Language and Discourse of the Returnees during Covid -19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This research examined the language and discourse of the returnees from seven West African countries during covid-19 pandemic. Data were obtained from online News Agency Agence France-Presse (AFP), International Organisation for Migrants (IOM) , Reliefweb, etc. Data were selected using simple random sampling technique and the descriptive design was applied. Austin's (1962) The Speech Act Theory was adopted. One of the major findings revealed that the language and the discourse of the returnees were replete with behabitives, commissives, and expositives. Also, the choice of lexical items by the returnees was occasioned by their changing moods caused by environmental and situational shifts. It is therefore recommended that linguists and other language experts should investigate the comparative and contrastive analysis of the language of the returnees and other groups of displaced people with a view to finding out their areas of divergence and convergence.

Keywords

Language, discourse, speech acts, declaratives, returnees.

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Introduction

Language and discourse are key indispensable, inseparable and related linguistic concepts that are very vast. It is a broad field of study that draws its theories and methods from linguistics, sociology, Philosophy and Psychology (Kamalu & Osisanwo, 2015). Linguistic sociology scholars define these concepts interchangeably (they include language in their definitions of discourse, and vice versa). Considering the definition of language, (McCathy and McCarten, 2010) observe that it is a system as well as a discourse; discourse is either a spoken or written language used functionally or structurally within and above the sentence. It is constructed in language (Thibodeaux, 2020) and the end of language is to engage in discourse (Crystal, 2010). There is no successful discourse without language. In fact, the businesses of discourses are carried out in language.

Language is used differently by every profession for discourses. We need to be prone to different language uses (David, 2016). The engineers, educators, clergy men, politicians, artisans, agriculturists, administrators, medical doctors, and all types of professions and especially the returnees have specific jargons that distinguish them from other professions or groups of people. They gracefully apply these registers to communicate their thoughts and intentions to themselves and other members of the society. Once certain terms are used, enlightened and learned people can easily identify the origin of such terms. For instance, constant application of archaic concepts may easily be traceable to the fields of religion and politics while current use of contemporary English may be stemmed from today's news.

The language and discourse of the returnees, especially from the 7 out of 17 West African countries we gathered data from, distinguished them from other people in the world. Their language and discourse set them apart from other groups of people in the globe. Their uniform stories of bitterness, stigmatization, discrimination, denial, hunger, shame, disgrace and distress, among other vices, and a sense of relief, temporary hopefulness and acceptability especially at homes during Covid-19 pandemic greatly influenced and informed their choices of lexical items applied in their daily interactions and transactions. Recounting these experiences, Whewell (2019) reports how some family's members actually disowned their members as a result of covid-19 pandemic.

In other words, the language and discourse of the returnees during Covid-19 pandemic were juxtaposed with disillusionments and hopes; the state of frustration was occasioned by the changing situations of the lives of the returnees such as joblessness, neglects, discriminations, homelessness, uncertainties and fears before the returnees reached their nations/homelands. Here, their language and discourse were characterized by hostility and harshness. While at home, where the returnees were catered for, automatically, there were situational shifts in their social conditions and simultaneously, constructional shifts in their language and discourse usage from those of bitterness expressions to friendly and soft-toned deliveries.

Covid-19 was indeed a major detractor; there was a global disorganization of basically everything in the whole world and many people accepted the abnormal conditions created by it as the new normal. The impact of Covid-19 in linguistic world was enormous; as the masking of the nose and mouth negatively influenced the pronunciations of words by people including the returnees. This seemingly new normal actually influenced the language and discourse employed by the returnees. It is therefore deducible that situations and conditions

determine the choice of language and discourse used by the returnees during covid-19 pandemic.

This research investigates the language and discourse of the returnees from 7 out of the 17 West African countries who returned during covid-19 pandemic. The researcher randomly selected data from the returnees from The Gambia, Cote d'ivoire, Liberia, Senegal, Nigeria, Guinea and Sierra Loene. The choice of West Africa is also randomly done. A total of 35 data were randomly selected from online *News Agency Agence France-Presse (AFP), UN Voluntary Repatriation Programmes (UNVRP), International Organisation for Migrants (IOM), Infomigrant , Africannews, bbcnews, Reliefweb and Bignewsnetwork. .* The returnees' statements and discourses are presented before their analyses using The Speech Act Theory. The aspects of this theory that are relevant to this research are (Austin's 1962) locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

1. The Returnees and Some Facts Responsible for Their Return

The returnees are people who initially left their own homes, states, countries and continents for other homes, states, countries or continents with a view to changing their lifestyles academically, socially, financially, morally and otherwise. They actually departed from their homelands to others for greener pastures or for a change of locations and after a while or for a long time, they come back home. Some returnees voluntarily return while others are forced to do so. Those that are home-sick, willingly, return especially at old age. This denotes that there are different categories of the returnees who returned due to nostalgia, maltreatment, old age, discrimination and other forms of displeasure and discomfort. The stranded Sierra Leoneans (New Global) are typical examples of those who were forced to return home.

