

Textual Orientation to Cculture-Sansitive Proverbs Meanings in Selected Ahmed Yerima’s Yoruba Culture-Based Plays

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ABSTRACT: *Proverbs have attracted a lot of attention in linguistic scholarship. Specifically, scholars have addressed the thematic and figurative features of proverbs in the espousal of ethnic experiences of different communities from sociolinguistic, stylistic, semantic and pragmatic perspectives. Observation has shown that Pragmatic efforts have however ignored emphasis on the impact of textual parts, especially, common grounds in character’s interactions through shared situational knowledge (SSK) and shared cultural knowledge (SCK) of interlocutors in proverbial interpretations. With the application of Kecskes (2014) socio-cognitive principle of common grounds, this study examines purposively selected Yoruba proverbs in Ahmed Yerima’s Yoruba-culture based plays Mojagbe and Ajagunmale with a view to determining their meanings relative to Yerima’s pragmatic intentions. The study reveals that proverbs which mainly have linguistic roots in metaphor are interpretively aided by common ground items of shared situational knowledge (SSK) and shared cultural knowledge (SCK) in characters’ utterances to pragmatically serve to warn/caution, emphasize, lament, accuse, and explain in the plays. This linguistic contribution to existing literature on Ahmed Yerima’s plays is significant for aiding the understanding of form-function nexus in context-sensitive proverbial interpretation in fictional discourse in linguistic scholarship in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Proverbial interpretations, meaning, perspectives, literary pragmatic principle

INTRODUCTION

The role of shared common grounds realized in shared social knowledge (SSK) and shared cultural knowledge (SCK) as textual parts in the interpretation of texts cannot be undermined. These textual parts largely feature under the principle of common knowledge or common grounds which accounts for the way in which information accumulates in conversation (Stalnaker 1999; Lewis,1996; Clark, 1996). Notably, common ground draws its strength from

common communal lexicons like proverbs, jargons, dialects, patois, idioms, penances and so on. Our focus in this study will be on proverbs. This is a fall out of the observation that instances of proverbs are largely found in characters' utterances in Ahmed Yerima's plays *Mojagbe* and *Ajagunmale* where they are pragmatically employed to convey targeted intentions, as such, it caught a pragmatist's lens of analysis.

However, as Odebunmi (2006) reveals, the success of the interactions through proverbs in African cultural literary texts, because of the metaphorical nature of proverbs, ultimately depends on prior shared situational knowledge (SSK), enhanced by prior shared cultural knowledge (SCK) of the characters. This is because the conversational common grounds in the plays present situations whereby participants design their thoughts and utterances relative to the common grounds they believe they already share. In line with Stalnaker's (1999) observation, this process is easily achieved through the "information structure" and "grounding" (which must necessarily be common) of the participants.

Our observation reveals that Yerima in the plays under study here largely employs proverbs as a form of narration to project his perspectives and thematic preoccupations. The success of the character's utterances in this direction (to achieve Yerima's goals), however, largely depends on the understanding of the social parameters under which the utterances, that is, the proverbs, are produced. Proverbs, taken in this study as, simple, concrete traditional sayings that express a truth based on common sense or experiences of the people, are often short generally known sentences which contain wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form, handed down from one generation to the other.

Although proverbs are often metaphorical and exhibit the use of formulaic language, collectively, they form a genre of folklore. To understand and be able to interpret proverbs, therefore, there must be a common ground for both the interlocutors. As such, common ground, we can say, is achieved through shared social and cultural knowledge of the characters involved in the conversation. In this study, we will examine Yerima's authorial perspectives in the proverbs through the SSK and SCK devices to determine the pragmatic functions that he uses the proverbs to perform.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE GROUNDS//BELIEFS AND PROVERBS

Common ground refers to the sum of all the information that people assume they share that may include world views, shared values, beliefs, and situational context (Clark and Brennan, 1991; Stalnaker, 1999; Barr and Keysar, 2005; Barbana, A, 2008; Kecskes, 2009 and so on). According to Stalnaker (1999), if people have common or similar prior experience, participate in similar actions and events, they know each other and have been in similar situations before, all that will result in common ground. Similar prior contexts, prior experience and similar understanding of the actual situational context will build common ground.

