Taiwo Ehineni
Department of African and African American Studies
Harvard University

The ethnopragmatics of Yoruba personal names: Language in the context of culture

Abstract

While the subject of Yoruba names has been significantly explored by previous studies, this paper discusses extensively the nature of such names from an ethnopragmatic framework, with the aim of explicating how Yoruba names are formed, their various cultural contexts as well as the significant functions they play in the Yoruba ethnolinguistic ecology. It identifies and categorizes personal names based on contexts such as family situation, circumstantces of birth, religious orientation, death situation and profession. This paper reinforces that names are not just arbitrary labels, but most notably, linguistic categories – lexical, phrasal or sentential – that have indexical relationship to sociocultural meanings and functions, places, time, people, and events.

Keywords: Ethnopragmatics, Yoruba, names, context of situation, culture

1. Introduction

Yoruba personal names are deeply rooted in the language and culture of the Yorubas; this chapter, therefore, provides an indepth study of the sociocultural context that informs their forms and functions. Working within the framework of ethnopragmatics, this paper identifies the naming contexts and the various factors within the Yoruba ethnic community that influence and/or motivate the formation of these names. The various functions of these personal names are

also discussed. The main observation we put forward is that the linguistic forms in names are invoked by their overall *context of situation* (Malinowski 1923). Put differently, we argue that Yoruba personal names are linguistic forms that relate to social norms. They foreground elements of Yoruba human experience and ways of life and reinforce the fact that language and culture are inseparable. Essentially, this paper claims that names are not just arbitrary labels, nor ordinary linguistic features (i.e words, sentences and other aspects of language), but are linguistic categories that have indexical relationships to socio-cultural meanings and functions, places, time, people and events.

The paper is organized into different sections for ease of discussion. Section 2 provides a general overview of the framework of ethnopragmatics and its various applications in previous studies. Section 2.2. explores, more specifically, the application of the ethnopragmatic approach to the study of African names. In section 3, an ethnopragmatic analysis of Yoruba personal names is presented, which also includes a discussion of the Yoruba naming context (Section 3.1.) and factors motivating the choice of personal names (Section 3.2.). The functional roles that names perform in the Yoruba society are examined in Section 3.3. Section 3.4. provides a conclusion.

2. Ethnopragmatics

Ethnopragmatics examines "speech practices from a culture-internal perspective" (Goddard 2006: 2). Thus, for Goddard, ethnopragmatics seeks to understand how people use language specifically in the way it makes sense to them in terms of their "indigenous values, beliefs and attitudes, social categories, and emotions" (Goddard 2006: 2). The notion of ethnopragmatics correlates with the idea that people in different cultures speak differently because they think differently, feel differently, and relate differently to other people (Wierzbicka 2003, 1997). As Clyne (1994: 3) puts it, "cultural values constitute 'hidden' meanings underlying discourse structures". Therefore, a community of people may use language to reflect certain views and orientations that identify them uniquely from other people. Thus, it is beneficial to explore linguistic forms in terms of social and cultural contexts of use, as it uncovers more specific meanings. This is particularly true of names which are products of such specific contexts as speakers' emotions and surrounding circumstances. This is exemplified and elucidated later in the chapter.

Futhermore, as Goddard and Ye (2015: 67) explain, ethnopragmatics highlights the claim that there is an explanatory link between *indigenous values* and *social models*, on the one hand, and *indigenous speech practices*, on the other. Eth-

nopragmatics is an approach to language-in-use where culture is viewed as playing a central explanatory role, by helping to see the connection between language and other cultural phenomena. Thus, in ethnopragmatics, speech is culturally motivated, which suggests that culture provides a context in which we discuss language. More lucidly, Duranti (2011: 151) defines ethnopragmatics as a term involving *ethno* and *pragmatics*, where *pragmatics* focuses on the contextual uses of language in general and *ethno* highlights local communicative practices and native speakers' orientation to these practices. To Duranti, ethnopragmatics is an interdisciplinary approach that draws extensively from "the sociocultural context of language use, which includes an understanding of specific linguistic activities as embedded in and constitutive of locally organized and locally interpretable events(...)" (Duranti 2011: 155). Thus, ethnopragmatics deals with exploring cultural dimensions in linguistic representations. In this perspective, language is seen first and foremost as a cultural element that reflects a specific ethnic community.

However, ethnopragmatics as a field of study is primarily informed by the concept of cross-cultural pragmatics – developed through several studies by Wierzbicka (1991, 2003). In fact, Goddard and Ye (2015: 67) comment that "ethnopragmatics is a re-conceptualization of the approach to 'cross-cultural pragmatics'" inaugurated by Wierzbicka's (1991, 2003) work where she dealt with how different people operating in different cultures possess different communicational strategies. Wierzbicka proposed a more intercultural approach to discussing pragmatics, by arguing that previous models such as Grice's account of conversational implicature (Grice 1975), Brown and Levinson's (1978) Politeness Theory, and aspects of speech-act theory (Searle 1975), are predominantly universalist, and descriptively anglocentric. Wierzbicka's intercultural approach to the study of meaning in discourse is based on conversational practices grounded in cultural values. Therefore, the use of language should be analyzed in terms of how it is used by a specific community and how it reflects sociocultural realities in the studied community.

More important is the fact that names have also been examined from an ethnopragmatic perspective. This is an attempt to underscore the sociocultural underpinnings that inform the formation of names. The ethnopragmatic discussion of names, which is the focus of this study, will be examined in subsequent sections.

2.1. An ethnopragmatic study of Yoruba names

While names have been largerly discussed from an ethnopragmatic perspective, this study provides an analysis from a specific Yoruba ethnic context. In this

section, we shall explore how the formation of Yoruba names is influenced by the sociocultural context of the Yoruba ethnic community. Certain factors that motivate the choice of names will also be identified and discussed. Thus, the general naming context among the Yorubas is discussed in Section 2.2., whereas Section 2.3. highlights the factors that inform the choice of the names. Section 2.4. deals with the social functions of the names.

