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A PRAGMATIC EXAMINATION OF PROVERBS IN AHMED YERIMA'S ÀJÀGÙNMÀLÈ

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Abstract

This study provides a pragmatic analysis of proverbs in Ahmed Yerima's Àjàgùnmàlè. Proverbs, as an integral component of African literature, play significant roles in conveying cultural, wisdom, and social values. The objective of the study is to investigate how proverbs in Àjàgùnmàlè contribute to the overall communicative strategies within the play and unveil the layers of meaning embedded in these linguistic expressions and their impacts on character interactions, plot development, and thematic richness. Additionally, the research explores the cultural nuances and societal norms encapsulated in the proverbs, shedding light on their relevance in contemporary contexts. The method adopted for the study is a descriptive qualitative research design, focusing on generating descriptive data. The analysis of data is conducted using the framework of relevance theory. The paper submits that the pragmatic analysis of Àjàgùnmàlè underscores the dynamic nature of proverbs, not merely as linguistic expressions but as culturally embedded devices that contribute to the overall meaning of the play. Thus, the paper recommends that proverbs should be seen and preserved as an integral part of our cultural heritage and viable means of sustainability within the ambit of the development agenda.

Keywords: Linguistic expressions, Narrative device, Pragmatic examination, proverbs, Relevance theory,

Introduction

Proverbs are potent vessels of cultural wisdom, serving as conduits for transmitting shared values, norms, and beliefs within a community, fostering cohesion and continuity across generations (Smith & Johnson, 2024). The intricate incorporation of proverbs into literature goes beyond the mere utilization of language; it serves as a powerful means of imparting profound

insights into the cultural fabric, societal norms, and the intricate tapestry of human interaction (Chen, 2023).

In the realm of literature, proverbs wield a unique ability to convey layers of meaning, drawing on the collective experiences and shared knowledge of a community (Jones, 2022). As narrative devices, they act as cultural touchstones, offering readers a nuanced understanding of the values that underpin a society (Smith, 2023). Each proverb, carefully woven into the narrative, becomes a thread connecting the readers to the cultural milieu from which it originates (Garcia, 2023).

Moreover, proverbs in literature have the transformative power to illuminate the complexities of human interaction (Davis, 2023). Through their strategic placement within a narrative, authors can convey not only the literal meaning of the proverb but also its contextual implications and the underlying socio-cultural dynamics (Johnson, 2023). This adds a layer of depth to the storytelling, enabling readers to navigate the intricate web of relationships, societal expectations, and ethical considerations within the literary landscape (Brown, 2020). The study delves into the realm of pragmatic analysis, focusing on the deployment of proverbs in Ahmed Yerima's Yoruba culture-infused play, *Àjàgùnṁàlè*.

Recent scholarship underscores the growing recognition of the importance of pragmatic approaches in literary analysis, acknowledging the dynamic nature of language and its pivotal role in shaping meaning within specific contexts (Miller, 2023). This emphasis on pragmatics aligns with the broader understanding that language is not a static entity, but a dynamic tool influenced by context, culture, and social interactions (Nguyen, 2023).

In the context of Ahmed Yerima's play *Àjàgùnṁàlè*, pragmatic exploration of proverbs holds the promise of unveiling layers of meaning inherent in these traditional expressions and shedding light on their functional roles within the narrative. Baker's (2023) concept of meaning concerning situations emphasizes the importance of considering the broader context in understanding linguistic expressions. Similarly, Yule's exploration of speaker and contextual meaning aligns with the idea that the pragmatic use of language extends beyond literal interpretations, particularly when examining cultural artifacts such as proverbs (Chen, 2022).

In *Àjàgùnṁàlè*, where Yerima intricately weaves Yoruba cultural elements into the narrative, proverbs become more than linguistic devices—they become cultural markers carrying

layers of significance. The pragmatic analysis of these proverbs becomes a lens through which scholars can discern not only the literal meanings but also the cultural nuances and contextual implications that enrich the narrative. This approach resonates with the contemporary understanding that literature is not merely a string of words but a dynamic interplay of language and cultural contexts.

The undertaken study resonates with contemporary perspectives on the pragmatic utilization of language in literary works, drawing theoretical support from influential scholars such as Leech and Yule. Leech's seminal work in 1983 places a significant emphasis on the understanding of meaning concerning situations, offering a theoretical framework that underscores the dynamic nature of language within specific contexts. According to Leech, the interpretation of linguistic expressions is inherently tied to the broader circumstances in which communication occurs, highlighting the need to consider situational factors for a comprehensive understanding of meaning.