As Clark (1996) observes, the use of language is such that in interactions, the form of social interactive behaviour in which a speaker addresses utterances to an audience requires the first

speaker to make certain assumptions about the second's ability to understand the third speaker. This is achieved through a consideration of such parameters as choice of topic, language, language variety, style of presentation, and level of presentation. These assumptions constitute what can conveniently be called "common ground". They have been subsumed to context and at least a part of the common ground constitutes what Lewis referred to as "common knowledge", a term adopted by Stalnaker (1999). The term "common knowledge", "mutual knowledge" "shared knowledge", "assumed familiarity" have been variously employed by different scholars for prior knowledge sharing (Clark and Brennan, 1991; Stalnaker 1999; Arnseth, and Solheim, 2002; Kecskes 2013, 2014 and so on). Following Grice (1975) opinion, Stalnaker (1999) named this prior knowledge sharing "common ground", which he describes as "presumed background information shared by participants in a conversation". By this, Stalnaker (ibid) makes referent to what speakers take for granted, and what they presuppose when they use certain sentences.

The foregoing is a revelation that communication is a process in which intention is formed, expressed and interpreted. From the speaker's perspective, intention is something that the speaker bears in mind prior to the utterance, or is generated in the course of the conversation and expressed in the form of utterances. From the hearer's or an analyst's perspective, intention is something that is processed by the hearer while or after the utterance is made or being made. According to Haugh (2008), the primary intention expressed in a particular situation will now serve the function of guiding the conversation. Knowledge or information explicated in linguistic forms, implied connotation and also background that can be inferred, all get united for comprehension and achievement of communication under the driving force of intention. Cooperation therefore is a consistent effort needed by interlocutors to build up relevance to intentions in their communication. This sense of cooperation is close to Grice's cooperative principles (Grice 1957) and Clark's (2015) and Colston' (2005) view of participants' seeing things from same perspectives. However, it has been observed that intention is not necessarily a priori but it can also be generated and changed during the communicative process. This dynamism is reflected in emerging utterances that may be interrupted and started again. It is not only the context but also the dynamism of the flow of the conversation and the process of formulating an utterance that may also affect and change intention.

Kecskes (2014) has observed that the current pragmatic theories lay emphasis only on the significance of an intention, cooperation, common ground, mutual knowledge, relevance, and commitment in executing communicative acts. This is such that cooperation and common ground are considered as being imperative for successful communication. According to Kecskes (ibid), presently, there are two main approaches to common ground. The dominant view sees common ground as "a category of specialized mental representations that exists in the mind, *a priori* to the actual communication process" (Stalnaker 1978; Arnseth and Solheim, 2002; Clark and Brennan, 1991). To Kecskes (2014), common ground is considered here as a distributed form of mental representation and adopted as a basis on which successful communication is warranted.

On the other hand, as a result of recent research in cognitive psychology, linguistic pragmatics, and intercultural communication, the need arises for the investigation on how the mind works in the process of communication. People in this direction, according to him are known as cognitive researchers. Kecskes (2014) further reveals that all of Barr and Keysar (2005); Colston and Katz (2005) and so on are of the view that “*a priori*”, that is, mental representation of common knowledge is not as significantly involved in the process of communication as pragmatic theories have claimed; instead, they formed a more dynamic, emergence-through-use view of common ground which conceptualizes it as an emergent property of ordinary memory processes”. Kecskes observes that several researchers (for example, Clark and Brennan 1991; Kecskes and Zhang 2013; Barr and Keysar 2005; Giora 2003) have indicated the surprising egocentric degree of speakers and hearers to play significant roles in the stages of production and comprehension. He notes that their egocentric behavior is rooted in the speakers’ or hearers’ more reliance on their own knowledge instead of mutual knowledge.

Kecskes (2007) argues that especially in the first phase of the communicative process, “instead of looking for common ground, which is absent to a great extent, lingua franca speakers articulated their own thoughts with linguistic means that they could easily use”. Based on this therefore, we assume here that cooperation and egocentrism are not mutually exclusive phenomena as they are both assumed to be present in all stages of communication to a different extent. These two approaches to common ground, weighing cooperation and egocentrism respectively, have nonetheless the same weakness as neither resides in a socio-cognitive perspective.

