

## A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Yoruba Names Derived from Proverbs

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### *Abstract*

*This paper investigates a group of Yoruba names that started as appellation but with time became personal names. The category of names was derived from Yoruba proverbs. Scholars in the field of anthroponomy have not given much attention to this category of names. Yoruba personal names invariably reflect the people's philosophy, beliefs and general world-view. The group of names under focus also reflects the philosophy and beliefs of the people. They define the aspiration, psychological tendencies and consciousness of the bearer. Data for the study was sourced from convocation brochure of four universities in southwest Nigeria over a period of six years. Oral interviews were also held in different towns across the southwest. The study relies on the assumptions of cultural theory in explaining the rationale behind the names, and their functions as personal names. The paper reveals that proverbs inscribed on vehicles or houses, used as trade names on shops, and proverbs frequently used as catchy phrases do end up as personal names in the Yoruba sociolinguistic landscape. The study contributes to existing works on Yoruba names, and it further broadens our understanding about Yoruba personal names.*

**Keywords:** *appellation, personal names, proverbs, world-view, southwest Nigeria.*

### **Introduction**

Naming is common to all the cultures of the world. In fact, all human societies give names to humans, animals, objects, places and landmark events. Naming acquires social importance and relevance because of its functions of identification and referencing (Agyekum 2006, Fasiku 2006 Olatunji and Issah 2015). *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Name) says that "a name is used to refer to an individual entity, the name singles out the entity by directly pointing to it..." In Africa, and particularly among the Yoruba, names are not mere labels of identity. As scholars have argued, they express experience, values, hopes, traditional and religious beliefs, and events in the lives of the people (Akinaso 1980, Nwaniki 2013, Fakuade, Friday-Otun and Adeosun 2020). Yoruba take great interest in the circumstances that surround the birth of a child; they commence in-depth observation from conception to the time the child is born. This helps in determining a name or names that accurately describe the events and circumstances that surround the birth. This is equally true of names given to places and events; circumstances that surround event and locations to be named are adequately considered. To this extent therefore, Yoruba personal names often reflect social and psychological meanings (Ogunwale 2015).

Scholars including Adeoye (1972), Oduyoye (1972), Akinola (2014) and a host of others identify different types or category of names: personal name (orúko àbísọ) panegyric name or praise name (oríki) prestine name or names brought from heaven (àmútòrunwá), and appellation (inagije/àlájé). The present study describes and reflects on the category of names under appellation, specifically those derived from proverbs. Unlike other categories identified above, appellations are not given at birth, rather they evolve later in the lives of the bearer, and

in most cases, supplant personal names that were given at birth. Names derived from proverbs fall into this category.

Yoruba language is rich in proverbs, and the use of proverbs in discourse is celebrated as the hallmark of oratory. Delana (1966: ix) writes that “no one can be considered educated or qualified to take part in communal discussion unless he is able to quote the proverbs relevant to each situation.” Yoruba proverbs reflect the wisdom, philosophy and world-view of the people, thus they come in handy in important discourses that reflect everyday life and everyday patterns of social interaction (Fasiku 2006; Abiodun 2000, 2018). A popular Yoruba adage says *òweḷesin òrò, òròḷesinòwe; bí òròbásonù, òwe la fì ñwa*. A literal translation of the proverb says that proverb is the horse of discourse, and discourse is the horse of proverb; when discourse is lost, proverb is used to retrieve it. The message inherent in the proverb is that proverb is the fastest or shortest means of clarifying issues in discourse. Put another way, it means that the easiest means of making salient points in discourse is the employment of appropriate proverb(s). From the foregoing, it is apparent that Yoruba names and proverbs are both linked to the philosophy and world view of the people. However, while proverb takes a comprehensive view of the people’s ways of life, their environment, beliefs and general philosophy, personal name is not as comprehensive in reflecting the world-view of the people. This is manifested in the apparent fact that whereas proverb reflects every aspect of human existence: his environment, experience, social activities and natural phenomena; name is limited in its coverage of all these aspects of human existence.

