

## Presupposition and sentence synonyms as semantic devices in selected Yorùbá proverbs

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### Abstract

*Proverbs are witty expressions precipitated by warranted situations. These situations can be likened to certain occurrences or events which took place aforetime to invoke a proverb match. In other words, whenever there is an occurrence or event, an appropriate proverb that suits such an occurrence, is employed. The paper therefore considers some Yorùbá proverbs with a view to unraveling not only their meaning equivalence in English, but to infer from such proverbs, their underlying assumptions and proffer solutions to their inherent problems. Employing the appraisal theory of J.R. Martin (2000) through the resources of Semantics, the study intends to consider the ways we can express our personal views while reacting to the views of others. The paper analyses fifteen Yorùbá proverbs based on the semantic devices of presupposition and sentence synonyms inherent in them. The fifteen Yorùbá proverbs are translated from the source language, Yorùbá, to English in order to unravel the intended meanings of the proverb. Thus, the paper reveals that certain Yorùbá proverbs do not only serve as antidotes to correct morals or societal ills, but that they are basically employed to elicit information regarding the veracity or otherwise of some facts relating to humans and invariably, certain inanimate entities with human attributes. The identified Yorùbá proverbs are shown to attract diverse meaning possibilities and/or sentence synonyms. The paper therefore concludes by affirming that Yorùbá proverbs are not only genre sensitive, but user dependent since circumstances or events relating to humans are involved.*

**Keywords:** presupposition, sentence synonyms, Yorùbá proverbs, selected Yorùbá Proverbs, English translations, proverbs' resolution.

### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss sentence synonyms of selected Yoruba proverbs and unravel their meanings and underlying assumptions. Remarkably, proverbs are folk oriented. This means that proverbs, like 'human language', are passed from one generation to another. Hence, a speaker's belief can be expressed in his/her language use. It should be noted that every human society possesses proverbs or folk experiences for one reason or the other. Bryan & Mieder (2003:20) see proverbs as manifestations of folk speech, relatively short and functional. Owomoyela (2005) also remarks that Yorùbá proverbs are contextually based in terms of the trio of culture, social and linguistic backgrounds. Little wonder, Smith (2002:176) observes that proverbs are elements of conversation; pithy expressions laced up with ancient constructions and lexemes.

Burton (1981:84) equally defines proverbs as "... shorthand frame of reference on the moral and ethical inclinations of a people." These proverbs are, however, laced up with not only

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ancient constructions and lexemes as noted by Smith (2002:176), but with truths (Ogunwale 2014:97-98). The truths can be likened to certain underlying assumptions in the proverbs.

Mieder (1985:119) defines a proverb as follows:

*... a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.*

Folly (1991:35-36) also defines a proverb as follows:

*Structurally we are examining a traditional linguistic unit with tendencies toward certain identifiable characteristics, e.g. topic/comment and single statement. Functionally, proverbs are typically conversational and spoken; and often through metaphor, they offer a solution to a particular problem .*

*They can be viewed as a rhetorical strategy for resolving a problem by creating a metaphorical scenario in which the same type of problem is solved. They tend to be impersonal, didactic, and sometimes humorous.*

Folly (1991:35-36) and Mieder (1985:119) therefore, believed that proverbs are not only passed from one generation to the other, but can also be orally transmitted since they are 'typically conversational and spoken'. Remarkably, the conversational nature of Yorùbá proverbs has made it possible to be employed as utterances among people of the same tongue. However, while ordinary everyday language may not necessarily impact, Yorùbá proverbs do so in a variety of ways.

Similarly, Coker A. & Coker O. (2008:47-58) and Ademilokun (2014:41-48) opine that among the Yorùbás, Yorùbá proverbs are prioritized because of its rich values; which antagonise corrupt practices in order to bring out the inner beauty of the Yorùbá culture. Little wonder, Yorùbá proverbs comprise certain inanimate entities that share human attributes. The study discusses the semantic devices of presupposition and sentence synonyms as the bases for the analyses.

