

A Comparative Socio-semiotic Perspective of Invectives in Two African Languages: Isizulu and Yoruba

K. M. Oparinde¹, R. L. Makhubu² and I. Bariki³

*Department of Media, Language and Communication, Durban University of Technology,
Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, 4001*

*E-mail: ¹<Kunleoparinde123@gmail.com>, ²<makhubu@dut.ac.za>,
³<kingbariki@gmail.com>*

KEYWORDS Context. Impoliteness. Socio-cultural. Visuals

ABSTRACT The diversified ways of language use in different geographic areas present valid reasons for the study of various usages of language. Invectives are a major aspect of language that have been greatly neglected in intellectual discourse. Motivated by the paucity of academic literature and other stereotypes in human communication, the thrust of this work is to discuss the socio-cultural factors embedded in the two cultures in their approach to invectives. The study examines a comparative taxonomy of invectives in isiZulu and Yoruba languages from a socio-semiotic perspective. Drawing examples from the two languages, the study explores instances of semiotic analysis that are created by the assumption that signs, utterances and messages are situated within the context of social relations and processes. The research tools included observation, interviews, and archival materials. The study indicates that invectives are context and culture-dependent. The study reveals striking similarities and differences in the invective-related discourses of isiZulu and Yoruba.

INTRODUCTION

This paper studies invectives in isiZulu and Yoruba languages using a comparative socio-semiotic approach. The study explores the use of invectives which function within social discourse most especially in situations of quarrel or verbal combat. Invectives involve emotions of hostility and the use of barbed expressions to hurt another party. In many instance, invectives are influenced by personal vendetta and often heavily coloured by personal biases (Adejumo 2013). The paper treats invectives by identifying them in the two languages. A typology was established to explore a socio-semiotic explanation for their use. The explanation stresses the context of social relations and processes vis-à-vis the two cultures in question: Zulu and Yoruba.

It is important to note that invectives occur in different ways depending on the participants, for instance, invectives among friends may not

portray anger. They could also be a source of humour. Understanding the use of invectives requires being steeped in a people's language and culture. Given the intertwined relationship between culture and language, the role of the former in this study is crucial. The research studies the comparative typology of invectives and identifies possible situations that can provoke the use of invectives in the two languages vis-à-vis the relationship of the users. IsiZulu is widely spoken in South Africa, but this study is limited to speakers in KwaZulu-Natal province. In the same vein, examples from Yoruba is limited to South-western Nigeria, even though Yoruba is spoken in other parts of the world such as Togo, Cuba.

Studies on invectives and related Yoruba topics are scanty as politeness appears to be a more popular theme (Bariki 2009). By implication, one of the motives guiding this work is to study the absence of politeness in academic domain. Apparently, insults and their nuances portray a certain degree of absence of politeness. Invectives are often culture-specific. It is imperative to add that due to the fact that works on invectives are very limited and rare to come by, the closest synonym will be reviewed along with invectives, that is, insult. The synonym is

Address for correspondence:

Kunle Oparinde
Department of Media, Language and Communication
Durban University of Technology
Durban, South Africa 4001.
Telephone: +27618431565
E-mail: Kunleoparinde123@gmail.com

closely related to the data under study and is also very relevant if invective must be dealt-with in a broad sense.

Related Literature on Invectives

According to Gabriel (1998:1331), invective is a “behaviour or discourse, oral or written, which is perceived, experienced, constructed and, at times, intended as slighting, humiliating or offensive”. Korostelina (2014a) observes that domains such as invective and insult are a frequent action in interpersonal relations; but surprisingly, intellectual discourse in the domain is still in its infancy. The paucity notwithstanding, a few authors have shown great interest in the domain.

Bariki (2009, 2011) does a comparative (socio-)linguistic study of insults in French and Yoruba. However, his studies rely purely on secondary documentary sources. Bariki asserts that insults can best be appreciated with a clearly defined context as apparently innocuous statements could turn out to be very offensive. Bariki makes his case by using typologies of insults-ethnotypes, ontotypes and sociotypes. In an attempt to simplify and broaden this categorization, Bariki introduces different typologies of insults common to both French and Yoruba. The importance of Bariki’s work derives from its pioneering nature in French/Yoruba comparative studies but it is not sufficiently detailed and critical to include such areas as impoliteness, solidarity insults and the result of asymmetrical power relations between people in society. Besides, it does not treat gestures and paralinguistic features on insult. Hence, the relevance of the researchers’ theme: social semiotic dimensions of invectives. The merit in Bariki’s categorizations is their simplicity. The researchers’ choice of these typologies was informed by the examples of insults the researchers observed in the field. The study will analyse insults by using a modified version of Adeosun’s model of socio-semiotic interpretation of Yoruba poetry. The researchers will also make allusion to Bariki’s (2009) typologies for purposes of clarification. The researchers’ attempt to compare the typologies discussed was to see to what extent Bariki’s typologies can be attested to in the examples the researchers discovered.

Kodah (2012) treats invectives from a literary perspective. The merit of his work is the prop-

erly contextualized situation given by the literary setting. Kodah deftly identifies different degrees of invectives in the literary characters drawn from Ahmadou Korouma’s novel *The Suns of Independence*. He studies the aesthetics of invectives as relating to all instances of abusive language use in the production of literary and thematic effects in the novel. He argues that the use of invectives result from frustration. Invectives serve as a psychological window for expressing disappointments and annoyances as a defensive mechanism against efforts on one’s personality or credibility. True to the literary tradition of analysis, Kodah identifies implicit and explicit recourse to insults which are aesthetically presented in form of metaphors, ironies, humours, comparisons and symbols.

