

# Linguistic Strategies that Imply Gender Inequality in Yoruba Proverbs and Postproverbials

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## Abstract

There are linguistic elements in Yoruba proverbs that reveal oppression of women. Previous studies have suggested reconstruction of these proverbs to remove the elements that suggest oppression of women. In doing so, some of them succeed in creating elements that mean discrimination and oppression against/of men. This paper posits that this is replacing an evil with another evil, which does not seem to provide solution expected of a research. This paper therefore investigates these linguistic elements and reconstruct them in a way that oppression of the two genders is abolished. The paper uses secondary data. Nineteen proverbs in Balogun (2010), out of which of some are reconstructed, serve as the data for this paper. The paper adopts Postmodern theory. This paper finds out that the proverbs mainly use negative nouns and adjectives, feminine words and positive verbal expressions to achieve discrimination against women. The postproverbials derived from some of the proverbs extend some of these linguistic elements to men folk to achieve balance. This paper uses the opposite of these linguistic strategies and elimination/replacement of some in the reconstruction of the proverbs to eliminate oppression of/ discrimination against any of the two genders. It recommends that researchers should not only reconstruct proverbs they feel undermine dignity of women or humanity but also begin to question their reconstructions to ensure that more damages are not caused.

**Keywords:** Linguistic strategies, Gender Inequality, Postproverbials, Proverbs

## Introduction

The paper examines the meaning of proverb, oppression of women through proverbs, reconstructed proverbs (postproverbials), Postmodern theory and attempt a criticism and reconstruction of the reconstruction in Balogun (2010).

## Proverb

Proverbs are wise short rigid sayings or expressions of wisdom which state a general truth and give an advice. “The traditional proverb is a verbal, concrete realiation of “a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology . . .” “The general conception of proverbs in preliterate societies as having the distinctive and main function of teaching is “too pragmatic and limiting”; he suggests that the artistic, literary features of such proverbs, which include “the sharp wit, the sarcasm, the humor, the rhetoric, and . . . all the aesthetic and poetic values of language use,” cannot be ignored (183)” (Raji-Oyelade, 1999)

Expressions of wisdom are usually referred to as proverbs. Any speech not embellished with proverbs is not considered ‘rich and intelligent’. Therefore, a typical African would often lace his speech with appropriate proverbs to pass his messages. They define a proverb as ‘a short well-known expression that states a general truth and gives an advice’. The central idea in the definitions of proverb is that a proverb is “an adage, saying, maxim, precept, saw or any synonym of such that expresses conventional truth” Usman, Mustafa & Agu (2013). Proverbs are ‘cultural tools for transferring the traditions of a speech community in

terms of their values, beliefs and collective knowledge from one generation to another. They are folkloric metaphors but unlike other oral folklore they are not set apart or restricted to certain domains of usage' (Ademowo and Balogun, 2015). Proverbs are described as 'red oil, with which yams are eaten'. Proverbs are 'sacred and they carry tremendous power and authority for anyone who is able to use them skilfully' (Penfield and Duru, 1988).

Omoera & Inegbeboh (2013) state that proverbs are 'symbolic expressions of people' and to a large extent are influenced by the linguistic and socio-geographical experiences and orientations of the diverse people.

Daniel (2016) reports that 'Martin (2015) defines proverbs as 'short and pithy sayings that express some traditionally held truth. They are usually metaphorical and often, for the sake of memorability, alliterative'. Nnolim (1983:36) explains a proverb as 'a recognised truth or shrewd observation about practical life that is ascertained through experience'. A proverb as a 'short phrase, usually from the folklore, containing wisdom, truth, morality and traditional perspectives expressed in a metaphorical sense, stable and trainable and transmitted from generation to generation' (Mieder, 2004)

### **Oppression of Women through Yoruba Proverbs**

It has been observed that women are not being represented well in some of the proverbs that are related to women. This has been termed oppression of women through proverbs. So, such proverbs need to be reconstructed. They term reconstructed proverbs postproverbials.