The foregoing is a revelation that current pragmatic theories have not captured common ground in its entirety, as such, we adopt Kecskes (2014) social cognitive model with insights from other relevant principles for the analysis of the data in this study. According to Kecskes (ibid), the socio-cognitive approach views common ground as:

a dynamic construct that is mutually constructed by interlocutors throughout the communicative process. The core and emergent components join in the construction of common ground in all stages, although they may contribute to the construction process in different ways, to different extents, and in different phases of the communicative process. assumed shared knowledge, *a priori* mental representation and emergent common ground (emergent participant resource, *a post facto* emergence through use) converge to construct a dialectical socio-cultural background for communication. Both cognitive and pragmatic considerations are central to this issue. While attention (through salience, which is the cause for interlocutors’ egocentrism) explains why emergent property unfolds, intention (through relevance, which is expressed in cooperation) explains why presumed shared knowledge is needed. Based on this, common ground is perceived as an effort to converge the mental representation of shared knowledge present as memory that we can activate, shared knowledge that we can seek, and rapport, as well as knowledge that we can create in the communicative process.

The fall out here is that there are three levels of meaning negotiation based on common ground aided by the textual parts of Shared Knowledge (a priori, either social or situational, these are assumed shared knowledge), and shared cultural knowledge (a post facto). The need for the principle of common ground for proverbial analysis in this study is necessitated by the nature of proverbs itself. According to Mieder (2004), a proverb is a short, genially known sentence of the folk which contain wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.

One can therefore see a proverb as a short sentence, which is well-known by members of the same community and, at times, they are rhythmic. Aspects in this regard are advice, sage themes and ethnic experiences, comprising simile, metaphor or irony which is well-known among people for its fluent wording, clarity of expression, simplicity, expansiveness and generality and are used either with or without change. Ultimately, without a Shared Knowledge (a priori, either social or situational, that is assumed shared knowledge), and shared cultural knowledge (a post facto), interpretations of proverbs will be difficult to attempt. With this background therefore, based on Kecskes socio-cognitive principle of common ground, three analytical levels evolve here for the purpose of our analysis:

- A. Shared knowledge of the subject/topic
- B. Shared knowledge of language use and lexical choices
- C. Shared socio-cultural experiences, referents and references

These three major classifications will form the platform for our analysis in this paper.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PLAYS

Mojagbe

The King, Oba Mojagbe is embattled in the play because his people are against him as revealed in the act of his arch enemies. One of such is Yeye, who sends Layewu, the messenger of death to kill King Mojagbe. The king, however has been spiritually fortified against such attacks, therefore, he survives Layewu's attack. Worried by the trend of uncomfortable events in the town, Mojagbe sends for Isepe, the seer, to seek for means to reinstate things. While Isepe is still with the king, Esan, one of the future Kings comes in with a mission to assassinate King Mojagbe. With the help of Isepe, Esan is detected and arrested. In anger, Mojagbe sentences Esan to death. He is to be executed at the market square to serve as a deterrent to others who might have similar intentions. However, Esan's background and lineage as a prince is the cause of another trouble since a prince must not be executed in such a manner. Mojagbe becomes angry over this as he perceives it as a plot to overthrow him. This plots him against the likes of Yeye who stubbornly insists on Mojagbe's dethronement.

Events and unbearable situations lead Mojagbe to kill Isepe, his seer. With the killing of Isepe, things became worse. Mojagbe realizes his mistakes and the stupidity of killing the seer. Death closes in and Mojagbe feels the hand of death as he reveals that "it is suddenly so cool" and his (Mojagbe) feet "grow cold". Yerima's story line here is indicative of his overbearing fear of

death thereby projecting the place of death in Yoruba culture. Here, Yerima considers how man forgets about the greatness of death, until the moment it comes or strikes.

Ajagunmale

Balogun goes to Saura, the priest of Esu to seek revenge against the King for not making him King of a subordinate town. In anger, Balogun casts spell on the town and there begins trouble all over the land. After consulting the oracle, Oluawo tells Oba that there is somebody in the land that is causing disruption. The king becomes worried and is determined to know who it could be that harbors so much hatred for him and his people.