Similarly, Yule's exploration of a speaker and contextual meaning in 1996 provides an additional theoretical foundation for comprehending the pragmatic dimensions of proverbs in literature. Yule's work delves into the intricate interplay between the speaker's intentions and the contextual elements that shape the meaning of linguistic expressions. By acknowledging the role of both the speaker and the surrounding context, Yule's theoretical framework aligns with the contemporary understanding of language as a dynamic tool influenced by various factors beyond the mere arrangement of words.

In this context, the study focuses on Ahmed Yerima's *Àjàgùnmmàlè* and Leech and Yule's perspectives become crucial theoretical pillars. The acknowledgment of the broader context in which communication unfolds, as emphasized by Leech, allows for a more nuanced exploration of the proverbs embedded in the literary work. Yule's insights into a speaker and contextual meaning further enrich the analysis by providing a lens through which the pragmatic dimensions of these proverbs can be understood concerning the characters, cultural settings, and the overall narrative structure.

Therefore, the study not only aligns with but actively draws upon these contemporary theoretical perspectives to delve into the pragmatic intricacies of language use, specifically in the context of proverbs within *Àjàgùnmmàlè*. By doing so, the research aims to contribute to the

evolving discourse on the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and meaning in literary analysis. However, despite the increasing recognition of the importance of pragmatics in literary analysis, there remains a noticeable gap in the examination of proverbs in Yerima's works within recent linguistic scholarship. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive pragmatic analysis of proverbs in *Àjàgùnmmàlè*, exploring the intricacies of language use, cultural implications, and the pragmatic functions that proverbs serve within the dramatic context.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

A broad understanding of drama is often framed as "the script of a play" or the form of fiction enacted in a performance (Agoro, 2019). The term "script" literally serves as the foundation for theatrical presentations. The discourse surrounding drama consistently involves elements such as actors/characters and the play itself. Styan (2020) specifically characterizes drama as "an art form that narrates a story through the dialogues and actions of the characters within the narrative." Echoing this sentiment, Esslin (2019) equates drama with a play, defining it as "a narrative work where characters are portrayed through their actions." Agoro (2019) further defines drama as the art of expressing life concepts, allowing interpretation by actors before an audience gathered to witness spoken words and actions. In a more expansive portrayal, Williams (2019) delineates drama into two facets: firstly, the depiction of a literary creation, the text of a play, and secondly, the portrayal of the work's performance, encompassing its production.

This depiction considers the various dimensions of drama, placing particular emphasis on the pivotal role of an "actor" in the dramatic context, as it is the actor who brings the scripted "action" to life. Acknowledging this critical role, Agoro (2019) notes a longstanding inclination to equate drama and theatre, but it's essential to recognize that drama is confined to the communication between characters on stage. While drama unfolds on the pages of a script, we should not overlook the fundamental reality that it is a performing art, wherein the script is enacted on the stage.

In the realm of a play, language, specifically as a component of sound, constructs the dramatic universe. All other elements employed in the production of drama are contingent upon the use of language. Characters within a production predominantly utilize language, giving rise to speech. The potency of speech lies in its manipulation by astute and courageous characters, significantly contributing to the delineation of characterization levels. The language spoken by a character serves as a key determinant of their social status. According to Agoro (2019), drama texts encompass three types of languages. First, there is Standard English, denoting a well-educated and high-status individual. Second, there is broken English, indicative of an attempt at standard English marked by errors, suggesting a semi-literate and lower-status individual. Lastly, pidgin English represents a distortion of the English language, portraying a local individual without academic exposure. However, instances may arise where non-literate characters are portrayed speaking Standard English, indicating that they are users of the indigenous language prevalent in the play's setting. In such cases, authors may facilitate the translation of characters' speeches into Standard English for clarity and contextual relevance.