### **Names in Yoruba Culture**

Yoruba names have profound values in relation to the culture, philosophy, religion, social organization and general word-view of the people; this explains why Yoruba names are not mere tags of identification. The Yoruba give considerable attention to events before, during and immediately after the birth of a child, and all the phenomena duly observed are considered in the naming of the child (Adeoye 1972; Oduyoye 1972; Akinnaso 1980, Fasiku 2006; Fakuade, Friday-Otun and Adeosun 2020). Yoruba personal names are sacrosanct, “they constitute an integral part of human existence” (Fakuade et al 2020: 252). So much goes into naming a child because names play significant role in the life of a child, thus the saying *orúkòníroni* (a name is the anchor of existence). Akinola (2014:66) writes that a “name is spiritually inclined. It possesses ability to predict the child’s path in life.”

To buttress the importance of naming a child, so much funfair goes into naming ceremony. It is always a form of feast where a lot of eating, drinking, singing and dancing take place. In addition, *ìwùre* (prayers) are normally offered in abundance, accompanied with symbolic items that include kolanut (*obi*); bitterkola (*orógbó*); honey, sugar, sugarcane, salt, alligator pepper (*ataare*), alcohol and money. Each of the items is used to recite appropriate prayers for the child to live a long and peaceful life; and to be successful in life

It is mentioned earlier in the study that Yoruba names are categorized into personal names (*orúkò àbísò*). Names in this category are given by the parents and relatives based on events and situations noticed before during and after the birth of the child. Such names may reflect the religion, vocation or situation of the parents, e.g.

Ògúndélé	Oyèkúnlé	Olúwayémisí
Òṣúndíyà	Òládoṣù	Olúwaṣèyí
Àyánkúnlé	Aṣáolú	Adébímpé

Ọ̀jẹ̀lábí

Abímbólá

Adédèjì

Another category is the panegyric name (oríki). The names in this category are given as praise name in addition to personal name, e.g.

Àlání  
Àdìgún  
Àrẹ̀mú

Àkànní  
Àjàmú  
Àkànmú

Àbẹ̀ké  
Àríké  
Àṣàké

One other category is the pristine name, or names brought from heaven (àmútòrunwá). Names in this category are given based on specific sign(s) noticed during the birth of a child. If for instance a child is born with the umbilical cord tied around its neck, it is named *Ọ̀jọ́*, while one that shows the leg first instead of the head during birth is named *Ìgè* (Adeoye 1972; Oduyoye 1972; Fakuade et al 2020). Other names in this category include

Ọ̀jọ́  
Tàlàbí  
Táíwò  
Ìdògbé

Àjàyí  
Dáda  
Ìdòwú  
Ìgè

Ọ̀ké  
Olúgbodi  
Àiná  
Ìlòrí

Apart from the categories already discussed, there is appellation (inagijẹ/àlájẹ). The names in this category are not given at birth. They are not given to infants. Rather, these group of names may be adopted by a person on self-volition, or may be given to a person by the people around him/her based on their observations of the person's features, behaviour/attitudes, vocation or any other observed traits. Abiodun and Olaogun (2012) write about appellation thus:

Names that “give a person out” in that they serve as a source of defining and evaluating a person; they also have the power of suggesting or predicting possible behaviour of the bearer. They are not given at birth, rather they are given later in life based on observed characteristic features, behaviour or traits (positive or negative).

Appellations are open-ended; they are borne out of physical and characteristic features, and any other form of behaviour. Their construction is not guided by social rules, rather, ability to observe accurately the physical and characteristic features of a person, and his/her pattern of behaviour is the major requirement for giving a person an appellation. This is why it is possible to come up with any appellation at any point in time based on any observed feature in a person. Such appellation may connote a positive or negative reference depending on the observed trait. However, Abiodun, Aladesanmi and Olaiya (2016) affirm that only positive appellations can become actual names. The examples below demonstrate a few examples of appellation that have become names:

Ajónḡlò: a thin and fairly tall person  
Fílání: a lanky and light complexion male who looks like a Fulani man  
Adú: a person who is very dark in complexion  
Ọ̀yínbó: a person who is very light in complexion  
Asíndẹ̀mádé: a trained crown maker/builder

Amóótá:	a sharp shooter
Adúróta:	a sharp shooter
Òlébè:	a professional farmer, renowned for making many heaps in a day
Àgbèdẹ:	a blacksmith
Alùfóge(jó):	a renowned drummer
Ajófóyìnbó:	a professional dancer, known for entertaining important dignitaries
Abulégíga:	known as the first man to erect a multistorey building in his community

Appellation, as already mentioned above, is the focus of this study. It is important to stress that not all names under appellation are discussed in the study, rather, attention is focused only on those appellations that are derived from proverbs, and which have become personal names, and are so used by people.

