

CONTEMPORARY YORUBA PERSONAL NAMING PRACTICES: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Raphael Idowu Ibiowotisi

Department of linguistics, Igbo and other Nigerian languages, Nwafor Orizu college of
education, Nsugbe. Anambra state, Nigeria

E-Mail: bunmiidowu63@gmail.com

Abstract

Personal names constitute a vital component of Yoruba linguistic and cultural heritage, serving functions that extend beyond personal identification to the expression of identity, history, religious beliefs, family values, and indigenous knowledge. In recent decades, however, rapid social transformation driven by urbanization, globalization, migration, formal education, religious pluralism, and digital communication has influenced traditional Yoruba naming practices, giving rise to new naming patterns that reflect both cultural continuity and social change. This study examines personal naming practices among contemporary Yoruba speakers from a sociolinguistic perspective. Guided by William Labov's Variation Theory and Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory, the study investigates the sociolinguistic factors that shape contemporary Yoruba naming practices and explores their implications for cultural identity and heritage preservation. A qualitative documentary research design was adopted, drawing data from published studies, documentary sources, and representative contemporary Yoruba personal names. The data were analysed thematically using sociolinguistic and onomastic principles. The findings reveal that contemporary Yoruba personal names continue to function as important linguistic resources for expressing religious affiliation, preserving family heritage, communicating parental aspirations, negotiating multiple identities, and transmitting indigenous knowledge. The study further shows that, although globalization and religious transformation have introduced new naming patterns, these developments have not displaced the cultural foundations of Yoruba anthroponymy. Rather, contemporary Yoruba speakers continue to adapt traditional naming practices to changing social realities while maintaining their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. The study concludes that Yoruba personal names remain dynamic expressions of identity and cultural continuity in contemporary society. It recommends sustained documentation, the integration of Yoruba naming traditions into language and cultural education, and greater institutional support for preserving indigenous naming practices as part of broader efforts to safeguard Nigeria's linguistic and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Yoruba personal names; sociolinguistics; anthroponymy; cultural identity; indigenous knowledge.

Introduction

Personal naming is one of the oldest and most enduring linguistic practices through which societies construct identity, preserve history, and transmit cultural knowledge. Across

cultures, names perform functions that extend well beyond personal identification. They embody social values, religious beliefs, historical experiences, and collective aspirations, making them an important source of evidence for understanding the relationship between language and society. Consequently, the study of personal names has become a significant area of inquiry in sociolinguistics, onomastics, linguistic anthropology, and cultural studies because names provide valuable insights into how communities perceive themselves and organise their social worlds (Akinaso, 1983; Hough, 2016; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021; Holmes & Wilson, 2022).

In many African societies, personal names are regarded as meaningful cultural expressions rather than arbitrary labels. They often commemorate important family events, acknowledge ancestry, express religious convictions, and reflect communal expectations. As a result, naming is not simply an individual or family decision but a socially significant act through which cultural values are preserved and transmitted across generations. This broader African perspective has continued to attract scholarly attention because personal names provide a window into the historical experiences, belief systems, and social organisation of indigenous communities (Hough, 2016; Holmes & Wilson, 2022).

The Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria possess one of Africa's richest and most elaborate naming traditions. Within Yoruba society, a child's name is carefully chosen to reflect circumstances surrounding birth, family history, religious orientation, lineage, occupation, or parental aspirations. The well-known Yoruba saying, *Orúkọ ọmọ ní í rọ ọmọ* ("A person's name influences the course of the person's life"), illustrates the cultural importance attached to naming and the widespread belief that names shape both individual identity and social perception. Consequently, the naming ceremony occupies a prominent place in Yoruba cultural life, serving as an occasion through which the child is formally introduced into the family, the community, and the wider cultural heritage of the Yoruba people (Akinaso, 1983; Ojebode & Odebo, 2021).

