

LANGUAGE USE IN CONDOLENCES AMONG YORÙBÁ OF SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Condolence messages published in the Nigerian national dailies and reasons for the different greetings that were not considered in the previous studies are addressed in this paper. The data for this study included data drawn from the Holy Bible, the Holy Quran, the Nigerian national dailies, books written by some Yoruba authors, the WhatsApp social media, participant observation and tape recording of many events of language use in some homes of people who have at one time or the other suffered bereavement. The findings show that some condolences require elocution, patience, circumlocution, allusive analogies and allusive anecdotes; some attract merry-making and some are mere rhetoric. The import of the paper is that while some condolences are memories tinged with sadness others are either rhetoric or an invitation to wining and dining.

Keywords: Condolence, culture, ethnicity, greetings, language-use.

1. Introduction

Turnbull (2010, p.301) defines condolence as "sympathy that one feels for somebody when a person in that person's family or the person the family knows well has died". With reference to condolence among the Yorùbá of Southwest Nigeria, a number of research studies have been carried out. The available studies include Daramola and Jeje (1975), Adeoye (1979), Amoko (1994) and Bello (2002). Daramola and Jeje (1975) and Adeoye (1979) discuss the different types of death as well as the different types of burials. Amoko (1994) examines people's attitude towards death, the concept of life after death and sympathy conveyance modes. He also looks at bereavement as a major social change in the family system as well as its stages of occurrence. Bello (2002) highlights the various ethnographies of communication involved in the language of condolence and avers that the expression of sympathy is a social phenomenon. She argues further that, although the expressions found in Yorùbá condolence are culturally based, they are also linguistically and socially rooted. According to her, certain social variables can serve as bases for different interpretations of utterances in condolences. However, none of them have worked on language use in condolences published in the Nigerian dailies. None also have worked on the reasons for the different greeting forms in relation to the different categories of deaths. These two areas that

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have not been considered in the existing studies will be our focal points in our present research work.

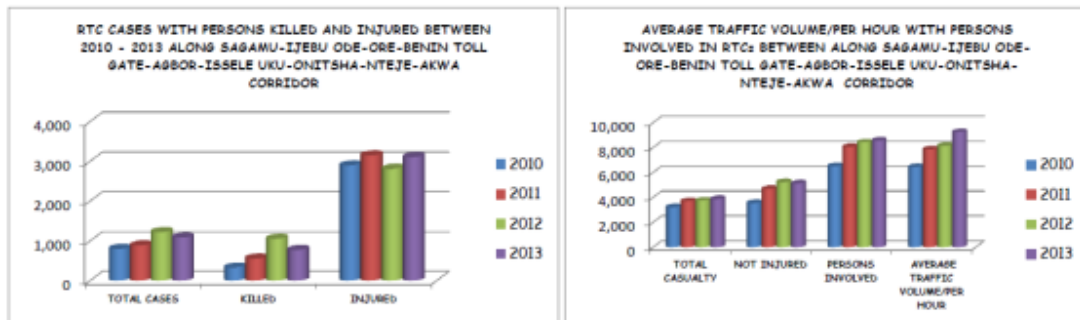
1.1 Disasters or Causes of Condolence

Turnbull (2010, p.413) defines a disaster as “an unexpected event, such as a very bad accident, a flood or a fire that kills a lot of people or causes a lot of damage”. Disasters are global phenomena and several cases of such have been reported and some of such cases have resulted to deaths or loss of persons and property (Palmer & Colton, 1965). It has been argued that disasters are either natural or man-made. Natural disasters occur all over the world and lots have been reported about them on the television, radio, and national dailies throughout the world. The disasters range from earthquake, typhoon, cyclone and tsunami to mention a few. For example, in January 12, 2010, there was a report of earthquake in Haiti which claimed the lives of 200,000 people with 2 million homeless while 3 million were in need of aids (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010>). India was not left out in 2008 as cyclone hit the North Indian Ocean where official figures showed that 84,500 people died and 53,800 people were missing (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008>). Earlier, a similar case had been reported in the country in December 26, 2004, where an estimated number of 200,000 to 310,000 people along the shores of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, South India and Thailand lost their lives (BBC News 25 January, 2005). Tohoku earthquake and Tsunami in 2011 were yet another disastrous events where 15,894 people were reported dead with 6,152 injured and 2,562 people missing. In the same event, no fewer than 127,000 buildings collapsed completely while over 272,000 buildings were half destroyed (National Police Agency of Japan, 2017). In Nigeria, one can vividly recall the Ògùnpa flood in 1980 and 1981 where several people lost their lives and property worth millions of naira were destroyed. In recent times, floods in Benue, Kogi, Adamawa and Rivers have claimed several lives and property as well (This Day, September 10, 2017).

