

## **A Syntactic and Semiotic Analysis of Some Yoruba Sexist Proverbs in English Translation: Need for Gender Balance.**

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### **Abstract**

Using systemic, structural and contrastive linguistic theories as bases of analysis, the paper identifies and explicates eighteen English-translated Yoruba proverbs associated with women and brings out their inadequacies with regard to gender prejudice against the female race. Out of the eighteen, fourteen are found to be gender-biased while only four of them are gender-neutral and can apply to both sexes. From the foregoing, the paper suggests the second versions of these proverbs that cater for the gender not represented in the first set. Thus, the paper is able to prove that the same set of proverbs can be used as reprimand for both the female and male sexes and not for only one of them as they were originally.

### **Introduction**

Just like among many races of the world, the Yoruba people of the south-western geopolitical zone of Nigeria hold the use of proverbs in esteem. This is to the extent that there are different sets of proverbs that accompany various human activities, events, things and ideas (Daramola, 2004; Salami, 2004 and Asiyanbola, 2006). Although some scholars look at proverbs as being archaic and moribund, nowadays; some of these so-called archaic proverbs, which are legacies of our forbears, are still relevant. In this paper, therefore, we have attempted to do five things. First, we have identified some proverbs that are associated with women in Yoruba-Nigerian society. Second, we categorized the proverbs into four classes according to their functions. Third, we translated the proverbs into English for international intelligibility. Fourth, we examine critically each of the proverbs with regard to their meaning and relevance to the present time. Lastly and most importantly, we attempt at re-creating some of the proverbs that are gender-biased in order to make them gender-neutral, and thereby, prove that the second version of each proverb concerned can also apply to the gender eliminated in the first versions. We have to note *ab-initio* that the Yoruba society that this paper is concerned with is a male-dominated one right from time immemorial and little wonder then that we

have proverbs such as we have originally in this corpus. It is very important that we have this at the back of our minds before we proceed further.

### **Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology**

The theoretical framework gains insights from structural grammar of Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985) and systemic grammar of Scott, Brockett, Brown and Goddard, 1971 in the analysis of the proverbial sentences considered in this paper. We also found the contrastive analysis of Robert Lado (1957) very helpful as it is basically concerned with how two languages and cultures can be compared and contrasted in terms of their similarities and differences. The two languages that we are concerned with are Yoruba, the source language and English, the second language. Our main concern, however, is to translate into English some Yoruba proverbs in such a way that their meaning and essence are not lost. This, we have done by employing two modes of translation as practised by Olorode (1987) and Adegbite (1988). First, we did a parallel word-to-word translation (PWT) of Yoruba source language (YSL) into English, and lastly, we did a normal sentential translation into English (NST). We have employed this mode of translation to enable us to have a thorough understanding of Yoruba culture as it is presented in English. These, we hope, will not cause the messages in the proverbs to get lost in translation. To categorize and analyze the proverbs, however, we have also employed the methodology of Daramola (2004); Salami (2004) and Asiyanbola (2006). This involves the categorization of the proverbs into four functional or semiotic classes as they are used in Yoruba society. Our theoretical framework also involves the use of linguistic stylistics as practised by Enkvist (1971) and Awonuga (1988) in order to explicate the sentential proverbs to arrive at their meaning, essence and usage in Yoruba society. Lastly, from the linguistic explication of the proverbs, we have been able to generate another version of the patriarchal proverbs out of the eighteen proverbs in our corpus to female-tolerant or gender-neutral versions, since the fourteen proverbs concerned can also apply to both genders and not to the female gender alone. The main concern of the present paper is, undoubtedly, within the purview of applied linguistics as a social science which has to do with the application of the knowledge of linguistics to solving societal problems as asserted by Sealey and Carter (2004).

## Data Collection, Analysis and Discussions

The data involve eighteen Yoruba proverbs associated with women. The major source of the proverbs is through oral medium, while the minor sources are from radio and television broadcasts and programmes in the Yoruba source language (YSL), and Yoruba newspapers and magazines circulated in South-western Nigeria.

In this paper, we have categorized our corpus conveniently into four; namely, proverbs employed to teach men moral lessons about women, proverbs employed to teach women moral lessons about men, proverbs to teach cooperation between the male and female sexes and lastly, those proverbs employed to discourage men from extra-marital practices.

