



Research Paper

The Sociolinguistic Application of Names and Appellations as Expression of Desires among the Yorubas: Biodunllori and OlukayodeFalegan as the Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The study explored naming system as expression of desires within the context of system of the Yoruba people with Biodunllori and OlukayodeFalega as the case study since names are significant among the Yorubas. Names mean various things to different people in different societies. The Yoruba people of Nigeria choose their names carefully just because they see names as reflection of different situations and professions. People acquire new names and appellations based on their personal achievements or contribution to the society. The paper studies names and appellations as expression of desires within the context of sociolinguistics using Ethnomethodological approach. The paper analyses the sociolinguistic features of names and appellations, selected from the two radio presenters, OlukayodeFalegan and Biodunllori.

KEYWORDS: *language, personal names, Yoruba culture and sociolinguistics*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Language is an indispensable factor in human interaction and communication. It serves as a vehicle which conveys messages as regards people's way of life, culture and world views. Language plays a significant role in any issue that concerns the development of any society. According to Wardhaugh (2006) "a language is what the members of a particular society speak" (p. 1). Language is a source of empowering people in the society in attaining growth and cohesion. Ayodele (2009) adds that language "is a major defining characteristic future of ethnicity" (p. 51). This means that it is a crucial factor to identity. Language can be used to define people, label and design a person or an object, it can be used to name and define a man, an idea or an opinion. That is why Wardhaugh (2006) admits that language is a "communal possession, although admittedly an abstract one. Individuals have access to it and constantly show that they do so by using it properly" (p. 2). Omeje (2008) claims that "language can be used to weigh, evaluate and inform people about other people, thought, experiences, feelings, etc." (p. 6). Language and culture are inseparable and in the words of Ngugi as quoted by <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu> (2014)

...specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality, but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries... Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other ... Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world ... Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (15-16)

This means that language is very important to our experience and it is a part of being human; it is hard to imagine life without it. It is a tool for expressing our thoughts and ideas. To confirm this, a blogger, Boroditsky (2020) says “language is central to our experience of being human, and the languages we speak profoundly shape the way we think, the way we see the world, the way we live our lives”. Language is therefore, uniquely a human gift, central to our experience of being human.

Personal Names

Name is a socio-cultural interpretation of historical events which embodies individual life experiences, social norms and values, status roles and authority, as well as personality and individual attributes; while <https://www.bing.com> defines the word, “name” as “a word or set of words by which a person or thing is known, addressed, or referred to”. The free dictionary defines name as a “word or words by which an entity is designated and distinguished from others;” and “a word or term by which a person or thing is commonly and distinctively known”. In Stjepan’s (2012) view “names generally evoke certain stereotypical pictures”. Adamic (1942) in Hailu (2017) explains that name is “merely a tag, a pointer-outer which in itself has next to no meaning” (p. 51). Similarly, Rey (1995: 26) in Agyekum (2006) argues that names are “purely referential...” (p. 207). This means that personal names are just ordinary references and nothing more, to some people. It indicates that names are only considered as arbitrary labels that refer to certain signified entries, and it is therefore, insignificant. Nevertheless, this is particularly contrary to the notion of the Yorubas in Nigeria and Africans, in general that names “are beyond a “word” or words by which a person, animal, place or thing is known. In the words of Guma (2001) in Hailu (2017), this “does not fundamentally connote designation, reputation, or identification, separation of one individual from the other person” (p. 51). Similarly, Mokola (2020, p. 220) has this to say about personal “names naming system among Basotho follows certain processes which reflect their belief systems and cultural heritage among other things.” However, Hailu (2017) argues that “names serve as symbols which will remain with people throughout their lives” (pp. 51- 52). In the Yoruba setting, names play an important role in reminding the future posterity that once upon a time there lived a certain group of people in a particular place. In the same vein, Agyekum (2006) has this to say about names in Africa, “in our cultural contexts we name in order to differentiate, to recognize and finally to know” (p. 207).

