

A Pragmatic Study of Yoruba Proverbs in English

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the unique attributes of man. Although it has been revealed that other animals communicate, nonetheless, it is yet not clear if one can define their language in the same sense that we regard man's method of "communicating ideas, feelings and desires by means of a system of sounds and sound symbols" (Hornby 1974:473). Language is therefore important to man "in terms of creative ingenuity, intellectual capacity and social uplift above all other creatures" (Adeyanju 2002:527).

Following Trudgill's (1985) submission of the functional nature of language, we can identify two aspects of language behaviour from a social point of view. First, the function of language in establishing social relationships. Second, the role played by language in conveying information about the speaker. It is clear that these aspects of linguistic behaviour are reflections of the fact that there is a close inter-relationship between language and society (Trudgill *ibid*: 14). Language, in the hands of man, inevitably becomes a tool for societal relation. It is natural that the existence of society necessitates the existence of language which acts as a tool for social interaction and consequently portrays the nuances observable from one society to another. The importance of language to society therefore pulls the need to investigate the relationship between language and society.

2. NATURE OF PROVERB

Various scholars have made several attempts at defining proverb. Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines it as a brief epigrammatic saying that is a popular byword. It is a truth couched in obscure language. Bonser (1930:xvii) defines proverb as: a concise and expressive, often figurative saying in common use, which acts as a conveniently formulated means of expression, charged with emotional significance, to indicate and transmit the facts of experience, or to point out by injunction or prohibition an ideal of social conduct and behaviour.

Proverb therefore represents an expression of the thought and life of a society. It represents tribal wisdom which could be handed down in an easily remembered form. The proverbs of a native people are interwoven with the details of their daily life, and must be studied in that context. Proverbs are a highly cherished mode of communication in the pre-literate societies of Nigeria and even in the traditional societies of the Yoruba nation. Among the Yoruba, for instance, the knowledge and use of proverbs are deliberately cultivated by adults especially the elders. This is because the ability to inject appropriate proverbs into conversation is regarded as a mark of good oratory, experience and wisdom. For this reason, proverbs are reserved for elders while the younger ones are expected to seek permission from the elderly before appropriating proverbs in any communicative event.

Proverbs are generally employed for lubricating and embellishing conversation (Ugwu 1990:122). They are also used to educate, entertain and to make a point in an argument. These usages are largely influenced by situations which in effect determine their meanings.

This work covers a wide range of the people's cultural behaviour encompassing real life contexts covering advisorial sessions, comment, reproach, warning, encouragement, conflictual contexts and other contexts that would advance the originality of this work.

The Yoruba are well known for their love of diplomacy especially with respect to communication. In their social exchanges, they believe that it is a very bad form to "speak with the whole mouth". It would, for instance, be indecent to reprimand directly a friend who has committed an offense; the Yoruba would, through well considered references to what the sages used to say, make the offender realized his/her wrongdoing.

Since proverbs are the repository of the collective wisdom of the tribe, tribal etiquette dictates that the older members of the community, who have amassed wisdom with their years are the rightful users. But since the Yoruba are very modest people, an elder using a proverb among his peers either prefaces it with, "awon agba a maa pa owe kan" ("the elders used to say a proverb") or it concludes with "e fori jimi, o da bi owe" ("please forgive me, that sounded like a proverb"), to which the listeners reply, "wa a pa mi" ("may you {live long enough} to use another"). It is possible, of course, that because proverbs are beloved of the people, and because a speech bereft of proverbs would be considered dull, the formulaic preface and conclusion are the speaker's means of making sure that the audience does not miss his clever use of a proverb.

The Yoruba language is exceptionally rich in proverbs, and new ones are constantly being coined. They are at most times profoundly philosophical, sometimes expedient, sometimes mischievous, sometimes funny; but always, they are refreshingly efficient in placing contemporary incidents within the continuum of tribal tradition. To adequately unearth the pragmatic content of their proverb within their socio-cultural landscape therefore, a pragmatic approach to the study is selected.

3. THE SPEECH ACTS THEORY

Speech Acts Theory was first developed by John Austin as published in 1962 in his post humorous book, How to Do Things with Words. According to Abram (1982 as quoted by Lawal 2003:151), it was originally proposed as a reaction to the logical positivists who analysed sentences according to their verifiable or falsifiable, truth conditions. Thus, Speech Acts Theory was propounded as a reaction to the weaknesses of truth-condition theory, the foremost of which is that it only accounts for one type of sentence: declarative, indicative sentence; it has no means of capturing what we mean by using interrogative or imperative sentences. In addition, it does not account for sentences in a declarative form which are not descriptions of events.