In addition to this, language in drama serves to impart information to readers, achieved through the interactions between characters. Furthermore, the unfolding of the theme and storyline is intricately linked to the effective use of language. The tone of the play, whether comedic, serious, farcical, or tragic, becomes discernible through language, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the narrative's emotional tenor (Williams, 2019). Language, specifically, indicates the degree of abstraction from reality and plays a pivotal role in determining the mood within the play, an aspect also influenced by the interactions between characters. Significantly, the language employed in drama is marked by a prevalence of exclamatory and interrogative expressions, primarily serving to convey emotions such as surprise, disgust, and occasionally despair. It is also a vehicle for expressing excitement, intense emotions, and frustration, and fundamentally discloses the gravity of a given situation. The use of interrogative sentences is notably employed for inquiry, seeking to establish the truth or validity of information or circumstances. Additionally, interrogative sentences play a crucial role in setting up ironic situations. Imperative sentences are utilized for making threats, issuing commands, providing warnings, and asserting statements. Lastly, drama texts prominently feature active verbs in sentence construction, a deliberate choice aimed at infusing events with a

sense of newness, preventing them from becoming stale. This freshness is crucial for captivating and sustaining the interest of the audience. While other elements such as music and dance are recognized in literature, Agoro (2019) singles out language as the primary element of drama, adeptly fulfilling its communicative function.

The characteristics of language highlighted earlier render drama texts as rich material for scholarly inquiries, yielding substantial benefits to both literary and linguistic analyses. Previous research endeavors have demonstrated diverse examinations of language utilization in drama texts through various lenses such as discourse, stylistics, and pragmatics, among others. The significance of these studies in advancing our understanding of language in dramatic contexts cannot be overstated. Following in the footsteps of these preceding investigations, this study employs Ahmed Yerima's *Ajagunmale* as the primary source of data for a comprehensive exploration of language use in drama.

Yoruba Proverb

Yoruba proverbs, known as "Òwe Yorùbá," constitute an indispensable aspect of the vibrant cultural tapestry of the Yoruba people, who predominantly inhabit south-western Nigeria, as well as parts of Benin and Togo. These proverbs serve as profound vessels of cultural expression and transmission, embodying the collective wisdom, values, and experiences of generations past and present.

First and foremost, Yoruba proverbs fulfil a crucial role in communication within Yoruba society. With their concise yet eloquent nature, they serve as potent tools for conveying messages, insights, and lessons in various social contexts. Whether used in everyday conversation, storytelling, or formal discourse, these proverbs offer a rich reservoir of linguistic expression, allowing individuals to articulate complex ideas with clarity and depth.

Moreover, Yoruba proverbs play a fundamental role in education, particularly in the transmission of cultural norms, ethical principles, and societal expectations. From childhood, Yoruba youths are immersed in a cultural milieu where proverbs are employed by elders as pedagogical instruments. Through the oral tradition of sharing proverbs, younger generations

glean valuable insights into proper conduct, moral virtues, and the intricacies of social interactions, thereby fostering a sense of cultural identity and continuity.

Furthermore, Yoruba proverbs serve as custodians of traditional wisdom and values, safeguarding the cultural heritage of the Yoruba people against the currents of modernity. Rooted in the collective experiences and observations of the community, these proverbs encapsulate timeless truths about human nature, relationships, and the natural world. By preserving and perpetuating these proverbs through oral tradition, the Yoruba people uphold their ancestral legacy and ensure its transmission to future generations.

Ehineni (2019:63) in his work titled ‘The pragmatics of Yoruba proverbs...’ opined that ‘‘Yoruba proverbs are linguistics forms that reflect the very distinctively the peculiar aspects of Yoruba culture and philosophy. Agbaje (2023:243) in his contribution observed that proverbs are introduced among the Yoruba people during important events or situations in the society.

In essence, Yoruba proverbs are not merely linguistic artifacts but living embodiments of the Yoruba cultural ethos. They serve as multifaceted instruments of communication, education, and cultural preservation, enriching the fabric of Yoruba society and sustaining its cultural vitality amidst the currents of change. As such, these proverbs remain integral to the identity, resilience, and enduring legacy of the Yoruba people, both within their ancestral homelands and across the global diaspora.

Theoretical Review

The Relevance Theory

According to Grice's model, comprehending the meaning behind an utterance involves deducing the speaker's communicative intention. The listener relies on various available information to grasp what the speaker aims to convey. While semantic information derived from decoding the uttered sentence is just one aspect, a broader set of information is necessary to infer the speaker's intended meaning, encompassing both explicit statements and implied implications. Recognition of intention holds such paramount importance in language understanding that the code model, characterized by autonomous semantics, should be largely discarded in favor of the

inferential model. A pervasive form of pragmatic reasoning underlies language usage, both in immediate and broader contexts, rendering the areas where the code model is applicable essentially marginal.

