

## **Commiserating through Proverbs among the Yorùbá: A Pragmatic Act Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

*The human activities, the world over, are replete with emotional disturbing encounters which call for comforting. Yet research attention paid to this crucial aspect of life has been little. This paper aims at exploring the act of comforting among the Yorùbá from a pragmatic perspective. Specifically, the study adopts a modified version of Mey (2001) to analyse the proverbs that the researchers collected through personal observation, consultation with the Yorùbá elders and published texts on Yorùbá proverbs. The researchers, as Yorùbá native speakers and teachers, used some data from their knowledge of Yorùbá proverbs. The findings of the research show that the selected proverbs accomplished the practs or pragmeme of comforting through the allopracts of reconciling disputes, encouraging the downcast in moments of grief, raising the expectations and hopes of those undergoing disturbing life experiences, as well as commiserating with those who lose their loved ones. The study further reveals that the users of these proverbs were able to achieve this because the shared socio-cultural knowledge (sck), the shared social situational knowledge (ssk) and the reference, relevance, voice and*

*inference features are mutually possessed by the participants. The study concludes that the use of proverbs to console or comfort underscores the rich socio-cultural heritage of the Yorùbá in the process of tackling life challenges.*

**Keywords:** Pragmatic acts, Participants, Yorùbá society, Yorùbá proverbs, Comforting

### **Introduction**

Many factors, issues and encounters lead to occasions, situations and circumstances that call for the accomplishment of pragmatic functions of comforting and consoling. It is real with all humans that people become emotionally imbalance when an ugly, disturbing and destabilising life experience comes knocking. According to White and Davidson (2013:1)

People become upset for a number of different reasons. Distress can be a reaction to a common disturbing life experience – an accident, a child hurt in a playground, someone injured in traffic – or after receiving bad news.

Or, it could be as a result of a very exceptional event, a plane crash, train derailment, major weather event or act of violence. Or it could be a build-up of many events, causing overload and stress.

All over the globe, moments of sorrow, grief and adversity are part and parcel of people's life encounter. Such issues do not spare any class, status, creed, race, religion, political affiliation, nationality, community, family or individuals (Rosof, 1994). This boils down to the fact that those

in need of comfort are multifarious. A few of them are accident, fire, flood, plane crash, or in short, disaster victims. Some others are the bereaved, theft, robbery and injury victims, as well as those hurt by situations and circumstances. All this implies that people in emotional discomfort, such as being sorrowful, sad, unhappy, including the crying babies, are all in need of emotional support (Stone, 2008).

Consequently, the societies, across cultures and ethnicities, have devised some ways of comforting one another. Greetings, cares and mourns are some of the traditional and general ways of expressing or showing sympathy or empathy. In the literature, it has been discovered that many experts in the art of comforting have turned out textual resources on this important phenomenon in the society (Stone, 2008; Szalavite, 2011; Rose, 2013; White and Davidson, 2013; and Shearn, 2016).

Comforting can be done at the instance or location of those who need them; it could be at home, office, farm, hospital, school, in the vehicle, at the bank, etc. (Greenleaf, 2012). As earlier mentioned, several means have been devised to douse the effect of griefs. While it is obvious that griefs may not be reversed, encouraging, care, helping someone after miscarriage, expressing words of comfort after losing a job or loved one, sympathising with someone who just had a broken marriage, lending emotional support to someone in a crisis, rocking or responding to a crying baby, are some of the common ways of comforting.

However, little or nothing has been made known in research on the fact that proverbs contain immeasurable and deep illocutionary or pragmatic acts of comforting. Proverbs, according to Lawal (1992), are the quintessence of a people's collective wisdom sustained and transmitted from generation to generation. Among the Yorùbá, proverbs play key roles from generation to generation in times of discomfort, grief and sorrow. This accounts for reasons why the Yorùbá have several proverbs as tools for emotional support that help to soothe or cushion disturbing effects.

