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Forms and functions of “impossibility” expressions in Yoruba informal interactions

Abstract

This study investigates the forms and pragmatic functions of “impossibility” slangy expressions in Yoruba informal interactions, within the framework of Mey’s pragmatic acts (2001). Data comprised ten informal interactions randomly sampled from thirty interactions observed among the Yoruba in different contexts. Findings revealed “impossibility” slangy expressions in Yoruba trifurcate into function-oriented, structure-function-oriented, and danger-oriented types. They are deployed to express rejection, rejection with warning, caution, discountenance and disapproval, rebuke with dare, challenge and threat in Yoruba informal interactions. Participants in Yoruba informal interactions make recourse to facial expression (physical act), and contextual elements: shared cultural knowledge (SCK), shared experiential knowledge (SEK), voice (VCE), inference (INF) and relevance (REF) to deconstruct the pragmatic imports of impossibility expressions.

Keywords: slangy expressions, Yoruba, informal interactions, pragmatic acts, impossibility

1. Introduction

Many functionalists (i.a. Durban 1996, Allan 2003, 2010, Odeunmi 2006a, Keszkes 2014, 2010, Filani 2015) have reiterated the role of context in language use. These scholars have essentially argued that emphasis should be placed on the context of language use rather than structure, particularly as it relates to meaning. Some of the language phenomena that make valid the disciplinary

claim of these language scholars are concepts like proverbs, idiomatic expressions, slang and unconventional use of language generally whose use and meaning rely heavily on context. Thus, following these views, it suffices to conclude that human languages, beyond their sentential structures, exhibit semantic and pragmatic dynamism. The Yoruba language, mainly spoken by the Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria (although there are speakers in places like Cuba, Brazil, Republic of Benin, among others), like other languages of the world, manifests semantic and pragmatic dynamism. For instance, in the Yoruba language and culture, it is not uncommon to come across lexical items and linguistic expressions (other than idiomatic expressions and proverbs) whose semantic and pragmatic nuances cannot be figured out by mere looking at or considering their linguistic or syntactic components, but by making recourse to their contextual usage. For example, as observed by Ajayi (2016a), the word *pẹ̀lẹ̀* whose English equivalent is 'sorry', can be interpreted as feminine or masculine, depending on the context(s). While the feminine (*abo*) sense depicts the actual or conventional meaning of the word, the masculine version (*akọ*) is pragmatically deployed to give the lexical item a meaning other than the conventional one. Hence, according to the people's culture and philosophical orientation, the ability to display dexterity in the use (including being able to use and decode "loaded" expressions) of the language is a major mark of wisdom, maturity and shrewdness. This phenomenon is one major reason the language has attracted the attention of language scholars, especially sociolinguists, discourse analysts, pragmaticians and ethnographers of communication who have mainly focused on idiomatic expressions and proverbs in the language (i.a. Owomoyela 1981, Fasiku 2006, Daramola 2013, Ehineni 2016 and Bolaji & Kehinde 2017).

In this study, attention is focused on certain utterances in Yoruba informal interactions, whose pragmatic imports can best be realised by discourse participants by making recourse to certain shared contextual elements. In particular, some expressions that demonstrate impossibilities in the Yoruba worldview and culture, which are often pragmatically deployed by the people, especially contemporary youths and young adults, to convey a sense or message of warning, disapproval, threat and rejection, among others are examined. The knowledge of these expressions has implications for the learning of the language, especially among second (language) learners or speakers of the language, hence the relevance of this study. We conceive as impossibility slangy expressions in this study such unconventional, colloquial and context-adaptive utterances that express ideas that the Yoruba understand or consider logically, pragmatically and culturally impossible. The expressions are conceptualised slangy given their

unconventionality and colloquialism in line with the arguments of e.g. González (1994), Chen (2006), Adeyanju (2007). While their unconventionality places them in the same class with other context-driven genres such as proverbs and idiomatic expressions in the language, impossibility slangy expressions are essentially different from them in that, given their “colloquial” nature, they are exclusively restricted to informal contexts and interactions. They are ad hoc expressions that are contextually created by users in specific discourse situations to achieve certain pragmatic goals. These expressions, as shall be seen later in the study, are characteristically framed as *o ò ní fẹ...* ‘you won’t want to...’ expressions.

2. Slang(ifying)

Different scholars have expressed different views about slang. For instance, Eble (1996: 11) describes slang “as an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group or with a trend or fashion in society at large”. Ellis (2002) opines slang is “a variety of language used in certain contexts by means of which people express their sense of belonging to a particular group within the community which is not specific to any geographic location”. Adeyanju (2007: 267) sees slang as “substandard but widely used expressions with or without the attributes of existing words/expressions usually employed to facilitate communication in a new sense, which may last for a while in a sociolinguistic environment and later disappear if not widely accepted and used”. Adeyanju’s definition reinforces Lorimer’s (1994: 933) definition that “slangy expressions consist of new meanings attributed to existing words or wholly new words generally accepted as lying outside standard polite usage”. In the submission of Zhou and Fan (2013), slang is an informal speech style which can be made up of a single word or a group of words. It is a speech form that is characterised by informality and it is often treated with low prestige. Zhou and Fan further note that slang expressions are often identified with youths and young people in society.

As observed by Gbogi (2016), slang (or slangifying) is a phenomenon that largely characterises the language behaviour of Nigerian youths. Many of these slangy expressions are traceable to the Nigerian hip hop music genre which has become the toast of many urban youths in the country (Ugot 2009, 2014, Osisanwo 2009, Dozie & Madu 2012, Gbogi 2016 and Ajayi & Bamgbose 2018). In line with the observation of Osisanwo (2009), Gbogi (2016) opines that slang(ifying) operates as an urban lingo that is produced and consumed within

the Nigerian hip hop nation and speech community. He further posits slangifying produces a youth-ocused language whose potential meanings are hard to decode by non-group members, that is, members who do not share in the hip hop culture. One major feature of slangifying, as Gbogi (2016) observes, is its heavy reliance on context for semantic interpretation. For instance, the word *badoo* which evolved from a popular Nigerian hip hop artiste, Olamide, is such that has become a salutary term among Nigerian youths. Literally, the word has the same lexical weight as the word *bad* from which it is coined. However, in the context of social interaction among Nigerian youths, it is a term that is used to hail youthful escapades and exuberances. Gbogi further notes that even in instances that involve the use of already existing words, slangifying usually recreates the words through pun and language mixing, making them not easily understandable. This notion is further reinforced in Odogwu's (2018) conceptualization of slang. In her opinion, slangy expressions are "coded" expressions deployed in conversation. As gleaned from her submission, the codedness of slang lies in its characteristic extension of the meaning of already existing words in a speech society (Yahaya 2010). It can also involve the use of newly coined colloquial words or phrases (Chen 2006) whose meanings are only decodable by members of a particular social or age group (mainly youths). It is a symbol of sub-culture in every human society (Idiagbon-Abdullahi 2010)

From these various definitions, it suffices to describe slang (or slangifying) as an unconventional use of language, which manifests a high sense of informality and colloquialism among users, particularly among youths or young adults. This conceptualization is predicated on González's (1994) description of slang as signalling an atmosphere of informality and relaxation. This understanding of slang guides the description/categorisation of the "unconventional" expressions focused in this study.

