

**POETIC FEATURES OF YORUBA PROVERBS**

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**SUBMITTED TO PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A BACHELOR OF  
ARTS (B.A) DEGREE IN LINGUISTICS STUDIES, UNIVERSITY  
OF BENIN.**

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## **APPROVAL**

This is to certify that this research was carried out by **Esther Olawunmi MOSES** (Miss) in the Department of Linguistics Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, under my supervision.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Dr. M.S. Agbo**

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**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## **CERTIFICATION**

I, Esther Olawunmi MOSES, a student in the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin, with the matriculation number ART1701317 has completed the requirements for course work and research for the Bachelor of Arts Degree (B.A), of the University of Benin. The work embodied in this Project is original and has not been submitted in parts or whole for any other degree or diploma programme of this or any other University or Institution.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to God Almighty, the doer of all Good things.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study looked at several selected Yoruba proverbs that were translated into English.

For the selected proverbs, the researcher used a contextual and functional analysis. According to the results of the contextual study, despite the proverbs serving various contextual purposes in our daily interactions, the English translation reflected some lexico-semantic qualities, such as meaning distortion, meaning substitution, meaning modification, meaning constriction, and sometimes, the meaning is actually kept. However, the study found that the poetic elements embedded in Yoruba proverbs were not well disseminated through translation practice in the use of proverbs in communication.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will provide an introduction of the topic. The chapter includes the background of study, statement of problem, the general aim and objectives of the study and research questions. An overview of the entire work will be contained in this chapter.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

People frequently employ various terms that are unique to their communities to voice their opinions and facilitate good communication. These expressions can be verbal or non-verbal including signs and symbols among others. The verbal forms could include forms such as songs, riddles, poems, and adages. Whatever form of expression is used in any society, they aim at expressing values, ideas, emotions, and desires, which are used to educate, caution, and enlighten such society. Just like many African stories, the Yoruba people of western Nigeria make use of proverbs known to them as ‘owe’ to indicate subjects of interest. Proverbs have considerable practical value and are used to describe emotions, reflect social conditions, and encourage and warn people.

A proverb, therefore, is a saying, popularly used to express simple and concrete truth based on common sense and the experience of people. According to Bascom (1949), 'Proverbs which are the most important type of aphorism in Africa, have a deeper meaning than is stated literally; a meaning which can be understood only through the analysis of the social situations to which they are appropriate.' Yoruba Proverbs (Òwe) are said to be the oldest and the most important genre of folklore which is used by the people, in many contexts. Yoruba Proverbs give answers to recurrent problems. They are also employed to preserve history, develop linguistic ability, amuse, and instruct. Nearly every area of people's lives is covered in the Proverbs. In addition, Yoruba Proverbs reflect the religious temper and heritage of the Yoruba people. Yoruba Proverbs are used to express social approval and disapproval, praise and criticize, warn and advise. Òwe is very valuable to preliterate people, for whom words cannot be read, they are more valued when heard. The inclination for language for imagery and the communication of abstract ideas through succinct and allusive phraseology may be seen especially in Proverbs in many African communities. Òwe can be seen to have immense value to speakers and orators. The term 'Proverb' has been defined and described by various people and all definitions point to a focus. One interesting definition is the one in Encyclopedia Britannica, volume 9 (1875: 749) and it states that 'Proverbs are succinct and pithy sayings in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and

beliefs' They are part of everyday discourse and are related to such other forms of folk literature as riddles and fables that have originated from oral tradition.

According to the Chamber English Dictionary (1989: 1177), Proverbs are defined as 'short familiar sentences expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson and requiring explanations.' Proverbs can be found all over the world, and it has been shown that the same knowledge can be extracted from them despite differences in linguistic and cultural context.

In Africa, Proverbial sayings are a very important part of folktales. They are not limited to only a particular set of people in society, but to both people of high cultures as well as the uncivilized. Therefore, an individual cannot be said to be a good orator unless he regularly uses Proverbs in his everyday discourse. Proverbs are particularly effective curbs on behavior in societies where societal norms dictate people's moral conduct. Proverbs censor defaulters or praise those who conform to the ethics of society. Societies also use proverbs to rebuke the younger ones who err in such societies.

