

## **Musical Pragmatics and Rhetoric in *Owóéjé* - a Yorùbá Traditional Movie**

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### **Abstract**

Copious literature abound on music and Nigerian traditional film productions, and on the enduring relationship between them. However, pragmatics import and musical rhetoric in traditional movies have not really occupied the minds of scholars in comparative terms, hence, the rather scarce scholarly writings on the subject matter. Whereas the descriptive and narrative capacity of music, especially, in Yorùbá movies is overwhelming, this has not been properly elucidated and documented by scholars. The paucity of scholarly works in this areas might be some sort of oversight or trivialization of the subject matter on the part of scholars. Therefore, using *Owóéjé* - a Yorùbá traditional movie as a point of reference, this paper expounds how traditional music is used pragmatically in relating messages to the audience in movies, and concisely interrogates the descriptive significance of musical rhetoric. The study is anchored on pragmatism and rhetoric as the theoretical bases. The music content of the movie formed the data for the study, which was subjected to qualitative analysis. Findings were that music in the movie was functional to explain, stress and project moral values (such as contentment and self-control), and to describe, advice, admonish, pray and counsel the targeted audience.

**Key words:** Pragmatics, rhetoric, Yorùbá movies, theatrical musicology

### **Introduction**

Yorùbá film production has witnessed tremendous growth and development over the years, and has become a major avenue through which Nigerians are educated, enlightened, and entertained in cultural and general terms. The positive impact of these films is felt globally as they continue to promote the socio-cultural and political heritage of the Yorùbá nation. Yoruba traditional filmmakers such as Mainframe Productions, Remdel Optimum Communications Limited and others, have produced astonishing cultural films, many of which are crafted to correct societal vices. It must be noted however that, some of the film productions have continued to project

indecent and violence which have subjected the cherished cultural heritage to ridicule and misrepresentation. Olúmúyìwá (2015) earlier observed that:

the contents of most of the Yorùbá video films in contemporary Yorùbá society are found to be blasphemous, obscene, indecent and injurious to morality. Most of these video films expose our traditions to ridicule, encourage illegal or criminal act, reinforce the corruption of public morality and glorify the use of violence such as robbery, kidnapping, sexual violence, prostitution, and greed. (p. 1894)

These anomalies notwithstanding, there are some Yorùbá film makers who still maintain the legacies of the Yorùbá cultural heritage, by projecting Yorùbá cultural elements, philosophical messages, and moral rectitude with the aim of educating, correcting and enlightening the populace. One of such Yorùbá films is a video produced and marketed by Remdel Optimum Communications Limited entitled *Owóèjè* (literally, blood money), which is an adaptation of Kola Akinlade's novel. The film provide a lot of lessons to the citizens, as it centres on the danger of seeking to get wealth through dubious means, which led to the shedding of innocent blood. The film, apart from promoting intelligent investigative exercise, also represents a body of knowledge in which gluttony or indiscriminate eating is condemned, as it constitutes a major way through which one can die untimely in the hands of wicked people.

While juggling with the form, style and ideology of the filmmaker, the intended message of the film is sometimes lost among the viewing audience, who subject the movie to their subjective interpretation. The role of music in providing explicit and accurate interpretation therefore, is paramount, owing to the importance of music in that regard. *Owóèjè* represents such a movie, the musical import of which are highlighted in this paper based on the theories of pragmatism and rhetoric.

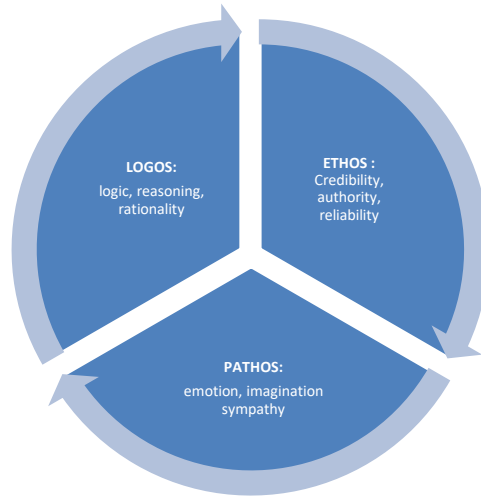
### **Pragmatism**

As espoused by Mey (2001), pragmatism is a driving force in the transmission of meaning relations in communication or the study of meaning in relation to speech situations. It is a study of meaning in a context of which the language is used, which encompasses a variety of factors such as communicative intent to know if a speaker is making a command, a request, or asking question (Adegbola and Adedeji, 2021). The theory centres on pragmatics, which are determined exclusively by how the situation is understood by the participants (Mey, 2001).

