YORÚBÁ INTERROGATIVE PROVERBS

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Abstract
This study examines the forms and functions of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. It posits that almost all interrogative proverbs in Yorùbá contain question words which appear in the sentence initial or sentence final. The study shows that Yorùbá interrogative proverbs have two basic forms: proverbs with declarative discourse preceding the interrogative sentence and proverbs that are direct question(s). The paper shows that to fully understand the functions of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs; there is need to take cognizance of the semantic and contextual features of the proverbs. On the basis of this, the study shows that interrogative proverbs in Yorùbá are not used to seek information, rather, they are used rhetorically to express an assertion, doubt, affirmation, creation of comic effect and to provoke people to think about what the obvious answer to the question(s) in the proverbs must be.

Keywords: Proverbs, Yorùbá, Interrogative, Illocutionary force, Rhetoric

Introduction
Proverb is known to be a complex element that does not lend itself to a facile definition. This explains why it has been variously defined by scholars. Délnà (1973:77) defines proverbs as ‘self evident truths’ that are communicated in a brief and condensed form. Noah (1996:95) notes that proverb is ‘a laconic declaration, generally invariable in its structure, whose intervention in a context of verbal representation condenses and radiates experiences, ideas and admonitions through its terse, pithy statement of a truism’. Šótùndé (2009) defines proverb as a short familiar sentence expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson which often requires an explanation beyond the literal meaning of the words used. Louis (2000:117) asserts that proverbs are ‘a kind of linguistic instrument, a rhetorical device by which people attempt to get other members of their culture and society to see the world
and behave in a common way.’ Meider (1985:117) defines proverb as a phrase, saying, sentence, statement or experience of the folk which contains wisdom, morals, lessons and advice concerning life which have been handed down from generation to generation. In most cases, the origin of a proverb is unknown. The effectiveness of a proverb lies in its brevity and directness, Crystal (2003:184). Proverbs are the products of human observation about what happens in their environment. Proverbs could be deductive, speculative, affirmative, empirical mythical and superstitious.

The term ‘Yorùbá’ is considered to be the association of several subgroups bound to one another by language and tradition, Igue (1973:9). The name ‘Yorùbá’ is applied to the language of the people. The language belongs to the West Benue – Congo family of the Niger-Congo phylum (Williamson and Blench 2000:31). Yorùbá occupies a large area in the south-western part of Nigeria extending through Lagos, Ògùn, Òyó, Ôsun, Ôndó, Òkiti, Kwara, Kogí and Òdó States. Yorùbá can also be found in the republics of Benin, Togo and also in Brazil, Cuba, Sierra-leone and Trinidad and Tobago. The Yorùbá in Nigeria regards the Yorùbá outside the country as ‘Diaspora Yorùbá’. The spread of Yorùbá in Diaspora is extremely thin. The proverbs we used in this study are collected from the Yorùbá in Nigeria.

Yorùbá proverbs are conceived as the ‘horse of word which can carry one swiftly to the idea sought’, Délànò (1973:77). Afóláyan (2005:176) also notes that Yorùbá proverbs are vehicles of ‘expression, evocation and provocation’. This is why the Yorùbá people regard the accurate use of proverbs in the society as a sign of wisdom. In Yorùbá society, proverb occur in almost every discourse and its meaning cannot be known solely on the basis of the aggregate meaning of the words that constitute each of them but the context in which it is used. This is the reason Yorùbá proverbs are called vehicles of cultural values. The idea behind Yorùbá proverbs is to drive home a crucial point in as few words as possible. This explains why the syntax is simple, the images vivid and the allusions domestic, and thus, most times easy to understand. Yorùbá proverbs present ideas in picturesque and more challenging way than ordinary speech could have done. Information contained in some of these proverbs could be quite reliable especially where such relates to particular events, places and personalities as rightly observed by Badà (1970). Factors influencing the incidence of Yorùbá proverb usage in the society include age, occupation and gender.