Many scholars have identified types of migrants. Four types of returnees namely, involuntary return migrants, voluntary but unavoidable, voluntary return migrant and second-generation quasi returnees have been identified by (Honerath, 2016). International Organisation for Migrants (IOM, 2018) observes that there are only two types of returnees namely, voluntary (sub-categorised as spontaneous and assisted voluntary returnees) and forced returnees.

Also, (Newlands and Salant, 2018) identify six types of returnees, namely the solicited, voluntary, reluctant, pressured, obliged and forced. The solicited types are not only voluntary for migrants but are solicited by the origin country. High skilled and talented migrants fall under this category. Voluntary migrants return voluntarily due to retirement, reunification with family members, belief in the betterment of homeland and achievement of goals. The reluctant migrants have not lost their legal right to remain but voluntarily return reluctantly. Inhospitality, bad social climate, nostalgic and difficulties are some reasons that inform reluctant returns. The pressured migrants are compelled by the treasured (destination) countries to depart; economic crises and unemployment are major causes of pressured returnees. Obliged returnees are returnees who do not have rights to remain in the destination countries; and as such they are ordered to return to their homelands. The forced migrants are illegal migrants that are not expected to be in the country of their destination. Those got are detained and forcefully deported.

 We group the returnees into three, based on the type, periods of their returns and especially due to the nature of their returns. There are the traditionalists or the conservatives, the semi-

conventionalists and the contemporary returnees. The traditionalists are those who from the inception of their departure from their native lands had made up their minds that after a while they will come back home probably to be buried in their fatherlands. This category visits home from time to time to put things in order in other to prepare for this final return. The traditionalists form the majority of voluntary returnees.

The semi-conservatives are those who are either here or there. They are returnees who cannot take concrete decisions on where to stay. They are easily influenced by the vicissitudes of life. They wait and watch to see and know the location, place and country that will be conducive for them to live. They can as well move from one place or the other, from one country to the other looking for greener pastures. This group of returnees forms a good number of illegal migrants.

The last category, i.e. the contemporary returnee, constitutes the majority who will not want to stay in their homeland or be indentified with their own people. These are returnees who perceived that the foreign lands are better than theirs and wouldn't want to return willingly. Majority of these returnees belong to the technology age (by technology age, we mean from 1990s till date); they are mainly forced or compelled to do so by situations beyond their controls. This group forms a majority of illegal migrants .

All returnees either willingly or unwillingly return to their hometowns. Those who return willingly are few but a great number of returnees are forced to do so due to unfavourable conditions such as war, racism, separation. These returnees use explicitives (i.e. very clear, simple and straight forward expressions based on personal experiences to communicate their intentions.

The returnees, like any other predominantly unhappy group of people in the world today, are faced with a lot of challenges ranging from personal, family, societal, economic and otherwise. The major challenge to the returnees is the dilemma in personal competence development (Xu, 2009). These challenges are responsible for their continuous homeward movements.

2. The Concepts of Language and Discourse

Language and discourse are polymorphous, interrelated and inseparable concepts used in all fields of human endeavours. Contrary to (Osoba and Sobola 2014)'s observation that there is always an interchange of language and discourse in literary and linguistics fields. The study maintains that there are usually interplays between language and discourse in all fields (and not only in literary and linguistics worlds) of human endeavours. In other words, all successful activities and speech events of man are carried out in language and discourse. There are political, social, academic, religious, economic, scientific, etc.; discourses and they are all related to language, whether verbal or non-verbal.

The concepts of language and discourse have been of tremendous concern to researchers and linguistic scholars. Discourse is said to be language used in all fields of learning (Osoba and Sobola, 2014) and language is a system as well as discourse (McCarthy and Clancy, 2018). Discourse is a unit of language longer than a single sentence; and to study it amounts to analysing either the spoken or written language in social context (Nordquist ,2020).

Language, as an instrument of communication, expresses discourse (Benveniste 1971 as cited in Olateju 2004). Again, discourse is a "continuous stretch of language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit such a as sermon, argument, joke, or narrative" (Crystal, 1992, p. 25). Besides, (Foucault, 2013) posits that discourse is the practice that systematically forms the object of what we speak; and what we speak is language.

