






“Proverbs are the Wisdom of the Streets”: A Pragma-Stylistic Analysis of Proverbs in Kemi Adetiba’s *King of Boys* Movie Franchise

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ABSTRACT

Various genres of literature within the African context have over the years portrayed and highlighted African cultures and traditions. One effective tool that has been used in the full realization of this has been the use of proverbs. The present study set out to examine how proverbs are used in Kemi Adetiba’s popular movie franchise, *King of Boys*, from the pragma-stylistic perspective. The paper opines that proverbs are not used arbitrarily by screenwriters, but are specifically used, through various figures of speech, to offer caution, warning or advice, assert one’s authority and power, and show one’s intent to achieve a goal. This study extends knowledge in the study of proverbs and presents language use in movies as a rich avenue in the promotion of knowledge in African societies.

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INTRODUCTION

Proverbs have always been a superior form of communication between two or more people in African societies. It is simply not a combination of elevated and metaphorical expressions but deeply and essentially rooted in the African culture and touches on almost every aspect of life. The received view has it that, proverbs help enrich and deepen the content of conversations. One’s ability to communicate fluently with proverbs is often regarded as a sign of maturity and knowledge in their language and culture. Mollanazar defines proverbs as expressions of embedded meanings in the context between a speaker and a hearer.¹ For Meider, it is a short, generally known sentence of folk which contains, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.²

¹ Hussein Mollanazar, *Principles and Methodology of Translation*. (Tehran: SAMT, 2001).

² Wolfgang Meider, “Popular Views on the Proverb.” *Proverbium* 2, (1985): 109-143.

In explaining Lord John Russell's popular definition of proverb, "a proverb is the wit of one and wisdom of many", Meider notes that, proverbs are constructed intentionally or otherwise by individuals for specific communicative functions and adopted by members of a society for same.³ From this, proverbs are seen as nuggets of wisdom, in linguistic expressions, that are accessible to all in a given community. Norrick asserts the didactic tendency of proverbs by expressing their essence in tradition and societal conversations in the nurturing of the younger generation.⁴ Yusuf reiterates the same by noting that it is a clear concise repeated clever statement of experience which is employed specifically to achieve a social need.⁵ Syzdykov adds that the use of proverbs reveals the historical experiences and the general way of life of a group.⁶ Proverbs, therefore, are means of transiting knowledge, values, morals and other aspects of acceptable social behaviors and practices of a society to their generations. In all, a proverb may be defined as a concise expression of wisdom which, in most cases, upholds the principles of good morals and values.⁷

Proverbs are firmly grained in the philosophy and experiences of Africans, thereby making them an indispensable tool for the communication and socialization of children.⁸ In Ghana and Nigeria, for example, the essence of proverbs is prevalently infused in the various themes and subject matters presented by authors and filmmakers in their books and movies respectively. Essuman, ResCue and Yeboah are of the view that the use of proverbs is a way to project the origin of the work and a technique to fully develop the plot of the story by offering detailed descriptions of the identities and utterances of characters.⁹ In the case of movies, Ayodabo explains that proverbs are used in order for characters to justify their actions and also show their disapproval of wrongdoings.¹⁰

Lindfors asserts that Achebe's use of proverbs is specifically targeted at helping the audience in their evaluation and measurement of the story by gaining insights into the actions of characters and events in general. He goes further by noting that proverbs are used by Achebe to prove the relevance and civility of African cultures even before the arrival of the Europeans.¹¹ From this, it can be said that proverbs are not used arbitrarily in various works. They enhance dialoguing, introduce profound meanings to subjects, intensify the plots, demonstrate culture, detail tradition and induce humour. Considering the relevance and prevalence of the use of proverbs in the African context, especially in movies, and the fact that most studies on proverbs have focused on written texts, it is important that some immense research attention is directed to this area of language use. It is against this background that the present study analyses the use of proverbs in Kemi Adetiba's popular movie franchise, *King of Boys*, from the perspectives of pragmatics and stylistics.

The *King of Boys* Franchise: An Overview

The *King of Boys* franchise is made up of a collection of the movie, *King of Boys*, and the seven episodes series, *King of Boys: The Return of the King*, which is a sequel to the movie, *King of Boys*. The said franchise is a crime drama that primarily revolves around the affluent businesswoman and

³ Wolfgang Meider, *Proverbs: A Handbook*. (London: Greenwood Press, 2004).

⁴ Neal Norrick, "How Proverbs Mean? Semantics Studies in English Proverbs." *Mouton*, (1985).

⁵ Yisa Yusuf, "The Sexist Correlation of Women with Non-Human in English and Yoruba Proverbs." *Deproverbio Electronic Magazine* 3, no.2 (1997): 1-9.

⁶ Kanat Syzdykov, "Contrastive Studies on Proverbs." *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences* 136, (2014): 318-321.

⁷ FBO Akporobaro, *African Oral Literature*. (Lagos: Princeton Publishing Company, 2006).

⁸ Kofi Agyekum, "Akan Proverbs and Aphorisms about Marriage." *Research Review of the Institute of African Studies*, no. 2 (2012): 1-24.