According to Austin (1962), sentences are better judged on the basis of what they can do instead of judging their truism or falsity. To him, performatives cannot be true or false, only felicitous or infelicitous. Austin creates a clear distinction between performatives and constatives, that is, statements that attempt to describe reality and can be judged true or false. He comes to the conclusion that most utterances, at their base, are performative in nature. That is, the speaker is nearly always doing something by saying something. Austin describes three characteristics, or acts, of statements that begin with the building blocks of words and end with effects those words have on an audience. Locutionary acts - the meaningful utterance; the illocutionary acts - the intention for the utterance and; perlocutionary acts - what we achieve by saying something. Austin focused on illocutionary acts, maintaining that here we might find the "force" of a statement and demonstrate its performative nature. He further explains that these acts must be explicated within a social context

3.1 Searle's Classification of Speech Acts:

Austin's work had an enormous impact on linguistic philosophy, and thereby on linguistics, especially in its pragmatic variant. Austin's thinking was further developed and codified by the American philosopher John R. Searle, who had studied under Austin in the fifties, and subsequently became the main proponent and defender of the former's ideas. Searle claims the illocutionary act is the minimal complete unit of human linguistic communication. Searle, while accepting the notion of illocutionary act (and its contextual consideration), does not accept the locutionary act but instead proposes four conditional yardsticks for telling one speech act from another. These are: (a) Propositional content (b) Preparatory conditions (c) Sincerity conditions and (d) Essential condition. The propositional content states specifically the features that should be considered in dealing with the meaning of an utterance (Odebunmi 2006:82). The preparatory

conditions include that the speaker should be in a position of authority over the hearer. The sincerity condition is that the speaker wants the ordered act done while the essential condition has to do with the fact that the speaker intends the utterance as an attempt to get the hearer to do the act (Coulthard 1979:24).

Searle (1969) maintains that illocutionary acts are performed with intentionality. Whenever one person says something to another, the speaker intends to perform an illocutionary act. An “illocutionary act is communicatively successful if the speaker’s illocutionary intention is recognized by the hearer”. While the number of uses for language is “enormous”, Searle believes that there is a limited number of things we can do with language; that is, the potential propositional content is limitless in the structure of the illocutionary act. To this end, Searle posits the notion of “illocutionary point”, which is the intention behind the illocutionary act stated in a verb that describes the work the sentence is doing. This is perhaps to end the puzzle of the number of verbs that identify illocutionary acts or describe the effect of the illocutionary act.

According to Searle’s taxonomy of elementary illocutionary acts, there are only five illocutionary points that speakers can attempt to achieve in expressing a propositional content with an illocutionary force: these are the assertive (or representative), commissive, directive, declarative and expressive illocutionary points. Assertive statements may be judged true or false because they purport to describe a state of affairs in the world. Commissive statements commit the speaker to a course of action as described by the propositional content. Directive statements attempt to make the hearer’s action fit the propositional content. Declarative statements attempt to change the world by “representing it as having been changed”. That is, declarations bring about some alteration in the status or condition of the referred to object or objects solely by virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed (Mey 2004:122). Expressive statements express inner states of speakers; the expression is essentially subjective and tells us nothing about the world.

Each illocutionary act with a force has an illocutionary point which is internal to its being an act with that force. That illocutionary point determines a particular direction of fit between words and things. The illocutionary act is satisfied when the success of fit is achieved from the appropriate direction of fit. Assertive illocutionary acts like assertions, conjectures and hypotheses have the words-to-things direction of fits. They are satisfied when the propositional content corresponds to a fact which exists in the world. Commissive illocutionary acts like promises and vows and directive illocutionary acts like requests and commands have the things to-words direction of fit. They are satisfied when things are changed by a future action of the speaker (in the case of directives) so as to correspond to the propositional content. Declarative illocutionary acts like appointments, benedictions, and condemnations have the double direction of fit. They are satisfied when the speaker does things in the world at the moment of the utterance just by virtue of saying that he does them. Finally, expressive illocutionary acts like thanks and apologies have the null direction of fit. Their only point is to express attitudes of the speaker about facts of the world. They are not satisfied or unsatisfied but rather appropriate or not. Searle’s classification of illocutionary acts is more general and less language dependent than Austin’s. It can be justified in terms of direction of fit. His twelve criteria are supposed to lay the foundations for a better classificatory procedure. Yet, out of his twelve criteria, Searle only uses four. These are presented below as put together by Mey (ibid: 119):

- Illocutionary point (the ‘force’ of the speech acts in Austin’s terminology).
- Direction of fit (the way the speech act fits the world).
- Expressed psychological state (of the speaker: a ‘belief may be expressed as a statement, an assertion, a remark, etc.).
- Content (what the speech act is ‘about’; ‘a promise to attend the party’ has the same content as a ‘refusal’, and so on).