The above definitions show the inseparability of language and discourse in our day-to-day transactions and interactions. For language and discourse to achieve their desired goals in time, they must be identified by social conditions as well as the individuals who use them (Nordquist, 2020). In addition, (Egbe, 1996) posits that the business of discourse is to communicate ideas or thoughts for instructions, entertainment, interactions and transactions.

2.1 Discourse and Discourse Analysis

The study of discourse as an approach to linguistic study began to be considered central in linguistics in the 1960s and early 70s (Kamalu & Osisanwo, 2015). Many scholars have defined discourse in different ways; some have explained that discourse contains the study of conversations or conversational components of texts. It is "language in use" (Brown & Yule 1981: 1). In this sense, a keen interest is devoted to spoken language especially conversation. In the same vein, Fasold (1990) observes that the study of discourse is "the study of any aspect of language use" (p.65). Also, Fairclough (1992) maintains that "discourse is for him more than just language use; that it is language use whether speech or writing; seen as a type of social practice" (p. 8). He also adds that discourse is a process that is socially situated.

Discourse includes the analysis of non-linguistic semiotics systems (systems for signalizing meaning, non-verbal and non-vocal communication) which accompany or replace speech or writing; performance art; sign language and bodily lexis (Olateju 2004, p. 8). It deals with a functional approach to the study of any piece of language in use, in any context (Opeibi, 2000). Its data can be spoken or written, monologic or dialogic. Besides, it has facilities to handle the study of how texts are organizes in a coherent manner to make meaning and accomplish communicative goals.
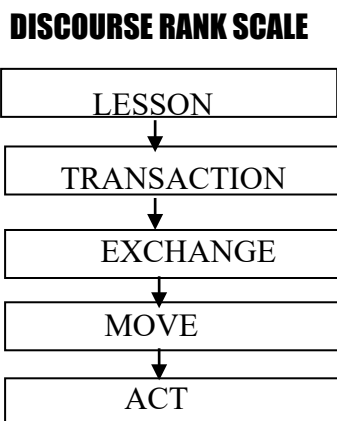
The definitions above explain discourse as language in use (Brown and Yule; 1983, Cook 1989 as cited in Kamalu and Osisanwo 2015). These definitions are limited to only one aspect of discourse. Discourse can also be defined as a particular unit of language above the sentence. It is "language above the sentence or above the clause" (Stubbs 1983:1) and in this sense discourse units are analyzed.

2.3 Discourse Rank Scale

Discourse rank scales are systems of hierarchical organization where linguistically identifiable elements of discourse are combined to form larger elements that continuously form larger elements until no larger element is linguistically determined (Raine , 2010) . Linguistic scholars have not agreed on the number of elements within discourse rank scales. However, (Sinclair and Coulthand, 1975) have proposed a five-unit discourse rank scale that applies basically to classroom discourse. These are lesson, transaction, exchange, move and act.

These rank scales are mainly applicable in classroom situation. There are two ways of explaining the organization of discourse rank scale. It can be discussed from the highest unit (which is the lesson) to the smallest unit (which is the act) or from the smallest to the largest rank scale.

The example of discourse rank scale is shown below in ascending order.

DISCOURSE RANK SCALE

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┌─────────────────────┐
│       LESSON        │
└──────────┬──────────┘
           ▼
┌─────────────────────┐
│    TRANSACTION      │
└──────────┬──────────┘
           ▼
┌─────────────────────┐
│     EXCHANGE        │
└──────────┬──────────┘
           ▼
┌─────────────────────┐
│        MOVE         │
└──────────┬──────────┘
           ▼
┌─────────────────────┐
│        ACT          │
└─────────────────────┘
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(*Source: Author, modified from Nelson's (2014) work on Sinclair and Coulthards' model rank-level*)

2.3.1. An Act

An Act is the smallest and the lowest indivisible discourse unit. It can be a clause or a short sentence. Examples of acts are: "What is that!"; and "What is that? This can serve as an exclamatory sentence or an elicitation that one can generate many answers; one of such can be: "It is a snake." This serves as a group. There are many classes of acts. These include additives, causatives elicitations, evaluation, contrastives, directives, prompts and adversatives. Additives are statements that give additional information to the main discourse. They start with words such as "in addition to", "also", "and" and "besides this".