Proverbs are used by people from all parts of the world for the transmission of their wisdom, knowledge, experience, and feelings.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Delano (1983:9) argues that it is crucial to incorporate proverbs into Yoruba discourse. In the Yoruba language community, proper and appropriate application and interpretation of proverbs are crucial. This is so because proverbs exaggerate or elevate statements. In order to minimize communication misunderstandings, proverbs should be utilized carefully and responsibly in everyday dialogue. Different situations call for different proverbs.

Unfortunately, some Yoruba native speakers misapply proverbs due to their incapacity to contextualize them, particularly emerging youths (in the 18 to 30 age bracket, often known as "GEN-Z"). Due to the Proverbs' adaptation to the modern era, some of its Proverbs also lack originality. Modern society is to blame for this issue.

Some young people don't comprehend Proverbs because they don't communicate primarily in Yoruba; others are fluent in both languages, which causes them to eventually switch their loyalty to English and stop speaking Yoruba. Additionally, the poetic elements that each word in a Yoruba proverb is crowned with are either neglected, employed incorrectly, or both. Either a lack of experience or the detrimental effects of western education is to blame for this.

Additionally, the majority of studies on Yoruba proverbs have focused on their pragmatic analysis. Reputable academics have conceptually examined proverbs, including Linguists like Lawal (1997), Bamgbose (1981), Delano (1983), Olatunji (2005), and Osoba (2014). Since proverbs offer flavor to any speech, they have been discussed as a cornerstone of effective communication. Regarding the employment of poetic devices in Yoruba proverbs, they say nothing. This study seeks to analyze the Poetic Features of a few selected proverbs in response to this gap in the literature. The purpose of the study is to demonstrate the necessity for more research in this field.

### **1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to identify the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs.

#### **1.3.1 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

1. to identify the poetic features embedded in Yoruba Proverbs.
2. to examine the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs from a literary perspective.
3. to examine the specific factors that influence the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the poetic features embedded in Yoruba Proverbs?

2. Judging from a literary perspective, by what means can we establish the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs.
3. What are the factors that influence the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs

### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The findings of this study will contribute greatly to the society considering that Proverbs play an important role in Yoruba discourse. Appropriate and correct usage and interpretation of proverbs is important in the Yoruba society.

Focusing on these variables; this study is therefore beneficial to the following:

1. The Researcher: Being a beginner for this kind of topic is a challenge for the undergraduate Linguists like the researchers. So this will be an instrument that will guide and navigate them in discovering credible and reliable factors that are vital for further understanding on the topic. They will undoubtedly require this research as their main source of knowledge for their upcoming studies.
2. The Yoruba native Speakers: It is necessary to say that not all speakers of Yoruba language are very aware of the factors that greatly affect the performance and condition of their usage of Proverbs. For the help they might need, this research will be abounded with sufficient knowledge in order to cease them from inappropriate usage and misinterpretation of the Yoruba Proverbs.

## **1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study is designed to understand the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs from a literary perspective. The researcher will interview native speakers from Ota community in Ogun state. These group of persons speak the standard Yoruba.

An interview will be carried out which will include the older generation(elders) of native speakers from Ota, as the use of Proverbs is more prominent among them. Non Yoruba speakers are not within the scope of this research. The study will be done through the utilization of one-on-one interviews of these speakers. By their strategy, the researcher will be able to

1. identify the poetic features embedded in Yoruba Proverbs used in everyday situations.
2. examine the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs from a literary perspective
3. examine the specific factors that influence the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs.

## **1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

There are two major limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research.

1. Lack of previous research studies on the topic: Citing and referencing prior research studies constitutes the basis of the literature review for any research

study, and these prior studies provide the theoretical foundations for the research question being investigated. However, depending on the scope of this research topic, prior research studies that are relevant to the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs were limited.

2. Time Constraints and Inconsistency: During the course of the research, the institution of study was rendered non-functional for 8 months, due to circumstances beyond control. This put a strain on the already accumulated knowledge, putting the researcher in a stress state of having to source for data and relevant literature all over again.

## **1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section presents the research methodology. It consists of the research design, sources of data and data selection, and the method of data analysis.

### **1.8.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study was established using a descriptive and qualitative method of research since the main goal of the researcher was to identify the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs.

In qualitative design, the phenomenon under observation is studied and a clear description of the characteristics is made.

According to Wikipedia, a descriptive method is used to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. This kind of research aims to describe information and traits about the subject under study.