On her part, Korostelina remarks that insult is an inevitable aspect of the social relations that face people on a daily basis. She analyses insults from the insights of social identity theory and theories of power. She studies the complex dynamics of insults in connection with the problems associated with the growth of national identity and legitimacy of power in Russia. Korostelina argues that insults take different forms: verbal or facial expression, gesture or an action. She submits that the effects of insult can ignite and trigger social transformations and radical change as well as revolutions. Insults entail perpetrators and targets. Korostelina (2014a) emphasizes that culture determines the context of insult. Insults are social acts generally assembled by social groups on the boundary between them. They are consistently redefined in various cultural contexts. She opines that insults have a lot in common with other social phenomena such as impoliteness, humiliation, embitterment, revenge, and incivility. While Korostelina’s work is fundamentally different from the researchers’, an evidence of similarity is the fact that she also identifies as an entity developed by social groups.

Mateo and Yus (2014:1) view the subject from a pragmatic perspective, seeing an invective as a powerful device that reinforces the intentional force of communication dramatically. In essence, insults are code-breaking, etiquette violators that are likely to ignite a swift response from the addressee. They argue interestingly that an insult might be a sort of catharsis or a way to relieve one of tension during moments of stress and high emotional strain. Instances of invectives

used in respect to Mateo and Yus study are vividly discussed in this paper.

Conceptual Framework

In *Language as Social Semiotic* (1974), Michael Halliday describes language as a system of semiotics, not as a system of signs, but rather as a substance of meaning. He sees language as having a meaning conceived or inherent. Halliday argues for a deep connection between language and social structure but also maintains and potentially modifies social order. Halliday argues that language and society can never be separated if meaning is paramount and is still the main reason for communicating. This implies the introduction of a semiotic approach to society and language.

Social semiotics is a term borrowed from Halliday (1978:2) to mean the way language functions both as expression of and as metaphor for social processes of meaning making in reality. Halliday rejects the hitherto held position where language was separated from society. Social semiotics relates to various social dimensions of meaning as well as the human endeavours of signification and interpretation in shaping individuals and societies. It involves meaning-making practices of all nature (multiple semiotic resources) from visual or pictorial to verbal and aural nature.

Vannini (2007) sees social semiotics as being concerned with how meaning surfaces out of the intensive intercourse of humans with different motives, goals, and outlooks. He sees the domain within the social contexts that apprise and modify human communication. His approach to semiotics differs from the Saussurean and structuralists' perspective. He embraces semiotics from cultural studies, symbolic interactions which eventually relates to social semiotics. To Vannini (2007), social semiotics places the users and the participants over the resources; focuses more on understanding how people make and use signs rather than how signs are used in isolation. He further notes that this approach attributes meaning to power. As such, the approach favours analysis of culture, society, politics, time, history, process, change, image and other semiotic systems along verbal language, among many others.

Kress (2010) notes that social semiotics generates new communicative modes as a result of

social development. He stresses that meanings are shaped by the society and as society changes, languages and variety of other means of communication change. In the same vein, Van Leeuwen (2005) in his work *Introducing Social Semiotics* sees social semiotics as a study that monitors the ways in which various aspects of modern society combine to create meaning through semiotic resources. He identifies the semiotic resources to be obvious modes of communication surrounding people such as language, gesture, images and music. In social semiotics, apparently less obvious resources such as food, dress and other everyday objects carry cultural value and significance.

It can be gleaned from the above review that unlike structuralist semioticians, social semioticians do not look for meaning in deep structures, but rather focuses on social-meaning making practices in the specific context where they occur. In social semiotics, meaning is basically context-dependent and cannot be treated in isolation without recourse to the culture of the users. A social semiotic perspective sees meaning as not being fixed to a particular code or design but as resources that people use and adapt to so as to make meanings. In this regard, invectives are designed in the context of a specific society and are socially adapted to it. Rather than studying invectives from isolated words or signs only, the research goes ahead to associate the society with all meaning-making modes as invectives may not be well decoded and interpreted without a prior knowledge of the culture.

Analytical Process in Current Research

For the purpose of analysis in this paper, Adeosun's (2012a) proposed socio-semiotic model for analyzing Yoruba written poetry is employed. Adeosun's (2012a) model takes care of the salient areas that are of interest to socio-semiotics: meaning, text, field of discourse, tenor of discourse, mode of discourse and context of culture. Allusion would be made from time to time to Bariki's insult typology. The strength in Bariki's typology is the frequent occurrences in insults. Most of the typologies were identified in the two languages. Adeosun's (2012a) model is hereby reproduced with explanations. For the purpose of this analysis, the poem in Adeosun's model is replaced with insult just as text is given an extended meaning to encapsulate any meaningful and insulting utterance or sign.

