



Second level meanings of names in Jẹ k'a sọ Yoruba and Jẹ k'a ka Yoruba: Reflections on and extension of content.

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ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on the names of some characters in two Yoruba language-learning textbooks written by Antonia Schleicher (1993 and 1998). The focus is more on the literature inherent in language learning. The chapter will also direct attention to how names add to the stories by providing cultural pointers for the learners during and after reading the specially constructed monologue or dialogue. Names such as those chosen for two sisters in a story in Jẹ k'á ka Yoruba, Kílàńkó and Omọlèrè will be used to illustrate the notion that writers choose names carefully to extend the plot. The question to ask will include why Kílàńkó in the story is the bad girl while Omọlèrè is the child of profit (or a profitable child) in the same story. King (1998) explains that, "[n]ames speak of a condition of the spirit through which the name bearer gains ground for locating self and elucidating his or her reason for existing" (p. 3). The writer presents the reason for existing by creating situations in which the characters live out their lives. Characters, unlike human beings, justify their existence in a plot or a narrative as planned by the writer. The other language learning book (Jẹ k'á ka Yoruba) for intermediate learners written by Schleicher, (1998) is also not in short supply of names, which point to interesting cultural meanings. A reader may want to know why a street is named Tèmídire (mine has turned into blessing) and the local chief named Elder Bámitáḽe who is 65 years old. Do these names give away the plot to insiders of the culture while outsiders need someone to unlock the wisdom in the names? Apart from a deconstruction of the names, are there other pedagogical issues that can be derived from names of characters in monologues and dialogues in the two books under review?

Keywords Jẹ k'á ka Yoruba, Jẹ k'a sọ Yoruba, Yoruba names, cultural identity, language learning

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AUTHOR'S BIO



ADE-ODUTOLA, Kole Oluwatoyin, PhD,'s academic journey has taken him through esteemed institutions in Africa, Europe, and the United States, where he obtained academic degrees. This rich multicultural exposure has broadened his perspective and deepened his understanding of global issues & concerns. With a strong commitment to contributing meaningfully to the visions of the organizations and institutions he collaborates with, He has three collections of poetry; The Poets Fled (1992); The Poet Bled (1999); The Poet Wept (2019). He is the author, of "Diaspora & Imagined Nationality,"(2012) published by Carolina Academic Press, He teaches Yoruba language & cultures at the University of Florida, Gainesville, USA

Introduction

The underlying cultural principles of names and naming in Yoruba culture are well established in scholarly works. There is a link between a people's system of values and their everyday living. Akinloye (2016), avers that, "the Yoruba's value system is reflected in their naming practices" (p. 242). It therefore makes sense that names, real or constructed, are codes in which a people's philosophy can be read, interpreted, and debated. In the Yoruba culture, the name given to every child is a piece within the family's historical puzzle. To buttress this, Adeniyi (2017) reaffirms that "[a] myriad of socio-psychological, environmental, and cultural factors are taken into consideration when a name is to be given to a child" (p. 85). As regards to language learning, Akinyemi (2005) posits that understanding and decoding names in a classroom setting speaks to the importance of culture in second language teaching and acquisition. He states further that there are two textbooks on Yoruba language learning that give attention to personal names and to what the names mean in English language. The gap in the textbooks Akinyemi reviewed in his paper is the absence of information on naming tradition within the Yoruba society. There are also chapters in the language learning textbooks that merely refer to Yoruba naming ceremony but hardly give the deeper meanings of such names when used as part of a dialogue or a monologue. The question to ask is whether the naming principle for humans also applies to that of characters in monologues and dialogues especially if Nilsen and Nilsen's (2008) observation is taken into consideration. They observed that "names do more than identify people; they tell intriguing stories (p.3).

The aptness of characters in literary works has received its share of attention by

scholars. Izevbaye (1981) historicizes the importance of names in narratives. In the paper, there are a number of assertions that can be extracted from his work. In terms of form, he asserts that there is a continuum between the art of naming in life and literature. Both reality and the make-belief world of literature depend on context to give them form and meaning. As regards to readers and the meaning they make, Izevbaye argues, "naming in literature is of unconscious value to readers, acting as the lodestar in the appreciation of narrative" (p. 166). King (1998) in her study of literary names in African-American works deploys the use of metatext of names, which she defines as "a place where names create streams of metaphoric, metonymic, allegorical, and other meanings that avail themselves of multiple interpretive possibilities" (p. 1). In effect, she submits that the names have the potential of modifying and extending deeper meanings of a work of art "by giving voice to unspoken themes and events, a process known as 'deep talk'." She draws upon works of several scholars such as Kristeva, Bakhtin, and Henry Louis Gates Jr.. In this paper, I argue that paying attention to what names connote in excerpts used in language learning textbooks adds to deeper understanding of the target culture from which the stories are drawn. It has to be stated from the outset that learners need to acquire a measure of cultural knowledge to be able to unlock the deeper meanings or cues offered by these names. In a bid to privilege culture as the driver of cross-cultural learning in foreign language classes, instructors can utilize every moment when it is possible to assist learners critically analyze products and practices by sharing perspectives about their own cultures and that of the target culture. Sanuth and Agoke (2016) are of the opinion that "cultures are inextricably connected to language, and both are encapsulated in texts of various forms; thus neither should be privileged over the other in language teaching" (p. 144). Their viewpoints adapted from Folarin-Schleicher and Moshi (2000) may not be too far from an earlier view by Galloway (1999).

