

Pragmatic Acts in the Conversational Discourses in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*

Samaila Yakubu

Faculty of Humanities,
Department of English and Literary Studies,
Federal University Wukari, P M B 1020 Wukari,
Taraba State, Nigeria
samaila.yakubu@fuwukari.edu.ng
+2348034478215

Abstract

This paper examines the mechanisms of pragmeme in the conversations of characters in Ola Rotimi's drama text titled *Kurunmi*. Previous studies on pragmatic acts have explored pragmatic acts in Ahmed Yerima's text titled *Mojagbe*, John Kolosa Kargbo's text titled *Let Me Die Alone*, and pragmatic acts in Soyinka's text called *Death and the kings Horseman*, but not so much is in done on the conversations of characters in Ola Rotimi's *Kunrumi*. Therefore, this study examines the pragmatic acts in the conversations of the characters in the text *Kurunmi*. Thirty (30) Extracts purposively selected from the text serve as primary data of the study. Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory was adopted as theoretical framework of the study while qualitative descriptive and quantitative designs were deployed to analyse data extracted for the study. The result of the analysis reveals that the characters in the text *kurunmi* deployed pragmatic acts of promising, warning, advising, praying, ordering, inquiring, informing, threatening, and pragmatic acts of opposing in their conversations. Thus, pragmatic acts of praying occurred with a frequency of 5 or 16.67 per cent. Pragmatic acts of promising, ordering, and informing occurred with a frequency of 4 or 13.33 per cent each. Pragmatic acts of warning, inquiring and opposing transpired with a frequency of 3 or 10 per cent each. Pragmatic acts of advising and threatening materialised with a frequency of 2 or 6.67 per cent each. The study concludes that the pragmatic acts deployed in the conversations of the characters enable them to convey what actually occurred before and during the war between the people of Ibadan and the people of Ijaiye, clearly.

Keywords: Pragmatic acts, *Kurunmi*, War, Ibadan, Ijaiye, Ola Rotimi, Conversation

Introduction

Language is the most valuable possession of human beings and the means of communication in every human society. It is the means through which services and information are exchanged. Language is what differentiates human race from the animals. Language as used in communication has continued to develop in terms of description. Pragmatic act is a situated speech act which combines the rules of language and society in which the language is used to determine meaning (Redulovic & Jovanovic, 2019). This assertion suggests that rules of language and the society in which the language is used contribute in no small measure to meaning construction in a language. Pragmatic acts theory analyses function of utterances

based on the contexts in which the utterances are made. Odebunmi (n.d) corroborates this declaration by stating that pragmatic acts theory explains the functions of utterances in consonance with the contexts in which the utterances are made. He explains further that in pragmatic acts theory, extra-linguistic elements are often deployed to pass messages across while speech acts focus on verbal interaction alone.

Besides, Alzzawi and Hussein (2020) corroborate the above assertion by declaring that in Mey's pragmatic acts theory, speakers' utterances alone do not communicate their intentions; rather paralinguistic features are combined with the utterances to enable them to effectively convey their intentions to their listeners. This assertion suggests that in pragmatic acts theory utterances alone will not be able to convey the speakers' intentions to their listeners; unless they are combined with paralinguistic features. Under pragmatic acts theory, linguistic and extra-linguistic elements are often blended by interactants to achieve their communicative goals. The interactants do not rely on linguistic elements alone to achieve their communicative goals.

Pragmatic acts can be viewed from two angles: Agent and act. Agent is an individual whose class, gender, age, education, previous life history and so on serve as means through which he or she can be identified in the society where he or she lives (Mey, 2006). Act, on the other hand, relies on the language. Here, again there are two aspects: from the individual perspective and the perspective of the context. The individual perspective is concerned with the language which an individual can deploy to perform a particular pragmatic act while from the perspective of the context, the question is what language can be used to create a condition for one to perform a pragmatic act (Mey, 2006).