To worsen the situation, Balogun condemns and challenges his brother, the King. Ajagunmale appears to the king in his sleep to ascertain the truth of the allegations that the Kings' accusers make against him. Ajagunmale is surprised at the King's behavior because everything he sees is different from the response he gets from his accusers. He therefore advises the King to find the truth in his inner strength and Eledumare and he, Ajagunmale will guide him. When the king wakes up, he is surprised because the spiritual meeting seems very real.

The Oba later summons his Oluawo, and together, they ponder over Oba's meeting with Ajagunmale. The Oba later concludes that Ajagunmale tactically reveals that he should do away with anger. In his wisdom, as guided by the gods, the King asks his brother, Balogun, to be made the king of the neighboring town Ikotun Igbado in three days. Balogun is happy. 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. At the coronation, the gods strikes Balogun dead. This reveals that whatever destiny man chooses definitely comes his way.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal three levels of meaning negotiation that unveils Ahmed Yerima's thematic preoccupation in the plays. These are: Shared knowledge of the Subject/Topic, Shared knowledge of the word choices, referents and references, Shared socio-cultural experiences, previous or past immediate. These are discussed successively below:

Shared Knowledge of the Subject/topic

In example 1, Mojagbe assures Olori of her safety despite the lurking danger through the metaphor of the mother fish and her children. This could not be done in a better way than to wrap the assurance in a proverb.

Ex. 1: Olori: *(Raises her head. still sleepy)* Kabiyesi
The noise I thought I heard.....

Mojabe: Nothing, *when the mother fish senses danger in the belly of the sea, it opens its mouth for all its children to swim in and yet no one single tiny fingerling is hurt or even scratched.* Mine is mine to keep, sleep, this fight is mine. Sleep, child. *(Olori Deola turns her back and goes back to sleep).* Now to

turn to my search for the doomed faces who clamor and chatter for my downfall. (*He goes, as if in a trance, to a small pot in a corner of the room*). Ela! My eyes "*were washed with the sleep paste ipin in the eyes of a dog, so I see beyond the eyes*. Open and show me. By all the gods who stand with me, who sent death to the king of death? Who wants Mojagbe the son of the great medicine man dead? Show me. *Elaiwori! Agbe nu omiriranniteja. Elaiwori!* Here, here they are... fools on the false drunken horse of shame and death... fools. One by one, I shall hack them down. Those who wish to repay my kindness with death. I shall cut down their souls. With Ogun's mighty war sword. One by one.

(*Mojagbe. pp 13*).

"*When the mother fish senses danger in the belly of the sea it opens its mouth for all its children to swim in and yet no one single tiny fingerling is hurt or even scratched*". What is being discussed here is safety. There is danger in town and people are afraid in their homes, not to talk of going out at night. That was why Olori was afraid when she said she thought she heard noise, then the King Mojagbe gives the word of assurance through the proverb. The proverbial use here brings emotion and deep assurance on the topic of safety. This is enough assurance for Olori to be rest assured even in the face of danger. The proverb in Yoruba land is referred in the face of impending danger for assurance of safety. With a shared situational knowledge (SCK), the textual part enhances Olori's perception and understanding of the metaphorical mother fish as Mojagbe and herself as the proverbial children of the fish. In this wise, through the principle of common ground shared by both Olori and Mojagbe, he is able to assure Olori that no harm will befall her.

We see Olori raising her head still sleepy at the opening of the interaction when Mojagbe came in after Mojagbe's statement of assurance. With SSK of the assurance therefore, Olori Deola's response is to turn her back and go back to sleep. This literally signifies non-verbal consent thereby indicating that Olori Deola understands the content of the proverb here.

Another instance where proverb is employed to introduce the subject or the topic of discuss is presented in 2 below:

Ex. 2: Mojagbe: Howu!! Who hates me this much.
Who is so resolved to let me starve to death, by removing all the teeth in my mouth? What have I done. Baba Isepe, that my arms are to be pulled out of my body by my own people like a common thief!
.....
Isepe: Hum, Kabiyesi...?