Some other categories of disasters are human- made disasters. The human-made disasters are as a result of discord, disagreement and clashes of interest and a staggering number of people have been killed. For example, between 1914 and 1918, during the First World War, 20 million deaths were recorded while 21 million people were injured (Smith, 2000; Watson, 2004). Between 1939 and 1945, during the Second World War also, over 50 million people were reportedly killed while a reasonable number of people were injured (Overy, 1995; Collier, 2003). We can also recall that civil wars have been reported in many countries of the world which include Nigeria, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Rwanda, Sudan and Somalia to mention but a few (Dùnmóyè, 2010; Okotie, 2010). The wars had claimed several lives and some countries and human beings have not recovered from their losses till date (Òbásanjó, 1999; Siollun, 2009; Alabi-Isama, 2013). Attacks that have been unleashed by herdsmen on Nigerians where several lives have been lost have continually been a source of concern to the living not only in the states where such killings have occurred, but in other parts of Nigeria and outside Nigeria (see Premium Times, January 12, 2018). Another menace that has claimed the lives of so many people is traceable to road, air and sea accidents. For example, the information in the Table below was obtained from the search engine of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) of Nigeria to confirm that a reasonable number of people have been killed through road accidents along Lagos-Ibadan Expressway alone in Nigeria between 2010 and 2013.

1. OJÓTA-MÒWÉ-SÀGÀMÙ-ÒGÈRÈ-OLÚYÒLÉ-ÌBÀDÀN CORRIDOR

| Year | Fatal | Serious | Minor | Total Cases | Killed | Injured | Total Casualty | Not Injured | Persons Involved | Average Traffic Volume/Per Hour | Traffic Count Point/Route |
|------|-------|---------|-------|-------------|--------|---------|----------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2010 | 185 | 510 | 122 | 798 | 330 | 2,898 | 3,228 | 3,548 | 6,505 | 6,435 | MOSOGAR/SPL-BEN |
| 2011 | 251 | 472 | 154 | 884 | 556 | 3,149 | 3,701 | 4,684 | 8,060 | 7,867 | MOSOGAR/SPL-BEN |
| 2012 | 388 | 630 | 253 | 1,222 | 1,053 | 2,809 | 3,762 | 5,227 | 8,429 | 8,145 | MOSOGAR/SPL-BEN |
| 2013 | 356 | 572 | 161 | 1,085 | 769 | 3,103 | 3,872 | 5,127 | 8,563 | 9,257 | MOSOGAR/SPL-BEN |



Some other causes of death include fire outbreaks, collapsed buildings, assassinations, stealing, political crises, terrorism, kidnapping, famine and illnesses. In fact, there have been cases where children would die and their parents would still be alive. This is the reason why the Yorùbá people say, "Ọmọ ò láyò lé, ẹniọmọ sin ló bímọ." (A child is not an indispensable legacy; only a parent that is survived by a child is worthy of being referred to as a parent/owner of a child). It can be observed that deaths are of different categories and different members of a family can be targets. There have been situations where some say "Ẹní kàn ló mọ" (He who knows it feels it) or "Ta ló mẹnì tó kàn?" (Who knows the next victim(s)?). In fact, in view of the calamities and different types of illnesses that are prevalent or common in the world today as well as from time immemorial, it is plausible to say that the days of sorrow are more than the days of joy. This fact is, in fact, corroborated in the scripture which says, "Making the best use of your time, because the days are evil" (see Ephesians 5:16). However, instances of deaths of relations have been and are still the bases for different categories of condolences. The question that is addressed in this paper is: how are condolences handled among the Yorùbá people and in the Nigerian National dailies?

2. Some Previous Studies

One area of interest to our present study on condolences among the Yorùbá of Southwest Nigeria is culture. Some of the researchers that have worked on culture include Adetugbo (1967), Bock (1968, p.212-213), Bauman and Sherzer (1975 p.95) and Andarh (1982 p.4 -5). For example, Bock (1968 p.212-.213) argues that culture is a set of inter-related, partially arbitrary expectations, understandings, beliefs or agreements shared by the members of some social groups which can be shown to influence (or to have influenced) the behaviour of some members of that group. For Bauman and Sherzer (1975 p.95), the verbal aspect of culture is concerned with the cultural rules by which the social use and non-use of a language is organized. According to Andarh (1982 p.4-5) also, culture embraces all the material and non-material expressions of a people as well as the process with which the expressions are communicated. The author submits further that culture has to do with all the social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic and technological expressions and processes of a

people usually ethnically and/or nationally or supra-nationally related and usually living in a geographically contiguous area. According to the writer, culture will involve what they pass on to their successors and how they are passed on. We can say that, one of such things that has to do with culture and which is passed on from one generation to another is language use in condolences when a person is bereaved.