Causatives are clauses that state the causes of actions. The examples of causatives are: " as a result of this", " so", " therefore" and "consequently". Elicitations are questions that demand responses from the students. They can be verbal or non-verbal (verbal, being the spoken discourse while non-verbal is the acted or dramatized discourse). Evaluations are statements and tag questions. They include words such as "Yes", "No", "Fair" and "Good". Contrastive are statements that show opposites of what one says. They are marked by words such as "contrarily", "in contrast" and " the opposite of this is". Directives are commands uttered mainly by teachers to the students. Senior students can do that to the junior ones mainly outside the classroom. Prompts are words such as "hurry up" "Be serious", "Go on" and "Come here". Prompts reinforce directives and elicitations. Adversatives are statements that bring contrary ideas to the main discourse. They normally start with conjunctions such as "Nonetheless", "Contrarily", "Despite this" and "the opposite of this is".

These acts perform different functions. An act can be a question, a request or a response.

However, there are basically three types of acts; namely, informative act, elicitation and directive act. Informative act acts as a statement. Its main function is to give information. Examples are: (i) I'll go to Lagos today. (ii) The world is evil. (iii) Thank God in all situations. (iv) Covid-19 is very terrible. Elicitation act asks questions which require answers. Examples of elicitations are: (i) Did you do the job? (ii) Who destroyed the pictures I kept on this chair? (iii) Where did you go? A directive act issues a command or makes a request. Examples: (i) Shut the door please. (ii) Do the job urgently. (iii) Stay here and wait for me.

2.3.2. A Move

A move is a single contribution of an individual in talks; it is made up of one or more acts. It is immediately higher than the act. It can be simple or complex; simple, when it contains only one act and complex, when it contains more than one act. Some scholars identify only three moves namely initiation move, response move and feedback move. Some consider the same three as opening move, answering move and follow-up move. According to Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) a move is "the smallest free unit that has a structure in terms of acts" (45). They proposed five classes of move namely; framing move, focusing move, opening move, answering move and follow-up move. Frames are words such as "okay", "right!", "also", "well" and "good". When these words are used, they indicate boundaries to sentences. Focuses are statements that are not strictly part of the discourse but give us information about what the topic is all about. Focusing and framing moves are commonly found in classroom discourse (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975), and they are always together. Examples:

      Focusing: This afternoon we are going to discuss Segmental Phonology.
      Framing: But we must first of all define Phonology briefly.
Opening moves are the starting points for every discourse. They can give information, request for something, and ask questions or direct actions to take place. The answering move is a reply to the opening move. According to (Osisanwo, 2003), an answering move can have two parts namely, the head and the post head. Once it does so, the initiator of the opening move can still respond to the post head. The example is shown below.
      Teacher: How many students did the assignment (opening)
      Class Governor: ten (post head)
      Teacher: Give me their names. (Response to post head)
A follow-up move is also called feedback move or verdict move. This is because it judges the responses that are given. If the answer is correct, it applauds the speaker and if it is wrong, it gives negative reply to the speaker. Examples of the follow-up moves are shown below.
      Teacher: What is Covid-19 Pandemic?
      Dayo: A diseases that spreads across nations of the world rapidly.
      Teacher: Very good; clap him. (Follow-up)
Having modified Sinclair and Coulthard moves (Burton,1979) argues that her modifications are not only relevant for classroom situations but in natural conversations. Her adjustments are: challenging move, supporting moves (which are not applicable in classroom situations because students cannot challenge their teachers and get away unpunished. Also, it is not ideal for student to issue supporting moves), bound opening, opening moves and re-opening move. The bound opening moves enlarge the framework of the discourse. Opening moves are the starters of the main discourses while re-opening moves reinstate the topic that has been diverted or delayed by the challenging moves.

2.3.3 An Exchange

The next rank that is higher than the move is an exchange. It is "the basic unit of interaction" (Coulthard, 1992: 64) that consists of minimally contributions by two participants and it is combined to form the largest unit of interaction, the transaction. The exchange is formed by a set of moves. Three moves (the initiation, a response and a feedback) are combined to form an exchange (Sinclair et.al ,1972). Also, they suggest that there are three major classes of exchange namely; eliciting, directing and informing.

An exchange has classes such as boundary, teaching, free and bound exchanges. The boundary exchanges show the beginning and the end of a stage in a lesson. They consist of two moves, focusing and framing. These two moves occur at the beginning of any discourse. There are sub-categories of teaching exchanges such as free exchanges and bound exchanges (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). Free exchanges are exchanges with initiating moves (Olateju, 2004). Olateju further observes that there are four major functions of free exchanges. These are informing, directing, eliciting and checking functions. It has been observed that the two types of exchanges that are obtainable in classroom situations are teachers' exchanges and students' exchanges. Teachers' exchanges are informatives, elicitations, directives and checks. Informatives give information; elicitations ask questions; directives give command and checks evaluate students.

