ANALYZING TRADITIONAL YORUBA FAMILY THROUGH FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS THEORY (FCPT)

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Abstract

This paper uses analytical research to examine communication in traditional Yoruba families and uses the analytical research method to adopt family communication patterns theory (FCPT). Emphasis was placed on parents' and children's relationships. Based on conformity and conversation orientation dimensions of FCPT, families can be divided into four categories, namely: consensual, pluralistic, protective, and Laissez-faire. The paper holds that traditional Yoruba families, hinging on the proposition of FCPT, lean toward the consensual family. The paper submits that conformity orientation is the commonly adopted communication pattern in Yoruba families.

Keywords: Family Communication, Yoruba Family, Conformity Orientation, Conversation Orientation, Family Type

Introduction

The Yorubas live in the Southern part of Nigeria, specifically in Oyo, Osun, Lagos and Ekiti states. They can be found in Benin, Ghana and Northern Togo. The Yoruba traditional occupations are farming (growing yams, corn, millet, plantain, peanuts, beans, and cocoa) leatherworking, glass making and wood carving (Omobowale, Omobowale &Falase, 2019). These people have a common set of culture, traditions and beliefs which influence their family structure and processes. The *Baale*, known as the family head, usually a man, is responsible for the welfare, peace and preservation of the ideals, traditions and mores of the family.

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This paper attempts to analyze communication in the traditional Yoruba family through family communication patterns theory using an analytical method of research. It examines the extent to which conformity and conversation orientations feature in the Yoruba family, and by extension, considers possible outcomes of the two dimensions, which may not so well be connected to the Yoruba culture but manifest as a result of the dynamics of the conformity and conversation orientations.

According to family communication patterns theory (FCTP), conversation and conformity orientations are two distinct patterns of communication in the family (Jiao, 2021) with which to describe the communication dynamism within the family. Conversation orientation is a pattern of interpersonal communication between parents and children, where parents encourage children to freely communicate with them and contribute to family matters. It allows for free interpersonal communication among family members, especially between parents and their children over a vast array of topics. However, conformity orientation is a family communication pattern that does not encourage give-and-take between parents and children. It is one in which parents seek compliance with instructions from children. In this sort of family communication, parents seem to see their children not as equal---parents' interest in communicating with their children is to preserve the sanity of the family by doling out instructions and seeking compliance.

These orientations are adopted in all interpersonal communication between parents and children to varying degrees. Family communication theory identifies four family types based on this variation: consensual (high on both orientations), pluralistic (high conversation and low on conformity), protective (high on conformity and low on conversation) and Larssez-faire (low on both orientations) (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). While some parents adopt more of a conversation orientation, others exhibit a lesser conformity orientation. It seems that parents do not consciously focus on the orientation to adopt at home, but seem to inadvertently adopt the orientation with the best outcome in any communication situation. For instance, where there is a need for compliance in a dangerous situation, parents are likely to

use the conformity orientation. Specifically, in a health risk situation or emergency, parents are unlikely to wait for a resolution arising from a moment of family discussion to make a decision. Thus, it is reasonable to say the task at hand determines which family communication pattern to adopt.

Literature Review

Family communication is conceptualized as the way individual family members communicate with one another (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 2004). Once a pattern of communication is created, it often shapes how individuals, particularly adolescents, view people outside the family environment. Because of its discernable patterns and forms, family communication is observed to have functional consequences for family members (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002).

Conversation orientation and conformity orientation are two dimensions of family communication meant for the purpose of coordinating the activities of family members (Koesten & Schrodt, 2014). Each dimension is conceptualized as a continuum with two polar ends of "high" and "low". The conversation orientation dimension of family communication is the degree to which family members are allowed to freely participate in unrestrained interactions on various matters that concern the family. Families high in conversation orientation have free, frequent and spontaneous interaction with one another. Concerning parent-child communication, parents create a climate for children to be free to express themselves concerning their lives as well as family matters(Homayoon & Almasi, 2021). Parents in families high in conversation orientation also encourage free and frequent conversation between them and their children. On the other hand, families at the low end of conversation orientation interact less frequently and only discuss a few topics openly with one another. Hence, all family members do not regularly discuss family matters and everybody's input in family decisions is not always considered.

Conformity orientation is the degree to which a family emphasizes a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values as well and beliefs (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Families high in conformity

orientation stress uniformity of beliefs and attitudes in their interactions. Parents-child interactions in families high on conformity orientation reflect obedience to parents without questioning. However, family law in conformity orientation is characterized by interactions that focus on heterogeneous attitudes and beliefs, and the individuality and independence of family members (Rueter & Koerner, 2008). Conformity orientation naturally favours the traditional family structure in which the family relationship is more important than other relationships external to it. Conversely, a family low in conformity orientation is less cohesive and less hierarchically organized: there is the independence of family members and members do not subordinate their personal space and interest to the family (Hurst et al, 2022).

