

THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC CRITERIA GUIDING INVITATION TO MEALS AMONG THE YORÙBÁ OF SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

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It is customary in Yorùbá community to invite people while eating and failure to do so is a violation of an important social etiquette in the area of human relation or a violation of the formal rules of correct or polite behaviour in Yorùbá society. This study examines invitation to meals as speech behaviour among the Yorùbá people of Southwestern Nigeria. The instruments used included participant observation, recorded utterances and actual interaction from some Yorùbá literature books. The study illustrates and discusses the social and grammatical rules underlying invitation to meals and its response. It also shows the significance of the interaction between language and social behaviour among the Yorùbá people. In all, the study emphasises that invitation to meals as well as its response is a sociolinguistic issue which depicts a conventional system of social interaction among the Yorùbá people.

Il est de coutume dans les communauté Yorùbá d'inviter les gens pendant les repas et le défaut de le faire est une violation d'une etiquette sociale importante dans le domaine des relations entre les hommes ou une violation des règles formelles de comportement correct ou de politesse dans la société Yorùbá. Cette étude examine l'invitation à des repas comme un comportement normal parmi le peuple Yorùbá du sud-ouest du Nigeria. Les instruments utilisés notamment sont l'observation participante, les paroles enregistrées et la consultation des certains livres de littérature Yorùbá. L'étude illustre et discute les règles sociales et de grammaire sous-jacentes de l'invitation aux repas et à sa réponse. Il montre également l'importance de l'interaction entre la langue et le comportement social chez les Yorùbá. En definitive, l'étude souligne que l'invitation à des repas ainsi que sa réponse est une question sociolinguistique qui représente un système classique de l'interaction sociale entre les peuples Yorùbá.

0. INTRODUCTION

The interaction between language and issues in the area of culture has continued to attract the interest of Yorùbá language scholars. One notes in this regard the works of Eṣkundayo (1977), Akinnaso (1980), Akindele (1990), Abioṣun (1992, 1998), Oyetade (1995), Oṣlateṣju (1997), Ikoṣun (2003, 2009, 2010a, 2010b) and many others. Cultural issues that have been addressed in their works include naming, greetings, games and address forms. In the present paper, we focus on one apparently ignored area, which is the linguistic and social etiquette that relates to the culture of inviting people who may come about while the act of eating or dining is in progress. Among the Yorùbá people, invitation to meals is extremely important and failure to invite to meals is, within the culture, a violation of an important social norm. In this paper, we examine the mode of serving and eating of meals, the mode of invitation, those who may invite and those who may be invited to join in meals, and the linguistic repertoire employed in the course of invitation. We equally look at the social principles and implications of this cultural phenomenon. However, our discussion will not cover Òṣwò, Onṣdó, Owé and Yágbà dialects of Yorùbá because in the dialects honorific pronouns are not used.

1. SOME RELATED WORKS

Findings from sociolinguistic studies conducted on Yorùbá and its dialects show that Yorùbá linguists are divided on the interaction between sociological factors such as age, social status, education and language choice or use. For example, some argue

that any of age, social status and education can determine choice of language or word in social interactions (see Akindele 1990, Abio□dun 1992, Oyetade 1995, O□late□ju 1997). Some others claim that it is not in all cases that age, social status and education can help to identify social differences in language use (see Abio□dun 1998, Iko□tun 2003). They argue that intimacy and friendliness can replace the factors of social status, education and age in choosing singular pronouns as modes of address.

There are also some cultures where differences in education, age and social status are not considered in language use. For example, when the Igbo people address one another, respect is not shown despite differences in age, education and social status. The older person simply says **Bia ka-anyi rie nri** 'Come and eat' while the younger or junior person also says the same thing. The case among the Igbo people is also realised among the Hausa people (see O□de□bunmi, 2003:71). Both the old and the younger person say to one another or each other: **Zo ka ci abinci** 'Come and eat'. In this paper, the sociolinguistics of invitation to meals and its response among the Yorùbá people of Southwestern Nigeria is examined. We shall look at the aspect of the Yorùbá culture that deals with invitation to meals and response and show the significance of the interaction between language and social behaviour in the Yorùbá community.

