

A Speech Act Analysis of the Language of Begging in Hausa

Isah Abdulmumini

Department of English and Literature, Federal University Gusau

Anas Zayyanu Kagara

Department of Liberal Studies, Abdu Gusau Polytechnic

Talata Mafara

Abstract

It is observed that among the Hausa speaking community in Northern Nigeria, some people employ a new strategy for begging. This paper analyses some of the expressions used by some Hausa modern day beggars in Sokoto and Zamfara states. Selected Hausa utterances/expressions from the domains of expression were subjected to analysis. The data were collected from direct observation of the beggars and was analysed within the framework of Speech Act theory proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1976). One of the three main aspects of the speech act: perlocution is copiously exemplified in the language use of the beggars. The paper describes these beggars who, in their language behaviour or speech events, manifest different aspects of the ethnography of communication. The beggars performed some acts through the use of certain expressions in order to persuade or convince their target audience. These utterances have certain perlocutionary effects and linguistic implication on the minds of the target audience.

Introduction

This article analyses the language of begging from the sociolinguistic point of view. Its aim is to show how beggars in selected Hausa speaking communities of northern Nigeria make use of language to realise their wishes. In the light of the above, one can say that, beggars use a powerful tool to realise their wishes and aspirations.

Begging is the practice of imploring others to grant a favour or a gift with little or no expectation of reciprocation. Kennedy and Fitzpatrick (2001) views begging as an act of asking passers-by for money in a public

place. However, begging goes beyond asking people for money alone in public spaces as beggars may approach people not necessarily for money alone but also for food, clothes etc. and this activity may not necessarily take place in public places only, it may take place anywhere. According to Khalid (1995), begging as an occupation, is a permanent means of livelihood involving large number of people, men and women, able and disabled. Begging seems to be a phenomenon peculiar to Hausa ethnic group of Northern Nigeria. Bukoye (2015) defines begging as “the practice of imploring others to grant a favour, which could be inform of gift like money, clothes or food with no expectation of reciprocation or refund”. Beggars are commonly found in public places such as transport routes, urban parks, wedding venues, motor parks, schools, mosques, churches and near busy markets. Beside money, beggars often ask for food, drink, clothes, medical expenses, transport fares, cigarettes or other small items.

Literature shows that begging is not peculiar to developing countries but it is a universal phenomenon (Ado, 1997) and a global urban problem. Hausa society in Northern Nigeria faces various social problems in the present time and begging is one of the most challenging ones. It is believed that Nigeria is the giant Africa; yet this problem is on the increase; it is a matter of great shame for everyone. It is pathetic to mention that begging has assumed wide dimensions and is being practiced in different forms or styles in our society. According to Aluko and Olanipekun (2019) “these so called beggars come in different shades, which includes the disabled, the poor, and the destitute and to a considerable extent the able-bodied, healthy and physically strong individuals who take the advantage of the sympathy of the society for them to remain jobless and at times perpetrate evils (like crime) in the name of begging in the street”.

It needs to be stressed that, some of these beggars do not look like poor in their appearance as the local beggars do. In most cases, they dress neatly when they go out for the business in such a way that people may not even know that they are beggars until they begin to speak the language and disclose their problems. In fact, some of them are well to do but they use the language to seek for favour from the well-to-do. Begging according to Bukoye (2015) is identified as a social problem and a maladaptive behaviour, and as such, the counsellors should assist the street beggars in their behaviour modification.

In addition, these beggars do not carry drums or any musical

instrument when they go out for the performance. Rather, they use language to entice alms-givers in order to achieve their aims. They do not normally enter residential homes but their targets are the well-to-do individuals because they get a lot compared to house wives who stay at home. The majority of such beggars in question are physically sound and healthy but take begging as their profession, because it enables them to earn their living easily.

Nowadays, women and small children are trooping into the business of begging. This is because, unlike other businesses that require capital investment, begging is a profession that does not require any capital and therefore no loss is recorded by the beggars.