Bound exchanges are either exchanges with lack of head initiation moves or exchanges with no initiating moves. An exchange can also be bound if the initiation move has no head but only consists of acts such as "repeat", "reinstate" re-initiate and "reinforce."

2.3.4. A Transaction

A transaction is the next rank to exchange. Two or more exchanges make up a transaction. Words such as "well", "right", "now" and "good" serve as boundaries of transactions (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). The teacher uses frames to mark the beginning of the transaction and the end of transaction. These words are also called frames. A comment, an evaluation and a conclusion can also be used to mark ends of transaction. Again, (Sinclair and Coulthard) identify three types of transaction namely; informing, directing and eliciting. A single transaction can consist of all the three major exchange types.

2.3.5 A Lesson

A lesson is made up many transactions. It is the highest and the largest rank scale. Sinclair and Coulthard maintain that lessons do not constitute the structure of any other discourse unit because it is the largest and highest rank. The structure of a lesson depends on both the teacher's memory capacity and students' responses.

2.4.Discourse Analysis

A Discourse analysis (DA) or discourse study was developed in 1970s as an academic field (Norquiest, 2020). Suciu (2019) observes that it has emerged to respond to the interdisciplinary requirements claimed by the complexities of the subject matter; and that it is a viable qualitative method in communication research. DA is a sub-discipline of linguistics

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that deals with language use, meaning and context. According to (Hodges et al. 2008), it deals with "studying and analysing the uses of language" (337).   It offers both structural and functional analyses of any piece of discourse in any social context. In other words, DA deals with language use and language beyond the sentence level. It equally refers to a variety of procedures for examining chunks of language whether spoken or written (Allwright and Bailey, 1991).

2.5. Language: Its Indispensability and Usage

Language is the life-wire of every society; without it man finds it difficult to communication effectively. It is man's greatest weapon used for interactions and transactions of all businesses in the world. This affirms (Schifrin ,1994)'s assertion that it is difficult to separate language from the rest of the world. Attempts to do so, will lead to confusion and cohesion. Virtually everything that keeps people and societies together depends on language (Schiffrin, 2006). To obtain equanimity and its attendant successes in the society therefore, language should be used appropriately. Appropriate application of language entails that all the levels of language are properly understood as they are used by the native speakers and applied in contexts.

The use of language in the society is enormous and unavoidable. Language is a representation of human experiences (Halliday, 1997 as cited in Bakuuro ,2017). In other words, language is used to represent our real inner and outer worlds and linguists such as (Halliday, as cited in Bakuuro) has identifies four major uses of language. One, language reflects on things. Two, language is used to represent or conceptualise the real worlds of individuals. Three, language is a symbolic system and four, language is used for interactivities between and among individuals. Man utilizes language to relate with others. In these relationships (Jiboku , 2005) , which may be equal or unequal, depending on the ranks of the communicators and the communicatees, specific language terminologies and applications are to be applied. Language should be appropriately used in every communicative event to realise meaningful and understandable information because it is the principle means of human communication (Drid, 2010). The centrality of language to the world is enormous. Without language, society cannot operate successfully.

Language is unique to man; everyone has specific ways of speaking called idiolect and every field has its special jargons known as register. Every group also has its identifiable way of communicating language; hence, the language of vocation, aviation, engineering, agriculture, commerce, politics, education, media and publicity. People are specifically and basically applying language by these various professions.

2.6. Interrelationship between Language and Discourse

Language is an indispensable tool used in discourse. Language is discourse and discourse, language. In other words, language is used as discourse and discourse as language use. Simply put, language and discourse are interwoven. Both concepts occur in contexts; (Bloor and Bloor, 2013) explain that discourse is a particular context of language use. Discourse is either spoken or written language used structurally or/and functionally. There is basically no area of human endeavour that does not apply either language or discourse. Language "pervades every aspect of human life and activity" (Adedun, 2014, p. 3); it is the greatest attribute that makes

human communication distinct from animals (Jikobo, 2005) and it helps "man to manipulate and cause development" (Ewulo, 2018, p. 171).

2.7.Covid-19 Pandemic Returnees and Language Use

All over the globe, travellers returned to their homelands to avoid the spread of covid-19 pandemic. One of the undeniable tools that they came back with was their language which is unique to them alone. The disturbing dispositions and dilemma of the returnees influenced their choice of language and discourse applied in each changing social situation they find themselves.

