

Names as Message Vectors in Communication: *Oduological* Analysis of Traditional Yoruba Personal Names from *Ifa*

Agboola Odesanya

Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos
agboola.odesanya@lasu.edu.ng

Oloruntola Sunday, PhD

University of Lagos, Akoka
and

Kunle Akinjogbin

Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos

Abstract

Naming systems vary among cultures. Among Africans, names are significant; thus Africans recognise the significance of personal names. While names mean different things to different people, the Yoruba people of Nigeria carefully choose theirs, because they believe names mirror circumstances, reflect connections with households, generational trade, among others. It was against this background that this study specifically sought to answer questions regarding how traditional Yoruba personal names originate from *Ifa* and the messages that such *Ifa*-based traditional Yoruba personal names conveyed. The study examined traditional Yoruba personal naming (TYPN) system within the context of *Ifa* divination system of the Yoruba. In the absence of a register of practising *Ifa* priests, from which they could draw a sample, the researchers used snowball sampling, leading to in-depth interviews with four *Ifa* divination experts (Babalowos). Analysis of their responses was done using the qualitative method of narrative analysis. Anchored on sociolinguistic theory, the study found among others, that *Ifa*-based traditional Yoruba personal naming differs from general Yoruba personal naming, because the former involves divinatory processes known as 'Esentaye' and 'Igbori' – pathways to revealing deeper-level messages and information conveyed to the person being named. Traditional Yoruba personal names of *Ifa* origin are on the decline as more people embrace foreign religions, now only adopted by adherents of Yoruba traditional faith, the study found. A contribution to the study of Yoruba anthroponymy, the study recommends that subsequent studies can either adopt larger samples, in addition to surveys or triangulate by mixing two or more research methods or combining research designs, with a view to expanding the frontiers of knowledge.

Keywords: *Names; Communication; Yoruba; Ifa divination*

Introduction

Approaches to communication differ across cultures. This is because culture sums up the way of life of a people. When a set of people are under common cultural umbrella, they share the same language, attitudes and have identical worldviews (Odebode, 2012). Thus, for them names are among their means of expressing themselves. It is the belief among many Africans that a name transcends its popular definition as meaning a noun – that which we call a place, an animal, or a thing. For instance, the Yoruba people of South-West Nigeria believe a good name is worth more than gold or silver. Ogunwale (2003) (as cited in Ogunwale, 2012) informs that a name is not a mere tag that Yoruba people bear without reasons.

While it is the case in some cultures for persons to bear names like *Linda* or *Blood*, it is arguably implausible for a Yoruba household in its right cultural consciousness to adopt same for their children. According to Ogunwale (2012), a linguistic insight that Traditional Yoruba Personal Names (TYPNs) offer is their message-laden nature. Thus, the communicative role that they perform becomes evident in the saying '*Bi ko ba si idi, obinrin ki i je Ikumuolu*' (It is for a reason that a female/woman bears *Ikumuolu*, meaning death has taken the household head). Etymologically, *Ikumuolu* is a name borne out of the demise of a household's breadwinner).

Among the Yoruba, the time of year, profession/trade, and royal affiliation among others can influence the choice of personal names. Thus, the name *Abidemi* derives from a situation where a pregnant woman gives birth while the husband (or a close relative) is away. A name like *Babarimisa* (pronounced *Babarinsa*, which literally can mean *father passed at my birth, or shortly after it*) reminds of bereavement as it carries through life message about the sad experience, a source of grief to the family. Ogunwale (2012) reports that such factors as parental expectations, home, spiritual, birth and prevailing conditions of the household influence name choices among the Yoruba. They strongly believe that *Ile l'a koko wo, ki a to s'omo l'oruko* (names are products of experiences/circumstances). Thus, '*Abisinuodun*' (pronounced

Abiodun) suggests that an individual was born at a festive time of the year (such as *Eyibi*, a popular one in Yoruba). Besides, among the Yoruba, some names point to the reign of professional drummers, known as *ayan*, skilled in the art of drumming, a skill then passed down to latter generations of children raised within *ayan* dynasties. The name *Ayangalu* is for a household of professional drummers. Its mention to a discerning Yoruba person reminds of a family profession. Even though the bearer may not be a drummer, the name tells us that their forebears were involved with drums. Similarly, people from royal houses usually have the prefix 'ade' (the crown) to their names. Thus, when a person introduces himself as *Adeb'ola*, we know they have affiliation with royalty. In families where members predominantly are believers in the Yoruba Ifa tradition, people expectedly bear names prefixed or suffixed with 'Ifa'. Thus, Ifa + Kunle become *Ifakunl'*, while Ope + Ifa become '*Opeifa*'.

Studies such as Ansu-Kyemerh (2000), Ubahakwe (1982), Oyeleye (1985), Oluikpe (1985) and Essien (1986) explored various aspects of anthroponymy across some African cultures. An interesting point about these studies is that they reflect many points that make African names stand out. For instance, Oyeleye (1985) says that names from African cultures sum up the personality and individuality of bearers. Ogunwale (2012) found that Africans consider bearers of names able to manifest the characteristics inherent in their names. In the opinion of Odebode (2012), names do not only index character, but also are an integral part of the cultural heritage they transmit across generations. Adeniyi (1987) and Ogunwale (2003) also either examined the morphology of Yorùbá personal names or, while Akinnaso (1980) and Abiodun (1996) looked into the socio-linguistic nature of Yorùbá personal names. Ekundayo (1996; 1997) focused on syntactic analysis of names using their structures. Despite studies on personal names, not many appear to have focused on traditional Yorùbá personal names (TYPNs) with particular emphasis on *Ifa*, the acclaimed intangible cultural heritage of the Yoruba. This creates a gap in existing body of knowledge about TYPNs. Thus, Yoruba names of *Ifa* origin form the concern of the study.

