Communication in the Yoruba court: reflections from Yoruba video films

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Abstract: The thrust of this paper is that, just like any other society, the Yoruba royal court draws its communication strength from both the verbal and non-verbal codes to govern the citizenry. The paper sheds light on judicious use and insensible use of discourse codes associated with the palace as exhibited in the Yoruba video films, with special emphasis on verbal utterances, symbol-communication and telegraphic codes vis à vis Yoruba traditional governance.

Keywords: Yoruba royal court, discursive codes, symbolic communication, traditional governance.

INTRODUCTION

In any given society, varieties of language emanate from different social groups. These varieties of a specific language give a clear-cut distinction to each of these social groups. For instance, the Received Pronunciation (RP) is associated with the Buckingham palace or the educated English. The RP is thus seen as the language of the noble and the educated elite. Variety in speech is not restricted to the Western world; it is a common phenomenon to any linguistic group, African society inclusive. Let us draw a vivid example from the Yoruba linguistic group of the Western Nigeria. Adebayó Faleti’s (1972) Basórún Gàà is used as the text-guide:

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Akin (Akinkunmi): ... Mo fe tó ojàre.
Agbónyin: O ’o gb’ara oko! “Mo fe sèyó” ni nwón í wí. O j’àiye p’ó o ‘ò sí l’áàfin
Akin: “Mo fe s’èyó”? 
Agbónyin: Hanin. O ‘o mò pe gbogbo nkan l’o ni àdàpè ti’è l’áàfin ní, ...
Akin: ... Bí mo ba wá fe yàgbfe nkó, bawo ni ng o tí wi?
Agbónyin: Mo fe dá’wó tèlè.
Akin: Mo fe dá’wó tèlè.
Agbónyin: Han-in
Akin: Kini nwón tun ndàpè l’aafin o?
Agbónyin: O ‘ò gbódó p’òkèlè; òwè l’o ó pe e “Irun - Sàlákó l’o ó pè e “Idi - Ijoko l’o ó pè e; abfe re: okinni l’o ó pè e

(FALETI, 1972: 38-39)

Akin (Akinkunmi): ... I want to piss now.
Agbónyin: Hear what this uncivilized one is saying! “I want to urinate” is the appropriate expression. You are lucky not to have been in the palace.
Akin: “I want to urinate”? 
Agbónyin: Yes. So you aren’t aware that virtually all things have their euphemistical expressions in the palace?
Akin: What if I want to pass excreta, how do I express myself?
Agbónyin: “I want to squat”.
Akin: I want to squat?
Agbónyin: Yes.
Akin: What are other things that are euphemistically expressed in the palace?
Agbónyin: You should not call “morsel”; bite, is what you should call it “Hair - Sàlákó”1 “Buttocks – seat is what you should call it needle – “okinni”2

The inference drawn from Akinkunmi and Agbónyin discourse is that there is a variety of words associated with the palace. Whosoever is unable to employ the palace diction is regarded as ‘uncivilized’ (ará oko). This implies

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1 Sàlákó - a type of hairdo.
2 Okinni – a name perhaps based on phonaesthetics depicting the smallness of the needle.
that the court uses polished and sophisticated language within. Observably, the Buckingham palace variety of English is deeply hinged on phonetics, whereas the Aláàfin palace as depicted in Adebayó Faleti’s text has its base in lexicology. Thus it stares us in the face that we have ‘register’ that is peculiar to the royal court just like to any other domain. Hence “register” is seen as a “restricted language” (De Beaugrande, 1993: 8).

When in palace, ‘formality’ takes the centre stage; and so no one can afford to be casual. There are set norms and standards, which must be strictly adhered to, if only to avoid royal rage or wrath. In fact, ‘register’ is taken to be a ‘field’. Based on this disparity, different fields exhibit different technical terms (or different verbal codes). This inherent phenomenon makes scholars to regard field as ‘the institutional setting in which a piece of language occurs’ (John Pearce as cited in de Beaugrande, 1993: 12). Perceiving ‘register’ from lexicogrammatical plane solely will exclude some speech items either at morphonological or syntagmatic level. Besides, the register is not elastic enough as to take care of paralinguistic elements in communication. The linguistic elements depend on verbal code (spoken form), or graphic code (written form); whereas the paralinguistic elements flourish on non-verbal code. A common feature to the two codes is being culture bound. Hence, the users of these codes have to mutually share same modes of life or value if any effective communication activity is to take place. Simply put, communication is an interpersonal activity based on mutual sharing of common codes between two or more individuals. This must not exclude ‘the reciprocal relationship’ (feedback) between the communicator and the receiver (Adeleke, 1995: 34).