⁹ Jonathan Essuman, Elvis ResCue, and Philomena Ama Okyeso Yeboah, "A Pragma-Stylistic Approach to Analysing Proverbs: A Review of Some Selected Proverbs in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*." *E-Journal of Humanities, Art and Social Sciences* 2, no.8 (2021): 97-107.

¹⁰ Sunday Joseph Ayodabo. 2016. "The Exploration of Proverb as a Crucial Device in Tunde Kelani's *Saworoide*." In *The Stage and the Screen: Perspectives on Arts Production in Contemporary Nigeria (A Festschrift in Honour of Dr. Gabriel Adekola Oyewo at 70)*, edited by R. O. Bakare, G Adeoti and M. Olaniyan. 250-264. (Alpha Crown Publishers, 2016).

¹¹ Bernth Lindfors, *Folklore in Nigerian Literature*. (New York: African Publishing Company, 1973): 79-92.

gang leader, Alhaja Eniola Salami, who has a promising future in Nigerian politics but faces challenges of power play and an intricate game of trust. The movie, *King of Boys*, starts in the present with a grand birthday celebration by Eniola and how she is portrayed as a philanthropist in her community notwithstanding her undersealed association with criminals in their loot and share business. The story details the disconnect between Eniola and one of the gang leaders and transits to the remote past where Eniola was sexually exploited and how she steadily worked her way to power through violence to become the 'Oba' (King) on the table of boys. In its development, the story shows how Eniola's downfall is seen to be orchestrated by Makanaki, one of the elders at the table, and high-profile political figures. Oba Salami experienced betrayal, pain, and loss of her power till she became a shadow of herself which consequently led her to flee her country for safety.

The sequel, *King of Boys: The Return of the King*, is set five years after the events in the movie, *King of Boys*. It starts with the return of Alhaja Eniola Salami from exile, exonerated of all the charges that were leveled against her by the Nigerian Corruption Crime Commission (NCCC). Eniola announced her intentions of running for the office of governor of Lagos state. Without the support of any major political party and her former godfather and politician, Aare, Eniola is faced with dealing with the challenges of her label as the street kingpin without the credibility to run for gubernatorial election no matter how hard she tries to dissociate herself from the streets. Again, her position as the Oba of the streets is also threatened by Odudubariba, who believes that Eniola's quest for political power was a distraction to the table of boys. This led to a division of the boys into two factions – Eniola's group and that of Odudubariba. Alhaja Salami had to find a way around her enemies. Jumoke Randle, the wife of the incumbent Governor of Lagos State, schemes so hard to unravel Eniola's past to taint her reputation; Dapo Banjo, a journalist, also works tirelessly in search of the truth about Eniola's dealings with the underworld; Odudubariba, and Makanaki, on the other hand, fight fiercely against Eniola to usurp the power of the streets from her. The various events of the movie and its sequel unfold through a dense use of proverbs by various characters, especially Eniola Salami, who was actively involved in the under-dealings of the boys on the streets. It is therefore unsurprising when Meider postulates that "proverbs are the wisdom of the streets".¹²

Pragmatics and Stylistics: An Approach to the Study

Thomas defines pragmatics as the study of meaning in interaction.¹³ She details that the meaning making process involved in this study is primarily dependent on the speaker, the hearer and the physical, social or linguistic context of an utterance. For Yule, pragmatics is the contextual analysis of a speaker's utterance and its associative interpretation by a hearer.¹⁴ Consequently, it is the study of how a hearer decodes the implied meaning of a speaker's utterances. Kasper also highlights context as an integral part of pragmatics by explaining that its focus lies in analysing how information is shared between participants in its social and cultural context.¹⁵ Crystal elaborately specifies that it is "the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication."¹⁶ In effect, pragmaticists are interested in studying language use to bring out meanings that are dependent on the various situations in which the language is used.

Style is the distinctive or peculiar way in which an individual writes or speaks. It can be said to be how an individual speaks, writes or performs something.¹⁷ This invariably takes into consideration how sentences are constructed and the various figures of speech that are embedded in them. It is therefore the various linguistic choices that one makes in order to put up a speech or writing.

¹² Mieder, *Proverbs: A Handbook*, 3.

¹³ Jenny Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics*. (London: Longman, 1995): 1-2.

¹⁴ George Yule, *Pragmatics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 1.

¹⁵ Gabriele Kasper, "Can Pragmatic Competence be Taught?" *University of Hawaii, Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center*, (1997): 1.

¹⁶ David Crystal, *English as a Global Language*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 301.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Neil Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. (London and New York: Longman Group Ltd., 1969).