The purpose of this paper is then to examine some of the proverbs and their functions in the performance of these crucial role among the Yorùbá. To achieve this goal, the researchers focus on selected Yorùbá proverbs and apply a pragmatic act approach to unravel the historical, social, cultural and environmental contexts that constrain and facilitate the use of these proverbs in accomplishing the pragmatic functions.

### **Pragmatics and Proverbs**

Pragmatics, as one of the current and broad linguistic inquiries, has attracted the attention of pragmaticians through proffering different definitions, culminating in various pragmatic dimensions. Though not referred or named as pragmatics, the contextual exploration began with Malinowski (1923) when he had some difficulties in translating the texts he recorded in South Pacific, specifically the Trobrian Islands. He noticed, to his dismay, that translating from a language into another, could only be facilitated by the understanding of the contexts in which

utterances took place. In 1957, Firth, building on the notions of Malinowski's context of utterances, introduced the concepts of context to include verbal features of participants to mean the verbal and non-verbal actions of both speakers and hearers in a discourse, whether written or unwritten. He also took into cognisance some other features such as objects that are relevant in discourse, as well as the effects of the verbal action.

Austin (1962) comes up with the idea that when we talk or speak, we are accomplishing some social acts. These acts he referred to as locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. With this, the dimension of speech acts emerged to kick-start what later became an inspiration that snowballed into an elaborate and widening area of study known as pragmatics. Since this development, scholars have studied and modified contextual studies in several ways. For instance, Searle (1969), Bach and Harnish (1979), Levinson (1983), Leech (1983), Thomas (1995), Yule (1996), Adegbija (1999), Mey (2001, 2006, 2009), and so on, have added different dimensions to the ever-widening field of pragmatics.

Austin's (1962) dimension of pragmatics was explained in terms of locution (linguistic context of an utterance in terms of phonetic, phatic and rhetic acts); illocution (the force or intention behind an utterance); and perlocution (the effect of an utterance on the hearer and speaker). Searle (1969) revisits the work of Austin (1962), his teacher, and introduces the pragmatic dimension of direct and indirect speech acts. While Bach and Harnish (1979) postulate the aspects of intention and inference in term of contextual beliefs (mutual contextual

beliefs MCBs). Levinson (1983) considers pragmatics as the study of language in use by accounting for those principles that relate language to contexts that are couched in the structure or grammar of a language. Leech (1983) writes by focusing on competitive, convivial, collaborative and conflictive functions of utterances, stressing that perlocutionary acts are realised by saying something.

Thomas (1995) sees pragmatics as interpreting meaning in contexts, while he further defines pragmatics as the study of meaning in discursive interaction. According to Yule (1996), a speaker may communicate in such a way that what we get is more than what is said. It is the explication of what is not said as contained in what is said that constitute the nucleus of Yule's notion of pragmatics. In the words of Adegbija (1999:189), "pragmatics is the study of language use in particular communicative context or situation." Mey (2006) also introduces his own perspective of pragmatics in an integrative construct of meaning interpretation. His theoretical construct of pragmatic theory advocates the study of language acts from an 'outside in' dimension to the functions accorded the words or utterances by the situation. The implication of Mey's notion of pragmatics is that more specifics, especially from the contextual backgrounds, are brought into the study of language acts in any speech event, including proverbs.

From the foregoing, proverbs as a field of study, is a ready ingredient for the explication of meaning at all contextual levels, and as an aspect or genre of speech in interactions. Proverb, as a genre of speech, can be examined at all levels of

linguistic analysis, while their use as a potent means of social control, of oiling conversation, of encouraging sports, health and hygienic living, of discouraging vices and of comforting and consoling victims of disturbing life experience, among other functions, make them amenable to pragmatic exploration.

