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## NON-VERBAL CUES AS DISCOURSE STRATEGY IN SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*

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### Abstract

This article examined Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* from a non-verbal communication perspective. The purpose was to demonstrate how non-verbal elements have aided the conveyance of meanings in the dramatic text. Excerpts that had ample use of non-verbal cues were purposively selected. The analysis employed the conceptual framework of non-verbal communication. The non-verbal cues identified were kinesics, to indicate support, unveil mental state and reveal thought process; haptics, to depict relationships, express disapproval and assign task; proxemics, to accord reverence, symbolise acceptance and indicate diffidence; chronemics, to reveal characters' roles, indicate urgency and highlight dominance in social relationships, and physical appearance, to determine cultural background, social status and ideological belief. These non-verbal cues reinforce verbal messages and communicate much non-verbal information about the characters and their roles. The study concluded that non-verbal communication is a powerful tool which the playwright manipulates successfully in achieving socio-cultural, ideological and contextual meanings in the dramatic piece. An appropriate interpretation of these non-verbal cues will aid the comprehension of meanings expressed in dramatic discourse.

**Keywords:** chronemics, dramatic discourse, haptics, kinesics, proxemics

### 1. Introduction

Wole Soyinka is, undoubtedly, one of the most renowned and revered literary icons in Nigeria and Africa who has traversed all genres of literature with creativity and innovation. His artistic productions, which have received scholarly attention globally, have been studied from varied standpoints by numerous scholars from diverse disciplines. Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (henceforth, *DKH*), a ritual dramatic discourse founded on oral tradition and the culture of the Yoruba antiquity, has been extensively studied over the years. It is conceivably the most polemical of all the theatrical works of his (Gibbs, 1977). This is perhaps so due to its complicated theatrical form, distinctive poetry and linguistic amalgam (Dasylva, 2004: 266). The central concerns of *DKH* include mystery and ritual of Yoruba life, clash of ideological belief, betrayal of trust, and death and transition. The mechanism for communication is both verbal and non-verbal and Soyinka exploits both media successfully to achieve socio-cultural, ideological and contextual meaning in the dramatic piece. This paper

examines Soyinka's *DKH* from non-verbal communication perspective with a view to demonstrating how non-verbal cues have aided the conveyance of meanings in the dramatic text.

Communication, as used above, involves the synchronised efforts of interlocutors. It is a dynamic and an interpersonal process which serves as the basis for our existence in life. We construct meaning by sharing our views and ideas with other people through the use of language. Atolagbe (2004: 180) observes that communication comprises the verbal and non-verbal aspects, with the former being expressed through linguistic means and the latter through non-linguistic means. According to Knapp and Hall (2002), non-verbal communication, which is the focus of this article, involves the use of non-linguistic cues in sending and receiving messages. Okesipe & Okolo (2013) classify non-verbal communication into eight subcategories comprising kinesics, proxemics, paralinguistics, haptics, chronemics, artifacts, physical appearance, environment and color. We examine each of these non-verbal cues one after the other.

Kinesics, otherwise known as body

language, is the utilisation of body posture, body movement, gestures, facial expression, and eye contact in conveying messages (Okesipe & Okolo, 2013: 24). Facial expression conveys attitudes and feelings such as satisfaction, astonishment, fright, sorrow, resentment, revulsion or disapproval during social interaction (Argyle, 1988). The use of eye contact in conversation performs the function of accepting or disregarding the presence of others and can disclose information about attitudes and power relation in interpersonal relationships (Webbink, 1986). As regard gesture and body posture, Goldman (1994) observes that both reveal a person's cognition and regulate communication. To corroborate Goldman's submission, Lewis (1998) opines that posture aids in conveying assurance, alertness, and interest. Also, it assists in determining the amount of attention or participation, the distinction in rank between speakers and the level of affection a speaker has for the other speaker. Finally, body language may uncover the state of mind of speakers in communication context.