Literature Review

Personal names are linguistic components of a language, and are integral to culture (Alzumor, 2009). It may be stated that the survival of a culture and its language guarantees the survival of the names originating from the duo. Zawawi (1998) submits that nothing on this earth – and in much of the heavens – exists without a name by which it is known. In terms of the transactional process of sharing meanings, ideas, and thoughts, Africans are very interesting people, who can communicate with virtually everything at their disposal. From a mere stare or a gaze that can be quite revealing, to patterns of dressing or designing residential and other buildings (Achebe, 1958) to types of names they bear (Akintoye, 2015).

Scholars, especially of African origin, understand the nature of names originating from within the cultures original to their continent. They equally understand the communicative potentials of the names, which function as channels of telling stories about their experiences, and documenting family traditions, norms and values (Ogwezzy, 2008). While writing on the socio-cultural significance and semantic richness of African names, Akinnaso (1980:276) observes that:

If we want to know that personal names can mean and have complex linguistic forms, we have to turn to Africa. This is not to say that the encoding of socio-cultural information in personal names is unique to Africa. In many other parts of the world, especially India, China, and several Oceanic communities, personal names do signal various forms of socio-cultural information. Indeed, since one's identity as a person and as a member of society is an object of universal concern, it is to be expected that personal naming practices will be related to identity concerns in all cultures.

Personal Naming in Yorùbá

The Yoruba are in South West of Nigeria, especially in the following states: Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti, Kwara, Lagos, Edo, and the western local government of Kogi. Bascom (1969) has documented that the Yorùbá people are one of the largest ethnic groups south of the Sahara (as cited in Orié, 2002:117). Their language, Yoruba, although predominantly spoken in Nigeria, is also spoken in Benin and Togo. They believe Ile-Ife (a town in Osun State, Nigeria) to be their ancestral home, Oyo-Ile as their political headquarters and Oduduwa their progenitor. Among the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria (the other two being Hausa and Igbo), they are the most civilized and the most enlightened as far as western education is concerned (Odebode, 2012). Before 1840, when Christian names and surnames began to gain popularity in their region, the full names of a Yoruba person name had three or four elements (Oduyoye, 1972; Oyelaran, 1976, as cited in Orié, 2002:117): *oruko* 'personal name', *oruko abiso* (attributive name), *oruko alaje* (nickname) and *oriki orile* (totemic name). According to Fasiku (2006), this is why the Yorùbá opine that '*A kì í l'órúko kí á má*

ni oriki' (We do not have names without a praise-name or cognomen). However, in modern times, Yoruba naming has changed, especially among the educated. For example, it is common to find people with only three names: a first name, a middle name, and a surname.

Naming of a Yorùbá Child

It is a belief among the Yoruba that some children have their names right at birth (*oruko amu ti Orun wa*). These are children born in some peculiar manner or difficult circumstances that make the prescription of special taboos necessary for the child's care. For example, Bamidele (2010) hints that a child born with his legs coming out before his head is "*Ige*". Among the Yoruba people, the naming of a child always attracts merrymaking, a ceremony known as "*Iko omo jade*"; the essence of this is so that the child receives a name (Oduño, 1967: 91). Usually (now changing though), a number of natural items feature during a typical traditional Yoruba naming. Bamidele (2010:4) quotes Adeoye (1992) and Daramola and Jeje (1995), in listing common items used at traditional Yorùbá naming: bitter kola, salt, honey, water, hot drink, fish, and alligator pepper are also items used in naming a Yorùbá child.

Extended family ties comprising child's parents, their own parents, siblings, siblings of their parents, friends, neighbours and colleagues, often ensure that naming a new child is a widely observed ceremony among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria. Attesting to this is the fact that the Yorùbá people have a sense of social bonding and cohesion, which Baran and Davis (2012) refers to as organic solidarity, which, in harmony with Herbas' notion of cultural knowledge that maintains social cohesion in social systems (as cited in Dissanayake, 2000).

Nature of Traditional Yorùbá Personal Names

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 behaviour (Oduyoye, 1972, as cited in Orie, 2002: 120). Thus, there are special names for twins and for children born after them. The first-born twin, thought to be younger because he or she was *sent* ahead to explore the world by the second-born twin, is called *T'ayewo* (from *to aye wo*) 'taste or explore the world'. The second-born twin, thought to be older because he or she waited patiently for the first-born twin to explore the world, is called *Kehinde* 'last to arrive'. A child born immediately after twins is given the name *Idowu* 'child born after twins', while the next is *Alaba* (Orie, 2002: 120).

Typology of Yorùbá Names

Orie reports Oduyoye (1972) and Oyelaran (1976) that traditional Yoruba personal names were of three to four types or elements, before Christian first and surnames began to gain popularity among new converts to the faith, close to middle of 19th century. They note that personal, attributive, and nicknames are chosen based on factors like circumstances of birth, the nature of family, and the hopes and aspirations of parents. Unlike these three, totemic names are inherited.

Traditional Yorùbá Personal Names

In general, people are known by personal names. A personal name is the name by which an individual is known. Also known as first name, it is different from family name. A traditional Yoruba personal name does not belong to families, unlike totemic names (Orie, 2002). Some examples of traditional Yoruba personal names are given below:

Table 1: Traditional Yoruba Personal Names

Name	Meaning
Adeyemi (<i>Ade ye mi i</i>)	The crown befits me
Akinola (<i>Akin inu ola</i>)	Valour of high status
Abiodun (<i>Abi si inu odun</i>)	Child born during a festival
Omodele (<i>Omo de ile</i>)	Child arrives home
Tantolorun (<i>Tani o to Olorun?</i>)	Who is like God?
Dejuoriwa (<i>De oju ki o ri iwa won</i>)	Watch carefully and you will see (their) attitudes/character
Omolaja (Omo la ija)	A child ends a feud

Sources: Orie (2002); Odebode (2012)

Traditional Yorùbá Attributive Names

Like personal names, attributive names may also depict the circumstances surrounding child birth. For instance, for a woman who had several male children in succession, who died at childbirth, a surviving male child born after that experience is likely to be given the name *Ajani* (fight to possess), whereas a female child whose parents waited for a long time to conceive may be given the name *Abebi* (begged to be born) (Orie, 2002).

