

Pragmatic Acts in Characters' Utterances in Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe*

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Abstract

Scholarly studies on Ahmed Yerima's dramas have largely concentrated on plot structure, characterization, thematisation, stylistic, and pragmatic features of his texts. While the pragmatic studies of the texts have examined context-determined meanings of proverbs and politeness features in Yerima's plays, very little attention has been paid to the contextual examination of the totality of the culture-based experiences he has refracted in the dramas. This study, therefore, fills this vacuum, being a pragmatic investigation of Yerima's Yoruba culture-based play, *Mojagbe*, aimed at enhancing an understanding of Yerima's culture-based plays by establishing a thematic link between the play and culture through a rigorous application of the theory of pragmeme. *Mojagbe* was purposively selected, given its richness in Yoruba cultural norms and values and all culture-based interactional utterances in it constituted the data for the study. These were analysed using insights from Mey's theory of pragmatic acts. The findings reveal that eight practs and allopracts of informing, invoking, warning, assuring, cautioning, lamenting, insisting, and accusing are found in traditional and communal contexts in *Mojagbe*, to treat issues of power, danger, immortality, re-incarnation, death, bravery, punishment, insincerity, and war through contextual features of shared-situational knowledge (ssk), socio-cultural knowledge (sck), inference (inf), reference (ref) and voicing (vce). The interaction between the play, *Mojagbe*, and culture facilitates access to a context-sensitive understanding of thematised socio-cultural issues in the play and their contextual reflection of the Nigerian society being refracted by Yerima, thereby revealing the pliability of the pragmatic approach of pragmeme in espousing the culture-based experiences of the Yoruba in Nigeria.

Key words: Yerima, culture-based, pragmatic act, *Mojagbe*, thematic foci

1. Introduction

The masquerade (eg úngún), the witches (àḣé), religion; God (Olórún, Àjàngúnṁḃḣè) and the gods (èṣù [devil], òḡún [god of iron], sàngó [god of thunder], yemoja [river goddess]), Ifá cult, knowledge, beliefs, myths and legends are cultural parameters that characterize and locate Yerima's plays in the African literary spatial setting (Adeniji, 2014). As Yerima (2007) observes, these are cultural historical links which are useful in the re-creation of historical anomalies, perfection of political events and correction of morals and social malaise. With this belief, based on the culture and traditions of the three major culture groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Igbo/Fulani, and Yoruba), therefore, Ahmed Yerima creates and re-creates stories that project and protect the culture of these groups in what is now referred to as "Yerima's culture-based plays".

Scholars observations have shown that Yerima's culture-based plays project people's knowledge, belief, art, moral, law and custom, and provide rich sources of data for linguistic studies (Adeoti, 2002, 2007; Sotunsa, 2007; Arua, 2007 and so on). However, studies on Yerima's drama have largely been from the literary perspective. The few linguistic explorations have concentrated on the use of proverbs (Odebunmi, 2006, 2007) and politeness principles as a defining mechanism (Arua, 2007). Little effort has thus been made to espouse African cultural experiences in the plays in linguistic scholarship. This work, therefore, sets out to fill this vacuum by exploring the pragmatic function of language use in Yerima's Yoruba culture-based play, *Mojagbe*, purposively selected because of its rich data base. The study will enhance an understanding of the play by establishing a link between the play and culture through the application of the theory of pragmeme. Also, it will reveal Yerima's thematic preoccupations and their associated contextual adaptations to socio-cultural issues in Nigeria.

2. Yerima as a Dramatist and *Mojagbe*

Yerima specializes in playwriting and acting and these came as no surprise since he started writing in his secondary school days. He wrote his first play "*The Man's Daughter*" while in form three. The production of "*The Man's Daughter*" prompted Yerima to set up his own drama group called The Georgian and Victorian Drama Group. Yerima sees the playwright in two capacities: the playwright as man and the playwright as God. As man, the playwright creates stories around his society with human thoughts, but as God, the playwright is

omniscient and omnipresent. He sees everything and re-creates that all may be well. In the bid to be relevant to the society, therefore, Yerima makes “man” the focus of his stories.

Furthermore, Yerima tactically locates his stories in the various Nigerian cultures to give it a sense of reality. He has written over twenty seven published plays that have to do with the Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo cultures. His treatments of characters and issues reveal a clear indication of Yerima’s mastery of the people’s aspects of culture such as proverbs, wise-sayings, norms, ethics and codes, religions and expressions. These all round knowledge and acquaintance make Yerima to be an outstanding playwright among his peers such as Femi Osofisan, Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Osanyin, Zulu Zofola, Bode Sowande, Cosmish Ekiye and so on.