In relation to the music in video productions, the artiste usually has a primary/target audience, and must take cognizance of the culture of production and the culture of the immediate recipient. But because music is a universal language, coupled with idea of sub-titling, the audience of the video and music cannot be limited to the immediate language audience (Sunday, 2020). This theory is relevant to the goal of this paper as it tried to examine how the film maker in *Owóèjè* used music to transmit his message to the audience. Akinola (2019) describes music as a form of persuasion and political strategy, ideologies of persuasion and pragmatic choice. Musical pragmatics in this paper, therefore, is how the artiste used music to admonish, advice, describe and to counsel the audience in a clearer way. The pragmatic acts employed include narrating, condemning, accusing and counter-accusing, blaming, justifying, (partial) veiling, threatening, hoping, and praying.

## Rhetoric

Aristotle - a Greek philosopher of the 4th century BC was particularly interested in rhetoric. He expounded on the concepts of ethos, pathos and logos, as tools for persuasive language. A lot can be learned about the art of persuasion from these three concepts, and once understood, can be easily applied to the use of persuasion in the work of art. Modes of persuasion are: Ethos, Pathos and Logos.



Ethos is the fundamental and distinctive character of a group, social context or period of time, typically expressed in attitudes, habits and beliefs. It is also known as aesthetics which is the traits in a work of art. Ethos (Credibility), or ethical appeal, means convincing by the character of the author/film maker. One of the central problems of argumentation is to project an impression to the reader/audience that you are someone worth listening to.

Pathos is the quality in something that makes people feel pity or sadness. Pathos (Emotional) on the other hand, means persuading by appealing to the reader's/audience's emotions. Language choice affects the audience's emotional response, and emotional appeal can effectively be used to enhance an argument. Persuasive communication according to Miller (1980) is any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another or others. Such responses are modified by symbolic transactions (messages) which are sometimes, but not always, linked with coercive force (indirectly coercive) and which appeal to the reason and emotions of the target persuadees. Wilson (2002) argues that persuasive communication can be targeted at Cognition, Attitude or Behaviour.

Logos refers to logic-based appeals, often using facts and figures (Sloane, 2001). Logos were observed as massively influential in experience and object as well. So it is always supported by information, figures, facts and statistics. It give comprehensive reasons and proof about how the product works.

Aristotle suggested that any spoken or written communication intended to persuade, contains three key rhetorical elements: ethos, pathos and logos. However, ethos and pathos are examined in relation to the film - *Owóèjẹ* in this paper.

## Material and Method

The purposive sampling method was adopted for the study, by which the video, *Owóèjè* was selected. The linguistic type deployed in the music videos - Yorùbá language, was retained in their original form during transcription into the English language. Generally, the musical video was reviewed based on Jacob Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory. Many scholars who have used this theory in analyzing their data include but not limited to Agboola and Adedeji (2021), Akinola (2019), and Sunday (2010). Data analysis was largely qualitative to generate a rich understanding.

## Synopsis of *Owóèjè*

*Owóèjè* was a derivative from the novel *Owóèjè* – a detective and mystery fiction book written by Kola Akinlade which was first published in 1976. The video represents a production ideology whereby meanings and impressive effects on the audience is intended, with different subthemes projected to the viewers.

The movie reveals wickedness in the traditional society, in which a hardworking but greedy man was murdered by an unsuspected community elder, in order to appropriate a certain farm to himself. Dolapo Adewale, known as Sule (Sulelgbira - an Ebira man, as fondly called in the video) represents a jovial, hardworking cocoa farmer and a promising young man, whose gluttony and lack of self-control would cause him not to “eat the fruits of his labour”. It became extremely difficult to identify his killer due to the circumstances of his death, having drank a poisoned palm wine together with his killer (Baba Wale), who himself took a substance to neutralize the effect of the poison in him. However, after a careful investigation, the culprit was identified and punished, the thief (Chief Olowojeunje) and criminal (Lana) were also punished.

