

A Semantic Analysis of Selected Propositions in Mohammadu Gawu's Song *Nigeria Da Niger*

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Abstract

This work centres on selected propositions in one of Mohammadu Gawu, a Hausa singer from Niger's songs titled *Nigeria da Niger*. The work adopts the semantic theory of presupposition as the framework of analysis of selected propositions found in the song while data for the study was a transcription of the song recorded on a CD plate. It has been discovered that for a proper understanding of the song, the listener needs certain background information which the singer assumes that the listener already knows such as: the Islamic faith, Hausa proverbs, the language, the culture, the leadership of the two countries among others. The work concludes that the singer uses his creative ability to preach for peace and unity between Nigeria and Niger as neighbouring countries within the African sub region.

Key words: *Presupposition, Proposition, Background Information, Discourse, Mohammadu Gawu, Hammani, Gowon*

Introduction

Communication in any human society comes through language. Language therefore serves as an instrument of communication through interaction by the speakers. Such interaction is usually done through the means of language. Language in this instance is pan human development and a behavioural aspect of human beings which make people different from animals. For language to be meaningful, series of sounds are usually grouped together in certain definite arrangements, which collectively emphasise the fact that the main aim of language evolved out of the need for men to communicate. Here, language does not just express our thoughts because it also goes further to express culture, which describes in totality the ways of a particular people. As rightly observe by Bello and Idiagbon (2002), language consists of words that are used to discuss about our everyday life, physical things and beliefs.

Based on the above assertion, we can describe songs as one of the means of communication, which comes in different forms and can be about anything, events or even on persons, and are used for various purposes in any society. They are often employed to enliven occasions, express sadness, show sympathy or occupy one's mind when one is alone. As rightly opined by Lamidi (2002), songs have different forms and functions, and by the same token, have different classifications based on their functions in the society. He further states that "specific songs or chants are used for wedding ceremonies, funeral dirges and pure entertainment". In this study, we examine Muhammadu Gawu's song titled *Nigeria da Niger* (Nigeria and Niger) taking into account the background information which the listener shares with the singers in order to arrive at the accurate interpretation of the song. To put the discussion on a sound footing, we segment it into the following sub headings: discourse environment of the song, proposition, framework of analysis, data presentation/analysis and conclusion.

Discourse Environment of the Song

Mohammadu Gawu hails from Falenge in Niger republic and has been one of the most popular Hausa singers right from the 70s until his demise in 2016. One feature that distinguishes him from other Hausa singers is the fact that besides him, all other voices are young female voices. He is the lead vocalist while the maids answer the choruses. This work centres on one of his most popular songs titled 'Nigeria da Niger' (Nigeria and Niger). The song is aimed at stressing the need for unity between the two neighbouring countries of West Africa. The song stresses that the two countries have come a long way as such, the bond between them is inseparable just like what binds twins. Such bonds include sharing a common border, same Hausa language, some of the people are Moslems who trade together, share the same kind of dishes, went through the same colonial experiences although Nigeria was colonised by Britain while Niger by France.

The song traces the relationship between the two nations as predating colonial era. This was done by two of their prominent Islamic scholars who fought to ensure the establishment of the Islamic religion (the jihad) Usman Danfodio in Sokoto Nigeria and Mamman Jobbo in Niger. In order to create a mutual understanding among the people of the two nations, these leaders used to exchange visits, gifts and other pleasantries. After independence of the two nations, such relationship was maintained as demonstrated in the

support the Niger government under president Jori Hamani gave the Federal government of Nigeria during the civil war under General Yakubu Gowon in order to ensure the unity of the country and invariably the African sub-region.

The song further eulogises both Gowon of Nigeria and Hamani of Niger for their visionary leadership in maintaining peace in both countries. The virtues of their wives: Victoria Gowon and Aishatu Hamani are also brought to the fore. Gowon is further described as a champion, a fearless soldier who possesses ‘grenade’, ‘double barrel’, and ‘gun’, deadly weapons used to crush the Biafran secessionists.

Gawu takes advantage in the song to request the Niger government under Hamani to sponsor him to Meccah to fulfill the Islamic injunction of performing the mandatory hajj for the purpose of praying for peace and progress of the government. The song finally terminates with a word of prayer for peace to reign in the sub region.

