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1. Contributions should be about 6,000 words. They are to be typed double-spaced on one side of the paper with adequate margins. Three copies are to be submitted and postage should be enclosed if return of paper is requested.

2. The following details should be noted on paper format:
   (a) An abstract of not more than one hundred words should accompany each paper.
   (b) APA referencing style should be employed. Notes should be very minimal and numbered sequentially and grouped together at the end of the paper just before the list of references.
   (c) Individual authors warrant that their contributions are original and will not infringe upon any copyright or property rights of others, and that the works do not contain anything that violates right of privacy.

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THE MORPHOLOGY, SEMANTICS AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF YORUBÁ NAMES

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Abstract

It is observed that all oruks 'attributive names', certain oruks ṣiṣọ 'personal names' and ṣiṣọ 'nicknames' can be easily identified along gender distinction in Yoruba (Ola-Orie 2002). In this paper, I show that the parameters for this identification are morphological, semantic and sociolinguistic phenomena rather than a sole affair of semantics as widely acclaimed in the literature. I establish that names which contain bọba 'father', ọṣin 'valour', ọgún 'war', ògè 'fight', òdè 'like/love' are exclusively masculine and therefore given to male children whereas names that contain ọ̀ja 'mother', ẹ̀wá 'beauty' the verbs ẹ̀rè 'adorn' and ẹ̀mbí 'bec' are almost always feminine and given to female children. I claim that these morphological and semantic properties are due to the influence of societal norms on linguistics. It is shown that while Yoruba assign physical activities such as waging war, wrestling and hunting to male members of the society, activities that involve caring, adoration and aesthetics are exclusively for females.

1. Introduction

Yoruba, like any other African, Asian and several Oceanic Communities, take delight in giving names that shed light on various forms of socio-cultural information around the time that a child is born. It has also been observed, for
Africa in general and Yorùbá in particular, that one unique feature of Personal names is their elaborate linguistic structure, semantic complexity and reflection of African values (Goodenough 1965, Odúṣù 1972, Ekùndàyọ̀ 1977, Akinashio 1980, Awoyàlẹ̀ 1982, Ajihọyẹ̀ 1996, Ogúnwàlè 2002 and Ola-Orie 2002, 2009). In this paper, I examine the issue of gender in Yorùbá personal names, personal names and nicknames and claim that while naming is a socio-religious affair among the Yorùbá, its sociolinguistic and semantic implication cannot be underplayed. In particular, I show that there are certain sociolinguistics factors that play vital roles in the names that male and female children bear. Some of these factors combine with morphology to fashion out their interpretation. Section 2 focuses on a review of Ìdìmọ̀ṣé's (1982) and Òlo-Òrìe's (2002) classification of Yorùbá names, based on male-female distinction and residues of inherent gender distinction in Yorùbá. Section 3 presents the parameters to use in my proposed classification and the analysis that accounts for the selected Yorùbá names. I conclude in section 4.


This section makes a review of two of the previous works that relate to my present study. First to be reviewed is one of the first works on Yorùbá names in Yorùbá studies namely, Ìdìmọ̀ṣé (1982). This is followed by the more recent work of Òlo-Òrìe (2002). The two put together give us a deep knowledge of what scholars have claimed for the aspects of Yorùbá names under consideration and what remains to be covered.

2.1 A Review of Ìdìmọ̀ṣé’s (1982) work

Ìdìmọ̀ṣé’s (1982) inspiring work looks at Yorùbá names under oríka àmílòòrónlò ‘a name which a child is born with’, oríka abíkọ́ ‘name that refers to the circumstances prevailing at the time of the birth’, abíkọ́ ‘born to die again child’, oríka ọ̀rìká ‘attributive names’, ọ̀rìká ‘nicknames’ and ọ̀rìká ‘avoidance-name’. The aspect that catches our attention is the classification of oríka names into male and female groups. One observation with Ìdìmọ̀ṣé’s presentation is the problem of the parameters used for his classification. Second is the problem of a perfect division or distinction between the names he classifies as being borne by males and females respectively. Ìdìmọ̀ṣé (1982) begins with a brief introduction of what abíkọ́ names are. He identifies five different types of abíkọ́ names which:

(i) reflect on current events in the child’s family at birth
(ii) focus on the child itself
(iii) show that the child’s parents are both wealthy and equally entitled to certain chieftaincy titles
(iv) are a reflection of the family’s occupation
(v) depict the religion of the family.