The diversity of Yoruba personal names reflects the complexity of the society from which they emerge. Categories such as *orúkọ àmútòrunwá* (destiny names), *orúkọ àbísọ* (given names), *oríkì* (praise names), lineage names, chieftaincy titles, and honorific appellations each perform distinctive social and cultural functions. Names such as *Táíwò*, *Kẹhìndé*, and *Ìdòwú* preserve birth traditions, while names beginning with *Adé-*, *Ògún-*, *Olúwa-*, or *Ifá-* communicate royal ancestry, traditional religious affiliation, Christian belief, or indigenous spirituality. In this way, Yoruba names serve as linguistic archives through which historical memory, philosophical thought, and indigenous knowledge are preserved. Their meanings extend beyond lexical interpretation to encompass the lived experiences and cultural worldview of the speech community, a position consistently reflected in studies by Akinaso (1983), Ehineni (2019), and Ojebode & Odebo (2021).

Although the cultural significance of Yoruba names has long been recognised, contemporary Yoruba society has undergone profound social transformation. Urbanization, migration, religious pluralism, formal education, globalization, and digital communication have reshaped patterns of social interaction, creating new contexts in which naming practices are negotiated. These developments have encouraged the emergence of hybrid naming patterns in which indigenous Yoruba names coexist with English, biblical, and Arabic names. Rather than indicating the disappearance of traditional naming practices, these changes reveal the remarkable adaptability of Yoruba anthroponymy. Contemporary naming practices therefore provide an important opportunity to examine how language responds to social change while continuing to preserve cultural identity.

Despite the extensive scholarship on Yoruba anthroponymy, contemporary naming practices continue to raise important sociolinguistic questions. As social institutions evolve, so too do the linguistic resources through which individuals express identity and negotiate their place within society. Personal names provide a particularly useful lens for examining these changes because they are shaped by the interaction of language, culture, religion, and social experience. In recent years, scholars have increasingly recognised that indigenous naming systems are not static cultural relics but dynamic practices that continually respond to changing historical and social circumstances (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021; Holmes & Wilson, 2022).

Research on Yoruba personal names has developed along several complementary directions. Akinnaso's (1983) pioneering studies established that Yoruba names are repositories of indigenous knowledge, preserving family history, religious beliefs, and communal values while reflecting the philosophical orientation of the Yoruba people. Building on this foundation, Ikotun (2013) demonstrated that Yoruba names also perform important communicative functions, serving as linguistic resources through which speakers express affection, humour, social evaluation, encouragement, and solidarity. From a different perspective, Ehineni (2019) argued that the meanings of Yoruba personal names cannot be adequately understood without considering the ethnocultural contexts in which they are produced and interpreted. Ojebode & Odebode (2021) similarly emphasised that Yoruba names constitute an important component of the people's intangible cultural heritage because they preserve collective memory and reinforce ethnic identity. More recently, studies by Abiodun, Ọlaiya, & Ọladeji (2022) have shown that contemporary naming practices continue to evolve in response to changing social, religious, and cultural realities while maintaining strong links with indigenous traditions.

Although these studies have significantly advanced knowledge of Yoruba anthroponymy, they have generally concentrated on the semantic, structural, cultural, or pragmatic dimensions of personal names. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to examining how multiple sociolinguistic variables—including religion, education, globalization,

migration, urbanization, and identity—interact to shape naming practices among contemporary Yoruba speakers. Existing studies also tend to examine these factors separately, leaving limited understanding of how they collectively influence naming decisions in present-day Yoruba society. Given the pace of social transformation in Nigeria, there is a clear need for an updated sociolinguistic account that explains both continuity and change within Yoruba naming traditions.

It is within this context that the present study investigates personal naming practices among contemporary Yoruba speakers from a sociolinguistic perspective. Drawing on William Labov's Variation Theory and Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory, the study examines the social factors influencing naming choices and explores how personal names continue to function as markers of identity, cultural belonging, and indigenous knowledge. By bringing together insights from sociolinguistics and onomastics, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between language, society, and culture in contemporary Yoruba communities.

The significance of this study extends beyond the field of onomastics. It contributes to current debates on language maintenance, identity construction, and cultural sustainability by demonstrating that personal names remain an important medium through which indigenous knowledge is preserved and transmitted. The findings will enrich scholarship in sociolinguistics, African linguistics, linguistic anthropology, and cultural studies while providing useful reference material for educators, historians, policymakers, and organisations committed to the preservation of Nigeria's linguistic heritage. At a time when globalization continues to reshape indigenous languages and cultural practices, understanding the sociolinguistic dynamics of Yoruba personal naming offers valuable insights into how communities preserve their identity while adapting to contemporary realities.

