

A Pragma-Sociolinguistic Study of Female Personality through Proverbs, in Yorùbá Sociocultural Milieu

Adekunle, O.O. Modupeola, PhD & Mordi, O. Ajoke PhD

Abstract

Language use in any cultural setting is generally decisive because language is a vital means of communication and a powerful tool by which the culture and tradition of a speech community are shared, proclaimed and preserved. Proverb, as a type of communication is used in Yorùbá culture among the Yorùbá people irrespective of their status, young or old and gender wise, male or female as well as age ranges, hence the concept of hat doffing by the younger ones while adopting a proverb in an expression before the elders as a sign of regard. Several proverbs in Yorùbá address female expected roles, duties or occupation, her possession of supernatural powers, her influence on her male counterpart irrespective of age, and other related issues. Hence, this paper focuses on explicating Yorùbá female personality in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting, through Yorùbá proverbs; using twenty proverbs selected from Sheba's Yorùbá proverbs with feminine lexis as the data base. Pragmatic theories of inference and context alongside the referential and contextual theories of meaning are considered as relevant tools for data analysis. This study reveals that Yorùbá proverbs are used to project the virtues of Yorùbá females, instruct, warn, or correct the womenfolk, thereby describing their prime place in cultural development. Yorùbá women are expected to be modest, polite, chaste, motherly, industrious and well-mannered and good-natured at home and in the society at large. Therefore, with the linguistic tools employed in this study to decipher the context of Yorùbá proverbs on the feminine gender, it is evident that female roles should not be restricted to Yorùbá cultural setting alone, but designated globally; as women can be agents of societal growth and development, if they are given the opportunity to perform.

Keywords: *pragmatics, context, inference, yorùbá culture, female personality, Yorùbá proverbs and language education*

Introduction

A proverb is a short familiar sentence expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson. Sotunde, (2009:1) opines that proverbs often requires an explanation beyond the literal meaning of the words used. Proverbs are wise sayings passed through generations to teach historical lessons, highlight good morals, and instil social values. Proverbs thus serve as beacons across the sociocultur-

al terrain of human interactions. Yorùbá proverbs are often used to propagate Yorùbá culture thereby preserving the Yorùbá language and the wisdom of the Yorùbá people for posterity. Owomoyela, (2005:38) showcases Yorùbá proverbs as tools for promoting Yorùbá oral tradition, as they describe Yorùbá cultural beliefs. Yorùbá proverbs contain diverse themes either on the good person, the fortunate person (or the good life), relationships, human nature, rights and responsibilities and truisms.

Yorùbá culture refers to the norms and values of the Yorùbá people. Yorùbá thought is mainly narrative in form, explicating and pointing to the knowledge of things, affecting the corporeal and the spiritual universe and its wellness. The Yorùbá have hundreds of aphorisms, folktales, and lore, and they believe that any lore that widens people's horizons and presents food for thought is the beginning of a philosophy. Considering the place of women in Yorùbá culture, **Marjorie, (2009:13) remarks that:**

African women in general, and Yorùbá women in particular are subjugated to male power and authority, and relegated to the realms of marriage, motherhood, and domesticity.

Exploring the indigenous perceptions of women and men on the conception of gender, she further remarks that:

In the Yorùbá context, both sexes share labour roles outside the domestic setting in commerce, production, and the service industry. Nonetheless, the Yorùbá people distinguish between male and female roles at home. Women's gender-specific responsibilities included cooking meals for the family and child rearing while men were responsible for obtaining the family's farmland and maintaining the compound.

In this regard, women's ability to have authority over other people in the public realm was limited. Hence, the expected roles of the female gender in the Yorùbá cultural setting are revealed in the choice of language in Yorùbá proverbs. Women in Yorùbá culture are generally but speciously believed to be preoccupied with child-bearing, home-keeping and cooking alone; hence, are not expected to flex muscle unnecessarily with their male counterparts on issues that have to do with decision making, exercising authority or playing dominant roles in the society.

This ought not to be so when the key roles played by women in today's modern world are brought to the fore of corrupt and power hungry leaders. Instead, African women want to be a force that creates cohesive and peaceful societies; that builds generations of prosperity and welfare. African women want to be loved and recognised, not as vulnerable members of community and society in need of charity but as formidable force that needs to be re-

leased, empowered and massively invested into fulfil their potential and ultimately reach their destiny.

The young women of Africa want to be considered as mothers, wives, daughters, aunts, sisters, cousins, grandmothers, friends, colleagues, not just as leaders of tomorrow but leaders today. Women of Africa want to live in a peaceful environment, continent in which there are no widows as a result of senseless humiliation, maltreatment, killings and war, they want an environment in which they are not sexually abused and violated and in which suffering is not caused by the self-interest of a few. More so, it is remarkably obvious that in some African, Asian and European countries, we now have female Presidents and Prime Ministers. Nowadays, females across the globe play important roles at home (even as bread winners) and in the society at large as leaders of high repute. Hence, their roles are supposed to compliment the roles of men as much as possible.