2.2. The naming context among the Yorubas

Naming is a very important socio-cultural facet of the Yoruba community; hence it is always accompanied by ceremonial activities. Like every aspect of culture, naming is a symbolic event that is usually historically constructed, socially maintained, and based on shared assumptions and expectations of members of a particular community. It is a ritual that is based on historical traditions passed down from generations to generations. In other words, naming is a communal festive occasion celebrated jointly by relatives, friends, neighbors, acquaintances and well-wishers. In Yoruba society, naming is referred to as *ìsọmọlórúkọ*, which literally translates as "giving a child a name". Traditionally, the naming ceremony usually takes place on the 7th day after birth, if the child is a girl, but if the child is a boy, it occurs on the 9th day. However, in the case of twins, the 7th day is also the day of naming if the twins are both females; the naming ceremony is held on the 8th day, if the children are male and female twins, while if both twins are male, then the naming takes place on the 9th day (Ilesanmi 1987). The difference in days of naming is based on the traditional Yoruba belief that females have seven ribs while males have nine (Akinnaso 1980). This belief is based on the orientation among the Yorubas that males are physically stronger than women. Furthermore, several studies on naming in Yoruba culture have also identified the use of symbolic elements, such as *omi* 'water', *epo* 'palm oil', *orógbó* 'bitter kola', *obì* 'kola nuts', *ataare* 'alligator pepper', *àádùn* 'grounded roasted corn made into paste with palm oil', *iyọ̀* 'salt', *ìrèké* 'sugar cane', *ọtí* 'liquor' and so on (see Adeoye 1979, Daramola & Jeje 1967, Ilesanmi 1987, Ladele *et al.* 1986, Ogunbowale 1979). It should be noted that all these traditional elements are significant, as Akinyemi (2005: 116) points out. Due to the contact of the Yoruba people with Europeans and the adoption of the Western calendar by the Yorubas, the naming ceremony now takes place in the morning of the 8th day after the birth of a child, with a party or social gathering following later in the afternoon. Akinyemi explains that unlike customary practice in the American and European societies, where parents are expected to provide a name for their child on the day of birth, the Yoruba people must not announce a child's name until a week after his/her birth. Tradition allows

parents, grandparents, great grandparents, relations, and family friends to give names to a newborn during the naming ceremony (Akinyemi 2005: 116). Hence, a Yoruba child may have as many as five to six names. Basically, it is the biological parents who decide on the name that a child will eventually use (Akinyemi 2005: 116). It should be noted, however, that many factors come into play when making this decision as discussed later in this paper.

Basically, as Akinnaso (1980: 278) comments, the naming ceremony is a symbolic initiation of the baby into society and into life. Hence, all members of the society are expected to attend and participate in the ceremony, joining in the cooking, eating, singing and dancing as well as contributing goods and services to the utmost of their ability. They owe the new baby and the parents these obligations which are expected to be reciprocated in the future. Hence, it is common for older people to refer to a younger people in the Yoruba ethnic community as "my child", "my son" or "my daughter" to relate with them. As Akinnaso elucidates, this reflects the emphasis put on cooperation and communalism among the Yorubas with respect to child raising. Thanks to their coming together as a community to celebrate the birth of a child and support the new child's parents, the Yoruba naming event serves to reinforce the virtues of cooperation and relationships in the Yoruba community.

2.3. Factors motivating the choice of names

The Yorubas have a popular maxim which says *ilé làá wò kat̩ó s̩o ̩om̩ólórúk̩o*, meaning "the condition of the home determines a child's name". This maxim emphasizes the indispensability of the social or circumstantial context when naming a child. In other words, names are not arbitrarily or indiscriminately chosen, they are deliberately informed by sociocultural considerations. In this perspective, Obeng observes that names may "reflect geographical environment where a child or its parents inhabit, as well as their fears, religious beliefs and philosophy of life and death. Children's names may even provide insights into important cultural or socio-political events at the time of their birth" (Obeng 1998: 163). Among the Yorubas, the choice of names may be motivated by family situation, birth circumstances, religion, profession, death-situation, among others. These factors are discussed in the following sections.

2.3.1. Family situation or parents' experiences

The family situation refers to current experiences or events in the family when the child was born. They include the experiences of the parents. For instance, if a child was born after a major breakthrough in a family or during a successful

achievement by the parents, the child could be given the names listed in (1) – (8) below.

name	meaning
(1) ayòmideji	'my joy has doubled'
(2) ayòmipòsi	'my joy has increased'
(3) ayòdipúpò	'joy has become much'
(4) olámilékan	'my wealth has been added to'
(5) ayòdipúpò	'wealth has become much'
(6) ayòmikún	'my joy is now full'
(7) oládipúpò	'wealth has become much'
(8) iremidé	'my goodness has come'

These names are given to commemorate good moments in a family's life. Parents usually give these names to express emotions such as joy and happiness. Also, these names are given to show that the child was born at a time when things were going well in a family. Thus, a name is given to mark progress or positive developments in a family. For instance, a child named *ayòmipòsi* 'my joy has increased' or *ayòmikún* 'my joy is now full' is perceived to be a child whose birth has brought more joy to the family.