In 1991, Ahmed Yerima was appointed Deputy Artistic Director of the Nigerian National Troupe, and in 2006, he became the Director General of the Nigeria National Theatre. As the Director, he has led the National Troupe to several memorable performances outside Nigeria. Indeed, Yerima led the National Troupe to a performance at the world intellectual property organization in Geneva. With the National Troupe, Yerima has also been on international outings in places like Ghana, Mexico, United States of America, Germany, Venezuela and so on. According to Adeoti (2007:2), working with the National Troupe, an organization that was founded on cultural integration, Yerima has, at his disposal, indigenous performance elements that could furnish him with themes and techniques, hence the exploration of myths, histories, religions and cultural beliefs of the Nigerian people.

Notably, Yerima is an award-winning, prolific Nigerian playwright, read both in Nigeria and overseas. Observation reveals that Yerima has written beyond his immediate ethnic group and brought to light the role of culture in the lives of women and men in various Nigerian societies. In the opinion of Eke (2011:543), “Yerima’s plays cover every possible description: historical, religious, political, mythical, and satiric”. Yerima’s play, “*Hard Ground*”, won the Nigerian play for literature, 2006, and ANA/NDDC, J. P. Clark Drama Prize, 2006, after which it went on a country wide tour. These achievements of Yerima as a scholar and theatre practitioner make him to stand out among his peers.

Mojagbe, one of Yerima’s known plays, is based on Yoruba culture. In the play, Oba Mojagbe is embattled because his people are against him. Coupled with this social disorder is the issue of incessant attacks from neighboring towns, one of which is the people of Igbo-Odo. As Mojagbe prepares for the war in his shrine, Isepe comes in to warn him not to go to war because death awaits him there. Also, he is warned that of all the war booty, he must not take more than one item. Isepe then teaches him the names of death, so that he will be armed with the knowledge and eventually escape death in case it visits him; the belief in Yoruba cosmology being that death will not kill anyone armed with the knowledge of the names of death. Isepe gives him two names and when king Mojagbe asks for a third one, Isepe tells him there is no other except those two. Moreover, he, Isepe, will be around to fight death.

Mojagbe stabs and kills Isepe afterwards but Isepe tells Mojagbe that killing him, Isepe, is a mistake for when death comes, King Mojagbe cannot face death alone as there are still lots for him to be done to fortify Mojagbe. Mojagbe tells Isepe that he no longer needs him. After the war, the people return with lots of war booty and in obedience to Isepe, Mojagbe takes only one item, Motunrayo, who is to replace Isepe because of her spiritual background. Unknown to Mojagbe, however, Motunrayo is actually the death being dreaded. She faces Mojagbe and attempts to kill him but Mojagbe tells death (Motunrayo) that he cannot be killed because he knows the names of death. Eventually, Motunrayo seduces the king and removes both the crown and the skull cap and with a gentle touch to the forehead and a whisper of his name. In the end, Mojagbe feels the hand of death as he reveals that “it is suddenly so cool”, and “his (Mojagbe) feet grows cold”. Yerima’s storyline here is therefore indicative of his overbearing fear of death. Projecting the place of death in Yoruba culture, Yerima considers how man forgets about the greatness of death, until the moment it comes or strikes.

3. Mey’s Theory of Pragmatic Acts

According to Mey (2001: 214), pragmatic acts can be viewed from two angles; that of the agent and the act. The agent concerns the individual as a person relative to his class, gender, age, education previous life history and so on. Through these factors, the individual as a person is located within a community. It is then imperative to determine the resources that people make use of with regards to communication. Fairclough (1989:141) refers to these as “background knowledge”. The background knowledge concerns the general idea available to both speaker and hearer about a situation. This is such that both the hearer and speaker share a pre-knowledge of the situation at hand and will be able to deal with the issue based on existing known information.

Verschueren (1999) is of the view that to realize background knowledge in situations, we may invoke the adaptability of language used by individual members in a society as the principal tool applied to events

around them. In doing so, meaning is then generated, especially with consideration for the language that is used in performing a pragmatic act by individuals relative to the available context, which usually determines the linguistic choices made by individuals.

A pragmatic principle to speech acting's most important business is to raise the question of the user's possibilities in a given situation. A theory of pragmatic act's focus is to generalize a situational prototype that is capable of being appropriate in situations in which both speaker and hearer finds their affordances. Such a generalized pragmatic act, Mey calls a "pragmeme". The instantiated "ipras" or "pract" refers to a particular pragmeme as its realization. So, every "pract" is an "allopract" since no two "practs" are the same because the situation that leads to their realization is different. An "allopract", therefore, is a different realization of a particular instantiation of a particular pragmeme, since there is no way of determining a "priori", that is, "what an allopract should look like", and "a fortiori", "what it cannot look like". Below is Mey's schema of pragmeme:

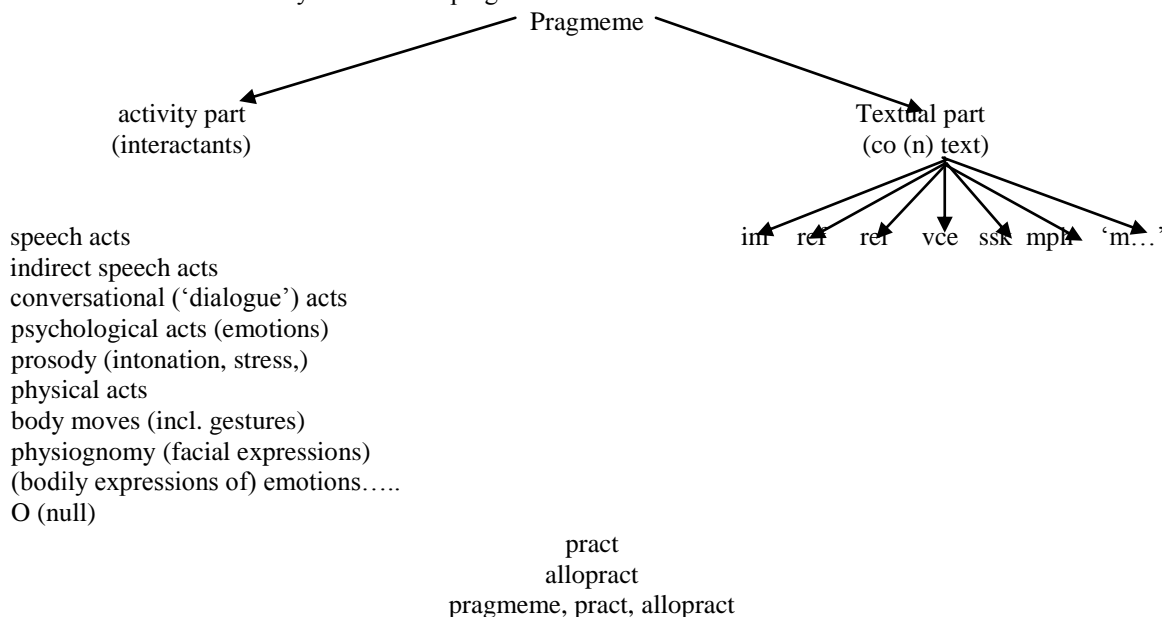


Figure 1: A model of pragmatic acts (Adapted from Mey 2001: 222).

The schema above shows that there are two categories involved in the realization of a pragmeme: the textual part and the activity part. The activity part represents the options that are available to the speaker to perform the various functions he so desires. To achieve this, he depends on the textual part to communicate his intention, in which case, he may employ the inference (inf), reference (ref), relevance (rel), voice (vce), shared situational knowledge (ssk), metaphor (mph), or metapragmatic joker (m). Essentially, both categories depend on context for the meaning realization of the discourse of interactants.

4. Analysis and Findings

Our findings reveal that eight practs and allopracts of informing, invoking, warning, assuring, cautioning, lamenting, insisting, and accusing are found in traditional and communal contexts in *Mojagbe*, to treat issues of power, danger, immortality, re-incarnation, death, bravery, punishment, insincerity, and war through contextual features of shared-situational knowledge (ssk), socio-cultural knowledge (sck), inference (inf), reference (ref), and voicing (vce). This is represented in Table one below:

Practs/ Allopracts	Context	Issues	Contextual Features
Informing	traditional	power, danger, death war	sck, ssk, vce, inf, ref, rel
Invoking	traditional	immortality, reincarnation, death, disappointment	sck, ssk, inf, ref, rel
Warning	traditional	danger, death	vce, ref, inf, rel, sck,ssk
Assuring	traditional	Danger	ssk, sck, vce, ref, inf, rel
Lamenting	communal	grief	sck,ssk, inf, rel
Cautioning	communal	bravery, anger	sck, ssk, vce, ref, inf, ref
Insisting	communal, traditional	Punishment	sck,ssk, ref, inf, rel
Accusing	communal, traditional	Insincerity	sck, ssk, ref, rel

Table 1: Summary of findings on practs in Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe*

These are discussed in turn below:

4.1 Practicing Informing

Informing features mainly in the traditional context in *Mojagbe*. It largely occurs in dealing with issues of danger, power and death through sck, ssk, vce, ref, inf, and rel. The following example, instantiating spiritual power and danger can be considered:

Ex. 1: Yeye: Tonight is not our night.
 It belongs to the owners of the night.
 A thousand big birds who perch on the sacred tree trunk
 at the centre of the market square...

(*Mojagbe*, p. 9)

In the extract above, Yeye and three other women are dressed in white wrappers and “*sh òk ì*” (sacred woven clothes) as head ties. In Yoruba traditional context, this depicts individuals belonging to a particular secret cult. Usually, the people that adorn the sacred “*sh òk ì*” are the “*Babal ávos*” (Ifa Priests), the “*Àj é s*” (witches), and the “*O s ó s*” (wizards). The witches are either white or black, depending on their spiritual activities relative to the society in which they operate. The witches are the ones Yeye refers to as: “a thousand big birds who perch on the sacred tree trunk at the centre of the market square...”.