## 2. Presupposition and sentence synonyms

First, what is presupposition? Palmer (1996:166-173) sees presupposition as a linguistic device which unravels a fact about the truthfulness or falsity of a sentence. To Palmer (1996:166-173), if the entities used within a sentence or proposition do not exist or are false, then there is 'presupposition failure'. As a result, a sentence/proposition is neither true nor false. Whatever is the case, Palmer (1996:166-173) believes that there is a 'truth-value gap' about the kind of judgment that can be passed in relation to a sentence/proposition. In consonance with Saeed (2003:104-110), there are presupposition triggers that can assist in knowing the truthfulness or falsity of a sentence/proposition. These triggers function as 'It' clefts or 'Wh' pseudo-clefts syntactic construction. Based on contexts therefore, a sentence/proposition is assumed to be true or false. Worth knowing, presupposition involves entities as referents. Such referents, which can be the names of individuals or demonstratives like 'this' or 'those', when used within a sentence, exist. As a result, a speaker assumes that a fact is believed to be true and known by a hearer. The act is termed pragmatic presupposition which can overlap with semantic presupposition (Grundy, 2008:48). On the contrary, Yule (1996:131-132) noted that presupposition remains 'constant under negation'. For instance, the sentences, '*I once have a wife*' and '*I do not have a wife now*' presuppose a fact; '*I have a wife.*' It should be noted that beliefs and attitudes are tied to presupposition (O'Grady *et al.* 2011:225).

Second, what are sentence synonyms? Two sentences with the same meaning are termed, sentence synonyms. Consider the example; *I gave the Trophy to Team X-One.*

Paraphrase/Sentence Synonym: *I gave Team X-One the Trophy.*

From the example(s), it shows that both paraphrase and entailment are interwoven. In other words, the truth of one sentence guarantees the truth of the other (O'Grady et al 2011:200-201). Thus, sentence synonyms express sameness in linguistic construction such that the meaning of one is the same as the meaning of the other (Schmitt, 2010:129). The point just made illustrates the connection between Pragmatics and Semantics. The example of Denham&Lobeck's (2010:293); *He is going uptown*; (Intended utterance—Pragmatics) entails or means the same as its paraphrase *He is going downtown*; (Actual utterance---Semantics). The two instances in a way, explains the role of culture in language use. Further examples feature in synonymous words like *Professor/Instructor* when used in sentence construction among people of different tongues/ languages. Thus, synonymous sentences or paraphrases express the same entailment (Denham & Lobeck 2010:297-325). Remarkably, presupposition is a type of entailment because *we infer, assume* certain propositions based on a particular sentence albeit, presupposition may not look like entailment. The argument is that a particular sentence will always express the same entailment(s) but not always the same presupposition (Denham & Lobeck 2010:327). The example below illustrates the attitude expressed towards a completed thesis:

*She cried before she finished her thesis.*

*Entailment: She was working on her thesis.*

*Presupposition: She finished her thesis.*

(Denham & Lobeck 2010:327).

Following from the example, therefore, the study sees proverbs as synthetic propositions because they are facts of the world which can also have sentence synonyms based on shared attitudes and beliefs among users within the same society. Moreover, the study discusses the conversational nature of Yorùbá proverbs (as utterances) by locating it within the appraisal theory given its close similarity (affinity) to the understanding of Yorùbá proverbs.

## Yorùbá proverbs as utterances

Grundy (2008:48-69), avers utterances as having their meanings triggered by one linguistic form or the other. Malinowski (1923:307) in Verschueren (2003:75) also noted that, "... the utterance has no meaning except in the context of situation." By implication, Yorùbá proverbs, as utterances, can only make meaning in context. As earlier remarked, Yorùbá proverbs as utterances, are conversational; the said utterances involve the utterer (the speaker) and the interpreter (the listener). Undoubtedly, both participants are surrounded by myriads of experiences which will reflect in the application of the proverbs. In addition, the shared experiences will also enhance the context of situation for the utterance. As many Yorùbá proverbs abound, the choice is that of the utterer and the interpreter to decide which proverb(s) to be employed for a situation and why. To Verschueren (2003:77), the practice is termed; 'utterer's production choices and 'interpreter's production choices' respectively. Verschueren (2003:77) further noted three worlds central to the production of an utterance: the physical, the social and the mental world and since language is cognitive, one world leads to the other thus, making the three worlds inseparable and interrelated. Being justifiably and tacitly permissible as a means of communication, the Yorùbá proverbs employed for this study have been carefully selected in order to know the opinions of the Yorùbás on their applications. It is on this premise the study kicks off its discussion on the adopted theoretical framework.