2. DIETARY CUSTOMS AND RESTRICTIONS AMONG THE YORÙBÁ PEOPLE

Food is considered among the Yorùbá people as one of the basic necessities of life, thus the saying, **bí ebi bá ti kúrò nínú ìsé□, ìsé□ bùse** (If hunger is removed from poverty, poverty will be greatly reduced). There are no hard and fast rules about where, when and how normal meals (this work excludes ritual meals) are eaten. Whether breakfast, lunch or dinner, food could be taken inside the house or outside, in front or at the back of the house. Normally, food is not served on a dining table where every member of the family will sit together at once to eat. Individual guests and hosts will have their food served on a separate plate except the children who may eat together from one plate. This culture of children eating in one plate is to foster a sense of belonging and brotherhood among the children, particularly if they belong to a polygamous home where the children are born to the same man (father) but by different wives. But, the children can be served separately for two reasons. First, if there is a disagreement between the wives, an individual wife may want her children to eat separately. Second, if the polygamous man is administratively weak or if he is unable to provide for the needs of the family then the women that are responsible for themselves and their children will not want to take up the responsibility of other children. It is important to remark also that the host and the guest(s) may eat together from one plate if they so wish. In most cases however, men eat together while women eat together. In any case, nothing forbids men and women from eating together.

2.1 YORÙBÁ NORMS ON INVITATION TO MEALS AND ITS ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION

Yorùbá people believe in communal sense of living or oneness in all things like joy and sorrow. Whatever happens to one happens to all and whatever one has belongs to others. For example, an errant child can be checked or punished by any older person in the community. That is why the Yorùbá people say **E□nì kan ló n□ bímó□ igba ojú ló n□ tó□ o□** (It is not the responsibility of the biological father to train his children alone but that of the community as well). This communal sense of living or

oneness in all things underlies the norms of invitation to meals. To the Yorùbá people, food is a good thing and must be shared with others. This also explains the etiquette of invitation to meals. According to Yorùbá norms therefore, it is mandatory or important to invite people to meals, and when one does not invite them, an elder among those that are around can remind him or her of his or her social responsibility. The person who is not offered the request can gossip behind about the lack of cultural etiquette of the person who failed to invite him/her to a meal. Utterances such as **Wo□n ò ti è□ lè founje□ lò□niyàn** (He/she (pl) could not even invite one for a meal) or **Kò ti è□ lè founje□ lò□niyàn** (He/she (sg) could not invite one for a meal) are often made. It is therefore part of the Yorùbá norms that when a visitor comes in, in the course of a meal, courtesy demands that the visitor be invited to share in the meal. This does not mean that the person has to eat, especially if the visitor and the host are not of the same age or sex or are not friends.

In addition, the following extract from E□s□o□-Olubo□ro□de (2003:16) lends credence to this claim of invitation (see lines 2 and 3).

- (1) Fúnmi: **S□□ìké□ Diá tó o bá n□ kó□?**
 Mojèrè: **Ìye□n ti yípadà sí as□o□ awò□sùn rè□, ó ti pe o□ko□ rè□ láti wá je□un. Wó□n ní kí n wá je□un, mo ní mo ti je□un, bé□è□ oúnje□ àtò□sán ló wà ní ikùn mi...**
- Fúnmi: Where is S□ike□ dear that you met?
 Mojèrè: That one has changed to her night gown, she has called her husband to come and eat. They said I should come and eat, I said I had eaten, whereas it was in the afternoon that I ate last ..

What matters here is the fulfillment of the social obligation to invitees.

Apart from the spirit of communalism, one other reason the Yorùbá invite people for meals is to show love or affection to someone they hold in high esteem. In-laws, relatives and well-wishers may be shown this type of love. The Yorùbá people also believe in the sacrificial power of meals. They believe that generous people have natural immunity against attacks launched by any person who has benefited from their generosity. This belief is reflected in Ifá Ò□wó□nrí (Abimbo□la, 1976:39-40).

- (2) **... N□jé□ kín là n□ bo□ n'Ífè□** ...What is it that we worship at Ife□?
E□nuu wo□n People's mouths.
E□nuu wo□n là m□ bo□ n'Ífè□ It is their mouths that we worship at Ife□.
E□nuu wo□n... Their mouths...

It should be mentioned, however, that two groups of people may be excluded from invitation to meals. If there is a disagreement between two people, one of them that is eating will not invite the other. A child that is passing by also will not be invited if he or she does not greet the older person that is eating.