According to Galloway, there is need for paradigm shifts in language learning/teaching classrooms. The shift defined as "a movement away from taken-for-granted boundaries and old explanations that no longer capture reality to accommodate the emergence of a new way of thinking, valuing, and perceiving the world" (p.153). As abstract as the definition of the shift might be, a close reading soon shows that cross-cultural education is "less bridges than a deep understanding of the boundaries" (p. 153). Names of characters in selected texts therefore have the potential of bringing culture to the fore on a pedestal for target language learning. There are various methods of reading names and naming in literary works, but the one adopted for this study is a modification of King (1998). She submits that there are principles which present a "methodological vehicle through which an interpreter may discover [or uncover] how a name identifies, defines, describes, or acts within a narrative plot" (p.5). These principles will be applied to the selected names for deeper comprehension of the brief narratives. Before these principles are stated, a review of what others have done in the area of reading names and naming is discussed briefly in the next section.

Literature review

The issue of names and naming has received its fair share of attention from different scholars across climes and cultures. For instance, Ansa and Okon (2014) examined the role of names as a means of social history among the Efik ethnic group of Nigeria. The authors generalize that, "naming, a people's worldview is expressed" (p. 83). The implication of this is that a lot can be read into names people or characters are given. Ansa and Okon included in their study a number of scholars who reflected on the nexus of language and culture; these are Ngugi (1972), Biobaku (1982), Yahaya (1982), Ifemesia (1982), and

Malinowski (2003). It has also been established that buried within the language used by any community is a possibility to uncover different aspects of their past and way of communication, Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000) writing on the Bono people of Ghana argues "personal names support human interaction as a vehicle for communication" (p.19). Gee (2008) expands the reach of what languages can do. He states "language here always comes fully attached to 'other stuff'; to social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world" (p.1). Adeniyi (2011) focused on proverbs as names from a socio-linguistic's perspective. According to him, Yoruba people assert that an individual's existence is tied to a name in that "not to have a name is not to exist" (p.159). The names given are not mere words; they are at times proverbs that require deft deconstruction. Adeniyi, using Oduyoye's earlier work, identifies three categories namely Àmútorunwá, Àbíṣọ and Oríkì. It is based on three broad categories that Yoruba names can be decoded and fully understood. Àmútorunwá is when the child brings a name into the world for example, twins-Táyé and Kéhìndé. Whereas àbíṣọ is when the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child helps in the choice of a name. Finally, Oríkì is a cognomen that has the history of the forebears of the child in a telescopic and poetic format. Each name can also be further subjected to grammatical analysis as a way of understanding the underlying structures of the names. Adeniyi (2011) explains that, these are not homologous. He says there are names with such linguistic structure that has a Noun phrase added to a verb. At other times a pronoun precedes the verb phrase. There have also been cases in which a noun phrase is added to another (p. 115). King (1998), on her part has already bestowed a license when she stated that an application of her method of reading names would have to "consider the culture (or rather, interlocutory community) out of which those texts [names] originate" (p.8). The section below states the method by which the names can be read, decoded, or deconstructed.

M e t h o d s

As stated earlier, the method for the reading of names and naming in this chapter is based on that articulated by King (1998). She opted to use this method as a strategy of covert writing by exploring the contextual aims of names, which she referred to as Onomatic desires. "This term refers to the utterances produced through the meaning potential of poetic names and name phrases" (p.6). In effect, I intend to see these names through these categories I created in no particular order:

- (1). Names that extend narratives/plots
- (2). Names that window-dress narratives/plots
- (3). Names that encode implicit cultural norms and values
- (4). Names that are road-blocks to accessible meanings and interpretations

The four categories are drawn from our knowledge of what names mean and the interpretation that occurs at the interface of readers with the text that has been read. Names eventually act as miles-stones to help navigate the flow (or hindrance) of the narration.

Data Collection

There are 11 excerpts from the two books considered for this study. Names examined are taken from the two Yoruba language learning books, *Jẹ k'a sọ Yoruba* (1993) and *Jẹ k'a ka Yorùbá* (1998). The names included in the analysis were selected randomly because they are relevant to this present work.