Literature Review

Conceptual Perspectives on Yoruba Personal Naming

Personal names have long attracted scholarly attention because they provide valuable insights into the relationship between language, culture, and society. Within sociolinguistics and onomastics, names are no longer regarded as mere labels assigned for identification; they are increasingly understood as linguistic expressions through which communities preserve historical memory, communicate social values, negotiate identity, and transmit cultural knowledge across generations (Hough, 2016; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Consequently, the study of personal names has evolved into an important area of linguistic inquiry, particularly in societies where naming is closely associated with tradition, religion, kinship, and communal life.

The African naming tradition reflects this broader sociolinguistic perspective. Across many African societies, names embody the circumstances surrounding birth, family

expectations, religious beliefs, occupational identities, and historical experiences. They therefore perform cultural, symbolic, and communicative functions that extend far beyond personal identification. This explains why African anthroponymy continues to receive considerable scholarly attention, especially within discussions of language maintenance, identity construction, and indigenous knowledge systems.

Among the Yoruba, personal naming occupies a distinctive cultural position because names are believed to shape both social identity and individual destiny. Naming is not treated as an isolated linguistic event but as a significant cultural practice through which families express gratitude, preserve ancestry, affirm religious beliefs, and communicate expectations for the future. The enduring Yoruba saying *Orúkọ ọmọ ní í rọ ọmọ* ("A person's name influences the course of the person's life") reflects this worldview and underscores the close relationship between naming and social identity. Consequently, Yoruba names often preserve information about birth circumstances, lineage, occupation, traditional beliefs, and family history, making them important repositories of indigenous knowledge (Akinraso, 1983).

Recent scholarship has broadened this understanding by emphasising the contextual and communicative nature of Yoruba personal names. Rather than deriving meaning solely from their lexical composition, names acquire significance through the cultural experiences and social interactions in which they are used. Ehineni (2019) argues that Yoruba names should be interpreted within their ethnocultural context because their meanings are deeply embedded in shared cultural knowledge. Likewise, Ojebode & Odebode (2021) observe that Yoruba names preserve indigenous philosophy and collective memory while reinforcing ethnic identity among contemporary Yoruba speakers. These perspectives illustrate that personal names are dynamic sociolinguistic resources whose meanings continue to evolve alongside the communities that use them.

Contemporary developments have further expanded the scope of research on Yoruba anthroponymy. Increasing urbanisation, migration, globalization, formal education, and religious pluralism have created new social environments in which traditional naming practices interact with emerging cultural influences. As a result, scholars have begun to examine Yoruba names not simply as cultural artefacts but as linguistic resources through which speakers negotiate multiple identities within rapidly changing social contexts. This shift from descriptive to sociolinguistic analysis provides the conceptual foundation upon which the present study is situated.

Sociolinguistic Dimensions of Yoruba Personal Naming

Contemporary sociolinguistic research increasingly views personal names as dynamic linguistic resources that both reflect and shape social life. Rather than remaining fixed cultural symbols, names evolve alongside changes in religion, education, migration, technology, and intercultural contact. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) observe that linguistic choices are rarely accidental; they are closely associated with social identity, group membership, and the

communicative needs of speakers. Holmes & Wilson (2022) similarly argue that language serves as a means through which individuals negotiate social relationships and project aspects of their identity. Within this broader sociolinguistic tradition, Yoruba personal names provide a valuable window into the interaction between language, culture, and society.

One of the most noticeable developments in contemporary Yoruba society is the growing influence of religion on naming practices. While indigenous belief systems historically shaped many traditional names, Christianity and Islam have significantly expanded the range of naming choices available to parents. Nevertheless, recent studies suggest that this religious transformation has not displaced Yoruba naming traditions. Instead, indigenous linguistic forms have largely been retained, with many families expressing their religious convictions through Yoruba lexical structures (Ehineni, 2019). This illustrates the capacity of the Yoruba naming system to accommodate social change while preserving its linguistic identity.

Globalization has also contributed to the emergence of hybrid naming practices. Increased mobility, formal education, media exposure, and digital communication have encouraged the combination of Yoruba, English, and Arabic names within the same individual. Such naming patterns reflect the realities of multilingual and multicultural societies, where speakers often negotiate multiple identities simultaneously. Rather than interpreting these developments as evidence of cultural decline, recent scholarship argues that they represent creative responses to changing social environments (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). In the Yoruba context, hybrid naming illustrates how indigenous identity can coexist with global cultural influences.

