International Journal of African Studies

Publisher's Home Page: https://www.svedbergopen.com/

SvedbergOpen
DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Research Paper **Open Access**

Discourse Framing in Gender-Sensitive Proverbs in Yorùbá Casual Conversations

Matthew Alugbin[1*]

[1]Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. E-mail: matthew_alugbin@yahoo.com

Abstract

The use of proverbs is a universal phenomenon in various societies in the world and Yorùbá is not an exemption. Studies abound on the nexus between language, sexism, and gender, most especially, how they relate to the use of proverbs in Yorùbá, a language spoken in Southwestern Nigeria. These studies have examined the discourse functions of proverbs in literary texts, television shows, newspaper reports and academic discourses with insufficient attention paid to how female subjugation manifests in the use of gender-sensitive proverbs in real-life conversational exchanges. This study investigates the linguistic undermining of women evident in certain Yorùbá proverbs in discourse-oriented situations with a view to identifying how the female gender is linguistically framed. The study analyzes six gender-sensitive proverbs combining insights from deconstruction theory and Fillmore's frame-semantic approach to the understanding of discourse. The study shows how contrast, comparison and dissimilar connections between women and men help to entrench the dominance of masculinity in the proverbs. The study argues that certain social framing re-conceptualizes and presents a flaw notion on the roles of women in the society. The study concludes that language is a social phenomenon and should develop according to the changing trends in the society.

Keywords: Yorùbá Proverbs, Gender, Discourse strategies, Framing, Deconstruction

1. Introduction

Language plays a vital role in the understanding of social relations among people. Power relations between the female and the male genders can be shaped by the use of language in the society. Since Lakoff's (1975) pioneering work on 'Language and woman's place', there have been lots of studies on language and gender. Lakoff looks at the language used 'by and about women'. She believes that the linguistic expression of humans is a product of their feelings and thoughts. She argues that women's language is evident in all levels of grammar like the choice of lexis, syntactic rules, intonational patterns, and particles. Studies have since advanced the linguistic explanation of language differences identified by Lakoff. Gender discourse has been investigated from various perspectives. Some of these include studies on gender and language at the workplace (Kendall and Tannen, 1997), suppression of women in literary texts (Kehinde, 2006), gender differences in family discourse (Tannen, 2003; and Merrill *et al.*, 2015), and so on. To this effect, the suppression of women in language use has been of interest to scholars over the years.

---

* Corresponding author:Matthew Alugbin, Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. E-mail: matthew_alugbin@yahoo.com

Studies on gender discourse vary in approach, methodologies and assumptions about what gender implies. The assumption of this study is in tandem with Wodak's (1997, p. 2) view of gender as 'a social construct'. Umera-Okeke (2015, p. 557) notes that 'language, culture and society interact to give members of different genders different levels of power and recognition in the society.' She distinguishes what is meant by sex and gender. While sex refers to biological features that distinguish a female from a male, gender occurs as a result of social roles that individuals assume in the society based on social factors. Gender identities and differences are constructed in various forms of interactions. The linguistic construction of male dominance and female subjugation in discourses manifest in different ways. Its evidence in discoursal use of Yorùbá proverbs points to one of these dimensions. Proverbial expressions in the Yorùbá language reflect the totality of who the people are.

Yorùbá proverbs may be difficult to specifically define, just as the notion of proverb itself is. Owomoyela (2005, p. 6) notes, that 'the constant in the definitions of the English proverb that it is pithy, concise, succinct, brief, terse, and so on, is not always true of the *Yorùbá* proverbs (*òwe*)'. However, this does not take away the general notions that a proverb expresses a general truth. This is true of *Yorùbá* proverbs. *Yorùbá* proverbs are devised to optimize the efficaciousness of speech (Owomoyela, 2005). One good, proverbial and metaphorical definition of *Yorùbá* proverb is captured by Fakoya (2007): '*Owe lesin oro, oro l'sein owe; b'oro ba s'onu, owe la fin wa* (Proverbs are the vehicle of thought; when the truth is elusive, it is proverbs we employ to elicit it).

