

You Don't Understand What I'm Saying; Relevance of Common Ground in Ahmed Yerima's *Ajagunmale*

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Abstract

The relevance of common ground is of utmost significance in the production and interpretation of literary plays, especially, those of African refracted universes. However, much as the contribution is to linguistic scholarship, little has been done in this direction, especially on the plays of Ahmed Yerima. Applying the relevance and common ground principles, therefore, this study sets out to investigate how the principles enhance the production and reader's interpretation of Ahmed Yerima's perspectives in *Ajagunmale*, so selected because it is rich in data. We found out that with the notion of relevance and common ground, Yerima effectively selects such lexical items of idioms, personal pronouns, proverbs and wise-sayings in the constructions of utterances of his characters in *Ajagunmale*, thereby aiding our easy understanding of Ahmed Yerima's perspectives in the play. A study of the relevance of common ground therefore significantly enhances our interpretation of the use of language and authorial perspective in the play, and could also be useful if applied to other Ahmed Yerima's plays as well as other African refracted universes.

Key Words: Relevance, common ground, *Ajagunmale*, Ahmed Yerima, African refracted universes.

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INTRODUCTION

Relevance as a notion cannot be undermined in the construction and interpretation of utterances as it adds additional information to existing common environment based on transcendental understanding of the reader or listener depending entirely on actions performed. The inherent significance of achieving successful communication based on surrounding text in discourse has been overtly investigated by scholars [1-7, 1]. Given its significance in the production and interpretation of African refracted universes and the relative insufficient literature in this direction in linguistic explorations, especially, on Ahmed Yerima's works, this study sets out to fill this vacuum with a view to determine the linguistic features of discourse that enhances the relevance of an utterance based on common ground in Yerima's *Ajagunmale*.

Relevance Theory and Common Ground

Relevance as a notion is taken in terms of the sense made by an utterance. This suggests that what the speaker says must be meaningful to the hearer since the meaningfulness of an utterance makes it relevant. It is, therefore, a means of achieving successful communication in discourse [1]. The idea here is that for additional information to be relevant, it must add

something to the existing common environment as well as the interpretation of utterances. Relevance theory (henceforth RT), a cognitive theory of human communication is developed by Wilson and Sperber [3]. The theory really emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a cognition-centered alternative to Grice's pragmatics (see Wilson and Sperber, *ibid*). The main assumption of the theory is that human beings are endowed with a biologically rooted ability to maximize the relevance of incoming stimuli (including linguistic utterances and other communicative behavior).

According to Carston [2], relevance is not only a typical property of external stimuli but also internal representations and thoughts, all of which may become inputs for cognitive processing. The pursuit of relevance is a typical aspect of the mental activity of human beings, always geared towards obtaining the highest reward from the stimuli that they process. This biological endowment, Carston [2] notes, is the result of the evolution of architecture, and the complexity of the human mind and a part of a general human ability to meta-represent one's and other people's thoughts and intentions. Hence Wilson and Sperber's [3] observation that

“as a result of constant selection pressure towards increasing efficiency, the human cognitive system has developed in such a way that our perceptual mechanisms tend automatically to pick out potentially relevant stimuli.

Our memory retrieval mechanisms tend automatically to activate potentially relevant assumptions, and our inferential mechanisms tend spontaneously to process them in the most productive way”.

According to Yus [8], relevance can be summarized as the decoded meaning of the sentence which is compatible with a number of different interpretations in the same context; these interpretations are graded in terms of accessibility; hearers rely on a powerful criterion when selecting the most appropriate interpretation; and this criterion makes it possible to select one interpretation among the range of possible interpretations.

A consideration of “common ground” would be meaningless without a cursory look at context whose significance lies in the volume of scholarly attention it has drawn over the years [4-6, 9, 1]. Contextual perspectives have either been in linguistic terms, in which case, context refers to previous and subsequent linguistic material in a text, or extra-linguistic terms of continually changing surroundings in the widest sense, that enable the participants in the communication process to interact intelligibly [1].

