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CORPORA ISSUES IN PROTOPROVERBIALS AND POSTPROVERBIALS OF YORUBA CULTURE

Abstract: Protoproverbials have been established as residual knowledge and wisdom bequeathed by culture and tradition. However, variants of these traditions frequently emerge, thereby placing a burden of classification and demarcation on scholars of paroemia. The authenticity, authority and relative influence of these variants have also been the subject of scholarly debates. This paper explores the problem of corpora in ‘protoproverbial’ and ‘postproverbial’ studies in Nigeria with a view to elaborating existing taxonomies of paroemia in the country, and suggesting improvements to existing data-gathering methodologies. Employing desk research and advancing a data-driven approach, the paper observes that some of the methodological issues in postproverbial studies do detract from claims made concerning emerging variants of traditional proverbials. For example, samples of variants dubbed ‘postproverbials’ or ‘pseudoproverbials’ are too minute and too transient to be significantly threatening to the authority and influence of proto-texts, as sometimes celebrated, or feared, in the literature. Rather, the African protoproverbial remains etched on communal consciousness and exerts continued influence on modern culture. The study recommends that, to maintain the integrity of ‘postproverbial’ data, and validate related arguments, the data gathering process and parameters for the classification of samples should be empirical and emulate universal practices in paroemia studies.

Keywords: postproverbial, pseudoproverbial, protoproverbial, rhetorical affixes, corpora, transgressive paremiology

1. Introduction

While the precise dates of most African traditional proverbs, or “protoproverbials,” are in doubt due to the late emergence of written records on the continent, their status as ancient and revered cultural bequests is hardly debated. What has rather been debated is the classification of variants that have emerged from the traditional proverbials, and the condition for their emergence. Additionally, questions have been raised about the methodologies employed to gather these variants and whether they inspire confidence in their authenticity or validity. Protoproverbials (Oloruntoba-Oju 1997; 2014) have been described as comprising proverbs and varied paroemia, including hypernymic variants such as aphorisms, witty sayings, idiomatic expressions, adages, etc., that constitute residual knowledge and wisdom bequeathed by culture and tradition in various communities. The protoproverbials follow a ‘prototype,’ in that they are recognizably marked by age, philosophical and aesthetic depth, as well as distinctive rhetorical and linguistic patterning. However, occurring alongside these protoproverbials over time are emerging variants which are also called “paraproverbials”, and which include “counterproverbials,” “metaproverbials” and “pseudoproverbials” (see section 2 below). Some variants have also been described as “postproverbials” (Raji-Oyelade 1997; 2004), and elaborated as “modern proverbs” that are products of modernity, generational shift, and/or linguistic and cultural “neocompetence”. As explained later in this paper, some of the postproverbials are also pseudoproverbials in the frame of Mieder’s (2004: 28) “antiproverbs” or Halliday’s (1978) “anti-languages.” The postproverbials echo “the urban imagination of Africa, appearing in literature, music, film, social media, and other fictional and non-fictional spaces” (*Postproverbial* n.d.). Raji-Oyelade (2012: 12) observes that they are “situated in the subfield of transgressive paremiology, that is, the collation, study, and interpretation of alternate proverbs which are radical and parallel compositions instead of conventionally accepted and given proverbs in traditional societies.”

The debate over the classifications above has gathered momentum over some three decades of academic discourse on protoproverbials and their variants. While urbanity and modernity

are indeed important factors that motivate the emergence of post-proverbials, the dynamic nature of society, its culture, and language, including sociolinguistic fluidity, had always stimulated the production of alternative or new proverbs even in traditional societies. They are, therefore not always, the product of “modernity.” For example, “antonymous proverbs” (proverbial units that propose opposing philosophical options)¹ often emerge as a result of the ambivalent nature of life, and not necessarily as a function of modernity, while the art of punning, twisting, and “rupturing” of traditional proverbs can be traced to the earliest times even before the advent of “modernity” (Oloruntoba-Oju 1997; Mieder 2004). Socio-cultural dynamics, and the consequent questioning of the truth or universality of some proverbials, often results in the birthing of antonymous variants. Such antonymous proverbs are not like the “playful blasphemies” that have been termed postproverbials. This is because, though they may express divergent realities and wisdom, they are considered *bona fide* alternatives and accommodated within the moral-philosophical and prototypic structural frames of traditional proverbs of a society.

Our attempt in this paper is to review some prominent terminologies and categorisations of paroemia in Nigeria, and how the methodologies leading to some of the taxonomies may be improved upon. This is what we have referred to above as the problem of corpora in “protoproverbial” and “postproverbial” studies in Nigeria. We are not reviewing the terminologies only, but also the associated data, with a view to commenting on the validity or otherwise of claims made for emerging pseudoproverbials within the community.