Another important sociolinguistic dimension concerns the role of personal names in preserving indigenous knowledge. Yoruba names continue to encode information about ancestry, kinship, birth traditions, spirituality, occupation, and communal values. Ojebode & Odebode (2021) argue that these names constitute an important aspect of Yoruba intangible cultural heritage because they preserve historical memory and reinforce cultural identity. Similarly, Ehineni (2019) demonstrates that the meanings of Yoruba names are grounded in shared cultural knowledge, making them valuable resources for understanding Yoruba philosophy and worldview. Consequently, naming remains an important mechanism through which indigenous knowledge is transmitted across generations.

Although existing studies have significantly enriched scholarship on Yoruba anthroponymy, important gaps remain. Much of the literature has concentrated on the meanings, classifications, cultural symbolism, and pragmatic functions of Yoruba personal names. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to examining how religion, globalization, education, migration, urbanization, and changing identity simultaneously influence contemporary naming practices. Furthermore, many previous investigations have examined these variables independently, leaving limited understanding of their combined sociolinguistic effects.

The present study addresses these gaps by adopting an integrated sociolinguistic perspective that examines contemporary Yoruba personal naming practices through the complementary insights of Variation Theory and Social Identity Theory. By bringing together linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions of naming within a single analytical framework, the study provides an updated explanation of how Yoruba personal names continue to preserve indigenous identity while adapting to the realities of contemporary society. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates in sociolinguistics, African onomastics, and linguistic anthropology and provides a foundation for future research on indigenous naming systems in multilingual communities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in William Labov's Variation Theory and Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory. Although the two theories emerged from different intellectual traditions, they are complementary in explaining contemporary Yoruba personal naming practices. Variation Theory provides a basis for understanding how naming patterns respond to changing social conditions, whereas Social Identity Theory explains why personal names continue to function as powerful symbols of identity, belonging, and cultural continuity. Their combined application makes it possible to examine Yoruba personal names not only as linguistic forms but also as social resources through which speakers negotiate culture, religion, family heritage, and contemporary identities.

Variation Theory

Variation Theory, developed by William Labov (1972), rests on the principle that language varies systematically according to social conditions rather than randomly. Linguistic choices are influenced by factors such as age, gender, education, religion, occupation, social class, and geographical location. Over the years, this perspective has expanded beyond phonological variation to include vocabulary, discourse, multilingual practices, and naming systems (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021; Holmes & Wilson, 2022). The theory therefore provides an appropriate lens for examining how wider social changes influence contemporary naming practices. Within the Yoruba speech community, personal names have never existed independently of society. Traditional names reflected birth circumstances, kinship, occupation, religious beliefs, and family history. Contemporary naming practices, however, increasingly mirror urbanization, migration, globalization, formal education, and religious pluralism. The growing preference for hybrid names and the coexistence of indigenous Yoruba, English, biblical, and Arabic names illustrate how naming adapts to changing social realities without abandoning its linguistic foundations. Viewed from this perspective, linguistic variation is not a sign of cultural decline but evidence of the dynamic relationship between language and society.

Social Identity Theory

While Variation Theory explains why naming practices change, Social Identity Theory provides insight into why personal names remain important symbols of belonging. Tajfel (1978) and Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that individuals construct part of their identity through membership of social groups such as families, ethnic communities, religious organisations, and cultural institutions. Language plays a central role in expressing these affiliations, and personal names often become one of the earliest and most enduring markers of social identity.

Among the Yoruba, names communicate considerably more than personal identity. They preserve ancestry, reflect religious affiliation, acknowledge family history, and express communal values. Names such as Adébáyò, Bàbátúndé, Olúwátóyìn, and Ifẹ̀olúwa illustrate how linguistic forms embody cultural memory while simultaneously reflecting contemporary social realities. As Ehineni (2019) observes, the meanings attached to Yoruba names emerge from shared cultural experience rather than from lexical interpretation alone. Similarly, Ojebode & Odebode (2021) contend that Yoruba personal names remain important repositories of indigenous philosophy and collective identity.