3. Relevant studies on the contextual use of Yoruba

The Yoruba language, like other world's languages, is very dynamic and its use is highly context-sensitive. This submission is predicated on the observation that many linguistic constructs in the language are capable of attracting different semantic/pragmatic realisations, depending on contexts. That is why, as observed by Ajayi (2016a), the word *pèlé* 'sorry', for instance, can actually express remorse or being genuinely apologetic for a wrong done (by which case it would be feminine) or a form of rebuke, ridicule or mockery (by which it is considered masculine) depending on the tone and manner of rendition on the one hand, the

situation and the nature of the relation between the user of the word and the fellow so addressed with the word on the other. This vital role context plays in the use of Yoruba, perhaps, explains why the language has enjoyed much scholarly attention particularly from linguists and stylisticians. A number of studies provide the foundation upon which this study is laid. These include Ajayi (2016a, 2016b & 2018), Akanmu and Ajetunmobi (2017), Bamgbose (2016), Odeunmi (2008), Oyetade (2000). Oyetade (2000) examines the phenomenon of verbal indirection in Yoruba informal interactions. His argument, essentially, is that, participants in interactions involving the use of verbal indirection in Yoruba often make recourse to context (common ground) for meaning construction. Odeunmi (2008) engages the place of context in the deconstruction of proverbs in Ola Rotim's *God's are not to blame*. With the deployment of Mey's pragmatic acts theory (2001), Odeunmi carefully and systematically demonstrates how recourse to contextual elements contributes to the understanding of the use of Yoruba proverbs in the text. Similarly, Odeunmi (2015) explores how contextual use of greetings in Yoruba indexes being 'a cultured person' (*omolúàbí*) among the people. Ajayi (2016a) is a pragmatic exploration of the role of context in the interpretation of "abusive" commendations among Yoruba youths, particularly in south-western Nigeria. The study, among other things, reiterates the fact that some expressions that could be described as superficially abusive can underlyingly serve as commendations among Yoruba youths. Ajayi (2016b) is an application of Mey's pragmatic acts theory (2001) to analyse pain-relieving strategies in Yoruba burial songs. Ajayi notes that Yoruba Christian pain-relieving burial songs are emotional acts that interact with contextual elements like shared Yoruba cultural belief (SYCB), shared Christian religious belief (SCRB), inference (INF), relevance (REL) and metaphor (MPH) to offer antidotes to the pain of death among Yoruba Christians in Nigeria.

Bamgbose (2016) is a pragmatic investigation of the use of indirect speech acts in Yoruba informal expressions. He notes that indirectness, mainly expressed through simple sentences in Yoruba, can be used to warn, instruct, and caution individuals, among others. Akanmu and Ajetunmobi (2017) examine the historical evolution, definition, denotative and connotative realisations of some slangy expressions and argots which have, overtime, become recognised expressions among the Yoruba. These scholars argue essentially that these slang and argots serve as precursor to the emergence of new idioms and idiomatic expressions in the language. Ajayi (2018) is an ethno-pragmatic investigation of verbal indirection in Yoruba, particularly with a view to invalidating the position of Oyetade (2000) that verbal indirection is solely a face-saving mechanism in Yoruba inter-

actions. In this study, the scholar demonstrates, in concrete terms, how verbal indirection can be deployed as a face-threatening phenomenon in Yoruba, depending on context. Ayigun (2018) is a pragmatic analysis of the use of euphemisms in Yoruba language. In particular, Ayigun examines the contextual factors that influence the use and meaning of the direct and indirect acts performed by Yoruba speakers with the use of euphemistic expressions.

These scholars, as noted above, have examined the role of context in the use of the Yoruba language from different dimensions, particularly within ethnographic, cultural and pragmatic studies. In particular, they have clearly shown how the conventional and idiomatic use of Yoruba rides on context for successful communicative interactions. However, the role of context in the deconstruction of “impossibility” slangy (unconventional) expressions in informal interactions in Yoruba, whose knowledge, given their essential pragmatic functions beyond just being colloquial elements of informal discourse, is germane to the speaking, teaching and learning of the language, especially among second speakers and early learners, has conspicuously been glossed over by these scholars; perhaps due to its relative newness in the language. Essentially, while the knowledge of conventional “impossibility” or “rejection” expressions (which are non-idiomatic, figurative or formulaic) such as i.a. *lái láí* ‘never’, *rárá* ‘no’, *kò ʒeé ʒe* ‘it is impossible’ is commonplace from existing literature on use of Yoruba; practically, no scholarly attention has been given to slangy/unconventional “impossibility” expressions in the language. Thus, given the global recognition of Yoruba as one of the most researched African languages of the world (Bamgbose 2016), especially in non-native environments, the need to further reinforce the role of context in the learning of the language is highly imperative. Similarly, there is need to emphatically draw the attention of teachers of the language at all levels to the pragmatic dynamism (and perhaps functions) of some of the so-called “colloquial/informal” expressions in the language which teaching has been largely left out in the pedagogical scope of the teaching of the language and culture. Thus, with a study of this nature, some of the contextual dynamics/issues revolving round achieving meaningful and purposeful intercultural communication in Yoruba, arising from indirectness and unconventional use of the language, particularly among second speakers/learners who are only familiar with the conventional way of expressing rejection, warning, threat, and disapproval, among others in Yoruba are foregrounded and addressed. The study is therefore significant given its potentiality of providing a veritable reference material for the teaching of effective communication in the Yoruba language and culture.