2. Accounting for new paroemic texts in the Nigerian context

In his taxonomy of the Yoruba proverbial, Oloruntoba-Oju (1997) uses the term “protoproverbial” to refer to source proverbs in es-

¹ Examples drawn from traditional Yoruba corpora include the apparent “antithetical pair” *Ẹsin iwajū ni teyin n wo sáré* [“the horse behind sets its pace by the horse ahead”] Vs *A kii’ wo ago aláago sị ẹ.* [“We do not set our tasks by other people’s time pieces”], among many others (Oloruntoba-Oju 1997: 112).

established traditional forms. All proverbial derivatives (proverbs deriving from or relating “metaproverbially” to other proverbs) are “paraproverbials,” occurring alongside and contracting one form of relationship or the other with the protoproverbial. The paraproverbials “stand beside” the original proverbs in a manner that may be complementary, oppositional or transformative. They therefore include “counterproverbials,” which Olorunto-ba-Oju also called *idàkeji èdè* in local Yoruba parlance (roughly translatable as “opposite view or expression”); “metaproverbials” or *àwíjò èdè* (roughly translatable as “analogous expressions that resemble a protoproverbial both philosophically and stylistically” 117) and “pseudoproverbials” or *àlùfànsá èdè* (banal, trite or “trivial discourse or expression”). The latter, which Olorunto-ba-Oju refers to as “pseudoproverbials”, are what Raji-Oyelade calls “postproverbials.” A later terminology for pseudoproverbials in the literature is “pseudo-wisdom” (Mandziuk 2021). The terms are used interchangeably in this paper.

The term “paraproverbial” is usefully embracing, as it accommodates any and every relation of the proverbial derivative to its source, including relations of “antithesis,” “temporality” and “ephemeral”[ity] (See Oloruntoba-Oju 1997). The “pseudoproverbial,” which is one of the paraproverbial forms also involves a moral-philosophical trajectory, being trivial, and being philosophically and morally less attractive than the original. The alternative nomenclature, postproverbial, does not appear to provide such a critique. The term postproverbial, therefore, appears to account for only one type of paraproverbial, which is the pseudoproverbial. Instead, the term postproverbial, as strongly upheld in Raji-Oyelade’s works, relates more to “verbal inventions [which] can be connected relatively to the notion of the anti-proverb” (Raji-Oyelade 2004: 302), which in turn involves twisted traditional proverbs (Mieder 2004). It may be argued that any proverb that appears to be related to, and postdate, another, can nomenclaturally be seen as a “postproverbial”; however, the conceptual focus of the term as deployed by Raji-Oyelade is on those proverbials that “blaspheme” or are “philosophically uninspiring” relative to protoproverbials. Most illustrations of the “postproverbial” in the literature have conformed to this definition. The postproverbial is also by its “post-ness” limited in tem-

poral scope, in that it can only account for those proverbs that come after an original protoproverbial but not those that may be parallel in time, or whose time sequence may be indeterminate. Such a problem of dating may sometimes affect the validity of the postproverbial corpora.

The foregoing has exposed protoproverbial and “postproverbial” discourses to appraisal and reappraisal, with different frontiers of research trying to justify postproverbials as either a product of linguistic creativity or a “child of ambivalence.” As a postproverbial scholar with concerted and dedicated research on the concept, Raji-Oyelade’s conceptualisation tilts towards exploring the “indigenous glottophagic” processes that have influenced the “Yoruba traditional proverbs” (Raji-Oyelade 1999: 76). In this regard, Daniel (2016) reiterates Raji-Oyelade’s view that postproverbials validate the creative potential of language and the innovativeness of the language users’ communicative prowess. While culture and tradition may provide a compass for understanding the driving philosophy and wisdom of society and predispose humans to the basic reality of their existence, they do not limit their perceptive and interpretive capability to evaluate society and recreate or innovate new concepts and traditions. In an apparent counterpose to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s expressed belief that “what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence,” Raji-Oyelade observes that rather than “pass over in silence,” the innovators of postproverbial attempt to rupture the traditional proverbs. On the other hand, one of the very distinguished scholars of Yoruba proverbs, Owomoyela (2005: 19), considers the term, “postproverbial” as “grandiose.”

Although the views above appear to be contestant, what is indisputable is that both Oloruntoba-Oju (1997; 2012) and Raji-Oyelade (1997; 1999) have tried to account for new paroemic texts that relate to source texts in an African setting. They both begin with the assumption of an original or traditional proverbial text, which Oloruntoba-Oju calls the protoproverbial, and attempt to classify the variants. The term, protoproverbial, finds theoretical anchorage in the concept of proverb corpora as cultural bequeaths, a kind of knowledge that encompasses “shared beliefs satisfying specific (epistemic) criteria of an (epistemic)

community” (Dijk 2005: 73). The classical orientation about culture argues for forms of communal commonality and communal continuity. In this regard, culture is a paradigm of “social homogeneity, ethnic consolidation, and intercultural delimitation” (Welsch 1999). Proverbs, as cultural aesthetic products, exude relative rigidity both in structure and contexts of use and are perpetuated in subsequent generations. This sometimes occurs through the social agents who [un]consciously take it up as a duty to protect this memory and the associated prototypical expressions.