Relevance of the Framework to the Study

The integration of Variation Theory and Social Identity Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding contemporary Yoruba personal naming practices. Variation Theory explains how religion, education, migration, urbanization, and globalization contribute to changes in naming patterns, whereas Social Identity Theory illuminates the cultural meanings that speakers continue to attach to those names. Together, the theories demonstrate that contemporary Yoruba naming is characterised by both continuity and innovation. Personal names continue to evolve alongside changing social conditions, yet they remain enduring expressions of cultural identity, historical memory, and indigenous knowledge. This integrated perspective therefore provides a suitable analytical foundation for examining the interaction between language, society, and culture in contemporary Yoruba communities.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on Yoruba personal naming have consistently shown that names are closely intertwined with the social, cultural, and linguistic life of the Yoruba people. Although researchers have adopted different theoretical orientations and methodological approaches, there is broad agreement that Yoruba names perform functions that extend beyond personal identification. They communicate family history, preserve indigenous knowledge, express religious beliefs, and reinforce cultural identity. The differences among existing studies lie mainly in their analytical focus rather than in their recognition of the cultural significance of naming.

Akinnaso's (1983) pioneering studies remain foundational to research on Yoruba anthroponymy. Using linguistic and ethnographic evidence, he demonstrated that Yoruba

personal names are systematically linked to birth circumstances, kinship, occupation, religion, and communal values. His work established that naming is governed by identifiable cultural principles rather than individual preference. While these studies continue to shape contemporary scholarship, they were conducted within a social environment that differs considerably from present-day Yoruba society, where globalization, migration, digital communication, and religious pluralism increasingly influence naming practices. Although scholars generally agree that Yoruba personal names extend beyond mere identification, they differ in their analytical emphasis. Akinnaso (1983) conceptualizes names as repositories of indigenous knowledge that transmit cultural values across generations. Expanding this position, Ikotun (2010) demonstrates that names also function as discourse resources through which speakers express affection, humour, criticism, and solidarity in everyday interaction. More recently, Ehineni (2019) shifts attention from semantic description to ethnopragmatic interpretation, arguing that the meanings encoded in Yoruba names are inseparable from the sociocultural contexts in which they are produced and interpreted. Collectively, these studies suggest that Yoruba anthroponyms operate simultaneously as linguistic, cultural, and social resources, although relatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how contemporary social transformations are reshaping naming practices.

More recent scholarship has shifted attention to the impact of social change on indigenous naming traditions. Ojebode & Odebode (2021) contend that Yoruba names continue to preserve collective memory and indigenous philosophy despite increasing globalization. Likewise, Abiodun, Ọlaiya, & Ọladeji (2022) show that proverb-derived Yoruba names remain productive in contemporary society, indicating that traditional wisdom continues to shape modern naming practices. It has been observed that changes in personal names often reflect negotiations among religious beliefs, personal identity, and cultural affiliation rather than a rejection of indigenous values. Collectively, these studies suggest that Yoruba naming traditions are evolving through adaptation instead of cultural displacement.

Despite these important contributions, existing empirical research has concentrated predominantly on the semantic, ethnographic, or pragmatic dimensions of Yoruba personal names. Comparatively fewer studies have examined how religion, education, globalization, migration, urbanization, and identity interact simultaneously to influence contemporary naming practices. Most investigations also focus on particular aspects of naming rather than providing a holistic sociolinguistic explanation of the processes shaping present-day Yoruba anthroponymy. The present study addresses this gap by integrating these social variables within a unified analytical framework. In doing so, it offers a more comprehensive understanding of how contemporary Yoruba speakers preserve cultural identity while responding to the changing realities of modern society.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The analysis is based on thirty purposively selected contemporary Yoruba personal names obtained from documentary sources. The names were examined to identify recurring sociolinguistic patterns that characterise present-day Yoruba naming practices. Five major themes emerged from the analysis: religious identity, cultural identity and family heritage, parental aspirations and life experiences, globalization and hybrid naming practices, and the preservation of indigenous knowledge.

Theme One: Religious Identity in Contemporary Yoruba Naming

Religious influence emerged as one of the most dominant features of contemporary Yoruba naming. Names such as Olúwátóyìn, Olúwadámíláre, Olúwafémi, Olúwaseun, Olúwabùkúnmi, Iféolúwa, Olúwatósìn, Tolúlópé, Aníféolúwa, and Ayòmídé consistently express gratitude, faith, divine favour, and dependence on God. Their frequency suggests that many contemporary Yoruba families deliberately employ personal names to communicate religious commitment while preserving the indigenous Yoruba language as the medium of expression.

