

Socio-legal Discourse Analysis of a Selected Court Proceeding

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Abstract

Socio-legal discourse is an emerging interdisciplinary area of research in which laws or legal documents are analysed via a sociolinguistics' lens. This paper identifies and discusses the relationship between language and law in a selected court proceeding. The researchers identify some features of discourse, which include exchange, move and act. The analysis adopts Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) discourse rank scale and places court proceedings under the rank of lesson. A bottom-top approach is adopted in this placement such that at the level of discourse acts, the analysis focuses on informative, elicitation and directive acts. In the discussion, the paper examines some discourse elements such as "focusing and framing move," "opening and answering move," as well as "follow-up move." For the socio-legal components of the text, discourse cohesion and coherence are used as tools of analysis. This paper reveals that these discourse features used in legal documents help to unify the sequence of events during court proceedings. Thus, it concludes that an understanding of these socio-legal discourse structures will provide greater insights into the examination of legal proceedings in law courts in Nigeria.

Keywords: *socio-legal discourse, court proceeding, legal language.*

Introduction

An upsurge in contemporary research in the field of discourse explores different areas of social interaction. One of these areas is legal discourse, which adumbrates the interplay between language and law as it shows how they function in sociolinguistic phenomena. Language plays a significant role in legal discourse because it is instrumental to legal texts' interpretation and verbal communication in courtrooms. Beyond day-

to-day uses, language, in diverse ways, performs many communicative functions (Aboh & Uduk, 2017, p. 1). Ekpang (2017) describes language as "a potent tool which public speakers use for communication, manipulation, mobilisation, as well as an instrument for social justice" (p. 441). According to Ogolekwu, Jibrin and Agu (2022), "language is the major apparatus that gives impetus to social interaction" (p. 112). No language exists in a vacuum; rather, it is situated within a certain phenomenon to function. In view of this, Sadiq (2007, p. 15) opines that language, either spoken or written, from creation has helped humans

meet certain needs, sometimes making them have a sense of fulfilment. In a discursive situation, Brown and Yule (1983, p. 1) identify the two roles language plays as transactional and interactional. To Osisanwo (2008), while transactional function deals with a purposeful exchange of messages and ideas, interactional function is concerned with verbal interactions for purely social reasons (p. 4). However, Halliday (1976, p. 8), cited in Aboh & Uduk (2017), states that:

Language serves to establish and maintain social relations for the expression of social roles which include the communication roles created by language itself – for example the roles of questioner and respondent which we take on by asking or answering a question; and also for getting things done by means of the interaction between one person and another (p.4).

Halliday views that language establishes social relationships as facilitated through socially influenced situations. Thus, Ekpang & Godwin (2020) view that language controls human messages and ideas, and it is used to react to social order (p. 69). Ogolekwu (2021) avers that "language remains a cutting-edge in all human activities." To him, it is the natural property that people use for communication and identification.

Legal discourse is a structural choice and interactional pattern that tends to occur only in legal discourse situations (Mellinkoff, 1963, p. 3). This is an indication that language use has linguistic jurisdiction depending on the users. Ekpang (2015) is of the view that "a person's identity can be deciphered through his/her use of a particular language" (p. 69). Berukstiene (2016, p. 95), on the other hand, asserts that any legal text can be considered a piece of legal discourse. In the same vein, Gibbons (2003) posits that the law is an overwhelming linguistic institution (p. 1). Kirby (2007, p. x)

opines that laws are one aspect of international discourse that is expressed through legal documents. To Sadiq (2011, p. 12), "laws are coded in language and concepts that are used to construct the law are accessible only through language.

Therefore, it can be said that legal discourse is concerned with legal text such as written court proceedings and verbal hearings of proceedings in the courtroom. In courtroom situations, the use of language is logical, authoritative and engrossed in formality. It is in this regard that Wagner & Cheng (2011, p. 8) agree that "law is a discourse of power, and that formula opens new dimensions." To them, "once citizens become aware of the fact that they are speakers of a specific discourse, they are indeed empowered to speak differently to each other as well as to their respective social institutions." In a related view, Amadu (2014) observes that "the language of court is formal; the magistrate exerts and wields more power in court" (p. 47). The study argues that the magistrate uses imperative (command), active and declarative utterances to control the direction of the conversation between them and the other participants in the courtroom and they tend to compel obedience of others in the court. Against this background, Johnson (2014, p. 525) observes,

What is said in police stations and in courtrooms by suspects and witnesses involved in civil and criminal offences is socially significant for citizens in that private and local discourse is made public and being repeated as it travels from interview to courtroom and enters the social consciousness via the media.