Names may also be given to as a result of parents' tough times or misfortunes. Some of such names are enumerated below in (9) – (15).

name	meaning
(9) òtégbèye	'conspiracy deprived us of our honor'
(10) àbáyòmí	'they would have made jest of me'
(11) olániyònu	'honor is full of troubles'
(12) fìjàbí	'born while in conflict'
(13) ayésòro	'life is difficult'
(14) ayéjùsùnlé	'life is not worth relying on'
(15) ajéníyà	'success has suffering'

These names are motivated by hard times and problems endured by parents during the time of the birth of a child. For instance, the name *òtégbèye* 'conspiracy deprived us of our honor' may specificially be given if a couple gives birth to a male child shortly after other people conspired to deprive the parents either of their social, financial or political entitlements. Also, *olániyònu*, 'honor is full of troubles' may be given to a child whose parents suffered several tribulations because of their reputation. *Fìjàbí*, 'born while in conflict' is a name given to a child born in time of war or during rivalry between the parents or the community and other people/communities. As Akinyemi (2005) observes, names are significant means through which Yoruba people document their histories; the names given in this section document parents' experiences.

2.3.2. Birth circumstances

This is a factor that relates to the peculiar situations of delivery of children among the Yoruba people. Usually, names given based on the birth circumstances describe the physical condition of a child at delivery, his/her posture at birth or position while coming out of the mother's womb. Hence, a child may be said to have 'orúkọ àmútọrunwá' – a name brought from heaven – when such a child is born with a unique posture at birth. In other words, such a child is said to have been "born with his/her name" (Akinyemi 2005: 117) since the situation of birth imposes certain names on the child. The Yorubas believe children are often born with their head first. However, when a child is born with the feet first, it is considered unique. Hence, a name is given to indicate this uniqueness. Essentially, names based on the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child may relate to the manner of birth, place of birth or period of birth. Manner of birth relates to *how* a child was born whereas period of birth relates to *when* he/she was born – e.g. during a festival or sacred days. Names given to children born in such circumstances are listed below in (16) – (22).

Names based on manner of birth

name	meaning
(16) ìgè	'born feet first'
(17) àjàyí	'born face down'
(18) ọ̀kẹ́	'born with amniotic sac'
(19) òjó	'male child born with umbilical cord twined around neck'
(20) àìná	'female child born with umbilical cord twined around neck'
(21) dàda	'born with knotted hair or dreads'
(22) olúgbódi	'born with the sixth finger'

These names reflect the situation in which the new child is born from his/her mother's womb. The Yorubas believe that the way a child is born may say a lot about his/her destiny. Specifically, *Ìgè* is a name given to a male or female child born feet first, in other words, in a breech position, *Àjàyí* is a male or female name given to a child born face down, while *Òkẹ́*, which literally translates as 'a sack', is a male or female name for a child wrapped in a thin membrane or amniotic sac during the birth. Also, when a male child is born with the umbilical cord twined around his neck, he is called *Òjó*, while if it is a female child that is born with the umbilical cord twined around her neck, she is named *Àìná*. Hence, the choice of a name may be a result of the posture in which the child comes out of the womb. Some families among the Yorubas, according to my informants, see such children as having special abilities since they were not born in the 'usual' or 'normal' way of delivery. Another aspect of the circumstancial names

is the period of birth. Names of this kind are given to indicate the time or moment when a child was born. These names commonly reflect periods such as traditional festivals, religious celebrations or other social events (coronation, war, etc). When a child is born during these periods, he/she can receive a name indicating the period of birth. Such names are presented in (23) – (28) below.

Names based on period of birth

	name	meaning
	name	*meaning*
(23)	abíọ́dún	'born during a festive period'
(24)	abọ́dúndé	'come with the new year'
(25)	abíọ́yè	'born during coronation'
(26)	abíogun	'born during war'
(27)	ogundínà	'war blocked us'
(28)	ogunléndé	'war pursued me'

The name *Abíọ́dún* may be used when a child was born during any of the traditional festivals (*Egúngún* (masquerade) festival, *Iṣu túntún* (new yam) festival, *Iléyá* (homecoming) festival etc.). Names such as *Ogundínà*, *Ogunléndé* are given to denote that a child was born during fierce moments of war. It should be noted that children given such 'war names' are perceived as potentially strong and vigorous, and therefore able to confront and deal with any tough challenges they face later in life. According to Blum (1997: 364), "these names are viewed as governing the child's fate in some ways, they should harmonise with the time and often place of the child's birth". Thus, it is believed that by designating the period of birth, these names suggest the personality or destiny of a child.

2.3.3. Birth order

Some names reflect the order in which children were born into a family. For instance, the first child in a family may be called *Àlàbí* 'first to be born', as he/she is the one that opens the mother's womb. However, names based on the order of birth among the Yorubas are given mainly to twins. Children who are born twins and those who are born after them are given names that show the order in which they follow the twins. These names are cited below in (29) – (33).

	name	meaning
	name	*meaning*
(29)	táyéwò	'have the first taste of the world'
(30)	kẹ́hìndé	'one who comes later'
(31)	idòwú	'one that comes after twins'
(32)	àlabá	'one that survives for us to meet'
(33)	ìdògbé	'one born third after twins'

The first of the twins is called *Táyéwò* (also known as *Táíwò*) while the name *Kẹ́hìndé* is given to the second twin. The next child born after the twins is called

Ìdòwú, which means 'one that comes after twins'. The child born after *Ìdòwú* is named *Àlàbá*, while the child born after *Àlàbá* is called *Ìdògbé*. The child born after *Ìdògbé* receives the name *Ìdòkún*. These names are positionally deter-mined and reflect the order of birth of the children. It is also important to note that among the twins, although *Táyéwò* is born before *Kẹ́hìndé*, *Kẹ́hìndé* is con-sidered as *Táyéwò*'s senior. This is because the Yorubas believe that *Táyéwò* [tọ́-ayé-wò], meaning 'taste the world to see", is a forerunner of *Kehinde* ('last to come'). *Táyéwò* comes first to taste the world to check if the world is a place to live and "after tasting the world to see how it looks like". *Táyéwò* gives *Kẹ́hìndé* a good report about the world. Hence, *Kẹ́hìndé* comes after *Táyéwò*. Thus, *Táyéwò* is a messenger, who went to the world on errands for *Kẹ́hìndé*. The Yorubas believe it is the older that sends the younger on errands. This makes *Táyéwò* (although first of the twins) the younger, while *Kẹ́hìndé* (although the last of the twins) the elder. Thus, birth order names also foreground Yoruba psychology and philisophy.

