
A Linguistic Analysis of Prayers in Yorùbá Greeting Forms

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Abstract. Greetings are one of the main pillars of Yorùbá cultural heritage. Yorùbá people have specialized greetings for virtually every kind of situation conditioned by their everyday living experiences. However, as essential as greeting is, findings show that there used to be a mix-up between prayer and greetings, such that prayers are misrepresented for greetings. Hence, this forms the basic discussion of this paper. The data collection relies on text materials on prayers and greetings, and the informants are selected elderly people in Èkitì. The descriptive approach is adopted. The paper suggests that prayers should not be taken for greetings.

Keywords: greetings, prayers, culture, Yorùbá people

Introduction

Yorùbá is a tribe occupied the south-western part of Nigeria. Yorùbá spread all over the world (Olowookere & Adewole, 1980). They attach a strong importance to greeting being one of the essential ingredients of their culture (Ogunbowale, 1966: 74-88). They rate high a person that greets while they regard whoever does not know how to greet as a lack of respect and home training; thus, they train their children how to greet less they disgrace them outside (Daramola & Jeje, 1969: 1-7). Males prostrate while females kneel down when greeting as a mark of respect to elders. As good as greeting is, it is at times used derogatorily (Aderounmu, 1990). Greeting takes different forms and at times, it is accomplished with prayers. Hence, it seems difficult to separate greetings from prayers.

The paper focuses on the misrepresentation of prayers in Yorùbá greetings. The purpose of the paper is to prove that prayers and greetings are not the same thing and they should be separated or not used interchangeably. The paper is examined in seven sub-sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two is the literature review. Section three contains research method while section four treats greeting forms in Yorùbá. Section five deals with prayer forms in Yorùbá. Section six contains greetings accomplished with prayers. Section seven consists of mixture of greetings and prayers.

Literature Review

Many scholars have researched on greetings in one society or the others (Akindele, 1990; Nwoye, 1993; Agyekum, 2008; Olaoye, 2013; Ajayi & Balogun, 2014; Segun, 2017). Olaoye (2013: 6-9) defines a greeting as “the exchange of expressions, pleasantries or good wishes between two people interacting for the purpose of fulfilling social relationship”. Smith (2027: 75) explains; “...greetings reveal much more about Yorùbá cultural values and what the people value about their culture. Not only are they a vital mode of communication, they are also a vital storehouse of cultural information and serve as effective agents of socialization”. Greetings are essential ingredients in Yorùbá culture. Yorùbá do not joke with greetings. They frown at anybody who does not know how to greet. A poem in Ibikunle (1969: 47) reads thus;

1. ...ewùrè tó wọlé láì kágò, a di mímú so,
Àgùntàn tó wọlé láì kágò a gbokùn lórùn,
Omọlúábí tó wọlé láì kágò là n dígbá àtakò lé lóri.

... the goat that enters without greeting will be tied down.

The sheep that enters without greeting will have its neck tied with rope
A descent child that enters without greeting will be attacked.

The above extract shows the importance attached to greetings in the Yorùbá society such that anybody who fails to greet at every appropriate time will be regarded as a person who lacks home training and it is believed that such a person will be trained from outside. This is regarded as a disgrace in Yorùbá setting. Hence, Yorùbá train their children how to greet right from home so as not to be disgraced from outside (Ogunbowale, 1966: 74-88). A nonverbal action like disdainful look is melted on a person who fails to greet. Every gender has a way of greeting. For instance, males prostrate when greeting elders while females kneel down. It is an insult for a Yorùbá child to greet an elder on stand or to throw his hand to an elder for hand-shake when greeting in so doing, they train their children how to respect the elders when greeting (Daramola & Jeje, 1969: 1-7).

There are greeting forms for different periods of events, ceremonies; burial, naming, marriage, house warming, fasting, works such as blacksmithing, farming, weaving, dyeing, palm tapping, travelling and driving (Aderounmu, 1990). There are greeting forms for seasons and times; morning, afternoon, evening and night, raining and dry seasons. Although, Yorùbá pay attention to greetings, they discern from when greetings mean good will and bad will or to deride (Ogunbowale, 1966: 75). That is why Yorùbá used to say; "Pèlẹ̀ lákọ, pèlẹ̀ lábo" (sorry has positive and negative meanings). All forms of greetings have a common response which is *o o!* or *a dúpẹ̀ o* 'yes' or 'thank you'.

