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ON THE PRAGMATIC IMPLICATIONS OF OYO-RELATED  
PROVERBS IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

**Abstract:** Every Yoruba town has certain peculiar norms, patterns of behaviour, traditions and, sometimes, history. These norms and traditions are often found mainly in either the way inhabitants of such a town use language or the way people from other places use language in relation to such a town. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines some Oyo-related proverbs with a view to investigating their pragmatic implications. It is believed that examining the pragmatic implications of these proverbs will provide insights into the culture, tradition and of Oyo people specifically and the Yorubas in general. The proverbs which served as the data source for the study were drawn from (a) Owomoyela's (2005) *Yoruba Proverbs* and (b) five elderly Yoruba people in Ede and its environs. The study revealed that the Oyo-related proverbs considered indicated the pragmatic acts such as boasting, warning, pretending and advising. The paper concluded that the nature, the psychology, the tradition and culture of a people could be known through a careful examination of proverbs related to them.

**Keywords:** African, Nigeria, Oyo, pragmatics, speech act, worldview, Yoruba

**Introduction**

Scholars across the globe have studied proverbs from different perspectives ranging from anthropology, philosophy, music and history to literature and linguistics (see Akande and Mosobalaje, 2014; Alster, 1993; Norrick, 1994, Odebunmi, 2006; Yusuf, 2001). It is these multifarious perspectives that account for a variety of foci and definitions of proverbs in the literature. However, as numerous as the definitions and foci are, most scholars agreed that proverbs usually embody the wisdom, worldview, values and cultural norms of a people (see Finnegan, 1970; Mieder, 1993; Yusuf and Methangwane, 2003).

Proverbs constitute a vibrant aspect of orature which are often used for different purposes. Since there is virtually no society that had no pre-literate era when orature was a crucial cultural artefact,

proverbs, a form of orature, are ubiquitous in every part of the world. As an oral form, and like every other genre of orature, proverbs are handed over from one generation to another generation and this transmission, which is basically oral, is very significant in the definition of the proverb. Mieder (1985:119), for instance, underscores the role of oral transmission in the definition of proverbs when he says “A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, *fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation*” (italics mine). While emphasizing the oral transmission of folklore generally and that of the proverb especially, Grobler (2001:143) says:

Folklore in most of its forms is difficult if not impossible to date. Especially in ancient societies where writing came to be used relatively recently, it must be assumed that *oral art was transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth since time immemorial*. The authors of items of folklore will in such cases forever remain unknown, yet it is interesting, for instance, to contemplate the process resulting in the formulation of proverbs in an African society.

The nature of proverbs is such that it does not lend itself to any exact and precise definition (Finnegan, 1970; Mieder, 1993). However, as Finnegan (1970: 393) has pointed out, there is “some general agreement as to what constitutes a proverb. It is a saying in more or less fixed form marked by ‘shortness, sense, and salt’ and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it.” Underscoring Finnegan’s view, Yusuf and Mathangwane, (2003:408) describe proverbs as “relatively short expressions which are usually associated with wisdom and are used to perform a variety of social functions.” See also Mieder (1993) on the nature of proverbs and Gallacher (1959:47) who states that “a proverb is a concise statement of an apparent truth which has [had or will have] currency among the people. Sometimes, proverbs are used intertextually to make reference to previous wisdom similar to the present one (see Winick 2003:595).

In her own view, proverbs “are a rich source of imagery and succinct expression on which more elaborate forms can draw” (Finnegan, 1970: 389). In a study of fifty-five popular views of the proverb, Mieder (1985:117) comes up with a seemingly

harmonized workable definition of a proverb as “a phrase, saying, sentence, statement or expression of the folk which contains above all wisdom, truth, morals, experience, lessons and advice concerning life which has been handed down from generation to generation.” Lau, Tokofsky and Winick (2004:8) also remark that proverbs are “short, traditional utterances that encapsulate cultural truths and sum up recurrent social situation.” Owomoyela (2005:3) remarks that proverbs are sometimes used to compare two things which have striking similarities. He goes further to say:

Proverbs, often incisive in their propositions and terse in their formulation, are deduced from close observation of life, life forms and their characteristics and habits, the environment and natural phenomena, and sober reflection on all these. Because proverbs are held to express unexceptionable truths, albeit with some qualification, their use in a discussion or argument is tantamount to an appeal to established authority. (Owomoyela 2005: 12)

As can be seen from the views of various scholars above, the defining characteristics of proverbs include shortness and brevity, terseness, truths, wisdom and moral lessons.

