

AN ANALYSIS OF FLORA RELATED PHRASEMIC TERMS IN JUKUN

NAHUM UPAH BUTARI

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND DRAMA

KADUNA STATE UNIVERSITY

KADUNA

Abstract

This work examines the communicative meaning and uses of selected flora terms that are used as phrasemic terms (i.e. umbrella term for proverbs, metaphors and idioms) in the Jukun society. Data for the work were drawn from the researcher's experience as a native speaker of the language. In order to draw a logical conclusion, the work adopts some semantico-pragmatic variables such as: contexts, culture, social values, beliefs, background knowledge, entailments, presuppositions, and conversational maxims. The work is able to discover that besides their natural uses as food, shelter, medicine as well as economic value, plants in Jukun land serve as one of the sources of proverbs, idioms and metaphor, the crux of this paper. The ten isolated sayings in this work centred on the themes of caution/warning, punishment, discipline as well as precautions. On this basis, the work concludes that these sayings serve as a controlling mechanism as well as a means through which people's behaviours in the society can be regulated.

Introduction

The phrasemic terms in Jukun play numerous roles. For instance, elders may speak to the youths using them as a way of teaching them how to unravel the mystery of life. The efforts they make to interpret these saying are therefore expected to be applied in their daily encounter with the realities of life. These sayings are derived from different sources in the Jukun society. Some of these sources include: songs, folk tales, discussions, divination, poetry, fauna and flora among others. However, in this work, attention is focused on the flora as one of the rich sources from which these sayings can be formulated. In order to achieve our aim, the work discusses a brief history of the Jukun, a literature review; phrasemic terms of both Jukun and English, framework of analysis, data presentation and analysis, and finally draws a conclusion.

Jukun: the People, Language and Culture

The term 'Jukun' by which the Jukun people of Nigeria are generally known, is derived from the Jukun compound word for 'men' or 'apa-jukun'. The Jukun people live in areas along the upper Benue River and are commonly believed to be descendants of the people of Kororofa, one of the most powerful Sudanic kingdoms during the late European Middle Ages. The people comprise a congeries of many groups, each organized on a different basis, although polygamous extended families seem to be the dominant unit (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

Within the middle belt area of Nigeria where the Jukun ethnic group is predominant, there are four major dialects of the language. While the Wapan dialect is found in Wukari local government area, Kpazo dialect is spoken in Donga and Takum Local Government areas and Kona is spoken in Jalingo Local Government area all in Taraba State. The Wanu dialect is found in Abinse in Benue state. At the present time, the Jukun people are not a corporate body under one administration. The main body (Wapan) is under the king of Wukari, the AkuUka. The absence of the tribal cohesion is due to the disintegration of the tribe which followed the Fulani conquests at the beginning of the 19th century (Meek 1933).

According to Shimizu (1980), the language belongs to the Nigritic or Niger Congo family of African languages, which are spoken widely from Senegal to Kenya. Languages such as Yoruba and Swahili belong to the same family. The word 'Jukun' also refers to the language spoken by the people.

Literature Review

In linguistics, the term 'phraseme' is usually employed as an umbrella term for proverbs, idioms and metaphors. Dobrovolskij and Piirainen in Ayodabo and Butari (2013:94) have used the term to examine the expression 'let sleeping dogs lie' to posit that it is a popular proverb which is equally metaphorical as an indirect comparison of a dormant danger with a dog sleeping. Krikmann (1994) has used the term 'proverbial metaphor', whereas Makkai has used the term 'proverbial idioms'. We adopt the term 'phraseme' as an umbrella name for proverbs, metaphors and idioms because these three terms serve the same communicative purposes in the society. For instance, besides being context bound, they are used for the purposes of: advising, reprimanding, praising, abusing or cautioning. According to Lawal (1995) et al and Adegboja(1999), each of

these terms requires six levels of contexts in which both the speaker and the listener would need to use and understand them. The six levels include: linguistic, situational, psychological, social, sociological as well as cosmological.