Yitah (2006) looks at how Kasena women from Northern Ghana take advantage of the socially acceptable "joking" relationship between an individual and their spouses' siblings, 'to subvert and contradict Kasem proverbs in an effort to transcend the misogynist images and connotations of these proverbs as well as to critique patriarchal norms'. He describes this as a 'proverbial revolt'. The 'paremiological revolt' involves interpreting existing proverbs from their own perspective in order to create 'counter-proverbs that respond to existing ones, more appropriately articulates the "truth" of their lives'. This revolt is characterised by disruptive strategies that questions 'truth' and critiques the logic of another proverb. 'Joking relationships, according to Regnar Johnson, are "relationships in which joking or behavior deemed to conflict with the norms of social order [is] contained by its institutionalization" (1978:131)'. She notes that both men and women deploy proverbs jokingly but only the women subvert them, this is considered as increasing awareness of their social position, especially as it is constructed by the 'original' proverbs. Here is one of the examples given with its context:

'Woman: How should I know (when I will bear your next child)? Am I God?'

**Proverb:** 'Man: Oh well, that's all right. I can wait. Our elders say that it is the patient person who will milk a barren cow'.

**Postproverbial:** 'Woman: When it comes to milking cows, then the person who would milk a barren cow must prepare for a kick on the forehead'. Yitah (2006) explains: the man wishes to know when the wife would bear another child because it has been fifteen years ago that she gave birth last. The wife criticises the man for seeing women as being exclusively in control of birth by reconstructing the existing proverb. Through this, she cleverly informs the man that any man who wants a child should be ready to endure the pain in the process. Her awareness of exploitation of women in her society is shown here.

Balogun (2010) explains that there are elements of oppression in some of the Yoruba proverbs that relate to women; he argues that these proverbs violate the rights and dignity of women and discriminate against them, an act which is detrimental to the struggle for gender balance. He contends that these proverbs should be urgently reviewed. This is a clear call for postproverbials of these proverbs. Balogun (2010) states that he joins Raji-Oyelade to call for postproverbials to address some of the inadequacies inherent in African traditional proverbs, i.e. a reconstructive engagement with some African proverbs considered to be out of date. Reconstruction is necessary for 'grandeur feminine delusion'. Consequently, he recommends that such proverbs be expurgated from the Yoruba oral tradition.

Ogunwale (1998) posits that there is existence of the proverbial oppression of men as against women in Yoruba culture. Though Ogunwale discusses some Yoruba proverbs that portray men in bad lights: indolence, insolence, disobedience and absurdity, he states that Yoruba proverbs reveal oppression of women more than men.

Yoruba culture simultaneously recognizes the natural dichotomy that exists between male and female, and their co-existence; it emphasises the fact that the relationship between women and men should be based on equality. It is natural to want to dominate one another. When this happens, both the oppressed and oppressor invent proverbs to justify their positions (Olasupo, Olugbemi & Adeniran, 2012).

### **Postproverbials**

Scholars have noted that sacredness and rigidity which are seen as characteristics of proverbs in the definitions above are being violated such that proverbs are being reconstructed, deconstructed or recreated. Proverbs have never been considered sacrosanct; on the contrary, they have frequently been used as satirical, ironic or humorous comments on a given situation. For centuries, they have provided a framework for endless transformation. In the last few decades, they have been perverted and parodied so extensively that their variations have been sometimes heard more often than their original forms (Litovkina, 2014 & 2017). Such recreated proverbs have been given different names by different scholars. Such names include but not limited to new proverb, supplementary proverb or postproverbial (Raji-Oyelade, 1999), counter proverb (Yitah, 2006), metroproverb (Raji-Oyelade, 2011), postmodernist proverb (Raji-Oyelade, 2012), contemporary proverb (Rethabile, 2014), anti-proverb (Mieder, 2004:28 in Omari, 2016, Lere, 2012 & Litovkina, 2014 & 2017 ), modern proverb, post-proverb (Omari, 2016) and postproverb (Daniel, 2016). Litovkina (2014 & 2017) state that:

*Wolfgang Mieder has coined the term Antispruchwort (anti-proverb) for such deliberate proverb innovations (also known in English as alterations, mutations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, deliberate proverb innovations, or fractured proverbs) and has published several collections of anti-proverbs in both German and English. Wolfgang Mieder's term Antispruchwort has been widely accepted by proverb scholars all over the world as a general label for such innovative alterations of and reactions to traditional proverbs.*

Postproverbials challenge conventional wisdom and native intelligence in traditional proverbs. They are continuously open to transformation associated with cultural dynamism (Raji-Oyelade 2013). Proverbs have three levels of meaning: (i) the text (literal meaning); (ii) the generalized moral and cultural principles (philosophical meaning); and (iii) the meaning defined by the specific interactional context (contextual meaning) (Nwoga, 1979).

