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Structure of Proverbs in Selected Yorùbá Written Literature

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Abstract
The claim that Yoruba proverbs embody typical clause structure without compromising their cultural values and rhetorical purposes in verbal and written discourse has not been subjected to adequate linguistic/grammatical analysis. This study explores, from a stylistic point of view, the various structures of proverbs found in some selected Yorùbá written literature. The intention is to identify, describe, and interpret the different patterns of structure and the communicative functions they signal in the proverbs. The study is anchored on Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. Twelve texts from the works of Olú-Owólabí, Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí, Ọládẹ̀jọ Òkédìjí, Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá, and Kọ́lá Akínlàdé having rich repertoire of proverbs with thematic and stylistic similarities were selected; and the proverbs were subjected to stylistic analysis. Findings reveal that simple sentence proverbs facilitate clear

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comprehension of the messages; compound-sentence proverbs project symmetrical ideas; while complex and compound-complex sentence proverbs communicate complex arguments and ideational explicitness in the language.

Keywords: Yorùbá written literature; proverbs; stylistics; systemic functional grammar.

1. Introduction

Proverbs are a body of cultural wisdom and knowledge that drive a society. Though the use of proverbs may differ from one society to another, their common feature is that they touch on a wide array of human activities, experiences, and concerns. Generally, proverbs are highly regarded as repositories of a people's collective social, religious, political, and cultural wisdom. They are employed to propagate culture and ideologies. Yorùbá proverbs are an embodiment of the cultural values, norms, beliefs, and philosophical worldview of the Yorùbá people. Owómóyèlá (2005:12) asserts that

> resort to proverbs is the most important and most effective strategy the Yoruba have devised to optimize the efficaciousness of speech.

To the Yorùbá, proverbs are *the horses of speech; if communication is lost, we use proverbs to find it* (Ọlátúnjí, 1984:170). There are lots of scholarly works on Yoruba proverbs; prominent among them are Bámgbóṣé (1968), Ìṣòlá (1970), Ọlábòdé (1981), Òjó-Adé (1983), Ọlátúnjí (1984), Àlàbá

(1986), Yusuf (1994), Adébọ̀wálé (1994, 2011), Raji-Oyelade (1999), Ọlátẹ́jú (1999), Adékẹ́yẹ (2001), Agbájé (2005), Ọ̀ṣọba (2005), Sheba (2006); Adélékè (2009), Adéjùmọ̀ (2009), Adéyẹmí (2009), Olújìnmí (2012), and Òjó (2015).

This paper focuses on the structure of proverbs as employed in some selected Yorùbá written literature. The structural types discussed include simple sentence proverbs (simple proverbs), compound sentence proverbs (compound proverbs), complex sentence proverbs (complex proverbs), and proverbs with compound-complex structure (i.e. compound-complex sentence proverbs). The study adopts Systemic Functional Grammar, a model of grammar that relates form to function and context, for the analyses.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model adopted for this study is Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG henceforth). It is an interpretive framework that views language as a strategic, meaning-making resource (Halliday, 1984). This means that it is an important instrument for interpreting texts. Halliday (1961) identifies four grammatical categories which can be used in the description of any language. They are fundamentals on which systemic functional grammar is built. They show how all the categories are logically interwoven and operate in synergy. The four categories are Unit, Structure, Class, and System. Unit as a grammatical category in SFG is designed to account for the stretches of language that carries grammatical patterns. A unit is easily identified in a language because of the frequency with which it appears and re-appears again within the language.

There are five units namely sentence, clause, group, word, and morpheme. These five units operate in hierarchy and are arranged in hierarchical order on a scale of rank. They could be arranged from the highest and largest to the lowest and smallest in descending or ascending order. Apart from the hierarchical relation, they also have a relationship of inclusion, in which one or more morphemes constitute a word, one or more words constitute a group, one or more groups makes up a clause, and one or more clauses constitute a sentence. *Structure*, the second of the SFG categories stipulates that all categories of grammar identified in any language are grammatically structured or ordered to make a meaningful unit. A structure is an arrangement of elements ordered in *places.* In other words, all the elements in the language, i.e. the morpheme, word, clause and sentence follow an arrangement which can be represented as S P C A. The predicate (P) is the only obligatory element in this structure.

A sentence is the basic unit of expression which has a predicate. It is the highest and largest grammatical unit whose structure consists of one or more clauses. The clause could be main/independent, and could also be subordinate/dependent. The relevance of this aspect of SFG is that it would enable us to break each proverb into its grammatical constituents for a better analytical discourse. Thus, the systemic theory of scale and category grammar is significant for the structural investigation and interpretation of proverbs in Yoruba Written Literature (YWL henceforth). The essence of this is to bring to the fore the stylistic peculiarities of such structures in the selected texts.

