



## Conversational Strategies in Ola Rotimi's *The gods Are Not to Blame*

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### Abstract

This paper examined the conversational features used by characters through talk in Ola Rotimi's *The gods Are not to Blame*. Several studies have been carried out on Ola Rotimi's works but this study was motivated by the scanty scholarly studies on the conversational strategies used in the text. In order to bring out the features of conversation in the text, the text was critically read, and salient conversational features were identified. The features were interpreted according to the messages they expressed in the text. The findings revealed that conversational features such as monologue, turn taking, turn allocation, speech overlap, error and repair mechanism, adjacency pairs, and insertion sequence were used to generate different effects in the text. The study concludes that the conversational features employed by the author create orderliness and regulate participants' talk in the interaction towards actualising the thematic goals of the text. Thus, the study indicates that conversation analysis gives a deeper and better understanding of human utterances as portrayed through the characters in the text, thereby increasing the readers understanding of the text.

**Key words:** Ola Rotimi; Talk; Conversational features; Conversations; Linguistic features

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Talk is at the heart of all societies. Through it, the everyday business of the society is accomplished. People in every society talk all day, every day. Through talks, they interact with each other. Conversation is interactive communication between two or more people (Mehl, et al, 2007). The development of conversational

skills and etiquette is an important part of socialization. No generally accepted definition of conversation exists, beyond the fact that a conversation involves at least two people talking together (Charles, 2000). Consequently, the term is often defined by what it is not. A ritualized exchange such as a mutual greeting is not a conversation, and an interaction that includes a marked status differential (such as a boss giving orders) is also not a conversation (Lauren, 2015). An interaction with a tightly focused topic or purpose is also generally not considered a conversation (Knapman, 2004). Summarizing these properties, Odebumi (2005) observes that conversation is the kind of speech that happens informally, symmetrically, and for the purposes of establishing and maintaining social ties.

Dialogue may be the optimal form of communication, depending on the participants' intended ends (Warren, 2006). Conversations may be ideal when, for example, each party desires a relatively equal exchange of information, or when the parties desire to build social ties (Chandler, 2009). Bailey (2009) observes that conversation is generally face-to-face person-to-person at the same time (synchronous). This face-to-face conversation may also be in the written form. In this study, conversation between characters in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are not Blame* will be analysed.

A large concentration of the studies on Ola Rotimi's *The gods Are not to Blame* come from the literary (Dasylva, 2004; Imo, 2016), sociological (Keller, 2011; Green and Korubo-Solomon, 2002; Eziafa, 2016) and cultural (Monye, 1995; Odebode and Eke-Opara, 2015) perspectives. Little attempts have been made to carry out linguistic analyses of the text. Oloruntoba-Oju (1998) carries out a major study of Ola Rotimi's plays. He does a stylistic analysis of action and tradition in *The god's Are not to Blame*, *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. The fact is that it is rare to find a whole work devoted to the linguistic analysis of the play, especially conversation

analysis. Thus, this study aims at applying conversation analysis to Ola Rotimi's *The gods Are not to Blame*.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Conversation Analysis

This approach is concerned with the study of talk in interaction (Odebunmi, 2006). In normal conversations, people do not just talk anyhow. They are guided by some specific rules to make their conversations ordered. There are appropriate responses to specific expressions and when these responses do not come, then it is either the person responding did not understand the question or he/she is deliberate in giving such response. Spontaneous or simultaneous speech is also managed, to the extent that it does not degenerate into confusion. Maintaining a good conversation requires conversation analysis.

Conversational Analysis (CA) is an approach to discourse analysis that is concerned with the study of talk in interaction (Hult, 2017). The major aim of CA is to describe how conversationalists achieve orderliness in their interaction. It studies how interactions are structured in a sequential manner. CA studies any instance of talk, which may include institutional discourse, doctor-patient interaction, antenatal classroom discourse, courtroom discourse (Lindlof, et al, 2002). It also studies routine or casual conversation. CA was a method introduced by Emmanuel Schegloff, Harvey Sacks and Gail Jefferson in the early 1970s. It was inspired by Ethnomethodology. CA has now become an established force in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, speech-communication and psychology.

### 2.2 Features of Conversation Analysis

#### 2.2.1 Turn Taking and Turn Allocation

Turn taking is a general feature of conversation. People involved in a conversation do not just talk in a disorderly manner. A person speaks and after his turn, another person takes the floor. It is not normal in a conversation for one person to speak all the time while others just listen. It is also the case that people are aware when it is their turn to speak. There are some clues to when a speaker's turn has finished and when another speaker should commence talk. Turn taking is a basic characteristic of any normal conversation. Speakers and listeners change their roles in order to begin their speech (Fairclough, 2003). Turn taking mechanisms may vary between cultures and languages. Scholars have identified a set of rules that govern turn taking in discourse. These are:

- a) When the current speaker selects the next speaker, the next speaker has the right to and is obliged to commence the turn.
- b) If the current speaker does not select the next speaker, any one of the speakers has the right to self-select and become the next speaker.

c) If neither the next speaker selects the next speaker nor the next speaker self-selects, the current speaker may resume his or her turn (Salkie, 1995; Baker & Ellece, 2011; Wooffitt, 2005).