The Yorubas attach a lot of importance to names and naming ceremonies. The belief is that names give prestige and honour to an individual, the Yoruba culture, philosophy, thought, environment, religion and language of the people. Agyekum (2006) believes that some scholars consider names to have attributes and therefore consider names to be attached to referents. He argues that these

scholars believe that names (proper nouns) have reference by means of the descriptive value they have about their referents; the relation of denotation between a name and a referent is deeply rooted in the sense of that name (p. 214).

This is also similar to Yoruba culture where the social and cultural context analyses of personal names strongly reveal the power of names to emphasize social relationships. To this end, (Agyekum, 2006p. 114) stresses that “personal names are iconic representations of composite social variables that indexicalise and relate to the name and the person”. Consequently, people expect the inherent power of words in names to reflect the lives of people either positively or negatively. Therefore, the individual’s name is valuable to the person, the family and even, to the society as a whole. People are named after professions, events, personal traits, circumstances, etc.

II. OBJECTIVES

This study’s aim is to establish the sociolinguistic aspect of name and by exploring the relationship between names among the Yorubas and how the society perceives them. The objectives of this study among others are:

- i. to investigate the social contexts of names and appellations among the Yoruba people;
- ii. to explain the effect of names and even appellations in order to determine if they are used as social tags to indicate personal identity; and
- iii. to examine the sociocultural importance of names.

Statement of Problems

The study of personal names is referred to as anthroponomy. (Algeo, 1992, p. 727) in Agyekum (2006) explains that “Anthroponomy falls under the umbrella of onomastics that deals with the study of proper names including their forms and use” (p. 207). The knowledge about Yoruba names can give insight into Yoruba people, philosophy, language and culture. According to Fox (2011)

Like people, companies have names and, like personal names, company names stand for image, identity, reputation, culture and promise. The usefulness of having a good name is enormous: it can be applied to all products and can be combined with a variety of brand names which enables sub-branding (p. 1)

This shows that in every culture, names have cultural and social contexts that identify the bearer. This implies that every person in the universe has one name that distinguishes him/her from all other peoples in the

world. In view of this, people expect the potent power of words in names to reflect the lives of people either positively or negatively. This study takes the socio-cultural aspect of the process of naming into account.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive or qualitative method including primary and secondary sources. The primary qualitative data were obtained through interview with the key informants, Olukayode Falegan and Biodun Ilori. "An ethnomethodological research is often referred to as a qualitative research" (Taiwo, 2010, p. 29). The aim of these researchers, therefore is to use this approach to understand local knowledge and practices relating to the daily life of the Yoruba people in terms of application of names and appellations as expression of desires. Therefore, ethnomethodologists do not just conduct their research from a distance, and that is why Taiwo's observation is very germane here:

They participate in the life of the people and observe daily interactions among them in formal and informal conversations among the groups and individuals. This method of doing research is called participant observation method, and the researcher is called a participant-observer (p. 29).

Ethnomethodological research demands that the researcher lives within the community he or she is investigating to facilitate his/her interaction with the people. In view of this, two Air-on-Personality (AOP) radio presenters, Olukayode Falegan and Biodun Ilori have been chosen as a case study. The study investigated and analyzed their given names and the interpretations attached to the names and appellations as a way of culture. This paper will use the available information through the raw interview the researchers had with the two radio presenters as the primary source of data analysis.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Garfinkel's (1984) Ethnomethodological approach. Ethnomethodology, according to Taiwo (2010) is a "blend of the words Ethnography and methodology. It is a branch of Anthropology, which studies people in their environment" (p. 28). Since language is a crucial part of the human social structure, therefore, we use it actively, on daily basis to create and shape the world through social interaction. It is often said that every language operates in a social world; so the knowledge of the culture, values, expectations and norms of the people as regards application of names and appellations as expression of desires among the Yoruba people, hence the need for this study. Some of the features of an ethnomethodological research adopted in this study among others according to Taiwo (2010) are: the study of naturally occurring phenomena in their setting; data collection and analysis that takes place at the micro level; it involves discovery through interaction; it involves the study of the local knowledge, i.e. identifying terms, concepts and logic used by individuals and the group to talk about specific subjects.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This aspect of the study presents and analyses the data. It analyses the sociolinguistic features of names and appellations selected from the two radio presenters, Olukayode Falegan and Biodun Ilori.