### Proverbs employed to teach men moral lessons about women

The proverbs in this category form the mode since they have the highest number compared with the other groups. They are basically employed to teach men moral lessons about women by emphasizing some abnormal behaviour which the Yoruba people think some women have. These proverbs are indirectly instructing men to move away from such women that have such bad social traits. The proverbs do not consider that it is possible for some men to have these traits being condemned in women. The following are the proverbs considered in this category:

- (a) YSL- Ìyàwó tí a fẹ́ lójú ijó ìran níí wò lọ.  
 PWT- (WIFE THAT PRO. MARRY PREP. PARTY WATCHING BE PRO. WATCH GO)  
 NST- If you woo a lady at a party, she will go astray when she becomes your wife.

There are two clauses in the above complex sentence that forms the proverb. The first is an adverbial clause of condition starting with *If*. This is followed by a main clause which is a moral instruction to a would-be husband. This is to warn the man to be careful of the source through which he obtains his wife. It is just like a man that starts courting a call-girl he meets in a hotel. The fact lies in the sense that the lady so married might still go back to her trade. However, this Yoruba proverb seems to be one sided. It is possible to re-create another version that will neutralize the gender prejudice against women inherent in it. Thus we can have

YSL- Ọkùnrin tí a fẹ lojú ijo ìran ni ń wo lọ.

PWT- If a woman meets a suitor at a dance party; the man may not make a promising husband.

This shows that not being promising or reliable to one's partner is not restricted to the woman race alone; the man can also share from the blame. Why we have the first version in the first place is because the Yoruba society is patriarchal or male-dominated in nature. It is the man that woos or marries the woman and not the other way round in Yoruba culture.

(b) YSL- Ìyawo tí a fẹ losù aga tí ń fiyan mọle yo-ba-níbe lorúko ọmọ rẹ yoo máa jẹ

PWT-(WIFE PRO MARRY PREP. MONTH PRO. FAMINE THAT AUX2 POUNDED YAM BUILD HOUSE REGRET BE. NAME PRO. AUX2 BE)

NST- If we marry a wife during the month of famine and she decides to be using pounded yam to build a house, the name of her child will be called "regret".

This proverb has the same structure as the first one in that it also starts with a conditional clause and a main clause. It follows a cause-effect structure, the cause being in the first clause and the effect in the second clause. It is equally a warning to the man to be watchful of the type of wife to marry. In a nutshell, a man should desist from an extravagant wife who cannot manage available resources prudently because if one does not run away from such a woman, when he becomes one's wife, one will regret having her as a wife as one will not be economically stable since his wife is not prudent. This proverb is also one sided as it is not only a woman that can be extravagant or uneconomical, a man can share from such a blame. So, we can re-render the proverb to take care of the male race to read:

YSL- Ọko tí a fẹ losù aga tí ń fiyán mọle, yoo-ba níbe lorúko ọmọ rẹ yoo máa jẹ.

PWT- The husband whom we married during the month of famine, and who decided to use pounded yam to build a house will name his child "regret".

(c) YSL- Ápon yan ìya o ní oun yan ìya. Tani a bá gbé aperẹ iṣu fún tí ko ní ko iyán końko fún ni.

PWT-(BACHELOR TAKE PUNISHMENT PRO. SAY PRO. TAKE MOTHER INT. PRO. AUX. GIVE BASKET PREP. YAM TUBERS AUX. NOT AUX. GIVE POUNDED YAM SMALL GIVE PRO.)

NST- A bachelor has chosen punishment and claims to have chosen a mother; can one give a basket of yam tubers to somebody for the person not to reciprocate the gesture with a plate of pounded yam?

The proverb is rendered in English in three clauses with the first clause as a statement of fact about an irresponsible and foolish bachelor who has chosen a lover-woman as a mother. The second part of the sentence is rendered in form of YES-NO-question meaning that while the foolish bachelor gave out a basket of yam tubers symbolizing something more valuable to his lover, the woman now reciprocated the gesture with a plate of pounded yam, the food supposedly prepared from the yam sent to her. This implies that the lover-woman is only giving the foolish bachelor part of what he has given her. The woman is then wiser and knows what she is doing more than the man who is foolish and has lost a lot of fortune. This proverb is always employed to teach bachelors to go for a young unmarried lady that they can marry to make a home with, rather than befriending or patronizing experienced women who will “shave their heads bald and add black paint to it”, that is, exploit them to the core with little or nothing in return. This proverb, although directed to the male race, can be re-created to cater for the female race too. Thus we can have

YSL- Àpọ̀binrin yan ìbajẹ̀, o ni oun yan baba, ta ni a ba sun kaaka fún tí ko ní sanwo iṣẹ̀ eni fún ni ?