4. Theoretical framework: Pragmatic act theory

This study benefits essentially from Mey's pragmatic act theory (2001)¹ which is considered in pragmatics circle as an improvement on speech act theory. As evident in Fairclough (1989) and Mey (2001), for instance, the speech act theory has been heavily criticised by scholars for its perceived deficiencies which have been demonstrated in several studies, hence the emergence of pragmatic act theory. One of the commonest arguments often used to point out the deficiencies of speech act theory is its inability to take care of context, and as such, it is more oriented towards utterances' classifications rather than functions. Thus, at best, the pragmatic act theory can be described as one that systematically addresses the lapses identified in speech act theory. Fairclough (1989: 9) describes speech act theory as being “atomistic” and individual-centred. In the same vein, Mey (2001: 214) opines that speech act lacks “a theory of action”. Therefore, pragmatic act theory, unlike speech act theory, takes care of not just utterances but “action” and the situation that influence these utterances. This theory, as opined by its adherents: Fairclough (1989), Mey (2001), Odeunmi (2006a and 2008), Ajayi (2016a, 2016b, 2017 and 2018), among others, deals with how people use language within their individual limitations, situations and the “affordances” of the immediate context (Ehineni 2019). In the submission of Mey (2001), pragmatic act theory focuses on “the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as what is actually being said” (2001: 221), and central to the theory is the notion of *pragmeme* (a situated speech act that reveals how the rules of language and society interact to determine meaning, Capone (2005)).

According to Mey (2001), there are two parts to a *pragmeme* – the activity part and the textual part. The activity part focuses on the interactants, while the textual part refers to the context of language use. The interactants, operating within the confines of the activity part, communicate using different speech acts such as indirect speech acts, conversational (“dialogue”) acts, psychological

¹ Although there are other context-oriented theories like Hymes' (1974) ethnography of speaking, for instance, which could as well be deployed for a study of this nature, these theories are however considered not appropriate for this study, given their criticism which revolves round their being too ritualistic in their approach to discourse, and especially because of their exclusive “applicability to ritualized speech events including funerals, weddings and their non applicability in non-ritualized events/interactions” (Unuabonah 2016), as detailed in this study.

acts, prosodic acts, and physical acts. Similarly, in the textual part, the interactants operate within the ambit of (con)textual phenomena such as INF (inference), REF (relevance), VCE (voice), SSK (shared situation knowledge), MPH (metaphor) and M (metapragmatic joker). The interaction between these two parts, activity and textual, makes up the pragmeme. Capone (2005) provides further insights into the workings of pragmeme. He argues that pragmemes are transformations utterances go through when subjected to the forces of context. In his arguments, these transformations “reshape the original illocutionary nature of a speech or speech act by providing contextual layers of meaning or change the illocutionary value of the speech act” (Capone 2005: 1360).

The pragmatic act theory is considered apt for this study, given the fact that the “impossibility” slangy expressions considered for analysis are expressions in non ritualized interactions that carry underlying and deep contextual and cultural meanings beyond the surface level. In other words, beyond what a non action or contextual theory like speech acts can reveal, the pragmatic act theory demonstrates clearly how contextual linguistic and non-linguistic variables interact to generate meanings in interactions involving the use of “impossibility” slangy expressions, whose meaning cannot be realized by mere recourse to their wordings. However, for the purpose of this study, as a data-driven modification of Mey’s pragmatic acts (2001), we introduce the concept of SEK (shared experiential knowledge, which refers to specific experiences shared by some individuals which have influence on their interpretation of certain linguistic utterances) as part of the contextual elements that become handy in the interpretation of “impossibility” slangy expressions in Yoruba informal interactions. We also make recourse to Odebunmi’s (2006a) SCK (shared cultural knowledge, which refers to some aspects or tenets of the culture of discourse participants which are often brought to bear in utterance interpretation) in our data analysis.

5. Methodology

Data for this study were acquired through ethnographic techniques: participant and non-participant observation. The data comprised unobtrusively observed informal and casual conversations/interactions among speakers of Yoruba (with some fluency in English and Nigerian Pidgin English as well). In particular, conversations among young parents and children, co-workers, siblings and friends, in different contexts such as the home, school, workshop, and social gatherings, were specifically observed. My observations were complemented with the practical experiences and observations of my LIN 381 (Ethnography of Communication (2018/2019 Session)) students who assisted with data collection. The

students, through our class interactions, had earlier been introduced to the phenomenon of impossibility slangy expressions and their characteristic features (largely being unconventional and causing semantic (Charteris-Black 2004, Ezeifaka 2013), pragmatic, contextual or comparison tension or incongruity. This knowledge adequately guided the students' observation and identification of such expressions used around them. Observatory notes were made of the basics of the interactions sampled, after which discourses were generated around them for coherence. Drawing insights from Bernard's (1994) and deMunck and Sobo's (1998) position on gathering natural and unobtrusive data in natural environments, different interactions were initially observed in different settings, out of which thirty were considered relevant to this study. However, given their similar features, ten excerpts, generated from ten different interactions, have been randomly sampled and presented for analysis in this study, with the participants given pseudo-names for ethical consideration. All the participants in the interactions observed were between eight and forty years of age. This confirmed the fact that slangy expressions are commonly found among toddlers, youths and young adults. Data were classified based on the observed “impossibility” features in the expressions and subjected to pragmatic analysis, particularly within the purview of Mey's pragmatic acts theory. Being Yoruba, my linguistic, cultural, experiential and imaginative competence in the language was handy in data engagement.

6. Data presentation and analysis

6.1. Yoruba impossibility slangy expressions in context

For ease of data analysis in this study, we have identified three forms/types of “impossibility” utterances, all of which project evidence of co-occurrence impossibility. These form the basis of our data discussion.

6.1.1. Function-oriented impossibility expressions

Function-related impossibility expressions involve a strategic combination of items or ideas that cannot co-occur based on their functional use or relationships by a speaker in order to express rejection, denial, or abhorrence for an action or a practice. Examples are discussed in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 1. Generated from a student-lecturer interaction

Student: *E kaaro sir.*

'Good morning sir.'

Lecturer: *Booni o? Hope you are good.*

'How are you? Hope you are good.'

Student: *Ẹ wòó, mo wà pa jàre.*

'I am very fine.'

Lecturer: *Kí ló n̄ ṣẹlẹ?*

'What is happening?'