(*Mojagbe pp 16*)

Mojagbe in the extract above laments the fact that somebody want to hurt him. Mojagbe belief here that somebody is plotting evil against him underground, yet, he still did not have the

picture of the perpetrator, as such in such circumstance in Yoruba land, one may be forced to resort to the use of proverbs to express the situation, especially with somebody one shares mutual background with. King Mojagbe takes to the use of the proverb "*who is so resolved to let me starve to death by removing all the teeth in my mouth*". In actual fact, Mojagbe's teeth are intact in his mouth, and nobody has pulled out the teeth in his mouth, however, when there is suspicion that evil is being plotted against one and it might be injurious and such proverbs are employed to broach the topic of attack on the person. It is only with Shared Situational knowledge (SSK) of the metaphorical representation in the form of proverb "removing all the teeth in my mouth" that Isepe understands Mojagbe's lamentation in this context. This is evident in his response, "hum, Kabiyesi", signifying understanding and expressing the fact that he is lost on the issue too as he does not know the person plotting evil against the king.

Also, when Mojagbe gets angry and he wants to kill Esan, Abese cautions him in metaphorical proverb which if Mojagbe did not apply the SSK of the Yorubas' usage of the words in proverbs, would not have understood. Let us see the extract below:

Ex. 3: Abese: No my Lord. We only want the king to walk right....

in the footpath of his father. (*Breaks into a chant*) Mojagbe o.

remember whose son you are. Only great men beget great sons.

Do not hurry to shed his blood. An act a king will think about consequences later is not a good act. *A dog does not eat a dog... Don't be in a hurry to show your fangs, your growl is enough to drive a thousand fears into our hearts.* Do not bite so quickly, great one.

Isepe: Ha hah! Abese!

Mojagbe: Let me be the judge of that, Abese

(,Mojagbe pp 18-19)

Abese in the extract above cautions Mojagbe not to be angry through the proverb. Talking about the topic of anger, Yoruba people usually associate an angry person with a Lion that when it gets angry, growls and shows its fangs. This is aptly done here through an application of the metaphors in the use of proverbs. Abese likens Mojagbe to a dog to make his points realized and the characteristics of a dog are metaphorically referred to in the metaphors *fangs* and *growl*. It is only with shared cultural knowledge (SCK) of the Yoruba metaphorical usage of these words in Yoruba proverbs that Mojagbe can pragmatically understand Abese's act of cautioning here. His response shows that he shares a common background with Isepe on the proverb and its use, as such he understands him very well. His response is a significant pointer here, "let me be the judge of that", meaning it is left for me to decide whether I want to "growl" and show my "fangs", that is whether I want to get angry or not.

Shared Knowledge of Language Use, Lexical Choices Referents and References

An instance of a shared knowledge of lexical choices, referent and references is manifested in the example below. This is seen in the proverbial expression realized via metaphor in the communication. In the extract below, Mojagbe's warning to Abese is successful. The communication success aided by the lexical choices is embedded in the SSK and SCK of the

metaphorization of the words *fire*, *mountain*, and *wind* in Yoruba proverbial usage to be able to understand the need to make haste as evident in Abese's response. Let us see example 4

Ex. 4: Abese: The frightening drums sent a thousand shivers down our spine. The Akoda's stood stupefied. Not a soul could move in the palace yard. The chief Akoda inspecting the night guards was rooted to the ground, consumed by the wrath of the fearsome masquerade... the frightening drums of death, my lord, were heard throughout the four corners of the village. Ha Kabiyesi, the thick smoke of evil roams, the figure of death looms large tonight. My lord.