In Adeosun's model, the text is viewed from two broad perspectives: the context of situation and the context of culture. Under the context of situation, the interrelated areas of field, tenor and mode of discourse give an idea of the intended signification. The arena and participants are encapsulated in the field of discourse. The physical and mental attributes of the participants and their background knowledge will reflect on the situation. The tenor of discourse will reveal the social status and social roles of the participants. It considers the attitudes participants bring to bear on the situation. The tenor of discourse touches on the social context of the insult which cannot be divorced from the context of culture. The mode of discourse is the channel of communication and the rhetorical disposition. For the purpose of clarity, the researchers draw out the researchers' modified model of Adeosun's (2012a) own.

Using this model implies that insults can best be understood in a cultural context. Adeosun's model gives the reader a good opportunity of decoding an insult exhaustively in a given situation. The analysis that will emerge from the approach presumes that insults have embedded social processes. In a nutshell, the researchers' socio-semiotic analysis will reveal what the insults are, how and when the insults are made, and why the meanings of the insults are reconstructed using the three variables of field, tenor and mode of discourse. Although in the typological examples, the field, tenor and mode of the discourse were only implied and not categorically stated because of space constraint.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted an exploratory design and specifically using qualitative method. In line with the notions of Altinay and Paraskevas (2008:168), the researchers' approach attempted to develop an understanding of the context in which invectives phenomena and behaviour take place. This approach was employed in this research in order to understand the depth of invectives in both Zulu and Yoruba culture.

Employing a simple random sampling, the researcher selected a total of hundred participants (50 each) randomly across the two cultures under study. Given the large number of elements to be dealt with, the researchers opted to use different methods of data collection in

order to account for similarity of information collected in line with Greene and McClintock (1985) notion. In this light, this research made use of four collection techniques: interviews, observation, discussion and documentary sources. The overall analysis is based on Adeosun's (2012) model of analyzing Yoruba written poetry coupled with a taxonomic classification.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

This section sets out to present and analyze some Zulu and Yoruba insulting songs, words, phrases or sentences. There are two broad types of data to be analyzed: contextualized and non-contextualized examples. The contextualized insults include clearly defined context of situation and context of culture. This category also comprises songs chanted during festivals and ceremonies. The general or non-contextualized ones are derived from the linguistic repertoire. Their contexts are not clearly defined but can be surmised, understood and interpreted based on a general knowledge of the given culture. The analysis of the contextualized examples are based on a modified version of Adeosun's (2012a) proposed model of socio-semiotic approach. The context of situation and the context of culture will be explored to determine the meanings of the songs and the inherent invective. A quarrel between isiZulu speakers captured from YouTube was also analyzed. On the other hand, insults with no specific contexts were analyzed using a fusion of Bariki's typology of insults and elements examined in Adeosun's model. The broad cultural contexts necessitating the use of these insults can be understood from the researchers' explanation. Below the researchers reproduce some contextualized invectives with a view to analyzing their socio-semiotic importance.

Passengers Insulting One Another in Taxi in Isizulu

The following excerpt was adapted from a YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7-Nlk62058>) video (10 minutes) of some Zulu passengers (grown women) insulting each other in a commercial taxi. The taxi driver is unhappy about the quarrel and says Usathane unge-nile - Satan is here/has entered. A concerned passenger intervenes by saying Fuze ngabe tinina enikhuza izingane kodwa manje nenzanje -

you are supposed to be ones who guide the children, but you are doing this. Another concerned passenger also tries to settle the fight and says Akesithandazane - let us pray. However, the verbal combats continue and below are excerpts of the invectives:

First insulter: *Fusegi ngquza*

- Fuck off, you pussy.

Second insulter: *Wena sfebe ngzohibamba*

- You bitch, I will catch you.

First insulter: *Wena thula nje sekwehla sibhebhane-* You just shut up, we will fuck each other.

Second insulter: *Kwagugawena kwafresh unyoko* - You are old, but your mother is fresh.

First insulter: *Njengoba unobuso obungaka nje ngathi ididi lika Mandela* - You have a big face as though it is Mandela's ass.

Second insulter: *Ushiswa yigolo lakho slima ndini* - Your pussy is burning you, stupid.

This goes on and on till one of the participants brings in religion: *Ngiyawakholwa* - I am a believer.

But the Reference to Religion Triggers More Invectives

Uyilehlobo ekholwa ize isangane; nithi nindisiwe nibe nidliwa oskhotheni hobos nangu usathane okholiwebo -

You, a satan believer; you are the type that believes to the point of losing her mind. You say you are saved, yet you are having sex.

The researchers will only make reference to the above excerpts due to the fact that the video is too long and they cannot capture everything in this paper.

Field of Discourse

The field of discourse is clear. Insults are hurled at each other by passengers' quarreling in a taxi.

Tenor of Discourse

The tenor derives naturally from the arena. The participants are quarreling and find it difficult to keep daily norms of decency in discourse. The informal and tense situation reveals the role played by the participants. The insults are vul-

gar. The social context and psychological context are evidently depicted. There are ample evidences of the use of sexotypes (cf Bariki 2009)

Mode of Discourse

The mode of discourse is spoken language with the main actors (insulters) condemning each other. Some of the participants (for example, the driver) try to play a conciliatory role by appealing to the sense of reason of the insulters.

Zulu Folktale Chanted Insult

Ngilahle ngizwa ngendaba

- I always hear through gossip

Bethi ukhona u-star wami

- That my man has another woman

Ngiyaqalaza angimboni

- I look around but I do not see her

Ngibona iphepha lokushidaba

- I see toilet paper

Yoruba Insults: Husband-Wife Chanted Insults

Below is a version of a husband-wife insults derived from folktales.