Table 2: Some Traditional Yoruba Attributive Names

Name	Meaning
Agbeke	<i>Child to be carried and pampered</i>
Akanji	<i>Child who brings awakening</i>
Alake	<i>Child who emerges to be pampered</i>
Alabi	<i>Child who emerges singularly to be born</i>

Source: Orie (2002)

Traditional Yorùbá Nicknames

Oyelaran as cited in Orie (2002) lists factors determining choice of nicknames among the Yoruba to include character, physical appearance, profession, or achievement of the individual being nicknamed. Oyelaran notes that Yoruba women often use nicknames to refer to children born before the women married into the family. It would be disrespectful for the wives in the household to directly call the children their personal names. To avoid a violation of this cultural norm, a woman must invent a nickname for each senior child (Orie, 2002).

Table 3: Some Traditional Yoruba Nicknames

Nickname	Meaning
E-le-yin-ju-e-ge	Beautiful eyes
E-ji-wun-mi	Gapped teeth please me
Opelenge-subu-lawo-awo-o-fo-o-subu-lodo-lodo-faya	A slim person falls on a plate, a plate is not broken, she falls on a mortar and it breaks (refers to a fat girl)
A-fin-ju	The neat one
K'á-lé-ye-mi	Let-the-evening-be-prosperous-for me
Peleyeju	* <i>Pele</i> befits face

Sources: Orie (2002); Fasiku (2006).

**Pele* denotes a type of marking on the face, once-famous body art among the Yoruba.

Traditional Yorùbá Totemic Names

Totemic names are names that belong to families. They have accompanying poems, which encode information such as family origin, behaviour and character, profession, religion, social status, and taboos (Babalola 1967, as cited in Orie, 2002). In fully identifying individuals, the Yoruba will mention certain names and then link the names to the family names of an individual's parents. An example (modified by the researchers) given by Orie (2002: 119) is a situation in which an elder mentions one or two of an individual's names, then links the names to those of the person's parents, while still linking the individual's father or mother to either of their parents added to their place of origin, thus:

Totem: *Omodele Agbeke Awelegbe Opo, omo Adetutu, omo Kolawole tii se omo Balogun Jaiyesimi ara won ni Ile-Ife.*

Meaning: Omodele Agbeke Awelegbe Opo, child of Adetutu (linked to the mother) and Kolawole (linked to father) the son of the warlord Jaiyesimi (attributive chieftaincy) from Ife town.

Orie (2002) emphasises that only those who are very familiar with an individual's family history, status, religion, character and other traits can recite totemic names. Generally, traditional Yoruba personal names can be ascribed, given or pet names.

The Ifa Divination System of the Yorùbá

Arguably, the history of the Yorùbá race is as old as the history of the Ifa divination. Abimbola (1977:1), an Ifa diviner and custodian, notes that Ifa (otherwise known as *Orunmila*) was one of the four hundred (400) divinities who came from heaven (*orun*) to earth (*aye*). The Supreme Being (*Olodumare*) (the Supreme

Being) had saddled each divinity with particular responsibilities on earth. According to Idowu (1962) *Esu*, one of the Yoruba divinities, was the universal ‘police’ and keeper of the divine power (*ase*) with which *Olodumare* created the world and maintained its physical laws.

Abimbola (1977:1) recalls that Ifa was in charge of divination because of his great wisdom, which he acquired because of his presence when the Supreme Being created the universe. According to Abimbola, Ifa therefore knew all the hidden secrets of the universe. Hence, he enjoys the praise name is *Akerefinusogbon* (small one with mind full of wisdom). Accounts record that Ifa divination is as old as the Yoruba race itself and its origin perhaps too far back in history to be exact. Abimbola recalls that the ancient town, Ile-Ife was among the places Orunmila lived. It was at Ile-Ife he had his first eight children: *Alara, Ajero, Owarangun-aga, Oloyemoyin, Ontagi-olele, Elejelu-mope, and Olowo*. Orunmila was also in *Oyan*, where he fathered *Amukanlode-Oyan*. Orunmila (as cited in Abimbola, 1977) while answering those who had sought to know if he would return to earth, urged them to seek him regarding affairs of their lives. Concerning the sacredness of the *Ikin Erindinlogun*, Orunmila had assured thus:

B'e e ba de ile
B'e e ba f'owoo ni
Eni t'e e moo bi nu-un
B'e e ba dele,
B'e e ba f'ayaa ni,
Eni t'e e moo bi nu-un,
B'e ba dele,
B'e ba f'omoo bi,
Eni t'e e moo bi nu-un

Authors' translation:

When you reach your homes,
 If you desire wealth,
 Consult Ifa,
 When you reach your homes,
 If you desire a wife,
 Consult Ifa,
 When you reach your home,
 If you desire a wife,
 Consult Ifa,
 When you reach home,
 If you desire a child,
 Consult Ifa (1977: v)

Theoretical Framework

Saussure (1966), in Berger (2004) sees language as a system of signs, which it uses to communicate and express ideas. Saussure, in other words, is saying that, in language, we find signs – such as names - informing us about people, places or ideas. While classification of Western names resonates with Saussure’s classification (of them) as arbitrarily referential (Agyekum, 2006), Yoruba names depart from this classification. This is because, like other African names, Agyekum (2006) argues, they are generally not predictable, for until the child is born and under what circumstances it is born, the name cannot be determined with accuracy (Agyekum, 2006). The names are also attached to their referents, says Frege (1947) in Agyekum (2006).

