

Communicative Role of Yoruba Names

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Abstract: *Worldwide, naming a child is as essential as having the child itself. In fact without a name, anybody is nobody. This is so because name serves as a means of identification, a means of expressing one's feeling and a living record keeper. Based on these assertions, names are not just giving arbitrarily among Yorubas. That is, names must be meaningful to the bearer (child) as well as the giver (parent) this paper therefore intends to examine the concept of name, the meaning of selected names and the communicative role of names among Yoruba. Also, the paper offers some recommendations on how to encourage the youth of nowadays to inculcate the habit of bearing their indigenous names and shun the habit of "Anglicization" or customization of their names in the names of globalization and modernization.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is from the Latin word "communicare" which means "to share" Communication can be defined as conveyance of different forms of information through the exchange of ideas or messages. It is the meaningful exchange of information between two or more communicators (De Valenzuela, 1992) In communication, it is essential to have a sender, a message and a receiver (recipient) However, it is not necessary for a receiver to present or be aware of the sender's intention to communicate him or her at the time of communication; therefore, information can be exchanged across vast distances in time and space. It should be noted however that communication cannot successfully take place if the communicating parties do not share an area of communicative commonality.

The process of communication involves the sender who conceives the thought and this thought could be an idea, feeling, information or concept. After this ideation stage, the sender would then encode the message to the receiver in form of words or other symbols. Finally, the receiver would interpret the words symbols into a concept or message that a people can understand.

Generally, there are two forms of communication. These are nonverbal and verbal communication. Nonverbal communication involves the process of transmitting meaning in the form of non-word messages. It usually involves the use of chronemics, postures, physical appearance, haptics, facial expression tone of voice hairstyles, symbols and eye contact. Verbal communication is a form of communication that entails talking using the spoken word, such as talking face to face, on a telephone or as a speech, In other words, it refers to all forms of communication that involve the use of words, whether in spoken or in written form (Sannie, 2000, Asubiojo, Adewusi and Oyediran, 2005).

Verbal communication can also be divided into oral and written. Oral communication makes use of human speech organs to produce vocal sounds with which organized speech can be formed and meaningful ideas and messages can be conveyed among persons or group of persons. Oral communication is characterized by immediacy, spontaneity, transience and flexibility. It also allows immediate feedback, naturalness, repetitions, negotiations of meaning, clarifications and reinforcing of message with nonverbal cues.(Oladipupo, 2011) Oral communication can take different forms, among these are face to face, telephonic conversation, speech, argument and debate, interview, prayer and name which is the focus of this study.

2. THE CONCEPT OF NAME AMONG YORUBA

Yoruba culture places extremely high value on children. They are so important in all Yoruba families that a union that is blessed with the fruit of womb is appreciated, honoured and valued, while a non-child-relationship is seen differently. It is seen as the highest good of the Yoruba. That is why they believe that names should not be given arbitrarily; one must consider the tradition and history of a child's relatives when conveyed on a common adage; "Ile laa wo ka to somo loruko" (one pays attention to the family before naming a child). Therefore, the child naming process is a rigorous one whereby peculiar and diverse interests are taken into consideration.

They also believe that name is spiritual inclined. It possesses the ability to predict the child's path in life. That is, it possesses circumstances, situations and events surrounding the life of its bearer. With these, parents usually do a thorough search before going names to their babies.

A name is an edifying emblem given to a child at birth by the parents, or brought from heaven by the child during that child's birth. Because of spirituality aspect of naming, that is why symbolic materials are used for naming ceremony. The materials symbolize hopes, expectations and prayers of the parents for the new baby. These include honey, kola, bitter kola, atare (alligator pepper) water, palm oil, sugar cane, salt and liquor. Each of these has a special meaning in the cosmology of the Yoruba. Their meanings include sweetness and happiness in life, longevity of life, accident free life, successes in all ramifications among others.

