

THE MORPHOLOGY, SEMANTICS AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF YORÙBÁ NAMES

Ọládiípò Ajíbóyè

*Department of Linguistics, African and Asian Studies,
University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria.*

Abstract

It is observed that all *orúko* 'attributive names', certain *orúko àbísò* 'personal names' and *àlájé* 'nicknames' can be easily identified along gender distinction in Yorùbá (Ọla-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 *baba* 'father', *akin* 'valour', *ogun* 'war', *jà* 'fight', *fẹ* 'like/love' are exclusively masculine and therefore given to male children whereas names that contain *iyá/yeye* 'mother', *ẹwà* 'beauty' the verbs *kẹ* 'adorn' and *bẹ* 'beg' 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 Yorùbá 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

Yorùbá, 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, Odùyoṣè 1972, Èkúndayò 1977, Akínasò 1980, Awóyalé 1982, Abíódún 1996, Ajíbóyè 1996, Ògúnwálé 2002 and Òlā-Orie 2002, 2009). In this paper, I examine the issue of gender in Yorùbá attributive names, personal names and nicknames and claim that while naming is purely 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 Adéoyè's (1982) and Òlā-Orie'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.

2. A Review of Adéoyè's (1982) and Òlā-Orie's (2002) classification of Yorùbá Personal Names (YPN)

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, Adéoyè (1982). This is followed by the more recent work of Òlā-Orie (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 Adéoyè's (1982) work

Adéoyè's (1982) inspiring work looks at Yorùbá names under *orúkò àmútòrunwá* 'a name which a child is born with', *orúkò àbísò* 'name that refers to the circumstances prevailing at the time of the birth', *àbíkú* 'born to die again child', *orúkò oríkì* 'attributive names', *àlájé* 'nicknames' and *àdàpè* 'avoidance-name'. The aspect that catches our attention is the classification of *àbísò* names into male and female groups. One observation with Adéoyè'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. Adéoyè (1982) begins with a brief introduction of what *àbísò* names are. He identifies five different types of *àbísò* 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 Adéoyè's classification. I retain the ordering in the work as much as possible.

Table 1

	Male	Female	Neuter
i	Kúmólú death-take-astute	Oníkèpé owner-(of)- adoration-complete	<i>Ọmótánbàjẹ</i> child-finish- malice
	Ọtégbèyẹ intrigue-takes- honour	Fọláwiyọ use-wealth-wash- hand	<i>Ìbídàpọ</i> lineage-mix- together
	Onípèdẹ one-that-takes-an- appeal-arrive	Morénikẹ <i>I-see-person-to- adore</i>	Ayòdélé joy-reach-home
ii	Akínyẹlẹ valour-fits-house	<i>Ọmótáyo</i> child-is-enough- for-joy	<i>Şiyonbọlá</i> march-meet- wealth
	Adérògbà crown-surrounds	Adédojà crown-turns-to- market	Adéwùmi crown-pleases- me
iii	Adéyẹmí crown-fits-me	Fadérera use-crown-to-play- the-lady-of-version	Bádéjòkó sit-with-crown
	<i>Ọdẹbùnmi</i> hunting-gives-me	<i>Ọdẹfúnkẹ</i> hunting-gives-me- to-adore	-
	<i>Ọgúnniyi</i> Ọgún-has-prestige	Mosádogun <i>I-run-hold-to war</i>	-
iv	<i>Onàbánjọ</i> art work-resembles- me	<i>Onàwùmi</i> Art work-pleases me	-

v	Fádèyí Ifá-turns to-this	Fáyínká Ifá-surrounds-me	-
	<i>Şàngódèyí</i> Şàngó-turns to-this	<i>Şàngódàrà</i> Şàngó-makes-wonder	-
	<i>Şóyínká</i> Oşó-surrounds me	<i>Efunşetán</i> Efun-does -(it)-finish	-
	Òjèwù mí <i>Òjè</i> -pleases-me	Òjèbùn mí <i>Òjè</i> -gives-me	-
	Oròwọlé Orò-enters-house	Oròyẹ mí Orò-fits-me	-
	Ọşúndínà Ọşun-blocks-way	Ọşúnkúnbi Ọşun-fill-family	-