3. Structure of Proverbs in YWL

The types of sentence pattern found in Yorùbá proverbs can be examined from the broad perspectives of sentence structure and sentence function. Only four major sentences based on structure shall be examined in this paper, namely simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. We shall examine these one after the other in the following subsections.

3.1. Simple Proverbs

A simple proverb is one which consists mainly of a subject and a predicator, i.e. one independent/main clause. Thus, it expresses only one idea in a given situation. Proverbs with simple sentence structural pattern are used by writers to communicate their experiences, feelings, emotions and messages in a clear, brief and direct manner.

Two examples of writers who favour the use of proverbs, with simple sentence structural pattern, to facilitate clear comprehension of their messages are Olú-Owólabí and Kólá Akínlàdé. In Olú-Owólabí's *Ẹjọ́ọ Tani?*, for instance, after the marriage ceremonies of Dr. Adédòkun and Sùḿbọ̀, Láníyì and his friends issued them a 7-day ultimatum threat letter passed through their houseboy, Emeka. While Dr. Adédòkun refuses to listen, Sùḿbọ̀ persuades her husband to give attention to their houseboy by saying:

(1) *Òǹpeni ní í ṣọ́lá*. (pg. 107)
'The caller is in-charge.'

In the Yorùbá culture, *òǹpeni* is usually an elder or somebody in the position of authority. In this proverb, however, Emeka, Dr. Adédòkun's house boy, enjoys the prerogatives of power and authority as somebody requesting attention despite his age and low status. The reason is that he has vital information for his boss.

In the same novel, Sùḿbọ̀'s friend, Fúnmiláyọ̀, convinces Sùḿbọ̀ to join their gang by befriending men who will take care of her and meet all her needs. She tells her that if she stays with Láníyì, the poor fellow, she will suffer; that she should decide by herself. She expresses herself thus:

(2) *Ebi ní í kọ́ aláṣejù lọ́gbọ́n*. (pg. 51)
'HUNGER teaches a stubborn fellow lessons.'

This proverb is a simple and a clear warning to Sùḿbọ̀ that if she refuses to heed their counsel or advice by dumping Láníyì for a new lover, she will have only herself to blame as hunger, want and starvation will be the consequence of her stubbornness. However, Sùḿbọ̀, knowing the consequence of the proverb, eventually yields to their advice.

In *Líṣàbí Agbòǹgbò Àkàlà*, Ọlọ́yọ̀ọ́ assures his *Ìlàrís* (servants) of his support, and told them not to be afraid as they are going into the towns and villages to fight for him. He assures them with this proverb:

(3) *Agbèfọ́ba kìí jẹ̀bi*. (pg. 5)
'The king's spokesman is never guilty.'

With this proverb, the king's point simply is that the *Ìlàrí* are not representing their own interests or sending themselves on this errand. He wants them to go with the consciousness that they are going there to represent him. The proverb makes it very clear that no one can arrest them since they have his authority and backing. In the same text, the joint service has started in earnest and the drummer wakes them up to get into action. He charges them with this proverb:

(4) *Ìgbẹ́ lowó wà* (pg. 51)
'Money is in the forest'.

Example (4) above, in the context in which it is used, expresses the importance of the farmland/forest as the source from which wealth such as food and money come. The proverb therefore is an admonition to the taskforce to get into action quickly as there lies the success of their ambition.

Other examples of simple sentence proverbs which illustrate the essence of labour or hard work in the text are:

(5) *Iṣẹ́ lòògùn ìṣẹ́*. (pg. 52)
'Work is the antidote for poverty'

and

(6) *Àkókò iṣẹ́ là á ṣiṣẹ́*. (pg. 60)
'It is the time of work that one must do it'.

While the first proverb, *Iṣẹ́ loògùn ìṣẹ́* emphasizes the need to work in order to conquer poverty, the second proverb, *Àkókò iṣẹ́ làá ṣiṣẹ́* emphasizes the importance of time in whatever work or

duty one wants to do since time is money. What should be done should be done at its right time, since a stitch in time saves nine and a time once lost is never regained.

In Olú-Owólabí's *Oyíndàmọ́lá Ọmọ-Ọlọ́rọ̀*, three ladies: Ọláìtán, Oyèníkẹ̀ẹ́ and Oyíndà, discuss among themselves the issue of early marriage. Oyèníkẹ̀ẹ́ and Oyíndà conclude that early marriage is bad and that whatever one wants to do, one should first count the cost. Ọláìtán, in agreement with her friends, says:

(7) *Èrò lọbẹ̀ gbẹ̀gìrì*. (pg. 12)
'Stirring is essential to the bean-soup'

The simple sentence proverb expresses the point that life is about counting the cost. It reveals the fact that anyone that does not want the bean soup to burn must stir consistently and conscientiously. In the same vein, decisions should be based on serious thinking.