2.3.4. Gender

Another important factor that affects the name selection in Yoruba is gender. A child may be given a name based on his/her gender. For instance, if a woman suffered several losses of children at childbirth, a surviving male child born after that experience is named *Àjàní* 'fight to have', while a surviving female child is called *Àbẹ̀bí* 'a child who was begged to be born'. It should be noted that a male child may not be named *Àbẹ̀bí*, neither can a female child bear the name *Àjàní* – it is culturally inappropriate. More examples of these gender-based names are given below in (34) – (40).

Masculine-names　　　　*meaning*

(34) máyọ̀wá　　　'bring joy come'
(35) bánkọ́lé　　　'build a house for me'
(36) akin　　　　'strong one'
(37) àjàní　　　　'fight to have'
(38) àkànní　　　'meet to have'
(39) wálé　　　　'come home'
(40) gbádé　　　'take crown'

Feminine-names　　　　*meaning*

(41) títílayọ̀　　　'forever is joy'
(42) bíọ́lá　　　　'born into wealth'
(43) àdùnní　　　'sweet to have'
(44) àríkẹ́　　　　'see to pamper'
(45) àjíkẹ́　　　　'wake up to pamper'

(46) wùnmí   'desire me'
(47) yémisí   'honor me'

What is important to note in describing the nature of gender-oriented names in Yoruba is that feminine names often reflect ideas such as sweetness, pampering, desiring, etc., while masculine names may be characterized with ideas involving action or responsibility. Similar observation was also made by Suzman on Zulu names which may be given according to sex of children, where male children are seen "as future providers and heads of families; so, it was particularly good to have a boy first, in which case he received a name like *uVusumuzi* 'Revive the home'" (Suzman 1994: 263). This example is similar to *Bánkólé* 'build a house for me' in Yoruba, where a name is associated with social responsiblity given to a male child at birth.

2.3.5. Religion

A child may also be given a name based on the religious inclinations of his/her family or deities affiliated with his/her ancestral lineage. Akinyemi (2005: 118) observes that "some Yoruba personal names reflect the religious inclination of families or the name of the bearer's personal patron deities". Akinyemi further explains that a name like *Ògúnjìmí* 'Ogún has given this child to me to keep' projects the image of Ogún, the hero-deity associated with the introduction of iron in Yoruba society, and also worshipped by the warriors, hunters, blacksmiths, and wood carvers because they all make use of metal in their profession (Akinyemi 2005: 118). There are different deities that are revered in the Yoruba traditional society and children may be given names to reflect the beliefs in these deities. A description of these deities is given in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. Yoruba deities and their desription

Deities	Description
Ogún	god of iron
Ifá	god of wisdom
Ṣàngó	god of lightning and thunder
Èṣù	god of roads and schemes
Òsanyín	god of forest
Òya	goddess of fertility
Yemoja	goddess of sea
Òsún	goddess of beauty and love
Ajé	god of wealth

In Yoruba traditional religion, the deities described in Table 1 are seen as super-natural beings endowed with extraordinary powers. Thus, they are worshipped by people who desire their blessings, since each deity has a specialization. Each deity has a shrine with priests or a priestess that people meet for spiritual consultations. Also, every clan or lineage in the Yoruba community has a family deity that is worshipped and venerated via the ancestors. Thus, when a child is born into such a family, he/she is given a name to reflect the deity that is worshipped by this family.

Similarly, if a couple has not been able to have a child after several years of marriage, they may go to the shrine of a deity to ask for children. If they get a child shortly after visiting the shrine, the child may be given a name to indicate their gratitude to the deity. For instance, the name, *Ọṣunfúnkẹ́* 'Ọ̀sun-deity-gave-me-(a child)-to-pamper', is given to a child by parents to appreciate Ọ̀ṣun-deity for giving them a child. Apart from using names to show appreciation to these deities, names may also be given to valorize them. These names may indicate their qualities, express their actions or foreground their exploits. Elaborate examples of the various deity-informed names are presented below in (48) – (77).

Ògún-deity informed names	*meaning*
(48) ògúnnọ́wọ̀	'ògún has respect'
(49) ògúnrótìmí	'ògún stands with me'
(50) ògúnmọ́lá	'ògún brings wealth'
(51) ògúnlànà	'ògún paves way'
(52) ògúnṣakin	'ògún makes a strong one'

Ifá-deity informed names	*meaning*
(53) fábùnmi	'ifá gives me'
(54) fáṣọlá	'ifá makes wealth'
(55) fálọlá	'ifá is wealth'
(56) fábíyì	'ifá gave birth to this one'
(57) fákòyà	'ifá rejects suffering'

Èṣù-deity informed names	*meaning*
(58) èṣùgbayì	'èṣù has earned respect'
(59) èṣùyẹ́mí	'èṣù befits me'
(60) èṣùdé	'èṣù has come'
(61) èṣùsànyà	'èṣù repaid my suffering'
(62) èṣùgbèmí	'èṣù support me'

Ọ̀ṣun-deity informed names	*meaning*
(63) ọ̀ṣunfúnkẹ́	'ọ̀ṣun gave me to pamper'
(64) ọ̀ṣuntókun	'ọ̀ṣun is up to the river'

(65) ọ̀ṣunkójọ̀	'ọ̀ṣun gathers'
(66) ọ̀ṣunyọ̀mádé	'ọ̀ṣun rejoices with the crown'
(67) ọ̀ṣundáre	'ọ̀ṣun creates justification'