Trauma, long term and physical health problems, social stigma, poverty, envy and discrimination, inability to survive normally and multiple unexplainable needs of the returnees during covid-19 pandemic were major causes of the selections of their lexical items.

As a great measure to ameliorate the pains of the returnees, migrants who had earlier returned were used as messengers to support the new returnees during covid-19 pandemic. Chylian Azuh, one of the 250 trained volunteers in Nigeria , Ebrima Sambo, one of the 248 volunteers from Ivory Coast, Yerro Krubaky from the Gambia, Alusine and Akao Kunikazu from Siera leone, Marina-Schramm from Cote d'Iviore , Bamba Badiane from Senegal, Abrahim Kromah, Princess Gbatue and Sharon Logan from Liberia, Aboubacar Sylla and Elhadj Mohamed Diallo from Guinea and other returnees and their officials' performative utterances were collected mainly from International Organisation of Migrants (IOM) and use in this work. Many of these returnees acted as migrants as messengers (MaM) during covid-19 campaign against the spread of the deadly virus.

Majority of the returnees actually talked based on their unpalatable experiences as returnees. They therefore urged the new returnees to be careful in observing the COVID-19 protocols for healthy living and avoidance of the spread of the dreaded virus.

2.8.The Speech Act Theory and Its Relevance to the Work

The speech Act Theory deals with the act of doing things with words. It actually communicates functions of any language (Baktir, 2013). It maintains that to "say something is to do something" (Araki, 2017 as cited in Austin, 19621). The speech act is the utterance that has a performative function (Christison, 2018). It was John Austin in his work, *How to Do Things with Words* that explains that there are locutionary acts (i.e. the acts of just uttering words). This includes phonetic acts, phatic acts and rhetic act (Araki), illocutionary acts (actions, derived from the uttered words) and perlocutionary acts which are effects obtained from the uttered words (Poluzhyn and Vrable 2003, Baktir 2012, Oishi,2006,). Locution, illocution and perlocution apply to all utterances (Drid, 2018). Here, the returnees are actually using language and discourse to communicate their thoughts and actions.

It is Austin (1962)'s illocutionary acts that we mainly apply in the analysis of data in this research. Austin classifies illocutionary acts into five namely, verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behavitives and expositives. According to some scholars, verdictives deal with judgments; exercitives with power and influence; commisives with obligations and declaration of intentions; behabitives with attitudes and feelings and expositives with reasons,

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arguments and communication (Araki, 2017, Baktir, 2012, Oishi 2006, Cahyaningati, (2012). There are several verbs that are used in explaining each of these acts.

3. Data Presentation and Analysis

Data were gathered from the statements of the returnees (as reported by UNICEF, 2020, Sert 2008, IOM 2018, 2019 and 2020); and very few from the officials of IOM from 7 participating West African countries in MaM's programme. These randomly selected countries are Cote d'ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria , Senegal and Sierra Leone .Data are labeled with letters "SR" (Statements of the returnees and the officials of IOM); this is followed by Arabic numerals (1 to 35 respectively)' hence SR1, SR2 to SR 35. Data are first presented before their analyses; the analysis is presented in patches as (Analysis SR1 to SR5; SR6 to SR 10, and to SR35 accordingly). Excerpts of data were randomly selected and pruned from 35 statements of which 5 represent each country. Austin (1962)'s The Speech Act is relevant to this work and are used in data analysis of this research.

3.1. Data Presentation 1, from Ivorian Returnees

SR1: We know that music has always been a good channel to reach out to the youths
SR2: Our objective is to pool our efforts to raise awareness on the risks of irregular migration and promote positive alternatives
SR3: At first, I wasn't afraid of the diseases itself, but I know it would have an impact on us
SR4: They gave me everything I needed to be able to protect myself against Covid-19
SR5: But things didn't go according to plan when Amadou arrived in Abidjan.

3.2 Data Analysis 1 (SR1 to SR5)

SR1 to SR5 are performatives; the excessive use of the 1st person singular pronoun (subjective and objective cases), "I" and "me" in SR3 and SR4, the 1st person plural pronouns (subjective and objective cases) "we" and "us" in SR 1 and SR 3, the possessive pronouns, 'our" in SR2, the third person plural pronoun "they" in SR4 and the reflexive pronoun, "myself" in SR4 are indicators of the returnees' direct involvement in the covid-19 experiences. The utterances are highly informatives; they explicitly report the perlocutions (of hope) of the returnees in active voice. Again, all the utterances are declaratives. It is worth adding that SR3 is a behabitive; SR5, an expositives, others commissives.