Much works have been done on context [10, 11, 12, 4, 13, 14, 15]. Context has been considered as the totality of the environment in which a word is used [1]. In other words, it is the sum of the situations in which a text comes to life. It is an abstract category employed by language scholars to provide a link between linguistic items and the social and situational factors of communication [14], and provides the background from which the meaning of a word springs [15]. Context therefore enhances interpretation of words, hence, Odebunmi’s [15] submission that context is the spine of meaning. A word that enhances our determination of the speaker’s meaning is known as the ‘co-text’. Co-text has been described as the lexical items that surround a particular word in a text [6, 15].

Relative to this, Clark [16] notes that people take too much for granted in inter-action. Indeed, they assume a common language, shared knowledge of issues as cultural facts, new stories and local geography. If the interactants are acquaintances, then, there are considerations for shared knowledge of earlier conversations and other joint experiences. In physical interactions, there are expectations of shared knowledge of the scene around them. A consideration of the above is what Clark refers to as “common ground”. According to Clark [17], common ground is “the sum totals of the

information that people assume they share”. This is also known as “common knowledge”. Common knowledge was introduced by Lewis [18] to account for how people coordinate with each other. Literally, the principle of common knowledge stipulates that people agree to do things relative to their joint knowledge of their environment, as such; common knowledge is a property of a community of people, even though the community may consist of just two people.

According to Clark [6], the notion of “common ground” was introduced by Robert Stalnaker [19], based on Lewis common knowledge to account for the way in which information accumulates in conversation. Stalnaker observes that:

The presuppositions of a speaker are the pre-suppositions whose truth he takes for granted as part of the background of the conversation presuppositions are what is taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in the conversation, what is treated as their common knowledge or mutual knowledge.

Stalnaker [19].

Stalnaker’s observation here is a suggestion that people take certain propositions to be common ground in conversation, such that, when they make assertions, they add to the common ground. Common ground also includes common/mutual beliefs, and common/mutual suppositions [17, 7]. Stalnaker [19] further reveals that common ground is a reflexive or self-referring notion. This is based on the fact that the interlocutors take the proposition at hand as the truth, as such, they share the same belief about the information and “because of the self-reference, people can technically draw an infinity of inferences from what they take to be common ground [7]”. According to him, for people to assess and re-assess their common ground, they need the right bases and these are: community membership, and personal experience. The communal common ground is built on the fact that communities share information that is common to its people. Common, in the sense that some of the communities are built around shared venues and locations, practices and expertise and so on. The community communal common good is such that when people are from the same community, they take as common ground, shared knowledge which is taken for granted. However, at times, some of the communities are either nested, when shared knowledge is specific, such as obtained in people belonging to the same culture or cross-cutting when people share beliefs on common ground of

identical nationality. These lead to gradations in assessments of common grounds.

The other main basis of common ground is joint experience which may be perceptual. The experience may be linguistic or communicative. In essence, the dictates of common ground are influenced by language or conditions of discourse. In linguistically influenced common ground, there are considerations for the conventions of language or what can be referred to as rules of language (semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology and pragmatics) relative to the interlocutor's community. In an instance as this, nesting or cross-cutting influences common ground as both speaker and hearer (s) understanding of "shared communal lexicon" is expected. This is essential as every community or culture is expected to have its own communal lexicon which has linguistic implications that ought to be known by members of that community. As such, speaker "A" presupposes "B" to share linguistic knowledge of communal lexicon with him, hence, his expectation of understanding by "B". For example, the people of Kabba, in Kogi State, Nigeria call "feet", "*ehin*", contrary to the Yorubas, also of Nigeria that perceive "*ehin*" as back, such that, when a boy of Kabba gets injured on the feet and comes home to his mother saying "*Mama, Mama, mo me' hin gbo*", (Kogi boys meaning) "mother, mother, I injured my back" the Yoruba mother goes to examine the foot rather than the back as she is not nested with the speaker. Although some lexicons are common to some community members and are cross-cutting because of their general or national outlook, some are nested as they can only be understood by members of the same immediate community. Other linguistic common ground forms may be specialized or professional which may either be nested or cross-cutting. These exist among nationalists, people of same professions such as lawyers, doctors, and people with same religious beliefs such as Christians, Muslims. These common communal lexicons are often called jargon, dialect, patois, idiom, parlance, proverbs etc. Instances are found in Ahmed Yerima's culture-based works and issues relating to interpretation of utterances based on communal common ground will surely enhance our analysis in this study.