Pattern Of Communication in Traditional Yoruba Family

The pattern of communication in the Yoruba family reflects the hierarchal structure of the family. In Yoruba family dynamics, the *Baale*, as the father of the house, exerts masculine authority over the children. In rare cases, the husband, who also is the father of the household, may adopt the conformity orientation in communicating with his wife. This situation may arise if there is a shortness of time to make a serious decision for the family where prolonged debate over a matter could threaten the life of family members or a situation where the family head is expected to take a position in response to a king's deadline. The husband may, by his authority as the family head, exert authority in communicating the position that would ultimately benefit the entire family, using the conformity orientation with minimal or no conversation orientation. Therefore, in the traditional Yoruba family, the conformity orientation perhaps is not limited in use to the children. It must be stressed that the conformity orientation pattern of communication is used to preserve the life, dignity and welfare of the family. Using the conformity orientation is not seen as lowering the dignity of the women (wives), but is deemed necessary where there is a serious need for compliance in the overall interest of the family.

Although the conversation orientation is also used in family communication in Yoruba families, such is not the norm, especially in

interpersonal communication between parents and children. At times, the *Baale* may seek the opinion of his wife on a decision---and conversation orientation may be adopted. However, it is very rare for the family head to seek the opinion of his children on family matters. The conversation orientation is often used between husband and wife in a relaxed atmosphere, especially to discuss family matters of a less contentious nature.

The conversation orientation is also used between the husband and the wife in romantic sessions when the children are not within earshot. This is always the case when small talks or pillow talks precede sexual intimacy. Many times, the wife seizes the moment of this pillow talk to seek the approval of matters that the husband had left undecided, which is of interest to her. It is also a period to put off the consciousness of the male masculinity that the *Baale* puts on momentarily. Although the small talk is done under a relaxed atmosphere, a wise married Yoruba woman knows it is a vulnerable period for the husband to yield to her request. Subtly, but not aggressively, the wife makes her demands calmly and with a soft tone of voice, adopting the conversation orientation. Usually, the communication pattern in that sort of situation for both parties is the conversation orientation on a high scale. Family matters, like the prospective suitors of their daughters, are examined and reexamined at this moment. One must say that the decision of the spouse of a child in the traditional Yoruba context rests with the parents, especially the father who makes the final decision on it. Sometimes, the final decision of the *Baale* may not please both mother and daughter. When this is the case, the daughter, who dares not question the verdict of the father when utterances of his decision are made may seek audience with her mother to see if the verdict can be overturned. If the mother also shares the views of her daughter, she may intervene by seeking an audience with her husband only when he is relaxed and in a good mood. The approach in presenting matters in Yoruba land matters a lot and it could determine if a matter is worth listening to or will be thrown off. In the case of the wife seeking favour with her husband in moments of romance, her approach is critical in ensuring that the conversation

orientation is brought to bear as a communication pattern between herself and her husband for optimal outcomes.

Mothers in traditional Yoruba families can adopt conversation orientation as a way of correcting erring daughters. A Yoruba mother may adopt the conversation orientation to correct a girl child's ill behaviour if an understanding with the child would be the best approach in instilling discipline and a sense of forthrightness especially if the child has become an adolescent. The reason for the bad act would be solicited through give- and thereafter the mother would elucidate on the bad behaviour and the consequences of it using conversation orientation.

The Conformity and Conversation Orientation in Yoruba Family

As discussed earlier, conformity orientation is the predominant pattern of communication adopted in traditional Yoruba families in training a child. This is because of the traditional culture of the perspective of the relationship between parents and children. A child from the point of view of Yoruba culture is seen as dependent on parents with less/limited rights. Although the child enjoys a variety of privileges, it is out of place for him or her to compete with his or her parents for authority in the family. In fact, in Yoruba tradition, children are expected to venerate their parents, because parents are the conduit through which they come to life.

The views of a child about himself or herself are steeped in culture. For instance, no matter how harshly a parent deals with a child, the child will not regard the parent as evil and such a child will not see the harsh treatment as capable of lowering his or her self-esteem (Oguntomisin, 2012). Whereas harsh treatment of a child by parents in Western culture may lower a child's self-esteem, it has been observed that verbal aggression is not capable of lowering a child's self-esteem. Oguntomisn (2012) in his study observed that a child's self-image and relationship with his or her parents are not in any way determined by a parent's verbal aggression. Based on this finding, one can understand why parents adopt name-calling and aggression as a typical way of demanding compliance from a child in Yoruba land. Shouting at a child

with an accompanying instruction is a reflection of high conformity. Both the parent and the child know that the act of the parent means no harm to the child.

The pre-modern Yoruba families recognize the supremacy of the *Baale* in the family. Thus the husbands almost call the shot, dictating the place of abode, and showing leadership in the affairs of the family. About his children, the *Baale* relates as lord, provider, decision maker, protector, and leader. Some situations may demand that the father be firm and frigid with his children. As mentioned above, the occasion may be associated with life and security. Wanting to be nice or understanding may compound an already messy or sticky situation. In such a situation, the children ought to know that the corresponding actions of their father are right at that moment. Women are rarely vicious in relating with their children. Perhaps this is because, in traditional Yoruba culture, women are homely: they spend quality time doing house chores, cooking and looking after their children when the husbands go to the farm or bush to hunt games (occasionally, women go with their husbands as well as children to the farm during the harvest season).