Family/Surnames

Family/Surnames names are derived from the patrilineal home of fathers that are given to children. Opoku (1973: 21-34) in Agyekum (2006) explains that "children who trace their genealogy to one patrilineal father may therefore share similar family names" (p. 217). "Falegan", for example is a family name which is traced to the family that worship "Ifa" divination in the Yoruba land. Names among the Yoruba people is uniquely associated with the bearer. Other examples of family names are: Egunjobi, Awodele, Odewale, Aladesuyi, Adegoke, Oyewusi, Adeyeye, Ogunlola, etc. Family names could tell one which of the Yoruba dialects a person speaks and these surnames are so peculiar that it could tell the exact place where one comes from in the Yoruba ethnic group. For instance names such as "Shogunle", "Sholanke," belongs to the Egba or Ijebu people of the Yorubas; while name like "Akinrinmade", "Akinruntan", "Ikuerowo", "Ikumenisan" belong to the Yoruba people of Ilaje in Ondo State. Family names peculiar to Ekiti people of Yoruba ethnic group are: "Oso", "Faokunla", "Fatukasi", "Oloniboko", "Olonilua", etc. In Ogbomoso, Oyo State, some surnames are unique to them such as: "Ikulayo", "Lala" which is derived from "funfunLala" which means as clean as white, and shortened to "Lala"; while the name such as "Ajani" belongs to Ibadan people in Oyo State. In view of this, it is possible to indicate one's place of birth by his/her name. This means that names distinguish one member of the community from the others.

Circumstantial Names

Some names are given to people based on the circumstances which surround the birth of such a child as corroborated by Agyekum (2006) "...these may relate to the places of birth, period or time, festivals or sacred days, manner of birth, etc." (p. 219). He elucidates further that

The place may even refer to the farm or inside the car when the woman was travelling to another place. It is also possible to use the names of rivers, lakes and other geographical areas as names for children (p. 219).

Names, therefore is culturally significant to individual and the entire Yoruba people. Odesanya and Akinjogbin (2017) argue that, "among the Yoruba, choosing names, especially personal ones, is a solemn undertaking for parents and grandparents, because the Yoruba believe that one's name can have a psychological impact on one's behavior" (p. 6). The following examples are circumstantial names among the Yoruba people: Biodun, Odunayo, Bodunde- Persons born during a festival such as Christmas and New Year or Easter.

Ilori – A child whose mother was pregnant during menstruation. When such a child is born, he/she is named "Ilori."

Kayode, Mayowa – Children that are born when their parents' lives are significantly transformed from sorrow to joy.

Abiona – A child that was born when his/her mother was on a journey: inside a car or on the road.

Abejide – In Ekiti dialect of Yoruba, "eji" means rain. "Abejide", therefore means a child born when rain was fallen torrentially.

Bosede: The name is given to children born on Sunday. In some cases, this is a female name while that of a male child is "Sunday".

Positional Names

The children that are born after the twins (ibeji) are all positional names for example:

Idowu - The child that comes directly after the twins. Similarly, Odebode (2015) asserts that "all other siblings that preceded the ibeji, apart from the immediate one, are referred to as egbonibeji i.e. the twins' elderly ones" (p. 31).

Alaba - The child that comes directly after "Idowu", who was born directly after the twins.

Apennu or Omopennu - A child who is born through a pregnancy that lasted for more than ten months. This means that instead of the nine months pregnancy, the mothers went beyond nine months. In Ghana, among the Ewe speaking people such children, according to Agyekum (2006) "may get the name Feyi, 'a year has passed', Fenu 'year thing', and Fenuku 'year seed'" (p. 221).