These two codes are preponderantly featured in communication activity of the Yoruba royal court (just like any others). The effort in this paper is to examine the verbal and non-verbal codes being employed in and by the Yoruba court; their effects and implications on both the ruler (Óba-in-council), and the ruled. It should also be possible to establish the communication ethos prevalent in monarchical governance.

It is a worthy thing that this issue of communication in and by the palace has not escaped the artistic lens of the Yoruba videographers. Some of them who have burdened themselves with different incidents in the royal court employ verbal and non-verbal codes as they related to governance in monarchical system of administration. Therefore, the data are extensively drawn from their productions.
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It is important to state that the two codes – verbal and non-verbal – form the two broad sections in our explication of communication activity in the palace.

**Verbal Code**

Verbal code is realised through the speech form. The form to be used is determined by the situation, the personage involved on either way – the Òba as the ‘speaker’, or the ‘listener’ to the chiefs, the court entertainers (the drummers, the minstrel), the messenger, the town crier). Each of them displays different decorum in communicating with one another.

**The Prosaic Form**

The prosaic form is uttered when homage is being given to the Òba or there is a general discussion on state matter in the palace. To acknowledge the authority and sovereignty of the Òba, his chiefs, the townspeople, and the vassal towns pay homage by making the following utterances either anchored on lexical expression or syntactic expression. Lexical expression involves the use of one word. On the contrary, syntactic expression is in two-fold viz: phrase and sentence. It combines two or more words.

a) Lexical expression
   (1) Kábíyèsí [Your Majesty], or
       [Your Highness]
   (2) Alaṣẹ (Owner of authority)

b) Syntactic expression
   bi) Phrasal expression
       (3) Òkó ìlú (Lord over subjects)
       (4) Iku, bàbá, yeye (Death, Father Mother)
       (5) Olúwaà mi (My Lord)

   bii) Sentential expression
       (7) Ka bí í kò sí (No one dares to question your authority)
       (8) Òba ti i ba lórí ohun gbogbo (The King who has authority over everything)
Káde pe lórí.
Kí bátá pe leṣè.
Kejígàrà išèkè pe lórùn
Kírùkèrè Óba je Ṱù bí okinni.
(Okun Èrù)

May the crown stay on your head for years to come
May the royal shoe march on for years to come
May the royal beads remain on your neck for long
May the king’s horse tail wear off to the level of needle.

All these verbal utterances are firmly immersed in *phatic communication* since the addresser’s endeavour is to establish communion (solidarity) with the Óba. However, courtesy will not allow anyone under the monarch to address him by his personal name except through the above royal nomenclatures. An exception to the rule occurs when his *oríkì* (praise poetry) is being chanted. It is an affront for any person, (his chiefs inclusive) to call a monarch by his name in a face-to-face communication. An instance of this occurs in *Agogo Èèwó*, where the Balogun of Jogbo calls Óba Ónijogbo by his personal name ‘Bòsípò’. Onijogbo sternly warns Balogun since the monarch can decisively deal with any defiant. After all:

Aróbafín lóba á pa
He-who-insults the king shall
Is the one the monarch shall exterminate?

Balogun quickly eats the humble pie as he knows that: *Aṣe lórò Óba* (King’s utterance is ‘law and order’).

Perhaps, this accounts for the reason why an Óba talks less whether at the meeting of Óba-in-council or in the public gathering. As the paramount head he is supposed to be a deft recipient of information so as to be able to respond (feedback) appropriately to the subject (message) of discourse. The monarch therefore relies on surrogate speaker(s) who as a matter of obligation readily acknowledge(s) the phatic expressions. Those who make response on his behalf include his chiefs, the *akigbe* (minstrel) and *ìránsè/oníse* (messenger), *agbópàá* (sceptre bearer). The commonplace response can be:
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(10)  Óba ki ó (The king also salutes you), or
(11)  Óba ni kẹ e pé.
      Óba ni kẹ fikalẹ si í
      (in Iyalode)
      The king wishes you long life
      The king asks you to take your seat.