Postproverbials are alternatives that are opposites of proverbials. The conscious undermining, or subversion, of traditional proverbs is generally regarded as playful among the younger generation of Yoruba speakers who are cosmopolitan in consciousness. One of the weaknesses of post-proverbials is that they are 'the intervention and corruption' of the indigenous languages through linguistic borrowings from the English language (Raji-Oyelade, 2014:21).

Yoruba proverb asserts that proverbs are reserved for elders: 'Enu agba l'obi ti ngbo (The kolanut is truly mature only in the mouth of the elders)'. This means that only the elders can speak words of wisdom in the society. Proverbs is 'a product of linguistic employment and communicative intents', an approach that allows the manipulation and adaptation of the usual restricted form, structure and nature of proverbs' (Daniel, 2016).

Daniel (2008) asserts that the age-related supposed wisdom is actually an attempt at coercion of the younger generation to fall in line with the perceived 'tradition' of the race. Onayemi (2004), Oluyamo (2006) and

Balogun (2010) all wonder at this supposed wisdom of the elders that results in the unfair treatment of women in the society (Daniel, 2016). She adds that for youths to be able to use a proverb, permission of the elder(s) has to be sought by saying “Toto se bi owe o!” (Let it not be like a proverb o!) and has to wait till the elder of course acknowledges and says: “Wa a pa’ mi” (You will make another proverb) before such a youth can go ahead. Daniel (2016) reports that this is the 21st century and there is no way the people of this age can be expected to live like the people of the 20th century, a position which she says Mieder (2014) agrees with.

### **Postmodern Theory**

Different people cohabit in the same society. So, accepting the numerous cultural modes of one period the same way becomes almost impossible. In an everchanging world, new explanations are required to understand new developments or changes (postmodernism offers such explanations). This does not imply that previous theories and explanations are incorrect. In fact, they have advanced academic pursuits of understanding the social sciences (Mouton, 1996:15) (*These days anything goes?*). This paper intends to use postmodern theory, which is a theory that consents to questioning of established norms and if needs be deconstructs and then suitably reconstructs and posits that societies in the world have cultural norms and values but they are not necessarily universal constructs.

Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Richard Rorty are the familiar postmodern vanguards and leading strategists. ‘They set the direction of the movement and provide it with its most potent tools’. They are aided by others like Stanley Fish and Frank Lentricchia in literary and legal criticism, Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin in feminist legal criticism, Jacques Lacan in Psychology, Robert Venturi and Andreas Huyssen in architectural criticism, and Luce Irigaray in the criticism of science (Hicks, 2011).

Postmodernism is not an irreverent confused juxtaposition, not just anything goes as argued by some scholars. Postmodernism is an eclectic movement that consents to questioning of established norms and if needs be deconstructs and then suitably reconstructs, thus contributing to continuous diversity, in an appreciation of multiplicity, the flexibility of such a movement is a necessity in an everchanging world. Societies in the world have cultural norms and values but they are not necessarily universal constructs (Samuels, 2008:220).

Though postmodernists disagree on many things, they do not disagree on the fact that ‘postmodernism is a rejection of absolutes, essences and foundations.’ Lyotard, one of the contemporary proponents of postmodernism, states that postmodernism is ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’. ‘By this, he means that we should abandon all attempts we make to find a grand, universal, trans-historical, transcultural scheme, paradigm or algorithm with which we can legitimize knowledge or justify the choice of one theory over another. Having abandoned the search for a grand norm, we are then left with heterogeneous, pluralistic multiplicity, incommensurable differences’. Morley supports this assertion by stating that postmodernists ‘see the dissolutions of distinction, the merging of subject and object, self and other... a sarcastic playful parody of Western modernity and a radical anarchist rejection of all attempts to define reality or re-present the human subject’.

Postmodernism is against the essential tenets of the modern period: reason (rationality) and method (science); it rejects those ideas that lay tenacious grip on the immutability of knowledge, truth and essentialism. Postmodernism states that reality is a social construct; it gives meaning only within the context of certain defined cultural conditions. To them, any reality not defined and characterized by communities or societies, based on their cultural particularity, is no reality. This is the reason behind rejection of Marxism, Humanism, Existentialism, Socialism, Essentialism, Darwinism, Creationism, Evolutionism, Spiritualism, Religionism, etc., because they are ‘authoritative and possessive of absolute truth, and therefore, unable to access reality’. Postmodernists, as Rorty puts it, wish to open ‘cultural space’ to multiple and plural criteria of justification and legitimization (Agbo, 2014). Why did the author(s) leave out Capitalism? The author considered postmodernism more relevant than capitalism.