Given this medium of oral transmission through which proverbs are acquired from time immemorial, proverbs are generally ethnic-based or race-based. In other words, proverbs that are commonly used by one ethnic group or people may not even exist, not to talk of being less common, among other ethnic groups or peoples. As hinted at above, the reason for this is not far-fetched: proverbs of a particular people are products of the values, the experience, the wisdom and the world views of that people. This accounts for why Yoruba proverbs may be different from Efik proverbs just as African proverbs are different from European proverbs. Even within the same ethnic group, proverbs may be characterized by subtle variation and creativity which often do not affect their overall meanings. The creativity that proverbs sometimes exemplify is supported by Owomoyela (2005:12) when he says “Just as the formulation of proverbs involves considerable creativity, so does their application – a fact that is sometimes discounted in exercises that attempt to assign definitive applications to specific sayings.”

As numerous as works on Yoruba proverbs are, little or nothing has been done in the area of the pragmatics of specific town-related

proverbs with a view to understanding the nature, the tradition and behavioural patterns of the indigenes of such towns. The present study is an attempt to focus on Yoruba proverbs that are related to Oyo town in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. There is ample evidence that some Yoruba proverbs make direct references to certain Yoruba towns and these references can be negative or positive, can serve as warnings and, at times, they tell us about the tradition in a particular Yoruba town. For instance, the proverb “Ìbàdàn kì í báńí í sò ré, kó má tannijè” (No matter how close and friendly an Ibadan person is to you, he or she will end up betraying you), Ibadan being a prominent city in Yoruba land, is negative and seems to overgeneralize that people from Ibadan are naturally deceptive while the proverb “A kì í torí à ñ rÈḍe ká ba È.è.dè. jé.” (You cannot on account of going to Ede town destroy your home), though punning with the presence of the two words Èḍe (a town in Osun State of Nigeria) and È.è.dè (i.e., a passage in a house), serves as a warning that people must always guard their home or family jealously wherever they are or wherever they intend to go. A Yoruba proverb which emphasizes the fact that cultural variation exists across Yoruba towns and that every town has its own peculiar tradition is “Ìdálùú ni ìṣèlú, egúngún ní gbowó orí ní Óṣogbo, òrìṣà ní gba tí òde Ìbàdàn” which translates to (Every town has its peculiarities, it is the masquerade that collects tax in Óṣogbo while the deity/god collects it in Ibadan); where Ibadan and Óṣogbo are cities located in Oyo and Osun States of Nigeria respectively. Finally, there is a proverb that makes a direct reference to Ìsé.yin, a town very close to Oyo town. The proverb “Kí á mú eḡin só wó. ò tun, ká fi eḡin só wó. òsì, ká fi è.yìn rìn délé Ìsé.yin, eḡi tí kò ní yìn ni, kò ní yìn ni” (If you hold an egg in your right hand, and you hold a palm kernel in your left hand and you catwalk till you get to Ìsé.yin, whoever will not praise you will not praise you) is a pun which focuses specifically on the syllable *yin*. Although proverbs such as these are limited in number, they are worth investigating as their pragmatic functions sometimes constitute some social control in the society, enhance the teaching of moral values and contribute to societal harmony; hence the present study.

#### ***Some of the Earlier Works on Yoruba Proverbs***

Existing studies have shown that different aspects of Yoruba proverbs have been investigated. Lawal, Ajayi and Raji (1997)

examine the illocutionary acts in six pairs of Yoruba proverbs by focusing on the types of pragmatic factors underlying their usage. The study makes a distinction between direct and indirect illocutionary acts. The direct illocutionary acts of the proverbs analysed are mainly assertive through claiming, disclaiming, informing and complaining about certain aspects of life while the indirect illocutionary acts consist in the acts of blaming, advising, warning, recommending, judging, assessing and evaluating.