### **The Yorùbá Society and Proverbs**

Alabi (2009) discusses the Yorùbá society as one that has a high regard for proverbs because of their rhetorical and social functions. The Yorùbá regards proverbs as “horses of speech; and if communication is lost, we use proverbs to find it” (p.516). According to Alaba (1986), the Yorùbá deploy proverbs to make statement of fact on moral instructions and against social ills. This implies that the Yorùbá, like many other ethnic groups in the world over, are endowed with proverbs. The Yorùbá use proverbs to enliven conversations, amuse, arbitrate in disputes, instructs, and particularly, comfort and console. For instance, *N ó ʒe baba fún ọ, kò jọ baba; n ó ʒe iyá, kò jọ iyá; wòsọ dẹmí kì í jọ onísọ; ojú mẹwàá ò jojú ẹni* (someone who promises to perform the role of a father or mother for you cannot perform them as your own parents; for someone to look after your market stall on your behalf cannot be like you and, ten people standing in for you cannot be as you being there). This is a proverb often said to console someone who is disappointed by an uncle, aunt or relation. It is often said again to console someone who is disappointed by somebody who fails to meet his/her expectation. This single proverb can also be used to console someone who, upon losing his/her

parents, is maltreated by the guardian or the person who is taking care of him/her.

*Bí ọ̀rẹ̀ eléèèsú bá kó tán, ọ̀tá rẹ̀ náà yóò kó* (When those using wrong influence to possess things are done, those who also have no one to influence things in their favour will also have their own opportunity). This proverb is often employed to sooth the pain of someone who is cheated or kept waiting on something which others use undue influence to gain. The proverb is said to console and encourage people to endure and have patience, while waiting to have an expectation.

In fact, the plethora of proverbs and their importance among the Yorùbá have inspired research works by scholars who have inquired into their linguistic and literary perspectives. These scholars include Crowther (1852), Bamgbose (1968), Agiri (1975), Alaba (1986), Ogundeji (1992), Yusuf (1994), Arifalo (2001), Ojoade (2004), Akinyemi (2007), Adejumo (2009), and Friday-Otun (2014), among others. But in spite of the robust works in the Yorùbá proverbs, the aspects of comforting through pragmatic act analysis have not attracted the attention of scholars. In filling this gap, this study intends to explore the use of proverbs in Yorùbá to console and comfort people by deploying the theory of pragmatics.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Among the theories of pragmatics, the Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory is the most suitable for a work of this nature. This is because this work is rooted in functional diagnosis which the pragmatic act theory of Mey is built on. Proverbs, metaphors,

idioms, etc. are different from conventional linguistic form, in that, while normal utterances have “a unit of analysis,” the former have a “double unit” used to express the familiar (the tenor) in terms of the unfamiliar (the vehicle). In other words, “proverbs and other indirect utterances are primarily pragmatic activities constructed in a social situation” (Sokari and Ugwu, 2013:90). Odebunmi (2008) reinforces the indirect strategy of proverbs by stating that proverbs are best studied through a theory of action. Normally, proverbs exhibit traits that underscore the shifting of emphasis from the propositional content and forms to the social, cultural, historical, interactional and physical contexts that facilitate their explication (Sokari and Ugwu, 2013).

According to Mey (2001:221), a pragmatic act is instantiated through an “ipra” or “a pract” which realises a pragmeme as ‘every pract is at the same time an allopract’, that is, a concrete instantiation of a particular pragmeme. Adeniji and Osunbade (2014:4) expatiate on this further by claiming that “what determine a pract are solely participants’ knowledge of interactional situation and the potential effect of a pract in a particular context.” Mey (2009:751) clarifies this point further that “The explanatory moment is from outside in, rather than from inside out: instead of starting with what is said, and looking for what the words could mean, the situation in which the words fit is invoked to explain what can be said/and is actually being said.”