## Musical Pragmatics and Rhetoric in the Movie - *Owóèjè*

The style of sound tracks in the video was mainly choral, with Western and traditional instrumental accompaniment, in the form of call-and-response, was through composed and rendered essentially in Yorùbá language. The prelude, interlude and postlude are carefully crafted with proverbs, allegories, metaphor and other figures of speech. Music is a major dramatic element in the movie and was used to validate, consolidate and to project didactic lessons in the film. Below is the review of the songs text in the video:

### i. Importance and Uselessness of Money

After the interlude, the song below was heard introducing the messages to the audience. The song explains the importance of money in human life and in the society at large. The filmmaker did not fail to describe the filthiness behind some people's wealth, using the Pragmatics of description. The following song text explains how many people have been killed because of some other people who wants to have money by all means. The description of the money in the video expatiates the power of money and how people look for it by all means.

*Aowo se kokolaye*  
*Owolafisele aye/2x*  
*Isaleoro o legbin/2x*  
*K'olorungbawal'owoowoeje*  
*Owo ta n tori e d'omolakejiloro*  
*Aaaowoeje*

Money is important  
We enjoy life with money  
There is filthiness behind some wealth  
May God deliver us from blood money  
Kind of money which people kill another person for  
Such money is bloody

## ii. The Law and Certainty of Nemesis for Wrong Doing

Pragmatic of warning

<i>Ot'afas'okeyi do boriolorunrie</i>	You throw up arrow and covered yourself with mortal, God sees you
<i>O sorunwajupomotipako</i>	If you sowed discord and disunity
<i>esin re kudede</i>	Know that nemeses will catch up with you
<i>Katoriowokawapomo la keji'ekun</i>	You caused sorrow to others just because you want to get money
<i>A aaowoeje</i>	Such money is a blood money
<i>Chr. Isaleoro o l'egbin/2x</i>	There is filthiness behind some wealth
<i>K'olorungbawal'owoowoeje</i>	May God deliver us from blood money
<i>Owo ta n tori e d'omolakejiloro</i>	Kind of money which people kill another person for
<i>Aaaowoeje</i>	Such money is bloody

## iii. Vanity of Life

The filmmaker deployed the pragmatics of admonishing, as it is shown in the song text below. The musician in this regard, explains the vanity of life as it advises the audience on how transient a man's life could be. The song makes use of proverb to emphasise the sanctity of human life and neighbourliness.

<i>Ile aye yiofoni</i>	This world is vanity
<i>Af'owobafuile lo ni</i>	A man's life is short
<i>Ma tori owop'aladugbore</i>	Don't kill your neighbour because of money
<i>Iruowoyenowoejeni</i>	Such money is a blood money
<i>Ijailara o tan boro</i>	Strife generated by envy last long
<i>A n juwon lo o se wilejo</i>	Because you wouldn't be able to settle such a case
<i>Chr. Isaleoro o legbin /2x</i>	There is filthiness behind some wealth
<i>K'olorungbawal'owoowoeje</i>	May God deliver us from blood money
<i>Owo ta n tori e d'omolakejiloro</i>	Kind of money which people kill another person for
<i>Aaaowoeje</i>	Such money is bloody

## iv. Importance of Cash Crop in Nigeria and Prayer against Indictment

In this section, importance of cocoa as a cash crop was emphasised and pragmatics of praying is utilised by the filmmaker. The filmmaker used the music to pray to God for increase, profit and long life to enjoy the benefit of hard labour.