## Theoretical background

The appraisal theory of J.R. Martin (2000:145) emphasizes the "semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgments alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations". Three main components are central to the appraisal theory: attitude, engagement and graduation. At the level of attitude, utterances are subject to aesthetic assessments with entities painted negatively or positively within a proposition. At the level of engagement, linguistic

resources like modality, concession, polarity and various adverbials are subject to evaluation on the part of both the speaker and the listener as to whether a fact is meaningfully negotiated as expected or not. At the level of graduation, judgment is passed across concerning a text; whether the message conveyed in a text; the instance of Yorùbá proverbs as utterances, is intense or less intense. However, at each of the levels, it is expected of the language user to know when the intended message in a text is meaningfully negotiated. The concern of this study is therefore, the need for the language user to proffer solutions to the less intense meanings of a text as it draws insights from the feminist theory. The feminist theory over the years, concentrates attention on analyzing gender inequality. Several themes like discrimination, sexual objectification, stereotype, oppression, patriarchy among others are explored. Feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, Nancy Cott and Toril Moi to mention but few, all averred that women in the society are portrayed negatively since they differ in the following respects: sex, race and class. The differences, as discovered, have made women or the female gender, incapable of living above societal expectations. Worth knowing, the data for this study which comprise fifteen different Yorùbá proverbs randomly selected from Sheba's, *Yorùbá Proverbs with Feminine Lexis*, espoused the themes of feminism like oppression, discrimination, stereotyping and sexual objectification. Hence, majority of the selected proverbs are gender biased in order to know the attitudinal response of the Yorùbás towards the two sexes on one hand and their different expected roles on the other. The selected Yorùbá proverbs also have the following features: possession of at least a sentence synonym; underlying assumptions (presupposition); and the fact that each proverb invokes negative feelings basically to correct individual or societal ills. Employing the semantic devices of sentence synonyms and presupposition, the selected proverbs are analysed in the next section

## Representation and analysis of the proverbs

### 1. À tètè ló bìnrin kò kan omo bíbí.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 1):** The proverb employs the feminist theme of sexual objectification by using 'lò bìnrin' to imply marriage. This is because among the Yorùbás, having a woman, ('lò bìnrin') implies marriage because a woman is seen as a sex object. However, the proverb is out to enjoin spouses in late or early marriages to be hopeful and accept fate.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 1):** Being early to have woman, does not concern childbirth / Early marriage does not imply having children early.

The sentence synonym of Yorùbá Proverb 1:

(a) Ài tètè ló bìnrin kò ní kí a má bímo, àrèmo ló màa kéré.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 1(a)):** Being late to have woman, does not concern not having childbirth; it is just that one's first born will be younger / Late marriage does not prevent one having children; it is just that one's eldest child will be younger.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *À tètè ló bìnrin* (Early marriage), *Ài tètè ló bìnrin* (Late marriage) and *omo bíbí* (Child bearing). Interestingly, *À tètè ló bìnrin* (Early marriage) and *Ài tètè ló bìnrin* (Late marriage) are Yorùbá antonyms which, in their applications, convey the same meaning.

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 1):

(i) There is an early marriage and a late marriage.

(ii) Early or late marriage has nothing to do with early/late childbearing. In fact, it is possible that in both cases, of early and late marriage, there is an absence of a child/absence of children.

### 2. A f'èni ló bìnrin kò ro ire sí ni.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 2):** Proverb 2 is simply the Yorùbás' societal response to the female gender. From the composition of the proverb, the female gender is oppressed. The

feeling of oppression has led to the need to seek a redress of value. The proverb's intention is to clarify the reason(s) behind certain inadequacies. Thus, the proverb enjoins one of the spouses to identify the concerned/or the theme i.e., the *A f'eni lo binrin/A-ba-ni-lo binrin sun* (One/He who shares one's wife), and make peace thereafter.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 2):** He who befriends one's wife, does not think good of one/He who shares one's wife does not wish one well.

The sentence synonyms of Yorùbá Proverb 2:

(a) *Af'eni lo binrin kò f'ojú rere woni.*

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 2(a)):** He who befriends one's wife, does not cast good look at one/ He who shares one's wife does not wish one well.

(b) *A-bá-ni-lóbìnrin sùn kò f'ojú ire woni.*

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 2(b)):** He who sleeps with one's wife, does not cast good look at one/He who sleeps with one's wife does not wish one well.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *A f'eni lo binrin* (One who shares one's wife), *kò f'ojú rere woni* (does not wish one well), *A-bá-ni-lóbìnrin sùn* (He who sleeps with one's wife) and *ko f'aju ire woni* (does not wish one well).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 2):

(i) There is someone who shares or sleeps with one's wife.

(ii) The same does not wish one well.