The study proved that women and the roles that they play in traditional Yorùbá socio-cultural setting is not in any way subservient to that of men. Instead, they take charge of all the man has worked for and manage his entirety. Women work more than men among the Yorùbá, they are the traders, they help their husbands in their farms, take care of the household and other responsibilities attached mostly to women.

Series of Yorùbá proverbs actually support the aforesaid, in the following instances: “Bí ọ̀kùnrin réjò, tóbìrin pa á, àní kẹ̀jò má ẹ́á ti sá lẹ̀” (If a man sees a snake, and a woman kills it, what matters is that the snake does not escape). This implies that both men and women can influence and affect any socio-cultural setting positively when they share a common purpose. To corroborate this point is another Yorùbá proverb that says “À ní sọ̀rọ̀ obinrin, a ní ká sọ̀ bàrà, ká lẹ̀ gbín bàrà só̀dò; ta ní máa bá ni pa á? Meaning: We speak of women, and someone suggests that we hedge our words and go plant bàrà seed by the stream; who will help in harvesting it? The proverb only negates the claim that women are reduced to the kitchen among the Yorùbá. This calls attention to the fact that men cannot do anything without the support of women at home and in the larger society.

In spite of the above-mentioned facts, some philosophical expressions (of which proverbs form a major part) still adhere strictly to the fact that the female gender is not expected to claim any right, or take sole decisions in issues affecting their husbands, children, nuclear or extended families; as they are somewhat subservient to the male gender in all ramifications. Be that as it may, this study seeks to identify some Yorùbá proverbs addressing this same

issue of gender bias in Yorùbá culture in matters affecting marriage, love, sexuality and the likes (which shows that women are usually at the receiving end in matters pertaining to civility and sanctity in home keeping and marriage); and tries to ascertain the context of such proverbs in order to explore the stance of the Yorùbá culture on Yorùbá female personality.

Therefore, series of Yorùbá proverbs are presented in this study to showcase the dexterity of the feminine gender in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting. Examples of such proverbs are: “A kì í dá èrù okó òlá barúgbó” (*One should not attempt to scare an old woman with a huge penis*). This connotes the fact that a person who has seen everything is not easily frightened by anything whatsoever, because of experience; “N ó lọ, n ó lọ!” lobìnrín fi ní dèrù ba ọkùnrin; “Bó o lọ, o lọ ọkùnrín fi ní dèrù ba obinrin. (“I will leave you, I will leave you!” is the threat a woman flings at a man. “If you have a mind to leave, go ahead and leave!” is the retort a man throws at a woman. This can be interpreted to mean that every person in a relationship has something he or she can do to support the other. Another one is: “Obìnrin tí yòò fẹ̀ alágbára, ọkàn kan ní ní ní”. (*A woman who would marry a formidable man must have an unwavering mind, which in context means ‘once one has made a decision on an important matter, one should remain resolute about it’*). All depict the virtue of a female member of a family and society as a woman, a wife or a mother, whose duties and roles cannot be quantified nor played by men without distress. Female figure at home or in the society depicts someone expected to be courageous enough to fend for her home/children even when the man is not available at home all the times. If the words of a parlance that says: “Àì-lóbìnrin kòşe-é dáké lásán; ó tó ká pe gbogbo ayé kó bá ni gbọ ọrọ náà” (Not having a woman is not a problem to keep secret; it merits appealing to the whole world to intervene in the matter, as it is something to be passionately considered). This proverb actually corroborates the fact that the place of a woman in a man’s life cannot be overemphasized, thus, a man without a woman needs drastic measures to resolve his problem.

Statement of the problem

Numerous researches have been carried out on the use of language in several traditional and western cultural settings. Among them are issues on the use of the Yorùbá language to project the cultural practices of the Yorùbá people through folklore, folktales, myths, philosophical sayings (among which is the use of Yorùbá proverbs). Owomoyela, (2005) has copious documents in his book-*Yorùbá Proverbs*, explicating their different uses in terms of themes.

Marjorie, (2009) describes the status of Yorùbá women, work and social change, with particular reference to the precolonial and colonial eras. Opefeyitimi, (2009) in his book- *Women in Yorùbá Culture: A Dozen of Academic Articles* documented articles on health issues of Yorùbá women, the use of semiotics among Yorùbá women, the powers of Yorùbá women (witchcraft), stylistic analysis of Yorùbá women hawking chants, and so on. Sotunde, (2009) wrote a book on Yorùbá proverbs and philosophy with two thousand proverbs translated, while Sheba, (2006) has over six hundred Yorùbá proverbs with feminine texts, the themes of which range from marriage, love, sexuality, motherhood, women status, and a host of others to her credit.