The researcher utilized the qualitative and descriptive method because it primarily determines the detailed perception of the respondents as a basis for the analysis of Yoruba Proverbs and their poetic features.

### **1.8.2 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION**

The method used for data collection from our sources is the participant–observation method. This method places us as members of the society and enables us to obtain complete information in the appropriate context of use. The data were collected orally by conducting one-on-one interviews with the indigenous native speakers of the Yoruba language living in Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria. These group of person speak the standard Yoruba, although they have their own dialect, but for the purpose of this study, they’ll be interviewed based on the standard Yoruba.

### **1.8.3 POPULATION SAMPLE**

In purposive sampling, the researcher selects the sample that has the characteristics that are needed (Kothari, 2004, Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). The Sample consists of proverbs which portray the poetic features embedded in Yoruba language.

30-50 native speakers will be selected randomly using simple random sampling as sample size of each selection. This interview was done fully in Yoruba language, as this made the respondents comfortable.

The researcher identified proverbs with strong poetic relevance. This formed the basis for using the literary work for contextual research. The literary work contains information that analyzes the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs

#### **1.8.4 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS**

Data were sourced from the feedback of participants of the interview. Data relevant to the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs were extracted for use in this study. Data used were representative of the selected speech society used as a case-study in this research work - (Ota, Ogun state). The samples (proverbs) were collected, and then using the meaning provided by each participant, the researcher links it to the various poetic features available.

#### **1.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Due to the multiple features that proverbs are produced with, this study adopted a blend of Contextual theory and Functional theory.

## Functional Theory

Functional theory is a method for studying language that systematically considers both the speaker's and the hearer's perspectives as well as the communicative requirements of both the speaker and the target language community.

Since language is fundamentally a tool, it makes sense to presume that the best way to evaluate and comprehend its structures is in light of the roles they play. The jobs of communicating meaning and background and contextual information are among them.

According to William Bascom's Functional Theory, proverbs are essential for maintaining a culture inside its social institutions. (Bascom, 1965:15): Proverbs help settle legal decisions, riddles, sharpen wits, myths validate conduct, and satirical songs release pent up hostilities.

## Contextual Theory

To comprehend folklore events, this theory takes into account not only textual interpretations but also the context in which they were created, such as a location, a historical period, a governmental system, etc. This school of thought also favored field research as a way to fully immerse oneself in the culture and its surroundings. This made it possible to interpret the folklore object more meaningfully and to see how it represented the people and customs of the society.

The importance of viewing folklore as a performance as opposed to a static presentation was outlined by Richard Dorson in the following way: "The transition from the library to the field not only adds new supplementary information, but also alters the perspectives of the text from linear narrative to multidimensional performance."

(Dundes, 1965:138): In order to understand proverbs, one needs to consider the traditional, psychological, sociological, and philological contexts in which a certain text was created.

Proverbs should be analyzed within their text and within the context of the culture in which they were used.

Both of these hypotheses are pertinent to the investigation at hand. The functional theory clarifies how proverbs are used in various local settings, while the contextual theory explains how proverbs should be interpreted within the cultural context in which they were created.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

This Chapter presents a general overview of the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs, and a review of relevant literature on studies related to it. All these studies are deemed beneficial and significant in investigating the influence of poetry in Yoruba Proverbs.

The Chapter begins with the Conceptual Framework; in which a cohesive, supporting linkage of selected related concepts will be discussed.

Scholars such as Fabunmi, et al, (2005), Ojo, (2006), Adeyemi et al(2009), Ogunwale (2012) and others have confirmed the multifarious nature of Yoruba Proverbs, which are found within the contexts of various disciplines. The last part of this chapter is the concern of the present studies.

#### **2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The basic concepts (i.e keywords) relevant to this work will be reviewed in this part; they include:

- Proverbs
- Poetic Features/Devices

- Literary Devices

## **PROVERBS**

Wikipedia defines Proverb as “a simple and insightful traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. It further explains that Proverbs are often metaphorical and use formulaic language. Collectively, they form a Genre of folklore.”

Russell (c. 1850) observed poetically that “a Proverb is the wit of one, and the wisdom of many.”

Mieder (1993, 597) proposed that “Proverbs are short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form and that are handed down from generation to generation.”