Proxemics refers to the physical space and distance observed between communicators during conversation. Argyle (1988) categorises space into personal and territorial space. He notes that the former indicates the space a speaker retains on every side in a communication context while the latter refers to that which he maintains for confidentiality. Space in non-verbal communication may be divided into four main categories, namely: intimate, social, personal, and public space (Okesipe & Okolo, 2013: 24). It is important to state that the space or distance maintained by speakers and listeners during interactions can influence how a message is construed.

Next to proxemics is haptics. This refers to communication through the use of touch. As one of the elements of non-verbal communication, touch is employed in social relationships to convey physical intimacy between communicators. The sense of touch is vital to human communication as it indicates intimacy and conveys approval or disapproval. In fact, Harris (2002) notes that touch can be employed by communicators to indicate support and as well

exchange compliments in social relationships.

However, paralanguage, otherwise known as, paralinguistic cues relate to the "qualities of voice such as pitch, rate, volume as well as pause and silence" (Okesipe & Okolo, 2013: 25). These paralinguistic cues augment verbal messages, uncover the characteristics of the speaker or speech and disclose his disposition, social class and origin. They also indicate whether an utterance is a statement, a question, or a command or whether the speaker is being sarcastic; such clues also highlight emphasise, contrast, and focus.

Chronemics refers to the use of time in communication. Time perception plays an indispensable role in the non-verbal communication process. The way a person utilises time can convey much non-verbal message about him or her (Knap and Hall, 2002). Our perception of time regulates how we organise our programme and stick to it. Stringent observance of time in daily routine may depict a person as disciplined, methodical and experienced while the opposite may give a damaging image (Okesipe & Okolo, 2013: 25). From the foregoing, details of chronemics may give impressions about how people act or conduct themselves.

Physical appearance involves the use mien, dressing and bodily attractiveness for identification and evaluation (Richmond and McCrosky, 2004). It influences the impression we create about others and equally assists in assessing their trustworthiness (Hickson III and Stacks, 1999). A person's garb can communicate much non-verbal message about his personality. Environment on the other hand can also communicate messages. For example, the neatness and ambience of one's environment can convey a message to others about his or her social status in the society.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that non-verbal cues perform an array of functions in communication. They communicate feelings, build and sustain interpersonal relationships as well as assist in communication (Argyle, 1988). Also, non-verbal cues "reinforce speech, evaluate people, regulate behaviour, express emotions" and reveal aspects of

interpersonal relationship that speech may not appropriately reveal (Okesipe & Okolo, 2013: 26).

## 2. Literature Review

Many linguistic studies have been conducted on Soyinka's *DKH*. Odebode (2005) examined Soyinka's *DKH* from a Pragma-sociolinguistic perspective with a view to understanding the playwright's use of names and nicknames. Aremu (2008) investigated the pragmatic presuppositions in the use of proverbs in the same text. Though both studies are germane to the present one, they, however, differ in that they focused on the playwright's exploitation of verbal means in conveying messages while ours is on the non-verbal means.

The main thrust of Odebumi, Oloyede & Adetunji's (2010) paper was to explore proverbs in Soyinka's *DKH* from a pragmatic standpoint. The study, which adopted Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory, analysed fifty-seven proverbs purposively selected from the text. The findings revealed that proverbs used in the text contained eight praxs, namely: encouraging, assuring, scolding, justifying, persuading, challenging, praising and warning. These praxs were marked with the pragmatic tools of metaphor, shared situational knowledge, relevance, inference and establishing reference.

Melefa & Chukwumezie (2014) evoked proverbs as strategies of conveying meanings in Soyinka's *DKH*. Their study found that Soyinka's use of proverbs contained the pragmatic acts of counseling, cautioning, challenging, accusing and unveiling. These pragmatic acts were performed with crisis-motivated proverbs and employed by characters to reinforce the force of dramatic action.

Aremu (2015) made conscious effort to explore Nigerianisms in the English language usage in Soyinka's *DKH*. The study employed Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts in analysing 40 utterances purposively selected from the text. The analysis indicated that Nigerianisms employed in the play fell within the contexts of language transfer, lexical borrowing, proverbs, metaphors, pidgin, symbolism, reference, inference and shared situational knowledge.