Hence, a study that focuses on the style of a speaker or a writer can be said to be stylistic.¹⁸ Turner states explicitly that it is a “part of linguistics which concentrates on variation in the use of language, often but not exclusively, with special attention to the most conscious and complex use of language in literature”.¹⁹ To Crystal, it is the study of the various choices made by language users from a linguistic point of view.²⁰ Therefore, a stylistic analysis is “a method of textual interpretation in which primary of place is assigned to language”.²¹

The present study adopts an approach which has the underpinnings of the concepts of pragmatics and stylistics explored above. This admixture is known by some scholars as pragmatic stylistics or pragma-stylistics.²² Huang defines it as how pragmatic perspectives are used to analyse the style of language used.²³ To Alolade, pragma-stylistics falls under context-oriented stylistics. He asserts that the “pragma-stylistic approach to meaning is a linguistic approach that examines the intended meaning and distinctive style of the speaker.”²⁴ The approach is succinctly explained by Awolaja thus:

Pragma-stylistics is simply stylistics with a pragmatic focus; that is, a systematic explication of both the linguistic and pragmatic aspects of a work geared to shedding light on the resources used for conveying meaning in the work, including not only the language but the various backgrounds (social, ideological, psychological, etc.) that inform it.²⁵

The pragma-stylistic approach is therefore centred on analysing the meaning of the various linguistic choices of a speaker or a writer based on the situations or contexts in which language is used. This approach was adopted in this study because of its reliability in analysing literary texts and language discourses in general.²⁶ It afforded the researchers the opportunity to unravel the meanings of the selected proverbs in context and their literariness.

METHODOLOGY

This study is within the qualitative research paradigm. For Babbie, qualitative research is one that allows the researcher to critically observe data and offer a detailed description of it.²⁷ Fossey adds that this research paradigm ensures that “the findings are coherent in the sense that they fit the data and social context from which they were derived”.²⁸ Twenty (20) proverbs were culled from Kemi Adetiba’s movie franchise *King of Boys*. Specifically, ten (10) were selected from the movie, *King of Boys*, and the remaining ten (10) from the sequel of the movie, *King of Boys: The Return of the King*, which was produced in limited series. Most of the proverbs were uttered in Yoruba and translated into English by Netflix subtitles. However, for the purposes of accuracy, the researchers who are also English scholars made changes where necessary. Although the proverbs employed in the movie franchise exceeded the number presented herein, the afore-given selection was made to produce an in-

¹⁸ Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*. Abridged Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1996).

¹⁹ George William Turner, *Stylistics*. (London: Penguin Books, 1973): 3.

²⁰ David Crystal, *Introducing Linguistics*. (London: Penguin English, 1992).

²¹ Paul Simpson, *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. (New York: Routledge, 2004): 1.

²² Essuman, ResCue and Yeboah, A Pragma-Stylistic Approach to Analysing Proverbs: A Review of Some Selected Proverbs in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

²³ Yan Huang, *Pragmatics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁴ Adewole Oluwaseun Alolade, “Pragma-Stylistic Manifestations in Sport Discourse from Selected Radio Stations in Ibadan Metropolis.” *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, (2020): 18-33.

²⁵ Ayodeyi Awolaja, “A Pragmastylistic Analysis of Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and *Measuring Time*.” Unpublished MA Thesis, Obafemi Awolowo University, (2012): 31.

²⁶ Samuel Ayodele Dada, “A Pragma-Stylistic Analysis of John 3:16.” *International Journal of English Linguistics*, (2012): 85-93.

²⁷ Earl R. Babbie, *The Basics of Social Research*. (Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005).

²⁸ Ellie Fossey, Carol Harvey, Fiona McDermott, and Larry Davidson, “Understanding and Evaluating Qualitative Research.” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 32, (2002): 717-732.

depth analysis. The analysis is primarily focused on the content of the proverbs and the contexts in which they were used, bringing out their various meanings and functions – thus, the choice of the pragma-stylistic approach for this study.

Table 1: Selected Proverbs from Kemi Adetiba's *King of Boys* Movie Franchise

No.	<i>King of Boys</i>	<i>King of Boys: The Return of the King</i>
1.	The locust bean said that it had never felt insulted until it reached Okemesi where it was called a tick.	After the King's palace burns, a more beautiful one is rebuilt.
2.	The slow crawling of a lion is not out of fear.	They say, what is a shoe without a foot? What good is the morning without the sun?
3.	The ram that moves backwards has gone to summon more power.	He who tries to catch rainwater with a sieve deceives himself.
4.	You have taken your finger, dipped it in hot pepper and poked your mother in the eye with it.	The water a fish swims in is the water that cooks it.
5.	A child does not recognize a deadly herb, so he calls it a vegetable.	Only once can a dishonourable man lure an innocent lady for sex.
6.	The teeth a dog uses to play with her puppies are the same teeth she uses to discipline them.	The stick that will pierce one in the eye is best avoided while still far away.
7.	A tree that cannot support us when we lean on it cannot kill us when it falls on us.	One doesn't fight to save another person's head only to have his own taken by a falcon.
8.	The flood is always determined to wash away the house but the owner must be ready to prevent it.	The eagle and the pigeon might both have wings but are certainly not the same type of bird.
9.	A butterfly that challenges a thorn head-on will surely have its wings and beauty torn to shreds.	One doesn't include a pregnancy when counting one's children.
10.	The taproot that stands in the way of an elephant will definitely be crushed.	The skull of the elephant is too massive for a child to carry.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Pragma-Stylistic Analysis of Selected Proverbs from *King of Boys*

1. *The locust bean said that it had never felt insulted until it reached Okemesi where it was called a tick.*

This proverb was used by Eniola when Aare told him that the political party had rescinded its decision to offer her the ministerial appointment on the grounds of her soiled reputation. The locust bean is regarded as a very important food spice in African societies and for most, it is not just an ordinary food spice but a source of income through trade. Its essentiality as a food spice transcends just making foods delicious. Importantly, it has been proven to have some medicinal value to improve eyesight, prevent stroke, diabetes, and some other infirmities.