Proposition

In recent years, many scholars especially psycholinguists have been concerned to produce representative of the semantic content through the notion of proposition. As a notion which derives from formal logic, proposition is used in a very freeway in text analysis literature, often to include notions which might be better regarded as ‘statements’ or ‘simple sentences’, (Brown and Yule, 1984).

‘Proposition’ as a term has come to be used in a variety of ways by philosophers. It is understood by philosophers to refer to a sense of a sentence, where a sentence is a concatenation of word, phonetically or orthographically specifiable, that conforms to the syntactic rules of well-formed natural language, thus, an n-way ambiguous sentence expression (an) n-way proposition(s). Conversely, a semantically anomalous sentence expresses no proposition at all.

In linguistics, the interest is primarily in the way in which different linguistic forms can be shown to express the same proposition e.g. ‘the cat ate the meat’, ‘the meat was eaten by the cat’ as well as how a single linguistic form can be analysed in terms of several propositions e.g. ‘those nice red apples cost a lot’ expresses the propositions that ‘the apples cost a lot’, ‘the apples are nice’ and ‘the apples are red’.

Logical space according to Harrison (1979) in the ‘tractatus’ is seen in terms of the internal relationships of the objects which compose states of affairs, each of which corresponds to a single proposition. Based on this therefore, it can be asserted that proposition is that part of the meaning of utterance of a declarative sentence which describes some state of affairs. Such state of affairs typically involves persons or things refer to by the expression of the sentence. The expression “it is raining outside” for example can be taken as a proposition based on the reality that at the moment of talking it is actually raining outside. The actual reality that something said is true and it is also there for verification is proposition. It is therefore an abstraction that can be grasped by the mind of an individual.

Therefore, we describe how things are in reality by means of propositions (conceived neither as abstract entities nor as mental ones but rather as sentences with sense); the simplest essential features are required for description (representation). Hence, the beginning of wisdom must lie in clarification of the logical nature of the elementary proposition, viz a sentence which is logically independent of every other such sentence i.e. which has no non-trivial entailments, but merely describes the existence of an elementary state of affairs.

Backer and Hacker (1994) have identified the following propositions:

1. *Assertions*. This is a situation where the speaker asserts that x and its oppositional content is truth condition.
2. *Requestive*. This on the other hand is where the speaker requests x of A and its propositional content is compliance condition.
3. *Erotetic or question* proposition is the type where the speaker demands information of A and the propositional content is answerhood.
4. *Corrective* type is where the speaker wishes something is done and the propositional content is a fulfillment condition. Besides the above four, others such as greetings, promises, warnings, apologies, commands, entreaties, welcome have also been identified.

Based on the above, while the declarative sentence will be asserting the truth of the sentence, the imperative will be mentioning it and the interrogative will be questioning the truth of such proposition. It’s therefore possible for two different sentences in two different languages to have the same proposition thereby establishing the concept of proposition as a universal concept. For instance the title of Mohammodu Gawu’s song under examination has the same propositions although one is in Hausa while the other is in English:

- (1) Nigeria da Niger daidai suke
- (2) Nigeria and Niger are the same.

Presupposition in natural language

According to Crystal (1991), presupposition can be seen as ‘a condition which must be satisfied if a particular state of affair is to be obtain, or (in relation to language) what a speaker assumes in saying a particular sentence, as opposed to what is actually asserted.’ Some linguists such as Levinson (1983), Lyons(1977) have come to use the term in a narrower sense such that, in a two – part analysis of sentences which contrasts the information assumed (or presupposed) by the speaker, and that which is at the centre of the speakers communicative interest, in this sense, presupposition is opposed to focus.

The term presoposition which Leech (1974) also refers to as ‘positive presupposition’ is characterized as a relation between x and y such that anyone who utters x takes for granted the truth of y .He further states that:

Presupposition is a relation between x and y such that:

- (a) *if the uttering of x is valid, y has to be true* (b) *if y is false, then the uttering of x is in valid or void.*

We can therefore say that presupposition expresses a referential requirement under which the proposition can make a statement. Thus, in one interpretation of the notion, the sentence “where is the salt?” is said to presuppose that the salt is not present to the speaker, that there is someone whom the speaker thinks might know where the salt is, similarly, if one says:

(X) the king of wukari Presupposes (Y) there is the king of wukari

If there has never been (Y), then x is asserting something that is false. That is the “existential proposition” which is (2) there is a king of wukari. Here, there is an assertion but is a false presupposition logically (x) is neither true nor false because one of its presuppositions (2) is not fulfilled.