Aceron (2015) investigates the importance of courtroom interaction and his findings show that "to elicit a response is to allocate and negotiate the meaning through a series of points, adjacency pairs, and insertion

sequence." According to the study, in court hearings or proceedings, "the judge holds the most powerful control and command as manifested in his manner and ability of using the language." In Nigeria, the issue of power control and command pointed out by Acheron is sourced from the dictates of law, which make judges or magistrates more powerful within the jurisdiction of the court to which they preside.

Cheng & Danesi (2019) explore a socio-semiotic (re)construction of legal language through the key communicative features of legal discourse or salient devices applied in courtroom spoken or written discourse, such as cohesive and coherent elements as well as their sub-categories. Since lapses emanating from courtroom discourse are enormous, Acheron (2015), in his study, "Conversational Analysis: The Judge and Lawyer's Courtroom Interactions," recommends for studies to cover the prevalent communicative features of legal discourse. He advocates for critical linguistic approaches in handling the discussions of courtroom discourse.

This chapter posits that language can function anywhere at any time, irrespective of the social situation and scenario that prompts it. Thus, this study focuses on the transactional function of language, where a court proceeding involving a case of "criminal conspiracy, criminal force, and theft" obtained from Area Court, Sankera, Benue State, is explored.

Communicative Features of Legal Discourse

Discourse Opening and Closing: Discourse opening is the initial exchange that begins a conversation (Osisanwo, 2008, p. 11). Like an opening, closing may be greetings or repetitions of the discussion (Akhimien & Farotimi, 2018, p. 4). In courtroom situations, discourse is opened in the form of summoning to welcome a presiding judge. The clerk

notifies all the participants by banging the table as they stand and echo a long drawn-out c-o-u-r-t. Unlike other discourse situations where formal or informal greeting is obtainable, courtroom discourse is uniquely opened in the form of summons to greet and formally welcome the presiding judge. Discourse closing in the court is done in the same manner.

Talk initiation in the courtroom: This is the process of starting off a talk with other participants, listening and waiting to take their turn. A talk in the courtroom is initiated by the prosecutor, who applies for the reading of the First Information Report (F.I.R.). F.I.R. contains the name of the complainant, the suspect(s), nature of the offence, the place and time of the offence, as well as the charge(s) levelled against the accused person(s). For instance, the following expression is a sample of talk initiation: *Before this court is an F.I.R. I apply that it should be read to the accused person for his plea, prosecutor.* . After the reading of the FIR by the court, which is always done by the clerk in the lower courts, conversations begin. The floor is opened for conversation after the reading of the FIR. At this point, the court/presiding judge will give turn to the accused person to respond to the charge(s) against them.

Turn-taking is a basic feature of all aspects of human discourse. (Osisanwo, 2008, p. 11). Since conversation is a means of social interaction involving two or more people who discuss some topic, it follows that discourse participants have to take turns to speak (Aboh & Uduk, 2017, p. 121). In courtroom situations, when FIR is read to the accused person, it marks the opening of non-verbal responses from the interlocutors, usually through questions presented in adjacency pairs as shown below:

Court/judge: Have you heard and understood the FIR against you?"

Accused: I have heard and understood the allegation against me.

Court/judge: Are you guilty or not guilty of the offence under Section 97 of the penal code?

Accused: I am not guilty.

This may lead to role sharing when the presiding judge and the counsel or lawyers for both parties attempt to defend their clients. Thus, role sharing will be conducted in an organised manner, ordered by the presiding judge, who plays the higher role.

Role sharing in legal discourse: This is determined by the participants, status, profession, age, sex, education, occupation, achievement, or gender in a speech event (Okata, 2019, p. 893). In a courtroom situation, the presiding judge, the lawyers/counsels and the informant/accused share roles during court hearings. Each role player is subject to the discretion of the court. Berry (1987, p. 51) suggests two possible statuses and assigns them +higher and higher, which could be understood as the higher and lower statuses of the participants. On his part, Osisanwo (2008, p. 13) discredits such binary functions and states three possible statuses of the participants who play different roles in a discourse situation as Upper Role, Middle Role and Lower Role (p. 13).