Beggars according to Burke (1999) and Cooke (2001) as cited in Bukoye (2015), can be categorised based on their appearance and techniques or mode of begging. Based on their appearances, they can be categorised into three groups; which include:

- (a) Professional beggars who find themselves in this trade on the grounds of physical disability;
- (b) Those who street-beg on account of old age;
- (c) Those who voluntarily force themselves into the begging class (which is the category that is of concern to this article).

Based on their techniques of begging, they are also categorised into three, which are:

- (a) **Passive Begging:** This type involves persons either sitting or standing in one place with songs or receptacle entreating donations;
- (b) **Active Begging:** This type of beggars move from place to place soliciting for money, gifts etc; and
- (c) **Aggressive Begging:** This technique is one which harsh words and intimidations are used by beggars in soliciting for help.

In Nigeria, street begging according to Ammani (2009) is more in the Northern part of Nigeria. This is because of the adopted system of *Almajiri* by the people for religious reasons. This article takes a look at the expressions and language use by beggars in Hausa dominated communities of Sokoto and Zamfara states. The researchers sampled some

of the Hausa expressions used by these categories of beggars, translated them and analysed them as a means of discourse and the linguistic implication of the expressions are the major concern of the article.

The Hausa and its People

The name Hausa is employed by Europeans as well as other people to denote both the people and their language. They are located on the high fertile savannahs that stretch north to the Sahel below the desert (Smith, 1969). The name Hausa probably originated from the northern tribes and may be identical with *A'usa* which is the name by which the western *Tuaregs* designate the country on the north side of the Niger near Timbuktu (Merrick, 1905, p. 91).

The origin of Hausa race is shrouded in obscurity. That the Hausas are not autochthonous to the region which they now inhabit, but are immigrants of comparatively recent date is however, unquestionable (Orr 1911, p. 64). According to Coleman (1958) the original Hausa moved into what is now the Northern region of Nigeria long before the spread of Islam to that area in the thirteenth century.

According to Bello (1992), 'Hausaland proper' can be said to cover much of Northern Nigeria outside the Middle Belt and Borno, but it also extends north of Kano and Katsina provinces, and both north and considerably west of Sokoto into the Republic of Niger, and perhaps, as some would argue, Southwest into the hinterland of Benin, Togo and Ghana.

Bello (1992) further explains that 'Northern Nigeria is undoubtedly the strongest center of the Hausa *Hausawa* (plural), *Bahaushe* (singular). It comprises approximately 30,000 square miles. Form its border with the Republic of Benin in the West, to the Cameroun Republic in the East, Northern Nigeria is about 720 miles wide. Form its northern neighbour, the Republic of Niger to the East of Nigeria in the south is the distance of approximately 410 miles.

Hausa language is one of the three major languages in Nigeria. It is probably the most widely spoken language not only in Nigeria but on the continent of Africa. Hausa is spoken by more than fifty (50) million people in Nigeria, Niger, Northern Ghana and communities from Kaolack in Senegal to Khartoum in Sudan (Furniss, 1996). Hausa is a member of the Chadic language family, which itself is a constituent member of the Afro-

asiatic phylum that also includes Semitic, Cushitic Omotic, Berbe, and Ancient Egyptian (Greenberg 1963; Newman, 1980).

Speech Act theory

Linguistic communication of all kinds consists of actions. In the past, words, symbols, sentences or some kind of token were considered as the basic units of communication, but it was speech act theory which suggested that production or issuances of words also denote actions. The meaning of these basic units was considered as the building blocks of mutual understanding between the people and what they intend to communicate. Speech acts are acts performed in uttering expressions.

According to Austin (1975), an utterance produced by a speaker conveys three layers of meaning which are interrelated to one another, the first is the locutionary act; the literal meaning of an utterance produced by the speaker. The second is the illocutionary act which is the speaker's intention conveyed in the utterance, while the third is the Perlocutionary act, the effect that the utterance has on the hearer. This view is also expressed by Kemi et al., (2017).