In 10, the second person singular pronoun ‘ó’ [singular You] is deliberately used so as to show the supremacy of the monarch over that subject who has earlier been the addresser, and has now become the addressee. As for 11, ‘e.’ [plural You] refers to many eminent visitors or vassal chiefs who have come to either pay annual tributes or grace a state ceremony like ‘Ódun Èlà/Ilasu (yam festival) as highlighted in Ódun Èlà, and Awísẹ respectively.

It is important to state that there are occasions when the Oba personally acknowledges the phatic communication of his chiefs. He does this by addressing each of these chiefs by their traditional titles such as: Ótún, Òsì, Asípa, Balógun, Iyalode (the only female chief in council), Seríkí Ele monà, Aró, Òdòfin. These titles vary from one town to other, the numerical strength also differs. The monarch can employ metonym ‘ìlú’ (town) to refer to them collectively. He can decide to address them as ilúmoyè (chiefs in town).

The syntactic expression features prominently when the Óba has to adjudicate [on land matter, chieftaincy tussle, etc.], or when it is his burden to offer iwúre (prayer or benediction); or declare war on enemy town. A vivid illustration is given in Ajagùnà. Óba Onílarí passes death sentence on Akin (his co-rival) who will not allow Adejókè to consent to his marriage proposal:

(12)  Ègbe ómó oloriburuku yií ló sí ìta baba rẹ, kẹ e tojú
      è yódà ke e tèyin rẹ kí í wọ ó.
      Take this worthless being to his paternal compound.
      There and then execute him with the sword.

(13)  Àt ‘Adejókè, àtoyún ìnú rẹ
      Mo gbèṣè le e.
      I seize in confiscations Adejókè with the foetus
      in her womb.
The orders given by the Óba are carried out with precision. We may need to recall example 8, above to affirm the unlimited powers that had been displayed by traditional rulers in the past.3

INFORMATIVE AND NON-INFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION

‘Informative’ means “meaningful to the receiver” (LYNOS, 1977: 53). Anyway, not all communication is informative, especially when the information is stale or a commonplace knowledge.

In the royal court the akígbe can engage in non-informative communication especially if he is preoccupied with intent to entertain the royal court or the public. He makes recourse to poetic form, where he has the artistic license to trade in propagandistic language. We should not forget that propaganda is inherent in communication activity.

When in public ceremony the court minstrel strives to give a tasteful and impressive performance. He eulogizes the Óba by chanting his lineage orikí or by creating humour. An example from Abóre video film will do:

Akígbe: Yânbi-n-lólú
           Tè e je je
           Jeje ní wón têlê n Ikôyí ile
           Bi wón pe iwó nî
           Iwó nî o
           Iwó nî báalà
           Óba òkè lo dirì ëwà fákukó
           Aṣó mé ta là á da láye
           È bì mi pe, írú aṣó kín nî

Awón Ara ìlú: Aṣó kín nî

Akígbe:  Àkókó -
           Irun dúdú ori

3 Aláàfin Ayibi asked Tétù (executioner) to fetch the heads of his father and in-law and mother in-law, because their daughter had jocularly insulted him when having his bath, “and this is all of the man so much dreaded by all!” (JOHNSON, 2001: 172-173).
Ni wón pe lásó dúdú
Àṣeṣeyewú lèkukó lālā,  
Igbà tewú ba gborí tán  
Ní wón pè lālā fun  
O ò da ti ẹ o tó ló  
Ohun tó fi sóókó ńó móge  
Ómò aráye ọ ni gbàà lówó rè

Minstrel:  Yán bí-n-lolú  
Walk with characteristic gaits  
For so they walk at Ikoyi fortress  
If they say you are the one  
Yes, you are  
You are the father of immaculate linen  
God of the high-heaven  
Designs the beautiful comb for the cock  
Three garments are adorned on terrestrial plane  
You ask me: What these garments are?

Townspeople: What are these garments?

