

**PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF TRADITION-MOTIVATED DISCOURSES IN
AHMED YERIMA'S AJAGUNMALE**

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ABSTRACT: *Studies on the use of language to refract societal realities in Ahmed Yerima's dramas have largely examined stylistic and pragmatic features of some of his texts. Within the pragmatic domain, efforts have been concentrated on the examination of context-sensitive interpretations of proverbial meanings and the consideration of politeness features in Yerima's plays. However, there is a dearth of work on the investigation of the pragmatics of Yerima's use of language in cultural projections in his drama in linguistic scholarship, especially with respect to establishing the link between Mey's theory of pragmatic acts and tradition-spurred topical issues in his Yoruba culture-based play, Àjàgùnṡàlè. This study therefore fills this gap by examining the pragmeme-driven functions performed by Ahmed Yerima in tradition-motivated utterances in Àjàgùnṡàlè, sampled for the evident preponderance of tradition-motivated discourses in it, towards determining his worldview on tradition-related issues in the society. These discourses were subjected to content analysis, drawing insights from Mey's theory of pragmatic acts. The findings reveal the practs of explaining, warning/cautioning, advising, persuading, rebuking, praising, accusing, and pleading in traditional and emotive contexts of the discourses in Àjàgùnṡàlè, to address thematic issues of culture, status/power, achievement, belief, social crisis, predestination, inquiry, and immorality with the advantage of contextual features of shared-situational knowledge (ssk), socio-cultural knowledge (sck), inference (inf), reference (ref) and voicing (vce). The interaction between the tradition-motivated discourses in Àjàgùnṡàlè and Mey's theory of pragmeme ultimately results in the understanding of tradition-related issues in the play and their context-driven dramatisation of the traditional orientations of the Yoruba in South-western Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Yerima, Tradition- Motivated, Discourses, Pragmeme, Àjàgùnṡàlè

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have variously defined pragmatics (Cf. Bach and Harish, 1979; Levinson, 1983; Leech, 1983; Barton, 1990; Thomas, 1995; Yule 1996; Adegbija, 1999; Mey 2001 and so on). Observations have shown that much as these scholars try, they fail to capture the scope of pragmatics. For example, Levinson (1983:5) describes pragmatics as "the study of language usage". He further observes pragmatics to involve "those principles that will account for why a certain set of sentences are anomalous or not possible utterances" (Levinson, 1983:5). This view accounts for pragmatics as a concept of grammar. As established by Levinson (1983:9), pragmatics is the study of those relations between language and contexts that are grammaticalized or encoded in the structure of language. Obviously, Levinson's conception of pragmatics reveals the aspect of language use that has grammatical connotation, thereby neglecting aspects of the relationships between language, the user and contexts.

Emphasizing the significance of context in the interpretation of utterance, Barton (1990: 6) describes pragmatics as “the meaning that consists of interpretation within contexts”. This strengthens Stalnaker’s (1978) view of pragmatics as “the study of linguistic acts and the context in which they are performed”. These descriptions of pragmatics are largely relevant to us as pragmatists, as they recognize the acts of speech and the context which is considered as the mainstream of pragmatics. However, the scope of pragmatics is beyond these as the definitions give no consideration for the language user and his intention. Leech’s (1983:6) definition of pragmatics as being “the study of meaning in relation to situations” and Thomas’ (1955: 22) as “meaning in interaction” prove useful and relevant in offering the tenets of pragmatics and its concern in interpretation of utterances, but are insufficient for the description of the processes and agents involved in pragmatics business.

In a more comprehensive attempt, Yule (1996:3) reveals pragmatics as: the study of speaker and contextual meaning, and how more gets communicated than is said, as well as the study of the expression of relative distance. Though fragmented as it were, Yule’s perception is a good attempt at decoding what transpires between language users. However, as Osunbade (2010:40) observes, Yule’s definition falls short of the coverage of the scope of pragmatics, as according to him, “no mention is made of speech acts, which is, of course, the core of any pragmatic study of language”. To cover for the lapses and inabilities to proffer a comprehensive definition of pragmatics, in lieu of the above given definitions, Adegbija (1999:189) defines pragmatics as the study of language use in particular communicative contexts or situations. This would take cognizance of the message being communicated, or the speech act being performed, the participants involved, their impact on their interaction, what they have taken for granted as part of the contexts (or the presupposition) and the deductions they make on the basis of what is said or left unsaid, and the impacts of non-verbal aspects of interaction on meaning.

