

## YORUBA PROVERB AS IMPOLITENESS AND POWER NEGOTIATOR IN KEMI ADETIBA'S *KING OF BOYS*

Tolulope Abisodun Oluremi<sup>1,\*</sup> & Olumide Olugbemi-Gabriel<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Department of English and Literary Studies, Osun State University, Nigeria*

<sup>2</sup> *Department of Languages and Literary Studies, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria*

\*E-mail: [tolulope.oluremi@uniosun.edu.ng](mailto:tolulope.oluremi@uniosun.edu.ng)

**ABSTRACT** Yoruba proverbs are linguistic resources that are deployed by the Yoruba people to achieve certain communicative goals. Studies have investigated Yoruba proverbs from different points of view. Among the Yoruba, one of the functions of proverbs is that they are reserved for impoliteness and power in relational communication, and the choice of a Yoruba movie, *King of Boys*, underpins the analytical interest of this paper. Therefore, this paper examines set of Yoruba proverbs; which in this paper, is termed conflictive-motivated face-threatening Yoruba proverbs (CFYPs) in the movie. Jonathan Culpeper's (1996) theory of impoliteness is adopted as the theoretical framework, and seven Yoruba proverbs that demonstrate instances of conflict are subjected to discourse interpretations. Analysis reveals that aspects of Yoruba proverbs that are sensitive to conflictive relational works in the movie are predominantly categorised as negative and positive impoliteness triggers. Negative impoliteness motivated CFYPs which are prevalently associated with wielding power are deployed as threats to life, while positive impoliteness induced CFYPs are employed to insult and criticise, especially by the less powerful. This paper concludes that there are CFYPs which are dependent on the exigencies to reinforce or weaken specific identities and socio-political norms or mis-norms within Yoruba socio-cultural milieu.

**KEYWORDS:** Impoliteness; *King of Boys*; Power; Yoruba proverbs.

### INTRODUCTION

Proverb is a linguistic resource of cultural expression. It is woven in philosophical, metaphorical and allusive language that gives credibility to traditional truth and wisdom. In its nuanced significations, proverb is deployed by people of all ages to give interpretations and comprehension to everyday situations, interactions and conversations. Not surprising, Achebe (1958), one of the greatest users of proverbs in literary works glorifies proverbs as the palm oil with which words are eaten. The metaphor of oil in Achebe's position privileges the extent to which proverbs foreground significant rhetorical force in spoken and written interactions. Proverbs are used in different spheres of human socialisation to address issues of personal and general concerns. In the contemporary society, individuals or groups use proverbs to achieve politeness. In other words, they strategically manipulate proverbs to realise socially appropriate conversational goals while they address issues of concern. In the same way, individuals or groups also deploy proverbs to achieve impoliteness—in that sense; they intentionally employ proverbs to damage co-interactant's identity in order to engender social conflict and disharmony. Often times, the latter is achievable as a result of

the socio-political power asymmetry that exists among them.

Proverb exists in all climes. Of note are African proverbs. While they are used in non-fictional contexts, they are as well used in fictional domain as a “vehicle of orality in novels, plays, and poetry in modern African literature” (Ojaide 2018: 97) to achieve varying concerns of relational works that are connected with politeness and impoliteness. Within the film industry paradigm, script writers or producers have appropriated proverbs as linguistic elements of cultural ethos and vest their casts with rich proverbial sayings with certain intentions. Adumbratively, casts are able to channel their linguistic behaviour in whatever ways they are so programmed to.

Nigeria is as big in cultural diversities as it is in population, land mass and natural resources. However, amidst these pieces of good fortune are the existential misfortune of economic and political corruption, sectarian division and violence, insurgency, banditry and general insecurity, which dominate national affairs. Thus, an institution such as Nigeria’s movie industry (known as Nollywood in parody of Hollywood)—which is the world’s second largest movie industry—has been playing vital roles in unveiling and mitigating these ubiquitous national characters and enemies. A number of movies (such as *Saworo-Ide*, *Agogo Èwò*, *Basòrun Gaa*) have privileged and accentuated the state of corruption in the Nigerian society. Amongst these movies, in the recent times, is *King of Boys* written and produced by Kemi Adetiba.

*King of Boys* critiques socio-political corruption, political leadership tussle, betrayal and the attendant violence by using high-profile actors to model behaviours. However, in projecting these thematic preoccupations, Yoruba proverbs play vital relational works among cast in the movie. The thrust of this paper, therefore, is on the illustrative portrayal of an aspect of Yoruba proverbs as potent conflictive linguistic tools in *King of Boys*. In the movie and within the context of usage, Yoruba proverbs are considered as conflictive-motivated face-threatening weapons purposefully deployed and “unmitigated in contexts where mitigation is required or with deliberate aggression to heighten the face damage inflicted” (Bousfield 2008: 132). Based on this background, this paper examines a set of Yoruba proverbs; which in this paper, is termed ‘conflictive-motivated face-threatening Yoruba proverbs’ (CFYPs). Essentially, these proverbs are intentionally gratuitous and conflictive face-threatening (linguistic) acts, instantiated in the movie as impoliteness and power resource to cause conflict and restrict interactants’ action environment. With this intent, this study claims that CFYPs are dependent on the exigencies to reinforce or weaken specific identities and socio-political norms or mis-norms.

## YORUBA PROVERBS, IMPOLITENESS AND POWER

Proverbs are every day human interaction-resource embroiled in metaphorical and formulaic languages. They are timelessly deployed to embellish interpersonal interactions. Braden (2012: 8) comments that “proverbs are brief wisdom sayings that provide a generalized wisdom statement regarding a specific issue in life. They are designed to be concise and picturesque to facilitate memorization.” Similarly, Ehondor (2017: 6) posits that “proverbs are the gems of wisdom, a mixture of wisdom and philosophy ... They are coined in order to impart practical knowledge to mankind. It is a great truth with profound thinking and tons of experience.” Considering the foregoing, proverb is attributed to be a mark of wisdom—the ability to act and react by virtue of knowledge, understanding, insight and a demonstration of good judgement as far as human interaction exists. Beyond its characteristic nature of being a kernel of wisdom, “one consensus requirement for a

proverb seems to be that it must be short and to the point, in other words, that it be pithy, succinct, terse, or brief? (Owomoyela 2005: 2). Nevertheless, there are proverbs that are wordy, but intense and signifying of their culture-dependency status. However, in whatever form or structure proverbs may be, they are known to be abstract ideas passed on from one generation to another on the back of culture and orality.