Furthermore, it is not in the custom of the Yorùbá to give notice of invitation to meals. So, what one may consider as notice of invitation is not necessary to meals, but to ceremonies or festivals. In this regard invitation could be to a marriage ceremony, burial ceremony, house warming ceremony, the naming of a child and many others. Such invitation to ceremonies and festivals guarantees plenty of food and drinks at no cost to the invitees. For example, Faleti (1979: 113), in his poem entitled **Ìgbéyàwó kan ní Ìletò wa** (A marriage ceremony in our village) says,

- (3) ... **Nigbat'o ya, o jo pe**
Akande mú'le po n 'tí; o m'ónà rò'kà.
O m'agbada o fidín 'ran.
Emi náà mà ba wo n de'be ni temi.
Ti mo je un ti mo yo ringindin...

...At last it was time.

Akande made enough drinks available,

he made enough food available

He used a pan to fry meat.

I too went there also

I ate and I was very satisfied...

The invitees can also demand more food and drinks at no cost if what they are given are not enough.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The instruments for this study comprised participant observation, tape recording of several events of invitation to meals and rejection or acceptance of meals and also Yorùbá literary works. The first instrument used was participant observation and tape-recording of several events of invitation to meals made in Ilé-Ifè, Èrìnmò, Ilésà, Inísà, Ibádàn, Àkúrè, Ìdó-Àní and Òsogbo. These communities were chosen because during the time of our research we discovered that the Yorùbá ethnic groups were sufficiently represented by members of these communities. The recordings were done in public places especially at social gatherings.

The second instrument had to do with literary data that were collected to provide further evidence from written works. The Yorùbá literature books that were consulted, are Abimbo (1976) and Yemitan and Ogundele (1979). The books are on Ifá divination process. In Yorùbá culture, Ifá is regarded as a repository of the people's culture, history, tradition and values.

Third, some actual interactional data were taken from Faleti (1979:113), Ajewole (1986:29), Isola (1989:60), Ogunniran (1991:3) and Esoro-Olubo (2003:16) to further strengthen the recorded utterances or to support the recorded utterances as genuine utterances used in invitation to meals as well as rejection/acceptance of meals among the Yorùbá people. The descriptive method will be employed in analyzing the recorded utterances.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data and the analysis of this research will be divided into sections. The data will be presented in 4.1 and the discussion of the data will be handled in sections 4.2, 4.3. and 4.4. However, in sections 4.2-4.4 we implore readers to take note of the use of second person singular subject pronoun **o** in sentences (a), (e), (h), (t), (w), second person plural subject pronoun **e** in sentences (b), (d), (s), (u), (v), (x), second person singular object pronoun **e** in sentences (k), (r), second person plural object pronoun qualifier **yín** in sentence (l), first person singular subject pronoun **mo** in sentences (i), (k), (l), (m), (o) as well as non-occurrence of pronouns in sentences (c), (f), (g), (j),

(n), (p) and (q). The plural pronouns are used in the honorific sense. Precisely, the use of singular pronouns as well as non-occurrence of pronouns in address forms mean contempt, disregard and lack of politeness (see also Abio□dun 1992, 1998, Oyetade 1995, O□late□ju 1997). On the other hand, the use of plural pronouns for a single person may mean, depending on the situation, deference, politeness, regard or euphemism.

4.1 DATA PRESENTATION

The data collected are divided into three categories. The first category comprises ways through which invitation to meals can be handled and they are:

- (4) (a) **O bá mi re** 'You (sg) meet me well'
 (b) **E□ bá mi re** 'You (pl) meet me well'
 (c) **Wá je□un** 'Come and eat'
 (d) **E□ wá je□un** 'You (pl) come and eat'
 (e) **O n□ wò mí ni?** 'Are you (sg) looking at me?'
 (f) **Sún àga re□ sibi** 'Move your (sg) chair closer'
 (g) **Wo omi isanwó□** 'Feel free to wash your hands'
 (h) **O rìn in re** 'You (sg) have come at the right time'

The second category consists of expressions with which visitors can initiate invitation to meals. The expressions are:

- (4) (i) **Mo ti n□ fi e□sè□ ko□ bò□** 'I have been hitting my legs against something'
 (j) **S□ é kí n wá je□?** 'Can I come and eat?'
 (k) **Mo bá e□ re** 'I meet you well'
 (l) **Mo bá yin re** 'I meet you (pl) well'
 (m) **Mo mò□ ó□ n rìn** 'I have come at the right time'
 (n) **S□ é kí n je□ oúnje□ yi?** 'Should I eat this food?'