(Adapted from Adéoyè 1982)

A careful study of table 1 shows some inconsistency in the parameters used in Adéoyè's classification along male-female distinction. Two sets of examples to support this observation may suffice. First, consider names with the morpheme *bùnmi* 'give me': *Odébùnmi* 'hunting gives me' and *Òjèbùnmi* 'Òjè 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 *Ode* and 'Òjè' are professions that are carried out by males. Next, let us look at the pair of names: *Òjèwù mí* 'Òjè-pleases-me' and *Onàwù mí* 'art work-pleases me'. Both also have in common the phrase: *wù mí* 'please me'. According to Adéoyè, *Onàwù mí* is meant for a female child only while *Òjèwù mí* is for a male child only. What one expects and which will have been established is for the suffix *bùnmi* to be for male children only, while *wù mí* 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 Adéoyè describes as neutral, i.e. those that can be borne by either sex. For example, *wùmí* as a phrase can combine with *Adé* to give us *Adéwùmí*, 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 *oríkì* 'attributive names', Adéoyè (1982:41) asserts that male *oríkì* usually depicts 'bravery' whereas female *oríkì* 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 *oríkì* names in (1) are for male while those in (2) are for female.

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---------|-----------------------------------|
| (1) | a | Àjà(w)ó | 'The one we fight and fall' |
| | b | Àmò(w)ó | 'The one we know and fall' |
| | c | Àjàní | 'The one we fight for to possess' |
| | d | Àṣàmú | 'The one we select to take' |
| (2) | a | Òdèré | 'A kind of bird' |
| | b | Àwèró | 'The one we bath and adorn' |
| | c | Àṣàké | 'The one we select and pamper' |

There seems to be nothing in the *oríkì* names in (1) that hinges on 'bravery', though one may claim that the *oríkì* 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 *ijàkadì* 'wrestling' which in Yorùbá land is a game

that is exclusively carried out by males. Nevertheless, such argument does not hold for (1b) and (1d) as there is nothing in *mò* 'knowing' and *şà* 'selecting' that reflects masculinity. Similarly none of the three female *oríkì* names in (2) reflects love, expectation or compassion.

2.2 A review of Ola-Orie's (2002) analysis of Yorùbá attributive names.

Using phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic parameters Ola Orié (2002) accounts for Yoruba attributive names. As to its phonology Ola Orié 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
		PREF-fight-restore	
	a.ii	Àkànní	LLH
		PREF-reach-have	
	b.i	À-wẹ-ró	LLH
		PREF-bathe-adorn (beautifully)	
	b.ii	À-bẹ-ní	LLH
		PREF-beg-have	
	c.i	À-bá-kẹ	LHH
		PREF-join-pamper	
	c.ii	À-ní-kẹ	LHH
		PREF-have-pamper	

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 *à* 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 *à* 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)

Verb 1	Verb 2
<i>Masculine</i>	
Bravery: <i>jà</i> 'fight'	Resultative: <i>ní</i> 'to possess'
Decisiveness: <i>kàn</i> 'meet intentionally'	Resultative: <i>gbé</i> 'to carry'
Purposely: <i>yàn</i> 'choose'	Resultative: <i>mú</i> 'take'

*Feminine*Nurturing: *kẹ* 'pamper'Tenderness *bẹ* 'beg'Beautifying *wẹ* 'bathe'

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 *orúko àbísọ* 'personal names' and *àlájẹ* '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 we have today. The data cut across general, human, animal, object and professional names.