According to Chambers 21st Century Dictionary; "A prayer is an address to one's god, making a request or giving thanks". A prayer is also an act of petitioning or soliciting help from a supernatural or higher being. Going by these definitions, a prayer is an expression of good wishes. The common response to a greeting in Yorùbá is either *àṣẹ* or *àmín* "amen". However, a greeting is at times accompanied with prayers, yet, both are not the same. Findings reveal that there is a mix up between greetings and prayers in Yorùbá such that prayers are misrepresented as greetings as demonstrated below.

2. *Ìgbà á rọ là ñ kí akọpẹ òun nàà a sì dáhùn pé àṣẹ o,*
Aroko bódún dé là ñ kí àgbẹ̀ òun nàà a sì dáhùn pé àṣẹ o,
Àrìnpa Ògún là ñ kí Ode òun nàà a sì dáhùn Ògún á gbẹ̀ ó
Àrẹ̀dú là ñ kí aláró òun nàà a sì dáhùn pé Iyemoja á gbẹ̀ ó
Ojú gbooro/òyà yòò yà là ñ kí onídírí òun nàà a sì dáhùn pé Ìyámòpó á gbẹ̀ ó.
 (Ibikunle, 1969: 47)

The palm tapper is being greeted, the tapping rope will be strong, he also will answer amen,

The farmer is being greeted, tilling the land and making profit at the end of year, he also will answer amen,

The hunter is being greeted, Ògún, the god of iron will hunt and get prey, he also will answer amen,

The dyer is being greeted, the dye shall be deep, she also will answer Iyemoja goddess will favour you,

The hair dresser is being greeted, the lines of the hair will be wide/ the comb will comb well, she also will answer Ìyámòpó goddess will favour you.

Research Method

The data collection for the paper relies on the text and Journal materials on greetings and the thirty informants drawn from Adó-Èkìtì, Èkìtì State, Nigeria. Their ages ranged between 65 and 70 years. The reason for the selection is because Adó-Èkìtì, the Capital city of Ekiti

Be it Ọ́lára's house,
 Be it Ọ́ràngún's house,
 a known child will say hello in the house,
 the elder will excitedly say welcome.

The importance of greetings to Yorùbá makes them to say; *Eni tí kò kíni kíulé pàdánù kú òde/káàbò*. "He that does not say hello when he enters will lose welcome". The extract indicates that greetings are give and take affairs. Yorùbá do not enjoy the act of maliciousness after a fight. They regard a person that fails to greet his rival because of misunderstanding as being immature (Segun, 2018). One eulogy reads thus;

5. **Gbónyìn eulogy (a local area in Èkìtì- State)**

Omọ onígbo Gbónyìn abùrìnbùrìn lodì,
 Ẹgbà kà bá lodìlodì tìn,
 À á kára ria okun.

The child of the owner of Gbónyìn bush,
 Who regularly malice,
 When we malice for a while,
 We will later greet one another.

As earlier noted, Yorùbá greet the dead with the assumption that it is the last respect they can pay to the dead. Although they do not expect response from the dead, they believe that the dead hears them (Daramola & Jeje, 1969: 6). At times, such greetings are accompanied with prayers as exemplified below.

6. Ó dàbò o!
 Ó tún dojò àjínnde!
 Ó dàrinnàkò!
 Ó dojú àlá!
 Kí o má jòkùn, kí o má jekòlò
 Ohun tí wọn bá n jẹ lájùlè' ọrun ni kí o bá wọn jẹ.

Bye bye!
 Until resurrection day!
 Until we meet each other suddenly!
 Until we meet in the dream!
 Never eat millipede, never eat earthworm
 Eat whatever it is being eaten in heaven.