1. *Ko le buni kori o wu ooo (2X)*

Eyi to se koko lenu bii ti eko

O se atesi loyan bii t'oromodiye

Ko le buni kori owu

Translation

She can't abuse me to the extent of provocation (2X)

One with bump in the mouth like pap

One with rashes on the breasts like a chick

She can't abuse me to the extent of provocation

Field of Discourse

A husband hurls insults at his rude wife.

Tenor of Discourse

The husband uses the features of the wife to abuse her. In this case, the wife actually triggered the anger of the husband. The similes and insults are propelled in a way that can dehumanize the recipients by replacing the woman's features with inanimate and non-human objects.

Examples are “bump in the mouth like pap” and “rashes on the breasts like chicks”.

Mode of Discourse

The mode of discourse is spoken rendered in a song form.

2. *Boko bati loun o se mo ooo (2X)*
Ale n beni koro to n se bi oko
Ale n beni koro to n se ju simi
Boko bati loun o se mo ooo
Ale mi dogun gerege (2X)
Moni mesan ni Ibadan, mewa nilu eko
Oda miloju para agunbe lokan
Ale mi dogun gerege
Iya n'ofun ale mi lowo, mafun ni toro
Iya n'ofun ale mi lowo, mafun ni sisi ooo
Toun tate kanle, toun tate kanle (2X)
Ori olowo n beni tosi toun tate kanle
Ori olola n beni tosi toun tate kanle ooo
Beyin oko le ra, ko ra baja ooo (2X)
Beyin ale mi baku meji ko sa funfun (2X)
Beyin oko le ra, ko ra baja ooo

Translation

If husband says he is tired (2X)
 A lover is hiding somewhere exercising husband's duties
 A lover is hiding somewhere winking at me
 If husband says he is tired
 My lovers are now 20 exactly (2X)
 I have nine in Ibadan, 10 in Lagos
 I am definite the last one is from Agunbe
 My lovers are now 20 exactly
 Mama, if I have to give my lover money, I will give him kobo
 Mama, if I have to give my lover money, I will give him shillings
 He's penetrating well, he's penetrating well (2X)
 A rich man is around the corner penetrating well
 A wealthy man is around the corner penetrating well
 If husband's teeth are on the verge of decaying, they should decay (2X)
 If all that is left of my lover's teeth are two, they should be white
 If husband's teeth are on the verge of decaying, they should decay

Field of Discourse

The wife retorts, indicting him in a very provocative manner.

Tenor of Discourse

The angered wife attempts to retaliate by having recourse to subtle threats. The wife now thinks the husband's excitement over her has waned. Her features seem to have lost their initial attraction. She is not, however, too concerned as she has a plan B or even C to deal with the situation.

The wife implies that she has other men who are already admiring her and that are ready to exercise the duties of a diligent husband. The wife goes on further to mention the number of men she currently has and even gives details of their cities of abode: Lagos, Ibadan and Agunbe, all in Nigeria. The wife explains further that the men have sexual prowess. If she has to compensate any of them, she would by giving him money (kobo and shillings).

Finally, the wife shows that she does not even care about the husband again and would not mind if his teeth should decay as long as her lover's teeth are white. It does not matter even if the lover has only two teeth. The reference to teeth are metaphorical and symbolic; she is ready to do away with the husband as the lover now takes precedence over the husband.

Mode of Discourse

It is a spoken discourse rendered in form of song.

Next, the researchers produce non-contextualized examples of invectives derived from the two cultures in a taxonomical form. Different typologies were derived including sign invectives which are portrayed through the use of diagrams in line with the semiotics section of the paper. In total, thirteen types are examined and compared within the two languages under study. The classifications are broadened to encapsulate Bari-ki's (2009) classifications and are analysed. The analyses of these invectives are done using three different premises. The premises are represented in the Figure 1.

These premises are drawn from Kodah's (2012) guide to study invectives within the soci-

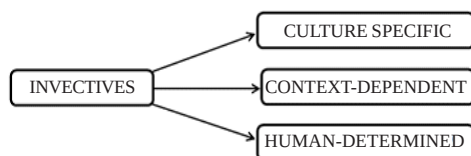


Fig. 1. Premises for invectives analysis

Source: Proposed by Kunle Oparinde

ety. He based his study on the particular notion that invectives have a large influence on the psychology and socio-political strife of human lives. Being culture-specific ascertains that these invectives are perceived as such only because the culture specifies it to be so. Being context-dependent indicates that these invectives are only seen as such depending on the circumstances that form the setting or statement. Human-determined means that the invectives could be ordinarily innocuous but may be viewed by some people as offensive. Presented below are the analyses of the examples of insulting words in the two languages.

Presentation of Discussion According to Typologies

The examples observed were grouped into typologies in line with Bariki's classifications.

Ethnophaulism

A morphological dissection of ethnophaulism gives ethno- and phaulism. "Ethno"- captures the idea of ethnicity, and "phaulism" means to be unjust or bad. Ethnophaulism is concerned with an ethnic or racial insult. It makes mockery of some identifiable features of a racial or ethnic group being derided. Racial or ethnic slurs and stereotypes are a universal phenomenon.