## Literature Review

Scholars from different field of studies have written on Yoruba personal names. Adeoye (1972) and Oduyoye (1972) write on the importance of personal names. Each of the scholars describes the nature of naming ceremony and the different groups of personal names. They identify and extensively illustrate four groups that have been mentioned in this study, namely personal name (orúkoàbísọ) pristine or names brought from heaven (orúkoàmútòrunwá), panegyric name (oríkì) and appellation (ìnagijẹ/àlájẹ). Akinola (2014) writes on the communicative role of Yoruba names. The scholar claims that names communicate beliefs, situations and events about the bearer and the people around him/her (parents, extended family etc.). He categorized Yoruba personal names into nine groups rather than the four categories popular in the literature. However, we note that his coming up with nine groups is due to his regrouping the Àbísọ category into six, namely: i) bestowed names, where he combines pristine and some that are non-pristine names; ii) circumstantial names; iii) name by profession; iv) name by family belief or worship; v) name by nobility; and vi) deliberate/freely given name. We observe fluidity and inconsistency in the regrouping presented in the work. For instance, putting Táíwò, KèhíndéAbíódún, Abíónà in the same category as bestowed names raises questions. Equally so is the grouping of Àsàkẹ, Àjíkẹ, Àbíkẹ, FólórúnşọÀbáyòmí and Èyítáyò under deliberate/freely given names. The present study will not pursue the fluidity and inconsistency any further because they do not come under the focus of our research.

Ogunwale (2015) focuses on Yoruba reincarnated names, stressing their sociolinguistic importance and meanings within the context of Yoruba beliefs, psychology and philosophy. Relying on the theory of critical discourse analysis, the scholar contends that reincarnated names perform many functions, and reflect meanings that include “soliciting, condemnation, interpersonal-authorities, predictions, entreaties...” (46).

Olatunji and Issah (2015) explain that personal names are meaningful constructs that reflect the day-to-day endeavours, hope, aspiration, achievements and state of being and the beliefs of the African people. They claim further that naming is not static in nature because as events unfold, naming continue to change to reflect the inner-minds of the people. The scholars conclude that name should be seen from a dynamic socio-cultural practice and also as a reflection of the reality of everyday social life of people (85).

Fakuade et al (2020) investigate and describe sociolinguistic features of Yoruba personal names and the influence of modernity and western culture on naming and names in the Yoruba culture. Like many scholars have opined, these scholars note that Yoruba personal names reflect socio-cultural practices, and more, they are not mere tags for identification, they show the “philosophical value of the people, and also emphasize the significance of past experiences, events or phenomena” (252).

One particular study that is very relevant to the present study is Fasiku (2006); the study focuses on the relationship between proverbs and personal names in Yoruba culture. The scholar identifies two ways in which proverbs and names are related. The first way, according to the scholar, is that some “proverbs underscore the importance of names” (54). To support this claim, he cites proverbs that include

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Orúkọ̀omoniijánuomọ̀             | A child’s name is his/her brake’                 |
| 2. Orúkọ̀ níí roomọ̀                | A child is influenced by his/her name            |
| 3. Orúkọ̀ isọ omọ̀ níí mó omọ̀ lára | A child gets used to behaving like his/her name. |

(Fasiku 2006: 54)

The scholar argues correctly that while proverbs like these suggest that names determine or “establish the role expectations, aspirations and consciousness of the Yoruba” (54), there is no absolute connection to show that proverbs are truly determinant of a person’s role expectation, aspiration or consciousness. He writes to affirm this position thus,

...in a pure dialectical relation between name and proverb there is no necessary causal connection between a name and the message it conveys, the name does not “determine” the consciousness of the bearer, and it is possible for a person not to be mindful of whatever message or responsibility is imposed by the name he/she bears. (57)

The second way in which proverbs and names are related is that “there are specific names that correlate some proverbs that in some cases have an origin in specific events and experiences in history, and thus serve as a way of reliving significant lessons, expectations, aspirations and roles, and experiences/events where the proverb was originally enacted” (57). In support of this thesis, the scholar illustrates with the following names, and their corresponding proverbs.

