Cultural Colouration and Implication of Translating Onomastic construction of Nigerian Proper Names

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ABSTRACT

Translating Nigerian proper names from Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa languages into English is a daunting task to literary translators. This is due to linguistic and cultural complexities of the meaning of such names. The present study uses the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa as a case study. The objectives of the study are to: assess whether the naming practices are similar across Nigeria's ethnicities, highlight factors that affect the interpretation of the names identified, and analyze what such names imply in the cultural beliefs of the people that use them both within Nigeria and beyond. The study adopts the operational framework of translation procedures developed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) as its methodology. The data of the study consists of assorted Nigerian proper names from the three ethnic groups in the country. The data are analyzed from the perspective of historical and cultural approach. The paper reveals how Nigerians value their world of culture and language by illustrating their onomastic essence and cultural liberty of the people. The paper concludes that translation of Nigerian proper names should be carried out with adequate knowledge of Nigerian languages and culture.

Keywords: Translation, Onomastics, Identity, Nigerian Name, Culture.

Introduction
Translating an element as historically and culturally significant as Nigerian proper names can be a herculean task to translators; more challenging is translating them into a different language. This raises the question: How can a name that has been carefully crafted to suit a particular setting, occasion and time be relevant in another language and another culture altogether? This forms one of the greatest challenges of translating Nigerian proper names in texts and contexts. The

translation of Nigerian proper names is significant in that it helps to shape, globalize the social thinking and culture of the people. The composition of literary texts requires some verbal aerobatics and this equally makes it difficult for the translator to translate proper names into another language. This does not mean that such translation is impossible. This paper focuses the translation and inter-connectedness of Nigerian proper names in relation to culture, memory and identity.

WHAT IS A PROPER NAME?

Naming is a universal practice of most cultures and an important family tradition. In the Bible days till now, name and naming ceremony assume a crucial position to the arrival of a child in the family. Among the Yoruba in Nigeria, name can imply a means of inviting God or Supreme Being to be part of household that believes in God or a particular deity; this is why a lot of rituals go into naming activity. One of the things that make Nigerians believe that other races are not quite sensitive to the African mode of knowing and knowledge` transmission is the way others misrepresent names of both human beings and elements in Africa Ariole (2011:530). Yoruba names can be discussed and analysed connotatively and denotatively. According to Babalola and Alaba (2003: ii), Yoruba names can be considered accordingly:

> On the basis of Yoruba Grammar, the variety in the structure of Yoruba personal names can be identified and appreciated. Many a Yoruba personal name is a complete simple sentence. On the other hand many a Yoruba personal name is the abridgement of a sentence. Furthermore many a Yoruba personal name is a nominalization.

Proper names are mono-referential, but not mono-functional linguistic label of people. Proper names do not come into existence by chance but according to a causal connection (Nissila 1962: 39). According to Bertills (2003:17), "Name-giving principles are to some extent, universal phenomena in different language areas, but there are, for example, large cultural differences between the function and use of personal names in western language cultures and Eastern tradition. In Nigeria, particularly, among the Yoruba people, names form the cultural label of the people long before the advent of Christianity and Islam. Today, Christianity and Islamic religions have greatly influenced the naming pattern of the people in Nigeria. Thus traditional names that make references to family deities, cultural practices and exploits have been corrupted with beliefs in foreign religions. For example in Yoruba land, it is a common practice for a Christian from traditional worshippers' background whose name or father's name has to do with deities such as *Ogun*, *Sango*, *Oya*, *Ifa*, *Osanyin*, *Esu*, *Egungun*, *Oro*, etc. to change his name based on his religious belief. For example, a boy named Ogunwale (the god of iron has arrived home) could drop the prefix "ogun" for "Jesu" (Jesus) to bear *Jesuwale* (Jesus has arrived home). Sangobiyi (god of lightning and thunder brought this to the world) could discard the prefix that has to do with the god and reconstruct his name to become: Oluwabiyi (The Lord has brought this one to the world). In most societies, naming is mostly characterized by communal rituals which are usually considered as sacred. In view of its significance, Nigerian names are usually carefully selected for the name-bearer. A name signifies an individual being and possesses a unique reference; (mono-referential). Bertills (2003:19) distinguishes between proper names and common names:

> " According to our general knowledge of onomastic and proper names in each language, we have no trouble distinguishing conventional names from common nouns or other proper names even when they are not within a context. The question of the borders and differences between common noun and proper noun/name can be traced far back and is of crucial significance in onomastic research (…) Proper names differ from common nouns orthographically and referentially but also morpho-syntactically and semantically. However, to put it simply, the criterion for distinguishing between proper names and common nouns is that proper names identify individual characters, places and institutions whereas common nouns generically refer to objects or states of affairs or individual representatives thereof, for example chair(s), elephant(s),car(s)" (Bertills, 2003:19).