Ṣàngó-deity informed names	*meaning*
(68) ṣàngódélé	'ṣàngó arrived home'
(69) ṣàngówúnmi	'ṣàngó attracts me'
(70) ṣàngódéyí	'ṣàngó became this one'
(71) ṣàngóyọmí	'ṣàngó exonerates me'
(72) ṣàngógbàmí	'ṣàngó saves me'

Ọya-deity informed names	*meaning*
(73) ọyadìran	'ọya become a vision'
(74) ọyadámilọ́lá	'ọya celebrates me'
(75) ọyasanmí	'ọya pays me'
(76) ọyadárà	'ọya performs wonders'
(77) ọyaṣèyí	'ọya has done this'

Essentially, names are "pointers to their users' religious beliefs and practices" (Obeng 2001: 144) and through names "Africans are able to reveal how the natural and the supernatural function together to construct an individual's fate and destiny" (Obeng 2001: 144). Yoruba religious personal names underscore how the Yorubas view their deities and celebrate them. Most of these names are expressives or declaratives – they assert who the deities are or what they have done.

2.3.6. Profession

Names may also be given based on the profession ancestrally associated with a family. Akinyemi (2005: 118) explains that Yoruba society is characterized by all kinds of professions and even though these professions vary according to gender, each has a prefix that can be added to names to reflect the professional affiliation of the name bearer's family. For instance, as Akinyemi illustrates, the prefix *Akin* in *Akinjídé* "the strong one has arrived" may only be used in naming male children born into a family of warriors (Akinyemi 2005: 118). It should be noted that what is meant by the designation "warriors" is that there is a specialized group of people (often referred to as warrior groups) who are trained to fight for a community against external forces. Also, it is pertinent to note that among the Yorubas, there used to be inter-ethnic wars where ethnic groups fought against one another to show superiority and assert dominion over others. Thus, the Yorubas, as a major ethnic group, have a trained group of warriors, skilled in the use of armory (including but not restricted to spear, arrows, traditional guns and cutlass) to fight. This is a respected and revered profession among the Yorubas,

as they provide security in different Yoruba sub-communities. Hence, a child born into such family is given a name to show that he or she is from a family of warriors.

 Furthermore, there is the family of hunters. Usually, children born into a family of hunters have the prefix *Ọdẹ* (hunter) in their names. Similarly, in the family of drummers, the word *Àyàn* (drum), is prefixed to their names. Even though "only men are actively involved in the hunting and drumming professions in Yoruba society" (Akinyemi 2005: 118), both male and female children are given names that contain the prefix *Ọdẹ* and *Àyàn*. To illustrate how the names may reflect profession, Akínyemi (2005: 118) identifies *Ọdẹwálé* 'the hunter has returned home' to identify the bearers as male, and *Ọdẹfúnkẹ́* 'the hunting profession has given this child to me to pet' to identify the bearers as female.

Apart from these aforementioned professions, Yoruba families are also involved in artwork and sculpture work. Children born to these families often have names that prefix the title *Ọnà* 'art' to their names. For instance, *Ọ̀nàmúyiwá*, 'Artwork has brought this child' to show that the artwork has been helpful in making the birth of the child possible, while *Ọ̀nàyẹmí*, 'Artwork befits me', demonstrates a family's pride in their art profession.

TABLE 2. Profession-oriented names

Professions	Personal names
hunters	*ọdẹkúnlé* 'the hunter fills the house' *ọdẹgòkè* 'the hunter climbs the hill'
warriors	*akínwálé* 'the strong one has come home' *akíngboyè* 'the strong one takes a title'
artists	*ọ̀nàrìndé* 'art has travelled back' *ọ̀nàyẹmí* 'art befits me'
drummers	*àyángbẹ̀yẹ* 'the drummer recieves dignity' *àyándoyin* 'the drummer becomes sweetness'
priests	*awopìtàn* 'the priest/cult reveals a story' *awogbèmí* 'the priest/cult supports me'

As illustrated in the above examples, names may be given based on the professional affiliation of a family. Ikotun (2014) identifies the name *Àgbẹ̀dẹ* 'goldsmith' as a profession-oriented personal name, but the word *Àgbẹ̀dẹ* may not be used productively as a prefix to derive similar personal names like the other profession-oriented names shown in Table 2 above. However, a child born into such

family may be called *Ọmọ-Àgbẹ̀dẹ* 'child of a goldsmith'. Another factor that may inform the choice of a name is the event of death. This factor is discussed in next section.

2.3.7. Death situation

A name may be motivated in the context of death. The Yorubas believe that if a mother suffers constant infant mortality, then the reason is that it is the child's mother in the underworld that does not want the child to stay in the world of the living. Such a child is regarded as an *àbíkú* 'born-to-die'. Akinyemi (2005) explains that these death-associated names are personal names given to children who are believed to have prearranged before birth the precise time of their deaths. Hence, as Akinyemi comments, the Yorubas believe that such names can prevent the untimely death of such children. This has also been observed in other African communities that by "giving children death-prevention names, the children's biological parents hope that even if the members of the spirit world recognize the children eventually, they will be so angry (because of the ugly nature of the death-prevention name) that they will not call the child to the spirit world. Specifically, the spiritual parents will be 'incapacitated' by the death-prevention names and this will enable the child to live" (Obeng 1998: 166). Death-prevention names among the Yorubas are presented below in (78) – (90).

Death-prevention name   *meaning*

(78) kúforíjì   'death, forgive this one'
(79) kúfisílẹ̀   'death, leave this one alone'
(80) kújẹ́nyọ̀   'death, allow me to rejoice'
(81) kúmáyọ̀mí   'death, don't make jest of me'
(82) kúmápàyí   'death, don't kill this one'

The above names in (78) – (82) are structured as an address to Death to allow an *àbíkú* child to stay and not die "again". The names may also be presented in a form of a command to the child to stay, especially when the parents are deeply frustrated after losing many children. These command-like names are given below in (83) – (89).