In spite of the volume and content of these various documents mentioned, there is hardly any particular write-up that explains the context of some Yorùbá proverbs on women to depict their personality in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting. This is the gap this paper intends to fill, by exploring the socio-cultural and situational contexts in which the selected Yorùbá proverbs convey the personality of the female gender in Yorùbá cultural setting through Yorùbá proverbs.

Aim and Objectives of the study

This study aims to employ pragmatic and semantic tools to explore the views of the Yorùbá people on Yorùbá female personality through selected Yorùbá proverbs; while the objectives are to investigate the socio-cultural context in which Yorùbá proverbs are used to project the virtues of the feminine gender in Yorùbá cultural setting, and ascertain the referential and contextual meaning of Yorùbá proverbs related to Yorùbá female personality.

Theoretical Framework

Investigating the use of language in any socio-cultural milieu (be it western or traditional), is an inquiry into how language contributes to meaning in human communicative discourses. This study which seeks to explore the context of Yorùbá proverbs attributed to the female gender in Yorùbá culture considers the pragmatic theories of context and inference as well as the referential and contextual theories of meaning relevant to achieving the aim and objectives of this study. Encyclopedia Americana (1994:514) defines pragmatics as 'the subfield of the study of language that investigates the techniques by which language is used for communication purposes'. Kempson, (1986: 561) describes pragmatics as 'the study of the general cognitive principles involved in the retrieval of information from an utterance' Pragmatic analysis of language according to Leech and Short (1987:290) is described as:

© *Òpánbàtà: LASU Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 1, January 2021

the investigation into that aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words and constructions, but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered.

The goal of pragmatic theories is to explain how utterances convey meaning in contexts, and how meaning is decoded from utterances in contexts and in particular situation. Context in pragmatics takes different forms. It could be situational (what warrants the use of language in a particular way), physical (the participants, place and time involved in language use) or psychological (the state of mind of the interlocutors while using language). This study strictly concerns itself with the socio-cultural context because it examines language in use within a speech community, which is - Yoruba. Inference as a pragmatic tool is useful in the analysis of data in this study in the sense that it allows the hearer or reader of an utterance to deduce meaning from what is said or written, and what is left unsaid in an utterance. In a simpler form, it allows the hearer or reader of an utterance to infer meaning from what is said or written, and beyond. This is why Adegbija's pragma-sociolinguistics theory of inference is considered relevant in the interpretation of the Yorùbá proverbs used in this study because it gives room for inferencing meaning of utterances in the light of factors such as: participants, state of mind, special relationship, mutual beliefs and the nature of the discourse.

The referential theory of meaning explicated by Ogden and Richards (1923) explains meaning of a word in terms of the relation between the word and the object(s) to which it refers, while the contextual theory of meaning popularized by Firth (1962) asserts that the most vital fact about language is its social function; as every utterance made is actualized in a culturally determined context of situation, and the meaning of an utterance is the totality of its acceptability and appropriateness in the social context where it is used. In the light of the descriptions of these semantic theories, it is evident that both are applicable and appropriate to the analysis of the data and attainment of the objectives for this study.

Literature Review

Studies on the concept and roles of women or the female gender in the society are becoming popular today than ever before as more scholars, especially linguists are getting more interested in researches pertaining to gender issues (especially women) in the traditional culture. Series of researches are being carried out on Yorùbá cultural thought, values and norms, as more books are being written on it. In spite of these, scholarships on Yorùbá proverbs are

still craved for in the academic and non-academic terrains because of their significance in the propagation and preservation of cultural values.

So many scholars and literary authors, particularly in African Oral Literature have given diverse definitions and descriptions of proverbs. Miruka, (1994) quoting Chambers 20th Century Dictionary describes proverb as a 'short familiar sentence expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson; a by-word or saying that requires explanation'. Ogunjimi and Na'Allah (1991: 65) posit that

Proverbs are oral compositions which embrace the philosophical and socio-cultural value systems of the people and point to the individual, domestic and collective life patterns of the society from which they are derived.

Going by this definition, one can make bold to say that Yorùbá proverbs in the light of this study are meant to showcase the views of the Yorùbá on the female gender in the society. Proverbs, according to Sotunde, (2009:20) are the products of observation of human behaviour and the environment. So, they could be deductive, speculative, affirmative and empirical. Sotunde further explains that 'every proverb is as constant as it is relevant for all seasons and occasions, illuminating an aspect of human life in either a positive or negative light'. Obviously, this description of proverbs by Sotunde agrees with the aim and objectives of this study which mainly seek to ascertain the context in which the Yorùbá feminine proverbs are used to either praise, satirise, or reprimand the feminine gender in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting. Asserting the features of proverbs, Isidore Okpewho (1992:227) affirms that:

A proverb is a piece of folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm. The 'terseness' implies a certain economy of words and a sharpness of focus, while the 'charm' conveys the touch of literary or poetic beauty in the expression.