In every society, it is the use of phrasemic terms and not their forms that requires the most on - the spot creativity. This is because they are often employed in a variety of ways to convey not just concepts associated with their literal meanings, but often concepts that can be understood only by their original metaphorical extensions. Butari (2013) has cited the example of the expression 'children should only be seen, but not heard' which would typically be employed to refer to children. On the other hand, if one uses the saying 'barking dogs don't bite' and 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush', it would not usually be for situations involving 'dogs' and 'birds'.

Jukun people as seen earlier are mostly found in Taraba State where the land is in the savanna with patches and strips of equatorial forest at the middle belt. Based on the presence of forests and the River Benue and its tributaries, the land is very rich both in animals and plants. Different trees, grasses and shrubs thrive in Jukun land due to the heavy rainfall usually experienced. With the availability of these flora and abundant rainfall, animals of different species are also found in the area. The presence of different species of plants has affected the people in various ways.

One of such ways is agricultural activities such as farming. Any typical Jukun settlement is therefore influenced by an arable land suitable for cultivation of crops such as maize, guinea corn, millet, yam, cocoa yam among others. The proceeds of farming are used for consumption, trading as well as gift items to the less privileged and visitors to the society. The status of a man is therefore measured not just by his ability to cultivate a large portion of land to cater for his family throughout the year but to sell and give out to neighbours, the needy as well as visitors. Attention in the society is therefore focused more on production than commerce.

Another aspect in which plants affect the people is in the area of health. Over the years, the people have come to realize the medicinal value of many plants that abound within the environment. The leaves, barbs and roots of some of the trees are used to treat ailments such as fever, stomach ache, headache, wounds among others.

Wild plants such as the locust tree produces seeds known as ‘su’ normally used as soup ingredient. ‘Su’ is also produced from soya beans as well as another wild tree popularly called ‘kana’. Crops such as maize, guinea corn as well as millet are raw materials for producing ‘tuwo’ ‘kunu’ as well as alcoholic drinks as ‘pito’ and the popular locally brewed beer ‘brukutu’.

Some of the plants found in the environment are used for shelter. For instance, roofing is done with sticks from special plants while the spear grass is used to complete the process of roofing. Furnishing and bedding materials are all produced from plants. For instance, the stem of a wild tree known as ‘kukum’ is used for both the door and the window frames while the bramble stem serves as raw material for beds. ‘Bagu’, a kind of straw serves as a raw material for producing household utensils used for serving tuwo, the popular ‘titi’, winnowing folk ‘nata’ are all produced from the same raw material ‘bagu’. To process the local beer and kunu, ‘kasasa’ is used to sift the dregs and the material is produced from the stem of the guinea corn. ‘kusa’ the calabash comes in different shapes and sizes in order to serve the local beer, kunu or water.

The importance of plants in the society is inexhaustible. However, in this work, the focus is on the linguistic contributions of plants in the society and specifically, how these flora terms serve as source of proverbs, metaphor and idioms. Before then, there is need to give concrete descriptions and categorisations of the various plants found in Jukun land.

Flora Terms

Plants can be categorized into: *tree, shrub, grass and flower*. Flower is however ornamental and could fall under any class.

The taxonomy for plant according to Leherer (1974) will be as:

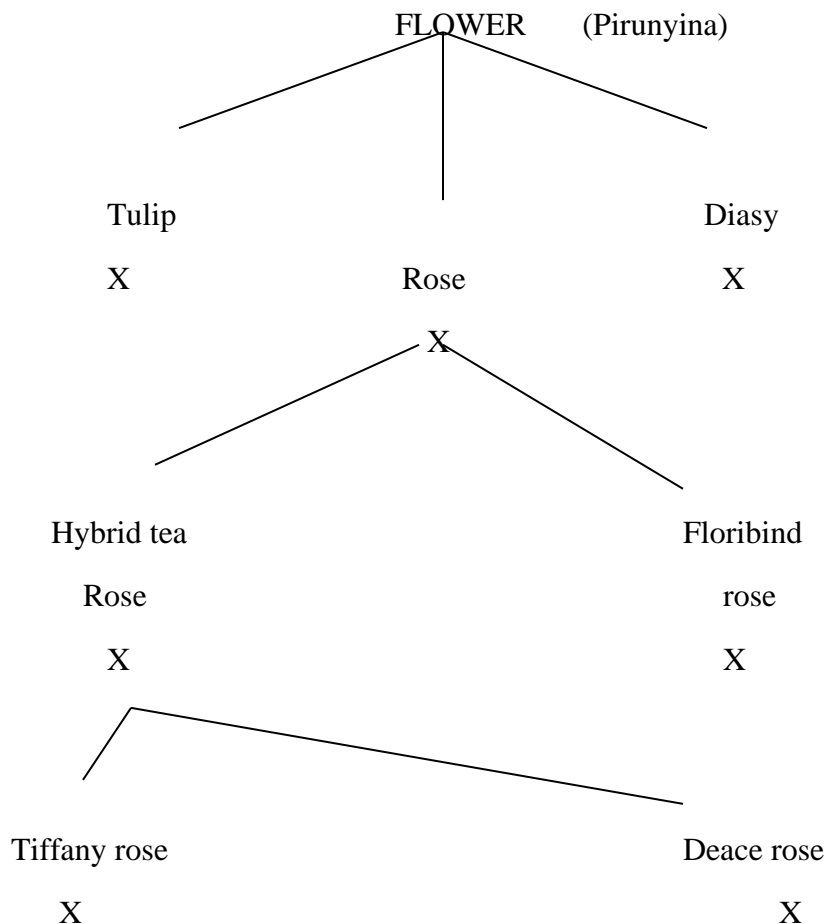
PLANT		NYINA	
TREE	GRASS	SHRUB	FLOWER
NYINA	NWUNA	JIBA’A	PIRU NYINA

According to the above taxonomy, *tree*, *grass*, *shrub*, *flower* are incompatible because there are instances where ‘trees’ like those found in the surrounding of a school or a park can serve as a good example of flowers that can be glossed as trees. These so call ‘flowers’ could grow so gigantic that one could class them as *tress* and not flowers. This therefore calls for partial incompatible since it is usually the case that A and B are incompatible when A not B and B not A.

Taxonomy in the class inclusion of *tree* and *flower* could therefore look like this:

TREE					NYINA			
Oak	Pine	Fir	Elm	Maple	Willow	ash	Beach	Chestnut
X	X	X	X	X	X	x	X	X

And



(The flower diagram is adapted from Anderson, 1978.)

The above is the case of English where flowers are given prominence. Since the Jukun society is different, flowers do not occupy so much importance. It is on this basis that even the name 'pirunyina' (i.e. the glowing part of the tree) used for flower is descriptive in the language. This is further demonstrated by the fact that all the types of flowers in the diagram are marked with letter 'X' to show that either they do not exist or where they do, they do not mean much to the people.

Flora in Jukun

Nyina (plant) in the Jukun language can be divided into: *nyina*, (tree), *jiba'a* (shrub), *nwuna* (grass) excluding flower.

The taxonomy in the class inclusion of Nyina (tree) and Nwuna (grass) in Jukun can be as follows:

	NYINA				TREE			
Jukun:	Buhuan	Tangbe	Dudu	Kukum	Pen	Kedemii	Kumale	Dantukpara
English:	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Since the English equivalent of these trees are difficult to come by, there is need to describe them.

Buhuan: A giant tree found in the forests. The trunk is usually chopped out and carved as a spear handle which is used by hunters.

Tangbe: This tree has powdery and yellowish bark, usually found in the low land and the fresh leaves are used for cooking fresh fish.

Dudu: This has powdery-black bark and the fruit is edible. It also serves as chewing stick.

Kukum: A tall tree whose wood is very good for firewood. If a forest is made of this species of trees, the soil is believed to be very fertile. It is also used to make window and door frames.