Student: *Happiness ni o...* [sighs a pack of food on A's table and asks:] *Uncle T, ẹsé èmi ni mo ni óúnjẹ yìí?*

'It is happiness. Uncle T, is this food mine?'

Lecturer: ***O ò ní fẹ fi pòò mu gààrí.***

'You won't want to use potty for gààrí consumption.'

Student: *Ah an, ẹ ẹ wà caring kankan.*

'You are not caring at all.'

Lecturer: *Iròṣ, lo wá abímo má jeun wáà.*

'No, give the instance of a parent who would not eat because s/he has children.'

Lecturer and Student: [Laugh]

In excerpt 1, the impossibility expression (1) *O ò ní fẹ fi pòò mu gààrí* 'you won't want to use potty for gaari consumption' signals/practs rejection/denial. In the interaction, the student asks the lecturer friend if she could eat the food placed on the lecturer's table. In his response, rather than rejecting the request directly, the lecturer chooses to employ the expression *O ò ní fẹ fi pòò mu gààrí* 'you won't want to use potty to drink gààrí' to convey his message. The lecturer (a young Yoruba man in his mid 30s), operating within the ambit of the shared cultural knowledge (SCK) among the Yoruba, orientates towards the cultural practice among the people in his response to the request of the student, knowing the student, who is also Yoruba, shares same and as such would understand the message. In the Yoruba socio-cultural system, *pòò* 'potty' and *gààrí* 'a very popular kind of food/snack among the Yoruba made from cassava, often mixed with water for consumption' are concepts whose uses are well defined by the cultural practices of the people. *Pòò* 'potty', for instance, is an item for defecation (especially among little children) associated with the toilet, and as such it is considered indecent, unhealthy, disgusting, and ultimately against the norm among the people to use it for food consumption. *Gààrí*, as mentioned earlier, is a snack-like food among the people. Typically, given their incompatibility in use, the former would not be found with the latter, especially as it relates to the food consumption practice/culture of the people. Thus, their (co-)occurrence in the statement of the lecturer is a deliberate metaphoric reinforcement of the oppositeness of the

two cultural domains where *pòò* and *gaàrí* feature in the Yoruba cultural practices to reject the request of the student. The pragmatic weight of this utterance in the interaction is reinforced with the physiognomic act: a “serious look” on the face of the lecturer which accompanies his statement.

Drawing inference (INF) from the impossibility of the Yoruba to use *póò* ‘potty’ for *gaàrí* consumption, coupled with the ‘serious look on the face of the lecturer, the student understands the statement to mean an indirect rejection of her request. This is evident in her response *áh an, ẹ ẹ wà caring kankan* ‘you are not caring at all’. The statement of the lecturer, although linguistically ‘irrelevant’ to the request made by the student, is pragmatically relevant (REL) as it is understood by the utterer, the lecturer and the hearer, the student, as ‘no or rejection’ to the student’s request.

Excerpt 2. Generated from a mother-son interaction

Son: *Mummy, sẹ mo lè lo omi inú bucket yẹn?*

‘Mummy, can I take my bath with the water in the bucket?’

Mother: *O ò ní fẹ fi ata gúngún lé tìròò.*

‘You won’t want to use ground pepper for eyelid beautification.’

Son: *Oh oh! Mummy ẹ ẹ dẹ jọọ.*

‘Mummy, please now.’

Mother: *O ti kúrò níwájú mi; sẹ èmi ní mo má a pọn omi iwè fún ẹ ní!*

‘Have you left my presence; would I be the one to fetch bath water for you!/Get out of my presence, should I be the one to fetch water for you?’

Son: [Leaves his mother’s presence grudgingly].

In excerpt 2, a mother-son interaction, the mother (who, from my estimation/observation, is in her thirties) employs the use of *O ò ní fẹ fi ata gúngún lé tìròò* ‘you won’t want to use ground pepper for eyelid beautification’ to pass a message of rejection and warning to her son. In the interaction, the son makes a request to the mother on whether he could take his bath with the bucket of water fetched by her. In her response, rather than making direct utterances such as *rárá, o ò lé lò ó* ‘no; you cannot’; or *má lò ó* ‘don’t use it, among others, the mother deploys the impossibility statement *O ò ní fẹ fi ata gúngún lé tìròò* which indirectly projects the metaphor ‘you will regret your action’ to convey her message of rejection, threat and warning to the son. In this instance, the mother rides on three contextual features: SCK, SEK and VCE in relation to the physiognomical act, a stern facial look, to construct the meaning of her impossibility utterance. The mother and the son are Yoruba who expectedly, as defined by their shared cultural

knowledge, know *ata gúngún* 'ground pepper' and *tíròd* 'eye pencil (for facial/eyelid beautification)' are incompatible items in the "business" of eye/facial beautification. For instance, they both know that 'ground pepper' is a culinary item in the Yoruba cultural practices and 'eye pencil' is an item for the beautification of the eyelid or face, especially among young girls and ladies. As such, from their shared experiential knowledge, they both know the pepper, given its physiological components, hurts the eyes and makes them produce discomfort tears (when/if the former comes in contact with the latter). This unlikely relationship between the two provides the ideology behind the Yoruba proverbial statement which rides on metaphor: *kíkéré l'ata á kéré tí fi ñ ṣ'òkọ ojú* which translates as 'notwithstanding the size of the pepper, it always constitutes a menace to the eyes when they both come in contact'. Thus, it would be a foolish attempt on the part of a right-thinking fellow to attempt deploying pepper for facial beautification, especially on the eyelid as expressed in the statement of the mother in the excerpt above. The son, in particular, orientating to contextual features of SCK, SEK and INF, infers the message the mother is passing across, both as a rejection and an implicit warning. In particular, he knows if he dares to go ahead and use the water in the bucket, the consequence would be likened to the unpalatable experience of any fellow who 'puts pepper in their eyes'. This understanding explains why he resorts to begging the mother (3) *Oh oh! Mummy e è dè jòdó* 'mummy, please' in a 'pleading' voice (VCE) in the next line as presented in the interaction.

Just as observed in excerpt 1, although the utterance *O ò ní fẹ́ fi ata gúngún lé tíròd* is not superficially relevant to the request of the mother, it is underlyingly relevant, particularly with the aid of contextual features such as SCK, SEK and INF. Both participants, being guided by the aforementioned contextual linguistic and non-linguistic variables, construct and deconstruct the meanings of the impossibility slangy expression used in the interaction.