Proverbs can, therefore, be best explained in relation to how it is culturally functional within a given society. The use of proverbs in *Yorùbá* language helps interlocutors to deeply express what ordinary combination of words would not communicate. *Yorùbá* proverbs are bundles of knowledge, wisdom, wit, and intelligence wrapped into a fold. Understanding the use of proverbs requires a deep and grounded knowledge of the language. In other words, that a person is a speaker of *Yorùbá* language does not automatically translate to having profound competence in the use of *Yorùbá* proverbs. This present study is concerned with how women are represented in certain *Yorùbá* proverbs, taking into consideration the actual usage of these proverbs in real social interactions among people. The essence of contextualization in this study is not to trace the source of the proverbs but to provide the readers with a better understanding of the situations leading to the usage of these proverbs. Proverbs are best understood when properly situated within a particular context of discourse. The study aims to examine the indicators of gender bias. This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do certain *Yorùbá* proverbs conceptualize the feminine gender?

2. What are the linguistic indicators of gender bias in these *Yorùbá* proverbs?

3. How does the representation of women in these *Yorùbá* proverbs affect the view of the status of women in the society?

2. Deconstruction and Feminism

Deconstruction as a form of criticism emerged in the works of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). Ango (2017, p. 123) notes that 'deconstruction interrogates preconceived notions about 'stable meaning', reality, and absolute truth'. It is one of the significant forms of post-structuralism theories. It emerged as a post-structural theory, in reaction to structuralism. Deconstructionist hold that language determines reality because language is relational just as reality is also relative. Ango (2017, p. 122) establishes the inseparable connections that exist between deconstruction and cultural studies and notes that these theoretical tools aim to 'critique the notion about knowledge representations and construction of identities…in such a way that privileges some and marginalizes others'. Deconstruction as an investigative strategy is central to feminism and other fields of study in cultural studies, postcolonialism, multiculturalism, amongst others. Deconstruction aims to probe into accepted notions of meanings and interrogate the use of language as it is used to construct the reality of the people.

Klages (2006, p. 123) argues that 'language is socially constructed and not mimetic, that is, it does not reflect any reality but constructs reality'. Thus, 'the realities we live with' in the society are the ones we have constructed by ourselves for ourselves through the use of language. The reality of our existence is, to a large extent, determined by our use of language. Deconstruction looks beyond the linguistic context of a text to extrapolate meanings. Ango (2017) notes that 'in deconstruction, the reader/interpreter engages in a 'language play' that seeks to reveal the silences, gaps, ellipses, and the captures within the text …'. This implies that there could be more than a meaning attached to a text. More so, where a speaker has said nothing, there could be meaning attached to it too.

3. Frame Theory and Discourse Analysis

Various theories aim to explain how human experiences are captured and transmitted from one person to another. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. xii) note that these intellectual traditions on how human experiences are captured and shared include Charles Fillmore's (1985) frame semantics, Terry Winograd's knowledge representation systems and Roger Schank's conception of scripts. To start with, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) hold that the concepts that govern our everyday thoughts are metaphorical, though people are not always conscious of this when they use language. In their conceptual metaphor theory, they argue that 'most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature' (1980, p. 4). Metaphorical systematicity holds that a concept can be understood in terms of another. The complexity of cognitive meaning attachment lies in the fact that a linguistic form may simultaneously generate several interpretations.

Taylor (1995, p. 87) points out that several terminologies such as 'frames, scripts, schemata, scenes, scenarios, idealized cognitive models' are conceptual terminologies used for cognitive characterisation of knowledge. However, his study favors the use of the term 'frame'. He states that frame metatheoretically refers to 'knowledge network linking the multiple domains associated with a given linguistic form'. This is similar to Lakoff's (1993) notion of generalizations governing polysemy, inference patterns and patterns of semantic change.

The meaning associated with a particular linguistic frame incorporates the deep beliefs widely shared by people about such linguistic items. Taylor (1995) points out that while some people may believe in the idealized scenario of a concept as the norm, it does not imply that such assumptions are immune to change. In fact, the formation of these frames is based, most importantly on 'deeply entrenched cultural beliefs and practices'. In other words, meanings attached to expressions are not only as a result of semantic and syntactic features alone. Thus, frames are 'configurations of culture-based, conventionalized knowledge' and do not 'necessarily incorporate scientifically validated knowledge of the world' (Taylor, 1995, p. 88). Frames create a cognitive framework that specifies how things should be viewed, perceived or done.