In the same text, Àbẹ̀kẹ́, in her wickedness, plans and persuades her daughter to marry Làtífu so that she might have the chance afterwards to kill him and thus have access to his wealth. When Oyíndà refuses, Àbẹ̀kẹ́'s remark to her daughter is expressed in the proverb:

(8) *Ìsàlẹ̀ ọrọ̀ lẹ́gbìn*. (pg. 50).
'The source of wealth is filthy.'

The simple proverb clearly reveals the fact that the source of wealth is often filthy. There are so many deadly and shameful

steps to be taken before one can make it. This, in most cases, requires wicked and mind-boggling steps.

Oyíndà and Mátànmí, one of the suitors of Oyíndà, planned to kill Làtífù, another suitor. After Làtífù had escaped the first death planned, he was all the same (eventually) killed that night. Ọmọ́níjọ́ suspects that the death is not natural because:

(9) *Ìròmi kìí jó lásán*. (pg. 97)
'Iromi, the water beetle does not
dance without a reason'

The situation in the example above is metaphorically likened to that of 'Iromi' (the water beetle), an insect which does not dance without a reason. This proverb establishes the fact that things do not always happen without a reason.

In Kọ́lá Akínlàdé's *Ajá tó ń Lépa Ẹkùn*, Fadérera, a young and covetous lady, sees the killer of Bàbá Alágbàfọ̀, as opportunity to make money out of the investigation concerning the man's death. She plots with the killer to get some money. While waiting to collect the money, she says:

(10) *Òfò olófò ni ìfà onífà* (pg. 74).
'One person's loss is another person's gain.'

This excerpt clearly expresses a philosophical idea about loss and gain. The loss referred to is the death or killing of Bàbá Alágbàfọ̀, from which Fadérera now wants to make some gains. This proverb describes how Fadérera benefits from the loss of another man, though it eventually leads to her own death.

Akin and Kọ́bùrù Àkàndé also in the same story, *Ajá tó ń Lépa Ẹkùn,* disagree on the suspected killer of Bàbá Alágbàfọ̀. Kọ́bùrù Àkàndé sees Akin as incompetent to handle this case, but Akin proves that this is not the first time he has handled such a case. He has successfully handled several ones before now. He expresses thus:

(11) *Èlùbọ́ ṣá ṣe gbódo rí.* (pg. 100)
'Yam flour was once in yam's shape.'

Akin is likened to *èlùbọ́* 'yam flour'. He has been successful in all of his past investigations as a younger officer and can still achieve the same feat even now. This is a lesson for anyone who tends to look down on himself/herself due to previous mistakes. People should learn to consider their own past achievements to motivating themselves.

In Akínlàdé's *Amọnịṣeni,* Mákindé and Oyínkan, his fiancée, attended Fáladé's freedom party and left the place by 9p.m., since it is the constant practice of Mosún, Oyínkán's boss, to close her gate by 10p.m. Therefore, they made it home before 10p.m. to avoid embarrassment. The writer comments thus:

(12) *Awọ̀lúmátẹ̀ẹ́, ìwọ̀n ara rẹ̀ ló mọ̀.* (pg. 3)
'One-who-enters-a-town-without-being-disgraced knows his limits.'

This simple proverb likens the situation to that of the person who, by knowing and understanding his limits and boundaries, and also operating within these limits, would not experience

shame/disgrace. Mákindé and Oyínkán are thus referred to as *awọ̀lúmátẹ̀ẹ́* (one who enters a town without being disgraced). This proverb advises everyone to operate within his bounds so as to avoid trouble, shame and embarrassment.

As a result of Pọ́nmilé's death, Akin Olúṣínà, during his investigation and discussion with Ògúndélé, thinks that Abídógun killed Pọ́nmilé to silence him and prevent the secret between them from getting exposed. He thinks that, after all, if Pọ́nmilé is dead, nobody would know or hear anything. He summarizes everything with this proverb:

(13) *Òkú ajá kìí gbó*. (*pg.* 23)
'A dead dog does not bark.'

The example above likens Pọ́nmilé to a dead dog. As there is no way a dead dog can bark, so also there is no way the secret in the hand of Pọ́nmilé can get leaked out. This proverb describes a situation in which nothing good comes out of a dead situation. A person is fruitless and useless after death. Nothing good therefore comes after death.

Also, Péjú, the mother of Pọ́nmilé, during her discussion with Akin Olúṣínà, confesses that, though her son has been a source of problem for her while he was alive, she still believes in destiny. She traces the background story of Chief Ajé Fámákinwá, who, though his father was poor, is now wealthy. She concludes with this proverb:

(14) *Àyànmọ́ ò gbóògùn*. (pg. 45)
'Destiny has no remedy.'

