A Sociolinguistic Study of Characters' Names in Ahmed Yerima's *Ikudeti*

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Abstract

Researchers have examined Ahmed Yerima's plays over the years, using different literary and discursive approaches to the exclusion of the works' onomastic resources. The present study is designed to fill this gap. The study examines all the characters' names in Ahmed Yerima's recent tragedy, Ikudeti using the VARIES model by Nilsen and Nilsen (2006), with the aim of unraveling the names' thematic and sociolinguistic imports in the universe and extra-textual context of the text. Thus, the paper examined the characters' names in relation to the variables of vocation, age, religion, informality/formality, ethnicity and sex. The study indicated that the text features a preponderant of 13 vocational names (31.7%). This is followed by ethnicity or ethnic related names which have a frequency of 11 (26.8%). In the same vein, religious names have 5 frequency (12.1%) while the trio of age related, informal/formal and sex related names have 4 frequency (9.8%) each. Finally, the study proved that there is an economy of words in naming as the theme(s) and general preoccupation of the text are captured by one name, "Ikudeti" which reveals the totality of the playwright's intention.

Keywords: Characteronymy, Onomastics, Ahmed Yerima, Ikudeti, Varies Model

Introduction

The first linguistic gift a child acquires at birth is a name, whether a good one or a bad one. Every child is given a name based on the culture and tradition of the parents in relation to the environment of the birth of the child. The naming system is as old as the bible days when God named the first human being and called him Adam. In proffering an answer to the question what's in a name? Oduyoye (2024)[1] says "A lot... A name, then, is a mark, a *wasm,* "a mark, a brand". To be nameless is to be without identity. A name identifies the person." However, not all names are given at birth: some are given based on the character of the bearer as he/she grows up, and such names are regarded as

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[1] Oduyoye, M. "Oriki and oruko in Yoruba tradition" In*: The celebration of a living legend-his life, works and everything in-between.* Ed, Adebisi Afolayan(Austin: Pan African University Press, 2024): 113-124.
The Holy Bible King James Version. (China: Holman Bible Publishers,1999) p., 2

nicknames (Odebode, 2010).[2] This is applicable in the case of Ikudeti, a king and a protagonist in Ahmed Yerima's *Ikudeti*.[3] The king thinks death could not kill him. But he eventually goes into coma and hangs between life and death. In Yoruba land, which is the setting of the play, it is said that *"Ile l'aa wo, k'a to so omo l'oruko"* (consider the context before naming a child). The Yoruba also believe that *"oruko nii ro omo"*, that is "a person's name influences his life and personality". This is the case in *Ikudeti* where most of Yerima's characters are influenced by their names.

Meanwhile, a name is a social deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) (Odebode 2010). The few strands of letters woven together as a name can exhibit the occupation, religion, birth circumstance, geography, educational status and sex of the bearer among others. These socio-cultural elements are the emphasis of sociolinguistic research. That is why our preoccupation in the present study is on onomastics (the study and science of naming) and sociolinguistic study of Ahmed Yerima's *Ikudeti*.

Contextualisation of the Text

The play opens with the rumour of the death of King Ajantala Arabambi, nicknamed 'Ikudeti'. The king is, however, not dead yet but in a coma. The king's mother, Yeye, does not want her son to die without an 'Abobaku' (someone who dies in honour of the king to accompany him and serve him in the world beyond). This is hinged on the belief that dying without the rites could spell doom for the king and his lineage.

Yeye feels that Ogunbadejo Adejowa family, which is a rival royal family, is behind her son's ordeal. Though Arabambi's fate has been sealed by a covenant entered into by his mother with the witches and Esu Elegbara (the belligerent god), she seeks a way out for her son. She wants her son to outlive the seven years agreement she had with the coven of witches. The play later reveals some other mysterious causes of Ikudeti's ill fate as the reader is exposed to the king's uncultured lifestyle while healthy. King Arabambi took up the name Ikudeti because he believed he was immortal. The name's original intention was to give the impression that the king was too strong for death, but as he struggles to live or die, the name comes back to haunt him. The following lines, where Adifala addresses Yeye, captures the situation:

> Adifala:…You enthroned your son Ajantale Arabambi as king.
> You laced him with so much power, he thought he was
> Iku [death] himself. (*Ikudeti* p. 88)[4] [translation ours].
> King Arabambi Ikudeti eventually finds himself in a life-or-death situation. According to Osugbo, the monarch is still unconscious.

