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CONTEXT, STYLE AND MEANING IN SELECTED POEMS OF REMI RAJI, GBEMISOLA ADEOTI AND SOLA OWONIBI

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Abstract

Contemporary Nigerian poetry has continued to engage dynamically with socio-political, cultural and economic realities, reflecting the complexities of postcolonial experience and the lived conditions of society. Within this context, poetry functions not only as an artistic medium but also as a form of social discourse through which poets interrogate issues such as governance, corruption, marginalisation, identity and human resilience. This study, titled Context, Style and Meaning in the Selected Poems of Remi Raji, Gbemisola Adeoti and Sola Owonibi, is motivated by the need to move beyond purely thematic readings of poetry to a more systematic understanding of how meaning is constructed through the interaction of context and stylistic choices. The study therefore aims to explore this interaction by: identifying the dominant discourse issues and themes in the selected poems; describing the dimensions of context embedded in the poems; examining the major stylistic and poetic devices employed by the poets and determining the thematic and stylistic similarities and differences across their works. This study is anchored on Aspects of M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) which conceptualises language as a social semiotic system and provides the analytical tools of field, tenor and mode for examining the relationship between language and context. The framework is complemented by Aspects of Bayo Lawal's Pragmatic Theory of Literary Analysis which accounts for meaning in terms of speaker intention, contextual

Keywords: Contemporary Nigerian Poetry, Language Metafunctions, Pragmatic stylistics, Poetic language, Systemic Functional Grammar.

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inference and reader interpretation. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design, employing a purposive sampling technique to select fifteen poems, five from each poet, based on their thematic relevance and stylistic richness. The data are analysed through an integrated approach combining contextual, stylistic and pragmatic analysis in order to systematically account for how meaning is constructed in the selected poems. The findings reveal that the selected poems are deeply rooted in socio-political and socio-economic realities, addressing issues such as governance failure, corruption, marginalisation, identity and human resilience. The study establishes that contextual variables such as field, tenor and mode significantly influence stylistic choices and meaning construction across the poems. While Remi Raji employs dense metaphor, symbolism and ideological intensity to convey political consciousness and resistance, Gbemisola Adeoti utilises satire, irony and rhetorical indirection to expose institutional contradictions and social injustice. In contrast, Sola Owonibi adopts a simple, narrative and empathetic style to foreground the lived experiences of marginalised individuals. The analysis further demonstrates both thematic convergence in socio-political engagement and stylistic divergence in expressive strategies, confirming that meaning in the poems emerges through the interaction of context, stylistic features and pragmatic inference. The study concludes that meaning in contemporary Nigerian poetry is fundamentally context-driven and stylistically mediated. It therefore affirms the relevance of context-sensitive and linguistically grounded approaches to literary analysis.

Introduction

Background to the Study

Poetry has always served as a profound medium of human expression, a genre through which experiences, thoughts, emotions and socio-political realities are articulated in heightened language. Unlike prose, poetry is marked by its compactness, rhythm, imagery and symbolic use of language which together demand a deeper level of interpretation. In Africa, poetry holds a dual heritage: the oral tradition which is deeply embedded in communal life and the written tradition which emerged under colonialism and has continued to develop in the postcolonial era. Both forms embody the totality of African experience in respect of its culture, history, struggles and aspirations.

In Nigeria, poetry has particularly flourished as a medium of political resistance, social commentary and cultural affirmation. Writers such as Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Odia Ofeimun have engaged the poetic medium to

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interrogate political misrule, cultural alienation and existential challenges. Contemporary poets like Remi Raji, Gbemisola Adeoti and Sola Owonibi continue this tradition. They reflect through their works the realities of Nigerian society: its politics, economics, history and human conditions. They also explore universal themes of identity, memory and resilience.

The present study situates itself within this broad trajectory by examining the interactions of context, style and meaning in the selected poems of the three poets. Context provides the interpretive frame through which meaning is derived; style embodies the linguistic and artistic strategies employed and meaning is the final product of the interplay of linguistic form, contextual factors and reader interpretation.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the abundance of studies on African poetry, there remains a gap in research that focuses explicitly on the interactions of context, style and meaning in the works of Remi Raji, Gbemisola Adeoti and Sola Owonibi. While these poets are widely recognised in Nigerian literary circles and beyond, critical attention to how they construct meaning through pragmatic and stylistic strategies remains limited. Previous studies often analysed them in isolation or within broader surveys of Nigerian poetry, neglecting a comparative and integrative approach that foregrounds language as the central medium of meaning-making.

This study addresses that gap by investigating how context (linguistic, socio-cultural, situational and psychological), style (deviation, imagery, symbolism, cohesion) and meaning (semantic and pragmatic dimensions) interact in their selected poems. The analysis is conducted using Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) with particular attention to context of situation comprising the three variables of field, tenor and mode and Lawal's Pragma-stylistic theory which together provide a functional and interpretive framework for examining the language of poetry.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aims to explore the interactions of context, style and meaning in the selected poems of Remi Raji, Gbemisola Adeoti and Sola Owonibi. The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the discourse issues in the selected poems,
2. describe the dimensions of context in the poems,
3. explore the major stylistic/poetic devices deployed in the poems, and
4. identify and explain thematic and stylistic similarities and differences across the poems.

