



Film Dialogue as Pragmatic Performance: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Tunde Kelani's *Thunderbolt* and *Narrow Path*

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Abstract. Film dialogue functions as a dynamic communicative event where language is used not only to advance narrative but also to perform actions, negotiate meaning, and reflect socio-cultural realities. Although previous studies on Nigerian films have examined their thematic, moral, and ideological elements, limited attention has been given to how characters' utterances operate as context-driven pragmatic acts. This study investigates the influence of context on conversational exchanges in selected Mainframe Films, *Thunderbolt (Magun)* and *Narrow Path*, with a view to identifying the pragmatic acts performed and determining how these acts contribute to meaning-making within the films. The study adopts a modified version of Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, which emphasises activity parts (dialogue acts) and contextual features such as inference, reference, relevance, metaphor, shared situational and shared cultural knowledge, which form an integral part of movies, situating utterances in appropriate contexts to produce practs. Dialogues purposively selected from *Thunderbolt* (2001) and *Narrow Path* (2006) were analysed for their thematic and communicative significance. Each utterance was examined in relation to its contextual parameters to determine the practs generated and their contributions to interactional meaning. Findings reveal that the contexts of culture, conflict, morality, and social expectation serve as dominant backgrounds of conversational exchange in both films. The pragmatic acts identified include authenticating and disclaiming, condemning and substantiating, advising and warning, imploring and appealing, cautioning and challenging, pacifying and substantiating. These acts demonstrate how characters engage with Yoruba cultural norms, negotiate moral accountability, validate belief systems, and resist or reinforce societal expectations. Moreover, acts such as imploring, cautioning, challenging, mocking, and substantiating affirm the embeddedness of Yoruba communicative logic within cinematic discourse. The study concludes that film dialogue operates as pragmatic performance where meaning emerges from the interaction of linguistic action and contextual

knowledge. It affirms that pragmatic acts in Yoruba-rooted films are culturally motivated and serve as important resources for constructing social relations, validating worldviews, and interpreting human experience.

Keywords: Film Dialogue, Pragmatic Acts, Context, *Thunderbolt*, *Narrow Path*, Yoruba Culture

1. Introduction

Language serves as a vital tool for performing social actions and negotiating meaning in every communicative situation. Beyond its structural and semantic properties, language is an instrument through which people act, persuade, question, challenge, and express intentions within specific contexts. In film discourse, dialogue performs these same functions. It does not only propel the plot forward but also constructs social relations, reflects worldviews, and dramatizes the communicative practices of a people. Dialogue in film thus functions as a form of performance, a reenactment of everyday speech situations where meaning is produced through interaction and shared understanding of context. In the Nigerian film industry, particularly in the works of Tunde Kelani, language is not an arbitrary artistic device but a medium through which cultural values, moral codes, and human relationships are negotiated and sustained.

Over the years, Nigerian films, popularly known as Nollywood, have evolved into a powerful cultural institution that mirrors the lived realities of its audiences. Films produced under Tunde Kelani's Mainframe Productions, such as *Thunderbolt* (2001) and *Narrow Path* (2006), are distinct for their authentic representation of Yoruba culture and for the centrality of dialogue in constructing meaning. These films foreground issues of love, marriage, fidelity, gender relations, and moral order, using language in ways that are deeply rooted in Yoruba social norms. Yet, despite the communicative depth of such film

dialogues, most studies on Nigerian films have tended to focus on their thematic, moral, ideological, or aesthetic dimensions, leaving the pragmatic aspect of film language largely unexplored. Film dialogue has often been examined for what it *represents* rather than for what it *does*, that is, the actions speakers perform through language within the context of the film's communicative situations.