Discourse common ground presents a situation whereby people design what they say against the common ground they believe they already share with their interlocutors. This process is easily achieved through the "information structure" and "grounding". According to Stalnaker [19], information structure is a property of utterances; in which case, "A" uses the special construction to distinguish two types of information [14]. Ultimately, the speaker must be able to establish that the hearer shares common ground with him; this is known as "grounding" [16]. To establish that the interlocutors share common ground, the hearers show periodic evidence of the state of his understanding

of the speaker's utterances. One way of doing this is back-channel signals such as "uh-huh, yeah, a head nod, or smile" as the case may be. In another form, appropriate next contribution as response to speaker's utterance is adequate. Our concentration in this study shall be on how the relevance of a situation spurs the application of the principles of common ground towards enhancing the interpretation of texts. This is attempted in the following sections.

A brief summary of the text

Ajagunmale, a story based on Yoruba culture opens with Balogun paying a visit to Saura, the priest of Esu, after sending valuable gifts. The priest is eager to know the cause for the gifts. When Saura asks for the reason, Balogun reveals that the king is expected, in his twentieth year on the throne, to wage a war and after he has conquered, he must give the town to his brother (Balogun) to rule, thus, he adds to the empire. Correspondingly, the king did according to customs and the war is led by Balogun himself. However, after the victory, instead for the king to give the town to him, he gives it to his son, an act which Balogun sees as an abomination. Saura cautions Balogun by reminding him that the king makes him a chief (Balogun) after the conquest, and his countenance reveals that he is happy about it. Balogun retorts that it is pretence that he merely pretends as if all is well, whereas, all is not well. Saura then asks what Balogun requests from Esu and is taken aback when Balogun states that all he wants is to be king. Consequently, he contracts Esu to throw the town into confusion and that the king should be involved in shameful acts that will make the people to reject him. Saura cautions Balogun again and asks whether he has consulted Ifa to ask Ajagunmale, the head of all priests in heaven, if he is destined to be king. This does not bother Balogun as he believes that as a prince, he has the right to be king.

After consulting the oracle, Oluawo tells Oba that the cause of all the troubles in the land is someone who has money to spend. The king becomes worried and is determined to know who it could be that harbours so much hatred for him and his people. Esu goes to work starting with the prince. Under spiritual influence (*eedi*), the prince forcefully sleeps with three women unknowingly. To make the matters worse, the daughter of Iyalode who will soon get married is among those raped. The king gets angry and decides to disown him as a son and prince of Ikoto Ile. There is also the problem of Elesin Oba. Shakiru, the king's shadow has been going round the town committing atrocities. Being the one that will follow the king to his grave, he is given a free hand over everything so that he can enjoy himself since his life will definitely be cut short. Shakiru, taking his position as an excuse, oversteps his boundaries. The misunderstanding between him and the king is made public and when Shakiru commits suicide, the king easily becomes the suspect.

To worsen the situation, Balogun condemns and challenges his brother, the king. In his state of confusion, Ajagunmale appears to the king in his sleep. His visit is to ascertain the truth of the allegations that the King's accusers make against him. Having met the king, Ajagunmale is surprised at the king's behavior because everything he sees is different from the reports he gets from the Oba's accusers. He, therefore, advises the king to find the truth in his inner strength and Eledumare and he, Ajagunmale, will guide him. When the king wakes up, he is surprised because the meeting is very real.

The Oba summons his Oluawo, and together, they ponder over Oba's meeting with Ajagunmale and conclude that Ajagunmale tactically reveals that he should do away with anger and his "head" shall fight for him. In his wisdom, as guided by the gods, the king asks his brother, Balogun, to be made the king of Ikotun Igbado against the custom, in three days. Balogun is happy. During the traditional coronation process, the kingmakers reveal that Balogun has been cursed by a king and only the king can lift the curse as the King's spirit fights on his behalf. This is confirmed when Balogun picks the calabash of alligator pepper. He is afraid and consults Ifa priests to ascertain how the coronation will go. Almost all the priests distort the words of Ajagunmale out of fear that Balogun will kill them. At the coronation, there is no problem until Balogun presents his head for the crown. The gods strike him and he writes in pain and clutches the crown to his chest as he dies. Through Saura, Yerima reveals that Balogun dies because he chooses a destiny never to be king and that whatever a man wants in life he must ask his "head".