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 1. Kúmólú    | Bíkò bá n’ídí obirinkì í jé ‘Kúmólú. (Without a special reason, a woman is never named to mark the death of a family pillar).   |
| 2. Oláníyọnu | Ẹnití kò rí ọlárí, tí ó sọ omọ̀ rẹ̀ ní Oláníyọnu. (Those who have never experienced wealth or honour, say there is problem in wealth or honour and name their children so). |
| 3. Aríléyan  | Bàbáolórùlékanti ó sọomọ̀ rẹ̀náríléyan, ní’boní óyansí? (An owner of one house who names his child takes pride in ownership of many houses, where is his pride?).           |
| 4. Àsámú     | Omọ̀ tí yóò jé Àsámú, kékeré ló tí n sẹnuşámúşámú. (A child that will be sharp, shows it early in his speech).  |
| 5. Apálará   | Apá l’ará, ìgbónwọ̀ niyèkan; bí a ò rẹnifẹ̀yinti bí ọ̀lẹ̀ni à n   |

rí, bí a ò rẹnigbékè lé, a tẹramóşé ẹni. (A man’s arms are his relatives, his helpers, if there is no one to lean on, it looks like we are failures, if we have no one to rely on, we get serious with our work).

6. Àńjùwón

Àńjùwónkòşééwí léjò, ijàìlarakòtánbòrò. (We are superior to them cannot be quoted as an argument or complaint in court; a quarrel due to envy is not settled by the passage of time).

(Fasiku 2006: 57-58)

The present study calls for a review of the claim by the scholar that Ọláníyọnu, Aríléyan, Apálará and Àńjùwón are names given at birth. The name Kúmólú, as correctly noted in the work in question, belongs to the category of names that “have an origin in spectacular events and experiences in history” (57), and it is given at birth as rightly noted in the study. Àsàmú, on the other hand, is also given at birth, being a panegyric name, however, it cannot be traced to spectacular events or experience in history as suggested by the scholar. The name, as already noted, is a panegyric name like Àlámú, Àrẹmú, Àjàmú, Àkànmú and others in the category.

Findings in the present study reveal that Àńjùwón, Apálará, Aríléyan and Ọláníyọnu, are appellations, they are not given at birth as personal names (orúkoàbísọ), as suggested in Fasiku (2006: 53). Direct interviews with children of the bearers of the names Apálará and Àńjùwón in the course of the research reveals that the two names are appellations. The children, who inherited the names, claimed they knew and still know the names that their fathers were given at birth, but their father was better known by appellation in their live times, and the appellations eventually became personal names which they (the children) inherited as surnames. Their evidence points out to us that these names are appellations. On the remaining two names Apálará and Àńjùwón, field work, and search in documents that included graduation brochures of four universities in the Southwest Nigeria between 2010 and 2016 did not reflect these names. We consulted elders in different communities, and they informed us that the two names in question are not personal names. According to a few of the elders, Aríléyan(ká) is an analogy drawn from Afoláyan(ka). It features in eulogy to praise any person or children of a person who is able to erect a big house with many rooms and sitting rooms, and possibly with a big compound. This is common among rich people who have many wives and children. The other name Ọláníyọnu is a derogatory appellation used to rebuke an erstwhile poor person who by accident becomes rich and starts to flaunt his riches. This is reflected in the proverb: *Ojú òrólárítí ńşomọrẹni Ọláníyọnu*. The clause *Ojú òrólárítis* derogatory, it implies *perpetual poverty*. The name Ọláníyọnu is a derogatory appellation of rebuke, because of its derogatory connotation, it is never used as a name. The point being made is that our research does not come across Aríléyan and Ọláníyọnu as personal names, rather, they are appellations; The former is normally use to eulogize and the latter to rebuke. Be that as it may, the present study calls for further research on these names and others that may fall into the same category.