Several scholars have studied films from different perspectives, including semiotics, critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and gender studies. For instance, Musthafa Amin (2009) employed Critical Discourse Analysis to examine gender stereotyping in *It's a Boy Girl Thing*, showing how language constructs power relations. Similarly, Uwah (2011) explored the representation of African traditional religion and culture in Nigerian films, while Azeez (2000) carried out a pragmatic study of marital discourse in selected films. These studies, though valuable, have mostly relied on content analysis and ideological critique. They focus on what films say about society but not on how the utterances themselves operate as contextual actions within interactional frameworks. In the same vein, international works such as Yan Shuang's (2009) analysis of *The Princess Diary* and Galuh's (2011) study of indirect speech acts in *Up* have demonstrated the utility of pragmatic analysis in film dialogue. However, there remains a paucity of indigenous scholarship that applies pragmatic models to Nigerian films, especially in the context of Yoruba socio-cultural communication. This gap underscores the need for an approach that explains how film utterances function as pragmatic acts shaped by context, culture, and communicative goals. The present study therefore addresses this gap by examining film dialogue as a form of pragmatic performance in Tunde Kelani's *Thunderbolt* and *Narrow Path*. It investigates the influence of context on conversations in selected Mainframe Films (*Thunderbolt* and *Narrow Path*) to determine the pragmatic acts performed and how these acts contribute to meaning-making within the films.

1.1 Synopsis of *Thunderbolt (Magun)* (2001)

Thunderbolt, directed by Tunde Kelani and produced by Mainframe Film and Television Productions, tells the story of love, mistrust, and the clash between traditional beliefs and modern rationality. The film centres on Yinka, a young Yoruba woman, and her Igbo husband, Ngozi, whose intercultural marriage faces severe challenges arising from suspicion and jealousy. When rumours of Ngozi's infidelity spread, Yinka, consumed by doubt and manipulated by cultural prejudice, accuses her husband of

unfaithfulness. In a fit of anger and vengeance, Ngozi's detractors secretly place *magun*, a traditional Yoruba charm believed to kill any man who sleeps with the woman it is placed on, on Yinka. The story unfolds as Yinka struggles to prove her innocence and find a cure to the deadly spell. With the help of a traditional healer, and her eventual reconciliation with Ngozi, the film exposes the tension between tradition and modernity, superstition and science, as well as love and cultural difference. Ultimately, *Thunderbolt* dramatizes the power of trust, the influence of indigenous belief systems, and the significance of communication and understanding in human relationships.

1.2 Synopsis of *Narrow Path* (2006)

Tunde Kelani's *Narrow Path*, adapted from Bayo Adebowale's novel *The Virgin*, explores the themes of chastity, womanhood, and cultural morality in a traditional Yoruba setting. The narrative follows Awero, a beautiful village girl admired by two suitors, Odejimi and Lapade. Bound by the cultural expectation of virginity before marriage, Awero's fate takes a tragic turn when she is raped by Dauda, a stranger from another village. The assault threatens her honour and her impending marriage to Odejimi, leading to social conflict and communal tension. Caught between shame and societal judgment, Awero's experience exposes the double standards of morality in a patriarchal society. Through her ordeal and eventual vindication, *Narrow Path* interrogates the notions of purity, forgiveness, and cultural rigidity while affirming the resilience and dignity of the African woman. The film combines traditional aesthetics with moral and social commentary, illustrating how individual choices intersect with communal expectations in Yoruba society.

2. Review of Relevant Literature

Film is increasingly recognised as more than a visual art; it functions as a communicative arena where language, culture, and social interaction intersect. Dialogue in film serves not only as a narrative device but also as a pragmatic performance through which characters perform actions, construct identities, and negotiate meanings within specific contexts (Toolan, 2011; Dynel, 2011). In African cinema, particularly in Yoruba-language and culturally rooted productions, dialogue embodies social norms, moral values, and communal ideologies, transforming film into a site of linguistic and cultural performance (Haynes, 2016; Adesokan, 2012). Tunde Kelani's Mainframe productions, including *Thunderbolt (Magun)* and *Narrow Path*, exemplify this function. Through richly

contextualised exchanges, his characters deploy language as a medium of persuasion, conflict, caution, and moral instruction, reflecting the social dynamics of Yoruba communication.