Odebode (2016), in his own attempt to study Soyinka as a writer, explored *DKH* from an ethnography of communication's point of view. The study showed that the playwright infuses his plays with onomastic sensibility such that the names reflect different sociocultural backgrounds. The paper further revealed that conversation genre is a major tool exploited by Soyinka to exercise his naming power over his characters. It submitted that names are identity markers that depend on established conventions.

The contributions of the foregoing literature are plausible and relevant to the present study because they offer us insights into the quality and depth of research that has been conducted on the text. While the reviewed studies were geared towards dissecting Soyinka's *DKH* from the perspective of verbal communication, our focus is from the non-verbal aspect of communication. The choice of *DKH* as the data for this study is hinged on the strategic manner in which Soyinka employed non-linguistic cues in projecting his thematic preoccupations, characterisation, and events in the play.

## 3. Methodology

Data for this study comprised excerpts sourced from Soyinka's *DKH*. Excerpts that had sufficient use of non-verbal cues were purposively selected. The analysis employed the conceptual framework of non-verbal communication. The data were examined and subjected to analysis using non-verbal communication conventions which specified the subcategories of non-verbal communication as: kinesics, haptics, chronemics, proxemics, paralanguage, clothing, environment, physical appearance and color. The study examined the data via the subcategories of kinesics, haptics, proxemics, chronemics and physical appearance in order to determine how they have aided the conveyance of messages in the dramatic text.

## 4. Discussion of Non-verbal Cues in Soyinka's *DKH*

The categories of non-verbal communication studied are kinesics, haptics, proxemics, chronemics and physical appearance. They are examined in relation to the message they convey in the dramatic text. For emphasis, the non-verbal elements in the excerpts used for this discussion

are italicised.

#### 4.1 Kinesics

This is one of the prominent non-verbal cues used in *DKH*. Characters utilise various parts of the body to communicate messages during social interaction. Two aspects of kinesics examined here are: facial expressions and body language.

##### 4.1.1 Facial expressions

The facial expression of characters in *DKH* changes continuously during interaction and this helps to unveil their thoughts and feelings. One aspect of facial expression examined is the use of smile. As a vital part of kinesics, smiles are visible and also “representative of emotional reaction” (Adesina & Ruth, 2015: 16). An instance of the use of smile in the play is captured below:

“PRAISE –SINGER: (*smiling*):  
Elesin’s riddles are not merely the nut  
in the kernel that breaks the human  
teeth...” (*DKH*, p. 11)

The excerpt above is a conversation between the Praise-singer and Elesin Oba. It occurs in Act 1 of the play where the theme of mystery and ritual of Yoruba life is projected. The king has just passed on, and Elesin Oba, the king’s horseman and one of the high ranking chiefs, is expected by tradition to accompany him to the afterlife through a ritual sacrifice. Here, Elesin is at the marketplace to say goodbye to the women. He is accompanied by the Praise-Singer and a drummer. The Praise-Singer is a companion to Elesin. He is one of the characters who employ kinesic markers in interacting with other characters. Jenkins & Parra (2003) observe that smiling as a kinesic act is related to emotional feeling of happiness, interest and trust. Hence, the use of smiling in this excerpt is indicative of the Praise-Singer’s delight and interest. He is delighted for being a companion to Elesin and also interested in supporting Elesin’s course which is to perform the ritual sacrifice. From the verbal exchanges between the duo, it can be maintained that both interlocutors are strongly in support of the tradition of ritual sacrifice. Another example which portrays the use of facial expression is cited below:

“ELESIN (*exasperated*): Must you  
be so blunt? (Recovers.)

Well, weave your shrouds, but let  
the fingers of my bride seal my  
eyelids with earth and wash my  
body” (p. 23).