Kendrick and Holler (2024) assert that “when people use language together in informal social interaction whether spoken or signed, researchers often describe it as conversation,” (para, 1). Kendrick's and Holler's submission indicates that when group of persons deploy language together in an informal social interaction, either verbally or gesturally, it is delineated as conversation. Conversation is a talk, especially an informal one between two people or among more people in which news and ideas are exchanged (Oxford languages, n.d). This declaration indicates that conversation is a casual utterance between two or among more people in which news and ideas are interchanged. Cambridge Dictionary (n.d) points out that conversation is “a talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered or news and information is exchanged.” This definition suggests that conversation is a chat between two or among more people in which thoughts, feelings and ideas are communicated, questions are cross-examined and replied or news and information is interchanged.

Abrams (2023) explains that effective conversations are not only those ones that participants agree with one another's views ; they include those that the participants disagree with each other's or one another's views, but come to consensus in the course of the conversation (para. 24). Further, she asserts that

disagreement in the course of conversation is inevitable, but the participants should reach consensus during the conversation (para. 25). Explaining what can be done to grasp conversation very well, Mey (2006) says conversation can be understood well if it is situated within the environment in which it is meant to be understood. This declaration suggests that for the conversation to be understood, it has to be held in the environment in which it is meant to be grasped.

Previous studies on pragmatic acts have explored Nigerianism in the English usage in Soyinka's drama text titled *Death and the King's Horseman*; pragmatic acts in characters' utterances in Ahmed Yerima's drama text *Mojagbe* and Pragmatic acts sequence in John Kolosa Kargbo's drama text *Let Me Die Alone*. To the best of my knowledge based on the available literature, no scholarly attention has been given to pragmatic acts performed in the conversations of characters in *Kurunmi*. Therefore, this study examines pragmatic acts performed in the conversations of the characters in the text by:

1. identifying the pragmatic acts performed in the text;
2. discussing the pragmatic acts in consonance with the text's preoccupation; and
3. accounting for frequencies of occurrence of the pragmatic acts, and their percentages in order to determine the pragmatic acts the author preferred.

Literature Review

Aremu (2019) undertook a pragmatic analysis of Nigerianisms in the English usage in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. The study was aimed at examining Nigerianisms in English usage in the text. Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory was adopted as theoretical framework of the study. Forty (40) utterances extracted from the text served as primary data for the study. Findings of the study revealed that Nigerianisms in the play were identified in language transfer, lexical borrowing, proverbs, metaphors, pidgin, and symbolism, which drew on contextual features of reference (REF), inference (INF), shared situational knowledge (SSK) and shared cultural knowledge (SCK). Based on the findings, the study concludes that Nigerianisms in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* were identified in the language transfer, lexical borrowing, proverbs, metaphors, pidgin and symbolism, which drew on contextual features of reference (REF), inference (INF), shared situational knowledge (SSK) and shared cultural knowledge (SCK). The research is different from the present study because it focuses on Nigerianisms in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* while the current study is concerned with pragmatic acts deployed in the conversations of the characters in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*

Adeniji and Osunbade (2014) carried out research on pragmatic acts in characters' utterances in Ahmed Yerima's text *Mojagbe*. The text was purposively selected because Yoruba cultural norms and values, and all cultural-based interactional utterances are embedded in it. They were analysed using insights from Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory. The result revealed that eight pragmatic

acts and allopracts of informing, invoking, warning, assuring, cautioning, lamenting, insisting and accusing were deployed in the traditional and communal contexts of *Mojagbe* to treat issues of power, danger, immorality, re-incarnation, death, bravery, punishment, insincerity and war through contextual features of Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK), Socio-cultural Knowledge (SCK), inference (INF), reference (REF), and voicing (VCE). The study differs from the current one in the areas of titles. The former explores pragmatic acts in characters' utterances in Ahmed Yerima's text *Mojagbe* while the latter focuses on pragmatic acts in the conversations of the characters in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*.