## Analysis and Reconstruction of the Selected Proverbs and Postproverbials

The data below are drawn from Balogun (2010). His reconstructions of the proverbs are criticized and reconstructed to eradicate the oppression of the two genders, as enshrined in the proverbs

### 1.

**Proverb:** '*Pashan ta fi na yale, oun be laja fun'yawo*' (The whip that was used to beat the first wife is kept for the second wife). **Postproverbial:** '*Pashan ta fi na oko kini, owa ni pepe fun oko keji*' (The whip that was used to beat the first husband is on the shelf for the second husband)

The proverb uses a derogatory noun (whip) restricted to women to portray discrimination against women while the postproverbial extends the derogatory noun to the two genders. In trying to solve a problem, the postproverbial succeeds in causing more problems. It has succeeded in representing a husband in a bad way, undermining the cultural importance of being the head attached to him, his might, and has also encouraged divorce. This reconstruction has caused more problems in an attempt to solve one. The proverb can be reconstructed by changing the derogatory word (whip) to a positive word (gift). This postproverbial can be reconstructed thus: *Ebun taa fun iyale, oun be laja fun iyawo* (*The gift we gave to the first wife is on the shelf for second wife*). Discrimination against any of the genders is eliminated in this postproverbial.

### 2.

**Proverb:** '*Baa fi gbogbo ile nla jin kolekole, kope o ma jale die kun; bi a si fi gbogbo odede jin iyawo agbere, kope o ma tara re f'ale*' ('Give a mansion to a thief - that does not prevent him from stealing; give a promiscuous wife all you have in a beautiful house - that does not preclude her from selling herself cheaply to a paramour'). **Postproverbial:** *Baa fi gbogbo ile nla jin kolekole, kope o ma jale die kun; bi a si fi gbogbo odede jin oko agbere tabi iyawo onisekuse, kope o ma se sina* ('Give a mansion to a thief - that does not prevent him from stealing; give a man or woman all you have in a beautiful house - that does not preclude him or her from being promiscuous').

The proverb uses negative adjective (*agbere*, promiscuous/adulterous) and negation (*kope*, does not) to achieve discrimination against women. The postproverbial extends these linguistic strategies to man and add a synonym of *agbere*, *onisekuse*, to avoid using the same word to describe the two genders; it portrays the two as adulterers while the proverb only portrays the wife as the adulterer. The proverb can be reconstructed in such a way that the negative adjective and the negation are removed thus: *Baa fi gbogbo ile nla jin kolekole, kope o ma jale die kun; bi a si fi gbogbo odede jin iyawo, o ni o ma se sina* (*Give a mansion to a thief - that does not prevent him from stealing; give a woman all you have in a beautiful house - that does preclude her from being promiscuous*). The reconstruction above has eradicated the fact that some wives are promiscuous. One of the strong reasons for promiscuity is lack of care for wives. The postproverbial has not only admonished men to take care of their wives but has also not seen women as prostitutes.

### 3.

**Proverb:** '*Itakun l'obinrin yoo maa fa kaa ni*' (Women are climber plants that overrun any available space'). **Postproverbial:** '*Itakun l'eniyan yoo maa fa kaa ni*' ('Humans are climber plants that overrun any available space').

The proverb uses a negative noun, *itakun* (climber plant) and no negations of auxiliary verbs, *l'o* and *yoo* (are and will respectively). Like (2) above, the postproverbial extends these linguistic elements to the two genders; it has also enshrined both men and women in crime instead of only women in the proverb. To eradicate this, the negative noun can be retained but the auxiliary verbs should be negated, the postproverbial can be reconstructed thus: **Postproverbial:** *Itakun ko l'obinrin ko lee maa fa kaa*. (**Women are not climber plants; they cannot be moving from one place to another**). This reconstruction has negated the stand that women are a mere plant which crawls without limit because in reality, many women are faithful to their husbands.

