Sociolinguistic Analysis of Ahmed Yerima's *Pegunrun*

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Abstract

This paper explores Ahmed Yerima's play *Pegunrun* using a sociolinguistic approach, a deviation from previous studies utilising linguistic-stylistic approaches. The paper shows the pivotal role of ethnographic elements as they contribute to the intelligibility of conversations. The dataset comprising 20 purposively selected conversations were analysed within the context of Hymes' SPEAKING, grid by focusing on 'Setting', 'Key' and 'Act'. Relevant aspects of VARIES model were also used to complement the analysis. The findings indicate that the setting was mainly informal; this informed the use of informal language and interaction. The major settings in the text are the palace and the shrine; hence, the issues of royalty, politics and belief in gods were prominent. Most conversations that occurred involved questioning, advising, reporting and persuasive acts, among others, while melancholic, serious, cheerful, etc. were the key identified. At the secondary analysis, sociolinguistic elements; vocation, age and religion were found preponderant and related to the language and setting of the play. The paper concludes that ethnographic elements are replete in the play and that the importance of sociolinguistic elements such as vocation, age, informality and sex cannot be overemphasised as they contribute to the intelligibility of the text and the world views projected by the voices of the characters in the text. The study enhances a deeper understanding of Yoruba culture as different cultural aspects were brought to the fore in the text.

Introduction

Language is an important aspect of human society. As social creatures, people use language to interact with one another. Thus, language is used as a means of expressing feelings, conveying ideas, intentions, and passing across knowledge among interlocutors. Language is used to ensure phatic, communal, and mutual intelligibility among them. To avoid misunderstanding, therefore, understanding the speakers' intention in communication is equally germane. In essence, language use enhances the detection of speaker's intention. Austin (1962) explains that every utterance made, such as stating a fact, confirming or denying something, making a prediction, giving an opinion, making a promise, or giving a piece of advice, is a speech act. When people communicate through language, they do not only make a set of grammatically correct sentences. Rather, these sentences can convey more meanings than what is expressed. The speaker's literal meanings are sometimes different from his intended meaning. There are always hidden meanings, intentions, or purposes in one's utterances. This is known in linguistics as 'speech acts': actions performed through language (Yule, 1996).

However, the detection of speaker's intention can only be ensured if the participants have similar cultural backgrounds or shared knowledge (Odebunmi, 2006). Yule (1996)

submits that "speech (language) is a form of social identity and it is used consciously or unconsciously to indicate membership of different social groups or different speech communities." A look at (Hymes 1974) reveals that language without social knowledge is equal to 'a social monster'. That is why language is believed to be conditioned by social norms and culture of a particular society. Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2007) points out that the best way to understand and promote the culture of a society is through its language because language serves as a mirror to a society and its culture.

This is so because how information is structured in communication (written/verbal) is an extremely important aspect of human interaction in society. It is expected that a speaker or writer distinctively organises his/her speech or texts in a way that will make it easier for listeners/readers to understand. To this end, language is considered as a strategic meaning-making instrument in a society. Meanwhile, literary writers have mastered the art of replicating social indices in their works. This is in tandem with the popular Aristotelian saying that literature mirrors the society.

Some factors which determine how language is used in every society are also replicated in literary texts. Based on the above, the present study that is inspired by the need to analyse language in its social context, considers a sociolinguistic analysis of *Pegunrun* by Ahmed Yerima, one of the modern playwrights. The text was examined using the ethnography of communication approach as proposed by Dell Hymes. This is specifically designed to unravel the sociolinguistic features of conversations among characters in the text. The SPEAKING variables are deployed to facilitate readers' comprehension of both the text and the world views advanced by the writer via the voices of the characters.

Methodology
The text contains five hundred and eighty four (584) turns, from which the data of the study comprising twenty (20) extracts were purposively selected. An extract comprises between one and four turns making about 80 turns under consideration in this work. The analyses were done in two sections; therefore, the data were divided into two. In data analysis one, the first ten data which were evenly taken from the play text was analysed following Hymes' (1974) ethnography of communication SPEAKING model to reveal how socio-cultural factors contribute to the understanding of texts. Similarly, in data analysis two, the remaining ten data which were evenly taken from the play text, were analysed by employing relevant aspects of Nilsen and Nilsen (2006) VARIES model to buttress the findings and achieve objective results.

Synopsis of *Pegunrun*
The play presents Ijekun Odo experiencing Pegunrun's anger during the reign of King Karounwi. The gods declare in Ijekun Odo community that the whole community will be wiped out through slavery. The people are plunged into dilemma when they hear that the white men are approaching the village to take them to captivity. However, the gods give them an alternative to choose between being taken captives and presenting a young female virgin to serve as a substitutive sacrifice. While the king and his chiefs are confused, Pegunrun, a young virgin volunteers to lay down her life as sacrifice to save her community from ruin in the face of onslaught of slavery and colonialism. Prior to her death she demands from the villagers that

she should be deified, so that every year the people of Ijekun Odo should worship her in a festival where gender inequality will not be allowed and everyone will dress as a woman. Further, she requested that she be the one to always choose the Iyalode for the Ijekun Odo community and that her mother should be well taken care of. One of the duties of Iyalode is to lead the villagers to Pegunrun's shrine for worship.

During the reign of King Karounwi, the incumbent Iyalode dies and there is a need to select a new person according to the tradition laid down by Pegunrun. Abidemi was selected to be the next Iyalode as the preferred choice of Pegunrun. However, the conflict between modernity and culture arises. King Karounwi does not allow the "fallacy tradition" to stand. He refuses to bless the new Iyalode and in fact, wants to destroy the place where Pegunrun is housed and turn it to Oja-Oba, (the king's market). He believes that modernity should be embraced and the new Iyalode should be chosen based on merit. As a matter of fact, the King's choice of Iyalode is an outspoken woman with masculine nature. Meanwhile, the decision does not go well with Pegunrun, she kills the king and sends a warning to Obalola that she must be worshipped before the next five days otherwise his life and the whole village will remain in distress. This propels him to send for a diviner, Ifakiyesi, who advises that, the instruction of Pegunrun must be followed for peace to reign in the land.