This definition is also relevant to the study in that it projects the fact that proverbs are words of wisdom expressed with focus, which in this case address the feminine gender in Yoruba context. Kammelu, (2012:25) opines that 'proverbs adorn and beautify any language'. She further states that 'proverbs are deeply rooted in the culture of the people that use them, and everyone who grows up within that culture becomes a living carrier of proverbs'.

Discussing Yorùbá proverbialism, Sotunde, (2009:352) avers that the proverb is a comprehensive representation of the Yorùbá philosophy of life and also constitutes the aesthetics of the Yorùbá language. He further explains that Yorùbá proverbs are the linguistic representation of the pragmatism with which life's experiences are approached, social interactive problems tackled and Yorùbá philosophy mirrored. In essence, the main function of proverbs is

to educate. Therefore, to use the proverbs is to instruct and edify man through the truism contained in them. Hence, Yorùbá proverbs, like others in different cultures are meant to propagate the moral and aesthetic value system of the Yorùbá people from generation to generation.

Elucidating the roles and functions of females in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting, a lot of importance is attached to the female gender especially when the issue has to do with marriage, children and home-keeping. Even in trade and fashion, women are forces to be reckoned with. Besides, females are believed to possess some extra-ordinary powers with which they can make or mar the home and society. Women can get whatever they desire both physically and metaphysically. The likes of Èfúnṣetán Aníwúrà (the Ìyálóde of Ìbàdàn), Jojolólá Ọlógbọ̀n-ọ̀wọ̀n and Ìyálóde of Ègbáland- Madam Èfúnróyè Tinúbú (a forthright women leader), are typical reference points in the display of prowess among Yorùbá women. These female leaders were also recognised because of their contributions to trading and fashion, they also contributed more to politics than trading. Apart from this, women are believed to be highly gifted in the use of body language (signs and semiotics); with which they can use their head, eye-face, nose, shoulder, hand, fingers, legs and tongue and teeth to express their intentions and thoughts without oral expressions. All these gestures are believed to be powerful tools of communicating either positively or negatively to get whatever they want. In light of these, females in Yorùbá cultural context are seen from diverse perspectives depending on their age, status and various dispositions at home or in the society. The female gender in Yorùbá cultural setting can be regarded as a child '*ọ̀mọ̀dẹ̀bìnrin*' when she has not reached the puberty stage, a lady '*ọ̀mọ̀ge*' or '*ọ̀dọ̀mọ̀bìnrin*' when she is a teenager and getting ready to be a bride; a wife '*ìyàwó*' when she newly gets betrothed to a man in marriage, a mother '*ìyá*' when she starts to have her own children, a grandmother '*ìyá àgbà*' when her children start to produce children, and a widow '*opó*' when she loses her husband.

In a larger society, the female is regarded as a public image who is expected to exhibit certain virtues worthy of emulation by the public, irrespective of her status or age. In view of these diverse perceptions of the female gender in Yorùbá culture, the expectations from her in terms of her overall personalities are very grave. As a girl child, she is always at the receiving end, she is made to sweep the floor, wash the plates, assist the mother in the kitchen, fetch firewood and water for cooking and bathing, helping the mother to hawk her wares (depending on the woman's status). The girl is warned not to sit carelessly, not to talk carelessly, not to eat hurriedly, not to do one thing or the oth-

er in whichever manners she wishes, just because she is expected to be a role model in the future. As a wife, she continues with these roles she has been saddled with from her tender age, until she dies.

In Yorùbá cultural setting, the female gender as a girl-child is subjected to certain negative cultural practices like the mutilation of the genital organs, which to the elders is a practice to disallow or curb promiscuity in the girl-child after marriage. Experience later revealed that such girls subjected to this heinous act suffer pains and frigidity and find it hard to enjoy the gift of sex in marriage. A close look at each of the experiences enumerated above show that the females in Yorùbá culture are either regarded as inferior or subservient to their male counterparts, as they are being prepared for their so-called ordained roles in the future. Even though their male counterparts also undergo genital mutilation also known as circumcision, theirs (that is, male circumcision) is primarily done customarily in preparation for sexual maturity and for health reasons; and are mostly done at a tender age when it is less painful, and mostly in hospitals; but the motives behind female circumcision is somewhat archaic and parochial because such selfish and primitive ideology is usually traditionally observed in an unwholesome, unhygienic manner predominantly in some African traditional societies. Whatever the case may be, the fact remains that the female is the centre of attraction at all spheres of human endeavour in Yorùbá culture. No wonder then there exists Yorùbá proverbs to substantiate each of the roles assigned to the females in Yorùbá cultural setting, to justify the treatment given to them at every stage of their lives. Such proverbs are carefully and decisively selected and analysed with the pragmatic and semantic theories earlier explained in the study.