Odebunmi (2006) also studies the proverbs used in three of Ahmed Yerimah's plays: *Yemoja*, *Attahiru* and *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees*. The study is an attempt to pay attention to the functions and contexts of the identified proverbs. The research shows that the proverbs are used in the plays for counseling, accusing, pronouncing and assuring the hearer. Adeleke (2009) argues that Yoruba proverbs are historical records in that they do reflect the Yoruba's pre-colonial and post-colonial experiences. Similarly, Adegoju (2009) examines the crucial roles some Yoruba proverbs can play in resolving social conflicts in Africa. By using insights from stylistic principles (coupled with tangential references to linguistic and rhetorical tools), the paper argues that through the wisdom embedded in Yoruba proverbs, conflict can be properly understood and effectively resolved without leading to avoidable chaos in the society. Adegoju remarks that apart from the cultural values that Yoruba proverbs carry, the essential rhetorical strokes in them also give pragmatic force to the interpretation we often give to these proverbs. The paper concludes that "although proverbs are not the exclusive preserve of any race or nation, the rhetorical import of the Yoruba proverbs ... is germane to attaining realistic conflict resolution in Africa, because the wisdom of such proverbs transcends cultural boundaries" (Adegoju, 2009:67).

Ademowo and Balogun (2014) also explore how proverbs can be employed in the management of conflicts as such management can guarantee harmony and peaceful atmosphere in the society. The study uses 24 randomly selected Yoruba proverbs which relate to warning and cooperation; and demonstrate how these proverbs can be used to achieve harmonious co-existence in the society. While the present study is similar to that of Ademowo and Balogun (2014) in respect of the pragmatic functions of the proverbs in the two works, the present study is different from it in that it concentrates solely on Oyo-related proverbs.

Akanbi's (2015) study focuses on the sociological effects and implications of certain Yoruba proverbs which make use of sexually explicit expressions such as penis and vagina. He argues that although these expressions are taboos among the Yoruba, when they are used in the context of proverbs, they are not considered vulgar. Zakariyah (2016) carries out a pragmatic analysis of 100 proverbs in four of the Ola Rotimi's works. The works are *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, *Kurunmi*, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*. The data analysed revealed that the illocutionary act of any data can be properly assessed by paying attention to, first, the situational context which emphasizes the actual location of utterances in relation to who says *what*, *when*, *where*, *to who* and *how* and, second, to the psychological variables. The study concluded that four of the six variables identified by Lawal (1997) are very important to the analysis of proverbs in the works of Ola Rotimi.

#### ***Methodology and Theoretical Framework***

The Oyo-related proverbs which constitute the data for this study were derived from two major sources: from elderly Yoruba people and from Owomoyela's (2005) *Yoruba Proverbs*. Oyo is a prominent town in the Southwestern part of Nigeria which used to be the capital of the Oyo Kingdom in the 1830s. What contributed to the prominence of Oyo town is the fact that it is under the rulership of the imperial majesty of this town, Alaafin, that the old Oyo Kingdom was being controlled and governed.

For the analysis of data, we draw on the theoretical domain of Speech Act Theory (SAT) as propounded by John Austin (1962) and modified by Searle (1979). For Austin, an utterance is either constative (true or false) or performative (i.e., the function it performs) and the best way to judge sentences and utterances is by looking at what they can do. In other words, the performative functions of utterances are much more important than their constative analysis which often concentrates on truth-falsity inquiry. However, the constative-performative dichotomy is not very helpful as Huang (2009) has noted that some constatives can be subjected to felicity conditions contrary to the initial claim made by Austin. Given this loophole, Austin abandoned this dichotomy and came up with a trichotomy of locution, illocution and perlocution.

