

A MOTHER DOES NOT WALK WITHOUT A DRINKING BOWL: AN ETHNOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED YORUBA PROVERBS WITH MOTHERHOOD LEXIS.

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Abstract

This paper presents an ethnolinguistic analysis of selected Yoruba proverbs with motherhood lexis. The Yoruba people of Nigeria have a rich cultural heritage that is encapsulated in their proverbs which reflect their worldview and provide insight into their culture, social norms and values. The study which was conducted through a qualitative content analysis of selected Yoruba proverbs with motherhood lexis brought forward some metaphorical expressions and linguistic features of the proverbs and offered awareness into gender roles and societal expectations placed on mothers thereby contributing to a better understanding of their status apart from shedding lights on the values, beliefs, family dynamics and behavioural norms associated with motherhood in Yoruba culture.

Key words: Yoruba, proverbs, ethnolinguistics, motherhood lexis.

Introduction

The Yoruba value motherhood a lot. On the day of a woman's wedding, the traditional Yoruba bride goes to her parents that is, the father and mother to get their prayers. Among other things they do say "wàá finú ṣoyún, wàá fẹ̀yìn gbómọ̀ pòn", meaning may your belly protrude with pregnancy, on your back, may you strap a child. Others are, "ògèdè kí gbódò kó yàgàn, ọmọ wẹ̀rẹ́ ńlẹ́ Aládi" meaning the banana tree planted by the riverside is never barren, the home of Aládi is full of children. Barrenness is a taboo and Yoruba mothers are deified, as seen in the saying—"Òrìṣà bí ìyá kòsì"—"There is no deity like the mother". Furthermore, diverse folktales, sayings and songs reveal the import of mothers for example the song:

Ìyá ni wúrà iyebíye e

Tí a kò lè fowórà a

Óó l'óyún mi fòṣu mèsán,

Oo pòn mi fòḍun mètà,

Ìyá ni wúrà iyebíye e

Tí a kò lè fowórà a

Translation:

Mother is the precious gold

That cannot be purchased

She carried me in her womb for nine months,

She cared for me for three years

Mother is the precious gold

That cannot be purchased

This view of life is reflected in Yoruba literature so that many proverbs in the language properly situate the place of motherhood among the people. A careful study of such proverbs can help us better understand the thoughts, philosophy and beliefs of Yoruba in motherhood, especially as they offer insights into gender roles and societal expectations placed on mothers thereby contributing to a better understanding of their roles and status apart from shedding light on values, beliefs, and behavioural norms associated with motherhood in Yoruba society. Furthermore, the analysis will offer an opportunity to study linguistic features ,metaphorical expressions, and the use of proverbs in communication within the Yoruba community.

A study of Yoruba Proverbs related to motherhood also teaches valuable qualities including love and care, self-control, resilience, discipline, hardwork, loyalty, patience, joy and happiness gentleness ,kindness and goodness, boldness, humility and optimism. These various aspects clearly spell out the role of the mothers in the Yoruba society.

After all, Adeniyi, Jegede and Adebajo (2018) observed that Yoruba proverbs are veritable avenues by which the sociocultural norms of the society are communicated and sustained. Also, Bolaji and Kehinde (2013) said, "In Yoruba Society ,proverbs have been and still remain powerful and effective instrument of transmitting ideas ,motive, knowledge and social morality from generation to generation. This is because proverbs reflect societal values of the people". The above quote is stated succinctly by Mieder (1982) 'proverbs are well-known word of folk which contains wisdom, form and morals and traditional views in metaphorical fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.

Among the Yoruba of West Africa, proverbs are marks of wisdom, belonging to the elders, who are often considered to be the custodian of the people's culture, tradition and ways. However, a proverb can also be used by a young person who keeps company with the elders. This is expressed in the proverb "omódé tó bá mọ ọwọ wẹ, á bá àgbà jeun" (a cultured child dines with the elders). Truth Bolaji and Kehinde (2019) observe that to the Yorùbá, a proverb is *òwe*, that which wraps something. It is structurally composed of *ó* + *wé* + *e*, roughly *it + cover + it*. The high vowel *ó* with a high tone is the third person singular generic pronoun, *it*. It identifies the unknown, all-pervasive subject, which may relate to humans, animals, and even abstract ideas. The next word *we* (to cover) is a transitive verb with an obligatory bound object. The last word is *e*, the obligatory, toneless object terminates the structure. Through the morphosyntactic processes of deletion, permutation and structural change, *òwe* –the colourless idea, which is often slippery and witty –is arrived at. Hence, a proverb or proverb connotes the idea of concealment, vagery, and secrecy. Its semantic depth is beyond the scope of everyday ordinary discourse and triviality, which is reserved for every Tom, Dick and Harry. A proverb is generally viewed as a wise saying. In reality, a proverb is a special kind of discourse which encases the timeless wisdom of a society or community. Proverbs are characteristically fixed expressions that are catchy, rhythmic, metaphorical, yet easy to remember. Its structure and use are restricted by communal convention and linguistic practice. It is culture bound and