Yeye relies on the sck and ssk of the readers about the “*àj é cult*” in Yorubaland for the readers to link witches to birds and also showcase the spiritual powers of witches when she reveals that they (the witches) are “the owners of the night”. With the application of reference, one sees Yeye calling humans, that is, the witches, birds. This is absurd as it is quite unnatural for a human being to be a bird except in fantasy stories. Without an application of ssk and sck of “*àj é cult*” in the situation above, one would not understand Yeye’s point of informing here, as a careful perusal of the excerpt does not reveal any lexical item indicating the act. However, a consideration of the conversational context and the application of inference reveal the act as informing of the coming of the witches.

Only readers with shared situational knowledge and shared socio-cultural knowledge of Yoruba believe that witches possess great spiritual powers such that when they are going for their nightly meetings, they place two legs on the wall while lying on their backs as their spirits leave the body and turn to birds to fly to the meeting venue or other destination the witches so desire will understand the situation here. Yoruba believe that witches can travel to any part of the world at night spiritually, and get back by morning without their body leaving their sleeping places. In fact, the Yoruba people link birds with the bird-person (*eleye*), for whatever happens to the bird in the night happens to the body of the owner, that is, the *eleye* at home. An application of ssk and sck of the “*àj é cult*” here thus enhances our understanding of the information that Yeye is trying to pass across. The relevance of the information here lies in one inferring that coming out at such a night implies facing danger.

4.2 Practising Invoking

Invoking is found in the traditional context in dealing with issues of immortality, reincarnation, death and disappointment, through contextual features of sck, ssk, ref, inf, and rel in *Mojagbe*. An instance is found in Yeye's invoking of the masquerade, Layewu. Let us examine example 2 below:

Ex. 2: Yeye:

The evening breeze which blows cool and swift, awaken the gentle,
nostrils of Esu, the tall and short friend of Orunmila. Arise!
Through the groves of the jaded crypt Arise!
The people who own us
Those who enthroned us fathers of the land ...
and gave our tongues power to pronounce, sent us, hence we summon you.
Hurry now in the darkness of the wind...
To the palace of our king, Mojagbe, make swift the heavy feet of Layewu...
move. Let Iku take the soul of the king.....
Let death give our people the respite that they need.
Mojagbe... now let us see how well your boasts mount you on a horse of
shame! Gallop this instant to the fall which awaits you!
Galo... galo... you mount
Guli... guli ... you shall fall.
Now, where is my father, Layewu?
One with the shreds of cloth of a basket cowries.. the masquerade... our
father who walks in two folds.
Layewu, it is you that I call
Layewu! o
Layewu! o
King of the masquerades of life.. father to your people.
But a messenger of death to the king.
Tonight reveal yourself to the sacrifice of the land. Reveal yourself,
Great one. Reveal.
(*Mojagbe*, pp. 9-10)

In two above, Yerima adopts the Yoruba traditional way of bringing out the masquerade from the shrine during masquerade festivals. References are made to the spiritual world as a means to merge both the spiritual and the physical. For example, the spiritual power is referred to as “the people who own us”, “those who enthroned us”, “fathers of (our) land” and “fathers who gave our tongues power to pronounce”. Thus, Yerima tactically creates the link between the spiritual and physical realm, through the use of references, to perform the pract of invoking.

The act is an exposee of Yorubas' belief in the relationship between the physical and the spiritual. Yorubas do invoke the spirits of gods and ancestors to intervene in certain issues. In this instance, Layewu (the masquerade of death) is invoked. Layewu is an evil masquerade employed by the evil ones to attack their “preys”. The witches' prey, and Layewu's target, here, is the king. The spiritual masquerade syndrome is more emphasized in the Yoruba cultural belief that it is a bad omen for one to dream or see masquerade pursuing one in a dream as it practically suggests death. Yerima continues the narration and his manipulation of Yeye is evident in his out of culture, but characteristic creative rhythmic expression, “Galo..-galo..-you mount, Guli...guli ...-you shall fall”, which is way out of Yorubas' rhythmic cultural ethic.

However, Yerima tactically reverts to form as he recognizes “Layewu”, the masquerade as “father” in line with Yoruba cultural practice. It could be strange especially to somebody an ssk or sck, if one refers to a masquerade as one's father. More amazing is the fact that, in Yorubas' conception, the masquerade is not of this world, as Yorubas call the masquerade, “*ar á Òrun*” that is, “the heavenly being”. One then begins to wonder how an earthly being, that is, a person in the costume of the masquerade is referred to as “the heavenly being”. Only readers who share the same sck, and ssk of Yoruba masquerade cult can understand the situation here. In this regard, Yerima practs immortality and reincarnation thus signifying that the forefathers are always there to guide and protect us.

