
ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION IN OLA ROTIMI'S *THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME*: A PRAGMATIC STUDY

Idowu Odebode (PhD)

Department of English, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria

Cynthia Eke-Opara

Department of English, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria. ()

ABSTRACT: *Ola Rotimi's The god's are not to blame has been subjected to various forms of criticisms. However, none, to the best of our knowledge, has delved into analysing the text using Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Communication. It is this gap that this research intends to fill. The study takes a look at eleven selected exchanges in Ola Rotimi's The gods are not to blame from a pragmatic point of view. It also applies Dell Hymes' theory on utterance meaning i.e. the "ethnography of communication" otherwise known as the SPEAKING Acronym, to the text. The study reveals that the dominant setting in the play is the king's palace. The act with the highest number of manifestation is the informative act, while the preponderant key in the text is the melancholic key. These, therefore, relate to the themes of death and royalty, praised in the work, among others.*

KEYWORDS: Odewale, pragmatics, Rotimi, ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Several studies (e.g. Adeyeye, 2000) on Ola Rotimi's *The god's are not to blame* have failed to benchmark the work from the ethnography of communication's point of view. This study, therefore, is designed to fill this gap. The study aims at applying Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication to Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame* in order to unravel the in-depth textual resources of the play. The study is given a pragmatic approach because pragmatics studies language use in context and language is "the source of human life and power" (Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams, 2007, p.3). The play, *The gods are not to blame* deals with the issue of death and kingship. A fugitive boy, Odewale, circumstantially killed his father and later married his mother after ascending to the throne of his unknown father. His quest to unravel this riddle that has bedevilled and plagued his town, sets the stage for the conflict in the play.

Ola Rotimi as a Writer

Olawale Gladstone Emmanuel Rotimi popularly called Ola Rotimi was born in 1938. He had his primary and secondary education in Port-Harcourt and Lagos respectively. He later proceeded to Boston University where he had his first degree in Fine Arts, and Yule School of Drama where he bagged his second degree. He was an actor, director and lecturer. He taught at several universities including the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Macalester College in St.

Paul, Minnesota. He has also authored many plays, some of which include: *The gods are not to blame*, *Kurumi*, *No direction home*. He died in 2000.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication. It was coined in the year 1962 as ethnography of speaking and later reformed as the ethnography of communication in the year 1964. Dell Hymes' goal was to generate a theory that helped researcher's revision of language use in specific situation. His assumption is that when we look at how groups actually use language, patterns could be revealed that would ordinarily not be by looking only at the word meaning. Lindlof and Taylor (2002, p. 44) posit that "ethnography of communication conceptualizes communication as a continuous flow of information rather than as a segmented exchange of messages. To support his theory, Dell Hymes submits that "culture communicates in different ways; however, all forms of communication require a shared code...."(Hymes, 1964). Therefore, he propounded the SPEAKING acronym to be a feature of discourse texts. The acronym is a set of alphabets that dictates the functions and roles of each of them is performing in each communicative circumstance(s) as explicated below:

S-stands for Setting. This refers to the general circumstances in which communication events takes place. It could be physical or psychological. It could be within time and place. **P**- stands for Participants. It captures the role relationship between the participants in the speech event. **E**-stands for Ends and it has to do with the purpose of the event, i.e. the respective aims of the participants. **A**-stands for Acts. It involves the form and content of the message or text i.e. the speech acts that are functionally and conversationally appropriate to the situation. **K**-stands for Key which is the tone or manner in which a text is delivered. It may be serious or unserious, formal or informal, ironic or sarcastic etc. **I**-stands for Instrument. It indicates the different channels of speech transmission like spoken or written, telephone or email, fax or text messages. **N**-stands for Norms. It captures the speech behaviour which could be linguistic or non-linguistic, universal or cultural, general or specific. **G**-stands for Genre and it refers to the linguistic form employed such as poem, letter, story and proverb.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Owens (1988) studies language acquisition and its modes. He considers pragmatics as "a set of rules which relate to language use within the communicative context". That is, pragmatics relates to the manner in which codes are employed in communication rather than its structure. He also makes mention of the aspects of the speech act theory. Some of these include; performative acts, the direct and indirect speech acts, the literal and non-literal speech acts among others.