(1987), Sheba (2000), Bello-Olówókéré (2004), Ájání (2004), Œmolọ̀ṣọ̀ (2008) and Adéyemi 2010. Vidal (1852) discusses the features of parallelism in Yorùbá proverbs. He compares them to Hebrew poetry. Ajibóllá (1947) and Ògúnbówálé (1970:135-146) are compilation of some proverbs, their meanings and usage. Beier (Beier and Gbadamoși(1959)) examines the ideas contained in the proverbs as reflecting the Yorùbá world-view. Sóbándé (1967) classifies Yorùbá proverbs into eleven categories. Owómóyélá (1981) is an exploration of an African Philosophy of social communication as contained in Yorùbá proverbs. Òlátúnjí (1984) examines sociological background of Yorùbá proverbs. He also discusses the features of Yorùbá proverbs. He asserts that Yorùbá proverbs state what should or should not be done in the society. In other words, Yorùbá proverbs serve as social charters condemning some practices while recommending others. Àlàbá (1986) examines the forms of the contemporary Yorùbá proverbs vis-à-vis the old ones. Délànò (1987) observes that Yorùbá proverbs may be a source of historical information while Sheba (2000) examines the concept of women in Yorùbá proverbs. Abiódún (2000) explains why the young people acknowledge the old people when they use proverbs. Adéyemi (2010) examines the socio-cultural perception of disability and the disabled people in the Yorùbá society through selected proverbs. Œmolọ̀ṣọ̀ (2008) attempted to classify Yorùbá proverbs into direct and indirect illocutionary acts/forces. In doing so, he relied on the syntactic structures, sentence functions and the context in which they were used. Types of Yorùbá proverbs that were identified include moral (conduct), religious, self-explanatory, plain statement of fact, warning, feminist, sexual or obscene. Also, Œmolọ̀ṣọ̀ (2008) recognized Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. However, his work on it is scanty, probably because the work did not major solely on Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. Despite this, the work arouses our curiosity, thus, we decide to investigative Yorùbá interrogative proverbs in order to do in-depth analysis on it.

The focus of this paper therefore is to examine the structures and function(s) of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. By interrogative proverbs, we mean proverbs that have interrogative sentence(s). To the Yorùbá people, proverb is the horse on which the word rides, the word is the horse on which the proverbs ride. When one is lost for words, proverb is used to seek and search for the right utterance, Adéyemi (2010:104-15). If this assertion is right, why then, do the Yorùbá people sometimes employ interrogative proverbs in communication? This study is set to unravel this puzzle.
This paper is divided into four sections. Section one, which introduces the study, looks at the definition of proverbs and the review of some earlier works on Yorùbá proverbs. In section two, we examine the meaning of interrogative sentences while section three gives a description of the forms and function(s) of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. Section four is the conclusion.

**Yorùbá Interrogative Sentences**

Interrogative sentences are sentences employed as questions. Awóbùlúyì (1978:123). Such sentences with an interrogating structure convey that there is a certain amount of information which the speaker does not have and which he is trying to make the interlocutor to supply, Haegeman (2006:21). This implies that questions are statements/sentences which seek information and for which a correct reply is expected. Radford (1988:462) believe that question in natural languages can be classified into a number of types. May be that is why Crystal (2003:218) says questions fall into three main types depending on the kind of reply one expects, and on how such questions are constructed. These types are: Yes-No questions (polar questions), Wh-questions (content word questions) and alternative questions. Yes-no questions allow an affirmative or negative response. Wh-questions begin with question words and allow a reply from wide range of possibilities while alternative questions require a reply which relates to options in the interrogative sentence.