## Theoretical Framework

Cultural theory is adopted in this study, and as will be explained, it is appropriate for effective explication of the theme of the study. Culture is the totality of a people’s ways of life. It captures the beliefs, institutions, art, language and other norms and general pattern of life of a society,

(Tylor 2016, Ajayi 2005, Adedeji 2010). The present study is situated within the ambit of the socio-cultural experience and activities of the Yoruba society. It focuses on an aspect of language (proverb), names and naming, and aesthetics that form part of the culture of the people.

The major assumption of cultural theory is that society is invariably guided by culture; as such, everyday activities of a society is dictated and governed by the culture of that society (Smith 2001). Culture is handed down from one generation to the other; thus, from generation to generation, the everyday experience and activities of a society reflect the imbibed culture of the society. Even when culture undergoes changes due to contact with other cultures, or due to other factors, relics of the old culture always reflect in the new culture or ways of life. For instance, the activity of naming remains an everyday part of the Yoruba culture even when foreign religions have influenced the content, types and pattern of naming among the people. Cultural theory is therefore designed to account for the motivation and rationale for the everyday activities of the society in relation to the culture. It also accounts for the ways and manner the culture of a people in a given society determines how they relate and interact with the environment in specific contexts and situations. In the light of the above, cultural theory is appropriate to the theme of the study in the sense that the study is a part of the culture of the people; naming and names, aesthetics through writing and diagrams, and the use of proverbs in various contexts are all parts of the culture of the Yoruba people.

## Methodology

Document assessment and oral interviews were used in gathering data for the study. Graduation brochures that contain names of graduating students in four universities between 2010 and 2016 were studied to extract names that were derived from proverbs. The four universities: Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti; University of Ibadan, Ibadan; Obaafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; and Osun State University, Osogbo are located in the Southwest of Nigeria where a large population of students that graduated from these universities came from. The researchers had oral interview sessions with elderly Yoruba people in Adó-Èkìtì, Òtùn-Èkìtì, Ilé-Ifè, Ìbàdàn, Ìkirè, Òşogbo, Ìlá-Òràngún, Ìkàré-Àkókó and Oṅdó. Apart from conducting interviews with selected elders the researcher located families that answer to the names discussed in the study, they were found mainly in Adó-Èkìtì, Òtùn-Èkìtì, Ìbàdàn, Òşogbo, Ìlá-Òràngún, Oṅdó and two communities in Kwara State: Ìmọḍe and Egòsi-Ilé in Òkè-Èrọ Local Government Area of Kwara State.

## Presentation of Data

Twenty names are presented below. The corresponding proverb from which each of the name is derived is also presented. It is observed that each of the names do not reflect the proverbs in full, rather each is a shortened form of the corresponding proverb from which it is derived.

Names	Proverbs
1. Awòlúmátèḗ	Awòlúmátèḗ, iwòn ara è ló mò. (The guest or stranger who never gets messed up, must have learned the art of self-respect).
2. Alátìşe	Alátìşe ló mò àtìşeara rè. (A focused person will always find