The sentences that are shown below are several ways through which rejection or acceptance can be expressed.

Sentences for rejection are:

- (4) (o) **Mo s□è□s□è□ je□un tán** 'I have just eaten'
 (p) **Á gba ibi ire** 'It would go well'
 (q) **Aràn an re á gbà á** 'A good worm will receive it'
 (r) **O□mo□ á bá e□ jé□** 'Children will dine with you'
 (s) **E□ s□é, mo s□è□s□è□ je□un tán ni** 'Thank you (pl), I have just eaten'
 (t) **O s□é, mo s□è□s□è□ je□un tán ni** 'Thank you (sg), I have just eaten'
 (u) **E□ s□é, a ti yó** 'Thank you (pl.), we are satisfied'

Sentences for acceptance are:

- (v) **E□ s□é** 'Thank you (pl)'
 (w) **O s□é** 'Thank you (sg)'
 (x) **E□ s□é, a dúpé□** 'Thank you (pl.), we are grateful'

4.2 INVITATION TO MEALS

We have shown in sections 2 and 2.1 that invitation to meals is deeply entrenched in the culture of the Yorùbá people and that there is sense of communalism whereby individuals are connected. The success of one man is the success of every other person. So also, the failure of one person is the failure of the other. Thus, whatever a person has belongs to the community. The food one is eating also is normally seen as a belonging to every other person and this explains the etiquette of invitation to meals. Therefore, for either invitation or request, an older person will normally use the second person singular pronouns as already presented in section 4.1. For example; the sentences **O bá mi re** ‘You (sg) meet me well’ and **E□ bá mi re** ‘You (pl) meet me well’ can be adopted by an elder anytime he/she wishes to do so without necessarily violating the rules of speaking. The adoption of the singular pronoun **o** for a younger person is a confirmation of the difference in age between the speaker and the addressee. The choice of the plural pronoun **e□** for a younger person is simply an indication that the younger person is held in high esteem. It may be that the younger person is socially highly-placed in the community or that the younger person is a stranger as well as an adult.

The misuse of the second person plural pronoun **e□** and second person singular pronoun **o** would be seen as lack of sufficient knowledge of the Yorùbá language as well as the Yorùbá culture. For example, it would be inappropriate for a grown up person to say **E□ bá mi re** ‘You (pl) meet me well’ to just a child. It is either **O bá mi re** ‘You (sg) meet me well’ or **Wá je□un** ‘Come and eat’. The younger person too cannot tell an elder, **O bá mi re** ‘You (sg) meet me well’ or **Wá je□un** ‘Come and eat’. It must be **E□ bá mi re** ‘You (pl) meet me well’ or **E□ wá je□un** ‘You (pl) come and eat’. But, if a younger person addresses an older person with either **O bá mi re** ‘You (sg) meet me well’ or **Wá je□un** ‘Come and eat’ then either or both sentences are evidence of contempt which must have resulted from familiarity which exists between the speaker and the addressee. By familiarity, we mean the kind of closeness that exists between father and son. The known fact is that a father and his son are always found together at home, working, eating, conversing etc. together. However, this does not remove the kind of respect the culture imposes on the child in his day-to-day interaction with the father.

The word **re** is a shortened word from **ire** (something that is good) or **rere** (good). To the Yorùbá people, food like shelter is one of the basic necessity of life, it is therefore regarded as very important and it is something that is good hence, the replacement of food with **ire**. This shows that figurative expressions can accompany invitation to meals in some cases. Thus, **O bá mi re** or **E□ bá mi re**, simply means you meet me at table and the person being addressed is therefore enjoined to participate in the eating. However, if a child should say **O bá mi re** to an elder, the addressee or any of the people that is around would quickly correct the child by saying **E□ bá mi re ni wó□n n□ so□ sí àgbàlagbà** ‘It is you (pl) have met me well that should be adopted for an elder’.

Furthermore, familiarity and age may also serve as the basis for the choice of language. For example, if **Adé** and **O□lá** are of the same age and **O□lá** meets **Adé** on a meal, the invitation will take the following form.