6.1.2. Structure-function-oriented impossibility expressions

What makes the structure-function-oriented "impossibility" type different from the function-related "impossibility" type discussed earlier is that, while the former is strictly about items/ideas whose relationships are considered impossible strictly based on their *function*, the latter deals with items which are *structurally* similar but *functionally* dissimilar to achieve certain pragmatic goals. In other words, in this instance, we relate to objects, items or phenomena that share some sort of similarity physically but are functionally used for different purposes. Examples are discussed in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 3. A sitting-room interaction between siblings

Bisola: *Seyi, daddy is calling you o*².

Seyi: *Ohhh! Why is he calling me now!*

Bisola: *I don't know o.*

Seyi: *Daddy disturbs someone a lot.*

Bisola: *Ha! I dare you to go and say that in front of him; o ò ní fẹ́ f'èlùbọ̀ ẹ̀ powder.*

'You won't want to use èlùbọ̀ ('yam flour') to powder your face.'

Seyi: [Keeps quiet].

The interaction presented in excerpt 3 transpired between two siblings. Bisola informs Seyi their father needs her attention but she is not pleased with this message because she feels she is being disturbed. She then complains to the conveyer of the message that 'daddy disturbs someone a lot'. Bisola is surprised by this comment and retorts she dares her (Seyi) to say that before the father with the “impossibility” utterance (4) *o ò ní fẹ́ f'èlùbọ̀ ẹ̀ powder* 'you won't want to powder your face with yam flour'. Making recourse to the SCK, both Bisola and Seyi, being Yoruba, could relate to *èlùbọ̀* 'yam flour' as a powdery substance for preparing *àmàlà*, a popular food among the Yoruba people. In other words, they both could relate to the substance as an edible item and not one culturally deployed for beautification, even though it looks very much like the powder (a substance that looks very much like yam flour) used for that purpose. As a cultural practice, no sane Yoruba fellow would resort to deploying yam flour for facial beautification, even though the yam flour and the powder look very much alike. The conveyer of the message, Bisola, interprets the statement by Seyi as an insult to their father, given their shared cultural practice as Yoruba that condemns the practice of a younger fellow abusing, insulting or talking down on an elderly person. Thus, she deploys the impossibility statement to rebuke her for violating that cultural norm. She is so sure, Seyi, being a fellow who understands this cultural norm, would not dare repeat that forbidden linguistic practice in the presence of the father who would not spare her the cane and thorough beating, if she did.

Stretching the argument further, one could as well submit the participants are equally drawing on their shared experiential knowledge of how strict and intolerant the father is to such anti-*omọlúàbí* linguistic behaviour as exhibited by Seyi, hence he would deal seriously with her if it ever came to his knowledge. Seyi's

² For emphasis as is the practice among the Yoruba.

subsequent reaction (of keeping silent) shows she understands the pragmatic import of Bisola's statement as intended. Against this backdrop, it would suffice to conclude that the impossibility statement/utterance by Biola is (de)constructed, making recourse to contextual elements of SCK (seeing Seyi's linguistic practice as unacceptable among the Yoruba), SEK (given their experience of their father as being strict and his non condoning of anti-*omolúàbí* practices like the one Seyi just exhibits) and INF, by both her and her sister (Seyi) as rebuking and challenging the untoward cultural practice of Seyi in the encounter. Without making recourse to the interaction between the target utterance and the contextual variables mentioned above, it would be difficult to place the pragmatic import of the statement. The addressee, for instance, would be wondering what relevance does *èlùbó* and powder have to the subject of discourse.

Excerpt 4. A well-side interaction between two roommates

Bode: [Not comfortable with the way his roommate is handling the rope of the fetcher used from drawing water from the well].

Rọra máà ju dorọ yẹn s'ómi...k'ókùn yẹn má jà o.

'Please be care with that rope... so that it does not drop in the well'

Tayo [Laughs]: *Tó bá já, sèbí a lè r'àmí.*

'If it does (drop in the well), we will buy a new one'.

Bode: ***O ò ní fẹ fi spaghetti fa'mi lódò*** [with a warning look].

'You won't want to use spaghetti to draw water from the well.'

Tayo: Don't worry, I will be careful.

The interaction presented as excerpt 4 took place between two friends staying in the same apartment. Bode, the first speaker here, is not comfortable with the "careless" manner Tayo, his friend and roommate, is handling the rope tied to the fetcher with which water is being drawn from the well. He then calls his attention to it. In his response, Tayo is of the opinion that if anything goes wrong with the rope (or by extension, the fetcher), they would buy a new one. Bode finds this response awkwardly unacceptable and, with a warning facial look (physiognomical act) has to quickly send a message of warning and caution to him to let him know he would not be a party to buying a new rope nor a fetcher if anything happened to them by virtue of his "carelessness". This message is captured in the impossibility statement (5) *O ò ní fẹ fi spaghetti fa'mi lódò* 'you won't want to use spaghetti to draw water from the well'.

Riding on contextual element of SEK, both Bode and Tayo could relate to spaghetti, a type of pasta (made with flour, water and sometimes egg which is cooked and

usually served with sauce) as an edible item or substance. Similarly, they both understand how soft, fragile, and rope-like spaghetti becomes, especially after cooking, hence the impossibility of using it as a rope to be tied to a fetcher to draw water from the well. And essentially, they both know, although spaghetti has the look or shape of a rope (after cooking), it does not measure up to the length, thickness and firmness of a rope; hence it cannot perform the same function as a rope. Against this shared experiential knowledge, Bode deliberately deploys the impossibility utterance in the excerpt above with the understanding that Tayo, who equally shares the same experiential knowledge of the impossibility of using spaghetti as rope, particularly for fetching water, would interpret it as signalling warning and caution. From the response of Tayo, it is quite evident, he too, deploying INF, in addition to SEK (which clearly demonstrates the impossibility of deploying spaghetti as a tool for fetching water from the well as known to both participants), and Bode's uncomplimentary facial expression, deconstructs Bode's statement as one signalling warning and caution, as evident in his response 'Don't worry, I will be careful'. He must have understood the statement of Bode as such that suggests he (Tayo) would be solely responsible for replacing the fetcher and the rope if anything should happen to them, hence his promise to be careful.