Survival Names

Africa's belief on some mysterious things about is that if a mother constantly loses a child through child mortality, then the reason is that it is the child's mates in the spirit realm that do not want the child to live in the world. In order to mitigate such a situation, the parents give the child a strange names. The belief is that if the names are unattractive the mates in the spirit realm, they will denounce the child in the world and this would make the child to live. The belief of Yorubas as confirmed by Agyekum (2006) is that "the name must be unpleasant even in the ears of the living" (p. 221). This implies that being alive is good and the newborn child should survive rather than to go back to the spirit world. The belief is that if the name is ridiculous, the child will be ashamed to go back to the underworld. Examples of such names are:

Kosoko (No hoe to dig the ground any longer).

Malomo or Kokumo (Please, don't die again).

Remilekun (You are born to comfort me after the death of a previous child).

Tepontan (It is a ridiculous name to abuse the child and that there is no room for special care for the child again),

Igbekoyi or Igbodi (The bush where death child is buried is closed, no room for the dead child in the bush again, there would be no land for its burial).

Title and Occupational Names

These types of names could be acquired from occupations or zeal of an individual in his or her profession. Such names are normally appellations and titles. Some of these names may also be religious, traditional priests; Christians and Moslems acquire them when they are ordained into office. Nevertheless, some people like to bear such names even when they are not formally ordained to bear such names. Agyekum (2006) adds that "those who acquire the multiple names via good deeds feel honoured and even use the names themselves to assert their status" (p. 337). This is the case of Biodunlori and KayodeFalegan. Examples of such names are: J. P, Otunba of Ile Ife, Raphael, Gausu of Iroyin (Newscaster), Falilat Sheik Ibrahim AjisanwoKewu, General Evangelist, General Imam (G. 5), Atunluse of OlojeEkiti, Amuludun of IjeroEkiti, Oluomo of Ibadan Land

J. P: It means Jerusalem Pilgrimage. Both Biodun and Kayode have this title to their names. According to them, the Oyo State Government, Nigeria, sponsored them to Jerusalem in 2005. In view of this, J. P is added to their names for instance: OtunbaOlukayodeFalegan (J. P) and Chief BiodunIlori (J. P).

Otunba: It is an honorary traditional chieftaincy title awarded to OlukayodeFalegan and BiodunIlori from Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. The title symbolizes that they are closer to the king.

Raphael: It is just an English name given to KayodeFalegan when he was born owing to the fact that his parents were Christians.

Gausu: It is an Arabic word, which means “powerful”, “innovative” and “sacrifice”. According to Kayode and Biodun, “gausu” means talent and creativity and ability to sacrifice one’s time for pleasure. It means to be knowledgeable, insightful, and to have natural gift for something without any prior training. The people (fans) gave them the appellation base on their proficiency and ability to cast news written in English in Yoruba language. Both of them added that they do not write their scripts before they present any programme, hence the name “Gasusu of Iroyin (newscaster) emerge.

General Evangelist: “Biodun-Kayode” (as they are popularly called) were given this appellation by a Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Akure, Ondo State Nigeria because of the fact that they often pray before and after each of their programmes on the radio. Their prayer and prophesy always come to pass. In view of this, they were given the title, “General Evangelist”.

Falilat Sheik Ibrahim AjisanwoKewu: These are Arabic titles. The meaning of “Falilat” in English is “a gifted person”. It symbolizes philosophical wisdom. It means someone who desires knowledge and truth. It means to have knowledge beyond one’s age. Such a person is a visionary, who desire to make the world a better place.

Sheik, an Islamic title on the other hands means “chief, a ruler or a prince”. The person is a leader of a Muslim organization or group. OlukayodeFalegan and BiodunIlori are Christians but were given the title because they speak and pray in Arabic language on Fridays during their programmes. In view of this, a Muslim organization decided to honor them with the title, “Falilat Sheik Ibrahim AjisanwoKewu”. Equally, the title, “General Imam (G. 5)” was added to their appellations in recognition of their talent in spite of the fact that they did not attend any Arabic school to learn Arabic language or Quran. The two men are verse in reading Quran and prayer in Arabic language.

