

## **Context of Culture in Femi Osofisan's *Many Colours Make The Thunderking***

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### **Abstract**

*Existing linguistic explorations on context have considered meaning relative to word use in the environment it occurs and the contexts of interactions that aid meaning. This study, however, is a departure from this direction as it considers the context in terms of the use of lexical items relative to such contextual aspects as participants, setting, acts and so on based on Yoruba cultural practices to construct a text. Osofisan's *Many Colours Make the Thunderking* was purposely chosen because it is rich in data. To this, we apply Hymes's (1964) schema of *SPEAKING* with insights from other relevant principles of context such as Odebunmi (2006), and Kecskes (2014) as they are culture oriented. The contextual features of the setting/ scene, participants, acts and knowledge are found to characterize the data. Where they are found, they largely project the knowledge of Yoruba cultural practices as reflected in the interactions of the characters. Also, the identified contextual features specify the felicity accorded to the speaker and the speech, the act sequence which relates the steps that occur in the process of the narration, and the shared cultural background that is mutual between the interlocutors. The contextual features significantly enhance our ability to identify and determine Yoruba cultural practices that are employed to construct utterances in the play. The study apart from contributing to existing studies on cultural discourse will set a template for analysis of the context of culture in African literary texts and*

*provide a means to identify how cultural means are employed to determine authorial preoccupation in African literary texts.*

**Key Words:** *Context, Culture, Yoruba cultural practices, shared cultural background, mutual*

## **1. Introduction**

Observations have shown that several cultural considerations go into the construction of characters' utterances in African literary texts thereby making them rich sources of data for research purposes. Femi Osofisan's *Many Colours Make the Thunderking* is no exception as references and allusion to African, most especially, Yoruba cultural acts and practices are employed in creating the scene, time, location, participants and so on. The linguistic textual template here is such that both the author and reader find their avoidances in encoding and decoding information towards informing, relating activities, sustaining conversation, text creation and production of constructive linguistic materials. The purview of context plays an important role in the production and interpretation of utterances in Femi Osofisan's *Many Colours Make the Thunderking*. This owes largely to the fact that word usage goes along with intents. This intent often seen as authorial thematic preoccupation gives focus to literary texts.

In this study, our focus is on how Femi Osofisan employs the tenets of context to project his cultural perspectives towards achieving a significant representation of the cultural values of certain Yoruba cultural aspects and re-representation of "Shango" in Yoruba cultural myth as the "god of thunder" and that King that did not hang (Oba Koso) himself. The tenets of context probed in this study are that of linguistic and social aspects as projected by Hymes (1964) and related insights from works of other scholars like Leech (1983), Mey (2001), Odeunmi (2001, 2006), Adegbite (2005), Hoye and Kraiser (2007), Osunbade (2010), Kecskes (2013) and so on. The study provides a template for the cultural examination of other Osofisan and related African cultural literary texts. It reveals African cultural values embedded in such, thereby upholding the relevance of African literary texts to linguistic analysis. Finally, it serves pedagogical purposes relative to, especially, pragmatic investigations and purposes.

## **2. The Principle of Context**

The purview of context has been variously examined by scholars from different perspectives. Scholars such as Malinowski (1923), Firth 1957, Hymes (1964), Ochis (1979), Levinson (1983),

Leech, 1983, Thomas (1985), Leech and Thomas (1990), Yule (1996), Perry (2006), Ran (2006), and so on are reflections of the centrality of context in pragmatics. Scholarly views on context have shown that it can be viewed concerning the previous and subsequent linguistic material in a given text, and continually changing surroundings that enable participants in the communication process to interact intelligibly, thus, we talk of extra-linguistic terms (see Odebunmi, 2001; Mey, 2001; Kecskes, 2003; Osisanwo, 2003 Adegbite, 2005 and so on). As such, two perspectives of context evolve here: the linguistic and the extra-linguistic aspects. Perry (2006) sees context in terms of the objective and the subjective natures. The subjective considers the utterance, the speaker, the time, the place, and the possible world in which the activities occur. The subjective on the other hand, according to Osunbade (2010), is understood as the common ground: that is, shared belief that serves as common presumptions for the interpretation of utterances (Stalnaker 1999, Perry, 2006). In this case, talking context, we consider the utterance and everything that surround the utterance to enhance our ability to interpret the utterance as constructed and intended by the speaker.