Ethnography of Communication

Hymes proposes the term 'Ethnography of SPEAKING, later amended to 'Ethnography of Communication' to describe a new approach to understanding language in use (Hymes, 1964). In doing this, he purposes to digress from analysing speech as an abstract model to investigating the speech as it is recognised in the ethnographic framework. As a result, Hymes offers a theoretical basis for language study that recognises linguistic variations from individual to individual and relative linguistic coherence across the social realm. Hymes opines that discourse cannot be considered without the sociological factors that shapen linguistic form and create meaning. Hymes posited a research instrument that can help researchers in exploring language use in the speech community. These research elements are known as SPEAKING, translate to:

Setting	–	the place of speech event
Participants	–	discourse interlocutors
End	–	the purpose of speech event
Act	–	thematic structuring of speech event
Key	–	manner/tone of speech event
Instrumentality	**–**	channel of communication employed
Norms	**–**	rules of social and speech behaviour
Genre	–	linguistic forms employed.

The VARIES model

The VARIES model is an acronym postulated by Nilsen and Nilsen (2006). Their major preoccupation is the description and analysis of conversation based on sociolinguistic elements embedded therein. Nilsen and Nilsen as quoted by Odebode (2012) opines that

V	represents Vocational jargon
A	stands for Age related language
R	for Religious/Regional language
I	represents Informality/Formality
E	for Educational jargons and
S	for Sex language.

The concept is appropriate for *Pegunrun* which is an African based literary work replete with sociolinguistic resources.

Review of Related Literature

Many studies that have been carried out in the field of Sociolinguistics include Kparevzua (2021) which examines Sociolinguistic aspects of meaning in Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother*…(1971) and *Comes the Voyage at Last* (1992). Subjecting the data to sociolinguistic investigation, the study affirms that the society one finds oneself impinges on the form or type of language one uses. The work is similar to the present study because they both use sociolinguistic approach but they defer in genres. While the study uses two texts (prose) the present study uses drama.

Chaudhary and AlZahrani (2024) work on Sociolinguistic Exploration of language and society in *The Bluest Eye*. The researchers examine the conversations of the characters in the text using Hymes' SPEAKING model and found that social variables like cultural norms, age, gender, race, class etc influence the communication competence of the characters in the social milieu presented by the author. The research is an addition to our wealth of knowledge. It opens our eyes more to the analysis of both formal and informal discourse without stress. This study is similar to this research, in the sense that both of them analyse conversations. They differ because while the study analyses its data using only Hymes' SPEAKING model, the present study integrates VARIES model into Hymes' SPEAKING model.

Deploying Dell Hymes' Ethnography of communication and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Ohia (2023) provides an analysis of Ogba proverbs as tools for cohesion. He affirms that SPEAKING model enhances comprehension of the data for the paper and reveals aspects of Ogba culture that manifest in Ogba proverbs. He establishes that proverbs are employed to enhance, spice and beautify oral and written communications commonly but proudly employed in Ogba people's interpersonal relations through conversations. The work is similar to the present study which takes a sociolinguistic approach to study Ahmed Yerima's *Pegunrun*. They differ in that, while the primary data for Ohia's work is oral interviews, the present study considers a dramatic text.

Didem (2022) explores Gender and Language: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Second Language Writing. The gender differences in the use of linguistic features as well as the social meanings attached to those differences were brought to the fore. Essays written by 22 males and 22 females students of a government university were analysed with respect to the use of linguistic features; adjectives, intensifiers, linking adverbials, number of words and sentences etc. The results shows that, in comparison to males, females use more adjectives, intensifiers

and words, males on the other hand used more empty adjectives and linking adverbials than females. The study recommends that the social variable, gender should be taken into consideration in the English teaching and learning in EFL settings to facilitate student's achievement in the subject. The research enhances our understanding of sociolinguistic variables such as the effect of gender on written English.

Oloruntoba (2018) investigates Gender and time in Ahmed Yerima's *Aetu*.' The article explores the effects of time and historical changes on Nigerian feminist literature. It critically looks at the play's engagement with how culture places women in socially subordinate positions. The researcher finds that the modern liberated Igbo woman is one who successfully merges the traditional duties of women with the gains of western education. This work updates our knowledge of another African literary text. It is similar to the present study because their primary texts are authored by the same African playwright, Ahmed Yerima. They differ in theory and context.

Ethnographic Analysis
In this section, we apply the ethnography of communication SPEAKING model to *Pegunrun*. Purposively selected conversations drawn from the texts are further given indepth analysis based on the theoretical framework.

> **Text 1**
> OLUAWO: Hurries in, have you done it?
>
> IYA: Yes
>
> OLUAWO: What did she say?
>
> IYA: She is happy with our choice. She wants us to go to Kabiyesi tomorrow and pick a date for the festival. Abidemi is a lucky girl. All the gods of the land agree with her choice as the new Iyalode (*Four Plays* p. 5).

The setting of the conversation is Pegunrun's shrine. This is the place that houses the goddess that protects and makes peace to reign in the land of Ijekun Odo. The two major participants are Iya and Oluawo. The goal of the conversation is to prepare for the installation of the new Iyalode of Ijekun Odo. Before offering herself a sacrifice for the land, Pegunrun had requested that she be the one to choose the subsequent Iyalode for the community. She chooses Abidemi, and it is a norm in the land that the new Iyalode should be taken to the palace for the King's blessings. The major illocutionary act of the conversation is questioning. The tone of the conversation is blissful because Pegunrun approves their choice of the new Iyalode. Iya's speech, "she is happy with our choice." buttresses this.