Research Questions

The paper intends to answer the following questions:

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1. What are the discourse issues in the selected poems?
2. How do the dimensions of context influence the meaning of the poems?
3. What stylistic /poetic strategies employed and how do they contribute to meaning in the poems?
4. What similarities and differences exist in the poets' thematic and stylistic choices as exhibited in the selected poems?

Scope of the Study

The study is restricted to fifteen poems: five from anthology of each of the them. Remi Raji's poems include *"Cyclone II", "Day and night", "The predator's prayer", "Bound to remember", "The mutineer's song'(Webs of Remembrance,2001)*, Gbemisola Adeoti's poems consist of *"Naked soles", "Ambush", 'New minimum wage", "Ghost workers", "Monster seeds"(Naked soles, 2005)* while Sola Owonibi's poems consist of *"Homeless not hopeless", "Africa", "Songs of the streets", "Voices of the voiceless", "Echoes of silence(Chants to the Ancestors,2007)"*. The analysis focuses on how context, style and meaning interact rather than on biographical details of the poets.

Significance of the Study

The study will be significant in several ways: academically, it will contribute to scholarship on African poetry by providing a comparative pragma-stylistic analysis of some selected poems of three important contemporary Nigerian poets. Practically, it will point out the role of poetry as a social tool, reflecting and interrogating the realities of Nigerian life in the social, political, cultural and economic aspects. Pedagogically, the findings will aid students and teachers of literature in the Nigerian setting in appreciating how poetry communicates meaning through context, language and style.

Justification for the Study

The choice of the poets is justified on the basis of their status as academic poets. They are university lecturers whose works combine artistic creativity with intellectual engagement. These selected poets are all professors of English and they are at the peak of their career. Their poems are deeply rooted in Nigerian socio-political experience as well as portraying universal human concerns. The selection of specific poems is based on their thematic relevance (addressing issues of governance, injustice, identity, memory and human resilience), stylistic richness and accessibility to published anthologies. The study is further justified by the choice of poets and period. The three poets represent a generation of Nigerian poets whose works combine literary artistry with profound socio-political consciousness. Their poems reflect post-military Nigeria's struggles with governance, corruption, moral disintegration and quest for collective renewal. The study is equally

justified by its interdisciplinary analytical framework which blends Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Lawal's Pragmatic Theory

Justification for the Poems Selected

The poems analysed in this study are purposively selected from the works of Remi Raji, Gbemisola Adeoti and Sola Owonibi. The selection of these poems is guided by specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. First, the poems are selected because they reflect prominent socio-political and socio-cultural realities. Many of the poems address issues such as governance, corruption, inequality, identity and social justice which are important contextual themes in contemporary Nigerian poetry. These thematic concerns provide appropriate material for examining how context influences meaning construction. Second, the selected poems demonstrate rich stylistic and linguistic features that are suitable for analysis within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The poems contain notable stylistic devices such as metaphor, imagery, symbolism, irony and rhetorical structures that enable a detailed exploration of how linguistic choices contribute to meaning.

Similarly, the poems were chosen because they provide representative examples of the poetic styles of the three poets. Each poet exhibits distinctive stylistic tendencies and communicative strategies. Selecting poems that reflect these stylistic patterns makes it possible to conduct a comparative analysis of how different poets construct meaning within similar contextual environments. The poems were equally selected because they contain clear contextual indicators that allow the application of the analytical categories of field, tenor and mode. These contextual variables make it possible to examine how social activities, interpersonal relationships and communicative channels influence the structure and interpretation of the poems. Finally, the selection of a manageable number of poems allows for detailed textual analysis which is necessary for qualitative stylistic study. Rather than examining a large corpus superficially, the study focuses on a limited number of poems in order to provide a deeper and more systematic interpretation of their contextual and linguistic features.

Context in Poetry

The concept of context in poetry has evolved from early text-centred approaches to more scholarly grounded interpretations. Early critics such as Cleanth Books (1947) emphasised the autonomy of the text, downplaying external influences on meaning. However, later developments in linguistics and literary theory repositioned context as central to meaning-making. The work of M.A.K. Halliday (1978, 1985) is particularly significant, as he conceptualises language as a social semiotic system, introducing the variables of field, tenor and mode to explain hoe context shapes meaning. Complementing this, Bayo Lawal

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(1997, 2003) emphasises the role of pragmatic context, arguing that meaning in literary texts depends on speaker intention and shared knowledge.

Context is central to meaning establishment in every communication, hence its indispensable role in poetry interpretation. Odebunmi (2006) argues that context provides the essential background from which meaning springs, noting that while words may carry significance in isolation, their fuller import is realised only when situated in context. In contemporary poetry, context is understood as multi-dimensional, encompassing situational, socio-cultural and historical factors that influence both the production and interpretation of poetic meaning.