What I present in table 1 is a summary of Ìdìmọ̀ṣé’s classification. I retain the ordering in the work as much as possible.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>Kúmólú death-take-statue</td>
<td>Osikẹpé owner-(of)-adoration-complete</td>
<td>Osinatilẹẹ child-finish-malice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ôtọgbẹye intrigue-takes-honour</td>
<td>Folāwiyọ use-wealth-wash-hand</td>
<td>Ìbabọ́pọ lineage-mix-together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii</td>
<td>Onipẹdẹ one-that-takes-an-appeal-arrive</td>
<td>Mọọsẹkẹ́ I-see-person-to-adore</td>
<td>Ayọdẹlé joy-reach-home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Akintọ́élé valour-fits-house</td>
<td>Òmọọjọ child-is-enough-for-joy</td>
<td>Ọjọmọ́bọlọ́ march-meet-wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii</td>
<td>Adèrọgbá crown-surrounds</td>
<td>Adèjọ́ga crown-turns-to-market</td>
<td>Adéwúmí crown-pleases-me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ódèyeimi crown-fits-me</td>
<td>Fádejërará use-crown-to-play-the-lady-of-version</td>
<td>Ìlajéjọ́kọ sit-with-crown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Órùmúniyi hunting-gives-me</td>
<td>Òdẹfẹ́nkẹ́ hunting-gives-me-to-adore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv</td>
<td>Ójúmọ́sẹ́gí Ògúm-bas-prestige</td>
<td>Òsídọ́gún</td>
<td>1-run-heel-to-war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Òmọhẹ̀ẹ̀pi work-resembles-me</td>
<td>Òtúwúmí</td>
<td>Art-work-pleases-me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Adéyọ̀dá 1993)

A careful study of table 1 shows some inconsistency in the parameters used in Adéyọ̀dá’s classification along male-female distinction. Two sets of examples to support this observation may suffice. First, consider names with the morpheme ìwọ́nĩmí ‘give me’: Òdèbínrí “hunting-gives me” and Òjèbínrí “Ôjè gives me”. While the former is ascribed to a male child, the latter is said to be exclusively for a female child. As to the preceding morpheme, at best, both can go with a male identity. Indeed both Òjè and ‘Ôjè’ are professions that are carried out by males. Next, let us look at the pair of names: Òjúwúmí “Ôjè-pleases-me” and Òmọ̀wúmí “art-work-pleases-me”. Both also have in common the phrase: wúmí ‘please me’. According to Adéyọ̀dá, Òmọ̀wúmí is meant for a female child only while Òjúwúmí is for a male child only. What one expects and which will have been established is for the suffix ìwọ́nĩmí to be for male children only, while wúmí goes for female children only, or vice versa. However,
this is not the case and there is no explanation for this.

The same problem is also observed in names Adeoye describes as neutral, i.e. those that can be borne by either sex. For example, wumi as a phrase can combine with Adé to give Adéwumi, which he classifies as neutral. Note that the same morpheme has been used in combination with other morphemes to produce male and female children respectively. There is no explanation for this inconsistency.

Talking about oríki 'attributive names', Adéoyé (1982:41) asserts that male oríki usually depicts 'bravery' whereas female oríki usually shows love; expectation and compassion (cf. Ola-Orie 2002). However, from our observation, there is no evidence that this claim is reflected in his grouping. The oríki names in (1) are for male while those in (2) are for female.