Moreover, the instrument used is spoken discourse. The norm, therefore, is the belief that the gods have the final say. Iya is happy to know that all the gods of the land agree with their choice of the new Iyalode. Oluawo is a consulting priest, who is believed to be

representing the god. Therefore, he assumes the plus Higher (+H) role and Iya, the matriarch of culture acts the minus Higher (-H) role. The genre is dramatic.

Text 2

OLUAWO: I shall continue to try and calm Laalu's restless nature. Even if I begin to feel the foul warmth, here in our midst. If only we could predict him. Like an ill winded whirlwind, he looms, and we must cower in fear.

ABIDEMI: Why me? When did I ever offend this fearsome god. I don't even know the first Iyalode, even though I often feel I share a bond with her. But why me I ask? Why must her load fit my head so perfectly that I tremble with fear? And now Esu's unpredictable spirit push me… until I feel I will fall again…bleeding for a sin I did not commit.

KEKERE AWO: We really can't predict him. He seems set to choke us all. Hmm… again I feel a restless heat as if we are falling into snake pit. Its neck bent to bite us or swallow us whole *(Four Plays* p.10).

The setting of the exchange is Esu's shrine and the participants comprise Abidemi, Oluawo, Iya and Kekere Awo. The goal of the exchange is to find a means to appease Esu, one of the gods of the land who is seriously embittered because of the choice of Abidemi as the new Iyalode. The major speech act in the excerpt is persuasive. Oluawo indicates this in his words, "I shall continue to try and calm Laalu's (devil's) restless nature." The interlocutors believe that if sacrifice is offered to Esu, he may agree to the choice of Abidemi. The key of the conversation is ominous. The instrument engaged is an oral conversation with a rhetoric question. Abidemi's utterance is an indication of the rhetorical questions "Why me? When did I ever offend this fearsome god?..." Moreover, the Yoruba setting (which this play replicates) believes so much in gods and that it is the gods who have the final say over all situations. Hence, people seek to please the gods to gain their favour. The genre is dramatic.

Text 3

OSINNUSI: Hurry women, I fear they will soon beat the drums announcing the choice of the new Iyalode…

JOWUOLA: How? We did everything we were asked to do.

OSINNUSI: Stop whom? The sacrifice is always done at the same time. Iya goes to the shrine with the name of the candidate, and the candidate comes here to appeal to Esu… (*Four play*s p.12)

The setting is at the shrine of Esu. The participants are Osinnusi, women from Pegunrun's family and Jowuola. Osinnusi (Olori ebi as the head of Pegunrun's family) and Jowuola is another candidate for the post of Iyalode. Osinnusi leads Jowuola to the shrine to make a

sacrifice to Esu to gain his support for the post of Iyalode. Hence the end of the discourse. The speech acts in the discourse are commanding and questioning. Osinnusi's utterance "Hurry women" and Jowuola's question "How?" buttress these.

Furthermore, the tone of this conversation indicates fear and uncertainty. This is because two candidates are running for the post of Iyalode of Ijekun Odo. The discourse is realised through the instrumentality of verbal discussion. The Yoruba Africans believe that sacrificing to the gods attracts favour and support. This is why Abidemi and Jowuola bring a sacrifice to Esu so that they can win his favour and achieve their goal. The genre of the discourse is dramatic.

Text 4
OSINNUSI: But what does our daughter want?

JOWUOLA: Sit on the throne of Pegunrun, and reign as the Queen of the women.

JOWUOLA: I say no! Baba let us go ahead.

OSINNUSI: I am the Olori Ebi of the family. We know that it is from our house that Iyalode of Ijekun Odo must come, but we are tired that it is Pegunrun our late mother who still choses the Iyalode. Many years have passed, and we want to change that tradition. We want…
(*Four Plays* p.15)

The setting of the discourse is Esu shrine. The participants are Osinnusi, Jowuola and other members of Pegunrun's family. The goal of their gathering is to inform Esu of their intention to change their usual tradition of which Pegunrun chooses their Iyalode for them. The illocutionary act in the discourse is requesting. Osinnusi's utterance "We are tired that it is Pegunrun our late mother who still chooses the Iyalode. Many years have passed, and we want to change that tradition' buttresses this. The key of the discourse is melancholic and the instrument is informal verbal conversation. Furthermore, it is a norm of the tradition replicated in the text to keep any legacy left behind by the dead people. The Pegunrun's family members contradict this norm by seeking the support of Esu to change their family tradition contrary to their late mother's wish. The genre is dramatic.

Text 5
ADUNNI: Where is Iya?

ABIDEMI: Gone up to the hill to the shrine…

ADUNNI: How can she forget it there when it was never taken there. Without it, you can never be Iyalode… (*Four Plays* p.18)

The conversation sets at Abidemi's room. The participants are Abidemi and Adunni. The goal of the discourse is to dress Abidemi for her installation as the new Iyalode of Ijekun land. However, Osugbo, a piece of cloth for her covering, is missing. However, without the Osugbo, there is no way she can be taken to the palace for the King's blessing. The illocutionary act of the discourse is questioning. Adunni's utterances "Where is Iya?" and "How can she forget it there..." showcase this. The tone of the conversation is melancholic. This is because they could not find Osugbo and without it, Abidemi cannot receive the King's blessing. The instrument used to convey the extract is spoken discourse.

Moreover, Africans believe in the use of an object as a symbol of authority. The interlocutors exhibit this culture by attaching much importance to Osugbo (a piece of cloth for face covering) which is a symbol of authority that Pegunrun hands over to the people of Ijekun Odo before her death. The genre is dramatic.