Olaniyi and Banku (2024) conducted a study on pragmatic act sequence in John Kolosa Kargbo's text *Let Me Die Alone*. Extracts from the text served as primary data for the study. Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory was adopted as theoretical framework. Finding revealed that there were different types of pragmatic acts performed and sequences observed by the characters in the text *Let Me Die Alone*. The pragmatic acts performed in the text include practs of requesting, negotiating, sexual advances, informing, reminding, denying, warning, inciting, pacifying, encouraging, orientating, assuring, deciding, announcing, taking charge, complaining, condemning, deriding, wishing, lamenting, revealing, calling to order, instructing, confessing and affirming. Specifically, sequences observed in the activity and textual acts of the characters in *Let Me Die Alone* include self interest, gratification, self-encouragement and alertness, self-revelation, self-defence, self-imposition, self-pity, self-pleasing, and self-attainment. The characters in the text *Let Me Die Alone* often deployed questioning of co-interlocutors' ability and willingness to take decisive actions. The former treated pragmatic acts sequence in John Kolosa Kargbo's *Let Me Die Alone* while the latter focused on pragmatic acts performed in the conversations of the characters in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*.

Adeoti (2024) conducted study on pragmatic acts in characters' utterances in Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*. The paper undertook a pragmatic investigation of how meanings and actions are generated in the text *Women of Owu*. Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory was deployed alongside implicature, and presupposition to analyse purposively selected extracts from the text. The result revealed that the pragmatic acts of informing, explaining, stating, naming and influencing were used in the text to unveil the thought pattern of audience. Besides, the study revealed the pivotal role that context plays in decoding the exact meaning(s) conveyed by each of the extracted utterances. Context is also instrumental to performance of some acts in the text. The former employed insights from Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory, implicature and presupposition to analyse its data while the latter deployed insights from Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory alone to analyse its data.