Minstrel:  First one –  
‘Tis the dark hair  
That is called the black velvet  
The-initial-appearance-of grey hair  
Defaces the immaculate linen  
When the grey hair is fully blossomed  
Then it is called the immaculate linen  
You shall possess yours before departure  
The symbol that makes you manly to your mistresses  
May the evil doers deprive you not of it.

Aside from allowing the townspeople to share from court entertainment, the minstrel employs the first person singular pronominal ‘Ìwó’ (You), which even highly placed chiefs, dare not use for the monarch. This confirms the poetic immunity being enjoyed by the oral artiste:
The monarch does not hang the minstrel
This is analogous to the freedom being enjoyed by the press.  

The excerpt also reveals the existence of spontaneous feedback, which is crucial in any interpersonal communication especially in a face-to-face situation. The akígbe is able to draw the townspeople’s attention. However, he has not passed any informative message as such.

As regards informative communication, both akígbe and Awo/Awiṣe (the Ifa priest) are obliged to pass informative messages to Obá-in-council on affairs of the state. The minstrel has to be acknowledged as a great resource material of the culture, history and tradition. He is a ‘rememberer’/’reminder’ who refreshes the memory of the Obá-in-council (OSUNDARE, 1987: 134-167). Thus the minstrel can be regarded as the information officer or information agency. The akígbe alludes to the distant past with easy either to (i) pinpoint to antecedents or (ii) show mythological implications of defiling the customary rites of the town. Akígbe can subtly chide the monarch without being gagged. The concrete examples are featured in Ogedengbe, Ódun Èla, and Sàngó video films. We may need to add that akigbe ushers in visitors to the court with praise poetry, and bids them goodbye the same way. He may also be considered as image-maker of the palace.

Apart from akigbe, there exists another information officer in person of akède Obà or alagogo Obà (the town crier). Olaoba (2001) sees the akède Obà as “the envoy”, “liaison official” between the ruler and the ruled and as “the public relations officer (PRO)”. I further consider the akède Obà as the ‘itinerant information officer” whose main duty is to disseminate information bothering on “political, economic and social announcements (OLAOBA, 2001: 7) round all the quarters in that town. He delivers the piece of information couched by the Obá-in-council in his own language. He thus becomes the channel of communication between the palace and the townspeople. Let us take an instance from Èkùró Olójà:

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4 The press freely employs personal names of heads of government, presidents of countries with or without the appropriate titles.
Akede Oba: (Lu agogo lemèta ní idágbandágbá awón ara ilú ladùúgbo roó jáde)

Akede Oba: Àgò ókùnrin
   Àgò obùnrin
   Àgò onîle
   Ago àlejo
   E bó síhàhín
   Kẹ e wa gbó’un t’ón wi o
   (Iró agogo)

Akede Oba: Ètò ìlú yìí,
   Ò tún ti de lákò tun o
   Ohun lo je k’áwón ìgògbà kan sóríjó
   Wón ní gbogbo ídile
   Tómó óba bá tó sí
   Ko fí asoju kóókan ranṣe saafín
   Nijó márùn-ún oní.
   (Ìdánudúró díè
   Mo wí í re
   Àbí n wí í re

Awp n Ara ilu: O wí i re.

   The town crier: (Strikes the gong thrice, at an interval between each strike).
   The town crier: I hail the males
   I hail the females
   I hail the citizens
   I hail the denizens
   You should all converge here
   So as to listen to what they have proclaimed
   (The strike of the gong for the second time)
   The town crier: The political organization of this town
   Has been rejuvenated now
   That is why the Chiefs have decreed
   That all the families
   Who have rights to the throne
   Should send a representative each to
   The palace in five days’ time.
   Have I passed a good news or I have not

Townspeople: You have passed a good news
The function of the gong, an object metal, being carried by the akede Oba is in twofold: (i) the insignia of his office; and the speech surrogate. The gong as the insignia of office gives the royal imprimatur to his message. The speech enables him to draw and gain the attention of the townspeople within the precincts of the quarters he is. Attention gaining is crucial to public announcement especially when it bothers on issue of governance. The shrillness of the gong can be heard at a far distance than the human voice which has its limits.