Mojagbe: I heard it too. Now, hurry to Balogun, tell him to come with the chiefs to the palace. *The fire on the mountain top looms large, all it needs is an ill wind to spread it.* Mind who you speak to on the way. Put the sacred aamo leaves between your lips and bite it. Speak to no one. Hurry man, before the drums die down and I.ayewu returns to its senders. Hurry! (Abese makes to leave) And. Abese

Abese: Kablyesi—(prostrates again)

(*Mojagbe. pp 12*)

In the conversation above, Mojagbe senses the looming danger and the need for a quick preventive act, hence he warns Abese to make haste as danger looms around the corner. While sending Abese to fetch Balogun, Mojagbe emphasizes the urgency of the errand with the proverb "*the fire on the mountain looms large, all it needs is an ill wind to spread it*". It is only with the textual part of SCK that Abese can interpret and understand Mojagbe's intention and the urgency of the errand as the lexical choice "fire" implies. Danger is symbolized with fire such that at the mention of the word fire, one senses and knows there is danger lurking around. Here in his utterance, Mojagbe with the on-going events and activities of the previous night knows there is fire on the mountain. The proverb therefore is suggestive of danger. Without prior SCK of the use of these metaphors in Yoruba proverbs, Abese will not understand the meaning and Mojagbe's use of fire to signify danger and his intention in this situation.

Instead of waiting for further instructions having understood the need for urgency as the lexical choices specify, Abese make haste to leave. If prior common ground knowledge of proverbial Yoruba lexical choice is not shared between Abese and King Mojagbe, Abese ought to be running around shouting help, calling on people nearby to come and assist to put out the fire, or better still, ask Mojagbe where the mountain is and where the fire is burning. However, with the application of SCK and the SSK as they share mutual lexical choices on the Yorubas' cultural and situational front, the communication becomes successful, Abese understands Mojagbe's proverb, the intention, and realizes the danger symbolized in the metaphor of fire. With the application the textual parts SCK and SSK here therefore Abese realizes the significance and the urgency of the issue at hand and prostrates in response which signifies understanding and compliance as he makes to leave (in a hurry).

Other lexical choices that are employed to appeal, pacify and caution in the proverbs are projected in the extract below:

Ex.: 5. Mojagbe: ... *there is limit even for the dance and perching freedom of pigeons, even in the house of peace lovers.* Take him away and do what I asked.

Abese: Yes my Lord, but a king does not kill his own blood. No matter what, I am sorry to speak so boldly.

(Mojagbe pp 19)

Mojagbe in anger cautions Abese through the proverb “*there is limit even for the dance and perching freedom of pigeons even in the house of peace lovers*”. The metaphor basically serves as cautionary piece to tell Abese that no matter how free an atmosphere may be, there should be some restrictions. It is only with the application of the textual piece of SCK that the information here can be digested. For example, there is no pigeon at the scene performing or dancing, the metaphorical allusion here shows the height of Mojagbe’s anger and his commitment to his decision to execute Esan, the supposed assassin.

A glean of the excerpt shows that the cautionary piece wrapped in the metaphorical proverb is not lost on Abese. Abese of course applies the SCK of the aspect of the Yoruba proverb that relates with pigeon's dance in the house of piece lovers and realized that the King is talking about reservations being even in certain circumstances, however, boundaries should not be overstepped. With shared cultural knowledge, Abese understands and shows an apt response in his words, "yes my Lord". However, he believes that even with the limit to the freedom of perching and dancing of pigeons in the house of peace lovers, there must be exceptions, hence his further argument that a king does not kill his own blood.

This proverb in example 6 below also relates how SSK enhances the interpretation of utterances in the play. Here is excerpt 6:

Ex 6 : Mojagbe: Rise, friends of the throne, or is it not safe to call you that anymore?

Balogun : We do not understand. Kabiyesi...

Mojagbe: But you do, Balogun, *hands that are clean does abhor dirt, unless the owner intends to wash them again.* I am worried when you feign ignorance in the face of the consequence of actions taken by you.

Balogun: (*Look, plainly into their eyes and allow chiefs who confirm their innocence*) We still do not understand you, Kabiyesi. Speak plainly, your highness.

(Mojagbe. pp 25)

An application of SSK to the proverb “*hands that are clean abhor dirt, unless the owner intends to wash them again*” enhances Balogun's ability to adequately understand Mojagbe’s accusation here. In Yoruba land, the metaphorical allusion to one's hand not been clean actually shows indictment. Here, Mojagbe accuses Balogun and other chiefs of insincerity, hence, their “clean hands” “abhorring dirt”.