Eniola compares herself to the locust bean whose benefits are varied, essential and well documented. This corresponds to her indispensability in the triumph of the incumbent government in both the southern and eastern elections. She fails to simply accept that the same political party that sought her help and support during elections in over thirty states since the year 1999, (barring her soiled reputation) has now decided to revoke their decision to appoint her as minister. As relevant as the locust bean, Eniola, comparatively the locust bean, expects her good works to be known and

rewarded in every state in Nigeria but unfortunately not so in Okemesi, a town in the Ekiti State, where the locust bean is mistaken for a tick, a parasitic animal. Comparing Eniola to a tick creates in her not only anger but also, pain because, like a tick, she is now seen as imbued with tendencies of transmitting an array of misfortunes (infectious diseases) to the party since ticks are implicated in the spread of diseases like Anaplasmosis, Babesiosis, Ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and many others. With hematophagous makeup, ticks act as vectors of many serious diseases that affect humans and other animals. The employment of the tick imagery helps to underscore the perceived exploitation and brutality of Eniola in her most abhorred elements.

The proverb can therefore be said to be metaphorical in its context of use. It compares the nature and benefits of the locust bean to that of Eniola, and the town of Okemesi as a figure for the political party that rejected the candidature of Eniola as a minister, on the grounds that she will drain the good image of the party because of her reputation as a gang leader. Eniola was just used as the backbone of the finances of the party – a financier. The metaphorical nature of this proverb adds concrete detail or image to aid the understanding of the subject at hand. This proverb also brings out the status of the locust bean in traditional African foods. It can be said to be a symbol of relevance in terms of tasty or delicious meals in African societies. The tick, on the other hand, is seen as a detestable parasite, championing a system that seeks ultimately to survive through killings. The ‘tick’ imagery used in the proverb ignites the imaginative potential of the reader and is likely to draw sympathy towards Eniola, who has now slipped from being a provider to a parasite. One identifies a kind of character redemption in the proverb, where Eniola insists on her relevance through the symbol of the locust bean.

2. *The slow crawling of a lion is not out of fear.*

This proverb was uttered by Eniola when her daughter, Kemi, advised her to take action against Mekanaki, one of the elders of the gang, who had been overreaching his bounds and abusing his power. Kemi makes it clear that her mother’s inaction against Mekanaki makes her seem weak and afraid. This proverb portrays the values of patience, strategic thinking and meticulous planning one needs in moments of conflict. The crawling of the lion can be said to be a symbol of focus, determination, and tact. In an attempt to attack its prey, the lion calculates its attack by crawling or walking slowly in order not to alert the target – this neither connotes fear nor weakness. It remains focused, determined, and tactful to achieve its goal.

In the context in which the proverb was used, Eniola invariably compares her inactivity in taking action against Mekanaki to “the slow crawling of a lion”. This, consequently, attributes the ferocious and deadly nature of a lion to Eniola. Just like a lion, Eniola is not weak in punishing Mekanaki but is tactful and calculative on when to attack. The proverb places importance on thought and planning in decision-making.

3. *The ram that moves backwards has gone to summon more power.*

This was declared by Kemi right after her mother, Eniola, stated that *the slow crawling of a lion is not out of fear*. Kemi makes this declaration in affirmation or support of her mother’s statement, thereby reminding her to assert her power and authority on Mekanaki.

This proverb invokes the image of a duel between rams. In such fights, they move backwards to observe and strategize and to garner some strength, force, or power to launch an attack on the opponent. Ram wrestling is one of the popular traditional sporting activities in Nigeria and most African countries. In this, two rams of similar weight are put in a ring to *lock horns*. After several hits, the ram that flees or dies is considered the loser. This imagery is triggered through the proverb to incite Eniola to act. This also aids the audience to have a mental picture of the tussle that is being incited by Kemi between her mother and Mekanaki.

Further, a ram is, comparatively, considered by many as an energetic animal. It may be considered as a symbol of courage and bravery. Kemi reminds her mother that it is necessary that she asserts these qualities of the ram in dealing with Mekanaki, for she has exercised patience and restraint

for long and she (Kemi) believes that it is time Eniola tapped into the strength and power of the ram and attack Makanaki. The proverb was also employed to show strategic planning in dealing with situations although some people may mistake it for idleness or weakness. It also portrays a popular traditional entertainment in ram wrestling.

