Registers in English

MRS. E. D. SIMON AND MS. O. O. EYO

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary development has formed the core of language study. In this respect, it has become imperative to study English registers. This paper is an attempt to examine different registers in relation to field of discourse, mode of discourse and tenor of discourse. It also investigate instances of language in action and the environment and situation where registers could be used without sounding confusing to the audience. The paper concludes that registers should not be used unnecessarily as this will amount to violation of style, purpose and the interest of the audience since the aim of language is to communicate meaning and understanding.

1.0 Introduction

The concurrence of instances of the contextual categories produces text varieties called registers. Any piece of language, written or spoken belongs to a particular 'register', defined as the term used to distinguish varieties of language according to their use. Register according to Onukaogu et al (1999:35) is used to refer to the linguistic expression unique to a particular profession. It is otherwise known as the "dialect" of any given profession or field of specialisation. Oriola and Olapade (2000:178) stress that register can be described as a variety according to situation or profession or it is a linguistic reflection of recurrent characteristics of user's use of a language in a particular situation. For example, we have the register of technology, register of economics/commerce, register of medicine, register of Mass Media among others. What this implies is that when we talk of the register of science, we mean the vocabulary, the grammar employed by scientists in the course of practising their profession e.g (hypothesis, theory, experiment, reaction, laboratory) as distinct from the vocabulary used in legal discussions by lawyers (contracts, criminal code, equity, plaintiff, convict, defendant, evidence etc).

1.1 Varieties of Registers

Oriola and Olapade (2000:178) state that there are three outstanding parameters used to distinguish these varieties. They include field of Discourse, mode of utterance and Tenor of Discourse. The field of discourse is the subject matter or situation in which the language is used. The subject matter is based on profession or any human activities like Religion, Medicine, Agriculture, Law, Science and Technology, Politics etc. Etiowo (1994:36) adds that registers such as biology and mathematics can also be recognised in this dimension.

The mode of discourse is the choice of a medium either spoken or written mode in order to see that the message is effectively relayed. Etiowo (1994:35) further claims that in the spoken medium we can distinguish the register of advertising, conversation and sports commentary. In the written medium, we can recognise in literature the register of prose, poetry and drama. Finally the tenor of discourse is based on mode of presentation, choice of diction and syntax either formal (classroom environment) or informal (a birthday party) which Oriola and Olapade (2000:178) say go a long way to show the relationship between the speaker and the audience. That is how we distinguish between colloquial and polite (or formal) style. Thus, when we address our Vice Chancellor or President, our Father or Mother, classmate or friend, and little brother or sister on the same subject we do not speak in the same form of language. We speak in different styles. Similarly, when a lawyer explains a point of law to a judge in a court or when he explains the same point to a university undergraduate studying history, he speaks in different styles.

Etiowo (1994:39) notes that the use of registers in fields of discourse does not imply that a professional cannot use language outside the expression peculiar to his field. For instance, if a Rector of a Polytechnic who is an Engineer is to address his students, he does not have to do it in technological idioms or language. He will use a language style that will be accessible to all. This is because the student population does not comprise only Engineering students. However, sometimes for effect, a professional could honour words from his field even when the members of audience are not his peers.

While one does not exclude the possibility that a given speaker may choose to speak in a national standard at one moment and in a regional dialect the next and possibly even switch from one national standard to another, the presumption has been that an individual adopts one of the varieties so far discussed as his permanent form of English

with varieties according to subject matter. On the other hand, the presumption is rather that the same speaker has a repertoire of varieties and habitually switches to the appropriate one as occasion arises. Most typically perhaps, the switch involves nothing more than turning to the particular set of lexical items habitually used for handling the subject in question: law, crockery, engineering, football among others. Oriola and Olapade (2000:178) add that apart from the three varieties mentioned, there are other linguistic components which could also help in identifying a particular register. They include phonological/graphological element of a language and also the lexical or semantic component.

1.2 Style and Register
Style, according to Perrin (1990:619), is very important in speech. Let us consider the following illustration:

Whereas the person whose names are set out in the first hereunder died interstate on the dates and at the place stated in the said column.

And whereas the person or persons whose names and address claimed relationship (if any) to the deceased are set out in the second column hereof have applied to the High Court of Lagos State for a grant of Letter of 'Administration' of the real and personal properties of the said deceased.

Notice is hereby given that the said 'Letter of Administration' will be granted to such persons unless a *'Notice to Prohibit'* the grant thereof is filed in this registry within fourteen (14) days from the date hereof. (Quoted from the *Punch.* Saturday 18 April, 1981, page 10, published in Lagos, Nigeria).