According to Austin (1962), the locutionary act constitutes the actual words used in an utterance, the illocutionary act is the force or the intention one has while saying something and, lastly, the perlocutionary act is the effect of saying something. Thus, speech act focuses mainly on the actual communicative functions of language. Both the locution and illocution are inseparable (Searle, 1979) while the effects of the locution (i.e., the perlocution) can be immediate or instantaneous especially in face-to-face conversations or delayed if the communication is in writing.

Austin further classified the illocutionary act into five groups: verdictives (for example: acquit, convict, find, rule), exercitives (for example: appoint, dismiss, name, order), commissives (for example: promise, undertake, intend), behabitives (for example: apologize, thank, deplore), and expositives (for example: quote, cite, recapitulate) (Austin 1962). One major problem with this classification is its inability to draw a clean line of demarcation between verdictives and exercitives and also between behabitives and expositives.

In an attempt to improve upon Austin's work, Searle (1977) came up with five classifications. These are assertives or representatives which are assertions, directives such as commanding or suggesting which are targeted towards getting listeners to do certain things or to behave in particular ways; commissives which relate to obligation and commitments on the part of the speaker and covers such acts as agreeing, refusing or pledging to do something; expressives which have to do with acknowledging, apologizing, denying and admitting and, finally, declaratives which cover such acts as baptising, arresting, pronouncing someone guilty or pronouncing someone husband and wife. Other speech acts include predicting, reporting, alleging, warning, persuading, blaming and praising (see Kreidler 1998). Relating this to the present study implies that we need to concentrate on what the proverbs under study can do rather than focusing on their logicity, truism or falsity as people hardly say something unless they intend that which is said to do or perform something.

### *Data Analysis and Discussions*

Presented here is the analysis of the Oyo-related proverbs which served as the data for this study. Worthy of note is the fact that there is no neat line of demarcation in the speech acts that these proverbs perform; thus, there is some overlap in their speech acts. Given this overlap, we group the proverbs into categories based on their illocutions.

Some of the proverbs under study are those that show that the Alaafin of Oyo (i.e., The Oyo King) is the most powerful king in Yoruba land and that his people are unique in many respects.

1. Aláàfin ní pè ó, ò ní dífá, bífá bá fọre, ti Aláàfin kò bá fọre ní kó?  
(The Alaafin of Oyo has called on you and you are consulting with the Ifa Oracle, if the oracle says there is no misfortune, Alaafin may say otherwise)
2. A jí ẹ́se bí Ò.yó. làá rí, Ò.yó. kì í ẹ́se bí baba ẹ̀nikan.  
(You can only behave like the Oyo people, the Oyo people will never behave like any other people)
3. Ká jà ká re Ò.yó, ká mọ ẹ̀ni tó lọba.  
(Let us quarrel and go to Oyo, and we will see on whose side the king is).

The first proverb above (Proverb 1) acknowledges the power of Alaafin even above that of the deities; for he himself is believed to be a deity. An invitation to his palace is enough to create so much fear in the mind of the invitee such that he or she needs to first of all consult with the oracle before embarking on such an adventure. And even if the oracle says one can go and there is no problem, Alaafin is so powerful that he may say otherwise. What this means is that given his position, he has the power to overturn the decision of the oracle. The speech act here is that of *acknowledging*; that is, acknowledging the godlike power of this king. Proverb 2 instantiates the speech act of *boasting*. It shows that Oyo people surpass other people, *inter alia*, in strength, war skills, wisdom, tradition, customs, wealth, manners and even in mode of dressing. It may be true that Oyo serves as a model and its people are exemplary in certain areas of life but the claim that other people have to act and behave like Oyo; not minding subtle cultural differences, certainly amounts to boasting and relegating others. Proverb 3 also illustrates



the speech act of *boasting* as it shows that it does not matter whether one is right or wrong, once you have a quarrel with an Oyo indigene and you are not an indigene, you will not get any justice as Alaafin will support the indigene; hence they (the Oyo people) do boast about owning the king.

Another speech act related to boasting is bragging; sometimes when a person believes he or she is the best or has certain qualities which others do not have, the tendency to brag about it is high. This is what the following proverb illustrates:

4. A kì í sọ pé abẹ̀ Ò .yó. mú; nígbà nàà ni yóò sọ pé bé .è. ni òun kò tî pọ̀n-ọ̀n.  
One does not tell an Oyo person that his knife is sharp, for only then will he say he has not even honed it yet.

