

## **A Socio-critical Discourse Study of Select Proverbs in a Nigerian Nollywood Movie, *The King of Boys***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This present study focused on socio-critical discourse study of proverbs in a Nigerian nollywood movie. Proverbs play significant roles in Nigerian culture and are widely used in different forms of communication. Shedding light on the cultural, linguistic and social functions of Nigerian proverbs, the study identified proverbs used in the Nollywood movie selected for analysis. It determined how proverbs contribute to meaning making and their broader implications for cultural understanding. This was done with the view to showing how S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G, an acronym in ethnography of communication can be used to reveal meanings of proverbs. The data for this study were selected from *The King of Boys*, a Nigerian Nollywood movie produced by Kemi Adetiba. It employed both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source included seven (7) proverbs selected from *The King of Boys*. The secondary source included books, journal articles and the Internet. The data were analysed using Dell Hyme's ethnography of communication's acronym, S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G (1974). Findings showed that proverbs were used to serve multiple functions in the movie including demeaning, discrediting and slurring characters. Also, some of the proverbs portrayed values such as patience, strategic thinking and meticulous planning. The study, therefore, concluded that proverbs are significant in African culture and are not only used for entertainment but used to critique social norms, power structure and shape identity.

**KEYWORDS:** Nollywood; Critical Discourse; Proverbs; Sociolinguistics; Nigerian

## INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria today, proverbs are significant in communication. Like Chinua Achebe rightly puts it, they are like palm oil with which words are eaten (Achebe, 1958). Proverbs are culturally oriented and are used by speakers with deep understanding of their cultural norms and values. They are linguistic resources often used to address certain issues in a given discourse.

In other words, proverbs are used to pass across pieces of information or opinions that might be impolite or offensive in a plain language. They are often cited to confirm, re-inforce, or modify a statement. They are also used to attract attention when making a point (Oni & Nwabudike, 2018, p.286).

Adedimeji (2003, p.54) describes proverbs as wise sayings that help to bring out the distinctive nature of language in a discourse. Proverbs are used by Africans, particularly, Nigerians in different ways. It has become a common feature in their day-to-day conversations and by extension; it has become a salient feature of Nigerian English.

This present study aims at providing a socio-critical analysis of proverbs in a select Nigerian Nollywood movie, *The King of Boys* so as to show how they have been used to embellish a given discourse as well as its significance in meaning making. The study also helps to unveil the relevance of proverbs in communication most especially in African context or culture. The objectives of this study are to determine how proverbs are used to make meaning and establish the implications of its use in a particular context.

## SOCIO-CRITICAL DISCOURSE

Socio-critical discourse is a fusion of sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis. Sociolinguistics studies the relationships or nexus between language and the society. That is, it explains how language is used in the society or a given social context to achieve a desired result. In other words, it explains how language functions in the society. Crystal (2008) buttresses that the scope of sociolinguistics encompasses identity of social groups, attitude to language learning and status of national language etc. The statement above emphasize the fact that sociolinguistics is not only concerned with social groups, attitudes and national language status but also with the larger role that language plays, particularly in shaping and reflecting social interactions, power structures and identity. Yule (2010) also corroborates Crystal's (2008) submission that sociolinguistics focuses on social identity and social attitudes to language. Holmes (2008), expatiates that sociolinguistics pays attention to explaining why individuals speak differently in different social environments or contexts and the function of language use in that context and how language is also used to express social meaning.