The notion of context is considered central to pragmatics given that it examines the ways that linguistic utterances become meaningful through their relation with context(s) (Grice, 1982; Thomas, 1985; Yule, 1996; Stalnaker, 1999; Adegbija, 1999; Grundy, 2000; Mey, 2001 and so on). The notion of context, as it is used in the social sciences, is not a strictly theoretical concept, but rather a more or less fuzzy notion, denoting a situational, historical, geographical, social or cultural environment of a phenomenon being studied (Godwin and Duranti, 1992). In traditional linguistics (until today), context is often limited to the “verbal context” surrounding some words or sentences. The influence of “verbal context” (on words or sentence structure) was made part of the very linguistic analysis itself and the very structure of text or talk in the study of literature, discourse, communication and conversation (van Dijk, 1975). van Dijk (ibid) further describes traditional contexts as different from text or as a broader social concept of context following a well-known but not uncontroversial distinction of levels of description of context as local or global, micro or macro, that is, a kind of social “situation”, as the case may either be.

The first, micro, is the immediate situation of actual discourse production and understanding, as is the case in face-to-face interaction involving the co-presence of individual persons as participants. The latter, macro, would be the broader historical, societal or cultural situation described not (only) in terms of current participants, but (also) in terms of groups, communities

or institutions, and not limited to the time or place of the actual utterance but involving a larger period and a larger location. A similar distinction has been made, but not systematically investigated by Halliday and Hassan (1985) when referring to the "context of situation" and "context of culture". Another observation on (more or less) local or global context is that they seem to have similar structures, components or categories.

Thus, both feature such categories as time (or period), place (space, location), actions, events or processes, as well as participants (persons, groups, organizations or institutions). This also seems to suggest that when characterizing contexts, we seem to be describing the "same" thing, namely some kind of social or political environment of an event, but only at different levels of understanding, construction or analysis. Arguably, all these might intuitively be "relevant" to understanding our discussion here; hence it might fall under the current common sense definition of context.

A significant study on context is Hymes (1964). Dell Hymes (1964) is the first scholar to propose a theory of context in terms of his famous SPEAKING grid, in which each letter is the first letter of one of eight parameters of the communicative situation. Setting/Scene indicates the time, place and physical circumstances while participants relate with speakers and hearers of different identities or categories. Ends reveal the goals and purposes of a communicative event, and the act sequence shows the format and order of parts of the communicative event. Key recognizes the tone, manner or spirit of a communicative act as instrumentalities are employed to identify the forms and styles of speech. Norms are indicators of the social rules or norms governing an event while lastly, genre specifies the kind or type of communicative event.

Hymes (ibid) identifies these properties of the communicative situation to account for the fact that language users not only need to learn the rules of grammar or discourse but also need to know the situation to use a text or talk correctly. This invariably suggests that it is not just some objective external social situation that is the context, but how language users interpret or define the communicative situation as part of their "communicative competence". We should also note that the parameters identified by Hymes (1964) are rather heterogeneous. They may be physical environment (such as the setting), social (such as participants and norms categories), or cognitive (such as ends), whereas the other seems to be properties of the discourse itself rather than its communicative situation (as is the case for key, act, sequence, instrumentalities and genre). Important categories are missing, such as the knowledge (ideologies) of the participants which

are crucial to define many of the appropriateness conditions of communicative acts, for instance, in the use of definite expression, presuppositions, or evidential.