Role sharing is evident in court because there are major role players: the presiding judge, the counsels to both parties and the parties involved in the case or dispute. Thus, this study examines three role players in a legal discourse or courtroom situation, which are exclusive, concurrent, and residual roles.

Fig. 1: This research has proposed a legal discourse role-sharing pyramid (see appendix).

Each of the above participants has a role to play in courtrooms. While the presiding judge exercises an exclusive role in the discourse, the lawyers/counsels for both parties share concurrent roles with the presiding judge. The presiding judge conducts trials in the court, assesses the credibility and arguments of both parties, and issues a ruling on the case brought before them based on the interpretation of the legal code. The presiding judge performs an exclusive role throughout the duration of the court proceeding to maintain impartiality and credibility. This affirms Ifversen's (2003) view that criminal law imposes particular frames on the victims' narrative, and the criminal legal context shapes the stories victims choose to tell about their experiences.

Besides, counsels to the parties include lawyers who represent the complainant and the accused person(s). On the other hand, the parties' counsels exercise concurrent power in the court because they counsel or advise the parties involved in the case and share professional roles with the presiding judge, such as bail negotiation and placement of charges. The third role is played by the parties involved in the disputes. They include the complainant, the witness, and the accused person. They are entitled to state their complaints or defend the charge in the case. While the complainant or the witness provides an explanatory statement(s), the accused person provides a voluntary statement(s) for their defence.

Table 1. Samples of legal discourse role sharing in courtroom based on pyramidal hierarchy

Role sharing type	Discourse events/role play
Exclusive role (by the presiding judge)	I am of the feeling that it is only the judge or the magistrate that is by law vested with the

	<p>powers to frame charges at this stage of the case; no charge has been preferred against the accused as he is standing trial for an allegation brought against him by the police... – Presiding judge.</p> <p>In conclusion, therefore, the applicant shall be admitted to bail in the sum of N5,000.00 and a reasonable surety in the like sum. – Presiding judge</p> <p>The substantive matter shall be adjourned to the 27th day of March, 2008 for hearing – Presiding judge.</p>	<p>Lawyer/Counsel to the accused.</p> <p>Residual Role (By the Complaint, Suspect, Witness Prosecute IPO)</p>	<p>I am not guilty – Accused</p> <p>Investigation into the matter has been completed – Prosecutor</p> <p>I have not objected to his moving the application – Prosecutor</p>
<p>Concurrent Role (by Lawyers/Counsels to Parties)</p>	<p>The application is moved pursuant to Section 354(1) of the penal code, 2 of the C.P.C., read together with Section 36(5) of the C.F.R.N. 1999, and we have filed along with it an affidavit prayer for the court to admit the applicant on bail – – Lawyer/Counsel to the accused.</p> <p>We have seen the counter affidavit of the respondent, and we submit that the affidavit is a faced, We urge you to strike out paragraphs 3, 4, 6, 9, and 11 for being argumentatively contrary to Section 97, Evidence Act –</p>	<p>Theoretical Framework</p> <p>Sinclair and Courlthard (1975) state that lesson, transaction, exchange, move, and act are viable strands to consider in the analysis of discursive situations. Hence, this study explores a court proceeding where the major communicative features of discourse situations are examined. The analysis adopts the prevalent features of discourse as contained in exchange, move and act. To Osisanwo (2008, p. 17), other genres outside the classroom may not require some of the units on their discourse rank scale, especially "lesson," which is the highest unit in the rank scale. The analysis of the data is based on a bottom-top approach in this placement: act, move, and exchange. At the level of discourse acts, the analysis focuses on informative, elicitation and directive acts. This study examines focusing and framing moves, opening and answering moves, as well as follow-up moves.</p>	<p>Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion</p>

Analysis of the data is based on the discourse rank scale cohesion and coherence.

Discourse Rank Scale

Discourse rank scale is the ordering of discourse units such that one unit constitutes the components of the higher unit in a hierarchical order. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) propose a five-unit discourse rank scale. They are: lesson, transaction, exchange, move and act (p. 45).

In this paper, analysis of the data is presented from bottom-top in this placement, specifically: Act, Move and Exchange.

Act: This is the lowest rank on the discourse rank scale, and it is classified as the smallest indivisible unit of discourse. It can be formed using grammatical units of words, groups, clauses or sentences. The table below shows different categories of acts involved in the legal discourse situation.