Furthermore, Insel (1976) sees bereavement as the interplay between experiencing of death and the meaning of the relationship with the deceased which determines, in most cases, the outcome of bereavement. Carr (1982) claims that bereavement is characterized by loss which goes beyond the death of a significant person. Carr (ibid) argues further that people may be bereaved by other losses which include status, role, separation and amputation. Amókọ (1994 p.23) too submits that response to bereavement can be culturally or individually defined and that cultural response to bereavement has to do with mourning while grief is the individual response to it. So, to Amókọ (ibid) as well as other researchers on bereavements, grief and mourning can be said to be in the domains of bereavement. In this research work, we are interested in the verbal aspect of culture with reference to language use in condolences among the Yorùbá of Southwest Nigeria. Although, Bello (2002 p.406) defines condolence as a form of greeting that transcends the usual primary levels of the general greeting types, existing studies which include Daramola and Jeje (1975), Adeoye (1979), Amókọ (1994) and Bello (2002) have only focused on verbal aspect of language use in condolences in relation to loss of relatives and not on language use in condolences published in the Nigerian National dailies among the Yorùbá of Southwest Nigeria. The sociolinguistics of some condolences published in the Nigerian national dailies is considered in this paper.

In addition, two issues raised in the studies that are of interest to the present work include news breaking and discussion concerning the dead. Amoko (1994 p.20-21) reports that in most cases, elderly people are engaged in breaking the news of death because of their maturity and life experience in the society and that the news is not broken suddenly as this may be disastrous on the health of the survivor(s). He argues also that people are always cautious about breaking news of death and the method adopted may depend on the prevailing circumstances in the home of the bereaved. According to Amoko (ibid), news breaking is accompanied by crying and wailing in most cases. Two questions which Amoko (ibid) should address are: are the elderly people male or female? Is it true that, in many cases, the elderly that are engaged in news breaking weep? In this paper, we will argue that the elderly people that engage in news breaking are the male ones and these elderly people are not given to emotions when they do the job of news breaking. The Yorùbá people say, "Ojú tó tirókunkò lè rọsà kó wá bà á lẹrù" meaning that such elderly people must have experienced several of such bereavements and therefore cannot be moved when the death of any kind occurs at least in the presence of the bereaved. So, what they do is that they ensure that they try their best possible to calm the bereaved during news breaking.

Similarly, Bello's (ibid) position that the Yorùbá do not talk bad of the dead, even if the dead had lived a wicked life, may be deemed as incorrect. This is because, in some cases, sentences like "Ìgbà tí ò kú, kí ló gbé ẹ?" (What was his worth during his life time?), "Àkú tunkú ẹ lónà ọrun" (To hell with him), "A dúpẹ, àlàáfia yìò ọ̀bàbáyìí tí ò sí mó" (It is well, his/her death will now bring peace to the neighbourhood) are made use of when some deaths occur though not in the house of the departed. However, two questions that are not addressed in any of the previous studies which will be considered in this present research are: (i) how do elderly male people report a bereavement to the family of the bereaved? and (ii) do the sympathizers, during visits, tell stories and if yes, what are the contents of the stories?

Cultural influence or cultural assimilation which results from cultural contact is also of interest to our present research work on language use in condolences. Some studies argue that some Yorùbá personal names that exhibit Yorùbá cultural heritage are now being modified to reflect the Christian cultural heritage and that such modifications are products of the outcome of the contact between the Yorùbá culture and Western or European culture (see Ìkòtún and Aládésanmí, 2012 p.5; Ìkòtún, 2013 p.59). For example, Ìkòtún (2013 p.59) discusses new trends in Yorùbá personal names among Yorùbá Christians and argues that the new trends are as a result of the influence of the western culture or civilization or the European churches and that name modification or name change, from the available evidence, is inevitable when there is acculturation (see also Ajíbóyè, 2009). According to the researchers, some Yorùbá Christians delete the noun phrases (NPs) of their tradition-based surnames and retain the verb phrases (VPs) as surnames because the NPs show reference to Yorùbá deities and that some Yorùbá Christians replace the tradition-based surnames with new derivations that have Christian connotations. We agree with Ajíbóyè (2009) and Ìkòtún (2013) that, with time, personal names that now serve as a mark of identity may no longer remain so because most Christian parents give such first names as Testimony, Favour, Blessings, Mercy, Goodness and All-is-well to their children while some surnames like Joshua, Enoch and Noah are preferred to Tradition-based surnames like "Ògúnwálé" (The God of Iron has come home) and "Şàngóbíyí" (The God of Thunder has given birth to this). Therefore, personal names like 'Testimony Joshua', 'Goodness Enoch' and 'All-is-well Noah' which are products of acculturation are common nowadays among some Yorùbá children of today. In our present research of language use in condolences, we will confirm whether there are instances where language use is a product of acculturation.