Austin (1962, p 109) went further to classify speech acts according to their illocutionary force which are Verdictives, Excercitives, Commissives, Behavitives and Expositives. Searle (1976) in an attempt to improve on Austin's effort put forward a taxonomy of illocutionary acts such as; Representatives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives and Declarations which are not totally different from that proposed by Austin. In everyday usage of language, the intention is not directly expressed but instead utterances are formulated to appear more polite to the listeners. Indirect speech act refers to a statement used to perform an action such as; request, permission or apology other than its direct implication.

Begging as an activity is not a relatively new phenomenon and has attracted the attention of some scholars who have written differently from various perspectives. These include Ammani, (2009) who investigates 'Street Begging: exposing the effects of Blatant paying of lip service', Mamwata, A. et al (2010) who explores 'Demographic Dimension and their implications on the incidence of street begging in Urban Areas of Central Tanzania', Aluko and Olanipekun (2019) who wrote on 'The Menace of Street Begging among Children in Urban centers: Activities, Survival and Coping Strategies' among others.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The data for this research were gathered through direct observation of the people involved in this begging style in Hausa communities of Sokoto and Zamfara states without their knowledge. That is why the entire expressions are completely Hausa expressions. Some of the Hausa utterances/expressions used by the beggars were randomly selected from the domains of expression and subjected to analysis. The expressions were translated into English for data analysis. The data were analysed using the Speech Act theory developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1976). One of the three main aspects of the speech act: perlocution is copiously exemplified in the language use of the beggars.

Implications of Begging on the Society

Begging is extremely stigmatising and degrading. Begging as a social problem has a lot of implications on the beggars in particular and the society in general. Some of them are explained below: Over-dependence on the well-to-do members in the society. This unwanted act has a lot of implication. This is in line with what Tambawal (2005) says, "a major negative effect of the menace of street begging is the dependency syndrome it causes on beggars because as soon as one gets used to going out and getting what he needs for his livelihood then the question of thinking along the line of being useful to himself and the society does not arise".

In addition, people especially the rich and those holding political offices would be shunning public places because beggars disturb them all the time. This also affects their official responsibilities and sometimes family contact. Furthermore, youth, whose talents are required for the socio-economic development of their community, are turned to artificial beggars instead of becoming independent members in the society. Women and children who take part in this business are prone to rape and prostitution. This is because through begging they can be persuaded by men and women with questionable character especially those who engage in adultery, homosexuality and other social vices. This has adverse effects on the society because bastards would be produced in large numbers who would be involved in all sorts of social vices due to lack of proper parenting and good home upbringing. In view of the above, Bukoye's (2015) research reveals some devastating consequences of street begging like; rape, sexual harassment, kidnapping for rituals, accidents, attack of

various diseases, premature death, denting country's image, among others. Some people also argue that helping the poor contributes to a cycle of poverty. Aluko and Olanipekun (2019) discover that, the beggars especially the women also engage in unhealthy activities such as stealing, drug abuse, homosexuality and pre-marital sex among many others.

Begging and the Law

Many societies of the world frown at begging on the street. Many religions have prescribed begging as the only acceptable means of support for certain classes of adherents. Religious ideals of '*Bhiksha*' in Hinduism, '*Zakat*' in Islam and '*Charity*' in Christianity beside others promote alms-giving (Milbank, 1995). This obligation of making gifts to God by alms-giving explains the occurrence of generous donations outside religious sites like temples and mosques to mendicants begging in the name of God.