The model of Mey’s (2001) is in two parts. That is, for a pragmeme to be realised, the textual part and the activity part

must be activated. The activity part borders on the speaker's cognitive context which places options such as speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational acts, psychological acts, prosody, physical acts, etc. at his/her disposal. The second part, the textual part, depends on the communication of speaker's intention in a communicative event. He/she may decide to employ "inf" (inference), "ref" (reference), "rel" (relevance), "vce" (voice), ssk (shared situational knowledge), "sck" (shared socio-cultural knowledge), "mph" (metaphor) and "m" (meta pragmatic joker). In this paper, the contexts of grief, pain and distressing symptoms that call for consoling and comforting will be explained in the light of the above features. Furthermore, the pragmatic act of comforting is a pract and its variants or alternates are regarded as allopracts.

Alzheimer's Association (2010:2) defines comfort care as palliative care which "focuses on relieving pain and other distressing symptoms including agitation, anxiety, poor appetite, loneliness and boredom." Hornby (2003:310) defines consolation as the act of giving comfort or sympathy to somebody who is unhappy or disappointed.

The proverbs selected for this study were collected through consultations and introspection. Some text materials on the Yorùbá proverbs, as well as Yorùbá elders were consulted. The researchers are native Yorùbá speakers. This gives an advantage of collecting some of these proverbs through personal observation and introspection. In addition, the researcher made frequent visits to the libraries to elicit data. Each selected proverb is subjected to pragmatic exploration by

investigating all possible contexts leading to how each of them can emerge or be used. This accounts for why Mey’s (2001) pragmatic act approach is favoured in this article. The modified version of this model as deployed for analysis in this paper is presented below:

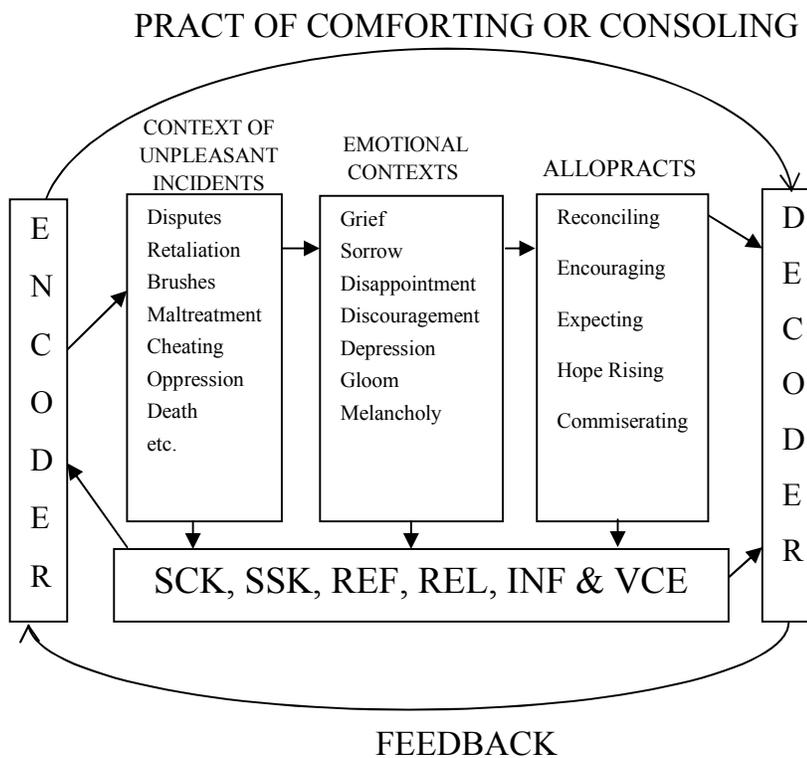


Fig. 1: *A model showing the pract and allopracts of comforting.*

In the model, the encoder performs a comforting act on the decoder. In-between them, are context of unpleasant or disturbing incidents, emotional contexts and allopracts, with each of them represented by a box. The context of unpleasant