A Yoruba child usually has more than one name because extended family member and other well wishers are also given the honour to give their own names to the child. It is strongly believed that those names are so profound, meaningful and powerful that the names children bear can influence their entire life cycle, from sundry behavior, integrity, professions, success among others.

The concept of name among the Yoruba people can clearly be understood through various proverbs that are related to naming. Some of these proverbs are:

1. *Ile laa wo ka to somo loruko* - one pays attention to the family background before naming a child.
2. *Oruko omo ni ro omo* – a child's name determines what he becomes or does.
3. *Oruko omo ni ijanu omo* –a child's name serves as a control measure that discourages him from bad deeds

3. NAME AS AN ESSENTIAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

Name is one of the important means of communicating one's mind. Name, according to Ajileye and Ajileye in *Stylistics in Theory and Practices* (1997:195) is defined as a word by which a person, animal, place, thing or concept is known and spoken to or of. He submits that a name is a linguistic item subsumed under language and a language performs communicative functions. Consequently, names also perform communicative roles. A name gives an individual a distinct character and makes a person become united in one body with the society. (Oladipupo 2011) Name is one of the things that all people and places have in common. It is an edifying emblem given to a child at birth by the parents, (Maduabum, 2012) describes a name as a kind of face with which one is known, Apart from this names also have significant traditional and historical relevances.

Yoruba has names for every situation. Sometimes a new name is created to take care of the new situation. However Yoruba do not give names carelessly, they usually emanate from the thought and feelings of the parents and relations who give the children such names. Consequently for the Yoruba's, names are more than identification tags, they constitute an integral part of human experience. In other words, Yoruba names reflect the world view and etymology of the people. Thus, Yoruba names show the philosophical value of the people and also emphasize the significance of an experience, an event or phenomenon (Fasiku, 2006)

Traditionally, Yoruba names are given to a child seven days after delivery with the aim that parents would have deliberated on the names to be given the child. Yorubas place high value on the possession or ownership of a child they believe that for a person to meaningfully fulfill his/her

accomplishment in life, he/she must have at least a child. No wonder they use to say “Eni ti o waye ti ko bimo ko ri aye wa” that is, anyone who is childless lives a meaningless life. The Yorubas attach a great importance to children and that is why they use their children’s name to showcase their moral consciousness, opinions and different aspects of the people’s culture, beliefs and traditions.

4. CLASSIFICATION OF YORUBA NAMES

Yoruba names are classified into different categories. Some of these are discussed below:

1. **Bestowed Names:** These are names that are bestowed on the bearers by nature in relation to certain unique attributes and situations or happenings about the birth of the child. The bestowed names are called “Oruko amutorunwa (names brought from heaven)”. These are also called destiny or situational names. Some of the names are:

Taiwo: The first of the twins to arrive.

Kehinde: The second of the twins to arrive.

Etaoko: The third of the triplet to arrive.

Idowu: The name of the second born after a set of twins.

Ojo: A male child with cord around his neck at birth.

Olugbodi: - A child with more than five fingers.

Alaba: - The name of the second child born after a set of twins.

Yetunde (Mother has come again): - The name of the girl born after the death of the father’s mother (his grandmother).

Babatunde (Father has come again): - The name of the boy born after the death of the father of the child’s father (his grandfather).

Abiona: - The child delivered on the road side or journey.

Abioja: - The child delivered in the market.

Abiodun: - A child born during a particular popular festival.

Babarinsa: - A child that his/her father died on the day he/she was born.

Some other names in this category are Yeyerinsa, Idoha, Idogbe, Dada, Oke, Abosede, Odun, among, others.

2. **Circumstantial Names:** This category of name is the ones given to the child as a result of what the parents had experienced or an event that occurred before or during the birth of the child. The experience or happening could be events before, simultaneous events or events immediately after the birth of the child. Some of the names in this category are listed below.

Adesina: - A child that was born after the parents had been barren for a long time.

Omope/Pennu: - A child who stayed beyond the regular nine months of gestation.

Babarinsa: - A child that his/her father died on the day he/she was born.