Pen: A tree found only on the low land with by-lobed leaves. The fruit is raw material for massaging oil for the treatment of injuries.

Kedemi: It has soft barb, a local herb for the treatment of stomach ache.

Kumale: A tree with thorny barb. The fresh leaves are used as soup when cooked and could be eaten raw as an antidote for cough.

Dantukpara: A giant tree with thorny barb which produces red flowers used as “draw soup”.

	NWUNA			GRASS				
Jukun	Kaana	Usuamu	Soana	usuule	Kakoo	mgababiti	Kashikoo	Zadi
English	Northern gamba grassX			Speargrass		x		X
	X							

Ka’ana: this type of grass is mostly found on a fallow land to indicate that the soil is fertile for cultivation.

Usuamu: this is popularly known as the stubborn grass because when uprooted from the ground, it has to be removed completely from the farm in order to give the crops breathing space.

Soana: its presence shows that the land is barren so the farmer has to relocate to a fresh land to allow the land to regain its fertility after two years. It is used to thatch the hut. Its English name is spear grass.

Usuule: this grass is found by the stream side and it is the favourite delicacy for the grass cutter hence, a preferred place for the farmer’s trap.

Kakoo: otherwise known as ‘small knife’, it is mostly found on uncultivated land. It has sharp edges that easily cut the rat hunter if he is not careful.

Mgbaabiti: this is mostly found in swampy places especially in the rice farm. The water squeezed from the leaves can be used to treat a fresh wound.

Zadi: this is found only on the mountains and it is used to thatch the hut. It has a yellowish colour which has come to be associated with any human hair that is not black as should be.

Kashikoo: this is a wild shrub whose steam is used as a type of trap to catch birds while the fresh leaves are used for cooking fresh fish.

Based on the differences in climatic conditions of the Jukun terrain, most of the plants and grasses described above may not be found in other societies. For instance, although Jukun and English recognize the division of plants into: *Tree, Shrub, Grass and Flower*, their perception of some of these classifications differ as *shrub* in Jukun is classed as jibaa (leaves). The term does not actually enjoy an independent classification because if found inside the bush, it could be categorized as nyina (tree) and if it grows in the farm land where it is expected to be cleared for farming, it could be classified as nwuna (grass). This shows that shrub is perceived differently by the two languages based on the differences in the world views.

Although Jukun language recognizes pirunyina (flower), it is not actually perceived as an independent category of plant. Based on this, it is described as just '*the glowing part of the plant*'. The language sees flower as solely a part of the plant when it is about to bear fruit, after in which it fades away. However, the only type of flower that receives the attention of the society is a red type produced by a giant tree found by the stream side at the end of March as a sign that the rains are fast approaching when everyone is expected to set their farms ablaze in readiness for the planting of maize. Else, any 'flower' that is planted as an ornament is known as either tree if it is tall or shrub if it does not grow tall.

Flora terms have the tendency of interfering with some Jukun L1 learners of English because nyina (plant) for instance is polysemy in the language. It is therefore not impossible for one to render *plant, tree, shrub* and *wood* as the same word *nyina* since nyina has more than one sense in the language; thus, sentences like these may emanate:

- I will buy some *trees* from the timber shade.
- Let us go to the bush to fetch some *fire tree*.

Theoretical Framework

Since the phrasemic terms are capable of communicating ideas in specific contexts, this work adopts a semantico-pragmatic approach with the belief that while the semantic aspect will handle the meaning of the selected sayings, the pragmatic aspect will handle how they are employed in real life situations to achieve the desired results. It is on the basis of this fact that, the work adopts some semantico-pragmatic variables such as: contexts, culture, social values, beliefs, background knowledge, entailments, presuppositions, and conversational maxims in order to establish the fact that besides their natural use for food, shelter, medicine as well as economic, plants in Jukun land serve the communicative function as proverb, idiom and metaphor, the crux of this paper. The ten isolated sayings in this work centred on the themes of caution/warning, punishment, discipline as well as precautions.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In order to draw a logical conclusion in our analysis of plant related phrasemic terms in Jukun, we adopt some semantico-pragmatic variables which include: contexts, culture, social values, beliefs, background knowledge, entailments, presuppositions, and conversational maxims from Bello (1991:71) with some modifications. In this work, we subject each selected term (whether proverb, metaphor or idiom) under the following structure: first is the Jukun version followed by its translation, the meaning and the analysis using any of the tools stated above as the case may be.