- (1). *Monologue on page 37 (Jẹ k'a sọ Yoruba)* speaks about Títí's family. The narrator is un-named but leaves textual clues about how old the person narrating might be. This un-named narrator is on a first name basis with all the family members including the grandparents. The name of Titi's father is Kunlé. Readers are not informed of the prefix of that name but on closer reading, one can see that the name falls

in line with someone with a large family. The Dictionary of Yoruba personal names (2003) says Kunlé is an abridgement of Adékúnlé and it means, "...have filled the home" (p.442). This character alone has seven children and his wife's name is Èbùn, which means gift. A good gift she must be to have as many as three males and four females. The names of the children will not be considered for this present study but will be noted along the line.

- (2). *Monologue on page 41 (Jẹ k'a sọ Yoruba.)* Here the husband of three wives is Akinlolú, which the Dictionary of Yoruba personal names translates as Akin ni Olú (meaning a male child is a principal child). Another translation of the same name is "warrior is lord." (Akin ni Olúwa). There is no doubt a man heading a household of three wives will need to be a warrior of some sort. The three names of his wives are very suggestive of how he married each of them. The first wife, born on a Sunday, is Bọsẹ, the second wife's name tells us her parents were thankful for her birth (Dúpẹ); the third wife is Àdùkẹ meaning someone people struggle to care for. She is the last wife, and that she gave birth to two girls. The second wife who gave birth to only a female is named Àiná. A child so called must have had a difficult entry into the world at birth. This is so because only children born with umbilical cord around their necks that are so called. A reader who deduces why the second wife has just one child based on this name may not be too far from Yoruba cultural reality.

- (3). *Monologue on Page 137 (Jẹ k'a sọ Yoruba)*, in this monologue Délé is talking about his journey to Nigeria with his parents. The literary meaning of Délé is 'arrive home' (with me). This name can have both a prefix and a suffix which are absent in this very choice of name. The passage, though a monologue, speaks to the narrative of arriving at the home country of

his parents. A summary of the story is that a family decided to travel from their base (an un-named country) to Nigeria. The beginning of the story presents the decision of the mother to go by sea instead of fly because she is afraid of flying. The second part of the story presents the voice of the father who from the text can be seen to take charge of what can be done or what should be avoided. When the name of the character is added to the narrative, it gives another layer to the idea of arriving home.

(4). *Monologue on page 157 (Jẹ k'a sọ Yoruba)*, in this excerpt Dúpe is talking about what she wore to church during the Christmas festivities. The full name, most of the time is rendered as Modúpe, which means 'I am grateful'. The character in this narration is set against her nameless friends who decided to celebrate in Western clothes while she decided to adorn herself in complete native attire. The name from the perspective of a reader is like saying we are appreciative of the character who upholds the customs and tradition of Yoruba people. The contrast of an adopted religion and outward appearance makes the simple narration a measure of cultural complexity that can be discussed at later levels of language teaching.

(5). *Monologue on page 233, (Jẹ k'a sọ Yoruba)*. A character named Dàpo talks about a wedding party he attended. The name Dàpo means to join forces, to combine or to join. A name like this talking about attending a wedding sends the reader a subliminal message. The name does not call too much attention to itself as it relates to the narration but leaves a subtle signal about what Yoruba people call àjọṣe ati àjọyọ. The name

can be extended to mean Darapo mo and used to talk about how children are seen as addition to the family. The name has a prefix that adds to a likely meaning of the name and gives hint about the circumstances of birth of the bearer.

Data collected from Jẹ k'a ka Yoruba, a book specially designed for intermediate learners of Yoruba.

(6). *Monologue on page 22* where an unnamed narrator tells us about his/her neighborhood. In the narration, a street is named Temidire (mine has turned into blessing) while the neighborhood is Irewole (blessing enters). The local chief's name is Elder Bamitale, and the text puts his age as 65 years. The elder lives on a street named (Adeyemo) "crown befits (the) child." All these names appear in the first two paragraphs of the narration as if preparing the reader for what is to come or what to expect. In this particular narration, there are no twists but those with added cultural proficiency can view the meaning of the names as an extension to the story.

(7). *Monologue on page 29*. In this brief narrative, Joke is a narrator and the principal character is her sister, Omowunmi (the dictionary translates it as "this child is pleasing/gratifying to me"). The whole story justifies the choice of this name. The protagonist is pleasing physically, mentally and academically. She is said to be tall and pretty. The character as described is a cynosure of every eye and according to the narrator; her sister is very much sought after by potential suitors for marriage. In addition, Omowunmi is college Basketball player. Here again the choice of name for the main character helps the readers gain added insight to the story.