Excerpt 5. A room chat between two students

Toyin: *Ronke, I like that Bayo guy so much, I think I am going to ask him out oo.*

Ronke [Apparently shocked by Toyin's statement]: *Are you sick or something, you want to ask a man out! Go and ask him out... Nìgbà tóò ní fẹ́ f'ẹja kíká ẹ̀ bangle* [with a frantic look].

'When you won't want to use smoked curved fish as bangle.'

Toyin: [Keeps silent].

In excerpt 5 above, Toyin calls Ronke's attention to the fact that she is developing feelings for a young man whose name is Bayo. She does not stop at that, she concludes she is going to ask him out. Given the shared cultural background of the duo, Ronke considers the idea as a wrong one and as such should not be pursued. She actually condemns the idea with the impossibility statement (6) *Nìgbà tóò ní fẹ́ f'ẹja kíká ẹ̀ bangles* 'when you won't want to use smoked curved fish as bangle' with a frantic look. Operating within the ambit of their shared cultural knowledge (as Yoruba), both of them understand the impropriety of a lady asking a man out, as what is culturally acceptable is that a man should be the one to woo a lady. In most cases, ladies who flout this norm are seen as uncul-

tured, weird, and shameless. This practice points to the patriarchal nature of the Yoruba society. Drawing on this shared cultural knowledge, Ronke considers Toyin's proposed move as unacceptable and as such warns/cautions her against it with the impossibility statement observed in the interaction. Besides, their shared experiential knowledge suggests they both are aware of how practically impossible it is for anyone to attempt using smoked curved fish (which are often dry) as bangle, even though both of them have the same shape. They both know that, beside the fact that using smoked curved fish as a bangle is not fashionable, such an attempt would result in the fish breaking into pieces (from its dryness). Obviously from her reaction, Toyin infers Ronke's impossibility utterance as a cautionary warning against her intended action. However, to scholars interested in humour, for instance, such an utterance as this might not be appreciated beyond its humorous nature, following Attardo's (1994) incongruity concept of humour. But of course, the participants in this excerpt, especially Ronke, do not intend to invoke laughter in Toyin, and that understanding is demonstrated through Toyin's response.

Excerpt 6. A casual road-side interaction between two friends

Addy: *Bro, how far now?*

'Brother, how are you?'

Banny: *I dey o.*

'I am okay.'

[A military man passes by.]

Banny: [Raises his hand in saluting the military man] *My ògá.*

'My boss.'

Military man: *Bro, how you dey?* [walks away]

'Brother, how are you?'

Anny: *Bro, shey you know say I feel like slapping that soldier.*

'Do you know I feel like slapping that soldier.'

Banny: [Laughs] *Slap! Nígba t'ó ò ní fẹ́ fi òpó iná tayín...wòó, you go suffer.*

'When you won't want to use an electricity pole as toothpick, see you will suffer'

Anny: *Nothing fit happen jòf.*

'Nothing will happen, please.'

Banny: *Okay o, go try am.*

'Okay, go and try it.'

Anny and Banny: [Laugh].

The two speakers, Anny and Banny, in excerpt 6 above were having a casual discussion by the roadside while a military man known to Banny passed by.

After the salutary interaction between Banny and the military man, Anny comments to Banny that he feels like slapping the military man, perhaps as a jocular interjection in the interaction. The interjectory comment sounds ridiculous but funny to Banny who must be wondering why Anny would conceive such an idea. He then warns him not to try carrying out his thought/wish with the impossibility utterance (7) *Nìgbà tòò ní fẹ́ fi òpó iná tayín* ‘when you won’t want to use an electricity pole as toothpick’. Given their shared situational knowledge (SSK), both speakers Anny and Banny understand the structural and functional differences between the electricity pole and the toothpick, even though both items are made from the wood. Structurally, an electricity pole, for instance, is usually long in size, thick, and heavy in weight (and more often than not, it is usually carried by two or three people whenever it is going to be erected, as it is not an object that can possibly be handled or carried by a single individual), while a toothpick is a small thin pointed stick of wood that is very light in weight.

Functionally, while the electricity pole serves as an object with which wires are connected to a source of power for electrification, the toothpick is mainly used to pick food dirt and residue stuck between the teeth. Thus, given their structural and functional differences, one cannot be used in place of the other. It is therefore an impossible task to attempt to deploy the electricity pole for tooth picking. Banny chooses to resort to the use of this “impossibility” utterance to warn Anny against his “intention”, because given their (Anny and Banny) SSK of how soldiers are known to be brutal, “inhuman” and deadly in dealing with perceived “ruthless” or erring civilians, he expected Anny would draw the inference (INF) the statement was expressing warning and caution. Not even the smiley facial looks on Banny could veil the weight of the warning inherent in the utterance. To Banny, slapping a military man, especially by a “bloody”³ civilian like Anny, would attract unimaginable beating and ruthless treatment from him. The message, as intended, is understood by Anny as such that warns or cautions him against his imagined action which is certain to come with grave consequences.

6.1.3. Danger-oriented “impossibility” expressions

In this category, we deal with those expressions that emphasise what the Yoruba would not consider possible actions based on the fear that such might attract dangerous or serious consequences. The striking difference between this type of impossibility and the two other forms earlier identified, which are most times

³ It is a common practice among uniformed men representing law enforcement agencies such as the army and police to refer to civilians as “bloody civilians” in Nigeria.

predicated on the notion of fear, is that it is more around actions or practices considered not just fearsome but also dangerous. Besides, this particular form, unlike the first two, does not involve drawing an association or link between two or more (un)related items. These are discussed in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 7. An interaction between a boss and an apprentice in a mechanic workshop

(rejection/warning)

Boss: *Mutiu, sáré wá lọ bámi ra pure water wá* [gives him 100 naira for a bag of pure water])
 'Mutiu, quickly go and buy some table water for me.'

Mutiu: *Oga, sé kí n mú shenji tó kù ní?*
 'Boss/Sir, should I keep the balance?'

Boss: *Mú kíní! Mun ùn, nígbàtí o ò ní fẹ gbatégùn lóríí transformer* [in a raised voice].
 'Take what! Keep it, when you won't want to relax on the transformer.'

Mutiu: [Leaves his boss disappointedly].