Methodology

Considering the title of this paper which focuses on the use of proverbs in Yorùbá cultural setting to examine the personality of the female gender, data are exclusively chosen from Yorùbá proverbs with feminine lexis. The proverbs are selected based on the themes related to the study, which are: marriage, sexuality, motherhood, women's social status, women's place at the home-front and society, as well as females as mothers-in-law. To avoid bias, twenty proverbs are chosen randomly from Sheba's proverbs, and grouped according to the roles assigned to females in the Yorùbá socio-cultural setting. Proverbs 1-9 refer to the female as a wife, proverbs 10-15 view and describe the roles expected of the female as a mother, proverbs 16-18 refer to the roles and social duties of females as respectable personalities in the society (working

class women), while proverbs 19 & 20 describe the woman's expected roles as a grandmother. The selected proverbs are subjected to pragmatic and semantic analysis using the pragmatic theories of context and inference; and referential and contextual semantic theories to ascertain the meaning of the proverbs in the context of Yoruba female personality in the traditional Yorùbá culture.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The personality of the female gender in the Yorùbá culture is expounded in the context of the following proverbs identified based on the specified female roles at home as a wife, a mother, a mother-in-law, and as a public figure in the larger society:

Proverb 1 'A dá sí ní lórùn obìnrin isònu tí í tún aṣọ ró lójú bàbá ọkọ' (Meaning: *Only a promiscuous woman dresses in front of her father-in-law*) Pragmatically, one can draw an inference from this proverb that a wife flaunts her nakedness in front of her father-in-law. When a woman displays her beauty in such a manner, she is believed to be luring her in-law into sexual temptation or inordinate affection. This implies promiscuity and is regarded as an unwholesome attitude in the Yorùbá cultural setting. An ideal *Yorùbá* wife is expected to be chaste. As such, in the context of the Yorùbá culture, a female who is legally married is expected to be absolutely faithful to her husband, and avoid every situation that may warrant extra-marital affairs even with her husband's family members. In essence, her relationship with her in-laws must be well-defined, as she maintains a reasonable gap with them.

Proverb 2 'Àfàtiiri ni tìyàwó ọ̀sìngín, bí a bá fà á, tí kò tiiri, ó ní ohun tí ó ní ẹ́' (Meaning: *Diffidently pulling back is what becomes a new bride, if she is pulled and she does not resist, there is something wrong with her.*) The inference we can draw from this proverb is that of the usual resistance expected from a new bride when her husband makes sexual advances towards her for the very first time on their wedding night. Considering the mutual beliefs of the Yorùbá, a modest bride is expected to feel shy or scared if she is innocent in the act; but if she does not resist and willingly follows her husband, it is an indication that she is not a novice in the act, hence, she is loose and may not be a virgin. In the context of Yorùbá culture and tradition, such a bride who feels reluctant to follow her husband is regarded as well-brought up and reserved, while the latter is abhorred with contempt.

Proverb 3 'A kì í mọ ọkọ ọmọ kí á tún mọ àlè rẹ'. (Meaning: *It is forbidden to know one's child's legitimate husband as well as her concubine*). This proverb,

like many others affirms that a woman is the epitome of dignity in her home, and the community at large. The context of situation in this proverb explains the stance of the Yorùbá about marriage. It is Yorùbá's mutual belief that it is forbidden for a married woman to be engaging in extra-marital affairs after marriage. Both her parents and the in-laws would not accommodate situations where a married woman harbours a concubine in her parents' house or in her matrimonial home. This may lead to her being disowned by her parents or divorced by her husband and in-law.

Proverb 4 'Aláàtikè kì í gbélé, ẹni n̄ wómọ kì í sùn' (Meaning: *The beautiful wife does not stay at home, a woman looking for a child does not rest*). This proverb typifies a situation where a beautiful woman keeps her beauty so as to be attractive if she has to get a decent husband. We can infer from the proverb that this notwithstanding, her beauty does not warrant waywardness. The mutual belief of the Yoruba is that an unmarried woman is not expected to hide herself indoors, she must be seen by an unmarried man that may be interested in her. Likewise, a married woman who is yet to have a child is not expected to sleep/rest until she gets pregnant. This describes how important children are to the Yorùbá people. No woman feels happy and comfortable without children of her own. In essence, she is not wholly accepted as a full-fledged member of her husband's family, until she gives birth to her own child.