- solutions to his/her problems).
3. Ojúmọ̀la Ojúmọ̀ ọ̀la kò yéènikèni. (The events of the day that will break cannot be foretold by any person).
  4. Báòkú Bí a ọ̀ kú, iṣe ọ̀ tán. (When there is life, there is hope).
  5. Inúomi Inú omikò se é bí. (No one keeps malice/grudges with water).
  6. Aṣónibáré Aṣónibáré ló mọ̀ ètẹ̀ṣónibárin. (One who is careful in the choice of friends, possesses the knowledge and antics of close relationship).
  7. Àbánikánńdá Àbániikán ń dá, ikánkan ọ̀ le mu ọ̀kúta. (It is mere wishes of the termite, no termite can consume stones).
  8. Àdábá Àdábá niijà, ẹ̀niijà ọ̀ bá ní ń peara rẹ̀ lókùnrin. (It is the lonely person that appreciates the tribulations of life, the person who has never experienced tribulations (of life) hails himself as a hero).
  9. Bólódeòkú Bólóde ọ̀kú, ọ̀de rẹ̀kòníhugbégi. (When the house owner is still alive, the frontage of the house cannot be bushy).
  10. Àjànàkú Àjànàkúki í yarára ọ̀mọ̀ tí erínbá bí, erinní í jọ. (The Elephant is never born a dwarf, an elephant will invariably give birth to its type).
  11. Èrùòbodò Èrù ọ̀bodò, ẹ̀nitíyòòwodò, lominú ńkọ. (A river is never in fear, it is the person entering the river that is weary and unsure).
  12. Àdàbà Àdàbàkònáání à ńkùngbé, iná jóeyé lọ. (The dove is unperturbed when the bush is set on fire, as the fire starts, the bird immediately takes off).
  13. Abẹ̀rùàgbà Abẹ̀rùàgbà niyòò lo ilẹ̀ yí pé. (Those who respect the elders will live long in life).
  14. Àjùmọ̀bí Àjùmọ̀bí ọ̀kantaánú, ẹ̀niOlúwaránsíniní ńṣenilóore. (Being born into the same family does not assure one of getting automatic assistance, only those sent to a person by God render assistance).
  15. Apálará Apá l'ará, iḡbónwọ̀ niyẹkan; bí a ọ̀ rẹ̀nifẹ̀yìntì bí ọ̀lẹ̀ni à ń rí, bí a ọ̀ rẹ̀nigbẹ̀kẹ̀ lé, a tẹ̀ramósẹ̀ ẹ̀ni. (A man's arms are his relatives, his helpers, if there is no one to lean on, it looks like we are failures, if we have no one to rely on, we get serious with our work).
  16. Ọ̀jòòbáńikan Ọ̀jò ọ̀ bẹ̀nikansòtá, ẹ̀niejírínieji ń pa. (The rain has no enemy, it falls or rains on any person).
  17. Àńjọ̀òrìn À ń jọ̀ ọ̀rìn, a ọ̀moríolówó. (We relate and struggle together, we cannot tell those created to be wealthy).
  18. Orítíngbeni Orí tí ńgbenikíi tójànràńjanran. (The head (inner head or personal god) that will favour a person, does not need to be extra-large).
  19. Àtidádé Àtidádé kìnìúnkò sẹ̀yìnOlódùmarè. (Securing a crown, as a mark of greatness, by the lion, is ordained by God).
  20. Ọ̀mọ̀nláyọ̀lé Ọ̀mọ̀ ọ̀láyọ̀lé, ẹ̀niọ̀mọ̀ sin lóbímọ̀. (Begetting children is not the mark of fulfillment in life, rather, having children to perform the final burial rites is the ultimate mark).



## Sociolinguistic Overview

Two questions come to mind following the presentation in this paper so far. The first question has to do with how the names presented in the data, and others like them evolve to become personal names. The second question is about the rationale or motivation for adopting them as personal names considering the fact that those who adopted them had personal names given at birth.

Looking at the first question, the study reveals that a number of the names started as inscriptions on vehicles (commercial vehicles), houses and shops (as trade names) as a mark of identification or advertisement. Apart from the theory that the names started as inscription, some evolved because they were used as catchy phrases, and they became popular with the users, thereby becoming a means of identification (for the users). With time such inscriptions and popular catchy phrases became the major means of reference to the users, and they eventually became personal names. In the course of our research, we came across the families of bearers of these names who informed us about the source of the names.

Àtidádé	We met families that answer to the name in Òṣogbo, Ìlá-Òràngún, and Ìkìrun, all in Osun State. They each told us that the name started as inscription on vehicles owned by their great grandfather.
Alátíṣe	The name is often spelled Alátíṣhe. We met one old man who bears the name in Egòsi-Ilé in Kwara State. According to the old man, it started as an inscription on his commercial vehicle. We also met a family in Òtùn-Èkìtì in Èkìtì State who also claimed that their grandfather used the name as an inscription on his commercial vehicle, and as a trade name boldly inscribed his shop as a dealer in building materials.
Abèrùàgbà	The Abèrùàgbà family is in Ìlá-Òràngún. The name started as Inscription on commercial vehicle.
Ojúmọ̀lẹ̀	We met two families that answer to the name, one in Ibadan in Oyo State, the other in Ìmọ̀ḍẹ̀ in Kwara State. The families had similar story about the way the name evolved. Their grandfathers were fond of the proverb: <i>Ojúmọ̀ ọ̀lakò yéènikéni</i> . The family in Ìmọ̀ḍẹ̀ affirmed that their grandfather was known for repeating the following at meetings:

Ojúmọ̀ ọ̀la kòyèni,  
Ilẹ̀tíyóòmọ̀ lọ̀la kòyéèyàn,  
Kò sèni tó mọ̀ohuntíyóòṣẹ̀lẹ̀kó tó dọ̀la,  
E jẹ́kásẹ̀sùúrù.  
(Tomorrows events are unknown to any person  
The day that will break is unpredictable  
No one can tell the events of tomorrow  
Let us be patient).

With time Ojúmọ̀lẹ̀ became the identity by which the grandfather was known. Upon registering in school, the children registered Ojúmọ̀lẹ̀ as surname, and the grandchildren inherited the surname. With respect to the family in Ibadan, their great grandfather was also found of the catchy phrase, and he also used it as a trade name. It eventually became a personal name.

Àdábá The researchers interacted with an elderly person who goes by the name in Oṅdó town. He claimed that his father went through tribulations in his 30s, and did not get any support from friends and relatives. He, however, overcame the tribulations, and became fond of the proverb from which the name Àdábá was derived. The proverb became part of his daily repertoire, and with time, the shortened form Àdábánijà became an appellation, it was later shortened to Àdábá, which eventually became his name, and surname for the children.

We heard stories similar to the one told in respect of **Ojúmòṣà** and **Àdábá** about names such as **Apálará**, **Ilésanmí**, **Òjòòbáńìkan**, **Èrùòbodò**, **Àjùmòbí**, **Inúomi**, **Báòkú** and a number of others. They are shortened forms of proverbs common in the repertoire of the bearers of the names. Our findings further reveals that, either as an inscription on commercial vehicles, shops or houses, or as a catchy saying popular with the users, they (the users) readily accepted the names as a mark of reference and identity.

Inscriptions becoming personal names as claimed in this paper is a common phenomenon in the Yoruba culture since the introduction of western education and the acquisition of the skills of reading and writing by the people (Oduro-Frimpong 2013; Faniran, Ikotun and Oloyede 2019). Writing on inscriptions becoming personal names among the Yoruba people, Faniran et al (2019:115) claim that

In the 60's, for instance, there were instances when users/owners used to be known and addressed by the inscription on their vehicles. They were hardly addressed by their real names...the catchy inscriptions on their vehicles were generally taken for the owner's personal names. In such cases, the inscriptions on their vehicles eventually become their aliases, nick-names or even surnames.

The important point noted in Faniran et al (2019) is that it is not just proverbs inscribed on vehicles that become personal names, other forms of inscriptions or catchy phrases do become names as well. Oduro-Frimpong (2013), based on his study in Ghana, affirms that any form of inscription can become an address form and, eventually, become a personal name. Our interest in this study is however on inscriptions and catchy phrases that are related to proverb.

The second question relates to the rationale or motivation behind accepting or taking up inscription on vehicles, houses and shops/trade names, and also catchy phrases common to a person/user as personal names. This question is germane, considering the fact that the users of inscriptions and catchy phrases had personal names at birth, yet such names given at birth becomes supplanted by appellations. With regards to the names under focus in this study, one important factor revealed to us as to why people accept and/or adopt appellations derived from proverbs as personal names is the wisdom and the philosophy behind the proverbs from which the names are derived. Proverbs are words of wisdom, they reflect the consciousness of the people about the ups and downs of life; they communicate to the people the hidden truth of life, and the essential steps to happiness and successful life. Thus, inherent in proverbs are hope, motivation, warnings, caution, advice, rebuke, admonition and many other lessons of life that are meant to guide a careful person on the journeys of life. When a person, therefore, becomes fascinated by the wisdom in a proverb, he/she may inscribe it on easily visible belongings such as a vehicle, a house, or a shop. The person may also use it as a trade name or make it a catchy phrase used almost on all speech occasions as a mark of self-identification or

to buttress a point. The wisdom inherent in the proverb thus becomes the watchword and guide for the person in his/her activities.