3. Data Collection

The data for this study were drawn from two sources. While one of the sources was formal the other was informal. The formal data comprised information drawn from the Holy Bible, the Holy Quran, the Nigerian National dailies, books written by Okediji and Okediji (1970) and Adeoye (1979) and the WhatsApp social media. We drew information from the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran because very many of the Yorùbá people are either Muslims or Christians and the two books talk about condolences. We consulted Okediji and Okediji (1970) and Adeoye (1979) because their books discussed Yorùbá traditions and customs. Information from the Nigerian national dailies was considered because condolences by some very important personalities to the families of highly prominent people whose relations have died and have served their countries or Nigeria in one way or the other are contained in such national dailies. WhatsApp data were considered necessary because various social issues including condolences that touch human lives are often discussed in the social media. The other data that were informal comprised participant observation and tape recording of many events of language use in some homes of people who have at one time or the other suffered bereavement in the Yorùbá speaking areas of Nigeria. The recording was done without the knowledge of the people around because this method is believed to guarantee natural language use that is important or essential for sociolinguistic studies of this nature.

4. Findings

Among the Yoruba people, death or occurrence of death falls into different categories: infant mortality, sudden death, death among juveniles, death among the youth and death through old age. Of all these, death attributable to old age is the only one that does not require much stress to announce. Others require a lot of patience, circumlocution and allusive analogies to break. In a situation where the deceased, especially, a youth or a middle aged person, sojourns outside his or her parents' locality, the male elders in the community or the denominational affiliations of the deceased will confer on how they will undertake the

arduous task of breaking the sad news to the immediate family of the deceased. The Yorùbá people say, “Ìbànújẹ̀ níkọ̀mọ̀ tojú òbí ẹ̀ rọ̀run” (It is deep sorrow for the parent to survive his/her child). Upon arrival in the house of the bereaved family, a representative who is gifted with the power of elocution will be selected to break the news and, in doing so, he is not just expected to go straight to announcing the demise of their beloved one. Rather, he will use allusions, engage in series of circumlocution and allusive anecdotes to drive home his message pointing to the fact that death is inevitable.

Such allusions may include, among others, “Babalawo á kú,...” (Death is no respecter of age, status or creed) and “A ò rí irú èyí rí, ...”(There is no new thing under the sky). Since the announcement of bereavement is always a bitter pill, especially deaths that have claimed young and promising ones as the members of the family of the bereaved are likely to receive the news with deep sadness, sympathizers sitting around the bereaved family always ensure that they muster the last drop of their energy to hold the bereaved from collapse from the shock. After breaking the news of the passage of the deceased, sympathizers will take turns to pray for the repose of the soul of the departed, This is after a lot of inquiries that led to the death of the deceased had been made. The prayers which are not formal or organized in nature are meant, on the one hand, to pacify the bereaved and identify with them in this time of sorrow, and, on the other, to wish the deceased a peaceful repose. Such prayers like: “Ẹ̀ kú isẹ̀hìndẹ̀, Ẹ̀ kú ará fẹ̀rakù, Ẹ̀ kú àmú mọ̀ra, Ọ̀lọ̀run kò ní sẹ̀ ní tẹ̀lé –n̄ –tẹ̀lé, Ọ̀lọ̀run yóò bá wadáwọ̀ ibidúró, etc.” are offered to the bereaved family. The prayers “Ẹ̀ kú isẹ̀hìndẹ̀”, “Ẹ̀ kú ará fẹ̀rakù” and “Ẹ̀ kú àmú mọ̀ra” are the greeting formulaic, expressed to commiserate with the family of the deceased. The prayers “Ọ̀lọ̀run kò ní sẹ̀ ní tẹ̀lé –n̄ –tẹ̀lé” and “Ọ̀lọ̀run yóò bá wadáwọ̀ ibidúró” mean may the Lord prevent further occurrence of this unfortunate incident. Other forms of prayers which may be regarded as formal and organized are those which involve selected elders who are either Christians, Muslims or traditional worshippers. These are respected members in the community where bereavement has taken place.

In Yorùbá land, occurrence of death, especially that of under-aged as already discussed above, is usually received with sadness as death is seen as the cessation of life. To corroborate this fact, a poem culled from a WhatsApp group graphically captures the attitudinal behaviour of some sympathizers with reference to the deceased. The poem is hereby reproduced below:

...When I'm dead...
 Your tears will flow
 But I won't know...
 Cry for me now instead!
 You will send flowers... 5
 But I won't see...
 Send them now instead
 You'll say words of praise...
 But I won't hear...
 Praise me now instead! 10
 You'll forget my faults,...
 But I won't know...
 Forget them now, instead!

You'll miss me then,...

But I won't feel...

15

Miss me now, instead!

You'll wish....

You could have spent more time with me,...

Spend it now instead!

You'll wish...

20

You could have spent all your money on me...

Spend now instead!

When you hear I'm gone, you'll find your way to my house to pay condolence but we haven't even spoken in years...

Please look for me now!...

25

However, this poem is mostly concerned with the death of the under-aged. During sympathizers' visits to the house of the bereaved, story-telling in the form of anecdotes and allusions is a common occurrence. The story-telling is meant to attenuate the effect of the painful shock. In this manner, cases of accidents or disasters that have claimed several lives would be told to pacify the bereaved and let the bereaved realize the fact that life is full of vicissitudes or that life is not a bed of roses. An example of such story-telling is shown below. But, our readers are enjoined to note the information in lines 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 24.