Based on Persian proverbs, Zolfaghari and Ameri proposed the following definition: “A proverb is a short sentence, which is well known and at times rhythmic, including advice, sage themes and ethnic experiences comprising simile, metaphor or irony which is well known among people for its fluent wording, expression, simplicity, expansiveness and generality and is used either with or without change.”

Akporobaro (2003:69) Proverbs has been and remains a most powerful and effective instrument for transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another.”

## ÒWE YORÙBÁ

Yoruba Proverbs are wise sayings passed through generations to teach historical lessons, highlight good morals, and instill societal values

Aderinto (2014), observes that “the Yoruba people use proverbs in public gatherings to communicate special messages, with caution to avoid careless, casual, or thoughtless statements whose damage might outlast lifetimes because Proverb carries great psychic properties.”

The Yorubas also appear to have a solution to every problem and a sage comment for every circumstance. The depth of Yoruba culture is made clear when you learn how to translate Yoruba proverbs literally and deduce their meaning.

Yorubas also have their own definitions of a Proverb. And according to them, ‘A Proverb is the horse which is used in tracing lost words (òwe lẹ̀sin ọ̀rọ̀, bí ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọ̀nù, òwe la fí ń wa). The literary quality of this proverb is pronounced by the metaphor ‘a proverb is the horse...’. As a horse is a reliable means of communication and conveyance to battle fields and long distance. So is a proverb:

a suitable means of driving the words home; a suitable means of verbal communication.

Shooks (2007) observes that nothing defines a culture as distinctly as its language, and the element of language that best encapsulates a society's values and beliefs is its proverbs.

A Yoruba proverb is open to different interpretations depending on the context and sagacity of the user and audience. The person on whom the task of decoding falls, therefore needs to probe beyond the surface of the proverb as stated, into the dark recesses of the 'unsaid', using the context as a guide. When one experiences Proverbs in an appropriate context, rather than in isolation, they come to life.

The use of Yoruba Proverbs by a younger person is prohibited in the presence of an older person, without prior permission to do so. A younger one in the presence of an elder would use any of the following phrases

- tótó ẹ́e bí òwẹ o...
- ẹ́yìn àgbà ẹ́ sọ wípé...

## **POETIC FEATURES/POETIC DEVICES**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, Poetry is a literary work in which the expression of feelings and ideas is given intensity by the use of distinctive style and rhythm.

Poetry can follow a strict structure, or none at all, but many different types of poems use poetic devices.

Poetic Devices are tools that a poet can use to create rhythm, enhance a poem's meaning, or intensify a mood or feeling. These devices help piece the poem together, much like a hammer and nails join planks of wood together. Some of these devices are used in literature as well, and for the sake of clarity, we will look at all these devices through the lens of literature.

### **2.2 PREVIOUS STUDIES**

Russell (c. 1850) observed poetically that “a Proverb is the wit of one, and the wisdom of many.”

Mieder (1993:597) proposed that “Proverbs are short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form and that are handed down from generation to generation.”

Akporobaro (2003:69) says that “Proverbs has been and remains a most powerful and effective instrument for transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another.”

Shooks (2007:16) observes that nothing defines a culture as distinctly as its language, and the element of language that best encapsulates a society’s values and beliefs is its proverbs.

Aderinto (2014:22) observes that the Yoruba people use proverbs in public gatherings to communicate special messages, with caution to avoid careless, casual, or thoughtless statements whose damage might outlast lifetimes because Proverb carries great psychic properties.

### **2.3 PRESENT STUDIES**

This research work sets out to identify the poetic features of Yoruba Proverbs; using the Functional and Conceptual Theory.

The rationale on the choice of Yoruba Proverbs rested on the premise that Yoruba Proverbs has a great influence on the day-to-day discourse of native speakers; majorly the elderly.

A situation of decline in the proper interpretation of meaning of these proverbs is quite rampant amongst the younger generation. This work, however, is an attempt to fill the gap in literature; prying into the poetic features embedded in the proverbs.



## CHAPTER THREE

### DATA PRESENTATION

1. Òwe l'ẹ̀ṣin ọ̀rọ̀, bí ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọ̀nù òwe la fí n wa.

TRANSLATION: Proverbs is the horse used in finding lost words.

MEANING: Proverbs are very much important in Yoruba discourse.