There is evidence of the use of kinesics to contribute to interaction in the above excerpt which is a rejoinder from Elesin Oba to Iyaloja. Elesin spots a beautiful damsel and desires to have her, despite the fact that she is engaged to another. Realising that this might cause distraction for him, he is reprimanded by Iyaloja to focus on the critical task ahead of him and avoid distraction in order not to fail in the performance of his duty to his race. Here, the word, *exasperation*, within the context of the text is suggestive of Elesin’s emotional state (Argyle, 1988). It indicates that he is depressed and bitter towards Iyaloja owing to her advice. His depression and resentment is further captured in his response to her as seen in the verbal expression *...must you be so blunt?* Aside from revealing Elesin Oba’s mental state, the kinesic act also shows that the relationship between both interlocutors is no longer cordial.

Further use of kinesics markers is observed in Act 11 of the play where the District Officer, Simon Pilkings and his wife, Jane Pilkings are seen dancing vigorously. The following quoted piece is a conversation between Pilkings and Sergeant Amusa.

“PILKINGS (*roars*): Now! Amusa  
*switches his gaze* to the ceiling  
suddenly, remains mute” (p. 25).

Pilkings and Sergeant Amusa perform some kinesic acts in the above dialogue. Amusa arrives at the residence of Simon Pilkings to deliver an important message. He is frightened seeing Pilkings and Jane in *egungun* costume, an ancestral mask belonging to a dead cult. Realising that the ancestral mask is being desecrated by the couple; Amusa withdraws his attention from their direction. He refuses to speak to them owing to their cultural insensitivity which is the reason for the ancestral mask being desecrated. For this reason, Pilkings roars at him. Roaring, as employed here is used to depict Pilkings’ mental state of frustration and displeasure in relation to Amusa’s refusal to state the purpose of his visit. However, another case of

kinesics is switching of gaze and is observed in the same text. It is indicative of Amusa's disapproval and defiance. Despite Pilkings' reaction, Amusa still maintains his stance not to reveal the purpose of his visit. This is seen in the way he withdrew his attention from Pilkings by gazing at the ceiling to avoid further communication between them.

#### 4.1.2 Body Language

In *DKH*, body language functions to complement the meaning that is communicated in verbal utterances. Consider the below excerpt:

"YALOJA: It does not bear thinking. If we offend you now have mortified the gods. We offend heaven itself. Father of us all, tell us where we went astray. (She *kneels*, the other women follow" (p. 16).

What is observable in this dialogue is the use of kneeling to express reverence and appeasement. The excerpt relays the theme of death and transition. Elesin speaks of his preparedness for death and adds that life is an honour which terminates when honour does. However, he is offended on hearing the women say that they know him for a man of honour. The kinesic marker of kneeling signifies Iyaloja's and the women's reverence for Elesin Oba. Also, it is indicative of their contrition and appeasement of Elesin Oba who they consider as one of the high ranking chiefs in the land.

The women in *DKH* are also seen to utilise body posture during their conversation exchanges. An example of this use is presented below where the theme of ideological clash is foregrounded:

"Woman (makes a quick tug at the constable's baton): That doesn't fool anyone you know. It's the one you carry under your government knickers that counts. (She *bends low* as if to peep under the baggy shorts. The embarrassed constable quickly puts his knees together" (p. 34)

This is an excerpt from Act 111 of the play. It is a conversation between the women and Sergeant Amusa. Both interlocutors represent two groups with differing ideological beliefs. Amusa and the constables arrive at the marketplace to disrupt the

ritual sacrifice but are hindered by the women and girls who are disconcerted due to the efforts being made by the Sergeant and his two constables to preclude the ritual sacrifice. What is interesting in this text is the kinesic act of bending low. It conveys the women's mockery and abhorrence for the constables, and by extension, the Western methods of disregarding African traditions. The next example illustrates Sergeant Amusa's use of body posture in the play.

"AMUSA: (Stammers badly and *points a shaky finger* at his dress): Mista Pirinkin... Mista Pirikin. (p. 24)

In this excerpt involving Sergeant Amusa and Simon Pilkings, the use of kinesics particularly enriched the discourse. Sergeant Amusa utilises kinesic marker of pointing a shaky finger at Mr. Pilkings' dress to complement his verbal message. The use of this kinesic marker indicates that he is nervous and very frightened seeing Pilkings and Jane in *Egungun* costume. Thus, Sergeant Amusa expresses fright by pointing a shaky finger at the costume, considering that it is forbidden for non members of the cult to touch or wear it. This is a way of demonstrating that it is an abomination for non members of the cult to touch or wear the costume. From the analysis of kinesics, it evident that facial expression and body language are powerful tools utilised to unveil characters' emotional state, interest, reverence, contrition and appeasement.