There are signals to turn taking that are called turn-eliciting signals (Coulthard, 1992). We have the Turn Construction Unit (TCU), which is the fundamental segment of speech in conversation. It describes pieces of conversation, which may comprise an entire turn. The end of a TCU, called a Transition Relevance Place (TRP), which marks a point where the turn may be go to another speaker, or the present speaker may continue with another TCU. The change of turn occurs only in the TRP. TRP is the possible structural completion point of one-word, lexicon, phrase, clause or full sentence.

There are other signals to turn taking. The dominant referring tone, the interrogative functions of tones and phatic questions serve a role in turn taking. For instance, a speaker may use a rising tone rather than a fall-rise tone in ending a sentence to hold his turn by underlining his/her present status as the dominant speaker. This indicates that the speaker expects to be allowed to go on without an interruption. Other signals are, the last speaker's gaze direction, the last speaker calling the name of the next speaker, the last speaker aligning his body towards the next speaker, and so forth.

#### 2.2.2 Adjacency Pairs

Adjacency Pair is a unit of conversation that contains an exchange of one turn each by two speakers (Adeyeye, 2000). The turns are so related to each other that the first turn requires a range of specific type of response in the second turn. It is a sequence that contains functionally related turns. Examples of adjacency pairs are:

Question – Answer Pair

Q. When will you be home  
A. At 5 o'clock

Greeting – Greeting Pair

G. Good morning Bola.  
G: Good morning.

Request – Acceptance/Rejection

R: Can I use your pen for one minute.  
A: Yes, please have it/  
R: I am sorry. It's the only one I have

Inform – Acknowledgement

I: You have to see the head of department before he leaves for the Senate meeting at 4.  
A: Okay.

Apology – Acceptance/Rejection

App.: I am sorry, I could not make the appointment  
Acc.: That's okay, we can fix another time/  
Rej.: You have no excuse. You just kept me waiting for nothing.

Congratulations – Thanks

C: Congratulations on your PhD.

T: Oh, thanks

In an adjacency pair, the first pair part invites, constrains, and partially determines the meaning and range of possible second pair part. If somebody shouts “help”, it is an action not language that is required. If the exclamation is ‘ouch’, it is likely to elicit a question, ‘What’s the matter’ which in turn starts off an adjacency pair, completed by, for example, ‘I’ve cut my finger’. Adjacency pairs are normal in conversations, but sometimes they do not necessarily occur.

### 2.2.3 Insertion Sequences

An insertion sequence is a sequence of turns intervening between the first and second parts of an adjacency pair (Baker & Ellece, 2011). It is a kind of delay in which the response expected is not given, rather, an entirely different, though related response is given. Conversations usually occur in pairs, for instance we have question-answer, request-acceptance/rejection, invitation-acceptance/rejection, and so forth. In short, insertion sequences occur in situations when people do not want to provide a direct response to an elicitation until they are sure of the intention of the speaker as we can see in the conversation piece above.

### 2.2.4 Error and Repair Mechanisms

In conversation, we do not always say things the correct ways we desire to say them. When we did not say what we ought to say, we still have a way of saying them. This is called error repair.

### 2.2.5 Overlap in Speeches

An overlap in speech occurs when two or more interlocutors are talking at the same time (Coulthard, 1992). It can also be described as occurrences of two or more participants trying to take their turns at the same time after the previous speaker had finished or is about to finish his turn. Adda (2007) notes that the real overlap occurs when the two participants start their turns simultaneously and none of them relinquishes the floor for the other. This is not always the case in a normal conversation. An overlap in speech may occur in any of the following situations:

a) When a speaker deliberately comes in while another speaker is having turn,

b) When a speaker thought another speaker had finished his/her turn and decided to come in.

Overlapping speech is very common in natural communication (Shriberg, Stolcke, and Baron, 2001). Delmonte (2005) observes that overlaps in speech may entail dis-fluencies (hesitations, repetitions, restarts) and are likely to contribute to speaker turn regulation.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative study. It involves the identification and interpretation of the conversational features used by Ola Rotimi in *The gods Are not to Blame*. The text serves as both the subject of research and the source of data. The data for the study was taken from Ola Rotimi's *The gods Are not to Blame*. Thus, the extracts from the text form the data for the study. In other to bring out the features of conversation in the text, the text was critically read, after which the features were identified and extracted. After they were brought out, the features were interpreted according to the messages they expressed in the text.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis focuses on conversational features such as monologue, turn taking, turn allocation, speech overlap, Error and repair mechanism, adjacency pairs, and insertion sequence.

### 4.1 Monologue

The play started with a prologue which served as the foundation or background for the whole play. The first part of the monologue was done by the Narrator. The role of the Narrator is very crucial to the development of the story and it set a standard for the conversational process.

#### Excerpt 1

NARRATOR. The struggles of man begin at birth.

It is meet then that our play begin with birth of a child.

The place is the land of Kutuje.

A baby has just been born to King Adetusa and his wife Ojuola, the King and Queen of this land of Kutuje.

In the first excerpt, the narrator through monologue gave us a background about the birth of a baby, who sets the conflict on which the whole story is based.

#### Excerpt 2

NARRATOR:

Baba Fakunle.

oldest and most knowing of all Ifa priests in this world it is you I greet.

Mother waits, Father waits.

Now, tell them:

what is it that the child has brought as duty to this earth from the gods?