Analysis and discussion of findings

A glean of *Ajagunmale* reveals that the play is largely dominated by interactions produced through relevance of events and the pragmatic successes in the play achieved through the application of the principle of common ground. A glean of the data reveals that Yerima employs issues relevant to the conversation enhanced by the communicative and linguistic principles projected through the use of idioms, personal pronouns, proverbs, and wise-sayings to deal with issues of explaining, declaring, praising, confessing and cautioning. These are revealed in our analysis below:

Background

When Balogun visits Esu, he is welcomed by Saura, the Esu Priest. In the course of their discussion, certain declarations about the relationship between Esu and Saura are revealed). Let us consider example 1:

Ex. 1: Balogun: But I thought you knew everything?

Saura: Not quite, Balogun. I am only a servant of the great one.

I do not possess such powers yet and
if I must advise my master,
I must have the facts with me. Speak
with me, Balogun, my ears
yarn. (Hands him a
pebble). Speak to it.

(*Ajagunmale*, Pgs, 9 – 10)

Balogun is astounded that Saura cannot freely exercise all the powers of *esu* as revealed in example 1 above. He cannot understand the hierarchical operation of the cult. He is of the impression that his grievances are known and understood by the priest, Saura. Hence his innocent thought that Saura knows everything that is happening to him. With this, Saura explains that Balogun must speak to the pebbles. Without a communicative common ground of what speaking to the pebbles meant in Yorubaland, there would have been a pragmatic failure here such that Yerima's intention in the play would not have been achieved. The pragmatic success here is further enhanced by the situational relevance of Saura's handling over of the pebbles to Balogun. In such situation in Yorubaland, the client seeking to see into the unknown reveals his travails to the god through the pebbles for the priest to reveal and proffer solution.

With the explanation that he is a servant, Balogun through the wise saying of the communicative common ground understands that he must first talk to Èsù. Saura calls himself a servant here, whereas in ordinary sense, he is not. In Yoruba culture, a servant is a lowly one who occupies a position that could be equaled to that of a slave. A servant therefore carries out multifarious errands for the master. He is at the beck and call of the master. The servant cannot do anything against the will of the master, and cannot affect nor influence the decision or acts of the boss. This is the position of Saura in Esu cult. Relatively, Saura is Èsù's errand boy, hence, his confession that "I do not possess such powers yet. And if I must advise my master, I must have the facts with me".

The structural classification of master-servant relationship, no doubt, significantly enhances Balogun's ability to place the status of Saura and greatly influences the effectiveness of his dealings with Èsù. Such relevant co-textual lexical item as "power" in the extract enhances our reference of status since power indicates individual's position. Without an application of effective communicative ground of hierarchy of Èsù cult in Yorubaland, Balogun could not have been inferred from Saura's contribution, especially, the reference to "such power", that such status expected by Balogun is beyond Saura.

An instance of communicative common ground is also found in Balogun's bid to reveal his problems. Example 2 captures this:

Ex. 2: Balogun: I am prince, but not too long ago,
the king
broke tradition and made me a chief
in the palace.
Ewo! Me, a blue-blooded prince.

(Ajagunmale, pg. 11)

The above reveals that an abomination has been committed. A careful examination of the utterance, “me, a blue-blooded prince” reflects the status of a prince in Yorubaland. Here, the linguistic common ground form is applied. This is manifested in the singular form of the personal pronoun to refer to the personality of Balogun as an ordinary being turned super ordinary through his being a blue blooded prince, an idiom linguistically signifying his royal status. The Yoruba royal families are regarded as the greatest in the land. A blue-blooded prince has the capability of becoming a king in the future. It is, therefore, an abomination for a blue-blooded prince to be made a chief when he ought to be an awaiting king.