Table 2. Speech/communicative acts in legal discourse

Informative Act	Elicitation Act	Directive Act
I did not beat the complainant; it was the passengers that beat him. – Excerpt Respondent: We have filed in fifteen paragraphs in respect of this motion – Excerpt	Court: Are you guilty or not guilty of the offence under section 287 penal code? Accused: I am not guilty (immediate response). – Excerpt	I urge the court not to grant prayers sought in the matter because it is defective – Excerpt I urge the court to grant the application in the interest of justice – Excerpt In conclusion, therefore the applicant shall be admitted to bail in the

		sum of N5,000.00 a reasonable surety in the like sum. Excerpt
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The table shows three acts involved in legal discourse based on the data provided for the analysis. The first act is an informative **act** where the participant or the speaker gives information about the scenario of the dispute. In the excerpt, the accused said he did not beat the complainant but gave information about the performer of the action. "It was the passengers that beat him." The second excerpt in the table under the informative act is information given by the respondent that "We have filed in fifteen paragraphs in respect of this motion." Information is very important in legal discourse because it helps the presiding judge in his ruling.

The second category of the act based on the data is **elicitation act** which involves asking questions and expecting feedback. The first excerpt is a question put to the accused with an expected response by the court. "**Are you guilty or not guilty?**" Meanwhile, the reaction of the interlocutor is defensive feedback and denial that he is not at fault concerning the incident that happened.

Third, a directive **act** demands an action and expresses an order, as shown in all the excerpts indicated against it in the table. "I urge the court not to grant prayers sought in the matter...", "I urge the court to grant the application in the interest of justice," and "... the applicant shall be admitted to bail in the sum of N5,000.00 and a reasonable surety in like sum" are all directive statements or orders from the counsel to the accused and the presiding judge.

Move: A move is minimum action taken by the participants in discourse. A move could be

simple or complex, depending on the acts which constitute it. Below are examples of move in the data provided.

Table 3: Samples of move in legal discourse situation

Focusing and Framing move	Opening and Answering move	Follow-up move
The issue jurisdiction is a very serious matter once raised (focusing), {but} must be examined before further steps are taken (framing) – Excerpt	Court: Have you heard and understood the FIR against you - Excerpt Accused: I have heard and understood the allegation against me – Excerpt	Counsel: Before the court is a summons on notice. Respondent: I have objected to his moving the application. Counsel: The application is moved pursuant of Section 354(1)(2) – Excerpt

The table above shows that *move* in legal discourse could be classified on the basis of focusing and framing, opening and answering as well as following-up moves.

First, focusing move states the actual issue while framing gives the concluding part of the speech made by that speaker in that single act as shown in the table “**The issue of jurisdiction is a very serious matter once raised (focusing), {but} must be examined before further steps are taken (framing).** Second, opening move initiates talk and feedback is expected from the interlocutor while answering move is the expected feedback as indicated in the table with the excerpt.

A. Court: Have you heard and understood the FIR against you? (**Opening move**)

B. Accused: I have heard and understood the allegation against me (**Answering move**)

Speaker "A" initiates a talk and expects a response (answer) from speaker B. The follow-up move implies affirmation of talks initiated by the first speaker and responded by the second speaker with concluding affirmation by the initiator or the first speaker.

A. Counsel: Before the court, here is the summon on notice

B. Respondent: I have objected to his moving the application

A. Counsel: The application is moved pursuant of section 354(1)(2)

Based on the above, speaker “A” follows up his move by trying to enforce what he said at first to be seconded, complemented and affirmed by the speaker "B," who objects the move but follows the statement by the speaker “A” and closes the act immediately. A follow-up move is very vital in legal discourse because the respondent or defendant uses it for defence in court. It is believed that silence implies acceptance; therefore, a follow-up move will make the interlocutor or second party involved in a dispute be silent and lack what to say.

Exchange: An exchange in discourse is achieved by the discourse series of moves or actions engaged by the discourse participants. Examples of exchange extracted from the data are:

Speaker: A Judge/court: Have you heard and understood the FIR against you?

Speaker: B Accused: I have heard and understood the allegation against me.

Speaker: A Judge/Court: Are you guilty or not guilty of the offence under section 97 PC

Speaker: B Accused: I am not guilty.

Speaker: C Prosecutor: Investigation into these has been completed.