3.4. Data Presentation 2, from Gambian Returnees

SR6: As a returnee, this is a very important undertaking for me.
SR7: It is my belief that the COVID-19 outbreak affects migrants disproportionately
SR8: I am really honoured that, despite the challenges now, I am playing my part to fight COVID-19 in my country
SR9: It is good to reconnect with my family, because I rarely spoke with others after returning
SR10: Before the pandemic, I was used to seeing Yerro carrying mostly light luggage and materials.

3.5. Data Analysis 2 (SR6 to SR10)

SR6 to SR 10 are also declaratives, expressed through active voice. They are concise commissives and behabitives devoid of ambiguities. Again, the utterances here are presented in modern day English and they are devoid of abstractions. The passionate presentations of the returnees' representatives and their sensational choice of words make their language highly emotional. They logically and factually present their intentions in simple words that are not limited to any linguistic group.

3.6. Data Presentation 3, from Guinean Returnees

SR11: We are all returnees; As the Coronavirus hit Guinea, an idea came to our minds
SR12: In Guinea, everyone needs a mask, so we decided to produce masks and sell them
SR13: When Covid-19 hit Guinea, we said that even if we had to get sick, we were willing to risk our lives for this population
SR14: But we realise now that we had to raise awareness among people of the reality
SR15: After the training, we went to the markets and neighbourhoods, and make the community understand as well that the Covid-19 patients should not be stigmatized.

3.7. Data Analysis 3 (SR11 to SR15)

Behabitives, expressives and commisives characterize the data above. Again, the dominant use of personal pronoun, "we" throughout the representatives, the collective application of illocutionary acts and the attendant perlocutions resulted in the returnees' realization of their dreams . In other words, the communicative force of utterances leads to the performance of these illocutions.

These speech acts are characterized by simplicity of words, clarity of purpose and directness of expressions. The voice is active, the explanations of facts are detailed. Factual and impressive use of language reflects the real life situation as experienced by the returnees during covid-19 pandemic. The returnees' language is in reported speech and it is informative and expressive.

3.8. Data Presentation 4, from Liberian Returnees

SR16: United we all make a difference in the community
SR17: Together we can win over this pandemic.
SR18: Prevention messages are not always followed by people taking action
SR19: We concluded that comic strip could be very useful to distribute in the community
SR 20: Sharon is part of a network of migrant returnees to provide accurate and clear information to the people at risk of unsafe migration and exploitation and abuse

3.9. Data Analysis 4 (SR16 to SR20)
SR16 to SR20 are all declaratives presented in reported speech; the utterances are simple and factual. They indicate a collective work of the returnees in actualizing their visions during covid-19 pandemic. The language is formal, simple, vivid and clear. Commissives, behabitives and expositives are the speech acts used here.

3.10. Data Presentation 5, from Nigerian Returnees

SR21: I made the video oh how to properly wash hands because people need to know how to avoid contracting coronovirus or spreading it.
SR22: I got paranoid, I couldn't think straight, I couldn't sleep.
SR23: I am always looking out (to see) if there is any danger
SR24: My advice to fellow returnees migrant and the public on Covid-19 is to stay safe…
SR 25: We have gone through a lot during our travel and we should not covid-19 take our lives.

3.11. Data Analysis 5, (SR21 to SR25)

SR21 to SR25 are declaratives presented in simple and straightforward way. The first person Pronouns, "I" and "we" are predominantly used to indicate the returnees' involvement in the fight against covid-19 pandemic, commissives, behabitives and expositives are applied coherently and comprehensively. Here, the utterances are well structured in a formal way. The language is informative, purposeful, impressive and persuasive with full developed ideas and facts.

3.12.Data Presentation 6, from Senegalese Returnees

SR26: After I returned, I chose to get involved in everything that affects my community
SR27: I stay home to protect myself and my family
SR28: I always use a tissue when I sneeze and throw it in the trash after.
SR29: I want to help raise awareness and lead by examples because it concerns us all.
SR 30: In Senegal, returned migrants have taken it upon themselves to fight unproven remedies and harmful misinformation by taking photos of themselves communication positive or preventative actions.