Within the framework of what he called the “ethnography of speaking”, the SPEAKING schema can be categorized into four; setting, participants, acts and knowledge. This theoretical perspective comes in handy in taking an insight into cultural issues relative to their projection, especially, in a literary text. This account is premised on the conception of culture as a cultural behaviour, dress, language and practices, and demeanour in a situation, which is taken as a template for expectation in a social group. In Osofiosan’s *Many Colours Make the Thundering, Hymes’* (1964) four categories of the SPEAKING schema are represented as tools for the production and understanding of utterance of the characters and present viable tools for the analysis of the use of language, especially culture-bound utterances in the infracted universe. Other scholarly views have associated context with meaning (Thomas, 1985; Odebunmi, 2001, 2006; Adegbite, 2005 and so on).

Although words can have certain meanings in isolation, full meanings of words can only be reached only when considered in context, in this regard, we consider such aspects as the context of the situation, that is, examining words meaning in the situation in which they are used. The further build-up to this is Firth’s (1957) effort of categorizing aspects of context into the participants, persons and personalities. In Hymes’ (1964) view of situational context through his recommendation of the acronym representation, “SPEAKING” is where S stands for “setting”, P “participants”, E “ends”, A “act sequence”, K “key”, I “instrumentality”, N “norm”, and G for “genre”. These are considered central to this work for their relevance to understanding contextual features projected in the play.

Other views on context abound in the literature. For instance, Ochis (1979), Levinson, (1983), Leech (1983), Mey (2001), Odebunmi (2001), van Dijk (2008) and so on, all conclude that the meaning of utterances can only be assessed through the consideration of the context in which they are used. As such, the speaker encodes, that is, constructs his utterances to project his intention which can only be assessed by the reader or hearer in the same perspective to be able to decode the encoder’s or the speaker’s intention effectively. We are asserting here that we cannot separate meaning from context. It is established by Odebunmi’s (2001) observation that context is the spine of meaning. This is further emphasized in Mey’s (2001) opinion that context is the totality of the environment in which a word is used.

The conception of context in this direction notwithstanding, we found Hymes's (1964) submission and insights from related principles that have been cited above more suitable for the analysis in this work. However, insights from the works of other scholars such as Odebunmi (2001, 2006), Mey (2001), Adegbite (2005), and Osunbade (2011) will come in handy in the analysis carried out in this work.

### **3. A cursory Look at *Many Colours Make The Thunderking***

The play is a presentation of the mythic history of Shango, a Yoruba god believed by his people to emit fire from his mouth and in the process cause thunder. Osofisan sets out by relating Shango's hunger for a need to be greater than his father. Alagemo, cast in the play as all-knowing, dictating the unknown future, told him that he has to marry three wives, the river, the forest and the hill. Baffled by the specification, Shango got worried but with the advice and support of Alagemo, Shango married all of them as directed by events. After a short while, things begin to get set in place for Shango and the empire begins to prosper and grow, however, there is no peace in the palace as Oya, the daughter of the river, one of Shango's wives remains barren.

With events overcoming one another, Oya, misled by her junior wife, Osun, sought spiritual force to get a child from the gods. With the spreading crisis of insubordination from Shango's aids, Timi and Gbonka, Shango gets angry, and in anger, emits fire that burns his palace. Simultaneously, Yeye Iroko that gave a son to Oya demanded that the child be returned. These and much more push Shango to leave the town, muscled by Gbonka's earlier threat that Shango should vacate the throne for him within seven days. Out of frustration, Shango hangs himself and Oya turns into a river. With the need to save Shango's face, his followers spread the rumour that Shango did not hang himself, that is, "Oba Koso", and as such, anywhere you hear the thunder rumbling, or there is lightening, Shango's followers associate it with the presence of Shango. Osofisan's storyline here is in line with Yoruba's' myth of Shango, a culturally inherited myth passed from generation to generation. Hence, we consider the play as culturally inclined.