4. Linguistic Frame Theory

Charles Fillmore lays the foundation for what is known as frame semantics in linguistic studies. For Fillmore (1985, p. 232), frame is not only a tool for organizing our experiences; it also helps us in "the description and explanation of lexical and grammatical meaning." As such, meaning in discourses is encoded and decoded through frames. This makes it possible for this study to approach the understanding of proverbs using frame-semantic tools. According to de Beaugrande and Dressier (1981, p. 90), frames constitute 'global patterns' of 'common sense knowledge about some central concept', such that the lexical item denoting the concept typically evokes the whole frame. In essence, frames are static configurations of knowledge. Ziem (2014, p. 8) note that since 'linguistic expressions can clearly be ascribed the function of cognitive stimuli', this prompts recipients who decode the massages to 'construct a conceptual unit'.

The objective of linguistic frame theory is to account for how knowledge and meaning are transmitted, acquired, stored and passed in human communication. Our understanding of linguistic expressions does not solely rely on what is communicates in written texts. This means that a lot of factors contribute to meaning generations during communication. Conventionally, people associate meanings to expressions and this creates the meanings associated with the meanings. This implies that meanings of expressions in such situations are context-driven. The meaning generated in a particular situation may not be applicable in another if there is no shared cultural background. This is particularly applicable to proverbs because they are situational-shared expressions. As such, frames that are generated in the minds of people during communication differ based on how they connect to the common ground of the discourse.

For Minsky (1974), the conception of the frame is cognitively generated and organised by a set of presupposed conventional knowledge available to an individual in a discourse situation. Meanings are encoded by linguistic expressions which in turn creates a conceptual unit in the mind of the message recipient. This is what is referred to as frame.

Using frame theory is suitable for the analysis of how abstract structures are cognitively represented. It is the argument of this study that the subjugation of the women folk through the use of gender-sensitive proverbs occurs first at the abstract level. This accounts for why frame theory is suitable for the analysis of these proverbs.

5. *Yorùbá* Proverbs and Gender Representation

Asiyanbola (2007) looks at English-translated *Yorùbá* proverbs and argues that the proverbs could be used for both male and female folks in the society. He looks at eighteen *Yoruba* sexist proverbs in English translation and concludes that 14 of the proverbs are found to be gender-based. The study draws attention to the fact that the use of masculine terms in proverbs may ignore women and thus imply that men are superior to women in the society. His study attempts

to 'de-genderise' the proverbs because women are not the only cause of social vices. The work argues for the use of neutral terms in the proverbs analyzed using strategies such as substitution, pluralization, and syntactic transformations to 'desex' the proverbs. Fakoya (2007) examines the discourse relevance of sexually-grounded proverbs in *Yorùbá*. The paper looks at the conversational value and the contextual relevance of proverbs rather than consider the proverbs as socially distasteful. The findings of the study reveal that in certain language situations, proverbs that are explicitly sexual can be pragmatically used for caution, encouragement, forbearance, self-confidence and to envision a resolution. Using context-structure analysis, the study looks at *Yorùbá* proverbs in discourse and posits that proverbs are context-driven. The study identifies the illocutionary force of proverbs and concludes that there is a correlation between the structure of a proverb and the direct and indirect illocutionary force it can generate.

Balogun (2010) looks at some *Yorùbá* proverbs that violate the rights and dignity of women. He contends that there is a need to review the assumptions underlying these proverbs. The work assumes that it conceptualizes the proverbial oppression of women in *Yorùbá* culture. However, the data used in the study were literally translated and not conceptualized. The direct translation of expressions from one source language to another will always leave out the context of use. The data used in the analysis are not discourse-oriented. Although this does not mean that meanings cannot be derived from such use, it has a consequence in the business of meaning negotiation in the proverbs. The implication is that a full understanding of a proverb's communicative potential cannot be realized when detached from the context of use. Some of the studies on proverbs fail to acknowledge that proverbs are laced with meanings that cannot be attained through structural, semantic studies alone. Not examining the use of proverbs in context is tantamount to looking at a surface meaning of proverbs while neglecting the deep message it intends to perform. However, this does not mean that lexical choices have no relevance in meaning-generation of the proverbs.

Fasiku (2006) is a critical exposition of *Yorùbá* proverbs in relation to the names people bear and the role expatiations of the society of people who bear these names. He argues that 'proverbs are means of unravelling the descriptions and explanations attached with a name'. Thus, societal role expectations of individuals are entrenched in proverb for the consciousness of the name bearer (Fasiku, 2006, p. 54). Also, the dialectical relationship is such that a name can be subsumed in a proverb for whoever bears the name. The study recommends the restoration of the severed link between names and proverbs for improved national consciousness.