Style in Poetry

Style in poetry refers to the distinctive linguistic and artistic choices that characterise a poet's expression. Early stylistic studies focused on formal features such as imagery, symbolism and metre but modern stylistics integrates linguistic analysis with literary interpretation. According to Geoffrey Leech (1969), style involves deviation and foregrounding where poets manipulate language to create aesthetic and interpretive effects. Similarly, Mick Short (1981) views style as a reflection of authorial choices shaped by context and purpose. Chatman (1966) argues that style constitutes a recognisable "thumbprint", a consistent literary manner that enables readers to identify an author even from fragments of text. Crystal and Davy (1969) describe style as the "language habits" of an individual, pointing to recurrent idiosyncrasies that define uniqueness. Murray (1971) suggests that one's style, like manner, reveals inner character.

In contemporary Nigerian poetry, style often manifests through metaphor, irony, satire, narrative simplicity and rhetorical strategies which are deployed to reflect socio-political realities. Thus, style is not merely ornamental but functions as meaning-making resource.

Meaning in Poetry

Meaning in poetry has been variously conceptualised as textual, contextual and interpretive. While early approaches treated meaning as inherent in the text, modern theories emphasise its dynamic and context-dependent nature. From a functional perspective, M.A.K. Halliday argues that meaning is realised through language in context while pragmatic scholars such as H.P. Grice (1975) highlight the role of implicature, showing that meaning often extends beyond literal expression. In literary studies, Bayo Lawal further demonstrates that meaning in texts is shaped by interpretation, intention and contextual inference. In poetry, therefore, meaning emerges from interaction between context and stylistic choices, requiring readers to engage with both linguistic patterns and the socio-cultural environment of the text.

Pragmatic theories further expand the concept of meaning by highlighting the role of inference and shared knowledge. John Searle (1969) emphasises that utterances perform actions through speech acts such as assertion, criticism or protest. Grice (1975) introduces the notion implicature, showing that meaning frequently goes beyond what is explicitly stated while Bayo Lawal (1997, 2003) argues that meaning is shaped by authorial intention, contextual clues and reader interpretation, making it inherently dynamic and negotiable. In poetry, therefore, meaning is not singular or fixed; rather, it is layered, indirect and context-sensitive. It emerges from the interaction of linguistic features) style), contextual variables (social and cultural environment) and pragmatic inference (what is implied rather than stated). This multidimensional view of meaning provides a strong foundation for analysing how poets encode complex experiences and how readers interpret them within specific contexts.

Poetry and its Language

Poetry is generally conceived as a creative and imaginative use of language characterised by aesthetic expression, emotional depth and condensed meaning. Traditional definitions, such as that of William Wordsworth (1802), describe poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," emphasising its emotional and expressive nature. However, modern scholarship views poetry not only as emotional expression but also as a structured linguistic activity through which meaning is carefully crafted. From a linguistic perspective, Roman Jakobson (1960) identifies poetry with the poetic function of language where the focus is on the message itself: its form, pattern and structure. This suggests that poetry foregrounds language, drawing attention to its sound, rhythm and organisation. Similarly, M. A. K. Halliday (1978, 1985)'s conceptualisation of language as a social semiotic system implies that poetic language is not arbitrary but shaped by context and communicative purpose. The language of poetry is therefore often deviant, figurative and symbolic, departing from everyday usage to achieve aesthetic and communicative effects. According to Geoffrey Leech (1969), poetic language operates through foregrounding where deviation and parallelism are used to create emphasis and meaning. This includes the use of metaphor, imagery, symbolism, irony and rhythm which contribute to the layered nature of poetic meaning.

In contemporary literary studies, the language of poetry is seen as functional and context-dependent, reflecting socio-cultural realities while also shaping interpretation. Thus, poetry is not merely ornamental language but a strategic and purposeful deployment of linguistic resources for meaning construction. Poetry is one of the oldest forms of human expression, combining imagination, rhythm and emotion in a compact and aesthetically elevated form. Its distinctive quality lies in the deliberate and artful use of language which goes beyond mere communication to achieve layered meanings and profound emotional

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effects. Poetic language is marked by defamiliarisation which is the deliberate disruption of linguistic norms to compel fresh perception Shklovsky, (1965); Dare, (1998). Ayeleru (2012) defines poetry as a literary form characterised by imagination, truth, rhythm and figurative expression. Carter (2020) notes, however, that its perceived complexity often deters readers from full engagement, owing to its dense layering of linguistic and stylistic features unlike prose, poetic language is deliberately condensed, symbolic and interpretive. Dada (2004) observes that poetry's messages are densely coded, requiring readers to "decode" meaning through linguistic and contextual cues.

Dasylva and Jegede (2017) similarly describe poetry as an enigma, stressing its reputation as a distant and puzzling genre. This complexity stems not from obscurity for its own sake but from deliberate defamiliarisation, the creative disruption of linguistic norms to provoke renewed perception. Fowler (1986) and Dare (1998) affirm that poetry reshapes familiar experiences by presenting them in novel by linguistic forms, encouraging deeper reflection and heightened interpretation. Thus, the language of poetry is not simply ornamental. It is central to meaning construction and to the poet's engagement with social and cultural realities. As Fowler (1986) asserts, poetry is both a linguistic and cultural act, one that encodes personal vision and collective experience.