4. *You have taken your finger, dipped it in hot pepper and poked your mother in the eye with it.*

This proverb was uttered by Eniola to Makanaki for his public display of disrespect to her and the crown of the King of the Boys. Makanaki believes that Eniola has not been a good King to them since she decided to principally focus on making money and gaining political power.

In typical African homes, proverbs are uttered by parents or elders to disobedient children, especially when they show gross insubordination or disrespect. Such proverbs portray the gravity or seriousness of the offence and exude the spirit of a wake-up call for the offender to change. Makanaki's behaviour towards Eniola propelled the use of this proverb.

This proverb gives a perfect picture and feel of the degree of the offence. It invokes an image of a child poking his peppered finger in his mother's eyes. This act may cause temporal or permanent blindness. The imagery also shows the deliberate nature of the offence through the *dipping of the finger in hot pepper with the intention of poking it in the eye of the mother*. Deliberate offences are unpardonable and incur grave repercussions; Eniola makes this known to Makanaki through the figure of the proverb. Eniola is representative of the mother, and Makanaki, the insubordinate child, this proverb does not just give a fair idea of how Eniola intends to deal with Makanaki for his insubordination but further shows the enormity of Makanaki's offence.

5. *A child does not recognize a deadly herb, so he calls it a vegetable.*

This was Eniola's second proverb directed at Makanaki, when he declared that she is not his King. She uttered this proverb at the round table meeting to let Makanaki know that he should be careful on the dangerous grounds he is treading

This proverb shows some characteristics of being a child. Here, the child is a symbol of ignorance, naivety, and inexperience. These attributes are what will ordinarily make the child mistake an inedible herb for something edible, a vegetable, and resultantly cause his death.

This is a metaphorical statement made by Eniola; she compares herself to the deadly herb that is easily mistaken for a vegetable because of her patience and calmness in handling the rising tension between herself and Makanaki. Makanaki is also compared to a child whose ignorance is brought to bear. Although Makanaki is spiritually fortified with charms and believes she can face Eniola squarely, Eniola still sees him as naïve of the dangers that will befall him because of his insubordination. By comparing Makanaki to a child, Eniola undermines his strength, knowledge and power as an elder at the table and as a man who is capable of challenging her authority. This proverb was issued as a caution to Makanaki.

6. *The teeth a dog uses to play with her puppies are the same teeth she uses to discipline them.*

This proverb was made by Eniola right after she explicitly told Makanaki to come for her crown if that is what he truly wants and desires. This is Eniola's way of telling Makanaki that she will not hesitate to deal with him. She will rain hell fire on him for openly challenging her for her crown as King. This is a gentle yet loud reminder to Makanaki that she is still in power and has power and her leniency is not weakness.

In this proverb, the dog is used as a metaphor for Eniola. It illustrates Eniola's motherly care and attention to the boys and her non-hesitance to punish them, when need be, just as the mother dog uses its teeth to carry, clean and play with the puppies, she also bites them with it when necessary to punish them. In essence, Eniola makes it clear that she will not coddle nor tolerate any form of disrespect from Makanaki although she may be lenient with him at some point. This proverb shows the multifaceted nature of Eniola as a mother; she is not one who enables her children in the face of

disobedience, but she is also a disciplinarian who readily punishes disobedience and this trait of Eniola is seen in the way she deals with her son, Kitan.

7. *A tree that cannot support us when we lean on it cannot kill us when it falls on us.*

This proverb was directed as a response to Eniola by Mekanaki after her caution to him through the proverb explored above. Proverbs are seen as a reserve of knowledge for the elderly and not young ones in African societies. Hence, Mekanaki's response with this proverb shows his knowledge and preparedness to contest Eniola's superiority and authority as the King.

Symbolically, trees represent life to humans as they offer air and food. In Mekanaki's reference, this tree has lost its basic significance of offering support to humans. To Mekanaki, Eniola's quest for political power led to her ignoring the boys to their own fate. Therefore, she has not been supportive of them since the ignition of her political ambition. Mekanaki compares Eniola to a tree that has no use. This exhibits Eniola's unreliability to the boys when they need her because of her political focus. In Mekanaki's mind, this unreliability transcends into Eniola's loss of power over them. Hence, he is not afraid of her cautions or threats.

This proverb also invokes images of one trying to lean on a tree or any part of it and a tree falling on someone. For one to be able to lean on a tree or any of its branches, that tree or branch must be heavy enough to carry the weight of the human body. Just as this tree or branch can support the body because of its heaviness, it can also cause death because of its heaviness when it falls on someone. For Mekanaki, Eniola is not a heavy tree to be leaned on hence she cannot kill or cause any harm when she tries to fall on them. This proverb is Mekanaki's way of ruffling Eniola's feathers and to show her that she is absolutely nobody and definitely not his king.