Garnham *et al.* (2012) look at how gender representation is grammatically marked in French and German with a focus on the potential influence of pronouns, with an assumption that the pronoun '*they*' is not gender marked in English. The study investigates how the use of the referential pronouns (*ils and sie*) in French and German respectively would reinforce masculine bias. The importance of this study lies in its exposition of the grammatical ways through which gender representation can be constructed. Igene (2013) looks at the stereotype representation of sex roles in elementary English textbooks of Nigerian primary schools. The study argues that the textbooks are capable of building a total child that will be useful for national development because the texts are replete with gender stereotypes. The study analyzes how pictorial representation of concepts coupled with text in the passage entrench and reinforce gender roles in the mind of the young learners. The study notes that jobs that require serving and catering for others were given to females while males are depicted as doctors, engineers, carpenters and so on. The importance of the study lies in the exposition of distorting stereotypes built in the minds of young learners in their formative years. The finding of the study is of great concern because it reveals how gender roles entrenched in the text is capable of manipulating the mind of the pupils at the formative years of their lives.

Umera-Okeke (2015) justifies the existence of sexism in the English language with instances of sex marked words at the level of word formation, syntactic structures, semantic connotations, and idiomatic expressions. As such 'a loose woman' becomes 'a prostitute' while 'a loose man' is 'just a casual person' (Umera-Okeke, 2015, p. 563). Her study shows that power between language and gender can be shaped by the use of language in the society. The works reviewed above reveal the various dimensions that the repression of the female gender may take in various circumstances.

6. Research Methodology

The data for this study is got from naturally-occurring interactions among users of *Yorùbá* language. This implies that the proverbs used are surreptitiously taken without the knowledge of the interactants. A total of 45 proverbs were noted during this period. However, only 15 of these proverbs are gender-related. Six of these gender-related proverbs were used for this analysis. The proverbs were expressed in *the Yorùbá* language and translated into the English language. The essence of this is to ensure that the use of these proverbs is not taken out of the context of use. Most of the proverbs used were recorded from discussions at newspaper reading centers, draught playing centers and social interactions among people in Ibadan, Oyo State. The variety of discussions that take place necessitated the choice of data collection.

7. Presentation of Data and Analysis

The proverbs are categorized based on the meanings generated by the use of such proverbs. This is done to understand properly the communicative intention of the speaker within its context of use.

7.1. Impatience and Ingratitude

Patience and gratitude are some of the basic virtues extolled by the *Yorùbá* people. People are therefore expected to be enduring in difficult situations with the expectation that better days lie ahead. If one is not grateful for the little at hand, one will be considered an ingrate not worthy of greater favor.

7.1.1. Text 1

The interaction involves people discussing the political situation of the 36 states in Nigeria (Oyo State) in relation to two governors – the predecessor and the successor.

Speaker 1:   *Igba aye Akala ati Ladoja, oro osise je ijoba logun* (During the tenure of Akala and Ladoja, workers' plight is of concern to the government.)

Speaker 2:   *Sebi eyin naa leni won ko se dada ti fi f'ibo le won lo* (It was you, the people said that they were not doing well and you voted them out.)

Speaker 1:   *Ta lo mo pe nnkan ti a ma wa doju ko ree?* (Who know this will be the aftermath?)

Speaker 2*:*   *B'obinrin o ba dan ile oko meji wo, ko le mo eyi ti o san ju.* (If a woman has not tried two husbands, she cannot know which one is better.)

The text above is a conversation between two participants on the state of the nation, particularly as it affects Oyo State, Nigeria. There is an analysis of how previous governments in Oyo State were responsive to the needs of the people vis-à-vis the present government. The proverb used here depicts a woman who is not grateful until she had tried two different husbands. The moral lesson in this proverb is that people need to be grateful to a good person and should not wait until one has an awful experience with another bad person. The regret of chosing the present political leader over the erstwhile leader is a fault that can be attributed to the entire electorate who were swayed by the promises of the present leader just to discover that the regime of the ousted governor was better. A woman is, however, the object of depiction to show that the society is always ungrateful to a good political leader until a bad one arrives. 'Alao Akala' and 'Rasheed Ladoja' – previous governors of Oyo state, are the husbands not appreciated by the people while 'Isiaka Ajimobi' – the present governor, is the second husband perceived not to be compassionate with the plight of the workers. Metaphorical dissimilarity is used to describe what is applicable in one home, which may vary in another.