As shown in Proverb 4, Oyo people do brag about their virtues and qualities. It is possible that sometimes they do this to spite others. However, the proverb Alára ní gbé ara ga, bí adìẹ bá fé .wólé, a sì bè rẹ̀ , literally translated as “If you do not blow your trumpet, nobody will blow it for you” is common in Yoruba land and it is suggestive of the fact that the Yoruba generally believe in blowing their trumpets; for nobody may blow it for them. Thus, this implies that the idea of bragging may be a universal phenomenon across Yoruba land.

The wisdom and tradition of the Oyo can be gauged through their diplomacy. They are highly tactical in their dealing with other people. For them calling a spade a spade is a function of context as there are situations which may demand that you say the truth in such a way that its sharp effect will not lead to a catastrophe or dampen the morale of others. This is probably why it is generally believed in Yoruba land that “A kì í wí síbẹ̀ , kí á kú síbẹ̀ , bí ti Aláàfin Ò .yó. kó .” (You do not tell the truth somewhere and die at the spot is not applicable in the palace of the Alaafin of Oyo). This is a proverb that indicates that because of the power of Alaafin, if one says what he is not supposed to say in his palace, such a person may be executed immediately. It is not every truth that is politically correct; hence the Yoruba proverb “Gbogbo ohun tí ojú bá rí kó. ni ẹ̀nu ń sọ” (It is not everything you see that you must say). This diplomacy is what others may perceive as deception and pretension. Three of the Oyo-related proverbs that illustrate the speech acts of pretending and deceiving are found below.

5. Àmò, ràn bini Ò.yó, o gbé kete lérí, wó, n ní níbo lò ñ lọ?  
(Oyo people will deliberately ask you where you are going to even when they see a bucket on your head on your way to a stream)
6. Ò.yó, dò bálè, inú rẹ̀ lósòó.  
(When an Oyo person prostrates for you, it does not necessarily mean that he wishes you well)
7. A fún ọ̀ níṣu LÓ.yò.ó, ò ñ dúpé ; o rígi sè é ná?  
You are given yams at Oyo and you rejoice; have you secured wood to cook them?

The first of these three proverbs, Proverb 5, demonstrates that the Oyo people are sometimes unnecessarily inquisitive about things that are obvious and glaring. In other words, even when they know the solution to a problem or an answer to a question, they still pretend that they don't. Proverb 6, like Proverb 5, also exemplifies the speech act of *pretending* and, in addition to this, it shows that of *deceiving*. One would naturally assume that somebody who greets another person warmly and prostrates for the person means well and cannot harm the person being greeted; however, as Proverb 6 indicates, this is not the case with the Oyo people. For these people, warm greetings and prostration do not amount to friendliness. Proverbs that show deception or pretentiousness are not the preserve of only the Oyo people as there are similar proverbs such as “Ká fi è.jè sínú, ká tu itó funfun jáde (Let us keep the blood inside and cough out the white sputum) and “Ká dò, bálè fún aràrá, kò sọ pé ká òdè ká má ga” (That we prostrate for a pygmy does not mean that we will not be taller than he is when we stand up) across the Yoruba land with varying dialectal forms. Inherent in the last of the three proverbs above, Proverb 7, is the speech act of *deceiving*. It shows that it is one thing to be given an opportunity; it is completely another thing to be provided with an enabling environment that can make such opportunity materialise. An opportunity given without the ideal facilities to make it realisable is mere *deception*. Apart from *deceiving*, Proverb 7 can also come under the speech acts of *advising* and *warning*. In some context, it may be interpreted to mean that a good and promising beginning does not guarantee a successful end. If this is the case, the person to whom this proverb is directed is warned that there may be challenges in the course of

realising one's target and the person is advised to be resilient and steadfast to achieve his or her set goal.