context determined. Proverbs vary from place to place, culture to culture. Yoruba proverbs are an integral part of the Yoruba culture, world view, and language; they often reflect the cultural values and beliefs of the Yoruba people.

Theoretical Framework

Ethnolinguistics is the study of how language relates to culture and ethnicity (Underhill, 2012). The field of study deals with relationship between languages and culture, and the way different ethnic groups view the world. It is the combination of Ethnology and Linguistics. The former refers to the way of life of an entire community, that is, all the characteristics which distinguish one community from the other while the latter refers to the systematic study of languages. Thus, Ethno-linguistics is a field of linguistics which studies the relationship between language and the cultural aspect of a society with a focus on how language shapes and reflects cultural practice a values,. Culture, as defined by Adefuye (1992) is the way an individual and especially a group live, think, feel and organize themselves, celebrate and share life. In the same vein, Lustig & Koester (2010) see culture as: "...a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices, which affects behaviour of a relatively large group of people".

These definitions reveal that culture is the sum total of a people's way of life comprising values, beliefs and perceptions of the world that underlie their behaviour which are shared by members of the particular society and this contributes to the way they perceive themselves as well as others. People's culture is seen in their language, literature (oral or written), food, clothes, recreation and beliefs etc and language is culture bound. Atolagbe (2000) says language is used to convey and express people's culture and worldview. Indeed language is an integral aspect of culture used to transmit culture from one generation to the other.

The study of proverbs is a very important aspect of ethnolinguistic as it helps in the preservation and analysis of cultural and linguistic legacy. Analysing Yoruba proverbs with motherhood lexis through an ethnolinguistic lens offers valuable insight into the cultural and linguistic significance of these proverbs. By exploring the symbolic and communicative functions of these proverbs in relation to motherhood, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural values, beliefs and practises surrounding motherhood within the Yoruba community. Akujobi & Ike (2021) stated that proverbs are often studied in reality of the culture they are coming from. The society where they emanate from is usually used in studying proverb. Thus, they are seen as replica of the social construction or social environment of their origin or place of use. This analysis can also illuminate the role of language in relaying and preserving traditions, as well as the ways in which specific linguistic expressions are used to sum and transfer cultural norms and beliefs. Furthermore, such an analysis may contribute to the broader field of ethnolinguistic by highlighting the relationship between language, culture and collective self within the context of motherhood in the Yoruba community.

This study utilized the ethnolinguistic framework of linguistic relativity proposed by Sapir Whorf (1956), which posits that language shapes thought. This framework indicates that the language spoken by a group of people influences their perceptions and understanding of the world. That is, how language use determines how people see and conceptualize things. Indeed the difference in qualities, or conceptualisations of same object simply reveal how language can shape individuals. Benest (2015) discussed the findings of Ole Henrik Magga a linguist who studied Saami, a language spoken in Norway. Magga revealed the use of several hundred words for an animal, reindeer thus suggesting the importance in their culture and influence in their language and lexicon. For example, there existed different words for a pregnant reindeer, another

for a short, fat female reindeer and yet another for a reindeer with a long, hooked nose among several other usages. In ethnolinguistic studies, the question to be asked is how the use of several words to name the same item affect the ways in which the user of the language see and conceptualize the object. Thus, ethnolinguistic helps to determine what is unique about one's language(Benest,2015).Thus, this study will explore how the Yoruba language, , shapes the perception of motherhood in the Yoruba culture through its use of proverbs on motherhood.

The Yoruba people can be found mainly in the South-western part of Nigeria . Yoruba people are also found in some parts of Edo, Kogi ,Kwara, Benue and the Delta. The language is Yoruba with varieties like Ekiti, Ijebu, Ondo, Ijesa etc which are mutually intelligible. Yoruba people are found in other countries in West Africa such as the Republic of Benin, Togo, and Ghana.