Sympathizer A: Èrú bà mí nígbà tí mogbó ohun tó sejè.

Sympathizer B: Báwanàà se gbọ níyen. Mo ti è sèsètoko dé nígbà tí mogbó iròyìnláabi òhún.

The Bereaved :Ìwòyí àná ni wọn ráńsé o.

Sympathizer A: Kí ló fakú è? Şó şàisànni?
5

The Bereaved : Ó sọ pé orí n fọun lásánni o, nígbà tí wọn sì fi má a gbe dé hospital wọn láwọnòşışé wà níyanşé lódi. Nígbà tí wọn fi má a gbekúro lọ sí taládáni, ẹpa ò bóro mó.

Sympathizer B: Ọrò ìyanşé lódi òşışé nàjíríà yì tojú sùni. Eléyì wà níyanşé lódi, tòhúnwà níyanşé lódi.10

Sympathizer C: Ohuntí wọn ní kókòóbó àwọnìjọba òhúnbọ wọn ò bọ ọ.

Sympathizer D: Ọpọ ilé iwòsànjọba òhúnnikò sí oògùn.

Sympathizer E: Táraawọn tó wà níjọba ò bá dá ilú Ọyínbó ni wọn n lọ ní tiwọn. Wọn ò bikítà nípaawọn m̀kúnù.

The Bereaved: Ori fifọ lásán mà ni o.
15

Sympathizer F: Ọrò ikú òdeoní seniní kàyéfi. Àdúgbò ibití mò n gbé, iwòyí ọsè tó kojá nièni kansùntí kò jí mó. Bée awontí wọn jọ wà ní àdúgbò wònní wọn ri tó n bá ẹnì kan sọrò lánàá. Wíwólé tó wólé àarò ojọ kejì òkú è ni wọn gbé jáde.

Sympathizer G: Séyẹn lẹ rí. Íwòyí ijẹta, ijàmbá ọkọ kansẹlẹ lónà Àkúrẹ.20
Ọmọ iyá méjì ló parẹ síbẹ.

Sympathizer H: Ẹ jòọ níbolàwọnòbí àwọnọmọ wọnyenti má a bẹrẹ?

Sympathizer I: Mo kà á nínú iwé iròyinkan.Gégé bí ohuntí àwọnoníròyìn
sọ wọn ní àwọnméjì ọhúnní àwọnòbí wọn bí.

Sympathizer J: Şé kì í sisòronlá nìyí? 25

Sympathizer C: Wọn á mọkàn ni. Kí lèyàn lè şesỌlórún tó rí gbogbo ẹ...

TRANSLATION

Sympathizer A: I was utterly shocked when I heard of what has happened

Sympathizer B: It was in the same manner that the sad news came to us. I
have just arrived from farm when the unfortunate news
was broken to me.

The Bereaved: It was around this time yesterday that the sad message was
conveyed.

Sympathizer A: What could have been responsible for his/her (untimely)
death? Was he/she indisposed before?

The Bereaved: He/ She only complained of a slight headache. But, by the
time he/she was taken to the hospital, it was discovered
that the medical personnel had gone on strike. It was
already too late by the time he/she arrived a private
hospital.

Sympathizer B: The incessant cases of strike actions by the civil servants
in Nigeria have now become worrisome. Every sector of
the civil service is now on gale of work cessation.

Sympathizer C: Government has (unfortunately) neglected what it should
be doing.

Sympathizer D: Most of government's hospitals lack drugs in their
pharmacy.

Sympathizer E: Whenever those in top positions in the government are ill,
they know how to seek medical care abroad. Those in
government are irresponsible to the yearnings of the
masses.

The bereaved: It was mere headache

Sympathizer F: The menacing manner by which death strikes these days
beats one's imagination in my neighbourhood, only last
week did a neighbour sleep at night, but was dead the
following day. Reports even had it that shortly before he
retired to bed the previous night, he was heard discussing
with another neighbour. But unfortunately his dead body
was discovered the following morning.

Sympathizer G: As if that was not enough just two days ago, two siblings from the same parents lost their lives as a result of a ghastly accident along Akure high way

Sympathizer H: You (pl), please, from where will the parents of the dead siblings start?

Sympathizer I: From a daily newspaper, it was reported that the two victims were the only children of the parent.

Sympathizer J: Is this not a terrible problem?

Sympathizer C: They just have to take heart. What can anyone do to the Omniscient God?