It is evident that Balogun shares prior common ground with Mojagbe in this situation, else, he would not have been able to process the meaning and the intent of the proverb. This is reflected in his response processed through common ground of SSK, "we still do not understand you, Kabiyesi". Not that Balogun and the other chiefs do not understand the proverb and the accusation of Mojagbe, but they are trying to run away from the accusation, especially relative to the issue at hand.

Also, when Balogun consults Esu, Saura the priest, is intolerant of Balogun's inquisition and because Saura is feeling sleepy already, he attempts to summarize Balogun's problems and tells him what to do. However, this does not go down well with Balogun who decides to make his problems known to exit himself. This is evident in his words as presented in example 7 below:

Ex.7: 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, pp 10)

Balogun in the extract above reveals that he has a boil, whereas in actual sense, he has no boil but with mutual ground of SCK, Saura understands the boil that Balogun is talking about. As the proverb reveals, Balogun has a boil on him that is painful, as such, it hurts, and he is the only one that knows where it hurts and how much it hurts. The pain that Balogun goes through is embossed in the metaphoric lexical item "boil", indicating the problem. Hence, the caution that Saura should talk less and allow him to state his case before Esu. 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 showing a successful understanding of the proverb.

The following is another instance where common ground and the lexical choices foreground successful communication. Let us examine 8 below:

Ex. 8: 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. (*brmgs 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, pp 27)

The proverb here is based on the Yoruba aspect of the masquerade cult. Without an in-depth understanding of the masquerade cult in Yorubaland, and mutual knowledge obtained through shared cultural knowledge, it would have been the King cannot interpret the proverb appropriately. Then there is need for a shared social knowledge to interpret the situation. With the manifestation of evil occurrence all around him, the King knows that all is not well. Hence, he commissioned Oluawo to inquire from the gods the cause of the social crisis. Specifically, Oluawo reveals that Esu has a hand in it, as such, Esu must be appeased. Doting on Yoruba's cultural belief, Yerima puts Esu in the center of the confusion in the play as is customary of the Yorubas. As mentioned earlier, Esu is the mischief maker. Yorubas' belief is that Esu is a mischief maker, the short man that lives at crossroads. These and other accolades belong to Esu.

When there is problem, it is Orunmila that people go to for solution. Hence, Oluawo's consulting Orunmila. True to expectation, Orunmila sees into the unseen and locates the problem as originating from Esu. The height of the problems and social disorder leaves the King with no other solution other than to speedily offer the sacrifice, however, the Oluawo sees differently. The culprit is not in Esu but in somebody that is sponsoring him, and that is the person that Oluawo refers to as somebody that has money to spend, hence his warning through the proverb "no matter how a masquerade is he is propelled by the carrier".

Another instance where shared knowledge of language use, lexical choices, referents and references are employed in the interpretation of proverbs is further exposed in example 9 below:

Ex. 9 Oba: See what my son has brought to me? Shame!
With his oily hands, he stains my most treasured robes"

Oluawo: Kabiyesi

(Ajagunmale,²⁸).

The King's anger towards his son is highlighted here without any lexical item showing the act of anger. However, it is only with the application of prior SCK and SSK of Yoruba proverbs, situational and cultural uses, that the interlocutors, with shared common grounds, 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. Of course, there is no robe to be pointed at nor is there visible oil. All mentioned items in the proverb here are metaphorical which can only be understood by the people that share same mammon ground of SSK and SSK.

Shared socio-cultural Experiences, Previous or Past Immediate

In this instance, interlocutors are expected to share same cultural experiences having lived in same society, and sharing from past or immediate socio-cultural experiences. Let us see some examples. Abese employs yet other lexical choices in his use of language as metaphorical proverb in his conversation with Mojagbe, the King. In the proverb, Abese refers to Mojagbe as " a bin" where all sores are heaped. In Yoruba land, the use of this lexical choice comes up in instances where insult, embarrassment, disrespect and other related face threatening issues emanate. This is employed wittingly such that the affected person will overlook such without resorting to anger.

Ex. 10 Abese: (*Chants*) *Kabiyesi, sit. No matter how angry a sane man is with his mother, he will never slap her or else the land will reject him.... and people will call him mad. Ewo! Kabiyesi Mojagbe, a king is a bin into which all sorts of people heap all sorts. Sit, my Kabiyei. sit. Like a king and smile.!* (slowly *Mojagbe sits*).