Yeyerinsa: - A child that his/her mother died immediately the child was born.

Ekundayo: - My sorrow turns to joy.

Oluwaremilekun: - God has relieved me of sorrow.

Abayomi: - People would have made jest of me.

Bamidele: - A child that was born while the parent was living in another town.

Abisogun: - A child that was born during a war.

Tanwa: - The type of the child we have been looking for.

- 3. Name by Profession:** - These are names associated with the child family's job or trades. These names show the profession of the parent's or family of the child. Some of these names are listed below.

Odewumi: - "I love being a hunter" Any name that has "ode" (hunter) as prefix is generally association with families known for hunting profession. Some other names in this category are Odekunle, Odetunde, Odebiyi, Odediran, Odejide among others.

Ayanniyi :- "Being a drummer is prestigious " any name that has "Ayan" (Drummer) as prefix is generally associated with families that take drumming as a profession. Some other names in this category are Ayanbiyi, Ayantunde, Ayanyemi, Ayangbemi and Ayandele.

- 4. Name by Family Belief or Worship:** this category shows the names that relate to family believe. These names usually begin with the names of the deities or ancestors that are associated with such believe or worship. Some of the names in this category are listed below.

Ogundele – "The god of ogun has come to my house". Any name that has ogun as prefix is an indication that the bearer is from the family who believes in the god of iron" known as "Ogun". Some other names in this category are Ogunbiyi, Ogundiji, Ogunfunke, Ogunkemi and Oguntayo.

Osunkemi – the god of Osun River has blessed me. Any name that has "Osun" as prefix is an indication that the bearer is from the family that believe in the god of Osun River. Some other names in this category are Osuntade, Osundele, Osungbola, Osungbayi etc.

Some other Yoruba names that are associated with other types of belief or worship are;

Awoyemi – "Ifa" divination fits me.

Aworinde – "Ifa" divination has come.

Sangodele – god of thunder has returned home.

Sangobuyi – god of thunder is prestigious

Ojebiyi – god of masquerade gave me this

Ojewumi – I love the god of masquerade.

- 5. Name by Nobility, Royalty or wealth:** These are names given to a child because of family background. If the social status of the parent is that of nobility or royalty, the prefix "Ade" (crown) or "Oye" (chieftaincy) is added to the names of their children for examples;

Adewale – The crown has come home

Adeyemi – The crown fits me

Adekanmi – It is my turn to wear crown

Adebowale – The crown has return home

Oyewumi – I love chieftaincy title

Oyedele – The chief has got home

Oyetade – The chief is as important as crown

Ajagungbade – The one who fought war to get the crown.

Also the name with the prefix "Ola" shows that the bearer is from rich or wealthy family. For examples:

Oladipupo – Wealth is in abundant

Oladimeji – Wealth has been doubled

Olatunji – Wealth has begun again

Temilola – Wealth is mine

Olola – The owner of wealth

Toriola – Because of wealth

Funmilola – (God) give me wealth

6. **Deliberate/Freely Given Names:** These are names that are intentionally given to children after a deep thought by the parents of the child. These names are not bestowed by circumstance or nature. The name is known as “Oruko Abiso” Some of these names are listed below.

Awofe – He whom you look to love

Asake – She, whom you selected to take care of.

Abayomi – The enemy would have made jest of me.

Folorunso – One who is kept under God’s protection?

Ajike – We wake to take care of this

Abike – One who is born to be taken care of?

Eyitayo – This worths happiness

Other Yoruba names in this category are Amao, Alao, Arife, Akano, Alamu, Atinuke, Ajike, Alafe, among others.