Critical discourse analysis according to Fairclough (2001) on the other hand is "a form of critical social science that explains the problems people are confronted with, particularly, social issues. It also focuses on the relationship between language (discourse) and the production and reproduction of texts that shows power abuse, inequality and dominance in the society. This also implies that all social behaviours have the ability to show power and relationships within the society. Critical discourse analysis has some major tenets. A CDA research focuses on the following tenets:

- a it must address social problems
- b power relations are discursive
- c discourse constitutes society and culture
- d discourse does ideological work
- e it must address the link between texts and society
- f discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997)

Also, critical discourse analysis is rooted in three important pillars which are ideology, power and identity (van Dijk, 2001). Ideologies are set of ideas that an economic, political or social system is based. It is also a set of beliefs held by a particular group of people that influences the way people behave. van Dijk (2006) sees ideology as primarily, some kind of ideas or beliefs systems. Ideologies can influence the behaviour of the society on certain issues, just like the feminist ideology influencing how women are treated in the society. Most times, ideologies function cognitively and socially. Cognitively, it provides understanding and interpretation to the beliefs and how it can be applied in everyday life. Socially, it organises and grounds members of the ideological group and it gives the basis of the discourse in the group (van Dijk, 2006).

Identity on the other hand is what something or someone is known to be. It defines who someone is and the qualities the person possesses. It is basically concerned with a group or an individual as social or personal, as intellectual concept or as the outcome of things done (Akpati & Aderoju 2023). A person's identity consists of their values, religion, ethnicity, cultural beliefs, ideologies and knowledge. Power is another significant pillar in critical discourse analysis.

## **SOCIO-COGNITIVE APPROACH**

The socio-cognitive approach, developed by van Dijk (1995), integrates social analysis, cognitive analysis, and discourse analysis to explain the interaction between discourse, ideology and power (van Dijk, 1995). The social aspect of socio-cognitive approach focuses on the general societal structure, i.e the context. The cognitive analysis differentiates other approaches: cognition which is an integral part of cognitive analysis serves as an intermediary between society and discourse. Cognition according to Oni and Nwabudike (2018, p.290) is subdivided into two types; personal and social. They further expatiate that cognition is all about beliefs and goals, evaluations and emotions, mental and memory structures, representation and processes in discourse (Oni & Nwabudike, 2018, p.291).

In addition, socio-cognitive approach encompasses ideologies as shared beliefs by social groups (van Dijk, 2001, p.12). van Dijk (2004) cited in Oni and Nwabudike (2008) also adds that ideologies are beliefs or "social representations" of a group such as their group knowledge and group opinions. van Dijk (2006, p.117) cited in Oni and Nwabudike (2018, p.291) gives four main functions of ideology as:

- a organizing and grounding the social representation shared by members of ideological groups

b being the ultimate basis of the discourses and other social practices of the members of social groups or group members.

c allowing members to organize and coordinate their joint actions and interactions in view of the goals and interest of the group as a whole

d functioning as the part of the socio-cognitive interface between social structure of groups, on the one hand, and their discourse and other social practices on the other.

## **NOLLYWOOD DISCOURSE**

This form of discourse involves all activities and events which take place in the Nigerian movie industry which could consists of English, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo or any other language (Enyengho, 2012). Nollywood discourse is also basically the use of language to interpret the connotative and denotative meaning of how people portray and represent their actions or why they carry out a particular activity.

There are different linguistic studies on Nollywood discourse. Michael and Bridget (2017) examine ambiguities in film titles. The study discusses how movie titles give multiple meanings when interpreted. Also, pragmatic features such as context, inference contribute to meaning making in movie titles. In addition, Jacob and Patrick (2011) investigate audience perception of Nollywood films. Despite the negative theme, poor plotting and poor sound quality in Nollywood movies, the study shows that audience do have positive perception of Nollywood movies.

## **EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON PROVERBS**

Adedimeji (2007) examines Nigerian proverbs in “The Stillborn and the Virtuous Woman by Zainab Alkali from sociolinguistics perspective. The study adopted Dell Hyme’s ethnography of communication theory. It discovered that language and society are intertwined owing to the use of proverbs which cannot be separated from each other. Odebunmi (2008) examines proverbs related to crisis and discusses their pragmatic functions in Ola Rotimi’s “The gods Are Not to Blame”. The study concludes that proverbs relating to politics were used to describe political affairs in the text.