(5)	Masculine	Feminine
a.	<i>general</i>	
	akọ	abo
	'male'	'female'
b.	<i>human</i>	
	ọkọ	aya/iyàwó
	'husband'	'wife'
	bàbá	iyá
	'father'	'mother'
	ọkùnrin	obìnrin
	'man'	'woman'
	dáwódù	béèrè
	'first male child'	'first female child'
c.	<i>animals</i>	
	àkùkọ	obídiẹ/agbébò
	'cock'	'chick'
	àgbò	agùtàn
	'ram'	'sheep'
	òbúkọ	ìdérègbè
	'he' goat'	'she' goat'
d.	<i>objects</i>	
	filà	gèlè
	'cap'	'head gear'
	ṣòkòtò	ìró
	'pair of trousers'	'female wrapper'
	ṣòkòtò	yẹ̀rì/tòbí
	'pair of trousers'	'women apron'
e.	<i>profession</i>	
	onígàjámọ̀	onídìrì

‘barber’

‘hair dresser’

Today, some of the above distinctions are being neutralized. For example *ṣòkòtò*, *agbádá*, and *yẹrí/yẹti* ‘ear ring’ are being worn by both males and females. Similarly, there is no longer a sharp distinction between the professionals; *onídírí* and *onígḥájámò* 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

Mario 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 Mario 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-*, *mukaa-*, are feminine while those formed with *nya-*, *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 (Awóbùlúyì 1978, Bámgbóṣé 1966, 1967). However, Adéoyè (1982) and Oḷa Orié (2002, 2009) show that there is an aspect of Yorùbá culture that reveals gender

distinction. This is in the aspect of naming. The problems relating to Adeoye and Ola Orié call for alternative parameters for classification along the same male-female distinction. In the section that follows, I present the parameters on which my classification is based. I show that Yorùbá gender features which are related to names are coded in certain morphemes whose semantics is driven partly by certain societal norms.

Parameter 1

All names that have *baba* 'father', *ogun* 'war', *akin* 'valour' and *jě* 'love' morphemes are for a male person.

Parameter 2

All names that have *iyá* 'mother', *kẹ́* 'adorn', *ẹwà* 'beauty' and *bẹ́* 'beg/entreated' morphemes are for a female person.

In section 3, I shall offer explanation for the choice of these parameters and analyze how they work in Yorùbá names with ample examples.

In any human race, it is not uncommon to witness segregation among male and female members. Such can be natural or artificial. It can also cut across religious, political or social factors. Differences between male and female can even be psychological or political. Among the Jews and Arabs, women are not given political function. In Nigeria, aspiring to a political position by women is very recent. In Yorùbá, many decisions in the family are taken by the head of the family who is usually the husband (a man). The Bible describes wives as weaker partners thus they are regarded as a delicate object (I Peters 3:7). The next section takes a look at some of the sociological factors that explain personal names along male-female distinction.

Among the Yorubá, 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...' Fádípè (1970) maintains that 'the Yorubá 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, Fádípè (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 [fẹ́]. 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-túndé	'father has come again'
	Babá-jídé	'father arrived early'
	Babá-rindé	'father walk arrive'
	Babá-rimisá	'father saw me and ran away'
	Baba-lọlá	'father is the honour/wealth'
	Babá-làdé	'father on return becomes rich'
	Baba-láwo	'A priest of Ifa'
	Baba-misinkú	'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) **Akín-yelé** 'Akin befits home'
Akín-wùmí 'Akin pleases me'
Akín-labí 'It is Akin (child) that we gave birth to'
Akín-jídé 'Akin came at dawn'
Akín-délé 'Akin arrived home'
Akín-tólá 'Akin is enough honour'
Akín-kùúgbé 'Akin did not die in vain'
Akín-kúnlé 'Akin fill the house'
Akín-wáare 'Akin comes well'
Akín-bòwálé '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 *Akinkúnmi* or *Akintúndé*. Further, whenever *akin* is prefixed to a verb phrase to derive a name, the name can depict a number of things. *Akínyelé* thus can be an expression of the father in the male child in order to show his satisfaction in being brave. *Akínwùmí*, 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