NST- A spinster adopts immorality and says she adopts “sugar daddy”, which man can we make love with that will not pay his bill?

As we can use the previous proverb to reprimand a frivolous and foolish bachelor, so also can we use the latter to reprimand a foolish and frivolous spinster who goes about with men to satisfy their sexual urge only for the men to pay her handsome money on each encounter. This irresponsible action should be discouraged in both men and women most especially during this period of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV-AIDS), which is becoming endemic in the present-day society.

(d) YSL-Obìnrin to bímọ̀ fún ni ti kúro lálẹ̀ eni.

PWT-(WOMAN HAD CHILD PREP. PRO. AUX. LEFT BE CONCUBINE ONE)

NST- A woman who has got a child for us is no more our concubine.

This proverb is rendered in a long sentence which is initially loaded thus:

M H Q

*A woman who has got a child for us is no more our concubine.*

With the analysis above, the focus is on the first *complex-nominal group* which is in italics. It is complex because it has modifier-head and qualifier (MHQ) structure. Functionally, it is the *subject* of the sentence which is the most important element in the sentence, hence it is being fronted. Everything in the sentence is about the first complex-nominal group which is the subject of the sentence. This is to tell us the importance that the Yoruba people place on the woman that has children and the children themselves. In the proverb, it implies that the first love encounter of a man and a woman is courtship or *concubinage*, but when the woman has got a child for the man, the woman cannot be referred to as the man's concubine. She is already his wife whether she lives in his house or outside it. The proverb proves to the hilt the Yoruba tradition about the love for the child. The Yoruba people are of the opinion that no matter the degree of hardship a woman receives in her husband's home, it is her children that will absolve her of such hardship. In another vein, no matter how bad a woman may be, the Yoruba people will still regard her or hold her in high esteem because she has children for her husband. It re-enacts another proverb: "Ninu ikoko dudu leko funfun ti n jade" which means "From the black pot comes the white pap". The woman of bad behaviour here is metaphorically referred to as the *black pot* while her child is referred to as the *white pap*. The above proverb can also be reformed to cater for the male race instead of the female race alone, although it will amount to our saying the same thing, meaning-wise, all over again, thus:

YSL- Ọkùnrin tí a bímo fún ti kúro ní alè ẹni.

NST- A man who is the father of one's child is no more one's concubine.

(e) YSL- Eşin obìnrin soro ñ gùn, o le gbéni subù.

PWT- (HORSE WOMAN HARD PREP. CLIMB PRO. AUX. MAKE ONE FALL )

NST- It is not good for a man to climb on his wife's horse because he can fall to his death.

The *horse* metaphor has been used in the above proverb to represent the whims and caprices of one's wife. There are some men who are only guided by the whims and dictates of their wives. The proverb is a warning that such actions will only lead to the downfall of such men. Among the present-day couples in Nigeria, for example, the age of chivalry has been re-enacted in that some men will not use their discretions in the absence of their wives. They just must gain the consent of their wives before they embark on something or the other. This proverb is to check excessive preponderance of one's

wife on every matter concerning one as it may be inimical to the existence of the man. The members of the man's extended family may decide to disown him or desert his nuclear family as the Yoruba people value man's independence from his wife as well as the social relationship with the extended family members. The above proverb is, however, gender-biased against women. We need to re-render it to take care of the male race too because it can be applied to men. For example, we can have:

YSL- Eṣin ọkùnrin soroo gùn, o le gbéni subú.

NST- It is not good for a woman to always climb her husband's horse because she can fall to her death.

The new proverb can be used to check over-dependence of some women on the whims of their husbands. This is because as women can disappoint and make their husband disillusioned, so also can some men equally disappoint and make their wives disillusioned.

(f) YSL- Obìnrin bímọ fún ni ko pé ko mo pani, obìnrin ko bímọ fúnni ko pe ko ma pani.

PWT- (WOMAN PRO. PROCREATE PREP. PRO. NOT SAY NOT AUX. KILL PRO. WOMAN NOT PROCREATE PREP. PRO. NOT SAY NOT KILL PRO.)

NST- Whether a woman has a child or not for her husband does not prevent her from killing him.