While common nouns can appear as proper nouns and vice-versa, the only function of proper name is identification whose meaning is largely dependent on pragmatic, linguistic and cultural domains. Proper names have traditionally been referred to as being some kinds of labels attached to individuals in order to single them out from other individuals, without describing or characterizing them in any way Vi`kuna (1990:7). Bloomquist (1993:15), Anderson (1994:15) work on derivations and simple names. A name can be a combination of all the three.

The consideration of name formation also recognizes issues related to whether the criterion for the coining of the names is primary as opposed to secondary name-formation, Leibring (2006:311-312). The evaluation of name formation as compared to name-selection is directly connected to the criteria for proper names in general, but in literary contexts it is even more dependent on the relationship between the name and the reference as the referent steers the criteria of name-giving (ibid). Name formation relies more on the semantic aspects of the name. Proper names are "linguistic signs". Linguistic sign is anything that can stand for something else (Berger 1999:1). Consequently, proper names are verbal signs that "stand for", a referent. They can also be considered as semiotic signs, that are related to their referents by resembling them (icon), by being casually connected to them (index) or by being tied to them by convention (symbol) (ibid:1). The traditional viewpoint of proper name has defined names as including denotative meaning but not connotative meaning:

> Proper names are not connotative; but they denote the individuals who are called by them, but they do not indicate or imply any attributes as belonging to those individuals. When we name a child by the name "Paul" or a dog by the name "Caesar, these names are simply marks used to enable those individuals to be made subjects of discourse (Aschenberg, 1991:9)

The affirmation of Aschenberg (1991) is that proper names are distinguishing labels of an individual. However, Kiviniemi (1982:151), states that semantic content of the name, in all probability, has been significant from the point of view of name-giving. Thus, the reason for the choice of a transparently semantic name is reflected in the name-giver's opinions, expectations and hopes for the referent rather than the referent itself. (ibid: 150). In Yoruba traditional name giving, name is not for the purpose of identification or labeling alone. It has cultural implication. Family beliefs, family position, status, profession, specific events, festival, religion, certain occurrences at birth and season come to play in naming process. On a pragmatic level, one requires basic information to understand the meaning of a proper name. The context supplies information about a name; it will never affect the denotative relationship between some proper names and their

referents. The study of semantics of proper names and meaning is largely a question of terminology and definitions. The semantic of proper name is also uniquely dependent on the difference between *Langue* and *Parole* and has implications for its study:

> A further implication for the study of names in literature is that in reading literary works, the knowledge of the world and the knowledge of language intertwine with each other. But perhaps the most delicate issue concerning the meaning versus the contents of proper names lies in their characteristics of drawing so many aspects together: the author, the reader and their respective language culture, backgrounds simultaneously as they actualize language, culture and the literary context in which the knowledge of the world, literature and knowledge of language are mixed up. Bertrills (2003:31).

Recent works on literary onomastics have been quite stimulating. Bertrills (2003) treats the subject of African names from the perspective of children literature. Fernandez (2006:56) recognizes three things translators generally do with names: substitution, transcription, and outright omission. Within the framework of translation studies, Ulf and Hal (2008) presented a method to transliterate names in the framework of end-to-end statistical machine translation. The system is trained to learn when to transliterate. The study also involves a discussion of the challenges in name translation evaluation. Nord (2003), drawing on a corpus of eight translations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* into five languages (German, French, Spanish, Brazilian, Portuguese, and Italian), the paper discussed the forms and functions of proper names in children's books and some aspects of this translation. The study claimed that an important function of proper names in fiction is to indicate in which culture the plot is set. Additionally, a few other studies on onomastic can be mentioned, for instance the work of Victor Ariole (2011) and Bariki (2009). These studies provide very useful information on onomastic research and particularly anthroponomy which is the study of cultural imperative of personal names. These studies provide very useful contribution to names, the construction of characters within the context studied. The study is significant with regards to providing useful insights on Nigerian proper name formation and meaning in texts and contexts.