The fact is that in pragmatics, speakers perform particular functions in their utterances and exploration of these functions has become area of interest to scholars who have studied pragmatic functions of utterances in different domains of language use, such as medical (e.g. Odebunmi 2003), computer mediated communication (Oni and Osunbade 2009), Literary (Odebunmi 2006, Yarahmadi and Olfati 2011, Polonska 2012, Nawaz et al 2013), etc. Within the literary domain which is being explored in the present study, studies have been more on speech act analysis of dramatic texts (cf. Yarahmadi and Olfati 2011, Polonska 2012 and Nawaz et al 2013); exceptions being Odebunmi (2006) which examines the practs of proverbs in Yerima’s *Yemoja*, *Attahiru* and *Dry leaves on Ukan Trees*, and Odebunmi (2008), devoted to the investigation of crisis-motivated proverbs in Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods are not to Blame*. However, to the best of our knowledge, there is a dearth of study on the investigation of the pragmatics of Yerima’s use of language in cultural projections in his drama in linguistic scholarship, especially with respect to establishing the link between Mey’s theory of pragmatic acts and tradition-spurred topical issues in his Yoruba culture-based play, *Àjàgùn-màlè*. This study therefore fills this gap by examining the pragmeme-driven functions performed by Ahmed Yerima in tradition-motivated utterances in *Àjàgùn-màlè*, sampled for the evident preponderance of tradition-motivated discourses in it, towards determining his worldview on tradition-related issues in the society vis-à-vis his thematic projections in the text, given that Ahmed Yerima, in his culture-based plays, employs language as communication tools within culturally defined contexts.

TRADITIONAL CONTEXT OF YERIMA'S PLAYS AND SUMMARY OF DATA TEXT

The significance of context lies in the volume of scholarly attention it has drawn over the years (see Levinson 1983, Thomas 1995, Yule 1996, Palmer 1996, Mey 2001, 2009 and so on). Contextual perspectives have either been in linguistic terms, in which case, context refers to previous and subsequent linguistic material in a text, or extra-linguistic terms of continually changing surroundings in the widest sense, that enable the participants in the communication process to interact intelligibly (Mey 2001: 39). It must be stressed here that context has been variously conceived by scholars (see Malinowski 1923, Firth 1962, Hymes 1962, Halliday 1978, Levinson 1979, Brown and Yule 1996, Adegbite 2000, 2005, Odebunmi 2001, 2006 and so on). For instance, context has been considered as the totality of the environment in which a word is used (Mey, 2001). In other words, it is the sum of the situations in which a text comes to life. It is an abstract category employed by language scholars to provide a link between linguistic items and the social and situational factors of communication (Adegbite, 2000), and provides the background from which the meaning of a word springs (Odebunmi, 2006). Context therefore enhances interpretation of words, hence, Odebunmi's (2006) submission that context is the spine of meaning.

Adegbite (2000) recognizes two types of context viz: the verbal context and the situational context. The verbal context is applied in the interpretation of linguistic items in terms of their linkage and relationship with one another. Adegbite notes that this reduces instances of syntactic or lexical ambiguity that may arise if words are considered in isolation. The concept of the context of situation is largely associated with two scholars: Malinowski (1923) and Firth (1962). Both are concerned with stating meanings in terms of the context in which language is used. In Odebunmi's (2006: 240) view, context manifests at two levels, namely, at the language and at the situation levels. At the language level, meaning is considered as having a possibility potential if the same language of communication is at the disposal of interactants, whiles at the situation level, assumptions are held on the basis of the shared code (linguistic or non-linguistic) and experience of the interlocutors. Odebunmi (2006) further submits that three important features/aspects of context exist: shared knowledge of subject/topic, shared knowledge of word choices, referents, and references and shared socio-cultural experiences, previous or immediate (sck).

With Ahmed Yerima's reliance on cultural historical links as tool of re-creation of historical anomalies, perfection of political events and correction of moral and social malaise (Yerima, 2007), there is the need for the application of the features/aspects of context to decipher Yerima's pragmatics. For example, as revealed by Ahmed Yerima, some representations of the images and social worldviews in his culture-based plays are real, but tainted with experiences and events in his perception, such that the plays assume particular representations of the African cultural world-view through traditional use of words and images. Ahmed Yerima's *Otaelo*, for example, is a good illustration of this. It is an adaptation of English William Shakespeare's *Othello*, in which Yerima's worldview and attempt at Africanisms are projected through such literary elements as characterization, location, status, images, and language use.