Pragmatics, as the study of language use in context, provides the analytical lens through which such communicative acts can be examined. Classical theories of speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) foreground the performative and inferential nature of communication. Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory extends this tradition by recognising that meaning arises through the interaction of linguistic activity parts and contextual features, including social norms, shared cultural knowledge, and situational parameters. This model has proven effective in analysing everyday discourse, but its application to film dialogue, where communication is both scripted and performative, reveals how cinematic utterances enact socially meaningful actions within fictional contexts. Scholars have applied pragmatic frameworks to film discourse to explore how characters use language to command, persuade, insult, apologise, and challenge, thereby illustrating that dialogue operates as a form of pragmatic performance (Verschueren, 1999; Dynel, 2011; Cutting, 2002).

African scholars have similarly recognised that the spoken language of film reproduces the pragmatics of everyday life. Adegbija (1999) and Odeunmi (2006) demonstrate that Nigerian and Yoruba speech communities rely heavily on contextual cues such as proverbs, indirectness, and shared situational knowledge to negotiate meaning. Proverbs and metaphors serve as pragmatic resources through which speakers encode moral guidance, criticism, or emotional restraint (Akinwotu, 2013; Odeunmi, 2010). In Yoruba society, communicative acts are deeply contextual, requiring sensitivity to social hierarchy, age, and politeness conventions (Adejare, 1992). These communicative norms are replicated in Yoruba films, where utterances often reflect respect, deference, and caution. Consequently, analysing film dialogue through a pragmatic lens allows a deeper understanding of how such linguistic acts are adapted to fictional yet culturally grounded situations.

Scholarly engagement with Nigerian films has often privileged thematic and ideological dimensions over linguistic and pragmatic ones. Haynes (2016) and Adesokan (2012) focus on how Nollywood narratives express moral and social concerns, while Okome (2007) and Akpabio (2003) examine their cultural symbolism and representation of gender. These studies affirm that Nigerian films serve as moral and ideological texts but stop short of analysing how

language performs those moral functions. Even when dialogue is discussed, attention tends to be on its realism or sociolinguistic authenticity rather than its pragmatic value. Hence, there is a need for studies that interrogate how dialogue functions as communicative action—that is, how utterances perform speech acts shaped by Yoruba socio-cultural norms.

A few Nigerian scholars have begun to fill this gap. Odeunmi (2008) and Babatunde (2010) apply pragmatic theories to Yoruba conversational and dramatic discourse, demonstrating that meaning in Nigerian interaction is inseparable from context. Akinwotu (2013), examining dramatic dialogues, identifies pragmatic acts such as warning, imploring, and threatening as recurrent features that reflect Yoruba communicative behaviour. Similarly, Adetunji (2010) analyses Nigerian political discourse using Mey's framework and concludes that pragmatic acts like advising and cautioning mirror traditional norms of polite and indirect communication. These findings underscore that the pragmatic act framework is versatile for analysing performative discourse, including film, because it accounts for both context and culture in meaning production.

Studies specifically addressing film dialogue in Nigerian cinema remain relatively few. Adeoti (2010) argues that dialogue in Mainframe films such as *Thunderbolt* and *Saworoide* functions as a narrative and moral device that reflects Yoruba rhetorical traditions. Aboh and Oha (2017) highlight how Nigerian film characters employ linguistic resources to negotiate gender and power, showing that utterances often mirror real-life speech behaviour. Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2019) similarly contends that Nollywood dialogues are extensions of oral traditions, rich in proverb and metaphor that function pragmatically as cautionary and evaluative tools. Despite these contributions, most analyses remain thematic or rhetorical, without a systematic identification of pragmatic acts or their contextual determinants.

The few studies on *Thunderbolt* and *Narrow Path* themselves focus on sociocultural and gender dimensions rather than language use. Elegbe (2019) interprets *Thunderbolt* as a cultural narrative about belief and superstition, while Ogundipe (2020) reads *Narrow Path* as a critique of patriarchal chastity norms. Fadipe (2018) explores morality and tradition in Kelani's cinema, noting that dialogue sustains Yoruba ethical codes but without examining how specific utterances perform pragmatic functions such as imploring or authenticating. Thus, while these works enrich the understanding of the films' moral and cultural contexts, they leave unexamined the

pragmatic mechanisms through which such meanings are enacted.