Remi Raji

Empirical scholarship on Remi Raji's poetry is relatively rich and has focused on ideology, stylistics and pragmatics as well as socio- political engagement. For instance, Ayeomoni (2012) conducts a graphostylistics analysis on Webs of Remembrance, demonstrating how grapholigical deviations such as punctuation, capitalisation and spacing function as meaning-making resources in expressing oppression and political critique. Ogungbemi (2018) examines transitivity and ideology in Raji's poetry using Hallidayan linguistics and van Dijk's model, revealing how "us versus them" dichotomies construct political meaning and ideological positioning in the poems. Muhammad and Olughu (2020) further show that Raji's poetry deploys figurative language, imagery and musicality to communicate socio-political concerns, enphasising that poetic techniques are central to the projection of social commitment and resistance.

From a pragmatic perspective, Oji (2021) reveals that A Harvest of Laughters encodes acts of oppression, suffering and hope, portraying the government as oppressive and citizens as victim. Collectively, these studies establish that Raji's poetry is deeply ideological, stylistically complex and contextually grounded, though most focus on single frameworks rather than an integrated contextual-stylistic-pragmatic approach.

Ghemisola Adeoti

Empirical studies on Gbemisola Adeoti's poetry are fewer but largely emphasise satire, political critique and socio-economic discourse. Existing scholarship on "Naked Soles"

consistently highlights the poet's use of satirical techniques, irony and rhetorical devices to expose corruption, labour exploitation and governance failure. Studies on poems such as "New minimum wage" reveal that Adeoti employs indirect criticism and humour as discursive strategies, allowing readers to infer deeper socio-political meanings. His poetry has been shown to rely heavily on contextual inference, making meaning dependent on shared socio-political knowledge. Empirical observations further indicate that Adeoti's poetic discourse foregrounds institutional critique, particularly the failure of state structures and the plight of the working class. However, most studies remain thematic and stylistic, with limited attention to systematic linguistic frameworks such as SFG or pragmatics.

Akanwa, Iwuji and Ogbedeto (2024) conducted a reflectionist analysis of Gbemisola Adeoti's poetry collection "Naked soles" with emphasis on the theme of alienation in Nigerian society. The study investigates how the poet represents the social and psychological experiences of individuals living under oppressive political structures. The findings reveal that Adeoti's poetry portrays multiple forms of alienation including political marginalisation, economic hardship and social exclusion.

Sola Owonibi

Empirical research on Sola Owonibi's poetry is relatively limited, making it an under-explored area in contemporary Nigerian literary studies. Available analyses, especially those based on poems like "Homeless not Hopeless" focus on themes of marginalisation, poverty, resilience and social injustice. Scholarly discussions indicate that Owonibi adopts a simple, direct and narrative style which contrasts with the dense and satirical styles of other contemporary poets. His poetry is often analysed as representational and humanistic, foregrounding the lived experiences of ordinary people in urban and socio-economic deprived settings.

Empirical observations also suggest that his poems rely less on complex figurative density and more on clarity, accessibility and emotional appeal, making them effective tools for social awareness and empathy. However, there is a noticeable gap in studies applying linguistic and pragmatic frameworks which this present study seeks to address. Across the three poets, existing studies show strong attention to socio-political themes, stylistic devices such as metaphor, satire, imagery and ideological critique. However, there is a clear gap in integrated analysis of context, style and meaning, systematic application of SFG (field, tenor and mode) and combined use of pragmatic theory and stylistic across multiple poets. The position of the present study is that it extends existing scholarship by providing a comparative analysis of the three poets, integrating Systemic Functional Grammar and Pragmatics and demonstrating how context, style and meaning interact systematically.

Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)

The study is anchored on the principles of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) as developed by M.A.K. Halliday. Systemic Functional Grammar views language as a social semiotic system through which speakers and writers construct meaning within specific social context. Unlike traditional linguistic theories that focus primarily on grammatical structures, SFG emphasises the functional relationship between language and the social environment in which it is used. According to Halliday, language performs three major metafunctions simultaneously: ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and textual metafunction.

The ideational metafunction concerns the representation of experience and reality in language. Through this metafunction, speakers and writers express events, actions, participants and circumstances in the world round them. In poetry, the ideational metafunction enables poets to represent social realities such as political oppression, poverty, injustice and human resilience. The selected poets in this study use poetic language to depict various socio-political and cultural experiences in Nigerian society. The interpersonal metafunction relates to the social relationship between participants in a discourse. It reflects how speakers position themselves in relation to their audience and how attitudes, emotions and evaluations are expressed through language. In poetic discourse, the interpersonal metafunction is evident in the way poets construct relationships with readers, express opinions about social issues and communicate ideological positions. Through linguistic choices such as tone, modality and evaluative expressions, poets establish particular relationships with their audiences.