(1)  a. Àjáì(w)ó 'The one we fight and fall'
    b. Àmọ(w)ó 'The one we know and fall'
    c. Àjáìni 'The one we fight for to possess'
    d. Àkámú 'The one we select to take'

(2)  a. Òdèré 'A kind of bird'
    b. Àwèrè 'The one we bath and adorn'
    c. Àṣákẹ 'The one we select and pamper'

There seems to be nothing in the oríki names in (1) that hinges on 'bravery', though one may claim that the oríki names in (1a) and (1c) which contain the verb jà 'fight' can only be borne by males from the socio-cultural perspective. This claim falls within the assumption that the Yorùbá society ascribes any activity that involves physical exercise to male people only. Another piece of evidence along this line of thought is ijakádá 'wrestling' which in Yorùbá land is a game that is exclusively carried out by males. Nevertheless, such argument does not hold fort (1b) and (1d) as there is nothing in mọ 'knowing' and sì 'selecting' that reflects masculinity. Similarly none of the three female oríki names in (2) reflects love, expectation or compassion.


Using phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic parameters Ola Orie (2002) accounts for Yorùbá attributive names. As to its phonology Ola Orie claims that while attributive names with LLH pattern goes for either male or female names (3a,b) the LHH pattern (3c) is exclusively for female names. L stands for 'Low' and H stands for 'High'.

(3)  a.i  À-jà-dí  LLH
    a.ii  Àkàn rè  LLH
    a.iii  À-kà-dì  LLH
    b.i  À-wè-rò  LLH
    b.ii  À-bè-nì  LLH
    c.i  À-bà-kè  LHH
    c.ii  À-nì-kè  LHH

The LLH is considered unmarked hence its wide coverage of both male and female attributive names. On the other hand the LHH tone pattern is marked, hence its narrow coverage of female attributive names only. On their morphology, Ola Orie (2002) rightly observes that attributive
names like many other nominals are derived through prefixation. The prefix $ā$ is attached to a verb phrase composed of a sequence of two monosyllabic verbs. On their syntax, Ola-Orie also notes correctly that there is restriction in the kind of verb phrase (VP) that can take the prefix $ā$ morpheme to derive an attributive name. In particular, the VP must consist of two verbs that have no object. Finally, on their semantics, Orie observes correctly that the semantics of the co-occurring verbs is restricted. The core of her semantic classification is summarized below:

The first verb in a masculine name is a performative verb denoting notions such as bravery, decisiveness, unique emergence, and praise; the second verb, which is resultative in nature, denotes possession. On the other hand, verbs denoting nurturing, tenderness, adoration, praise, and beauty are chosen in creating feminine names (Ola-Orie 2002: 123)

Some examples that back up the content of the excerpt from Ola-Orie’s work are given in (4).

(4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bravery:</td>
<td>Nurturing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ja ‘fight’</td>
<td>Tenderess:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisiveness: $kā$ ‘meet intentionally’</td>
<td>Beautifying:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposely: $jā$m ‘choose’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is observed that while masculine names have full attention in terms of their verbal composition, the same cannot be said of the feminine names. I guess this is because the verbs that combine to derive female attributive names are not as unique as those that combine to derive masculine names. This is the area that requires more than semantic criterion. In this paper I intend to extend Ola-Orie’s analysis of attributive names along gender distinction to other names such as oṣiko oṣisa ‘personal names’ and alájẹ ‘nicknames’, combining semantics and sociological factors. But before, then, I want to digress to point out that despite the claim that Yorùbá does not exhibit gender distinction in its grammar, it appears this is only true when we look at it from overt morphology. It is evident that there is non-feature induced gender distinction in the language. This is the focus of section 2.3.

2.3 Covert gender distinction

Apart from human names, there are other words that are gender related which have not been documented. I refer to them as covert gender names. They are names that are inherently ascribed to either a male or a female object. The data below show that Yorùbá indeed has residues of gender inclined distinction and goes on to suggest that in the distant past, the language might have gotten a more elaborate gender distinction than what we have today. The data cut across general, human, animal, object and professional names.
‘barber’

Today, some of the above distinctions are being neutralized. For example sokọdọ, aghidọ, and yẹrọ ‘ear ring’ are being worn by both males and females. Similarly, there is no longer a sharp distinction between the professionals; onidiri and oniṣejiyọ́mọ as a man can plait hair just as we have female barbers. I move to the overt gender marking, which is the focus of this paper.