7. **Praise Name:** - (oriki ori) this category of names shows the historical link of the bearer with his/her ancestors or fore-fathers. Examples of such names are Omo ekun, Olofa, Ikoyi Eso, Awinijo, Olalomi.
8. **Abiku Names (Born to die name)** These are special names given to predestines to death The Yoruba people Believe that some children are born to die. The kind of names given to Abiku (born to die child) is one of the measures used to forestall recurrence of such sad event, such name usually reflect the fractional of the parent. It is also used to warn or appeal to Abiku children not to die again. Some of these names include:-

Malomo- do not go again

Kosoko- no hoe (to dig the grave any more)

Banjoko- sit with me

Orukotan- all names have been exhausted

Aja- Dog

Durosinmi- wait to bury me

Kokuko- this will not die again

It is believed that the spirits of there children who usually die before reaching puberty die a child of the child who dies before twenty years of age would leave him if any if the above mentioned names is given to him or her.

9. **Appellations:** - These are nickname or title given to the bearer after observation of certain characteristics that are unique to the bearer. These names are not given immediately the child is born; it is usually added to the other names already given to the child later. In most cases people usually drop all other names and call and address the person only with such a nickname. Some of these names are given below.

Marindoti: - (The neat one) The name given to somebody that is always neat.

Agoro: - (The very tall one) The name given to a very tall man

Kuruyejo: - (The very short one) The name given to a short person.

Jeje: - (The gentle one) The name given to a gentle man or woman

Eyiowuawi: - Say whatever you like

Ijangban: - (The troublesome one) The name given to troublesome person.

5. IMPORTANCE OF NAMES OF AMONG YORUBAS

Yorubas places high value on names, they strongly believe that name is an exact representation of the bearer’s character, personality and more importantly, a symbol of home. This is why a name be given without justification. Thus every name has its own peculiarity bestowed on it by virtue of certain circumstances, environment, and the nature of family or parent of the child bearing the names (Fasiku, 2006). The roles of names among Yorubas are highlighted below.

- 1. Name Performs Identification Function:** Name serves as essential way of identify one person from another. It is used to call address and identifying one person from another. It is used to call address and identify the bearer. A name precedes whatever position one achieves in the community and that is why the Yorubas stress the fact that the bearer of a name should be conscious of the fact that he has such a name to protect. Therefore our names say a lot about us and they help us become who we are.
- 2. Name Performs Historical Function:** Names are given to remind the parents of the bearer the past events. Some names are given to serve as a reminder that something good, bad or memorable took place some times in the past. For instance after the struggle of June 12, many parents in Yoruba land named their children "Abiola". This name was used to honour and remember Chief M.K.O Abiola, the assumed winner of June 12 presidential election that was adjudged the most free and fair election in the history of Nigeria because whenever the name is being called, it would be enliven ones memory of what happened during the June 12 episode in 1993. Thus, name serves a living record keeper, that is, it helps to preserve events and ideas that are of historical relevance. That is why it is usually said that names are stories e.g Ikubolaje, Eyiesan. In other words, Yoruba people use names to tell you the circumstances that surrounds their birth.
- 3. Name Serves as a Vehicle of Communication:** Names are used as virile tools of expressing ones ideas, feelings or states of mind. It serves as a vehicle through which our thoughts are expressed. Information that one might not be willing to share directly with other people are indirectly expressed through the names given to one's child. For examples names like:
Adekanbi ----- Is it my turn to wear the crown?
Majiyagbe ----- May I not suffer in vain
Makanjuola ----- Don't be in hurry to get rich
Tanwa ----- This is the preferred child
Tantolorun ----- Who is as great as God?
Eyiwumi ----- I preferred this
- 4. Appreciative Function:** Name serves as a means through which Yoruba appreciate God. It is the medium of showing gratitude for what God has done for the parent of the child. For examples;
Oluwatobi ----- God is great
Modupe ----- I thank God
Opeyemi ----- I deserve to thank God
Aanuoluwapo ----- God mercy is great
- 5. Name Serves as Status or Class Symbol:** The name given to a child serves as status classification. It differentiates one class of people from others. For instances in Yoruba land, the names of the prince, princess and other people from royal family differentiate them from other members of the community. Through naming, one can easily identify different people from different social cadre in the community. For instance, names like Adewale, Adeyemi, Adebowale, Oyeyemi, Oyewusi among others are from royal family while names like Olatunji, Oladele, Olaposi, Olaniyi. Indicates that the bearers are from well to do or rich family. Also, names like Ogundele, Ogunwuyi, Ogunwale shows those families whose occupation is hunting.
- 6. Name as a Unifying Factor:** People from different backgrounds and families bear different names. But, in so, many cases, some people bear the same name or surname, these people see themselves as one. They usually like one another whenever they meet even when they are not related. Their name unites and binds them together and it would encourage mutual interpersonal relationship between the name sakes.
- 7. Name Serves as Corner Stone of Our Personality:** It is believed that the child's name dictates his/her path in life and it can give power to overcome any unforeseen circumstances. It carries so much weight on ones personality. A child's name helps him or her to be cautious