What then could make a blue-blooded prince like Balogun to be angry? Balogun explains without hesitation. As he reveals, the king broke the tradition and made him a chief, dashing his hopes of being a king. Yerima’s application of the Yorubas’ linguistic patronage of “abomination” in “ewo!” is deliberate as he wants the emphasis on that aspect of impossibility of what is not culturally accepted should be known. The pragmatic success here is achieved through Saura’s linguistic communicative common ground without which Balogun’s explanation of frustration here would have been lost. With Balogun’s application of the relevance of the linguistic common ground to kingship issues in Yorubaland, Saura could infer the meaning of a blue blooded-prince, and what it entails, hence, his desire to help Balogun out of his predicament.

The relevance of common ground is also experienced in the production and successful interpretation of example 3 below:

Ex. 3: Saura: Thank God, I am but a mere
servant of a god.
He sees my heart always, and I do
not have to pretend.
Before I sleep, it is to Esu that I
turn, and when I wake up,
it is Esu that I turn to. He is my
symbol of royalty,
while I am the scrapped, scratched,
bone of
loyalty indented on his royal staff.
They must go together.
But you have me fooled. I still
think that was what I saw

on the day of the coronation. With
eyelids firmly shot and
man lying so still, indeed sleep is
the brother of death.
You fooled us all, Balogun.

(Ajagunmale, Pg. 12)

Through Saura’s utterances in three above, Yerima tactically deals with the issue of faithfulness by highlighting the ingredients of being faithful and the significance of observation of the principles through relevant carefully chosen lexical items. First in this direction is a consideration of the degree of Saura’s dedication and faithfulness to his master, *èsù*. Second, Saura’s conception of his master is presented in a rhythmical form as he considers *èsù* as his “symbol of royalty” and he is “a bone of loyalty” indented on his (*èsù*’s) royal staff”. Yerima’s attempt at poetic excellence cannot go unnoticed for the pragmatic success achieved through the rhymes of royalty and loyalty. An application of linguistic common ground of the dedication of high priests of gods in Yorubaland enhances one’s ability to infer the meaning of Saura’s utterances above. Through relevant linguistic common ground, therefore, one understands that in Yorubaland, royalty interacts with loyalty. As such, in royal circles, loyalty is expected. Hence, in royal circles, issues and pebbles of deception are quite unexpected. Consequently, Balogun’s act of deception and pretence on the chieftaincy coronation is totally unexpected and culturally unacceptable because it is never an act expected of royalty.

Another instance of the relevance of common ground in the play is found in the interaction below:

Ex. 4: Saura: Did he at that point promise to make
you the king of Igboado?

Balogun: Did he have to? It was his twentieth
year, I am his brother,
and he was about to wage a war like
our forefathers before him.
It was reasonable to assume...

(Ajagunmale, pgs 15 – 16)

Yerima’s stylistic excellence is fore-grounded in the interaction here. In a rather stylistic dialogue, Balogun answers Saura’s inquisition with further inquiry. However, Balogun’s elicitation framed as a response prepares the ground for the pragmatic act performed in the extract. Based on assumption, Balogun believes that the king, his brother, ought to follow tradition. This, he reveals when he states that “it was his twentieth year”, “...and he was about to wage war like our forefathers before him”. It is only with the

application of communicative common ground of the traditional practice of waging war in the town that Saura understands Balogun's explanation here. Since Saura shares a common cultural knowledge with Balogun, he immediately understands that according to tradition, in his twentieth year, the king must wage war like his forefathers and give the town to his brother to rule. With this in mind, Balogun believes that he ought to be made king of Igbo-ado after conquering the town.

When Oluawo enters the palace and meets Oba and Olori in intimate circumstance, the linguistic and communicative common ground of proverbs and wise-sayings come in handy to enhance the interaction here. Let us see their interaction in 5 below:

Ex. 5: Oba: Rise, my beloved wife. Pillar and strength to the palace.

If we even return for a second life, I, like now, will marry you again.

Oluawo: (*Breaks into a laugh*) no wonder the egret perches on the cow ignored and yet protected. No wonder the bees will not stop sucking the flower fulfilled. It is the sweetness of honey that keeps them there. My eyes have seen it all. How Olori massages the tender ego of the king and extracts everlasting promises of even the world beyond from him. Kabiyesi o.