The terms ‘question’ and interrogative’ are often interchanges, Matthews (2007:200). However, a distinction can sometimes be made. Thus, ‘can’t he shut up?’ has the structure of an interrogative, its function would not be a question but a request or command. Questions are used by people in all walks of life to learn about their world and find information to guide their lives. Questions also confront people with a challenge. Apart from eliciting information, questions are used for a number of purposes. These include provoking people to share ideas they have, lead people to consider new ideas, challenge beliefs and guide reconsideration of values and developing the process of thinking that may guide decision making, Kissock and Iyortsuun (1982:6).

**Formation of Interrogative Sentences in Yorùbá**

Unlike the English Language where in most cases, the interrogative pattern of the declarative sentences is formed by changing the position of the auxiliary with respect to that of the subject (subject-auxiliary inversion-moving the auxiliary leftward across the subject). For example:

- **Declarative:** ‘The murderer has broken the window’
- **Interrogative:** ‘Has the murderer broken the window?’
The interrogative sentence derivation in Yorùbá does not involve the movement of its auxiliary. There are two types of interrogative constructions in Yorùbá. One, those that contain question words and two, those without question words. Interrogative constructions that contain question words are of two basic kinds. These are yes/no (polar) and content word (wh) interrogative constructions. Polar questions in Yorùbá are derived by adjoining either of two question head elements, ǹjé or ṣé to the beginning of declarative sentences, as exemplified below.

Declarative: 1. Bísí wá ‘Bísí came.’

Interrogative

2. (a) Ṣé Bísí wá ‘Did Bísí come?’
   (b) Ǹjé Bísí wá ‘Did Bísí come?’

Unlike ǹjé/ṣé, bí is a polar element that regularly occurs sentence final in Yorùbá polar questions as in:

3. Bísí wá bí? ‘Did Bísí come?’

bí makes the question in which it appears more emphatic. In some constructions, ǹjé can co-occur with bí but ṣé cannot as shown below:

4. Ǹjé Bísí lọ bí? ‘Did Bísí go?’

Yes/no questions in (2-4) above allow a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer.

The process of forming content word questions in Yorùbá involves movement. Content word questions in the language are nominal expressions which are often moved sentence initially where they are immediately followed by the focus marker ni, Ìlọrí (2010:256). Yorùbá content word questions are ta ‘who’, isi ‘what’, èwo/wo ‘which’, ibo ‘where’, báwo ‘which’, èló ‘how much’, mélòó ‘how many’, nítorí kí… ‘why’. This is illustrated in the following examples.

5. (a) Délé rí Ta (ni) ní ojà → Ta, ni Delé rí…i ní ojà? ‘Délé saw who in the market?’
   (b) Délé rí Olú ní ibo → Ibo, ni Délé ti rí Olú…i? ‘Délé saw Olú where?’
   (d) O gbó kí (ni) → Kí, ni o gbó…i? ‘What did you hear?’
   (e) Wón ta mélòó → Mélòó, ni wón tà… ‘They bought how many?’
These content word questions demand phrasal or clausal answers. There are other types of content word question constructions which do not involve wh-items. Examples of such question expressions are:

6.
(a) Aṣọ mí dá?
‘where is my cloth’
(b) Aṣọ mí ńkọ?
‘where is my cloth’

dá and ńkọ are content word questions that occur at the sentence final only.

The interrogative ‘constructions without question words in Yorùbá are pronounced specially, Awóbùlúyì (1978:124). The voice is lighter and higher for such constructions than their declarative versions. The eyebrows are raised in the process.