of what he does. In other words, a child who has a good name to protect would not like to tarnish his good or his family's good names. That is why Yoruba usually says "Oruko omo ni ijanu omo". That is, a child's name serves as a control button for the child. The name therefore, a force that drives him and act as catalyst which propels the bearer to consciously and cautiously regulate his behavior (Fasiku, 2006).

- 8. Name Is Used to Appeal, Warn or Instruct:** There are situations when a man gives a child name to warn, or instruct the child or his spirit against what they do not want. For instance, most "Abiku" born to die name are used for these purposes. For example:

Malomo – Do not go again

Kosoko – There is no hoe (to bury you if you die again)

Durosimi – Wait and bury me (when I am old)

Remilekun – (wait to) Wipe away my tears.

Bamitale- Wait till I become old

- 9. Name is used to predict the child's path:** Names is used to predict the line which the child would follow in life. Thus, it is a way through which the parents predict what they want their child to become in future. A child's name his/her first crown. It is the child's first batch of honour and that is why people painstakingly choose these names carefully.

6. CONCLUSION

Some people believe that in the real sense of it, there is no direct relationship between the name given to a child, the message or the meaning of the name, and the bearer of such a name; they maintain that the name does not really determine the consciousness of its bearer, and that whenever the attitude and action of a person do not reflect the name a person bear, then the name becomes a mere identification tag used solely to refer to the person. However to the Yorubas, this is not so because it is generally believed that a name given to a child usually as a great influence on the future of the bearer. They believe that there is strong connection between a name and the significant values and virtues associated with it. That is why Yoruba people have the proverb that says that "Oruko omo ni ro omo" (A child is influenced by his/her name) Therefore, giving good names to children and making them realizing the import and meaning of the names can to a large extent prevent and indeed end many of the social vices that are currently plaguing our contemporary society. In other words, when a child bears a good name, he/she would certainly strive hard to improve on certain socially approved expectations and aspirations in life rather than involving themselves in stealing, armed robbery assassination, raping, kidnapping and terrorism.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is indeed worrisome nowadays that some Yoruba youths and some others no longer proud to answer their Yoruba names. They prefer names for identification and other purposes. They adduced the following untenable reasons for their action.

- Superstitious meaning of Yoruba names
- Needs for globalization
- Pronunciation problem
- Inferiority complex
- Religious reasons

In order to solve the identified problems above, the followings are hereby recommended.

1. The regular use of Yoruba language as a means of communication should be inculcated in the children in order to understand the virtues and values in those names.
2. Anglicization or customization of Yoruba names in the name of globalization should be discouraged because the virtues and values attached to these names are gradually being eroded. Therefore Anglicized or customized names such as the ones below should be avoided

Bamidele – Bamdex

Akinola - Akins

Sola – Solex

Adeyemi – Adex

Opeyemi – Oppy

Yomi – Yomex

Bola – Bolly

3. Finally, there should be a deep thought before a name is given to a child. A name should not just be given for the sake of it. It should have important meaning that would meaningfully communicate everything about the child or his/her parents, that is, the parents should always think very well and look inward before given appropriate name to a child in order not to give wrong, irrelevant or meaningless name to a child.
4. It should always be included as complementary to our religious or other foreign names.

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