Related Literature

Motherhood is universal and of a truth the concept of motherhood is deeply rooted in the fabric of society, revealing countless roles, expectations and emotions. In the African society, motherhood is an exalted status. In his study of proverbs on women in Africa Diopio (2019) , states “In Africa, the expected destiny of every female is to become a mother” and that, females are perceived differently in the various stages of their lives. While, the wife is a role is a minor one, the position however improves with longevity in the marital home, especially she becomes a mother of grown sons. As a mother, especially of grown children her identity as ‘wife’ – associated with marginality – is diminished. She comes to be referred to as ‘the mother of’ so and so, as a respectful appellation.

Corroborating Diopio's highly exalted status of mothers in African orature, Adebowale(2020) refers to the Yoruba statement “ Orisa bi Iya kosi”,meaning There's no deity like a mother which puts mothers on the same level as gods and deities revered spiritually inYoruba culture. To him this saying is mainly because of “ the spiritual essence mothers pass on to their offspring. Moreover, the mother's duty never ends- that unconditional love, the absolute spirit of limitless sacrifice, and the selfless care she provides to her children. Mothers would literally take the place of their children even in the face of death. These selfless acts been displayed over the years have shown the importance of Mothers in Yoruba society”.

Adebowale (2020) further stated that a woman's role is multi dimensional in Yoruba culture - **a mother, a wife, a daughter, a priestess, or even a witch**. The way she is seen depends on the position she occupies, and the different perceptions are reflected through songs, works of art, music, language, and religion. The highest value is given to a mother because Yoruba people revere motherhood. The common saying in Yoruba "Obirinin lo'laye; (The world is owned by women) implies that the world revolves because of the power it draws from women — this saying holds a physical and spiritual meaning. Motherhood is further exalted because of the divine strength of creating life, the powerful intuition that allows a mother to have foreknowledge of any activity around her offspring gives her the almost Omnipresence power of knowing all. This God-given sense of wisdom and knowledge over the years, has positioned mothers as secondary deities on earth. This duty they carry with all sense of pride and love.

Makinde (2004) stated further that motherhood is considered to be very important in Yoruba culture because the preservation of humanity depends on the role of mothers in the society (Lawal 1996).Despite the encomiums poured on mother, however, a wife is not so revered. In most of Yoruba culture, a wife is

referred to as “eru” (slave) and yet it is still the ambition of almost every girl to be married, because it is through marriage that she becomes a ‘mother’ because of the society’s negative attitude towards having children out of wedlock. By becoming a mother, a woman is promoted to the esteemed position in which she can be referred to as a precious stone.

Adekanbi (2023) says the Yoruba word Iya (mother) is not simply one that gives birth to a child. To him, Iya is a co-creator of the child and gives life with the Eledaa –creator-because Iya is present at creation. During childbirth, the Iya exists at the intersection between the realm of the unborn and the physical world. It is a dangerous position. For this reason, the Iya is blessed with mystical resources to martial on their children’s behalf ‘no one knows you like your Iya because she is present at your creation. Your iya is your guide into the world and has the power to proclaim over you on how you exist in this world.

Emeka- Nwobia & Ndimele (2019) examined Igbo Proverbs on womanhood. They also stated that while there exists some negative perception of women, when it comes to the sub-categorisation of motherhood, she is seen in the positive light as loving, life giver, caregiver, a manager equipped with managerial skill and at the epicentre of every happening in the family among others. This study will attempt at getting an overview of motherhood among Yoruba people.

Research Questions

This study will answer the following questions:

1. What do Yoruba proverbs with motherhood lexis tell us about motherhood in Yoruba culture?
2. What linguistic features are reflected in the selected Yoruba proverbs with motherhood lexis?

Methodology:

The study was conducted through a qualitative ethnolinguistic analysis of selected Yoruba proverbs with motherhood lexis. These proverbs were purposively selected for the analysis from Owomoyela (2005) and Sheba (2006). The analysis was carried out through the identification of motherhood lexis in the selected proverbs. Motherhood lexis refers to the words and phrases in the proverbs selected that refer to mother, motherhood, maternity, maternal roles, and the state of being a mother. The entails also involve an investigation of the cultural beliefs and practices associated with motherhood in the Yoruba culture and a lack at linguistic features as reflected in selected Yoruba Proverb with motherhood lexis.