8. *The flood is always determined to wash away the house but the owner must be ready to prevent it.*

This proverb was uttered by Eniola as a prayer against Mekanaki at a river bank with three priests in the presence of a full midnight moon. Eniola, clad in white attire with a white headscarf, rolls in the sand on the shore while she violently pounds the sand, as if pounding it deeper into the ground, and mutters this proverb as a prayer. This was done amidst singing and chanting by the priests. The use of white clothing in ritual performances is almost always associated with divinity. Kwakye-Opong asserts that the use of white clothes in ritual performances denotes purity, victory and holiness.²⁹ Here, Eniola is ushered into a spiritual realm just to prepare and fortify herself for her battle with Mekanaki, a battle she aims to win.

The seriousness and intensity of this ritual performance by Eniola and the priests show how she intends to deal with Mekanaki. Metaphorically, Eniola compares herself to the owner of the house, who needs to fight, seek protection and take the necessary precaution to prevent a turbulent danger which is meant to break and destroy all that she has built through her immense sacrifice and hard work over the years. With this, Mekanaki is presented as the flood, and the house as Eniola's achievements and successes. This proverb symbolizes Eniola's readiness and determination to face and annihilate Mekanaki, who interestingly, is equally being fortified in another scene by a fetish priest to destroy Eniola.

9. *A butterfly that challenges a thorn head-on will surely have its wings and beauty torn to shreds.*

This is Eniola's last proverb shrouded in prayer against Mekanaki at the river bank. Eniola is determined to destroy Mekanaki before he takes the lead and harms her. She promised him at the table after his blatant disrespect that she will stretch her hands on his dead body and she intends to achieve

²⁹ Regina Kwakye-Opong, "Communal Coherence, Spirituality and Clothing Symbolism of the Chief Priest in the Ga Traditional Governance." *International Journal of Costume and Fashion* 14, (2014): 33-50.

just that. The line of Eniola's proverbs communicates anger, protest, caution and threats and this brings to bear the kind of woman that she is, one who does not take things lightly.

Here, Eniola compares Mekanaki to a butterfly, a delicate flying insect that wants to land directly on a thorn. Thorns can cut one's skin and mostly should be avoided to prevent injury. Clearly, thorns should therefore not be a playing ground for a butterfly. Its beauty will be shattered and its delicate wings and body of thin layers of chitin will be shredded. Eniola is representative of the thorn – a sharp pointed growth on the stem of a plant. In this proverb, Eniola asserts her power and ability to wreak havoc on Mekanaki, the butterfly.

10. *The taproot that stands in the way of an elephant will definitely be crushed.*

This proverb was uttered by young Eniola when she met members of the round table to re-strategize for the way forward after the demise of her husband, Alhaji Salami. She was determined to take over from her husband as the King of the streets after she had taken over all his properties. The men however found it insulting for her to lead them. Eniola therefore declared this on the cold-blooded body of Alhaji Taiwo who dissented her taking-over and was strangled to death. With the men scared out of their wits at the swift turn of events, no one dared to challenge, reprimand or object her. Here, the rise of the female character, Eniola, to a position that has been owned and fiercely contested by only men is seen. A woman finally ascends the throne of men through an act of violence.

Metaphorically, Eniola compares herself to the mighty elephant who because of its size, weight and power can trample on any insignificant object or animal that stands in its way. Here, the taproot represents Alhaji Taiwo and all the elders at the table who undermined her ambition and quest for power simply because she is a woman. By asserting herself just like the elephant, Eniola rebels against the tradition of men being the only capable leaders and thus, a clear feminist inscription in Kemi Adetiba's film is seen.

Pragma-Stylistic Analysis of Selected Proverbs from *King of Boys: The Return of The King*

1. *After the King's palace burns, a more beautiful one is rebuilt*

This proverb was uttered by Alhaja Eniola Salami when she returned from exile to her motherland, Nigeria, after being exonerated of all charges that were levelled against her by the NCCC. It was an answer to a question posed by a journalist, inquiring about the reason for her return.

Eniola compares herself to a king whose palace has been burnt. Symbolically, the burnt palace is representative of the lost properties, successes, soiled reputation, and court charges which led Eniola to exile. Hence, the more beautiful palace which is to be rebuilt is tantamount to the new image and successes which she intends to build upon returning to Nigeria from exile.

The underlying message in this proverb is that the struggles and challenges that one goes through should not be the end of life – one must have a renewed focus to rebuild after a downfall. Eniola who refers to herself as “four Kings in one” does not want to be subdued by her loss, therefore, commits her determination to rise again in this proverb. The proverb shows the authority of kings through their palaces. It is in light of this that a more beautiful one must be built in case the old burns – a king without a palace is no king.

2. *They say, what is a shoe without a foot? What good is the morning without the sun?*

This proverb was made by Eniola when she was lamenting and weeping on the grave of her children, Kemi and Kitan, at the cemetery. She has been filled with profound sadness and an unbearable grief since the unfortunate demise of her children that she literally soaks a whip in hot pepper and flogs herself as punishment for the death of her children. It shows the depth of Eniola's loss, it clearly showcases the intensity of her pain, grief, loneliness, dejection and how meaningless her life has become since the departure of her children.