(8). *Story on page 41* is about two sisters Kilanko and Omolere. According to the Dictionary of personal names Kilanko is a

shortened form of *Ki ni a n ko jade* (On what are we performing a naming-ceremony). The Dictionary (pg. 434) suggests this may be a name for a cosmic child (*Abiku*). A reader may want to ask why *Kilanko* is the bad/undisciplined girl while *Omọlere* is the child of profit (or a profitable child) in the same story? Any culturally sensitive reader cannot miss the dramatic effect of both characters in the story. The two names are pointers to a readers anticipation.

(9). Monologue on page 65. The narrator Mrs. Dairo, a grandmother, talks about her experience with illness. The choice of this very name should draw a reader's attention to a Yoruba proverb that talks about a cosmic child who disgraces the diviner during a healing procedure (*Abiku sọ oloogun dèké*). Managing the illness of cosmic children, even when they are adults like this narrator, can be very demanding. The name Dairo means "...has detained this child". One likely question language learners may ask is what detained the child and why? Dairo is one of the names that encodes an implicit cultural norm that needs further explanation. The choice is very apposite for the narration and allows for engaging discussions on cosmic children in relation to Yoruba system of health and wellness. However, the objective of this very monologue is to expose learners to health-related vocabularies; it also brings up a comparison between Western medicine and its side effect and traditional holistic medicine. Apart from the choice of names, it allows learners to delve into differences and similarities in practice and perspectives.

(10). The story on page 75 tells of *Ijapa* (tortoise) and *Aja* (the dog). The only named character is *Yannibo*, the wife of the protagonist, *Ijapa*, in the story. The name *Yannibo* is one of the names that constitute roadblocks to accessible meanings and interpretations. According human attributes to animals is a widespread narrative strategy. The story accords animals, human attributes in a way that no sub-ethnic group can feel offended

(11). Story on page 111 has both humans and animals. It tells the story of Tortoise and the Elephant. The human king is unnamed but the king of animals has a name, *Alagogo* (the owner of time or owner of bells). Interpreting the significance of bells, a reader may have to turn to the saying for whom the bells tolls which is also the title of one of Hemingway's book. The idea of bells foretells danger and death. In the Yoruba culture, bells feature in music as time keeping instrument. Bells are also metaphors that evoke prayers from believers. It says that one's time should be as measured and certain as the clock. Apart from names in the story, the plot also raises a number of ethical issues of how animals have to die in the sustenance of life of humans. The time of the king in the story was ending and instead of transiting gracefully, the king asked from his subjects including animals, for ideas about how he can prolong his life.

D i s c u s s i o n a n d c o n c l u s i o n
Names are like maps that have the potential to help readers navigate simple or complex stories. Some names help articulate in-between the lines ideas, the unsaid components of stories. A name like *Kunle*, which featured in *Titi's* family

narration, points the reader to how the writer conceives of such a family. Though Yoruba people, like other ethnic groups, show affection to children, yet they are quick to point out that “*òmọ bẹrẹ, oṣi bẹrẹ*” [meaning many children breeds mystery]. A name like Kunle and his family directs attention to the size of families in modern times when economics and income is a major determinant of how many children a family can cater for. The maternal grandfather's name, Mosún (longer version can be Mosunmọla (I move close to wealth) allows for a discussion on tone marks. For instance, sùn is the verb to sleep whereas sún is a verb to move closer to something or someone. The direction of the tone marks can be utilized in assisting learners appreciate the low and upper tones just as using the meaning of the name to reinforce another aspect of the language. There is a Yoruba saying that points to the process of naming children. That saying (*ile la n wo ki a to sọmọlorukọ*), which translates to it is to the homestead we look for a befitting name for a child. A parody of this saying in this situation will read “it is the nature of the plot that a writer considers before choosing the name a character.” It is also possible to argue that writers of language learning textbooks choose names that serve many purposes at once. The names lean heavily on cultural realities and sometimes on spirituality. In the two books under review, the names of the characters point readers to certain directions of the plot or the monologue. Just as Schleicher (1997) once asked an obvious question about how to integrate the important subject of greeting as part of the pedagogical strategy for teaching beginners, I too will do the same by asking how to include the meaning of names and its implications for better appreciation of text and cultural understanding. In response to her own question, she argued that “[i]n order to do this, teachers need to ascertain the level of cultural awareness of the students and their level of linguistic proficiency” (pg. 341). Her suggestions are located within the cross-

cultural learning model. The heart of this model is that learners are aware of their own cultural perspectives, products and practices just as they learn about the practices of others. For instance, Schleicher, suggests that “American students can discover that there are similarities and differences in the way the Yoruba people divide the day compared to how Americans divide the day” (pg. 341). Unlike the part, greetings play in linguistic performance and proficiency, names and naming gives learners possibilities for engaging with deeper level meanings and how to read a text beyond the grammar and sentence structure.

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