Now Baba Fakunle tells Mother, tells Father, tells the Priest of Ogun and aged keeper of the King's household and the land; He tells them

what it is that the boy has brought as mission from the gods

to carry out on earth.

Here the narrator continues by giving us the background information that when a child is born, the child's future or destiny is investigated. The narrator tells us that the boy has brought bad luck: he will kill his father and then marry his mother.

**Excerpt 3**

NARRATOR. Bad word  
Mother weeps, Father weeps.  
The future is not happy  
but to resign oneself to it  
is to be crippled fast.  
Man must struggle.  
The bad future must not happen.  
The only way to stop it  
is to kill,  
kill the unlucky messenger  
of the gods  
kill the boy.  
Priest of Ogun ties boy's feet  
with a string of cowries  
meaning sacrifice  
to the gods who have sent  
boy down to this Earth.

From excerpt 3, the narrator, again, through monologue, tells us the solution to the evil luck the boy has brought to the earth. The solution, according to the narrator is sacrificing the boy to the gods.

**Excerpt 4**

Two years later  
King Adetusa and his wife, Ojuola  
have another son,  
Aderopo,  
to fill the nothingness  
left behind by the first.

In excerpt 4, we are told by the narrator, in monologue, that two years after the boy had been sacrificed to the gods, the king has another baby to erase the bad memory of the previous.

**Excerpt 5**

It is now  
two and thirty years  
since that boy  
was borne into the bush  
to die, and dying stop  
the awesome will of fate.

King Adetusa has met  
rough death  
and passed into the land  
of our silent fathers  
Queen Ojuola herself  
is not getting younger.  
Their second son, Aderopo,

is now full grown.

In Excerpt 5, the narrator gives us the information that the baby, Aderopo, has grown up and King Adetusa has met rough death and passed into the land of their silent fathers. Moreover, Queen Ojuola herself is not getting younger.

**Excerpt 6**

The land of Kutuje  
had known peace and seen quiet  
for some time  
until  
the people of Ikolu,  
taking advantage of death in the palace  
attacked Kutuje.

In excerpt 6, the narrator tells us again about the land of Kutuje and the peace they are losing to the Ikolu attackers. Ikolu Attackers invade the palace and town of Kutuje and killed hundreds, seized hundreds, enslaved hundreds more and left behind in the land of Kutuje hunger, and fears.

**Excerpt 7**

ODEWALE. I heard their wailings  
first as rumour  
I heard them far, far away  
in the course of my countless wanderings  
from land to land, town to town, village to villages,  
seeking peace and finding none.

I came to this land of Kutuje  
to see for myself  
the truth of the rumoured wailings.

Crossing seven waters  
I, a son of the tribe of  
Ijekun Yemoja,  
found my way  
to this strange land  
of Kutuje. I came  
to see suffering  
and I felt suffering  
Get up  
Get up' I said  
to them; not to do something  
is to be crippled fast. Up, up,  
all of you;  
to lie down resigned to fate  
is madness.  
Up, up, struggle: the world is  
struggle.

In Excerpt 7, the narrator introduces us to Odewale of the tribe of Ijekun Yemoja, who came to see suffering of the people and motivated them to struggle and fight for their land. He gathered the people of Kutuje under his power and they attacked the people of Ikolu, and

freed their people and also seized the lands of Ikolu, and prospered from their sweat. As a result, in their joy the people made him king by braking tradition.

#### Excerpt 8

ODEWALE. For eleven years now  
I, Odewale  
the only son of Ogundele  
have ruled Kutuje  
and have taken for wife.  
as custom wishes  
Ojuola, the motherly Queen  
of the former King  
Adetusa.

She now is bearer  
of all my four seeds  
Adewale, and Adebisi  
his sister,  
Oyeyemi, her brother,  
and Adeyinka,  
second sister.

In excerpt 8, the narrator uses monologue to give us a background on how long Odekunle had ruled Kutuje and have taken for wife, as custom wishes, Ojuola, the motherly Queen of the former King Adetusa. She now is bearer of all his four seeds Adewale, Adebisi, Oyeyemi and Adeyinka. They have all lived in joy in the eleven years of his rule and Kutuje had prospered.

#### Excerpt 9

There is trouble  
now in the land.  
Joy has broken  
and scattered  
Peace, too, is no more.

In excerpt 9, the narrator tells us that there is trouble now in the land of Kutuje. Joy has broken and scattered. Peace, too, is no more. This particular excerpt sets the stage for the plot of the play. It also serves as the offshoot of the play and the beginning of conflict.

### 4.2 Turn Taking

Turn taking is the most crucial part of a dialogue or conversation. Turn taking involves giving room for other interlocutors to talk so that there will be exchange of ideas among interlocutors. There are many instances of this in the text because the text is a drama text and the whole event in the play involves dialogue. However, a few excerpts have been chosen to explain this linguistic feature.

#### Excerpt 1

SECOND WOMAN. Your highness... I have tried, in my own house, I have tried I boiled some herbs, drank them, yet sickness remains.

ODEWALE. What herbs did you boil?

SECOND WOMAN. Asufe eijeje leaves ...

ODEWALE. Y-e-s.

SECOND WOMAN. Lemon-grass, tea bush, and some lime-skins

ODEWALE. That's good. And nothing happened?

SECOND WOMAN. I and my household drank the medicine, yet we do not get better, my lord.

ODEWALE. For how long did you boil it?