The study further integrates the Grice co-operative principle (i.e. maxims of quality, quantity, manner and relevance). The work is insightful as it sheds more light on the cooperative principle and speech act theory. However, the study fails to mention other pragmatic theories like Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication. The present study is designed to integrate one of this.

Dare (2000) carries out a linguistic assessment of our primary text. He discovers that at the level of syntax, Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame* is faultless. However, he recognizes some faults at the level of semantics. This is because the work does not correlate with the meanings a native

speaker of English will give to some words employed in the text. He goes further to say that it is true that the characters speak English but the manner in which they use it cannot be said to be English. Finally, he agrees that the use of English by Nigerians, mostly creative writers, might be a coincidence. This work uses a sociolinguistic and functionalist point of view. It leaves out the pragmatic aspect of the study. It is this vacuum that the present work intends to fill.

Olaosun (2007) applies some pragmatic principles to ten samples of imperative and interrogative structures extracted from selected newspaper adverts in Nigeria. He pays attention to the understanding of the contextual assumptions surrounding the use and structure of the adverts which depend on their meaning. He posits that mood plays a major role in understanding the meaning of newspaper adverts. He indicates that we cannot look at imperative and interrogative features of advertising in constative sense because the structure makes sense when we give pragmatic or semantic interpretations to it. This work deals solely with newspaper adverts. It does not consider dramatic discourse as we intend to do in the present study.

Olaniyi (2010) views the language use in the political inaugural speech of Musa Yar Adua. He discovers that the analysis of President Umar Yar Adua's inaugural speech has revealed a set of heterogeneous illocutionary acts. He submits further that there is a more significant use of commissive performatives in the speech. The work studies pragmatics from the speech acts point of view, unlike the present study which is based on application of the ethnography of communication to a drama text .

Data Analysis

This section is devoted to data analysis. Selected conversations are extracted from our primary text i.e. *The gods are not to blame*. The data are subjected to Dell Hymes' SPEAKING acronym. This is done in order to underscore the meaning making strategies and pragmatic imports of the text.

Text 1

NARRATOR: The struggles of a man begin at birth.
It is meet then that our play begin with the birth of a child.
The place is the land of Kutuje. A baby has just been born
to King Adetusa and his wife Ojuola, the King and Queen
of this land of Kutuje. (p. 1)

This narration marks the beginning of the play. It aims at informing the audience of the events that occurred prior to the play. The setting can be deduced to be a shrine. This is proven in the stage direction as follows, "... regards the shrine from a distance" (p. 1). The participants include: the narrator, King Adetusa, Queen Ojuola and a baby. The end is to shed light on the past event(s). The act is informative because the text informs the reader on the birth of a child. The key is joyful as the coming of a child is being celebrated. The instrumentality is vocal. This is proven in the stage direction thus "... then turns to address the audience". Since the play is grounded in Yoruba African culture, the norm is for the play to have a narrator because the Yoruba believe that "songs precede intrigues." The genre is story telling.

Text 2

SECOND WOMAN: Sickness has been killing us all these many days.
What has the king done about it?

THIRD WOMAN: You overwhelmed the bushmen of Ikolu when they
attacked and enslaved our land. Now we cry in pain for help
and there is silence.

SECOND CITIZEN: When the rain falls on the leopard, does it wash off its
spots, has the richness of kingly life washed off the love of
our king for his people?

FOURTH CITIZEN: We have suffered long in silence!