Also, it could be amazing how somebody can be “tall” and “short” at the same time. However, with the application of sck, and ssk of Yoruba cultural knowledge of “*è sù ò d l à r ò*”, one easily infers that “tall” and “short” are references to the confusionist “*èsù*”. Furthermore, Yerima taps on the knowledge that evil in Yoruba culture is executed in the night and not during the day, hence, his setting of the act in the night when all have slept. In fact, some Yoruba are greeted as: “*omo oru laa se ka, to ba do'ju ojo a se rere*”, that is, “evil is perpetrated

during the night, while the day is meant for good". Hence, Yerima in the excerpt above through Yeye urges Layewu to "hurry now in the darkness of the wind", to move to the palace of king Mojagbe to "let Iku (death) take the soul of the king". Without a socio-cultural knowledge of this Yoruba way of life, one might not understand Yerima's intention here. Yerima's dependence on Yoruba cosmology is further emphasized in his representation of "father Layewu" being with the "shreds of cloth of a basket of cowries". Linked with the costumes of Yoruba masquerades, cowries are usually attached to signify a link to ancestral background. Above all, the call of Layewu three times imitates Yoruba's way of invoking spiritual beings to intervene in the physical realm.

4.3 Practing Warning

Warning largely occurs in the traditional context through such contextual features as vce, ref, inf, rel, ssk, and sck, to treat issues of danger, and death. Let us consider example 3:

Ex. 3: Abese: The frightening drums sent a thousand shivers down our spine. The Akodas stood stupefied. Not a soul could move in the palace yard. The Chief Akoda inspecting the night guards was rooted to the ground, consumed by the wrath of the fearsome masquerade... the frightening drums of death, my lord, were heard throughout the four corners of the village. Ha Kabiyesi, the thick smoke of evil roams, the figure of death looms large tonight, my lord.

Mojagbe: I heard it too. Now, hurry to Balogun, tell him to come with the chiefs to the palace. The fire on the mountain top looms large, all it needs is an ill wind to spread it. Mind who you speak to on the way. Put the sacred amo leaves between your lips and bite it. Speak to no one. Hurry man, before the drums die down and Layewu returns to its senders. Hurry!
(*Mojagbe*, pp. 12)

In this interaction, one could easily identify an omnipresent heterodiegetic narrator who knows and sees all the actions in the play. From all indications, the sound of Layewu's drum stupefied everybody and instilled fear in them. If "the Akodas stood stupefied" and the Chief Akoda that is inspecting the night guards "was rooted to the ground", consumed by the fear of the masquerade, how much more an ordinary palace servant, Abese. Abese's claim that the frightening drums sent a thousand shivers down their spine links him with those who are afraid, in which case, the first person plural pronoun "our" collectively links Abese as referenced along with those who are afraid. It is amazing, therefore, for Abese to have knowledge of the situation of the four corners of the village, despite the gravity of the fear that gripped everybody, and shook them out of their wits; definitely, Abese could not be in a condition to give such report.

Consequently, Yerima's voice trashes that of Abese as it overshadows Abese's voice to project the traditional context where Yerima establishes that "the thick smoke of evil roams", and "the figure of death looms large". These figurative expressions, which relevantly, are fall outs of certain precedence, could only be inferred by someone with the sck and ssk of Yoruba's cultural expressions as references to danger and death. As such, the utterances are basically employed to pract warning on the issues. The effect is reflected in Mojagbe's response to Abese's contribution when he asks Abese to hurry to Balogun to call the chiefs to the palace. There is also the need for sck and ssk of Yoruba cultural practices to understand the act of putting "amo" leaves between Abese's lips and biting it. In Yorubaland, this act is to prevent a messenger from divulging a secret.

4.4 Practing Assuring

Assuring occurs in *Mojagbe* in the traditional context basically to address the issue of danger, through contextual features of sck, ssk, vce, refe, inf, and rel. Wherever assuring occurs, Yerima's voice is found to clash with those of his characters. According to Mey (2000:189), voice clash is a situation whereby voices are considered disharmonious, that is, when voices do not match. Mojagbe is presented as being afraid, but because he has to protect his family, suddenly, he becomes a hero, a fearless superhuman. Let us consider example 4:

Ex. 4: Olori: (*Raises her head, still sleepy*) Kabiyesi.
The noise I thought I heard....

Mojagbe: Nothing when the mother fish senses danger in the belly of the sea, it opens its mouth for all its children to swim in, and yet no one single tiny fingerling is hurt or even scratched. Mine is mine to keep, sleep, Olori... this fight is mine. Sleep, child, (*Olori Deola turns her back and goes back to sleep*). Now to turn to my search for the doomed faces who clamour and chatter for my downfall. (*He goes, as if in a trance, to a small pot in a corner of the room*). Ela! My eyes were washed with the sleep paste, ipin in the eyes of a dog, so I see beyond the eyes. Open and show me. By all

the gods who stand with me, who sent death to the king of death? Who wants Mojagbe, the son of the great medicine man dead? Show me. Elaiwori! Agbe nu omi riran niteja, Elaiwori! Ha, here they are... fools on the false drunken horse of shame and death... fools. One by one, I shall hack them down. Those who wish to repay my kindness with death. I shall cut down their souls. With Ogun's mighty war sword. One by one.