Theme Two: Cultural Identity and Family Heritage

The corpus equally demonstrates the enduring importance of names associated with ancestry, kinship, royalty, and traditional birth practices. Names such as Adébáyò, Adéwálé, Adéyemí, Ògúndélé, Ògúnrindé, Táíwò, Kèhìndé, Ìdòwú, Àlàbá, and Bàbátúndé preserve information relating to royal descent, birth order, family lineage, and historical continuity. Their continued use indicates that cultural heritage remains an important consideration in naming despite increasing social and cultural transformation.

Theme Three: Parental Aspirations and Life Experiences

Another important pattern identified in the data is the use of personal names to document family experiences and express parental expectations. Names including Ayòdéle, Ayòmíkún, Ayòbámi, Ayòkúnlé, Dúrójayé, Dúrótimí, Mòdúpé, Tèmítópé, Olásunkanmí, and Tolúlópé reflect joy, gratitude, hope, perseverance, prosperity, and fulfilment. These names illustrate how naming continues to provide families with an opportunity to preserve significant experiences while projecting positive expectations for the future.

Theme Four: Globalization and Hybrid Naming Practices

The findings further reveal the growing influence of globalization on contemporary Yoruba naming. Hybrid combinations such as David Adébáyò, Mary Iféolúwa, Daniel Adéwálé, Grace Olúwátóyìn, Joshua Olúwaseun, Esther Olúwafémi, Sarah Ayòbámi, Samuel Ayòdéle, Deborah Adéyemí, and Michael Ògúndélé demonstrate the coexistence of indigenous Yoruba names with English, biblical, and Arabic names. These naming patterns suggest that many contemporary families seek to balance cultural heritage with religious affiliation, educational aspirations, and global social realities.

Theme Five: Personal Names as Repositories of Indigenous Knowledge

The analysis also indicates that Yoruba personal names continue to preserve indigenous knowledge and cultural memory. Names such as Bàbátúndé, Adébáyò, Ògúndélé, Táíwò, Kẹhíndé, Ìdòwú, Àlàbá, Ifẹ́olúwa, Olúwadámíláre, and Ayòkúnlé embody beliefs relating to ancestry, kinship, leadership, spirituality, resilience, and communal values. Their continued relevance demonstrates that naming remains an effective means of transmitting Yoruba history, philosophy, and cultural traditions across generations.

Summary of the Findings

The analysis reveals that contemporary Yoruba personal naming practices continue to reflect the interaction between language, culture, and society. Although social transformation has introduced new influences into naming, indigenous Yoruba linguistic forms remain central to the construction of identity and the preservation of cultural heritage. Religious affiliation, family history, parental aspirations, globalization, and indigenous knowledge emerged as the principal sociolinguistic factors shaping personal naming practices among contemporary Yoruba speakers. These findings provide the basis for the discussion in the next section, where they are interpreted in relation to existing scholarship and the theoretical framework adopted for the study.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that contemporary Yoruba personal naming practices continue to reflect the close relationship between language, culture, and society. Although rapid social transformation has altered many aspects of everyday life, the evidence suggests that Yoruba personal names have adapted rather than declined. Instead of abandoning indigenous naming traditions, contemporary Yoruba speakers have reinterpreted them to accommodate changing religious beliefs, educational experiences, migration, urbanization, and increasing global interaction. This pattern highlights the resilience of Yoruba anthroponymy and illustrates how language can preserve cultural continuity while responding to social change. Similar observations have been reported by Akinnaso (1983), Hough (2016), and Holmes and Wilson (2022), all of whom argue that personal names remain important cultural resources through which communities negotiate identity and preserve historical memory.

One of the most significant findings is the growing prominence of names expressing religious identity. The widespread use of names such as Olúwátóyìn, Olúwadámíláre, Olúwafẹ́mi, and Ifẹ́olúwa reflects the central place of religious belief in contemporary Yoruba society. This finding is consistent with the observations of Fakuade, Friday-Otun, and Adeosun (2019), who note that Christianity and Islam have substantially influenced naming preferences without eroding the indigenous linguistic structure of Yoruba names. Likewise, Ikotun (2013) argues that many Yoruba Christians now combine biblical and indigenous names as a means of expressing both religious conviction and ethnic identity. The present study, however, suggests that the process extends beyond the adoption of new religious values. Rather than

replacing indigenous traditions, contemporary parents consciously preserve Yoruba linguistic forms while using them to articulate evolving spiritual identities. This indicates that religious transformation has encouraged cultural adaptation instead of cultural displacement.