#### 4.2 Haptics

Characters in *DKH* employ haptics, that is, the use of touch to determine relationships, reveal culture, indicate pacification, approval or disapproval and assert authority. The following excerpts illustrate these uses.

"Jane gets up and *throws her arms around his neck*. Kisses him" (p. 27).

Haptics marker is evident in the above excerpt which features a dialogue between Mr. Simon Pilkings and his wife, Jane. The subject of discourse between both interlocutors centres on the content of Sergeant Amusa's report. The divergent views advocated by both interlocutors resulted in a heated argument which made Pilkings upset. This necessitates the choice of the

haptics marker deployed by Jane to pacify Pilkings. The pacification is exemplified by Jane throwing her arms around Pilkings' neck and kissing him. Through this act, the theme of Western values is projected. Besides this role, the use of haptics is symbolic of the familiarity or fondness that exists between both interlocutors who are marriage partners. It also reveals their culture and values. Another case of haptics is observed in the following excerpt where the theme of conflict between the Yoruba tradition and the Western methods is captured:

“With a sudden movement they  
*snatch the batons* of the two  
constables... and *knock off their hats*”  
(p.37)

Amusa and the constables are at the marketplace to apprehend Elesin for his intention to commit ritual suicide. Discerning the purpose of their visit, the women attempt to prevent them from having access to Elesin. While both parties pull each other forcefully, several young girls emerge and begin to intimidate Amusa and the constables. The girls perform some haptic acts in this text by snatching the batons of the two constables and knocking off their hats. The use of haptic here denotes clash between two opposing ideologies, that is, between Western methods and African tradition. More so, touch, as used by the girls, serves to humiliate and disapprove of the two constables who are representative of the Western methods. Aside from the use of haptics to project ideological clash, it also connotes acceptance and approval as cited below:

“Jane: Welcome home. She holds out  
her hand. As he takes it, footsteps are  
heard approaching the drive” (p.57).

Olunde, who has just returned from England, visits Jane with the intention of speaking with Mr. Simon Pilkings regarding the incarceration of his father, Elesin Oba. The haptics marker can be seen in *...Jane holds out her hand and Olunde takes it* (57). This implies approval and acceptance. Having spent four years of study in England, Jane believes that Olunde must have been refined and thus, is free from the barbaric custom practised by his people. This is why she welcomes him here. Another significant use of haptics is noticeable in the following excerpt:

“Pilkings: (*takes him to one side*):  
Listen Bob, that cellar in the disused  
annexe of the Residency, you know,  
where the slaves were stored before  
taken down to the coast (58).

Here, Pilkings and Bob discuss an old storeroom where slaves were kept before they were shipped away. Pilkings performs a haptic act by taking Bob by the hand to another part of the house so as to pass information across to him. This type of touch is referred to as professional touch. It is employed by Pilkings to assign task to Bob who is one of the armed policemen. To this end, the touch initiated by Pilkings is task oriented. The next excerpt features the use of haptic marker to indicate disapproval:

“Elesin: Take *your albino hands from me you...* His voice chokes as he is gagged” (p. 60).

In this excerpt, Elesin is seen roaring at Pilkings not to touch him. This is shown in the way Pilkings places his hand on him. The use of touch here indicates disapproval. Though initiated by Pilkings, it portrays Elesin's disgust and contempt for Pilkings due to his disregard for the traditional custom which he (Elesin) cherishes. Haptics is also utilised to foreground the theme of betrayal of trust and also assert authority as exemplified in the excerpt below:

“The two guards also leap forward  
and *place safe- guarding hands* on  
Elesin” (p. 70).