For instance, the proverb *Alátiṣe lómọ̀àtiṣe ara rẹ̀* (a focused person will always find solutions to his/her problems) is an admonition that reminds a person that success or greatness is only attainable when one commits him/herself to a set goal. The bearer of the name who we encountered in Egòsi-Ilé claimed that he struggled for long to buy a commercial vehicle after successfully completing training as a commercial driver. But help to accomplish this did not come despite appeals to relations and friends. According to him, he was on the verge of giving up when he reminded himself of the proverb. He picked up the courage to meet a vehicle dealer, who sold him a vehicle for commercial purpose with the agreement to pay in installment, he inscribe the proverb on the vehicle. He affirmed that with time people identified and referred to him as *Alátiṣe*. He further affirmed that the proverb became his guiding principle, thereby reminding himself at all times that whatever he was capable of doing for himself mattered and not expectations of what people would do for him.

We encountered the bearer of *Ádábá*, who claimed to be a cocoa farmer in Ondo town. He informed us that the proverb *Ádábá nìjà, ẹ̀nìjà ò bá ní ń pẹ ara rẹ̀ lókúnrin* (it is the lonely person who appreciates the tribulations of life, the person who never experienced tribulations of life hails himself as a hero) became popular with him following tribulations he faced early in life. He claimed he was a successful cocoa farmer in Bágbe-Ondó before the age of thirty-five. However, his cocoa farm was razed by fire, and he became poor and frustrated with life. What stuck him most, according to him, was that friends and relatives did not help him to recover from the misfortune. He said he, however, recovered gradually, but learned the lesson that people hardly assist a person during difficult times. For him, the proverb became a catchy phrase he used very often to guide himself, and to admonish and encourage people when they are going through hard times. The shortened form of the proverb *Ádábánìjà* eventually became his mark of identification, and later supplanted his original name. The shortened form was later shortened to *Ádábá*, which he claimed he uses for all official transactions.

The researchers also met Alhaji *Èrùòbodòin Ilá-Òràngún*. He claimed to be over ninety years of age. He explained to us that he was nicknamed Eruobodo because of his constant use of the proverb *èrù òbodò, ẹ̀nítíyò̀wọ̀dòlominú ńkọ* (a river is never in fear, it is the person entering the river that is weary and unsure) in his youthful days during wrestling contests. According to him, he was a good wrestler in his youth and was capable of throwing older and apparently stronger opponents. Whenever there was a wrestling contest in which he had to face an older and apparently stronger opponent, he would intone, *èrù òbodò, ẹ̀nítíyò̀wọ̀dòlominú ńkọ* or its shortened form *èrù òbodò....* to awaken his consciousness regarding his strength and ability, to create fear in the mind of the opponent, and to remind himself that with determination and sense of purpose he would throw any opponent. He jokingly informed us that today, only his peers who are ninety years and above know his actual name which he told us is *Àkànní Bùrẹ̀mò*.

From the above, it is evident that each proverb from which names are derived contains one lesson or the other which users are conscious of. The attraction to the wisdom or lesson in proverbs are responsible for their being inscribed on vehicles, houses and shops, or being used as catchy phrases. The users never intended using them as personal names, but with time, people use abbreviated forms of the proverbs to identify and signify the users. In most cases, the users do not reject the identity, or reject being identified and referred to by the abbreviated forms they chose to use, and with time they become personal names, supplanting actual names giving at birth, and in a number of cases becoming surnames.

## Conclusion

This paper has added to our knowledge and understanding of personal names in Yoruba. The study reveals that shortened forms of Yoruba proverbs inscribed on vehicles, houses and shops as trade names either for aesthetics, and/or in some cases as a reminder of experiences of life do become names of user. Not only are the users known and identified by the inscriptions, they answer to the inscription as means of identification. Equally so are shortened forms of proverbs that become catchy phrases common to a person. With time, such catchy phrases become the means of address and identification of the user. As revealed in the paper, there are people whose personal names and surnames are easily traceable to proverbs across the Yoruba nation. The paper concludes that names derived from proverbs serve the purpose of reliving experiences, and equally serve as guidance to the users in their daily activities and interactions with others.

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