The sentence is made up of a *nominal clause* as *subject*, followed by a *complex-negative verb phrase* (*does not prevent*), a *pronoun* standing for the woman, and a *prepositional phrase*. The proverb is used as a warning to men that they should not be carried away by the fact that their wives have got children for them and so the wives cannot wrong them because whether their wives have children for them or not does not prevent their being killed or persecuted by their wives. The proverb may be an exaggeration or hyperbole, however, the truism is that the wife that will hate the husband will still do so irrespective of her fertility status.

This proverb can also be re-created in order to be more objective as the situation it touches on can apply to both sexes:

YSL- A- bimọ - fún- ọkunrin ko pé ọkùnrin ma pani a- o- bímo- fún- ọkùnrin ko pé ko má pani.

NST- Whether a woman has a child or not for the husband does not prevent her from being persecuted by the man.

This is to say that if partners can disappoint, it is not only the female partners alone that can do so as disappointment and disillusionment can come from either of the partners- male and female.

(g) YSL- *Átigbé iyawo ko to ọ̀n, owo ọ̀bẹ lo soro.*

PWT-(MARRYING ART. WIFE BE NOT AUX. VALUABLE MONEY STEW BE DIFFICULT)

NST- Marriage ceremony is not as difficult as maintaining a home.

The structure of the proverb is subject (S), verb (V) and adverbial phrase of manner (A).

The proverb is used as a warning to some men who are very hasty about being married.

There is a comparison and contrast between the expenses of marriage ceremony and that of maintaining a home of which in time past, the man was wholly responsible. If one wants to marry, one should first of all have a good job to maintain his family. The members of one's extended family can only help one to sponsor one's marriage ceremony with regard to the bride price, bride wealth and reception of guests but they cannot help one to take care of one's nuclear family in term of the day-to-day needs such as feeding, clothing, shelter, children's education and others. The above proverb can have the second version that bother on the female gender because marriage is for two people and not for one person alone:

YSL- *Àtilọkọ o to ọ̀n, atiṣebiyawo- to- ń - fowo- ọ̀kọ lo lo soro.*

NSL- It is easy for a woman to get married to a man, but it is difficult to be a financial help-mate to the man.

The proverb is recreated here to cater for the role of women in the present-day society which demands that both men and women should be hard-working to cater for their homes. The burden is too heavy for only the husband to bear nowadays unlike as it was in the past when men were to be the sole bread winners of their families and when there was little or no socio-economic challenge. So, women as well as men, should work very hard to bring up their children properly in the present-day society.

(h)YSL- *O d ì gba tí a bá gbéyawo kí a to morí ẹ̀ni.*

PWT- (PRO. TILL TIME THAT AUX3. HAVE WIFE THAT PRO. KNOW HEAD ONE)

NSL: The type of woman we married will dictate our destiny.

This proverb above is directed to the male race. It is equally rooted in the Yoruba belief about destiny (ORI) and about the tradition of marriage where the man is expected to be

more active than his female partner among the Yoruba people. It is like the English proverb: “Behind a successful man, there is a lady”; but this Yoruba proverb is saying more than that thus: “Behind a successful or unsuccessful man, there is a lady”. This same proverb can be re-created to take care of the women race too, thus:

YSL- O dìgba t í a b á lọkọ kí a to morí ẹni.

NSL- The type of husband a lady has married will dictate her destiny.

So, we can rightly say that: “Behind a successful or unsuccessful woman, there is a man”.

*Proverbs employed to teach women moral lessons about men*

The proverbs in this category include those that are meant to advise the women race to comport themselves to the Yoruba social norm of women submission to the husband, good conduct, prudence in home economic management, care of personal appearance and the entire family:

(a) YSL- Ìyawo ti a bá fẹran lọmọ rẹ ní wuni.

PWT-( WIFE THAT PRO. LOVE BE. CHILD PRO. AUX. LOVE ONE)

NST- It is the wife that one loves, that one loves her child.

The sentence has an end weight in that it is loaded at the final part:

M H Q Q  
the wife *that one loves that one loves her child*

The focus here is on the wife, not every wife, but the one the husband loves. It behoves the woman to be of good behaviour so that the husband will love her. And, as love is extensive and contagious, it definitely extends to the child or children of such a lucky woman. The proverb can be used to dissuade women from behaving badly to their husbands so that the husbands will love them and thereby love their children.