On a general note, the conversation on culture has morphed and percolated over time, with earlier theorists which include Barthes (1972) and Foucault (1988), to later theorists like Bhabha (1994) and Hall (1997) amidst others, highlighting the place and influence of culture on languages, peoples and their literary expressions from disparate perspectives. Proverb is, therefore, one of the most expressive and creative use to which language has been put. It is strong, witty, full of wisdom and often deployed to have an effect on the hearer(s). It is trite that every cultural environment has its own unique proverbs. Certainly, a lot can be told about a culture by what wisdom is encoded in its proverbs, and what imagery, creativity, metaphor or language is employed to express that wisdom. Proverbs are deeply rooted in and popular with all cultures: English, Latin, Japanese, Arab, Chinese, and African, to name a few out of the myriads that are in existence. Amidst these taxonomies, African culture is suffused more in proverb usage. Finnegan (2012: 379) confirms this when she avows that: "proverbs seem to occur almost everywhere in Africa, in apparent contrast with other areas of the world such as aboriginal America and Polynesia." African proverbs vary according to such identitarian lines as language, nation and region; they exist as forms of indigenous knowledge that touch on and concretely give expressions to African life and worldview and add concreteness to everyday discourse. Thus, "in many African cultures, a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs. The figurative quality of proverbs is especially striking ..." (Finnegan 2012: 380).

Yoruba proverb (*òwe*) is an aspect of African proverbs. "Like the proverbs of other races, Yoruba proverbs serve as social charters, to praise what the society considers to be virtues and condemn bad practices. The Yoruba values proverbs very highly, for they are considered to be the wisdom lore of the race" (Olatunji 1984: 170). These proverbs are replete with imagery which are better understood and appreciated when they are associated with certain situations in the Yoruba world. In the summation of Owomoyela (2005: 3), "*òwe* is a speech form that likens, or compares, one thing or situation to another, highlighting the essential similarities that the two share." In essence, what Yoruba proverbs do is to deploy images to explain or interpret actual human situation(s). This figurative value therefore gives Yoruba proverbs layers of meaning, which are accessed based on the context of usage.

Context (of usage) is another quality that characterises Yoruba proverbs. The weight of any Yoruba proverb and its meaning as well as the intent of a user is felt when the context of such proverbial expression(s) is considered. Context influences Yoruba proverbial expressions and it also determines how Yoruba proverbial expressions are interpreted. Finnegan (2012: 411) accentuates the significance of proverbs within contextual consideration when she asserts that:

... the most interesting point to emerge from the writings of those who have studied the actual use of proverbs is their situational aspect. Proverbs are used on particular occasions, by individuals in a particular context, and their wit, their attractiveness, their sight, even their meaning must be seen as arising from that context.

In its signifying importance, context is paramount in every Yoruba proverbial expression. Apart from the fact that it grants a speaker an undiluted proverbial point made to a listener,

it also gives a listener the understanding of the efficacy of speech made. In that sense, Yoruba proverbs are known and deployed to achieve various functions. Of important fact is that they are used to shape speech. Owomoyela (2005: 12) confirms this position when he avers that:

... proverb is the most important and most effective strategy the Yoruba have devised. ... The culture's richness in them ... bears out the Yoruba insistence that bereft of proverbs, speech flounders and falls short of its mark, whereas aided by them, communication is fleet and unerring.

Secondly and very significant is the fact that Yoruba proverbs perform prescriptive functions (Olatunji 1984). By being prescriptive, "they serve as social charters condemning some practices while recommending others" (Olatunji 1984: 175). As a result, the proverbial expressions used in any discourse may be negative or positive. Upon being positive, individuals involved in social interaction do so with the intention to use proverbs to achieve such practices, an act which is tantamount to supporting face (politeness). On the other hand, when it is negative, the individuals involved in social interaction are with the intention to use proverbs to constrain/damage such practices, which is equivalent to attacking face (impoliteness). Thus, in view of their prescriptive role, proverbs serve as rubrics guiding societal conducts and/or how individuals intend to achieve the goals of interaction.

Scholars have, to a certain extent, examined Yoruba proverbs. Amongst them are those that have investigated Yoruba proverbs with attention focused on their roots, categorisation and compilation, while paying little or no attention to their context of usage (Owomoyela 2005; Yusuf 1995; Olatunji 1984; Bamgbose 1968). Further than this, there is the sociological investigation that is vested in Yoruba proverbs. Works of Ebenso, Adeyemi, Adegoke and Emmel (2012), Ademowo and Balogun (2014), Aderinto (2014), among others, have studied Yoruba proverbs from the sociological standpoint. Ebenso et al. (2012) examine Yoruba proverbs vis-à-vis attitudes about leprosy; Ademowo and Balogun (2014) focus on the nexus between language and development, and how proverb as well as its lessons could help revive moral/cultural values, and thus become a veritable instrument of development; Aderinto (2014) probes into how Yoruba and Igbo proverbs are used to express carefulness in people, so as to guarantee better life and keep them out of trouble. From the philosophical viewpoint, Balogun (2006) Fasiku (2006), Fayemi (2010) as well as Adegboyega (2017) posit that Yoruba proverbs have philosophical relevance in the quest for an effective judicial system in traditional Africa. Furthermore, they claim that Yoruba proverbs have dialectical relationship with names; which instantiate a descriptivist theory of reference with regards to names in the philosophy of language, thereby espousing the values and virtues embedded in Yoruba proverbs and names.