In some closely – knit societies, bereavement is seen as a shared commitment in which sense that a bereavement to one is regarded as a bereavement to all. This feeling is often felt in a communal society. In this way, it is believed that it is not only the immediate family of the deceased that feels the brunt of the pain, but others that are remotely connected to the deceased family too feel the scourge. So, prayers are often offered one to another everywhere members of the community in which bereavement takes place meet. For the death of under – aged youths, prayers such as “Ọlọrun á bá wadawọ ibidúró” (God will put an end to this type of calamity), “A ò ní rí irú ẹ mó” (May such an unfortunate incident never occur again), “Ọjọ á jìnà síra” (We that are still alive will live long) are usually offered and are meant to strengthen the family members of the deceased as well as the sympathizers. The form the prayers take especially among the Christian clergy is also shown below:

Pastor: Ẹ pẹlẹ. Gẹgẹ bí onígàgbọ, ẹ má bọkàn jẹ.Olúwa ló fúnni, Olúwa ló gbà á.Ká má bọkàn jẹ.Olúwa á tù yínínú.

The bereaved: Ẹ ẹun. Ẹ ò ní firú ẹ gbà o.

Pastor: Ẹ jẹ á gbàdúrà. Ní orúkọ Jèsù, OlúwaỌlọrun, a dúpẹ fúnirú àkókó bí èyí nítorí wí pé ẹ sọ pé nínú ohungbogboká má a dúpẹ. A gbàdúrà fúnidílẹ̀ yí kí ẹ bá watù wọn nínú. Kí ẹ bá wafòpínsírú àjàlù bá yí nínú idílẹ̀ yí àtilààrinjọ Ọlọrun lápapò...

TRANSLATION

Pastor: Accepting condolences. As a Christian, I charged you to take heart. It is the Lord that giveth; it is He that taketh. We should take heart. May the Lord comfort you.

The Bereaved: Thank you. May this unfortunate incident never be your portion.

Pastor: Let us pray. In Jesus name, the heavenly God, we thank you for this moment as you hare said in your words that in everything, we should give thanks. We pray for the family (of the deceased) that you comfort them and put an end to this type of calamity in the family, and the church in general...

The introductory section of that of the Muslim clergy is: Ina lilahi waina ile hirajihuna (We are from you (God)) and we will return to you (God)).

But, the death of the elderly ones, especially those whose children are well-to-do in the society, is often received with less pain. Such expressions as, ‘with gratitude to God for a life well-spent, the family of... announces the glorious exit of ...’, always greets the announcement of the death of an elderly person in the society. This implies that announcement of the demise of that category of the persons mentioned above is not often shrouded in secrecy. It is the transition of a monarch only that usually calls for meetings among the *Ọba* – in – Council or the chiefs in the domain of the deceased monarch. To honour the departed monarch, an official announcement, through the beating of the gong, may be made to the town people through the town crier a few days after the demise of the monarch. In some cases, major markets may be officially closed down or a curfew imposed to allow the priests to perform libations for the smooth passage of the dead monarch. It is important to state that the death of the elderly ones is usually greeted with light merriment pending the official announcement of the official burial and outing ceremonies of the departed soul. The information in the concluding remarks of a WhatsApp write-up titled ‘investors in deaths’ reproduced below shows the financial involvement of the burial and the outing ceremonies of the aged people especially among the *Yorùbá* of Southwest Nigeria.

...Yes. That is what so many people are, mostly in this part of the world. Sad. But very real and very wrong. The other day a patient was brought to the hospital, a 59 year old, very pale with fast breathing. Urgent tests and scan showed severe anemia and massive pleural effusion. The man needed blood ASAP with chest tube for drainage of the effusion. He was brought by his son and his brother. So when they found out that a pint of blood costs N8,000 they requested for discharge. No money to get blood was the reason. Two days later, he died. A month later, a “befitting” burial was conducted, hundreds of thousands of Naira spent. This scenario plays out regularly in our hospitals. Investors in death! Your mother or brother is sick and you live in Lagos, UK or America. If you are nice you send a paltry sum. Few days later, they call you he/she is more serious. You are busy. A week later they tell you it’s getting worse, you can’t get off duty. Then they call you he/she is dead and you enter the next available flight home to arrange for the burial. Investors in death! Your mum/dad never drove a car all their lives (despite the fact that you can afford one) and then they die and they ride in Hummer ambulance to their burial. Investors in death! Your aged parents live in ramshackle house with no amenities. Then they die and like a witch’s trick a grand house erupts in 3 months. Investors in death! Note that everything you do at burial you do for yourself. You kill cows? The dead does not partake in it. Souvenirs? They don’t take one to judgement seat. All the dancers, asoebi and cooling vans, they don’t notice. All is for your personal glory. What is a befitting burial without a befitting life? It is better to give someone a chicken in life than to bring a cow to their burial. I think we invest too much in death. Sometimes, the living lose their source of livelihood for burials. All is vanity. This is one thing our people need to change!