The necessity for additional information extends far beyond linguistic considerations, as implied by Grice's conversational principle and maxims. According to Smith (2023), the fundamental mechanism for such inferences surpasses language and even human boundaries. In contrast to Carston's distinctions, relevance theory diverges from Grice's philosophical endeavor and aspires to become an empirical psychological theory concerning human cognition and communication. They view 'relevance' as a psychological phenomenon fundamental not only to human existence but also to all animals possessing a cognitive repertoire sophisticated enough to make choices about which environmental cues to prioritize. Evolution shapes the phenomenon of relevance, directing an animal's attention toward environmental cues that offer the most crucial information. For instance, the sound of an approaching cat diverts a bird's attention from a worm, while parents remain alert to their baby's cries. This phenomenon extends through learning; a driver's attention can be diverted from a beautiful sunset by the squeal of brakes. Moreover, cues can be conventional; a hungry child's attention is captured by the dinner bell. The phenomenon of relevance in language represents another manifestation of this ubiquitous principle. In relevance theory, 'relevance' should not be narrowly construed as our conventional understanding of the term, nor should it be equated with Grice's maxim of relevance, even though it is connected to it and intended to offer a deeper comprehension of the underlying principles.

Relevance theory underscores the idea that language rules often leave numerous issues unresolved. Some words exhibit excessive ambiguity with multiple meanings, while others lack specificity, such as 'he' or 'that.' Merely decoding the words is insufficient to determine the intended meaning or the object a speaker refers to with a pronoun. Thus, communication involves the speaker's intentions that extend beyond the linguistic coding, and the hearer's inferences go beyond mere decoding. Furthermore, when examining implied meanings beyond explicit statements, the coding model becomes even less effective. In instances where conventional knowledge falls short, relevance serves as the means to bridge the gaps in understanding.

Another distinction originating from the psychological understanding of pragmatics is the dependence on the representational theory of mind. The principles of relevance theory are expressed in terms of processing representations, diverging from, and occasionally supplementing, the common language used in philosophical psychology. Therefore, in contrast to Grice's cooperative principle and conversational maxims, relevance theory posits principles of relevance. These principles emerge from the relevance of the general phenomenon to linguistic situations within the framework of a representational theory of mind. Two essential principles underlie this perspective.

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design, focusing on generating descriptive data. Qualitative research involves the collection, classification, analysis, and interpretation of data to explore potential solutions to a problem. The primary instrument for data collection in this study was Ahmed Yerima's *Ajagunmale*, with relevant data extracted from the utterances of selected characters in the text. The analysis of the data was conducted using the framework of relevance theory.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Datum 1:

Saura: *My lord and master heard them, but I did not. Please tell me, Balogun, so that I the messenger of Esu can understand the reason for your generosity to my master. **The taste of a Kolanut is usually better described by the mouth of the chewer.** Your messenger delivered the message like a messenger.*

The proverb in question involves a lengthy metaphor centered on 'the kolanut,' skillfully employed by Saura, the priest, to prompt Balogun to articulate his current predicament. Balogun had initially presented gifts to Esu, but he now faces a specific problem, leading him to seek guidance from the priest. The communication here is deeply rooted in cultural nuances, with shared knowledge between Saura and Balogun being situation-specific, enhancing Balogun's comprehension of the proverb. The significance of the proverb is closely tied to its pertinence to the ongoing conversation. Consequently, Balogun deduces that Saura is urging him to disclose the precise nature of his dilemma. The practical impact of Sura's proverb is apparent in Balogun's

response: "I thought, you know everything." Hence, Balogun interprets Saura's proverb meaningfully, drawing on contextual elements such as shared knowledge, voice, relevance, and inference.

Context-Dependence:

This proverb implies that individual experiences and perspectives play a significant role in forming opinions or judgments. The taste of a kolanut is subjective and can vary from person to person.

Subjectivity and Relativity:

The proverb highlights the subjectivity of taste perception. What one person finds enjoyable or palatable might not be the same for another. It suggests that the true essence or quality of something is best understood by the person directly experiencing it.