Akinlabí 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 the Yorùbá; in most cases it is the father who gives names to children that are born to a family. In such common case, neither the giver nor the bearer of a name that 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 Yorùbá names. The warriors constitute a distinguished class in the Yorùbá land. Thus, as earlier mentioned, they are men of valour. Among the *Ọ̀yó*, they are the *Èsọ́* whereas among the *Èkìtì*, they are the *olóógun* '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 *Abídogun* 'born before a departure to a war front'. In most cases, they are titles given to outstanding warrior.

(8)	
Balógun	'father in war'
Arógunládé	'the one that put on a crown when he sees war'
Arógunyò	'the one that rejoice when there is war'
Badà	'king of warrior'
Jagun	'warrior'
Jagunmólú	'The one that wages war and is victorious'
Bógunjókò	'The one that sit with war'

Jagunlabí	'It is a warrior that we give birth to'
Abógunlóko	'The one that meets war on the farm (and fight fearlessly)
Ogunlolá	'War is wealth'
Ajagungbadé	'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 *Ààrẹ̀ Ònàkakanfò*, *Àrẹ̀ Oníbon* and *Başòrun*. 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 [fé] as a masculine feature/morpheme in Yorùbá male names

A dictionary of the Yorùbá language defines *fẹ̀* as 'to be willing, like, love, want, desire, woo, approve' (p. 83). This definition of *fẹ̀* 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 *fẹ̀*, when affixed to some other morpheme(s) to derive names, such names have been observed to be exclusively referring to a male child. In Yorùbá 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 Ifa corpus as contained in Akinwowo's *Ogbè wá tẹ̀*.

Ogbè wá tẹ̀ kára kó rọ̀ wọ̀n

Á díá fún Yemowó, tí í ẹ̀ aya Ọ̀bàtálá

Ọkọ ní fẹ aya

Obinrin kì í sàré lọ í fọkọ

Bí obinrin bá láwọn ọkùnrin

A fí sínú ara rẹ

Bí ọkùnrin bá láwọn obinrin

A wí lẹnu ara rẹ

Ọkọ ní í fẹ aya

Obinrin kì í sàré lọ-í fẹ ọkọ (Akinwowo 1993)

Ogbe corpus commune so that they can be comfortable

Ifa divination was performed for Yemowo the wife of Obatala

It is the husband that marries a wife

A woman does not run to marry a husband

If a woman has some men (in mind)

She will keep it to herself

If a man has some women (in mind)

He will voice it out

It is the husband that marries a wife

A woman does not run to marry a husband

The corpus above establishes the fact that when a woman is in love with a man she finds it difficult to first express it openly. Rather, she keeps this to herself. But, by contrast, a man makes his intention known to a lady he falls in love with by walking straight to her and asking for her love. This may be the reason why *oríkì* names, such as in (9) are borne by male persons.

(9)

Àkàn-fẹ 'child that is specially reached and loved'

Àbẹ-fẹ 'child that is begged to be loved'

Àyàn-fẹ 'child that is chosen to be loved'

Àkò-fẹ 'child that is met to be loved'

Àṣà-fẹ́	‘child that is selected to be loved’
Àyò-fẹ́	‘child that one is delighted to be in love with’
Àdù-fẹ́	‘child whom many shall scramble to love’
Àmò-fẹ́	‘child that is known and loved’

The idea contained in the corpus is corroborated in marriage custom among the Yorùbá which allows a man to be the one to propose to a lady and makes it mandatory for him to keep her under his roof after all the necessary marriage steps have been taken and all necessary requirements have been met. Hence, the common saying that *Lágbájá ti gbé Tàmèdù níyàwó* ‘Mr. Somebody has married Mrs. Y’.