Bariki (2009) studies the socio-cultural and ethno-pragmatic significance of African names as used by the Yoruba and Izon of Nigeria and the Akan of Ghana. From the perspective of linguistic anthropology, he revealed the non-arbitrary nature of these names and demonstrated the need to translate them, particularly in fictional texts, so that their significance may be preserved. Initial works by linguists and anthropologists were mainly pre-occupied with the classificatory function of naming and the relationship between names and social structure Bariki (2009:1). Linguists have amply demonstrated that the variety of the structure of personal names in Africa can be appreciated through the grammar of the language in question (ibid: 1).

CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF NIGERIAN PROPER NAMES

In Nigeria, names possess historical, social, cultural and religious bearing that go beyond ordinary identification. Nigerian proper names are strongly connected to the word in terms of language and culture. The cultural value of Nigerian name refers to the value attached to a given name, its semantic, semiotic load, and circumstances surrounding a child's birth, all` these suggest the linguistic label to be given to the child. Most names are clearly culture-specific, stronger reference

to culture is evident in names such as: Ayesoro, Emoruwa, Ikuemenisan among others. Readers who are not familiar with these cultural names will obviously not understand the cultural import of these names.

The problem of culture brings about the challenge of translating proper names in other tongues because every language portrays the world in diverse way and has its own grammar structure, grammar rules and syntax variance. Since every name is unique, and culture-bound in most cases, the problem of culture brings about the challenge of translating proper names. Some theorists like Hague (2012:101) affirm that name must be translated because of the following reasons:

a) Because a particular word in one language often contains meanings that involve several words in another language.
b) Because grammatical particles are not available in every language.
c) Because idioms of one language and culture may be utterly perplexing to speakers from another language and culture.

Benveniste (1971:223-224) affirms that language is the nature of man and "provides the very definition of man" Adams, (1986:729). The problem of language and cultural difference strains the simple transfer of proper names in language, because "no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached Sapir (1956:69). Conversely, equivalence consists of many countenances; for instance, it is an essential condition for translation, an obstruction to advancement in translation studies Hague (2012: 101). Traditional Yoruba naming culture gives names to a new born on the sixth day. Ifa deity, directs the choice of name to be given through predestination process after divination. Today Yoruba name their child the eighth day of birth. The ceremony is usually performed by high ranking members of the family such as, father, mother, grandparents, and next of kin. The spiritual requirements that will help the child to accomplish his destiny on earth are carried out with rituals. Most of these naming ceremonies are of two stages: the secret ceremony where all taboos, rituals are observed before the public ceremony, which is usually characterized by feasting and entertainment of invited friends and extended family members. Yoruba names are classified as follows: Destiny names (known as Oruko Amutorunwa- names brought from heaven). E.g. Aina, Ige, Ojo, Taiwo, ilori, etc. Yoruba believe that certain children are born with preordained names relating to the events of their birth and that parents have no control over such a child's destiny name. These names are: Idowu- given to a child after a set of twins, Alaba- after Idowu, Idogbe – a name given to a child born after Alaba. Ige- a child born in breech position, Dada - with dreadlocks, Aina Orosun; a baby girl born with umbilical cord wrapped around his neck, Ojo: a baby boy born with umbilical cord wrapped round his neck; Olugbodi – born with more than ten (10) fingers/toes, Abiona – born while on a journey or by the roadside; Babatunde – born into a family where a father or male ancestor recently passed away, Yetunde – name given to daughter born into a family where a mother, ancestor has recently passed away.

Acquired Names: (OrukoAbiso): Ibiyemi (suitably born), Olusoga (made to be the head by God), Adegbuyi (worthwhile crown), etc. For a name such as Ekundayo- a name given in relation to bitter events that precede the joyous arrival of the child into the family (sorrow turned to joy).

Appellative names or nick names: (oruko inagije). Arikuyeri (death dodger), Ekun Oke (lion on the top).

Hypocoristic names (Oruko Oriki): Agbeke (embraced to cherish), Arike (cherished when seen), Ajoke (embraced by all). Praise names: This is a recital name that underscores achievement, greatness of ancestors of various Yoruba families.

Redemptive names: (OrukoAbiku): Ikukoyi (death has rejected this one), Kokumo (dies no more), Malomo (don't die again), Durojaiye (live and enjoy life), Igbekoyi (earth disowns this one), Ikudaisi (death spares this one).

It is believed that names are so powerful that they have an impact on life, behaviour, integrity and success of a child.