The textual metafunction concerns how linguistic elements are organised into coherent and meaningful texts. It explains how language resources are structured to produce messages that are logically connected and communicatively effective. In poetry, the textual metafunction is reflected in the arrangement of poetic lines, thematic structures and cohesive devices that contribute to the overall meaning of the poem. A central concept in Systemic Functional Grammar is context of situation which explains how social context influences linguistic choices. The context of situation consists of three variables: Field, tenor and mode. Field refers to the social activity or subject matter represented in a text. It answers the question of what is happening in the discourse. In literary analysis, field helps to identify the thematic concerns and experiential content of a poem. Tenor refers to the relationships between the participants in a discourse. It examines how speakers position themselves in relation to their audience and how social roles are reflected in a language use while mode refers to the role of language in the communication process and the channel through which communication occurs. It considers whether language functions as spoken or written discourse and how linguistic resources are organised to convey meaning. Functional Grammar establishes a set of

levels and categories to account for the formal aspect of language. Three primary levels are established: Form, Substance and Context. The Form deals with the organisations of language - phonic and graphic. Context, on the other hand, deals with the relationship between form and situation, that is, the study of meaning - semantics. The levels of analysis of descriptive linguistics constitute grammar, phonology, lexis and context as illustrated in the diagram below according to Tomori (1977:45).

Tomori (1977:45)'s Levels of Analysis of Descriptive Linguistics

Phonetics	**Linguistics**			
Substance	← →	**Form**	← →	**Situation**
Phonic substance	**Phonology**	**Grammar**	**Context**	**Extra-**
Graphic substance	**Orthography**	**Lexis**		**textual features**

Lawal's Aspects of Pragmatic Theory

The context of language is the most fundamental and it covers such components as the phonological, lexical and syntactic structures of the sentence. Coming next is the situational context which covers the topic of the discourse and the factors of the physical event including concrete objects, person and location. The psychological context covers the mood, attitudes, beliefs and state of the mind of the language user. The next level is the social context which is concerned with interpersonal relations among the interlocutors. The sociological context describes the socio - cultural and historical setting. The cosmological context covers the user's world view. In the second column, we have an equal number of hierarchical patterned levels of competence necessary for the production and interpretation of language in use. The various levels of context are symmetrically related to the corresponding competencies which can be employed to interpret and classify an utterance into a particular type of speech act and to give an appropriate response or reaction. The language user deploys his competencies to identify and understand presuppositions, implicatures and MCBs through inference.

There is also a hierarchical organisation of speech acts and they are somewhat related to the contexts and competencies that produce them. The locutionary act is the most basic, while its identification and comprehension depend on the purely linguistic constraint of lexical, morpho - syntactic, phonological, phonetical and micro - semantic structure of the sentence. Locutionary acts are the speaker's overt linguistic behaviour and the competence and context relative to their interpretation. These are also referred to as the

surface structures. Illocutionary can either be direct or indirect, intended or unintended and conventional or non-conventional depending on the highly variable context of communication. Perlocutionary acts are the conventional or unconventional, intended or unintended consequences of utterance. Lawal's model, no doubt, is comprehensive enough to accommodate the encoding - decoding process of any utterance, the seeming overlap between the context and competencies column notwithstanding. The urge to suggest a merger of the social context with the sociological context is countered by the fact that it makes a clear distinction between the two of them. One may not see the model as Lawal's final contribution to the theory of Pragmatics as the model is still undergoing development.