- (5) Adé: **O□lá, wá je□un** Adé: ‘O□lá, come and eat’ or
 Adé: **O bá mi re** Adé: ‘You (sg) meet me well’ or
 Adé: **O n□ wò mí ni?** Ade ‘Are you (sg) looking at me?’

The use of personal name or singular pronoun **o** is culturally allowed in this situation. The interaction here suggests familiarity or that **Adé** is older than **Olá**. Members of the same age group can communicate with one another either by using their personal names or the short singular pronoun **o** or the long or emphatic singular pronoun **ìwo** (you (sg)). The first two invitations are direct while the third invitation is indirect. These invitations show that a friendly relationship exists between **Adé** and **Olá** and the invitations are also meant to further strengthen the social relationship that exists between them.

The sentences: **Sún àga re síbí** ‘Move your (sg) chair closer’, **Wo omi ìsanwó** ‘Feel free to wash your hands’ are other ways of inviting people to a meal. These sentences are not meant to be interpreted literally. The sentences stand for invitation. These types of invitation are either for colleagues or younger people. It will be an act of disrespect and a misuse of language if a younger person should tell an elder, **O n wò mí ni?** ‘Are you (sg) looking at me?’ or **O rìn in re** ‘You (sg) have come at the right time’ or **Sún àga re síbí** ‘Move your (sg) chair here’. It is still not allowed even if the pronoun **o** is replaced with the pronoun **e** in the sentence **O n wò mí ni?** ‘Are you (sg) looking at me?’.

Among members of the nuclear family, invitations to meals can take some forms from a wife to her husband. For example, among couples, the sentence **Oúnje yín ti s e tán** ‘Your (pl) food is ready’ can be adopted by a wife for her husband. This sentence is taken from an extract from Isola (1989:59-60) (see line 2).

(6) Máko: ...**O tún dé niye n, ò rò Sálù nikan ló wà láyé ni?**
 Ìyàwó: **Oúnje yín ti s e tán...**

Máko: ...You have come again, is it only Salu’s matter that is in the world?
 Ìyàwó: Your (pl) food is ready...

The sentences, **Oúnje yín ti se tán** ‘Your (pl) food is ready’ and **Oúnje (r) e ti se tán** ‘Your (sg) food is ready’, have different purposes to serve. **Yín** and **(r)e** are both possessives. The possessive **yín** is used as a mark of respect if the food being qualified is for one person. This is also to show politeness and regard. But if there is a disagreement between a wife and her husband and the husband asks his wife **S é oúnje mi ti s e tán?** ‘Is my food ready?’ and the wife says **Oúnje yín ti s e tán** ‘Your (pl) food is ready’ depending on the tone, that is, if the tone is negative, the response, in this case, will sound cheeky. But if the wife initiates the invitation with an endearing tone, it may mean that the wife is seeking reconciliation with her husband.

Furthermore, in most cases, mothers are the ones who initiate invitation when their children’s food or meals are ready with the sentence **E wá je un**. The use of pronoun **e** shows that the addressee is not a child. But, if a child were to be addressed then the pronoun **e** would be deleted. The sentences **E wá je un** ‘You (pl) come and eat’ and **Wá je un** ‘Come and eat’ are command sentences which require optional subject pronoun. However, to show politeness the pronoun **e** is obligatory. Note that command sentences are usually from a superior person to the subordinate. Therefore, parents, who in this regard are superior to their children, do not adopt honorific pronouns when addressing their children. However, if a child has committed an offence, the mother, in a bid to show disapproval of the child’s misbehaviour, may use the honorific pronouns as euphemism. The mother may say **E wá je un** ‘You (pl) come and eat’. The child will immediately understand that there is a problem. Ordinarily, parents are not supposed to use honorific pronouns for

their children. Politeness or respect, under this condition, is shown to express annoyance or mockery.