The proverb speaks to the beauty and power of interdependence, for if there is no foot, the shoe is of no essence. In the same way, the goodness of the morning would not be greatly felt when there is no sunshine. Figuratively, Eniola represents the shoe and the morning whose meaningful existence

wholly depends on her children, who are represented by the foot and the sun, who naturally inject strength, hope and meaning into her life. This proverb makes use of rhetorical questions which draws one's attention to the extent of Eniola's plight, grief and inability to cope with the loss of her children. Contextually, Eniola utters this proverb to show how empty her life has become without her children.

3. *He who tries to catch rainwater with a sieve deceives himself.*

This statement was made by Eniola to Ade Tiger when he notified her of Odogwu Malay's constant and incessant phone calls in hopes of trying to get in touch and have a word with her. Ade Tiger is strongly of the opinion that the crown still belongs to Eniola since half of the men at the table are still religiously loyal to her and most of the people in the streets are solidly behind her. However, she risks having a problem if she does not coordinate a strike to eliminate Odudubariba who is posing himself as King.

Figuratively, Eniola compares Odudubariba to one who is desperately trying to attain the unattainable. By trying to catch rainwater with a sieve, an object that cannot hold water, is simply a display of one's desperation, lack of knowledge, and ignorance. For Eniola, no matter how hard Odudubariba works to usurp her power, it would not work just like one's futile attempt to catch rainwater with a sieve. Odudubariba at the end of the day might end up deceiving everyone that trying to usurp power from Eniola is attainable but inwardly he knows that it is not possible. This proverb further speaks to the confidence Eniola has in her ability to rule as king and defend her kingship even when all odds seem to be against her.

4. *The water a fish swims in is the water that cooks it.*

This statement was made by Eniola to Iya Oloja, Head of the Market Women Association when she went to her house to ask for help in soliciting votes and to get the market women to rally behind her since they are known to be effective in galvanising votes. Iya Oloja made it absolutely clear to Eniola that she is better off supporting the Randles in order to maintain her position since it is being threatened by a young woman from a wealthy family. Oloja cynically alludes to vote rigging in elections and how the real candidate is never on the face of the ballot. Shocked by Iya Oloja's audacity to freely express such an idea, Eniola uttered this proverb to serve as a warning to Iya Oloja for choosing her opponent in spite of all the help she has offered her. She understood that loyalty meant nothing to Iya Oloja.

Metaphorically, Iya Oloja is compared to a fish, which thinks the water is only there to protect it, since it is its natural habitat, oblivious to the fact that water can also be used in its destruction. The ambiguity surrounding the contextual meaning of the proverb is clear. It may be said that the proverb was meant as a caution to Oloja to be mindful of her support to the Randles because they are the same people who will cause her destruction. On the other hand, it may be said to be in reference to Oloja's betrayal, and by extension that of the market women, to Eniola despite her support to the market women. In the first instance, the fish may be representative of Oloja and the water, the Randles and her association with them. In the second, the fish may be representative of Eniola, and the water the market women and her association with them. This proverb is an admonishment for one to be mindful of the people around in all dealings.

5. *Only once can a dishonourable man lure an innocent lady for sex.*

Eniola directed this proverb to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Eniola faced several challenges in the gubernatorial elections in the form of her reputation being marred by Dapo Banjo's newspaper, the tricks of Jumoke Randle, the betrayal of Iya Oloja and Reverend Ifeanyi and insufficient funds out of her frozen assets. She clandestinely met the President to make her the representative of his party in the elections for her to be at his beck and call. When the President responded in the negative, she reminds him of his neglect in getting her back to the country, by getting all charges levelled against her by the NCCC dropped, from exile after helping him win the election.

This proverb from Eniola simply means that a person who has been deceived before cannot be deceived again. The President is captured as the dishonourable man, who cajoles women who do not

know his true being into getting what they treasure most, in this metaphor. Eniola on the other side is the innocent woman. The proverb shows the need for one to know and learn from his or her mistakes and be vigilant or change accordingly.

6. *The stick that will pierce one in the eye is best avoided while still far away.*

Jumoke Randle visits Aare for his help after Eniola was successfully given the nod as the official gubernatorial candidate of Lagos State for the incumbent party. Jumoke was alarmed and shocked especially by how Eniola skilfully and intelligently answered all questions that were posed by the journalists including the ones that were intended to hurt her reputation. She then decided to approach Eniola's godfather, Aare, to get rid of Eniola from the election race.

This proverb was uttered by Aare when Jumoke told him the reason for her visit. He was impressed that Jumoke knows that it is imperative and better to arm one's self and stay away from that which can harm. Eniola is compared to a sharp stick capable of piercing or causing harm to one's eye, figuratively Governor Randle. The eye perceives about eighty percent of all impressions and can be conceived as an important organ. Governor Randle may be posed as Jumoke's eye because of his importance to her family as the breadwinner. Therefore, Eniola causing the downfall of Governor Randle (figuratively, Jumoke's eye) will mean the end of Jumoke Randle's life hence the urgent need to eliminate Eniola (the stick capable of piercing). The cultural significance of proverbs simply cannot be undermined. Proverbs serve as a form of caution and advice to both the young and old. It teaches one how to live their lives and better navigate and define their space in a world that often harms than shows grace.