Proverb 5 'Alókọ má lárá, abibàjé légbèé' (Meaning: *One who has a husband but lacks relatives, is lacking in a vital aspect*). The context of this proverb is 'virtue', which is a vital aspect of womanhood. One can infer from this proverb that the Yorùbá culture holds family relationship in high esteem. Thus, a woman planning to get married in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting should be ready to accommodate and tolerate her husband's relations and in-law. The mutual belief of Yoruba people is that a woman is actually married to her husband's entire family (nuclear and extended), so cannot be on her own or claim total possession of her husband.

Proverb 6 'Àwàdà àṣejù tí í mú obinrin sọ pé ọkọ òun kò sán an gun tó bàbá òun' (Meaning: *Excessive joking and garrulousness makes a wife say that her husband is not as physically and sexually strong as her father*). The context of this proverb addresses the position of a woman's father and husband. The proverb also cautions women about talkativeness or unguarded utterances /unbridled tongues common with females. When a woman is garrulous, she can express absurd thoughts that may culminate into trouble. The inference here is that women are expected to be gentle, cultured, calm, and well-composed.

Proverb 7 'Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní i ẹ̀, kì í tán lára kọ̀kọ̀ kọ̀kọ̀' (Meaning: *'That is her habit' is the usual comment on a woman who moves from one husband to another*). The reference point of this proverb is 'an adulterous woman'. The context is satirical as it abhors a woman that engages in incessant divorce or involves in extra-marital affairs. The mutual beliefs of the Yorùbá about marriage is that it should be a life-long contract between a man and his wife irrespective of the challenges they may be experiencing, as no marriage is perfect.

Proverb 8 'Bí obìnrin dára tí kò níwà, asán ní' (Meaning: *A pretty woman without virtues is worthless*). The context of this proverb is the importance of virtue in a woman, especially the married women. The mutual belief of Yorùbá culture is that piety outweighs beauty in a woman, as beauty fades with age, but character stands the test of time. So, a woman that parades herself as beautiful but lacks necessary attributes that are expected of a wife or mother, cannot get a good husband, thus difficult to have a satisfying marriage.

Proverb 9 'Ìyàwó se ọ̀bẹ̀ tódùn, ọ̀kọ̀ gbàgbé ìjà ànà.' (Meaning: *The wife prepares a delicious soup; her husband forgets the previous rancour with her*) This proverb elucidates the importance of cooking skills in the females in Yorùbá cultural setting. The symbol of 'delicious soup' implies a must-have virtue that every woman that wants to enjoy her marital life must possess. If a woman is beautiful but cannot cook good meals for her husband, she cannot entice her husband. One can draw inference from the proverb that no matter how grave the quarrel between a woman and her husband may be, if she is a good cook, the rift between them would not last.

Proverbs 10 'Abiyamọ̀ kì í gbọ̀ ẹ̀kún ọ̀mọ̀ rẹ̀, kí ó má tati were' (Meaning: *A mother does not hear the cry of her child and refuses to respond*). This proverb draws inference from the care of a mother. The Yorùbá culture upholds the fact that a true and genuine mother will hurriedly attend to the need of her child even at the expense of her leisure. This implies that in the context of Yorùbá culture, motherhood is beyond just giving birth to children, as the task of nurturing children is held in high regard. Therefore, females as mothers are expected to be caring, not only to their biological children, but also to every child that comes their way.

Proverb 11 'Abiyamọ̀ kì í rìn, kó ẹ̀nẹ̀wọ̀ ahá.' (Meaning: *A mother does not walk without a drinking bowl*). The contextual interpretation of this proverb is that 'no child must be hungry wherever there is a mother'. This also connotes the unending care expected from a typical Yorùbá woman towards her child. The inference drawn from 'a drinking jar' typifies 'satisfaction'. This corroborates the fact that an ideal mother in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting must

always be mindful of her children, husband and people around her, and be ready to meet their daily needs as much as possible. She must not be careless as to be caught unawares when her attention is mostly needed at any given time and place.

Proverb 12 'Abiyamọ ẹ ọwọ kótó lu ọmọ rẹ'. (Meaning: *A mother beats her child with caution*). The context of this proverb is 'discipline'. It refers to the fact that mothers should never fail to correct their children when they do anything bad, but the chastisement should be done in love. The inference drawn from the act of beating is that it must not be done to the extent of inflicting physical or emotional injury or hurt on the child. This may make the child rebellious rather than being a corrective measure.

Proverb 13 'Bá mi na ọmọ ọ mi, kò dè inú ọlómọ' (Meaning: *No mother sincerely asks someone to beat her child on her behalf*). The inference drawn from this proverb is that no one can satisfactorily discipline a child (through beating) than the mother. It further implies that in an attempt to discipline her child, she would still be mindful of not hurting him or her. So, would do the beating with caution so as not to end up nursing injuries inflicted on the child. This proverb refers to a situation where mothers in the context of Yorùbá culture, do not forget the pains of child-bearing easily, as such, feel reluctant to maltreat their children or see them being assaulted by someone else.