4. YORUBA PROVERBS IN ENGLISH

This chapter presents Yoruba proverbs translated into English. The life of an average Yoruba person is permeated and saturated with various practices which regulate the events of his/her life. In other words, an average Yoruba person is guided by norms which serve as the fulcrum of his/her belief system on marriage, family life, labour, religion, social relation (like friendship, mutual support and respect, etc), health, life and death, etc. All these constitute the premises that

dictate the world-view of the members of the Yoruba speech community which are expressible through proverb usage. This section therefore presents select Yoruba proverbs and their pragmatic translations in English.

In this chapter, a total number of twenty-five (25) Yoruba proverbs are presented. The data were elicited from two sources, that is, written text and home video. These methods represent both the documented and the real-life demonstration of the subject under review. Nine aspects of the culture of the Yoruba people reflect in these proverbs. The aspects cover the following areas: social relation, justice and ethics, religion, philosophy, life and death, beauty, faith, agriculture and game. They represent aspects of Yoruba culture which reflect in the data gathered. They have been classified accordingly. We do not however presume that these numbers are exhaustive of aspects of the culture of the Yoruba people which can be found in their proverbs. Here, the data are presented in the Oyo dialect of Yoruba language (as proposed earlier) to be followed by appropriate translation in English.

5. ANALYSIS

A growing body of research theorized on language use with the aim of better understanding the implications of language on culture and vice-versa. Searle's Speech Acts Theory based on Austin's performative utterances, divided speech acts into five categories: Directives, Commissive, Expressive, Representative and Declaration. This chapter aims at testing, with a platform of selected Yoruba proverbs, the validity of Searle's theory when applied within the Yoruba proverbial context.

The proverbs which shall constitute our analytical texts have been drawn from various segments that comprise the beliefs and practices of the Yoruba people. They are altogether twenty-five (25) in number.

Text 1: Aro kii jo lasan, omo araiya nii fonna si i:

'The fireplace does not burn on its own; it is people who kindle the fire on it'.

The illocutionary point in this speech act is to assert the fact that things do not happen by chance. It employs imagery to relay the fact that events are engineered by people. Its direction of fit is words-to-world since the speech refers to consequences of actions that might be undertaken by people. The expressed psychological state is a remark on the speaker's belief: the speaker believes the expressed proposition and also wants the hearer to believe it. The relevant speech act, therefore, fulfils the conditions that identify assertives. It is thus, an assertive speech acts.

Text 2: Bi iku ba n pa oju gba eni, ami orun a ma so ni:

'When one's contemporary dies, it induces an aura of mortality (in one)'.

The illocutionary point in this speech act is to inform the hearer of the experience of mortality which robs on one when one hears of the demise of a colleague. It captures a natural feeling which people experience. In another context, it may indicate the subjective feeling of someone who may have witnessed the demise of a friend. Thus, it will not just inform but express the state of the feeling of the hearer. Its direction of fit is words-to-world since it captures an experience. The expressed psychological state is a statement of belief. The speaker's intention is to point attention to a state of affair in the world. The relevant speech acts, therefore, fit the conditions that identify assertive.

Text 3: Igba a ri ni l'owuro eni :

'A man's success brings him into limelight'.

This act reflects an illocution point that aims to relay an experience in the world by asserting the philosophy of the people with regard to the concept of morning in the belief system of the Yoruba people. Morning in this regard is not referring to a period in a day, rather it speaks of the fact that a man only gets to be known when he succeeds. The speaker's illocutionary force therefore intends to convey a world of belief steeped in the culture of the Yoruba people. Its direction of fit is words-to-world. The expressed psychological state is an assertion of belief: the speaker believes the expressed proposition and also wants the hearer to believe it too. The act therefore fulfils the conditions that identify assertive. It is, thus, an assertive speech act.