The perennial problem with akede Oba’s message is occurrence of noise. The noise refers to interference arising from semantics or inherent ambiguity in language. For instance, the town crier in Ekuró Òlója beats the gong on three occasions, when it ought to be just two occasions. The striking of the gong is a form of signature tunes that connotes ‘converge’ (that is, the opening beat) or ‘depart’ (that is the closing beat).

Every aspect of Yoruba appears to have religious undertone. The palace greatly thrives in this. The monarch reveres and cherishes his ancestors as he believes that with the support of òkú órún (the departed) or the ‘Alálè’ ‘Onilè’ or ‘Alešekù (the pristine head) he would be able to govern and enlist the loyalty of his subjects. Ibitokun (1995: 22) affirms; “The ancestral is the measure of the Yoruba past”. It behoves the Oba to establish ‘cosmic harmony’ between the physical and metaphysical planes Traore (1972: 64). To achieve this, Ifa is consulted. The Ifa priest known as ‘Awo’ or Àwise’ or ‘Arubà’ is the surrogate of Órunmìlà. He casts the ‘ópèlé (divination chain) or throws ‘owo eyó’ (cowries) to know what the problem or issue is and what step to take to resolve it. Cosmic communication is therefore resorted to. The Órunmìlà surrogate (Awo) makes cosmic communion possible between the ancestors (the past), gods (the eternal) and the unborn (the future). This is a common phenomenon in a terrestrial-based culture like the Yoruba where ‘gods and mortals freely interact’ (Ibítokun, 1995: 22). Through Ifá divination, the community is able to reassess, redefine and perhaps recreate its values.

Virtually all the Oba in the video films viewed have one thing or the other to consult Órunmìlà (the all seen) for. This goes to show the importance of Órunmìlà (or the oracle) in traditional Yoruba governance. This cannot be underscored. In fact, Órùnmìlà can be regarded as the precursor of the ‘akewi-tayese’ (He-who-chants-valuable-lines-that-reshape the world) (Olabimtan,
1986: 65). Before the Awo casts his ‘ópele’ he would persuasively implore Orunmìlà to give a point blank message. Let us consider the excerpts below drawn from Kòtò Aye:

Awo: O gbó Ifá
Ma fire pebí
Ma fíbi pere
Ma fölòlò fohùn
Ise t’Olódùmarè ba ran ó
Ni kó ó je
Iwájú ópòn
E2ṣýin ópòn
Olùmú òtún
Olùkànrán òṣì

You all know Ifá
Never swap good with evil
Never swap evil with good
Never exhibit apprehension in passing the message
The message couched by Olódùmarè through you.
Should be the one you deliver
Hail to you the fore of the divination tray
Hail to you the back of the divination tray
He-who-strides-to-the right uninhibited
He-who-strides-to-the left uninhibited.

After the preambles, the Awo then throws the sixteen cowries (owó eyó) or the òpèlè (the divination chain) to know the type of Odu (category of Ifa divination poetry) that has appeared on tray. In Arèmò Olókùnesin, the chiefs ask Araba to consult Ifa to know who will succeed the late Òba Adenrele. Òdu Ṣyékúkúwòrí appears on the Ifa tray and it runs thus:

Be-n-be
Awo bẹ-n-bẹ
Bi-n-bi
Awo bì-n-bì
Àsáke lè bè
Òde lè bè
Óyèkú ṣe bàwòrì
Ló difá fún Órùnmilà
Njọ́ tó fè rè e ba wón bè ninu ógbun.

You-take-a-leap-and-I-take-a-leap
Was the Ifa priest of you-take-a-leap-and-I-take-a-leap
You-take-a-plunge-and-I-take-a-plunge
The hawk was able to take a leap
The dove was able to take a leap
Óyèkú fraternized with Òwòrì
Ifa divination was performed for Órùnmilà
The day he was to take a plunge into the valley
[with some others]

After this poetic rendition of the Ifa verse Araba resorts to the layman language to interpret Órùnmilà’s message to the chiefs. He informs the chiefs that Ifa rejects Adewumi, whom everybody has been eyeing as the heir apparent. He warns the chiefs not to ignore Ifa’s message for:

Ifa è e puró o
Òpele ı ọseke

Ifa does not lie
Òpele does not trade in treachery

All the chiefs agree, but Olori Motólani, Adewumi’s mother strives to constitute herself to a mechanical noise in this cosmic communication. She believes that:

Ohùn Ifá ni ohùn Àràbà
Àràbà ni ohùn Ifá
Ifa’s voice is Araba’s voice
Araba’s voice is Ifa’s voice

Perhaps Araba has to be induced with money or other valuable materials, so as to make him interfere with ifa’s message. Araba is firmed on Ifa decision in spite of this mechanical noise. It is imperative to say that many a priest has had cause to manipulate Ifa’s “voice” to satisfy a specific group interest after material or financial inducement. After all a Yoruba saying attests that:

Ómóde ò jobi
Agbà ò joye
‘Tis failure to induce the youth with material lots
That accounts for the elder’s failure to secure the chieftaincy title.

Twisting of Ifa’s message has precipitated chaos. Ounjë Oluwa highlights such an incident. The gods vent their anger on the Òba-in-council and the townspeople. The non-indigenes have to flee Kajóla, the cursed town. In sum, cosmic communication is fundamental to monarchical government. It cannot be undermined.

Non-verbal Code

The palace also makes excessive use of non-verbal code in communication. It is a ubiquitous code in the royal court as it compliments verbal expressions. As earlier noted the Òba responds to phatic communication through his surrogates – the chiefs, the messenger. Since he is no robot, he usually waves his royal horsetail to the guests or the chiefs who have paid due homage as a mark of honour to him. When homage is being given to the Òba the male guest is to prostrate full length with his (guest’s) cap off his head. But the female guest is expected to kneel, then bow until her forehead is on the ground. She may even roll on the ground like her male counterpart will do just to show obeisance.

The non-verbal communication in the palace can be classified into: symbol-object communication, kinesic communication, and telegraphic communication.
There are many royal paraphernalia which the monarch utilizes for communicative purposes; viz.: ade (crown), òpá àse (sceptre), ópa (walking stick), àkún (chieftaincy beads), ìgbá ìwa (sacred calabash). All these royal materials are capable of being used as àrokò (symbol-object) (Morgan n.d., Òpadótun 1986; Ogundeji 1997). Symbol communication becomes valuable when the monarch is not and cannot be physically present to execute an order. He then depends on his royal paraphernalia. The monarch can summon and arrest anybody by sending his personal effects such as àkún or ópa aše. The townspeople take the Òba’s insignia of office as being the person of Òba to the extent that people accord ikò/òjís.e (courier) respect and honour due to Òba, if he were to be physically present (OJO, 1966: 75). Implicitly, a human agent is required in ‘àrokò’ symbol-communication system (OGUNDEJI, 1997: 145). Typical examples are present in Ayángalú. Even, the executioner at verge of carrying out the judicial order can be stopped. If the ópa aše or ìrùkè.rè (or both) is/or are placed on the neck of the condemned culprit, the axe of the executioner would have to wait for another day. As highlighted in Ejò Orí Apáta, Fodeṣó benefits from aroko symbol-object communication as his life is saved by mere placement of ‘ìrùkè.rè’ and ópa aše.

“Igbá ìwà” is an ominous symbol and it is rarely employed in court communication as it connotes death or suicide for the monarch. When an Òba has perpetrated atrocities to the extent of being rejected by his people, he is advised to ‘open the sacred calabash (s ́ igbá ìwà) as no being can have the effrontery to hang or execute a king. The reason for this is not far to seek. An Òba is the visible symbol of deity among the Yorubas (OJO, 1966: 75). Therefore, ‘it is an unthinkable horror among the Yorubas for any man to lay hands upon a being regarded sacred’ (JOHNSON, 2001: 173). On rejection from exalted position by all and sundry on account of atrocities perpetrated by him, he is advised to fetch ‘igba ìwà’.

The placement of royal paraphernalia, such as ‘ade’ ‘ópa’ ‘ìrùkè.rè’, and ‘òpá aṣe on the throne or royal seat, indicates the period of interregnum in the life of that community. The display of these royal effects makes the deliberation and decisions taken by the chiefs valid since these royal insignia denote the physical presence of the monarch. This is a common feature in any Yoruba
community that regency is alien to. The most senior chief can then stand in as the head of the meeting. The town of Kajóla in Óúnje. Olúwa has such an experience.