Specifically, this paper flows from the realm of language and its inevitable interface with the cultural practices of the people native to it. According to Agyekum (2006), studies like this are an aspect of sociolinguistics, because it is anchored on the “theory that there is a strong interface between a people’s language and their cultural practices” (Agyekum, 2006: 210). In other words, language influences people’s cultural expressions, one of which naming is. Naming, a practice of strong cultural reckoning among the Yoruba, evolved from their culture, in which one finds the *Ifa* divination system as an intangible store-house of their values and norms, philosophies as well as history.

Very similar to Agyekum’s 2006 study that looked into the naming practice of *Akan* people of Ghana, this paper, therefore, finds its theoretical underpinnings in sociolinguistics. It dwells on the relevance of language in which *Ifa*-based personal names as a cultural resource that mirrors the Yoruba people’s perception and understanding of the world in which they live. Interestingly, the Yoruba language embodies the worldviews and philosophies of its people. Thus, *Ifa*-sourced names denote or connote information about

their referents. This echoes the position of Agyekum (2006: 210) that language can be used as a “microscopic lens to view and understand the social practices and day-to-day activities of a society”

Data Analysis and Discussion

Research Question 1: How do Ifa-based traditional Yoruba personal names originate from the Ifa Corpus?

Commenting on this, Babalawo Ifaolepin Aderemi, who confirmed that Ifa has its peculiar way of naming people, revealed that a child can be named three or more days following its birth, but certainly, before the day the child is publicly named (Ikomojade) on the eighth day, adding that certain family rites may also be an additional factor. His words:

The core of it is that naming is subject to Esentaye (a divination to know the future do’s and don’ts of a new child) done before the day of naming. Esentaye guides the parents of the child on the extent of accompanying merry making; it advises them on which to choose between low-key and elaborate affairs. Specifically talking about Ifa’s laid down naming procedure, save for problems arising from the Esentaye inquiry (a spiritual forecast conducted on the child’s future concerns, usually three days after birth but must precede the child’s naming), the child of Ifa-believing parents can get a name on the sixth (or seventh, eighth day in some cases) following birth. It takes place very early in the morning, when the child’s father, led by an Awo (priest), places the child (gender regardless) on the Opon Ifa (divination tray: wooden and round or rectangular) upon which some powdery substance (Iyerosun) is poured. The presiding priest of Ifa (if the male parent is not one) then places the child’s feet on the divination tray, thus drawing a pattern of vertical lines, which represent a certain Odu, usually Ogbe Ate Alara. This is Ifeseteopon. The act is usually very brief and short.

Speaking from an experience spanning four decades, during which he claimed to have named many children including his, the interviewee further explained the process of deriving names from Ifa thus:

Already prepared prior to the Ifeseteopon (child’s legs on the divination tray) are some items: Ifa leaves, edible bush mouse (eku), catfish (eja aaro) – both are dead and dry – kolanuts (obi), alligator pepper (ata ire). Ifa (as symbolised by kernels kept in a covered ceramic or calabash, as the case then was) is washed with special leaves, gong goes off, and thus, the child gets a name, subject to Oro Idile (family tradition), as I mentioned earlier, which decides if it would be six days, seven or eight days after.

According to Aderemi, although the process of Akosejaye divination is inexpensive, it usually requires some natural items:

The main items required are kolanut, catfish and bush rat, which are central, and very little bits of each will be fed to the child, whose mother eats the rest. The baby suckles the essence of it when breastfed by the mother. That is the procedure of Ifa. Although these days, people have added items like sugarcane, honey, corncake (aadun, a Yoruba snack), which they use in praying during naming, Ifa priests, who know their onions, insist on just the traditional items I already mentioned. It is an inexpensive matter.

The in-depth interview respondent hinted that parents are at liberty to add names to that which *Akosejaye* reveals. When asked if traditional Yorùbá personal names can only originate from *Ifa*, Aderemi, who claimed to have practised as an Ifa priest for 40 years, gave five directions from where Ifa-based names can originate:

Yoruba names, according to Ifa, can arise from about five directions: From Ifa (Ifa+bi+eyii = Ifabiyi; Ifa+to+ola = Ifatola). It can come from the Odu (Odu+gbe+mi = Odugbemi). It also arises from Awo (Awolola, Awolowo, Awobunmi) chieftancy, or Osun – not the female deity – (Di+osun+mu = Dosunmu; A+mu+osun = Amosun), and lastly, from Ope (Di+Ope+Mu = Dopemu; Ope+bun+mi = Opebunmi; Ope+wu+iyi = Opewuyi). Other names, which are not from Ifa per se, also originate from the Odu resulting from the Esentaye of the child. For instance, if the resultant Odu concerning the child is Ogundabede, the child will bear Ayedun; if it is Ogbe Alara, the child will be named Aikuniola or Aikulola, which can be shortened to Aiku.