3.13. Data Analysis 6 (SR26 to SR30)

SR26 to SR 30 are equally declaratives presented in an unambiguous way. The language is easily understood because of the choice of simple day-to-day words in their communication. Also, the use of the 1st person singular pronoun, "I" shows the returnees 'direct and active involvement in the fight against covid-19 pandemic in Senagal. The utterances are straight-forward and can easily by understood by all discourse participants.

3.14. Data Presentation 7, from Sierra Leonean Returnees

SR31: I was happy to come back, but I wish I had not
SR32: Whilst we will intensify safe migration messaging campaign, IOM will continue to develop programs to address the problem of youth unemployment of the
SR33: COVID-10 adds a layer of vulnerability to Sierra Leonean youth
SR34: 99 Sierra Leoneans yesterday returned from Niger via a flight chartered by the IOM with support from the European Union

SR35: The returnees were forced to wait over half a year in a transit centre in Agadez because of border closures related to COVID-19.

3.15. Data Analysis 7 (SR31 to SR35)

SR 31 to SR 35 are commissives, behabitivies and expositives explicitly presented in reported speeches. They are formal, unambiguous and impressive words presented in simple and complex sentences. The choice of lexical items by the returnees and their changing moods are informed by their current situations. In SR31 when the returnees were taken good care of, they were happy and the perlocutionary forces of their utterances were of joy and hopefulness. But as soon as their situations changed (from good to bad) their choice of words equally changed; words such as "forced", "wait over half a year in transit" (SR35) ", adds a layer of vulnerability to Sierra Leonean youth" (SR33) emerged. Again, the application of the personal pronouns, "I" and "we" by the returnees indicate personal involvement in the real contemporary problems encounted by the returnees. Again, their use of personal pronouns denotes the returnees' commitment to achieving their goals and makes their utterances personal.

4. Findings

In this study, we have found out that the language of the returnees are replete with behabitives, commissives and expositives. The returnees explicitly present their performative utterances with the dominance of active voice. They predominantly use personal and reflexive pronouns and vividly describe ideas and facts in reported speech to relate their experiences, Also, simplicity, logicality, formality, clarity, straight-forwardness, specificity, directness and impressiveness, emotional and sensational use of words (invoked through their personal recounts of unpalatable situations) characterize the language of the returnees. The language of the returnees is also factual, and devoid of abstractions and ambiguities. Their language strongly centres on the real life problems encountered personally by them. With the present-day problems, the returnees use the present-day English (contemporary English) to communicate their intentions with a view to solving them.

We have also discovered that in all the 7 countries selected for this research, there is the similarity of language use by the returnees during covid-19 pandemic. From Ivory Coast to Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal, Nigeria and Sierra Leone and by implication the other 10 West African countries; and also, by extension, the world; the returnees dominantly use declaratives in simple reported speech.

Another major finding is that the returnees' choice of lexical items is occasioned by situational changes in life, such as the state of apprehension, discrimination, joblessness , disillusionment on the one hand, and freedom, hope, high expectation and appreciation on the other hand. When they are somehow comfortable, they speak a language full of hope and believability but when they are frustrated and uncertain of the present and future, their language automatically changes to that of hopelessness and uncertainties. In other words, the vicissitudes of life determine that choice of words used by the returnees.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Our attention, in this study, has been focused on the language and discourse of the returnees during covid-19 pandemic. We have seen that the returnees are people who come back to their native lands or from where they had initially stayed (before their departure) due to various reasons which may be personal, family, societal, financial, etc. Many of them are faced with problems both in the places they returned from and where they now live. They are viewed as frustrated, underprivileged and hopeless people. Many are jobless and in extreme poverty. Besides, they are stigmatized and considered as problems generators. They are often depressed, sick, physically and emotionally, anxious and full of pains due to their traumatised past and present conditions. In such a situation, their language and discourse actually appeal to the minds of discourse participants and evoke and provoke sympathy in them.

We have applied Austin's Speech Acts of locution, illocution and perlocutions in analyzing the data gathered mainly from the utterances of the returnees from 7 West African countries randomly selected from the 17 West African countries. The aspect of Austin's Speech Act that is tremendously applicable and applied to this work is his illocutionary acts (behabitives, commissives and expositives while verdictives and exercitives are not applied at all).

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The study recommends that the linguists and other language experts should critically carry out a contrastive and comparative analysis of the language and discourse of the returnees and other professions with a view to discovering whether or not there are similarities and differences between the language and discourse of the returnees and other professionals. They should also study extensively the locutionary and perlocutionary forces of the returnees' verdictives and exercitives. Again, the returnees should learn how to adapt themselves to adverse situations and use language and discourse positively so as to ensure healthy applications of words at all times.

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