The gap, therefore, lies in the insufficient attention to the *pragmatic dimension* of film dialogue in Nigerian cinema. Although the films of Tunde Kelani are celebrated for their linguistic authenticity, no major study has systematically applied Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory to identify and interpret the pragmatic acts performed in their dialogues. Understanding these acts such as cautioning, imploring, authenticating, condemning, and challenging, is crucial because they reflect the communicative norms of Yoruba society and reveal how meaning is contextually and culturally constructed. Examining dialogue as pragmatic performance also demonstrates how language in film functions as social action rather than mere representation.

Consequently, this study contributes to bridging this gap by investigating film dialogue as pragmatic performance in *Thunderbolt* and *Narrow Path*. It builds on prior Nigerian and Yoruba pragmatic scholarship (Odebunmi, 2006; Akinwotu, 2013; Adetunji, 2010) to show how context-bound utterances in Yoruba films perform actions that both mirror and mediate real-life social communication. By situating Kelani's films within the pragmatic-act framework, the study illuminates how film dialogue embodies Yoruba conversational logic, where speech acts such as imploring or cautioning are culturally embedded strategies for expressing emotion, enforcing morality, or negotiating relationships. In doing so, it extends pragmatic research beyond conversational and literary texts into cinematic discourse, affirming film as a vital site of socio-cultural communication and pragmatic performance.

3. Theoretical Framework: Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory

This study is anchored on Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, a context-driven approach that conceptualises language as a form of social action performed within culturally and situationally defined environments. Mey argues that pragmatic meaning does not reside solely in linguistic structures, but in the interaction between utterances, users, and the socio-cultural realities that shape communicative behaviour. This view expands earlier speech act theories by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), which emphasised the performative capacities of language but paid limited attention to the socio-cultural settings that enable or constrain those performances. Central to Mey's framework is the notion of the *pragmeme*,

defined as a socially recognised communicative act that emerges from culturally regulated patterns of interaction. A *pragmeme* represents the general communicative intention, while its realisation in actual discourse, referred to as a pragmatic act (*pract*) reflects the speaker's adaptation of linguistic and contextual resources to achieve a specific communicative goal. Pragmatic acts, therefore, are context-dependent performances shaped by speakers' intentions, cultural norms, shared knowledge, and situational demands (Mey, 2001).

Mey further identifies two interrelated dimensions of every *pragmeme*: the Activity Part and the Textual Part. The Activity Part encompasses the broader contextual conditions that influence meaning-making, including participants' identities, social roles, cultural expectations, power relations, and shared situational and cultural knowledge. These contextual factors are especially relevant in Yoruba communicative environments, where metaphor, proverb, deference, and moral reasoning strongly inform interpretation (Adejare, 1992; Odebunmi, 2006). In the selected films, these contextual cues frame how characters authenticate beliefs, negotiate social norms, express caution, challenge authority, or contest injustice. The Textual Part, by contrast, deals with the linguistic means through which pragmatic acts are realised. These include lexical choices, proverbs, metaphors, idiomatic expressions, tone, rhetorical structures, and other metapragmatic signals that guide interpretation and convey pragmatic force. As earlier film-pragmatics studies have shown (Dyner, 2011; Akinwotu, 2013), cinematic dialogue relies heavily on such textual cues to dramatise social actions, construct identities, and advance conflict or resolution.

Mey's theory is particularly suited to this study because film dialogue, though scripted, functions as a reproduction of real-life communicative behaviour, reflecting the cultural, moral, and ideological landscapes of society. In *Thunderbolt* and *Narrow Path*, pragmatic acts are performed through both linguistic choices and socio-cultural expectations. These acts mirror Yoruba communicative logic and demonstrate how meaning is negotiated through the interaction of text and context. Pragmatic Acts Theory therefore provides a robust analytic tool for explaining how film dialogue operates as pragmatic performance, and how characters' utterances enact socially grounded actions that reinforce or interrogate cultural norms.