### 3. Bí obìnrin r'ojó oko fálè, k'òlè ro ti àlè f'óko.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 3):** Proverb 3 is gender biased. This is because the proverb is silent on the waywardness of the male gender in marriage i.e., whether the man or husband has a concubine too. Thus, the proverb sees the female gender as a sex object with no shame. On the contrary, the proverb calls for caution on the part of a married woman to be sincere or faithful to her spouse and to desist from any negative activity that may ruin her marriage (an extra marital affair). This point is clearly enunciated in the antonymous relationship of 'oko'(husband) and 'àlè'(concubine) in the proverb's composition.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 3):** If a woman tells about her husband to her concubine, she cannot tell about her concubine to her husband/If the woman gossips about her husband to her concubine, she cannot gossip about the concubine to her husband.

The sentence synonym of Yorùbá Proverb 3:

(a) *Ìrò t'óbìnrin r'ojó oko lódò àlè, kò jé r'ojó àlè béè lódò oko.*

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 3 (a)):** The type of things the wife says about her husband in the presence of the concubine cannot be said of the concubine in the presence of the husband.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *obìnrin* (woman), *r'ojó* (gossips), *oko* (husband) and *àlè* (concubine).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 3):

(i) *There is a married woman with a concubine.*

(ii) *The same gossips about her husband to the concubine but cannot or dare not gossip about the concubine to her husband.*

### 4. Eni fé arèwà fé iyonu, gbogbo ayé ló bá won tan

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 4):** Just like proverb 3, proverb 4 is gender biased. This is evident in the use of 'arèwà'(a word used in the female Yorùbá world to mean a beautiful lady/woman). Again, the same proverb is silent on the male gender's 'handsomeness' i.e., whether or not it is a problem to the female counterpart or the society at large. The point notwithstanding, the proverb hopes to reconcile physical beauty. Thus, the word 'beauty', as employed in the proverb, goes beyond the physical beauty of appearance. It implies the inner beauty of kindness and wit

needful to save embarrassing situations. Hence, the proverb calls for the implied beauty (the *person and quality*) to exercise patience, caution and wisdom in her dealings with not only men, but fellow human beings.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 4):** One who marries a beautiful woman or beauty, marries trouble, everyone is a kinsman or relative/One who marries a beauty, marries trouble because she claims to be related to everybody.

The sentence synonyms of Yorùbá Proverb 4:

(a) Eni fé arèwà l'óbìnrin fé ìyonu, eni gbogbo ní bá won tan.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 4(a)):** Whoever marries a beauty or beautiful woman marries trouble, everyone or everybody is a relative.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *arèwà* (a pretty woman/beauty), *iyonu* (trouble),

*gbogbo ayé/eni gbogbo* (everybody) and *tan*(related/kin).

(b) Eni fé arèwà n'iyàwó, ti fé iyàwó gbogbo ayé.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 4(b)):** Whoever marries a beauty, has married everybody's wife.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *arèwà* (a pretty woman/beauty), *iyonu* (trouble),

*gbogbo ayé/eni gbogbo* (everyone/everybody) and *tan*(related/kin).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 4):

(i) *There is a beautiful/pretty woman or a beauty.*

(ii) *The same has trouble with her beauty because the beauty makes her everybody's relation or kin.*

## 5. Bí obìnrin ò jowú, obè kíí dùn.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 5):** The proverb is another dimension to the theme of oppression. This is because the implied wife or woman in the proverb must have been pushed to the level of 'owú (jealousy/envy) by the husband or man. Thus, the proverb intends to correct anomalies either in cooking or otherwise. Worth knowing, the same proverb is a display of the males' tricks in making the soup/cooking of the woman or wife delicious or more delicious than before.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 5):** If a woman is not jealous, her soup will not be tasty / delicious.

The sentence synonyms of Yorùbá Proverb 5:

(a) Bí obìnrin ò pè méjì, obè kíí dùn.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 5(a)):** If women are not two in number in the house, the soup will not be tasty /delicious.

(b) Bí obìnrin kò bá ní orogún, obè oko kíí dùn .

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 5(b)):** If a woman has no rival, the husband's soup is will not be tasty /delicious.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *obìnrin* (woman), *obè*(soup), *dùn* (tasty/delicious), *oko* (husband), *obìnrin ... méjì / orogún* (two wives/second wife or a rival).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 5):

(i) There is a married woman who is jealous.

(ii) The reason is due to the fact that the husband has brought into the home/house, a second wife or a rival and so, the husband's soup tastes more delicious than before due to jealousy.