2. Olè tó bẹ̀ gìjà sí inú ilé onílẹ̀, bí onílẹ̀ ríi bí kò rii, gìja rẹ̀ tún ku ẹ̀ẹkan.

TRANSLATION: A thief who hopped into someone else's property, whether or not the owner notices, still has one more hopping (out) to do.

MEANING: Personal integrity is it; ill gotten benefits seldom last.

3. Orí ò mọ̀ ibùsùn, ibá tún ibẹ̀ se láàárọ̀

TRANSLATION: The head knows not its bed. It would have tidied it up in the morning

MEANING: No one knows his/her future for certain; else one would have prepared for it, ahead of time.

4. Etí mẹ́ta ò yẹ orí; èyàn mẹ́ta ò lè dúró ní méjì-méjì.

TRANSLATION: Three ears do not suit the head; three people cannot stand in groups of twos.

MEANING: There is always a right and wrong way to do anything: focus on the right way.

5. A kì í dé ejò mọ́ filà ká jayé ire.

TRANSLATION: One cannot put on a cap with a snake in it, and be at peace.

MEANING: Be conscious of the risks in your choices; avoid intolerably high risks or scenarios with zero way out.

6. Òkò tí a bá bínú jù, kì í pa ẹyẹ.

TRANSLATION: A stone thrown in anger can hardly kill the bird.

MEANING: Actions taken in anger seldom achieve desired results; tone that fury down: it can be self-defeating

7. Ká máa nàwó, kò ní kí ówó ó tán; ká ya ahun, kò ní kí owó ó pọ̀ sí.

TRANSLATION: Spending money does not make money finish, nor does stinginess make anyone rich.

MEANING: Be generous; kindness pays

8. Òkun kì í hó ruru, kí á wà á ruru.

TRANSLATION: Never paddle wildly in a stormy sea.

MEANING: Handle complex issues patiently and calmly; it's not very smart to further complicate an already complicated situation

9. O rí àgbébò adiyẹ lójà, o sàré sí i; tó bá nýé ogún tó n̄pa ogún sẹ̀ aládiyẹ á tà á?

TRANSLATION: You found a fully grown hen in the market and rushed to buy it; were it to be great at breeding, would the owner sell it?

MEANING: Think twice about anything cheap or free; it can prove costlier

10. E gún ẹsin ní kẹsẹ, ẹ ló ntà'pá, baba ta ni wón máa ki irin bọ ní'kùn tí kò ní ju apá?

TRANSLATION: You spurred a horse and wondered why it kicked; who would be struck with steel in the belly and not react?

MEANING: Be fair; be considerate; treat others as you would want to be treated.

11. Àtàn tó bá máa kún, á gba ẹgbin mọ'ra.

TRANSLATION: A dunghill that would be filled up would be tolerant of filth.

MEANING: No one is, nor indeed can be, perfect: it is human to err - be tolerant; intolerance constrains our growth: have a large and forgiving heart.

12. Ogbón díẹ, òmùgò díẹ, l'oba fí n to ilú

TRANSLATION: Applying a little wisdom and a little stupidity is how a king administers his kingdom.

MEANING: There's some sense in nonsense; often, what seemed stupid could well be a reflection of untold wisdom

13. Ẹgbònsẹ kékeré létí àwo gbẹgìrì, tí a nù kùrò, bó bá kùrò lójú, kò lè tán lọkàn.

TRANSLATION: A tiny turd on the edge of a plate of bean soup that is wiped off, even if overlooked by the eyes, hardly leaves the mind.

MEANING: A little indiscretion easily messes up a good reputation

14. Wúra tó máa dán, á la iná kojá.

TRANSLATION: A piece of gold that wants to shine must pass through fire.

MEANING: Good things do not always come easy; no pain, no gain; be willing to pay the price tag.

15. Bí ajá wọ agbádá iná, tí àmòtẹ̀kùn wọ ẹ̀wù ẹ̀jẹ̀, tí ológìnní sán àkísà mò ìdí, ẹ̀gbé aṣẹ̀ranjẹ̀ nì wọ̀n n̄sẹ̀

TRANSLATION: If the dog wears a fiery robe, the tiger wears a bloodied vest, & the cat could only manage to put on a ragged loincloth, carnivores they still all are.

MEANING: Discrimination is vanity; stripped down, as humans, we are more alike than we are different; envy no one, but be humble.