SECOND WOMAN. As soon as it boiled, I put it down.

ODEWALE. No, no. You must boil it longer, woman, longer, so that the medicines in the herbs can come out in full spirit to fight the sickness. Boil it longer.

THIRD WOMAN. I boiled mine longer -a long time. I even added dogo-yaro leaves to it.

ODEWALE. And how does the body feel?

THIRD WOMAN. Not as well as the heart wishes, my lord.

(Act One, Scene 1. P.13)

In excerpt 1, there is an interaction involving three interlocutors: Second woman Odewale and Third woman. Each of them takes their turns without causing confusion or denying other interlocutors their own turns. During their interaction, questions are asked and the right answers are given to the questions asked, information and ideas are also exchanged.

#### Excerpt 2

ODEWALE. My people, I beg of you, plead with him, or I shall lose my temper soon  
(Other CHIEFS begin to grumble.)

OJUOLA. Pray, son, tell us the word from Ifa. No matter how bad it is, we are ready to hear it. The horns cannot be too heavy for the head of the cow that must bear them. To remain silent is to make light of the troubles in the land.

ADEROPO. I am not making light of them, Mother. It is that the word is hard that must be said.

OJUOLA. Say it and you shall have done your part.

ADEROPO. Very well. Ifa oracle says the curse, your highness, is on a man.

SECOND CHIEF. A man?

ADEROPO. A full-grown man.

ODEWALE. And who is this man?

ADEROPO. I don't know, your highness, the oracle did not say.

ODEWALE. Very well. This man-the cursed one-what did he do, what offence?

ADEROPO. The man has killed another man.

(Act One, Scene 2, p.20)

In excerpt 2, There are four interlocutors: Odewale, Ojuola, Aderopo and second Chief Odewale takes the first turn, Ojuola takes the second, Aderopo takes the

third, Ojuola again takes the fourth, Aderopo takes the fifth, then second Chief takes the sixth, and so on. Each interlocutor takes their turn as required at the right time, when necessary.

**Excerpt 3**

ODEWALE. Now my people-when trees fall on trees, first the topmost must be removed. First, tell me-when was King Adetusa slain? (CHIEFS think.) Ojuola ...

OJUOLA. A long time ago my lord.

ODEWALE. Where

OJUOLA. On the road from Oshogbo.

SECOND CHIEF. He said he was going to see his mother's land near Ede.

ODEWALE. Well, wasn't there anyone with him? Someone who survived? Someone who managed to come home and say what exactly happened, where it happened, how it happened, not even a rat?

PRIEST. Five bodyguards were in his company, but only one of them came back.

ODEWALE. What happened to the other four?

SECOND CHIEF. They ran away after the killing your highness

ODEWALE. Why?

FIRST CHIEF. Out of fear that our people would kill them in anger, I think.

ODEWALE. I see... what about the loyal bodyguard who came back? What did he say?

THIRD CHIEF. Robbers.

PRIEST. But even with him, there was confusion in his head.

FIRST CHIEF. He said robbers lay in wait for them in the bush near Ede and killed the King.

(Act One, Scene 2, p. 22)

In excerpt 3, we have six interlocutors: Odewale, Ojuola, second Chief, Priest, First Chief and Third Chief. The interlocutors are listed according to how they appear in the dialogue. The six interlocutors come together to discuss the circumstances that surround the death of the former king. They all have varying degrees of information about the incident. Despite the fact that they are as many as six, they are still able to rub minds together.

**Excerpt 4**

ODEWALE. Do not kneel. I pray-

OJUOLA. I beg to ask my lord a question

ODEWALE. A question? Ask, ask anything

OJUOLA, What is the quarrel between Aderopo and ...

ODEWALE. No! [Rises]

OJUOLA. But, my lord:

ODEWALE. I do not want to hear that one.

OJUOLA. But you said I could ask any question

ODEWALE. There is a limit. Any question, true, but ... but ... not about that that... do not let me have ...

OJUOLA. So I will know nothing about the grievance you

ODEWALE. [reconsidering]. Later. then, later. The blood is still hot.. later.

OJUOLA. This is a promise, my lord. There is no doubt in my mind that you will tell me everything on my second asking. [Kneels and begins to leave.]

ODEWALE. Tell Akilapa to come here.

OJUOLA. I will, my lord. [Curtseys. Exit.]

(Act Two, Scene 4, p. 39)

In excerpt 4, there are only two interlocutors: Odekunle and Ojuola. Their interaction is based on husband-wife interaction. It is mutual and cordial. Though the interaction does not last for long, the two interaction are still able to achieve their communication are still thought not satisfactorily.

**Excerpt 5**

ODEWALE. Who sent you to kill me!

AKILAPA. [panting]. The Queen. She says your highness calls me.

ODEWALE. [somewhat relieved]. So, do you have to tear in like that? Hunh? [Seizes him y the neck.] Man, man, man ..look at him! Everything: gira, gira, gira... power, power, force, force action. Action No thoughts, no patience, no coolness of blood. Yet you go about shouting that you are better than women, superior to women... [Shoves him aside.] Get out, braggart, go marry a woman and learn coolness of mind from ed. Aha! But, my lord.

AKILAPA. [astonished]. Aha But, my lord, I already have seven wives!

ODEWALE. [sharply]. Well, marry again, idiot!