Omoera and Inegbeboh (2013) study usage and aesthetics of proverbs in selected proverbs from southern Nigeria. The study reveals Imageries used as meaning making strategies in proverbs. It further discusses their forms and context in which they were used. Dell Hyme’s S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model was adopted for analysis. Twelve proverbs were randomly chosen for analysis. Findings of the study show that proverbs were used to express different life styles of the people. In addition, Abiodun (2014) examines the social implication of Yoruba and Igbo proverbs on carefulness. The thrust of the work reveals how Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups make use of proverbs that show carefulness in their conversations. The study concludes that Yoruba and Igbo people value and appreciate proverbs and they see proverbs as linguistic resources that can be used to correct certain social vices and behaviours.

Kadiri, Ibrahim and Ekwueme (2021) examine the implication of Nigerian pidgin proverbs on students’ social challenge. The study used 30 selected Nigerian pidgin English proverbs from the students of university of Nigeria, Nsukka. These proverbs were analysed qualitatively using Grice’s theory of conversational implicature. Also, 30 questionnaire were administered to students and were analysed quantitatively. Findings of the study revealed that all the proverbs selected violate Grice’s

theory due to their context-dependent nature. Also, findings showed that proverbs have a great impact on students' social language.

The review of existing literature reveals that substantial research has been conducted on proverbs, particularly in Nigerian English. While previous studies have primarily examined proverbs from a linguistic perspective, they have largely relied on data collected questionnaires, interviews and literary texts. In contrast, this study focuses specifically on Nigerian English proverbs as used in Nollywood movies. This study pays close attention to social references and ideological issues embedded in the selected proverbs. By doing so, this study fills a gap in literature by exploring how proverbs function in Nollywood storytelling and cultural representation.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source includes seven (7) Nigerian proverbs selected from *King of Boys*, a Nigerian Nollywood Movie produced by Kemi Adetiba. These selected proverbs were said in Yoruba. In this study, the said Yoruba proverbs were translated to English version by Mrs Adegboye, a language expert with depth knowledge of Yoruba. The reason for the restriction of the proverbs to seven is to carry out an indepth analysis of the selected data. The proverbs selected for this study are analysed using Dell Hyme's (1974) Ethnographic acronym: S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G which means Settings, Participants, Ends, Act, Key, and Instrumentalities, Norm of interaction and Genre. The model helps to understand how language is used in social situations by focusing on different aspects that influence communication. In other words, it analyses how language functions in different cultural and social settings, considering not just the linguistic elements but also the broader social and contextual factors that shape communication.

**S- Setting and Scene.** This is the physical and social context in which communication takes place, especially the location and time.

**P- Participants.** This explains the individuals involved in the communication, showing their roles and their identities, for example gender and age

**E- Ends.** This refers to the purposes or reasons for the communication. What exactly do participants intend to achieve in the interaction

**A-Act Sequence.** This explains the structure or order of the discourse exchange. It further addresses what is said in a communicative event

**K- Key.** This involves the manner in which tone is used or the spirit of the communication

**I- Instrumentalities.** This is the channel used in communication such as spoken language, written text non-verbal modes etc

**N. Norms of interaction.** These are the social rules and expectations governing the communication such as turn taking, politeness etc.

**G- Genre.** This is the type of communicative even such as debate, storytelling, or interview. It also explains the formats or structures of the communication.

**Synopsis of *King of Boys* directed by Kemi Adetiba**

King of Boys tells the story of Alhaji Eniola Salami, a wealthy, powerful and influential personality in Lagos with a complicated past. Eniola Salami seeks control of both political and criminal schemes. She is an ambitious woman who is hungry for power, thereby forcing her to confront both her enemies and conscience. Throughout the movie, she faces betrayal by those close to her. The movie also explores the theme of betrayal, corruption, power and revenge. The movie also reveals the tough decision that Eniola Salami must take in order to assert control of her criminal group. King of Boys is a movie that examines the dark side of ambition and the human cost of power.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section analyses and discusses proverbs selected from a Nigerian nollywood movie; it examines how the selected proverbs in *The King of Boys* construct meaning, reflect cultural norms, and reinforce ideological positions.