- (1) Jukun: *Gbagboro* da nyaninuuyuramba
Translation: The *forest climber* is not found elsewhere except in the forest.
Meaning: Like father like son.

The above saying can be contextualised through an imaginary situation in which two persons are discussing the bad behaviour of a child. One of them eventually sums up the conversation by pointing out that the child in question takes after the parents. He thus says: *Gbagboro* da nyaninuuyuramba [like father like son]. The given circumstance here represents the normal use of this proverb that is, in connection with a third person correlation. The same proverb can however be used with regard to the following: a person is reprimanded because of something he has said or done. He defends himself by arguing that he acted after the example of a superior. The same proverb is used here by the speaker in connection with himself i.e. in the first person correlation, to justify his action. A third possibility is this: in a conversation between two people,

the former expresses his displeasure regarding the latter's conduct which he ascribes to the latter's parents had set for him. In this instance, the proverb refers to the second person i.e. it is used in the second person correlation.

With reference to the above situation, the different correlations and the correspondent meanings emanating from them may be stated as follows:

First person: justification of own action.

Second person: direct negative criticism amounting to insult.

Third person: negative comment.

2. Jukun: Uma bangwuntitijiyi, kadanra u shanyakukooba

Translation: If an elder has descended so low to eat fresh **Bambara** nut with a child, the child would expect the elder to peel the back for him.

Meaning: Familiarity breeds contempt.

This saying discusses the theme of respect in the society where one can only earn the respect of others by conducting himself in a mature way. One feature of the society is the practice of the age grade system whereby people within the same age bracket mostly associate together during social gathering, at entertainment arena, communal labour etc. At these fora, they throw a lot of banter which to people outside the circle could be termed an abuse. Based on this, everyone is expected to be aware of this and conduct his affairs with his age mates. However, if one is not conscious of this and decides to demean himself by associating with others especially the younger ones and they made pronouncements that negate his respect, he is not expected to complain. If this is uttered in a context in which an elder complains about a child's misbehaviour towards him, it presupposes that the elder is at fault. The saying therefore is an admonition to the elder to be conscious of his actions towards the younger ones in order to earn their respect.

3. Jukun: *Nyinan*ghariku mi, perengarikufuna

Translation: While the **tree** bends from outside, man bends from inside.

Meaning: Someone may pretend to be a friend but in actual sense, an enemy
(Not all that glitters is gold/ salutation is not love).

This expression presupposes that someone may have claimed to be friendly but in actual sense is an enemy. The metaphor of the tree used here shows how dangerous human beings can be when it comes to pretence. In a typical Jukun society, one important purpose of the stem of a tree is for thatching the round house or the hut. By mere looking at a tree, one can easily know its suitability to serve the purpose of roofing the thatch house. Upon that realisation, one can easily select the ones that are straight and that can serve him. Unfortunately, one cannot dictate that from a friend by merely observing him. This statement therefore usually occurs as a caution for people to be careful in dealing with those they come across especially for the first time. People also utter this saying to express their disappointment in people they trusted but in the long run turn out to be betrayals. The saying also entails that A is disappointed in B.

4. Jukun: *Denkanri* gun kapere a sendaramba

Translation: The *okra* cannot be taller than the farmer.

Meaning: One must respect constituted authority.