7.2. The Assumption That Men Should Be Less Polite

One of the reasons why the *Yorùbá* society has remained a highly patriarchal one is the belief that men are most time right. Thus, when there is an altercation between the male and the female gender, except where role allocation places the woman at a high pedestal, the woman is expected to apologize to the man regardless of the person at fault.

7.2.1. Text 2

The exchange below is between three commuters in a public transport tricycle. The first commuter is expressing displeasure at how the second commuter has stepped on him. The third commuter wades in to mediate.

Speaker 1:   *Inu Maruwa lawa; kii se inu private car.* (We have boarded a Maruwa (tricycle); not a private car).

Speaker 2:   *Toripe mo wa ninu Maruwa le si se gbodo gori mi mole* (And you must match me because I am in a tricycle)

Speaker 1:   *Kile tun fe kin so leyin ti mo ni ki emabinu?* (What else do you want me to say after tendering my apology?)

Speaker 3*:*   *Booda, eyin naa mo pe pele l'ako o l'abo.* (Brother, you also know that apology can be masculine or feminine.)

In the text above, speaker 2 complained because speaker 1 stepped on her toes. Participant speaker 1 said 'sorry' but it was not a sincere one, hence it was not accepted by participant speaker 2. To make peace between the two commuters, participant speaker 3 used a proverb to remind speaker 1 that the 'sorry' could be manly or womanly, thus telling him his sorry was not accepted by speaker 1 because it was manly.

The manly 'sorry' will be the one verbally expressed without true acceptance of being guilty. This is why the man tries to rationalize the reason why toes can be stepped upon—this is a public transport and not a private car. A womanly

'sorry' would not consider this reason before tendering a sincere apology. Also, the tone of the apology could be a defining factor to know a 'manly sorry' and a 'womanly sorry'. While a harsh, unremorseful apology will be categorized with the former, a concerned and a repentant apology will be categorized with the latter. Again, the expression of apology is perceived manly when not said genuinely while a genuine one is seen as womanly. Men will not want to portray themselves as women, hence the desire to offer a manly apology.

The proverb in the text above has employed the use of contrast to juxtapose the concept of apology into the bipolar of femininity and masculinity. Also, the order of the lexis places the masculine before the feminine. It will be considered odd in *Yorùbá* to put the proverb as *'pele l'abo, o l'ako'*. This lexical arrangement points to the prominence given to the male gender, even in the proverb.

7.3. *Portrayal and Depiction of Males as Heirs*

In the *Yorùbá* setting, males are perceived to be the true heirs of the family. When children are given birth to and there is no male in the family, it is assumed that there is yet to be someone to carry the tradition, position and title of the family lineage.

7.3.1. *Text 3*

At a popular draught playing center, two people are discussing why a friend did not show up as expected at the relaxation joint.

Speaker 1:   *O ye ka rira lana* (We ought to see yesterday).

Speaker 2:   *Beeni.* (Yes.)

Speaker 1:   *Se o it gbabe ni abi ki lo sele?* (Have you forgotten or what happened?)

Speaker 2*:   Woo, mi o gbagbe. Bi ko ba nidi, obinrin kii je kumolu.*(See, I did not forget. If there is no unusual reason, a woman cannot be named 'Kumolu')

There is the use of proverb by B to explain that there was a cogent reason why he could not see A the previous day. '*Kumolu*' if properly written would mean '*iku ti mu olu*' which translates to 'death has taken the foremost or prime**'.** Ordinarily, the proverb will then imply that, but for certain conditions, a woman should not assume the headship of a family. But within the larger society, the restraint on women to assume leadership will be extended. And if a woman is not allowed to rule over a family, how can she rule a society? Women are therefore portrayed as incapable of assuming the headship of the family because she is not the foremost. A woman will assume the headship of a family on a condition – the absence of a competent male.

Naming is used in the text above to restrict the societal expectations placed on women. Thus, it is only in rare situations that women are expected to be successful such that when they die, people will say 'death has taken the prime figure in the family'.

7.4. *Endurance*

One of the virtues highly extolled in traditional African society is endurance. It is the ability to persist in the face of great difficulty. Man is the object used in the data below to portray tenacity despite the ravages of time.