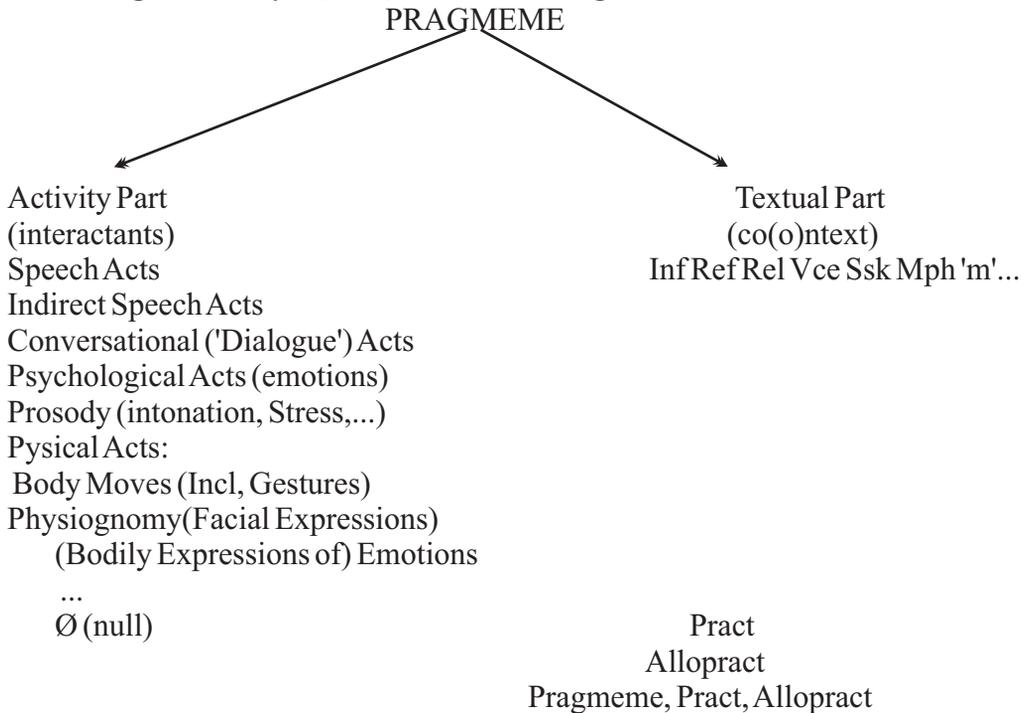
Theoretical Framework

Pragmatic Acts theory is a theory of language study developed by Jacob Mey in 2001. The theory was developed as a result of weaknesses discovered in Austin's (1962) speech acts theory which was later developed by Searle (1969). Odogwu

and Akpojishi (2018) point out that speech acts theory is abstract and does not consider context in analysing utterances. Context contributes immensely in grasping of a text, as true semantic import of a text can be understood when the text is not studied in abstraction. The weaknesses found in speech acts theory, made Mey to develop a theory of action which takes into consideration individuals involved in pragmatic process and the context of situation (Ugoala & Israel, 2020). This theory focuses on combining utterances and extra- linguistic features by participants in speech events to achieve communication goals.

Mey (2001, p.22, as cited in Akinmusuyi, 2022, p.16) points out that the theory of pragmatic acts does not explain language from inside out, that is, from the words which originate from a speaker and go out to a hearer, rather its explanatory movement is from outside in. The focus is on the environment in which the participants in speech event understand one another clearly. He explains further that in pragmatic acts theory, emphasis should be placed on the importance of the situation, environment and extra linguistic features in meaning construction and comprehension (p.16). This assertion suggests that situation, environment and extra-linguistic features are important in meaning construction and comprehension under pragmatic acts theory.

Figure 1: Mey's (2001) Scheme of Pragmeme



There are two parts in Mey's (2001) pragmeme, namely, activity and textual parts. The activity part contains options like speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational acts, psychological acts, prosody, body movements, facial

expressions, and expressions of emotion. Language users choose one or more of these options to communicate with others (Okpeadia, 2012). On the other hand, textual part contains inference (INF), reference (REF), relevance (REL), voice (VCE), shared situational knowledge (SSK), metaphor (MPH), and metapragmatic joker('M'), which influence communication (Okpeadia, 2012). The interaction of the elements on both sides of the schema leads to realisation of pragmatic acts. Emike (2015) asserts that the activity part of pragmeme indicates the roles participants in discourse play while the textual part deals with various contexts in which the discourse occurs.

Methods

Data for the study were purposively extracted from Ola Rotimi's drama text *Kurunmi*. The research identified thirty (30) text tokens of the pragmatic acts deployed in the conversations of the characters in the text, and analysed them, using both qualitative descriptive and quantitative designs, through the instrumentality of Mey's (2001) Pragmatic acts theory.

Data Presentation and Discussions

The text is characterised by different types of pragmatic acts as follows:

Pragmatic Acts of Promising

Pragmatic acts of promising are identified in the conversations of the characters in the text. They are captured in the following extracts:

Ogunkoroju: "I shall do my best for Ijaiye, my lord." (p.31)

Kurunmi: "...I, Kurunmi shall seek the Elders of Ijaiye for counsel in any action I mean to take..." (p.42).

Crowd of Young Warriors: "We'll fight! We'll fight! Muso! Muso! Muso!" (p. 49)

Ibikunle: "I must fight..." (p.73)

The extract "I shall do my best for Ijaiye, my lord," suggests that the speaker promises to deploy all the means at his disposal to defend the people of Ijaiye or fight for them... "... I Kurunmi shall seek the elders of Ijaiye for counsel in any action I mean to take...", indicates that Kurunmi promises to seek advice from the elders of Ijaiye before doing anything in the land. Pieces of advice from the elders often help leaders run the affairs of their lands very well. "We'll fight! We'll fight! Muso! Muso! Muso!", connotes that the warriors assure their people that they will fight to defend their land. Warriors often fight to defend their land. The extract "I must fight...", suggests that the speaker promises to fight to the end.