### **4. Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

The contextual features of the setting/ scene, participants, acts and knowledge are found to characterize the data. They are cursorily examined one after the other below:

#### **4.1 Setting/scene**

The setting/ scene in this study, as earlier mentioned, reveals the time, place and physical environment and projects the context of the culture in the play. Let us examine how the

parameters of context have enhanced our ability to adequately understand and interpret the following extract:

**Ex 1. Shango:** Bring the dancer to me!

(The generals lead the dancer forward).

**Igunnun:** Kabiyesi! (Shango looks at him for a while in silence).

**Shango:** Dancer, men become mountains

**Igunnun:** And, mountains, Kabiyesi, turn to dust!

**Shango:** Our people say-A man begets a child, and later, the child becomes a father

**Igunnun:** But they also add, my fiery king:

"the child, however tall, does not become a man,

Until he has grown.

To become the father of his father!"

**Shango:** That is why I sent for the Ifa priest.

I Shango summoned Babalawo to my palace,

And said- Oronmiyon the peerless was my father,

But the child who does not surpass his father,

Remains a child! So tell me, Baba Ifa,

What must Shango do to become a man?

And he casts his nuts. (*MCMTK pg 16*)

The setting or scene created above is that of the order of events in a king's palace in Yoruba land. This conclusion can only be arrived at based on the context of the culture of the Yoruba people. In Yoruba land, the palace is usually arranged formally with the chiefs sitting orderly based on their status in front of the king while the generals, orderlies, servants and others stand to witness and partake in whatever they are charged to do, and whenever they are called upon as events demands. Here, the king asserts his authority by commanding the generals to bring the dancer forward. This is the culture of the Yoruba people. The King commands, and of course, this is felicitous, for apart from being the King, he is in his palace where he holds the highest authority and gives orders. Shango, the King, commands Timi and Gbonka, his two generals, "Bring the dancer to me!". This invariably reveals the place of the setting and the scene as the King's palace. This is further reinforced in Igunnun's response, "Kabiyesi", a lexical choice which invariably

portrays recognition of Shango as King and he renders greetings and total submission to him whom the Yorubas' see as the representative of the gods.

The physical environment is also a pointer to the palace, the home of Shango. In Yoruba land, the King can send for the Babalawo to be brought to his palace for consultation without prior arrangement to guide him over difficult and spiritual issues. This he superimposes when he says "I Shango summoned Babalawo to my palace". As such, our knowledge of the setting of events here enhances our ability to effectively understand the ongoing events in the play, as we can see Shango is worried about becoming great and needed spiritual guidance which he is going to get at all cost. As time goes on, however, Shango becomes desperate and leaves the confines of his palace to look for a solution to his problem in the forest. This is captured in the excerpt below:

**Ex. 2:** (A clearing in the forest, Alagemo and Shango arrive, Shango is in the uniform of Alagemo's apprentice. Alagemo inspects the place).

**Alagemo:** This is the place.

**Shango:** Here?

**Alagemo:** Yes, Here is where Aroni, the Forest King, usually passes with his daughter. Princess Osun, the one who lost her voice. (*MCMTK, pg 30*)

In the excerpt above, we can see Shango's desperate desire to fulfil his mission. He forces Alagemo into looking for a solution and Alagemo told him lies in his marrying the forest, that is, Princess Osun, the daughter of Aroni, the King of the forest. Part of the plan is to wait for the father and daughter on the path they usually take. When they got there, Alagemo confidently reveals that "this is the place". The location is revealed in the definite demonstrative item, "this", definitely showing the place of the occurrence of the event. The confirmation of the location of the place is made by Shango's inquisition as registered in his utterance, "Here?". A contextual exploration of the cultural context shows the physical environment where a man waits to woo a woman in Yoruba land. It usually comes up along the route to the farm where there is room for such confidential discussion, away from prying eyes as is the culture.