The findings also underscore the enduring importance of names associated with ancestry, birth order, family lineage, and royal heritage. The continued popularity of names such as Adébáyò, Táíwò, Kẹ̀hìndé, and Bàbátúndé demonstrates that traditional systems of social organisation continue to influence naming practices despite increasing modernization. This observation supports Akinnaso's (1980, 1983) argument that Yoruba personal names preserve historical experience and indigenous philosophy. It also aligns with Ehineni's (2019) ethnopragmatic analysis, which maintains that the meanings attached to Yoruba names emerge from shared cultural knowledge rather than from lexical interpretation alone. Ojebode & Odebode (2021) similarly contend that personal names constitute an important element of Yoruba intangible cultural heritage. While these studies have convincingly established the cultural significance of Yoruba names, they paid comparatively less attention to the ways contemporary social change reinforces the continued relevance of traditional naming. The present findings therefore extend existing scholarship by demonstrating that indigenous names remain active symbols of belonging and cultural continuity within an increasingly interconnected world.

The findings further reveal that contemporary Yoruba parents continue to use personal names to document family experiences and communicate aspirations for their children. Names expressing joy, gratitude, perseverance, hope, and fulfilment, such as Ayòdélé, Ayòkúnlé, Dúrójayé, Mòdúpẹ́, and Tẹ̀mítópẹ́, illustrate that naming remains closely connected to everyday social life. These names do more than commemorate important events; they preserve emotional experiences and project expectations for the future. This observation resonates with Akinnaso's (1983) view that Yoruba names reflect the circumstances surrounding birth and family life, while Ehineni (2019) similarly argues that their meanings become fully intelligible only within the cultural experiences shared by members of the speech community. Hough (2016) also observes that personal names, irrespective of culture, frequently function as repositories of memory and social values. The present study adds another dimension by showing that, in contemporary Yoruba society, names continue to provide families with a linguistic means of expressing resilience and optimism despite changing economic and social realities.

Another important outcome of this study is the emergence of hybrid naming practices. The increasing combination of Yoruba names with English, biblical, and Arabic names reflects the growing influence of globalization, migration, education, and intercultural interaction on contemporary identity. Earlier studies have interpreted such developments in different ways. Fakuade, Friday-Otun, & Adeosun (2019) regard them as evidence of the adaptability of Yoruba naming traditions, whereas Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) argue more broadly that

linguistic choices often reflect the multiple social identities negotiated by speakers in multilingual communities. Holmes and Wilson (2022) similarly contend that language adapts continuously to changing social relationships and communicative needs. The findings of the present study support these perspectives but also indicate that hybrid naming should not be interpreted as evidence of cultural decline. Instead, it reflects a conscious effort by many Yoruba families to balance indigenous identity with the opportunities and expectations associated with an increasingly global society. Indigenous names therefore remain central to personal identity even when they appear alongside names of foreign origin.

The analysis equally demonstrates that Yoruba personal names continue to preserve indigenous knowledge and cultural memory. Names associated with ancestry, kinship, leadership, spirituality, and communal values remain widely used because they connect individuals with their cultural heritage and family history. This finding supports the position of Ojebode & Odebode (2021), who describe Yoruba names as important repositories of indigenous philosophy, and aligns with Green-Lotven's (2024) argument that personal names function as communicative resources through which communities transmit historical knowledge across generations. More recently, It observed that even where individuals modify or replace personal names for religious or personal reasons, indigenous names continue to influence cultural identity and social belonging. The present study strengthens these observations by demonstrating that contemporary Yoruba naming practices remain effective mechanisms for safeguarding indigenous knowledge despite increasing exposure to global cultural influences.