So, during condolence visits, prayers for the departed old persons are meant to ask God to supply the family members of the deceased with the wherewithal to entertain guests at the burial and outing ceremonies of their departed one. Some of the prayers include “*Ọlórún á pèsè*” (The Lord will provide), *Àsírí á bò*”/“*Owó tẹ ó ná kò ní wọn yín*” (You shall not lack), “*Èyìnòkú á dára*” (There shall be goodness after the burial) and “*Ọmọ rere á gbèyìngbogbowa*” (We will be survived by good/prosperous children).

Data drawn from some dailies and periodicals also showed that some condolence messages are products of acculturation and are mere rhetoric; they hardly reflect the depth of the minds of the senders. For instance, as indicated in the poem above, when the deceased was alive, little or no attention was paid to him or her. But, shortly after his or her demise,

sympathizers would start singing praises about the deceased. Such praises as ‘we miss you’, ‘we love you, but God loves more’, ‘I wish I could have spent more time with him or her’ and other praises would be rendered. In fact, during the demise of Chief Mrs HID Awolowo, some sympathizers who visited her house in her home town said the followings (see also The Nation of September 21, 2015 p.6 -7):

Mama HID Awolowo was a “heroine” and a “great mother” who would be “missed by Nigerians.” She was a “nationalist and shining example of womanhood.” Just yesterday, we heard of Mama’s departure, all of us were looking forward to her centenary celebration on this earth, but the celebration was fast forwarded. Human can plan but God will act, we lost a heroine of our nation, a great mother, a devout Christian, a nationalist and shining example of womanhood.

Some people would say there are political and biological political children of Awo and Mama, but to us, we wish she had lived on and on, but death is the end of living. Should we mourn her death? I had a feeling of loss, it happened ultimately, but I felt a sense of relief later because it will become a celestial re-union of the Mama and her husband, Papa Obafemi Awolowo because they stood with each other.

A princess has died. This woman undoubtedly, is the matriarch of the Yoruba race. She epitomized commitment, womanhood and virtue. She lived an exemplary life. Chief Akande charged the children Mrs Omotola Oyediran and Dr Tokunbo Awolowo-Dosunmu, to ensure that the attraction that makes people to always converge on the Ikenne home of the Awolowos are sustained.

But, the question is: while the deceased was alive, was she accorded the attention due to the wife of a nationalist? Did any of the sympathizers pay a visit to the woman when she was alive? In some parts of the Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups, relations of the deceased lavishly spend money on their departed ones even when they found it difficult to visit and spend money and time while the dead were still alive.

Another instance of the insincerity on the part of some mourners is that of the condolence message sent by President Buhari to the family of the late Matriarch of the Awolowo dynasty, Chief Mrs HID Awolowo who passed on at the ripe age of 99 on September 21, 2015 (see p.1, p. 5-6 of The Nigerian Tribune of September 21, 2015). In the condolence message sent to the Awolowo family, the president remarked that:

...Therefore, having reached a ripe age, we only can celebrate and thank God for her life, we are not supposed to mourn. However, we know death, no matter how old you are, is a thing of sorrow not of joy because nobody would want to lose a loved one. We have this to say that Mama had lived a fulfilled life. Mama fulfilled the saying that ‘behind a successful man, there is a successful, strong, courageous and bold woman’, I think mama was that. Mama lived an exemplary life for the Yoruba people and Nigeria. Our regret in government is that Mama did not live long enough to see the transformation that this country will undergo with the active participation of her son-in-law, with the active participation of granddaughter, so, this is something that saddens us.” Chief Awolowo died at 99 (see Footnote ⁴).

⁴Chief Mrs HID Awolowo was the wife of one of the foremost nationalists, chief Awolowo who fought for the freedom of the Nigeria Republic. He was also the first Premier of the old Western Region during whose tenure witnessed the establishment of the first television in Africa and the first stadium in Africa. It was also during his tenure as Premier that the popular Free Education Policy was introduced in the Western Region. Chief

From the excerpt above, especially from “Our regret in government” in line 8, one would think that six years after the demise of the Awolowo matriarch (2015 – 2021), there would have been a remarkable turn-around for the nation’s social, political and economic situations. But, paradoxically or conversely, since her demise, the country has been witnessing worsening socio-economic problems. For instance, the nation is deeply enmeshed in mounting foreign debts while it has been facing worsening insecurity situations master-minded by the Fulani herdsmen and the Boko Haram insurgents. Similarly, never has Nigeria witnessed soaring costs of goods and services. The Table below depicts the tragedy that has befallen the economy of the country, and which should have saddened Mama HID Awolowo (as she was fondly called) had she been alive today.