Here, Elesin is incarcerated. Iyaloja visits the penitentiary to see Elesin but she was not granted access to him. However, after much conversation with Pilkings, she is granted access to the Elesin but ordered not to cross a particular line while discussing with him. Iyaloja accuses Elesin of betraying tradition but he tries to defend himself. While the conversation is on between them, Iyaloja violates the order given to her by Pilkings and is confronted by a guard. The use of a haptic marker is discernable in the expression “*...place safeguarding hands on Elesin* (70). It serves to assert authority. The type of touch employed here is also referred to as professional touch. By incarcerating Elesin Oba in order to prevent the ritual sacrifice, dominance and power in social relationships is hereby exemplified. Power

relation indicates the supremacy of the Western civilisation over African tradition.

#### 4.3 Proxemics

The distance maintained by interlocutors is worth examining in *DKH*. Interlocutors perceive and use distance to achieve communication goals. The following examples illustrate the different types of distance observed in the play.

“Jane gets up and *throws her arms around his neck*. (p. 27).

The dialogue above indicates intimate distance between Jane and Pilkings. It revolves around the disagreement between both characters over the content of Sergeant Amusa’s report which reveals Elesin Oba’s intention to commit ritual suicide. While Pilkings feels that Elesin should be apprehended in order to prevent this barbaric act, Jane is of a contrary opinion. The divergent views advocated by both interlocutors culminate into a disagreement which upset Pilkings. This is why Jane pacifies him in this discourse. The action of throwing her arms around Pilkings’ neck and kissing him reveals the intimate relationship between them. Jane realises that their relationship is being marred on account of the disagreement and must be amended. Another example of proxemics is cited below.

“The Bride emerges, *stands shyly by the door*. He turns to her”. (p. 40)

The excerpt above illustrates the use of personal distance. This is observed between the bride and Elesin Oba who had just consummated their marriage union. We see that the bride has a sense of personal space which she protects from the invasion of others after the consummation of their marriage union. Realising that the women and Iyaloja knew what had transpired between her and Elesin Oba, she becomes shy and uses this distance to protect her personal space. The next example which follows is an instance of the use of social distance.

“IYALOJA: We must have said something wrong. *Comes forward a little*. Elesin Oba, we ask for your forgiveness before you speak” (p.15).

The above dialogue centres on Elesin, Iyaloja, and the women. The women probe the possibility

of him being prevented from fulfilling the onus vested on him by his race but he replies in the negative. He suddenly flairs up on hearing the women say that they know him as a man of honour. This is why Iyaloja steps forward to apologise on behalf of the women. In the above communicative situation, we observe social distance between Iyaloja and Elesin Oba. Social distance as seen in this dialogue is employed by Iyaloja to accord reverence and loyalty to Elesin Oba by virtue of his position as the King’s Horseman. Also, the distance gives us insight into Iyaloja’s characteristic role as the mouth-piece of the market people and representing their universe.

#### 4.4 Chronemics

This plays a vital role in the dramatic text by influencing the way characters perform their activities. In *DKH*, time has been used to indicate characters’ status and to exemplify dominance and power in social relationships. The excerpts below reveal this:

“PILKINGS: Alright, let go. You are relieved of all further duty.  
Amusa *report to me first thing in the morning* (p.49)

What is significant in the above dialogue is the manner in which time is employed and the message it conveys. Pilkings performs a chronemic act such as relieving Amusa of all his duties and instructing him to report to him (Pilkings) first thing in the morning of the next day. Here, the chronemic marker is observed in the expression, *report to me first thing in the morning*. This conveys Pilkings’ perception of time and his status. He is portrayed as a monochromic time user who believes that time is a precious resource that should not be wasted or taken lightly. For this reason, he places paramount value on schedules and tasks and ensures that they are executed promptly. His perception of time and the urgency required to get task executed influences his directive to Sergeant Amusa. Aside from indicating time perception, the chronemic marker is indicative of dominance and power in social relationships as it portrays Pilkings as one who exerts authority over Amusa. The directive issued to Amusa is an evidence to corroborate power relations between both characters. Another case of chronemic is



cited below:

“Pilkings: I am...not so sure. *He turns and breaks into a sudden run. The two constables follow, also at a run*” (p. 49).