(Mojagbe, p. 13).

Mojagbe's utterance in the extract above brings to mind the Yoruba philosophy of the protective mother hen or the legendary Yoruba war lord, "*el ẹgb ẹje*" who when he goes to war brings all those who go to war with him back home safely. Armed with this background, Mojagbe equals himself with the mother fish indicating that no harm can come to Olori. Mojagbe, therefore, seeks to detect his detractors through spiritual means which is indicative of Yoruba people's cultural way of life in such situations. To take a peep into the unknown, Mojagbe reveals that his eyes were washed with the sleep paste, "*ipin*" in the eyes of a dog, so (he) sees beyond the eyes. "*Ipin*" is the "eye discharge". Of special kind is the "*ipin*" of a dog. Yoruba believe that the dog sees the unseen, hence the Yoruba proverb that "a barking dog is not insane, he knows what he sees". The Yoruba, therefore, use "*ipin*" of the dog to prepare charm which when washed the eyes with (*we oju*), makes a man to see beyond the ordinary. It is with the application of sck and ssk of Yoruba supernatural world that one can infer Yerima's pragmatic act in the excerpt.

Yerima, in this context, discusses the issue of danger. Such lexical items as "hurt" "scratched", "fight", "downfall" and "dead" referentially make recurs to danger; and with the lexical items, one can infer that the king is in danger, hence, his restlessness. Through sck of the truth of the utterance, therefore, Yerima successfully practs assuring, for with the assurance that "when the mother fish senses danger in the belly of the sea, it opens its mouth for all its children to swim in and yet no one single tiny fingerling is hurt or even scratched", Olori went back to sleep and she sleeps like a child.

4.5 Practing Lamenting

Lamenting is found in the communal context to deal with the issue of grief in the play. Yerima successfully achieves this through the use of contextual features such as sck, ssk, inference and relevance. This is shown in example 5:

Ex. 5: Mojagbe: Howu! Who hates me this much.
Who is so resolved to let me starve to death, by removing
all the teeth in my mouth? What have I done, Baba Isepe, that
my arms are to be pulled out of my body by my
own people like a common thief!.....

(Mojagbe p. 16)

Following the exclamation in Yoruba language, "*h ọwìl*", to show surprise, Yerima successively employs certain figurative expressions to depict the state of mind of Oba Mojagbe. This is expressed in the following utterances: "who is so resolved to let me starve to death by removing all the teeth in my mouth?; what have I done... that my arms are to be pulled out of my body by my own people like a common thief?".

These two expressions indicate violence towards the speaker to achieve certain goals. The violence in the expressions is explicit while the intention of the author is implicit. A close consideration however reveals a figurative use that indicates frustration based on events in the immediate environment. Since there is no lexical item indicating the act, there is a need for an application of ssk of condemning a thief in Yorubaland to properly understand that King Mojagbe laments in the given context. With the application of sck and ssk of the utterance, Isepe properly understands Mojagbe's figurative use of words, especially, starving one to death by removing all the teeth in one's mouth, and the pulling of one's arm from his body like a common thief. Through the figurative expressions, the act of lamenting is performed without neither the King's teeth being actually removed, nor his hands being pulled from his body.

4.6 Practing Cautioning

In dealing with the issue of bravery and anger, Yerima practs cautioning in the communal context in our data through such contextual features as sck, ssk, vce, ref, inf, and rel in the play. Let us consider the following examples 6 and 7:

Ex. 6: Abese: No my Lord. We only want the king to walk right.....
in the footpath of his father. (*Breaks into a chant*) Mojagbe o,
remember whose son you are. Only great men, beget great sons.
Do not hurry to shed his blood. An act a king will think

about consequences later is not a good act. A dog does not eat a dog...
Don't be in a hurry to show your fangs, your growl is enough to drive a
thousand fears into our hearts. Do not bite so quickly, great one.

(*Mojagbe* pp. 18-19)