Mojagbe: Very well. I shall tell you so that the new Alaafin will hear

(*Mojagbe pp 59*)

A mother in Yorubaland is regarded as one's god. It is unheard of that one beats up or slaps his mother hence such an act is considered an abomination. This is reflected in Abese's cautioning piece realized through Yoruba proverb, "*no matter how angry a sane man is angry with his mother, he will never slap her*" It is only with the application of SSK of son cum mother relationship and the cultural upholding of maternal institution respect as a *mini god* in Yorubaland that Mojagbe can understand the cautionary note in this utterance.

With the application of shared social knowledge to the proverb, Mojagbe understands the caution and this is evident in his response "very well....". Mojagbe is presented in the play as an aggressive man. He gets angry easily. In his state of anger, Abese tries to appeal to him to calm down.

Another metaphorical proverb is employed in the example below when Mojagbe plays around the Yorubas practice of sharing bean cakes at funerals.

Ex : 11 Otun: Kabiyesi. these are mothers of the village

Mojagbe: Then let them treat me as a son! Hear their song.

An undignified chant for a king. Haa, already they sing my funeral song Not a word of praise. Osi, your women dance well to the song and dance you have crafted... but you all sit like shigidi before me. *I shall not sit to share bean cakes at my own funeral. Ewo!*

Balogun: Kabiyesi

Otun: Caution. Kabiyesi

(*Mojagbe. pp.31*)

It is only with the application of the shared cultural knowledge to the metaphorical proverb and a shared situational knowledge to process the proverbial use of the word "bean cake" and "funeral" that both Balogun and Otun understand Mojagbe's accusation here. It is common

practice according to Yoruba culture to share bean cake at the demise of a person on the eight day. The mention of bean cake been shared for Mojagbe is suggestive of the fact that the he is dead. Mojagbe, as he does not have enough evidence to confront Balogun and the chief's resorts to speaking via proverbs to lay claim to his accusation that the chiefs are planning his demise. With the application of SSK, both Balogun and Otun understand the challenge as evident in their responses which come in form of cautionary piece for the king.

When Balogun goes to Saura to inquire how far he has gone in employing Esu to fight for his cause having sent goods in double fold to Esu, Saura reveals his ignorance of the cause for the gift and persuades Balogun to reveal it himself. Let us examine example 12:

Ex. 12: 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 Kolanut is usually better described by the mouth of the chewer. Your messenger delivered the message like a messenger.

Balogun: Uhun!

(Ajagunmale. pp 9).

Saura tries to know the cause of Balogun's challenges. At a point, Saura cannot go ahead with the investigation other than to revert to let Balogun to talk to Esu and explain issues, this Saura packs in a metaphorical proverb. The kolanut is symbolic in Yoruba land as it is used in important occasions, especially in making enquiries, for prayers, entertainment of guests and so on. It is only with the shared cultural knowledge (SCK) of the Yoruba practice of sharing kolanut that makes Balogun to understand the proverb and this is reflected in his response "uhun!" signifying consent. Thus we could infer that Balogun himself already understands the need for Balogun to talk to Esu personally.

CONCLUSION

Our application of the principle of common ground projected through textual parts of Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK) and shared socio-cultural knowledge (SCK) to the interpretation of proverbs in Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe* and *Ajagunmale* reveals that Yerima largely depends on the use of Yoruba proverbs as communication tool in the play. The proverbs are mainly metaphorical and are known to be employed in Yoruba daily utterances and where they are found in the plays, they serve to warn/caution, emphasize, lament, accuse, and explain. Our analysis in this study substantiates Odebumi's (2007) claim that Yerima's style of handling proverbs naturally shows that his plays are accessible to readers, both local and foreign, who desire to come to term and share social knowledge with Nigeria culture and tradition through proverbs. We also agree that the proverbs are indispensable materials for proverbial pedagogy. The study is yet another contribution to existing literature on how Ahmed Yerima uses language to project his perspectives in his works. It also serves as template to examine related proverb constructs in other African culture-based refracted universes.

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