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[2] Odebode, I.O "A pragmatic study of names of characters in selected plays of Wole Soyinka". Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. (University of Ibadan: Department of English, 2010), 162.

[3] Yerima, A. "*Pegunrun Ikudeti Kutelu Osun (Four Plays)"*. (United Kingdom: Alpha Crowns Publishing Ltd., 2020)

[4] Yerima, A. *Pegunrun Ikudeti Kutelu Osun (Four Plays)*. (United Kingdom: Alpha Crowns Publishing Ltd., 2020), 88.

> Osugbo: Dead? Still. His back turned to our cravings.
> His ears turned off our noises, but he remains
> half-dead.(*Ikudeti* p. 72)[5]

Furthermore, he had inordinate ambition and was proud. Similarly, he exercised his power recklessly on his subjects. At present, he is, however, being punished alongside his mother who is also deceitful, adulterous and extremely ambitious. As the name, Ikudeti (death is forbidden) suggests, it is difficult for the bearer to pass away. The king is unable to rest in peace because of his mother's and his own terrible conduct. After slaying several Princes and the suitable man for the role, Yeye installed her son as king. In his conversation with Yeye, Adifala clarifies the issue as follows:

> Adifala: You enthroned him within a pool of blood.
> So he lived a life of excesses, he played a game
> of survival with death and met a shameful end.
> A death stripped of the honour of an Oba's death,
> an empty death fit only for the son of a common
> Eleshin. A bastard son. Omo ofo, lo kuku ofo.
> (*Ikudeti* p.88, emphasis ours)[6]

The quote above is insightful as it underscores the king's parentage. Eleshin, a common messenger, was his father. Thus, he is a bastard. Therefore, the Yoruba phrase "omo ofo, lo kuku ofo" in the quote means "a misfortune child, go and die a misfortune death." This is because he is a child of calamity. It was thought that the King's traumatic past was the reason he was unable to pass away. After killing the genuine father and all the potential princes, Oluawo, the leader of the cult, helped Yeye empower her evil son to stave off death, but they both failed to realise that the law of Karma may eventually catch up with them. Adifala makes an effort to convey this to Yeye succinctly as follows:

> Adifala: Yes. But you and that late Oluawo forgot that
> blood does not wash away that easy, it leaves
> stains in the cleft of little fingers. It is part of
> the stains which hunt your so-called innocent son now...
> (*Ikudeti* p. 89)[7]

Arabambi's reign is tyrannical and reckless, he lives as if he would never die and calls himself 'Ikudeti' or 'Gbekude' (he who fights with death and binds it). He becomes unruly to the witches who enthroned him and defies their rules. He later dies a miserable death like the commoner that he is and not like a king that he made himself. He is really hated by his subjects because of his recklessness and arrogance. Yeye, his mother, also suffers because her late husband later blames her for the way her son turns out as a wicked person. He further blames her for interfering with the will of the gods. Instead of admitting her fault, Yeye

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[5] Ibid., p 72.
[6] Ibid., p 88.
[7] Yerima, A. "*Pegunrun Ikudeti Kutelu Osun (Four Plays)*," P, 89.

excuses the king's evil deeds and disrespect for tradition by blaming these on the chiefs thus:

> Yeye: It was his chiefs. They taught him to disregard
> the little things about customs. They gave him
> the name Ikudeti assuring him that he could
> defeat death in a game of fall. He allowed them
> to creep into his personae. It was his chiefs Baba.
> (*Ikudeti*, p.98) [8]

Eventually, Yeye is rejected and sent out of the palace. She loses the glamour of the throne, the riches and affluence she so much laboured for. The play ends with the body of Ikudeti on stage waiting to finally expire as he has lived a life powered by Esu (the belligerent god) who denounces his sordid action on account of his power intoxication. The play is characterised by the themes of death, inordinate ambition, betrayal and wickedness.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework apt for this study is the VARIES Model by Nilsen and Nilsen (2006).[9] The model is derived from the Variability theory by William Labov (1972) cited in Ajileye (2011).[10] The latter deals with the different varieties of language available to a speaker and the choices he makes. The approach is meant to investigate language and societies in relation to language use. The theory holds the view that variation is intrinsic to linguistic structure. How a language is written or spoken differs based on individuals and situations or context of usage. Labov is of the opinion that differences in language use are normal and important in the functions of language.