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a **qualitative approach** within the framework of **Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory**, which views language as action situated in context. The model enables an analysis of how film dialogue functions as pragmatic performance, revealing how utterances enact culturally grounded communicative acts in Yoruba society. Two Mainframe films directed by Tunde Kelani, *Thunderbolt (Magun)* (2001) and *Narrow Path* (2006), were **purposely selected** for their linguistic richness and socio-cultural depth. Relevant dialogues were transcribed from Yoruba and Nigerian English into Standard English, with attention to preserving idiomatic meanings, proverbs, and cultural expressions that carry pragmatic significance. Analysis focused on identifying **activity parts** (dialogue acts) and their **contextual features**, inference, reference, relevance, metaphor, manner, shared situational and cultural knowledge, as proposed by Mey (2001). Utterances were examined for pragmatic acts and interpreted in relation to their immediate and socio-cultural contexts. The scope of the study is limited to selected scenes in *Thunderbolt* and *Narrow Path*, excluding broader cinematic elements.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

The analysis focuses on how utterances in *Thunderbolt* and *Narrow Path* function as pragmatic performances that enact culturally grounded communicative acts. Following Mey's (2001) *Pragmatic Acts Theory*, each dialogue excerpt was examined in relation to its contextual features; shared situational knowledge (ssk), shared cultural knowledge (sck), inference (inf), reference (ref), and relevance (rel), to determine the pragmatic acts performed which recur in the films' conversational exchanges.

5.1 Authenticating and Disclaiming in *Thunderbolt (Magun)*

Dialogue Excerpt 1:

Doctor: "Science can explain many things, but not all things. What you call superstition may have its own logic."

Herbalist: "The power of *magun* is not in the charm, but in belief."

Both speakers perform authenticating acts, validating their respective worldviews. The doctor's utterance authenticates modern rationality through cautious assertion, while the herbalist authenticates traditional knowledge by appealing to collective belief. The interaction exemplifies Mey's notion of shared

cultural knowledge (sck), where pragmatic meaning arises from contrasting but coexisting epistemologies. The acts jointly produce a pragmatic equilibrium that reflects Yoruba pluralism, which is the coexistence of scientific and traditional explanations for social phenomena.

5.2 Condemning and Substantiating in *Narrow Path*

Dialogue Excerpt 2:

Elder: "A woman who loses her chastity before marriage has brought shame to her family."

Awero's Mother: "But my daughter was forced; should she be blamed for her pain?"

The elder's statement performs a condemning act, rooted in cultural morality that values female purity. It invokes shared cultural knowledge (sck) about chastity and honour, framing the event as communal disgrace. Awero's mother's response performs a substantiating act, providing contextual justification and contesting social judgment through moral reasoning. This exchange illustrates how pragmatic acts in the film reveal underlying social tensions between justice and tradition, empathy and normativity. The analysis shows that condemnation and substantiation operate as dialogic tools through which characters negotiate moral accountability in Yoruba society.

5.3 Advising and Warning in *Thunderbolt*

Dialogue Excerpt 3:

Mama Tola (Neighbour): "My daughter, in marriage, patience is the rope that holds the calabash together. If you break it, everything scatters."

Yinka: "But how long can patience last when love begins to fade?"

Interpretation:

Mama Tola's utterance performs a pragmatic act of advising, using a proverb to express moral instruction. The metaphor of the "calabash" reflects Yoruba symbolic language, where household harmony is likened to a fragile vessel. The contextual features at play are shared cultural knowledge (sck) and metaphor (mph), which ground the advice in familiar imagery. Yinka's response implies a warning act, signalling emotional strain and the possible breakdown of marital harmony. The exchange illustrates how advice and warning often co-occur as communicative strategies in Yoruba interaction, emphasising respect and moral persuasion rather than confrontation.

5.4 Condemning and Authenticating in *Thunderbolt*

Dialogue Excerpt 4:

Elder Herbalist: “The charm does not kill an innocent woman. It exposes the deceitful.”