16. Adẹ̀tẹ̀ ò lẹ̀ fún wàrà, sùgbọ̀n ó lẹ̀ da wàrà nù.

TRANSLATION: A leper cannot express milk, but can very well waste it.

MEANING: Underestimate no one: those who cannot build, may be able to destroy

17. Agbẹ̀-igi-lére kan kò lẹ̀ gbẹ̀ inú u rẹ̀.

TRANSLATION: No sculptor can carve the internals of the statue he or she is carving.

MEANING: There is a limit to what anyone can do: be reasonable in your expectations; most people are doing the very best they can, regardless of how it seems.

18. Wọ̀n ní obìnrin sọ̀ iwà nù, ó lóun ò lórí ọ̀kọ̀; kìnì wọ̀n fì n̄gbé ilé ọ̀kọ̀, bí kì í sẹ̀ iwà?

TRANSLATION: A woman, said to be ill-mannered, claimed she wasn't just favoured in marriage; say, with what does anyone keep a home, if not good manners?

MEANING: Be better; bad manners confer no benefit.

19. Òótó korò, şùgbón bí a bá gbé itó ọ rẹ̀ mì, a máa ẹ ara lóore.

TRANSLATION: Truth is bitter, but beneficial, if it can be swallowed.

MEANING: The truth may be inconvenient, but it results in ultimate good, if embraced.

20. Àlùya ni ilù ọ̀fẹ̀.

TRANSLATION: A free drum gets beaten until it's bursted.

MEANING: People hardly treat whatever is free with respect; what's cheap or costs nothing is easily abused.

21. Alágbẹ̀de tó ñlu irin lójú kan, lóhun tó fẹ̀ fà yọ̀ ñbẹ̀.

TRANSLATION: A blacksmith who kept hitting a piece of iron at a single spot had his reasons.

MEANING: People have their reasons: give them the benefit of the doubt; often, we'll see some sense in nonsense, if we look closely enough

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TRANSLATION: Only a patient person can milk a lioness.

MEANING: When faced with a high-risk issue, be mindful of impatience; with patience, virtually nothing is impossible.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS

1. Òwe l'ẹ̀şin ọ̀rọ̀, bí ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọ̀nù òwe la fí n wa.

TRANSLATION: Proverb is the horse used in finding lost words.

MEANING: Proverb is a medium of driving words home

POETIC FEATURES: Metaphor.

‘Òwe-proverb (inanimate) is said to be a horse (animate).

2. Olè tó bẹ̀ gìjà sí inú ilé onílé, bí onílé ríi bí kò rii, gija rẹ̀ tún ku ẹ̀ẹ̀kan.

TRANSLATION: A thief who hopped into someone else's property, whether or not the owner notices, still has one more hopping (out) to do.

MEANING: Personal integrity is it; ill-gotten benefits seldom last.

POETIC FEATURES: Onomatopoeia.

‘gìjà’ is a word that is derived from the sound that the feet makes when a person jumps from a high level

3. Orí ò mọ̀ ibùsùn, ibá tún ibẹ̀ se láàárọ̀.

TRANSLATION: The head knows not its bed. It would have tidied it up in the morning

MEANING: No one knows his/her future for certain; else one would have prepared for it, ahead of time.

FUNCTIONAL THEORY: The speaker here is clearly saying this as an advice statement.

CONTEXTUAL THEORY: It could have been said out of pity or regret for an already made mistake. Or, it could be a futuristic advice toward an action or decision that would be made later.

POETIC DEVICES: Synecdoche-a poetic device in which a part represents the whole. 'Orí-head' in this proverb represents a man. 'Orí-head' in this proverb is the part used to represent 'man' which is the whole.

4. Etí m̀eta ò yẹ orí; èyàn m̀eta ò lè dúró ní méjì-méjì.

TRANSLATION: Three ears do not suit the head; three people cannot stand in groups of twos.

MEANING: There is always a right and wrong way to do anything: focus on the right way.

POETIC DEVICES: Adynation.

This Proverb is an insinuation of an impossibility.

5. A kì í dé ejò m̀o filà ká jayé ire.

TRANSLATION: One cannot put on a cap with a snake in it, and be at peace.

MEANING: Be conscious of the risks in your choices; avoid intolerably high risks or scenarios with zero way out.