Abese, in line with Yoruba cultural way of appealing to a person, sings the praises of King Mojagbe. One can see Yerima's voice trashing that of Abese as he intrudes into the narration vagary to relate his King, Mojagbe, to a dog, with consideration for the wrath of a dog, rather than the moral trait. Through an application of *sck* of Yoruba wise-sayings, one can make an inference that Yerima manipulates the Yoruba wise saying; "*ad ò k ò òje fun ara won*", that is, "fowls do not eat each other's intestine" to come up with his own coinage of "a dog does not eat a dog" which satisfies the purpose of appealing, "don't be in a hurry to show your fangs". The relevance of this cautionary piece lies in restraining Mojagbe from getting angry, given that known for his bad temperament, Mojagbe might wreck havoc. The reference to a dog eating a dog is indicative of the two parties (Mojagbe and Esan) being royal bloods and according to tradition, the blood of a prince must not be shed, else, it brings evil in the land. Without the *sck* of a dog and its known characteristics in Yoruba culture, one might not be able to adequately infer the implication of a dog eating a dog, or a dog showing his fangs, nor the growl of a dog. As such, an application of *sck* of the utterance enhances one's understanding that a dog gets angry when provoked. However, the pragmatic act here is that of cautioning as Mojagbe is being cautioned to on the issue of anger. He is thus expected to be lenient, so as not to "bite so quickly". Yerima tactically exploits this figurative use of language and its significance lies in the dog's characteristic ability of biting. However, Mojagbe is not a dog, hence, he ought not to bite. Hence, the need for *sck* of the biting dog in Yoruba cosmology to be able to infer that the biting is an act of punishing which Yerima cautions Mojagbe not to do because of Esan's royal background which might fuel the already flaming social crisis in the town.

Another cautionary act is performed when Alaafin's messengers come from Oyo to demand for the customary annual gifts for Alaafin from Mojagbe. Mojagbe gets angry but Abese cautions him as example 7 reflects:

Ex. 7: Abese: (*Chants*) Kabiyesi, sit. No matter how angry a sane man is with his mother, he will never slap her or else the land will reject him.... And people will call him mad.
Ewo! Kabiyesi Mojagbe, a king is a bin into which all sorts of people heap all sorts.
Sit, my Kabiyesi, sit. Like a king and smile.! (*slowly Mojagbe sits*).

(*Mojagbe* p. 59)

The pragmatic act of cautioning is achieved through proverb, built around the mother in the extract above. A mother, in Yorubaland, is an institution, a mini-god that one cannot offend. It is unheard of that one beats up or slaps his mother; hence such an act is considered an abomination. This is reflected in Abese's cautioning piece realized through Yoruba's proverb, "no matter how angry a sane man is with his mother, he will never slap her." It is only with the application of *sck* of Son - mother relation and the cultural upholding of maternal institution as a mini god that one can understand the cautionary act in this utterance.

Yerima's literary creative ability is fore-grounded here. Mojagbe is referred to as "man", while "Alaafin" is the mother. Without an application of *sck* of hierarchical lineage of the status of Kingship in Yorubaland, one can neither infer the referent in the utterance, nor the relevance of the caution which repercussion, as grave as it is, one may not understand. In Yoruba land, it is believed that no matter the situation, one must not beat one's mother, thus emphasizing the sacred role of the mother in the life of a child. However, an application of *sck* to the expression enhances a pragmatic success of the interaction as it is only then that the punishment of the land rejecting such person and the end result of his being called a "mad man" is inferred.

4.7 Practicing Insisting

Insisting occurs in some instances in the traditional context, through *sck*, *ssk*, reference, inference, and relevance to deal with the issue of punishment. For example, when Esan is caught in the palace while trying to assassinate King Mojagbe, the King, out of anger pronounces capital punishment on him. However, because of the royal status of Esan as a prince in the land, it is an abomination to execute him as it is bound to bring evil in the land. Determined, Mojagbe insists on carrying on with his decision despite oppositions. Example 8 shows this:

Ex.: 8 Mojagbe: ... there is limit even for the dance and perching freedom of pigeons,
even in the house of peace lovers.

(*Mojagbe* p. 19)

Pigeons, in Yorubaland are known to be peaceful. The belief is that pigeons are spiritual bringing wealth to whichever house they visit. Yoruba have a saying with respect to this; "*tòtùn tòsì nì eyelé fì n'kó ire*

wolè, that is, “pigeons carry wealth on both wings to the host”. As such, pigeons are welcomed by everybody. It is common knowledge that pigeons do not prepare their food, they are fed by the hosts. The relevance of this to Mojagbe’s utterance lies in the pragmatic interpretation that there is limitation to everything in this world. With the application of *sck* and *ssk* of pigeons’ freedom in Yorubaland, both Abese and Isepe could infer Mojagbe’s reference to pigeons and its import. Mojagbe’s position here is that whoever Esan is, Mojagbe is a no-nonsense man who puts limitation to everything. Consequently, Esan’s royal status notwithstanding, he must be punished through capital punishment. Yerima practs insistence here without any lexical item that suggests the act. However, with the application of *sck* and *ssk* of the pigeon philosophy in Yoruba land, both Isepe and Abese could infer that Mojagbe does not rescind his decision, despite caution and advice from Abese; rather, he insists on going ahead with the execution of Esan.

4.8 Practing Accusing

The pract of accusing is also found in the play in both communal and traditional contexts to address the issue of insincerity through contextual features of *sck*, *ssk*, *ref*, and *rel*. This is depicted in example 9:

Ex 9: Mojagbe: Rise, friends of the throne, or is it not safe to call you that anymore?

Balogun : We do not understand, Kabiyesi...