Pragmatic Acts of Warning

Practs of warning are deployed in the conversations of the characters in the text. They are embedded in the extracts below.

Oluwole: "...you must do nothing rash against the Kingdom..." (p.19).

Kurunmi: “...no one sells food out of Ijaiye...all farm crops already plucked or unplucked will stay reserved in the land...”(p.29)

Akiola: “Don't ... try that again, my lord” (p.40)

The extract “...you must do nothing rash against the kingdom,” is a warning to Kurumi not to act without deep thought. If a leader acts without proper thought, it may have an adverse effect on his people. The extract “...no one sells food out of Ijaiye...all farm crops already plucked or unplucked will stay reserved in the land...”, is a warning to the people of Ijaiye not to sell food crops out of Ijaiye territory, but to reserve them. Food is very important to both soldiers and civilians. If a particular region runs out of food during war, there may be a catastrophe. The extract “Dont't try that again, my lord...” is a warning to the addressee not to strive to do a particular thing again. Some people are warned not to do a specific thing again after they have been pardoned.

Pragmatic Acts of Advising

Practs of advising are performed in the conversations of the characters in the text. They are captured in the following extracts:

Kurunmi: “Now hear me, my brothers...Let us not act like children...” (p.76)

Ogunkoroju: “My lord must rest, and leave the watch to us.” (p.83)

The extract “Now hear me, my brothers...Let us not act like children...”, is a piece of advice given to the people of Ijaiye not to act like children. Children often act without thought. The extract suggests that Kurunmi wants his people to act after a lot of careful thoughts. “My lord must rest, and leave the watch to us” is a piece of advice given to Kurunmi to have a rest and allow low- ranking soldiers to stand on guard. In military tradition, low- ranking soldiers often stand on guard rather than high- ranking officers.

Pragmatic Acts of Praying

Pragmatic acts of praying are deployed in the text. The prayers are embedded in the extracts below:

Obogunrin: “... He who plots evil against Kurunmi, Lord of this land of Ijaiye, Ogun, let the earth burst open and swallow his body ...” (p.12)

Areagoro: “Ogun...lord of battle...Today your children of Ijaiye need your help...”(p.60)

Kurunmi: (embracing sons and chiefs):“May the gods be with you, my sons...”(p.61)

The extract “ He who plots evil against Kurunmi, Lord of this land of Ijaiye, Ogun, let the earth burst open and swallow his body...”, is a prayer to the gods to annihilate any person who plans evil against Kurunmi. If people like their leader, they often pray for his safety, success and protection . The extract “ Ogun...lord of battle...Today your children of Ijaiye need your help...”, is the prayer to Ogun, the god of battle to help his children to triumph over their enemies. People often pray to the gods to come to their aid whenever they have problem(s). The extract “May the

gods be with you, my sons...”, is the prayer offered by Kurunmi to the gods to guard and protect his sons. Parents often pray for the guardian and protection of their children, especially if their lives are in danger.

Pragmatic Acts of Ordering

Pragmatic acts of ordering are identified in the conversations of the characters in *Kurunmi*. They are captured in the following extracts.

Kurunmi: “... Get the warriors ready...”(p.30)

Kurunmi: “... take five thousand soldiers with you to Iwawum. And you defend Iwawum ...” (p.61)

Kurunmi: “Fight my people, fight.” (p.62)

Kurunmi: “... Withdraw five hundred men from Iwawum and station them at Iran...” (p.65)

The extract “Get the warriors ready...”, is an order given to the commander of Ijaiye troops to get the soldiers ready for war. Readiness of soldiers is very important, especially during war in the sense that opposing forces will not be able to take them unaware. “... take five thousand soldiers with you to Iwawum. And you will defend Iwawum...” Iwawum is considered an important town and this importance is the reason it is ordered to be defended at all cost. The extract “Fight my people, fight”, is an order given to fight opposing forces. Soldiers are often ordered to fight and defend their land. The extract “... withdraw five hundred men from Iwawum and station them at Iran ...”.suggests that Iran holds a strategic position in Ijaiye land, which is why the commander is ordered to withdraw five hundred fighters from Iwawum and camp them there.