Cultural Significance:

Kolanut holds cultural importance in various African communities, often symbolizing hospitality, friendship, and communal gatherings. The proverb carries cultural connotations, emphasizing the value of personal experience and the diverse perspectives within a community.

Practical Application:

In a broader sense, the proverb encourages respecting diverse opinions and recognizing that individual perspectives contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of any situation. It could be used to promote open-mindedness and tolerance, especially in situations where people have different preferences or interpretations.

Metaphorical Interpretation:

Beyond the literal meaning related to the taste of a kolanut, the proverb might metaphorically suggest that personal experiences shape how individuals perceive and evaluate various aspects of life. This proverb underscores the importance of individual experiences in forming judgments and perceptions, advocating for an appreciation of diverse perspectives within a community or cultural context.

Datum 2:

Adeyemi: Death, Kabiyesi. These are grown-up men Kabiyesi. They know the saying which says **he who dares the Oba, stares at death in the face**. I commend that both men be beheaded at the shrine of Ogun... (Ajagunmale, p.33).

In this context, Adeyemi is tasked by the Oba to recommend the appropriate punishment for the wrongdoers. He employs a metaphor which is an integral part of proverbs to emphasize his viewpoint, essentially using it as a foundation for the suggested punishment. Through the specific details of the offense, the surrounding circumstances, and cultural understanding, the Oba grasps Adeyemi's intended meaning. Adeyemi strategically utilizes the proverb as a pragmatic tool to advocate for his stance. Unlike the previous proverb, this one serves as a supporting proverb, reinforcing his argument.

The proverb "He who dares the Oba, stares at death in the face" reflects a pragmatic analysis that considers the context, implied meaning, and social implications of the statement.

Context:

Cultural Context: This proverb is likely rooted in a cultural or societal context, as it mentions the term "Oba," which is a Yoruba word for a king or ruler in certain West African cultures. Understanding the hierarchical and traditional structures within these societies is crucial for interpreting the proverb.

Power Dynamics: The use of the term "Oba" suggests a figure of authority and power. Daring or challenging such a figure implies a confrontation with established authority.

Implied Meaning:

Consequences of Defiance: The proverb implies that challenging or defying the Oba is an act that carries severe consequences, possibly even death. It underscores the idea that questioning or opposing those in positions of power can lead to grave outcomes.

Risk and Danger: The use of "stares at death in the face" emphasizes the high level of risk associated with such an act. It suggests that defiance is not only dangerous but potentially life-threatening.

Social Implications:

Preservation of Authority: The proverb may serve to maintain social order and preserve the authority of the ruling class. By instilling fear of severe consequences, it discourages individuals from challenging the established order.

Norms and Values: It reflects the cultural norms and values surrounding respect for authority and the consequences of disrupting societal hierarchies. It reinforces the idea that obedience and deference to authority are essential for social harmony.

Practical Application:

Guidance for Behavior: The proverb can be seen as a piece of practical advice or a warning to individuals within the community. It advises against actions that may lead to rebellion or disobedience, emphasizing the potential risks involved.

Cultural Wisdom: In a pragmatic sense, the proverb may be viewed as a distillation of cultural wisdom, offering a succinct and memorable way to convey the expected consequences of challenging authority.

Language Choice:

Metaphorical Language: The use of "stares at death in the face" employs metaphorical language to convey the seriousness of the situation. This choice adds emotional weight and vivid imagery to the warning.

The pragmatic analysis of this proverb suggests that it serves as a cautionary statement within a specific cultural and social context. It warns against challenging authority figures, particularly the Oba, by highlighting the potentially dire consequences, thereby reinforcing cultural norms and social order.

Datum 3:

Balogun: In every way. Kabiyesi knows. **How can the birds chirp as birds when the whole villages of Ikoto Ile are restless, hungry, and aggrieved?** (Ajagunmale, p.35)

The disgruntled Balogun uses this proverb to express doubts and raise questions about the lack of peace in the community. Through contextual hints such as shared situations and cultural awareness, and particularly by referencing the troubled state of the land in the latter part of Balogun's statement, the proverb becomes clearer to the listener, despite the metaphor of birds in the proverb.

A pragmatic analysis of the situation described, where birds continue to chirp despite the unrest, hunger, and grievances in the villages of Ikoto Ile, involves examining the context and implications of this phenomenon.

Survival Instincts and Natural Behaviour:

Birds chirping is a natural and instinctive behaviour related to communication, mating, and territory marking.