Death-prevention name   *meaning*
(83) málọmọ́   'don't go again'
(84) máku   'don't die'
(85) dúrójayé   'wait to enjoy life'
(86) dúrósimí   'wait to bury me'
(87) dúrótìmí   'wait with me'
(88) bánjókòò   'sit down or stay with me'
(89) bámitálẹ́   'stay with me till the night'

Furthermore, death-prevention names may also be formed to show nagginess or nastiness among the Yorubas. This reflects the observation that "they [death-prevention names] may be nasty names of migrant labourers, dangerous animals, nasty objects, filthy places and expressions of emotions" (Agyekum 2006: 221, see also Obeng 2001, 1998). Examples of these groups of death-prevention names among the Yorubas are provided in (90) – (93) below.

Death-prevention name	*meaning*
(90) akísàátán	'no more rags'
(91) ìgbékòyí	'the bush rejects this'
(92) emèrè	'the bewitched'
(93) kílànkó	'what are we gathering'

The name *Akísàátán* 'no more rags' is a nagging name to inform the *àbíkú* child that the parents do not have clothing material in which to bury him or her, if he or she dies. Also, by using the word 'rags', the child is being humiliated as someone who deserves only rags, not good clothes. *Ìgbékòyí* 'even the bush rejects this one' is another nasty name to insult the *àbíkú* child that he or she would be rejected in case he or she dies again. In this section, we have discussed various factors that may determine the choice of a personal name among the Yorubas. The discussion thus far indicates that the use of a language is influenced by the worldviews and philosophy of the society that uses that language. In other words, names may be seen as linguistic forms with cultural features. For instance, Yoruba names reflect people's beliefs and cultural orientations about birth-order, manner in which a child is born, deities, infant mortality, profession, and so on. This also reiterates Akinyemi's observation that "Yoruba personal names carry specific cultural information about the people's societal values, philosophical thoughts, worldviews, religious systems, and beliefs" (Akinyemi 2005: 121). Apart from the fact that the used names are selected according to various social factors, names also perform specific functions in the Yoruba society.

2.4. Functions of names in the Yoruba community

Yoruba names perform a number of functions in the Yoruba community. These functions include indicating identity, marking status, expressing past experiences or emotions and feelings, showing solidarity, and so on. These functions are discussed in the following subsections.

Identity

Yoruba names provide information about a person's socio-cultural background and family identity. It is thus possible to use one's name to trace his/her back-

ground or lineage. A personal name may indicate that one is from a royal family – for instance names with *Adé* (crown) prefix – or reveal if one was an *àbíkú* child that survived – for example names with *Ikú* (death) prefix. Personal names may therefore reflect a person's birth day, period, events surrounding his/her birth, as well as family profession or status in the society, or even inform society that the child was an *àbíkú* child that survived. Thus, among the Yorubas, a personal name is a person's private porfolio.

Status-marking in conversation

Yoruba personal names, especially hypocoristic personal names, may be used to index different contexts of conversation, including a peer interactional, superior-to-subordinate, and subordinate-to-superior contexts. This has also been observed in Akan personal names (Obeng 1997). Obeng comments that, among the Akans, hypocoristic day names are used to mark status in different contexts, such as among equals or in superior-subordinate or subordinate-superior interaction. Similar to Akan hypocoristic names, Yoruba hypocoristic names may perform different communicative functions relative to the issue of status. Apart from the fact that in a superior-to-subordinate context the hypocoristic names express affection, warmth, the idea of being loved or worth caring for, hypocoristic names denote the smallness of the referent when used in this context (See Obeng 1997, 2001). That is, among the Yoruba, an older person may use a hypocoristic personal name such as *Akínakìn* (from *Akín* 'the strong one'), or *Búkì* (from *Bùkọ́lá* 'mine is God's') when referring to a younger person to show that he or she is a superior to the younger person. However, when such a hypocoristic personal name is used among peers, it is used to indicate equality or solidarity.

Crucially, as far as status is concerned, it should be noted that the hypocoristics may not be used by a suboordinate to refer to a superior (suboordinate-to-superior-context). It is considered disrespectful for a younger person to call an older person using his/her hypocoristic personal name. Such a young individual may be immediately cautioned and/or reprimanded by the members of the community. However, it is also possible for an older person to offer permission or consent to a young person to use a hypocoristic to refer to him or her, to show familiarity, love or intimacy. This is particularly possible in situations including parent-child context or a boyfriend-girlfriend situation, where the older wants the younger to be able to relate freely with him or her. Hence, there are social "constraints" that regulate the use of the hypocoristic personal names among the Yorubas.

Expression of experiences

As Obeng (2001: 8) indicates, generally, names in African societies "may express emotional features as anger, disappointment and anxiety of the name-giver or the child's immediate family". Yoruba names may convey the experiences of a child's parents or family. These experiences may be negative and may include parents' frustrations and challenges. Such negative experiences are often revealed through death-prevention names such as *Málọmọ́* 'don't go again', *Mákú* 'don't die', *Dúrósínmí* 'wait to bury me', *Dúrójayé* 'wait to enjoy life', which illustrate the name-giver's frustration having witnessed previous loss of children. The name *Málọmọ́* 'don't go again' suggests that the child had once come into this world (that is, has been born before) and gone back (to the spirit world), hence a plea is given to make him or her stay here on Earth. Additionally, names may communicate positive experiences such as recent successes and accomplishments. For instance, names such as *Iremidé* 'my fortune has come' *Ọlámipọ̀si* 'my wealth has increased' show that the name giver (who is indexed through the use of 'my' first person possessive pronoun) has made some breakthrough.