| Average exchange range between Nigerian naira and selected African and European currencies | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------|----------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| S/n | Year | Benin Republic | South Africa (Rand) | Ghana | Egypt | Morocco | US Dollar | Euros | Pounds Sterling |
| | 2015 | 1 XOF = N 0.33 | 1 rand = N 15.58 | 1 cedi = N 53 | 1 pound = N 25 | 1 Dirham = N 20 | 1 USD = N 198 | 1 EUR = N 220 | 1 GBP = N 302 |
| | 2016 | 1 XOF = N 0.43 | 1 rand = N 17.76 | 1 cedi = N 73 | 1 pound = N 27 | 1 Dirham = N 26 | 1 USD = N 256 | 1 EUR = N 285 | 1 GBP = N 345 |
| | 2017 | 1 XOF = N 0.58 | 1 rand = N 25.091 | 1 cedi = N 79 | 1 pound = N 18 | 1 Dirham = N 34 | 1 USD = N 334 | 1 EUR = N 378 | 1 GBP = N 431 |
| | 2018 | 1 XOF = N 0.65 | 1 rand = N 27.45 | 1 cedi = N 75 | 1 pound = N 20 | 1 Dirham = N 38 | 1 USD = N 361 | 1 EUR = N 427 | 1 GBP = N 482 |
| | 2019 | 1 XOF = N 0.52 | 1 rand = N 24.95 | 1 cedi = N 68 | 1 pound = N 21 | 1 Dirham = N 37 | 1 USD = N 360 | 1 EUR = N 403 | 1 GBP = N 460 |
| | 2020 | 1 XOF = N 0.66 | 1 rand = N 23.20 | 1 cedi = N 67 | 1 pound = N 24 | 1 Dirham = N 40 | 1 USD = N 380 | 1 EUR = N 434 | 1 GBP = N 488 |
| | 2021 | 1 XOF = N 0.73 | 1 rand = N 30.65 | 1 cedi = N 71 | 1 pound = N 26 | 1 Dirham = N 46 | 1 USD = N 413 | 1 EUR = N 505 | 1 GBP = N 586 |

Source: <https://www.exchangerates.org.uk/>

The essence of the information in the Table above is to show that under the present administration that claimed to “make Naira equal in value to dollar” before it assumed power in 2015, the Naira value has been unbecomingly and unseemly decreasing in value since 2015 when it assumed power (see Vanguard News of March 23, 2015, TheCable of March 23, 2015). Even as at 31/7/2021, the Naira value was unbelievably #508.00 to \$1.00 in the black market. So, as it has been shown above, between 2015 when the present government in Nigeria assumed power and now, the economic, social and political situations have been precarious and they are at variance with the transformation the president promised in 2015. In

Mrs HID Awolowo later became the grand mother-in-law to the Vice President of Nigeria, Prof. Yemi Oshinbajo (SAN).

fact, the present hash, disturbing and discouraging socio-economic and socio-political situations in Nigeria also remind us of the Punch opinion in 2016, a year after the present administration came into power. The opinion of the tabloid was titled, “Buhari: Still waiting for the real change”. Part of the Sunday Punch Editorial is reproduced below:

...However, while he inherited a disarticulated economy, Buhari has exacerbated our misfortune with his legendary prevarication and studious vagueness. The lack of a concise, proactive economy strategy, even till now, is glaring. Manufacturers are short of forex to import raw materials, leading to the closure of factories and job losses after the naira fell precipitously to the dollar over the past year. On Wednesday, \$1 exchanged for N350 in the parallel market. Trade is contracting and local producers are closing down due to the harsh business climate. The latest report by the National Bureau of statistics is so gloomy. Another negative growth rate in Q2 2016 means that the economy has entered into a recession, Buhari should make a quick start on reform. Curbing corruption is essential, but rebuilding the economy is equally critical... (see Sunday Punch of May 29, 2016 p. 16).

In addition, a summary of another review of Buhari’s performance after a year in office which was titled: “First Anniversary: Economy bleeds as Buhari dawdles” is presented below:

With no clear policy direction, critical sectors of the Nigerian economy such as power, oil and gas, manufacturing and transportation appear worse off at the end of the first year of the President Muhammadu Buhari administration (see Sunday Punch of May 29, 2016 p. 54).

We can therefore say that the position of the Holy book that “the righteous are taken away before the time of calamity” (Isaiah 57:1) is fulfilled with the death of Chief Mrs Awolowo in September 2015 barely four months after the inauguration of the Buhari administration. However, are there condolences for other losses such as property, status and separation/divorce? The answer to this question can be the focus of another paper.

5. Conclusion

We have examined condolence messages published in the Nigerian national dailies and reasons for the different greetings that were not considered in the previous studies. The data for this study included data drawn from the Holy Bible, the Holy Quran, the Nigerian national dailies, books written by some Yoruba authors, the WhatsApp social media, participant observation and tape recording of many events of language use in some homes of people who have at one time or the other suffered bereavement. We have argued that the elderly people that engage in news breaking are the male ones and these elderly people are not given to emotions when they do the job of news breaking. We have shown also that some condolences require elocution, patience, circumlocution, allusive analogies and allusive anecdotes; some attract merry-making and some are mere or empty rhetoric. The import of the paper is that while some condolences are memories tinged with sadness others are either rhetoric or an invitation to wining and dining.

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