The interaction in excerpt 7 took place in a mechanic workshop between a boss and one of his apprentices. The boss calls on him to help buy some sachet of table water (called pure water in the Nigerian context). The young man enquires if he could keep the change of the money he is given after he might have bought the sachet water. The request is quickly declined by his boss with the impossibility statement (8) *nígbàtí o ò ní fẹ gbatégùn lóríí transformer* 'when you won't want to relax on the transformer' with a *raised and firm voice*. The boss deploys this statement to decline/reject the request of the apprentice, knowing, given their shared situational knowledge about the sensitiveness of the transformer; the apprentice would interpret it accordingly. Every Nigerian, including the boss and the apprentice, knows the transformer, being an apparatus for reducing or increasing the voltage of an alternating current, is highly electrified and as such should not be played/toyed with let alone being seen as an object for relaxation. This shared knowledge, for instance, is what results in the coinage of another interesting version of this "impossibility statement" *O ò ní fẹ hug transformer* 'you won't want to hug the transformer' often interchangeably used with the one in the excerpt among Yoruba youths. The reaction of the apprentice points to his understanding of his boss' statement as an unequivocal rejection and perhaps one that signals serious consequences if he did not return the change of the 100 naira given to him. It therefore suffices to comment that, drawing on contextual features of SSK, and INF, and the physiological act VCE, the participants in the excerpt are able to achieve a meaningful interaction.

Excerpt 8. An interaction between two siblings

Motun: [Enters with a long face apparently from hunger] *Oúnjẹ mi dà?*
‘Where is my food?’

Bola: *Mo fún ọrẹ mi tó wá kí mi.*
‘I entertained my guest with it.’

Motun: *Mo jẹrí kápéntà ẹ, kò ní fẹ feyìn yòṣó.*
‘I trust your carpenter, he won’t attempt using the teeth to pull out a nail from the wood.’

Bola: *Mi ò ọ́rẹ́, mo ti fi ọ́ ẹ́ álejò...*
‘I am not joking. I already used to entertain my guest.’

Motun: *Uhn, o ò ní fẹ fi petrol dín dòdò.*
‘You won’t want to attempt frying plantain with petrol.’

Bola: *E maa binu, mi ò mò pé ẹ́ maa tètè dé.*
‘Don’t be offended, I never knew you would arrive so soon.’

In excerpt 8, a discussion between two sisters, the elder sister deployed two impossibility slangy expressions which are co-textually coreferential: (9) *Mo jẹrí kápéntà ẹ, kò ní fẹ feyìn yòṣó* ‘I trust your carpenter, he won’t attempt using the teeth to pull out a nail from the wood’ and *o ò ní fẹ fi petrol dín dòdò* ‘You won’t want to attempt frying plantain with petrol’ pass a message of expressing discourtenance and disapproval to her interlocutor. The former is an example of function-related impossibility while the latter exemplifies danger-related impossibility, even though, by extension from the interaction, it becomes obvious that the elder sister comes home famished, and expects her food to be served to her as soon as she arrives. She is however taken aback when the younger sister comments that she had served the food to entertain her friend. This is a response she does not take kindly to it as evident in her anger-laden response. In the first instance, the elder sister, making reference to the shared situational knowledge (SSK) among the Yoruba regarding the unwelcomed and unwholesome practice of attempting to remove the nail from the wood by any carpenter, discourtenances the sister’s response and particularly to show she is not in for a “prank”, if indeed that is the intention of her sister.

The message is clear to the sister who responds she is actually serious (about the fact that the food had been served to a friend who came visiting) as shown in her response (10) *Mi ò ọ́rẹ́, mo ti fi ọ́ ẹ́ álejò* ‘I am not joking, I had given it out to a visiting friend’. Apparently, this response does not go down well with the elder sister who goes further to show her disapproval of this act with another “impossibility” utterance which is co-textual to the initial one: (11) *Uhn, o ò ní fẹ fi petrol dín dòdò* ‘you won’t want to use petrol to fry plantain’, accompanied with

a frown on her face. With this statement, the elder sister is making recourse to the shared situational knowledge (SSK) among the people of the “unfriendly” relationship between petrol and frying which of course involves fire.

All over the world, and particularly among the Yoruba, the danger of playing with the combination of petrol and fire is a common knowledge, and as such it is often warned against. Therefore, to attempt to fry plantain with petrol, as captured in the utterance of the elder sister, is to attempt committing suicide, a practice anyone in his/her right senses would not give a thought to. The elder sister makes this utterance to express her disapproval for the “unpardonable” offence of the younger sister. Thus, in this context, the utterance *Uhn, o ò ní fẹ́ fí petrol dín dódò*, which inherently expresses impossibility in the Yoruba socio-cultural worldview, carries as much pragmatic weight as direct speech acts as i.a. ‘why would you do that?’, ‘that is a foolish and unacceptable thing to do!’. Drawing on the contextual features of SSK, inference (INF), and the unfriendly physiognomic expression on Motun’s face, the sister understands the message: as one that carries a tone of disapproval and disaffection, hence she apologises accordingly.

Excerpt 9. From an interaction between an bus conductor and a passenger

Conductor: *Owó ẹ́ dá?*

‘Where is your money?’

Passenger: *Èèlọ́ ní ẹ́ gbé UI?*

‘How much to UI?’

Conductor: 100 naira.

Passenger: *80 naira ni máá fún un yín o.*

‘I am going to pay 80 naira.’

Conductor: *80 naira lẹ́ ma fún un mi kẹ́? Nígbá t’ó ò ní fẹ́ kírun l’express.*

‘You are going to pay me 80 naira? When you would not want to pray [in the Islamic way] on the express [way].’

Passenger: *Ó ga ò* [brings out 100 naira note from her purse and gives to the conductor]

‘That is really serious.’

The interaction presented in excerpt 9 was an exchange between a bus conductor and a passenger. The conductor demands the passenger pay her transport fare as they are gradually approaching her (the passenger’s) point of disembarkation. The passenger then asks how much she is to pay and is surprised the conductor is charging a sum of 100 naira. She then responds she is going to pay 80 naira. The conductor is apparently not pleased with the amount she offers to pay, hence resorts to the making of the impossibility utterance (12) *Nígbá t’ó*

ò ní fẹ́ kírún l'express 'when you won't want to pray [in the Islamic way] on the express/high way' to reject the amount she is offering to pay. The conductor, riding on the shared situational knowledge (SSK) among Nigerians in general, and the Yoruba in particular about the impossibility of attempting to spread a prayer mat (as found among Muslims) on the high way or express, knowing how suicidal that can be, to observe their statutory five-time prayer sessions daily, to decline/reject the amount the passenger offers to pay. In the Nigerian context, the express or high way is considered a dangerous zone, given the high speed at which drivers on such roads move (perhaps with the notion that it is a free route and as such is a “platform” to explore their driving skills to the maximum). This high speed explains why there are incessant cases of ghastly and sometimes fatal auto crash on the express. Of course, the conductor imagines the passenger shares that situational knowledge with him, being a fellow Nigerian who knows how reasonably impossible it is for anyone who is sane to attempt to conduct a prayer session on the way.