3. Overt gender marking

Mari and Gaynu (1969) define gender as ‘a grammatical distinction or classification of words’ found chiefly in the Indo-European and Semitic languages’ (p. 8). A language that displays this feature usually distinguishes a masculine and a feminine gender. In some cases, a neuter gender class emerges. According to Mari and Gaynu (1969), there are even languages that operate gender distinction according to whether the name depicts an animate or inanimate object. Further, there are languages that exhibit grammatical gender. Hausa and Kinyarwanda are two of such languages. In the latter, there are certain nominalizing morphemes, which are productive in deriving nouns and capable of showing gender distinction. For example, in Kinyarwanda, names that are formed with nyira-, muka-, are feminine while those formed with nwa-, munya-, see-, and ki- are masculine.

It is a known fact that Yorùbá does not exhibit grammatical marking of genders as observed in some other languages, thus the grammatical gender feature is not inherent in its grammar (Awóbólù́yì́ 1978, Bámúgbọ̀ 1966, 1967). However, Adeoyé (1982) and Ola Orie (2002, 2009) show that there is an aspect of Yorùbá culture that reveals gender
Among the Yoruba, there is a division of labour between male and female members of the family. While acknowledging that ‘there was no actual prohibition of women from hoeing and planting...’ Fadipe (1970) maintains that ‘the Yoruba as a whole did not make use of the labour of women on their farms’ (p. 47). This claim is an indication that there is a distinction between male and female members in terms of occupation. On the type of a job a wife can do, Fadipe (1970) notes further:

The wife is responsible for seeking either in an elaborately processed form or practically as harvested, some of the products of the farm that are in excess of the normal requirement of the farmer and his family (pp. 148-149).

Going further on the kind of duty a woman performs, he asserts that: ‘It is of course a woman’s duty to cook for her husband and to keep the house.’ (p. 149). All these put together imply that the job of a female member of the family consists of light assignments to be carried out mostly at home or in the market. The male on the other hand exclusively does all tedious jobs at home (including building and repairing the house, fitting wooden handles to knives or axes, etc.). and on the farm. Such works include cultivation of farmland for planting various crops, and climbing of palm tree either to harvest palm fruits or tap palm wine etc. In essence, it is the responsibility of a man to provide shelter for the family and to supply the entire household with food (see Fadipe 1970, p. 150). The discussion above as I present shortly has indirectly dealt with some aspects of the features to be considered under masculine names.

3.1 Male names and their masculine features

This section presents some parameters that I use in the
classification and analysis of the categories of the names under review into male-bound and female-bound distinction. There are four morphemic features under the parameters for masculine names. The four are [baba], [akin], [ogun] and [fẹ]. I examine them in turns.

3.1.1 [baba] as a masculine feature:

The first to be considered as a feature/morpheme which can combine with other morpheme(s) to form names that a male person bears is *baba* ‘father’. Though, *baba* on its own is a name, it can serve as a prefix morpheme to derive some other human names. Whenever it does so, the derived name can only refer to a male person. Some examples are given below.

6. **Babá-tundé** ‘father has come again’
   **Babá-jídé** ‘father arrived early’
   **Babá-rindé** ‘father walk arrive’
   **Babá-rinmisá** ‘father saw me and ran away’
   **Babá-ọjọlá** ‘father is the honour/wealth’
   **Babá-ládé** ‘father on return becomes rich’
   **Babá-láwọ** ‘A priest of Ifa’
   **Babá-mişinkú** ‘the head of a funeral rite’

There is no part of Yorùbá land, to the best of this researcher’s knowledge, where any of the above names refers to a female person, except where it serves as the person’s surname. Most of the names under review reflect the belief of the Yorùbá that a dead person can still come back to the house the second time in the same form, sex inclusive. Thus, when reincarnation takes place, one expects an old man that died to reincarnate as a male child and never as a female.

### 3.1.2 [akin] as a masculine feature:

The feature/morpheme *akin* seems to be unique among the Yorùbá. It signifies ‘valour’. It is highly significant for someone to be addressed as a brave man. A person that is qualified to have names with this morpheme is either a famous hunter or a warrior or a male child born to the house of a powerful man. The Yorùbá at naming ceremony give names that have [akin] morpheme.