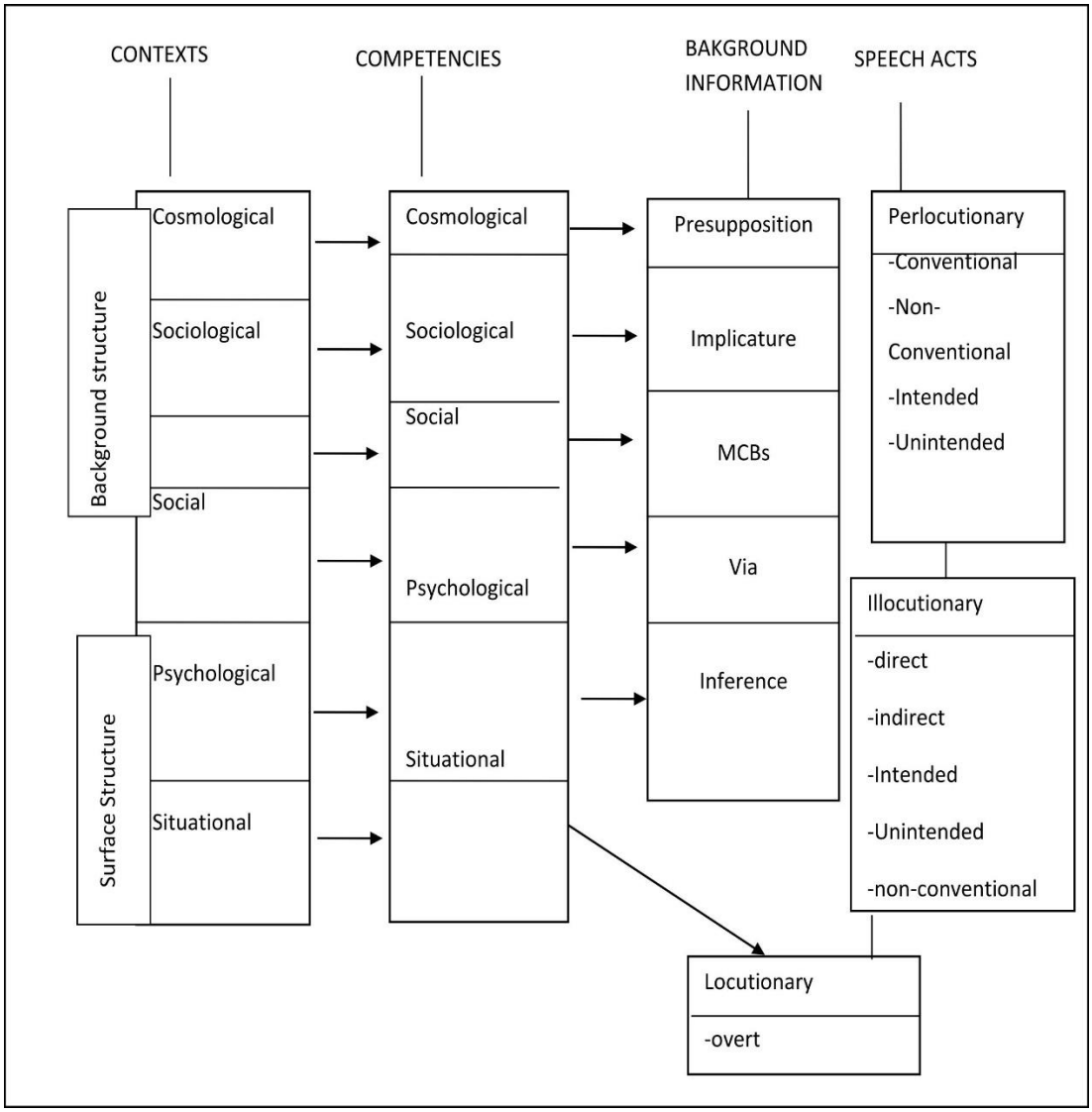

Fig 2.1: Lawal (2012) Model of Pragmatic Theory

Research Design

The study employs a qualitative descriptive research design suitable for examining how context, language and style interact to create meaning in poetry.

The Data

The primary data for this paper consisted of fifteen (15) poems selected from the anthologies of three contemporary Nigerian poets: Remi Raji, Gbemisola Adeoti and Sola Owonibi. Five poems were chosen from each poet to ensure representativeness and thematic breadth: Remi Raji: "*Cyclone II", "Day and night", "The predator's prayer", "Bound to remember", "The mutineer's song".* Gbemisola Adeoti: "*Naked soles", "Ambush", "New minimum wage", "Ghost workers", "Monster seeds".* Sola Owonibi: "*Homeless not hopeless", "Africa", "Songs of the streets", "Voices of the soiceless", "Echoes of Silence".* The choice of these poets is deliberate. As academic poets and university lecturers, their works embody the fusion of literary artistry and intellectual engagement. They represent the third and fourth generations of Nigerian poetry, addressing pressing concerns such as corruption, governance, cultural memory, identity, marginalisation and human dignity with stylistic innovation and socio-political consciousness. The selected poems exemplify their diverse yet complementary preoccupations, providing a balanced and representative corpus for examining the interaction of context, style and meaning in African poetry.

Data Selection Procedure

The poems were purposively selected based on thematic relevance (socio-political critique, memory, identity, marginalisation, and existential issues), stylistic richness and representativeness across the poets' works and availability in published anthologies.

Method of Data Analysis

The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design method to examine how context, style and meaning interact in the selected poems of Remi Raji, Gbemisola Adeoti and Sola Owonibi. The analysis is conducted in three interrelated stages. First, a contextual analysis is carried out using Aspects of M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, particularly the variables of field, tenor and mode. Field is used to identify the subject matter and social activity represented in the poems; tenor examines the relationship between the poet and the audience, including power relations and attitudes; while mode focuses on the role and organisation of language in the discourse. This stage establishes how context influences meaning. Second, a stylistic analysis is undertaken to identify the linguistic and poetic devices employed in the texts. This includes the examination of metaphor, imagery, symbolism, irony, repetition and rhetorical structures.

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These stylistic features are analysed in relation to the contextual variables to determine how they contribute to meaning construction.

Third, a pragmatic analysis is conducted, drawing on the principles of Bayo Lawal's Pragmatic Theory of Literary Analyis. This involves identifying speech acts, implicature and presupposition in the poems in order to uncover implied meanings, communicative intentions and context-dependent interpretation. Finally, the results from these analytical stages are synthesised and compared across the three poets to identify patterns of convergence and divergence in their use of context, style and meaning. This integrated approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is constructed in contemporary Nigerian poetry.

Data Analysis

Following the methodology described earlier, this section presents a qualitative analysis of the selected poems of Remi Raji, Gbemisola Adeoti and Sola Owonibi, focusing on the discourse issues in their selected poems as well as contextual variables, stylistic features and pragmatic elements that interact to produce meaning.

Contextual Analysis (Field, Tenor Mode)

Across the poems, the field of discourse is largely socio-political and socio-economic, reflecting themes such as governance failure, corruption, marginalization, identity and survival. In Remi Raji's poems (e.g., Cyclone 2, The Predator's Prayers), the field foregrounds political crisis and historical consciousness, constructing meanings of resistance and national anxiety. In Gbemisola Adeoti's poems (e.g., Ambush, Ghost workers), the field centres on institutional corruption and labour exploitation, producing meanings of critique and exposure. In Sola Owonibi's poems (e.g., Homeless not Hopeless, Song of the Streets), the field reflects urban poverty and human struggle, emphasising lived experience and resilience.