Analysis of Data

Proverb 1: *Abiyamọ kìí rìn kó ẹ́ánwọ́ ahá.*

Translation : A mother does not walk without a drinking bowl.

Mothers are naturally in charge of the child's physical welfare and water is an essential for survival. Hence, she should always go with it, especially if she has the little ones around. The Yoruba believe *omi kòní ọ́tá* (water has no enemy). No one keeps water at arm’s length. Hence, a mother takes along, at all times and everywhere, emblems, items to ensure wellness and safety of the child. No wonder the saying, *ìyá nì wúrà; baba nì jígí* (mother is gold; father is mirror). Just as gold is of great value and precious, the mother has a great value to the child and the entire household, compared to the father who is a mere reflection or the

mirror which provides information needed at a particular point in life, about the child, his nature and his background. The metaphor *şánwó ahá in this proverb*, carries the thought of walking empty-handedly, and in effect) around, from place to place while those in need are left to the mercy of the elements.

A good mother is generous not stingy; she is also observant of the child's needs . Still referring to a child's comfort and wellbeing. Yoruba people say *Abiyamọ kii gbó ẹkún ọmọ rẹ kó má tátí wéré* (translation: A nursing mother does not hear the cry of her baby without responding anxiously). Instead of using straightforward positive clauses, this proverb employs the use of negation to present its argument. One could simply say *tí abiyamọ bá gbó ẹkún ọmọ ẹ, á tátí wéré* (a nursing mother responds anxiously to the cry of her baby). However, this will not achieve the same effect of aesthetics and mental stimulation, as do the negative clauses. That a child is crying indicates discomfort, a mother never feels at home when the child is stressed or suffers.

The mother is agile and attentive to the child's cries and responds immediately. No wonder the Yoruba says a mother sleeps with just one ear the other is ever attentive-meaning, she doesn't sleep soundly. Mothers are ever attentive and responsive to meeting the needs of their children. No matter what, a mother must have forbearance and must be there always for the child providing needed care and attention no matter what. A baby or the little child is always dear to and depends on her, especially for nourishment. No matter the situation, a mother never abandons her child; she is expected to always be there even when others flee in trouble or in sorrow. Unfortunately, some mothers do not always live up to this lofty role and expectation. There have been cases of abandoned and throw-away babies, giving rise to motherless homes.

Proverb 2. Àbàrá fẹ̀nfẹ̀ abiyamọ fí ń gbọmọ rẹ l'ówó àjẹ

Translation : A mother uses a thunderous slap to save her child from the clutches of the witch.

The imagery created or depicted here is that of an aggressive individual who does all in her power to shield the child from a ferocious witch. The adjective *fẹ̀nfẹ̀* (very wide and broad) stresses the intensity and ubiquity of the blow, so much so that the victim has no place to hide.

The Yoruba believe in the existence of malevolent spirits that do cause harm. The mother here does all in her power to get the child delivered. This shows deep love and consideration for the child. The mother here, would rather satisfy her safety or life for a child. Ordinarily, Yoruba people dread these spirits. This proverb shows that good motherhood calls for vigilance and precludes tardiness. A good mother takes necessary action to save a child or snatch him from death especially when danger looms or the child is ill. Spiritually, Yoruba mothers are believed to have the wherewithal to deliver/shapen their children's lives. When a Yoruba individual visits a babalawo (herbalist) with one issue or the other one of the questions almost always asked is information about the mother as she's seen as very powerful spiritually. Indeed a Yoruba mother is not expected to curse her child as revealed in the saying, *abiyamọ kii ń şépè* (a mother does not curse) as this could have an eternal impact on the child.

Proverb 3. Abiyamọ şe ọwó kótó lu ọmọ rẹ.

Translation : A mother beats a child with a curved hand.