Notably, many of Yerima's plays reveal his artistic excellence and the ability to deal with tradition-motivated issues in his immediate social environment to project and protect, specifically, Nigerian cultures. One of such plays dominated by traditional utterances, events

and images is *Àjàgùnṡàlè*. The play opens with Balogun paying a visit to Saura, the priest of Esu, after sending valuable gifts to Esu. Saura is eager to know, and eventually asks for, the reason for the gifts presented after Balogun consults Saura that he wants to see Esu. Balogun then reveals that the king is expected, in his twentieth year on the throne, to wage a war and after he might have conquered, he must give the town to his brother to rule, thereby, adding to the empire. The king acts according to customs and the war is led by Balogun himself. However, after the victory, instead of the king to give the town to Balogun, he gives it to his son, which, according to Balogun, is an abominable act. Evidently, Balogun wants to be king at all cost. Saura, however, advises Balogun against his inordinate ambition to become King, and asks him whether he has consulted Ifa to ask *Àjàgùnṡàlè*, the head of all priests in heaven, if he is destined to be king, on the background that not all princes are so destined.

In his desperate chase of power, Balogun commits traditionally abominable acts of condemning and challenging his brother, the king, for being autocratic, and goes ahead to seek the help of Esu to create confusion for the King. In his state of confusion, *Àjàgùnṡàlè* appears to the king in his sleep to ascertain the truth of the allegations that the King's accusers make against him. He advises the king to find the truth in his inner strength and Eledumare and he, *Àjàgùnṡàlè*, will guide him. The Oba later summons his Oluawo (chief priest) and ponders over his meeting with *Àjàgùnṡàlè* with him. In his wisdom, as guided by the gods, the king eventually asks his brother, Balogun, to be made the king of Ikotun Igbado against the custom, in three days. This act makes Balogun happy but during the traditional coronation process, the kingmakers reveal that Balogun has been cursed by a king and only the king can lift the curse as the King's spirit fights on his behalf. This is confirmed when Balogun picks the calabash of alligator pepper. He is afraid and consults Ifa priests to ascertain how the coronation will go. Almost all the priests distort the words of *Àjàgùnṡàlè* that Balogun is not destined to be King out of fear that Balogun will kill them. However, when Balogun presents his head for the crown, the gods strike him and he writhes in agony and clutches the crown to his chest as he dies.

Through Saura, Yerima reveals that Balogun dies because he chooses a destiny never to be king and fails to listen to advise to be contented with the honour of being a prince already bestowed on him by the gods. One notable instrument employed by Yerima to achieve success in the play is the use of language, which serves as a means of communicating the author's messages to the reader(s), as our analysis will later reveal in this study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Jacob Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory is favoured in this study, being a function-based approach to the study of meaning. In the pragmatic acts theory, a speaker may co-opt others, set them up, influence them through conversations, and deny certain claims without betraying such acts through lexical choices (Mey, 2001:216). In other words, there is no word or lexical item to indicate a particular act except for a consideration of the conversational context. According to Mey (2001:221), a pragmatic act is instantiated through an "ipra" or "a pract", which realizes a "pragmeme" as "every pract is at the same time an allopract, that is, a concrete instantiation of a particular pragmeme". In essence, what determine a pract are solely participants' knowledge of interactional situation and the potential effect of a pract in a particular context, hence, Odebunmi's (2006) submission, that "practing resolves the problem of telling illocutionary force from perlocutionary force".

The focus (of pragmatic act) is on the interactional situation in which both speakers and hearers realize their aims. “The explanatory movement is from the outside in, rather than from the inside out: Instead of starting with what is said, and looking for what the words could mean, the situation in which the words fit is invoked to explain what can be (and is actually being) said” (Mey, 2011:751). Specifically, “implied identification” is central to Mey’s pragmatic acts, such that, the importance is not on the “said” but the “unsaid”. The hearer is controversially influenced (set up) to see the speaker’s act, as no act is explicitly made. In particular, there is no speech act to indicate a pragmatic act. The only way to identify a pragmatic act, therefore, is to be on the lookout, or listen for it.