The Structures of Yorùbá Interrogative Proverbs

In this section, we shall examine the structures of Yorùbá Interrogative Proverbs. Bámgbósé (1969:75-76) classifies Yorùbá proverbs structurally into four different types, namely, simple, complex, sequential and parallel. Also, Òmọlọṣọ (2008) uses some of Bámgbósé’s syntactic criteria to classify Yorùbá proverbs as simple and complex proverbs. He submits that Yorùbá proverbs can be declarative (either positive or negative), or interrogative. Structurally, Òmọlọṣọ classifies Yorùbá interrogative proverbs into three, namely, (a) direct interrogative proverbs or those that begin with questions tags like báwo ‘how’, kí ‘what’; (b) interrogative proverbs that begin with bí ‘if’ and end with kí ‘what’ and (c) declarative proverbs produced on high pitch to indicate they are questions. He exemplified (a) - (c) above with only three proverbs. The proverbs are:

7.
(a) Kí ni eegún ń wò ti kò fówúrò jó?
‘What commitment does a masquerade have that it cannot dance in the morning.’
(b) *Bí ọmọdé láṣọ títí, sé ó lè ní àkísà tó àgbá?
‘If a youth has many clothes as an elder, can he have as many rags as elder has?’
(c) *Ebi ki i pani titi ki a fi igi orulu dana..?
‘Does one because one is hungry (sic) use the rafter of one’s house as fire wood?*

We asterisked (7 b and c) above because they are judged unacceptable in the language. Example (7b) is not tenable because no interrogative sentence begins with bí ‘if’, a conditional clause marker in the language. The interrogative sentence in (7b) begins with sé. However, the traditional way to render (7b) is Bí ọmọdè bá laṣo bì àgbà, kò lè ni àkísà tó o. ‘If a young person has more suits/clothes as an elder, he cannot have as many rags as the elder.’ Therefore, example (7b) is not an interrogative proverb as Omolòsó (2008) make us to believe. We want to say here, that virtually, all Yorùbá declarative sentences can be turned into interrogative sentences by adjoining the polar question marker(s) if there is ulterior motive by the speaker. As we shall see later, no Yorùbá interrogative proverb begins with polar question markers. The proverb in (7c) is in negative declarative sentence whose basic role is in asserting that something is not the case. There is no way (7c) or any proverb of its kind can be produced on high pitch to indicate that it is a question in Yorùbá as claimed in Omolòsó (2008).

The implication of our comments above is that, there is a need to examine the forms of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs in order to get a good perspective of it. Our position in this paper shows that Yorùbá interrogative proverbs have two basic forms: (a) proverbs with declarative discourse preceding the interrogative sentence and (b) proverbs that are direct questions.

One basic structure that is peculiar to almost all the Yorùbá interrogative proverbs is that there is always a declarative sentence preceding the interrogative sentence in each proverb. Such an interrogative sentence is dependent on the subject matter contained in the discourse of the preceding declarative sentence as shown in the following proverbs.

8. Baba jóná ó n bèèrè irùngbôn, kí ló fa sábábi?
‘A man is burnt to death and you enquire about his beard, which part of him caught fire first?’

9. Èèyàn ní oun yóò bá ó jé, o ní kò tó bẹ̀ẹ̀. Bó ba ní o kò nu idí, ènì mélòó lo fẹ̀ fẹ́dí hàn?
‘A man says he will blackmail you and you say he cannot. If he says you do not clean your anus, to how many people will you show your bottom to disprove him?’
10. Ajá tí ó gbé iyò, kí ni yóò fí ṣe?
   ‘The dog which stole salt, what is it going to do with it?’

11. Ìpòn òdàjá, ó ní ọjá ọ kùn; iyàwó tírẹ méliòó ló wà nibẹ?
   ‘How dare the bachelor complain that only a few people patronize the market; how many wives has he there?’

12. Bí a bá fogún ọdún pilè were, igbà wo la fẹ fì bugi jẹ?
   ‘If it takes two decades to go crackers, how long would it take to be at the maddest?’

13. Èbi tí ó pa Owólàńkẹ kò jẹbi, kí ni eegún fẹ fì eyin ẹ?
   ‘The trap that kills Owólàńkẹ is not to blame, what could an egúngún masquerade be doing under the palm-fruit trap?’