It is this protectionist stance that accounts for prototype sayings in Yoruba paroemia, such as *Àgbà kù wà l’òj à k’òrí omo tuntun ó wó.* (“with the presence of the elders, things will not go wrong”) and *e nu àgbà l’òbì ti ñ gbó* (“it is in the mouth of the elders that the kola nut is attested ripe”), which encapsulate wisdom as an attribute of age. In other words, these proverbs make protoproverbials a privilege of age and cultural competence. The protectionist stance also accounts for the “signature expressions”, referred to as “rhetorical affixes” (Oloruntoaba-Oju 1997; 2014) or “pre- and post-proverb hedges” (Omoloso 2016), which typically precede or succeed a traditional African proverb, and which also attribute the wisdom of the proverb to the elders. Examples such as *èyin àgbà le máa n pa l’owe wipe ...* (it is you the elders that say the proverb that...), *tótó, o se bi owe eyin àgbà* (by the leave of you, the elders), etc. revere the elders as the custodians of proverbs/culture, and make proverbs cultural artefacts that should be treated with respect. The non-use of these rhetorical affixes is often perceived as rude representations and cultural mischief in traditional reckoning. The practice of pseudoproverbials, or postproverbials, tends to rupture this cultural understanding. A new transculturality and the interpenetration of different ways of life, which results from the “inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures” (Welsch 1999: 197), has bred new, albeit less aesthetically satisfying language corpora. Relating this to post- or pseudoproverbials, it can be argued that these are products of youth culture which is rapidly propagated in verbal art forms in music, films, and other communication media such as social media forums in contemporary forms.

The notion that “elders are the custodian of proverbial wisdom” has actually been challenged (see Oluayamo 2006 cited in Daniel 2016; Daniel 2008 and Balogun 2010) as a strategy to coerce the youngsters into believing in the universal truth value of traditional proverbs. The argument here rests on the view that proverbs “are a product of linguistic employment and [instrument for] communicative intent” (Daniel 2016: 67). In this view, signature rhetorical affixes, as cited above, would seem to be perceived as an age-related communicative strategy meant to coerce “the younger generation to fall in line with the perceived ‘tradition’ of the race” (Daniel 2016: 69). In our view, language, which gives proverbs expressivity, as well as its many communicative paradigms, is an instrument of communication in its multifarious forms and in many cases may be an instrument of power and tool of coercion. However, proverbs often derive authority from their persuasive, not coercive, rhetorical orientation – rhetoric itself being, quintessentially, the art of persuasion. Nonetheless, the view of certain age-old paroemiological practices as “coercive,” complements the idea of postproverbials as products of “cultural rebels” who for mischief or jocular reasons create them to suit their discourse needs. Wolfgang Mieder, a leading scholar of proverbial studies, opined that “more often than not, proverbs are used innovatively: they are changed and twisted until they fit the demands of our modern age” (Mieder 1993: 58; Naciscione 2015).

Mieder’s assertion here also points to a status elevation for innovated variants of proverbials, and exposes the dynamic nature of creativity in the use of proverbs over time. However, while modernity is one of the factors in the production of variant paromias, paraproverbials, including postproverbials, always have the potential to emerge due to “the dynamic world view of the community concerned... and the natural transformative potential of discourse” (Oloruntoba-Oju 1997: 109). Equally implicit in Mieder’s position is the theory of anti-proverbs. Like Oloruntoba-Oju’s “pseudoproverbials” and Raji-Oyelade’s “postproverbials”, Mieder’s “anti-proverbs” are specialist coinages that reflect the “instantial stylistic use” (Naciscione 2015: 230) and “new communicative phraseological units” (Valdaeva2003: 390) of proverbs which question the contextual rigidity, illocutionary

stringency, and structural fixity of traditional proverbs in instant discourse. One may therefore agree with Naciscione's (2015: 230) that the varying terms employed by the theorists such as those referred to above can be regarded as products of academic scholarship and are linked "inextricably to specialist knowledge."

However, the analysis of the postproverbial poses sharp questions about the corpus, its identification, its agency, its repository, and its analysis. It is to these problematic areas that we now turn attention.

3. Methodology

The foregoing serves as a launchpad from which to examine other fundamental issues relating to postproverbial studies. First, what are the important corpora problems encountered in postproverbial studies, and second, how have the data-gathering methods in previous research helped to advance, or hinder, the concept of the postproverbial? Employing desk research methodology, we attempt, in the following sections, to identify the data-gathering methods that postproverbial scholars have adopted, and the methodology employed in the sampled articles. The paper uses the purposive method to select four journal articles published on the subject matter between 2013 and 2020. These include: Jegede (2013), Ademowo and Balogun (2015), Daniel (2016), Raji-Oyelade and Ango (2020). In addition, the theoretical postulations of two Nigerian scholars who have worked on proto-, para-, pseudo-, and post-proverbials (Oloruntoba-Oju, 1997; 2014, and Raji-Oyelade 1997; 1999; 2012), are used as primary resources. This, as envisaged, will allow for an in-depth and rigorous examination of the issues of corpora in the publications, on the one hand, and an investigation of the contributions of the relevant methods to advance Yoruba postproverbial studies on the other hand. It will also enable us to propose ways of improving on the data-gathering methods in postproverbial studies, and of clarifying opaque aspects of the concept of the postproverbial.

4. The problem of corpora in postproverbial studies

Corpus has been defined as "a collection of naturally-occurring language text, chosen to characterise a state or variety of

a language” (Sinclair 1991: 171). As a research practice, corpus linguistics deals with the study of language from a social perspective and investigates the symbolic content, meaning, and discourse value of corpora (Ope-Davies 2021). Also, as instantial discourse forms and minted expressions, postproverbials are said to pose serious corpora issues, given the diverse contexts of genres and discourses. However, where are postproverbials or pseudoproverbials located; who are their authors and how are they to be analysed?

4.1 Analysis of postproverbial/pseudoproverbial corpora

The analysis of the postproverbial or pseudoproverbial would typically involve a tripodal process. First is the identification of the relevant protoproverbial, then of its pseudo derivative or anti-thesis, as well as its agency and or repository, and then its analytical implications.

As noted by Oloruntoba-Oju (1997), the pseudoproverbials “contravene the illocutionary imports of their [co-related] antecedents,”); identifying the antecedent expressions is, therefore, an inevitable part of identifying a suitable corpus. In other words, postproverbials belong to a specialised corpora category as their text constituents are drawn from a particular genre or register and deployable in specific cultural and communicative contexts. They are a genre suitable for particular occasions and championed by the new generation of language users who often manipulate proverbs for humorous and satiric ends.

In other words, since postproverbials draw their existence from protoproverbials, the valid corpora must include references to an original context and to the deconstructed context. This consideration also informs the analytical methodology and sequencing in the investigation of paroemic derivatives.

4.2 Sequencing

In both Oloruntoba-Oju and Raji-Oyelade’s explications, the protoproverbial is first listed, followed by the postproverbial, as the following examples show:

1a. **Protoproverbial:** *Ọbẹ́ tí baúlẹ́ ilẹ́ kùù jẹ́, iyálẹ́ ilẹ́ kùù sẹ́ é*

Translation: The stew that is forbidden to the husband, the wife does not cook it.

1b. **Postproverbial:** *Ọ̀bẹ̀ tí baálé ilé kù jẹ, ẹranínú rẹ̀ ní kò pò.*

Translation: The stew that is forbidden to the husband, can only be lacking in sauce and assorted beef.

4.3 Postproverbial as pseudoproverbial or pseudo-wisdom

The above examples show that “postproverbials” or “pseudoproverbials” do derive locus from an existing protoproverbial but subvert the epistemic logic of the original. While the protoproverbial (1a. above) indexes the sociocultural reality of a people that believe that peaceful co-existence is a product of playing mutually complementary roles, the postproverbial or pseudoproverbial (1b.) dismisses the important philosophical import of the original and substitutes it with a rather banal or jejune interpretation. The assessment of such violations in the literature has given rise to characterisations that may not always be complementary. For example, Raji-Oyelade (1997; 1999) identified markers or indicators of banality in postproverbials, while Olorunto-ba-Oju (1997) is more caustic in appraising them as not only “banal” but also as often “literal and aesthetically uninspiring” (1997: 120). Mandziuk (2021: 24) also points out that such proverbs encapsulate pejoratives and “pseudo-wisdom.”

Some examples (with their translations) cited in Olorunto-ba-Oju (1997: 121-122) are reproduced below:

2a. *Dàda ọ̀ lẹ̀ jà, sùgbón ọ̀ ní àbúrò t’ógbójú.*

Translation: “Dada cannot fight, but he has a younger sibling who is fierce.”

2b. *Dàda ọ̀ lẹ̀ jà, ọ̀ n sá lọ.*

Translation: “Dada cannot fight; he runs away.”

3a. *Ọ̀ gbọ̀ kíkù òjò, ọ̀ da omi agbada nù, tí òjò kò bá rẹ̀ mọ̀ nkó?*

Translation: (“[Just because] you hear the rumble of [rain] you throw away the water in the reservoir, what if it does not rain after all?”)

3b. *Ọ̀ gbokíkù òjò, ọ̀ sá wole; mi ọ̀ bá ẹ̀ wí ọ.*

Translation: (“You hear the rumble of rain, you flee into the house; I don’t blame you, my friend”.)

Such pseudoproverbials as the ‘3b’ examples above fit perfectly with the jocular anti-proverb classification of the genre and can be tolerated within the appropriate contexts. In both cases, the grave philosophical of the protproverbial is subverted, but they cannot constitute a clear threat to the philosophical authority of the relevant protproverbial. The jocularly does mean that the individual’s wit and discourse or rhetorical skills are usually keyed into the use of proverbs to playfully outwit a co-interactant. Therefore, communicative intent, social influence, and situational experience provide the rhetorical resources for the dynamism in the use of proverbs and the creation of postproverbials. These indices – intention, social influence, and situational experience – can drive the proliferation of postproverbials in discourse and a study on postproverbials may need to consider these indices in carving a methodology for gathering data on the subject. More important, however, is the question of agency and repository of the pseudoproverbial.