Contrary to the imagery in proverb two is the antonym in the metaphor of *şe ọwó kótó lu ọmọ rẹ*. This metaphor creates a picture of being aware of the frailty of an object, entity or subject matter and as a result treating it with care, beating it with hollow of a curved palm. When the two proverbs, that is proverbs 2 and

3 are combined with the contrastive coordinating conjunction *ṣùgbón* (*but*, or the adverbial **conjunction** *however*), the result will be a beautiful symphony of contrastive parallelism. The result will be that while the truly protective mother gives no damn to how an enemy (witch) is treated or how he feels, she, like a rooster, provides a protective care for her children. A mother is cautious in beating her child. Metaphorically, this proverb underscores the manner in which mother beats – mothers beat in love and not in anger. They are restrained and avoid bodily harm, they beat in a bid to make the child better and not to destroy the child. The Yoruba mother believes you need to train your child to give you peace but in a way that it's not destructive. Interestingly, when contrasted with proverb 2, where the slap is thunderous and deafening, we can see that the mother is a balanced individual and does things appropriately as situations warrant. Real mothers are never too harsh in disciplining the child. She disciplines with love not with anger. Parent-child love is fundamental to a child's overall growth- mentally physically, socially even spiritually. Pondering over this is vital for good parenting. Another proverb which corroborates this particular one is, *Ba mi na omo mi, ko denu iyalomo*. A mother is not always sincere when she asks people to beat (discipline) her child on her behalf. Even when requested discipline from someone else, doing so in excess is frowned at by the mother. This emphasizes the protective care a mother should always have for her baby.

Proverb 4. *Abiyamọ ọtá àgàn ; ẹni n ọ́ṣiṣé, ọtá ọlẹ.*

Translation: A barren woman is always jealous of a mother, a sluggard considers an industrious person an enemy.

The tonal counterpoint in the double-clausal proverb 4, with clause 1, ending in a Lọ-Low tone (LT) and clause 2, the final clause, terminating in Low-Mid tone (LM), strikes a similarity in the participants. Here we observe the comparison of the act of jealousy of the barren woman of the fertile one and the lazy individual of an industrious person. As revealed in our literature review, motherhood naturally promotes a woman from the position of a slave to that of a mother and an upcoming mother-in-law with its attendant benefits. The desire to have a child is especially compounded in a polygamous family type which was rife in those days. Barrenness is highly dreaded. A Yoruba proverb states, *. Bí ó ti yá ni n yá, iyàwó lán̄tete, bí ó ti n dájó iyàwó, ni ó n kàgbo ọmọ.* meaning delay is dangerous, as Lantete's wife is preparing for marriage so also she's preparing herbs for the children "This proverb brings to fore, Yoruba and love for children. It's unheard among traditional Yoruba people to say one does not want a child or one would delay child birth until later. Preparation for child birth is done far before marriage as the mother to be takes herbs to cleanse her system. Added to this, Yoruba girls are also encouraged to keep themselves pure not deflowered before marriage as this is believed would also ensure no issues in conception

Women would do whatever it takes to be free from the shackles of barrenness. There is hardly any song or saying among Yoruba people that children and the desire to have them is not celebrated-we have sayings like- 'olomo lo laye' meaning he who has a child has the world. Small wonder why a barren woman would do all in her power to have a child. Added to this, the position of the child determined by age of birth, also has its effect on the reception of 'ogun', inheritance, at the demise of the father.

Proverb 5 *Àìbíṃọ àgàn ló n mágàn dábaà àbíkú, ó ní kó n bii sisile nàà kó ku.*

Translation: Childlessness makes a barren woman suggest giving birth to a Abiku, she says even if the child dies immediately after childbirth, it does not matter.

As explained earlier, Yoruba people exalt motherhood to the extent that someone who dies childless is believed to not have lived a fulfilled life and that it would have been better not to have been born at all, meaning life is worthless without children. No wonder why a barren mother would rather prefer to have a still born or have an abiku child that dies not too long after birth (Yoruba belief death of anyone is not natural and especially when it happens to a mother several time). *Abikus* are said to be children who die and still come back to same woman and to prevent the continual reincarnation, such children get their corpses mutilated after death and given derogatory names in the traditional Yoruba Society. At their rebirth to ,which such marks are seen as birthmarks, they are given names like, kokumo-will not die again, Malomo-don't go again. Indeed, the author (Ayobami Adebayo) of the celebrated novel," Stay with me" says, Yoruba mothers are named after their children for example Iya so and so, mother to so and so, and this brings joy to them. Small wonder why many give birth to several children. The mother in proverb '5' does not care the child dies immediately after birth for at least she would no longer be termed again, a barren woman, a highly derogatory term .The conversation like structure of this proverb needs be foregrounded as Yoruba use such structure to make proverbs. Of a truth, unfavourable condition blurs one's vision and makes one render poor judgement of matters; he who feels it knows it.