incidents include disputes, disagreement, brushes, frictions, maltreatment, cheating, oppression, and so on. Next to it is the box housing emotional context which includes grief, sorrow, disappointment, discouragement, dejection, and so on. This box is followed by the context of allopracts such as, encouraging, expecting, hope raising and commiserating. Each box feeds the other as represented by the arrows that goes from the encoder to the decoder. In the whole exercise, the pract or performance of comforting is being performed. In the model, a pragmeme is instantiated as a pract, hence, the interchangeable usage as will be seen in the body of the article. The lower horizontal box housing SCK, SSK, REF, REL, INF, and VCE are both shared by the encoder and the decoder. This produces the arrows that go from the box in opposite directions to both encoder and decoder. Furthermore, there is a feedback from the decoder to the encoder to ensure continuity of the whole acts. The SCK, SSK, REF, REL, INF, and VCE of the encoder and decoder are activated by the unpleasant incidents which trigger the emotional contexts and the allopracts as indicated by the adjoining arrows.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

Ten proverbs are presented and analysed in this research. As earlier said, the goal is to investigate the pragmatic functions in their use to comfort people by deploying the model designed above.

## **Reconciling**

### **Example 1**

**Bí a kò bá gbàgbé ọ̀rọ̀ ànà, a kò ní rí ẹnìkan à á bá ẹ̀rẹ̀.**

**If we do not forget the misgivings of yesterday, we will be left with no friend.**

In the society, it is usual for people, young and adult, male and female to interact and work together. In the course of these, unpleasant or disturbing incidents in form of disagreement, brushes, retaliation, frictions, death and so on, do occur. These inflict grief, sorrow, disappointment, and even depression on both parties to the conflict. But, the issue is not really in not disagreeing or not quarrelling; the onus lies in both parties to a disagreement or dispute to learn the way of reconciliation. When reconciliation becomes difficult in knotty issues, those arbitrating often reach on to this proverb to comfort the disputants or the warring parties. The essence is to console by urging them to forget about the issues causing the frictions or else, things will not go on well. The thrust of the use of this proverb is in forgetting about the ugly past so as to forge ahead. People are bound to offend one another, but the only way forward is to forget the past and forgive one another and continue to live together as one.

This proverb is used to accomplish the pragmatic act of reconciling those in disputes for peace to reign in the Yorùbá society. The proverb is often quoted to the parties involved in disputes to pacify them. Example 1, like other examples that

will be analysed in this paper, represents an indirect speech act and it is employed where the shared socio-cultural knowledge (sck), shared situational knowledge (ssk), the reference (ref), relevance (rel) and voice (vce) of the participants are mutual and even.

**Example 2**

**A foró yáró ni kì í jé kóró tán.**

**Insistance on retaliation will merely prolong disputes.**

Just like in example 1, Yorùbá society employs this proverb to reconcile parties in dispute. The context for the use of this proverb is produced through unpleasant or offensive act of someone against another. The party who feels cheated, oppressed or maltreated may be looking for an opportunity to pay back. This is against the fact that a hurt done to another may bring about sorrow, depression, or discouragement. Hence, the tendency to retaliate may be high. But retaliation is often frowned at in any decent society. An evil done to counter another evil may generate endless conflicts, and this does not augur well for individuals, friends, families, communities and the country at large. This proverb is often used to perform the pragmatic function of reconciling. The users of this proverb also have to meet some contextual conditions for its impact to be felt. In other words, the sck, ssk, ref, rel and vce of the participants must be mutual for the proverb to be effectively used. The proverb accomplishes the pract or pragmeme of consoling or comforting through the allopract of reconciling.