4.3 MODES OF REQUEST FOR MEALS

There are occasions when visitors or anybody can initiate invitation to meals by making use of some figurative expressions. For example, the sentence, **Mo ti n fi e sè ko bò** 'I have been knocking my legs against something' simply means I know I will meet you at table. It does not mean that the person has been actually knocking his legs against something. The sentences, **Mo ti n fi e sè ko bò** 'I have been hitting my legs against something', **S e kí n wá je un?** 'Can I come and eat?' and **Mo bá e re** 'I meet you well', can only be used by an older person to a younger person or a colleague to another colleague but not by a younger person to an older person. It would amount to rudeness if a junior person should tell an older person, **Mo ti n fi e sè ko bò** or **S e kí n wá je un?**

However, the **e** in **Mo ba e re** is different from the **e** in **E bá mi re**. The **e** in **Mo bá e re** is from the word **ire** (you (sg)) and it is not a mark of respect. If respect were to be shown, the **e** in **Mo bá e re** will be replaced by **yín** which means that the sentence will be **Mo bá yín re**. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a younger person can only say **Mo bá yín re** to an elder, if a certain sort of relationship exists between the two of them (see Ogunniran, 1991:3)

(7) Saje nti Alábe dé: **Ò gá! E mà lè s e bé è dá bò ò ò li àtè pà nni je ráúráú!**

Ripé tò Ìjàòdo là: **N kò ra tiyín mó o n...**

Sergeant Alábe dé: Master! You (pl) may eat that roast plantain and groundnut alone!

Inspector Ìjàòdo là: I did not buy your own together with this...

In the above extract the sentence **Ò gá! E mà lè s e bé è dá bò ò ò li àtè pà nni je ráúráú!** 'Master! You (pl) may eat that roast plantain and groundnut alone!' was a request for a meal from the junior officer to the senior officer and the factor of familiarity or close relationship was responsible for the junior officer's request for food from the senior officer. Otherwise, the junior officer's request for food would have been regarded as idiotic as well as lack of etiquette or home training.

The sentence or question **S e kí n je óunje yí?** 'Should I eat this food?' can be a request from a child to his or her mother. If the mother says 'yes' then the child is free to take it. But, if the child has committed an offence, the mother can say **Hin, jé e tó bá jé pé iwo ló s e é** 'Yes, go and eat it if it was you (sg) that prepared it'. The response shows the mother's disapproval.

4.4 REJECTION/ACCEPTANCE OF MEALS

The factors of age, social status, politeness, familiarity, kinship and love, to mention a few, that are considered in invitation to meals are also considered in response or rejection of meals. For example, an elder may insist that the younger one should join him at the table but the sentence **Mo s è s è je un tán** 'I have just eaten' even when he/she has not eaten is normally used by the young ones to bail themselves out of such situations. But, it must be observed that refusal and acceptance depend largely on the level of intimacy. If there is no intimacy and the younger person

refuses the invitation, he/she would be seen as a well-behaved, well-mannered person who has a disciplined background. But, if he/she accepts, it means he/she is not well brought up. So, the younger person as well as his or her parents would remain condemned. Thus, the essence of the invitation here is just to fulfil the norms of the Yorùbá society.

Responses to invitation to meals have some connotations. In the case of a younger person inviting an elderly person to food, the usual response which connotes rejection, though with appreciation, could be: **Á gba ibi ire** 'It would go well' or **Aràn an re á gbà á** 'A good worm will receive it' or **O mo á bá e jé** 'Children will dine with you' (see also the following extract from Ajewole, 1986:29):

- (8) Ògèdèn gbé: **E káàbò Bàbá e ni.**
E bá mi ire o.
 Ògún mókùn: **Aràn re á gbà á.**
 Ògèdèn gbé: You (pl) are welcome our father
 You (pl) have met me well o.
 Ògún mókùn: A good worm will receive it.

The word **re** in this response is from the word **rere** 'good'. The word **re** is used in this context to qualify the word **aràn** 'worm'. This response from an elder is a way of politely declining the invitation. The response also means a prayer for the younger person who has shown the spirit of generosity. Another response which is a polite rejection to an invitation is: **O mo á bá e jé** 'Children will dine with you'. The sentence **O mo á bá e jé** is a manifestation of the people's belief in procreation. The addressee's response of polite rejection is a prayer of prosperity.