Text 4: O ko sa gi l'ogbe, o ko ta oguro, l'ofa, o de idi ope o gbe nu s'oke: o fe ni iro?

'You do not gash the tree; you do not pierce the raphia palm with an arrow, you come to the base of the palm tree and lift your mouth; does it (the wine) flow for nothing?'

This text contains two speech acts corresponding to the two functions identifiable therein. The first illocution point is to inform the hearer that nothing goes for free. Every benefit has the seed of effort attached to it. Its direction of fit is words-to-world since the proposition asserts a condition in the world (of a culture). The expressed psychological state is a statement of belief that nothing goes for nothing. The speech act, therefore, fulfills the conditions that identify assertive.

The second illocution point correlates to the classical imperative which embodies an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something. Its direction of fit is world-to-words since the world is adapted to the uttered word. Thus imperatives (at least in intention) change the world in that the speaker wants the hearer to do something according to his/her wish. The expressed psychological state is conveyance of instruction. The speech act, therefore, also fulfills the conditions that identify directive. It is therefore, a directive speech act.

Text 5: Ise ni ogun ise:

'Productivity dispels poverty'.

The text portrays a proposition with an illocution point that aims to inform the hearer that a formidable escape from lack is work. Its direction of fit is words-to-world: the proposition captures an affair in the world - that one will have to do something in order to terminate poverty. The expressed psychological state is a statement of belief. The relevant speech act, therefore, fulfills the conditions that identify assertive.

Text 6: Omo yi ma wo mi l'oju, eni a ba lo s'ode ni a a wo l'oju:

'Child, keep your eyes on me; we keep our eyes on the person with whom we go out visiting'.

This text contains two speech acts corresponding to the two message units outlined above. The illocutionary point in the first speech act is an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something. Its direction of fit is world-to-words since the speaker is committed to getting the hearer to do something he/she thinks is right to do. The expressed psychological state is a conveyance of instruction: the speaker expresses something which he/she also wants the hearer to do. Thus, the speech act fulfills the conditions that identify directives. It is, thus, a directive speech act.

The second illocution point is to express a state of affair in the world based on experience. It posits that in partnership, independence is a risk. Its direction of fit is words-to-world since the uttered statement is adapted to the world. The expressed psychological state is a comment on the speaker's belief - the speaker wants the hearer to be informed of his/her belief. It is thus, an assertive speech act since it fulfills the conditions that identify an assertive.

Text 7: Bi owo eni ko ba te eku ida, a kii beru iku ti o pa baba eni:

'Until a man holds the hilt of the sword firmly in his hand, he does not seek revenge for his father's death'.

The illocution point of the above statement is to assert the need for patience in dealing with sensitive issues of life. The speaker employs an imagery of a mature fighter with unbeatable instrument of warfare ready to avenge a grievous wrong. The aim is to teach a lesson on patience and perseverance. Its direction of fit is words-to-world since the statement is adapted to the world: it is a reference to an experience in the world. The expressed psychological state is a statement of belief. The speech act, therefore, fulfills the conditions that identify assertives. It is, thus, an assertive speech act.

Text 8: Fija fun olorun ja ki o f' owo leran :

'Be patient and let God avenge for you'.

The illocution point in the speech act is to admonish one to desist from an act that is detrimental to one's life. It invariably is an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something. Its direction of fit reflects a situation where the world is adapted to the utterance since the speaker wants to get someone to do something; it is therefore world-to-words. The expressed psychological state relates to giving of advice. The relevant speech act, therefore, is indicative of a directive speech act since it fulfills the conditions that identify directives.

Text 9: Etutu ko fe poroporo d' enu, kiniun l' omo araiye n fe ni mo:

'The white ants do not really love the dry stalk of corn; those we think love us, only do so minimally'.

The content of the above proposition reflects an illocution point that aims to inform the hearer of the need to be wary of people. Parallelism, as a rhetorical device, is used here to correlate the activity of man to that of the ant: man does not trust another man as ant cannot be trusted with dry stalk of corn. The speaker, by this statement, therefore refers to an experience in the world. Its direction of fit is words-to-world: the speaker refers to an experience in the world. The expressed psychological state is an assertion of belief: the speaker expresses his belief to the hearer, not necessarily to cause him/her to join the belief, but primarily to get him/her informed. Going by all these descriptions, therefore, it is reasonable to affirm that the speech act fulfills the conditions that identify assertives; it is, thus, an assertive speech act.