Atunluse of OlojeEkiti: It is a chieftaincy title given to OlukayodeFalegan and BiodunIlori (Biodun-Kayode) by the king of Oloje, a town in Oye Local Government Area of Ekiti State, Nigeria. This title was given to them in recognition of their significant role in information dissemination to the people of Ekiti State, via radio.

Amuludun of IjeroEkiti: The title was bestowed on the duo of Biodun and Kayode by the king, Ajero of IjeroEkiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. It was as a result of their role in entertaining the public through their programmes on the radio.

Oluomo of Ibadan land: Biodun-Kayode got the title from Ibadan, Oyo State because of their popularity through their programme presentations on radio. The title symbolizes worthy ambassadors. The Ibadan people are proud of the duo.

Agyekum (2006) stresses that there are derogatory names used as invectives, and they normally bring conflict among the people and such names exist among the Yorubas: “Kukute” – it derogatively given to a short person; “Ologbo” (cat) – It mocks a person who is very slow and dull; “Werepe” (Devil’s beans) – It derides a person who is very troublesome and often fights; “Sango” (god of thunder) – A troublesome and wicked person is nick-named as “Sango”; “Atawewe” (small but hot pepper) – It refers to a person who is bad-tempered, quarrelsome and troublesome; “Omiata” (pepper’s water) – It refers to a troublesome person. “Itanforiti” (The story of Itanforiti is read from a Yoruba novel, *Aditu Igbo Olodumare*, written by D. O Fagunwa, who dwells inside the rock. He is very powerful and indefatigable. In view of this, the name is given to those who are very agile, strong, stubborn and undefeated; “Iberu” – (fearful) – It means that the person is a terror, a bully and very oppressive; “Ijaya” (terrorist) – It means a person who creates fear in people. Equally, such a person is oppressive.

Honourific and Title Names

In Yoruba environment, names are so symbolic that people around somebody could give names to people base on what they do. Agyekum (2006) corroborates this

Some other names are achieved outside people’s given names. Such names may be achieved from occupations, wars, zeal, and stool names when a person is enthroned. Such names are normally appellations and titles (p. 222).

Examples of such names are:

Why-worry: A person who is relaxed and very confident in what he/she does.

Ogidan: A bold and courageous person.

Ojiji (shadow): A person who is not often seen. Someone who comes to a place and disappears without any notice.

Ekun (Tiger): Anyone whose character resembles tiger's is nicknamed "Ekun".

Ijakadi (fighting): A person who is in the habit of fighting is tagged "Ijakadi".

Ako-okuta (unbreakable stone): This appellation is given to a rugged, strong and obstinate person.

Koseemu (unbeatable): This name is allocated to a person is not predictable. He always has answer to all questions including telling lies.

Agbeti (Indefatigable): The name is given to a physically strong person.

Kakanfo: This is a name of a Yoruba legend, a warrior and a leader who leads other warlords to war in the olden days. He bold and very courageous. A person might not even be a warrior but could be given this appellation if he is doing something valuable to the family, associate or to a community, then he could called "Kakanfo 1" or "Kakanfo 2"

Ilufemiloye: It means that the person is a man of the people, loved by the community.

Baba-eto: A person knows how to organize is called "Baba-eto".

Olooto: An honest person, truthful and a complete gentleman has the appellation, "Olooto".

Alabojuto: It means, a supervisor and a leader. Anyone with a leadership quality could be "Alabojuto". Nevertheless, a person could derogatively be called "Alabojuto" in an organization he the person is not always regular in work.

Igi-iwe: This is given to a brilliant and bookish person.

Iwelumo: A bookworm and very intelligent person is named "Iwelumo".

Akada: It is derived from the English word, "Academic". The Yoruba has a way of changing English word to Yoruba. "Akada" is given to a bookish person.