In the excerpt above, Pèjù believes that destiny, according to the Yorùbá belief, cannot change or be changed, just as destiny is with Chief Fámákinwa, who despite his poor parental background is still wealthy. Hence, people should learn to accept their fate. Therefore, just as Chief Ajé has been destined to excel in life, so also is Pọ́nmilé destined to die prematurely.

3.2. Compound Proverbs

A compound proverb consists of two equally important ideas with equal grammatical prominence. In it, two or more main/independent clauses are linked by connectives such as 'and', 'but', 'either… or', 'neither… nor', or punctuation marks, such as comma (,) and semi-colon (;). In other words, compound proverbs have a number of coordinated simple proverbs and are used to connect two or more circumstances together. Writers convey information and messages that have equal prominence and significance through proverbs with this particular sentence pattern/type.

Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá employs proverbs with compound sentences to project symmetrical or contrastive ideas. In Ìṣọ̀lá's *Ó Le Kú*, for instance, Àjàní and Àṣàkẹ́ had a disagreement concerning their marriage. While Àjàní is ready, Àṣàkẹ́, because of her stepfather, delays the marriage. Àjàní persuades her to yield but Àṣàkẹ́ pleads, using this proverb:

(15) *Ohun a fẹ̀lẹ̀ mú, wọ̀ọ̀ níí wọ̀, ohun a fagbára mú, kankan níí le.* (pg. 5)
'What one handles carefully gives in easily, what one handles with force gets toughened.'

The excerpt is a compound proverb with two contrastive ideas. The first main clause is *'Ohun a fẹ̀lẹ̀ mú, wọ̀ọ̀ níí wọ̀ọ̀,'* while the second main clause is *'Ohun a fagbára mú, kankan níí le'*. The first part of the proverb compares with Àṣàkẹ́'s option of a tactful way of handling the issue, while the second part of the proverb refers to Àjàní's untactful and hasty resolve of push. This proverb advises one to take things easy in life.

In the same text, Lọlá, after she has caught Àṣàkẹ́ with Àjàní, decides to break the relationship. After Àjàní's apology, Lọlá remains yet adamant, and tells him that friendship is not compulsory. She captures this opinion with this proverb:

(16) *Wọ̀fún nìtẹ́ lọ́rùn, Ìdodo nìdajì ara*. (pg. 54)
'You receive satisfaction with what you can permit; the navel is the midpoint of the body.'

Here, Lọlá compares the navel, which is the midpoint of the human body, to the satisfaction one receives from what one permits. This is a lesson that one should not kill oneself. One can only permit what one can accommodate.

In the same story, after Àṣàkẹ́ has declared to Àjàní that she is pregnant, Àjàní starts to avoid seeing Lọlá, pretending to be busy. Lọlá then begins to suspect him because of his reactions. The writer, in an attempt to capture the situation, says:

(17) *Awọ tẹ́ẹ́rẹ́ bonú, ẹgbẹ̀rún èrò ń bẹ nísàlẹ̀ ìdodo*. (pg. 73)
'Thin skin leather covers the stomach, thousands of thoughts are under the navel.'

Two pieces of information are connected by a comma in the example above. The first information reveals the fact that the stomach is deep and no one can see through it, just as Lọlá could not know what is in Àjàní's mind. The second information reveals that there are thousands of thoughts going on in Àjàní's mind which Lọlá can never know. This proverb stresses the fact that no one can see what goes on in the mind of another person.

In the same story, Lọlá, after getting information that Àṣàkẹ́, her rival, is pregnant and that Àjàní has even accompanied her to the antenatal clinic, challenges Àjàní for being unfaithful to her. But Àjàní desperately defends himself, persistently, hence making Lọlá to respond thus:

(18) *Ẹni a fẹ́ la mọ̀, a ò mẹni tó fẹ́ni*. (pg. 84)
'One only knows the person one loves, one does not know the person that loves one.'

It is obvious from the compound proverb that Lọlá is sure that she loves Àjàní but that she is in serious doubt as to whether Àjàní loves her in return.

Still in the same text, Bọ̀dé, the elder brother of Àjàní, advises him to get engaged quickly, as there is time for everything. Ṣadé buttresses the point and says:

(19) *Ẹ́nu ọmọdé lobì tií so, ẹnu àgbà lobì tií gbó*. (pg. 101)
'Kolanut grows in the child's mouth, Kolanut ripens in the elder's mouth.

Example (19) is metaphorical in the sense that Àjàní compares the situation to that of two different views - Ṣadé's view as *'ọmọdé'* (child), and his elder brother's view, as *'àgbà'* (elder). In Yorùbá society, the elders have authority and often have the final say. Therefore, there is authority in what Bọ̀dé, his elder brother, has said.