For praise or description of a child

Personal names may be given to convey certain attributes peculiar to a specific family. Such personal names are referred to as *oríkì àbísọ* 'attributive personal name' (Oyelaran 1976). These names may also "express what the child is to his or her parents, and what the parents hope that the child will become later in life" (Akinyemi 2005: 120). As Akinyemi further explains, such names may convey some heroic, brave, or strong characteristics about a child. For instance, *Àjàní/ Àjàmú* 'one who fights to have or possess' is a name usually given to a male child conceived after prolonged arguments (fights) between parents; whereas for female children, this type of name often suggests tender care or endearment. For example, *Àdùkẹ́*, 'one whom people shall contest to endear' is a name for a child considered to be lavished with love and care, and *Ajike* 'one whom we rise up early in the morning to endear' is a name that typifies a child as someone people should pamper every morning. An aspect of personal names where the function of praise is largely manifest is totemic names. Totemic names may be referred to as *oríkì orílé* (Oduyoye 1982). The term *oríkì orílé* literally means 'praise belonging to family'. These names, as Orie (2002: 119) comments, are characterized by poems that encode information such as family origin, character and taboos. Totemic names derive from totems such as *ọ̀kín* 'peacock', *erin* 'elephant', *ọ̀pó* 'staff', *oyin* 'honey', which are used to categorize family character. For instance, in the family of kings, apart from a kingship personal name, a child may also be given a totemic personal name based on the totem associated with

dominion in the Yoruba community. In other words, such a child may be referred to as *Adeníyí Erinfọlámí* 'crown has honor' 'the elephant that breathes with wealth'. These totemic personal names are presented below.

TABLE 3. Totemic personal names

Totem	Corresponding personal names
Erin	*Erinfọlámí* 'the elephant that breathes with wealth' *Erinlákátabú* 'the mightily built elephant'
Ọ̀kín	*Ọ̀kínbàlóyè* 'the peacock occupies a position' *Okíngboyè* 'the peacock takes a title'
Oyin	*Oyínkánsọ́lá* 'the honey drops into wealth' *Oyíndàmọ́lá* 'the honey mixes with wealth'
Ọ̀pá	*Ọ̀páyímiká* 'the staff surrounds me' *Ọ̀pábúnmi* 'the staff adds to me'

These totemic personal names draw meanings from objects or animals used as emblems to symbolically represent a family or serve as a distinctive mark of a lineage. Basically, they are given to children to eulogize and valorize certain qualities of the family into which such children are born. Another important function of personal names among the Yorubas, that of giving instruction and passing commentary on human nature, is discussed in the next section.

Instruction and commentary on human nature

Names in this category are given to teach morals and equip people with wisdom. These names are derived from lessons learnt from behaviors of certain people in the society. They may be referred to as *proverbial names* since they express cultural truisms and inform about human nature in general. These proverbial names may state such general facts as expressed in *Olówóòkéré*, 'the wealthy one is not a small person', *Ọláòṣebikan* 'wealth alone does not solve a problem' or *Olówópọ̀rọ̀kú* 'the wealthy one destroys poverty'. They may also ask rhetorical questions to call people to logical or critical thinking. Among such names are: *Tanimọ̀la* 'who knows tomorrow?', *Tántọ́lọ́un* 'who's like the supreme God?', *Tanimọ̀ọ́wò* 'who knows how to cater for him or her?' Furthermore, these names may also be clipped as *Ẹ̀hìnẹni* 'one's back' (from *ẹ̀hìnẹniníbanikalẹ́* 'one's back stands with one till the end', *Báòkú* 'as long as we are not dead' (from *báòkúiseòtán* 'as long as we are not dead work does not end'). Hence, based on the complex nature of proverbial names, different structural patterns may be identified as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Proverbial names

Declarative forms	Interrogative forms	Clipped forms
ọláòṣebikan	*tanimọ̀la*	*ẹ̀hìnẹni*
olówóòkéré	*tántọ́lọ́un*	*ánjọ̀rìn*
olówópọ̀rọ̀kú	*tanimọ̀ọ́wò*	*báọ̀kú*
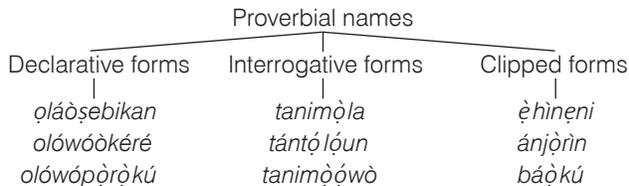
Fig. 1. Discourse-pragmatic structures in Yoruba proverbial names

The different structures in proverbial names are provoked by their various ethno-pragmatic imports. In other words, even though these names are all proverbial names, they communicate different messages and inform people about different aspects of human nature and character. Basically, they tend to educate people on topics such as life, wealth, poverty, hard work, trust and so on. It is also important to note that the message in proverbial personal names may be indirectly communicated – for instance, in *tanimọ̀la* 'who knows tomorrow?' a message that no one knows everything is indirectly conveyed (see Obeng 1994, 2001: 49-68 for a more detailed discussion of indirectness). More importantly, Yoruba proverbial names demonstrate that names are deeply rooted in the sociocultural context of the Yoruba people and it is difficult to understand the names without a thorough knowledge of the Yoruba society, beliefs, philosophy, and psychology.

3. Conclusion

This paper has revealed that names are formed not only based on a context of situation (Malinowski 1923, Halliday and Hassan 1985) but more specifically derived from a context of culture – where certain sociocultural factors in a particular community determine what name is given to a child, why such a name is given, and for what purpose the name is given. In other words, we demonstrate that names are formed based on significant contexts in Yoruba culture. Furthermore, the exploration of personal names in terms of the various functions they perform in the society suggests that names have communicative relevance. They may be used to convey people's identities, status, experiences and emotions. They may also be used to provide instruction to people in the society. Thus, names also have didactic significance. Hence, we argue that names are not just ordinary labels, they play significant social and pragmatic roles in the Yoruba society.