IsiZulu

Igxagxa: An isiZulu derogatory word for white people, *igxagxa* means "white trash" or "white ugly and old". It is used to create an impression that white people easily look older than their age and they mostly look ugly. The white people are considered to have fallen between two cultures for no purpose.

Yoruba

Mólà: In Yoruba, this word (*mólà*) is used to mean "animals" in many contexts. It is used in Nigeria in reference to their counterparts from the Northern part of Nigeria popularly referred to as the Hausas. The word directly inveighs on the personality of people of Northern Nigerian extraction.

Racial or ethnic slurs and stereotypes are a universal phenomenon. This in essence shows that these two tribal groups have portrayed similarities in referring to other people from different races or tribal groups. The same ethnophaulism feature is reflected in Bariki's (2009) study.

Dehumanization

Dehumanization explains the rebuttal of "humanness" to other people. This majorly occurs in two forms, viz: animalization and objectification. In animalization, features of animals are given to persons. This act projects people as lacking the normal human features. Objectification, on the other hand, is concerned with associating people with objects.

IsiZulu

Inyoka: In isiZulu, "*Inyoka*" denotes a snake, but is expanded semantically to connote backbiter in certain contexts. A backbiter is a person who speaks spitefully and slanderously about other people. "*Inyokas*" have the reputation of attacking others through the act of defamation of character. Snakes are wild and their venom can cause death to humans and animals. The backbiter is thus seen metaphorically as a snake capable of producing fatality.

Ikhanda lakho limise okukajeqe: This sentential example means "your head is like home-made steam bread" is an example of objectification. This poignant abusive simile with very clear imagery portrays the victim as having a badly-shaped head which has been moulded wrongly. The home-made steam bread can be moulded to any shape depending on the type of bowl used in the moulding. Generally, this invective applies to people with big heads.

Yoruba

Ajá: *Ajá* means dog in Yoruba and connotes promiscuity with particular reference to women. A

woman that engages in adultery and fornication is seen as a dog. Yoruba society frowns at promiscuity and uses this metaphorical animalization to drive home its moral values. This is very much unlike the English culture where a dog is considered to be a valuable pet within the house.

Orí e bí ibépe: This example of objectification means “your head is like pawpaw”. It is also a full sentence invective. “*Orí*” means head, “*e*” as “you”, “*bí*” means “like” and “*ibépe*” as “pawpaw”. The person’s head is likened to a pawpaw to capture the idea that he/she has a big but shapeless head.

Dehumanization is also very present in the two languages. It is used for the purposes of mockery and humour. Dehumanization can be likened to Kodah’s (2012) descriptive invective which he sees as an explicit comparative description. Given the arbitrary nature of the stereotypes, the words (animals and objects) are appreciated differently by the two different cultures.

Sexotypes

Sexotypes are basically concerned with the male and female genitalia and their functions and society’s perceptions of their use. They are naturally related to gender stereotypes. Elements of promiscuity, adultery and fornication all come into play under this type.

IsiZulu

Isifebe: *Isifebe* is directly translated as a bitch, animalizing the female specie. This is a highly pejorative term for a person especially a female that is seen as unreasonable, malicious or rudely intrusive. The vulgar word is to insult women believed to have high sexual desire that is comparable to that of a dog.

Yoruba

Òkóbó: This word is translated as “impotent” (abnormally unable to achieve an erection or orgasm). This in the Yoruba culture is used for a man who lacks libido. This is a highly derogatory word. Such a person is an object of ridicule in the Yoruba society. In Yoruba, direct reference to the sexual organs is not common despite this example. The direct reference to the

organs therefore portrays the pungency desired by the speaker in a particular insulting context.

The examples show the similar traditional patriarchal values and gender stereotypes in the two societies. The two societies frown more at devalued female values than those of men. Men indulging in premarital or extra-marital sex are admired in many instances for exercising their manhood and manliness. Women who do the same thing are seen to be debasing their culture and womanhood.

Physical Invectives

Physical invectives capture the easily noticed physical traits of humans. The invectives have to do with the victim’s physical features, dress habits or body accessories.

IsiZulu

Tikoloshe: In Zulu mythology, this word means a “dwarf-like” water spirit that is known for engaging in witchcraft for destructive reasons. The spirit is believed to be mischievous and completely evil. Because of the short size of the spirit, dwarfs or naturally short persons are referred negatively to as “*tikoloshe*”. It is also pertinent to make allusion to the similar belief systems in two languages in reference to witches.

Yoruba

Kùkùtè: This word refers to a tree that has been cut down but still retains its lower part. Basically, the tree cannot grow again. The targets of this stereotype are compared to dwarfs who have obtained their growth limit.

Physical invectives here have been analysed according to the evidences gathered from the isiZulu and Yoruba native speakers. These invectives are generally very offensive to the recipients.

Moral/Personality Invectives

Moral/personality invectives have to do with the intellectual standard of a person. Each society has its norms and cherished values which are not meant to be breached. These moral values are sometimes culture-specific.

IsiZulu

Ihlongandlebe: The example here makes allusion to an immoral and disrespectful person. The victim here is considered to be very wayward and difficult to control. The target has perverse behavioural traits which are attributed to his/her background.