Prover 6. *Àbíkú ñlọ, iyá ñpè é.*

Translation: A child destined to die is on its way [to dying]; its mother is calling it back.

Abikus, as explained earlier, are children that the Yoruba believe are destined to die, although traditional medicine has obfuscated such superstition as being behind the death of a number of parents, whose children die from marriage between individuals with sickle cell disease. The superstitious belief in *àbíkú* was prominent in the days when health facilities were not available and many children who had sickle cell disease and a mother could have several such children, because no genotype tests were ever conducted, since what was important then was the desire to attain the status of motherhood. The mother would pray and hope that such children survive. When all else failed and the child eventually died, as he would, the Yoruba would say, *àbíkú sọ olóògùn di èké!* (An *àbíkú* makes the medicine man a liar) . The final words, *ñ lọ* and *ñ pèé*, contrasts the frustration of a mother, and the defiance of an *àbíkú*, in the two super-ordinate clauses, underscoring the Yoruba belief in *àbíkú*.

Proverb 7. *Ajá kùí j'òkú àgàn ,eni tó bí ọmọ ni yóò sin-ín,eni tí kò bí, ọmọ náà ni yóò sin-ín.*

Translation: A dog cannot eat a barren woman's corpse; somebody will bury both the barren and those with children

This simile, comforts the barren woman that there is no need to fret over barrenness, as every corpse will be buried by someone. As said earlier, Yoruba people cherish children and they indeed celebrate childbirth. However, they are pragmatic in nature. It is ideal to have children but if one doesn't have then, the person will still be buried by people as the corpse will not be left to be devoured by a carnivorous animal like a dog. This proverb is stating the obvious, we should accept our destiny no matter what life thrusts at us, childlessness is not the end of the world. Although *eni omo sin lobi mo*, she who is buried by a child is she who has a child, but even you don't have a child you will still be buried by someone.

Proverb 8. *Agborandu bi iya ko si, ta ni yoo se omo olomo lore.*

Translation: There is no sympathiser like a mother who can be so gracious to another person's child? A guardian is not like a mother, who can favour another person's child?

Yoruba people are pragmatic set of people, free from deception or exaggeration. They believe you cannot mourn more than the bereaved, except when pretending. So, there's none that can love one more than one's mother. This proverb is put in a rhetorical question to show how impossible it is for a guardian to love like or more than a mother. Mothers go to any length to bring up a child as she is concerned about the life of the child and no job is too odd for her to do to give a child life. Several folktales among Yoruba people abound on the maltreatment of children especially orphans by their guardian especially the step mother. A-mo-on-pon bi iya omo nii mo omo toju. No one carries the child like the mother; only a child's mother knows how to care for her child.

This also shows love and care and the pragmatic nature of Yoruba people. Indeed, there's a conversation like proverb that says, eniafioro lo to ni to hunbaje, kiwanikioloroso? He that was informed of a negative happening that responded by saying, "I'm doomed, what should the bereaved do? Yoruba denigrate motherless homes or guardian. The best person to care for a child is a mother so asking a maid, guardian or other --caregivers to substitute for children will be denying the child of his biological Rights.

Proverb 9. *Ọmọ ọlómọ là ńrán níṣẹ ‘dé tòru-tòru.’*

Translation: It is only another person's child that one sends on a return-unfailing-even-after nightfall errand.

As already established, mothers do all to ensure the safety of their children. However, children that are 'omo orukan' orphans or those used as housemaids where their parents aren't and at times in polygamous families are often made to deliver errands and perform tasks that are risky. (This reveals or corroborates the proverb, 'aja momo tie fun lomu, omo ti oya kije' meaning A dog knows how to breastfeed its kid and knows how to slaughter the kid of a rabbit), such children tend to come out in life better than the over pampered ones as they tend to develop survival skills no wonder Yoruba say- 'ada ni loro, fi agbara ko ni'- he that tends to punish you unjustly, tend to build you to be resilient.

The tautology, *t'òrut'òru* conveys the repetitive nature of the clandestine oppression by the powerful and the helplessness of the hapless child. Unlike the many positive proverbs extolling the virtues of motherhood, proverb 9, denigrates an undercurrent evil perpetuated by step mothers and the childless. This proverb condemns it.