### 4.

**Proverb:** *'Bi koba ni dii, obinrin kii je Kumolu, bi obinrin ba je Salawu, yoo san wo ori'* ('Without any reason, a woman cannot be called Kumolu, if a woman bears Salawu, then she will pay tax'). The proverb uses masculine names (*Kumolu* and *Salawu*), negative verb (cannot) and a positive verb (bears) to portray women as being incapable of being a head, except in case of emergency, and paying tax when modern reality shows that many women are now heads and pay tax. So, this proverb can be reconstructed by retaining the masculine names and negating the second verb, too, thus: ***Bi koba ni dii, obinrin a maa je Kumolu, bi obinrin ba je Salawu bi ko je Salawu, yoo san wo ori.*** (Without any reason, a woman can be a head, whether a woman bears Salawu or not, she pays tax). The reconstruction above shows that women can be leaders naturally and do not need to bear masculine names to pay tax.

#### 5.

**Proverb:** *'Bi obinrin b' ape nile, aje londa'* (If a lady stays too long in the house, she becomes a witch). This proverb uses a negative noun, *aje* (witch) to suggest that a woman who stays long in her home becomes a witch. This proverb encourages women not to stay long so as not to become witches; instead of this condemnation, they can be encouraged by the use of a positive noun thus: ***Bi obinrin b' ape nile, awokose nii da*** (If a woman stays long in the house, she becomes a role model). This postproverbial instead of condemning the woman for not embracing divorce like many women do, encourages women to stay long in their houses so that they can become role models for the young ones who may nurse the intention of not staying long in their husbands' houses. Such women should even be gathered to re-orientate the young wives who see divorce as the only solution to their marital problems.

#### 6.

**Proverb:** *kaka ko san lara iya aje, ofi gbogbo omore b'obinrin, eye wan yi lu eye'* ('Instead of it getting better for the witch, all her children are girls, the birds are thus multiplying'). The proverb uses negative verbs, *kaka ko san* (Instead of it getting better) and *fi* (produces) and negative noun, *eye* (birds/witches) to state that all witches give birth to witches. Not all witches give birth to witches. Black pot produces white pap. Therefore, this proverb can be reconstructed by making the two verbs positive and using a positive noun thus: ***O ti san lara iya aje, ofi gbogbo omore b'obinrin, omo wan yi lu omo*** (It is better for the witch mother, she produces girls only, children multiply). This reconstruction has eliminated the stand that witches are known for bad children or things only, which is against another Yoruba proverb: *Inu ikoko dudu ni eko funfun ti jade* (black pot produces white pap).

#### 7.

**Proverb:** *'Obun-un r'iku tiran mo; o ni ojo ti oko oun ti ku oun ko we'* ('The filthy woman saw the husband's death as an excuse; she said since her husband died, she has not taken bath'). The proverb uses a masculine common noun, *oko* (husband), to discriminate against women. This proverb does not take care of the fact that not only dirty women but also men create reason(s) for not bathing. To achieve balance, the proverb can be reconstructed through replacement of the common noun with a different noun that is the main reason for not bathing thus: ***Obun-un r'inkan tiran mo; o ni ojo ti oye ti de oun ko we*** (The dirty create reason not to bath; they say they have not bathed since the arrival of harmattan). Apart from eliminating oppression of the two genders, the postproverbial above gives a main excuse why many dirty people seem not to bath.

#### 8.

**Proverb:** *'Ori obinrin ti yoo su 'po kii je ki oko ye'* ('A woman destined to marry a widower will not allow the husband to survive'). The proverb uses negative verbs, *yoo su 'po* and *kii je* (destined to marry a widower and will not allow respectively) to condemn the women whose husband die but does not praise the numerous women whose husbands live as long as they live or even longer than they live. What an imbalance! The postproverbial can be reconstructed by making the two verbs negative and positive respectively thus: ***Ori obinrin ti ko ni su 'po nii je ki oko ye*** (The destiny of a woman that does not want her to be a widow allows the husband to survive). This postproverbial eradicates wishing both genders (women and men) evil of widowhood and death respectively.

9.