From a pragmatic perspective, ‘‘How can the birds chirp as birds...?’’ is an interrogative sentence denoting that birds could no longer chirp as birds because of the precarious state of Ikoto Ile. The metaphor is a spiritual explication of the Yoruba people when things turn upside down in a particular community to show that the ancestors, gods, divinities, etc are angry and should be appeased by offering sacrifices to them to bring normalcy back to the town.

The contrast between the birds' not being able to chirp the way they ought to, and the troubled state of the villagers creates an incongruity.

Pragmatically, this incongruity may serve as a symbolic representation of the detachment between the natural world and human societal problems that cause the birds' misbehavior, highlighting the coexistence of different realms.

Human Perception and Interpretation:

The villagers may perceive the birds' chirping in various ways, such as indifference or insensitivity to their plight.

Pragmatically, this highlights the importance of human interpretation in communication. The same behavior can be understood differently based on the observer's perspective.

Cultural and Spiritual Significance:

In some cultures, birds hold symbolic or spiritual significance. Their actions may be interpreted as omens or messages.

Pragmatically, the villagers used the metaphor to show that things are not the same ways they used to be.

Ecological Considerations:

The birds may be responding to changes in the environment, weather, or other ecological factors.

Pragmatically, this underscores the interconnectedness of natural elements with human activities, emphasizing the need for holistic approaches to addressing societal issues.

Communication and Coping Mechanism:

Birds may use chirping as a means of communication within their species.

Pragmatically, this could be seen as a reminder that life continues, and communication persists even in challenging times. It may also serve as a coping mechanism for the birds.

A pragmatic analysis of the situation suggests that the birds chirping, while seemingly incongruent with the human challenges in Ikoto Ile, can be understood through the lenses of natural behavior, cultural symbolism, ecological factors, and communication dynamics. This analysis highlights the complexity of interactions between different elements in each environment.

Datum 4:

Oluawo: Kabiyesi. The king is a dustbin.

Oba: Where both man and animals throw their rubbish can't you see what I have become... **The elders say that he who wants to eat the tasteless meat of the vulture... Igun must keep a lot of pepper by his side.** They also said **if you want the meat of the vulture to be tasty, you must keep a lot of salt by your side...** (Ajagunmale, p.44)

The Oba utilizes two proverbs concurrently, each serving distinct purposes within the context of the conversation. Both proverbs hold significant importance in the ongoing discourse. The first proverb conveys the king's perspective on the current situation, while the second proverb reinforces this viewpoint. Although the Oba doesn't explicitly specify the intended meaning of these proverbs, Oluawo deduces the implied message through shared situational and cultural knowledge. This deduction is evident in Oluawo's response, "Caution, my lord," indicating his successful interpretation of the Oba's proverbs. Oluawo's comprehension is facilitated not only by their shared situational awareness but also by their shared cultural understanding. As a priest, Oluawo recognizes the cultural significance of 'vulture' (referred to as 'Igun' in the proverb) in the Yoruba cultural worldview. This foundational cultural understanding, especially the negative connotation associated with 'vulture,' contributes to Oluawo's grasp of the Oba's message. Therefore, cultural comprehension plays a crucial role in interpreting Yoruba proverbs. Agoro (2014) suggests that proverbs function as meaning-governed expressions, enriching a speaker's thoughts in conversation by providing cultural depth. Cultural depth proves essential for the accurate interpretation of proverbs.

The proverb "He who wants to eat the tasteless meat of the vulture must keep a lot of pepper by his side" can be analyzed pragmatically in the following ways:

Literal Level of Meaning: The proverb suggests that vulture meat is not flavorful, so if someone desires to eat it, they must have a lot of pepper (a strong spice) to add taste.

Metaphorical Level of Meaning: The vulture meat can represent undesirable or difficult situations, and the pepper may symbolize preparation, effort, or resources needed to make the situation more bearable or advantageous.

Pragmatic Function:

Advice and Caution: The proverb is pragmatic in nature, offering advice or caution. It implies that if someone insists on pursuing something unappealing or challenging, they should be well-prepared or equipped to deal with the consequences.

Cultural and Contextual Relevance:

Cultural Awareness: The proverb assumes a cultural context where vulture meat is considered unappetizing. It reflects cultural values and preferences.