With the present trends of events in our society, however, this proverb can now be re-created to cater for the male race given the spate of divorce and physical separation of husbands and wives. Thus, it is possible to have

YSL- Ọko tí a bá fẹran lọmọ rẹ ní wu ni

NST- It is the husband that we love that we cherish his child.

Nowadays, it is possible to have a single female parent taking care of about two or more children of different husbands. This new proverb is applicable to this situation because it is possible for her to have been married to two or three men at one time or the other. In

this situation, the men will have different levels of responsibility and commitment to the woman, who is the mother of their children. Therefore, it is always the current husband who laughs last that will laugh best and it is the children of such husband that will be royally treated at the expense of other children belonging to the unlucky husbands that have been divorced by the woman in question.

(b) YSL- Papá t í a mú ná ìyaalé, o n bẹ laja fun iyawo.

PWT-(CANE THAT PRO. AUX. BEAT SENIOR WIFE BE. LEFT PREP. SHELF PREP. JUNIOR WIFE)

NST- The cane that was used to beat the elderly wife by the husband is left on the shelf for the younger wife.

The proverb re-enacts the similarity of experience among women as the experience of the elderly wife in the hand of a tyrannical husband is not always different from that of the new wife. This is to warn the newly married wife of a polygamous man that the honeymoon she is experiencing presently may soon elude her when her husband takes another woman for wife. In a situation just like the one we explained previously referring to the present-day society, where divorce and separation have been the order of the day among couples; the proverb can still be re-created thus to cater for the wife who can be overbearing:

YSL- Papa tí a mú na ọkọ akọkọ o n bẹ laja fún ọkọ tuntun.

NST- The cane that was used to beat the first husband is left on the shelf for the new husband.

Overbearing behaviour can be associated with one or the other member of a married couple as it is not restricted to a particular gender. The man or the woman can be overbearing or difficult. Therefore, the above new proverb can be re-rendered, if at all it does not yet exist; but the fact therein is objective and is happening in our present-day society. The proverb, that has been recreated, re-enacts another Yoruba proverb which says: “O ri agbebo adie loja, o sare si i, o nye ogun o n pogun ni oninnkan ta a”. This means: “You saw a hen in the market and you rushed to buy it. If it is productive, the owner will not sell it”.

(c) YSL-Obìnrin sọ wa nù o ni oun ko lori ọkọ

PWT -(WOMAN LOST BEHAVIOUR PRO. SAYS PRO. NOT HAVE HEAD HUSBAND)

NST- A woman is bereft of good behaviour and she complains of not being destined to have a good husband.

The proverb re-enacts the Yoruba belief in “ORI”- *head* or destiny. According to a Yoruba belief, there are two types of head; the inner one and the outer one. The inner one is one’s behaviour while the outer one is the apparent one we are carrying on our neck. It is believed among the Yoruba people that one’s outer head may be good while one’s inner head (behaviour) may be bad. Even, if one’s outer head (appearance) is not good, one may improve on it if one’s inner head is good. Here, in the proverb above, the wife who is of bad behaviour, now finds an alibi or solace in her destiny that she claims does not provide a good husband for her not realizing that she has got a bad behaviour (*bad inner head*). The proverb is used as a reprimand for a woman of bad behaviour to do away with her behaviour so that she can have a stable and happy home. The above proverb can be re-rendered in another version to take care of the other gender, thus:

YSL: Okùnrin sọ wa nù o ní oun ko lorí aya.

NST: A man is bereft of good behaviour yet he complains of not being destined to a good wife.

The new proverb above is telling us that it is not only the woman that can have a bad behaviour only for her to blame her *destiny* for providing for her a bad husband, the man can equally have a bad behaviour towards the wife only to blame his destiny for giving him a bad wife. The lesson inherent in the two proverbs is that there is no absolute good husband or wife, one needs only to adjust to one’s spouse so that there will not be either divorce or separation.

(d) YSL- Funfun niyì ehín egùn gaga niyì orùn omù síkísìkìsíkí niyì obìnrin.  
PWT- (WHITE BE. FEATURE PREP. TEETH CURVE AND ROBUST BE.  
FEATURE PREP. NECK BREAST ROTUND AND ATTRACTIVE  
BE. FEATURE PREP. WOMAN)

NST- As the white colour is an attribute of the teeth, and rounded- curves are features of the neck; being rotund and pointing are features of women’s breasts.