This saying calls to attention the need to respect constituted authority in the society no matter how influential or wealthy one could be. In this saying, age occupies a significant position in the society so much that although one could be physically taller than another person, that would not prevent one from been disciplined once he goes wrong. The okra is a type of vegetable whose fruit is used as soup. It usually grows very tall but once the farmer comes around to pluck the fruit, he can bend the crop to do that. It is this analogy that is applied in the case of a son who may be physically taller than the parents but once it comes to discipline, they can bend his head and give him a hard knock as a disciplinary measure. Just like the okra, a member of the community must be submissive to constituted authorities to avert punishment and in the case of the family; one must be obedient to the parents to avoid punishment or even a curse. Any time the saying is uttered it is presupposes that one has violated the law in the society and punishment about to be meted out to the offender.

5. Jukun: Uma rigenyina, u pukan zoo mi yirikara

Translation: While felling a **tree**, do not forget to check the edge of the axe.

Meaning: Whatever one does, one should think of others also or one should not be self-centred.

No one is an island in the society because one's individuality is derived from the other members of the society. To foster unity and progress, there is need for every member of the community to keep their bias in check and the only way to do that is by being conscious of the existence of others. By considering other members of the community, one is indirectly also considering oneself because once one is in need, others will equally come to his rescue. In context, the saying therefore stresses the need to apply caution in dealing with other members of the community without being selfish, a situation of 'live and let live'.

6. Jukun: Koperekusaashi, **zaa**dungbarikakukuyoo**zaa**ba

Translation: Naturally, **weeds** are bound to grow among crops.

Meaning: Life is a mixture of the good and the bad.

The society is conscious of the fact that members have peculiarities; as such, people must not be treated on the same level. While some are out to build the society, others are equally out to destroy the society. To this, the only way to make progress is to accept this fact and work hard on the isolated cases. One of the ways of calling the bad elements to order is through punishment which must be aimed at correcting them and not to condemn them. Parents who have such isolated cases are always reminded of this saying so that they can wake up to the reality that not all their children will act in the same manner and that once one is wayward, the only way out is to try to apply corrective measure. Contextually, the saying has some resemblance with the biblical parable of 'the wheat and the tare' whereby the master instructed the servants to allow both to grow up to maturity before the tares are to be burnt. It is in similar spirit that parents are encouraged not to curse, condemn or write off an erring child among the good ones with the

hope that he or she may change one day. The saying therefore is a wakeup call on parents to live up to their responsibility of rehabilitating their erring children.

7. Jukun: *Gorogoro*anzunrisabe shin

Translation: A single *bean-seed* can spoil the entire locally brewed beer.

Meaning: The bad attitude of one person is capable of impacting negatively on others.

This expression is similar with the saying that when one finger touches the oil, the rest will get soiled. Within context, People especially children are cautioned to be careful with the type of friends they associate with simply because the attitude exhibited by one's friend is capable of affecting one. At the family level, parents always drum this saying into the ears of their children to be careful so that they don't bring bad names to the entire family since the society views every family member as an ambassador of the family. To this, if one is unruly, the entire society will judge that as a reflection of one's family member's attitude. It is a common belief in the society that a single seed of a bean-seed known as 'gogoro' is capable of spoiling the entire drink if it is thrown into the container of the locally brewed beer.

8. Jukun: Wadanyapere a zun*fyigbamkpoku*wazapemba

Translation: You don't need to tell someone who is eating *Bambara* nut to drink water.

Meaning: If one has been pushed to the wall, one would naturally react.

In Jukun society, the Bambara nut is usually fried and eaten as a delicacy hence, water must be served alongside the meal. To this, before anyone can start eating, such a person must make sure drinking water is equally served to avoid been choked. It is this analogy that influenced the couching of this saying to caution people to take precaution in whatever they are doing. If someone is careless, the saying is usually handy to draw such a person's attention to the fact that he would not have anyone's sympathy for the consequences of his action. Within context, any child that challenges a stronger opponent to a fight or wrestling is usually been reminded of the fact that once he is defeated no one will neither come to his rescue nor sympathise with him.

The saying therefore serves as one of the controlling mechanisms to make people to take precautionary measures in whatever they do bearing in mind the consequences of their actions.