Yoruba

Arungún/àpà: These are literally translated as “inheritance squanderers”. They could also mean a prodigal person. The society presents these persons as highly irresponsible. The target displays wasteful and extravagant propensity in terms of money, belongings or other materials. The victim does not consider anything worth maintaining. By implication, the child was not taught how to preserve things and maintain valuables.

The examples cited show that both Zulu and Yoruba cultures place much premium on good manners and home training.

Filial Invectives

Filial invectives are indirect invectives where the addressee has not done anything bad to warrant the insults. The targeted person is insulted for the misdeeds of a close relation.

IsiZulu

Ivezandlebe: This is akin to what Yorubas refer to as an “illegitimate” child, a child born out of wedlock. The recipient is seen as despicable because his/her birth as a result of immoral sexual behaviour. The “recipient” is being insulted for the deeds or misdeeds of the parents.

Yoruba

Omo àlè: This can be literally translated as “an illegitimate child” in what is commonly referred to as a “bastard”. It is the isiZulu equivalent of *Ivezandlebe*. This word is negatively weighty especially when the person concerned truly has no known father. The child considers the use of “*omo àlè*” as a big insult. Korostelina (2014) also make a case for legitimacy insults

and this could also be in line with Korostelina’s idea.

Filial invectives as portrayed by the isiZulu and Yoruba examples are mostly parents-children related. A Yoruba child would prefer to be insulted directly rather than associating the insults to their parents. In both languages, filial insults have to do with people considered to be very close to the victim.

Political Invectives

Political parties are known for hurling political invectives at other political parties. They use harsh words on one another in order to provoke the wrath of other parties. They occur in all phases of politics: in Parliaments, during traditional chieftaincy politics, amongst students.

IsiZulu

Impimpi/Igundane: *Impimpi* is a word used by different political parties in the Zulu community to refer to a spy. The word shares almost the same meaning with “*Igundane*” which literally means a “rat”. It connotes a backstabber in Zulu political setting. The two words are politically motivated. The words depict a person that belongs to a political party who is involved in espionage. Such a person would get facts from the political party and relay it to his or her root party. In political cases, the recipient is deliberately planted in the opposition party in order to get undue advantage over the opposing political party. In other instances, even during “labour strikes”, the non-conforming person who goes to work while others are on strike is also referred to as “*igundane*”.

Yoruba

Egbé àwòn olè: Meaning, the “party of thieves”, this is used by parties to insult the ruling party. It is an invective that tries to portray the other party as being populated by self-serving men and women. Yoruba songs feature very prominently as political insults. An example is:

Inú igbó lope ngbé (bis)
Enìkan kùí kólé adétè sí igboro
Inú igbó lope ngbé

Translation

The forest is the natural habitat of the palm tree

No one builds in the town (as it is meant for lepers)

The forest is the natural habitat of the palm tree

This was a popular song of the 1960s sung by members of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C.). It was directed at their arch rivals the Action Group (A.G.).

Political insults feature in both languages and cultures. The invectives range from inter-party and intra-party levels to individuals either in form of words or songs. The researchers observed a major difference in the channels of insults: songs are a prominent part of political invectives in Yoruba.

Social Invectives

This type has to deal with the societal perception towards the personality of the recipient. It comprises the views of the community or society regarding a particular person. These views, in most cases, are uniform and are considered to be true because they represent the general perception of the society.

IsiZulu

Umgulukudu: *Umgulukudu* means “a hardened criminal”, a person who has committed several offences which are punishable by law. The target loses all respect in the society. The nature of the crime may attract a terribly negative perception from the society. Parents do not want their children to be seen in the company of such a person whose influences could be negative. This general perception of the society makes it a social invective.

Yoruba

Olè/Gbájúè: *Olè* is a thief and *gbájúè* is a cheat or fraudster in what is generally referred to as “419” in Nigerian parlance. The two generally go hand in hand. “*Oles*” and “*gbajues*” are known for stealing, shop-lifting or using cunning ways to dupe people of their money or property. People who operate in these vices become elements of ridicule in the society.

The social invectives here have been portrayed exactly the way the society perceives them and in most cases, they are a reflection of values of the society. The Zulu and Yoruba societies share fairly common norms in matters relating to social invectives.

Status Invectives

Status invectives may be based on the social, economic or professional standing of the target. These invectives relate to social positions of the recipients from a negative perspective. The examples in this regard portray a wretchedness that is dehumanizing in some respects.

IsiZulu

Isichaka: *Isichaka* is translated as poor. It depicts a “broke” person having little or no money. The standard or quality of the target’s very low economic status is viewed with pity and sympathy. The victim has poverty written all over him/her. *Isichaka* is a status invective used by the privileged people on the less privileged.

Ukuceba ngokuthwala: The example here is used in insulting rich people who are thought to have acquired their wealth from illegal means. The victim suddenly becomes rich without a known good source of income.

Yoruba

Erú/Ìwòfà: These words mean slave/servant. They are people contracted to do serious work for the rich. In some cases, they are not even paid for their services, they are just given food to survive and make them work better. They are unskilled labourers that dare not go against the will of their bosses. In the Yoruba setting, some of these slaves come from slave families just like the kings come from royal families and these slaves will continue to be slaves. There is a nuance in the two: “*erú*” are engaged right from time to serve royal and rich families till their freedom while “*ìwòfà*” are bought with money to work for the rich.