In *Fàbú*, Ìṣọ̀lá recounts his experience at the Teachers College, where the Bible course is made a compulsory one. In the college, so many students from Christian and Muslim backgrounds are told to interpret a Christian hymn titled 'Rock of Ages Cleft for Me'. The writer compares the different interpretations given by the students, using this proverb:

(20) *Oríṣiríṣìí ọ̀bẹ là á rí lọ́jọ́ ikú erin; àràǹbarà èté lọ́jọ́ sàráà*. (pg. 68)
'Different kinds of knives are displayed on the day an elephant dies; different kinds of mouth are displayed on the day of free food.'

The maxim above is a reference to the different, strange interpretations given to the Christian hymn which is likened to what normally happens on the day an 'elephant' dies. In the same vein, the experience of the students while interpreting the hymn and giving it different meanings, such as '*Àpátá ọjọ́ orí, là sí méjì fún mi', Àpáta arúgbó sún fún mi'* and so on, is comparable to the way people normally come *en masse* whenever there is free food.

3.3. Complex Proverbs

A complex proverb consists of one main/independent clause plus one or more subordinate/dependent clause(s). From our knowledge of grammar, a sentence is said to be complex when another idea, thought or message is embedded in the main idea. A complex proverb therefore is used when there is a need to communicate several intriguing ideas necessary for the reader's quick response. It has two or more unified thoughts expressed in one main/independent plus one or more subordinate/dependent clauses. The dependent clauses are joined together by subordinating conjunctions such as *'ni'* (that), *'ṣáájú'* (before), *'bóyá'* (if') *'nítorí pé'* (because), *'àfi'* (unless), and *'nígbà tí'* (when). The writers who favour the use of proverbs with complex arguments and ideational explicitness are Fálétí and Òkédìjí.

In Fálétí's *Baṣòrun Gáà*, Gáà kills King Májẹ́ógbé as a result of a grievous mistake which the latter has committed. Gaa seeks the opinion of his cabinet members on the choice of a new king, but they refused to talk. Their excuse for not talking is expressed through this proverb rendered thus by Sàmù:

(21) *Bérin bá fọn, ọmọ erin ò gbọdọ̀ fọn*. (pg. 7)
'If the elephant blows its trumpet, its calf
must not repeat the same act.'

The adage illustrates the practice/custom among the Yorùbá, which forbids the younger ones to talk when an elder is talking, as whatever the elder has said is the final. This proverb teaches

that once a decision has been taken by an elder, the young ones must abide by it.

In the same book, Adégoólú decides to humble himself and cooperate with Gáà because of the experience of the past Kings. When Gáà notices this humble act of King Adégoólú, he declares:

(22) *Bọ́mọdé bá mọwọ́ í wẹ̀, yóò di kòríkòsùn àgbà*. (pg. 50)
'If a child knows how to wash his hands, he will be an elder's pally.'

Example (22) has a main clause plus a subordinate clause. The subordinate comes first, stating the condition of being an elder's pally. The benefits in being an elder's pally are enormous. These include possession of wisdom and having unhindered access to the elder's secret. The elder will guide the younger person in avoiding pitfalls in life and also assist him to succeed in life. This act of submission and humility is what the King had to win Gáà's heart, and it pays off. As a result of Gáà's wickedness which includes the killing of Àgbọ̀nyín, the only child of King Adégoólú, Sàmù, while discussing with Ọ̀yá'ábí, says:

(23) *Bàtá tó ń ró wélewéle kò níí pẹ́ ti yóò fi ya*. (pg. 109)
'The *bàtá* drum that sounds heavily will soon tear.'

The example is a complex proverb which states why the drum will soon tear completely. This proverb in the first part compares Gáà's wicked and mischievous behaviour to the drum that is being beaten profusely, while the second part refers to the repercussion of which is judgement. The tearing of the bàtá drum is synonymous with death, the likely judgement or repercussion of Gáà's wickedness. The proverb teaches that excess of everything is bad. It also implicitly teaches caution, self-control and retribution.

In Fálétí's *Ọmọ Olókùn Ẹṣin,* as a result of Àjàyi's thirst for freedom, and not only for himself but also for the entire villagers, he intentionally misbehaves and is ready to face the consequence. He is maltreated by the messengers. His mother's words for the tough-looking messengers of Olúmokò are therefore expressed thus:

(24) *Bí a rán ni níṣẹ́ ẹrú, àá fi tọmọ jẹ́ ẹ*! (pg. 13)
'If we send a person on a slave errand, he should run it like a freeborn.'

The proverb is complex because it recognizes the right of the master to direct one to carry out a perilous message and the wisdom of the messenger to handle the message with care, caution and discretion to avoid the after-effect of the bad/dangerous directive. It is a lesson for us to apply wisdom in anything or assignment we are given to do. A slave errand is a very difficult task but, with wisdom, it is easy.