Taken together, the findings reveal that contemporary Yoruba personal naming practices are characterised by continuity as much as change. While religion, education, globalization, migration, and technological advancement have reshaped aspects of naming, they have not displaced its indigenous foundations. Instead, Yoruba speakers continue to reinterpret traditional naming conventions in ways that accommodate contemporary realities without losing sight of their cultural heritage. This study therefore extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that Yoruba personal names are not static cultural artefacts but dynamic sociolinguistic resources through which identity, cultural memory, and indigenous knowledge are continually created, negotiated, and transmitted. In doing so, it offers an updated understanding of Yoruba anthroponymy and contributes to wider debates on language, identity, and cultural sustainability in contemporary African societies.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have important implications for sociolinguistics, onomastics, language education, and cultural preservation. They demonstrate that Yoruba personal names continue to serve as linguistic resources through which identity, family history, religious beliefs, and indigenous knowledge are expressed and sustained. This reinforces the

need for greater scholarly attention to indigenous naming systems as valuable sources of sociolinguistic evidence.

For language education, the study highlights the importance of incorporating Yoruba naming traditions into school curricula and cultural studies. Doing so will not only improve learners' understanding of the language but also strengthen their appreciation of the cultural values embedded in Yoruba names. Such an approach will contribute to language maintenance by encouraging younger generations to recognise the significance of indigenous naming practices.

The study also has practical implications for cultural institutions, historians, and policymakers. As globalization continues to reshape patterns of language use and identity, deliberate efforts are required to document and preserve Yoruba personal names and their meanings through digital archives, community-based initiatives, and cultural education programmes. These measures will help ensure that future generations continue to access the rich linguistic and cultural heritage encoded in Yoruba anthroponymy.

Conclusion

This study examined contemporary Yoruba personal naming practices from a sociolinguistic perspective with the aim of explaining how language, culture, and society interact in shaping naming traditions. The findings reveal that Yoruba personal names remain meaningful expressions of religious identity, family heritage, parental aspirations, and indigenous knowledge despite rapid social transformation. Although globalization, migration, education, and religious pluralism have introduced new naming patterns, these developments have complemented rather than displaced the indigenous foundations of Yoruba anthroponymy.

The study further demonstrates that contemporary Yoruba speakers continue to negotiate tradition and modernity through naming, preserving cultural continuity while responding to changing social realities. Personal names therefore remain important cultural resources through which historical memory, communal values, and social identity are transmitted across generations. By bringing together sociolinguistic and onomastic perspectives, this study provides an updated understanding of Yoruba naming practices and underscores the continuing relevance of indigenous languages in preserving Africa's cultural heritage. It is hoped that the findings will stimulate further research on naming systems and contribute to ongoing efforts to promote the vitality of Yoruba language and culture.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes several important contributions to scholarship on Yoruba anthroponymy and sociolinguistics. First, it provides an updated account of contemporary Yoruba personal naming practices by examining how religion, globalization, migration,

education, and changing patterns of identity influence naming decisions in present-day Yoruba society.

Second, unlike many earlier studies that focused primarily on the semantic, cultural, or pragmatic interpretation of Yoruba names, the present study adopts an integrated sociolinguistic perspective that explains naming as a product of both linguistic variation and identity construction. This broader analytical approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between language and society.

Third, the study demonstrates that hybrid naming practices should not be interpreted solely as evidence of cultural erosion. Instead, they represent the creative ways in which Yoruba speakers negotiate indigenous identity within an increasingly globalised environment. By highlighting this dynamic relationship between continuity and change, the study enriches contemporary debates in sociolinguistics, African onomastics, and linguistic anthropology while providing a useful foundation for future research on indigenous naming systems.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Educational institutions should incorporate Yoruba personal naming traditions into language, literature, and cultural studies curricula to promote greater awareness of indigenous linguistic heritage.
2. Government agencies, cultural organisations, and research institutions should establish digital repositories for documenting Yoruba personal names, their meanings, and the cultural histories associated with them.
3. Parents and community leaders should be encouraged to preserve meaningful indigenous Yoruba names while adapting responsibly to contemporary religious and social realities.
4. Future studies should adopt broader empirical approaches involving participants from different Yoruba-speaking communities to examine regional, generational, gender, and religious variations in naming practices.
5. Policymakers, traditional institutions, and the media should collaborate to promote Yoruba naming traditions through cultural festivals, public enlightenment programmes, and digital platforms as part of wider efforts to preserve Nigeria's linguistic and cultural heritage.

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