4.4 Agency and repository of postproverbial corpora

Agency constitutes a fundamental source of consideration here. Whereas modernity and technological innovations have largely been credited with birthing the parodied proverbs in postproverbial theory, a key element or ingredient is the associated human agency that is consciously “parodying, twisting or fracturing” (Mieder 2004: 28) the traditional proverbs, thereby creating new corpora and provoking a scholarly search for same. Where the protproverbial is communal property entrenched in traditional consciousness, the postproverbial is a child of chance and a transient phenomenon, typically produced by youngsters and bearing the marks of liminality or transitionality, hence hardly attaining wide recognition by the cognate speech community. Since data gathering is key to the success of the postproverbial project, as noted earlier, the procedure for this process comes inevitably under scholarly scrutiny.

4.5 Anonymity, ephemerality, competence, and propriety

It is observed in this study that, from collection and documentation of postproverbial data to their transcription and transla-

tion, the bulk of data sampled in postproverbial studies often lacks verifiable procedures. A critical issue here is the source of data. Often, there is the issue of anonymity of the source. For example, in Ademowo and Balogun (2015), fifteen (15) “popular” sex-related proverbs were claimed to be randomly selected from day-to-day “anonymous users” and a critical approach was applied in the analysis (Daniel 2016). The anonymity of sources creates the problem of verifiability. As most articles (Ademowo and Balogun 2015; Daniel 2016; Raji-Oyelade and Ango 2020; Mandziuk 2016; etc.) in the postproverbial corpus do not name their sources, the method of data gathering becomes a serious issue in the study of postproverbials.

Corpus linguistics provides a methodological foundation for examining communicative behaviour in real-life situations and deals with the utilisation and collection of large and principled language samples for qualitative and quantitative analyses (Reppen and Simpson-Vlach 2010), in order to ensure proper social memory representation and balance. “Language technology, large data collections, and sophisticated automatic methods allow the exploration of current proverb use based on authentic language mass data in a new dimension” (Steyer 2017: 46; Omowoyela 2005). Engaging proverbials with a corpus linguistic approach can take different dimensions: the qualitative and quantitative dimensions. However, whether qualitative or quantitative, these source texts are mostly available in automatic internet searches. On the other hand, postproverbials are not readily available, as most are newly emerging, different from the Yoruba traditional proverbials that are culturally and readily available and mostly documented.

The absence of electronic data for Yoruba postproverbials makes it difficult to subject the phenomenon to corpora linguistics methods. While we acknowledge the effort at gathering postproverbials (*Postproverbial* n.d.), we observe that this is at a nascent stage of development and cannot be favourably compared to the vast databases of traditional paroemia. Corpora of Yoruba protoproverbials can be found in large quantities in established studies and anthologies, popular oral sources², and also on the

² Proverbials have a long history even as an oral medium passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. Oloruntoba-Oju (2014; 2017) has frequently cited

web, as noted above, while postproverbials studies still depend on a small set of data whose proprietary and acceptability threshold is currently minute. It may well be argued that a large set of data would not be necessary for qualitative analysis; however, to ascertain the syntactic, semantic, and functional (dis)similarities between protoproverbials and their postproverbial counterparts, there is the need to adopt an approach that allows for a quantification of the degree of association maintained by both. The distributional patterning and functional or illocutionary imports are two factors that make “corpus-driven exploration of proverb” patterns a creative and important aspect of proverb studies. A corpus-driven exploration of postproverbials will go a long way to reveal the continental features and illocutionary functions of these variants of proverbs.

A related problem is ephemerality. Postproverbials, as “accidental variants,” involve an obvious twist of common belief that poses as an affront to cultural knowledge. This is precisely because they are situational, spontaneous conversational variants and regarded as “cultural outcasts”; postproverbials, as pseudo-proverbials, soon fade out as new situations arise and contexts change. As characteristic of popular culture, they are transitory. In other words, while the relatively fixed clauses of traditional proverb corpora can be subjected to an automatic search, variants, reductions, or extensions of the same sentences cannot be so automatically harnessed as digitised data. A number of literary corpora are also being produced especially in Yoruba literature. For example, Adeyemi (2012) brought out several “anti-proverbs” from the novel *Réyè` Rún* by Oladejo Okediji. Many of these examples are actually also pseudoproverbials. While most postproverbial scholars operate largely within English language disciplines, extended access to new corpora of Yoruba proverbs requires deliberate efforts at interlingual and interdisciplinary cooperation with Yoruba scholars.

In awareness of the last point, we again acknowledge the effort that produces the webpage <https://postproverbial.com>, where the proprietor of the site has launched a collection and up-

the testimony of Ajayi Crowther who, as far back as 1850, observed paroemia as a communal conversational practice found “in the mouths of all” among the Yoruba.

date of postproverbials from different African languages, in order to encourage researchers who are interested in postproverbial studies to build analytical and empirical research frontiers. Such an effort is in tandem with Reppen and Simpson-Vlach's (2010: 90) view that "researchers interested in exploring aspects of language use that are not represented by readily available corpora [...] will need to compile a new corpus". By the same token, the analytical empiricism guaranteed in corpus linguistics is characteristically encouraged through the collection and utilization of large and principled naturally occurring data to "ensure representativeness and balance" (89). However, pseudoproverbials are quite easily constructed, since they mostly parasite on traditional protoproverbials and carry no burden of deep philosophical contemplation. Postproverbials generated through such efforts may not readily accord with the cultural status and potential of traditional proverbs especially in terms of the level of communal awareness and degree of recognition or of acceptability. The issue being raised here is not whether postproverbials exist or not; rather, what this contribution advocates is the need to collect data that ensure "social representativeness and balance" from both primary and secondary sources of spoken and written natural texts and sources and contexts that can be verified (see Oloruntoba-Oju 1997).