AKILAPA. [resignedly]. If it is your will, my lord. But what

ODEWALE. Go to the homes of all the chiefs in the land, tell

AKILAPA. I will, my lord. [Hurries out.]

(Act Two, Scene 4, p.40)

Similarly, in excerpt 5, there are two interlocutors: Odewale and Akilapa. Their interaction is very brief. Though their interaction deviates from the story line a little the deviation emphasizes the importance of patience and tenderness which Odewale and Akilapa lack. Odewale realizing his own weakness advise Akilapa to lean some patience especially from woman.

**Excerpt 6**

ODEWALE. Where is the man who came back to report his death?

OJUOLA. The bodyguard? The last I heard was that he now lives in Ilorin, far, far, away.

ODEWALE. I want him here!

OJUOLA. But, my lord, Ilorin is a far-

ODEWALE. Now! I must see him before I sleep! [Calling] Agidi! Labata! Akilapa! [To OJUOLA.

They know the man well, don't they?  
OJUOLA. They do, my lord.  
[Enter BODYGUARDS running]  
ODEWALE. You leave for Ilorin now.  
BODYGUARDS [surprised]. Ilorin!  
ODEWALE. And you must come back before the moon stands straight in the sky.  
BODYGUARDS. Ah!  
ODEWALE. Ojuola will tell you what to do in Ilorin.  
[Retreating into bedroom.]  
OJUOLA. Who among you doesn't know Gbonka?  
AGIDI. Gbonka, Gbonka?  
LABATA. Gbonka who?  
AKILAPA. There are countless Gbonkas all over the world. your highness.  
AGIDI. Gbonka, Gbonka.  
ODEWALE [stopping at bedroom entrance]. Bodyguard to the former King, you goats!  
AGIDI, LABATA, AKILAPA [in unison]. Ah! Gbonn-k-aaa!  
AGIDI. Gbonka, the son of Elempe.  
AKILAPA. A-ah, the man left Ilorin a long time ago.  
ODEWALE. Where is he now?  
LABATA. Dead.  
AKILAPA. Liar! My brother, Degelu, saw him on his farm in Ipetu only last market day. [Addressing AGIDI, seeking corroboration.] Don't you know my brother, Degelu, the son of my mother's brother who married Motara the sister of your wife's mother, Niniola, who sells palmwine and pounded yam at the market near ...  
ODEWALE. You are wasting time! Where is Gbonka now?  
AKILAPA. Ipetu, my lord. He has a farm, a cassava farm ...  
ODEWALE. I want him here. Now!  
AGIDI, LABATA, AKILAPA. Very well, your highness.  
[They rush out. ODEWALE goes into the bedroom.]  
(Act Three, Scene 2, pp.55-56)

In excerpt 6, there are six interlocutors: Odewale, Ojuola, Bodyguards, Agidi, Labata and Akilapa. The interactants belong to different social classes: Odewale and Ojuola belong to the ruling (upper) class while Bodyguard, Agidi Labata and Akilapa belong to the ruled (lower class). Thus, the behaviour and manners of the interlocutors that belong to the lower class is barbaric and uncultured. However Odewale and Ojuola are able to manage them.

### 4.3 Turn Allocation

Turn allocation involves allocating turns to another interlocutor. What this means is that The current interlocutor or another interlocutor allows a specific interlocutor to take turn.

FIRST CHIEF. Enough! People of our land! The King stands before you in greeting.  
FIRST CITIZEN. What use are greetings to a dying body?  
CHIEFS [shocked]. Ahah  
ODEWALE [gestures to CHIEFS] Let them talk.  
FIRST WOMAN Yesterday, my twins died-both of them. My third child... unstrapping the baby on her back] here, feel her, feel how hot she is come feel.  
(Act One, Scene 1, p.11)

In the excerpt above, First Chief tries to quiet the people of the land by informing them that the king is standing before them in greeting. First Citizen notes that greetings are of no use to a dying body. Then the Chiefs, shocked, try to discourage the people from talking, but Odewale says, 'Let them talk,' allocating turn to the people. He wants to understand their plight, so as to give them the opportunity to talk.

### 4.4 Overlap in Speech

Overlap occurs in speech when two or more characters or people talk at the same time such that one of the interlocutors may have to stop for the other. There are a good number of such occurrences in the text. The following excerpts are some of the incidents in the text.

#### Excerpt 1

ODEWALE. No, no-do not beg. I have said nothing yet to prove me innocent of your charges, and already you beg for forgiveness. No, do not beg, I pray you, only listen. And listen well. I know your pains, my people. I feel your suffering too. Sickness is in your houses? Sickness has entered my palace too. [Calling.] Ojuola! Ojuola! [Addressing TOWNSPEOPLE.] My children too are. [OJUOLA appears.]  
OJUOLA. My lord...  
ODEWALE. Bring the children here.  
(Act One, Scene 1, p.11)

In excerpt 1, Odekunle calls Ojuola. Ojuola was still answering when Odekunle asks her to bring the children. This overlap occurred as a result of urgency.

#### Excerpt 2

TOWNSPEOPLE. We thank our king for ...  
ODEWALE. No, no, do not thank me. I am only doing my duty. Do not thank me. Instead, let me ask you one question. Now, you have all come here, sprawling.

vomiting, rubbing tears on one another, begging me to

do my duty, and help you. But what about you yourselves? What have you done to help yourselves? Answer. Or is the land at peace? Are not people ailing and dying

TOWNSPEOPLE. We are suffering my Lord, we are ...