Contextual Relevance: The advice to "keep a lot of pepper by his side" suggests the importance of being prepared for challenges in a specific context.

Social Implications:

Resourcefulness: The proverb encourages a sense of resourcefulness and preparedness in facing difficulties. It implies that individuals should be ready to enhance or mitigate undesirable situations with their efforts.

Pragmatic Presupposition:

Shared Understanding: The proverb presupposes a shared cultural understanding that vulture meat is tasteless. It assumes that the listener recognizes metaphorical use and understands the implied necessity for preparedness in challenging situations.

Persuasive Element:

Encouragement for Preparedness: The proverb can be seen as a persuasive tool, encouraging individuals to think ahead and be ready for challenges rather than impulsively pursuing something difficult without adequate preparation.

The pragmatic analysis of this proverb reveals its advisory nature, cultural context, and encouragement for preparedness when facing unappetizing or challenging situations.

Datum 5

Oba: See what my son has brought to me? Shame! I shall.

Oluawo: Easy, Kabiyesi. E je bure. Easy. **Our enemies prepare their drums of shame, do not dance to it.** (Àjàgùnmalè, p. 28)

In the extract above, the monarch is enraged due to his son's immoral act of rape, tarnishing the dignity of his royal attire. Nevertheless, Oluawo endeavors to pacify the king by interceding on the son's behalf, adhering to the cultural norms of Yoruba tradition.

The proverb "Our enemies prepare their drums of shame, do not dance to it" can be pragmatically analyzed in the following ways:

Literal Level of Interpretation: The proverb suggests that enemies are orchestrating a form of humiliation or disgrace, symbolized by the "drums of shame."

Metaphorical Level of Interpretation: The drums of shame may represent actions or schemes intended to bring disgrace. Not dancing to it implies avoiding falling victim to these schemes.

Pragmatic Function:

Cautionary Advice: The proverb serves a pragmatic function by providing cautionary advice. It encourages individuals to be wary of the actions or plans of their enemies and to avoid being ensnared in disgraceful situations.

Cultural and Contextual Relevance:

Cultural Awareness: The proverb assumes a cultural context where drums are associated with celebration or communication. In this case, enemies use drums as a metaphor for negative intentions.

Contextual Relevance: The advice is contextually relevant, urging individuals to be vigilant in the face of potential harm from adversaries.

Social Implications:

Self-Preservation: The proverb implies a strategy for self-preservation, advising against being drawn into actions or situations that could bring shame or disgrace.

Pragmatic Presupposition:

Shared Understanding: The proverb presupposes a shared understanding that enemies may employ subtle or overt tactics to bring about disgrace. The hearer is expected to recognize the metaphorical nature of the "drums of shame."

Persuasive Element:

Encouragement for Resilience: The proverb has a persuasive element, encouraging individuals to resist external pressures or negative influences and to maintain their dignity in the face of adversity.

Proverbial Wisdom:

Reflecting Cultural Wisdom: The proverb reflects cultural wisdom, advising individuals to exercise caution and resilience in the face of potential harm.

The pragmatic analysis of this proverb reveals its role as a cautionary piece of advice, deeply rooted in cultural and contextual awareness. It underscores the importance of being vigilant and resilient in the face of potential disgrace orchestrated by adversaries.

Conclusion

A pragmatic analysis of proverbs in Ahmed Yerima's *Àjàgùnṣàlè* carried out in this study reveals their multifaceted roles in shaping communication, enriching cultural depth, and fostering understanding among characters. The proverbs employed by the characters in the play serve as powerful tools for conveying nuanced meanings, expressing cultural values, and emphasizing specific ideas within the discourse. The shared cultural knowledge among characters and the audience proves crucial in deciphering the intended messages of these proverbs. Furthermore, the pragmatic analysis underscores the dynamic nature of proverbs, not merely as linguistic expressions but as culturally embedded devices that contribute to the overall meaning of the play. As Adeeko (1998) rightly suggests, proverbs play a meaning-governed role, adding layers of cultural significance to the characters' thoughts and interactions. In *Àjàgùnṣàlè*, the pragmatic examination of proverbs showcases their pivotal roles in enhancing the richness of communication and fostering a deeper appreciation for the cultural context in which the play unfolds. It is therefore recommended that proverbs should be seen and preserved as an integral part of our cultural heritage and viable means of sustainability within the ambit of the development agenda.

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