The following points concerning the passage should be noted :
1. The register: This passage belongs to the legal register (i.e the register of law).
2. The field of discourse: The subject matter is the confirmation of the inheritance of a certain property.
3. The mode of discourse: The medium is written English
4. The style of discourse: The style is technical and official
5. Language features of the register:
   Vocabulary
   i. Suffixed prepositions chosen to be unambiguos and precise:
   'hereunder'
   'hereof'
   'hereby'
   ii. Special words and phrases:
   'Intestate (dying without a will)
   'grant' (law to give possession of property)
   'real properties' (portion(s) of land, building or both together)
   'personal properties' (non-landed possessions)
   'Letters of Administration' (authority to take, or inherit and non)
   'Notice to prohibit' (an objection, to the claim or confirmation)

'Registry' (office of the Registrar of High Court of Justice).

Structure
All syntactic characteristics of local register are necessitated by the need of precision in order to prevent accidental or deliberate misinterpretation to the register here are:

Punctuation of orthography
A lack of commas, as protection against some dishonest introduction of extra commas, thereby making apparent changes in grammatical construction and, therefore, in meaning.
i. The use of block capitals, capital letter and quotation marks to draw attention to the most important operative words in the legal advertisement
ii . The use of a full-stop at the end of each main part of what is only a sentence. This include:
a. The sentence length: unbroken chains of varied grammatical sentence.
b . Complexity of sentence pattern: A great deal of subordination and co-ordination
c . Stating alternatives: To give precision possible alternatives permitted are stated; for example, person or persons claimed relationship (if any) within fourteen (14) days
d . Verb: passive verb patterns predominate

C. Overall patterns of rhythm and emphasis: The complexity and balance of the structure, the technical words, special orthographic conventions and the long sentences make legal register characteristically formal and traditional.

Oriola and Olapade (2000:180) state that the law profession has always been termed conservative because many of the legal concepts are derived from classical times and old English as indicated in the example above.

1.3 Register as language in Action
Register is an instance of language   in   action. It can, therefore, be described in terms of phonological, lexical and grammatical indexical markers (peculiar to a text) and common features shared by texts. Register is the realisation of the semantic possibilities of language. Register is also culturally determined since it is the culture of society which determines the patterns of environment in which language can occur.

These environments, generalized as situation types and which include the relevant objects and participants in the event, determine, and in turn are determined by language use. When we talk about the language of horse-racing, the language of politics, women's language among others, we imply that there are certain recurrent mutual relationships between features of situation and language use. These relationships make the language of horse-racing different from the language of cow-racing, the language of political debate or the language of love. This fact could be trivial in itself as one can readily determine how the language of horse-

racing differs from the language of political debate, and how these differences are created by differences in the social context. But register, as the configuration of several contextual features, can draw attention to what changes in situation and context, alter features of language and the reciprocity of this relationship. Mode and field are also interrelated. Written mode then makes the social activity 'more' linguistic than the spoken mode.

Below is an excerpt from sewing field. The language here is so restricted that similar instances of language could be found in almost any pattern: Stitch armhole facing back to armhole facing front to shoulders and sides. Pin facing to armhole edge, *Right side together,* matching notches and seams. Clip curves: Turn facing to *Inside* Press Top stitch 3/8" (1 cm) from armhole edge.

Perhaps even more restricted is the following text: Using 10 needles cast on 102 (110:118:126) sts, 1st row K2, *P2, K2, rep from "to end. 2nd row P2, *K2, P2, rep from * to end. Rep 1st and 2nd rows until work measures 4 in.
In this text, mode and tenor remain the same but there is a change in field. This text is of course, part of a set of knitting instructions.

Another aspect of language-in-action deserves further mention. Halliday (1975:45) has pointed out in connection with field that the social activity of the linguistic event can change although the field remains the same. The activity can be placed on a 'more or less' linguistic clime; in other words, the focus of the activity may be language or it may be some particular action. The focus of activity in the preparation of a meal is the cooking itself. The focus of activity of a cooking lesson however, is language itself. Language is being used to teach about the preparation of food.

The repeated association of field, mode and terms of discourse in situation type creates expectancies. This is suggested by the notion of predictability of register Expectations that may or may not be met, however. The marked register of greeting and address promotes smooth social interaction when participants know and abide by the rules. When they do not, friction can be caused among the participants, a social 'gaffe' perhaps committed.