Factive verbs like ‘know’, ‘regret’, ‘realize’ presuppose their complements: for example, if the president realizes that there is corruption. Here, the speaker is committed by his use of the verb ‘realize’ to the truth of the proposition expressed by the complement clause = there is corruption (Maiyanga, 1998).

Aspectual like ‘stop’ carry logical presupposition. For example ‘Bosu stopped reading’ presupposes that someone who goes by the name Bosu had been reading. Chomsky (1971) cited the following example: ‘It was John who was here’ presupposes that “someone was here”. Here, the first sentence presupposes the second in the sense that the truth of the latter is a prerequisite for the utterance to have truth – value. Similarly, in the kinship terms for instance, the statement ‘this is my father’ presupposes the type of relationship that holds between the speaker and the addressee, that of father/son, a biological relationship.

Theoretical framework

In order to fully understand the selected propositions in the song, we adopt Kardz (1972) idea that the concept of presupposition, our framework of study must express a referential requirement whose satisfaction is the condition under which the proposition can make statement. Such; ‘referential’ requirement is described by Srawson (1950) in Maiyanga (1998:147) used in criticising Russel (1905):

- (1) X the king of France is bald
- To Strawson, the above proposition presupposes:
- (2) There is the king of France

However, since there was no king of France in 1905 or today, X must be asserting something that is false, namely the existential presupposition ‘There is the king of France’.

Lyons (1977), Wilson (1975), have observed that factive verbs like know, regret, realise presuppose their complements. For instance:

- (1) The man who sets his barn of corn on fire knows how much ashes costs (Maiyanga 1998).
- (2) He who swallows the desert palm fruit knows the size of his anus.

We know that the speakers are committed by their use of the verb ‘know’ to the truth of the proposition expressed by the complement clause. Wilson (1975) also notes that some aspectual verbs ‘stop’, ‘swallow’ carry with them logical presuppositions. For instance:

Weshibe has stopped disturbing me
Presupposes that there is someone who goes by the name Weshibe and that she has been disturbing the speaker.

Data Presentation and Data Analysis

The instances above and other similar phenomena that are expressed in the song form the crux of our data presentation and analysis below:

- (1) Allah taimake mu don girman Anabbi
(Allah help us for the sake of the prophet)

This proposition is taken from line two of the song. For its presupposition to state the case, the complement clause must have a referential requirement. In this instance, the referential requirement is the second portion of the proposition ‘for the sake of the prophet’. For this proposition to take effect, the prophet referred here should be taken as the true messenger of Allah as popularly believed in the Islamic world. The antecedent clause ‘Allah help us’ is authentic since Allah in the Islamic world is seen as a supreme being who possesses all powers as such, can help those who call on him any time they are about to embark on any venture. The verb ‘help’ in the proposition tend to suggest that.

The proposition also tend to presuppose that for one to request for help in the Islamic world, the prophet, Mohammed which although not overtly mention must be called upon. Since it is stated in the Quran that he is the last prophet whom all should reach Allah through him, the song felt there was no need to repeat his name again. It can therefore be inferred within the context of the song that the prophet being referred here is Mohammed, may the peace of Allah be upon him.

- (2) Komi kaw wa Hussaini dus sai kaw wa Hassan
(Whatever you do for Hussaini you must also do for Hassan)

For the presupposition to be effective and state the case, the complement clause must equally have the referential requirement which in the above is ‘you must also do for Hassan’. For this Hausa saying to be authentic, Hussaini must be the twin brother of Hassan. Twins are a set of children born on the same day by the same mother. In the Hausa community, if both of them are males, they are popularly called Hassan and Hussaini as the case in this song states. Traditionally, there are so many mysteries surrounding twins and one of such is their sentimental attachment to each other. Because the bond of the twins, parents usually do not separate them because of the belief that such separation could have negative effect on either the person that cause the separation or on the twins themselves. There are cases where twins separated either fell sick continuously or in some cases resulted in the death of one of them.