Proverb has also been explored considerably from its linguistics perspective. For instance, Akanbi (2015) examines the syntax of Yoruba proverb and submits that Yoruba proverbs are rule-governed and structure-inclined. Away from the syntax of Yoruba proverbs is the pragmatic enquiry of Yoruba proverbs. Scholars such as Odebunmi (2006, 2008), Ademilokun (2014), Lawal (2015), Ehineni (2016, 2019), Idowu (2019), Jegede & Osoba (2019) have considered Yoruba proverbs from discourse/pragmatics perspectives. The points of concentration of these works have been on how context of culture as well as the prevailing circumstance(s) within which Yoruba proverbs are used regiment proverbial meanings. Moreover, there is also the submission that Yoruba proverbs are linguistic tools in achieving discourse acts and communicative goals. Other emphasis averred is that studies on Yoruba proverbs will provide additional paremiology and pedagogy on Yoruba proverbs.

In the light of previous studies, it should be affirmed here that sufficient attention has not been given to Yoruba proverbs as resources for impoliteness and power in relational aspect of communication within a typical Yoruba speech community. Next to this identified gap is the confirmation that the data for this paper, *King of Boys*, a Yoruba movie, has not received adequate scholarly interpretation since it was produced in 2018 by Kemi Adetiba. This paper, therefore, represents an attempt to fill the identified gap by examining Yoruba proverbs as impoliteness and power negotiator in the movie.

## IMPOLITENESS

The theory of impoliteness offers adequate affordances in explicating and affirming aspects of the Yoruba proverbs as obliquely enhancing conflictive talk that engenders intentional face threatening act, constrained/influenced action environment and face damaging act. There have been quite a few impoliteness theories (Lachenicht 1980; Culpeper 1996, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2016; Bousfield 2008). However, this paper finds Culpeper's (1996, 2005) model of impoliteness most suitable in analysing Yoruba proverbs as impoliteness and power negotiator in the movie-text, *King of Boys*.

Culpeper (2008) is noted for impoliteness theory. According to him, "politeness, impoliteness and other such terms are labels of contextual evaluations of particular manifestations of relational work" (Culpeper 2008: 41). Relational work, in this context, thus "refers to all aspects of the work by individuals in the construction, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of interpersonal relationships among those engaged in social practice" (Locher & Watts 2008: 96). In this regard, impoliteness is an embodiment of human relational work that involves two minimal interactants, who negotiate their positions vis-à-vis each other. According to Culpeper (1996), impoliteness is "the use of strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony" (qtd. in Bousfield & Locher 2008: 131). Subsequently, Culpeper (2005: 38) gave a more refined account of impoliteness as "impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates a face attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)." The major difference in the two definitions is the emphasis on intentionality. Culpeper (2008: 32) is of the view that "interactants judgements are not mutually exclusive with intentions: people make use of understandings of intentions in their judgements ... (Thus), the perception of intention is a crucial factor in an evaluation of potentially face-attacking behaviour." Culpeper's definition of impoliteness and introduction of intentionality appears encompassing but there is "a contradiction in the understanding of what constitutes impoliteness" (Bousfield 2008: 131). According to Bousfield (2008: 131–132):

... while it is laudable that Culpeper is attempting to incorporate the role of the hearer in the construction and communication of impoliteness—something that has been somewhat lacking in approaches previous to that study—ironically he risks doing so at the expense of the role of the speaker and speaker's intent. Because of this, Culpeper's (2005) definition of impoliteness is, in my view, not one which could be considered to be always co-constructed by participants in interaction.

In view of this hiatus in Culpeper's definition, Bousfield (2008) offers more insights on the issue of impoliteness. In the words of Bousfield (2008: 132):

I take impoliteness as constituting the issuing of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive face-threatening acts (FTAs) that are purposefully performed: 1) Unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation (where mitigation equates with politeness) is required and/or, 2) With deliberate aggression, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, ‘boosted’, or maximised in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted.

Bousfield (2008) is of the view that for impoliteness to be considered successful, the intention of the speaker (or author) to offend (threaten/damage face) must be understood by those in a receiver role. The speaker creates face-damage act and logically, the hearer receives the intended face damage act.

Culpeper (2008) argues that impoliteness involves power. In his affirmation, “impoliteness can restrict an interactant’s action-environment insofar as the producer pressures the interactant into a reaction, whether that means taking self-preservatory action or deciding not to react” (Culpeper 2008: 36). Impoliteness is a resource of power which has a way of constraining the action of a vulnerable addressee through face-aggravation. Thus, Culpeper (2008: 36) further asserts that “insofar as one’s action—environment is perceived to be restricted and there is a clash of interests, it can be argued that impoliteness always involves power.”

Culpeper (1996, 2011, 2016) distinguishes five super-strategies by which impoliteness can be created and received. They are bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock impoliteness, off-record impoliteness and withhold politeness. *Bald on record impoliteness*: the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimised. *Positive impoliteness*: is the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee’s positive face wants. Such strategies include impoliteness triggers such as ignoring; which may include failing to acknowledge the other’s presence, snubbing or excluding the other from an activity; dissociating from the other, the use of inappropriate identity markers, use of taboo, swear, abusive or profane language, among others. *Negative impoliteness*: connotes the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee’s negative face wants. These include impoliteness triggers such as frightening, condescending, scorning, ridiculing, belittling, invading the other’s space and several others. *Off-record impoliteness*: is performed by implicature but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly outweighs any other. *Withhold politeness*: which portends the absence of politeness work where it would be expected. Alongside these face super-strategies, Culpeper (2005), thus, proposes four face attacks, namely: attacks on quality face, social identity face, equity rights and association rights. These forms of attack can be group-based or individual based.

In the work of Culpeper (2011), it is also revealed that these five super-strategies could be evident in three *degree of offence*. They could be attitudinal, linguistic-pragmatic and contextual degree of offence. The attitudinal reflects the emotional sensitivity of the expectations, desires and/or beliefs infringed upon. Further still, it displays how impoliteness may have emotional consequences for interlocutors (Culpeper 2011). The linguistic-pragmatic degree of offence comprises linguistic triggers that generate offences. Lastly, the contextual degree of offence is central in determining if an impolite output is realised. To cap these all, the super-strategies and their degree of offence usually culminate in three impoliteness functions: affective, coercive and entertaining impoliteness.