FIFTH CITIZEN: How long must feverish birds tremble in silence before
their king (pp. 9-10)

Shortly after the prologue, the play opens with a plagued community. The king has summoned his subjects in order for them to get to the root of the problem which is bedevilling their town. Therefore the setting is the front of the king's palace. This is proven in the stage direction (in P. 9) which says "Before the palace". The participants include; the second woman, the third woman, second citizen, fourth citizen and the fifth citizen. The end of the meeting is for them to get to the root of their problem. The act is preponderantly informative as the people gather to inform the king about their suffering. The key is melancholic because the townspeople are sad. Furthermore, the text has the verbal communication as its instrument. The norm is to complain to their leader/king. This is captured in the words of Fifth Citizen thus: " How long must feverish birds tremble in silence before their king," The genre is dramatic.

Text 3

ODEWALE: Bring me those herbs I cut from the bush last night. Everybody, come and
see ... I, with my own two hands, and alone in the bush ... ? (p. 15)

ODEWALE: ... [Calling] Abero! Ab—

ABERO: Here I am, my lord. (p. 15)

Preceding the above text, Odewale explains to his citizens that they should not sit and fold their arms while calamity befalls them. He urges them to go and look for solutions and not just wait for a miracle to take place. He then asks them to go and get herbs from the bushes and tells them that he, himself, has already gotten some for his family. The place where he addresses his subject is the front of the king's palace, hence the setting. The participants include; Odewale, the townspeople (he referred to as 'everybody') and Abero. Odewale calls Abero before telling him what he wants. The end is to prove to the people that he, Odewale, has not been idle. The act is both commanding and advising. The key is sadness. The instrumentality is oral communication. The norm is to provoke his subjects into action. The genre is dramatic.

Text 4

TOWNSPEOPLE: [inspired, beginning to disperse.] We shall go! Long may your highness live! We thank you, our lord! May your reign be blessed! Long may the crown rest on your head! And the royal shoes on your feet! (p. 15)

The king's counsel enlivens the people's hearts and therefore, they begin to shower encomiums on him as explicated in the above text. This whole event occurs in the front of the king's palace, hence, the setting. The participants consist of the Townspeople and King Odewale. The end is to eulogise the king. The act praising or eulogising. The people feel relieved and are in a happy mood, hence the tone. The instrumentality is oral communication. The norm (in Yoruba culture replicated in the primary text) is to honour the king for his fatherly counsel. The genre is dramatic.

Text 5

FIRST CHIEF: Aged keeper of all secrets known only to the god who is your master, you the watchman Baba Fakunle, it is you we greet. (p. 26)

Prior to the above extract, Baba Fakunle is sent for, with the hope that as a seer, he would unravel the cause of their problem. On arrival, the chiefs greet him as a sign of respect. The setting is located at the shrine of Ogun. The participants include; the First Chief, King Odewale and Baba Fakunle who is being addressed in the text above. The end is to give him his due respect. The act is eulogising/greeting. The first clause in the extract is used to eulogise Baba Fakunle while greeting is ensured via the second clause. The key is melancholic. The instrumentality is the verbal communication. The norm is to acknowledge the greatness of the seer and make him receptive to their demands. The genre is proverbial.

Text 6

ODEWALE: Don't beg him. He will not talk. The murderers have sealed his lips with money. Hmm, our race is falling fast, my people. When the elders we esteem so highly can sell their honour for devil's money, then let pigs eat shame and men eat dung. (p. 27)

Baba Fakunle refuses to reveal the killer of King Adetusa. He does this to protect the interest of King Odewale. However, King Odewale has no knowledge of this and gets angry and even insults the seer with the above statement. The discourse takes place in the Shrine of Ogun which therefore serves as the setting of the utterance. The participants comprise Odewale, the Third Chief and Baba Fakunle among others. The end is to rebuke Baba Fakunle. The act is commanding. The key or tone is angry as demonstrated by Odewale. The instrumentality oral communication. The norm is to provoke Baba Fakunle into speaking. The genre is proverbial.