**Kinesic Communication**

Kinesics manifests itself in royal court communication through the offering of ‘òsùba’ (skilful locking of two palms), ‘dí e.ṣẹ óba mu’ (embracer of the monarch feet), ‘dípómú’ (pillar embracer). The use of ‘osubà’ can mean ‘ìtúbá, (apology) or acknowledgement of the supremacy of the monarch. The embracement of either the monarch feet or the pillar of aafin is synonymous with refuge seeking from the monarch in the palace. In *Ti Oluwa ni ile*, Ótún has to hold on to Òba Apátira’s feet since he wants his protection from imminent danger of death.

**Telegraphic Communication**

The drummers, trumpeters and flutist in the palace send telegraphic messages to the monarch who seldom appears in public unless there is an official function or religious rites to perform. Almost four decades ago, Professor G. J. A. Ojo captures the communicative functions of these musical artists in the ancient Yoruba palace:

> They in fact gave the Òba signal-tunes at appropriate time for him to rise or perform some action. Using the talking drums, the drummers passed on messages to the Òba informing him of every important happening, in and around the open courtyard, worthy of his knowledge and attention. Thus, Òba staying most of the time in the inner recesses of the palace was kept informed by their telegraphic messages of the events outside his direct observation.

*(OJO, 1966: 73-74)*

This is even prevalent till date in some Yoruba palaces, such as Afin Alaafin Òyó.

*Ogedengbe, Sango, Saworoide* films vividly highlight all these communicative functions. These various musical ensembles include – dundun
(a membranophonous instrument); and *kakàkí* (trumpet) *fèrè* (flute) (aerophonous instruments).

It is important to say that the royal court also sends telegraphic message to townsfolk via the membranophonous instrument known as ‘*gbèdù*’ (sacred drum) announcing the passing away of the monarch. Its beat is only heard at the deep of night or dawn. Through this, the townspeople are aware of interregnum.

We may compare the use of telegraphic communication in the palace to the use of modern day intercommunication in offices.

**Conclusion**

My discussion so far on communication has revealed that the Yoruba royal court has its own communication network, which is germane to effective administration and successful governance. The royal court draws its communication strength from both the verbal and non-verbal codes. The verbal code draws attention to fundamental elements in the communication model: addresser, message, addressee channel, noise and feedback. It is obvious that the ruled as a matter of obligation and rule have to employ honorific pronouns and pronominals for the king so as to accord him the royal homage attached to his office, while the ruler who usually answers through a surrogate uses non-honorific pronouns in order to show his monarchical superiority. However, the minstrel, who trades in propagandistic utterances, has the licence to call the oba by his name when engaged in eulogy, and can even caution the king when he feels he is transgressing. In other words the oba’s surrogates play the role of image maker, liaison official and information officer as exemplified in the activities of the town crier and the drummer respectively (telegraphic codes at work).

With regard to the non-verbal code, it highlights the following communicative elements: symbol-communication, kinesic communication, and telegraphic codes. The semiotic representation of the oba through his paraphernalia is also highlighted with premium given to elements such as human and non-human agents, courier, and speech surrogates (musical instruments). The study has shown that judicious use of communication in the royal court may bring about good governance, while its improper use may lead to
insurrection, more so in a pre-literate society, where communication has its base in verbal and non-verbal code. This goes to confirm that, there exist symbiotic relationship between communication and governance in a traditional African setting, like the Yoruba community of Western Nigeria.

Resumo: O foco deste trabalho é que, como qualquer outra sociedade, a corte real ioruba extrai sua força de comunicação tanto de códigos verbais quanto de códigos não-verbais, para assim governar seus cidadãos. O trabalho elucida o uso criterioso e inconsciente dos códigos discursivos associados ao palácio (associados à corte) como exibido no vídeo/filme ioruba, com ênfase especial nos enunciados verbais, comunicação simbólica e códigos telegráficos confrontados com o modo de governo tradicional ioruba.

Palavras-chave: corte ioruba, códigos discursivos, comunicação simbólica, governo tradicional.

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