An exchange is formed by a set of discourse moves. In the above excerpt, an exchange is achieved as speaker "A"(the judge) initiates a talk through elicitation and speaker "B" (the accused) responds with immediate feedback from speaker "A." It is different from a classroom discourse where a teacher solely and finally gives a follow-up evaluation. The follow-up exchange in legal discourse could be achieved through cross-examination or talks from either the presiding judge, the prosecuting counsel or the representative counsels (lawyer). Speaker C (the prosecuting counsel) does the follow-up talk, although the talk was initiated by the presiding judge who represents the court.

Exchange in legal discourse involves the playing of roles, which is done mostly through eliciting exchange. Based on the foregoing, it can be said that discourse rank scale is an admissible platform to analyse courtroom discourse situations.

Cohesion in Discourse

Discourse cohesion is a group of linguistic channels used to create or recreate a united whole. It can be further stated that cohesion makes it possible for aspects of a text to be dependent on other aspects of that text to elicit meaning. This means a text (written or spoken) is only a text if it is meaningfully linked together. Such links could be achieved, either with lexical or grammatical devices.

Lexical device: This refers to the choice of vocabulary. Lexical cohesion occurs as a result of the semantic relationship between words (Antony, 2014, p. 535). Osisanwo

(2008) identifies two types of lexical devices: reiteration and collocation. Below are samples extracted from the appendices showing categories and sub-categories of lexical cohesion.

Table 4. Samples of lexical devices and their sub-categories in legal discourse

Lexical Devices	Texts (Discourse Situations)	Sub-categories
Reiteration	"...occupants of his vehicle numbering up to five in number attacked him" – Excerpt	Repetition
	Bail is a constitutiona l right of an accused person; it is however not donated by granted on laid down condition and procedure – Excerpt	Super-ordinate
Collocation	Court: Are you guilty or not guilty? – Excerpt	Antonym/near antonym
	The deponent has not spoken to the respondent... – Excerpt	Links

Table 4 above shows how lexical elements are linked to portray meaningful messages to the reader or hearer. The first lexical device illustrates how the respondent framed charges against the accused and his

accomplice through reiteration as he repeats the word "number." This is done to show that the offence was not committed by one person. Besides, reiteration also occurs in the second excerpt, that is, “**constitutional laid down condition**” and "procedure, which are used in a single expression. Meanwhile, **constitution**” is the superordinate term under which we have “**laid-down condition**” and "procedure.

The second lexical device is collocation, as shown in Table 4, through the use of antonyms and semantic links. The words/phrases “**guilty**” and “**not guilty**” collocate in opposition. Thus, the speaker (presiding judge), who represents the court used the expression for elicitation and to provide two wording options, which are **guilty**” and “**not guilty,**” for the accused person to choose from. These options are antonymous in nature. On the other hand, **deponent**” and “**respondent**” are collocates because the police prosecutor who represents the Commissioner of Police is the respondent” while the complainant or the witness is the deponent. Therefore, there is a link between the “**police**” (respondent) and the **informant** (deponent), which can be termed relational opposition.

Grammatical Cohesion

Grammatical cohesion is classified into four types: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). However, this study identifies only two of these devices in the selected data, as the analysis below shows:

Table 5. Grammatical devices in achieving legal discourse

Grammatical Devices	Texts (Discourse Situation)	Sub-Devices
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Conjunction	<p>Are you guilty or not guilty? – Excerpt</p> <p>I have carefully listened to the argument of the applicant’s counsel (name withheld) and the respondent and have this to say – Excerpt</p> <p>The court has no power to pick and choose which offences to try and which to leave out – Excerpt</p>	Coordinating conjunction
	<p>I urge the court not to grant prayers sought in the matter because it is defective – Excerpt</p>	Subordinating conjunction

The prevalent grammatical device in the text is the use of coordinating conjunctions “**or**” and “**and,**” which connect units that share lexical or syntactic elements. There is also the use of the subordinating conjunction “**because,**” which

introduces reason for the move. In legal discourse, the use of conjunction is paramount because it is a linking device between words, phrases, clauses or sentences in a text. As connectives, they are adopted in courtroom discourse to establish a sequence of events and orderliness in trials and proceedings. To this effect, it can be said that cohesive devices (lexical or grammatical) help to link, connect, tie, and hold texts together as one unit.

Coherence

Coherence can be achieved in discourse through semantic relations and cognitive processes and the three major devices in achieving coherence are: cause-and-effect devices, contiguity in time and space devices, and associative devices (Osisanwo, 2008, p. 40). These devices are used to illustrate the legal discourse situation in the data provided, as shown in the table below.