9. Jukun: *Dasa* da kubiranyiin

Translation: The *pumpkin* has thrived on a dirty soil.

Meaning: Something useful at one's disposal but a certain situation forbids him from enjoying it.

In a typical Jukun community, every household has its own refuse dump site where refuse is dumped and the children also go there to defecate. It is therefore common for crops that form part of the refuse to grow in such a place. Since the dump site contains leaves, grasses, charcoals swept from both within and outside the compound coupled with the faeces of children, any seed that happens to grow there is usually attractive and healthy. One of the crops that usually grow in such place is the pumpkin whose leaf is used as vegetable. Unfortunately for women in the community, the attractive leaves of any pumpkin that grow on the refuse dump cannot be used for cooking. The above scenario forms the background of the saying. In context, boys usually utter this to show their frustration when their female relatives are beautiful and attractive but unfortunately for them, culture and religion forbid such marriage. The saying therefore comes under the theme of regret.

10. Jukun: *Nyina* a marisazumpiru, banwarikususukukyekye

Translation: Any firewood that is smoky should be removed from the fire.

Meaning: If someone refuses to cooperate with others, he should be isolated.

Progress in any society is achieved through the collective effort of everyone in the society. However, in an event that one individual refuses to cooperate with the other members towards building the society, he should be left alone. Such isolation is not out of wickedness but to draw his attention to the fact that no one is an island. The saying is applicable to a situation whereby a child refuses to adhere to the warning by the parents to associate with irresponsible friends. The saying would be handy to warn him/her so that in an event that he finds himself in a problem, he

would not blame them for abandoning him. The saying therefore has both the themes of warning and discipline.

Conclusion

This paper examined some idioms, proverbs and metaphors that are derived from some plants in Jukun land. The paper observed that apart from their natural uses, the following flora terms serve one of the sources through which proverbs are derived in the society: bambara nut, shrubs, pumpkin, okra among others. Through some semantico-pragmatic variables such as: contexts, culture, social values, beliefs, background knowledge, entailments, presuppositions, and conversational maxims, the work is able to discover that besides their natural uses as food, shelter, medicine as well as economic value, plants in Jukun land serve as one of the sources of proverbs, idioms and metaphor: the crux of this paper. The ten isolated sayings in this work centred on the themes of caution/warning, punishment, discipline as well as precautions. On this basis, the work concludes that these sayings serve as a controlling mechanism as well as a means through which people's behaviours in the society are regulated.

Works Cited

- Adegbija, E. *The English Language and Literature in English: An Introductory Handbook*. Ilorin: University Ilorin, 1999.
- Anderson, E. Body-part Terminology. In Greenberg, J. (ed). *Universal of Human Language* vol3. California: Stanford University Press, 1978.
- Bello, O. Some Pragmatic features of market Discourse of Yoruba and Hausa. Olorunleke, Ojo and Ladele (eds.) *New Perspectives in Linguistics and Literature*. Lagos: Ilu Project Associates, 1999.
- Butari, N. A Semantic study of Obscenity and verbal abuses in Jukun. Ndimele, Ahmad and Yakassai (eds.) *Language, Literature in culture in a multilingual society: A Festschrift for Abdulrasheed Abubakar*. Portharcourt: M & J Grand Orbit Communications Ltd, (Chapter 7), 2013.
- Krikmann, B. The Great Chain Metaphor: An Open Sesame for Proverb Semantics. in *Proverbium Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*. Vermont: The University of Vermont, 1994.
- Lawal et al. A Pragmatic Study of Selected Pairs of Yoruba Proverbs. *Journal of Pragmatics*. Elsevier Science B. V, 1995.

Lehrer, A. *Semantic Fields and Lexical Structure*. Amsterdam. North-Holland Publication Company, 1974.

Meek, C.K. *Sudanese Kingdom*. Britain: Stephen Austen and Sons Ltd., 1931.

Shimizu, K. *A Jukun Grammar*. Tokyo: Afro – Publication, 1980.