The tenor of discourse varies across the poets. Remi Raji adopts a confrontational and ideologically charged stance, positioning the poet against oppressive systems. Gbemisola adeoti employs a satirical and ironic tenor, creating indirect criticism through humour and ridicule. In contrast, Sola Owonibi establishes an empathetic and inclusive relationship, aligning closely with marginalised individuals. These variations in tenor significantly shape meaning, ranging from direct protest to implicit critique and emotional identification.

The mode of discourse further differentiates the poets. Remi Rji's mode is metaphorical and ironically dense, producing layered meanings. Gbemisola Adeoti's mode relies on irony and rhetorical indirection, requiring interpretive engagement. Sola Owonibi's mode is simple, narrative and direct, ensuring clarity and accessibility. Thus, mode determines how meaning is encoded and decoded in the poems.

Stylistic Analysis

The poems exhibit a wide range of stylistic and poetic devices that contribute to meaning construction. Remi Raji employs metaphor, symbolism, alliteration and repetition to create intensity and ideological depth. His use of dense imagery often encodes political realities in symbolic forms. Gbemisola Adeoti's poetry is characterized by satire, irony and rhetorical questioning which function as tools for indirect criticism. These devices enable the poet to expose societal contradictions while engaging the reader in interpretive processes. Sola Owonibi, on the other hand, utilises simple diction, narrative structure and vivid imagery to depict everyday experiences. His style is less complex but highly effective in conveying emotion al and social realities. Overall, stylistic choices in the poems are not merely decorative but serve as functional resources for meaning-making.

Pragmaic Analysis

From a pragmatic perspective, the poems employ speech acts, implicature and presupposition to extend meaning beyond the literal level. Speech acts such as criticism, protest, warning and lamentation are prevalent across the texts. Implicature plays a crucial role, particularly in Gbemisola Adeiti's poetry where meaning is often indirect and inferential. Readers are required to draw on contextual knowledge to interpret the underlying critique. Presupposition is also evident as the poems assume shared knowledge of Nigerian socio-political realities. This pragmatic dimension shows that meaning in the poems is context-dependent and interpretive which requires an active reader engagement.

Comparative Synthesis

The analysis reveals both convergences and divergences among the poets. All three poets engage with social-political, cultural and economic realities as well as ideological concerns, using poetry as a medium of critique and representation. However, they differ in their stylistic and contextual strategies: Remi Raji is metaphorical, intense and ideological driven Gbemisola Adeoti is satirical, ironic and indirectly critical while Sola Owonibi is narrative, simple and empathetic. These differences demonstrate that while context provides a shared foundation, style mediates how meaning is constructed and interpreted.

Political Corruption and Governance Failure

Political corruption and governance failures dominate the works of the three poets as seen in Adeoti's "*Ambush* "and "*Ghost workers",* Raji's "*The predator's prayer*" and Owonibi's "*Songs of the streets".*

In "*Ambush*", Adeoti personifies the land: "The land is a giant trap / waiting to snare its own children."

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The clause illustrates a material process where the "land" functions as Actor, turning against its own people as Goal. The presupposition here is that Nigeria's socio-political environment, corrupted by failed leadership, betrays its citizens. The implicature is that governance (ordinarily nurturing) has become predatory. In *Ghost Workers*, Adeoti attacks institutional deceit: "Workers who earn without lifting a hand." Here, irony foregrounds the absurdity of corruption. The presupposition is of a system plagued by fictitious payrolls while the MCB is the shared public awareness of "ghost workers" scandals in Nigerian civil service. Raji's "The *predator's prayer" uses* parody of prayer to indict elites:

"Blessed are the teeth that tear the commonwealth. The material process of tearing foregrounds violence while the subverted prayer-form generates irony. Pragmatically, it indicts leaders who exploit communal resources. Similarly, Owonibi's "*Songs of the streets*" represents the chaos of marginalised lives through syntactic deviation and fragmentation, stylistically foregrounding socio-political disorder. As Lawal (1997) notes, such stylistic foregrounding mirrors social disruption. These poems, considered together, indict corruption by deploying irony, metaphor and imagery to expose systemic failure.

War, Violence and National Trauma

The destructive impact of wars and crises is reflected in Raji's "*Bound to remember*" and "*Mutineer's song*", Adeoti's "*Monster seeds*" and Owonibi's "*Voices of the voiceless*". In "*Bound to remember*", the Nigerian Civil War is memorialised: "The scars are written on the soil." This relational process signifies permanence, portraying scars as attributes of the land. The presupposition is that war leaves indelible marks on both landscape and collective psyche. *"Mutineer's song"* embodies resistance through song. The implicature is that poetry itself becomes a survival tool against oppression, aligning with the tradition of protest poetry. Adeoti's "*Monster seeds*" uses agricultural metaphor: "Seeds of hate sprout in our soil." The material process of "sprout" dramatises how violence reproduces itself. The MCB is the cyclical violence Nigerians recognise in recurring ethnic and political conflicts. In "*Voices of the voiceless*", Owonibi laments: "Our cries are echoes in abandoned streets." The metaphor of "echoes" suggests futility while repetition intensifies despair. Pragmatically, it portrays the people's alienation from governance.