Also commenting on how names originate from the Ifa Corpus, another respondent and the Aseda of the Oyingbo-based *Indigene Faith of Africa (Ijo Orunmila Adulawo)*, Priest Ifabunmi Ademola slightly corroborated Aderemi’s view on the length of days for the naming of a child. Ifabunmi however noted that the number of days following which a child can be named varies with household nuances, from the third to ninth after child’s birth. The respondent had this to say on how Ifa names people:

In the case of Ifa, when a new child is born, on the third day, we must do the Esentaye (Akosejaye) of the child to know how the child is to embark on his/her journey in life, the taboos of the child. It may be a taboo shaving the child’s hair, for the child to wear clothes of certain colours. For instance, Odu Iwori Osa abhors green. His (the child’s) destiny may not tolerate noise such as a party at his naming. Some of his taboos fade away with his coming of age, while other taboos are for life. That reminds of me of a man on a street at Oko-Oba, Lagos, whose child’s Akosejaye warned the parents against any partying. Being

a well-to-do person, on the day of naming, the father ignored warning and called a party that featured a musician. On the same day, a fight ensued very close to the party. The child's father went there, perhaps to settle matters, but someone ripped him with a knife, which gouged his intestines. He died same day. His disobedience of the warning cost him his life.

Apparently concerned about the consequences of anyone failing to adhere to the revelations from Akosejaye divination, which another respondent (Babalawo Aderemi) also warned against, Babalawo Ifabunmi gave the instance of how a name (Olaifa) originates from the Ifa Chapter known as *Odu Okanran Oyeku*, verses from which he recited as follows:

Ibi ní se onídu áre-áre
 Òpẹ̀ àgùnká nì ga'rùn-ga'sẹ̀
 Dífá fún Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀ tí yóó j'ọ́lá Èdú pẹ̀.
 Mo r'eku lójà n ò san'wó
 Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀, ọ́lá Ifá lẹ̀mí nẹ̀ Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀
 Mo r'ẹ̀ja lójà n ò san'wó
 Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀, ọ́lá Ifá lẹ̀mí nẹ̀ Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀
 Mo ra gbogbo ohun lójà n ò san'wó
 Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀, ọ́lá Ifá lẹ̀mí nẹ̀ Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀

Ifabunmi, whose Ifa-based name Awolola derives from the chapter known as *Odu Ogundabede*, listed the ingredients that usually accompany *Akosejaye* divination for a child, pointing out that the ingredients were symbolic of certain positive wishes and desires of the parents for their child. His explanation went thus:

With water, we pray for peace and calmness in the child's life, sugarcane for honour and respect, kola for longevity, kolanuts for good health, while palm oil is for victory over enemies (because it floats in any liquid body). Salt is for a wish against imbecility, honey is for sweetness; there could be a long list whatever the mouth eats.

While explaining the process of deriving names from Ifa, another respondent, Babalawo Olaifa Ifabunmi asserted that the Yoruba do not just bear names without reasons. Reflecting his Ifa-centric viewpoint on naming, Olaifa emphasised that the Esentaye (this was explained earlier) is the first thing that must be done to know the name that has *descended* (come) with the child, among other revelations. He explained the process thus:

Usually, we will carry the child and use its head to touch the front of the divination tray (Opon Ifa), the legs to touch the inside of the tray, filled with powder from wood (iyerosun), thus drawing a pattern. After this, I begin to consult Ifa concerning the child. Akosejaye stands for 'what one wants to become'. It is performed on the third day after child's birth. People in Ijebu and environs refer to it as Akosejaye. 'Up country' (ilu oke), we call it Esentaye (the leg that touches the earth). With it, Ifa reveals to the parents how things will be for their child. We step the child's foot on the divination tray. We use two leaves in addition (Gbegi and Atepe leaves) in addition to this. The leaves symbolise longevity for the child. The child's foot is touched with these leaves placed on the tray, prior to divination. The Odu that appears during the Esentaye usually reveals the child's name. It also tells us what food the child must not eat, what he must or not do, venues he must or not attend. Some children must not be taken to a market for a certain period. Another child must not be taken near a water body, unless he personally walks there as a grown child. If a child must not eat anything forbidden, the mother must also not, because it can flow to the child through breastfeeding. The child, as guided by the parents, must carefully adhere to the taboos of Esentaye.

Babalawo Olaifa said concerning some of the ingredients listed by his counterpart, respondent Babalawo Ademola:

On the naming proper, in praying, we use rat, fish, sugarcane, aadun (corn cake), honey and all the mouth eats, while announcing to those present the name earlier revealed through the Esentaye. One after the other, we then put very little of the rat and others into the child's mouth as we pray, and hand the rest to its mother to eat. Singing, dancing and refreshment follow. That is it.

Although with a slight difference from the way his counterpart (Babalawo Ademola) had recited the Odu Okanran Oyeku (Okanranyeku), in pointing to the roots of the traditional Yoruba personal name *Olaifa*, which is his own name, Babalawo Olaifa rendered the *Odu* thus:

Ibi ní se onídu áre-áre
 Òpẹ̀ àgùnká nì ga'rùn-ga'sẹ̀
 Dífá fún Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀ tí yóó j'ọ́lá Èdú pẹ̀.
 Mo r'eku lójà n ò san'wó
 Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀, ọ́lá Ifá lẹ̀mí nẹ̀ Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀

Mo r'ẹja lójà n ò san'wó
Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀, ọ́lá Ifá lẹ̀mí nẹ̀ Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀
Mo ra gbogbo ohun lójà n ò san'wó
Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀, ọ́lá Ifá lẹ̀mí nẹ̀ Òdògbònìkẹ̀rẹ̀

Priest Olaifa explained the implication of the above verses from *Odu Okanranyeku*, saying that any child in respect of whom this *Odu* appears will bear the name *Olaifa*. *Okanranyeku* promises that the child will enjoy life, will be a favoured person in life, and will not struggle much to make ends meet. That is how the name Olaifa emerges from the *Odu*. When asked how he knew, respondent Olaifa narrated the story concerning a certain *Odogbonikere* in the *Odu* thus:

In the spirit world, before he embarked on a journey to the earth, Odogbonikere (the character in the *Odu Okanran Oyeku*) consulted Ifa to know if life on earth would be peaceful for him. Ifa's response was affirmative, but urged Odogbonikere to make appeasement and believe in Ifa. When Odogbonikere was finally born, his parents sought the view of Ifa, concerning their child. In response, Ifa told the parents, who had sought to know their child's *Esentaye*, that the child would be named Olaifa.