Text 10: Gba mi l' osiko ojo, ki n gba o l' asiko erun:

'Help me during the rainy season, and I will help you when the season is dry (one good turn deserves another)'

This text is an example of a classical compound structure. It contains two parts with two speech acts following each other in a sequential order. The perlocutionary effect of the first naturally induces the second. The first illocutionary point puts an effort on the speaker to get the hearer to do something. Its direction of fit therefore adapts the world to the utterance leading to world-to-words arrangement. The expressed psychological state is a statement of request: the speaker craves the hearer to help him/her do something. The relevant speech act, therefore, is constitutive of a directive having fulfilled the conditions that identify directive speech act.

The second part consists of an illocutionary point which aims at operating a change in the world by means of creating an obligation in the speaker. The speaker commits him/herself to a promise. Its direction of fit is same as the first part (world-to-words). The expressed psychological state is the commitment of the speaker to a future action. The speech act therefore is a commissive since it fulfills the conditions that identify commissives.

Text 11: Ti' ju fun mi ki n ti'ju fun o, eni ti ju fun ni ni a nti ju fun:

'Respect is reciprocal'.

The illocutionary point in the above speech act is meant to instill lesson in the hearer for a right conduct, particularly one that has to do with respecting or honouring others. The act is therefore meant for correction and is committed to getting the hearer to do something. Its direction of fit is world-to-words: the speaker attempts to get something done by describing an act. The expressed psychological state is an attempt to correct since one is not expected to utter such utterance in isolation of a context that requires one correcting an inappropriate behaviour. The speech act, therefore, having fulfilled the above conditions that identify directives, is qualified to be described as directive speech acts.

Text 12: Onisango ti o jo ti ko tapa, abuku ara re ni:

'The Sango worshipper who dances but does not kick the air discredits him/herself.'

The illocutionary point in the speech act aims to instruct the hearer to take a befitting action. The speaker deploys reference (as a contextual feature) to a religious attribute to inspire right conduct in the hearer. Its direction of fit is world-to-words, that is, it reflects a situation where the world is adapted to the uttered words. The expressed psychological state portends rebuke. The speaker has the intention of reprimanding the hearer for taking an inappropriate action or decision. The relevant speech act, therefore, satisfies the conditions that identify assertives. It is, thus, an assertive speech act.

Text 13: Ore wo ni orisa se fun abuke ti o bi mo ti o so ni Orisajimi?

'What kindness does the hunchback owe the gods that made her name her child 'god gave me this'.

The above act is an example of an indirect speech act. Although, the speaker indeed utters a question (formally characterized as such by word order, intonation etc) of the wh-type, the hearer nonetheless, is not expected to answer the question; the speaker rather intends, through the act, to commit the hearer to change his/her position as regards a decision or action. The speech act (used as metaphor) is therefore never intended as an inquiry into something, it rather embodies an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something. Its direction of fit is world-to-words. The expressed

psychological state is an indirect approach to giving advice: the speaker wants the hearer to change his/her mind towards a person or event. The speech act, therefore, satisfies the conditions that identify directives. It is, thus, a directive speech act.

Text 14: Orisa kekere ko se ha para:

‘A god, however small, cannot be stuck up in the rafter’.

The illocutionary point in the speech act is to draw attention to a belief. The speaker wants the hearer to recognize the importance of a thing, hence uses the metaphoric utterance to convey such proposition. Its direction of fit is words-to-world since the content of the proposition refers to an object in the world. The expressed psychological state therefore is a statement of belief: the speaker believes the proposition and also wants the hearer to believe same. The conditions we have identified, therefore, satisfy the requirements for an assertive. It is, thus, an assertive speech act.

Text 15: Eni se obe ate a ni ki orisa pa a eni ti ko se rara nko?

‘A person cooks stew without salt and we ask the gods to kill him, what about the person who does not cook at all?’

Here is another example of an indirect speech act. The illocutionary point is not to get the hearer to answer the overt question, but to request that s(he) gets lenient on a matter. The speech act therefore comes as an imagery which requires the speaker to get the hearer to do something. Its direction of fit is world-to-words; and the expressed psychological state reflects a request: the speaker would rather choose to cushion the illocutionary force to make it sound as a question rather than a command. The relevant speech act, therefore, fulfills the conditions that identify directives, thus making it a directive speech act.