Yoruba names have ethnopragmatic significance since they reflect language in a sociocultural context. They reinforce the fact that language is deeply grounded in the context of cultural beliefs, traditions and practices of a particular ethnic

community. Language is a sociocultural mirror. It is a pragmatic lens through which we may view social structures (i.e. royalty via royal names), human relationships and social roles (i.e. hypocoristic personal names), people's frustrations or fortunes (i.e. death-prevention names and circumstancial names). Ultimately, it is argued that names are neither mere arbitrary labels nor ordinary linguistic features (i.e. words, sentences and other aspects of language), but most importantly, names are linguistic categories that have an indexical relationship to socio-cultural meanings and functions, places, time, people and events. This also advances the view that language and culture are inseparable.

References

Adeoye, C.L. 1979. *Àṣà àti Ìṣe Yorùbá* [The culture and practices of the Yorubas]. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.

Agyekum, K. 2006. "The Sociolinguistics of Akan Personal Names". *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 15(2). 206-235.

Akinnaso, N. 1980. "The Sociolinguistic Basis of Yoruba Personal Names". *Anthropological Linguistics* 22(7). 275-304.

Akinyemi, A. 2005. "Integrating Culture and Second Language Teaching Through Yorùbá personal names". *The Modern Language Journal* 89(1). 115-126.

Blum, S. 1997. "Naming Practices and the Power of Words in China". *Language and Society* 26. 357-379.

Brown, P. & S.C. Levinson. 1978. "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena". *Questions and Politeness*, ed. by E.N. Goody. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 56-290.

Clyne, M. 1994. *Intercultural Communication at Work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Daramola, O. & A. Jeje. 1967. *Àwọn Àṣà Ti Òrìṣà Ilẹ̀ Yorùbá* [The cultures and deities in Yorubaland]. Ibadan: Onibon-Oje Press.

Duranti, A. 2011. "Ethnopragmatics and Beyond: Intentionality and Agency Across Languages and Cultures". *Hybrids, Differences, Visions. On the Study of Culture*, ed. by C. Baraldi, A. Borsari & A. Carli. Colorado: The Davies Group.

Goddard, C. & Zh. Ye. 2015. "Ethnopragmatics". *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture,* ed. by F. Sharifian. United Kingdom: Routledge. 66-85.

Goddard, C. 2006. "Ethnopragmatics: A New Paradigm". *Ethnopragmatics: Understanding discourse in cultural context*, ed. by C. Goddard. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 1-30.

Grice, H.P. 1975. "Logic and Conversation". *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*, ed. by P. Cole & J. Morgan. New York: Academic Press. 41-58.

Halliday, M.A.K & R. Hasan, 1985. *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective*. Geelong: Deakin University Press

Ìkọ́tún, R. 2014. "Wrong Forms of Some Yorùbá Personal Names: Some Phonological and Sociolinguistic Implications". *Linguistik Online* 68. 43-56.

Ilesanmi, T.M. 1987. "Naming Ceremony among the Yorùbá. Orita: Ibadan (Nigeria)". *Journal of Religious Studies* 14(12). 108-119.

Ladele, T.A., Mustapha, O., Aworinde, I.A. *et al.* 1986. *Àkójopọ̀ Ìwádìí Ìjìnlẹ̀ Àṣà Yorùbá* [Collections of thorough research on Yoruba culture]. Ibadan: Macmillan Publishers.

Levisen, C. 2012. *Cultural Semantics and Social Cognition. A Case Study of The Danish Universe of Meaning*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Malinowski, B. 1923. "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages". *The Meaning of Meaning*, ed. by C.K. Ogden, I.A. Richards. London: Kegan Paul. 296-336.

Obeng, S.G. 1994. "Verbal Indirection in Akan Informal Discourse". *Journal of Pragmatics* 21. 37-65.

Obeng, S.G. 1997a. "Apologies in Akan Discourse". *Journal of Pragmatics* 31. 709-734.

Obeng, S.G. 1997b. "Request in Akan Discourse". *Anthropological Linguistics* 41(2). 230-251.

Obeng, S.G. 1997c. "Indirectness in Pronominal Usage". *Journal of Language and Social Pyschology* 16 (2). 201-221.

Obeng, S.G. 1997d. "From Morhophonology to Sociolinguistics: The Case of Akan Hypocoristic Day-names". *Multilingua* 16(1). 39-56.

Obeng, S.G. 1998. "Akan Death-Prevention Names: A Pragmatic and Structural Analysis". *Names* 46(3). 163-187.

Obeng, S.G. 2001. *African Anthroponymy: An Ethnopragmatic and Morphophonological Study of Names in Akan and Some African Societies*. Muenchen: Lincom Europa.

Oduyoye, M. 1982. *Yoruba Names.* Ibadan: Daystar Press.

Ogunbowale, P.O. 1979. *Àṣà Ìbílẹ̀ Yorùbá* [The Yoruba traditional culture]. Ibadan: University Press Limited.

Orie, Ọ.O. 2002. "Yoruba Names and Gender Marking". *Anthropological Linguistics* 44(2). 115-142.

Oyelaran, O. 1976. *Oríkí [Praise Poem] Paper Presented at the Yoruba Studies Association Meeting*, University of Ibadan.

Searle, J. 1975. "Indirect Speech Acts". *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*, ed. by P. Cole & J. Morgan. New York: Academic Press.

Suzman, S. 1994. "Names as Pointers: Zulu Personal Naming Practices". *Language in Society* 23(2). 253-272.

Wierzbicka, A. 1991. Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Wierzbicka, A. 1997. *Understanding Cultures Through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wierzbicka, A. 2003. *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction,* 2nd ed. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Wierzbicka, A. 2007. "Russian Cultural Scripts: The Theory of Cultural Scripts and Its Applications". *Ethos* 30(4). 401-432.