POETIC DEVICES: Adynation.

An insinuation of an impossibility.

6. Òkò tí a bá bínú jù, kì í pa ẹyẹ.

TRANSLATION: A stone thrown in anger can hardly kill the bird.

MEANING: Actions taken in anger seldom achieve desired results; tone that fury  
down: it can be self-defeating

POETIC DEVICES: Metaphor.

This proverb is clearly not about stones, neither is it about birds. These objects are just representations of ideas.

7. Ká máa nàwó, kò ní kí ówó ó tán; ká ya ahun, kò ní kí owó ó pọ̀ sí.

TRANSLATION: Spending money does not make money finish, nor does stinginess make anyone rich.

MEANING: Be generous; kindness pays

POETIC FEATURES: Paradox.

This Proverb employs a self-contradictory statement in order to arrest attention and provoke fresh thought, and poses a possible truth.

8. Òkun kì í hó ruru, kí á wà á ruru.

TRANSLATION: Never paddle wildly in a stormy sea.

MEANING: Handle complex issues patiently and calmly; it's not very smart to further complicate an already complicated situation

POETIC FEATURES: Onomatopoeia

The first 'ruru' represents the sound that is heard during a storm in the sea; while the second 'ruru' represents the 'wild' way of paddling the sea.

9. O rí àgbébò adiyè lójà, o sáré sí i; tó bá nýé ogún tó ípa ogún sè aládiyè á tà á?

TRANSLATION: You found a fully grown hen in the market and rushed to buy it; were it to be great at breeding, would the owner sell it?

MEANING: Think twice about anything cheap or free; it can prove costlier

10. È gún ẹ̀şin ní kẹ̀şé, ẹ̀ ló òtá'pá, baba ta ni wón máa ki irin bọ̀ ní'kùn tí kò ní ju apá?

TRANSLATION: You spurred a horse and wondered why it kicked; who would be struck with steel in the belly and not react?

MEANING: Be fair; be considerate; treat others as you would want to be treated

POETIC FEATURES: Rhetoric Question.

The question the proverb asked was not meant to be answered, it already has a silent answer embedded in it.

11. Àtàn tó bá máa kún, á gba ẹ̀gbin mọ́'ra.

TRANSLATION: A dunghill that would be filled up would be tolerant of filth.

MEANING: No one is, nor indeed can be, perfect: it is human to err - be tolerant; intolerance constrains our growth: have a large and forgiving heart.

POETIC FEATURES: Metaphor.

‘Ààtàn’-dunghill is used to represent humans. While ‘ẹ̀gbin-filth, is used to represent the dirty attitudes that humans are capable of exhibiting.

12. Ọgbón díẹ̀, òmùgò díẹ̀, l'ọba fí ń to ilú

TRANSLATION: Applying a little wisdom and a little stupidity is how a king administers his kingdom.

MEANING: There's some sense in nonsense; often, what seemed stupid could well be a reflection of untold wisdom

POETIC FEATURES: Antithesis.

This proverb involves a seeming contradiction of ideas within a balanced grammatical structure. The Parallelism of both expressions: ‘Ọgbón díẹ̀-a little wisdom’ and ‘òmùgò díẹ̀-a little stupidity’; serves to emphasize opposition of ideas.

13. Ìgbònsẹ̀ kékeré létí àwo gbẹ̀gìrì, tí a nù kùrò, bó bá kùrò lójú, kò lè tán lọkàn.

TRANSLATION: A tiny turd on the edge of a plate of bean soup that is wiped off, even if overlooked by the eyes, hardly leaves the mind.

MEANING: A little indiscretion easily messes up a good reputation

POETIC FEATURES: Imagery.

The choice of words in this proverb has been able to create images in the mind of the recipient.

14. Wúrà tó máa dán, á la iná kojá.

TRANSLATION: A piece of gold that wants to shine must pass through fire.

MEANING: Good things do not always come easy; no pain, no gain; be willing to pay the price tag.

15. Bí ajá wọ agbádá iná, tí àmòtẹ̀kùn wọ ẹ̀wù ẹ̀jẹ̀, tí ológìnní sán àkísà mò ìdí, ẹ̀gbé aṣẹranjẹ ni wọn nṣe

TRANSLATION: If the dog wears a fiery robe, the tiger wears a bloodied vest, & the cat could only manage to put on a ragged loincloth, carnivores they still all are.