On the other hand, it will be an act of disrespect and a misuse of the Yorùbá language if a younger person should say to an elder **O mo á bá e jé** 'Children will dine with you' or **á gba ibi ire** 'It would go well'. The response from a younger person to an elder is either **E s é** (Thank you (pl)) or **E s é, mo s è s è je un tán ni** 'Thank you (pl), I have just eaten' and these sentences are polite rejections. The choice of the pronoun **e** is a mere way of showing politeness. This response means an attitude of appreciation. The second person plural pronoun **e** can be used for either one person or many people. When it is used for one person, it is used as a honorific pronoun 'you' used as a mark of respect. The use of **e** is essentially for older people and younger ones who are held in high esteem. The use of **e** shows politeness and respect. When a younger person invites an elder to dine with him at table, he/she does so as a mere formality. The essence of this invitation is to show that he/she is not miserly. The response to such invitation is already determined. This is because, if the older person refuses, his/her refusal will be seen as honourable. His/her refusal too is expected to teach the younger person how to conduct himself/herself when he/she is old. The sentence **Mo s è s è je un tán** 'I have just eaten' could be a lie in most cases, but it is regarded as normal and tenable in this context.

A non-linguistic factor may also serve as a basis for meal rejection. An invitation to a meal could be rejected if a younger person uses a single hand or a left hand, to serve an elder a meal. This non-linguistic behaviour shows disrespect to the elder. In addition to the use of the two hands, a female person may be expected to kneel down a little in recognition of the addressee's age or social status.

In addition, in most of the polygamous homes, envy is manifested in various ways: (i) If one of the wives has more children than the other, (ii) if one has male children and the other has only female children, (iii) if one has children and the other does not have any child at all. If the issues raised above are established, the woman who has more children or who has male children might instruct her children not to honour any invitation to meals by the co-wife. The fear is that the other woman may want to do some havoc through food poison. In cases where such offer cannot be declined, the food would be thrown away without the giver's knowledge. On the other hand, if there is no suspicion and invitation to a meal is given in good faith, the response in most cases, is always in the affirmative.

Furthermore, the use of **e** in **E gba óúnje yìí** 'You (pl) take this food' by a co-wife refers to at least two children and not one child. The **e** in **E sǎ́, a ti yó** 'Thank you (pl.), we are satisfied' by the eldest or older child is a mark of politeness for the co-wife. The pronoun **a** 'we' in **E sǎ́, a ti yó** 'Thank you (pl.), we are satisfied' in this context is very important so that none of the children would be singled out. Another reason for rejection may be that the children may be afraid of being considered greedy. If the person responding uses, **mo**, i.e. **Mo ti yó** 'I am satisfied', the co-wife may say, give it to your brothers. But, by the use of pronoun **a** 'we', the co-wife would know that the child is not only speaking for himself but for the others as well.

In addition, the sentence, **E sǎ́, a dúpé** 'Thank you (pl.), we are grateful' may mean 'yes' or 'no'. In most cases, the sentence always means 'yes' even though the children would collect the food and later throw it away without the giver's knowledge. On the other hand, the 'yes' may mean that the children would collect the food and eat it. This latter case suggests the existence of friendliness and harmony. However, if it is believed that somebody in the Yorùbá extended family setting harbours some hatred or dislike, invitation to meals from the person will always be disregarded. In some cases, if someone has not got the option to reject, the person will joyfully collect the food and later throw it away for fear of being poisoned. Under normal circumstances, invitation to meals from a relative may be accepted or rejected without any thought of evil deeds.

Furthermore, if invitation to meal by a wife is consistently rejected by the husband, then, such rejection, if it is not on health grounds, may lead to suspicion of double standards or that the man is having another wife somewhere. The wife may raise an alarm that will connote 'save my marriage'. She may inform friends or relatives who will help them look into the reason(s) that may be responsible for the husband's refusal to accept such invitation to meal.

5. CONCLUSION

In this study, we have examined invitation to meals and response among the Yorùbá people of Southwestern Nigeria. We have shown that the Yorùbá people consider food as one of the basic necessities of life and that because of the sense of communalism whereby individuals are connected, invitation to meals is deeply entrenched in the culture of the Yorùbá people.

Similarly, we have shown several ways through which invitation and response can be handled and that the several ways help to show a conventional system of social interaction among the Yorùbá people. In social interactions, as it has already been discussed, the young people must be mindful of their behaviour and choice of words or language. Failure to recognize these facts will be seen as lack of home training on the part of the young people. The elders also stand condemned if their social

behaviour or choice of language is not in agreement with the Yorùbá norms expected in such a speech event.

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