Text 6
KAROUNWI: … Who is the covered wimp of a masquerade with a veil who stand before me?

IYA: Our new mother. The chosen by Pegunrun herself.

KAROUNWI: I will not bless the new Iyalode based on traditions and an old stale story. Who leads you here? (*Four Plays* pp.22-23)

The setting of the exchange above is King Karounwi's palace. The participants are King Karounwi, Abidemi, Jowuola and other members of Pegunrun's family. The goal of their gathering at the King's palace is for the King to bless the new Iyalode as the tradition of the land demands. The key is melancholic because peoples' expectation from King Karounwi is not met. The people feel disappointed over the King's refusal to bless the new Iyalode. The main speech act in the conversation is questioning. King Karounwi in the manner of someone with official high relationship poses questions while Iya (matriarch of culture) gives answers.

The instrumentality employed for this exchange is verbal conversation. The conversation exhibits the traditional belief that King's blessing is germane and that is why the people are not happy when King Karounwi declines blessing the new Iyalode. His utterance "I will not bless the new Iyalode." (p.23) proves this. This is because he feels that the tradition is archaic. The genre is dramatic.

Text 7
IYA: By the gods, I call you Yeye Pegunrun. Rise. You gave your word that, if we ever need your help, we should pull at the chain. This is the second time. Arise Yeye…I say rise, the third time.

PEGUNRUN: Do not bother. Your cries came with each step of your heartbeat.

IYA: Yeye you are up!

PEGUNRUN: You sound distracted, what is the matter?

IYA: Plenty went wrong Yeye. Oba Karounwi, mocked your heroic deeds. *(Four Plays* p. 31)

The exchange is set at Pegunrun's shrine. Iya (the matriarch of culture) and Pegunrun (a goddess) are the participants. Pegunrun is symbolic and she denotes someone who destroys curse. She is the first Iyalode of Ijekun Odo. She helped her people to avert the curse of slavery by offering herself as a sacrifice. The end of the discourse is to report King Karounwi to Pegunrun so that she can come to their rescue. The report infuriates Pegunrun because her heroic deed is being watered down by the king. She decides to terminate the King's life. The dominant speech act in the discourse is reporting. Iya's response to Pegunrun's question; "Plenty went wrong Yeye. Oba Krounwi mocked your heroic deeds." (p.31) establishes this. However, the key of the conversation is melancholic because the king interrupts people's happiness when he refuses to bless the new Iyalode of Ijekun Odo. The instrument is verbal conversation. The major norm in the discourse is the belief that when a matter is difficult for humans to handle, it should be handed over to the gods. Pegunrun who is a goddess, assumes the plus Higher (+H) role while Iya (matriarch of culture) plays the minus Higher (-H) role. The genre is dramatic.

Text 8
PEGUNRUN: But did Karounwi negate these words of wisdom… today?

IYA: Today. Yes, Yeye. Like a baboon he jumped from tree howling, shrieking, boasting and puffing.

PEGUNRUN: What do you want me to do to him?

IYA: He is a king… only his left ear Yeye. Pull it gently. The rich and powerful cannot bear much pain. Kike la n ke Oba *(Four Plays* p.33)

This setting of the dialogue is Pegunrun's shrine. The participants are Pegunrun and Iya. The end is to determine what punishment should be given to the erring King. The predominant speech act in the excerpt is questioning. Pegunrun's statement "What do you want me to do to him?" (p.33) reveals this. The key of the conversation is happiness because Iya and other members of Pegunrun's family are vindicated. The instrument used to convey their message is verbal conversation. When Pegunrun requests for suggestions on what punishment should be given to King Karounwi for dishonouring a tradition, Iya's response; "He is a king… only his left ear Yeye. Pull it gently." (p.33) shows the norm of tradition in the conversation is giving deference to the King. Pegunrun assumes the plus Higher (+H) role while Iya acts the minus Higher (-H) role. The genre is dramatic.

Text 9

IYA: The drums from the palace. Ha ha!

PEGUNRUN: What does it say?

IYA: Oyetola Karounwi is gone …The drum plays a dirge in his honour

PEGUNRUN: I say it is done. I have work to do... (*Four Plays* p.35)

The setting of the conversation is Pegunrun's shrine. The participants are Pegunrun and Iya. The end of the conversation is to hear the announcement of King Karounwi's death. This is because King Karounwi dishonours Pegunrun and he deserves to be punished. The principal act in the conversation is informative. This is proven by the sound of drums informing the speakers that the King is dead. Furthermore, the key of the exchange indicates happiness because the speakers' desire comes to pass. Pegunrun's utterance, "I say it is done." (p.35) showcases this. The instrument is oral conversation. In the Yoruba culture, drum often plays significant roles, part of which is information dissemination. This is why drumming is used to announce the death of King Karounwi. The genre is dramatic.

Text 10

ADIFALA: Aroko!

ADELU: Yes baba. Aroko you say.

ADIFALA: A message from the killer or killers. Ifa says it is a woman.

ADELU: A woman. Kills the king and allows the late Olori to sit on his laps? This is an insult.

ADIFALA: Yes. She swells. Her teeth grit. And her cheeks twitch. Your father dared her. He refused to accept Pegunrun's choice for the new Iyalode… (*Four Plays* pp. 37-38)

The setting of the exchange is King Karounwi's throne room. The participants include Adelu, (the prince), Adifala (the priest), Otun and other chiefs. The end of the conversation is to find out the reason behind the sudden death of the King from the oracle because he is expected to live long on the throne. This is the reason Adifala is consulted. He reveals that the king is killed by the mother of culture, Pegunrun. The chiefs ask Adifala to consult the oracle and appease Pegunrun. The speech act is informative. This is because after consulting the oracle, Ifadeyi informs other participants about what the oracle says.