Mojagbe: But you do, Balogun. Hands that are clean abhor dirt, unless the owner intends to wash them again. I am worried when you feign ignorance in the face of the consequence of actions taken by you.

(Mojagbe, p. 25)

A close observation of Mojagbe’s utterance above reflects ironical expression which addresses the insincerity of the chiefs. For example, “friends of the throne” speaks a volume. The ironical use is located in Mojagbe’s elicitation “or is it not safe to call you that anymore?” The use of the lexical item “safe” practically relates to the trust that Mojagbe has in his chiefs. Hence, he proceeds to accuse them when he says that “hands that are clean abhor dirt, unless the owner intends to wash them again”. It is only with the application of *sck*, *ssk* and *ref* of the utterance that one can relate the hands that are clean and how they abhor dirt to Balogun and his insincere behavior in the given context.

Also, following the intention of Mojagbe to execute Esan, the townswomen come to appeal to Mojagbe who insults them. However, they remain adamant and get angry in return. Consequently, the chiefs plead with Mojagbe who takes this to be an act of betrayal and insincerity. Let us examine the instance below:

Ex 10: Otun: Kabiyesi, these are mothers of the village.

Mojagbe: Then let them treat me as a son. Hear their song.

An undignified chant for a king. Haa, already they sing my funeral song.

Not a word of praise. Osi, your women dance well to the song and dance

you have crafted... but you all sit like *shigidi* before me.

I shall not sit to share bean cakes at my own funeral. Ewo!

(Mojagbe, p. 31)

Yerima tactically exploits the relationship between mother and child to emphasize the negativity of the insincerity on the part of the townswomen. A mother is expected to be sincere and protect the interest of her son. In a situation where such is lacking, the relationship goes sour and the son sees the mother as threatening his well-being. Yerima, therefore, draws on the picture of son and mother vis-à-vis the mother’s socio-biological role of offering protection to the child rather than betraying him. Without an application of *sck* and *ssk* of the utterance “let them treat me as a son”, one would have missed the pragmatic import. Also, with the knowledge of inference, one identifies the chiefs whom Mojagbe metaphorically refers to as “*shigidi*”, that is, “molded or carved statue” believed to be useless in acts and might. Making a reference that likens a man to this kind of statue demonstrates a pragmatic strategy of practicing accusing, as the King verbally charges the chiefs of having orchestrated his misfortune.

More so, Mojagbe’s accusation of the women of plotting his downfall is equally evident in the dramatic scene where he sees his enemy in Yeye. Example 11 shows this:

Ex. 11: Balogun: Kabiyesi... a king... a great king like you does not fight his mother and wives. Let it be Yeye will soon be here. Let her speak with the women one by one.

Mojagbe: Haa, it is now that you have sharpened the knife that will behead me.

And you ask me to put it by my bedside, and wait for the lover you have chosen for me. Unaware that the lover who sleeps by my bedside tonight, and whom you chose for me, is the royal head cutter, and you ask me to

trust and love him. Death instant death awaits me.

(*Mojagbe*, p. 32)

Yerima's artistic craftiness in the story is highlighted in the given traditional context with respect to the performance of the pragmatic act of accusing in the thematisation of insincerity. In the opening of the play, Yeye is observed to be the driving force that leads the three women to invoke Layewu and send him on errand to kill the king. The link is knotted here as Mojagbe practs accusing by implicitly establishing Yeye as plotting his downfall. In Mojagbe's view, balogun appears insincere in asking him to trust Yeye, for trusting Yeye will be like "sharpening the knife that will be-head (him)". It is only with the application of sck and ssk of the metaphoric usage that one can infer that Yeye is the referent of the knife that will behead Mojagbe to pragmatically illuminate the practicing of accusing.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated interactional utterances, paying special attention to the pragmatic functions of language use in Ahmed Yerima's Yoruba culture-based play, *Mojagbe*. The study recognised scholars' observation that Yerima's culture-based plays project people's knowledge, belief, art, moral, law and custom, thereby providing rich sources of data for linguistic studies. Using all culture-based interactional utterances in *Mojagbe* as data, the study adopted analytic insights from Mey's theory of pragmatic acts. The findings thus revealed that eight practs and allopracts of informing, invoking, warning, assuring, cautioning, lamenting, insisting, and accusing are found in traditional and communal contexts in *Mojagbe*, to treat issues of power, danger, immortality, re-incarnation, death, bravery, punishment, insincerity, and war through contextual features of shared-situational knowledge (ssk), socio-cultural knowledge (sck), inference (inf), reference (ref) and voicing (vce). The interaction between the play, *Mojagbe*, and culture therefore facilitates access to a context-sensitive understanding of thematised socio-cultural issues in the play and their contextual reflection of the Nigerian society being refracted by Yerima, thereby revealing the pliability of the pragmatic approach of pragmeme in espousing the culture-based experiences of the Yoruba in Nigeria.

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