In the same story, immediately Àjàyí is taken to Babalórìṣà, on sighting Àjàyí, he says:

(25) *Bájá gbé ogún ọdún láyé, ẹran ògún ni*. (pg. 143)
'Even if a dog lives up to twenty years in the world, it remains Ògún's meat.'

In this proverb, Àjàyí Ọmọ Olókùn Ẹṣin is metaphorically the *ajá* 'dog' which is usually used as sacrifice to *Ògún* (god of iron) in Yorùbá society. It is the belief in Yorùbá society that no other animal can be used to appease Ògún, the god of iron. The proverb implies that, no matter for how long they have been looking for Àjàyí, he is still to be used as the sacrificial dog whenever he is caught.

In the same story, Arinládé's husband remembers how Àjàyí protected his wife from the enemies by running away with her. He, therefore, notifies Àjàyí, Àyọ̀wí and Ìbíwùmí about his wedding, since they witness the relationship from the start. He asserts that:

(26) *Etí tó ó bá gbọ́ àyún*[1]*níí gbọ́ àbọ̀*. (pg. 163)
'The ear that hears the beginning of a matter must definitely hear the conclusion.'

The example above is a complex proverb, with a main clause and a subordinate clause. He stresses the fact that whoever knows the beginning of an event/issue must surely know or

[1]The word 'àyún'is a dialectal item of Òǹkó town. It means the genesis of something or an event.

witness the end. Àjàyí, Ayọ́wí and Ìbíwùmí have witnessed the occasion when Lágboókùn wants to forcefully marry his fiancée, Arinládé. Therefore, since they have been privileged to know of the ugly incident at the onset, they must also witness the happy or joyful end.

In Òkédìjí's *Àjà Ló Lẹ́rù*, Lápàdé, after reading in the newspaper about the cocaine-pushers and sellers who were declared wanted by the police, remembers when he was still in the police service. Áúdù, still in active service, has now been promoted to the rank of Inspector. Lápàdé says:

(27) *Bí orí pẹ́ nílẹ̀, a dire*. (pg. 6)
'If the head perseveres, it
must become successful.'

This complex proverb expresses the fact that Áúdù's promotion to the rank of Inspector is well deserved, having spent so many years in service. The proverb highlights the condition for becoming successful, and, that is 'persevering'. The proverb teaches a lesson of perseverance, persistency and consistency. Since Áúdù is the only remaining and serving policeman, the commissioner has no other choice than to make him an Inspector. No matter how long one suffers, success will eventually come.

Also, in Òkédìjí's *Àjà Ló Lẹ́rù*, at Jàmpàkò's house, the bondman, Kádírì, whom Lápàdé and Tàfá have come to look for, refuses to talk, but suddenly voices out and, in so doing, disrespects Lápàdé. He says:

(28) *Ehoro làṣá ò le gbé, bíi tọmọ èkúté kọ́*. (pg. 37)
'It is the rabbit that the hawk cannot grab,
not the baby rat.'

The proverb compares Tàfá to *ehoro* (a rabbit) and Lápàdé to *ọmọ èkúté* (a baby rat). The rabbit is too big an animal for a hawk to capture, but the baby rat is very easy. The contextual meaning is that it is only Tàfá, who is likened to *ehoro* (rabbit), that Táíwò cannot capture because of its size; he could capture Lápàdé, who is likened to *ọmọ èkúté* (baby rat), while Táíwò himself is likened to *àṣá* (the hawk). It is obvious that Táíwò could not capture Tàfá because, at this time, Táíwò is very weak. This proverb teaches that a weak person should not endanger his own life.

In Òkèdìji's *Àgbàlagbà Akàn*, Lápàdé, orders for *àmàlà* with *gbẹ̀gìrì* (bean soup). But as he sets to eat, problem evolves, and this problem engages him till the evening time. By the time he arrives, the food is already cold, but he is set to eat it like that. He then expresses himself thus:

(29) *Bí a kò bá kú, a ó jẹ ẹran tó tó erin*. (pg. 22)
'If we do not die, we will eat meats as big
as an elephant.'

This complex proverb describes Lápàdé's situation, where he has to come back to the food which he has earlier left. It teaches that there is hope no matter the challenge that one encounters.

In the same story, Áúdù accusses Lápàdé of being among the killers of one of the thieves at Bawo Ládèjì; but when

Lápàdé convinces him of his innocence, and he refuses to be persuaded, then Lápàdé says:

(30) *Ṣùgbọ́n ajá tí yóò bá sọnù, kì í gbọ́ fèrè ọdẹ o*. (pg. 26)
'But a dog that must wander off will not heed the hunter's whistle.'