Furthermore, the key is melancholic because the participants are discussing the sudden death of the King. Adelu is surprised and annoyed because a woman kills his father. The instrument of the conversation is verbal communication cum coded language. It is a norm, in

the Yoruba cultural setting replicated in our text, to consult the oracle to unravel a mystery. Adifala who is a consulting priest, acts the plus Higher (+H) role while other participants play the minus higher (-H) role. The genre is dramatic.

Statistical Analysis of Selected Conversations in *Pegunrun*
This section presents the descriptive statistical analysis of the data. The preponderant SPEAKING items demonstrated in *Pegunrun* are given statistical distribution. This analysis focuses on setting, key and act because they are core to this study.

Analysis of the Settings in *Pegunrun*

Setting	Frequency
Pegunrun's shrine	4
Esu's shrine	3
Abidemi's room	1
King Karounwi's palace	1
King Karounwi's throne room	1
Total	10

Table 1: Indicating the frequency of the settings studied in *Pegunrun*

Table 1 exhibits the settings in *Pegunrun*. It reveals that Pegunrun's shrine has the highest frequency. This is because Pegunrun is the protagonist and the play revolves around her. It is closely followed by Esu's shrine which occurs three times. The settings with the lowest frequency are King Karounwi's palace and throne room which occur once each.
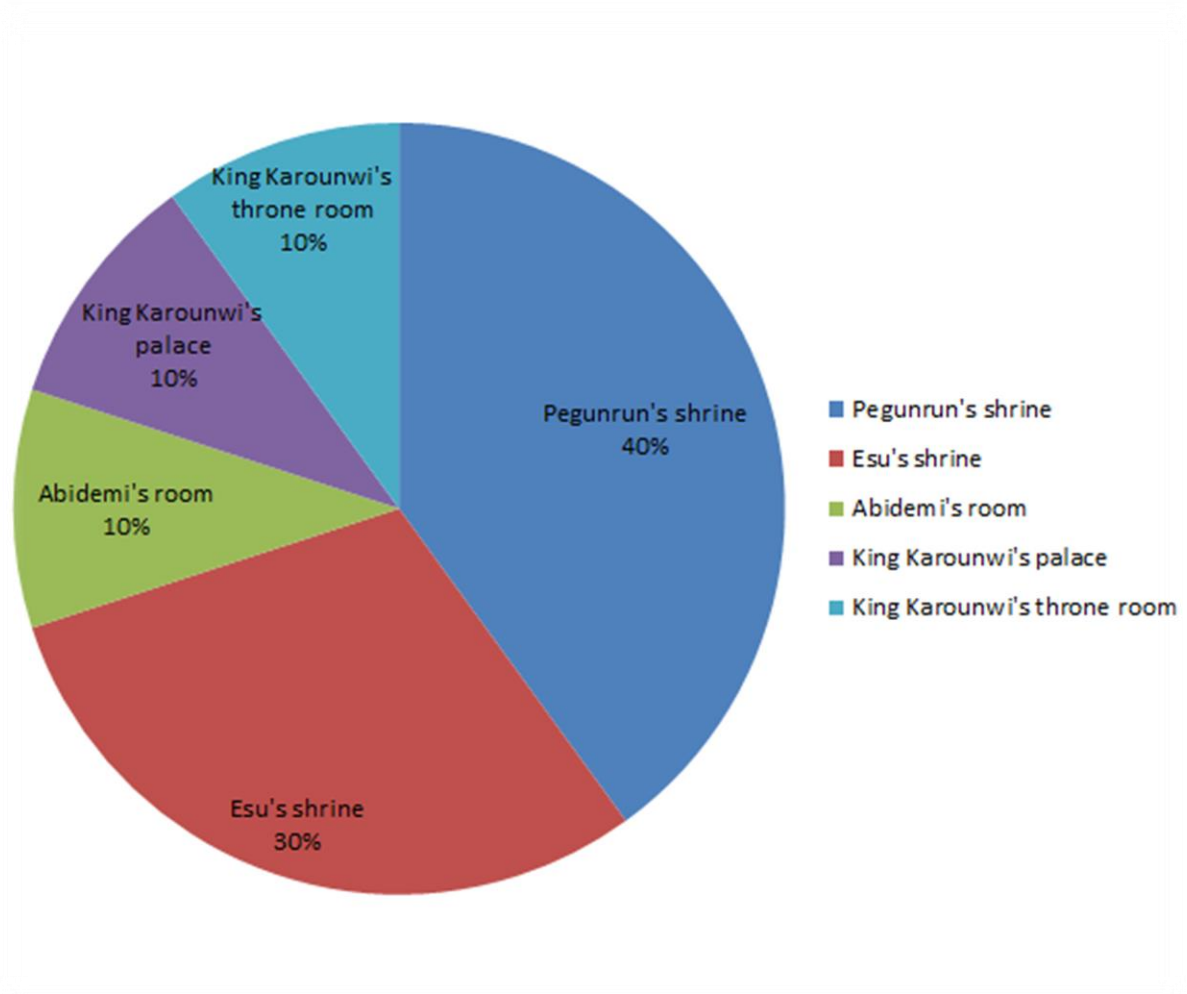
Fig. 1 A Pie Chart illustrating the settings' frequency in *Pegunrun*