Text 7

THIRD CHIEF: Is it because the king called you plotter in the death of our former King, that now, like a parrot that has eaten too much pepper, you call him murderer? (p. 28)

Before the text above, Baba Fakunle has just been provoked to accuse Odewale of being the murderer of the late King. This event takes place at the shrine of Ogun, hence, the setting of the utterance. The participants include: Third Chief, King Odewale and Baba Fakunle. The end is to confront Baba Fakunle over his allegations and to exonerate the king. The act is questioning. The key is serious. The instrumentality is the spoken communication. The norm is for Baba Fakunle to apologise to the king, as a marker of deference, for his assumed mistake. But the old man refuses to. The genre is dramatic.

Text 8

ADEROPO: Yes, your highness. He was slain in violence, and it is fearful to know that the same murderer still lives in peace in this same land. The oracle warns us that we have left our pot unwatched, and our food now burns. (p. 21)

In the above text, Odewale feels exonerated and satisfied that the question ‘how did King Adetusa die?’ is answered. Odewale is finally told that the late king was killed in violence. This leads him to a hasty reaction which later metamorphosises into his tragedy. The entire action takes place in the king’s palace (setting). The participants include: Aderopo, Odewale and the chiefs. The end is to narrate how the late king died and to tell them of the warnings of the oracle. The act is informative. The key is melancholic. The instrumentality is oral communication. The norm is that they are moved into action. The genre is dramatic.

Text 9

ALAKA: A man brought you there, wrapped up in white cloth like a sacrifice to the gods. Your arms and feet were tied with strings of cowries— (p. 63)

Consequently, Alaka (Odewale's perceived kinsman who has just paid him a visit) explains to Odewale how he received the king (as a baby) and gave him to his foster parents. This event takes place at the dining in the palace. The participants include: Alaka, and Odewale. The end is to narrate how Odewale left his original home for his foster home. The act is informative. The key is serious. The instrumentality is spoken communication. The norm is for Alaka to open up under oath to the king. Thus everyone is able to understand why Odewale was not killed at birth as proposed by the gods. The genre is dramatic.

Text 10

FIRST CHIEF: Gods! I have seen deaths before. As a warrior in this land of Kutuje, I have seen deaths, at home, in the battle. I have seen deaths. But the death of a woman with a knife pushed

deep by her own hands to reach her very womb... Gods! (p. 69)

In the above text, Queen Ojuola has just committed suicide after realising that the man she is married to, not only killed her former husband, but is also her long lost son. The setting is outside the bedroom in the royal palace. The participant is the First Chief. The end of this dialogue is to inform those in the royal house of the recent death of the queen. The act is informative. Furthermore, the key is melancholic. This is because the death of anyone brings about a sense of sadness. However, the death of a queen by suicide arouses a greater sense of sadness. The instrumentality is via the oral communication. The norm is to mourn the departed queen particularly, her death circumstance. The genre is dramatic.

Text 11

ODEWALE: No, no! Do not blame the gods. Let no one blame the powers. My people learn from my fall. The powers would have failed if I did not let them use me. They knew my weakness; the weakness of a man easily moved to the defence of his tribe against others. I once slew a man on my farm in Ede. I could have spared him but he spat on my tribe. The man laughed, and laughed. He called me a 'man from the bush tribe of Ijekun'. And I lost reason. Now I find out that that very man was my... own father, the king who ruled this land before me. It was my run from the blood I spilled to calm the hurt of my tribe, that brought me to this land to do more horrors. Pray my people—Baba Ogunsomo. (p. 71)

The above extract serves as a point of realisation for the protagonist. He understands that the calamity, which has befallen him, is not the making of the gods alone but also his tragic flaw. Having gouged his eyes, he advises his subjects to learn from his mistakes and not to fall victim of such a circumstance. The setting is Odewale's sitting room. This is established in the stage direction on page 70 thus, "Odewale is groping his way into the sitting room". The participants include Odewale and his subjects. The end of Odewale's speech is to admonish his listeners. The act is that of advising. The key is melancholic. The instrumentality is spoken communication. The norm is to affirm the belief that every man shall be responsible for his actions. The genre is narrative.