**Proverb:** ‘*Esin obinrin soro gùn, o le gbéni subù*’ (‘It is not good for a man to climb on his wife’s horse because he can fall to his death’). The proverb uses a feminine noun, *obinrin* (women) to achieve discrimination against women. This proverb warns men against taking steps based on advice from their women. If they do so, they are bound to fail. This proverb fails to consider the fact that many men thrive based on the advice of their wives and wisdom is not gender-based; many women are wiser than men. Thus, this postproverbial can be reconstructed by removing the feminine noun thus: *Esin soro gùn, o le gbéni subù* (**Climbing horse is difficult, it can make one fall**). This postproverbial means that acting based on advice can cause one’s downfall. This postproverbial has taken care of the fact that advice can come from anyone and taking steps based on it can cause one havoc.

10.

**Proverb:** ‘*Orisa je npe meji obinrin ko de ‘nu*’ (‘Women detest rivals’). The proverb uses a feminine noun, *obinrin* (women) to achieve discrimination against women. This proverb considers women as the only jealous gender, experience has proved otherwise. Therefore, the proverb can be reconstructed by removing the feminine noun thus: *Orisa je npe meji ko de ‘nu* (**Rivals are detested**). This postproverbial has eliminated inclusion of any of the genders; this means that humans detest rivals or detesting rivals is universal and ubiquitous.

11.

**Proverb:** ‘*Obinrin ko se finu han*’ (‘Secrets should not be revealed to a woman’). The proverb uses a feminine noun, *obinrin* (women). This proverb shows that it is only women that cannot be trusted with secrets when experience has shown that many men cannot also keep secrets. The proverb can be reconstructed by removing the feminine noun thus: *Eniyan ko se finu han* (**No one should be shown secret**). This postproverbial has eliminated portrayal of only women as bad custodians of secrets. Humans generally are culprits in this.

12.

**Proverb:** ‘*Awo egungun lobinrin lese, awo gelede lobinrin lemo, bobinrin foju koro, oro a gbe*. (‘Women can only engage in the cult of *egungun*, (masquerade); they can do well participating in the cult of *gelede*, but if a woman sees the cult of *oro*, she will be consumed’). The proverb uses a positive verbal phrase, *a gbe* (will be consumed) to achieve discrimination against women. Though participation in *ororitual* is an exclusive right of men but it is not all women that have witnessed it that have been killed; sometimes some are spared for various reasons. Therefore, the proverb can be reconstructed by negating the phrasal verb thus: *Awo egungun lobinrin lese, awo gelede lobinrin lemo, bobinrin foju koro, koni ki orogbe* (**Women can only engage in the cult of *egungun*, (masquerade); they can do well participating in the cult of *gelede*, but if a woman sees the cult of *oro*, she may not be consumed**). The postproverbial also sees *oro* ritual as exclusive right of the men folk but does not see any harm in it for women if they by chance participate in it.

13.

**Proverb:** ‘*Owu ti iya gbon, lomo ran*’. (‘The child takes after the behaviour of the mother’). The proverb uses a positive verb, *ran* (takes after) This proverb sees the mother as the only one with bad behaviour that a child can emulate. So, when a child misbehaves, such misbehaviour is traced to the mother. Experience has shown that a child can inherit bad behaviour from anyone around her, too, especially the father and may not inherit her mother’s bad behaviour because black pot produces white pap. The proverb can be reconstructed by negating the verb thus: *Owu ti iya gbon, ko lomo ran* (**The child does not inherit her mother’s bad behaviour**). This postproverbial has eliminated the stand that it is only bad behaviours that the child inherits from the mother. Also, it has attested to the fact that, in some cases, there are some children who have well-behaved mothers but are not well-behaved.

14.

**Proverb:** *‘Olobe lo loko’* (‘She that prepares the tasty soup owns the husband’). The proverb uses a specific noun, *olobe* (cook) to suggest a competition among wives of a husband to win his heart. The winner would be the one who can cook the best delicacies. To eradicate this, the proverb can be reconstructed by replacing it with a common noun thus: ***Iyawo lo loko*** (**The wife owns the husband**). Through this reconstruction, competition has been eliminated and the use of ‘wife’ means that wives exist for many other reasons other than preparation of delicious soups. It also attests to the fact that some wives who cannot cook good food still have husbands and own their husbands’ hearts, especially in this postmodern era when recruitment of house help is on the increase.