The relevance or Significance of the variability theory to the present study lies in the submission of Syal and Jindal (2010, p. 63)[11] that "Particular changes come about in the language when it is used in particular social situations, depending on a variety of factors such as **the role of the participants, their social status, age, class, gender and the place of origin**" (emphasis ours). The variability concept is significant to the present research as this study sets out to examine the character names in Yerima's *Ikudeti* [12]in relation to the roles of the participants (i.e. characters), their social status, age, class, gender and the place of origin. Meanwhile, Nilsen and Nilsen's (2006)[13] improves upon the variability theoretician's work by formulating the VARIES model, which deals with linguistic choices in different context/situations. The model is made up of a set

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[8] Ibid., p.98.

[9] Nilsen, A & Nilsen, D. "Just how ethnic is ethnic humour". *Canadian ethnic studies/ Etudes Ethniques au Canada.* 38, no. 1 (2006): 1-9.

[10] Ajileye, M.K. "A sociolinguistic investigation of Anglicism in personal and business names in the Yoruba speech community". Unpublished PhD Thesis. (University of Ibadan: Department of English, 2011).

[11] Syal, P & Jindal, D.V. *An Introduction to Linguistics: Language, Grammar and Semantics*. (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India Learning Private Limited. 2010). p. 63.

[12] Yerima, A. "*Pegunrun Ikudeti Kutelu Osun (Four Plays)*," P, 89.

[13] Nilsen, A & Nilsen, D. "Just how ethnic is ethnic humour". *Canadian ethnic studies/ Etudes Ethniques au Canada.* 38, no. 1 (2006): 1-9.

of acronym summarisable in Odebode (2012).[14] The acronym captures: V (vocational jargons, A (age-related language), R (regional or religious language), I (informality/formality), E (educational jargons), S (sex language). These theories assisted the researchers in situating the characters' names within the sociocultural milieu and historical contexts that produce them.

Literature Review

Scholars have worked on the different aspects of onomastic studies. Some of these are reviewed as follows: Odebode (2010)[15] does a pragmatic analysis of names of characters in selected plays of Wole Soyinka. In the study, he delves into the etymology of onomastic properties of Soyinka's plays with the aim of discovering the important socio-pragmatic values of the names as they relate to the themes and styles employed by the playwright in each of the plays. He adopts Adegbija's pragma-sociolinguistic theory which combines pragmatic and sociolinguistic dimensions of textual analysis. The pragmatic approach involves the speech act, face act and cooperative principle while the sociolinguistic dimension involves the primary, secondary and tertiary layers as well as Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). He analyses 90 names of characters in the five selected plays namely: *Kongi Harvest, The Road, The Strong Breed, King Baabu* and *Death and the King's Horseman*, all by the same author, Wole Soyinka.

He discovers that "names, as linguistic elements, are socially diagnostic features which Soyinka has tactically manipulated in his plays to function interpersonally by serving as means of identification of the characters (bearers)." (Odebode, 2010)[16] Furthermore, he submits that the names in Wole Soyinka's texts are "instruments of creativity, memorability and dramaturgy… they provide a clear signal to the understanding and deconstruction of the texts." (Odebode, 2010)[17]. Odebode's research has updated our knowledge on onomastics and given insight into the creative use of onomastic properties by Wole Soyinka. The similarity of Odebode's (2010) work to the present study lies in its literary onomasticity, the geographical location of the researchers and the selected playwrights. However, its dissimilarity is imbedded in the literary and creative uniqueness of each of the selected playwrights and the difference in the plays selected. While Odebode (2010) [18]focuses on Wole Soyinka's texts, this paper focuses on Ahmed Yerima's *Ikudeti*.[19]

Odebode (2012)[20] studies the major characters' names in Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* and discovers that they perform the interpersonal, ideational and textual