## 6. Bí obìnrin kò dò okó méjì, kíí mo èyí tó dùn jù.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 6):** The proverb sees the female gender as a sex object and as promiscuous. Though negatively implied, the proverb admonishes a married woman. A married

woman, according to the Yorùbá tradition, should not be wayward or promiscuous, otherwise she may end up not appreciating men and especially her husband. Thus, the proverb seeks to address the issue of promiscuity by appealing to the sexual urge of a promiscuous woman. The proverb sees the need for a decent married woman to stick to 'one husband' which is understood in the language of Yorùbá proverb 6 as, 'one penis'. The same proverb encourages contentment.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 6):** If a woman does not have sexual intercourse or sexual affair with two husbands or two penises, she will not know which one is sweeter.

The sentence synonym of Yorùbá Proverb 6:

(a) Bí obìnrin ò bá dán ilé oko méjì wò, kò ní mo èyí tí ó sà.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 6(a)):** Unless a woman tries two husbands, she will not know which one is better.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *obìnrin*(woman), *oko méjì /okó méjì* (two husbands/two penises) and *èyí tó dùn jù/ èyí tí ó sà*(the one that is sweeter/better).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 6):

- i.* There is a woman.
- ii.* The same has two husbands/has an affair with two husbands/penises.
- iii.* The same woman therefore realizes which one is sweeter or better.

## 7. Oko gbégbá kí n gbágbòn ní mú àibalè okàn bá obìnrin.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 7):** The proverb voices out the need for gender balance and of course, every gender to his/her own duty and responsibility. Thus, the proverb encourages division of labour that is, sharing of responsibilities. The practice, according to the proverb, will yield positive result: there will be peaceful co-existence in the home.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 7):** Husband; do this, so that I will do that, create anguish for the woman.

The sentence synonym of Yorùbá Proverb 7:

(a) Oko gbégbá n gbágbòn ní múlè gún.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 7(a)):** Husband; do this, so that I will do that makes the home peaceful.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *Oko* (husband), *obìnrin* (woman), *gbégbá kí n gbágbòn* (do this, I'll do that), *ní mú àibalè okàn bá obìnrin* (creates or brings about anguish for the woman) and *ní múlè gún* (makes the home peaceful).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 7):

- i.* There is a married man and woman; husband and wife.
- ii.* The couple in (i), engaged in the act of 'doing this and doing that' together.
- iii.* The practice leads to; first, anguish on the part of the woman and second, a peaceful home.

## 8. Ìlèkùn tí ò ní gbàgbé kó jókòò è jéé, omo tí ò ní ìyá ìwòn ní jèbi ejó mo.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 8):** With the combination of animate (motherless child) and inanimate (door with no jamb) entities, the proverb is gender balanced. This is evident in the use of 'omo tí ò ní ìyá'(motherless child); who could be male or female. However, the proverb sees the need for human caution and security. Hence, the proverb addresses not only a motherless child but a child as adult on the need to exercise caution and be accountable for any deeds; good or bad. In addition, the proverb encourages individuals to desist from trouble in order to avert court cases.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 8):** A door with no jamb should sit quietly or be still and not available for use, a motherless child should not be judged guilty.

The sentence synonym of Yorùbá Proverb 8:

Ìlèkùn tí ò ní gbàgbé kó jókòò è jéé, omo tí kò ní ìyá ìwòn ní jìjà èbi

mo.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 8(a)):** A door without jamb should be still, a child with no mother should not be found fighting unreasonably.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *Ìlèkùn*(a door), *Ìlèkùn tí ò ní gbàgbé*(a door with no jamb/lock), *kó jókòó è jéé* (should be still/not available for use), *omo*(child), *omo tí ò ní ìyá / omo tí kò ní ìyá* (a motherless child), *iwòn níí jèbi ejó mo* (should not be judged guilty) and *iwòn níí jija èbi mo* (should not be found fighting unreasonably).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 8):

- i. There is a door with no jamb and the same door with no jamb is compared to a motherless child.
- ii. The door with no jamb is not fit for use, likewise a motherless child should not be found fighting unreasonably or found guilty of a crime.

## 9. A sùn kaàkà kii gb'òfé.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 9):** Though explicit of the gender, the feminist theme of stereotyping is implied. This is because the Yorùbá society believes that females sleep around for money. On the contrary, the proverb seeks to address the negative attitude of some women towards money or material possessions. There is therefore the need to know that for every work/task, 'nothing comes from nothing but that something must come from something' and not through foul or immoral means. In the proverb's composition, it is believed that nothing goes for free in the implied feminine world of prostitution or promiscuity.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 9):** She who lies down carelessly does not admit free of charge.