This proverb compares Áúdù to '*ajá*' (dog), while Làpàdé is likened to *'ọdẹ'* (the hunter). The warning of Lápàdé to Áúdù is referred to as *'fèrè ọdẹ* (the hunter's whistle). The hunter's whistle functions as a warning. This proverb serves as a warning for people that, if they want to succeed in life, must listen to the elder's advice. Elders are to instruct and help to guide people against danger as Lápàdé warns Áùdù.

In *Àgbàlagbà Akàn*, Lápàdé, in deep thoughts, remembers his gone-by peaceful days as a policeman. But now that he is no longer in service, robbers are on the increase. He consoles himself and comments that:

(31) *Bí etí kò bá gbọ́ yìnkìn, inú kì í bàjẹ́*. (pg. 4)
'If the ear does not receive bad news, the Mind will not be displeased.'

This proverb has two clauses: *'bí etí kò bá gbọ́ yìnkìn* and *'inú kìí bàjẹ́'*. The first clause (*Bí etí kò bá gbọ́ yìnkìn*) is a subordinate clause, with the subordinating conjunction *'bí'* (if). The second clause (*inú kì í bàjẹ́*) contains the main idea or thought. It is the news of the robbers that Lápàdé hears and

reads in the newspaper that makes him sad. This implies that the ear receives information into the mind, meaning that all the bodily organs, working together are thereby affected. This proverb confirms the philosophical truth that only when one hears bad news, that one becomes sad.

3.4. Compound-Complex Proverbs

A compound-complex proverb is one which contains at least two main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses. A compound-complex proverb combines the feature of a compound proverb with that of a complex proverb. The writers who employ this proverb pattern in their use of proverbs are Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí and Ọládẹ̀jọ́ Òkédìjí. In Fálétí's *Ọmọ Olókùn Ẹṣin*, Àjàyí longs for freedom for himself and, most especially, for his people. When asked by Olúmokò of the reason behind his protest actions concerning the burnt bricks, he explains in a proverb thus:

(32) *Bọ́mọ bá tó lápó, a lápó; bọ́mọ bá tó lọ́fà, a lọ́fà.* (pg. 127)
'When a child is old enough to have the quiver,
he will have it; when a child is old enough
to have an arrow, he will have it.'

This proverb has four clauses; two main plus two subordinate clauses. Clause one *Bọ́mọ bá tó lápó* is a subordinate clause with the subordinate conjunction 'bí' (If). Clause two *a lápó* is a main clause. The third clause *Bọ́mọ bá tó lọ́fà* is also a subordinate clause, while the fourth clause á *lọ́fà* is a main

clause. Àjàyí uses the proverb to indirectly inform Olúmokò that the people are ready for freedom, since they have served Olúmokò enough. It is a lesson for all people to always put others into consideration.

In Òkédìjí's *Àjà Ló Lẹrù*, after Lápàdé and Tàfá have discovered Táíwò in Jampako's house, Tàfá wants to slap Táíwò during the interrogations but Áúdù, the Inspector-General of Police enters, and as he is leaving, Táíwò tactically leaves with him. Lápàdé, terribly annoyed and frustrated, could not do anything about it. The writer comments with this proverb:

(33) *Ewúrẹ́ ń bínú, ó ń fẹsẹ̀ halẹ̀; yóò bu olówó rẹ jẹ bí*? (pg. 43)
'The goat is annoyed and stamping its hooves on the ground; would it bite its owner?'

This excerpt is made up of two main clauses and one subordinate clause. Clause one (*Ewúrẹ́ ń bínú*) is a main clause which connotes the main idea or thought that the speaker wants to emphasize. Clause two (*ó ń fẹsẹ̀ halẹ̀*) is also a main clause, while clause three (*yóò bu olówó rẹ̀ jẹ bí?*) is a subordinate clause. The proverb likens Lápàdé to *'ewúrẹ́'* (goat) that is annoyed and protesting, while Áúdù is likened to *'olówó rẹ̀'* (its owner) the person to which anger and protest are being directed. The reaction of Lápàdé is represented by *ó ń fẹsẹ̀ halẹ̀* 'he is stamping his feet on the ground'. It is obvious from the proverb that Lápàdé's anger and protest are futile as he cannot do anything against the actions of Áúdù. The proverb teaches that

one should accept one's fate on what one does not have power over, for instance, constituted authorities.

Furthermore, in an attempt to rescue Tọ́lání, Angelina's younger sister from the hands of kidnappers, Lápàdé who had earlier promised Angelina that the girl would be found within two days, is in deep thought about his promise and the consequence of not fulfilling it. The writer comments thus:

(34) *Onígbèsè dá ìtàdógún bí ẹni pé kò ní pé mọ́ láílái; ìtàdógún wá kù sí dẹ̀dẹ̀, ọjọ́ ẹlẹ́ṣìn ín wá kọ̀la*. (pg. 189)
'The debtor fixed the seventeenth day as if it would never come; the seventeenth day now draws near, the day of shame beckons tomorrow.'