Another dimension to look at the presence of the morpheme ‘fẹ́’ in names is the special desire for a male child in every Yorùbá family. For instance, every king has a desire for a male child that will succeed him on the throne after his death. This happens to every man too; he wants a male child that will hold the fort after his demise and brings continuity to his own lineage. In either case, what is sought for is an *àrólé* ‘the successor/the one who succeeds the headship of a family. The notion ‘successor’ is interpreted within the concept of **paternal lineage**. The proverb in (10) further shows the significance of this.

(10) *Bí iná bá kú a fì eérú bojú.*

Bí ògèdè bá kú a fì ọmọ rẹ rópò.

When the fire dies, it covers its face with ashes

When the banana dies, it replaces itself with its offspring

However, there is an opposing view to the above claim. In this differing view, it is said that in the olden days;

there was less number of female children than their male counterpart. This according to the source leads to the scramble for betrothals among men. Indeed, this usually leads parents who have a boy to go to a pregnant woman in a family of their desire to request that if the woman delivers a baby girl, she will be married to their family. However, when the woman gives birth to a male child contrary to the man's expectation, the man is undaunted. Instead he offers a congratulatory greeting and adds *mo bèyìn* 'I remain on the queue' (in case the next baby to the family is a female). So it is the overall assessment of the difficulty of getting a suitable wife that probably makes parents to give *oríkì* names such as *Àsàfẹ́*, *Àkòfẹ́*, etc. This goes on to suggest that the essence of giving such *oríkì* names might be to make the child a hot cake to ladies when the time for him to get married is ripe. I must also mention that in the above *oríkì* names, there are three names: *Àyànfẹ́* 'child that is chosen to be loved', *Àdùfẹ́* 'child whom many shall scramble to love' and *Àmòfẹ́* 'child whom many shall know and love' that my findings reveal which are borne by female as well. For now I have no adequate explanation for this overlapping.

To recap, I have attempted to discuss issues of features/morphemes that generate names that only a male child can bear in the Yorùbá land. It is established that the Yorùbá ascribe certain functions to men because of their physical strength. This in turn has reflected in very significant ways in the kind of names they give their male child compared to their female counterpart. In the next section, I consider features/morphemes that generate names which only female children bear.

3.2 Female names and their feminine features

As it is in the case of male names, what I consider here is in relation to features that generate names that can be ascribed to any female child. The following morphemes: [iyá] 'mother', [ké] 'adore' and [ẹwà] 'beauty' which semantic and sociological features I discuss are used to generate names that are almost always borne by females. I shall proceed as before, to explain and illustrate with many examples each of the cases in turns.

3.2.1 [iyá] as a feminine feature:

Just as in the case of [baba], [iyá] 'mother' is an independent morpheme or word on its own. Inherently, it is feminine from a semantic point of view. When it combines with some other morphemes or lexical items to form new names, such names almost always refer to a female child/person. Observe the variant of *iyá* in the examples given below.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| (11) Ìyá-lóde | 'The first lady in a town or village (a lady of high rank)' |
| Ìyá-dùn-ún-ní | 'Mother is sweet/good to have' |
| Ìyá-bò | 'Mother has returned' |
| Ìyá-lólá | 'Mother is the honour' |
| Yé-wándé | 'Mother has searched for me up to this place' |
| Yé-bólá | 'Mother meets honour' |
| Yé-bòrò | 'Mother meets wealth' |
| Yé-túndé | 'Mother has come back again' |
| Yé-jídé | 'Mother came/arrived at dawn (early)' |
| Yé-kémi | 'Mother adores me' |

Yèyé-òṣun	'Òsun priestess'
Yèyé-odò	'River priestess'
Ìyá-lórìsà	'priestess'