In India, as emphasised by Mamwata (2010), begging has been prohibited by law in various jurisdictions. In India, punishment for begging varies by region; however many of the laws (including New Delhi's) are modeled after *The Bombay Prevention of Beggary Act*, which orders the detention of those found guilty of begging. Many of the American laws while not actually making begging illegal make it difficult to find a reasonable location to beg. According to Johnny (2008), begging in Luxembourg is legal except when it is indulged in as a group or the beggar is a part of an organised effort. Some advanced communities reduced street begging because of concerns that people begging on the street may use the money to support alcohol or drug abuse. As such, those wishing to give beggars can rather give gift cards or vouchers for food or service and not cash.

In Nigeria, some state governments have enacted laws banning street begging but the laws cannot be implemented due to some social factors. Some state governments have also introduced monthly allowances for the beggars as a step to stop street begging but the programmes suffer some set back and had to be suspended due to various reasons as well as government's failure to sustain such efforts.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The thrust of this section is to present and analyse the data. The data are mainly Hausa utterances that are used by the beggars in question. This section provides answers to the question, why do these beggars use these

expressions in conversation? This article using Speech Act Theory proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1976) analyses some of the expressions used by the beggars in Hausa dominated environments. From the researchers' observation, the following are some of the expressions used by the present day beggars among the Hausa speaking communities of Sokoto and Zamfara states depending on the circumstances and the persons being addressed:

Expression 1

Wallahi wannan sutura ita ce kawai ta rage man

Meaning: By God! This is the only clothes that I owned.

Direct Speech act: representative (informing)

Force: Perlocutionary

In this context, the beggar, normally appears in a dirty outlook and swear by God that, he has only one set of dress for offering his five daily prayers and other acts of worship. He used that to convince the public to assist him with clothes. This is because people pity him because he mentions prayer which is the first pillar of Islam.

Expression 2

Wallahi na sani cewa nauyi yayi ma yawa

Meaning: By God! I am aware that, the burden is heavy for you.

Direct Speech act: representative (stating)

Force: Perlocutionary

Here, the expression used indicates that the beggar is aware of the addressee's burdens but s/he still seeks for assistance from him. This is meant to inculcate in the mind of the giver a sense of charity. Use of *wallahi* (By God) is one of the strategies used by the beggars in question in order to achieve their target and gain the attention of the rich whom they are talking to.

Expression 3

Tunda ana jin nauyi na bai kamata in karya doka ba

Meaning: It is wrong to disrespect the law, as I am being respected.

Direct Speech act: assertive (stating)

Force: Perlocutionary

Here, the beggar tries to identify with the addressee that they are associates to each other in a different business apart from the one under discussion. From the researchers' investigation, this expression is mostly used in academic environments especially if the teacher or lecturer is a man of principle who do not usually compromise standard by receiving bribes from the students. This expression is therefore used to request for favour from lecturers in tertiary institutions.

Expression 4

Naji labarin irin taimakon da kake yiwa mutane, Allah yayi ma albarka

Meaning: I heard about your kindness to people, may God bless you!

Direct Speech act: representative (reporting)

Force: Perlocutionary

This is another expression used by the beggars. They try to praise the well-to-do by acknowledging that people appreciate his assistance and they pray for him to excel every day and night. Praising the well-to-do is one of the strategies used by the beggars in order to achieve their aims.

Expression 5

Gaskiya samun irin ka sai an bincika

Meaning: Truly! You are wonderful and people of your kind are hard to come by.

Direct Speech act: assertive (informing)

Force: Perlocutionary

In this strategy, the beggar is trying to praise the prospective giver that people like him are not available just for him to feel highly honoured and give out charity to him. In this context, the beggars also try to acknowledge the well to do for his kindness to the poor.

Expression 6

Na sani cewa kana iya kokarin ka

Meaning: I am aware that, you are doing your best.

Direct Speech act: assertive (informing)

Force: Perlocutionary

The beggar in this context tries to qualify the addressee as a 'generous' even

among the well-to-do. In addition, he acknowledges his assistance to people.

Expression 7

Ka kara hakuri idan ka samu dama kasa 'yarka makaranta

Meaning: Be patient! Once you have the opportunity, enroll your Daughter to school.