### **Encouraging/Expecting/Hope raising**

#### **Example 3**

**Kí ikú má pa ẹni tí ń dá ni lóró, kí òrìṣà mǎà jẹ kí ǹnkan ẹe ẹni tí ń ẹe ni níkà, bí ó pẹ tí tí orí ẹni á dání láre.**

**May death not strike a tormentor, may the god not allow evil to befall the wicked, sooner or later, destiny will justify the one being tormented.**

With the sck and ssk of the users of this proverb underscored against the contextual background of the wicked living among the Yorùbá, like in any other society of the world, it is obvious that people, many at times, are oppressed, unjustly brutalised, disappointed, betrayed, debased, cheated and dehumanised. Such ugly instances come with attendant sorrow, grief, disappointment, pain, and depression. Example 3 is then relevant, in most cases, to encourage the victims of these inhuman treatment to persevere and endure. The proverb is employed to realise the pragmatic act of encouraging the victim to continue, knowing very well that a bright light awaits him/her at the end of the tunnel. The proverb is often said to pacify an apprentice or anybody under an oppressive master or boss. The proverb performs the pragmeme of consoling or comforting through the allopract of encouraging and expecting.

**Example 4**

**Bí ó pẹ́ tíí, akólòlò yóó pe baba.**

**It may be long, a stammerer will finally pronounce ‘ba-ba’.**

In this proverb, the sck and ssk of who a stammerer is, is clear to its users. In the Yorùbá language, “Baba” (father) is a double syllable word using “ba” as the root. In pronouncing “baba”, the syllable “ba” is used twice, but a stammerer may pronounce it several times due to his/her speech deficiency. He/she keeps on saying “ba –ba –ba –ba –ba –ba”. Against this backdrop, a stammerer may take a longer time to pronounce it. The Yorùbá society now turns the situation of the stammerer in this context to a means of pacifying someone who is undergoing a bad situation with the hope that, no matter how long it takes, the experience will sooner or later come to an end. No doubt, the incidents of maltreatment or oppression with resultant sorrow, grief and pain that the victims of such inhuman experience encounter need to be soothed. The proverb is then used to encourage the victims to continue to endure, knowing that “tough time never lasts but tough people do”.

Furthermore, the proverb can be used to comfort someone whose progress in an endeavour seems very slow. With the features of the users’ ssk, ssc, vce, rel, and ref in place, it is understood that the person undergoing a slow progress as a result of one setback or the other, should take solace in that sooner or later, the ordeal will be over. This is common among those undergoing undue stress or problem. The proverb is

engaged to actualise the pragmatic act of comforting through the allopracts of encouraging and expecting.

**Example 5**

**Bí ó pé tíí, ogún ọdún á ku ọla.**

**No matter how long it seems, twenty years will remain a day.**

The proverb above serves the pragmatic function of comforting through the allopracts of encouraging and expecting. Just like examples 3 and 4, many contextual features can instantiate the proverb above. Issues of life call for, among other things, perseverance and expectation. Almost every aspect of life calls for occasions, events, challenges and situations that constitute some odds or obstacles on the way to achievement or success. One should then not give up in the face of these odds, but be made to see the light ahead. With this proverb, people comfort one another when discouragement sets in, as a result of some unpleasant or disturbing issues. The use of this proverb is, however, hinged on the cooperative features of the sck, ssk, vce, inf, ref, and rel possessed by the participants. The “twenty years” mentioned in the proverb is quite long, but its use connotes that no matter how long an ordeal is, one should not lose hope because, when there is a will, there will be a way. As earlier said, the proverb is used to actualise the pragmeme of comforting through the allopract of encouraging and expecting.

**Example 6**

**Ajá tí ó pa ikún lóní lè pa òyà lóla, nítorí náà, kí a má bínú pa ajá.**

**A dog that kills a squirrel today, can kill a grasscutter tomorrow, therefore, we should not kill the dog in anger.**

The proverb above takes us to the cultural context of hunting expedition in Yorùbá society. In the example, the context of hunting, using a dog is depicted. At times, dogs are locally trained to hunt game. But if the dog succeeds only in killing a small animal that may disappoint the dog owner.