(*Ajagunmale*, pgs 23 – 24)

Through linguistic common ground here, Olori is presented as pillar and strength to the palace which is quite idiomatic. This is intended by the King to reiterate the role played by Olori in his life, hence, his promise of being with her, even if given a chance in the next world. To this, Oluawo comments; "no wonder the egret perches on the cow ignored". This proverb relates the King and Queen's love for one another to that of the cow and egret. Intimate man-woman relationship is usually likened to cow-egret relationship in Yorubaland. With an application of the relevance of the cow-egret relationship to the issue at hand, we are able to link the Queen with the egret, and the King, the cow, also the Oba successfully understands Oluawo's meaning that the egret is not only secured, having perched on the cow, it enjoys the benefits of transportation as well. The relevance of the utterance lies in its ability to adequately express and communicate the intention of Oluawo in the circumstance.

Without an application of the principle of relevance, the cow-egret phenomenon, would have been difficult to establish, especially, the link between the egret and the cow. As such, one is able to conceive the

picture of the sympathetic skinny legged egret perching on the fatty cow for survival. The perched egret is ignored because it is light in weight and, of course, constitutes no burden to the cow. The relevance achieved through idioms enhance Yerima's choice of linguistic common ground, the application of which enable our interpretation as readers that Olori's relationship is equated with the perching of the egret on the cow ignored by the king because she brings no burden to the him.

In the same vein, Oluawo remarks that "the bees will not stop suckling the flowers fulfilled". With the application of linguistic competence of the traditional meaning of the wise-saying, one catches the famous picture of a bee suckling the flowers and the contentment derived therein. With this, one could see a situational relationship whereby the flower provides fulfillment for the bees in terms of the sweetened buds. Without the sweetened buds, the bees might have not come. It can thus be easily inferred that the King is the bee, while the Queen is the flower. Hence, they are inseparable, hence their preference to even live together as husband and wife even in the coming world.

Furthermore, when Balogun sends for Familola to know what will happen the following day that he will be crowned king of Igboado, Familola saw death, but for fear of being killed by Balogun, he turned the hand of the clock round. Yerima's use of wise sayings becomes useful here. Let us examine example 6.

Ex 6: Kekere: (*Looks around to confirm they are alone.*)

May Ifa forgive us,
This is not what you taught me, Baba.

Familola: Watch what you say, son, or else we trip on the sharp edge

of your inquisitive tongue. We are still in the face of danger.

We must tread softly.

Kekere: Baba, you did not tell him the truth. I saw it all. You

deliberately misread the signs.

Familola: Shii. Yes.... I told him that he wanted to hear, so that we may live.

Our lives were more important. Our master, Orunmila will understand.

We must hurry out of here, evil lurks and the land wrecks of it. Esu prowls.

I thought you said you read the signs?

(*Ajagunmale*, pg 52)

As 6 above reveals, after the oracle consultation, Kekere, also well versed in the process of

consultation (although an apprentice) detects that Familola his master) lies to Balogun, hence, the challenge that he deliberately misread the signs and did not tell the truth. However, with an appropriate application of the principle of relevance of what ought to be told and what ought not to, because of the consideration for their lives, Familola cautions Kekere through the metaphor, “watch what you say son or we trip on the sharp edge of your inquisitive tongue”. With the application of the linguistic common ground here, kekere understands Familola his master very well, as he is further reminded that “they are still in the face of danger”. Thus, Yerima tactically employs the figurative linguistic common ground as a vivid attempt at describing the state of things for Kekere to understand.

The following example is another exposee of the relevance of common ground in *Ajagunmale*

Ex. 7: Oba: Me. Oba Akinbiyi Adetutu Arabambi..
Egun nla labi....

The raw hot lead that burns the heart of
great prey.....

Son of the Big Elephant who steps on his
enemies at will...

Husband of a thousand wives..... the
Olumona of Ikoto Ile. Me.