*King of Boys*, the data for this article, is a socio-political and sensational crime thriller permeated with intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening Yoruba proverbs (CFYPs). Due to the existence of face damage in the movie, Culpeper’s

impoliteness theory is adequate in interpreting the nature and extent of face-damage, power wielding and curtailing of action-environment engendered by such CFYPs.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

### Materials

The materials used for this paper were seven (7) conflict-motivated Yoruba proverbs derived from the movie, *King of Boys* (2018). Though, other non-conflict-motivated Yoruba proverbs were deployed in the movie, the focus of this paper is on conflict-motivated Yoruba proverbs because events in the movie are largely conflict-driven. The movie was selected because it is a Yoruba language movie that showcases a typical Yoruba society. In addition, at the moment, it is rare to find linguistic analysis that can be credited with this movie. The most important of all is the fact that the movie is suffused with CFYPs, which were deployed as relational work tools of interaction by specific characters in the movie. A cursory viewing of the movie will only give the viewer some modicum of entertainment, and the same also goes for the conflictive-motivated face-threatening proverbs deployed in the movie, which contribute immensely to the underlying socio-political theme of the movie. These proverbs vis-à-vis the movie can be well-interpreted against impoliteness strategies, which create conditions for impoliteness and give a wholesome interpretation to the conflictive-motivated face-threatening Yoruba proverbs used in the movie.

### Procedure

Yoruba proverbs in *King of Boys* were non-randomly selected in view of their relevant conflictive face-work that engenders certain socio-political disruptions in the movie. They were selected for insightful exemplifications of impoliteness super-strategies and expressions of various forms of face threatening acts, constrained action environment and face damaging acts, which project socio-political betrayal, violence and corruption in the movie. These proverbs were those used by the three major casts in the movie: the lead actress, Eniola Salami (ES), Aare Akinwande (AA) and Makanaki. Accordingly, these Yoruba proverbs were critiqued with the theoretical apparatus of Culpeper's impoliteness theory. We have analysed Yoruba proverb as linguistic tool of conflictive relational work because it uses impolite triggers and super-strategies as a convincing face-damaging and face-threatening technique. Analysis in the next section, therefore, takes the form of stating the Yoruba proverb, describing the context of occurrence and analysis.

## TEXT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we demonstrate that the three selected characters in the movie initiate intentional face threatening acts in the context of conflict in the form of Yoruba proverbs. Essentially, we validate that these Yoruba proverbs are CFYPs deployed by the characters against one another to threaten, debase or glorify identities and weaken or strengthen their socio-political pedigree. These CFYPs thus indicate how a speaker aggravates a hearer's/target's face in the course of conversational exchanges; signalling an ambience of total disinterest in the actions of the hearer, thereby engendering impoliteness.

## CFYP 1:

*Irú sọ pé òun ò jìyà rí, ó ló òun ò bàjè rí, ó ló òun ò kàbùkú rí, sùgbón nìgbà tí ó dé Òkèmèsí, wón pe ní eégbon.*

The locust beans said that it had never felt insulted until it reached Okemesi where it was called tick.

[Context: Eniola Salami (ES), the lead actress in the movie, is a grand sponsor of the ruling political party. She holds no political post, but she wields an imposing political power in the party. Her party enjoys her wealth and benefits from her pressing viciousness against any opponent. Eniola Salami is promised a ministerial post in the current dispensation, but Aare Akinwande (AA), a political godfather, and other party stalwarts renege on this promise because they all feel that she is better off as a political tool (enforcer) for killing and maiming party opponents than being vested with a political office. It is, therefore, within this context that she utters CFYP 1 above.]

AA: Hnnn Eniola, let us get back to why you are here. Personally, I know about your agitations. I know about your agitations and your concern. I know how you feel. You see, if I tell you that you are a very important part of our movement, you must believe me. You are my person. You are my child. So when I tell you to be patient, I know exactly what I am talking about. It is all about timing. That is why the elders of our party have decided to keep you aside on till the next election. What we are planning for you is bigger. We are talking about power; real power. What we are trying to do now is to clean up this idea that you are from another world ...

ES: Sir, what do you mean by different world, Sir; with all due respect?

AA: Eniola, do not take it personally. This is politics.

ES: No, Sir. I just want to know. It is this same world that has financed more than 30 states election in this country, since 1999? Or the world you call upon whenever you need muscle, or when they say Aare could no longer deliver the South? Who did you run to? Me, me, Eniola. And what happened? People came out. People came to support you. You, who had the power of the south, who had the power of the east ...

AA: Eniola, don't get upset for no reason.

ES: No, Baba, don't go there. Look at me very well. *Irú sọ pé òun ò jìyà rí, ó ló òun ò bàjè rí, ó ló òun ò kàbùkú rí, sùgbón nìgbà tí ó dé Òkèmèsí, wón pe ní eégbon.* (The locust beans said that it had never felt insulted until it reached Okemesi where it was called tick.)

From the foregoing, a conflictive context has been set up by virtue of the fact that ES is denied the promise of a ministerial post made to her by her party officials, especially AA. Thus, her perspective of that act is that she has been used and dumped. And this is the reason for picking offence at AA. From the conversation of AA, it is obvious that he foresees a seeming conflict with ES; so he begins to acknowledge the emotional sensibilities of ES through polite mitigators such as admitting that he knows ES' "agitations", that ES is "his child", and the promise of a "bigger" post. However, AA triggers face threatening act against the hearer (ES), in the form of personalised negative assertion, and unconsciously against himself (AA), the speaker, when he says to her: "What we are trying to do now is to clean up this idea that you are from another world." This FTA, potentially threatens the speaker's face as a traitor who abandons ES having used her to sponsor his party, and threatens the hearer's quality face since she is seen in the light of a parasitic politician who can do anything to achieve her desires.