ODEWALE. Yes I know. But what have you done about it, I

ask. You there-Mama Ibeji-what did you do to save your twins from dying? It is sickness that man can cure, not death. What did you do to cure their sickness Nothing? Oh, I see, your body is too weak, your bones suddenly gone soft, you cannot move, you cannot go into the bush and cut herbs to boil for your children to drink. Is that so? Answer.

(Act One, Scene 1, p.12)

In excerpt 2, the townspeople are trying to thank their king, Odewale, for what he is doing to bring peace and healing to their land. He turn, he quickly interrupted them causing speech overlap by telling them not to thank him that he is only doing his duty. In the other stretch of conversation, Odewale brings in overlap in speech again to let the townspeople know that he has been doing something about the problems in the land.

### Excerpt 3

FIRST CHIEF. And what is so private about that ...

ODEWALE. No arguing, I pray. This curse-is it in the body of a man, in the womb of a woman, in the head of some animal, in the air--where?

PRIEST. He is asleep again.

ODEWALE [calling]. Ojuola! Ojuo...

OJUOLA [entering]. My lord [Kneels.]

ODEWALE [raising her up]. Forget courtesies, woman. Go and cure your son, he has been stricken with dumbness in Ile-Ife.

ADEROPO. I was not...

FIRST CHIEF. [fuming]. Then speak!

(Act One, Scene 2, pp.19-20)

In excerpt 3, we have a series of overlap and the overlap is as a result of urgency. Aderopo had been told to go to life and consult the Ife priest on the problem in the Land. Aderopo returns and finds it difficult to tell the story of what the Ife priest said. So in order to make him speak, out of anxiety, the interlocutors had to speak at the same time in some cases.

### Excerpt 4

BABA FAKUNLE. You called me pig' You are the murderer

FIRST CHIEF. Murderer?

ODEWALE. Why. I have not killed you yet: I have not even touched you and you call me ...

BABA FAKUNLE. Go on, touch me.

(Act Two, Scene 1, p.27)

Excerpt 4 is another example of overlap. Here Baba

Fakunle knows Odewale is the murderer but finds it hard to disclose. So in order to make him (Baba Fakunle) disclose it, Odewale has to call him names due to his hot temperament. This attempt leads to overlap in Speech.

### Excerpt 5

OJUOLA. By ten thieves near Ede, at a place where three footpaths meet, and that ...

ODEWALE. At where?

OJUOLA. That was what the man who came back with the King's body said, my lord.

(Act Three, Scene 2, p. 54)

In excerpt 5, Ojuola and Odewale's Speeches overlap. Ojuola is trying to describe the location of the murder of the farmer King, Adetusa and the reported murderers. However, Odewale is impatient and has to speak without allowing Ojuola to finish. This leads to overlap in their speech.

### Excerpt 6

OJUOLA. A soothsayer came here and called him the killer of the former King

ALAKA. Him...a killer! Is the man mad?

OJUOLA. That is what I told the King-not to take him seriously. I even told him about my own trouble when I had my first baby-a boy. This same soothsayer said that the boy had bad luck and that he would kill his father ...

ALAKA. The boy would do what?

OJUOLA. And then marry me, his mother afterwards.

ALAKA. That your son would kill his own father, and then turn round and marry ...

[Starts eating avidly.] Pray woman, let me eat in peace

[Enter ODEWALE from bedroom.]

OJUOLA. [to ALAKA]. I beg you, Old One, talk to him, tell ... him not to feel troubled over the ...

ODEWALE. [nervously loud]. What type of clothes was King Adetusa wearing when he was killed:

OJUOLA. I ... I cannot now remember, my lord.

[ODEWALE, gravely disappointed, stops short, gazing absently ahead of him.]

(Act Three, Scene 3, p.57)

In excerpt 6, Odewale is troubled. He has friend, Alaka, who comes visiting. Ojuola, his wife, explains the situation on ground to Alaka, emphasising the fact the Odewale has been accused by Baba Fakunle as the killer of the farmer king. She also tells him of how the same soothsayer told her to kill her first son because he brought bad luck to the earth. Alaka, moved by this story has to cut in thereby causing overlap by saying, 'The boy would do what?' Another overlap occurs as Odewale emerges and speaks while Ojuola was asking Alaka to help her calm Odekunle down, while Odekunle emerges from the room and nervously asks about the type of clothes king Adetusa was wearing when he was killed. This causes another overlap.



#### 4.5 Error and Repair Mechanisms

FIRST CHIEF. Which of you knows where Aderopo is now?

THIRD CITIZEN. Has the sickness killed him?

**(Error)**

(TOWNSPEOPLE wail a dirge)

ODEWALE. Peace, people, peace. All we ask you is: where is Aderopo? We did not say cry for him, the poor man is not dead yet.

TOWNSPEOPLE. Where is he then?

ODEWALE [To OGUN PRIEST]. Elder One, you tell them.

PRIEST. We have sent Aderopo to Ile Ife, the land of Orunmila, to ask the all-seeing god why we are in pain.

ODEWALE [To TOWNSPEOPLE]. Now you know. Those of you who thought that we, my chiefs and I, slept while you suffered, what have you now to say?