Olówó igbó: “*Olówó igbó*” can be literally translated as “owner of bush money”. This is an invective targeted at the rich as against the previous ones used for the poor. The word portrays the rich people as amassing wealth through

acts of illegality such as cultism, rituals, robbery, drug dealings, etc.

Status invectives as portrayed by the examples have indicated that the two cultures under study have both economic status invectives and class status invectives. They also value wealth that is legitimately acquired.

Gender Invectives

Gender invectives are associated specifically with the gender of the recipients. They are invectives that are gender-selected and carry natural gender information.

IsiZulu

Isiyoyoyo: This example depicts a henpecked man. The man in his home does not have any iota of authority to exercise simply because the wife has taken over the authority of the house. At times, the wife even beats the husband up and the man takes responsibilities of domestic works. There is a reversal of traditional roles of authority and discipline. The husband takes over the house-hold chores.

Yoruba

Gbèwùdání: This sentential imperative invective literally means “hold my clothes for me”. Yoruba is basically a patriarchal society. The man is the head of the family. He is the master, boss, commander, and leader of the family and has the sole responsibility of breadwinner for the family. But in situations where the reverse is the case, the man is bound to be subservient to the wife, a situation that runs counter to Yoruba culture. The man in that situation is regarded as “*gbèwùdání*”; a married man who is supposed to be the commander but instead helps the wife to dress up for occasions and washes her clothes and underwear and so on. This reversal of traditional role presents the man as totally lacking in manliness.

Gender invectives from the two cultures tend to stress male supremacy. The images and traditional values produced are stereotypically sexist in favour of men.

Misc-solidarity Invectives

This is a fusion of the words “miscellaneous” and “solidarity”. This comprises multifarious usages not particularly associated with

types. An aspect of this insult might occur as a joke; in other words, the words are insulting but the parties involved do not perceive them as such. For example, friends can insult each other with words that are considered to be jovial but can be construed to be very insulting in other contexts.

IsiZulu

Fusegi: *Fusegi* as an invective literally means “fuck off”. It often serves the purposes of saying “get-off”, “get-away” or “shut-up”. Because of the solidarity factor embedded in this example, the parties involved take no offense when they are told “*fusegi*” i.e. “keep shut” or “stop talking”. The word is used in a comic sense. The word is generally perceived to be rude but the context and the solidarity effect of it makes it innocuous.

Yoruba

Gbénusòùn: This is literally translated as “shut-up”. In some cases, it could mean “fuck-off” just to indicate that one is not very interested in a second party’s involvement or utterances. *Gbénusòùn* in many contexts occurs as a mock insult. Friends can say it to each other without creating offence.

Misc-solidarity invectives present the trivial and frivolous side of invectives. They generally lack the offensive touch basically because of role-relations and contexts.

Power Invectives

Power invectives relate to a violation of society and culturally valued status, age or gender norms. They are evident in words, actions and signs. They are understood in cultural terms. In both cultures, it is perceived to be disrespectful for a much younger person to establish direct eye contact with his/her superior while talking. De Kadt (1995) in Rudwick (2008:153) confirms this with respect to Zulu people. De Kadt also recalls that Zulu students sit down (in the office of their lecturers) without being offered a seat. The reason is that they feel culturally uncomfortable when they (the inferiors) talk to their superiors in status who (while seated) occupy a lower position physically. The contrast with

Yoruba is clear: an inferior person would be asked to sit down before he does.

Regulation of Behaviours by Conventions

An important cultural phenomenon of the Zulu people is *Hlonipha*. It is a kind of socio-linguistic phenomenon where a particular restricted communication style is observed in relation to certain relatives. Rudwick (2008) identifies two types of linguistic *hlonipha*: “deep” variety of *isiHlonipha* and “soft” variety of *Hlonipha*. The deep variety “comprises of (sic) a large corpus of lexical items which are synonyms for the expressions which carry syllables that need to be avoided. The “soft” variety... can be understood as the simple avoidance of the names of individual. Some of the notions captured in *hlonipha* are viewed similarly in general Yoruba culture. The following description of *hlonipha* gives a broad/description of Yoruba social behaviour also (Rudwick 2008: 155)

Social *hlonipha* actions are fundamental to traditional Zulu life and what is considered “proper” behaviour within the community. Among traditional Zulu people *ukuhlonipha* (italics in the original) (to respect) as a social action, reinforces a complex value system which is based on the social variable of age, status and gender.

Yorubas do not have the *hlonipha* phenomenon, but situations abound when appellations, actions, posture, gesture and behavioural patterns are regulated by conventions. In asymmetric relations, the agent or inferior person must show deference. There are linguistic and paralinguistic forms of showing this asymmetric relationship. Every action or utterance to the contrary constitutes an insult. Children must never call their parents or elders by name. Like in isiZulu, adult men are addressed as baba or mama (also *iya* in Yoruba) as a mark of respect. A violation of this norm and some others constitutes insults.

A symmetrical situation in Yoruba requires culture-specific linguistic, extra linguistic and paralinguistic intervention. A very important linguistic aspect of insult avoidance is the use of “E” (you plural) to address an older person, the “O” (you 2nd person pronoun singular) form is reserved for younger persons or persons of lower social and/or professional status. In Yoruba, refusal to greet an older person with the required gesture or posture is considered to be insulting.