These works embody what Jeyifo (2004) calls the "poetics of disillusionment," revealing how collective trauma shapes national consciousness.

Poverty, Exploitation and Social Injustice

Economic hardship and social exploitation are constant concerns in Adeoti's "*New minimum wage*", Owonibi's "*Homeless not hopeless*" and Raji's "*Day and night*". In "*New minimum wage*", Adeoti uses irony and satire: "The pittance is a song / the rulers dance

to." Here, the presupposition is widespread economic injustice. The implicature is that leaders trivialise workers' struggles, reducing survival wages to political spectacle. Owonibi's "*Homeless not hopeless*" humanises the destitute: "Beneath the bridge, hope sleeps with hunger."This material process metaphor situates poverty in physical space, juxtaposing "hope" with "hunger" to reflect resilience amid deprivation. Raji's "*Day and night*" dramatises daily hardship: "The market of hunger opens at dawn." Here, "hunger" as Actor suggests its ubiquity. The MCB is that hunger pervades Nigerian life, reinforcing collective understanding. These poems collectively expose systemic exploitation while affirming human endurance through paradox and metaphor.

Exile, Displacement and Identity

Themes of exile and identity loss are prominent in Raji's "*Cyclone II",* Adeoti's "*Naked soles*" and Owonibi's "*Echoes of silence".* In "*Cyclone II*", storm imagery reflects uprootedness: "Winds scatter the roots of memory." The material process shows destructive external forces undermining memory as Goal. The presupposition is that colonial and postcolonial disruptions destabilise African identity. In "*Naked soles*", Adeoti writes: "Our soles know the thorns of the journey." Here, vulnerability is foregrounded through metaphor. The MCB is the collective awareness of migration and hardship as shared African experience. Owonibi's "*Echoes of silence*" deepens alienation: "The silence speaks louder than drums."

This oxymoron foregrounds exile's psychological toll where silence symbolises estrangement. Together, these works interrogate displacement as physical, cultural and psychological, emphasising fragility of identity.

Environmental Degradation and Exploitation of Nature

The despoliation of the environmental features in Raji's "*The Predator's prayer*", Adeoti's "*Ambush*" and Owonibi's "*Africa*". Raji indicts ecological plunder: "Blessed are the teeth that chew the forest."

Here, the material process of "chew" symbolises environmental destruction which implicates political elites. Adeoti's "*Ambush*" extends imagery of entrapment to nature itself where "giant trap" evokes a hostile environment shaped by human greed. In Owonibi's "*Africa*": "Your rivers weep beneath oil's shadow." The relational process attributes sorrow to nature, implicating exploitation of natural resources. The presupposition is Africa's ecological devastation, familiar in the Nigerian oil crisis. These poems embody what Osundare (1983) calls the ecopoetic impulse in African writing where environmental exploitation symbolises broader socio-political plunder.

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Findings

The data analysis establishes that meaning in the selected poems emerges from the interaction between context (field, tenor and mode), stylistic devices and pragmatic inference. Context determines the thematic focus, style shapes expression and pragmatics enables deeper interpretation. Together, they form a comprehensive framework for understanding meaning in contemporary Nigerian poetry. In the long run, the study affirms that African poetry is not only an aesthetic enterprise but also a vehicle of cultural memory and critique. The works of Raji, Adeoti and Owonibi show how poets function as cultural watchdogs, giving voice to the marginalised and projecting visions of justice and dignity. The study revealed that all the three poets are deeply committed to socio-political critique drawing from Nigeria's post colonial challenges. While Raji's style is marked by lyrical complexity and intertextual depth, Adeoti favours satire, directness and accessible idioms rooted in local expression. Owonibi, on the other hand, employs realism and empathetic representation to highlight the plight of urban poor and voiceless,

Summary and Conclusion

The analysis of the selected poems by Remi Raji, Gbemisola Adeoti and Sola Owonibi establishes that meaning in African poetry emerges from the interplay of context, style and pragmatics. The poets use their art to interrogate pressing socio-political realities such as corruption, governance failure, poverty, war, displacement and environmental degradation while pragmatic elements such as speech acts, presupposition and implicature situate meaning within shared cultural and historical realities. Stylistic devices such as imagery, irony, paradox and repetition further deepen interpretation and highlight the poets' commitment to social engagement. In the long run, the study affirms that African poetry is not only an aesthetic enterprise but also a vehicle of cultural memory and critique. The works of Raji, Adeoti and Owonibi show how poets function as cultural watchdogs, giving voice to the marginalised and projecting visions of justice and dignity. The study revealed that all the three poets are deeply committed to socio-political critique drawing from Nigeria's post colonial challenges. While Raji's style is marked by lyrical complexity and intertextual depth, Adeoti favours satire, directness and accessible idioms rooted in local expression. Owonibi, on the other hand, employs realism and emphatic representation to highlight the plight of the urban poor and voiceless.

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