4.6 Agency and competence

A related problem is the issue of competence. What distinguishes protoproverbials from postproverbials is the social domestication of aged cultural and historical wisdom in the former and the banalizing of the same within the latter corpora. Protoproverbials are well situated in the social and cultural values of a people and, therefore, constitute the "incast" paremiography in the culture. The term "incast", according to *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary (n.d.), refers generally to "something added for good measure"; hence, the idea that traditional proverbs are deployed to ensure conversational propriety and added philosophical values in discourse. It also implies the agency of a competent speaker of the source language that births the proverbs. Of particular interest here is what has been described as "paroemic competence" which "confers discursive authority on the compe-

tent discussant” (Oloruntoba-Oju 2014: 1712). Competence in this context is not only measured by linguistic competence, but by the comprehensive cultural immersion and associated cultural communicative skills that ensure the deployment of paroemia in situationally relevant contexts. The knowledge of the world must be fused with knowledge of the relevant linguistic system to facilitate the relevant cultural interconnectivity or cultural discursive competence.

Paroemic competence is, therefore, a complex skill that is made up of several sub-skills or levels of competence that are required in the production and or appreciation and analysis of the proverbial. Three levels of competence have been identified in the discussion of the protoproverbial and its variants – a generalized cognitive or awareness competence involving the awareness of the protoproverbial and its performative/illocutionary imports; a creative competence, which is necessary to appreciate and possibly transform its semantic horizon, and a creative-stylistic or rhetorical (non-literal) competence that allows for the expansion of the rhetorical frontiers of the protoproverbial in a way that is aesthetically noteworthy (Oloruntoba- Oju 1997: 122-125). It follows that the postproverbial or pseudoproverbial activist must also demonstrate sufficient competence to be able to identify the relevant corpora and evaluate the associated cognitive relations in relation to the original and, above all, its discursive limitations. It would appear that pseudoproverbials, or postproverbials, have sometimes been romanticized in the Nigerian context beyond their discursive significance within the overall framework of paroemia.

4.7 Definitional scope of postproverbial

Perhaps the most important problem of the postproverbial corpora is that the paroemic type that constitutes the “postproverbial” is sometimes in dispute. The data adopted in the identified studies appear to often vary in scope and express different levels of subjectivity. Raji-Oyelade (2012, p. 126) opined that “for every popular traditional proverb in use, there is at least one postproverbial as its prosthesis.” However, what exactly constitutes the postproverbial is sometimes indeterminate in the mixed practice of the scholars.

i. Creativity, subversion or sheer incompetence

It will be recalled that “postproverbials” as conceptualised for Nigerian/African settings (Raji-Oyelade 1997; 1999) centre on subversive and comic renditions of protoproverbials. Prominent examples from antecedent scholarship include the following where the ‘a’ samples are the protoproverbials and the ‘b’ samples are the post- or pseudoproverbials:

- 4a. *Eṣin iwájú nì, t’èhìn n wo sáré.*
 (“The leading horse, is an example to other racers”)
- 4b. *Eṣin iwájú nì o gba ‘pò kiníi.*
 (“The leading horse, will surely take the first position”)
 Comment: In this illustration, there is a shift from the logic of the exemplar to a tautological statement (Raji-Oyelade 1997: 101-102).
- 5a. *Dàdà ò lè jà, ṣùgbón ó ní àbúro` t’ó gbójú.*
 (“Dada cannot fight, but he has a younger sibling who is fierce.”)
- 5b. *Dàdà ò lè jà, o nsá lọ.* (Dada cannot fight; he runs away)
 Comment: The pseudoproverbial alters the philosophical orientation of the protoproverbial without offering an alternative depth of perception (Oloruntoaba-Oju 1997: 120-121).
- 6a. *Igi gogoro má guń mi lójú, àt’òkèrè lati n wòò.’*
 (For the tall pointed tree not to pierce my eye, one watches it from afar off).
- 6b. *Igi gogoro má guń mi lójú, ma dọqjì è nì.*
 (For the tall pointed tree not to pierce my eye, I will dodge it).
 Comment: While the postproverbial version is comical, the protoproverbial “retains some metaphorical content that makes it appear mysterious” (Daniel 2016: 73).
- 7a. *Ọpẹ l’obinrin, gbogbo ẹnì bá ní condom lo n bawọn sun.*
 (Women are ever ready for fucking, just get a condom and cajole.)
- 7b. *O pẹ l’obinrin, gbogbo ẹnì bá ní igbà lẹwọ ní guń uń*
 (Women are palm trees, anybody with a ladder climbs them). (Anonymous)
 Comment: the traditional proverb depicts women as weaker vessels while the postproverbial emphasizes this weak-

ness in relation to sexuality (Ademowo and Balogun 2015: 16).