By implication, a disappointment resulting from a high expectation is part of a disturbing life experience. In order to sooth the grief and pain that such situation inflicts on the victim, example 6 is relevant. The user of this proverb and the hearer in the context shared the socio-cultural and situational knowledge of the use of the proverb. The features of relevance, reference and inference play significant roles in encoding and decoding the proverb. Actually, the anchor in the proverb is consequent upon the future benefit that can be derived from the person who disappoints. When it is hoped that someone who fails to perform to expectation today can perform even above expectation tomorrow, the hope is kept alive. The proverb is employed to achieve the pragmeme of consoling or comforting through the allopract of encouraging and hope raising.

**Example 7**

**Èdá ló mò ọ̀n dàrú, Olúwa Ọ̀ba ló mò ọ̀n tò.**

**The humans know how to disorganise, the Lord the King knows how to re-organise.**

The proverb above is used to encourage someone undergoing a disturbing life experience to have hope in God, especially when the harrowing encounter emanates from a mortal being. The use of the proverb can be handy in consoling someone who has been disappointed, or made to suffer unjustly. Sympathisers can use this proverb to encourage the victim by urging him/her to have hope in God. Definitely, the encoder and decoder of the proverb have a mutual socio-situational knowledge of the occurrence and then engage appropriate features of rel, ref, vce and inf. The proverb serves the pragmatic function of consoling through the allopract of encouraging and expecting.

**Example 8**

**Mímì lásán ni ẹ̀pọ̀n àgbò ní mì, ẹ̀pọ̀n àgbò kò ní já.**

**The scrotum of the ram will only swing, it will not cut.**

The proverb is taken from pendulum nature of ram's scrotum. Rams are known with big and heavy scrotum. In this proverb, the scrotum can be someone undergoing a trying time. The swinging of the big scrotum is compared to the victim of an unpleasant or disturbing incident, who can be shaken by his/her challenges, but who would never be overcome by the difficulties. The proverb is engaged to comfort someone

encountering problems, discomfort, tribulation or a precarious situation. The proverb also raises the hope of the victim, implying that no matter the enormity of the challenges, he/she will not fail but prevail. The encoder and the decoder of the proverb have mutual contextual understanding of the circumstances surrounding the proverb. In other words, the sck, ssk, ref, inf, rel and vce of the participants are activated for the understanding and interpretation of the proverb. The proverb is employed to realise the pragmeme or pract of consoling and comforting through the allopract of encouraging and hope-raising.

### **Commiserating**

#### **Example 9**

**Omi ló dǎnù agbè kò fọ.**

**It was the water that poured away, the gourd did not break.**

The images of water and gourd are used in the proverb. In the Yorùbá society, pregnant women who encounters miscarriage or still-birth are commiserated with through this proverb. The gourd is a vessel which holds water. For one reason or the other, the gourd may have its water poured away accidentally. The water is the figure representing the fetus or pregnancy while the gourd represents the mother conceiving the fetus. In a context of loss of pregnancy or still-birth, the proverb is employed to console the mother. Through the proverb, the users express gratitude to God because the negative occurrence did not claim the life of the mother (gourd). The features of sck, ssk, ref, inf,

rel are brought to bear on the participants for the proverbs to be properly appropriated for use. The proverb is employed to perform the pragmeme or pract of comforting through the pract of commiserating.

**Example 10**

**Òkú ñ sunkún òkú, akáşlóri ñ sunkún ara wọn.**

**The dead is mourning the dead, the mourners are bewailing the death of themselves.**

Death, an unpleasant incident, is an inevitable experience that all must undergo sooner or later. When death comes knocking at the door of anyone, the relations, well wishers, including the mourners, use the proverb to commiserate with themselves to accept the fate, as everyone will sooner or later share the same fate. The users of the proverb possess the features of sck, ssk, vce, ref, inf, and rel in order to properly interpret and apply it. Hence, the proverb serves the pragmeme or pract of consoling or comforting through the allopract of commiserating.