That the lady passenger understands this utterance as a relevant response to her offer to pay 80 naira and as such a rejection of same by the conductor is obvious in her response and action in reaction to the conductor's utterance. Combining the SSK, the unfriendly facial look on the conductor's face, his raised voice (VCE) and inference (INF), the message becomes clearer to the passenger that the conductor is determined to go to any length, including embarrassing or abusing her, (as commonly found among commercial car and bus drivers as well as their conductors in Nigeria), to make sure she pays the amount he charges. The young lady, in order to avoid such untoward scene and scenario, has to quickly do the bidding of the conductor. The conductor could as well have chosen to reject the amount mentioned by the passenger with such direct acts/expressions as *rárá* 'no', *mí ò gba 80 naira* o 'I am not collecting 80 naira', *kò gbà* 'not at all', among others, but deliberately resorts to the deployment of the “impossibility” slangy utterance as a pragmatic strategy of scaring the passenger into acceding to his demand. The choice of this impossibility expression noted above could as well be necessitated by the conductor's belief that gentlemanly even with his linguistic practice in the encounter would not allow him achieve his goal (of overwhelming the passenger to pay the amount charged).

Excerpt 10. From a room interaction between two undergraduates

Tolu: Abeg, who use my pef?

'Please who used my perfume?'

Sola: Na me finish am yesterday.

'It got exhausted while I was using it yesterday.'

Tolu: *Abeg, make una no touch my tins again o. Mi ò şeré rárá*
 'Please don't touch my things again. I am not joking at all.'

Sola: *Na today! Tí mo bá lò ó nkò?*
 'Since when! What happens if I touch them?'

Tolu: ***O ò ní fẹ fa wèrè l'óyàn.***
 'You won't want to pull/touch the breast of a mad woman.'

The initiator of the interaction presented in excerpt 10, Tolu, starts with a complaint with protest upon the realisation that his perfume had been exhausted, knowing he still had some left the last time he used it. The complaint triggers a response from one of his roommates who owns up that it got exhausted while he was using it. Tolu is really upset by this development and retorts such should not repeat itself, not only as it relates to his perfume but also all his other belongings. Sola, apparently surprised at such an outburst, asks to know what would happen if he does not desist from "touching" his belongings. As a way of letting him (Sola) know the grave consequences that await him if he does, Tolu responds with the impossibility utterance (13) *O ò ní fẹ fa wèrè l'óyàn* 'you won't want to pull or play with the breasts of a mad woman'. With the aid of contextual elements such as SEK, SCK and INF, Tolu and Sola are able to interpret the utterance as expressing threat and warning. Going by the shared experiential and cultural knowledge among the Yoruba, *wèrè*, a mad person, is a mentally ill fellow, who does not have the mental capacity to behave in a reasonable manner. Such individuals are considered violent and sometimes dangerous to deal with. Thus, they are most times avoided or abandoned by the people (except in few cases where the relatives are seen taking care of them). Their queer behavioural lifestyle often attracts the attention of sane minds, especially kids and toddlers who most times make jest of them. They are thus considered special beings that must be avoided as much as possible, hence the popular proverb among the Yoruba: *wèrè dún ún wò, kò şe é bí lómọ* 'watching a mad fellow display their madness can be pleasurable, but no one prays to have one as his/her child'. If mad people are then considered unapproachable, given their violent and irrational nature, it would be an act of foolishness or stupidity for any man to attempt to have an erotic relationship or affair with a mad woman, let alone playing with or pulling her breasts⁴. Attempting to play with or pull the breasts of a mad woman would have its serious and unimaginable consequences, as the fellow, having

⁴ Although it is culturally believed that some individuals engage in this practice but such are seen as being emboldened by some protective charms. Such fellows are believed to do such for fetish reasons, in most cases as money ritual.

lost her sanity, could attack the “offender” who might lose his life in the process.

Against this backdrop, both participants in this excerpt interpret the utterance *O ò ní fẹ́ fa wèrè l’óyàn* as one that carries a serious message of warning and threat to Sola if he dares touch Tolu’s belongings again. The utterance is an indirect way of Tolu telling Sola he would attack him with the same level of violence a mad woman would attack her “offender”.

7. Conclusion and general remarks

With recourse to Mey’s pragmatic acts theory, this article has attempted a pragmatic analysis of “impossibility” slangy expressions in Yoruba informal interactions. It has attempted a contextual classification of impossibility slangy expressions in Yoruba into function-oriented, structure-function-oriented and danger-oriented types. The study has also further reinforced the essential role context plays in utterance interpretation, as often amplified by fields of linguistics such as pragmatics, sociolinguistics and ethnography of communication. In particular, this study investigates the role of contextual features such as shared situational knowledge (SSK), shared experiential knowledge (SEK), shared cultural knowledge (SCK) relevance (REL), inference (INF), and voice (VCE) in (de)constructing the meaning of indirectness embedded in impossibility slangy expressions in Yoruba informal interactions. With the aid of these contextual features, such utterances are understood as expressing rejection, rejection with warning, caution, discountenance and disapproval, rebuke with dare, challenge and threat. This study is further evidence that slang and slangifying are pointers to linguistic creativity, linguistic and communicative competence among users. It has further emphasised the submission of Bamgbose (2016) that the study and learning of the language should not only focus on structure, vocabulary and proverbs but also on other pragmatic aspects of the language. The major contribution of this study to scholarship, therefore, is that, following the arguments of “contextualists” like Allott (2010), Odeunmi (2006b), Hymes (1972), among others, context is very central to the use, teaching and learning of languages in general, and the Yoruba language in particular. Borrowing the words of Goffman (1981) in his book *Forms of Talk*, impossibility slangy expressions in Yoruba are ‘orphans’ when deprived of the contextual cues and clues that animated them. The study also provides fresh data that give further insights on the use and application of Mey’s pragmatic acts theory (2001), especially in an African language context.

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