In the pragmatic act theory, there are two categories involved in the realization of a pragmeme: the textual part and the activity part. The activity part represents the options such as speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational (‘dialogue’) acts, psychological acts (emotions), prosody (intonation, stress,) physical acts, etc. that are available to the speaker to perform the various functions he so desires. The realisation of the pragmatic function in a given communicative event hinges on the textual parts, especially in the communication of the speaker’s intention; in which case, he may employ the ‘inf’ which stands for inference, the ‘ref’ for reference, ‘rel’ for relevance, ‘vce’ for voice, ‘ssk’ for shared situational knowledge, ‘mph’, metaphor, or ‘m’ for metapragmatic joker. Both categories depend on context for the meaning realization of the discourse of interactants.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS IN AHMED YERIMA’S ÀJÀGÙNMÀLÈ

Our findings reveal the occurrence of practs of explaining, warning/cautioning, advising, persuading, rebuking, praising, accusing, and pleading in *Àjàgùnmalè*. These practs are largely performed in the traditional context, while few occur in the emotive context of tradition-motivated discourses in the text to treat issues of faith, deceit, status/power, achievement, belief, social crisis, predestination, inquiry, religion, and immorality through contextual features of sck, ssk, ref, inf, and rel. Let us examine these practs in turn:

Explaining

Explaining is found in our data in the emotive context to deal with the issues of culture, status/ power, faith, and marital bond reached through socio-cultural knowledge (sck), socio-situational knowledge (ssk), reference (ref), inference (inf), and relevance (rel). An example illustrating marital bond is provided below:

- Ex. 1: Oba:** Rise, my beloved wife. Pillar and strength to the palace.
If we even return for a second life, I, like now, will marry you again.
- Oluawo:** (*Breaks into a laugh*) no wonder the egret perches on the cow ignored and yet protected. No wonder the bees will not stop sucking the flower fulfilled. It is the sweetness of honey that keeps them there. My eyes have seen it all. How Olori massages the tender ego of the king and extracts everlasting promises of even the world beyond from him. Kabiyesi o.

(*Ajagunmale*, pp. 23 – 24)

Olori is presented as pillar and strength to the palace in the above discourse. This phrase is engaged by the King to project the role of an Olori in the life of an Oba, hence, his promise of being with her, even if given a chance in the next world. To this, Oluawo comments; “no wonder the egret perches on the cow ignored”. This proverb relates the King and Queen’s relationship to that of the cow and egret. Intimate man-woman relationship is usually likened to cow-egret relationship in Yorubaland. With an application of *sck* and *ssk* of the cow-egret relationship, the Oba understands Oluawo’s meaning that the egret is not only secured, having perched on the cow; it enjoys the benefits of transportation as well. With the aid of reference, we are able to link the Queen with the egret, and the King, the cow. The relevance of the utterance lies in its ability to adequately express and communicate the intention of Oluawo in the circumstance, which is to hint at the bond-inducing endowment of the Olori.

Without an application of *sck* and *ssk* of the cow-egret phenomenon, it would have been difficult to establish the link between the egret and the cow. As such, one is able to conceive the picture of the sympathetic skinny legged egret perching on the fatty cow for survival. The perched egret is ignored because it is light in weight and, of course, constitutes no burden to the cow. With this, it is easy to make inference that Olori’s relationship which equates with the perching of the egret on the cow is ignored by the king because she brings no burden to the king, but rather rewarding to the king.

In the same vein, Oluawo remarks that “the bees will not stop sucking the flowers fulfilled”. With the application of *sck* of the traditional meaning of the wise-saying, one catches the famous picture of a bee sucking the flowers and the contentment derived therein. One could thus see a situational relationship whereby the flower provides fulfillment for the bees in terms of the sweetened buds. Without the sweetened buds, the bees might not have come. It can therefore be easily inferred that the King is the bee, while the Queen is the flower. The bond covertly hinted at indirectly is given expression by the pragmatic practicing of explaining, with respect to their inseparability which justifies the couple’s preference to even live together as husband and wife even in the coming world.

Warning/Cautioning

Warning/cautioning solely occurs in the traditional context to deal with issues of achievement, culture, belief, social crisis, and predestination through contextual features of *sck*, *ssk*, *vce*, *ref*, *inf* and *rel* in the play. For example, when Balogun consults Èsù, Saura, the priest, is intolerant of Balogun’s inquisition and because Saura is feeling sleepy already, he attempts at summarizing Balogun’s problems and telling him what to do within the affordances of the cultural issue in question. However, this does not go down well with Balogun who decides to make his problems known to èsù himself. This is evident in his words as presented in example 2 below, exemplifying the practicing of cautioning while dealing with cultural issue:

Ex.2: Balogun: I will speak to the point, if only you will talk less
and let me do the talking. I am the one who knows where
my boil is and how it hurts”.

Saura: Please, forgive me. My lips will remain sealed from now on.
Please, speak Balogun.