Analysis of the keys in *Pegunrun*

Key	Frequency
Fearful	1
Blissful	1
Ominous	1
Melancholic	5
Happiness	2
Total	10

Table 2 Indicating the frequency of the keys studied in *Pegunrun*

It can be deduced; from Table 2 that melancholic key occurs as the highest frequency. Melancholic key is the major key in the text because the speakers' utterances deal with the issue of death. It is followed by the happiness key while the fearful, blissful and ominous keys appear once each.
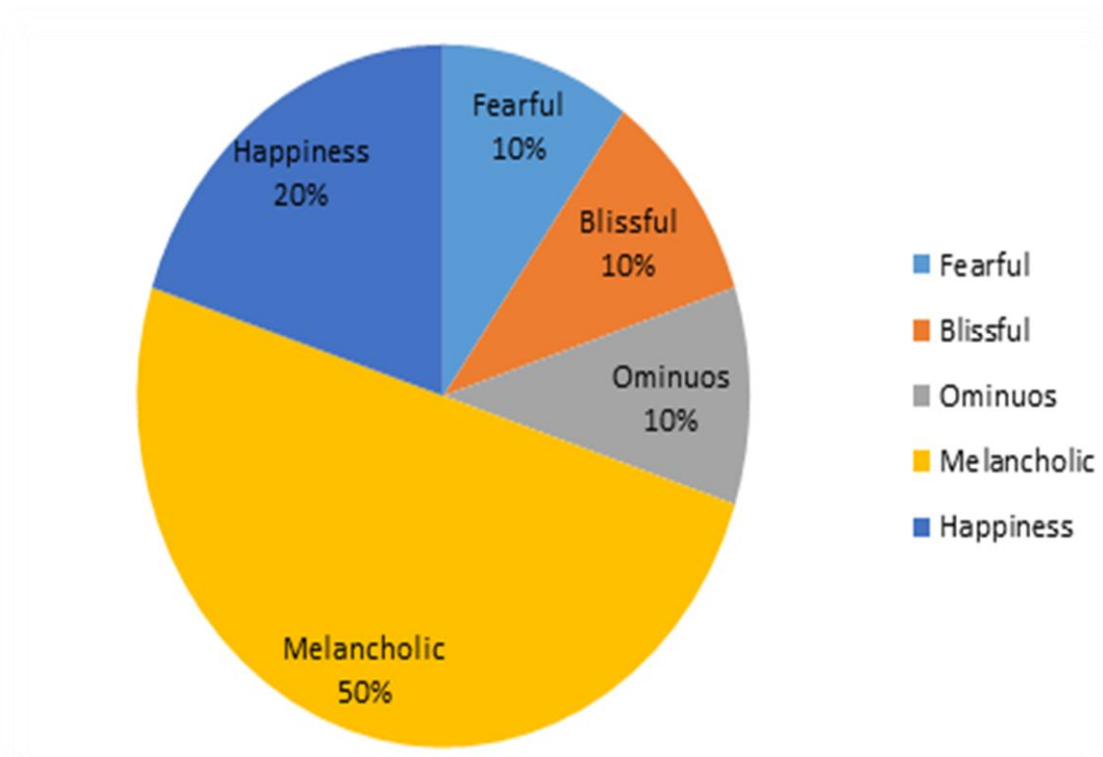

Fig. 2   A Pie Chart illustrating the keys' frequency in *Pegunrun*

Fig. 2 highlights the keys' frequency. The fearful, blissful and ominous keys have an equal frequency which is closely followed by happiness key. It is noticed that the melancholic key has the highest frequency, this is because the play is a social tragedy evident in the death of both the protagonist (Pegunrun) and the King.

Analysis of the Acts in *Pegunrun*

Act	Frequency
Requesting	1
Persuasive	1
Reporting	1
Informative	2
Questioning	5
Total	10

Table 3. Indicating the Frequency of the Acts Studied in *Pegunrun*

It is observed from table 3 that the questioning act attracts the highest frequency. This reveals that the questioning act is prominent in the text. The next to it is informative act that occurs twice. The acts of advising, apologizing, reporting and appealing occur once each.
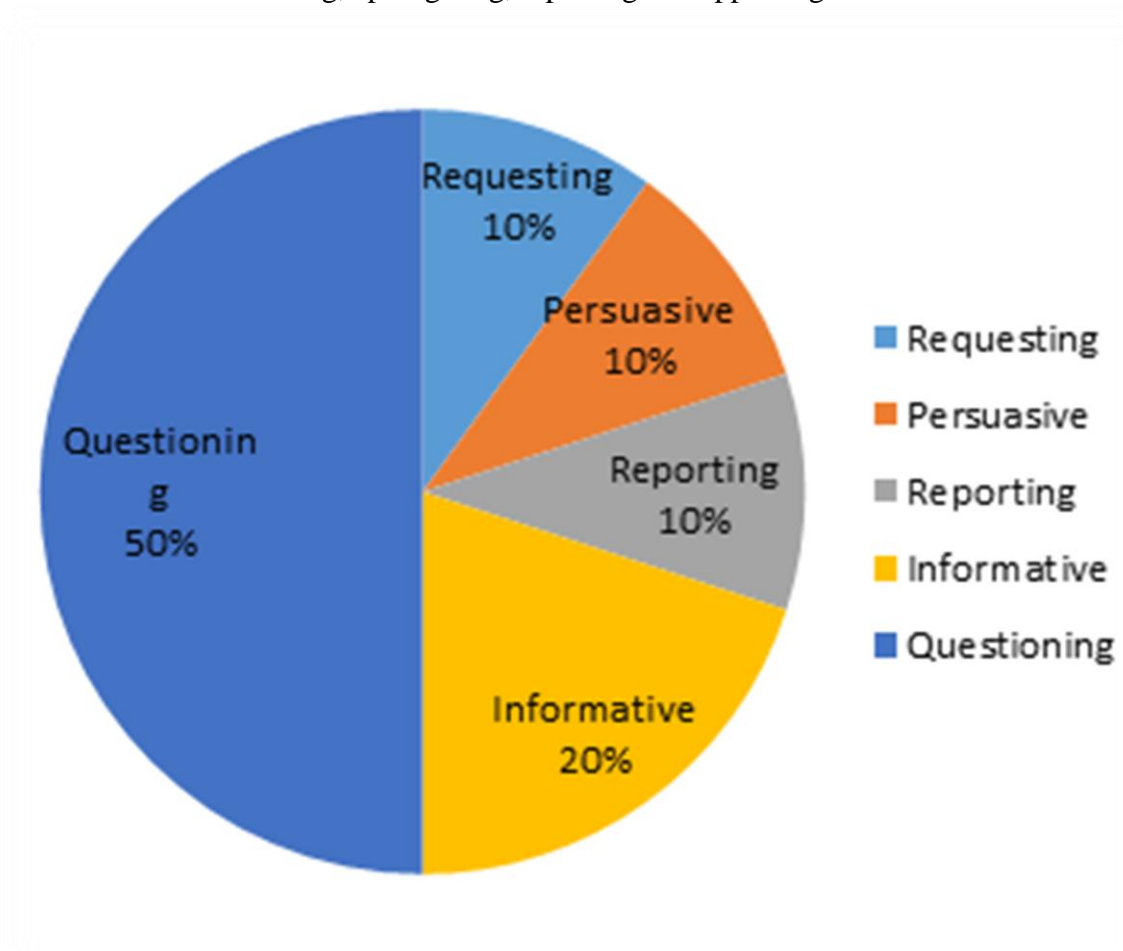