Pragmatic Acts of Inquiring

Pragmatic acts of inquiring are found in the text. They are captured in the following extracts:

Oluyole: “... Kurunmi, have we fallen low in the eyes of your subjects that even slaves among them now feel too noble to prostrate themselves in respect for our presence?” (p.18)

Areagoro: “Is there something wrong my lord?” (p.29)

Kurunmi: “Why did they not show boldness and tell me to my face that they did not like my actions...?” (p.41)

The extract “...Kurunmi, have we fallen low in the eyes of your subjects that even slaves among them now feel too noble to prostrate themselves in respect for our presence?”, is an inquiry made by Oluyole to find out why Kurunmi's people feel too big to pay respect to the elders of Oyo Kingdom as they were doing in the past. The extract “Is there something wrong my lord?” is an inquiry made by Areagoro to find out whether there is something wrong with the chief or not. People often make inquiries to find out whether their close associates are fine or not if they observe some strange behaviour in them. The extract “why did they not show boldness and tell me to my face that they did not like my actions..?” suggests that Kurunmi asks to

find out why Alafin Atiba and his chiefs are afraid to tell him directly that they don't like his actions.

Pragmatic Acts of Informing

Pragmatic acts of informing are identified in the conversations of the characters in the text. They are found in the following extracts:

Bodyguards: "Our lord is coming, Are Kurunmi is coming!" (p.13)

Asegbe : "My lord, the Elders are here to see you" (p.18)

Labudanu: "They are preparing for war, my lord..."(p.32)

Labudanu (burst in): "My lord the soldiers of Ibadan are coming." (p.55)

The extract "Our lord is coming. Are Kurunmi is coming" is a piece of information shared among the bodyguards to make everyone of them be aware of the coming of Kurunmi. In military tradition, if a superior officer is coming to an arena where low-ranking officers are, the low-ranking officers are often informed to prepare for any eventuality or stop exhibiting behaviour which may land them in trouble. "My lord, the Elders are here to see you", is a piece of information suggesting that the elders of Oyo kingdom come to Kurunmi to talk with him about the affairs of the kingdom. Elders often meet with the leader(s) of the kingdom to discuss affairs affecting the kingdom. The extract "They are preparing for war my lord...", is a piece of information passed to the chief of Ijaiye to enable him to be aware of what his enemies are preparing for. If a leader becomes aware that his enemies are preparing to fight him and his people, he will prepare his people to get ready to fight the enemies. The extract "the soldiers of Ibadan are coming", is a piece of information supplied to Kurunmi to enable him to be aware of the direction of movement of the enemy troops. If a leader has knowledge of direction of the movements of enemy troops, he can easily deploy his troops to block them from encroaching his territory.

Pragmatic Acts of Threatening

Pragmatic acts of threatening are deployed in the conversations of the characters in the text. They are embedded in the following extracts:

Warriors: "... You dare step forward again,...terrible things will happen in Ijaiye." (p.38).

Ogunmola: "... he who plots with another to bring me to harm, that person is the baby who cries to stop its mother's sleep; it too will suffer the anguish of not sleeping."(p.49)

The extract "...You dare step forward again ...terrible things will happen in Ijaiye" is a threat to the hearer; it suggests that if the hearer assist the people of Ijaiye again, bad or dreadful things will occur in Ijaiye. The extract "...he who plot with another to bring me to harm, that person is the baby who cries to stop its mother's sleep, it too will suffer the anguish of not sleeping", is a threat to any person who connives with

another person to bring harm to the speaker. Some threats are real or true while others are empty or idle.