(Ajagunmale, p.10)

A consideration of Balogun's utterance in the example above suggests a face threatening act (FTA) as a pragmatic tactic to caution Saura. This, obviously, is borne out of Saura's intolerance of Balogun coupled with Balogun's determination to make his case known to Èsù. It is only with an application of ssk of the communal use of the wise-saying that Saura understands Balogun's FTA in his utterance. Assisted by shared sck, Saura infers the meaning and the relevance of Balogun's warning/cautioning to the conversation. However, except for a consideration of the conversational context, Saura would not have read the FTA as cautioning since there is no lexical item indicating this. For instance, Balogun asserts that he has a boil, whereas in actual sense, he has no boil but our sense of reference reveals that he carries a grudge that is painful, as such, it hurts, and he is the only one that knows where it hurts and how much it hurts. Thus, the caution that Saura should talk less and allow him to state his case before Èsù becomes manifest. The pragmatic success is recorded in Saura's response "please forgive me. My lips will remain sealed from now on. Please, speak, Balogun". The remorse of his act of intolerance towards Balogun could be read in Saura's repeated plea, hence, his recognition of Balogun's cautioning.

Advising

Advising also occurs in traditional context in the play. An instance that reveals Oluawo alerting the Oba of Ifa's forecast of the approaching evil is shown in the following example:

- Ex. 3: Oluawo:** What does anybody ever do to offend ESU? Orunmila says we should send him some gifts. And also his high priest, Saura.
- Oba:** Send them.... Anything they desire. All these evil happenings must stop.
- Oluawo:** But remember, Kabiyesi... no matter how wild a masquerade is, .. he is propelled by the carrier. It is those carriers you should be after. That is why I propose that at the next meeting of the Chiefs you serve them good palm wine, laced with this, kabiyesi. (*Brings out a small calabash with a cover.*) Whoever has a hand in this, be he a man or woman, shall die two days after. And we shall have peace in the land. This has to do with somebody that has money to spend... even ESU does not just stand at the crossroads for a man. It is people who ask him to. I have given you my message, kabiyesi.
- Oba:** Very well. But I do not want bloodshed. Not one life. I only want to know who harbours so much hatred for me and my people. Leave the punishment to the gods.

(Ajagunmale, p. 27)

With the manifestation of evil occurrence all around him, the King knows that all is not well. He then commissions Oluawo to inquire from the gods the cause of the social crisis. Specifically, Oluawo reveals that Èsù has a hand in it, as such, Èsù must be appeased, being put at the centre of the confusion in the play to reflect its culturally recognized role in conflict situation in Yoruba cosmological world as the mischief maker, the short man that lives at crossroads. The height of the emergent problems and social disorder leaves the Oba with no other solution than to speedily offer sacrifice to Esu who is linked with the problems. However, the Oluawo declares that the culprit is not Èsù but somebody that is sponsoring him, that is, "somebody that has money to spend". He therefore advises that it is those sponsors that must be fished out by engaging a proverb "no matter how a masquerade is, he is

propelled by the carrier”, that is “*kòsí bí egúngún se burútó, atókùn ní darí rẹ*”, that sets the background for the advice being practiced. Given that the carrier is not known and he acts under the disguise of the masquerade, and given also that the disguising costume cannot go anywhere unless it is mobilized or propelled by the carrier, Oluawo advises the addresses, the Oba (king), to locate the carriers. With our knowledge of reference, we adequately link the masquerade with Èsù, and the carriers (i.e. the perpetrators of evils or social disorders in the society) with those who send Èsù on errand. Without an application of sck, and ssk, one would not understand the proverb as advising. Here, Òrúnmìlà, through Oluawo, advises the King to look beyond Esu and seek those who send Esu on errand of perpetrating evils or causing social disorders. A careful look at the scene reveals that there is neither masquerade nor carrier in the palace; it is only the concept of the masquerade and the carrier that is borrowed because of its relevance to the discourse. However, there is no lexical item that shows or suggests advising except for a consideration of the given context of discourse which pragmatically indicates that the act counts as advising.

Persuading

Instances of persuading are sometimes found in *Ajagunmale*, especially in the traditional context to deal with different issues typical of the Yoruba cultural practices. An instance of persuading with respect to issue bordering on inquiry at the shrine of Esu can be considered in example 4 below.

Ex. 4: Balogun: And my requests?

Saura: My Lord and master heard them, but I did not.

Please tell me, Balogun, so that I the messenger of Esu
can understand the reason for your generosity to my master.