(*Ajagunmale*, pg 23)

The Oba is weighed down because of threats to his life and especially, the one that arises as a result of the dream he has that Shakiru, his shadow in life and partner in death (*abóbakú*), jeers at him. To strengthen him, the Oba starts singing his own praise. This is common in Yorubaland as praise singing is expected to lift the spirit and instill confidence for one to surmount all obstacles. In example thirty-eight, there is a need for an application of the relevance of common ground of the communal practice of lineage praise rendering here. For example, allusion to names such as “*Arábámbí*” and “*Egúngún nínlá*” (the big masquerade) are quite culturally inclined. With the application of linguistic common ground of praise rendering, one understands that “*Arábámbí*” is one of the names of Sango, the god of thunder. Sango is a powerful god in Yorubaland. When angry, Sango emits fire from the mouth and causes rain. Sango is not a coward, and because of this attribute, people from Sango’s lineage or that looks like Sango with ferocious look, red eyeballs, or platted hair are likened to Sango.

Also, “*Egúngún nínlá*” in Yorubaland is considered to be quite spiritually powerful and as such are respected as father to younger masquerades. Great people in Yorubaland are likened to “*Egúngún nínlá*” because of their status. In the heat of the moment, the Oba says that he is “the raw hot lead that burns the heart of great prey”. The metaphoric representation here is noted. Oba’s claim that he is the hot lead that burns

the heart of great prey simply implies that he is strong and will kill all his enemies. This, he reiterates by calling himself “the son of Big Elephant”. Obviously, an Elephant whether big or small can never give birth to a human. However, Yorubas do reference themselves relative to Elephant because of its strength and might. Without an application of common ground of Yoruba lineage praise rendering, one will not understand how an Elephant gives birth to a man as captured in the expression. However, with the proper knowledge of relevance, one realizes that the Elephant is the biggest animal in the bush and when it steps on a bush, it never rises again. This personal praise chant thus implies that the King will step on and kill all his enemies. Also, it is only the Olori that we know as his only wife in the play, yet he claims to be husband to a thousand wives. With the application of the linguistic common ground here, the King is the husband to three groups of women in the palace: “*ayabas*” (wives of the former Kings), “*Oloris*” (his own wives), and “*aya omos*” (wives of his children).

Also when Oluawo enters the palace and meets the Oba and Olori in a happy mood, Oluawo asks for forgiveness for interrupting. But the Oba tells him that he is not interrupting. Example 8 captures this.

Ex. 8: Oba: Forgive? We were just talking about you.
You are indeed the son

of your father. Oluawo, son of Awolola.
Awo that looks for food

for the white birds. The one that stays at
the back of the house, and

still knows what Ifa says. Owonrin is the
father of Ifa, Ejiogbe is the

father of Opele. Otototo, orororo,
differently did we come to this

world, differently do our destinies unfold. I
will chant the praise of

Ejiogbe, I will chant the praise of Oluawo,
the all-seeing priest of my

palace. I say you are the son of your
parents.

(*Ajagunmale*, pg 24)

Yorubas also sing people’s praises to make them happy. However, sck and ssk of this cultural practice must be employed to understand such. In Yorubaland, to say that one is “the son of his father” implies that the individual is not a bastard. The King in thirty-nine above further sings the praises of Oluawo’s father and it is only with an application linguistic common ground of Ifa cult that one understands the pragmatic import of this utterances and realizes how great an Ifa priest “Olúawo” and his father are, for only great priests are so recognized as “awo that looks for food for the white birds” that is “*awo rere tí wá oúnje fún eye*”, “a good priest that looks for food for the birds”. It should be noted that white birds are not mentioned in the Yoruba version of praise chant of Ifa

Priests, the mention of white birds, here, indicates Yerima's attempt at showing how pure Awolola, Oluawo's father is. This is imperative so as to segregate Awolola from the wicked priests that do evil. One needs an application of the linguistic common ground of Yoruba cultural beliefs and practices to understand the praise chant, especially, ancestral African gods such as "Òwónrín", "Ifá", "Èjìogbè" and cultural religious item, "òpèlè", and other religious expressions as "òtótótótó, "òróróró".

CONCLUSION

Our study here shows that Yerima at needed aspects employs the principle of relevance to arouse the knowledge of common grounds of linguistic and communicative common ground indicated by idioms, personal pronouns, proverbs, and wise-sayings in producing the play *Ajagunmale*. This is also applicable to other African refracted universes and knowledge of this can also be applied to other African plays to be able to aptly understand the writer's thematic preoccupations in the plays.

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