TOWNSPEOPLE. We thank our king for...

**(Repair Mechanism)**

ODEWALE. No, no, do not thank me. I am only doing my duty. Do not thank me.

(Act One, Scene 1, p.12)

In the excerpt above, we have a situation one of the interlocutors commits an error in speech and having found out they have committed an error, they use a repair mechanism to correct the error. First Chief asks the Towns people if they know where Aderopo is. The townspeople immediately assume that he too has been struck with an ailment and has died. As a result, Third Citizen asks if the sickness has killed him too. Immediately the townspeople begin to wail a dirge. Odewale quickly intervenes and explains to them that Aderopo is not dead yet but has gone to Ife in respect of the problem in the land. The town people, knowing that they have committed an error in speech, apply repair mechanism by apologizing for saying what they said.

#### 4.6 Insertion Sequence

Insertion sequence occurs when an interlocutor tries to avoid a particular topic of discussion or question by inserting a different topic entirely or by providing a contrary answer.

##### Excerpt 1

ADEROPO. My lord, may I come ...

ODEWALE. If you think that you can drum for my downfall, and hope that drum will sound, then your head is not good.

ADEROPO. What was that, my lord?

ODEWALE. What is the matter, fellow, aren't you a Yoruba man? Must proverbs be explained to you after they are said?

(Act Two, Scene 2, p.32)

In excerpt 1, Aderopo asks if he can come inside to

discuss with Odewale. However, instead of Odewale to say 'yes', which is the appropriate answer to that question, he uses a proverb which accuses Aderopo of plotting his downfall. Aderopo protests saying, 'What was that my Lord?' Instead of Odewale explaining why he accused him in that manner, he uses a different answer to avoid answering Aderopo's question.

##### Excerpt 2

ADEROPO. What wrong have I done to you?

ODEWALE. First, answer me this: did you, Aderopo, or did you not press that I should send for that.. that blind bat who calls himself Seer?

ADEROPO. What was wrong in ...

ADEROPO. I did.

ODEWALE. Next question: did you love your father Answer 'yes' or 'no', young man: Yes, or no? or did you not?

ADEROPO. What type of question is that?

ODEWALE. Did you love your father or did you not?

ADEROPO. There is no denying that I loved my father.

ODEWALE. Very well. Now then, when you heard that your father was killed by men you did not know, why did you not summon that blind bat then to tell you who had killed him, so that you could avenge the death of that father you said you loved so well? Answer that...

ADEROPO. He mentioned no name.

ODEWALE. Then why is it that all of a sudden the Seer trembles to hang me by the neck as the killer of your father?

ADEROPO. Why ask me? Am I the Seer?

ODEWALE. No, you are a tortoise, a coward, a conniving slippery maggot!

ADEROPO. What are those words supposed to mean?

(Act Two, Scene 2, pp. 33-34)

In excerpt 2, Odewale uses insertion sequence to avoid answering Aderopo's question, answering him with another question. Aderopo answers Odewale's question. Odewale asks another question, and Aderopo tries to avoid answering the question by asking another question.

##### Excerpt 3

OJUOLA. My lord, will you eat something now?

ODEWALE. I thought you were leaving with your son. [Now in casual wear, emerges from the bedroom Aderopo.]

OJUOLA. [kneeling]. It is you I married, your highness not my son.

ODEWALE. [moved]. Him! Great woman. Indeed. Who says women have no heads?

(Act Two, Scene 4, p.38)

Excerpt 3, is a conversation between Ojuola and Odewale. Ojuola asks if Odewale will eat something.

Instead of Odewale to answer with 'yes' or 'no', he answers with an entirely different statement.

**Excerpt 4**

OLD MAN. What is it you want?

ODEWALE. Let me ask you that, Elder One

OLD MAN. What did you say?

ODEWALE. The elders of my tribe have a proverb because the thief calls the farm-owner thief!

(Act Three, Scene 1, p. 46)

In excerpt 4 above, Old Man asks Odewale what he wants from him. Instead of Odewale telling exactly what he wants, he throws back the question at old Man., 'Let me ask you that, Elder One.' The Old Man tries to find out why Odewale throws the question back at him, but Odewale replays with a proverb. Thus, Odewale employs insertion sequence in other to avoid Old Man's questions.

**Excerpt 5**

OJUOLA. [to FIRST CHIEF] Were you not the one who sent for Baba Fakunle when my former husband was slain?

FIRST CHIEF. It is the custom of our land to find out how our kings die.

ODEWALE. Did you send for him or did you not?

FIRST CHIEF. Custom demanded; I obeyed.

(Act Three, Scene 2, p.53)

In excerpt 5, First Chief employs insertion sequence play down on his responsibility of sending for Baba Fakunle when the former king was slain. Accepting full responsibility for this will subject him to more questions from Odekunle. First Chief's second response, 'Custom demanded; I obeyed' more directly answers the question.

**Excerpt 6**

GBONKA. [Scared: It is so, it is so, I was with King Adetusa

ODEWALE. Who slew him?

GBONKA. It was near Ede, at the place where three when he met hot death. footpaths meet!

ODEWALE. I did not ask you where-

FIRST CHIEF. He said who killed the former King?

...

GBONKA. A man, your highness.

CHIEFS. A man! Did you not tell us a band of robbers?

ODEWALE. Which do you want us to believe now? Answer

quick!