So, if "this" literally suggests the place that Aroni and Princess Osun usually pass, and the lexical item, "here", is also repeated in Alagemo's contribution over again, we can see the emphasis on the place and location to show identification of the place captured in "here's where", as a significant point of contact for Shango to achieve his ambition. Without a good knowledge of the context of culture of the Yoruba people in this wise, it may be difficult for a proper interpretation

of the context of the environment in the extract above and one might miss its contextual relevance to the projection of the thematic preoccupation of the playwright. Also, when Shango sends porters one, two and three on errands, it is with the application of the context of culture that we can determine the setting of the scene and the physical environment. Let us see Ex. 3:

**Ex. 3: Porter one:** I think we can rest here a bit. The king and  
his retinue are still some way back.

**Porter two:** These bags, so heavy! Do you know what's in them?

**Porter three:** No. but I can guess. Kabiyesi wishes to make a  
big impression on his future in-laws!

**Porter two:** Is that what it is? Presents for the bride?

**Porter three:** What else? The king of the mountain will not give  
up his daughter to any common man. From what we hear  
about other suitors, he is not easily impressed. (*MCMTK pgs 40-41*)

In the excerpt above, Osofisan has taken us to another setting where the scene takes place. However, with our application of the context of culture, we know that it is the culture of the Yoruba people to send valuable gifts to the father of a would-be wife. The volume and value of the gift depend on the status of the suitor. In the situation and circumstance above, Porter one is suggesting to his colleagues that they can rest "here" a bit as "the king and his retinue are still some way back". We can discern here that the porters are on a journey with Shango. They are on a footpath, tired and needed a rest. Osofisan deliberately creates the scene for a rest for the porters to pass on the information about Shango's preparation for his marriage to the daughter of the king of the mountain.

The lexical item, "here", reveals the location, which based on the context of the culture of the Yoruba people reveals how they chose spots to rest when going on long journeys to put their energy together once again before continuing on their journeys. This type of scene here effectively replicates the Yoruba culture where an influential man woos an influential woman, most especially from another town. Other examples such as this abound in the play through which the application of the setting/scene schema, as a context of culture parameter enhances our ability to understand the literary piece better. Next, we will consider participants as a schema of the context of culture.

## **4.2 Participants/ End**

The contextual feature of participants shows the speaker(s), the hearer(s) and the categories of the people that hear or share in the conversation. This is such that we can determine their utterances/ contributions to ascertain the ends, that is, their goals, purposes and thematic intentions for the communicative event. A number of these instances are found in the play and some excerpts are considered below:

After some years in Shango's palace, Oya remains barren and becomes frustrated with Shango's marriage to another wife. She throws caution to the wind and takes the option she thought is best for her.

**Ex 4: Alagemo:** What can I do to help, my queen? You know Shango  
Only follows his own wishes.

**Oya:** He neglects me. He treats me most inhumanly. Because  
You brought that other woman here.

**Alagemo:** He commanded. I obeyed.

**Oya:** Well, I'm commanding you now. And I want you to take  
Me into your bed!

**Alagemo:** What Queen!

**Oya:** Alagemo, please. I need a child to hold in my arms! To  
Prove that I am a woman! I know that's why my husband  
Neglects me. And now, you're about to give him a third wife!  
Think, what will happen to me when she comes!

**Alagemo:** I know. Our people say that a woman without a child  
Is like a passing stranger in the home. But the solution is not-

**Oya** What haven't I tried! Alagemo you know everything! You  
Suggested herbs and herbalists! But nothing worked! I know  
Why, just as I know I am not barren. Alagemo.