Iwin: It means "spirit" in Yoruba. Those who are called "Iwin" in Yoruba are people who manifest strange behaviours positively.

Ajitadidun: It is an appellation given to a businessman or woman who sells sweet things.

Iya-alaanu: A compassionate and generous woman is called "Iya-alaanu".

Elekuru: "Ekuru" is a type of local food made from beans and it is common among the Yoruba people. A person who sells "ekuru" is therefore, called "elekuru".

Senator: A person could be called "Senator" in spite of the fact that he/ she is not an elected Senator if he could talk and analyze local issues.

Honourable: People who are elected into the national or state house of assemblies are called "Honourable" but some people call themselves the name and always put the appellation beside their names as if they are members of the House of Assemblies.

Eni-owo: "Eni-owo" is a Yoruba name for "Reverend" but people who are not ordained as Reverend give themselves the title, "Reverend".

Olu-omo: Many people love to call themselves "Oluomo" which means "a worthy son".

Apase: It means the person that bears authority. In view of this, different people call themselves "Apase" 1, 2, or 3.

Erinmuye: A person who smiles is named "Erinmuye" in Yoruba.

Ebora: It means a "demon" or a "strange spirit". Anyone who manifests strange positive or negative behavior is named "Ebora".

IV. DISCUSSION OF THE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

It is observed from the analysis that many African names are meaningful. This is also the view of Babane and Chauke (2017) in Mokala (2020) "names are loaded with meaning" (p. 220). It also shows that the culture of naming among the Yoruba people have undergo a transition because of the fact that language is dynamic development. It is equally observed that there is a lot of innovation in the culture of naming due to significant changes in social reorganization and the sociocultural activities of the people as we can see in Biodunllori and OlukayodeFalegan's names and appellations whose social framework are transformed as a result of their media presentations. From this analysis it is observed that the Yoruba people value name a lot. This is attested to by Mokala (2020) when he asserts that Africans "attach great significance to the meaning of names" (p. 221). Through this study, it is significant to say that some people are given names owing to their physical and intellectual features. "This usually happens in cases where the physical features are extra-ordinary" (Mokala 2020, p. 226).

From our data, it is in fact, noted that names could actually tell us which of the dialects of Yoruba a person speaks: Ekiti, Oyo, Ijebu, Akoko, Ijesa, Ile-Ife, Ogomoso, Akure, Ondo, Egba, etc. as this could show which part of Yoruba a person belongs to because some names are very peculiar to certain particular dialectal groups of the Yorubas. Agyekum (2006) states that "all these names are meant to portray some of the aspects of

life and the conflicts that ensue in human relations” (p. 223). As stated earlier, names such as Faokunla, Oloniluyi and Olonisakin, for instance belong to Yoruba people of Ekiti, while names such as Sobowale, Sonaya, Sonibare and Sogunle are of the Egba people, but names such as Ikusika, Ikuemenisan, Ikuero belong to the Ikale-Ilaje people of Ondo State.

People could use physical structure, including one’s complexion, height or size, or a person’s job to give him/her a name. Such names include “Adumaadan” which means a very dark complexion person. “Aguntasoolo” refers to a tall person. “Onilu” means a person who beats drums, while “oniburedi” is a person that sells bread. For example, Biodunllori and OlukayodeFalegan attributed their numerous names to the work they do and the programmes they present on radio as name is very important to the Yoruba people and to the African society as a whole, and this reveals some aspects of the Yoruba culture.

V. CONCLUSION

Naming is an important aspect of Yoruba culture because a name is a marker of identity. The Yoruba names are deep-rooted in culture owing to the fact that personal name has extensive socio-cultural, political and emotional meaning. It has been revealed that the patterns of naming a person is equally connected with the cultural and social change in the society. As a result of this, the Yoruba language and culture has a lot of influence on the choice of names given to children. This study has explored the application of names and appellations as expression of desires among the Yorubas using two on-air personalities, Biodunllori and OlukayodeFalegan as a case study.

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