Proverb 10 *A ni ọmọ kò gbọ́n, ìyá rẹ̀ ní kí ó máà sàà tí kú, kí lón ọmọ bíi agò?*

Translation: We say the child is a fool the mother says as long as he does not die, what kills faster than foolishness?

The structure here is also conversation like-statement cum question. This proverb shows Yoruba belief in being wise and tactful. Indeed, wisdom is seen as a great asset. Not being wise as said in this proverb or foolishness can cause death. On the one hand, this is contradicted with a mother's love who desires the existence of the child despite all his shortcomings. No wonder why no matter the situation a mother never abandons her child; she's always there even when others flee in trouble or in sorrow. This also shows love and concern. That the mother would do all and every in her power to ensure the child survives or is at peace. A Critical examination of the proverb, on the other hand underscores the permissive attitude of some mothers. Some pamper the child, especially if the child the-one-and-only. Such ones include, the only child, the only boy, the only girl and so on. The proverb is more of condemnation of ill parenting than a eulogy.

Proverb 11 *.Aladugbo eni ni omo iya eni.*

Translation : One's neighbours are one's siblings.

This proverb depicts the fact that children born of same mother are expected to be extremely close or be bonded by being closely knitted. Amongst the Yoruba, it is believed that suckling of same breast from same mother and emanating from same womb would automatically make or get one closely knitted or yoked. It's always a thing of surprise when siblings manifest hatred as the mother may exclaim "you people suckled the same breast and emanated from same womb". Despite this, a neighbour is also perceived as being close as can be readily more accessible than a sibling who is afar. The proverb also emphasises the communal life in the traditional Yoruba society.

Proverb 12. *Omọ tí a jí adìẹ bí, yó jìí adìẹ ju ìyá lẹ.*

Translation: A child born while the mother is a habitual chicken stealer will steal chickens even more compulsively than its mother.

(Children take after their parents.). This proverb tells us that the child learns automatically from the mother and tends to even outdo the mother and in this context in doing bad. This teaches that the mother is seen as a role model. It reveals that the Yoruba believe the mother by the virtue of the fact that she spends more time with the children is to be held responsible for all misdeeds and these Mothers can be recipients of praise or condemnation, depending on how they bring up their children and the examples they set for the child to imitate or emulate. As a matter of fact, the Yoruba say, *Omọ tó dára ti bàbá ni; omọ burúkú ti yá ni* meaning. A well-disciplined child is the father's child; an ill-bred child is the mother's.

One major reason mothers are expected to train their children up is the fact that just as they tend to gain more when the child succeeds, they are also at the receiving end when the reverse is the case as the child who misbehaves is said to be that of the mother! Indeed among the Yoruba the father usually calls a child who makes the family proud 'my child' and the other the child who misbehaves 'your child' when addressing the mother. This proverb also emphasizes the beauty of discipline. A Yoruba proverb says, *Omọ tó ní kiyáà òun má sùn, òun náà ò níí fojú kan orun.* A child that is determined to keep its mother awake will itself not catch a glimpse of sleep. This teaches the fact that disciplining of children is encouraged. Children though highly valued are corrected to ensure well brought up children exist in a society.

Proverb 13: *Ọlanfẹ ni baba ẹyẹ, iyùn ni baba ileeke; ẹni tí a bá fẹran lẹmọ e ñwunni.*

Translation: The ọlanfẹ bird is the father of all birds; the coral bead is the father of all beads; it is the offspring of the person whose mother one loves that are attractive. (One's love for a woman affects one's feelings toward her children).

This proverb shows that fathers especially in polygamous homes tend to naturally love the children of women that they love more than those of the others. In fact fathers have been known to be political to avert problems at their home front by giving items to the more beloved wife and her children without the knowledge of their counterparts to avert rivalry.

Prover 14 *.Ikú òde ní ńpa ọmọdé fún ìyá .*

Translation: It is death from outside that kills a child for his or her mother. (A child not properly instructed at home will learn a lesson from strangers outside the home.)

This proverb reiterates the importance of proper training of children by their mothers as failure to do so would predispose the child to maltreatment from outsiders when he misbehaves. The saying, *Ení bímọ o ràn ní ñpon n dàgbà*, Whoever gives birth to a problem child will bear it on her back until it is weaned. Since mothers are expected to be the main care giver or carer, it is not surprising that they bear the brunt when the child misbehaves. Other sayings that show the importance of child discipline are; *A ke baje omo iya agba*, the spoilt- over pampered child of the old woman. *A ko le tori pe ki omo ma kuu, ko maa fi epon baba re sere*. One cannot say that because a child should not die, he should be playing with his father's testicles (permissiveness is frowned at especially in serious matters. The child is not let loose; there are checks and balances.