In this proverb, there are comparisons of various kinds of the parts of the human body but the focus of the proverb is the woman. It emphasizes the importance of the breasts in the shape of a woman. It is the woman’s breasts that distinguish her from the man. It shows that if a woman does not have a rotund and pointed breast, she will not be attractive to men since many men are interested in the woman’s breasts as the first focus of attraction. The importance of the breasts in women cannot be overemphasized as they serve as the

point of sexual and erotic activity for the couple. It also serves as a medium of feeding the young ones with milk. The fact that modern medical practitioners now emphasized breast-feeding as the sole medium of nutrition for new born babies lends credence to the importance of women's breast which is the focus of this proverb. This is a proverb that educates the woman to take good care of her appearance including the breasts which are very important sources of attraction to the husband on the one hand and means of nutrition for the baby on the other hand.

(e) YSL- Àdásinilòrun obìnrin òdògò eléwùrẹ́ ń wá ewùrẹ́ o ní kí wọ́n jẹ́ kí ọkọ oun dé. Se ọkọ rẹ lo gbe ewure ni?

PWT- (MICHIEF-MAKER WOMAN PRO ODOGO GOAT OWNER AUX SEARCH PREP. GOAT PRO. AUX. SAYS LET PRO ALLOW PRO. HUSBAND PRO. COME. BE AUX. IT HUSBAND PRO. AUX. STEAL GOAT ART.)

NST- Mischief- maker, the wife of a certain man called Odogo. The owner of a goat is looking for it, Odogo's wife asked people to be patient till the arrival of her husband. Is her husband responsible for the stolen goat?

The proverb is talking about a wife that brings an *ill wind* or problem for the husband. It is the kind of woman that will bring her husband into trouble. In the proverb, there is a theft of a goat and the owner of the goat is searching for it. Instead of the wife of Odogo to keep silent and go about her business, she asked the owner to be patient till her husband returns. When the husband returns, we have to expect that he will answer embarrassing questions from the owner of the lost goat.

This proverb can be recreated to allow for gender equality as the wife can bring the husband into trouble so also can the husband bring the wife into trouble. Thus, it is possible to have the second version of the proverb:

YSL-Adásínlòrùn ọkunrin òdògò, eléwùrẹ́ ń wá ewùrẹ́, o ní ká jẹ́ kí ìyawo oun dé.

NST-Mischief- maker the husband of Odogo, the owner of a goat is searching for her lost goat, he asked her to be patient till the arrival of his wife.

(f) YSL- Kòbìnrin tató rin kọkùnrin tatorin ẹ̀nikan ní láti lomi lẹ̀yìn ẹ̀sẹ́ ju ara wọ́n lọ.

PWT- (LET WOMAN URINATE WALK LET MAN URINATE WALK PRO. BE. PREP. HAVE WATER PREP. BACK FEET MORE THAN BODY OTHER ART.)

NST- Let a woman and a man walk while urinating, one of them will have a messy feet much more than the other.

The above proverb is directed to the woman race that it is not everything that men can do that women can also do and get away with it. This is not to distract the attention of the female race from the modern challenges which enable women to be rubbing shoulders with men at various fields of human endeavours: politics, education, health, science and technology, economics and so on. The proverb only shows the patriarchal or male-dominated setting of the Yoruba race. The proverb is often rendered by Yoruba elders when they are settling a dispute involving infidelity between husband and wife. This is when the wife is trying to retaliate on the cheat-husband by having amorous and sexual affairs outside marriage. This shows that the social expectations from both the women and the men are different in Yoruba land. The Yoruba people expect a woman to be a model of perfection while they do not expect so much from men. In other words, the attention of the society is absolutely paid to the woman while not much attention is paid to the man. This may be because of the role of the woman as the major influence on the child. This brings to fore an English proverb which says: “Educate a man, you only educate one person, but educate a woman, you educate the whole nation”. It shows that if a woman is educated or becomes of a good moral standard, her behaviour or quality will be contagious on the other members of the society as they have that endowed charm to influence others. Thus, it will be disastrous for the society if women behave carelessly and recklessly like their male counterpart. The situation that will result from such action of the women then can be summarized in another Yoruba proverb, thus: “Bí esinsin bá ń jẹ elégbo, awọn eniyan kùí ríí, sùgbọn nígbá tí elégbo bá ń jẹ esinsin ni wọn má a ń pariwo” meaning that “When a person with a sore is being bitten by house flies, people do not pay attention, but people shout at the top of their voices when the house flies are being eaten by the man with the sore”.