Table 6. Devices in achieving coherence in legal discourse

Devices	Texts (Discourse Events)	Sub-Devices
Cause and effect device	Lawyer: I am in agreement with the prosecutor that one of the offences for which the accused is standing trial is not ordinarily bailable, that is, Section 287 of the penal code. I therefore decline the admission of the accused person. The accused person should be	Reason and Result

	remanded in prison custody – Excerpt	
Contiguity in time and space device	Criminal conspiracy, criminal force and theft - Excerpt ... we urge you to strike out paragraphs 3, 4, 6, 9, and 11 for being argumentative, contrary to Section 97 Evidence Act - Excerpt.	Chronological sequence
Associative device	Court: Are you guilty or not guilty for the offence under section 287 Penal Code. Accused: I did not beat the complainant; it was the passengers that beat him - Excerpt	Concession - contra expectation

The above table shows clearly that coherent devices account for sense (meaning) in the text. The meaning of every discursive act is situated upon how coherent the text is and its relative phenomenon.

Based on the first illustration of coherence in the table above, the coherence device is “cause and effect, which is achieved through the structure of reason and result. The counsel to the accused (lawyer) has no substantial defence on the account that “... **offence for which the accused is standing trial is not bailable.** This intensifies the reason for the

next action moved by the court (presiding judge): **“Therefore, I decline that the admission of the accused person be remanded in prison custody.”** This excerpt has shown the result of an unbailable offence. This implies that the case is **“not bailable”** (reason) and the defendant should be **“remanded in prison custody”** (result).

The second coherent device is contiguity in time and space which indicates the chronological sequence of events: **“criminal conspiracy, criminal force and theft.”** The arrangement of the charge is chronological because of the action sequence. The first action, **“criminal conspiracy**, means the prime suspect and his accomplices jointly met to commit the offense **“criminal force,”** also called an assault; the third domain of the charge is **“theft,”** also called stealing." Thus, it can be summarised that the suspect and his crime partners met, assaulted the complainant (informant), and stole his belongings. This charge is coherent because it starts with the participant, the action and the aftermath of the action (result). Besides the numbering of the paragraphs, it takes chronological order from the least to the highest, as in paragraphs **3, 4, 6, 9, and 11.**

The third coherent device seen in the table is called an associative device. They are referred to as associative because of the coherent relationship that exists between the words or phrases in the text. For instance, **“guilty”** and **not guilty”** are in contrastive alternation. That means **“guilty”** contrasts with **“not guilty”** in the text. Besides, there is concession and contra-expectation in the text, as shown in the table: **“I did not beat the complainant; it was the passenger that beat him.”** The above excerpt shows how the accused person defended himself and admitted that the complainant/informant was actually beaten. But the contrary expectation is that he denied beating the complainant, which is contrary to what the court expected.

In the whole, coherence plays vital roles in legal discourse because it is the logical bridge that exists between words, expressions, and paragraphs in a text, making for a consistent and unified narration of the proceedings. This is the view of Levenbook (1984) that “many contemporary philosophers of law agree that a necessary condition for a decision to be legally justified, even in a hard case, is that it coheres with the established law." Devices in coherence are used to unify the sequence of events in court proceedings.

Conclusion

In courtroom situations, conversations adhere to legal ethics, defined procedure, or formality. The English language adopted during court proceedings, though interpretive, is sometimes perceived as awkward, ambiguous, vague, and archaic because of its distinctive diction. The use of French and Latin loanwords has linguistic implications as some key participants in this discourse such as the informants, witnesses and accused persons, especially at the lower courts in Nigeria, fail to grasp the linguistic dynamism of the context. This chapter has therefore analysed and discussed courtroom verbal transactions from the discourse analysis perspective. A conversational analysis was first done to draw up a typology of legal proceedings; thereafter, three units of the discourse rank scale were identified in the data and discussed. Finally, the devices used to achieve cohesion and coherence in the text were identified and examined. The researchers conclude that although the judiciary has its peculiar or exclusive register as it adopts structural patterns of formal conversations, albeit transactional, and text within this context is achieved through regular cohesive and coherent patterns. Therefore, it can be concluded that an understanding of these socio-legal discourse structures would provide greater insight into the study of legal proceedings in law courts in Nigeria.

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