

THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF COMPOUND SURNAMES AMONG SOME EDUCATED YORUBA MARRIED WOMEN

Gbenga Fakuade

gbengusfakus@yahoo.com

Bukola Fadahunsi

bukkyswift@gmail.com

Adewale Rafiu

rafenadewale@gmail.com

Blanle Adekeye

bolanleadekeye@yahoo.com

University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

Abstract

This article discusses the sociolinguistics of compound surnames among some Yoruba married women in Nigeria. The study establishes the fact that some married women still retain their fathers' names after marriage due to some social reasons or factors. The need for easy recognition, the desire to avoid problems of official documentation in the offices after marriage, efforts to guard against the extinction of family names, and to protect ancestral roots, among others, are found to be responsible for this practice. The paper argues that some of the social factors which are found to be responsible for the use of compound surnames by married women include education, religion and exposure to western culture. The paper argues further that this practice among educated Yoruba married women is indicative of erosion of this aspect of Yoruba tradition as a result of contact with Islam and the West. The paper recommends a similar investigation among illiterate Yoruba married women and also among other ethnic groups such as Hausa, Igbo, Tiv, Efik, Fulani etc, to determine other reasons, if any, for this practice. Two main methods were used to collect data for the study: questionnaire and oral interview. The data collected were presented in tabular form, using descriptive statistics.

Keywords: Compound surnames, Yoruba, marriage, lexemes, onomastics, anthroponomastics, naming

1. Introduction

Names are essential mediums of communication in every part of the world. However, Africans and the Yoruba in particular attach a great importance to the use of names. Names are what people are known with and are called by; they communicate and tell stories about people and circumstances surrounding their birth.

In Africa, once a child is born, he/she is christened and this is called naming, the act of naming children in Africa often involves ceremony, the ceremony could be seven days or months after the child is born. This varies from culture to culture, however, in fact, naming is a specific linguistic act, intimately linked with values, traditions, hopes, fears and events in people's lives. Names reveal the many preferences of their owners (or givers) in terms of real life objects, actions, features and beliefs (Rosenhouse, 2002). In naming a new baby and consciously choosing a word to refer to a new person, that word has enormous symbolic power: it will identify the person, and at the same time the name can send a message, express a hope or prayer, perpetuate a cultural or religious tradition (Alford 1987:51).

When a child is christened, he/she is usually given a personal name along with other names in addition to his/her family name. The family name is what is referred to as the surname or last name. It serves as a family identity; usually, this is the name a woman drops when she has been married, as this is the tradition in many parts of the world, especially in Africa where this is seen as a symbol of respect, submissiveness and love from a woman to her spouse (Fadahunsi, 2013).

However, many women in contemporary Nigeria, for different reasons, have failed to embrace this tradition, instead they retain their fathers' names and merely 'celotape' their spouses' names as appendages, thereby bearing compound names. Some women are believed to have combined their maiden names with their husbands' names for different kinds of patronages derivable from their maiden names. Some women have claimed that they bear compound surnames out of their overwhelming love and loyalty to their fathers: some women who have made their marks in their various professions/disciplines long before marriage are also fond of using compound surnames as they have been known in their careers by their maiden names. People have expressed different opinions or views concerning the use of compound surnames by married women. Thus, this study investigates why married women bear compound names. It also seeks to investigate and gauge the attitude of their spouses and the society towards this practice. The study also addresses the morphological processes in the formation of these 'double-barreled' surnames.

2. The Yoruba People and Marriage

The Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria are a nationality of approximately 50 million people, the vast majority of whom are concentrated primarily within Nigeria, but who are also spread throughout the entire world (Fani-Kayode, 2013).

They are believed historically to have migrated from the Middle-Eastern part of the world during the medieval period. They are a religious group of people who are mainly Christians, Muslims or of Traditional beliefs. The Yoruba people have different stories about their origin, but they all relate to the same ancestor “Oduduwa”

The Yoruba people take their culture seriously; greetings form an important part of daily life. While greetings are exchanged, it is important for the people to smile, and when asked about the wellbeing of someone, time is given to respond as this is considered to be polite. The Yoruba greet their elders with a lot of respect, the boys prostrate to greet their elders, while their female counterparts greet by kneeling on one or two knees depending on the tribe.