TRANSLATION ANALYSIS OF SOME NIGERIAN PROPER NAMES

Yoruba Proper Names

In this section we shall analyse some Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa names in relation to the practical achievement of the name-bearers in the society. These names are:

(a). Obasanjo Olusegun Okikiola:
Obasanjo – One that has come to rule and reign for ever
Olusegun – Godwin
Okikiola – Famous for wealth

Yoruba believe that the name a person bears is so powerful that they bear on the life, behaviour, achievement, integrity and success of a child. This is true of the above name. Former Nigerian President, Olusegun Okikiola Obasanjo born on 5 March 1937 from the Yoruba ethnic group bears this name. He was a former Nigerian Army General, who ruled Nigeria between13th February, 1976 to 1st October, 1979. He served as the elected civilian President of Nigeria between 29th May, 1999 to 29th May, 2007. Obasanjo equally reigned as the Chairperson of the African Union between 2004 and 2006. Though Obasanjo is not fully in power in Nigeria today, but remains *a king maker* who continues wield influence in the political landscape of the country. Yoruba believe the power behind this name follows the bearer to achieve his destiny on earth.

Another type of such name is:

(b). Oye Bandele.
Oye, in Ekiti dialect is translated as chieftaincy or title.
Bandele means that which follows me home (to the family).

Oye Bandele, whose name suggests crown, success and achievement, was born in Ekiti State. He is a man of many crowns. Currently, he is serving as the Vice Chancellor of Anchor University, Lagos. He served as Vice Chancellor of Ekiti State University, having served as Vice Chancellor of The Univeristy of Education, TUNEDIK and University of Science and Technology, Ifaki-Ekiti, Nigeria between 2008 and 2011. Against all odds Professor Oye Bandele fulfils his destiny as dictated by his name.

In an attempt to address the semantics of Nigerian proper names and their cultural significance, the translator as reader and interpreter should evince a high degree of reflection.

Cultural loaded names demand good cognitive understanding that can fully describe the spiritual space of a person with reference to the name he bears. Although individual differences exist from one society to another, the culture to which one belongs is paramount in the development and manifestation of powers and progress attached to a given name.

(c). Names attached to deities: Omifunke is interpreted as a child given by water spirit to cater for

The name has high spiritual connotation. Omifunke: *The Water spirit has given this child to me to take care of* means that the child was born through consultation with the Water goddess. Such names are not easy to translate unless there is clear understanding of the cultural implication of such names by the translator. It presupposes that the parent had some initial challenges in conception; the challenge that led to seeking help from Water goddess. It equally connotes that the child was conceived in the spirit world before being given birth to by his mother. The implication is that the destiny and life of this child will be ruled by Water Spirit called "Mammy Water", the Water goddess. Semantically, this name has deixis, as it is always labelled on female folks. This name is connotative in sense in tha:. First, since water flows from one point to another, and it is known across the globe, it means that the child will be known and respected across the continents of the world. It equally means that since a man cannot do without water that he will not drink it, it means that the child will be loved in any community she chooses to live in life. To corroborate this view, Fernandez (2006: 56) asserts that proper names often act as dense signifiers that give clue about the destiny of a character.

In order to guarantee effective translation of such name into another language, the translator has to ensure that both the source text name conveys the meaning of same message in the target language and culture. This could be achieved when the translation carries elements that express the meaning of the original name and sounds natural to the native speakers of the target language.

Igbo Proper Names

Among the Igbo in Eastern part of Nigeria the name "Okafor" opens up a world of memories and experiences as well as happiness in Igbo socio-cultural society. "Okafor" represents a name given to a child that is born on "Afor day", that is a market day. This name becomes a unique icon for the bearer and can be linked to double notion of names and memories. The same goes for names such as: "Nweke", a child born on "Eke day" and "Nworie", a child born on "Orie day". Duncan 2004 cited in Botolv (2012:98) posits that names which commemorate important events or personalities from a country's history can be significant expressions of national identity with powerful symbolic importance. Although onomastics is considered as a linguistic discipline, it is also linked to other research domain such as cognitive linguistics. Among the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria, most people would agree that it is fundamental for people to be familiar with memories of events surrounding their names. In other words, the name a person bears, and the stories of events surrounding such name diachronically and synchronically creates the collective spirit of the name. The name is a key to memories and experiences Huden (1994:33). Such names " are important features of national and territorial identity" Saparov (2003:179) . A good proper name should have the capacity to communicate not only the ideological knowledge, but also cognitive, emotional and historical knowledge. Within the theoretical onomastics, one of the great

issues regarding the content and function of a name is whether it has a "meaning" or "sense" beyond its reference Meike, Noemi et al (2012:99). A good proper name should have more extended meaning than the object which it ordinarily refers. Searle (1969:172) claims that:

> But the unique and immense pragmatic convenience of proper names in our language lies precisely in the fact that they enable us to refer publicly to objects without being forced to raise issues and come to an agreement as to which descriptive characteristics exactly constitute the identity of the object. They function not as descriptions, but as pegs on which to hang descriptions.