MEANING: Discrimination is vanity; stripped down, as humans, we are more alike than we are different; envy no one, but be humble.

POETIC FEATURES: Personification.

The abilities of humans were given to ‘ajá-dog, ‘àmòtẹ̀kùn-tiger’ and ‘ológìnní-cat’

16. Adẹ̀tẹ̀ ò lẹ̀ fún wàrà, sùgbọ̀n ó lẹ̀ da wàrà nù.

TRANSLATION: A leper cannot express milk, but can very well waste it.

MEANING: Underestimate no one: those who cannot build, may be able to destroy

17. Agbẹ̀-igi-lére kan kò lẹ̀ gbẹ̀ inú u rẹ̀.

TRANSLATION: No sculptor can carve the internals of the statue he or she is carving.

MEANING: There is a limit to what anyone can do: be reasonable in your expectations; most people are doing the very best they can, regardless of how it seems.

POETIC FEATURES: Adynation.

An insinuation of an impossibility.

18. Wón ní obìnrin sọ ìwà nù, ó lóun ò lórí ọkọ; kìnì wón fì ñgbé ilé ọkọ, bí kì í sẹ ìwà?

TRANSLATION: A woman, said to be ill-mannered, claimed she wasn't just favoured in marriage; say, with what does anyone keep a home, if not good manners?

MEANING: Be better; bad manners confer no benefit.

19. Òótọ korò, sùgbón bí a bá gbé itọ ọ rẹ mì, a máa sẹ ara lóore.

TRANSLATION: Truth is bitter, but beneficial, if it can be swallowed.

MEANING: The truth may be inconvenient, but it results in ultimate good, if embraced.

20. Àlùya ni ilù ọfẹ.

TRANSLATION: A free drum gets beaten until it's bursted.

MEANING: People hardly treat whatever is free with respect; what's cheap or costs nothing is easily abused.

POETIC FEATURES:

21. Alágbẹde tó ñlu irin lójú kan, lóhun tó fẹ fà yọ ñbẹ.

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POETIC FEATURES:

25. Onísùúrù ló lè fún wàrà kìnìún.

TRANSLATION: Only a patient person can milk a lioness.

MEANING: When faced with a high-risk issue, be mindful of impatience; with patience, virtually nothing is impossible.

POETIC FEATURES:Adynation.

An insinuation of an impossibility is evident in this proverb, but a way out of the impossibility was stated in the same sentence.

Insinuation of possibility: 'fún wàrà kìnìún' - milk a lioness

Way out: 'Onísùúrù' - being a patient person

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This is the concluding chapter of this research. It presents the summary, conclusion and recommendations based on the findings of this study, as well as, suggestion for further research.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

In this research, our focus has been on the identification of poetic devices embedded in Yoruba Proverbs. The research on the investigation of the meaning of Proverbs was introduced with a presentation of definitions from different scholars.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS**

1. The Yoruba people see proverbs as a medium of driving words home. They see it as a very important ingredient in every day to day conversation. Proverbs are age-long standing multifunctional tools used for social influence; to advise, to scold, to praise or warn etc. Nonetheless, despite the advancement of economy and technology, proverbs are still relevant and a part of a people's culture.
2. All Proverbs are metaphoric sayings. Most times, their literal meaning are incoherent; the major way to ensure comprehension and mutual intelligibility is by accurately identifying the roles of the poetic devices embedded in each proverb. Identifying the poetic devices means we have to

look at the proverb from a functionalist view and also from a contextual view. This means that we perceive the Proverb judging from the speaker and listener's perspective (functional theory) and then we look at the proverb based on the context in which it was said, i.e location, the events happening at that time, etc.(contextual theory).

## **CONCLUSION**

The ideas of proverbs are clear, sophisticated, and smart. They play a key role in linguistic and cultural study and are important structural components in all languages. Proverbs are a common part of almost all societies, yet the roots of proverbs are sometimes lost or forgotten over time. Proverbs represent the cultural characteristics of the language's speakers. Proverbs can describe a wide range of concerns because they are generated from actual usage and observation of daily life. The comprehension of proverbs depends on the language and nonlinguistic context in which they are used. The Poetic Features embedded in each proverb makes an important contribution to the interpretation and character of the Proverb.

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