The above examples and the comments indicate that “postproverbials” are almost invariably theorized by their proponents as an erroneous and trite distortion of the wisdom inherent in protoproverbial. As noted by Oloruntoba-Oju (1997), originally the samples named “postproverbials” were first noticed as errors, and not as competent or creative re-renditions. He observes that:

In contemporary Nigerian history, the emergence of the pseudoproverbial [postproverbial] is popularly traced to the frustrated school certificate examinee in Yoruba subject. Confronted with a task to complete a protoproverbial, whose opening is stated, the incompetent youngster (some say gangster!) simply provides a literal complete that is not only wrong but is ludicrously banal. Initially setting off an outrage, this failed examinee soon became the butt of jokes among teachers and examiners who also propagated the phenomenon by default during such hilarious sessions. (123–124)

ii. Youngsters and classroom “postcompletives”

Indeed, classrooms continue to be a setting for harvesting “postproverbial” renditions produced by students who are deficient in the language. Table 1 below presents some examples from the “language and society” class taught by one of the authors in 2021.

Table 1: Some particularized postproverbials and their protoproverbial variants

s/n	Protoproverbials	Post-/pseudoproverbials	Comments
1.	<i>Aki i ko èlé...</i> (one does not take a loan...;) Ans.: <i>şę .’şó.</i> (for a fashion spree)	<i>Aki i ko èl’ é...</i> ; (one does not take a loan...;) Ans.: <i>kí á má lèè jẹ pizza.</i> (and be afraid of giving oneself a good treat, like a pizza)	The post-/pseudoproverbial subverts the philosophical logic and seriousness required in investing ones’ hard earnings on thoughtful and profitable projects rather than on frivolous items.

s/n	Protoproverbials	Post-/pseudoproverbials	Comments
2.	<i>B'irinbá kan'rin</i> ,... (When two iron rods strike each other;) Ans.: <i>ikan à tè fun'kan</i> . (one of them bends)	<i>B'irinbá kan'rin</i> ,... (When two iron rods strike each other;) Ans.: <i>wón má sà'na</i> . (there will be sparks) <i>B'irin bá kan'rin</i> ,... (When two iron rods strike each other;) Ans.: <i>won dan'gbara wo ni</i> (it is a mere test of strength)	The post-/pseudoproverbial mischievously focuses on the physical or surface manifestation of a power tussle rather than the metaphorized, and deep consequences indicated in the proto- text.
3,	<i>Af'opin á ton í oun ó pa fit il á</i> ...; (The firefly that wants to put out the candlelight) Ans.: <i>ara e niyo pa</i> . (will end up killing itself.)	<i>Af'opin á to fẹ pana-a suy á</i> ...; (The firefly that wants to put out the smoke of rast) Ans.: <i>eranpošini</i> . (makes the beef surplus [by its own addition])	The post-/pseudoproverbial turns a serious warning into jest.
	<i>Alašeju ù ní í gbé sar aa</i> ... (only the overzealous takes his alms...) Ans.: <i>kojá mošál as í</i> (beyond the threshold of the mosque)	<i>Alašeju ù ní í gbé .bọ</i> ... (only the overzealous takes his ritual...) Ans.: <i>kojá id í ešu</i> . (beyond <i>ès ù</i> 's shrine)	The post-/pseudoproverbial, in this case, can be said to be reactionary in that it attempts to twist the religious sensitivity involved in the two variants.

As seen from the above, the postproverbials (or pseudoproverbials) all manifest the principles of literalness, banality, and verbal play. They generally “vary the protoproverbials in a manner that is banal, literal and often aesthetically uninspiring” (Oloruntoba-Oju 1997: 120) and are “trite,” “banal,” “deforming,” as well as being alternative creations derived from and which stand against traditional proverbs” (Raji-Oyelade 1999: 75). Another feature is the limitless potential for iteration or rapid viral reproduction since the “pseudocompletive [of the postproverbial] is informed neither

by deep philosophical considerations nor by aesthetic ones” (Oloruntoba-Oju 1997: 126). The following examples are apposite:

- 8a. Protoproverbial – *B’irin bá kan’rin, ikaṅ á tẹ̀ fuń’kan.*
(When two iron rods strike each other; one of them bends)
- 8b. Postproverbial 1 – *B’iriń bá kan’rin, wón má sá’ná.*
(When two iron rods strike each other, they throw up flashes of light)
- 8c. Postproverbial 2 – *B’irin bá kan’rin, wón dań `gbará wò ni.*
(When two iron rods strike each other, it is a mere show of strength).

iii. Erroneous categorizations

Samples that do not fit the above categorization often find their way into the corpus. Citing one or two examples from Jegede (2013) will suffice here.

9. He who borrows a dozen yam seeds at the threshold of planting but declines payment by the twilight of harvest rolls boulders across the path of kindness at the next hour of need (*Naked*, 47)
10. Odo-Ogun does not stop to look back/Amid the season’s torrential rain (Gods 70)

Jegede (2013) considered the above to be postproverbial variants of the protoproverbials below.

Eni tí ó yá egbàfà tí kò sán; ó bẹ̀ ̀igi di nà egbèje.

(He who refuses to pay back a loan of one thousand two hundred is not likely to get help in the future.)

Odò kii sán kó b’ojú w’eyin (A river does not flow backward).