Example 1:

**ENGLISH VERSION:** It is inside the darkest pot that one cooks white pap

**YORUBA VERSION:** Ninu ikoko dudu, leko funfun ti n jade

**Using SPEAKING Model for analysis**

**Setting:** The statement is metaphorical which revealed a traditional African way of cooking in the kitchen. The expression also has some cultural significance, particularly showing how difficult life or situation of things can be.

**Participants:** The speaker here is Eniola Salami. She used the expression to offer some words of wisdom to Mr Gobr.

**Ends:** Alhaji Eniola Salami used the expression to convey a message to Mr Gobr that victory is achieved after going through difficult challenges of life (symbolized by the “darkest pot”). She also tried to convince Mr Gobr that she is a changed and refined person.

**Act Sequence:** The expression involved first mentioning the “darkest pot” and then completing the metaphor with the idea of cooking white pap. This explains that pap requires patience and it goes through obscure processes.

**Key:** The proverb required reflection and deep thinking about life challenges and their outcomes

**Instrumentalities:** The tool used in the expression above is metaphor. “The darkest pot” as used in the expression symbolizes “life challenges” while “white pap” symbolizes “victory”.

**Norms:** The expression has some cultural and social expectations. The metaphor means perseverance even in difficult circumstances as represented by the “darkest pot” which leads to positive outcomes as represented by the “white pap”.

**Genres:** The expression is a proverb. Alhaji Salami used the metaphor to communicate a deeper message about life’s challenges and rewards.



Example 2:

**ENGLISH VERSION:** The locust bean said that it had never felt insulted until it reached Okomesi where it was called a tick

**YORUBA VERSION:** Iru ni oun o te ri, a fi gba t'oun de Okemesi ta ape oun ni' Ori

#### Using SPEAKING Model for analysis

**Setting:** The statement occurred where Eniola Salami reflected on her perceived betrayal by the political party she has supported over the years. She used the locust bean metaphor to express her displeasure over the manner she was unjustly treated.

**Participants:** Alhaja Eniola Salami and her political associates

**Ends:** The expression was Mr Tijani's response to Eniola Salami. He felt insulted after being referred to as a 'tick'.

**Act Sequence:** The locust bean first felt no insult but upon being a tick, he felt insulted.

**Key:** The tone of communication here is anger.

**Instrumentalities:** The expression is a metaphor where Mr Tijani was referred to as a tick

**Norms:** Calling a locust bean a tick has some cultural and social implications. It represents deeper cultural critique and satire. The underlying meaning of this proverb among the Yoruba people is that certain situations may bring contempt on a man or woman of influence even among their people. Thus, the proverb is deployed to discredit a man or woman whom good conduct is expected from but has demonstrated otherwise

**Genre:** The expression is a blend of idioms, storytelling and character development. The use of metaphor and the shift in the locust bean's feelings upon encountering the insult reveals insights about social norms and cultural practices.

Example 3:

**ENGLISH VERSION:** The slow crawling of a lion is not out of fear

**YORUBA VERSION:** Iyokele kiniun kii se t'ojo

#### Using SPEAKING Model for analysis

**Setting:** This occurred during a conversation between Eniola Salami's daughter, Kemi asking her mother to take decisive action against Mekanaki, an elder in their organization. Eniola used lion in her response that her approach is strategic; not born from fear.

**Participants:** Alhaja Salami Eniola, king of Boys made the statement. Other participant (s) Mekanaki

**Ends:** This statement explained the lion's behaviour and other strategies of the lion that are not fear driven and Salami's reflection on power, strength and strategies.

**Act Sequence:** The act described the ability of the lion while the content explains a contradiction to the wrong assumption or beliefs about the slow crawling of the lion to be out of fear.