**Alagemo** This not wise, Oya. The very earth we stand upon will  
Reject us. The problem can only be temporary, I advise Patience. (*MCMTK, pgs*  
*46 - 47*)

Oya in the excerpt above is frustrated. This owes to the fact that all her efforts to give birth to a child in Shango's house have proved abortive. In this instance, the participants are recognized as Oya, that is, Shango's wife, and Alagemo, Shango's closest aid. There is no identified hearer in

the communicative event as the conversation is meant to be confidential. A consideration of the context of culture reveals that such a meeting is forbidden in Yoruba culture and, of course, such interaction is taboo, as such, it is kept secret. From the interaction above, we can see that Oya wants Alagemo to take her to his bed to make her pregnant so that she can hold her child in her arms. Such is the desperation. As revealed by Alagemo himself, the Yoruba people believe that a barren woman has no place in the home as she is seen just as a passerby in the home. Then, this justifies Oya's unwitting request and adulterous escapade. However, Oya's contribution here as a participant is perceived as a build-up by Osofisan to achieve the specific end of seducing Alagemo, knowing the great power he has and so that she can get a child through him thus forestalling Shango's marriage to a new wife. Of course, this has so many fallouts. Notably, it would have been a great betrayal of Shango on the part of Alagemo and it forms another plot in the play. However, the event did not come to pass because Alagemo adhered to culture and his decision to faithfully uphold it. The parameter of the participant as a contextual feature, therefore, comes in handy here to aid our analysis. Another participant/end instance is recorded when Osun takes Oya to see Yeye Iroko to seek a child. Example 5 sheds more light on this:

**Ex 5: Osun:** We are here because of my lyaale. She has a problem

Which only you can solve. So she's come to speak to you.

**Oya:** Yeye, please help me! I've known such suffering, such pain as I never imagined anybody in this world could Experience, and it has turned me bitter. Yeye, I've come to you To rescue me. In a hollow husk! My husband has Forgotten the way to my room.

**Yeye Iroko:** You want him back. ....

**Oya:** I'll give you anything you ask! The most precious things I Own. If I can have him back, even for one night, and carry His seed! Oh I'll give you the child itself! Just for one tender Moment if I could look at this child, hold it to my breast, and tell myself that it is mine! You'll have anything you wish, Yeye, for a moment of such fulfillment!

**Yeye Iroko:** Careful now! Careful, my daughter! When you Speak to Iroko, every word you utter is taken in all Seriousness. Every promise becomes impossible to retract.

Don't be reckless.

**Oya:** No please, Yeye! Every word I just said is in dead earnest

I meant it all, as long as-

**Osun:** Wait Oya! You are making a promise you'll not be able to Keep! (*MCMTK, pg 51*)

The participants in the excerpt above are Yeye Iroko, Oya and Osun. Oya seems to be the major speaker here as she dominates the discourse ground while making her request to Iroko, the tree god. The other participants, Yeye Iroko and Osun taken here as hearers, just chip in their contributions in the forms of caution and advice. In the context of Yoruba culture, people who seek children do go to Yeye Iroko as it is believed that she gives children to barren women. Oya's desperation is seen in her readiness to give anything as long as she has the child. This desperation led to stupidity as she started promising anything so long as she can have a child of her own, even though she promised to give the child back so long as she looks at him and hold him, even if it were once. She promised all. Well, we do not know whether Oya is oblivious to the potency of Iroko's power. This leads to Yeye Iroko's caution:

Careful now! Careful, my daughter! When you

Speak to Iroko, every word you utter is taken in all

Seriousness. Every promise becomes impossible to retract.

Don't be reckless.

This shows Yorubas' culture and the context in which it is realized. The gods in Yoruba land are powerful and as such, it is quite unwitty to invoke their wrath. In Yoruba culture, the gods are superior beings that God sent to the world to deputise him. They are quite powerful. Oya's desperation and her willingness to give anything just to get a child led to her downfall in the play as Iroko later asks Oya to keep her promise of returning the child after he had spent some time with her.