GBONKA. A man! May Sango's lightning strike me dead if

I'm lying

ODEWALE. What kind of a man-what was he like?

GBONKA. It was a long time ago, my lord.

ODEWALE. Very well, then, let that pass. [Points to

ALAKA.]

This man here-look at him well. Do you remember him?

GBONKA. [after glaring at ALAKA]. Did he say he was the

man who killed King Adetusa?

ODEWALE. Answer my question! Do you remember him?

GBONKA. [stares at ALAKA again]. I do not, my lord.

(Act Three, Scene 4, p.66)

In excerpt 6, Odewale is desperately looking for the killer of the former king, and everyone is afraid of giving him the details. Thus Gbonka employs insertion sequence to avoid Odewale's question, 'Who slew him?' Instead of answering the question directly, he decides to talk about where the incident occurred. First Chief intervenes by re-directing him to the question, 'He said who killed the former King?' This time, Gbonka employs a more subtle and indefinite answer by replying, 'A man, your highness.' Odewale probe further, 'What kind of a man-what was he like?' That's another big question for Gbonka He employs insertion sequence again by saying, 'It was a long time ago, my lord.' He avoids answering that question again. Again, Odewale asks Gbonka if he remembers Alaka. Gbonka, again, employs insertion sequence to buy time in answering Odewale's question by saying, 'Did he say he was the man who killed King Adetusa?' This particular act provokes anger in Odewale, and Gbonka has to answer with a more direct answer, 'I do not, my lord.'

**4.7 Adjacency Pairs**

Adjacency pairs are statements that collocate in a stretch of utterance certain questions require certain answer. Consider the following excerpts from the text.

**Excerpt 1**

ODEWALE. Bokini

BOKINI. My lord.

(Act One, Scene 1, p.16)

In excerpt 1, Odewale calls Bokini. Bokini in turn says, 'my Lord'. 'My Lord' is the corresponding response to that kind of greeting among people of Yoruba extraction in Nigeria. The expression, 'my Lord' is a sign of respect to the person calling especially if he is a king or a ruler.

**Excerpt 2**

ADEROPO. Your highness...

KING'S BODYGUARD. The King greets you.

ADEROPO [To CHIEFS]. Fathers of our land ...

ODEWALE. Aderopo, lover of our kingdom, your reign be happy

PRIEST. We greet you, son, you have come well.

ADEROPO [rising]. I thank you all, my fathers.

(Act One, Scene 2, p.18)

Excerpt 2 depicts a typical Yoruba cultural setting. Here the king is described as 'your highness.' At times, the king does not answer. In this case, the king's bodyguard answers. Aderopo also greets the Chiefs. In turn Odewale and the priest greet Aderopo, respectively. The type of insertion sequence in this excerpt is greeting.

### Excerpt 3

ALAKA. Scorpion! My child, Scorpion!  
ODEWALE [recognizing him]. A-ah! Alaka, son of Odediran!  
ALAKA. Scorpion!  
One that must not be vexed.  
Smooth on the surface  
like a woman's jewel;  
poison at the tail.  
It is you I greet,  
[Prostrating himself.]  
Son of my master the hunter  
who squats playfully  
to kill a lion.  
[ODEWALE hurries down, arms outspread. They embrace.]  
ODEWALE. My master' Alaka, son of Odediran, son of  
ALAKA. This is me!  
[They embrace again.]

(Act Three, Scene 1, p.43)

In excerpt 3, the kind of insertion sequence that manifests is praise. Alaka praises Odewale and Odewale in turn praises Alaka through his lineage. Alaka again praises Odewale chanting his praises.

### Excerpt 4

OGUN PRIEST. My lord ...  
ODEWALE. Balogun.  
FIRST CHIEF. I stand with you, my lord  
ODEWALE. Otun.  
SECOND CHIEF. My lord.  
ODEWALE. Osi.  
THIRD CHIEF. I am here, my lord.  
ODEWALE. Pray, give her my wife-my mother. Pray give her a burial of honour.  
PRIEST AND CHIEFS. No more shall life make a mockery of her womanhood.  
ODEWALE. I thank you.

(Act Three, Scene 4, p.71)

Excerpt 4, has a different approach. It does not follow the greeting method or praises method, but a more solemn approach. The truth has just being revealed and Odewale is about to depart the land of Kutuje for an unknown land in his parting farewell message, he adopts adjacency pairs to address each participant individually and instruct them on what to do.

## CONCLUSION

This study dwells on the conversational features used in Ola Rotimi's *The gods Are Not to Blame* revealing their relevance in achieving effective communication. Throughout the text, conversational features such as turn taking and turn allocation, insertion sequences, adjacency pairs, error and repair mechanism are prominent and they help to weave together the subject matter and themes of the text. By employing conversational features, the author is able to achieve orderliness in the interaction of the characters. In the text, interactions are structured in a sequential manner. Thus, this study indicates that conversation analysis gives a deeper and better understanding of human utterances as portrayed through the characters in the text; thereby increasing the readers understanding of the text. It is quite obvious from the analysis that conversation can be contextually determined as well as construed in any exchange between interlocutors. It becomes imperative for people to be tactful, by employing the features of conversation analysis to have meaningful exchanges with others. Therefore, conversation analysis is a theory essential for successful demystification of utterances, particularly in literary texts.

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