Statistical Analysis

This section focuses on the statistical interpretation of our data analysis. The major elements praised in the SPEAKING acronyms are given statistical distribution as manifested in our primary text.

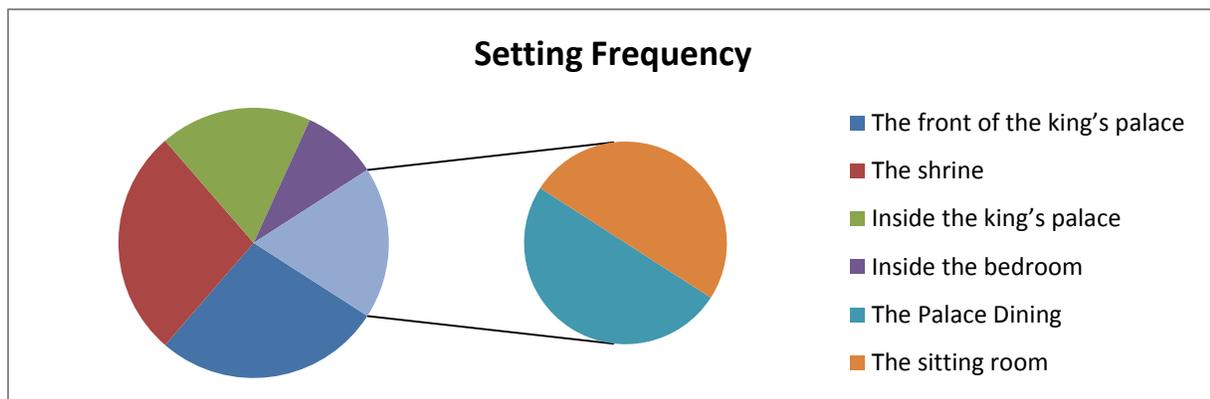
Analysis of Setting in the Selected Texts

The following table and graph show the frequency of the setting in the selected text.

Table 1: A Table Indicating the Setting Studied and its Frequency.

SETTING	FREQUENCY
The front of the king's palace	3
The shrine	3
Inside the king's palace	2
Inside the bedroom	1
The Palace Dining	1
The sitting room	1
Total	11

The above frequency table shows that the king's palace has the highest number of frequency. This is so because virtually all the scenes in the play take place in the palace. It should be noted that settings such as the sitting room, outside the bedroom, the dining area, inside the bedroom etc. cannot exist outside the house. Therefore, they can all be categorised as the king's palace. The next highest setting is the shrine. This is where most of the oracle consultations are carried out. The least frequent setting is 'Odewale's farm in Ede'. This is so because the only activity carried out there is the killing of the late king. Moreover, this setting is being referred to through the use of flashbacks.

**Fig 1: A pie chart illustrating the setting studied.**

The above pie chart shows that the king's palace has a setting with the highest frequency in our data. This happens because the entire play revolves round the palace. The next setting in the frequency hierarchy is the shrine and the ones with the least frequencies are; Odewale's farm in Ede, the sitting room and outside the bedroom.