7.4.1. *Text 4*

At a newspaper reading center, the reason for the sudden departure of one of the readers is being discussed.

Speaker 1:   *Ki lo se Bobo ti o fi sa kuro nibi lana*? (Why did Bobo leave here abruptly yesterday?)

Speaker 2:   *Won pe lori ago wipe baba re ti ku.* (He was informed of his father's death on phone.)

Speaker 1:   *Haaa! Se won dagba sa? Haaa*! Was the father old?

Speaker 2:   *Mi o mo sugbon ko ye ki won je omode*. (I don't know but he can't be young.)

Speaker 1:   *O maa fi mora ni o. Okunrin kii ke; ako igi o gbodo soje*. (He would have to accept it. A man does not cry; hardwood does not ooze sap.)

The proverb used in the above text preaches endurance in the face of tribulations and troubles. For someone who has just lost his father, it is said that he should not cry because he is a man. This does not truly imply that men do not cry. However, it is used to suggest that there is lot of expectations on him as a man. He is therefore expected to be brave in facing his challenges. The use of this proverb may again depict a false misconception that a man is a superhuman

being that should always manage emotions by not crying, even when the situation demands it. This may go to show to the womenfolk that their emotions are weak, thus there is no problem when they cry all day over the loss of loved ones. More so, it is unusual for this kind of proverb to be spoken to a woman, even when there is need to encourage her. Through comparison of a man to hardwood, the notion of man's strength is established. Just as hardwood is rigid and unbreakable, so is a man expected to be in the face of adversity even though both women and men face hard times in life.

7.5. Legitimization of Men's Dishonesty

When women lie, this act is frowned at with all seriousness but when the lie is coming from a man, it is regarded as a white lie. A white lie is told without an intention to harm but to avoid distress and embarrassment.

7.5.1. Text 5

At a draught playing center, some people are discussing a radio program which was aired the previous night.

Speaker 1:   *Se o gbo programu Oriyomi lanaa?* (Did you listen to Oriyomi's programme yesterday?)

Speaker 2:   *Mo gboo.* (Yes, I did.)

Speaker 1:   *Abi oo ripe okunrin yen bu u ku.* (Can you see that the man was not thoughtful?)

Speaker 2:   *Ko mo pe iro die ooto die leeyan fii s'oko obinrin.* (He doesn't know that a little truth and a little lie is what is needed to be a woman's husband.)

The text above reveals the disappointment of the interactants to a man who was honest with the wife when there was a rift. The proverb expects the husband to tell the wife a lie to save the ugly situation the truth has caused. Although several *Yorùbá* proverbs take an uncompromising stand against lying in the society, the use of the one in the above text could serve as an immunity under which dishonesty of a husband can be justified. Through the use of contrast, two elements are set in the proverb. The proverb is an antithetical combination of two diametrically opposite concepts to form a unified whole.

7.6. Assumption the Men are Deep Thinkers

To depict men as beings with deep and critical thinking, the proverb below is used. Good reasoning in the *Yoruba* society is believed to originate from deep thought and a man is the object of this representation in the proverb below.

7.6.1. Text 6

In the text above, the discussion is on the politics of Oyo state. The speakers are discussing the possibility of electing a governor who is still very young.

Speaker 1:   *Odo ni Seyi Makinde. O si ni anfaani gidi lati di Gomina ipinle Oyo.* (Seyi Makinde is still a youth. He has good chances of becoming the Governor of Oyo State.)

Speaker 2:   *Ti o ba fe wole, o gbodo sun oorun meta ti omokunrin n sun. Abi e ti gbagbe pe Sugar naa wanbe?* (If he wants to win, he should have three sleeping positions that men have. Have you forgotten that Sugar is also there?)

The above text is a discourse on the political situation in Oyo State. Though men are the individuals referred to in the text above, the proverb can be used to apply to either the female or the male gender. The suitability of one of the prospective candidates is being considered. To have three sleeping positions of men implies that he should think very deeply before declaring his interest to contest in the upcoming gubernatorial election. The proverb above depicts men as beings with critical reasoning. To have three sleeping positions on an issue by a man implies considering the pros and cons of a particular issue before making decisions. Thus, men are represented as cerebral humans whose reasoning is intellectual rather than emotional.