With this background knowledge about twins in the Hausa community, parents always treat them without any form of discrimination. If for instance parents go out for shopping, they buy each item double and the same colour, quality and size especially if they are identical and of the same sex. This is usually done to persuade them to maintain their peace as well as to avoid one of them being harmed by the one that is unfairly treated.

The song therefore uses the metaphor of Hassan and Hussaini to explain the kind of bond that exists between Nigeria and Niger. As the twins are identity so also the two countries share almost similar name, common border, religion, the Hausa language and culture. As neighbouring countries within the African sub-region, the inhabitants have been co-habiting right from inception so that it is almost impossible in some instances to differentiate the nationals of the two nations. Based on this historical antecedents, the song calls on the people to further maintain the bond and avoid any thing that will bring disunity among them no matter the situation.

- (3) Abin da ya taba hanci duka idanu ta ruwa sunkai
(Whatever touches the nose will force tears out of the eyes)

This proposition again echoes the need for unity among the people of the two neighbouring nations. Just like the nose and the eyes are parts of the same body, Nigeria and Niger are also vital parts of the whole-Africa as a continent. If for instance there is a problem in Nigeria, Niger is equally going to be affected given the proximity between them. This metaphor is self-explanatory because as parts of the body, if one for instance is suffering from an ailment like catarrh, as one blows one’s nose, tears are definitely expected to come out of the eyes in spite of the fact that the part affected is the nose. It is this background knowledge that is echoed in couching the above popular Hausa saying.

One instance that gave rise to this saying in the song was the Nigerian civil war which took place from 1967-1970. As a neighbouring country to Nigeria, Niger was inadvertently affected in areas such as the number of refugees that crossed over the borders to Niger leading to shortage of food and other necessities of life, low economic activities, and loss of lives among others. This experience shows that, an injury to one means an injury to both nations. The experiences of the Nigerian civil war therefore brought about the need to preach peaceful co-existence among the people who are one, hence the description of Nigeria and Niger as 'Hussaini and Hassan'.

- (4) Mamman Jabbo suna Usman na Hodiyo
Sun tasa suna cikin yawon duniya
(Mamman Jabbo and Usman Danfodio
They have experience because they are widely travelled)

The song juxtaposes two religious leaders with similar qualities from the two countries. Besides their religious inclinations, both leaders have made several trips to Meccah. While others travel to the holy land to only perform the mandatory hajj, the two leaders have taken advantage of this to get more experiences on how to enhance their leadership quality.

As adherents of the Islamic religion, both of them led the jihad (Islamic holy war) for the propagation of Islam within the sub-region. While Mamman Jabbo led the war in Niger, Usman Danfodia led in Sokoto Nigeria. The song states that although both leaders are from different countries, they meet every night. Considering the distance between them, it is not possible for them to meet every night as stated by the song. However, their meeting can be described as symbolic given the fact that as Muslims from the same region whose prayer timing is the same, they tend to perform their prayer at the same time whereby they request Allah to bless the people and give them peace and prosperity in whatever they do. Since their point of convergence before Allah in prayer is the same, the song describes their action as meeting every night before Allah during prayers.

- (5) Jori Hamani su da Janaral Yakubu Gowon Sun zamna wuri guda sun kai shawara
(Jori Hamani and General Yakubu Gowon Had a bilateral talks)

The juxtaposition of the leadership of the two countries is not limited to the religious aspect but equally in the political sphere of the two nations. In the above proposition, Yakubu Gowon a onetime military leader of Nigeria and Jori Hamani his counterpart in Niger who was a civil leader ruled the two nations at the same period. Not minding the fact that Nigeria was under military dictatorship and Niger was democratic, the two leaders had very strong bilateral talks considering the need for unity among the people of the two nations.

One of such talks was the challenge of quashing the secession move by Ojukwu who was out to establish an independent state of Biafra. As a neighbouring state, Niger gave its full backing to the federal government of Nigeria in order to maintain one and united Nigeria. Hamani's action was to maintain peace and stability in the sub-region because Nigeria is so strategic that its disintegration would obviously affect other African countries especially Niger who happens to be its closest neighbour. This means that the similar leadership styles of the two nations is sustained even after independence. The bilateral talks in question are the strategic planning and support Niger gave Nigeria on how to successfully execute the civil war which lasted from 1968-1970.