Similarly, Babalawo Ifadamilare Ajofoyinbo, who is the youngest interviewee, agreed with others – who are his seniors in Ifa divination – on the central role of *Akosejaye* divination in the choice of names. Respondent Ajofoyinbo lamented the influence of rapidly changing times on the process, and put at three the number of days preceding *Akosejaye* divination. He added that the process takes place early in the morning because the period is the best time for a child's 'comprehension' of prayers said to it. On how names derive from the Ifa Corpus, Ajofoyinbo, who claimed that some Christians and Muslims covertly embrace the *Akosejaye* divination for their children, regardless of their religious inclinations, had this to say:

Parents will bring their child to my place very early in the morning of the third day after the child's birth. I would remove the child's cap and footwear. The child must be wrapped in white cloth, pure white cloth, not black, not red. A night before the morning, the child's hair must be shaved. I will ask Ifa (with divination chain or palm-nuts) about the child's *Akosewaye*. Materials to be used are water, bush rat (dead and dry), catfish, some pieces of kola nuts and bitter kola, alligator pepper, sugar, salt, honey, corn cake (*aadun*), sugarcane – all in a bowl. We put very small bit of each in the child's mouth and pray. When we finish praying with the materials, we begin singing and dancing Ifa songs, and collect thanksgiving money from those present. The money is for the child. Refreshment may follow with the rest of the materials and food. When we have a new child, on the third day after, we do it to know the kind of life that the child has come to live, how he/she will live life in peace; or we may wish to know who, among the members of the child's family, that has returned. A child may be a paternal grandparent returning. Ifa can reveal names of the child. If *Osa Meji* appears, the child will be named Ifayemi.

When asked to explain the reason for this position, Ajofoyinbo, who claims to have been accustomed to Ifa divinations since he was six years old, further stated thus:

It is so because *Osa Meji* narrated the story of Ifayemi who lived in the times of old. So, when I recite an *Odu*, and I come to the point where there is a name, that becomes the child's name. If the revealed *Odu* is *Eji Ogbe*, the name *Bamitale* becomes the child's name. If it is *Orangun Meji (Yepa Odu)*, *Titilope* becomes the child's name (*Titi l'ope Orunmila* – meaning *Orunmila's gratitude is eternal*). We can also call the child *Opeifa*. The names from Ifa are so many that your jotter cannot contain them.

Nevertheless, *Akosejaye* divination can be prone to errors, the respondent noted in the course of the in-depth interview. This situation arises from the incompetence of the presiding Ifa priest; this sometimes stirs panic in the parents, he claimed, as he lamented the tendency in some of his colleagues to do things without seeking participation from more experienced diviners at the *Akosejaye*, which also reveals both positive and negative information about its subject (child). When questioned on the possible positives and negatives of the process, Babalawo Aderemi emphasised thus:

There is no way both will not surface. This is due to the dual nature (positive cum negative) of existence. Except it is due to his insufficient knowledge in Ifa, the divining priest may choose not to say the dangers that he sees, for reasons best known to him. That is his own conscience, but Ifa will always reveal the future it foresees. So, there is emergent *Odu* from a divination that is not of dual nature – this may either be for good or for bad. With the prescribed sacrifice (*etutu*) however, Ifa can nip the negative in the bud, thus ushering in the positive. There is an improper tendency for some priests to emphasise only the positives, leaving the negatives unaddressed. Others will scare the client with the announcement of say death...saying Ifa sees death. It is improper a thing for a priest to do. His role is to guide the client and ensure that the client makes the prescribed appeasement that will neutralise all negatives and retain the positives.

On the relevance of the process, which, barring a priest's incompetence, the respondent claims is capable of revealing everything about its subject (the child), the interviewee, respondent, who holds a degree in Law, said:

The process can reveal future concerns such as nature of profession, kind of husband/wife to marry, and more. It is good to do it, to avoid unneeded challenges in life. In some cases, the future of a child, as foreseen, may state that only the child's biological mother should back the child. This is the case of my last child, who is a girl. While I do not know what Ifa saw before handing down that warning, I know it wards off afflictions and calamities. If I go against this, there can be negative consequences. Such things do emerge from divinations, with clear warnings. There may or may not be prescribed sacrifice to prevent certain bad things from befalling the child. Knowing and obeying the warnings from Akosejaye keep misfortunes away. Except for possible misleading, which may arise from the non-expertise of the priest conducting the divination, Ifa can reveal all matters relating to an individual's future; from nature of profession, the colours to use and not to use, to the kind of house he can build (bungalow or higher). I know because I have conducted several divinations for new babies and mature adults.

Research Question 2: What messages do Ifa-based traditional Yoruba personal names convey?

In the course of in-depth interview sessions held with the Ifa priests, it was evident that Ifa-based TYPNs actually convey several messages. When probed if there are any meanings, let alone messages, embedded in Ifa-based TYPNs, Babalawo Ifadamilare Ajofoyinbo strongly held that Ifa-based TYPNs are meaningful. He argued:

It is not true that Ifa names have no meanings. I am not saying this because I am an Ifa priest...Because of their backgrounds, there are Christian households with Ifa-related names, which they have retained. Some of them re-name themselves in the way of their religion. As for the Muslims, they often want to change the old surnames and make them look Islamic. There are many famous pastors with names reflecting link with Ifa, and they have not changed them. Some of them bear names like Osubiyi, Osu.