### **Acts**

The act parameter as a feature of the context of culture is identified in this study as the order of events as recorded in the communicative event. Subsumed under this is the tone, that is, the manner or spirit of the communicative event, and the forms and style of speech. An example is presented in Ex.6 below:

**Ex 6: Alagcmo:** The wedding of King Shango and Oya proved to be the most memorable in the history of Yoruba land. To celebrate it, the King

slaughtered 15,000 of the best cows from Kanuri land, 60,500 sheep, 100,000 goats, and a million chickens. The ruler of Borno came with a gift of a hundred elephants, the Emir of Kano with a hundred of the best thoroughbred! The Egyptian Prince brought a thousand different boxes of scent and mysterious herbs, each carried by a beautiful slave! Dahomi sent a battalion of female warriors for Shngo's army, and the Foutah King of the Foutah Jallon, troupe of dancers and flutists, plus a family of gifted sculptors. Indeed the river princess could not but be seduced by this evidence of opulence! The marriage was a resounding success, for many seasons the kingdom knew peace and stability, and grew rich. Its sculptors and musicians became famous throughout the world. Its markets drew traders from all points of the compass. All the historians agreed, and chanted it in their songs, that indeed Shango surpassed his father. Wealth had come to the land like never before.

But why was the king unhappy? (*MCMTK. pgs 27-28*)

Osofisan in the extract above presented a summary of the play so far through Alagemo. The presentation is formal and narrates the chronological growth of the kingdom in terms of wealth, fame, trade and so on. With our application of the contextual feature of acts, we find that it is with the actualization of the proposal for Shango that all the acts are achieved. The proposal is that Shango should marry the river and later, the forest. Looking at the situation, it seems unrealistic as marriages to the forest and the river are quite out of the blue. However, it is possible as in Yoruba cultural belief, in those days, the forest and river were people that is, they were living beings. In the Yoruba cultural record, Shango's marriages to the forest and river princess are myths. Shango is known in Yoruba land as a great god, the god of iron and thunder. It is only highly spiritual men like him that can perform such unusual feats. So, as the excerpt reveals, having followed the Babalawo's directive, Shango got married to the river coming out with resounding success and with it comes all the goodies. An application of the contextual feature of acts to the above extract, therefore, enhances our ability to state the chronological order of events that led to the conclusion of the excerpt- now people can sing that Shango surpasses his father.

The interaction in the extract below between Shango and Alagemo further substantiates this:

**Ex 7: Alagemo:** Kabiyesi

**Shango:** Greetings Alagemo, can I speak to you alone?

**Alagemo:** Yes of course. (He indicates a seat for Shango who ignores it.)

The King could have sent for me

**Shango:** No, no. I don't want Oya to know about this.

**Alagemo:** Ah!

**Shango:** You know why I've come, don't you.

**Alagemo:** Yes!

**Shango:** What can you do to help me?

**Alagemo:** You know yourself, Kabiyesi. You knew from the beginning.

**Shango:** I am to marry a forest!

**Alagemo:** As soon as you are ready. (*MCMTK, pg 28*)

In the interaction above, Alagemo and Shango start with greetings and build up the conversation to stating the reasons that brought the king to the servant. Through acting as a contextual feature therefore it is revealed that the interactants engage in adjacency pairs. This is a situation where two people take the conversation floor in turn, that is, one person waits for the other to finish his contribution before he takes his turn. Notably in taking turns, intents and expectations are expressed thereby reflecting the turn of events relative to the culture of the people. The order of events is well reiterated here again.

The act of Shango here, actually depicts the practice of the Yoruba culture where even the highly placed will go to the lowly to keep a secret. Alagemo even remarks that "the king could have sent for me", but Shango told him, "I don't want Oya to know about this", thus presupposing the need for secrecy. The order of events is followed here until it builds to the topic of the dialogue, "I'm to marry a forest".

### **4.3 Knowledge**

Knowledge, relative to the parties involved in the conversation helps in the interpretation of the extracts. The knowledge talked about here is that cultural background must be shared by both parties for a good understanding of the utterances in the interaction. For this study, it is taken as the social rules, that is, the norms governing communicative events relative to society. Also, we want to know the genre of the communicative event. Instances like this arise on issues where cultural backgrounds are needed to process information on culture. Let us examine Ex.8 below:

**Ex 8: Shango:** The babalawo sent me to you.

**Igunnun:** Yes. I know, I have been waiting.

**Shango:** You mean the priest has told you about-

**Igunnun:** I am Igunnun. I was born and raised

In the shrine of divination! Any time anywhere

That the nut clatters on a tray, the message echoes back

In the chambers of my mind. That night, I looked

In my calabash and I saw you by the tray. My king was burdened.