#### 15.

**Proverb:** *‘Ìyàwó tí a fẹlójú ijó ìran níí owo lo’* (‘A woman whom one meets at a dance party and marries will slip away at the glimpse of a better suitor’). The proverb uses a positive verbal phrase, *wo lo* (slip away) to condemn choosing wives at parties. It states that good wives cannot be found at parties. Many good wives were met at parties. Therefore, the proverb can be reconstructed by negating the verbal phrase as follows: ***Ìyàwó tí a fẹlójú ijó ìran ko ní woran lo*** (A woman whom one meets at a dance party and marries will not slip away at the glimpse of a better suitor). This postproverbial has eliminated the belief that wives got at parties are lost to parties; it has stated that wives got at parties cannot be lost to parties because parties are no longer strange to them.

#### 16.

**Proverb:** *‘Obìnrin bímo fún ní ko pé ko mo pani, obìnrin ko bímo fún ní ko pé koma pani’*. (‘Whether a woman has a child or not for her husband does not prevent her from killing him’). **Postproverbial:** *‘Abimofún ara eni kope ki a ma pa ara eni; a o bimo fun ara eni, kope ki a ma pa ara eni’*. (‘Whether there is offspring between a couple or not does not prevent either of the parties persecuting the other’).

The proverb uses negative verbal phrase, *ko pé ko mo* (does not prevent) which has positive meaning to portray wives and mothers as killers when in reality many of them save lives and even die before their husbands. The postproverbial, too, sees the two genders as killers through the use of negative verbal phrase with positive meaning. The proverb can be reconstructed by negating the positive meaning thus: ***Obìnrin bímo fún ní ko pé ko pani, obìnrin ko bímo fún ní ko pé ko pani*** (Whether a woman has or has no child for one does not make her kill one.). This postproverbial states that any condition a woman finds herself does not make her to kill her husband.

#### 17.

**Proverb:** *‘Kobìnrin tatorin kokùnrin tatorin, enikan ní láti lomi leyìneseju ara won’* (‘Let a woman and a man walk while urinating: one of them will have messy feet much more than the other’). The proverb uses a feminine noun, *obinrin* (women) to establish a competition between men folk and women folk, thereby creating an unhealthy rivalry. It can be restructured by replacing it with a general or common noun thus: ***Be’niyan tatorin o ní láti lomi lese*** (If a person urinates while walking, there will be water on the back of the leg). This postproverbial has eliminated the rivalry and stated a fact which affects everyone.

#### 18.

*‘Obinrin ti ko dara nile oko re, ko lee dara nile omo re, iyawo omo re ni yoo ma ba s’orogun’* (‘A woman that is bad in her husband’s house cannot be good in her son’s house: she will become a rival to her son’s wife’). The proverb uses a positive verbal phrase, *ko lee da* (cannot be) and *yoo ma* (will become) to express a total condemnation of women. They are not even given benefit of doubt that they can change in the future. This proverb can be reconstructed by negating the verbal phrases thus: ***Obinrin ti ko dara nile oko re, o lee dara nile omo re, o le ba iyawo omo re s’ore***. There is tendency for change in this life. Any bad person can become good in the future. This is what the postproverbial has taken care of.

#### 19.

**Proverb:** *‘Isense ti o fi de ihin kii kuro lara pansaga obinrin’* (‘the saying ‘your mannerism brought you here’ will always be a stigma on a promiscuous woman’). The proverb uses a positive verbal phrase, *kii*



(will be) to state that women are unrepentant adulteresses but experience has proved that some adulteresses quit. It can be restructured by negating the verbal phrase as follows:

*Isense ti o fi de ihin a maa kuro lara pansaga obinrin* ('Your mannerism brought you here' may not 'always be a stigma on a promiscuous woman'). This postproverbial has shown that some adulteresses can change as experience as shown.

## Findings and Conclusion

This paper finds out that the proverbs mainly use negative nouns and adjectives, feminine words and positive verbal expressions to achieve discrimination against women. The postproverbials derived from some of the proverbs extend some of these linguistic elements to men folk to achieve balance. This paper uses the opposite of these linguistic strategies and elimination/replacement of some in the reconstruction of the proverbs to eliminate oppression of/discrimination against any of the two genders. The paper has explained proverbs and postproverbials. It has reviewed some of the previous studies on oppression of women in Yoruba proverbs. It has explained Postmodern theory. It has identified, analysed and reconstructed the strategies used in the proverbs and postproverbials to portray gender imbalance. It is recommended that researchers should not only reconstruct proverbs they feel undermine dignity of women or humanity but also begin to question their reconstructions to ensure that more damages are not caused.

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