Proverb 15. *A kì í lé ẹlenu rírùn níbi àmù ìyá re*.

Translation: One does not chase a smelly-mouthed person away from his or her mother's waterpot. This shows the fact that a child is acceptable to the mother no matter any challenges that he has and in this context he's said to be smelly mouthed but despite that he could have access to the mother's traditional water pot-'amu'. This is because "Omo en ni omo eni" One's child is one's child no matter the state or condition he cannot be replaced with someone else. This still reflects that mothers are precious, golden, tolerant and burden bearers. No matter the situation a mother never abandons her child; she's always there even when others flee in trouble or in sorrow. Mothers as valuable people. Hence it's always sorrowful when the child loses the mother early in life as the great assistance had been snuffed off. Yoruba brides have been known to weep hysterically during their traditional wedding ceremony as a result of the demise of their mothers-as they (mothers) never go out of circulation be they mothers, grandmothers or great grand mothers!

16. *Orí kì í po ju jà ká má mọ tìyá ẹni*.

Translation: Heads are never so plentiful in the marketplace that one does not recognize one's mother's.

Mothers tend to benefit more from their children! No matter what the children may be undergoing they tend to remember their mothers as a result of all her sufferings and show of love. Nollywood shows that fathers tend to neglect their children in times of adversity and for other women but a woman tends to stay more with her children naturally. The saying, *Bo se n se ise obe lo ye bo se n se omo, e bi iya re leere*. It is the knife that understands the behaviour of the yam, so also a mother understands the behaviour of the child. Mothers for the fact that they stay with their children more than any other are wont to know almost everything about their children. This is always mockingly said by Yoruba men to their wives that 'iya teacher la mo, a kin mo Baba teacher' meaning, we do know the teacher's mother, but not the father. This makes the mother to be eternally valuable and demanded, especially with their caregivers ability for their grandchildren. A child must be ready at all times to understand and stand by his mother. This proverb tells the effect of all positive things said about the mother on the child's disposition to the mother. After being initially attached by the umbilical cord, breastfeeding and unalloyed care, love and concern, this adage is not the least unexpected

Proverb 18.

Àpon yan ìyá ó ní òún yan ìyá; ta là bá kó ọ̀ṣu méjì fún tí kò gúnyán konko fúnni?

Translation A bachelor chooses suffering but says he chose his mother; to what person would one give two yams but would not make pounded yam?

This proverb tells the importance of a wife over and above a mother. Since marriage is the gateway to an unexplored and happy path, a bachelor is derided for choosing the mother 'Iya', thereby choosing 'Iya', suffering as a mother cannot play the role of a wife. The play on word 'iya' –mother, contrasted with 'iya' –suffering is used to lay emphasis on the importance of having a wife as Whatever a mother can do for a man, a wife can do, and more.

Proverb 19: *Bí ọmọdé bá ní aṣọ bí ìyá rẹ , kò lè ní èyí tí ìyá a rẹ fì pò ọ́n.*

Translation: If a youth has a wrapper like her mother's, she does not have the one her mother used to bear her. (However rich or great a person becomes, the person owes deference to his or her parents.).

Mothers are unparalleled in experience and its wealth. A child may have more contemporary items, but cannot buy the experience the mother possesses.

Findings

This study finds that structurally, Yoruba proverbs are characterised by tonal counterpoint, contrastive parallelism, negation, metaphors and similes as well as tautology, among others

In addition, proverbs are powerful communicative tools in Africa, and its use is restricted not restricted. Another finding of the study is that mothers are highly valued by everyone, hence there are so many elevating proverbs singing their praises, and identifying the crucial roles they play in society, especially in relation to children, the future of tomorrow.

The Yoruba mother is believed to be a godlike person, no wonder the Yoruba say, *orisa bi iyaosi*. She loves, adores, cherishes, protects, endures all and would do all in her power to birth and preserve the child. The proverbs considered in this paper encapsulate the philosophy and thought processes of Yoruba people about life, like their unwritten constitution that dictate and direct affairs.

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