There is no society that does not have a way of advising or rebuking its people. Generally speaking, the Yoruba people often appreciate, warn, admonish and advise one another through their proverbs. Though these proverbs are Oyo-related in that the word Oyo is conspicuously present in them, they are generally applicable to the other Yoruba sub-groups as well as to Nigerians generally; especially those who are familiar with the language. Presented here are some of such proverbs.

8. Ò ní rÒ yó , ò ní kánjú, Aláàfin kò rebíkan.  
(If you are going to Oyo, you don't have to be in a hurry as the Alaafin always remains in his palace).
9. Ta ní mọ Òkòlò lÓ yò ó ? Ojó tí wó n mọ Òkòlò  
lÓ yò ó , ló ti iná bọ ilé.  
(Nobody knew Okolo in Oyo until the day he burnt several houses in Oyo town).
10. A kì í wí síbè , kí á kú síbè , kì í se òwe tí ènìyàn ní pa ní  
ò dọ . Aláàfin Ò yó .  
(You don't tell the truth and die on the spot is not a proverb that is applicable in the palace of Alaafin of Oyo).
11. Akè sán lòpin Ò yó ; ilé ọkọ nìbí ìsinmi obìnrin.  
(Just as Akesan is Oyo's city limit, so a spouse's home is a woman's final destination).

Proverb 8 instantiates the speech act of advising or admonishing as it underscores the need to be patient in whatever one embarks upon. In ancient Yoruba culture, the Alaafin would always be found in his palace and hardly would he go out of his town, Oyo. So, whoever hopes to visit the Alaafin does not have to be in a hurry since, regardless of whenever he or she gets there, the Alaafin will still be in his palace. Proverb 9 also serves as a warning. This proverb has some historical background. There was a man in Oyo who was very poor and not many people knew or wanted to associate with him on account of his penury. One day, he thought of what he could do to become very popular in the town; he woke up one day and started burning thatch houses in Oyo. So, his name was on the lips of everybody and he became very popular. When he was taken to the king,

he explained why he had to do what he did and he was set free. As we can see therefore, one of the prominent sources of Yoruba proverbs is history. The account given in respect of Proverb 9 thus confirms Adeleke's (2009) view that proverbs are historical records. This proverb, Proverb 9, illustrates two speech acts. The first one is that of *warning*: if you live in a place where you are not popular, you should not go beyond your boundary or do anything that can lead you into trouble as there will be nobody to defend such a person. The second speech act is that of *denigrating* as the proverb shows that a person to which it is directed is of no account in the society but he or she keeps behaving as if he or she is important.

Another proverb which demonstrates the speech act of *warning* is Proverb 10 which shows that Alaafin is so powerful that one has to watch whatever one says whenever one is in his palace. An attempt to say something that is considered insulting or that challenges the power of Alaafin may lead to outright summary execution. So, there are things you dare not say in front of Alaafin. Finally, Proverb 11, is a form of rebuke especially to female adults who are married. It emphasizes the fact that, even if there is a quarrel between a couple, it is not enough a reason for the wife to move out of her husband's house. It also has a deeper meaning that a woman should be satisfied with whatever her husband provides: material or sexual. So, a married woman should find solace in her husband's home and should not be jumping around from one man to another man. Thus, the proverb instantiates the speech acts of *admonishing*. The present study confirms Akande and Mosobalaje (2014) who observe that Yoruba proverbs are sometimes deployed to *warn, advise, suggest encourage* and *admonish* in popular culture such as hip-hop music.

Each of the proverbs in Proverbs 12 to 15 below illustrates a distinct speech act. As will be shown, while there are proverbs that are used to encourage people, there are some that may be used to predict something or praise people.

12. Èní bá pa àfèṣòjò kó mú-un re Ò. yó. ; eḍá lará oko n̄ jẹ.  
(Whoever kills a spotted grass mouse should take it to Oyo; the brown bush rat is good enough food for villagers).
13. Akè sán lòpin Ò. yó. ; ibi a bání ló. wò. ni ilé ẹni.  
(Akẹsan is the boundary of Oyo; the place where one is found in dignity is one's home).