Proverb 14 'Èni tí kò níyàá, kì í dégbò èyìn' (Meaning: *Whoever has no mother avoids sustaining injury on his back*). The inference one can deduce from this proverb is that one who has nobody to help him or her should avoid troubles. If a motherless child sustains injury on his/her back, it only takes a compassionate mother to help him/her out so that such injury will not turn to a sore. Pragmatically explained, this proverb does not necessarily refer to sustaining injury, it rather describes a situation whereby mothers usually protect and safeguard their children from any embarrassing situations. It represents the unrivalled role of a mother to her child in time of trouble.

Proverb 15 'Àbàrá féńfé ní abiyamọ fi ń gbọmọ rẹ lówọ àjé. (Meaning: *A mother uses slaps to save her child from the attack of the witch*). The contextual interpretation of this proverb hinges on child discipline. The inference from this proverb is that a good mother should never pamper her child to the extent of exposing him/her to danger. In a situation where the child misbehaves towards another person, she quickly scolds or slaps him/her in the presence of the person, so as to be adjudged firm. This is to safeguard the child from the wicked ones who may wish to retaliate supernaturally, and harm the child.

Proverbs 16 'Àisí lójà obìnrin, rorooro ní í dá. (Meaning: *The absence of*

women from the market makes the market dull and uninteresting). This proverb refers to the worth of women in the society. The situational context of 'market-place' is used in the proverb to show the importance of women at home and in the society at large. Women constitute appreciable number of sellers and buyers in a typical market scene, and the exchange that normally takes place in any market scene is usually dominated by women who are primarily traders. When the noise is absent, then, it signifies absence of food, money and people in the society. This is the reason why every market place is usually lively and noisy during transactions; but usually dull and void of life and activity when women are not there. The referential meaning of this proverb, considering the socio-cultural context is that a market without women depicts a state of poverty, austerity, hunger, and war. The inference in the proverb is that the home is bound to be lively and the society wealthy when women are available.

Proverb 17' Àìsì obìnrin lóòdè, bí ẹni lu àsán ilù kan ni.' (Meaning: *The absence of women in the home is like beating only one drum*). What one can infer from this proverb is that women add flavour and savour to the home, thus, the absence of a woman from the house or a home is like beating a solo drum, which sounds melancholy and lacks the expected rhythm it should have when there are other accompaniments. The contextual meaning of this proverb is that the place of a woman in the house cannot be over-emphasized. When there is no woman in a house, it also means that there are no children in the house. So, the expected noise emanating from the cries of babies and that of the mother cuddling her child or singing lullaby to him or her is replaced with heavy sighs of sorrow from the man, who is either unmarried, divorced or widowed. So, a woman as a wife is responsible to her husband, as a mother, she is responsible to both her husband and children; as a grandmother or mother-in-law, she has salient duties to her grand-children and daughter/son-in-law; and as an influential woman in the society, she is looked up to in matters of healthy societal advancement. So, the proverb is not restricted to the home, but cuts across the general value of the female personality in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting.

Proverb 18 'Àpónlẹ̀ kò sí fún ọba tí kò lólorì.' (Meaning: *A king that has no queen commands no respect*). This proverb describes a king without a queen as deserving no value, as his lack of a wife (queen) portrays him as inexperienced. From this proverb, one can infer that women are indispensable both at home and in public places. So, it is ridiculous and unwholesome for a Yorùbá king not to have a queen. In the first place, he is not considered qualified for

the position, because one of his duties as a king is to settle disputes ranging from marital to land and related issues. So, if he has no wife and no children, he is considered not qualified enough to rule his people. As such, he is never respected until he has a wife. More so, women are believed to be objects of glamour, beauty and continuity wherever they are.

Proverb 19 'Íyá ẹni á fẹ gbọmọ ẹni, ẹ̀gbọ́n kì í fẹ ká ní obinrin bọ̀rọ̀bọ̀rọ̀' (Meaning: *One's mother wishes to carry one's child, but she does not want one to have a wife in time*). This proverb portrays a situation where a woman usually longs for grandchildren from her son because it is a proof of his potency and additional joys to the family, but feels reluctant to admit that he should get married. One can infer from the proverb that she loves her son with passion and would not want anyone to share his love with her. The contextual meaning to this proverb is that a mother often considers her daughter-in-law as a rival, even though she (as a mother) desires to be a grandmother. This reveals that a mother in Yorùbá socio-cultural situation hardly believes that anyone else could take care of her son as much as she would, so, she finds it difficult to share her role of motherhood with anyone.