Yorubas greet endlessly. Yorubas have different greetings for different occasions; when it rains, when someone passes on, when someone embarks on a journey, when someone is sitting down, etc.

Zulu people too have recourse to paralinguistic features while greeting even though urbanization has brought about a hybrid cultural and socio-semiotic realities that are not in consonance with the traditional Zulu values. This can also be said of Yorubas.

Visual Invectives

This is where the term semiotics comes into play directly. These types of invectives are manifested through the use of signs, and these signs vary depending on cultures. Signs do not convey a universal semantic import. A sign that is not offensive in a culture might become seriously offensive in another. Here, a comparative analysis is done between isiZulu and Yoruba and these invectives are presented through diagrams.

IsiZulu

Swinging the index finger at the sides of the head

Cultural explanation: It means the recipient is crazy. This has a similar interpretation in the English culture. The implication of this is that the insulter is telling the recipient that his/her head is not functioning very well.

Yoruba

Shooting out the palm with stretched-out fingers

Cultural explanation: This is an insult on one’s mother. It is a filial insult with a very weighty cultural implication. Most Yorubas would prefer being insulted directly rather than their parents. It should be observed that this can be a solidarity insult also depending on the role relations and context. It does not however cancel the fact that the sign is very insulting when the parties involved have no close relations. Some friends would not tolerate this sign even in a context of comradery.

CONCLUSION

The examples reproduced from texts are analysed using a modified form of Adeosun's proposed socio-semiotic model of analyzing Yoruba poetry. The non-contextualized examples are treated generally in line with Bariki's typology.

The basic objective of this paper is to highlight the behavioural and sociolinguistic traits of isiZulu and Yoruba languages in order to enhance cross-cultural integration. In accomplishing this goal, it became necessary to study the two languages in relation to their cultures (Zulu and Yoruba) and to identify the examples in the cultures. Given the symbiotic relation between language and culture, a lot has been known about the latter through discussions on the former. While examples may not be fully identified, the study has revealed great similarities in terms of broad typologies.

This work finds out that Zulu and Yoruba cultures are broadly related regarding the ways invectives are used and the purpose for which they are used. Zulu people and Yorubas both make use of invectives and negative axiology plays a lot of roles in their daily activities. Through insults, a lot can be said about a people, its language and culture. A study of this nature can enhance a cross-cultural inter-ethnic or international relations and help to bridge some gaps between different peoples. Some of the categories are very similar or overlap one another, for example, sexotypes and gender stereotypes. They have however been grouped into different categories for the purpose of clarity and emphasis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As earlier identified, academic references to invective-related discourse is still in its infancy, especially in Africa. Given man's mobility and the consequences of globalization, coupled with the cultural and linguistic divergence in the work, studies in invectives and related issues are good means of enlightenment and could be useful in reducing intercultural miscues, misrepresentations and avoidable communication breakdown. As such, this study suggests that linguists may begin to explore this new dimension in the area of linguistic studies.

REFERENCES

- Adejumo A 2013. Satire as protest in an indigenous festival: The case of Efe. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 2(7): 43-50.
- Adeosun HO 2012a. *A Socio-semiotic Study of Selected Yoruba Written Poetry*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. Ilorin: University of Ilorin.
- Bariki I 2009. L'injure en français et en yorouba: inventaire et commentaires. In: DD Kuupole, I Bariki (Eds.): *Applied Social Dimensions of Language Use and Teaching in West Africa*. Cape Coast: University of Cape Coast Press, pp. 35-42.
- Bariki I 2011. L'univers linguistique de l'injure en français. *UNAD Studies in Language and Literature*, 4(1): 23-35.
- de Kadt E 1995. The cross-cultural study of directives: Zulu as a non-typical language. *South African Journal of Linguistics*, 27: 45-72.
- Gabriel Y 1998. An introduction to the social psychology of insults in organizations. *Human Relations*, 51: 1329-1354.
- Greene J, McClintock C 1985. Triangulation in evaluation. *Evaluation Review*, 9(5): 523-545.
- Halliday MAK 2013. Meaning as choice. In: L Fontaine, T Barlett, G O'Grady (Eds.) *Systemic Functional Linguistics: Exploring Choice*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, pp. 15-36.
- Kodah M 2012. The aesthetics of invective: Reflections on the use of verbal violence in *The Suns of Independence* of Ahmadou Kourouma. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(5): 01-08.
- Korostelina KV 2014a. *Political Insults: How Offenses Escalate Conflict*. USA: Oxford University Press.
- Korostelina KV 2014b. Intergroup identity insults: A social identity theory perspective. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 14(3): 214-229.
- Kress G 2010. *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Mateo J, Yus F 2014. Insults: A Relevance-theoretic Approach to Their Translation. From <http://www.academia.edu/2013198/Insults_A_relevance-theoretic_approach_to_their_translation> (Retrieved on 10 September 2014).
- Rudwick SI 2008. Shifting norms of linguistic and cultural respect: Hybrid sociolinguistic Zulu identities. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 17(2): 152-174.
- Van Leeuwen T 2005. *Introducing Social Semiotics*. USA: Routledge.
- Vannini P 2007. Social semiotics and framework: Method and analysis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13: 113-140.

Paper received for publication on November 2016
Paper accepted for publication on December 2016