8. Discussion of Findings

The deconstruction of proverbs can occur at two major stages. There is the superficial or periphery stage of deconstruction which could be referred as the surface deconstruction. Proverbs, when limited to this level of interpretation, lose their quality and essence of use. If proverb interpretation is limited to this stage, the meaning becomes ruptured and the communicative purpose of the proverb will be lost. This is identical to what Raji-Oyelade (1999, p. 75) calls 'the phenomenon of the post-proverbial in the *Yorùbá* culture'. From the proverbs analyzed above, the situationality of the usage of the proverbs may refer to any gender be male or female. It communicates a moral message to both genders. However, the female gender has been used as the object to bring out possible vices in people to correct or avert it. Hence, some

Yorùbá proverbs unconstructively portray the feminine gender, thereby using it as a tool to draw out inherent social vices common to women and men in the society. Thus, the universality of *Yorùbá* proverb sometimes particularizes women as the object of reference.

Scholars like Asiyanbola (2007), Balogun (2010) have argued for the substitution of masculine dominant lexis in *Yorùbá* proverbs with feminine or neuter gender lexis such that: *Obirin so'wa nu, o ni oun o ni ori oko* (A woman lacks good character, she is complaining of not having a good husband) becomes: *Eniyan so'wanu, o ni oun o lori oko/aya* (One is bereft of good behavior, yet one complains of not being destined to get either a good wife or husband) (Balogun, 2010, p. 34) or *Okunrin sowa nu o ni oun o lori aya. (*A man is bereft of good behavior yet he complains of not being destined to a good wife) (Asiyanbola, 2007, p. 73).

In the cited instance above, the change of the gender lexis ('obinrin' – women to 'eniyan' – human being) brings to the fore, a fact that good behavior is a precursor to having a good spouse. Alternation of the gender lexis can also help in the transformation of a proverb to be deconstructed in terms of gender affiliations. A person lacks good characters/ he is complaining of not having a good wife/husband. However, not all proverbs can be polarized and examined in terms of being masculine dominant and replaced with neuter gender lexis. The constructions of male domination in some *Yorùbá* proverbs are so deep and not lexically overt. For instance, how does one substitute: *Pele l'ako; o labo* (Sorry can be masculine and feminine) as evident in Text 2? While the suggestions of Asiyanbola (2007), Balogun (2010) are of great importance, there is no doubt that the disuse of certain proverbs is the best way to resist some of these male-dominant proverbs. Such proverbs are socially constructed. The dominance of the male gender proverbs should be met with defiance. Conscious awareness of the effects of these gender-sensitive proverbs will, therefore, lead to its excision.

The findings of the study reveal that certain *Yorùbá* proverbs have helped to strengthen the *Yorùbá* society as a patriarchal one with dominance over the women folks. The proverbs use metaphorical dissimilarities to explain the connection between women and men. Through the contrast between two dissimilar notions, the dominance of masculinity is entrenched in the *Yorùbá* proverbs as analyzed. While femininity is attributed to the weaker side of the concepts, masculinity is assigned to the stronger side. The proverbs also made use of comparisons to draw similar attributes of a particular gender to the impression it aims to portray through it. In this case, the male gender is compared to strong concepts. The proverbs also use naming as a tool to restrict and constrain the societal expectation of women roles.

The representation of women in *Yorùbá* proverbs is a reflection of hardships and marginalization the womenfolk have been made to pass through the past ages. Deconstruction of gender-bias proverbs must first take place at our cognitive level of meaning construction by assigning proper roles to the status of women in the society. If not, the agitation for gender-neutral proverbs will be just an academic exercise.

9. Conclusion

The role of the feminine gender has been structured in the proverbs analyzed such that the masculine gender has been placed on a pedestal. These gender-sensitive proverbs reinforce the psychological reasoning of the male gender to assume a domineering role in the society. The continued use of these proverbs will further retain the repression of women in the society. More so, this repression will be deeply rooted in the subconscious mind of the society as the true picture of the position of women in the society. Patriarchy and female subordination as expressed in certain *Yorùbá* proverbs have gone a long way to subvert and kill the leadership potentials and instincts of women. The continued use, therefore, creates an unwritten acceptance of these proverbs. The use of women as a specific mapping to represent the generic re-conceptualizes the roles of women in the society in relation to the bad notions they are portrayed with. The knowledge structures of some of these proverbs are metaphorical and they have a psychological reality that they portray and describe in the real world.