These people also have a very rich cultural background; there are different forms of dance, arts, music, dressing and philosophy. The Yoruba people occupy the following states: Lagos, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti and some parts of Kwara, Kogi and Edo States. They have a general language called “Yoruba” (Yooba) which is the form that is taught in schools in the South Western zone of Nigeria (Bamidele 2013). There are other dialects of the language from different places such as Ondo, Ijebu, Isale-Eko, Oyo and Ekiti, etc.

The family is the most sacred and significant institution to the Yoruba, who are child-centred, ruled by the elderly, and controlled by adults. The family is an effective unit of political control, religious affiliation, resource allocation, and assurance of safety. Thus marriage for the Yoruba man or woman is a necessity as noted by Fadipe (1970); cited in International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family (2003):

For a man or a woman who has reached the age of marriage to remain single is against the mores of the Yoruba

Marriages in Nigeria take place under three legal systems (Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2003): Civil (Statutory Law), Islamic (Maliki School of Law), and Customary (tribal/traditional law) (Denmark 2005, Research Directorate 2006). Even when couples marry under statutory law, customary law generally prevails in personal matters. Customary law tends to vary from one ethnic group to another, from state to state and more often from one town to

another (Ewelukwa 2002). It is important to indicate that the three marriage types mentioned above are practised among the Yoruba of Nigeria.

Ideally, marriage should establish the foundation of the family. When it does, marriage is a union not only of the two spouses but the two extended families to which they belong. Marriage itself is the proof that both spouses are good products and ambassadors of their families. By successfully going through the demanding steps to the Yoruba marriage, the spouses are a good reflection on the quality of character of their families. It indicates they have shown restraint as people who are well brought up, focused, enduring, reliable, disciplined, and also as people who are able to defer gratification until they are ready for the responsibilities of adulthood. In other words, the ability to satisfy the hierarchy of human needs was critical to the Yoruba evaluation of the spouses' readiness to be united in marriage. They ought to be able to provide food and shelter and safety. They ought to have the level of commitment and patience needed to inculcate a sense of belonging and self esteem in their children (Babatunde, 1992; cited in International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family 2003). All these, commitment and patience, are a reflection of the Yoruba philosophy which is based, according to Sotunde (2009), on a fulfilled life which consists of personal freedom, relative comfort, reproductive existence, conformity with communal values.

As soon as the marriage ceremony is completed, the woman must drop her father's name and take her husband's name in line with the existing tradition. Whether the wife takes the husband's name as tradition dictates, or hyphenates his father's name to her husband's, a certified copy of marriage certificate or sworn affidavit for change of name is sufficient for her.

3. The Yoruba people and Naming

All over the world, names function as means of identification. Several authorities on naming agree with this view (Doob1966; Olusanya and Olurode 1994, Akpabio 2003). They argue that more than for identification, names communicate and provide a lot of information about their owners such as the bearer's position in the family; the circumstances surrounding the birth of the bearer; parental/family situation; family hopes, desires, expectations and aspirations; financial situation; links with departed family members; and a way of keeping records (i.e. historical accounts) .

Among the Yoruba, it is generally believed that names are like spirits which would like to live out their meanings, therefore parents do a thorough search before giving names to their babies. Naming ceremonies are performed with this in mind. According to Ogunyemi (2009), the eldest family member is given the responsibility of performing the ceremony. Materials used are symbols of the hopes, expectations and prayers of the parents for the new baby. These include honey, kola, bitter kola, alligator pepper, water, palm oil, sugar cane, salt and liquor. Each of these has a special meaning in the world-view of the Yoruba. For instance, honey represents sweetness, and the prayer of the parents is that their baby's life will be as sweet as honey.

After the ritual, according to Johnson ((1997), the child is named and other extended family members are given the honour to give their own names to the child. They do this with gifts of money and clothing. In many cases, they would want to call the child by the name they give him or her. Due to this, a new baby may end up with more than a dozen names. Therefore, a name is, in a sense, the ultimate vehicle of the whole range of a person's identities. Apart from just referring to a person, names, in countless unspoken ways, express a person's ties to his or her gender, family, ethnic group, and religion, and are therefore a kind of condensation of all that person's identities. Thus names are carriers not of meaning, but of associations of personal and cultural significance: a great difference from lexical elements.