**Key:** The key here is explanatory in nature. This is because insight is given about the behaviour of the lion (Eniola Salami).

**Instrumentalities:** The channel of communication was a spoken form. It happened as a conversation between Alhaja Salami Eniola and other members of her criminal gang.

**Norms:** This statement challenges the norm that wild animals like lion will always act aggressively without fear.

**Genre:** The statement is a proverb that conveys the understanding of criminal behaviour, and emphasizes a more thoughtful or strategic explanations for the lion's actions.

The crawling of the lion can be said to be a symbol of focus, determination and tact. In an attempt to attack its prey, the lion calculates its attack by crawling or walking slowly in order not to alert the target. The proverb portrayed the values of patience, strategic thinking and meticulous planning one need in moments of conflict.

Example 4:

**ENGLISH VERSION: A child does not recognize a deadly herb, so he calls it a vegetable**

**YORUBA VERSION: Omode ko mooogun, o n pe Lego**

Using SPEAKING Model for analysis

**Setting:** The proverb was made by Eniola Salami during a roundtable meeting. This happened after Makanaki, one of her associates declared openly that Eniola Salami was no longer their leader.

**Participants:** Participants include: Alhaja Eniola Salami, her adopted son who is her body guard, Tiger. The child represents innocence while 'herb' represents something dangerous. 'Vegetable' is the mislabeling of something benign. In the movie, the participants are involved in a power struggle with one trying to deceive and outsmart the other.

**Ends (Purpose):** The purpose of a child calling the herb a vegetable showed how people out of ignorance misrepresent the true nature of something. In the context of King of Boys, the statement revealed how Makanaki misunderstood or misinterpreted the political motives, actions and intentions of Eniola Salami.

**Act Sequence:** In King of Boys, the characters failed to recognize the dangerous environment they were in until it was late.

**Key:** The tone of the expression is one of caution while the mood is tense and often dramatic.

**Instrumentalities:** Communication occurred here in both verbal and non-verbal means. The expression was used to downplay dangerous realities.



**Norms of interaction:** The expression showed a social norm where Mekanaki intentionally misrepresented the move of Alhaja Salami Eniola with a vegetable.

**Genre:** The expression is a proverb used to communicate wisdom and warning about ignorance and misinterpretation particularly the dangers of confronting powerful forces. In using SPEAKING model, the expression reflected the misconception, ignorance and manipulation present in the political and social dynamics in the movie.

Example 5:

**ENGLISH VERSION: The teeth a dog uses to play with her puppies are the same teeth it uses to discipline them.**

**YORUBA VERSION: Eyin taja fi n bomo e sere lo Fi n bu je**

**Setting:** The proverb was said by Eniola Salami. This happened after she challenged Mekanaki's intention regarding her leadership. She used it to convey a message of warning.

**Participants:** Alhaja Salami Eniola (the dog) played the role of both the protector (the nurturing figure) and a disciplinarian (the one who enforces order). Other participant (s): Mekanaki

**Ends (purpose):** The purpose of this expression is to show the dual nature of power and how the same power can be used to care for others and enforce discipline and control in King of Boys.

**Act Sequence:** in King of Boys, Alhaja Eniola Salami balances her role as a leader and a mother figure.

**Key:** The tone used in the context of the expression above is a serious one.

**Instrumentalities:** The expression is metaphoric and uses the imagery of a dog's teeth which symbolizes force or power. This is evidently linked to Eniola Salami.

**Norms of interaction:** In King of Boys, the norms of political and social interaction required that leaders should show strength and empathy to keep their position and be relevant.

**Genre:** The expression is a proverb that conveyed deeper truth about power, loyalty and leadership in the movie. The proverb also illustrated a motherly care and attention to one's children and the ability to punish them. Just as the mother dog uses its teeth to carry, clean and play with the puppies, it also bites them with it when necessary in order to punish them.