Register as text variety is `embedded' in situation and, therefore, the individual experience and of course, the individual capacity `to mean'. Register reflects both the on-going activity of the situation to which the text belongs and also the previous experiences of an individual. Who has not felt the embarrassment of being in a new situation and, thus, not knowing' what to says' or perhaps just as importantly `how to say? Control of several registers and the ability to shift from one to another is implied in good social behaviour. But control of a range of different registers results from experiencing different kinds of situations, demanding different kinds of behaviour. So register range will be revealed in idiolect. Gregory and Carroll (1978) quoted in Onukaogu et al (1999:27) refer to idiolect as the language user's individuality, and the set of

linguistic features associated with the particular person. It refers to the characteristics, peculiarities of the individual's unique way of speaking a language. Gregory and Carroll (1978) are of the opinion that the uniqueness of an individual's speech comes not by abstracting features of temporal, geographical, social and standard or non-standard dialect, but rather from the configuration of these features. Social patterns will also be revealed by the individual capacity to shift register in so far as an individual's experience is to some degree a function of vertical and horizontal social function.

Register shifting may indicate formal education and a conscious awareness of linguistic norms. However education must not be viewed as the determinant of this kind of linguistic skill.

It is perhaps easy to understand how field is determined by the way in which a society organises, analyses and names its experiences and orders it in systems of knowledge; or that mode will be strictly determined by the availability of specific symbolic mediums and, so, by the technology of that society, or that roles and relationships inherit in tenors of discourse depend upon the institutional and individual roles that make up the social structure. The situation types, the environment in which language can occur will be determined by culture. The `context of situation' can be placed within the `context of culture'. Therefore, audience and speaker's background, purpose of discourse, field of discourse, situation(s) of discourse among others are some of the factors affecting and influencing the use of registers.

1.4 Register and Jargon

Etiowo (1994:40) asserts that to some extent jargon means meaningless or unintelligible speech. However, Holman (1976:281) states that jargon signifies the special language of a group or profession, as in legal jargon, pedagogic jargon, thieves' jargon. Oriola and Olapade (2000:182) posit that jargon is a form of slang because it is a specialised language, the trademark of any particular trade, occupation, profession, interest, club or cult. It is usually unwritten and is intelligible only to those participating in the activity it concerns. Wood (1976), quoted in Onukaogu et al (1999:36), says that jargon has come to be used also in the sense of the mechanical, unimaginative copying of cliches, circumlocutions, in place of simpler and more direct language.

Jargon should not be confused with registers. All jargons are registers but all registers are not jargons. For instance when a politician addresses a rural audience on the economy of a state, it is different from when an economist does so. The politician, according to Etiowo (1994:40), could be discussing inflation; but because he is not a professional, he will do so in the layman's language or way and to the *acknowledgement* and applause of the audience. In this case he can employ the

'register' of economics/commerce to drive home his points. But it is different for the economist who will be talking about 'the devasting effects of inflationary trends in jeopardising the economy and prevent the economy's revitalization'. For the same audience as that of the politician, the economist could be speaking 'jargon' while employing the 'register' of his profession.

According to Onukaogu et al (1999:37) commercial jargon, for example are words, phrases associated with business correspondence. They should however be avoided in formal writing. They include 'inst', 'ult', 'prox', 're', 'Attached hereto' among others.

There is no valid objection to the use of learned and technical terms for audiences and situations to which they are appropriate, but using them unnecessarily when addressing a popular audience is a violation of the basic rule that the style should fit the writer's purpose and his audience.

Conclusion

From the foregoing register is linguistic reflection of recurrent characteristics of user's use of language in a particular situation. This paper has tried to investigate varieties of register according to field of discourse, mode of utterance and tenor of discourse. It has also critically examine, the relationship between style and register with examples from the legal, sewing and knitting registers, and shown that in the sewing and knitting registers, mode and tenor remain the same but the field changes. The paper also investigated register as language-in-action and showed that register can be culturally determined and can be revealed in idiolect. Finally, this paper investigated the relationship between register and jargon and concluded that all jargons are registers but all registers are not jargon.

References

Etiowo, Joy. 'Registers'. *Use of English for Polytechnics and Other colleges.* Ed. A. A. Onukaogu, Calabar: But-Bass Nig Enterprises, 1994.

Gregory, Michael and Carroll, Susanne *Language and Situation: Language varieties and their Social Contexts.* London: Routlege and Kegan Paul, 1978

Halliday, M. A. K. *Learning how to mean: Exploration in the Development of Language.* London: Edward Arnold, 1975.

Holman, C. H. *A handbook of Literature.* Indianapolis: The Odyssey press, 1976.

Oriola, A and Olapade, O. *Use of English: A Practical Approach* Lagos: De Hadey Publishers, 2000

Onukaogu, A. A. et al . *English For Tertiary Education.* Calabar: BON Universal Ltd, 1999.

Perrin, Robert. *The Beacon Handbook.* Dallas: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990.