Although Yorùbá greeting forms are numerous, there is one expression common to Yorùbá greetings; *Ẹ kú* (Olowookere & Adewole, 1980: 11b). It has no English translation but its interpretation depends on the contexts. At times, the greetings may be introduced with *pèlẹ* (the meaning varies). Moreover, the greeting forms vary based on the contexts or situations. For instance, if a person falls or experiences an attack, steps on life-coal, sustains injury and undergoes unpleasant circumstances, he can be greeted; *Ẹ pèlẹ, a kò ní rí irú è mó* (Sorry, we shall not witness it any longer). The same *Ẹ pèlẹ* can also be used as a pleasantry for celebrants during marriage, birthday, house warming and graduation; this may be followed with prayers. This time, *Ẹ pèlẹ* does not mean "Sorry" as shown below.

7. E pèlẹ́, ẹ kú oriire
 E kú àjàbọ́
 E ẹ́ fí ẹ́sẹ́ ẹ re
 E ẹ́ kólé níbẹ́
- Congrats, happy good fortune
 Happy freedom,
 You will use it to secure good job
 You will build a house from it.

Yorùbá greeting forms and the responses are highlighted below.

8.	Greeting forms	Responses
a.	E kú ikàlẹ́ I meet you well	òò/ẹ́ sẹ́ ò yes/thank you
b.	E kú ijokòó Well seated	òò/ẹ́ sẹ́ ò yes/thank you
c.	E kú ináwó Happy celebration	òò/ẹ́ sẹ́ ò yes/thank you
d.	E kú òngbẹ́/ láádá Happy fasting	òò/ẹ́ sẹ́ ò yes/thank you
e.	E kú ọwọ́ lómi/ewu ọmọ Congratulations on the new baby	òò/ ẹ́ sẹ́ ò yes/thank you
f.	E kú idèlẹ́ Happy representing	òò/ẹ́ sẹ́ ò yes/thank you
g.	E kú ẹwà Happy adorning	òò/ ẹ́ sẹ́ ò yes/thank you
h.	E kú ifojúsónà Happy expectant	òò/ẹ́ sẹ́ ò yes/ you
i.	E kú ọjọ́ mẹ́ta Quite an age	òò/ẹ́ sẹ́ ò yes/thank you

A critical study of examples (8) above reveals that all the greeting forms are associated with *E kú* 'happy, good, well' plus the subject matters. What we are saying in essence is that any greeting form devoid of *E kú* "happy, good, well" or *ẹ pèlẹ́* "sorry" and does not take *òò/ ẹ́ sẹ́ ò* 'thank you' as a response in Yorùbá society should not be regarded as a greeting form but something else.

Prayer Forms in Yorùbá

Prayer is an act of communication between human beings and supernatural beings. The supernatural beings can be God, deities and the dead (Olabimtan, 1978: 36-40). At times,

Yorùbá also pray to their heads with the belief that the heads determine their destiny and whatever they ask from the heads cannot be denied of them (Rowland, 1986: 8-10). According to Olabimtan (1978), Yorùbá pray to their ancestors with the belief that they exit and they hear them if they pray to them. As their dead took care of them when they were alive, they will also take care of them and answer their requests if they call upon them. Yorùbá demonstrate their confidence in their deities by directing their prayers to them when occasions warrant it. Prayers are also referred to as *iwùre* in Yorùbá and it sometimes accomplished with sacrifices (Fabunmi, 1972: iv).

Yorùbá attach importance to prayers such that they believe that through prayers; their desires will be granted, their deities cannot disappoint them and they can achieve possibilities. In Yorùbá setting, it is the elders or people that hold the traditional chieftain titles that are given the privilege to pray except if such people are not available in the occasion. Prayers encompass all situations and it can be offered anywhere, hence, Yorùbá used to say: *Ohun tó dára n fẹ àdúrà, èyí tí kò dára n fẹ àdúrà and ibi gbogbo nilé àdúrà* (Good things require prayers, bad things also require prayers and everywhere suits prayers). When prayers are offered, there is always a response like *àmin* or *àṣẹ*. At times, the response may also be in form of prayers as shown in Yorùbá greetings below.