The sentence synonym of Yorùbá Proverb 9:

(a) A-ta-ikaàkà kan kii gba òfé.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 9 (a)):** A carelessly lied woman does not do so for free / No woman lies supinely for free.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *Asùkaàkà/A-ta-ikaàkà* (one who lies down carelessly/supinely) and *kii gb'òfé/kii gba òfé* (does not admit free of charge/ does not do so for free)

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 9):

- i. There is someone that is, a woman who lies down carelessly or supinely.
- ii. The same woman that lies down carelessly/supinely does not do so for free or does not admit free of charge.

## 10. Obìnrin tí kò ní iwà, ìyá rẹ ní bá sorogún.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 10):** The proverb is gender biased. This is because the concept of *iwà* (morals or good character) has been unjustifiably employed in the proverb to run down the female gender. The concept of morals cuts across all gender; male or female. However, on morals, the Yorùbás believe that the home is meaningfully run by a woman, the stereotypical inclination of the proverb hinges on a woman's character that is, not to be characterless. This, according to the proverb, becomes necessary so that she does not become useless or blame her luck/ her mother for her bad manners.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 10):** A woman with bad manners is doomed to live with her mother as a rival.

The sentence synonyms of Yorùbá Proverb 10:

(a) Bí obìnrin dára tí kò níwà, asán ló jé.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 10 (a)):** A pretty woman who is ill-mannered is a useless woman.

(b) Obìnrin so iwà nù, ó ní òun kò mú orí oko wáyé



**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 10 (b)):** When a woman is ill-mannered, she will conclude that she has bad luck at choosing a husband.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *obìnrin* (woman) *tí ko níwà, /so iwà nù* (is ill-mannered/ has bad manners), *asán ló jé* (is a useless woman), *iyá rè ní bá sorogún* (is doomed to live with her mother as a rival) and *ó ní òun kò mú orí oko wáyé* (says, she has bad luck at choosing a husband).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 10):

- i.* There is a woman who has bad manners.
- ii.* The same is of the opinion that she has bad luck at choosing a husband.
- iii.* The same woman, due to her bad manners, is considered useless and may end up being her mother's rival.

## 11. 'Èmi kan lónì, èmi kan lánàá', ní íse iyàwó òdèdè tó poko rè.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 11):** The proverb is also gender biased. This is because the reverse can be the case in marriage that is, the husband may end up getting rid of the wife. On the contrary, the proverb hopes to encourage married women especially, to exercise caution. The proverb shows the attitude of the Yorùbá women in marriage; fond of boasting of their marital status and their husbands. Thus, the proverb enjoins women to be careful of such boast since it could invoke a negative feeling liable of putting an end to the man's life or the marriage.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 11):** 'I am the one yesterday and today', as the crying of the wife who killed her husband.

The sentence synonyms of Yorùbá Proverb 11:

(a) 'Èmi nikan lánàá lónì', bi ekún apokoje.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 11(a)):** 'I am the one today, and the one yesterday', gives room for over confidence that makes a wife kill her husband.

(b) 'Ìwo lónì, iwo lánàá', bí ekún apokoje.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 11(b)):** 'You today, you yesterday'; as the wailing of someone who killed her husband.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *Èmi* (I), *lónì* (today), *lánàá* (yesterday), *iyàwó òdèdè* (married woman/housewife) and *ekún apokoje* (crying of a husband murderer). Interestingly, *lónì* (today) and *lánàá* (yesterday) are Yorùbá antonyms with remarkable meanings.

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 11):

- i.* There is a married woman/ housewife.
- ii.* The same makes a cry of boasting; yesterday and today.
- iii.* The cry of the same woman is likened to that of a husband's murderer.

## 12. Eni fún ni lómo parí oore.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 12):** The proverb is gender balanced. This is evident in the use of 'omo' (a wife who is a child of someone). In its composition, Yorùbá Proverb 12 encourages an act of gratitude which signifies magnanimity/favour.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 12):** He who gives one a wife has shown enough magnanimity.