Fig. 3 A Pie Chart illustrating the keys' frequency in *Pegunrun*

We have seven (7) major Settings, five (5) prominent Keys and five (5) Acts. Most of the activities take place in the shrine. The prominent keys in the text is melancholic this is because the text is replete with sad events. The high frequency of questioning act is not normal because it is not usually the best way of discourse. Its prominence in the text indicates crisis and it means the play is replete with tragic events.

Data analysis of VARIES Components (Sociolinguistic Elements)
This section brings to the fore, relevant sociolinguistic variables embedded in *Pegunrun.* Purposively selected conversations are drawn from the text. These are further given in-depth analysis based on the VARIES model. The analysis comes after each conversation.
The VARIES Analysis of Ahmed Yerima's *Pegunrun***.**

Language and Vocation

    Text 11 *(drumming)*
    JOWUOLA: I hear drums. Listen Baba. What do they say? (*Four Plays* p.17).

Text 11 indicates drumming activities across *Pegunrun*. People take drumming as a profession and they are identified with it in so many ways. For instance in Yoruba language the family of drummers are called the 'Ayans' children from that family language are usually named 'Ayangalu,' 'Ayanbiyi' and so on. Drumming often plays significant roles in the society. It is used in the contexts of entertainments as in the case of the King's mother who dances to welcome her visitor. It is also used for information dissemination such as when Jowuola informs Baba about the sound of a drum and wanting to know its purpose (p.17). Furthermore, drumming plays dirge to announce the passing away of a king. It is a hereditary profession especially in Yoruba setting and that is why in almost all communities, one will always find 'Ile onilu' (the drummer's house/family). It is not just an activity but a vocation that serves as means of livelihood.

    Text 12 *(singing and dancing)*
    IYA (RAISES A SONG): A n gbeYeye rele Oba Yeye! Rora maa tele muye muye
            Yeye! Iyalode n rele Oba Yeye! … (*Four Plays* p.22)

Text 12 presents a group of singers led by Iya (the matriarch of culture). They sing in honour of Abidemi who is the new Iyalode of Ijekun Odo. It signifies honour through songs. Although, in the Yoruba African community (replicated in our texts), songs are rendered for different purposes, these include dirge (mournful piece of music), nuptial weep (ekun iyawo), which is an important aspect of wedding ceremony in the olden days.
    Furthermore, in Yoruba land, songs are rendered to insult or mock specific members of the community. Songs precede intrigues, people sing songs as a result of brawl. Singing and drumming are inseparable especially during entertainment. It cuts across the three predominant religions in Nigeria, that is, Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion.

Text 13 (*trado-medical vocation*)

OLUAWO: O ya Kekere Awo, home. There is so much to do at the shrine tonight. Abidemi …come to the shrine before you return home. There is an additional chant you will say before you set out tomorrow.
(*Four Plays* pp.10-11)

From Text 13 above, we can infer the vocation of a herbalist or traditional priest. The utterance of Oluawo portrays the role of a traditional religion leader. Oluawo functions as the chief priest of Esu, a supernatural being. His role reflects that he is a messenger through whom Esu speaks. This is a traditional vocation. Similarly, the use of lexical items such as shrine and chants reflects traditional vocation. In Yoruba land, traditional medicine is in vogue. People consult the Ifa Priests for soothsaying or any other physical and metaphysical issues.

Text 14 (*royalty/politics*)

IYA: What again? What does Obalola want from us this time?...
(*Four Plays* p. 57)

The exchange above exemplifies the monarchical positions typical of the Yoruba society which *Pegunrun* replicate. People of the royal family are in the position of authority. Ascendancy to the throne is hereditary. Only the royal blood can become kings in Yoruba land. The King and his chiefs attend to the communal issues which they may or may not combine with any other work. The discourse highlights the descriptive name Obalola (royal heir) which indicates royal vocation. The King is vested with authority to direct the affairs of the community, Obalola is the son of the reigning king who is expected to reign when the king dies, while Olori is literarily the wife of Kabiyesi who is expected to always give the king the necessary supports.

Language and Age

Text 15

KAROUNWI: …She stopped the Whiteman coming to make us and our children slaves. But now times have changed, we need the Whiteman's ways to grow, to develop. The song of yesterday has turned to the rubbish of today… (*Four Plays* p. 26)

Karounwi's utterance in Text 15 above indicates the era (past and present) praised in the texts. This is seen when he admits that Pegunrun has saved them from the Whiteman's slavery in the time past. Nevertheless, he opines that times have changed so the Whiteman's ways is needed for progress. The song of yesterday has turned to the rubbish of today (p.26). Karounwi, being king, holds the power to force his opinion on his subjects. Thus, the text demonstrates monarchical system of authority in which the king gives order and no one is permitted to question his authority.

Language and Religion

Text 16
ABIDEMI: A few drops of blood fell on *Esu's* black stone.

IYA: Eewo!

OLUAWO: Blood on Esu's black stone? (*Four Plays* p.8)

Texts 16 shows name and lexical items such as; *Esu, blood and black stone*. They constitute a reference to traditional religion. Her statement reveals the existence of a belief system in Sango (the god of iron). In her discussion with Iya (mother of culture), Abidemi says 'A few drops of blood fell on Esu's black stone' responses from Iya and Oluawo indicate that what Abidemi did is a taboo.

Informality

Text 17
OSINNUSI: I did. But he returned them back (*Four Plays* p. 17)

IYA: Eewo! (*Four Plays* p.8)

Informal language is reflected all through the data. Text 17 reveals tautology (p.17). The reason for the high rate of informality in the data is the informal setting and the nature of the conversation between the interlocutors.

Language and Education

Text 18
IYA: A black chicken. A bottle of palm oil. And nine obi abata… three for each of you…must be taken to the shrine of Pegunrun, before noon today (*Four Plays* p.53).

Language of education is appropriately reflected in the utterance of Iya (Matriarch of culture), who plays the role of an instructor to Jowuola and Osinnusi. Master-student relationship is evident when Iya guides her addressees by telling them the items to use, the quantity and the time of the day those items should be taken to Pegunrun shrine.

Language and Gender

Text 19

KAROUNWI: LETS OUT A WILD LAUGH. This world must really be going upside down… a man leads a family of women for a royal blessing to enthrone a woman. Does this make sense to you?

KAROUNWI: LOOKS AROUND. Where are they? The owner of the family of dreamers? I say who leads this pack of women? (*Four Plays* p.23-25)

In Text 19, King Karounwi interrupts Iya while speaking on the need for the new Iyalode to be blessed. To him, the words of Iya do not hold water, so he requested to know their leader. The King feels disgusted when Osinnusi, the family head, shows up. Traditionally, it is believed that women should not talk where men are present. If they wish to talk, they must talk to each other. It is also uncommon for men to listen silently to a group of women talking. The conversation shows further that men deny equal status to women as conversational partners. Therefore, he can only speak with their leader, that is the family head, who is usually a male and not one of the "pack of women".

From the foregoing, it is evident that sociological factors (vocation, age, religion, informality education and sex have been realised as important factors that determine participant's use of language and the interpretation(s) given to it. The major vocations praised in the text are drumming (p.17), singing and dancing (p.22), trado-medical and royalty/politics (p.57). Likewise, instances of age related language is preponderant in *Pegunrun* because of their setting. Age, in terms of era is exemplified in (p.26) when King Karounwi opines that the song of yesterday has become the rubbish of today. He prefers modernization to tradition. The text is also enunciated with religion related language, but the major religions praised in the text is traditional religion. Furthermore, because of the nature of the setting, theme and issues raised in the text, a lot of informal languages are deployed. Notwithstanding, the text is educative enough as major discourses highlight the language of education. The text is as well replete with gender issues as male chauvinism is noted in it.

The findings indicate that the settings are mainly informal and because of the informal nature of the settings, the participants used more informal languages. The major settings in *Pegunrun* are the palace and the shrine, respectively. This is because the text discussed the issues of royalty, politics and belief in gods. It was also revealed that questioning, advising, reporting and persuasive acts among others occurred in the selected conversations. A further look reveals different types of key: melancholic, serious, happiness, fearful, ominous and cheerful. Further analyses reveal that the text has major sociolinguistic elements of vocation (royalty/politics, drumming, trado-medical, singing and dancing), religion, education, and age. The variables are seen as related to the themes, language and sociological setting of the play. They are significant in conversational discourses such that through them, our understanding of the text has been greatly enhanced.

Conclusion

This work is conducted to investigate and unravel the sociolinguistic features in conversational interactions among the characters in Ahmed Yerima's *Pegunrun*. The work uses Dell Hymes' SPEAKING acronym and Nilsen and Nilsen's VARIES model to bring to limelight the sociolinguistic features in the text. It was also revealed that questioning, advising, reporting and persuasive acts among others occurred in the selected conversations. A further look reveals different types of key: melancholic, serious, happiness, fearful, ominous and cheerful. This work indicates that language reflects the society and the two cannot be separated from each other. As discovered in the study, Hymes' SPEAKING acronym reveals the contextual, cultural and traditional elements in Ahmed Yerima's play.

Nilsen and Nilsen's VARIES model, on the other hand, gives an insight into how social variables such as drumming, singing and dancing, royalty/politics and trado-medical vocations are discovered in the text. The age reveals the change of one era to another and how the age gap among the participants form their roles differences in terms of respect and honour. The predominant religion in *Pegunrun* is traditional religion; another religion discovered is Christianity that is regarded as a "strange religion." It is observed that there is religion imbalance because the author praises only two out of the three major religions that are dominant in African setting.

It was found that the characters employed code mixing and code switching to fill certain lexical gaps when there is no word to adequately express their thoughts in the English language. Taking into cognisance the categories of participants, the writer uses informal language in the text to reflect the educational level of the participants. Sex related language which includes the lexemes; mother, woman, son and father were also preponderant. Conclusively, sociolinguistic elements have contributed to the intelligibility of the text. These sociolinguistic elements that guide human speech also guide interpretation of the same in a way that misunderstanding and or misinterpretation are avoided within the context of use. The study enhanced the understanding of Yoruba culture as the different cultural aspects of the ethnic group were brought to the fore in the studied text.

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