This study concludes that proverbs in *Yorùbá* is one of the many dimensions the female gender is marginalized. Some *Yorùbá* proverbs (un)consciously undermine the roles of women in the society and also (c)overtly subjugate the social expectations of women's roles in the society. It is not impossible to change the orientation of these proverbs. What applied to the womenfolk that prompted these proverbs is not applicable in this present world. Leadership, strength, and candor are not only determined by physical might in this present world. So, gender roles and expectations in the present world is different from what it used to be when only strength and might determine the stronger human. Because language is a social phenomenon in the human society, it should, therefore, develop in line with the trending changes in the society. Since social change is an evolutionary process, the use of language should reflect the significant contribution of women to the societal development in the recent age. It is therefore not impossible to evolve new sets of proverbs that reflect the experiences of women in the present century.

References

Ango, Z. (2017). Perspectives on the Centrality of Deconstruction to Cultural Studies. *Papers in English and Linguistics (PEL),* 18 (1), 122-135.

Asiyanbola, A. (2007). A Syntactic and Semiotic Analysis of Some *Yoruba* Sexist Proverbs in English Translation: Need for Gender Balance. *Nebula,* 4(3), 63-78.

Balogun, O.A. (2010). Proverbial Oppression of Women in *Yorùbá* African Culture: A Philosophical Overview. *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya,* 2(1), 21-36.

de Beaugrande, R. and Dressier, W. (1981). *Introduction to Text Linguistics.* Longman: London.

Fakoya, A. (2007). Sexually-grounded Proverbs and Discourse Relevance: Insights from Yorùbá. *Carlifornia Linguistic Notes,* XXXII(2), 1-29.

Fasiku, G. (2006). YorùbáPproverbs, Names and National Consciousness. *The Journal of Pan African Studies,* 1(4), 50-63.

Fillmore, C. (1985). Frames and the Semantics of Understanding. *Quaderni di Semantica,* 6(2), 222-254.

Garnham, A., Gabriel, U., Sarrasin. O., Gygax, P. and Oakhill, J. (2012). Gender Representation in Different Languages and Grammatical Marking on Pronouns: When Beauticians, Musicians, and Mechanics Remain Men. *Discourse Processes,* 49(6), 481-500.

Kehinde, A. (2006). Patriarchal Suppression and Neurosis: African Women's Plight in J. M. Coetzee's in the Heart of the Country. *African Study Monographs,* 27(4), 169-185

Kendall, S. and Tannen, D. (1997). Gender and Language in the Workplace. In R. Wodak, (Ed.) *Gender and Discourse,* 81-105. London: Sage Publications.

Klages, M. (2006). *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed.* London: Continuum.

Igene, S. (2013). Challenging gender Stereotypes in Elementary Language Texts in Nigeria. *Journal of the Nigeria English studies association,* 16(1), 120-132.

Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and Woman's Place,* New York: Harper and Row.

Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By.* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Lakoff, G. (1993). The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and Thought,* pp. 203-251. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Merrill, M., Gallo, E. and Fivush, R. (2015). Gender Differences in Family Dinnertime Conversations. *Discourse Processes,* 52(7), 533-558.

Minsky, M. (1974). A Framework for Representing Knowledge. *Artificial Intelligence Memo,* 306, M.I.T., Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. Retrieved from https://courses.media.mit.edu/2004spring/mas966/Minsky%201974%20 Framework%20for%20knowledge.pdf

Owomoyela, O. (2005). *Yorùbá* proverbs. University of Nebraska Press, London.

Raji-Oyelade, A. (1999). Postproverbials in Yorùbá Culture: A Playful Blasphemy. *Research in African Literatures,* 30(1), 74-82.

Tannen, D. (2003). Gender and Family Interaction. In J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff (Eds.), *The Handbook of Language and Gender,* pp. 179-201. USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Taylor, J. (1995). *Linguistic Categorization: Prototypes in Linguistic Theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Umera-Okeke, N. (2015). Language and gender. In I. Kamalu and I. Tmunobelema (Eds.), *Issues in the Study of Language and Literature,* pp. 107-125. Ibadan: Krafts Books Limited.

Wodak, R. (1997). Introduction. In R. Wodak, (Ed.) *Gender and Discourse,* 1-20. London, Sage Publications.

Ziem, A. (2014). *Frames of Understanding in Text and Discourse.* John Benjamins Publishing. Amsterdam.