The sentence synonym of Yorùbá Proverb 12:

(a) Eni tó fúnni lómo saya parí oore.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 12(a)):** He who gives a child for one to marry has shown enough magnanimity.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *Eni* (he/she/whoever), *fúnni* (gives), *lómo* (a precious child/wife) and *parí oore* (shows magnanimity/favour/blessing).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 12):

- i.* There is a person or an individual.
- ii.* The same gives out a precious child as wife to a man (husband).
- iii.* The act or practice is that of generosity or magnanimity/ favour

### 13. Bí aya bá m'ojú oko tán, alárinà a yèba.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 13):** The proverb is also gender balanced. In fact, the proverb is employed to encourage a man (oko) and a woman (aya) in marriage, to know or understand each other. The act, from the proverb's composition, would prevent a third party that is the 'alárinà' (an intermediary) from knowing their plans or be part of their sacred relationship.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 13):** As soon as the wife is familiar with her husband, the intermediary steps aside.

The sentence synonym of Yorùbá Proverb 13:

(a) Bí oko bá m'ojú aya tán, alárinà a yèba.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 13(a)):** When the husband becomes familiar with the wife, the intermediary steps aside.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *Bí* (as soon as/when/if), *aya*(wife/married woman) *bá mojú oko tán*(is familiar with her husband and vice-versa) and *alárinà a yèba*(the intermediary steps aside).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 13):

- i.* There is a wife and a husband in marriage.
- ii.* The couple in (i) seems to be at the stage of familiarity in order to know each other very well.
- iii.* During the stage or process, the intermediary is expected to step aside.

### 14. Omo osàn ní kó kùmò bá iyá rẹ̀.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 14):** The proverb is both gender balanced and gender biased. On gender balance, the use of 'omo'(a child; male or female) is evident in the proverb's composition. On gender bias, the implied child causes trouble or hardship in the proverb to the mother and not the father. The stereotypical inclination is that a good child is the father's; a bad child is the mother's. Employed to correct bad manners, the proverb enjoins a child to be calm/respectful and not troublesome/quarrelsome. While a quiet child may not cause trouble, the quarrelsome child causes trouble to the mother. Worth knowing, 'a child' in the proverb is likened to a kind of a fruit; 'osàn'(orange). The same child as fruit is thus, enjoined in the proverb to be calm so as not to cause hardship to the mother.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 14):** It is the orange (hanging on the tree) that invites hardship to its mother.

The sentence synonym of Yorùbá Proverb 14:

(a) Omo osè ní kó kùmò báiyá rẹ̀.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 14(a)):** It is the offspring of baobab tree that usually invites cudgel to its mother.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *Omo* (a child/offspring), *osàn* (orange), *osè* (baobab tree) and *ní kó kùmò bá iyá rẹ̀* (causes or invites hardship/cudgel to its mother). It should be noted that 'orange' and 'baobab tree' are used interchangeably to mean the same thing. The two are 'fruits' and 'fruits' as children, are brought forth by mothers within the context of the Yorùbá proverbs.

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 14):

- i.* There is a mother and her child.
- ii.* The child in (i), usually causes or invites trouble/hardship/cudgel to the mother.

## 15. A kii lé elénu rírùn nídíí ìkòkò iyá rè.

**Resolution (Yorùbá Proverb 15):** The proverb, though explicit of the male gender, concentrates on stereotyping. The implied gender is the male and not the female. This is because the Yorùbá society believes that the male is responsible for the mother's care and upkeep. Though gender biased, a child is expected to know his/her rights. On the contrary, the proverb hopes to make the Yorùbá male child sensitive to his role as a male (patriarchy).

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 15):** We are not to send a dirty-mouthed child away from his mother's cooking or drinking pot/A filthy child cannot be sent away from his mother's drinking pot.

The sentence synonym of Yorùbá Proverb 15:

(a)Elénu rírùn ló làmù iyá rè.

**English equivalent (Yorùbá Proverb 15 (a)):** The person with a smelling mouth owns his/her mother's drinking pot.

The word expressions in the proverbs include: *Elénu rírùn*(a filthy child/garrulous offspring) and *ló làmù iyá rè*(is the owner of his/her mother's drinking pot).

The sentences of presupposition (Yorùbá Proverb 15):

- i. There is a mother and her child.
- ii. The child is filthy because he has a smelling mouth; a garrulous child.
- iii. The same child, despite his/her smelling mouth, must not be stopped from drinking in his/her mother's pot.