ES is able to evaluate AA's FTA (that is, this idea that you are from another world) as intended to be maximally offensive; an insult on her quality face. Thus, ES is able to respond, and counter AA offensively by metaphorically retorting that the "same world has financed more than 30 states election since 1999; that the same world has provided the needed muscle and support." The height of it is the use of a proverb by ES to completely damage both the quality and social identity faces of AA. ES retorts as follows: "No, Baba, don't go there. Look at me very well. *Irú sọ pé òun ò jiyà rí, ó ló òun ò bàjè rí, ó ló òun ò kàbùkù rí, sùgbón nìgbà tí ó dé Òkèmèsí, wón pe ní eégbon.* —The locust beans said that it had never felt insulted until it reached Òkèmèsí where it was called tick)." This proverb, in this context, is a CFYP against AA. The proverb is a linguistic-pragmatic trigger that signals positive impoliteness meant to project AA in the light of a disgusting godfather. Locust bean is a culinary delicacy preferred by almost all Yoruba people. However, it is not a popular food seasoning in Òkèmèsí (a town in Ekiti State, Nigeria) because the people of Òkèmèsí possess a disgusting mental model about locust bean as tick. The underlying assumption of this proverb among the Yoruba is that certain situation may bring contempt on a man/woman of influence even among their people. Thus, the proverb is deployed to discredit a man/woman whom good conduct is expected from but has demonstrated otherwise. AA might have sustained quality and social identity face among his people, but with ES, it is not so. ES is, through the CFYP, able to damage AA's quality face (his whims and caprices as a godfather) and social identity face (being a godfather); thereby making mockery of his elevated political identity as disgusting. This CFYP is thus categorised as positive impoliteness trigger, typically that of insults; which is informed by corresponding linguistic-pragmatic degree of offence. In terms of function, ES demonstrates affective impoliteness which serves the purpose of projecting blame on AA as the one responsible for the ill-luck that befalls her.

CFYP 2:

*Bí erú ẹni bá dojúkọni, à n pa á ni.*

When a slave turns against his master, he is fated to be killed.

[Context: It is a known fact that ES is denied a ministerial appointment. AA has kept part of the proceeds of corruption (national cake) worth forty-five million dollars (\$45m) in a casket bearing a decayed dead-body in his house from the prying eyes of determined whistle blower.<sup>(1)</sup> Nevertheless, the stolen fund does not attract the attention of whistle blowers from outside. Rather it attracts Makanaki and Odogwu, who are the protégés of ES. The two conspire and steal the loot in AA's house. Coincidentally, AA and other party loyalists including the Governor conclude that ES is the mastermind of the grand theft as payback for being denied the promised ministerial post. On the basis of their conclusion, ES is arrested on the charges of money laundering through Inspector Shehu (IS). It is against this backdrop that AA deploys the proverb above.]

AA: (on phone) don't tell me you are doing all you can, I just lost \$45million that I cannot report to the authorities.

IS: We are on it, Sir. But we have to proceed with caution. Eniola is a dangerous adversary.

AA: (cuts in) Eniola, *wò ó bí erú ẹni bá dojúkọni, à n pa á ni!* (When a slave turns against its master, then it's fated to be killed.)

IS: Sir?

AA: My Friend, go and get the thing done.

The context of a huge amount of money believed by AA and the Governor to have been stolen by ES due to her ministerial appointment denial is conflictive. AA is aggrieved to have supposedly lost \$45million to ES. However, AA does not know that ES is not the one that stole the funds from his house. AA, being in the position of power, gets ES arrested for money laundering. Before the arrest is made by IS, AA, in a telephone conversation with him, offers a proverbial FTA against ES. AA bellows: “*Bí ẹrú ẹni bá dojúkọni, à ń pa á ni.* —When a slave turns against its master, then it’s fated to be killed.” This FTA is a Yoruba proverb that is considered in this context as a CFYP against ES. It is a linguistic-pragmatic trigger deployed as negative impoliteness to intentionally attack ES’ face, especially, her equity rights. Of course, the Yoruba people believe that the relationship that exists between a slave and his/her master is asymmetrical. For this reason, the inherent implication of this proverb among the Yoruba is that it helps to blatantly intimidate or get rid of a subordinate person, and to bring such person to the consciousness of his or her servitude status. AA, as a party godfather, believes that ES should be subservient to him. Hence, in this situation where ES is believed to have stolen AA’s money in retaliation, the CFYP deliberately and relevantly threatens and imposes act of summary execution on ES. This CFYP, in this context, demonstrates coercive impoliteness which functions to impose social harm on ES due to structural power imbalance.

CFYP 3:

*Ìwọ mú ika, o ki i ẹbọnú ata, o ki i sí ojú iyá ẹ.*

You dipped your fingers in pepper, and poked your mother in the eye.

[Context: Makanaki, the protégé of ES, has carried out a theft of \$45million in AA’s mansion. Though Makanaki informs ES about the operation; inviting her to lead, but he does not mention that the victim is AA. ES consents to the operation without knowing that the victim is her political boss. And ES does not join in the operation because she still broods over the ministerial post denied her. The success and proceeds of the operation get into Makanaki’s head, and he decides to oust ES from the leadership. Conflict ensues because ES feels she is not sufficiently informed of the operation to warrant her ordeal and the additional insult that Makanaki wants to usurp her leadership position within their clique, emboldened by his new fond illicit wealth. It is based on this situation that ES offers the CFYP above.]

ES: (at their clique meeting) Akorede is not here. Anyway, *igi gogoro mágunmi lójú, òkèerè lati ń wo.* (to avoid being poked in the eyes by thorns, you should observe them (thorns) from a safe distance.) Thank you for coming once again. Because I know you are very busy people. But I must call this emergency meeting before things get out of hand. Nothing moves in Lagos without you people on this table. As the Head of this table, I know that I have been fair to our association but today, I am not happy.

Apostle: (cuts in) God forbids! You are happy in Jesus name.

ES: No Apostle! How can I be happy when some small rats want to eat and destroy everything we all worked for ...?

Makanaki: *Na who be rat?*

ES: Akorede, we are mates now that I have to wait for you. What a pity! *Ìwọ mú ika, o ki i ẹbọnú ata, o ki i sí ojú iyá ẹ* (You dipped your fingers, in pepper, and poked your mother in

the eye.)

Makanaki: Makanaki is my name and I don't have a mother.

Odogwu: Maka now! Respect the crown.

Makanaki: Which crown? *You are afraid of a lion that has lost its claws and teeth.* Old glory, old school! A mother that can't take care of her children .... She is making money from politics. She has no time for us. When last has anyone benefitted from this woman? But she wants to come back and eat from our struggle. She wants to be king on this table. Mama, your era has passed. Drop the crown.