Example 6:

**ENGLISH VERSION: A butterfly that changes a thorn head-on will surely have its wings and beauty torn to shreds**

**YORUBA VERSION: Labalaba to digbo le'gun aso re a faya**

**Setting:** The conversation was between chief Koyode and Eniola Salami where he advised her against confronting powerful and dangerous figures like Mekanaki.

**Participants:** Chief Koyode and Eniola Salami

**Ends:** The goal of Eniola Salami was to become the King of Boys. Confronting the thorns without good strategy could lead to chaos and destruction.

**Act sequence:** The act of Eniola Salami (butterfly) trying to change the thorn head-on suggests confrontation or challenge. The sequence leads to the destruction of its beauty.

**Key:** The tone used here is that of warning and caution which implies a direct confrontation with certain challenges. It is intense and full of suspense.

**Instrumentalities:** Eniola Salami used her wealth, connections, political influence to wield power in the movie.

**Norms:** The norms here involved alliances, betrayal and power. The expression implies that one should not cross Eniola Salami because confronting her might be dangerous.

Example 7: **ENGLISH VERSION: No matter how you wash a fish with water, it will still smell like a fish**

**YORUBA VERSION: Kosi ba se fo eja, oun ma run bi eja**

**Setting:** Eniola Salami discussed one's inherent nature with Makanaki and why one should cover things up

**Participants:** Alhaja Eniola Salami and Makanaki

**Ends:** The expression highlighted the inimitability of one's past or qualities that reveal him or her to the public.

**Act sequence:** In King of Boys, Eniola Salami tried to hide things from Makanaki. The act sequence is a failed attempt by Eniola Salami to control the situation to her advantage.

**Key:** The tone used here is sarcastic

**Instrumentalities:** The language used here is symbolic. The language reflected the personality of Makanaki

**Norms:** The expression was basically used to show power structure in the movie.

**Genre:** The expression is a proverb. It referred to the unchanged nature of man. This was a conversation between Makanaki and Alhaja Salami. He used the proverb to demean and describe Alhaja Salami as a wicked and an unrepentant soul who must not be trusted again.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The study, using Dell Hyme's S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G analytical tool, revealed deep socio-political and cultural meanings embedded in the selected proverbs. The proverbs were used in the movie to assert power, especially Eniola Salami. The elements of "key" and "participants" served as weapon challenging the patriarchal structure of the society. Eniola Salami used the two elements to exercise dominance. Also, "Setting" and "Genre" elements emphasized the connection of the proverbs to tradition while "Act sequence" showed how proverbs are used to rationalize violence and betrayal. Findings further showed that proverbs were mainly used in the movie to discredit and slur people, portray values such as patience, strategic thinking and careful planning. In addition, some of the proverbs revealed high-handedness of some of the characters. Lastly, the selected proverbs also revealed tenderness, ignorance naivety and motherly care.

## **CONCLUSION**

This present study explored the socio-critical functions of the selected proverbs in King of Boys, a Nigerian Nollywood movie produced by Kemi Adetiba using Dell Hyme's (1974) SPEAKING as an analytical tool. The study revealed that proverbs in movies are not just rhetorical devices but are

rooted in the social, political and cultural system of a given society. Through the use of SPEAKING model as a tool in this study, the selected proverbs were unveiled in relation to their different contexts of use in the movie as well as their communicative functions, particularly in negotiating power, resistance, morals and identity constructions. The analysis also showed that proverbs are linguistic tools used by characters especially Eniola Salami to assert authority and challenge social norms. This study further showed the importance of Nollywood movie as a discursive space where social issues can be dramatized using different language practices.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this present study using SPEAKING model, further studies could extend this research by examining a wide range of movies in Nollywood or incorporating reception studies to widen the scope of how proverbs can be interpreted by viewers across different social groups. Also, researchers should apply the SPEAKING model to other African movies in order to analyze and show how language can be used to negotiate meaning and power, thereby contributing to a more understanding of discourse in African societies.

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