This proverb has three main clauses and one subordinate clause. Clause one *Onígbèsè dá ìtàdógún* is a main clause. The second clause *bí ẹni pé kò níí pé mọ́ láílái* is a subordinate clause. Clause three *ìtàdógún wá kù sí dẹ̀dẹ̀* is a main clause, and clause four *ọjọ́ ẹlẹ́sìn ín wá kọ̀la* is also a main clause. The proverb compares Lápàdé to *onígbèsè* '(the) debtor' who promises Angelina two days to look for and find her younger sister, Tọ́lání. Failure to do so will lead to terrible shame. The proverb expresses a philosophical idea about how fast time runs, as a thousand days fritter away as though it were a hundred days.

In Òkédìjí's *Àgbàlagbà Akàn*, Adégún, Àníkẹ́'s father sent people to defraud and kill her daughter's teacher, in order to

cover the secret between himself and the teacher. Lápàdé condemns him for his wickedness. He says:

(35) *Òjòjò ń ṣèwọ̀fà, wọ́n ló gbéṣe rẹ̀ dé, bó bá ń ṣọmọ lọ́wọ́ wọn, wọn a máa náwó, wọn a máa nára; wọn a dífá, wọn a máa pẹran.* (pg. 163)
'The pawn is sick; they say he has come with his usual behavior, if it happens to their child, they will be spending money, they will be spending energy; they will consult the Ifá oracle, they will be sacrificing animals.'

The compound-complex proverb above has six main clauses and one subordinate clause. Clause one *òjòjò ń ṣèwọ̀fà* is a main clause. The second clause *wọ́n ló gbéṣe rẹ̀ dé* is also a main clause. Clause three *bó bá ṣọmọ lọ́wọ́ wọn* is a subordinate clause, with the subordinate conjunction *bí* 'if'. Clause four *wọn a máa náwó* is a main clause; also clause five *wọn a máa nára* is a main clause. Clause six *wọn a dífá* is also a main clause; similarly clause seven *wọn a máa pẹran* is also a main clause. The multi-complex nature of the proverb with so many main and dependent clauses makes the proverb tedious and difficult to interpret. However, the proverb compares Fẹ́mi, Àníkẹ́'s teacher to *ìwọ̀fà* 'pawn' who is sick. Adégún's treatment of Fẹ́mi is as if he does not know her. This is ironical because he knows her. The proverb therefore emphasizes fair treatment for all people.

In Òkèdìjí's *Ká rìn Ká pọ̀,* Lápàdé suddenly discovers himself on the floor, naked, without any cloth on his body. He remembers the experience of manager Akínwùmi that he read in the newspaper, how the man suddenly discovers himself with a

naked woman who had been missing for a long time. As he is having the same experience, he expresses thus:

(36) *Ṣùgbọ́n ohun tó jọ ara wọn la fi í wéra wọn! Èèpo ẹ̀pà jọ pósí ẹ̀líírí, ọwọ́ alábahun jọ àrán ọ̀pẹ, àtàǹpàkò ènìyàn jọ orí ejò.* (pg. 7)
'But one only compares things of similar appearances, the groundnut shell resembles the coffin of a tiny rat, the tortoise fingers resembles that of the male fluorescence of the palm-tree, the thumb of a human being resembles a snake's head.'

The above compound-complex proverb is made up of three main and one subordinate clause. Clause one *ṣùgbọ́n ohun tó jọ ara wọn la fií wéra wọn*! is a subordinate clause. Clause two *èèpo ẹ̀pà jọ pósí ẹ̀líírí* is a main clause. Clause three *ọwọ́ alábahun jọ àrán ọ̀pẹ* is also a main clause. Clause four *àtàmpàkò ènìyàn jọ orí ejò* is also a main clause. This proverb is used to highlight the point Lápàdé wants to make that he had been in a similar situation before, with that of the branch manager. The proverb is used to throw light on issues that need to be compared. If we look at the things compared, we will see that they are truly comparable. The thumb of a human being, for instance, truly resembles the head of a snake. The thumb, as flat as it is, when raised up resembles the head of a snake. Thus, the compound-complex proverbs communicate complex arguments, and supply more information.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the structure of proverbs in Yorùbá written literature. The sentence types of proverbs we have discussed are simple, compound, complex and compound-complex. From our discussion so far in this section, it is obvious that the writers of the selected texts have relied heavily on the use of proverbs with varied sentence patterns to express different ideas, opinions and messages to their readers. The proverbs therefore become handy as a potent tool of literary communication. It is observable that each writer's exploitation of the proverb for creative uniqueness, manifests in their literary communication.

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