In view of the provocative robbery in which Makanaki has been involved, his brazen disrespect for ES and the fact that his action will further jeopardise ES' relationship with AA and other political associates, ES applies negative impoliteness strategy against the face of Makanaki. As the king of her association, ES starts revealing Makanaki's insolent escapades to other members of her group using a Yoruba proverb (e.g., *igi gogoro mágunmi lójú, òkèrè lati ñ wo*—to avoid being poked in the eyes by thorns, you should observe them (thorns) from a safe distance) to push her message through. This is a proverb deployed by the Yoruba to send a note of caution to whoever is concerned about what may be considered a problem. Through this proverb, ES sensitises members of her group to the fact that in order to guide against future havoc of the type caused by Makanaki, obstacles must be countered early enough. By this proverb, ES invariably portrays Makanaki as a problem to their association, and also as a stumbling block to her political career; hence the need to treat him with extreme caution. With this, ES makes a negative expression, a negative impolite sub-strategy against Makanaki; thereby damaging his association rights.

Furthermore, ES intensifies attacks on Makanaki's association rights through personalised negative vocatives- insults (e.g., 'some small rats') and negative assertions (e.g., 'want to eat and destroy everything we all worked for'). In this manner, ES is able to expose how Makanaki is evidently untrustworthy, which is quite imposing given the context of power disparity between ES and Makanaki. Nevertheless, as a reaction to the negative impoliteness strategies maintained by ES against his person, Makanaki retorts with a question (e.g., '*Na who be rat?*' translated as 'Who is a rat?') as a sign of disapproval and counter-strategy but an offensive one within the context. In other words, Makanaki employs unpalatable question (e.g., '*Na who be rat?*'—'Who is the rat') as sub-strategy of positive impoliteness to damage the positive face want of ES—the need to sustain her headship of the group. This counter-strategy is in-turn re-countered offensively by ES through a proverb (e.g., *Ìwọ mú ika, o ki i bonú ata, o ki i sí ojú iyá ẹ*—You dipped your fingers in pepper, and poked your mother in the eye). This proverb, in this context, is a CFYP adopted as a negative impoliteness sub-strategy against the face of Makanaki. Dipping one's fingers into pepper to poke one's mother's eye is a grievous socio-cultural transgression in Yoruba society because of the reverence reserved for mothers. Thus, the proverb is a CFYP used by the Yoruba to express dissatisfaction at an act of insolence especially from a subordinate. In that sense, this CFYP is a linguistic-pragmatic trigger essentially used by ES to curtail Makanaki's equity rights. The CFYP, together with other FTA intensifiers, exemplifies affective impoliteness deployed by ES to exacerbate emotional anger and attacks against Makanaki.

As a reaction to the entire negative impoliteness and its sub-strategies, Makanaki deploys yet another offensive positive impoliteness counter-strategy. The CFYP deployed by ES makes reference to Makanaki's mother but in quick response and defiance, he (Makanaki) employs outright disclaimer (I don't have a mother) as a sub-strategy of positive impoliteness. Down the line is a stream of derogatory descriptions ('you are afraid

of a lion that has lost its claws and teeth') and pointed criticism ('old glory, old school! A mother that can't take care of her children ... is making money from politics. She has no time for us'). These sub-strategies lucidly target ES's quality face, with the intention of bringing into disrepute ES and her role as king of her group.

CFYP 4:

*Pàsán taa fi na iyálé, ó wà lájà fún iyàwó.*

The whip used to flog the first wife is kept in the rafter for the second wife.

[Context: ES chairs a meeting where she tries to expose Makanaki's alleged schemes against her and the entire group. Makanaki walks late into the meeting and berates ES's statement, which indirectly refers to him as small rat. Makanaki's lateness to the meeting shows glaring disrespect for the leadership of ES as the king of the group. Then to foreground the contempt he has for ES, Makanaki shares the proceeds of the theft equally among the members of the group against the knowledge that the king is entitled to higher share. It is based on this situation that ES offers the CFYP above.]

Makanaki: (at the meeting) Mama, *àsìkò yín tí lẹ, ẹ méréù lẹ*, (Mama, yours is now bygone era, drop the crown) (boys bring in shared money in bags)

Makanaki: (to Apostle) Unzip am ...

Apostle: (Opens the bag. Shocked!) Jesus of Nazareth!

Makanaki: Apostle, that is not from the king. It's from Makanaki ...

Odogwu: And Odogwu Maley ... *tell them facts*.

Member: Well, what is done is done, Mummy. We cannot reverse what has been done. But I am actually glad that Makanaki respects the rules enough to make sure that the king has her share.

Makanaki: (retorts) No o, no o, everybody at this table, equal share.

Member: Makanaki, her cut is 40 after everything else.

Makanaki: She's not my king.

ES: *Wón ní ọmọdé ò mo oògùn, ó n pè é ní ẹfó* ... (A child does not recognise a deadly herb, he calls it vegetable). You little ones, where were you when I started? Look at me Akorede. Sitting on this table as the head is not by mistake. Your weak late uncle whom you inherited that seat from should have told you. No worries! *Pàsán taa fi na iyálé, ó wà lájà fún iyàwó*. (The whip used on the first wife is kept in the rafter for the second wife).

Makanaki has clearly demonstrated insubordination and contempt towards ES, the king. This is exemplified in his demonstration of positive impoliteness strategy adopted to damage ES's social identity face which involves, among others, her role as the king of her group. For instance, Makanaki makes use of insulting sub-strategies such as *Màmá, àsìkò yín tí lẹ, ẹ méréù lẹ* (Mama, yours is now bygone era, drop the crown) to disparage the credibility of ES as a leader, who has lost her place because she is incapable of making timely provision for members of her team. Makanaki's ability to make this provision ('Apostle, that is not from the king. It's from Makanaki ...') further casts aspersions on ES's face. The height of this social identity face damaging insult is seen in the negative intensifier (e.g., 'No o, no o') and the affirmation (e.g., 'everybody at this table, equal share') made by Makanaki to insinuate ES's loss of position and to also call into doubt her ability to provide for the group.