7. **Akin-ṣẹ́yé** ‘Akin befits home’
   **Akin-ṣẹ́mí** ‘Akin pleases me’
   **Akin-lẹ́yí** ‘It is Akin (child) that we gave birth to’
   **Akin-jídé** ‘Akin came at dawn’
   **Akin-déjé** ‘Akin arrived home’
   **Akin-ọjọlá** ‘Akin is enough honour’
   **Akin-ṣẹ́mii** ‘Akin did not die in vain’
   **Akin-ṣẹ́mí** ‘Akin fill the house’
   **Akin-wí** ‘Akin comes well’
   **Akin-bóyé** ‘Akin returned home’

The claim that only reputable hunters or men of valour can take a name that has *akin* as an affix implies that to a large extent such names can be hereditary. Indeed, it will be a mockery for an indolent person, a hunter who has not killed one of the wild animals in the forest or a warrior who has not brought honour from the warfront to name his child *Akin-ṣẹ́mii* or *Akin-jídé*. Further, whenever *akin* is prefixed to a verb phrase to derive a name, the name can depict a number of things. *Akin-ṣẹ́yé* thus can be an expression of the father in the male child in order to show his satisfaction in being brave. *Akin-ṣẹ́mii*, when given to a child at the naming ceremony is a reflection of the parent’s joy that he is a man of valour. And
Akinlabi is a reflection of the parent’s wish that his son be as brave as he (the father) is when he becomes of age.

Since no woman takes to hunting, no woman goes to war. As it is the practice among the Bantu, so it is in Yoruba; in most cases it is the father who gives names to children that are born to a family. In such common cases, neither the giver nor the bearer of a name has akin as affix can be a female person.

3.1.3 [ogun] as a masculine feature:

Closely related to the feature/morpheme [akin] is the feature/morpheme [ogun] ‘war’ which is found in certain Yoruba names. The warriors constitute a distinguished class in the Yoruba land. Thus, as earlier mentioned, they are men of valour. Among the Yoruba, they are the Ekiti whereas among the Ekiti, they are the olérègun ‘warrior’. One way which these people are identified is through their names. Most names that are formed through the affixation of ogun are not given at birth. The only exception to this claim is Abidogun ‘born before a departure to a war front’. In most cases, they are titles given to outstanding warriors.

(8)
Balógun
‘father in war’
Aregundada
‘the one that put on a crown when he sees war’
Arogunyó
‘the one that rejoice when there is war’
Badá
‘king of warrior’
Jagun
‘warrior’
Jagunmólú
‘The one that wages war and is victorious’
Bógunjókó
‘The one that sit with war’

Jagunlabi
‘It is a warrior that we give birth to’
Abógunlóko
‘The one that meets war on the farm (and fight fearlessly)’
Ogunlólú
‘War is wealth’
Ajagunbádá
‘The one that fight war to receive crown’

Apart from those names that have ogun in their composition, there are yet others that are given to warriors as title. They include Òlé Lókakarípí Aù Ómíbí and Bọsírún. Even though none of the last set of names has ogun affixed to the remaining morpheme(s) in their derivation, the meaning conveyed by each of them has reference to a warrior. Again, since warriors are usually men, it implies that such names can only be borne by a male person.

3.1.4 [fe] as a masculine feature/morpheme in Yoruba male names

A dictionary of the Yoruba language defines fe as ‘to be willing, like, love, want, desire, wish, approve’ (p. 83). This definition of fe has a range of meanings and consequently a wide scope of application. Two of the meanings namely like and love, have direct relevance to our discussion in this section. The morpheme fe, when affixed to some other morpheme(s) to derive names, such names have been observed to be exclusively referring to a male child. In Yoruba society as it is in most parts of the world, it is the male that proposes to his female counterpart when falling in love. This view is expressed in Òsò corpus as contained in Akintoyewo’s Ogbé wà òùfè.

Ogbé wà tè kára kò rò wòjí
À día fún Yemowó, tí jé aya Òbátálá