A consideration of few of the examples is in line. *Ìyálóde* is the highest chieftaincy title a woman can take in any Yorùbá community. It is usually given to a woman of sterling qualities. We are aware of the famous *Ìyálóde* of Ìbàdàn and Ègbá lands respectively. Similarly, *Ìyálórìsà*, is a priestess who takes charge of the worship of *Ọbàtálá*. This is the same with *Yèyéodò*. The likes of *Ìyábòdé*, *Yéjídé*, *Yétúndé* etc are names given to a female child born immediately after the death of the grandmother. The case of *Ìyádúnní*, *Ìyániwúra* and *Ọláiyá* is slightly different. The first two are ~~more or less a kind of appellation which can be borne by both~~ male and female individuals. Thus while names like *Yétúndé*, *Yéjídé* are given at birth, *Ìyádúnní* and *Ìyániwúra* are names that are acquired at a later stage in life. In case of *Ọláiyá*, it has some sociological undertone. A child who immediately after birth was abandoned by the father but received a parental care only from her mother or her relation can be so named irrespective of its sex. There is also an instance which may not be due to negligence on the part of the child's father. Death can strike killing the father and thus leaving the responsibility to the child's mother alone. In such circumstance, the child's survival rests solely on the mother hence the name, *Ọláiyá*.

3.2.2 [ké] as a feminine feature:

Ké 'adore' ordinarily means to indulge or pet tenderly. The Yorùbá adore their little ones irrespective of sex. However, child adoration is more pronounced with female children. From the kind of job ascribed to daughters and

mother as mentioned in the early part of this paper, it becomes obvious that unlike some other tribes where female members of the family engage in hard, more physical and tasking jobs, the Yorubá consider them as fragile objects that need be handled with care. While a male child is verbally and physically rebuked if he does something wrong, the female counterpart evades the wrath of the parent in most cases. This act of indulgence is reflected in some set of names the Yorubá give to a female child.

- (12a) Moréni-ké 'I have found someone to indulge/look after tenderly'
- Folá-ké '(Child) whom we tender/indulge with honour/wealth'
- Atínú-ké '(Child) whom we have been petting/indulging from womb'
- Adéní-kèé 'The crown needs to be petted/ adored tenderly'
- Fóyè-ké '(Child) whom I have given to our family chieftaincy to pet/indulge tenderly'
- Odéfúnn-ké 'Hunting gives me to pet/indulge tenderly'
- Olání-kèé 'Honour/Wealth needs be indulged/ adored tenderly'
- Morómọ-ké 'I have found a child to pet/Indulge tenderly'
- Omoní-kèé 'The child needs be indulged/has tender care'
- Morádé-ké 'I have found a crown (child) to pet/indulge tenderly'

(12b) Àbẹ̀-kẹ́	‘One that is begged to indulge’
Àpẹ̀-kẹ́	‘One that is called to indulge’
Àmọ̀-kẹ́	‘One that is known (before) being indulged’
Àdù-kẹ́	‘One that is scrambled for in order to indulge’
Àsà-kẹ́	‘One that is selectively indulged’
Àní-kẹ́	‘One that is owned to indulge’
Àrí-kẹ́	‘One that is seen/got and indulged’
Àyìn-kẹ́	‘One that is praised and indulged’
Àgbé-kẹ́	‘One that is carried to indulge’
Àbá-kẹ́	‘One that would have been indulged’
Àtún-kẹ́	‘Child to be petted/indulged over and over again’

While (12a) consists of names that are referred to as *àbísọ* given at birth, those in (12b) are *oríkì orúkọ* ‘praise names’. To the best of our knowledge, none of the names in (12) is borne by a male child in any part of the Yorùbá land.

It should be pointed out that among the Yorùbá there are certain valuable items, such as crown and traditional titles that are highly cherished. Whenever any of such valuable things enters into formation of Yorùbá names, they usually come out to be names that can be given only to a female child. We can thus infer that *Morádékẹ́* is more or less a way of equating the fragility of crown or the difficulty in ascending to the throne to that of having a female child. Most female *oríkì orúkọ* that we know in Yorùbá as reflected in (12b) above are unique in the sense that they all carry the morpheme *kẹ́* unlike their parallel male names that have various morphemes in the same environment. Such male *orúkọ* names

include *Àdìó*, *Àdìgún*, *Àlàó*, *Àrímú*, *Àkàndé*, *Àkànmú*, etc.