   However, there are other few Yorùbá interrogative proverbs that are independent or direct questions without any declarative discourse preceding it. Such include:

14. Kí ni eegún n wò tí kò fì òwùrọ jọ?
   ‘What commitment does a masquerade have that it cannot dance in the morning?’

15. Ta ní a gbé gešin tí kò ní ṣe ipákọ̀ ṣàkè?
   ‘Is there anyone put on a horse back who will not raise his head backward?’

16. Kí ni ológìní ń wá tí ó fì jóná mọ̀ lé?
   ‘What was the cat looking for before it was burnt up with the house?’

17. Kí ni ẹ̣nikan gbé karí tí ènìyàn méfà kò lè sò kalẹ?
   ‘What could a single person be carrying that six others could not lift?’

18. Kí ni ọmọ eyé fẹ ẹ̀ fún iyá rẹ ju kó dàgbá kó fọ lọ?
   ‘The fledgling is of no use to its mother, it flies off as soon as its wings can carry it.’

19. Mélòó ni ọkánjúà máa lá nínú àpò iyò?
   ‘How much could the greedy possibly lick of a bag of salt?’

20. Oore kí ni ipá ẹ̀ fún idí?
   ‘Of what benefit is the enlarged scrotum to its victim?’

21. Ta ní yóò sọ pè Lébe ọ pọ̀nmọ̀ re?
   ‘Anyone dare confront Lébe, the masquerade over his behaviour?’

   Irrespective of their structures as shown in (8-21) above, most of the interrogative proverbs contain question words while few do not. Yorùbá interrogative proverbs that contain question words are called after the English spelling of the marker of questions which sport WH-words. Such question words always occur at the beginning of most of the interrogative sentences as shown in the following examples.
22. Bí ọ̀rọ̀ sí akópò, kí ni ewúrẹ́ ń wá ní isọ̀ eyẹlẹ́?
‘Without their being mixed together, how can you find a goat in the stall for pigeon?’

23. Ta ni ó fí ìbẹ̀ tó nù jẹ́ isu?
‘Who will confess that it was he who had used a knife before it got lost.’
‘A knife before it got lost.’

24. Olè tó gbé kákáki ọba, níbó ni yọó tì fún?
‘The thief who steals the King’s bugle, where is he going to blow it?’

25. Àkò tó gbé kàkàkì ọ̀ba, níbó ni yọó tì fún?
‘You are rejected in the town, yet you want to raise a song, if you raise it, who will join you to sing the chorus?’

However, there are other few interrogative proverbs where the question words occur at the end of the interrogative sentences as exemplified below.

26. Èni se ìbẹ̀ àṣán, a ní kí oriṣà pá a, èni tí kò ọ̀rìṣà pá ńkọ̀?
‘The gods is asked to kill a man who prepared soup without meat, what of the man who prepared nothing?’

27. Abomilámù réégún, èni tó lọ́ pón lódò ńkọ̀?
‘If the masquerade scares off those scooping water from the water-pot, what could possibly be the fate of those who fetched it from the brook?’

28. Bí ọ̀lọ́kùnrùn kí i bí jẹ́ adiyé, èni tó ń wa itàkùn ńkọ̀?
‘If chicken is forbidden to the sick man, what of those taking care of him?’

29. Wọ́n ni kí ohun tó wu ni wá, ohun tó dára bó sibè, bó bá dára tí ó bá wu ni ńkọ̀?
‘The call is for something admirable but something interesting surfaces, what if it is not admirable.’

The question word in (26-29) above is ńkọ̀ “what”. The few Yorùbá interrogative proverbs that do not have question words include the following:

30. O kò sá igí lógbè, o kò ta ọgùrọ lọfà, o gbẹ̀ ènù sókè nídìí òpẹ̀, òfẹ̀ níí ro?
‘You neither slit the back of a palm-tree, nor pierce the trunk of a date-palm, yet you expect to drink palm-wine, does the juice come freely without labour?’