Proverb 20 'Obinrin f'omọ̀rẹ̀ fọkọ̀ dọ́rí méfà, ó ní òun kò wáyé ẹjọ̀; tó bá tún fẹ̀ wáyé ẹjọ̀ ń kọ̀?' (Meaning: *A woman gives her daughter to six husbands consecutively and then says that she does not want trouble, what, then, would it be like if she was looking for trouble?*). From this proverb, one can infer that Yorùbá socio-cultural setting abhors adultery and promiscuity among women. The context describes a situation where a mother encourages her daughter to engage in adultery, probably for her own selfish reasons of enriching herself with the wealth of the different men, but never considers the ignominy or repercussion of the act, which spells doom and lack of peace for her and her daughter. This is simply a satire. The proverb reveals the importance the Yorùbá culture gives to marriage, and expects the female members of the society to preserve the institution with dignity.

Conclusion

Looking critically into the context in which each of the twenty Yorùbá proverbs used in this study presents the concept of womanhood or the personality of the female gender in the Yorùbá cultural setting, one can conclude that viewing the female gender as a wife, the Yorùbá expects her to be modest in character, chaste in general disposition, faithful to her husband no matter the trials and temptations she may be facing; she is to be disciplined in all its ramifications. Considering the context in which proverbs 1 to 9 (which describe the

females as wives) are used, a woman should be a home keeper, dexterous in the kitchen, and maintain the dignity of womanhood by loving her husband, children and in-laws whole-heartedly. As a mother, the personality of women is displayed in the content of proverbs 10 to 15 where she is portrayed as highly sensitive to her children's physical, psychological and emotional needs. She scolds her child to safeguard him from wrath and protect him from the wicked. She never spares the rod to spoil the child. Where situations call for it, she would rather suffer herself to please her child.

In the context of her place at home and the society at large, proverbs 16 to 18 describe women in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting as indispensable and unique in every sense, as they spice up every situation, and add life and glamour to the home and society. In fact, women in the Yorùbá socio-cultural context are viewed as agents of continuity as they bring forth children to enlarge the family cycle. The children they produce are a source of pride and strength for their husbands, because they are the proof of their masculinity and fertility. Women in Yorùbá culture earn joy and respect for their husbands and give support and succour to their children. As mothers-in-law, women in Yorùbá context tend to show concern and care towards their children irrespective of their age. By the time the male child is mature enough to get a wife, they never fail to remind him; this is for their interest in seeing and nurturing their grandchildren, not in the bid to really have a daughter-in-law with whom he would share part of his wealth and attention. In essence, women in Yorùbá culture are agents of cultural development in all its ramifications as explicated in the proverbs used in this study. All the virtues exhumed and described through Yorùbá proverbs (as a means of communication) about female personality in Yorùbá socio-cultural setting are made feasible through the pragmatic tools of context and inference, as well as the referential and contextual semantic theories.

REFERENCES

- A Dictionary of the Yorùbá *Language*. Ibadan: University Press Limited.
- Adebija, E. (1988). "Decoding the meaning of utterances" in *Journal of Pragmatics*. Vol. 12: 151-160
- Adebite, Wale (2000). "Pragmatics: Some Basic Principles and Procedures" in A.O. Babajide (Ed.) *Studies in Language*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Encrownfit. Pp 60-80.
- © Òpánbàtà: *LASU Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 1, January 2021

- Adeyemi, O.B. (2000). *Studies in English Language*. Ibadan: Enicrownfit Publishers.
- Ajikobi, 'Dimeji (1999) What does an African 'new woman' want? Lagos: Ark Publications. ISBN 13: 9789783488694. Online soft cover
- Chambers 20th Century Dictionary. Vol.2 London: Longman.
- Encyclopedia Americana (1994) Vol. 2: 514. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kammelu, N.C. (2012). Women Personality in Igbo Proverbs, *Journal of English Studies*, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo.
- Kempson, R. (1986). *Semantic Theory*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Leech, G.N. & Short, M.H. (1987). *Style in Fiction*. London: Longman.
- Marjorie, K. M. (2009). *Yorùbá Women, Work, and Social Change*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ogden, C. K. & Richards, I.A. (1923). *The Meaning of Meaning*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Ogunjimi, Bayo & Na'Allah, Abdul Rasheed (1991). *Introduction to African Oral Literature*. Ilorin, Nigeria: University of Ilorin Press.
- Okumba, Miruka (1994). *Encounter with Oral Literature*. Nairobi, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers.
- Opefeyitimi, A. (2009). *Women in Yorùbá Culture*. Ibadan: Penthouse Publications.
- Osisanwo, Wale (2008). *Introduction to Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics*. Lagos: Femolus-Fetop Publishers
- Owomoyela, O. (2005). *Yorùbá Proverbs*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Sheba, Laide (2006). *Yorùbá Proverbs with Feminine Lexis*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Sotunde, F.I. (2009). *Yorùbá Proverbs and Philosophy*. Abeokuta: Damsan Nigeria Company.