- (6) Mai garnati, mai dubarbar, mai bindiga
(The possessor of grenade, double barrel, gun)

The above proposition eulogies general Yakubu Gowon, the military leader who prosecuted the civil war between 1967-1970. This is to salute his doggedness, astute, steadfastness and above all statesmanship. As an army general, he is described as one who has these weapons at his disposal and was able to effectively use them to quell the uprising successfully.

The statesmanship in him made him to sacrifice his life to fight for the unity of Nigeria which by extension the Africa sub-region in general for the simple reason that instability in Nigeria was bound to affect Niger as its closest neighbour.

- (7) Zaman Aishatu Jori ya yi kyau da na Mistoriya
(Aishatu Jori's humble life style is replicated in (Mistoriya) Victoria)

Considering the fact that behind every successful man there is always a woman, the above proposition expresses the virtues of the first ladies who stood behind their husbands as leaders of the two nations. Apart

from her beauty, Victoria the wife of General Gowon was said to be a source of motivation and encouragement to the general while the war was on especially as a newly wedded wife in the face of the war.

Aishatu on the other hand combined her beauty with intelligence and education in making sure that her husband succeeded as a civil leader. In spite of their positions as first ladies in their countries, they maintained simple life style and care and identified with the masses especially the victims of the civil war. The proposition presupposes that simple lifestyle and humility of a woman usually impacts positively on the leadership styles of the husband.

(8) ... na yi rook gun gwamnati kuka na a sa ni jirgi in yo haji

(My request to the government is to fulfill my ambition of boarding a plane to haj)

This proposition is a request to the government to sponsor the singer to perform the mandatory trip to Meccah for pilgrim. This presupposes that although a Muslim, Gawu had never travelled to Meccah for haj as the time of composing the song. As a result of this, he considers himself as an incomplete Muslim. Being conscious of this and considering his poor financial status, he makes this passionate appeal to the government of Niger to sponsor him for the trip in order not to just fulfill his ambition of becoming Ahaji but to also pray for peace and success of the government.

In spite of the above cogent reasons advanced by Gawu, his fellow singers the maids view his trip to the holy land not only to pray for the forgiveness of their sin but to bring them gifts of jewels and other items that will get them noticed.

(9) Masu tsaron kasa a samu zaman lahiya

(Those who watch over the land to ensure peace)

The above line refers to the military that ensures security in the land. Although the civil war took place in Nigeria, the song commends the army for quelling the uprising which would have affected Niger as well. It is on this note that the two countries are described here as one since whatever affects one affects the other as expressed in some of the propositions in the song.

The song therefore attributes the peaceful coexistence in the two nations to the doggedness of the army who fought assiduously for the unity of the nation. The song takes into cognizance the fact that with a secured nation, other activities will take place hence, the commendation given to the army. The song also goes ahead to dare any one to risk attempting to rebel or cause any uprising which will end the same way as Ojukwu. The song appreciates the commander-in-chief General Yakubu Gowon for leading by good example.

(10) Amin. (Amen)

Although 'amen' above is a single word, as a discourse closing remark and within the context of the song which means 'it should be so', it recapitulates the belief in Allah to grant the singer's desires as stated in the song. This presupposes that the singer is an adherent of the Islamic faith whose admonition is for believers to have faith in Allah by commencing any venture whether work, eating, journey or a song in this case in his name. Considering the fact that the song contains some elements of prayers for unity, peace and prosperity in the two countries as earlier observed, the song naturally closes by requesting Allah whom it sees as a supreme being capable of granting one's heart desires to accept his prayer and wishes it to be so. As a religious word, 'amen' is also popular among the Christian faithful who usually punctuates their prayers with the word right from the beginning to the end.

Conclusion

This work has been able to examine the song 'Nigeria da Niger' as two brother nations. Such brotherhood manifests in different forms such as: common borders, trading partners, common language, culture and religion. Such bonds were created, sustained and maintained through the efforts of the visionary leadership of the two nation right from pre-colonial to present. In order to arrive at all the above, the following background knowledge serves as clues: religion, Hausa culture and language, proverbs among others hence, the adoption of the theory of presupposition.

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