Text 16: Awo nii gbe awo n’igbowo, bi awo ko bag be awo n’igbonwo, awo a te, awo a ya:

‘Cult members must exhibit mutual help and support, if they fail in this respect, they will be opened to ridicule’.

The above proposition contains two speech acts. The first illocutionary point is to inform the hearer of the state of affair within a group, that is, the speaker aims to intimate the hearer of how solidarity is maintained in the occult. The direction of fit is words-to-world since the utterance gives a proposition on the state of affairs in the world. The expressed psychological state is belief - the speaker states what he/she believes to be the norm among the sect expressed in the proposition. The speech act, therefore, is an assertive since it satisfies the conditions that identify such act.

The second illocutionary point portends an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something. The speaker actually borrows from the experience in the world to admonish the hearer on what is expected to be done. Its direction of fit is world-to-words. The expressed psychological state captures the feature of an advice. The relevant speech act, therefore, satisfies the conditions that identify a directive.

Text 17: Egbe eni ni a ngun yan ewura pe :

‘One should invite one’s contemporaries to join one in eating pounded water yam’.

The illocutionary point of this speech act puts the speaker in a position to get the hearer to do something. With reference to taboo, the speaker aims to pass instruction on right conduct. Its direction of fit is world-to-words. The expressed psychological state portrays a remark about the belief of the speaker: s (he) believes in the content of the proposition which is rooted in the belief system of the Yoruba culture. The speech act, therefore, identifies directive, it is therefore a directive speech act.

Text 18: B’owo je, obi t’ o so l’erun!

‘(You are a) wrong-fated kola tree which spoils trade!’

The above metaphoric utterance alludes to the world of flora. The illocutionary point is to reprimand the hearer for a wrong committed. To achieve this objective, the speaker likens such misdemeanour to a kola tree, which produces during the dry season with a resultant effect of a bad harvest. Based on this background description, the fit captures the world in the utterance producing words-to-word direction. The psychological state portends an expression of anger: the speaker implies that the hearer has wronged his/her feeling just as kola tree, which produces during the dry season would make a

farmer unhappy. The speech act, therefore, satisfies the conditions necessary for identifying assertives. It is, thus, an assertive speech act.

Text 19: Iwa rere ni eso niyan, eyin funfun ni eso oge:

‘Good character adorns a man as white teeth adorn a fine lady’.

The parallelism between the two qualities exhibited above projects an illocutionary point that aims at informing the hearer of the importance of good conduct. It underscores the adornment induced by good character and compares it to that which derives from physical beauty, thus, creating a balance between inner and outer beauty. The text therefore is a reference to the world of beauty as enshrined in the belief system of the Yoruba. The direction of fit is words-to-world since reference is made through the utterance to the world. The expressed psychological state is an assertion of belief: the speaker believes the proposition and wants the hearer to not only believe with him/her but take to the content of the proposition. The relevant speech act, therefore, fulfills the conditions that identify assertives. It is, thus, an assertive speech act.

Text 20: Ojo pa mi, ojo ko pa ewa ara mi danu:

‘The rain beats me, but the rain cannot wash off the beauty of my body’.

The text reflects an illocution point that aims to inform the hearer of an ongoing experience. The speaker wants the hearer to know what is happening to him/her. The act is thus a reference to an experience in the world. Its direction of fit is words-to-world since the utterance captures an experience in the world. The expressed psychological state reflects a mixture of confidence and belief: the speaker acknowledges the fact that the situation holds the possibility of affecting him/her but s(he) is confident of regaining his/her balance thereafter. The relevant speech act, therefore, agrees with the conditions that identify assertives, hence, it is called an assertive speech act.

Text 21: Ogun kii gbe inu ado je

‘A charm does not stay inside its container and be effective’.

The illocutionary point is to inform the hearer of the futility of keeping an item in a useless state. This is achieved through reference made to a charm kept in a container and thus is rendered ineffective. Its direction of fit is words-to-world. The expressed psychological state is a statement of belief: the speaker expresses the belief that anything/anyone latent is unproductive and would want the hearer to believe same. The speech act is thus classified as assertive based on the conditions explained above.

Text 22: Ori adetu npete aran, ori adaran npete lati j’ oba:

‘One who is destined to wear an etu cap aims at wearing a velvet (aran) cap; one who is destined to wear a velvet cap aims at wearing a crown.’