To address and respond to Makanaki's positive face wants and positive impoliteness

strategy, ES adopts negative impoliteness strategy to damage Makanaki's negative face wants. At first, ES adopts the condescending Yoruba proverb (e.g., *Wón ní ọmọdẹ̀ ò mo ọ̀d̀gùn, ọ́ n pè é ní ẹ̀fọ́*.—A child does not recognise a deadly herb, he calls it vegetable) as a sub-strategy of negative impoliteness to attack Makanaki's ploy to become the new king of the association. This proverb, among the Yoruba, is drawn on to picture its victim as someone that lacks knowledge in certain respect; a knowledge gap that could prove fatal. Makanaki is put down to the position of an inexperienced member of the group who desires to be king but does not know that kingship is not child's play. To further enforce her attack on Makanaki's quality face, ES makes use of intensifiers such as ('you little ones') and ('where were you when I started'). While these imply that ES has leadership track record, the intensifiers demean Makanaki as unripe for the leadership position he plans to occupy and that he's obviously on a suicide mission. The peak of the FTA on Makanaki's face is ES' use of the Yoruba proverb (e.g., *Pàsán táa fì na iyálé, ọ́ wà lájà fùn iyàwó*—The whip used for the first wife is kept in rafter for the second wife). This proverb is a CFYP brought into play by ES in this context against Makanaki, and it's a linguistic-pragmatic trigger deployed as negative impoliteness to intentionally attack the latter's equity rights. This proverb, among the Yoruba, presupposes that a woman is regarded as a child to be disciplined anytime she errs, and that a man has the right to beat his wife. Such proverb conditions women into believing that they are inferior to men. Makanaki's uncle (in the proverb's context, the first wife) is murdered when he displays insubordination towards the king, ES, and it is the same attitude of insubordination that is being displayed by Makanaki (the second wife in the context of the proverb) towards ES; the proverb thus carries an eerie warning to Makanaki for maximum effect. Thus, this CFYP functions as a coercive impoliteness that signals threat to life, especially bearing in mind that ES is in a direct position of power over Makanaki.

#### CFYP 5 and 6

<sup>5</sup>*Eyìn tí ajá fì n bá ọmọ ẹ̀ seré ló fì n gé e jẹ.*

The same teeth a dog uses to play with its puppies is also used to bite them.

<sup>6</sup>*Igi tó yẹ ká fẹ̀yìn tì kó gbani, tí ọ́ bá wó lu ni kò lè pani.*

A tree that cannot support one's desire for rest cannot kill when it falls on one.

[Context: Still at the meeting where ES decides to reveal Makanaki's unacknowledged theft and plot to become the king. she alludes to how Makanaki's uncle is dealt with for displaying acts of insubordination and impudence towards her. As a result, she threatens Makanaki with same fate. However, Makanaki remains undeterred. He fires back at her, and demands she drops her crown for a new era led by him. It is as a result of this circumstance that ES utters CFYP 5 and Makanaki retorts with CFYP 6.]

ES: No worries! *Pàsán táa fì na iyálé, ọ́ wà lájà fùn iyàwó*. (The whip used on the first wife is kept in the rafter for the second wife).

Makanaki: It seems that crown on your head is starting to drive you crazy.

ES: Yoruba say "May God deliver us from evil". You think that prayer was about sickness, disease or death. That prayer was about me. I am Evil ....

Makanaki: You think I am afraid of God.

Apostle: Keep quiet. Why are you talking like this? Are you not afraid of God? Don't you know that God is seeing everything that is happening here? He will be mad at you ....

Makanaki: That is the problem. Any small thing, God, God, God. You are all afraid of the God you have never seen. You are supposed to be afraid of me seated here, but you are not. If only you could see inside me, you will know how dark my heart is.

ES: Akorede—you want my crown?

Makanaki: Yes.

ES: Stand up—come and collect it. *Ìwọ á mò wípé eyín tí ajá fì ñ bá ọmọ è seré ló fì ñ gé e jẹ* (You will realise that the same teeth a dog uses to play with its puppies is also used to bite them).

Makanaki: Mama, you like to speak in parables. Let me give you one: *Igi tó yẹ ká fẹ̀yìn tí kò gbani, tí ó bá wó lu ni kò lè pani.* (A tree that cannot support one's desire for rest cannot kill when it falls on one.)

Makanaki is hell-bent on seizing the kingship title from ES. At the meeting, he defies ES not minding the allusive threat made against his life. He, therefore, rides on positive impoliteness to damage ES's quality and social identity face. Makanaki starts to achieve this through positive impoliteness sub-strategies of personalised negative assertion (e.g., 'it seems that the crown on your head is starting to drive you crazy'). This is an insult on ES as the king and it suggests that ES has a level of conceit in the discharge of her duties as the king. In response to this, ES draws on negative impoliteness to offensively counter Makanaki (e.g., Yoruba say "May God deliver us from evil." You think that prayer was about sickness, disease or death. That prayer was about me. I am Evil ...). This offensive counter strategy metaphorically presents ES as evil; demonstrating her demonic attribute and the authority she has as the king to oppress Makanaki and target his equity rights.

In his bid to save his equity rights and avoid being imposed upon, Makanaki responds to ES' negative impoliteness through pointed affirmation, which is a sub-strategy of positive impoliteness. In his words: (e.g., you think I am afraid of God), Makanaki attacks ES' quality face with the aim to demean, disregard and make ES uncomfortable. By affirming the fact that he is not afraid of God, he demeans the quality face of being "evil" that ES professes to. Makanaki further takes to sub-strategies of criticism and affirmations, when a member of the group, Apostle, tries to stop him from uttering blasphemous statements within the context of how the belief in God influences the Nigerian society. This criticism (e.g., "that is the problem. Any small thing, God, God, God. You are all afraid of the God you have never seen") intensifies and endears Makanaki's quality face, while it also negatively targets ES' quality face. In the same vein, the affirmation (e.g., "you are supposed to be afraid of me seated here, but you are not. If only you could see inside me, you will know how dark my heart is") intensifies and demonstrates that Makanaki is capable of being the king of the group.