Doctor: “You speak with certainty, but not all things seen through faith are proven by science.”

Interpretation:

The herbalist’s utterance performs a condemning act, directed toward the perceived immorality of unfaithful women, while simultaneously authenticating traditional belief systems. The doctor’s response introduces disclaiming, questioning the reliability of supernatural explanations. This interaction exemplifies the pragmatic negotiation between indigenous and Western epistemologies. Through reference (ref) and inference (inf), both characters defend their worldviews using language as a tool of validation. The dialogue underscores how Yoruba film discourse stages pragmatic conflicts between belief systems through acts of authentication and disclaiming.

5.5 Imploring and Appealing in *Narrow Path*

Dialogue Excerpt 5:

Awero: “Mother, please believe me. I am not the one they say I am.”

Awero’s Mother: “My child, the world listens to the loudest voice, not always to the truth.”

Interpretation:

Awero’s statement performs an imploring act, appealing to her mother’s empathy and moral support. The pragmatic force derives from shared situational knowledge (ssk), the communal stigma surrounding rape victims in traditional Yoruba society. The mother’s reply conveys both empathy and resignation, functioning as a subtle appealing act to fate and communal perception. The exchange reveals how imploration in Yoruba communication often expresses both vulnerability and moral persuasion, shaped by emotional restraint and contextual sensitivity.

5.6 Advising and Cautioning in *Narrow Path*

Dialogue Excerpt 6:

Elder Woman: “A girl must guard her honour like a pot of water on her head; one careless step and it all spills.”

Awero: “But what if the pot is broken by another’s hand?”

Interpretation:

The elder’s proverb performs a cautioning act, using metaphor to reinforce societal expectations of chastity.

The utterance draws on shared cultural knowledge (sck) and metaphor (mph) to encode moral surveillance. Awero’s rhetorical question constitutes a challenging act, subtly questioning the fairness of victim-blaming. This exchange demonstrates how pragmatic acts in the film function as dialogic tools for negotiating social norms, allowing female characters to resist or reinterpret patriarchal authority through indirect speech.

5.7 Disclaiming and Challenging in *Thunderbolt*

Dialogue Excerpt 7:

Ngozi: “They say I brought shame to my husband and his people. But tell me, how can love be shame?”

Friend: “When trust is broken, love becomes an empty shell.”

Interpretation:

Ngozi’s utterance performs a disclaiming act, denying accusations and defending his moral integrity. The friend’s response enacts a challenging act, confronting Ngozi’s justification with a proverb-like metaphor. The interaction reflects the Yoruba communicative value of indirect confrontation, where correction and criticism are couched in metaphorical reasoning. The pragmatic effect arises from relevance (rel) and inference (inf), enabling the hearer to interpret meaning through cultural association rather than explicit statement.

5.8 Pacifying and Substantiating in *Narrow Path*

Dialogue Excerpt 8:

Priest: “Peace must come before justice; when anger speaks, truth hides.”

Village Head: “Yet, peace cannot stand where shame remains unspoken.”

Interpretation:

The priest’s utterance performs a pacifying act, seeking to calm communal tension and restore harmony, a core value in Yoruba conflict resolution. The village head’s response functions as a substantiating act, reinforcing the necessity of truth-telling even at the cost of temporary discord. The pragmatic interplay here shows how Yoruba dialogue often seeks balance between peace and truth, two moral imperatives that guide social order. The contextual features of shared cultural knowledge (sck) and relevance (rel) determine the cooperative negotiation between both speakers.

6. Discussion of Findings

The analysis of dialogue from *Thunderbolt (Magun)* and *Narrow Path* demonstrates that film language in Tunde Kelani's Mainframe productions operates as a pragmatic performance shaped by socio-cultural expectations, moral values, and interpersonal dynamics. The findings show that pragmatic acts in the films are not random but are rooted in Yoruba cultural logic, where communication is highly contextual and meaning is negotiated through shared cultural and situational knowledge.