31. O rí ogbó adiyé lójà, o sáré rá á, ibá màa yè ogún, kí ó máa pa ogún, wọ̀n a gbè wá sójá wá tά?
‘You saw an old hen in the market, you quickly bought it, if it had been productive would it have been brought to the market for sale?’
The Functions of Yorùbá Interrogative Proverbs

To fully study the functions of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs, there is a need to take cognizance of the semantic and contextual features of the proverbs. Yorùbá proverbs are made of words. These words are constituted into a system called sentence. The meaning of a sentence depends on the meaning of the component words and how they are syntactically combined. When a sentence/utterance is produced by a speaker, he has just specified the bare outlines of the meaning he intends to convey, leaving the interlocutor to reconstruct the details in their full richness to get his intentions. This is called speech/illocutionary acts- the actions speakers perform in uttering sentences, including informing, promising, requesting, questioning, commanding, warning, preaching, congratulating, laying bets, swearing and exclaiming, McGregor (2009:142). The type of action performed by the speaker in making an utterance is called its illocutionary force- the force that an expression of some specific form will have when it is uttered, Matthews (2007:184) or what the speaker’s utterance suggest the speaker is doing. However, some utterances do not always wear their illocutionary force on their sleeve. Also, in some cases, there are typical associations between certain syntactic forms of sentences and a particular illocutionary force. For example, the interrogative sentence: ‘Can you pass the book to me?’ has a typical illocutionary force of a question which would normally attract a response like ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Such an answer may be inadequate or inappropriate because the illocutionary force of the question as it has been used here is a ‘command or request’. In a situation like this where an illocutionary force other than the typically associated to a syntactic form is given, they are called indirect speech acts and when the association is the typical illocutionary force, we speak of direct speech acts.

In classifying Yorùbá proverbs into illocutionary acts, Òmọlọṣọ (2008) applies some of Allan’s (1986) criteria for classifying into direct or indirect speech acts. Òmọlọṣọ opines that direct illocutionary acts of Yorùbá proverbs refer to what the speaker is doing overtly by uttering the proverb. Likewise, he notes that in an indirect illocutionary act, the speaker communicates more to the listener than he verbally expresses and for the understanding of what he says, the speaker relies on the shared background information between himself and the interlocutor. On this basis, Òmọlọṣọ posits that Yorùbá interrogative proverbs appear to
be particularly marked for indirect illocutionary forces like complaining, blaming, protesting, ordering and requesting. While we agree that Yorùbá interrogative proverbs can be classified under indirect illocutionary acts, we differ in certain respects concerning the illocutionary force, for obvious reasons. We do not agree that Yorùbá interrogative proverbs have the illocutionary forces Ọmọlọṣọ́ mentioned in his work. First, the three proverbs in (7) which he uses are grossly inadequate to substantiate his claims. There is a need to buttress his claim with more explanations, but he did not. Second, it is important to know why the Yorùbá people do have interrogative proverbs in the first instance.

In our study of the syntactic structures of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs, we observe that none of the interrogative sentences in the proverbs have polar question head elements, ńjé/ṣé beginning them. Majority of the proverbs have content word questions as shown in examples (8-32) above. As we have noted previously, the content word questions demand phrasal or clausal answers. However, this is not so with Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. Thus, the question in each Yorùbá interrogative proverbs has important rhetorical dimensions. The question is asked for a purpose other than to obtain information. Consider the following:

33. (a) A bímọ́ kò gbón, a ní kí ó má kù ú, kí ló ń pa èèyàn bí àìgbọ́n?
   ‘Someone’s concern is that his foolish child should not die, but what greater cause of death is there than foolishness?’
   (b) Kí ní apari wá dé isò onígbajúmọ?
   ‘What does a bald-headed man want in a barbing saloon?’

The rhetorical questions in (33a and b) above are asked to encourage the interlocutor to think about what the obvious answer to the questions must be and not for seeking information. A rhetorical question is a question type posed for its persuasive effect without seeking information or excepting a reply.