*Proverbs employed to teach cooperation between the two genders*

The proverbs in this group are degenderized ones in that they state categorically the mutual existence of both genders in a community as one cannot do without the other and that both genders should work together for the progress of their family in the first place, and that of the larger community on the other hand. We have three of this kind of proverbs in our data. They are the following:

(a) YSL- Bòkùnrin réjo bobìnrin pa á, kéjo má sa ti lọ.

PWT-( IF ART MAN SEE ART SNAKE IF WOMAN KILL PRO. THAT SNAKE NOT AUX2 RUN AWAY)

NST- If a man sees a snake and a woman kills it, what matters is the death of the snake.

This proverb is proving gender equality as it implies that both the male and the female sexes are equally important and useful in the society. Not all human endeavours are exclusively for men. For example, it is possible to have a man who has bought a car but cannot drive it only for his wife, who is brave enough, to drive it for him.

(b) YSL- Oowo soya lobo atampako ñ dun oko, ọrọ n í í kọni ní yọdi sọbọlọ.

PWT- (BOIL ATTACK WIFE PREP VAGINA THUMB AUX PAIN HUSBAND MATTER BE TEACH PRO BE BRING OUT BUTTOCK PROTRUDING)

NST- When the wife has boil at her vagina entrance and the husband has whitlow on his thumb, then the next matter is for the wife to allow her husband to make love to her from the rear.

The proverb starts with an adverbial clause of condition or time followed by a main clause that states the need for cooperation between the man and the woman in a particular sexual act or situation. It re-enacts another Yoruba proverb which says “Aso igba la n da fun igba”, meaning “a particular period demands a specific action”. For example, when it is cold, one puts on a coat and when it is hot, one puts on a light dress.

(c) YSL- Tokotobo lo n şişẹ oko Ido.

PWT- (VAGINA AND PENIS BE AUX. WORK PREP. FARM PERSONAGE)

NST- Both the vagina and the penis should work together for success on Ido’s farm.

This proverb involves a figurative expression called synecdoche in that a part is representing a whole. *Penis* is a symbol representing man, while *vagina* is a symbol for the woman. Both the man and the woman should work together for success in a society. Before the woman can be pregnant, for example, both the woman and the man should be equally serious in their sexual acts. When the child comes to the world, the couple still assiduously work together to take care of the child. Neither of them should be passive in the society, both should be involved in the progress of their community as a single sex cannot do everything all alone.

### 3.4 Proverbs employed to discourage extra-marital practices

This category of proverbs is also gender-neutral in that they are applicable to both women and men alike. The only one in our corpus is condemning illicit affairs between the two sexes.

YSL- Ija ni gbeyin ale.

PWT- (FIGHT BE AUX COME LAST CONCUBINAGE)

NST- Concubinage comes first, quarrel comes last.

There is a comparison between concubinage, an illicit sexual relationship, and fight which can ensue when there is no love between the couple again. Any sexual relationship between a woman and a man that does not lead to procreation is termed concubinage in Yoruba land. If children are involved, it is no more concubinage but marriage, as far as the Yoruba people are concerned. In a situation where the man or woman, as the case may be, has spent his or her fortune and energy for the sustenance of the union but failed, then the relationship breaks and quarrels ensues. This proverb negates the earlier proverb: “Obinrin bimo fun ni ko bimo fun ni ko pe ko ma pani”. That is, “whether there is procreation or not, a woman that will *kill* the husband will still do so”.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this paper, we have identified eighteen Yoruba proverbs that are associated with women. We have categorized these proverbs according to the uses in which they are put in Yoruba-Nigerian setting. For international intelligibility, we have translated the proverbs into English, analyzed and discussed them grammatically and stylistically in order to bring out their meaning, essence and usage among the Yoruba people. Lastly and most importantly, we found out that out of the eighteen proverbs investigated in this paper, that are associated with women, fourteen of them are gender-biased while the remaining four are gender-neutral. We, therefore, attempted at degenderizing each of the fourteen gender-biased proverbs by suggesting another versions that will take care of the other gender not represented in the first set of proverbs. We have done this because it is not only women that should be blamed for some societal problems, for example; divorce, sexual immorality, extravagance and high-handedness; so we should have proverbs that reprimand or warn both sexes since proverbs are expected to guide both the male and female genders and not only one of them.

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