

**A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF THE DISCOURSE OF STUDENT  
SOCCER FANS IN SELECTED SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIAN  
UNIVERSITIES**

BY

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**2010**

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the glory of Almighty God, “Al Wadud”, (the Loving), who made it possible for me to cover yet another significant mileage in my academic odyssey. But for His unconditional love, this surely would have been impossible.

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**SUMMARY OF NOTATIONAL CONVENTIONS**

Symbols		Meaning
1. $\Sigma$	=	Sentence
2. $\alpha$	=	Main clause
3. S	=	Subject
4. P	=	Predicator
5. Ce	=	Complement extensive
6. Ci	=	Complement intensive
7. NMG	=	Nominal group
8. VBG	=	Verbal group
9. ADG	=	Adverbial group
10. PRG	=	Prepositional group
11. M	=	Modifier
12. H	=	Head word
13. Q	=	Qualifier
14. Prep	=	Prepend
15. Comp	=	Completive
16. aux	=	Auxiliary verb
17. L.V.	=	Lexical verb
18. neg	=	Negator

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the discourse of student soccer fans in some Southwestern Nigerian universities, with a view to characterizing the discourse genre. The study accounted for the verbal and the non-verbal resources of the discourse, and the relationship between the two modes of communication in the discourse, in order to reveal their dynamics.

Data for the study comprised twelve samples of the conversations obtained from student soccer fans in University of Lagos, University of Ibadan and Obafemi Awolowo University. Two samples were got from each of the centres visited for data and two centres were visited in each of the three Universities selected for the study. The participant observation method was employed in gathering data for the study in the three Universities. Audio recordings of the verbal discourse of the subjects were done in each of the centres using a completely surreptitious method of recording, while video recordings of the non-verbal features of the discourse of the subjects were done using both surreptitious and non-surreptitious methods in the twelve centres. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics was employed in the analysis of the verbal resources, while multimedia semiotics was drawn upon in the analysis of the non-verbal features of the data. Analysis of the interaction of the verbal and non-verbal signs was also carried out.

Analysis at the primary level where the verbal resources of the discourse were examined revealed that soccer fans deployed verbal resources such as mood (indicative, interrogative and imperative), sentences, code-switching, code-mixing, Pidgin English, indigenous language, social allusion, inclusion, boasting and defeatist language which, in addition to reflecting the passions of the subjects for their favourite football clubs, expressed a wide range of meanings. Analysis at the secondary level, where non-verbal resources of the discourse were examined

showed that student soccer fans used jerseys, head warmers, belts, hand bands and gestures to convey their intentions visually. The analysis showed further that student soccer fans used such semiotic nuances to gain psychological advantage over other fans by intimidating them with their appearance and portraying themselves as classy people.

The study concluded that the English discourse of student soccer fans in Southwestern Nigerian universities was multimodal.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THEORETICAL PRELIMINARIES

Language is seen as arising from its context of situation, and different situations will predictably give rise to different language features.

Delin (2000)

The above view indicates that language is context-bound. Byram (2000:239), cited in Olaosun (2006:1), reinforces this view when he affirms that “each domain of language is characterized by distinct terminology, the conceptual structure and rhetorical organization of communication”. This is so because language continually adapts to every aspect of human life. And it can only be understood when considered in relation to society. Language is of utmost importance in every society. Delin (2000:3) further corroborates this fact when he observes that “language plays a central role in everyday life ... and reflects the society”. In fact, language can be said to be the nexus that binds the society together. It is the medium through which members of a community communicate ideas and feelings to one another. Thus, it is immensely difficult to divorce language from the society and vice-versa. Lamidi (2000:106) attests to the interrelationship of language and society in the following words:

Language and society are so closely related that we cannot discuss one and neglect the other... Neither does a community exist without specific forms of communication nor does a language exist without some speakers of it. It follows that in discourse situations, there will be an interrelationship between language and its community of speakers.

The sensitivity of language to the structures of the society manifests in the relationship between language and context. And this relationship has been greatly explored in linguistic research. Two types of context are recognised in language studies: verbal and situational

contexts. According to Adegbite (2000:64), verbal context is concerned with the company which a linguistic item keeps. Thus, it falls in the realm of linguistics proper. On the other hand, situational context reflects the relationship between language and society, as it shows how cultural and situational factors impinge on the production and interpretation of utterances. Although some scholars who subscribe to the formalist theories of language such as *structuralism* and *transformational generative grammar* have argued that context (situation) is not deserving of linguistic attention because, according to them, the contextual structure is too chaotic to be systematized, a great deal of research into the functional use of language has shown that language and context are inseparable. Cook (2001:5) comments on the issue thus:

Discourse analysis is sometimes accused of being ... rather messy for it cannot bring to analysis the precision of approaches which isolate one facet of communication from others... however, ... the precision of such methods is bought at the price of misrepresenting the complexity of human communication. The study of language must take context into account, because language is always in context, and there are no acts of communication without participants, intertexts, situations, paralanguage and substance.

The above view indicates that for any linguistic model to be described as adequate, it must be able to account for the relationship that exists between language and context. Mey (2001:39) describes context as “the continually changing surroundings ... that enable participants in the communication process to interact, and in which the linguistic expressions of their interaction become intelligible”. Lamidi (2000:107) also observes that:

Every language event takes place with some people in attendance. This is the context of situation. The context is the environment in which a text comes to life; it is an environment of language use where every utterance is interpretable, given the background to it.

Indeed, context permeates language. As language users, we operate in contexts (Mey 2001:42): it determines what we can say and what we cannot say in a particular situation. This explains the relevance of *appropriateness* as a concept in language use. For instance, the way a pastor will compliment a young lady for her beautiful legs will be different from the way a young “happening” undergraduate will do so in the midst of his friends. While the former may say: “Hey, you have hot legs”, the latter may say: “You have beautiful legs”. Although both the former and the latter are stating the same thing, they are conditioned by elements of context to make use of different linguistic resources. Also, context makes it possible for us to appropriate the intentional meaning of an addresser when such a meaning is conveyed in an ambiguous expression.

All this and many other dynamics of the contextual or situational use of language serve as manifestations of the influence of context on language. It is the recognition of the overwhelming influence of context on language that led to the emergence and growth of fields of language studies such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis.

Having touched on the inseparability of language and society, we consider it pertinent to shed some light on our perception of what constitutes language, since there seems to be divergent views on the construct. Traditionally, language is perceived to consist of spoken and written symbols only; and this must have led Wardhaugh (1978:3) to define language as a “system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication”. This view of language held supreme among theoretical

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