**Discussion of Findings**

Ten proverbs have been analysed in this paper. It has been observed that the pract of comforting accomplished the allopracts of reconciling, encouraging, expecting, hope raising and commiserating. In example 1, the allopract of reconciling was actualised in occasions of grief and disappointment arising from an offending attitude of someone to the “comfortee” This happens in real life situation where a party hurts another party which, at times, may be too painful to easily forget. In such a

situation, enmity and hostility between the two parties may linger for some time, or even for a long time. A third party who assumes the position of a peace maker does this by employing this proverb to reconcile both parties in the conflict. Likewise, example 2, in its use for reconciling, appeals to parties involved in a dispute to avoid retaliation, as such practice often aggravates ugly situations.

In examples 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8, the allopracts of encouraging, expecting and hope raising were accomplished in each of them. These proverbs are apt and real in life experience. For instance, in example 3, it does happen here and there, among the Yorùbá, as in other societies, for one to be learning or serving under a tough, disciplined and, at times, oppressive masters, bosses or relations. This often result in unpleasant treatment of learners or service providers. In circumstances of this nature, example 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are appropriate in consoling or comforting the parties maltreated, oppressed or brutalised .

Example 3 comforts by encouraging the person at the receiving end to be expecting a justified or vindicated result. Example 4 also comforts, raising the hope of the victim by underlying the defined end of the ordeal, no matter how long. Example 5, like example 4, emphasises the ultimate end to the ordeal, even if it lasts for many years. Example 7 pacifies a party who is betrayed, unjustly treated or inflicted with some pain. The proverb emphasises the role of God as a “repairer” in whatever injury, damage or pain that someone is going through in life. Example 8 depicts consolation by emphasising that

trials, problems, unpleasant circumstances and bitter experiences are meant to merely shake the victims, but not to culminate in life termination.

The focus of example 6 is slightly different. The consolation effort, this time around, is directed towards the bosses, masters, guardians or parents. The tendency for those below the ladder to disappoint, offend or provoke those above the ladder is real. This scenario also extends to frictions between parents and children, guardian and wards. The proverb becomes a tool of comfort or consolation by cautioning the disappointed, offended or provoked, not to over react in such situation, raising the hope that someone who is rude to somebody today, may be obedient tomorrow; the child, apprentice, or subordinate who disappoints people today may be a source of comfort tomorrow; and the learner who provokes his/her superior today may be a beacon of hope tomorrow. Hence, caution should be exercised in any kind of reaction being put up.

Examples 9 and 10 accomplish the pract of comforting through the allopract of commiserating. However, the emphasis or focus of example 9 in the act of comforting is only on women who experience miscarriages or still birth, while example 10 relates to the mourning of the dead generally.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the pragmatic functions of consoling or comforting by discovering the allopracts of reconciling, encouraging, expecting, hope-raising, and commiserating. It has

been established through this study that the frontiers of the pragmatic act theory of Mey (2001) has been extended to the exploration of Yorùbá consoling or comforting proverbs. The belief of the Yorùbá society in dousing emotional discomfort, as it is in other societies of the world, gives birth to the proverbs analysed in the study. This socio-cultural and socio-situational fact is shared by the users of the proverbs.

This implies that the shared social situational knowledge (ssk) and the shared socio-cultural knowledge (sck) of the users facilitate the accomplishment of the consoling or comforting pragmeme through the allopracts observed in the study. This corroborates the claim of White and Davidson (2013) that situations will always force people to be in emotional discomfort; people will have to devise some means of cushioning the effects. This implies that the socio-cultural knowledge and the socio situational knowledge of the people aid the use of proverbs to douse the effects of emotional disturbance.

The use of proverbs to console or comfort in Yorùbá society also underscores the rich socio-cultural heritage possessed by the Yorùbá. Through this study, it is confirmed that the Yorùbá, through proverbs, can reconcile disputants, encourage those who are downcast, raise the expectations and hopes of the people undergoing difficult or trying times, as well as commiserate with those who lose loved ones.

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