The taste of the Kolanut is usually better described by the mouth
of the chewer. Your messenger delivered the message like a messenger.

(*Ajagunmale*, pg 9).

In the example, Balogun goes to Saura to inquire how far he has gone in employing Èsù to fight for his cause having sent goods in double folds to Èsù but Saura demonstrates his ignorance of the reason for the gifts and persuades Balogun to reveal it himself. Saura, in the extract, presents himself as an ordinary man who can only work on the information given to him, hence, his insistence that Balogun must state his case before Èsù, as the tradition demands in Yoruba culture. By engaging the proverb “the taste of the Kolanut is usually better described by the mouth of the chewer”, Saura effectively makes an indirect pragmatic appeal to Balogun to relate his situation to him being the messenger of Esu, so that the message will be delivered to Esu accordingly. Persuading is thus practiced in the rhetorical engagement of the proverb via inference. Such inference favours context-driven association of Balogun’s situation in question with “the taste of the kolanut”, which is usually better described by “the mouth of the chewer”, inferentially implying Balogun himself, especially to underscore the persuasive intention of Saura vis-à-vis his inquiry into Balogun’s problems which demand the assistance of Esu.

Rebuking

Rebuking is found in the traditional context in *Ajagunmale* to deal with issues of status and power through sck, ssk, inf, rel and ref. Let us consider the following example in which Balogun reveals his desire to be king:

Ex. 5: Balogun. In life you cannot ask for success, you have to create it ...

And if it remains far, grab it ... is it unnatural to be ambitious? Is it?

Saura: But the gods have already made you a prince. Contentment is also a virtue.

Balogun: Woe betides contentment! A thousand curses on contentment. I need more than what the gods have given freely. To be a prince is even another burden to my soul. To aspire to be king after being a prince for such a long time..... That is right thing to do..... to be.

(*Ajagumale*, p. 13)

Balogun is presented in example 5 as being overambitious and his over-ambition leads him to Èsù and Saura. As a custodian of culture, being a priest of a religious cult, Saura evaluates Balogun's status and opines that Balogun needs not aspire for power any longer, considering the cultural implication of his aspiration. With the application of *sck* of the people's cultural belief and practices, Saura reveals that destiny plays a key role in a man's attainment of status in the society. Saura thus reminds Balogun that it is only the gods that make a man what he is (be it a king, a prince, commoner or slave), as reflected in his words: "but the gods have already made you a prince." By implication, Saura communicates the intention that Balogun has already been favoured by the gods, given that in Yoruba culture, a prince is accorded kingly regards everywhere he goes. This, of course, is so as a prince is often referred to as "*Oba lóla*", that is, "the future king", although not all future kings become kings. Riding on *sck* that not all princes end up becoming kings, Saura goes ahead to indirectly rebuke Balogun for being uncontented. The fact is that a consideration of Saura's utterances shows no word indicating the pract of rebuking, but assisted by shared situational knowledge of the conversational topic and the relevance of the utterance to the ongoing discourse, the pract is inferentially drawn. Although Balogun has the shared cultural knowledge of the role of the gods in human destiny which should condition a prince to be contented, he remains adamant to pursue his inordinate ambition to become king. So when Saura rebukes him, saying that "contentment is also a virtue", he erupts in anger "woe betide contentment...", suggesting that he is unrelenting in his chase after status and power irrespective of the rebuke being indirectly condemned to.

Praising

Praising in *Ajagunmale* occurs largely in the traditional context to deal with issues of religion, power, and culture through *sck*, *ssk*, *ref*, *inf*, and *rel*. Let us consider example 6 and 7 that follow, dealing with the issues of power and culture.

Ex. 6: Oba: Me. Oba Akinbiyi Adetutu Arabambi.. Egun nla labi....

the raw hot lead that burns the heart of great prey.....

son of the Big Elephant who steps on his enemies at will...

husband of a thousand wives..... the Olumona of Ikoto Ile. Me.

(*Ajagunmale*, p. 23)

The background to the above discourse is that the Oba is weighed down because of threats to his life, especially the one that arises as a result of the dream he has that Shakiru, his shadow in life and partner in death (*abóbakú*), jeers at him. To strengthen himself, the Oba starts singing his own praises. This is common in Yorubaland as praise singing is expected to lift the spirit and instill confidence for one to surmount all obstacles. There is a need for an

application of sck and ssk of the communal practice of lineage praise rendering to properly understand the act of praising being practiced here. For example, allusion to names such as “*Arábámbí*” and “*Egúngún nínlá*” are quite culturally inclined. With the application of sck of cultural lineage praise rendering, one understands that “*Arábámbí*” is one of the names of Sango, the god of thunder, who is a powerful god in Yorubaland. When angry, Sango emits fire from the mouth and causes rain. Sango is not a coward, and because of this attribute, people from Sango’s lineage or who share Sango’s ferocious look, red eyeballs, or platted hair are likened to Sango.