9.	Prayers	Responses
i.	Ìgbà á ró o The climbing rope will be strong	Àmín/ àṣẹ Amen
ii.	Ọkò á rẹfó Journey Mercies	Àmín/ àṣẹ Amen
iii.	Àroko bódún dé May you make a bumper harvest	Àmín/ àṣẹ Amen
iv.	Àrẹ dú The soaking will be black	Olókun á gbè ó Olókun goddess will favour you
v.	Ojú gbooro The line will be wide	Yemoja/ Ìyámòpó á gbè ó Yemoja/ Ìyámòpó will favour you.
vi.	Àrọ yè o May you carve and be alive	Ògun a gbè ó Ògún the god of iron will favour you.

A critical look at the examples (9) above shows that they are not different from when one prays either in the Churches, Shrines or elsewhere. Yorùbá accomplish greetings with prayers to show how religious they are and to express their goodwill towards the recipients.

Greeting Forms Accompanied with Prayers

Many at times, greetings are accomplished with prayers (Olawuyi, 2017: 59-66). Yorùbá do this to demonstrate the level of their concern for the situations that warrant such greetings. Besides, accompanying greetings with prayers is a way of demonstrating their faith in God or deities to grant them of their goodwill for the recipient of the greetings. The response to the greetings and prayers are *òò/ẹ ṣé ò* and *àṣẹ/àmin* “yes/thank you” and “amen” as exemplified below.

10.	Greetings/prayers	Response
ai.	È kú àṣẹyìndè, Happy burial ceremony	òò/ẹ ṣé ò yes/thank you

ii.	Ọjọ á jìnnà síra wọn Òkú á sanjọ May the days be far from each other The dead will compensate you	àṣẹ amen
bi.	Ẹ kú àwònù/àmúmọra Sorry for the wasted effort/endurance	òò/ẹ ṣé ò yes/thanks
ii.	A kò ní rí irú bèè mó May we not witness such again	àṣẹ amen
ci.	Ẹ kú ináwó ìgbéyàwo Happy wedding celebration.	òò/ẹ ṣé ò yes/thank you
ii.	Ẹ̀yìn iyàwó kò ní mẹnì Orókún ọko. Kò ní pẹhọ The wife will not be barren The husband will not be sterile	àṣẹ amen
di.	Ẹ kú oríire/congratulations Happy good fortune	òò/ẹ ṣé ò yes/thank you
ii.	Oríire ọ̀hún á kalé The fortune will last	àṣẹ amen
ei.	Ẹ kú wàhálà/òpò Sorry for the trouble	òò/ẹ ṣé ò yes/thank you
ii.	Ọlórún á bá a yín wá a rí. May God discover him for you	àṣẹ amen
fi.	Ẹ kú ètò ilú Happy managing/coordinating the town affairs	òò/ọba n kí ẹ yes/the king is greeting you
ii.	Ẹbọ á fín The sacrifice will be accepted	àṣẹ amen

A critical examination of examples 10 (aii, bii, cii, dii, eii, fii) above shows that they are purely prayers. Although they are accompanied with greetings as reflected in examples 10(ai, bi, ci, di, ei, fi), the response *àṣẹ* ‘amen’ indicates that only prayers can receive such a response. For instance, example 10 (aii) is a prayer to celebrate with a family that has buried its aged one for spending a lot of money on the burial ceremony. Example 10 (bii) is a prayer of condolence to comfort the bereaved and to enhance his faith in God to stop the sudden death in the family of the victim. Examples 10 (cii) is a prayer of fruitfulness for the couples, while example 10 (dii) is an expression of sharing from the joy of the celebrant and a prayer for a lasting fortune for the fortunate person. Example 10 (eii) is a prayer to comfort a person that loses either a property or a relative for God’s intervention to recover the lost property. Example 10 (f) is an expression to appreciate the efforts of the chiefs in managing the affairs of their community and to pray that gods should accept the sacrifice made as a part of effort to move the community

forward. Considering the contents and the responses of the prayers and greetings in the examples above, it is glaring that prayers and greetings are not the same thing although they are complementing each other.

Mixture of Greetings and Prayers in Yoruba Greeting Forms

There is a mixture between greetings and prayers in Yorùbá setting. This has made prayers to be misrepresented for greetings (Ibikunle, 1969). If one does not study the contents of the greetings in Yorùbá society vividly, one can think that prayers are truly greeting forms. Abiodun (2006) is of the opinion that prayers form the bulk of the greeting forms; there are greetings in prayer forms. What Abiodun is saying is that prayers can be used as greetings. But a look at some of the examples cited by Abiodun (ibid.) as exemplified below, shows that although greetings and prayers go simultaneously, they are distinct.