7. *One doesn't fight to save another person's head only to have his own taken by a falcon.*

Aare uttered this proverb to Jumoke to know why he should help destroy Eniola for her husband to win the gubernatorial election. He finds no need to help for two reasons. Firstly, when Governor Randle won the seat of Lagos State, he never visited him to show his appreciation nor has he offered him any contract to show his gratitude. He has completely ignored his existence. Secondly, upon all the evil he committed against Eniola, she has not responded with evil towards him after returning from exile.

Aare finds no need to embroil himself in a battle that does not concern him and consequently cause harm to his own self. The head is a symbol of life or something dear in this proverb. Aare does not want to fight to save the position of Governor Randle and thereby losing his life in the process by incurring the wrath of the falcon. As a predatory bird, the falcon symbolizes death, and evil. This clearly epitomizes the character of Eniola, who refers to herself as *laburu*, God's worst punishment on a person. The falcon is therefore representative of Eniola. This proverb cautions one to mind his or her own business and not meddle in the affairs of others.

8. *The eagle and the pigeon might both have wings but are certainly not the same type of bird.*

This statement was uttered by Jumoke Randle on the day of the Lagos State gubernatorial debate when her husband commended Eniola in her presence that, her tenacity and fortitude throughout her campaign have been nothing short of impressive and admirable.

Governor Randle draws a parallel between his wife and Eniola. Offended by her husband's comparison, she made the proverb as a declaration to assert that although they are all women, she is the powerful one. Metaphorically, Jumoke compares herself to the eagle, which symbolizes bravery, foresight, wisdom, power, vision and the most fearful of all birds while she compares Eniola to a pigeon, a timid and reserved bird. The eagle's might surpasses that of the pigeon; Jumoke conceives herself as more powerful than Eniola. The intent of this proverb was basically for Jumoke to unrealistically elevate herself above Eniola and demean and embarrass her in the presence of both their teams.

9. One doesn't include a pregnancy when counting one's children.

This statement was uttered by Eniola to Aare on phone at the round table meeting. Eniola finally realized that Aare is behind Ade Tiger's supposed betrayal. Angry and hurt, she blurts out that Aare has taken all that is dear to her including her children and now he wants her crown. Aare makes it quite clear that it is her life that they plan on taking next. As a sage, Eniola utters this proverb to let Aare know that as an elder and a wise man, he simply should not depend and celebrate that which is yet to happen for it is unwise to make plans based on something that has not happened.

This proverb is deeply grounded in biology and practicalizes reality to its core. Metaphorically, one's plans have been compared to pregnancy because pregnancies may not necessarily result in childbirth and extensively, children – there could be a miscarriage or some other unforeseen misfortunes. Hence, the success that comes with Aare executing his plan, which is succeeding in killing Eniola, amounts to the children. Aare's subtle celebration of his intention to eliminate Eniola is therefore immature and unwise.

10. The skull of the elephant is too massive for a child to carry.

This proverb was chanted by both young and old Eniola when finally, she makes an unseen power move at the round table meeting to show that indeed she is *laburu*, God's worst punishment on a person. She commands Ade Tiger, whom all the elders perceived to be on their side, to shoot an elder who called Eniola senile and mocked her with the death of her children. This was the hostile takeover and reassertion of Eniola's power as the King of Boys. She shouts the proverbs amidst loud gun shootings and the flow of human blood.

Figuratively, Eniola compares her crown to the skull of an elephant that is too big and heavy for anyone that is not authorized or has her blessings to carry. The child is a metaphor for Odudubariba who simply believes that by a strong alliance, he can lay claim to the kingship without incurring the wrath of its owner. Eniola makes it distinctly clear by her action and this proverb that absolutely no one can seize her crown and that she is the only one, not Aare nor the elders at the table, to determine her successor. This proverb also reiterates her magnificence, strength, strategic thinking and solidifies her as *laburu* and the one and only King of Boys.

CONCLUSION

The present study asserts that proverbs are linguistic choices that are employed as part of the style of a screenwriter in order to fully expand the plot of the story and offer detailed descriptions and understanding to the audience. The study espoused the context and meaning of proverbs as Kemi Adetiba's style of putting her message across. It adopted the pragma-stylistic approach in analysing literary works. It was revealed that proverbs are not used arbitrarily in utterances but are used to offer caution, warning or advice, assert one's authority and power, and show one's intent to execute a plan or achieve a goal. Kemi Adetiba significantly employed the stylistic choice of proverbs through, principally, metaphors, symbols, and imagery for the functions aforementioned. This goes a long way to keep the attention of the audience in the development of the story by enhancing dialoguing, introducing profound meanings to the acts in the scenes, intensifying the plots, and inducing humour in some cases. It also offers a clear journey of education on the rich mastery of knowledge in African societies and demonstrating culture and tradition through language. Owing to the fact that African movies present a strong avenue for the dissemination of necessary information that is vital to the socialization of the younger generation in the societies, the present generation has the onus to pay some attention in this area in terms of research to fully mine and promote knowledge.

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