Also, “*Egúngún nínlá*” in Yorubaland is considered to be quite spiritually powerful and as such are respected as father to younger masquerades. Great people in Yorubaland are likened to “*Egúngún nínlá*” because of their status. In the heat of the moment, in the given discourse, the Oba says that he is “the raw hot lead that burns the heart of great prey”. The metaphoric representation here is significant, as it connotes that the Oba is the hot lead that burns the heart of great prey, suggesting that he is strong and will kill all his enemies. This, he reiterates by calling himself “the son of Big Elephant”. Obviously, an Elephant (whether big or small) can never give birth to a human. However, the Yoruba do reference themselves relative to Elephant because of its strength and might. Without an application of sck and ssk of Yoruba lineage praise rendering, one will not understand the relevance of such allusion to the Elephant as captured in the expression. However, with the proper sck and ssk, one realizes that the Elephant is the biggest animal in the bush and when it steps on a bush, it never rises again. This personal praise chant thus implies that the King will step on and kill all his enemies. Also, it is only the Olori that we know as the Oba’s only wife in the play, yet he claims to be husband to a thousand wives. It is only with the application of sck of the people’s cultural practice that one will understand the implication here. The King is the husband to three groups of women in the palace: “*ayabas*” (wives of the former Kings), “*Oloris*” (his own wives), and “*aya omos*” (wives of his children). The lexical item “me”, which opens the discourse, sets the background for practicing praising in it to enhance an understanding of the noble status of the King and his capability to overcome the situation at hand.

Praising is also found in our data in the traditional contexts involving acknowledgement of the spiritual power of some humans. Example 7 captures this.

Ex. 7:

Oluawo: I came straight to the chamber as you commanded. With my bad foot, I get slower by the

day. Please forgive me, your Highness.

Oba: Forgive? We were just talking about you. You are indeed the son of your father. Oluawo, son of Awolola. Awo that looks for food for the white birds. The one that stays at the back of the house, and still knows what Ifa says. Owonrin is the father of Ifa, Ejiogbe is the father of Opele. Otototo, orororo, differently did we come to this world, differently do our destinies unfold. I will chant the praise of Ejiogbe, I will chant the praise of Oluawo, the all seeing priest of my palace. I say you are the son of your parents.

Oluawo: Ten children, and I was the first...to the date they died in their sleep, my mother never showed me another man.

In the tradition-motivated discourse in example 7 above, Oluawo enters the palace and meets the Oba and Olori in a happy mood; he then asks for forgiveness for interrupting. In his response, the Oba wonders why he asks for forgiveness and begins to sing his praises as traditionally done in Yoruba land to reckon with someone's heroic status. However, sck and ssk of this cultural practice must be employed to understand such. The king's seemingly unending accolades eventually extend to Oluawo's father, as the King acknowledges that Oluawo is "the son of his father". He then further sings the praises of Oluawo's father and it is only with an application of sck of Ifa cult that one understands the pragmatic import of this expression and realizes how great an Ifa priest "Olúawo" and his father are, for only great priests are so recognized as "awo that looks for food for the white birds" that is "*awo rere tí wá oúnje fún eye*". It should be noted that white birds are not mentioned in the Yoruba version of praise chant of Ifa Priests, but the mention of white birds here indicates Yerima's attempt at showing how pure Awolola, Oluawo's father is. This is imperative so as to segregate Awolola from the wicked priests that do evil. One needs an application of sck and ssk of Yoruba cultural beliefs and practices to understand the praise chant, especially, ancestral African gods such as "Òwónrín", "Ifá", "Èjìogbè" and cultural religious item, "òpèlè", and other religious expressions as "òtóótótó", "òróóro" deployed in the Oba's utterances. Since there is no lexical item indicating the act being practiced, with the aid of sck, and ssk, Oluawo understands that the pragmatic act of praising is performed and he confirms, indirectly, that he is not a bastard; thereby acknowledging the awareness of his genealogical praise-worthy power and status.