As a response to Makanaki's negative face want of wanting to become the king of the group, ES deploys the sub-strategies of challenge and reinforcement of power asymmetry assorted with threat to attack Makanaki's equity rights. ES' confrontation (e.g., "Akorede—you want my crown") towards Makanaki, and the latter's affirmation (e.g., "yes"), slithers into a show of power which is illustrated in the form of a proverb (e.g., "*Eyín tí ajá fì ñ bá ọmọ è seré ló fì ñ gé e jẹ*"—The same teeth a dog uses to play with its puppies is also used to bite them). This proverb is regarded in this context to be a CFYP. The Yoruba people believe that it is characteristic of dogs to mouth playfully, or bite out of fear, frustration or correction. This proverb is thus predicated on being used as caution against acts considered to be discourteous among the Yoruba. Considering ES and Makanaki's feud, this CFYP is relevant. ES and Makanaki have once been in a cordial relationship of king and subject, but now, ES is determined to deal with Makanaki for contempt, insubordination and vaunted

ambition. This CFYP functions as coercive impoliteness in this context as it is appropriate as a linguistic-pragmatic trigger that damages Makanaki's equity rights, and tries to sever his aspiration to be king.

In his response to this coercive impoliteness, Makanaki defensively retorts through a positive impoliteness strategy by using a marching proverb (e.g., *Igi tó yẹ ká fẹ̀yìn tì kó gbani, tí ó bá wó lu ni kò lè pani*—A tree that cannot support one's desire for rest cannot kill when it falls on one). The inherent notion of this proverb is that, amongst the Yoruba, being incapacitated in the position of authority breeds dishonour. This proverb, a sub-strategy of positive impoliteness, is a CFYP used as an insult to attack ES' quality face and equity rights. Judging by the proceeds of theft which Makanaki shares equally with the members of the group in demonstration of ES's failings, the latter's ability to continue as king of the group is attacked. More to this is that, the CFYP imposes on ES's equity rights, since it's condescending towards her capability as a king. Thus, this CFYP is a product of affective impoliteness used as a linguistic-pragmatic trigger; showing the heightened anger, which Makanaki has towards the king, ES.

CFYP 7:

*Ajá tó bá lóun dèná dẹ̀kùn, ó se tán àtikú ni.*

A dog that ambushes a lion is definitely ready to die.

[Context: Makanaki leaves the meeting boastfully and furiously. ES also reacts angrily to Makanaki's misdemeanour. They both decide to get back at each other. Makanaki consults an herbalist to fortify himself for the supremacy battle between him and ES. In the same vein, ES approaches the church for spiritual fortification against the probable forces which Makanaki might deploy against her. It is against this background that she utters CFYP 7 above]

Church: (Singing song) Come and be victorious, Lord Jesus Christ for your servant in the midst of all enemies. Father, come and be victorious for your servant in the midst of all our enemies. Father, come and be victorious. The son is victorious. The Holy Spirit is victorious.

ES: Akorede, you have no understanding. Because it is said that the flood is always determined to wash away the house but the owner must be ready to prevent it. *Ajá tó bá lóun dèná dẹ̀kùn, ó se tán àtikú ni* (A dog that ambushes a lion is definitely ready to die).

ES has been the king, and she desires to continue in that capacity. Against the threat made by Makanaki to usurp her throne, ES takes on negative impoliteness to further damage the former's equity rights. She starts with a negative expressive by alluding to the destructive nature of flood, and its tendency to erode the house if the owner is not vigilant and determined to stop it. With this, ES metaphorically labels Makanaki as a destructive flood that will not hesitate to overthrow her from the throne as the king. In this regard, ES targets Makanaki's desire to be free from servitude and imposition. Furthermore, the threat to Makanaki's equity rights is clearly more emphasised with the use of a proverb by ES, who buttresses thus: (e.g., *Ajá tó bá lóun dèná dẹ̀kùn, ó se tán àtikú ni*—A dog that ambushes a lion is definitely ready to die). This proverb, in this warpath context, is a CFYP adopted as a negative impoliteness sub-strategy against the face of Makanaki.

The fundamental conception of this proverb is grounded in the fact that the Yoruba people consider lion as the king of the jungle, and a dangerous animal that is unmatched

and unstoppable. When it finds its prey, it stalks, sneaks in, surveys, explodes and grabs the prey. It does not alter its course upon setting its eyes on a victim and all animals dread it. Therefore, against this extant reality, it is undoubtedly improbable that any other animal will challenge the lion to a duel. Thus, this proverb underscores the notion that to dare someone of greater status is foolhardy. Judging by the status of ES as the king, the CFYP portrays her as a lion, and Makanaki as a dog, that is subservient to ES. In this regard, the CFYP uttered by ES comes as an intensified threat ('... definitely ready to die') on Makanaki's equity rights, which is imposing in view of the existing power disparity between them. Being the king, ES' uttered CFYP is a linguistic-pragmatic trigger engaged with all senses of supremacy to hinder Makanaki from his actions. This CFYP, therefore, functions as affective impoliteness borne out of heightened anger against Makanaki's negative want—an eye for the king's throne.

## CONCLUSION

In a departure from the nuances underpinning previous scholarly works on proverbs, this paper has examined Yoruba proverbs as impoliteness and power negotiators among some selected characters in the movie, *King of Boys*. Through insights from Culpeper's (1996, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2016) impoliteness theory, portions of proverbs deployed as conflictive-motivated face-threatening Yoruba proverbs (CFYPs) in the movie have been analysed and established. It is evident from this analysis that aspects of Yoruba proverbs that are sensitive to conflictive relational works are predominantly categorised as negative and positive impoliteness triggers in the movie. Negative impoliteness motivated CFYPs which are prevalently associated with wielding power and authority are deployed as threats to life, while positive impoliteness induced CFYPs are employed to insult and criticise especially by the less powerful. Moreover these two categories of CFYPs, considering the context in which they are used, correspond with the exact linguistic pragmatic degree of offence. Through this, affective function which purposely protects CFYP users' values and frustration of cooperation is achieved. Likewise, coercive function which functions to destroy victims' sense of security and engender constant state of fear and anxiety is achieved. Thus, these findings are intended to state that there are CFYPs and they are mostly dependent on the exigencies to reinforce or weaken specific identities and socio-political norms or mis-norms within Yoruba socio-cultural milieu.

## NOTE

- (1) Whistle Blowing policy is designed by the Federal Ministry of Finance to compensate anybody with useful information for recovering proceeds of corruption (Anya & Iwanger 2019).

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