14. Èlè dè á dé Ò yó , ariwo ni á pò .  
(Pigs will surely get to Oyo although it may be stressful.)
15. N ò bá wà ní Ò yó , ò bá ti so eṣin jàntirẹ; àgùtàn mi kì bá tí níye.  
(Were I at Oyo I would own a horse by now''; I should have had numerous sheep).
16. Àṣẹ Ò yó kì í ró “Gbà,” àfi “Mú-un wá.”  
(The order from Oyo never sounds Gbà [meaning “Take!”], only Mú-un wá [meaning “Bring”]).

As shown in Proverb 12, each of the two types of rat in the proverb is eaten by a different people. While àfè is meant to be eaten by the Oyo indigenes, the villagers residing in the outskirts are supposed to be satisfied with eḍá, another type of rat. Thus, the proverb shows a sharp divide between the rural and urban dwellers; a situation which may lead to class struggle. As we can see, therefore, Proverb 12 illustrates the speech act of *demarcating*. Like Proverb 12, Proverb 13 also shows *demarcating* and *limiting*. It shows every town has its own geographical boundary just as Akesan is the boundary of Oyo. It thus implies that no matter how powerful a king is, he rules over a particular territory and once he moves out of that territory, his power becomes limited. Proverb 14 is a little bit different in that instead of showing *demarcating*, it illustrates the speech act of *encouraging*. It means, though it may be very difficult, the feat of taking a pig to Oyo is achievable. It is a proverb that is often used to encourage people to be steadfast in the face of certain challenges in the course of achieving a set goal. There is a sense in which it could be argued that Proverb 15 indicates *regretting* as well as *predicting*. The proverb shows that Oyo is a town where one could become wealthy probably due to several business opportunities in the town; so when a person utters this proverb, it may amount to a form of regret as well as a prediction. The last proverb, Proverb 16, demonstrates the speech act of *demanding*. Alaafin would always send his emissaries to neighbouring villages and towns within his kingdom to collect tributes every now and then for the maintenance of the palace and Oyo town generally. However, Alaafin would never send any gift of any form to these neighbouring villages and towns. This is more or less a form of admonition that life is about

give and take and one should not always be taking without giving all the time.

The essence of meaningful life in any human society is rooted in cooperation. No man is self-sufficient in all areas of life; however, if there is cooperation and people are willing to share and exchange ideas, many teething problems in our society could be solved. This is why the Yoruba do say “Ká fi ọwó. ò tún wẹ ti òsì, ká fi ti òsì wẹ ti ò tún ni ọwó. fi ní mó.” (If we use our right hand to wash our left hand and use the left hand to wash the right, our hands will be clean); a proverb which underscores the importance of cooperation.

17. Ò.yó. ò gbó. “Wòde,” Ìjè.sà ò gbó. “Wò.dà,” Ò.yó. gbó. “Wò.dà” bí ẹnì gbó.Fá.  
(Oyo people do not understand “Wode,” Ìjèsà people do not understand “Wòdà”; Oyo people understand “Wòdà” as somebody who is well-versed in Ifá).

Proverb 17 is obviously one of the Oyo-related proverbs which emphasises the significance of collaboration. It shows that since it is not possible for somebody to know everything, we have to learn from one another for us to progress in life. Thus, the proverb underscores the speech act of *cooperating*.

### **Conclusion**

The study set out to examine the cultural and pragmatic dimensions of seventeen Oyo-related proverbs in Yoruba land. The proverbs revealed the nature, norms and traditions of the Oyo as sometimes symbolised in Alaafin. While some of the proverbs showed the enormous power of Alaafin (e.g., Proverbs 1 and 9), some showed the nature of Oyo people generally (e.g., Proverbs 5, 6 and 15). The proverbs investigated illustrated different speech acts ranging from *boasting*, *warning*, and *admonishing* to *pretending* and *advising*. It can be inferred that most of the speech acts derived from these proverbs are not just specific to Oyo town but are also applicable to the Yoruba people generally. The conclusion that can be drawn from this paper is that it is possible to know the nature, the psychology, the tradition and culture of a people by paying attention to their proverbs.

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