The text refers to the insatiable nature of man. It thus refers to an experience in the world with an illocutionary point that aims to create an awareness of the nature of man. Its direction of fit is words-to-world. The expressed psychological state is knowledge dissemination: the speaker wants to call the attention of the hearer to a behaviour that characterizes human existence in the world. S(he) aims to achieve this by making reference to shared cultural knowledge between him/herself and the speaker. The speech act therefore fulfills the conditions that identify an assertives and that makes it to be recognized as assertive speech act.

Text 23: Bi ale ba le, a fi omo Ayo f’ Ayo:

‘The arrival of dusk announces the suspension of ayo game’.

The text relates to ayo game: an activity in the world of sport among the Yoruba people. Literally, therefore, it refers to an experience in the world. However, the illocution point exerts an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something— most expectedly, to stop an existing activity. Its direction of fit, hence, suggests the fact that the speaker borrows from an existing belief to get the hearer committed to an action (world-to-words). The expressed psychological state relates to giving an advice. The explanation so far tendered agrees with the conditions that identify directives ‘(though mild in its force). It is, therefore, a directive speech act.

Text 24: A kii fa ori olori l'ehin re:**'No one gives verdict to a case in absentia'.**

The illocutionary point is to express a proposition as regards what is appropriate to be done in an instance. The speaker speaks in the context of judicial practice, thus, making reference to an activity in the world. Its direction of fit is words-to-world. The expressed psychological state is a statement of conviction: the speaker holds a conviction and would like the hearer to hold same. The relevant speech act, therefore, fulfills the conditions that identify assertives. The speech act, thus, is assertive.

Text 25: Oba n pe o, o n d'ifa, b'ifa ba f' ore, bi oba ko f' ore n ko?**'The King summons you to his court, but you bluffed at the command, pretending that you are consulting ifa oracle. Do you know what will happen to you if the oracle favours you but the king descend on you brutally?'**

The text projects classical imperative without invoking any iota of inquiry. The hearer is not expected, therefore, to answer with a verbal reply; rather, the utterance embodies an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something; to 'direct' him/her towards a goal, which would oblige him/her to take heed to the wish of a superior. Its direction of fit is world-to-words since the world is adapted to the uttered words. The expressed psychological state is a remark on the authority conferred on a superior over a subordinate. The relevant speech act, therefore, fulfills the conditions that identify directives (though done indirectly). It is, thus, a directive speech act. It is important to note that the indirect expression of directive in this text aligns with the common nature of proverb to mask the truth in the face of confrontation.

6. IS THE POPULAR BELIEF THAT PROVERB FUNCTION CANNOT BE DETERMINED OUTSIDE A CONTEXT JUSTIFIABLE

Proverb offers a useful means of studying the cultural behaviour of a group of people. Scholars have posited that it must however be examined within a context to ascertain its semantic interpretation and appropriateness (Seitel 1976; Monye 1990). Odeunmi (2008:75) asserts that "given that proverbs are strictly context-text, it is essential to explore them in terms of how their meanings emerge in situations of use". This can only corroborate the general functions proverb performs. Though we must pause to state that the finding reflects that this approach cannot specifically locate a specific function for a proverb owing to the fact that the proverbs are not contextually placed. Thus, we conclude that proverbial function truly cannot be appropriately determined outside a context.

7. PROVERB STUDY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There is need to emphasize proverb study as an aspect of second language study in Nigeria. Knowledge of native proverbs enhances an understanding of English, the official language. Thus, it can be posited that an awareness of the nuances of one's mother tongue can foster the knowledge of the nuances of a second language like English. The reason is that proverb does not only supply necessary knowledge needed to straighten an awareness of the totality of a people's language; it also enhance knowledge acquisition by supplying information on aspects of culture.

The world is fast becoming a global village and cultures are increasing owing to the need to communicate. Therefore, since language and culture are to some extent, inseparable, the increasing awareness of a people's cultural content vis-à-vis their language behaviour through such a medium as proverb cannot be neglected. This is where this study becomes relevant in the scheme of globalization. In a continent like Africa, where oral tradition which serves as the main cultural reservoir is gradually rolling into extinction, it behoves us to recourse to proverbial study for enlightenment on all aspects of our culture including language behaviour. Foreigners can also gain access to this information; that way, we will be able to foster harmonious relationship and cross-cultural understanding.

8. CONCLUSION

This study has provided an empirical account of the significance, essence and functions of proverb within the Yoruba culture viz-a-viz the translation of such usages in English translation. It has the potential to promote knowledge in cross-cultural linguistic studies.

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