One major finding is the dominance of cultural context in shaping character utterances. In both films, speakers draw heavily on shared cultural knowledge (sck) and shared situational knowledge (ssk) to authenticate belief systems, reinforce moral codes, and validate worldview positions. For instance, the doctor-herbalist exchanges in *Thunderbolt* foreground a pragmatic tension between traditional epistemology and modern scientific reasoning. Their utterances reflect an embedded negotiation where authentication and disclaiming function as reciprocal acts to validate competing belief systems. This highlights Yoruba cultural pluralism, where indigenous wisdom and scientific rationality coexist and often intersect in everyday communication.

Similarly, the women-centred discourses in *Narrow Path* reveal the culturally informed nature of moral judgement and gender expectations. Condemning, cautioning, and substantiating acts surrounding chastity, purity, and honour display how patriarchal norms are pragmatically enacted through language. The elders' utterances draw on proverbs, metaphors, and communal moral standards to caution, warn, or condemn, while characters like Awero and her mother employ challenging, imploring, and substantiating acts to resist societal pressure and negotiate justice. This indicates that pragmatic acts in the film serve as a means through which cultural tension, especially around gender and morality, is discursively contested.

Another significant finding is the recurring pattern of paired pragmatic acts, such as advising/warning, pacifying/substantiating, and imploring/appealing, illustrating that film dialogue often reflects dialogic progression rather than isolated linguistic actions. These paired acts show that meaning in Yoruba film discourse emerges from interaction: a speaker performs an act, and a respondent's reply produces a complementary or opposing act that deepens the communicative event. This supports Mey's (2001) assertion that pragmatic acts are inherently context-dependent and relational.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that metaphors and proverbs function as central pragmatic resources in both films. Characters use metaphorical expressions not merely as stylistic elements but as tools for advising, cautioning, condemning, and authenticating. These figurative expressions encode cultural meanings that guide interpretation, reaffirming the interdependence of language, culture, and context in Yoruba communication. By employing these resources, film dialogue mirrors everyday Yoruba speech practices and reinforces the films' cultural authenticity.

Lastly, the films show that pragmatic acts often carry ideological and moral implications. Whether addressing trust, fidelity, chastity, conflict resolution, or communal justice, the utterances analysed demonstrate that pragmatic actions in film are used to reflect, reinforce, or challenge social values. Thus, the findings confirm that film dialogue is a vehicle for socio-cultural commentary, and that meaning in Yoruba film discourse is inherently pragmatic, constructed through actions, negotiations, and cultural reasoning embedded in language use.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined film dialogue as pragmatic performance in *Thunderbolt (Magun)* and *Narrow Path*, demonstrating that cinematic communication in Yoruba-rooted films is fundamentally shaped by context, culture, and social interaction. Through the application of Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, the analysis identified a range of pragmatic acts, including authenticating, disclaiming, condemning, substantiating, advising, warning, imploring, appealing, pacifying, and challenging, that reveal how characters use language to perform actions, negotiate meaning, and communicate socio-cultural values.

The findings show that pragmatic acts in these films are culturally motivated and embedded in Yoruba communicative norms, where proverbs, metaphors, and shared knowledge guide interpretation. Dialogue is shown to function as a site of cultural negotiation: characters validate belief systems, negotiate moral responsibility, enforce social expectations, and challenge societal norms through context-dependent linguistic actions. Consequently, the films affirm the centrality of culture in meaning-making and highlight the capacity of film dialogue to dramatise real-life communication patterns.

The study concludes that film dialogue is not merely a narrative device but a dynamic avenue for performing

pragmatic actions that reflect and critique social realities. Tunde Kelani's films, in particular, demonstrate that cinematic discourse in Nigeria is a rich domain for pragmatic enquiry, offering insight into how language functions as social action within cultural frameworks. By illustrating how context-driven pragmatic acts shape meaning in *Thunderbolt* and *Narrow Path*, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of film as a communicative and cultural performance. It also underscores the need for further research on pragmatic strategies in African cinema, where language remains a vital tool for articulating identity, ideology, morality, and cultural values.

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