Direct Speech act: directive (requesting)

Force: Perlocutionary

Here, the word 'daughter' is used to identify with the well to do so that he can assist the beggar even though they may not be related by blood. The beggars also use the word *haquri* meaning *patience* in order to achieve their aim while begging.

Expression 8

Kowa ba Allah baya rashi

Meaning: Begets, as you give to God.

Direct Speech act: representative (informing)

Force: Perlocutionary

Here, the beggars try to convince the rich men that God always provides for those who assist the poor and givers never lack. So, they should redouble efforts in assisting the needy so that their wealth will continue to increase. Another strategy of preaching is put in place in order to achieve an aim.

Expression 9

A taimaka mana mu biya kudin maganin yara

Meaning: Assist us to pay drugs bill for children.

Direct Speech act: directive (requesting)

Force: Perlocutionary

Here, the beggars present the sick children to the well to do to serve as evidence and reasons of their begging. People naturally sympathise and have pity on the sick especially if they are small children. So, they achieve their aim through this illegal way. The word 'assistance' is used in order to achieve a target.

Expression 10

A taimaka mana mucu abinci, wallahi rabonmu da abinci tun jiya da dare

Meaning: Assist us to eat food. By God! We did not eat food since yesterday night.

Direct Speech act: directive (requesting)

Force: Perlocutionary

In this context, the beggars try to inform the public that they are in a critical condition and have spent almost a day without eating. Again, the word *wallahi* (By God) is used in order to make their condition known to the public just to get help from them.

Expression 11

A taimaka mana mu saiwa marayu abinci

Meaning: Help us to buy food for the Orphans.

Direct Speech act: directive (requesting)

Force: Perlocutionary

In most cases, the beggars present the orphans to the public to serve as evidence that compel them to beg. Using words like 'orphans' and 'assist' is one of the discursive strategies employed by the beggars in order to win the hearts of the rich and get assistance from them.

Expression 12

A yiwa Allah a yiwa zumunci

Meaning: For God and consider our blood relationship.

Direct Speech act: directive (requesting)

Force: Perlocutionary

In this context, the beggar tries to remind the target audience that both of them are related and based on that, the giver shall not relent in his effort of assisting the blood relatives. This is because *Hausawa* know the reward of maintaining relationship among people.

Discussion of Findings

The study based on the above analysis, shows that begging forms a formidable part of beggars' life as they use it to achieve their target. The beggars also use words and expressions such as 'assist', 'help', 'orphans'

'God bless you' 'By God' etc. in order to make their conditions known to the public. They also preach and offer supplications and acknowledge the assistance of the well-to-do in order to achieve their aims. All these words and expressions have effect in the minds of the target audience and are used to instill pity in the minds of those expected to give charity.

Furthermore, from the analysis conducted, it can be deduced that the directive act (requesting) ranks as the highest direct speech act performed by the beggars in the utterances presented, as 5 utterances from the 12 analysed were used by the beggars to perform the acts. The remaining utterances were shared by the different speech acts. This demonstrates the power of directive act (requesting) in begging as the beggars mostly use it to realise their wishes. It is interesting to note that, sometimes these beggars are very clever and can use their power of language to persuade people to give them money especially those that they know. The two parties sometimes engage in a debate over the amount to be given as charity which is unusual in begging business.

Conclusion

The paper discovers that in recent times a new strategy is introduced in the begging profession in the Hausa speaking communities of Sokoto and Zamfara states of northern Nigeria who use certain expressions to persuade the well-to-do in order to get charity. These beggars, who are powerful men and women, forced themselves into begging as a result of laxity. They use language to persuade the public to give them money, food and other valuables. The paper also reveals that the expressions used have perlocutionary effect in the minds of the target audience. The paper is concerned with the linguistic implication of the expressions used by beggars. Those involved in the business should be encouraged to use their talents and provide linguistic progress so that the country can be proud of their contributions in nation building instead of becoming liabilities to the society.

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