3.2.3 [ɛwà] as a feminine feature:

Beauty as an aesthetic value is highly admired among the Yorùbá. Ladies especially spinsters do a lot of things to make themselves pretty. This includes the plaiting of hair in different styles; making marks on their body parts such (thigh, stomach, back); using of cosmetics such as *osùn* 'camwood' and *àdí* 'palm kernel oil' etc. In addition, every mother ensures that her daughter looks pretty. The question is: how does the above relate to the focus of this section? The answer is straightforward. Of all the names that contain the morpheme [ɛwà], there are only three that tend to be neutral i.e. referring to either sex, the rest are borne by female. Consider what we have in (13).

- | | | |
|------|-----------------|---|
| (13) | <i>Adéṣewà</i> | 'Crown makes beauty' |
| | <i>Awéléwà</i> | 'Slender to obtain beauty' |
| | <i>Abíṣewà</i> | 'One that comes to be beautiful' |
| | <i>Ẹwàlánkẹ</i> | 'Beauty is what we indulge' |
| | <i>Fèyíṣewà</i> | 'Take this for beauty' |
| | <i>Bẹwàjì</i> | 'Wake up with beauty' |
| | <i>Owólẹwà</i> | 'Money is beauty' |
| | <i>Ọmọlẹwà</i> | 'A child is the evidence of one's beauty' |

But for *Bẹwàjì*, *Owólẹwà* and *Ọmọlẹwà* which our finding reveals to be neutral in terms of gender, others are exclusively for a female child.

3.2.4 [bẹ] 'beg' as a morpheme:

The morpheme *bẹ* 'beg/entreat' features very prominently in female *oríkì* (cognomen). The morpheme *bẹ* has no peculiar property that could be linked to a particular gender. However, when in contexts especially in *oríkì*

'cognomen', we begin to see the sense in which this morpheme can be linked to females. Consider the following examples taken from Babalola and Alaba (2003).

- (14) Àbèkẹ́ 'child to be entreated and petted'
 Àbẹ̀ní 'child for whom entreats were made
 before I had her'
 Àbẹ̀gbé 'child entreated before one carries her
 up'
 Àbẹ̀fẹ́ 'child entreated and loved'
 Àbẹ̀jẹ́ 'child who will answer after being
 entreated'
 Àbẹ̀jì 'child to be entreated before she is
 woken-up'
 Àbẹ̀kí 'child to be first entreated before one
 greets her'

First, going by the gloss in (14) most of the *oríkì* names such as *Àbẹ̀ní*, *Àbẹ̀gbé*, *Àbẹ̀jì* and *Àbẹ̀kí* describe a female child. The only one that stands out of them is *Àbẹ̀fẹ́* which like *Àdùfẹ́* is taken by a male child. The reason for this is in the combination of *bẹ̀* with *fẹ́* (the latter having been previously described as male-bound).

Second, as earlier mentioned, though parents enforce discipline in the home, girls are treated with gloves in hand in many homes. Sometimes when girls are scolded for a bad behavior such that they are upset, parents (usually the mother) will later go back to beg or pet them.

4.0 Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated that though Yorùbá language does not belong to the group of languages that make use of grammatical gender distinction, there are some

morphemes that are made to function as gender morphemes in certain Yorùbá names such that when they combine with other morphemes to form names, they make distinction in terms of whether the name is for a male or a female child. In the course of the analysis, it is pointed out that there are few instances where we have exception to our rules. I provided explanations for such where I could. On the whole, it is established that rather than for gender to be a grammatical phenomenon as in the case of Hausa and Kinyarwanda, Yorùbá language renders it as morphological, socio-cultural and semantic phenomena.

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