Now that we have pointed out that the questions in Yorùbá interrogative proverbs are rhetorical, the speaker has different illocutionary force when these interrogative proverbs are uttered. For example, some of the proverbs are used by the speaker for assertion. Consider (34) below:

34. (a) Ajogun Ifá ní kí òun má kù ú, ènì tẹ̀ Ifá ńkọ́?
   ‘Someone who inherit Ifá oracle prays that he may not die, but where is the original owner?’
   (b) O fi awọ ẹkùn se oógún àíkú, ẹkùn ibá máa ku, iwo a ri awọ rè ìse òògún?
‘You used the foreskin of the leopard to make a charm that will prevent you from
dying. If the leopard had not died, how would you have been able to get its skin to
make charm.’

c) Mákùú ó mawo, ó ń bá wọn bọpa; Mákùú ó mòwọ, ó ń bá wọn mòòkùn lódò,
 igbà wo ni Mákùú ó ni kú?

‘Máàkù is uninitiated but he dabbles in the occult; he cannot swim yet dives into a
river. How long could he survive such escapades?’

The three proverbs in (34) above are used by the speaker to assert that death is
inevitable. The questions in the proverbs assert that the truth of the (preceding) statement is
obvious. Also, Yorùbá interrogative proverbs may be used for pure comic effect as shown in:
35. (a) Wón ni kí arígbó gba ọmọ pón, ó ní ‘ṣébí wón mè pè oun kò lèyín. Wón ní
dí o pa ọmọ jẹ ni?’.

‘The old woman was asked to help carry the child on her back. She replied
“but you know that I am toothless”. Did they ask her to eat up (kill) the child?’

(b) Òkunrin ń fì ọwọ kan tū ṣòkòtò, ó ń fì ọwọ keji tènì. Òbinrin ní ‘kò rí tòun mú gbọ.’ Bí ó bá fẹ rì tiè mú gbọ ìkọ?’

‘A man is loosing his loins with a hand and preparing the bed with the other and the
woman is complaining that she is not being attended to. What else will the man do if
she is to be attended to.’

The proverbs in (35) above are used humorously to amuse the listener.

It is also common to use some of the questions in interrogative proverbs for
affirmation where the certainty or obviousness of a statement is expressed as shown below in
(36):

(36) Oba ń pe ó, O ní ò ń mu gaàrì lówọ, ta ló ni ó? Ta ló lomi tì ó fì ò mu gaàrì?

‘The King wants you, but you say you are eating gaàrí. Who owns you and owns the
water with which you are eating gaàrí?’

The speaker uses the question in (36) above to affirm the truth that no one question
the authority of the king in Yorùbá land. The king owns the land and everything on it.

Another common illocutionary force of rhetorical questions in Yorùbá interrogative
proverbs is the expression of doubt. Consider (37) below.

37. a. Ta ní fì ọbè tò nù jẹ iṣu?

‘Who will confess that it was he who had used a knife before it got lost?’

b. Ejó tò o rò títì láááró tò ó jàre, báwo lo ẹ̀ fẹ rò ọ lálé tò ó jàre?
‘A case you could not win with your pleadings in the morning, how do you hope to win it in the evening?’

From the foregoing, we have been able to show that the question at the end of the Yorùbá interrogative proverbs is rhetorical with illocutionary force like assertion, affirmation, expression of doubt, and creation of comic effect.

Conclusion
This study has been concerned with the re-examination of the structure and functions of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. In the course of this, Yorùbá interrogative sentences and the structures of Yorùbá proverbs are described, and the functions of the proverbs are discussed. It has been shown that the Yorùbá interrogative proverbs have two basic forms which can either be a direct question or declarative discourse preceding an interrogative sentence. The study also shows that these proverbs are rhetorical in nature with illocutionary force like creation of comic effect, expression of doubt, assertion and affirmation.

References:


