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PRAGMATIC AND STYLISTIC FUNCTIONS OF STAMMERING IN MAMMAN

SHATA'S "UMARU DAN DAN DUNA NA GWANDU"

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Abstract

This study examines the pragmatic and stylistic functions of deliberate stammering in Shata's "Umaru Dan Dan Duna na Gwandu." The poem demonstrates how stammering often perceived as a speech defect is artistically employed by the singer as both a communicative and aesthetic strategy. Anchored in Foregrounding Theory, Speech Act Theory, and Grice's Cooperative Principles, the study explores how Shata's deliberate disfluency performs communicative acts such as praise, emphasis, humour, and audience engagement. Data were obtained from the orthographic transcription of the original Hausa oral performance and analysed qualitatively. The findings reveal that stammering serves both pragmatic and stylistic purposes: heightening attention, reinforcing admiration, and enriching the rhythm and emotional force of the performance. The study concludes that stammering in Shata's poetic discourse functions not as a linguistic impairment but as a creative device that enhances meaning, artistry, and audience participation in Hausa oral poetry.

Keywords: *Mamman Shata, Hausa oral poetry, pragmatic functions, stylistic analysis, stammering, foregrounding theory, discourse analysis*

Introduction

Language serves as a versatile and creative medium through which speakers convey not only meaning but also emotion, attitude, and artistry. In African oral poetry, linguistic creativity functions as a vital communicative tool that transcends mere grammatical correctness to embrace rhythm, repetition, and playfulness with sound. Among Hausa oral performers, Dr Mamman Shata Katsina stands out for his remarkable linguistic inventiveness. His poem “Umaru Dan Dan Duna na Gwandu” is distinguished by its deliberate imitation of stammering, which he employs not as a speech defect but as a stylistic and communicative device.

In everyday conversation, stammering or stuttering refers to interruptions or repetitions that disrupt the natural flow of speech. However, in Shata’s poetic performance, this feature is purposefully employed to achieve both stylistic and pragmatic effects. The stammering in the poem serves to amplify praise, capture the audience’s attention, and deepen emotional engagement. Through such linguistic choices, Shata transforms a typically negative speech characteristic into an artistic expression that demonstrates his mastery of performance and his acute understanding of audience dynamics.

The Hausa oral poetic tradition encourages this kind of performative experimentation. Oral poets, known as mawak’a, act as cultural communicators who harness language to entertain, educate, and comment on social realities. In live performances, the meaning of a poem depends not only on its words but also on tone, rhythm, gesture, and audience interaction. Consequently, Shata’s strategic use of stammering should be viewed not as a linguistic flaw but as part of his communicative artistry—a pragmatic and stylistic strategy designed to evoke laughter, admiration, and emotional resonance.

The stylistic perspective is equally important in this discussion, particularly through the concept of foregrounding. Foregrounding theory explains how deviations from linguistic norms attract attention to form and enhance aesthetic impact. Thus, Shata's deliberate stammering can be seen as a form of linguistic foregrounding—an artistic manipulation of sound that renders his performance memorable and engaging for listeners.

From a pragmatic standpoint, this analysis explores how language functions in context and how speakers employ utterances to perform social actions. Viewed through this lens, Shata's stammering fulfils expressive, phatic, and emotive functions. It also aligns with Grice's Cooperative Principle, wherein apparent breaches of linguistic norms can still convey meaning when both speaker and listener share a mutual contextual understanding (Grice 45).

Despite Shata's cultural significance, there remains a scarcity of linguistic research on his works. Most existing studies have focused primarily on thematic or socio-political interpretations, often overlooking how his distinctive sound patterns contribute to meaning. Therefore, this study investigates the pragmatic and stylistic functions of stammering in “Umaru Dan Dan Duna na Gwandu”, highlighting how linguistic disfluency operates as both a communicative and aesthetic device in Hausa oral performance. The study argues that Shata's creative use of stammering demonstrates the influence of context, intention, and artistic deviation in shaping meaning within oral discourse.

Definition of Key Terms

To ensure conceptual clarity, this study defines the following key terms as they are used throughout the paper.

Hausa Oral Poetry: This refers to the traditional verbal art form of the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria, characterised by a blend of rhythm, performance, and social commentary. It often serves as a means of moral instruction, praise, and entertainment (Finnegan 112).

Pragmatic Functions: These encompass the communicative purposes that language fulfils in specific contexts. They include expressing politeness, humour, emphasis, and emotional attitudes, all of which enable speakers to achieve their social and interpersonal goals (Leech 15).

Stylistics: Stylistics is the study of language use in both literary and non-literary texts, focusing on how linguistic choices create meaning, aesthetic effects, and communicative impact. As Leech and Short explain, stylistics “seeks to explain the relation between linguistic form and literary function” (Style in Fiction 13). Essentially, it bridges linguistics and literary criticism by exploring how particular uses of sound, syntax, and structure enhance a text’s expressive power. Simpson defines stylistics as “a method of linking linguistic description with literary interpretation” (Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students 2). In this study, stylistics is employed to elucidate how Shata’s deliberate manipulation of speech patterns—especially his imitation of stammering—foregrounds specific linguistic features to achieve both artistic and pragmatic effects.

Stammering: Clinically, stammering (or stuttering) refers to a speech disorder characterised by the involuntary repetition or blockage of sounds (Guitar 9). However, within the context of this study, it denotes a deliberate artistic device employed by the poet Mamman Shata to create rhythm, humour, and emphasis during performance, rather than representing a natural speech impairment.

Discourse Analysis: This field examines language use beyond individual sentences, focusing on how meaning, identity, and social relationships are constructed through spoken or written interaction (Gee 19). It provides a framework for interpreting the pragmatic functions of stammering in Shata's poem within the broader communicative event.

Empirical Studies

Research on Hausa oral poetry has shown that mawaka, or oral poets, perform not just for entertainment but to convey complex social meanings through language and sound. Finnegan highlights that African oral literature is marked by "the use of sound, rhythm, and repetition as communicative resources." In Hausa performances, sound patterns—like elongation, reduplication, and vocal play—create rhythm and strengthen meaning within communal contexts.

Most scholarly attention on Mamman Shata's songs has focused on their thematic, sociological, or moral dimensions rather than their linguistic features. Yusuf explores the socio-political messages in Shata's work, demonstrating how they reflect the communal experiences and moral expectations of Northern Nigeria. Similarly, Ibrahim's analysis of "*Shata da Sardauna*" emphasises Shata's use of metaphor and historical references to convey ideals of leadership but overlooks the linguistic artistry underpinning these choices.

In addition, Sani's study examines the performative aspects of Shata's oral art, identifying his use of call and response, tonal variation, and repetition as techniques that sustain audience engagement. However, Sani's analysis does not address instances of intentional phonological manipulation such as mimicry or stammering which are central to Shata's distinctive performance style. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that Shata's art is profoundly

communicative; nevertheless, the linguistic dimension of his performance strategies remains underexplored.

From a linguistic performance perspective, Crystal observes that “the deliberate use of disfluency—pauses, restarts, or repetition—can serve pragmatic or emotive functions.” In the context of oral poetry, such features may dramatise speech, generate humour, or deepen the poet’s emotional connection with the audience. Despite its prominence in several of Shata’s performances—including “Umaru Dan Dan Duna na Gwandu”—no major study has examined stammering as a pragmatic and stylistic device in his works.

This study seeks to address this gap by analysing stammering in Shata’s songs not as a speech disorder but as a communicative strategy and stylistic feature. It distinguishes itself from previous research by focusing on the pragmatic interpretation of stammering and exploring how it functions as a performative device that enhances praise, emotion, and audience rapport. Consequently, this research contributes to the broader fields of Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics by demonstrating how intentional speech disfluency can fulfil significant artistic and linguistic roles in Hausa oral poetry.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, grounded in the principles of Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics. Its objective is to interpret the pragmatic and stylistic roles of stammering in Mamman Shata’s poem “Umaru Dan Dan Duna na Gwandu.” The data comprise both textual and performance materials derived from the singer’s oral rendition, which were subsequently transcribed into written form for analysis. This process ensures that key oral features—such as tone, rhythm, and the immering—are retained in the written text. In addition,

secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and documentary recordings of Shata's performances, were utilised to enrich the interpretation. The analysis focuses on how language use in the poem reflects communicative intent, artistic expression, and cultural significance.

Research Design

The research employs a qualitative interpretive design aimed at explaining how language operates as a form of social action, rather than measuring it quantitatively. As Gee observes, discourse analysis "interprets how language constructs social meaning within particular contexts" (Gee 21). Accordingly, this study systematically investigates Shata's deliberate use of stammering as a pragmatic strategy for praise, humour, and emphasis within the performance context of the poem.

The research design comprises three main stages:

- 1. Data Collection and Orthographic Conversion** – This stage involves locating authentic audio recordings of the poem, carefully listening to the performance, and converting the oral text into Hausa orthography while preserving its key performance features.
- 2. Transcription and Translation** – At this stage, the Hausa text is accurately transcribed and then translated into English to facilitate comparative analysis and interpretation.
- 3. Analytical Interpretation** – This final stage focuses on examining the pragmatic and stylistic functions of stammering in the poem using tools drawn from discourse and pragmatic analysis.

Data Source

The data for this study were obtained from a recorded live performance of the poem "Umaru Dan Dan Duna na Gwandu" as rendered by Dr Mamman Shata Katsina, a renowned Hausa singer.

The selected performance was chosen for its distinct inclusion of stammering as an expressive strategy, which aligns with the objectives of the study. The audio recording was transcribed phonetically and translated into English for analytical purposes. Supplementary information was also drawn from existing publications and online archives relating to Shata's performances and linguistic style (Ibrahim 64; Sani 51).

Procedure of Analysis

The analytical process comprised three main stages:

- 1. Transcription and Segmentation:** The poem was transcribed and divided into stanzas and speech segments containing instances of stammering.
- 2. Identification of Pragmatic Functions:** Each occurrence of stammering was analysed to determine its communicative role—such as emphasis, imitation, humour, or emotional reinforcement.
- 3. Interpretation and Discussion:** The identified patterns were interpreted within the context of Shata's performance style, supported by relevant pragmatic theories and existing scholarly perspectives on oral literature.

Justification for Method

This approach is appropriate because it integrates linguistic analysis with oral performance studies, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how linguistic creativity serves artistic and communicative purposes in Hausa oral poetry. The qualitative and interpretive orientation provides a flexible framework for capturing the nuances of Shata's performance, particularly his deliberate manipulation of speech disfluency for stylistic effect.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in three complementary theories **Foregrounding Theory**, **Speech Act Theory**, and **Grice's Cooperative Principle** which collectively explain how Mamman Shata's deliberate use of stammering achieves aesthetic and pragmatic effects in his performance.

Foregrounding Theory, developed by the Prague School linguists such as Jan Mukařovský (1932) and later expanded by Geoffrey Leech and Paul Simpson, posits that literary language deviates from ordinary language to attract attention and enhance meaning. Leech defines foregrounding as “the motivated deviation from linguistic norms to achieve artistic prominence” (A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry 42). In this study, Shata's use of stammering represents a phonological deviation that draws the audience's attention, evokes emotion, and accentuates key thematic points of praise and humour.

This creative deviation aligns with Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969), which views language as a form of action. Through intentional stammering, Shata performs illocutionary acts such as praising, mocking, or dramatising emotion—each serving communicative purposes beyond literal expression.

Finally, Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) elucidates how meaning in discourse depends on adherence to conversational maxims. Shata's deliberate breach of the maxim of manner (“avoid obscurity of expression”) is not a communicative failure but a stylistic strategy. This purposeful disfluency generates implicatures that convey artistry and heighten audience engagement.

In summary, the integration of these theoretical perspectives explains how Shata's poetic manipulation of stammering transcends speech imperfection, functioning simultaneously as a stylistic foregrounding device and a pragmatic communicative tool.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

This section presents selected excerpts from “Umaru Dan Dan Duna na Gwandu” by Dr Mamman Shata Katsina. The song is performed in Hausa, featuring repeated chorus lines sung by the lead vocalist (Shata) and a chorus. A notable stylistic feature of the poem is the poet’s intentional use of stammering (e.g., na’ na’, ka’, sa’, da’ da’). The excerpts below include English translations along with pragmatic and stylistic interpretations.

Excerpt 1

Hausa:

Ina direbobin tun da chan sun san akwai Dan Duna a’ a’ birni.

English Translation:

“Since long ago, all drivers knew that there was Dan Duna in the c-city.”

Analysis:

The repetition a’ a’ (mimicking a stammer) serves as a phonological dramatization rather than hesitation. Here, Shata performs emphasis and reverence, highlighting Dan Duna’s reputation as a celebrated driver. The stammer foregrounds the subject by deviating from normal speech flow, thereby attracting the audience’s attention (Leech and Short 13). According to Grice’s Cooperative Principle, the poet flouts the maxim of manner to achieve a heightened pragmatic effect of praise and rhythmic enhancement (Grice 46). The disfluency thus functions as both a stylistic foregrounding device and a pragmatic marker of admiration.

Excerpt 2

Hausa:

Barka da faman badar na' na' Jamma.

English Translation:

“Congratulations on your hard struggle, o—o—owner of Jamma.”

Analysis:

The term badar metaphorically refers to struggle or hard work. By congratulating Umaru, Shata acknowledges the challenges of long-distance driving and the perseverance it requires. The stammer na' na' expresses warmth and intimacy while reinforcing musical rhythm. Stylistically, the disfluency foregrounds emotional intensity and musical texture, while pragmatically it functions as a positive politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson 1987), enhancing social solidarity through expressive repetition.

Excerpt 3

Hausa:

Ba wani tsoro, ba wata shakka, ai masa lodi san da ya' yadubo.

English Translation:

“There is no fear or doubt — load it for him, he ch—checked it.”

Analysis:

This line portrays Umaru as brave and dependable. The stammer ya' in ya' yadubo dramatizes action and confidence, symbolising the driver's competence and self-assurance. Foregrounding

theory explains how deviation from fluent speech draws attention to the rhythm and strength of the utterance (Simpson 2). Pragmatically, Shata transforms the disfluency into a speech act of assurance and authority, while rhythmically reinforcing his audience's admiration.

Excerpt 4

Hausa:

Kai zasu tura Umar ka' kadubo.

English Translation:

"They will send Umar to ch-check the road."

Analysis:

The stammer ka' acts as a performative intensifier, emphasising Umar's dependability and leadership. It foregrounds the word kadubo ("check"), enhancing its prominence. Through this deliberate deviation, Shata blends linguistic play with poetic rhythm. Pragmatically, the act conveys respect and dramatizes Umar's reliability, achieving the dual function of stylistic artistry and social exaltation.

Excerpt 5

Hausa:

Yara suna ga Umaru can yataho da' da' jirgi.

English Translation:

"The children see Umar coming with an a-airplane."

Analysis:

In this humorous closing, the stammer da' da' dramatizes playful exaggeration. The image of Umar arriving with an "airplane" symbolises achievement and admiration. The repetition foregrounds humour and rhythm, inviting the audience's laughter and engagement. As Simpson notes, foregrounding often "defamiliarises" language, making ordinary expressions striking and memorable (4). Thus, Shata's use of stammering becomes both a stylistic deviation and a pragmatic act of creative praise.

Interpretive Summary

From the excerpts above, we can identify several pragmatic and stylistic functions of stammering:

1. **Emphasis and Intensification** – Stammering highlights key names or actions that deserve recognition, making them more prominent in the listener's mind.
2. **Emotional Expression** – It conveys excitement, joy, and affection for the subject, reinforcing the performer's expressive intent.
3. **Rhythmic and Aesthetic Purpose** – The repeated sounds create noticeable patterns that contribute to musical rhythm and poetic beauty.
4. **Humour and Audience Engagement** – The intentional disfluency elicits laughter, surprise, and emotional involvement, thus strengthening the interaction between performer and audience.
5. **Identity and Authenticity** – It reflects Hausa cultural and occupational speech patterns, lending the performance a sense of social realism and authenticity.

Therefore, stammering in Shata's "Umaru Dan Dan Duna na Gwandu" is not merely an accidental speech defect but a deliberate pragmatic and stylistic choice. It transforms linguistic disfluency into a communicative resource that captures attention, enriches meaning, and maintains audience connection. By consciously breaking conversational norms, Shata achieves greater expressiveness and artistic intensity—showcasing his skilful use of foregrounded language in Hausa oral poetry.

In summary, this analysis shows that Shata's use of stammering serves as a prominent linguistic feature that enhances both meaning and performance aesthetics. The following section will explore these findings in relation to the study's theoretical frameworks Foregrounding Theory, Speech Act Theory, and Grice's Cooperative Principles to further clarify how pragmatic intent and stylistic creativity intersect in Hausa oral poetry.

Findings

Dr. Mamman Shata Katsina's analysis of "Umaru Dan Dan Duna na Gwandu" uncovers how stammering, typically seen as a speech disorder, serves as a powerful artistic and practical tool in Hausa oral poetry. The poet's intentional manipulation of disfluency illustrates that linguistic performance in traditional Hausa songs goes beyond mere grammatical accuracy; it captures emotion, identity, and cultural aesthetics.

1. Stammering as a Stylistic Device

The study indicates that Shata systematically employs stammering to achieve stylistic emphasis. By repeating syllables like na' na', ka', and da' da', the poet establishes rhythm while

highlighting important expressions. This repetition acts as a form of phonological parallelism, a recognized aspect of oral literature that enhances memorability and invites audience engagement.

2. Pragmatic Function of Stammering

From a pragmatic viewpoint, stammering in the poem serves both expressive and interactional purposes. It conveys excitement, affection, and admiration while simultaneously involving the audience in a shared emotional experience. Shata intentionally disregards Grice's maxim of manner opting for sound repetition over clarity to reach a communicative objective that extends beyond literal meaning. Thus, the disfluency symbolizes sincerity, passion, and genuine emotion.

3. Social and Occupational Identity

Another key finding is that the use of stammering reflects occupational speech patterns among Hausa drivers. The poet mimics their rhythmic speech to create authenticity and foster a sense of belonging. This transforms the poem into social commentary on Hausa working class life, where language reflects both the resilience and challenges faced by ordinary people. This observation aligns with the pragmatic principle that meaning is shaped by social context (Brown and Levinson).

4. Aesthetic and Musical Value

The study also highlights how stammering adds to the musicality of Shata's performance. The repeated syllables blend smoothly with drum rhythms and chorus responses, acting as rhythmic anchors within the song's oral structure. In this way, stammering is not incidental but rather a purposeful aesthetic device that enriches artistic expression. It showcases the creative adaptability of Hausa oral poets who transform everyday speech patterns into poetic art.

5. Transforming Disfluency into Creativity

The most significant insight is that Shata reconceptualizes stammering as an expression of creativity rather than imperfection. Through intentional linguistic play, he turns what might be perceived as a speech defect into a valuable communicative tool, thereby challenging traditional ideas about fluency and eloquence. This artistic re-evaluation resonates with Leech's notion of “foregrounding,” where deviations from standard linguistic patterns serve as a means for aesthetic expression.

Summary of Findings

1. Stammering in Shata's poem is a deliberate pragmatic and stylistic strategy, not an involuntary speech defect.
2. It functions as a tool for emphasis, rhythm, emotional expression, and humour, thereby foregrounding key aspects of meaning.
3. The phenomenon mirrors Hausa sociolinguistic realities, particularly among drivers and working-class communities.
4. Shata uses stammering to strengthen audience engagement and preserve cultural identity through oral performance.
5. The study highlights the intersection of language, culture, and art, showing how foregrounding and pragmatic deviation operate creatively in Hausa oral poetry.

Conclusion

This study examined Dr. Mamman Shata's "Umaru Dan Dan Duna na Gwandu" with focus on the pragmatic and stylistic functions of stammering as a linguistic and artistic phenomenon in Hausa oral poetry. The analysis revealed that what is often viewed as a speech impediment becomes, in Shata's creative practice, a foregrounded feature of performance serving as a marker of artistic innovation, cultural identity, and emotional depth.

Through the deliberate manipulation of disfluency, Shata transforms stammering into a stylistic deviation that enriches rhythm, dramatizes praise, and reinforces audience participation. Pragmatically, the poet flouts Grice's maxim of manner to achieve expressive and communicative effects beyond ordinary speech.

The use of stammering thus embodies the principles of Foregrounding Theory, where linguistic deviation draws attention to form and meaning simultaneously. Culturally, it reflects Hausa values of humour, expressiveness, and collective identity within performance art.

In essence, Shata's creative manipulation of speech patterns demonstrates how linguistic deviation and pragmatic intent can merge to produce artistic meaning. Future studies may extend this insight to other African oral traditions, exploring how sound, rhythm, and disfluency contribute to meaning making in performance discourse.

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