4. Lexeme, Onomastics and Anthroponomastics

The terms lexeme, onomastics and anthroponomastics are not only very useful to the discussion and understanding of the topic of this paper, they constitute an indispensable tripod for our theoretical discourse. Therefore, it is important to have a clear understanding of what these terms mean. In a broadest sense, a lexeme is the term used in linguistics to refer to a minimal unit of language (a word) with a semantic value (distinctive meaning) and often a specific cultural concept attached to it. Lexemes are the basic elements of a language. They are made up of one or more form- meaning composites called lexical units. For example, in the English language, *give*, *gives*, *gave*, *given*, and *giving* are forms of the same lexeme, *give*. Lexeme can be divided into single-word lexeme, double-word lexeme and multi-word lexeme which by extension forms single-word name, double-word name, and multi-word name in Yoruba, e.g. Aina, Adeolu, and Oluwarantinmi, respectively.

Looking at lexeme from the perspective of onymic motivation (onymic motivation answers the question why a proper name is a proper name. It explains the function of a lexeme and of a proper name as to individualize, identify and differentiate a unique referent) ,Olostriak (2009) defines lexeme as the proper name because it reflects the communication need of respective speech community, namely to denote a given object of an extra-linguistic reality as a unique one and only entity.

Onomastics is the study of proper names and their origin, as well as the changes they undergo as a result of long use in the source language or in connection with their borrowing into other languages. Proper names are divided into anthroponymy (study of personal names), toponymy (study of place names), Zoonymy (proper names of animals), astronmy (names of stars), cosmonymy (names of the zones and part of universe), theonymy (names of gods), etc. From above definition, one can therefore define anthroponomastics as a branch of onomastics which studies the names of human beings: given names, surnames, clan names, matronyms, patronyms, teknonyms, nicknames, ethnonyms (Coates 2005, Vikameln 2013).

5. Theoretical Model

The study of names is a multidisciplinary field that has occupied the attention of philosophers of language, anthropologists, sociolinguists, linguists and ordinary people. Personal names can best be analysed by a combination of both philosophical and anthropological notions. In logical and philosophical sense, a name refers to a different element of human experience i.e. to an individual or collective entity, which it designates or denotes.

One branch of onomastics that deals with the study of proper names including their forms and use is anthroponomy (Algeo 1992). Lexemes found in anthroponomastics bear witness to the values and ideas of the society concerned, revealing details about people's origins and professions, tradition and fashion, social rank, etc. Anthroponomastic studies are based on the theory that there is a strong interface between a people's language and their cultural practices. It mirrors on how language is used as cultural practices and how language is used as a powerful tool to view and understand the world view of a particular society. One can therefore use language as a microscopic lens to view and understand the social practices and day-to-day activities of a society. The language of the people is therefore the exit valve through which their beliefs and thoughts, cognition and experiences are articulated (Farb 1993).

The language is a manifestation and description of the complexity and diversity of people's way of life and practices. The language of the people is manifested in their naming

systems and practices, marriage, family, kinship, politics, economics, occupation, health systems, religious beliefs and practices, law, funeral activities, etc. The language of the people also depicts the social stratification of the society (Agyekum, 2006).

The theoretical concerns of contemporary linguistic anthropology as enunciated by Duranti (1997) have to do with three interconnected analytical notions that help to understand the function of language in culture. These are (i) performance, (ii) indexicality and (iii) participation. All the three are important to our discussion of use of compound names.

Indexes are signs that have some kind of existential relation with what they refer to either spatial, temporal, social or personal (Silverstein 1976). In indexicality, according to Duranti (1997), cited in Agyekum (2006), language is used as a tool through which our socio-cultural world is constantly described, evaluated and reproduced. If we say that words are indexically related to some objects and reality of the world it implies that words carry with them a power that transcends beyond mere identification and tagging of people, objects and properties. The maiden names and surnames of married women in Yoruba community both have different socio-cultural reference and interpretation.

Performance refers to a domain of human action where special attention is paid to ways in which communicative events are carried out. Women that bear compound names are operating within the framework of purposive function of socially constituted behaviour. Such names therefore perform certain socio-cultural functional actions.

Participation sees communicative events as belonging to a bigger class of social activities that go beyond the linguistic expressions and utterances to the socio-cultural domains. Compounding father's name with husband name by married women conforms to both performance and participation for such compound names may indicate how such women assess themselves in the society and how they function in social activities.