- 11a. Greeting: *Ẹ kú ìdura*
 Prayers: *Ìsọkalẹ̀ ànḡfàní*
Àfòṅ á gbó kò tó wò
A ó gbó ohùn iyá, a ó gbó ohùn ọmọ
Tibi tire lẹ́ ó ò bí o.
- b. Greeting: *Bárikà, ẹ kú ewu ọmọ*
 Prayers: *Olúwa yóò dá ọmọ sí*
Olúwa yóò wò ó
Yóò lówòọ̀ rere lẹ́yìn
Yóò sọmọ kalẹ̀
Olórun a sọmọ ní Bántálẹ̀

Following examples (11) above, the first response of the recipient will be *ẹ sẹ́ o/òò* ‘thanks/yes’, the next response will be *àşẹ/àmin* ‘amen’. Since parts of the features of a greeting are *là n kí* “we are greeting” and *òun náà a sì dáhùn* “he also will respond”, lack of proper study of examples (11) and (12) below may make one to assume that they are greetings because they go simultaneously with greetings and contain the above mentioned features as demonstrated below.

12 Greetings

- | | Responses |
|---|---|
| a. Àroko bódúndé là n kí àgbè
The farmer is being greeted, tilling the ground and making profit at the end of the year, | Òun náà a sì dáhùn pé àşẹ ò
he also will answer amen, |
| b. Ìgbà á rọ là n kí akòpẹ
The palm tapper is being greeted, the tapping rope will be strong, | òun náà a sì dáhùn pé àşẹ o,
he also will answer amen, |
| c. Àrìnpa Ògún là n kí Ọḡ
The hunter is being greeted, Ògún, the god of iron will hunt and get prey, | òun náà a sì dáhùn Ògún á gbè ó
he also will Ògún, the god of iron
will favour you |
| d. Àrẹ́dú là n kí aláró
The dyer is being greeted,
the dye shall be deep | òun náà a sì dáhùn pé Iyemoja á gbè ó
she also will answer Iyemoja goddess
will favour you, |
| e. Ojú gbooro/òòyà yóò yà là n kí onídirí
The hair dresser is being greeted,
the lines of the hair will be wide/
the comb will comb well, | òun náà a sì dáhùn pé Olókun á gbè ó
she also will answer Olókun goddess
will favour you. |

- f. Àtàjèrè ojà **là n kí** onísòwò
 The trader is being greeted
 you will sell and make profit
- òun náà a sì dáhùn pé Ìyámòpó á gbè ó
 she also will answer Ìyámòpó goddess
 will favour you.
 (Ibikunle, 1969: 48)

The highlighted clause **là n kí** “is being greeted” in the examples (12) above shows that although the examples above are prayers, the use of the clause, *là n kí* “is being greeted” has reduced them to greetings. But the responses like *Òun náà a sì dáhùn pé àşẹ o* “he also will answer amen” portray the examples as prayers. For instance, the responses of the recipients contain the prayer terminologies; *àşẹ/àmin* “amen”, *Ògún á gbè ó* “Ògún, the god of iron will favour you”, *Iyemoja á gbè ó* “Iyemoja goddess will favour you”, *Olókun á gbè ó* “Olókun goddess will favour you”, *Ìyámòpó á gbè ó* “Ìyámòpó goddess will favour you”. The gods and goddesses mentioned in examples (11) show the belief of the devotees (the recipients) in these gods to bless the people that are praying for them. The point we are trying to push forward in this paper is that although, examples (12) above are purely prayers, they are misrepresented for greetings because they have been in use as greetings over the years.

Conclusion

The paper examines prayers in Yorùbá greetings. The paper explains that there used to be a mix-up between prayers and greetings. This has made prayers to be misrepresented for greetings. This might be because the mix up has been in use over the years because of this, the society uses them unconsciously and also overlooks the fact that examples (10) are prayers and they ought not to have been accompanied with the greeting terminology *là n kí* “is being greeted”. The paper suggests that prayers should not be taken for greetings because their responses differ.

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