However, these examples do not fit with the classic recast of the protoproverbial as literal, banal, and philosophically-emptied renditions of these protoproverbials. In the examples above, the philosophy, moral import, and structure of the protoproverbial are retained in Jegede’s renditions, whereas postproverbials usually entail “de-formation” and “loss of poetic flavour” (Raji-Oyelade 1997: 104). Renditions such as the above are actually accounted for by Oloruntoba-Oju’s (1997: 111) classification of paraproverbials (i.e., “every and any proverbial that is related to a protoproverbial in whatever way”), particularly, the variant that he calls “metaproverbial”, referred to as *Afiwé orọ or àwijo èdè* (“analogous rendi-

tions” or “a variation of the protoproverbial”). The classification reveals the complex grammatical and discourse values as well as “illocutionary imports” or patterns of the paraproverbial. *Àfíwé òr'ò* or *àwíjò èdè* can be regarded as *exposé* or interpretive “metadiscourse” forms that share intertextual relationships with the prototexts or protoproverbials in a mutually relevant context. Such translational or intralingual re-renditions of the protoproverbial “hardly [query] the philosophical orientation of the protoproverbial but mostly [supply] a contemporary and situationally relevant context where such a context *appears* not to be well served by the philosophical purview of the original” (Oloruntoba-Oju 1997: 117). The objective is usually to achieve some “stylistic/rhetorical effect,” as Oloruntoba-Oju explains further:

While the philosophical orientation of the protoproverb remains intact, the rhetorical frontier of the protoproverbial is expanded to achieve an effect that is sometimes comic, sometimes serious/sober, but always rhetorically uplifting. The terseness of the original proverb, which is lost in the expansion, is compensated for in the pleasant stylistic rhetorical structure of the metaproverbial variant. (119)

Clearly, examples such as the above, again, attune more with the classification, “metaproverbial” while they hardly fit with the classification “postproverbial,” whose conceptual fount lies in features such as literalness, banality, subversion, and comicalness. This observation has important implications for postproverbial corpora. It seems clear that, for an empirically valid study of postproverbials, corpora must attune with the interactional and communicative values of particularized variants of proverbs. To properly accommodate samples such as those under reference above as *bona fide* data within postproverbial studies, there may be a need to reconceptualise what constitutes “postproverbial,” expand its theoretical frontier and streamline it with other paraproverbials long identified in the literature.

5. Conclusion

Like pseudoproverbials, postproverbials are re-renditions of traditional proverbials to produce literal and often banal parodies for comic effect, reflecting the linguistic and communicative pro-

density of particular language users. However, as seen from this study, considerations regarding the corpora for postproverbial studies reveal a plethora of problems or issues. Among these is the tendency to harvest duplicative and redundant “postproverbial” samples for a single protoproverbial, resulting potentially in a glut of non-remarkable samples. Unlike the protoproverbials which are established communal products, postproverbials, or pseudoproverbials are often accidental variants that emerge from an individual’s communicative ingenuity or lack of it. Also, postproverbials are often compiled from “anonymous sources,” leading to a glut of data that may not be easily verifiable. The ease with which a banal rendition of an original proverb can be produced almost by anybody (including researchers), therefore, tends to cast doubt on the authenticity or true extent of the use of postproverbials among the populace. It would appear in the circumstance that the use of digital procedures for gathering data is recommendable to produce a verifiable and dependable corpus. A deliberate effort at interdisciplinary and interlingual cooperation with scholars in Yoruba studies would also open up access to unknown literary corpora in the subject area.

A related problem is the ephemeral nature of samples. Since postproverbials are usually not deep philosophical renditions, compared with protoproverbials, they hardly form part of the communal stock of proverbs. Accordingly, it has been difficult to raise a strong or genuine database for postproverbials to promote empirical studies of the phenomenon. Again, researchers in the area have demonstrated the capacity to generate intuitive or hypothetical corpora that mimic traditional proverbs but lack access to a large corpora base that is associated with protoproverbials. The dearth of large and reliable naturally occurring spoken or written data of postproverbials would often put the validity of scholarly arguments on the phenomenon to the test. Again, ways of improving the validity of postproverbial data need to be deliberated upon by scholars.

Finally, scholars of the postproverbial as originally theorized in Nigeria need to be cognizant of the paroemic types that fit into the conceptual frames. The term, postproverbial has been conceptually “patented” for banal, literal, comic, and “blasphemous” (Raji-Oyelade, 1997; 1999) re-renditions of traditional proverbs

associated with some youths. The equivalent term for such renditions in Nigerian proverbial studies has been “pseudoproverbial” (Olorunto-Oju, 1997; 2014). However, as demonstrated in the foregoing, samples that do not fit this description often find their way into a number of postproverbial analyses, and, again, this draws attention to the issue of corpora for postproverbial studies. To accommodate other types of proverbial samples, the theory of postproverbials would need to be re-conceptualised in relation to other taxonomies of the proverbial that appear to account more fully for the different manifestations of paroemia in African contexts. In all, it is recommended that to maintain the integrity of postproverbial data and validate related arguments, the data gathering process and parameters for the classification of samples should be made more empirical.

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