6. Method

This section of the paper discusses the methods used in the collection of data, the methods of data analysis, the subjects/respondents, etc. It is important to state the central focus of this study, which is: to investigate the use of compound surnames by married women. To achieve

this aim, the study made use of two groups of subjects; (i) married women who bore compound surnames (Group A Respondents), and (ii) Men and women who were either married or single and did not bear compound surnames (Group B Respondents).

The number of women in group A was 50, while group B also had 32 respondents (twenty men and twelve women). There was no particular age grade for the respondents to attain. The criteria used in selecting subjects in group A were: (i) they must be females, (ii) they must bear compound surnames, and (iii) they must be married or must have been married before. Group B was meant to gauge or measure the reaction or feelings or attitude of the society towards the use of compound surnames by married women. They were randomly selected based on two criteria: (i) they must be adults and (ii) they must not bear compound names.

Two main methods were used to collect data for this study: questionnaire and oral interview. Two types of questionnaire were used: the first one contained thirteen questions and it was administered among married women who bore compound names, the second questionnaire had eleven questions and it was administered among group B respondents. The total number of questionnaires administered was 50 for group A and 32 for group B as indicated above. The study also made use of oral interviews. It combined structured and unstructured interviews to authenticate or corroborate the responses got from questionnaires. It is important to indicate that 50 respondents who completed the questionnaires were the ones who provided us with verbal information on the use of compound surnames by married women. The data collected were presented in tables, using descriptive statistics.

7. Data Presentation and Discussions

A Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age	Number	%
20-29	12	24
30-39	18	36
40-49	14	28
50-59	6	112
Total	50	100

This table indicates that 36% of group A respondents are between 30-39 and that 28% are between 40-49 years of age, 24% fall between 20-29 years, and 12% are between 50-59 years of age.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Religion

Religion	Number	%
Islam	29	58
Christianity	21	42
Others	-	-
Total	50	100

Table 2 shows that the practice cuts across both Islam and Christianity: 58% of the respondents who bear compound surnames are Muslims, while the remaining 42% are Christians.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification

Educational qualification	Number	%
Bachelor's degree	28	56
Master's degree	15	30
Doctorate degree	7	14
Others	-	-
Total	50	100

The table above shows that 56% of the respondents have bachelor's degree, 30% have master's degree and 14% have doctorate degree.

Table 4: Reasons for Bearing Compound Surnames

Reasons	Number	%
Easy identification	24	56
Prevention of extinction of family name	6	12
Family tradition	6	12
Love for family name	6	12
Avoidance of problem of academic documentation in the offices	4	8
Safeguarding the ancestral roots	4	8
Total	40	100

Table 4 summarizes the reasons given by married women who use compound surnames for their choice of surnames. 56% of the respondents claim that the desire to continue to be identified by their father's names is the main reason for answering compound surnames.

Table 5: Structural Order of Compound Surname

Order	Number	%
Husband's name before father's name	14	28
father's name before husband's name	36	72
Total	40	100

Table 5 shows that 28% of the respondents compound their surnames by putting their husbands' names before their fathers', while the remaining 72% compound theirs by putting their fathers' names before their husbands'. The 72% who put their fathers' names before their husbands' claim it is because their fathers were the first men they knew, the remaining 28% who put their husbands' names before their fathers' claim that they do so to show that they are married to their husbands and that the tradition is that once a woman is married, her husband comes before any other man.

Group B Respondents

Table 6: Group B's opinion on the use of Compound Surnames by Married Women

Opinions	No of Respondents	%
Women bear this name for fame, recognition and affluence	12	37.5
There is nothing wrong with bearing this kind of name	8	25
It is a sign of pride	3	9.37
Some women bear this name because they have no male sibling	3	9.37
Lack of submission to husband	3	9.37
To avoid problem of academic documentation	3	9.37
Total	32	100

Table 6 shows the opinions of group B respondents on the use of compound surnames by married women. The table shows that married women use compound surnames for fame, recognition and affluence.

Table 7: Disadvantages of Using Compound Surnames

Disadvantages	No of Respondents	%
Discord in the family	6	18.75
Lack of total submission to husband	6	18.75
Lack of respect for husband	6	18.75
Continued attachment to family	3	9.38
None	3	9.38
Husband's insecurity	3	9.38
Problems with husband's family	3	9.38
Name might be too lengthy	2	6.25
Total	32	100

Table 7 shows some of the perceived disadvantages of using compound surnames.