Ajofoyinbo also frowned at some Yorùbá people's tendency to choose to bear what he referred to as animal names (*such as Linda*, emphasis is the researcher's) these days. He further argued in favour of Ifa-based TYPNs, which he considered laden with meanings. The respondent, who was clearly perturbed, probed thus:

Can you imagine someone just creating names for a child? What is the meaning of that? Some foreign names belonging to animals are given to children. Why will the children not start exhibiting the character of such animals? If we name a child Dare, it has a meaning; Ope has a meaning. If we name the child Seyi, it has meaning. Abayomi is also meaningful. But what will prompt our person to name his child Jack Chun or Jack Chan. We do not know the power of the word and language invoked through the name, whether it is the name of a dog or not. Supposing it is the name of a dog, when the child grows, it will begin exhibiting traits of the animal, strange to humans, because we have thrown away our Yoruba names in preference for foreign ones.

Concerning the messages that TYPNs convey, the youngest of all the in-depth interview respondents added, buttressing his position with some Ifa verses:

Ela p'ani gba p'ani gba	[Obeisance to <i>Ela</i> , another name for Orunmila]
Ela p'ani gba p'ani gba	[Obeisance, once more]
Alele pe o to'le	[Dusk taking long to set]
Ojumo pe o t'o o mo	[Dawn taking time to break]
Af'idaji kutukutu omo oosa le meji	[He rises at dawn, twice child of a god]
L'aye l'aye, ojumo ire lo ti n mo ni i	[Dawn has been kind since eternity]
Di a fun Orunmila	[Divination for Orunmila]
Ti yoo gbe Yeye ojo ose n'yawo	[Who sought to marry mother of the week]
Iya ose to l'aje de bi okun	[The woman of endless wealth]

He further narrated the message in the *Odu* and the subsequent names that emerge there from:

At this point *Iya Ose* (mother of the week) is the message concerning the name. Therefore, we can name the child Ab'osede (Eni ti o ba ose de e) – he/she who comes during the rites of a week. We can also name the child Ajedokun (fortune expands into the sea). Each name has a message. The names are many, as I earlier said, the messages are also many.

The respondent noted that, at a mention of the name in the presence of people who are discerning, its message becomes evident. To buttress his point, again, he launched into recitation of verses from *Odu Ogundabede* concerning how messages are embedded in names:

Ina ku f'eeru b'uju u	[Ash survives the fire]
Ogede ku u f'omo re r'opo	[The rhizome survives the banana]
Ogede ku, ko ba ri eni gbe'gi ohun-un	[Which is fallen and helpless on the ground]
Dia fun Ayedun ti awon ara re ng pe ni wa Orun	[Divination for Ayedun, whose mates have summoned to the hereafter]
Nje aye ti dun ng o wa mo,	[Ayedun replies them: this world is fun; I refuse to die]
Ara aye ni m'a ba je e	[I shall dine with the living]
Ara aye ni mi a ba mu un	[And drink with them too]
Isinku Orun e p'eyinda	[Goodbye to your departed souls]

According to the above verses from *Odu Ogundabede*, as the respondent explained, some spiritual mates in the spirit world are calling a child (an *abiku*) to reunite with them by dying as he has always shuttled between births and deaths. However, because the child now no longer sees any reason to die to join his mates, he tells them to forever part ways with him. Any child in respect of whom this *Odu* appears will bear *Ayedun*, he explained. The interviewee also rose to the defence of his own Ifa-based TYPN, *Ifadamilare*, attributing its origin to Ifa in the *Odu Irete Meji*. He explained the message in it:

Ati ko Ifa a da bi ija	[Learning <i>Ifa</i> is like a quarrel]
Ati s'oogun a da bi ole	[Embracing charms may seem like laziness]
Di a fun Ifadamilare ti i s'omo Edu	[Divination for <i>Ifadamilare</i> , the child of <i>Edu</i> - Orunmila]
Nje Ifa ti da mi l'are o e	[Ifa has rewarded me]
Edu ti da mi l'are o	[Edu has justly rewarded me]
Ona ara ni mo gba	[Through wonder]
Ifa ti dami l'are o	[Ifa has rewarded me]
Edu ni n ma a sin	[I shall worship Edu]

He noted that his name *Ifadamilare* is self-explanatory, in that it can easily *tell* people about himself. He said: When people hear my name, they will know that for me to bear such a name, it has a message behind it. Because my father was already old when he had his first male child, and because I came as his first male child, he named me *Ifadamilare*. He had almost given up on having a male child. When people hear my name, they can understand the reason behind the name.

While speaking on whether or not Ifa-based TYPNs have messages embedded in them, another respondent, Babalawo Ifabunmi Ademola, dismissed people's indifference to the personal names they bear, blaming the indifference on ignorance. His emphasis:

The people saying that are ignorant. There must be a reason a name is chosen, just as I mentioned earlier about the experience involving my son. *Ifakunle* means children are increasing in a household. Is that not meaningful? *Ifayemi*, *Ifadunmade*, *Olaifa* are names that are also meaningful. The messages in Yoruba names are easy to get. The names *Akinkulehin*, *Olakulehin* reflect the experiences of the parents of their bearers. Such names can be chosen when a woman, long believed to be infertile, finally bears a child. In this circumstance, the message is that at last, the woman had the child bearing any of the names.

Giving insight into the message behind his own TYPN in the interview, the respondent, whom Ifa named *Awolola* (in *Odu Ogundabede*) and whom parents named *Ifabunmi*, further remarked thus:

Now, let us use my name as an example. My name is *Ifabunmi*. When anybody hears *Ifabunmi*, they sense that I must have something to do with Ifa. They will understand that I hail from an Ifa household. My name is a testament to the rewards that God can bestow on man through Ifa.