**Shango:** I was and shall continue to be

Until the obstacle is laid to dust! Stand up my friend.

Look at me and tell me - who am I? (*MCMTK, pg 17*)

In Ex.8 above, Shango and Alagemo reveal shared common Yoruba cultural knowledge. This goes a long way to enhance pragmatic success in the interaction. Take for instance, the utterance, "The Babalawo sent me to you", without shared cultural knowledge, Alagemo would not have understood what Shango means by "babalawo". Babalawo in Yoruba land, is a priest, a seer, or a diviner who sees into the unknown. This is evident in Alagemo's revelation about himself that he was born and raised in the shrine of divination. As the nut clatters on the tray, Alagemo says that "the message echoes back in the chambers of his mind". This also, Shango understands having shared the same Yoruba cultural background with Alagemo. Those cultural items, the nuts, the tray, on which the Babalawo casts his nuts, and the calabash, where Alagemo sees Shango used to encode messages are well understood and acknowledged by the interlocutors. This immensely contributes to the process of interpreting and understanding the extract. The Yoruba belief is that, whenever a divination is made, there must be an accompanying message. Shango understands Alagemo's utterance about the message here through his shared knowledge of the culture of the Yorubas, as such, he lays his trust in Alagemo's powers as the Yorubas' belief in priest's abilities to see into the unknown, as revealed in Shango's quest to know who he is, "who am I", and the priest's spiritual power to proffer solution.

Another example that portrays the significance of shared knowledge in the understanding of utterances is shown in Ex. 9 below:

**Ex 9: Yeye Iroko:** Oya, quite an age. isn't it?

**Oya:** Yeye!

**Yeye Iroko:** Quite an age! Enough time for the memory to

Fade, for pledges to be forgotten!

**Oya:** It's not like that, Yeye. Not at all! Please, Yeye, give me

A little more time! He's only a baby!

**Yeye Iroko:** I've waited long enough, Oya. I won't wait any longer.

I'm calling on you to fulfil your pledge.

**Oya:** I was foolish Yeye! Foolish!, because I was desperate.

Wanted to be a mother at all costs. I'm sure you understand.

You are a woman too! Oh, I've since held this warm living

being in my hands, fed him on my breasts! Yeye, I love him.

I cannot give him up!

**Yeye Iroko:** You were warned. These are rules which strict observance

Sustains all of us. You must surrender the child. (*MCMTK*, pg 79)

Just as in the previous example, it is through shared knowledge of the cultural practice of the Yoruba people that the conversation is sustained. For example, it is general knowledge in Yoruba culture that oaths and promises to the gods must be fulfilled, hence Yeye's demands that Oya must fulfil her pledge. With the shared knowledge that she cannot but fulfil her promise to the gods, Oya starts to plead and blames all on her being desperate. Even when Oya concludes that she would not part with the baby, Yeye Iroko warns her and reminds her of the need to adhere to the rules "which strict observance sustains all of us".

## **5. Conclusion**

This study explores the context of the culture in Femi Osofisan's *Many Colours Make the Thunderking* through Dell Hymes SPEAKING grid. It reveals that context is significant in an analysis such as this where such parameters as setting/ scene, participants, acts and knowledge potentially enhance the ability to interpret authorial intentions adequately. Also, we found out that it is with the features of context that there is a successful understanding of the utterances in the play which leads to an effective projection of Osofisan's thematic preoccupations in the play. The study immensely contributes to the understanding of conversations in Osofisan's *Many Colours Make the Thunderking* and his culturally motivated thematic inclinations, thus serving as a template for the analysis of such African culture-based plays.

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