Findings

In table 1-7, we presented our data with a brief analysis. In this section, the interpretation of the data, and oral interview findings in relation to the central objectives are presented. Tables 1, 2 and 3 show the general information about the demographic attributes of married women who bear compound surnames: their ages, religions, education and qualifications were presented in percentages. Women between the ages of 30-39 are the highest as they constitute the largest part of respondents which is 36%. Women between 40-49 years of age are the second largest, they form 28% of the respondents, 24% of the respondents are between the ages of 20-29 and 12% are between the ages of 50-59, thus the study shows that the practice is commonest among middle-aged women. It is important to indicate that 58% of the women are Muslims, while 42% are Christians. The least educational qualification is Bachelor degree (56%). This was corroborated by the women's responses during the oral interview.

Table 4 provides answer to the first research question, which asked why the married women bear compound surnames: 56% of the women claimed they use compound surnames to retain the existing easy identification through their fathers' names. Other reasons given include prevention of extinction of family names (12%), love for family name (12%), maintaining family tradition (12%), guiding against problem of academic documentation in the office (8%), safe guarding ancestral roots (8%).

It was noted during the oral interaction that all the women discussed the use of compound surnames with their husbands before they got married to them i.e. they bear the compound surnames with the consent of their husbands. It was further noted that 70% of these women's husbands were in support of their wives, however 30% were indifferent. During the interview we gathered that only educated women are fond of using compound surnames. It is not a common practice in Yoruba society.

When asked whether their children bear compound surnames, 50% of the women answered in the affirmative.

Table 5 shows the order of compounding the surnames: 72% of the women allow their fathers' names to precede their husbands', while the remaining 28% put their fathers' names after their husbands'.

Table 6 shows the opinions of the public on the use of compound surnames by married women: 37.5% of the selected respondents were of the view that women bear compound surnames for fame, recognition and affluence, especially those with influential fathers, 25% said there was nothing wrong in a woman compounding her husband's name with her father's after marriage, 9.37% believed it is a sign of pride, another 9.37% claimed that some women bear compound surnames because they have no male sibling to keep the family name alive, another 9.37% were of the view that women who bear compound surnames are arrogant and non-submissive to their husbands, the remaining 9.37% believe that some women bear compound surnames to avoid problems that could stem from total change of names. Going by the figures and our analysis of table 6, it is clear that most people do not support the use of compound surnames by married women.

Table 7 shows the perceived disadvantages that the society believes that the use of compound surnames by married women could bring, 18.75% were of the view that use of such names could cause disharmony or discord between the woman and her husband; 18.75% claimed it could bring about lack of total submission to the husband; 9.38% believed that the use of compound names is not indicative of the woman's attachment to her family lineage, it shows further that this kind of surname could make the husband feel insecure as it will seem the woman can just drop her husband's name and move on at any time to marry another person, 18.75% said that such women would not respect their husbands.

8. Conclusion

We have, in this paper, established that some educated Yoruba women use compound surnames for different reasons or social factors. The reasons given by these married women include, among others, the following: guarding against the extinction of family names, avoidance of problems of academic documentation, protection of ancestral roots, easy identification, etc. The study also found out during oral interaction with the respondents that the use of compound surnames is common among the educated, particularly those who have influential fathers, who are business tycoons, and politicians. Furthermore, it was established that women that bear compound surnames do so with the consent of their husbands, even though the society at large does not support and encourage these women to retain their fathers' names after marriage as most people believe that a woman should change her name completely to her husband's after marriage. Thus this study is a pointer to erosion of Yoruba tradition, i.e. the tradition that demands a married woman to answer her husband's name after marriage, as a result of contact with Islam and the West. The study further shows that Yoruba tradition is not static.

Some of the social factors which are found to be responsible for the use of compound surnames by married women include education, exposure to western culture and religion (some of these respondents who are Muslims claim that their religion gives room for the use of compound surnames).

Finally, since the focus of this study is the use of compound surnames among the educated Yoruba married women, it is recommended therefore that future research on this subject be conducted among uneducated Yoruba married women. A similar study should also be conducted among other ethnic groups such as Igbo, Hausa, Fulani, Kilba, Efik, Tiv, Berom, etc. to determine whether there are other reasons for this practice.

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