From the above analysis, "Afor" represents socio-economic heritage of the Igbos, coined and handed over to the people from one generation to another. It is unique icon of memory in that it gives us more information about the socio-cultural and economic heritage of people tied to their past. Afor is though identified with past memories of the Ibo; we can say that this proper name shows the close relationship between a man and his environment, through the lenses of times. If a person has some meta-linguistic and historic awareness, he may listen to Igbo proper names as voices from past memories which function as a textual representation, often in an obsolete language of the historic landscape Weide et al (2012:102). "Afor" thus represents collective onomastic memory and heritage of the Igbo's past.

Hausa Proper Names

Among the Hausa speaking race in Nigeria, proper name forms not only linguistic expression referring to a person in the real or imagined world, it is also a symbol that brings about a variety of feelings. For example, the name such as "Tanko", "Bawa" and "Dongodaji" translated respectively as "the "Redeemer", "the bush has rejected me" and "the mighty forest" are symbolically memorable names. They connect the bearers to historic events. For instance, "Bawa" translated as the bush has rejected me connects the bearer to his specific locality, that is, "the bush". This name creates the impression and feeling of belonging to a natural environment. The bush provides the icon of attachment to the natural environment. In Nigeria, it refers to the sepulcher, the grave where dead people are created interred. This name is synonymous with Abiku. It implies that the child died several times at birth or at unripe age has now decided to stay alive for long as the sepulcher has rejected him. The idea of bush in African setting has extended meaning beyond a surface meaning it represents, thus, underscoring the cultural capacity, onomastic typology and memory of the name. "Dongodaji" is a metaphor of the "heir", a sustainer of the family line. This is the point at which one can affirm that there is something in a name in Nigeria and Africa at large.

It is of note that foreign religions in Nigeria have sharpened the naming structure and colouration of the people. People, for example would not want naming their children or continue to bear names that have coloration of deities and memories of traditional festivals. Thus such names as Sangobiyi (god of thunder gave birth to this one), Aborode (born during the period of Oro festival); Oro is a deity females dare not see or watch; if they dare the warning, they die instantly, Ogunsina (god of iron has paved way), etc. Those that were given such names change

them to Oluwabiyi (God has brought this to life), Aboluwade (coming with God), Oluwasina (God has made a way) etc respectively. This religious extremism has gone a long way in eroding the cultural beliefs and memories of the people. Some have even gone to the extent of completely discarding their ancestral traces through names by adopting colonial names. This attitude has gone a long way to denigrate their origin and sell them into cultural inferiority. African names are not given without reasons whether historical or eventful. Calling someone by his proper traditional name can shape his destiny, reconstruct his future and possibly bring him fortunes. Translators of Nigerian names need proper circumstantial, historical and occupational understanding of such names they translate into another language and culture for adequate reproduction of messages the names carry.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have shown how diverse natures of Nigerian names can challenge the translator's competence. It is found out that, proper name in Nigeria context is characterized by heavy load of semantic components. The role of the translator is critical; the translator must go beyond linguistic differences between languages to decode sense of name; he should be able to understand and convey the cultural similarities and differences between the source and target languages.

From the study, we equally show that culture and language are inseparable and they go parallel in the sense that one cannot exist in isolation of others. Naming practices and processes do not differ significantly in the three ethnic groups studied but rather give us an insight into socio-cultural basis and inter-connectedness of names to culture, identity and memory among the people. A deeper understanding of the culture of the original name is essential if the names are to be appropriately rendered into the target language and culture. The translator of Nigerian proper names should be involved in managing the translation of these names by effecting necessary changes that will not violate the principles of faithfulness. This paper has equally shown remarkably that beyond the portrayal of the social values, norms and material culture of the people, Nigerian proper names reveal convincingly how the people apprehend their universe against the background of their daily experience. This study provides insights into the cultures, values and language of Nigerian traditional society. It is believed that this study presents sufficient grounds to stimulate further research by scholars interested in onomastic study in a wider interest

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