In this dialogue, Pilkings and Jane converse in the presence of Sergeant Amusa and two other constables. On hearing the clock strikes, they both observe each other in shock and wonder if the ritual sacrifice had been performed. This informs the above dialogue where Pilkings and the two constables hurry to the venue of the ritual sacrifice. The first chronemic act is performed by Pilkings and it is observed in the expression, *he turns and breaks into a sudden run*. However, the second, initiated by the two constables, is captured in the expression *...also at a run*. A close study of the dialogue reveals that whatever it is that prompted Pilkings and the two constables to hurry is something that calls for urgency. Besides, the adverb *sudden* suggests that time is limited and a level of promptness is required. Time as used in this discourse communicates much non-verbal information about Pilkings and the two constables.

Further use of chronemic marker by characters is observed in the following excerpt where Olunde speaks about the telegram he received informing him about the demise of the king.

“OLUNDE: A relation sent it *weeks ago*, and it said nothing about my father. All it said was, our king is dead. But I knew I had to return home *at once* so as to bury my father” (p.52)

The chronemic markers in the above discourse are the adverbial phrases *weeks ago* and *at once*. Whereas the first alludes to the period Olunde receives the telegram; the second describes his response on hearing that the king is dead. The chronemic markers employed in the dialogue portrays Olunde as a monochromic time user. This is because of the high premium he attaches to time. Realising that the king is dead, he is obliged to return home in order to bury his father. The action of promptness as conveyed with the adverbial phrase *at once* is indicative of his perception of time.

#### 4.5 Physical Appearance

The physical appearance of characters in *DKH* uncovers their cultural background, social status and ideological posturing. The following texts contain this:

“Elesin stands up resplendent in rich clothes, *cap, shawl*, etc. His *sash* is of bright red alari cloth (p. 17).

The physical appearance of Elesin Oba as portrayed above is symbolic of affluence, nobility and royalty. This description corroborates Richmond & McCroskey’s (2004) submission that physical appearance is generally the first non-verbal message received and can be used to develop judgments about people based on how they look, what they wear and their level of attractiveness. Thus, for Elesin Oba to be garbed in such manner is indicative of his social status as the king’s horseman and one of the high ranking chiefs in land. Also, it unveils his cultural background and presents him as one who is set out to perform a dignified role.

Further use of physical appearance to convey message in *DKH* is observed in the below text:

“That doesn’t fool anyone you know. It’s the one you carry under your *government knickers* that counts. She bends low as if to peep under the *baggy shorts*” (p. 34).

The garb of the constables is what is significant in the above excerpt. It is captured with the phrases, *government knickers* and *baggy shorts* and is indicative of the kind of uniform worn by corps officers during the British colonial era. Therefore, the garb of the constables suggests that they are representatives of the British government. Consider the next excerpt which equally captures the use of physical appearance in the play:

Elesin appeared in *wrapper only*. In his hands a *white velvet cloth* folded loosely as if it held some delicate object (p. 40)

Here, Elesin Oba is seen in a wrapper with a white velvet cloth in his hands. The cloth worn by the Elesin communicates much non-verbal information about him. It is indicative of the

consummation of his marriage union with his bride. However, the white velvet cloth in his hands is symbolic in that it signifies the virginity of the bride.

### 5. Conclusion

This study has investigated Soyinka's *DKH* from a non-verbal communication perspective with a view to bringing to the fore how non-verbal cues serve as tools for conveying messages in the dramatic discourse. It is established that the playwright has employed kinesics, haptics,

proxemics, chronemics and physical appearance to describe characters and their roles, elucidate significant points, and represent certain subject matters relevant to the African cultural context and content. The playwright has infused his dramatic piece with different non-verbal cues which have helped in achieving socio-cultural, ideological and contextual meanings in the dramatic piece. A proper decoding of these non-verbal codes will contribute to the understanding of meanings expressed in the dramatic text.

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