Circumstances and experiences seemed to be the driving force behind the messages contained in TYPNs, which mirror people's challenges, hopes, triumphs, and change in status, among others. As another respondent, Babalawo *Olaifa*, pointed out, names, which he likened to the *aroko* (a visual communication symbol among the Yoruba), communicate about desires for change. Hence, he strongly blamed on serious ignorance and bigotry the notion that TYPNs do not have meanings. He notes:

Those who say so are without faith. They are forgetful bigots. We must not forget our source. A person's name is his identity. If I decide to name my child *Ifabode*, I am wishing for the return of lost things. *Ifatunbi*, which is now *atunbi* (born-again), may be due to the turning of a new leaf by a child's father or mother. Parents can choose names for their child, but those who say that Ifa names are meaningless are merely being unreasonable. Faiths differ and that should not cause conflict. If you worship Jesus, that is your choice, and it can influence your names. We do what has been handed to us by our ancestors. Anyone can be *Jesutofunmi*, if they so please. There is no fight about that.

For instance, concerning the message behind his traditional Yoruba personal name, the respondent, who sounded certain that no one bearing the name would ever struggle to survive in life, further disclosed:

The secret of my name is responsible for what I am eating until this day...because of the message Ifa had given when my mother was heavy with me that I would be a priest, that things would not be difficult for me in life, if I eventually became a priest. I was ready to continue with school, but my father insisted on me becoming an Ifa priest...because he knew I could change my mind about becoming a priest, if I continued schooling. My father would divine regularly, and the diviners would remind him about the divination concerning me. He was not going to discountenance it. My parents later narrated the story to me. When I finally was born, the Odu Okanranyeku emerged again, prompting my name and my parents to insist on Ifa priesthood for me. As I am, I do not struggle feed in life. My name is the secret of that.

Babalawo Aderemi responded also notes that traditional Yoruba personal names of Ifa origin are usually heavy with messages that are purposeful, messages that run errands about circumstances and realities. In his opinion, such names hang their necks on something. He argued thus:

... Truly, Yoruba names must hang their necks on something. They have are heavy with messages. They run errands, even if those who bear them may personally not know about this... There is no name in Yoruba that has not a message – be it about lineage, profession, traditions, profession and so on. This way, the name goes about with its message; it is not for mere sake of identity...

Aderemi further argued for the purposefulness of African names thus:

...there is always a reason, a purpose and a message in Yoruba names. Take for instance, the name Adekunle – which means that the number of heirs in a royal household is rising – cannot be Adetule (crown scatters the home). Olanrewaju is a name that tells about progress. Why can we not have Olanreyin (wealth is retrogressing)?

On the notion that such messages are impaired when names are shortened, as is now the practice in some quarters, the respondent further stated:

A name is not for mere sake of identity, unlike the Whites, who bear names like stone, glass. We have Nigerians who live in Nigeria, but whose minds are overseas; they just want their names to be Western. The worldview of the Yoruba does not allow for names for fun, or for shortening of names. They call names fully - Olanrewaju. When shortened, it becomes 'Lanre, thus leaving out Ola and Waju

When asked about the message behind his own Ifa-based traditional Yoruba personal names, the respondent reacted thus:

My name is Ifabiyi. My name is not IfaBiEyii (phonetically, re-mi-mi-do-mi (Ifa begets this) it is Ifa Bi Eyii (phonetically, re-mi-re-do-mi) .It means Ifa has vomited this. When you hear Ifabiyi, it tells you that I am from a household of Ifa believers.

Conclusion

This study explored naming within the context of Ifa divination system of the Yoruba. As the analyses of the data gathered for this study have shown, naming according to *Ifa* is not predictable; it is dependent upon the outcome of a divinatory process known, according to purpose, either as *akosejaye* or *esentaye*. The process is conducted between three to five days after a child's birth. This finding validates an earlier position by Agyekum (2006) on the unpredictability of most African names. Besides, the study has also found that *Akosejaye* and *esentaye* are routes to the revelation of the child's name, and sometimes also resonate with beliefs bordering on re-incarnation. According to respondents *Akosejaye*, could reveal the names of a child, in whose respect the divination takes place. And with *akosejaye* or *esentaye* may specific warnings be reeled out regarding what the child may eat or not eat, go or not go, amidst others. It is the belief of respondents that the warnings would be ignored at the peril of the concerned child parents. Rendered in the language of the Yoruba, *Ifa* divination bears testimony to the linguistic fact that language influences people's cultural expressions, an *Ifa*-based naming system being an integral part. Being a practice of strong reckoning among the Yoruba, naming evolves from their culture. And in their culture one finds in the *Ifa* divination system a vast store-house of their values and norms, philosophies as well as history.

However, as the study has found, the divinatory process of *Ifa* is not infallible. The accuracy of a particular divination outcome rests solely on the level of competence of the presiding *Babalawo*. Therefore, it is a competence-dependent precision. Thus, this leaves room for inconsistencies in divinatory outcomes. There is a counterpart name-generating divination, *Igbori*, which respondents said could reveal which

departed family member is re-incarnating or ‘returning’ through the child. Time was when *Igbori* served as the divinatory process from which such names as *Babatunde*, *Yeyejide* and *Iyabo* could be sourced. Specifically, this study, which flows from the realm of language and its inevitable interface with the cultural practices of the people native to it, Agyekum (2006) notes, is an aspect of sociolinguistics. It, thus, contributes to the extant literature and studies in African and Yoruba anthroponymy. It is anchored on the position that there is a strong interface between a people’s language and their cultural practices (Agyekum, 2006), and also reflects that that naming can be used as “microscopic lens to view and understand the social practices and day-to-day activities of a society” (Agyekum, 2006: 210).

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