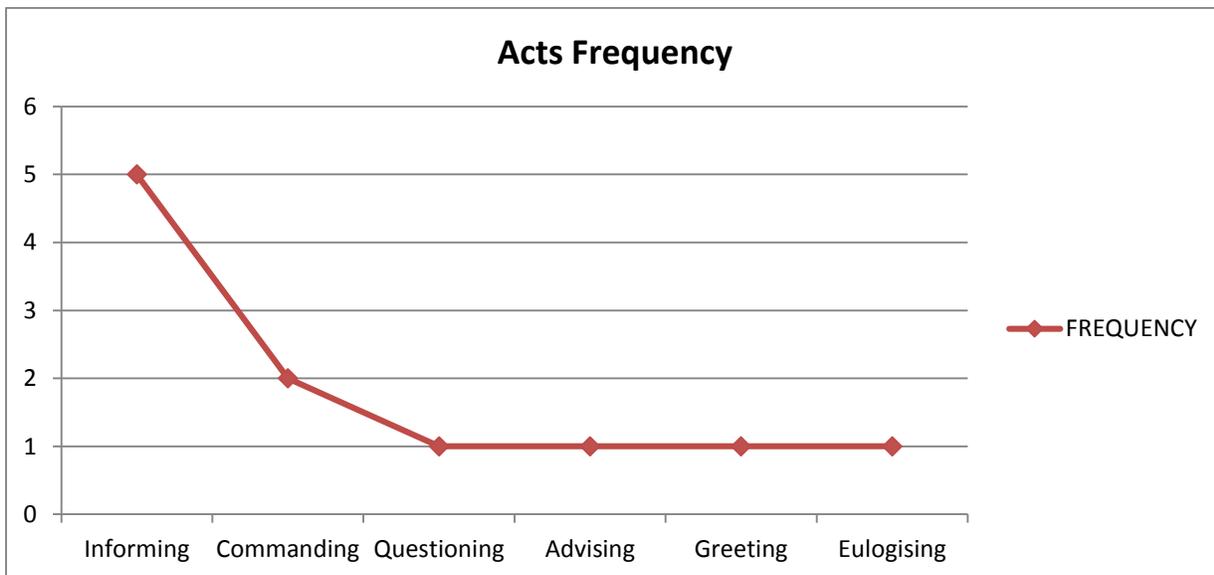
Act Analysis in the Selected Texts

This analysis indicates the frequency of the illocutionary acts studied.

Table 2: A Table Illustrating the Acts Studied.

ACT	FREQUENCY
Informing	5
Commanding	2
Questioning	1
Advising	1
Greeting	1
Eulogising	1
Total	11

The table above shows the number of times each act occurs in the selected utterances analysed in the previous chapter. It shows that the act with the highest frequency is the informative act, followed by the acts of commanding, questioning, advising, greeting, praising and complaining respectively.

**Fig 2: A line chart indicating the acts' frequency**

The above graph demonstrates the acts' frequency. The act with the highest frequency is the informative act. This is so because the entire play is set to inform the audience about the past, the present and the possible posterity of Odewale. Thus most of the utterances in the text are declaratives. The next act which is more frequent than the rest is the act of commanding. This is so because most of the utterances selected belong to Odewale who uses authoritative utterances as the king. Questioning has the third highest frequency and percentage because the entire village needs answers to why they are suffering. Advising follows questioning. The remaining acts have equal frequency mainly because most of the citizens are not bothered much about praises, greetings or complaining. The entire play is filled with agitation, anxiety and grief.

Analysis of the Keys in Selected Utterances Studied

This section looks at the table and graph frequency of the keys located in the selected utterances.

Table 3: A Table Illustrating The Key Studied

KEY	FREQUENCY
Melancholic	5
Serious	2
Infuriation	2
Joyful	1
Worrying	1
Total	11

The table above demonstrates the number of times each key occurs. These keys indicate the mood each selected exchange carries. The melancholic key has the highest frequency with joyful and worrying having the lowest. From the table, we may deduce that the melancholic key is preponderant because the play itself is a tragedy. Furthermore, the infuriation and serious keys also have relatively high frequency. This is because virtually all the words of the characters are spoken in anger or agitation.

CONCLUSION

So far, this study has indicated that Hyme's Ethnography of Communication gives a deeper and better understanding of human utterances as portrayed through the characters in our primary text; thereby increasing the readers understanding of the text. The setting analysis shows that the play is a typical African traditional tragedy and it relates to the issue of royalty. The frequency of the acts suggest that the text is not only dramatic but also informative. The key suggests a melancholic mood preponderantly, thereby attesting to the thematic preoccupation of the play (i.e. tragedy). Therefore, we may conclude that the ethnography of communication is a theory essential for successful demystification of utterances, particularly in literary texts.

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