Possible Outcome of Conversation and Conformity Orientations in Children

Studies have revealed that both dimensions of family communication patterns have outcomes in children in childhood and later in adult life(Kapetanovic, Boele, Skoog, 2019; Zarnaghash & Zarnaghash, 2013; Esteve, Emler, Wood, 2009) while, the studies of Kapetanovic et al and Esteve et al indicated that family communication pattern is significantly related to depression and delinquency, Zarnaghash and Zarnaghash found family communication pattern to be related to mental health. However, in Yoruba families, one may expect that families high in conformity orientation will have family relationships where there will not be intimacy between parents and their children. However, it is observed that verbal aggression, one way to externalize anger and frustrations, is not potent to lessen the strength of intimacy between parents and children. Verbal aggression and verbal abuse manifest as

ways of externalizing conformity orientation by parents. A study examining the influence of verbal aggression on the self-esteem of children within the context of African society indicated that there is no positive relationship between parental verbal aggression and low self-esteem (Oguntomisin, 2012). Further probing revealed that the respondents conceptualized verbal aggression of parents as a way to correct children. Therefore, from this study, the assumption that high use of conformity orientation leads to low self-esteem is not a reality among Yoruba children. This is based on the fact that a Yoruba child's construction of verbal aggression is within a socio-cultural milieu which sees verbal aggression from parents as a way of correcting ill behaviour. Except when a child sees parental verbal aggression as a calculated way of inflicting emotional pain on him or her will it be seen as ill and as having enormous potential to cause harm?

Raising a child with a predominant conversation orientation is foreign to the traditional Yoruba family. The *Baale* does not consider it fit and proper to invite his children to family discussions. If a matter that concerns a child is to be discussed, such usually takes place without the presence of the child and his or her input is inconsequential. According to family communication patterns theory, conversation orientation creates an environment where all family members contribute to family matters and discuss freely; but it must be emphasized that such freedom in traditional Yoruba family precludes a child having the audacity to engage the family head on family matters.

The communication structure between *Baale* and his children is a sharp contrast to that of the mother and her children. While there may be an absence of conversation orientation between the father (*Baale*) and his child, most especially where concrete family matters are concerned, it is not uncommon for the mother and adolescent girl child to engage in horizontal conversation on hazy matters that require clarification. Moments of such interaction are characterized by questions and answers, the questioner being the adolescent child, usually female, and the mother being the custodian of knowledge from whom answers are sought.

Family Communication Patterns, Family Types and Traditional Yoruba Family

Family communication patterns theory neatly divides families into four basic units based on their preposition (Noorafshan et al, 2013). These are referred to as family types. The first family type is the consensual family. This type of family is characterized by both high conversation and conformity orientations. Is this a reality in traditional Yoruba families? The family communication in traditional Yoruba families is high in conformity orientation. Conversation orientation is not a predominant characteristic of family communication in traditional Yoruba families, because the traditional Yoruba families are patriarchal: the male head makes decisions, policies and rules for the entire members of the household as received from family deities. Thus, no member of the family is expected to interrogate the decision process. There is uniformity of thoughts and family character with conformity orientation.

The second type of family is pluralistic characterized by high conversation and low conformity orientations. Interpersonal communication in this type of family is one in which parents permit children to freely contribute to the family discussion, allowing for two-way communication between parents and children with few occasions where conformity orientation is deployed. In this kind of family, it is the norm for members to hold family meetings to discuss issues that concern the family; however, this does not nullify the need for either of the parents to make a decision on behalf of the family when such is required. This is not the family communication pattern of the traditional Yoruba family.

The third family type is the protective family. It is characterized by high conformity orientation and low conversation orientation. Parental instruction is high in this family with a low form of family interaction. Parents-children communication is more of passing instructions than two-way communication. It is also possible to have this sort of communication pattern between spouses--- the bearer of authority in the family, usually the husband, does not give room for two-way communication but doles out instructions. The principal key

in this kind of communication is to ensure family uniformity---in purpose and action. Protective family is not without moments where conversation orientation is deployed, but it is not just a predominant communication approach adopted in the family. It must be submitted that the traditional Yoruba families bear a resemblance to this family characteristic.

The last family type is the Laissez-faire family. This kind of family is characteristically low in conformity and conversation orientations. Parents in this kind of family leave their children to their own devices. This is a communication characteristic of a dysfunctional family. A dysfunctional family is without an established leadership. Where there is a lack of instructions in a child's life, it portends the absence of leadership. It is recommended that a healthy traditional Yoruba family ideally should not take on this colouration.

Conclusion

Yoruba traditional family communication has been examined via the family communication patterns theory. The paper submits that though the dimensions of conversation and conformity orientations characterize the Yoruba traditional family, the predominant communication orientation used is conformity orientation. The conformity orientation is associated with authority, hierarchy and masculinity that reflect the Yoruba family philosophy. The conformity orientation is gradually giving way to conversation in modern Yoruba families today where husband and wife sit to discuss where to live and the number of children to have, and where parents and children discuss where to lodge for Christmas party. The modern Yoruba family is a complete departure from the traditional Yoruba family in terms of communication structure.

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