## Discussion and conclusions

The study discussed some Yorùbá proverbs that are laden with gender-related lexemes in order to see the Yorùbás' societal responses to the idea of responsibility and duty on the part of both sexes. The study aside generating sentences of presupposition and sentence synonyms to the identified proverbs; also provided resolutions to the proverbs in order to settle gender-related conflicts. Thus, Yorùbá proverbs though orally transmitted because of its conversational nature, employed different lexemes which in the selected Yorùbá proverbs, made meaning both in isolation and when in association with other words. The instance of the lexeme, 'obìnrin', has several meanings in isolation: *female, woman, lady, or girl*. The same lexeme, when in association with other words within a context, would assume a different but related meaning. The instance of the lexeme, 'obìnrin', in **Yorùbá Proverb (10)**:

'Obìnrin' tí kò ní iwà, iyá rè níí bá sorogún (A woman with bad manners is doomed to live with her mother as a rival) had the meaning, 'a bad mannered or ill-mannered woman.' Another instance of a lexeme with multiple meanings in **Yorùbá Proverb (12)** was, 'omo' which though means 'a child', assumed the meaning of 'a wife' in the proverb based on context. In other words, a lexeme has other meanings aside its inherent meaning more so, when in association with other words. Also discovered in the study was the similarity in meaning involved between certain lexemes which though were opposites, yet conveyed the same sense/meaning when in association with other words. The instance of **Yorùbá Proverb (1)** showed a case of opposition between the lexemes, *À tètè ló bìnrin* (Early marriage) and *Àì tètè ló bìnrin* (Late marriage) respectively. It was discovered that the two lexemes when in association with different words, could 'presuppose the same idea' as featured in the proverbs: (i) *À tètè ló bìnrin kò kan omo bíbí* (Early marriage does not imply having children early); and (ii) *Àì tètè ló bìnrin kò ní kí a má bímo, àrèmo ló màa kéré* (Late marriage does not prevent one having children; it is just that one's eldest child will be younger). By implication, the two proverbs re-affirmed the point made by Yule (1996:131-132) on presupposition that; presupposition remains 'constant under negation'. Thus, early or late marriage, the presupposition in both cases of the proverbs was that, 'there was a marriage'. Remarkably, the opposition in **Yorùbá Proverb (1)** had led to two facts: first, there was an overlap between sentence synonym and presupposition. **Yorùbá Proverb (1)** and its

sentence synonym presupposed that there was a marriage whether 'early or late', and of which had nothing to do with early/late child bearing. Second, the presupposition in the same proverb(s) had paved way for the resolution of conflicts i.e. the need for individuals to accept fate. The study thus averred that though Yorùbá lexemes could make meaning in isolation, the same could make more sense or meaning when in association with other words within a context. Notably, the different meanings conveyed by the different lexemes in the selected proverbs, gave room for certain inherent themes of feminism. The instance of **Yorùbá Proverb (2): Af'eni ló bìnrin kò f'ojú rere woni** (He who befriends one's wife, does not cast good look at one/ He who shares one's wife does not wish one well); portrayed the lexeme, 'obìnrin'(a female/wife), as a sex object oppressed by another male aside the husband. However, **Yorùbá Proverb (2)** and other selected proverbs with inherent feminist themes like oppression, stereotyping and others, have strengths and weaknesses. **Yorùbá Proverb (2)** and other selected proverbs with inherent feminist themes, intended to create positive awareness. The different proverbs which were gender biased, hoped to make the female gender be conscious of their weaknesses and thereafter, correct societal prejudice on promiscuity, ill-manners among others. Hence, the different lexemes employed in the selected proverbs were culture bound with a view to correcting individual or societal ills. On the contrary, the Yorùbá society, through the application of the different Yorùbá proverbs, expects and encourages both sexes/gender to be responsible. The instance of **Yorùbá Proverb (7): Oko gbégbá n gbágbòn níí múlé gún**(Husband; do this, so that I will do that makes the home peaceful); vividly portrayed the societal expectation of the two sexes/gender that is, to be 'responsibility carriers'. In other words, the Yorùbá society sees 'responsibility' in marriage, home and the society at large, a collective affair involving both sexes in order to make peace reign. The paper concluded by recommending that the choice of lexemes in Yorùbá proverbs be meaningfully negotiated in order to avoid misrepresentation of ideas. The implication was that failure to incorporate a detailed definition of lexemes in Yorùbá proverbs would be tantamount to gender bias. Thus, in the application of Yorùbá proverbs devoid of gender bias, prominence could be placed on certain Yorùbá lexemes with a view to making both sexes correct wrong impressions or make amends as situation demands.

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