Accusing

Accusing is found in the traditional context to treat the issue of immorality through sck, ssk, reference, inference and relevance in the play. For example, when the prince is infected with "èèdi" (misbehavior-inducing charm), he starts misbehaving but the King fails to realize that the prince is acting under evil spiritual control. As such, when the prince rapes the daughter of Iyalode who is meant to be given to the King of Iberekedo in marriage, the Oba gets angry and accuses the prince of bringing shame to him. Example 8 illustrates this:

Ex. 8: Oba: See what my son has brought to me? Shame!

With his oily hands, he stains my most treasured robes".

(Ajagunmale, p. 28).

The King's anger towards his son is noted in the above example without any lexical item showing the act of anger. However, it is only with the application of sck and ssk of Yoruba proverbs and uses that one can interpret the King's accusation packed in the proverb "with his oily hands, he stains my most treasured robes". This proverb foregrounds the offence of the prince such that it is difficult to plead for him. "My most treasured robes", is a reference to the throne which, because of prince's shameless and immoral act, gets soiled with oil. The practice of accusing arises, in this instance, because of the King's anger, consequent upon his being put to shame by his son's act of immorality.

Pleading

Yerima also practices pleading in the traditional context to treat the issue of immorality, assisted by sck, ssk, ref, inf and rel. When the Oba gets angry because of the prince's misconduct, the Oluawo pleads with him as captured below:

Ex. 9:**Oba:** See what my son has brought to me? Shame! I shall....**Oluawo:** Easy, Kabiyesi. E je bure. Easy. Our enemies prepare their drums of shame, do not dance to it. (*Àjàgùnṁàlè*, p. 28)

In the extract above, the king is furious as a result of his son's immoral behavior of rape which has soiled his royal regalia but Oluawo tries to calm him down by pleading on the son's behalf as culturally done in the Yoruba culture, using a wise-saying "our enemies prepare their drums of shame, do not dance to it". An application of sck and ssk of Yoruba cultural belief is imperative for the understanding of Oluawo's utterances, especially, the Yoruba wise-saying. The utterance here takes its source from the Yoruba saying "*otá mílu ilù ibàjè, Olórun kò ní jé kí ó dún*", that is, "the enemy drums of shame, God will not let it sound". The original version of the wise-saying is a wish. However, to suit his purpose, Yerima manipulates the wise-saying to count as a plea in the given context. Though realized in what appears in the garb of a command, it functions pragmatically as a plea, "do not dance to it". This language usage strategy of Yerima is therefore an indirect way of communicating his intention as a pragmatic act of pleading, inferentially reached rather than being overtly conveyed.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

This study will enhance an understanding of Yerima's *Àjàgùnṁàlè* and by extension Yoruba culture-based plays in general by establishing a link between the plays and the Yoruba people of Nigeria's culture through an in-depth application of the theory of pragmeme to language use in the performance of certain pragmatic functions in tradition-motivated discourses in the play. Also, judging from the fact that concentrations of studies on Ahmed Yerima's plays have been from the literary perspective, this study is a significant contribution to existing linguistic works, especially, considering its pragmatic explorations of the specific functions which language is used to perform in the fictional world refracted by Yerima in the play, *Àjàgùnṁàlè*. The study equally contributes to the understanding of Yoruba culture-specific pragmatic acts that manifest in characters' tradition-motivated utterances in the play and the contextual features used to realize them in the communication of Yerima's thematic messages to his readers. The study is therefore expected to assist scholars and learners engaged in the study of pragmatics to understand the pragmeme theory-driven interpretation of literary texts in linguistic scholarship.

CONCLUSION

This study is an examination of the pragmatic acts in tradition-motivated discourses in Ahmed Yerima's *Àjàgùnṁàlè*, a play which is rich in Yoruba cultural practices. Exemplifying with the tradition-motivated utterances in the play, the study routes its analysis through insights from Mey's theory of pragmeme. The findings reveal the practs of explaining, warning/cautioning, advising, persuading, rebuking, praising, accusing, and pleading in traditional and emotive contexts of discourse in *Àjàgùnṁàlè*, to address thematic issues of culture, status/power, achievement, belief, social crisis, predestination, inquiry, and immorality with the advantage of contextual features of shared-situational knowledge (ssk), socio-cultural knowledge (sck), inference (inf), reference (ref) and voicing (vce). The interaction between the tradition-motivated discourses in *Àjàgùnṁàlè* and Mey's theory of pragmeme ultimately results in the understanding of tradition-related issues in the play and

their context-driven dramatisation of the traditional orientations of the Yoruba in South-western Nigeria.

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