan

What a sad reflection, one that gives the reader something to ponder

Karen

Excellent poem and well deserved to be among the finale!

Carrie Richards

You've painted incredible pictures here.

Jude.

This is just a magnificent write!.....

Sue Wason

Congrats on this fine piece: Lagos sounds like most Eastern American Cities

Daves Austin

7. Conclusion

Thus far, we have done a Discourse Analysis of two contemporary poems, 'Lagos' by Jude Chukwuemeka and 'New Lagos' by Adeyemi Joshua, using the Speech Act Theory. The analysis reveals that the poets succeeded in achieving the three main acts of speech in discourse as proposed by Austin. The poets have effectively deployed the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts to project their messages by bringing into the limelight the lifestyle and struggles of Lagosians. In addition, it is possible to notice the beautiful blend between nature and human activities – ewedu, fufú, iya eleko, oyinbo, and other related matters proving that Lagos is not aloof from its natural endowment. Such resources may need to be more harnessed, the city well planned, and the people better educated about the potential of Lagos and its ecolinguistic relevance to humanity.

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