Pragmatic Acts of Opposing

Pragmatic acts of opposing are deployed in the conversations of the characters in the text. They are embedded in the extracts below.

Kurunmi: “We have tradition. Whenever an Alafin dies, his first son, that Alafin's first son,

must die with him”.(p.19)

Kurunmi: “Over my dead body” (p.21)

Kurunmi: “.... Kurunmi will never prostrate himself to shoot a deer with a father one morning and then squat with the son in the evening to shoot a goose!... ”(p.21)

The extract “We have tradition. Whenever an Alafin dies, his first son, that Alafin's first son,

must die with him” suggests that Kurunmi is opposed to the idea that the first son of Alafin should live and inherit his father's throne, he must die along his father. The extract “Over my dead body”, suggests that Kurunmi is strongly opposed to the plan to install Adelu as the Alafin of Oyo, and is determined to prevent it, even to the point of fighting or dying.

The extract “ ...Kurunmi will never prostrate himself to shoot a deer with a father one morning and then squat with the son in the evening to shoot a goose!... ”, connotes that Kurunmi will never forgo the demand of the tradition which says when Alafin dies, his first son must commit suicide, and adopt a new tradition which allows the first son of Alafin to live and succeed his father's throne.

Findings

The study revealed that the key characters in the text including Kurunmi deployed different types of pragmatic acts in their conversations. The pragmatic acts they deployed include pragmatic acts of promising, warning, advising, praying, ordering, informing, inquiring, threatening and opposing. The dominant pragmatic acts deployed in the conversations are the pragmatic acts of praying, they occurred with a frequency of 5 or 16.67 per cent. The second dominant pragmatic acts the characters employed in their conversations are pragmatic acts of promising, ordering, and informing, they occurred with a frequency of 4 or 13.33 per cent each. The third predominant pragmatic acts we found in the conversations of the characters are pragmatic acts of warning, inquiring, and opposing, they occurred with a frequency of 3 or 10 per cent each. The fourth predominant pragmatic acts we identified in the conversations of the characters are pragmatic acts of advising and threatening, they transpired with a frequency of 2 or 6.67 percent each.

T a b l e

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Pragmatic Acts Summary across Kurunmi

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Pragmatic acts of promising	4	13.33
Pragmatic acts of warning	3	10
Pragmatic acts of advising	2	6.67
Pragmatic acts of praying	5	16.67
Pragmatic acts of ordering	4	13.33
Pragmatic acts of inquiring	3	10
Pragmatic acts of informing	4	13.33
Pragmatic acts of threatening	2	6.67
Pragmatic acts of opposing	3	10
Total	30	100

In the above table, the characters employed pragmatic acts of praying. They prayed to the gods to express their requests. They used pragmatic acts of promising; some characters promised to do something. The characters deployed Pragmatic acts of ordering; we saw the orders given to some characters in the text. They utilised Pragmatic acts of informing; some characters informed others about something. Pragmatic acts of warning were used by the characters in the text; some characters warned others. Pragmatic acts of inquiring were deployed in the text; some characters inquired about something. Pragmatic acts of opposing were used in the text; some characters opposed strange tradition. The characters performed Pragmatic acts of advising; some of the characters advised others. They also used Pragmatic acts of threatening in the text; some of the characters threatened others.

Conclusion

The study was focused to analyse different pragmatic acts performed in the

conversations of the characters in the drama text *Kurunmi*. The data examined in the study revealed that characters in the text performed different types of pragmatic acts: Pragmatic acts of promising, warning, advising, praying, ordering, inquiring, informing, threatening and opposing were identified in the conversations of the characters. The study concludes that pragmatic acts deployed in the conversations of the characters enable them to convey what actually occurred during and after the battle, between the people of Ibadan and the people of Ijaiye, without bias in such a society as Nigeria where lack of objectivity in describing events or inclination to favour one group over another is the order of the day.

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