<i>Ibikokolowowa o</i>	There is money in cocoa farming/business
<i>Baba je k'akereoko dele</i>	Oh lord make us enjoy the benefits of our labour
<i>Ibikokolowowa o</i>	There is money in cocoa farming/business
<i>To ban i kokoowoti de o</i>	If you have cocoa, your money has come

<i>Bikokobatiponk'omop'owode</i>	When your cocoa get ripen, your money has come
<i>Igikokoowo lo n so</i>	Cocoa tree produces money
<i>Awonagbeonikokoolowoniwon</i>	Cocoa farmers are rich people
<i>Oluwa je kak'ereokod'ele o</i>	Oh lord make us enjoy the benefits of our labour
<i>Agbeonikoko o agbe</i>	Cocoa farmer, cocoa farmer
<i>Be bas'owo, bebas'owoke e rereojaje</i>	May you have abundance profit in your business
<i>Ere l'obinrin n je labooja</i>	A woman usually makes profit from the market
<i>Be bas'owo, bebas'owoke e rereojaje</i>	May you have abundance profit in your business
<i>Akobaadaba, olorun ma je a ri 2/x</i>	May God deliver us from every indictment
<i>Ejoelejoorooloro</i>	Matter that does not concern us
<i>Olorun ma je a ri 2/x</i>	May God deliver us from such

#### v. Self-control on Tale Bearing and Gluttony

The pragmatics of advising and counseling were used in the song texts below. The filmmaker advised that not everything one sees should be said, as this may lead to the lost of one's dear life. The reason is that we live in a world where people dislike truth. Also, the audience is pragmatically advised through the instrument of music to be careful of gluttony, as this may lead to untimely death.

1. <i>Bojubari o enu a dake</i>	When your eyes see, keep quiet
<i>Eni to bajuni lo, o ma le juninuhe</i>	Who is older than you can be wiser than you are
<i>O so ju u mi n osi so wahala lo fa</i>	Saying everything you see can lead you into trouble
<i>Ile ayayio, su u ru lo gba</i>	One must tread softly in this world
2. <i>Call: Elenu ma ri ma je sora o 2/x</i>	Gluttony man, be careful
<i>Res: Atenujel'ewu o 2/x</i>	Gluttony is dangerous
<i>Call: eyi to lojosi, anfaniwo lo da fune?</i>	What benefit have you derived from gluttony?
<i>Res: Atenujelewuo</i>	Gluttony is dangerous
<i>Call: Wonbilikiwonbiaiwaibajeni so n gbo</i>	Gluttony is a bad habit
<i>Res: Atenujelewuo</i>	Gluttony is dangerous
<i>Call: Olewu o, olewu, o lewu o, o l'ewuit</i>	Dangerous and even very dangerous
<i>Res: Atenujelewuo</i>	Gluttony is dangerous
<i>Call: Sora o, sora, Sora o, olewu</i>	Be careful, behave yourself
<i>Res: Atenujelewuo</i>	Gluttony is dangerous
<i>Call: O n se kup'aniyan, iwaibajelewuo</i>	
<i>o ko da ra</i>	Gluttony kills, it is a bad habit
<i>Res: Atenujelewuo</i>	Gluttony is dangerous

#### Discussion of Findings

From the foregoing review, the pragmatic roles of music in *Owóèjè* includes the use of music to validate, consolidate and to project didactic lessons in the film, amidst possible variations in evaluation and interpretation of movie on the part of the audience which Bordwell & Thompson (2004) had noted. In an attempt to make the messages of *Owóèjè* clearer, the use of proverb, allegory, metaphor and other figures of speech were employed as potent means to teach, correct, advice, counsel and encourage people of the society in a clear and pungent manner. Corroborating

the use of music as means of facilitating audience' understanding of dramatic essence, Adeniyi (2004) noted that music enhances theatrical values and consolidates pedagogical pursuits of drama in the contemporary Nigerian society, as Akinola (2019) also described music as a form of persuasion and political strategy, ideologies of persuasion, and pragmatic choice.

### **Conclusion**

Stories, either fiction or non-fiction usually has some utilitarian functions in African traditional society, and specifically, in the Nigerian society. In the Yorùbá culture of Nigeria, and applies amongst most African cultures, music and drama are two forms of art that are inseparable, and were creatively used in *Owóèjè*. Music in *Owóèjè* was employed to advice and inform the audience, and was basically presented as prayer and warning.

The paper has shown the pragmatics import and musical rhetoric in the video - *Owóèjè*, in which music was utilised as an instrument to reinforce the lessons accruable in the film. Music was deployed in the video as a pragmatics of advising, praying, educating, counseling, admonishing and describing, with the believe that it would go a long way in admonishing the people on the unwholesome pursuit of money and the dangers of such approach to life.



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