[14] Odebode, I. "An ethnographic analysis of names of round characters in Wole Soyinka's *The strong breed". Theory and practice in language studies,* 2, no. 9 (2012):1776-1782.
[15] Odebode, J. "A pragmatic study of names of characters in selected plays of Wole Soyinka" P, 170-172
[16] Ibid., p.170.
[17] Ibid., p 172.
[18] Odebode, I. "A pragmatic study of names of characters in selected plays of Wole Soyinka" P, 170-172
[19] Yerima, A. "*Pegunrun Ikudeti Kutelu Osun (Four Plays)*,"
[20] Odebode, I. "An ethnographic analysis of names of round characters in Wole Soyinka's *The strong breed". Theory and practice in language studies,* 2, no. 9 (2012):1776-1782.

functions. The relevance of Odebode's study to the present research can be traced to its literary onomasticity while the difference lies in the selection of different playwrights and the theories adopted for each.

Nissan (2019)[21] exemplifies how different rabbinic messages or homiletic texts have elucidated the anthroponymy of characters in the bible. He makes use of ample biblical references to explicate the study. He concludes that "we have been dealing with a rich and long-lived cultural practice of manipulating personal names (or other proper names) in relation to some circumstances of their bearers" in the Holy Bible (Nissan, 2019)[22]. The study is related to the present research because it deals with character's names. The two studies differ because while the present study deals with the names of characters in a selected literary text, Nissan's (2019) work deals with the characters' names as used in the Holy Bible.

Ojebode (2019)[23] explores Abiku names in Osofisan's *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* in order "to bridge the gap between the past and contemporary realities and also to critique the Nigerian politics" (Ojebode, 2019)[24]. He uses onomastic semiosis in his demystifying study. He discovers that the 'birth and rebirth' characteristic of an *Abiku* child is synonymous with the instability of Nigerian politics with great effect of the corrupt leadership in the country. He, therefore, sees Osofisan's play as a satire and his use of *Abiku* names as purposeful. This study successfully updates our knowledge on the *Abiku* child in Nigeria and sheds light on the politics of Nigeria. The study is similar to the present one because it is literary onomastic research but it differs in its focus. Ojebode focuses on Abiku names in relation to Nigerian politics in Femi Osofisan's play, *who is Afraid of Solarin?* while we are focusing on characters' names in the play *Ikudeti.*

Hatab (2021)[25] works on multicultural aspects of names and naming in Arab world. He submits that "Significance of proper names is stressed in Arabic cultural heritage where names are viewed as true manifestations of social values and benefits" (Hatab, 2021, p.262). The researcher further examines the multicultural aspect of anthroponymy in Sudan, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and Jordan. He then examines the multicultural aspects of toponymy in Jordan and Egypt. He discovers that old names of streets are not discarded when renaming occurs. The new name will be on top while the old name will be written beneath the new one in order to show respect to the former name. Hatab's work is similar to the present one because it deals with onomastics.

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[21] Nissan, E. "Onomastic Wordplay in Roman-age to Medieval Rabbinic Biblical Exegesis, and Beyond". In Olivius ed. *Onomastics: Between sacred and profane*, (Romania: Vernon Press, 2019), pp. 355-384

[22] Ibid., p 372

[23] A.O. Ojebode, "African onomastics and politics: A demystification of *Abiku* names in Femi Osofisan's *Who's Afraid of Solarin?" Journal of humanities and social science studies*, 1, no. 5, (2019): 15-21.

[24] Ibid., p, 16

[25] Hatab, W.A. "Multicultural aspect of names and naming in Arab world". In *Names and Naming,* Felican O, Bughesiu A. eds. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 261-275.

Neethling (2021)[26] examines onomastics multiculturalism in relation to anthroponymy and toponymy in South Africa. He delves into the relationship between language and culture and examines the concept of onomastics, anthroponymy, toponymy and commemorative name change which occurred in South Africa after independence. He concludes that "it is clear that once a dramatic government change has taken place as in South Africa in 1994, the changing of names, particularly where individual human names are embedded in toponyms, will follow". (Neethling, 2021)[27] The study is relevant to the present research because both studies deal with names.

Odebode (2021)[28] studies "multicultural aspects of naming in Nigeria" from a sociolinguistic perspective. He examines multicultural names in Nigeria in order to discover the sociolinguistics significance of the names. The researcher examines the naming culture in the three major languages in Nigeria. Hausa (northern part of Nigeria) Igbo (Eastern part of Nigeria) and Yoruba (Western part of Nigeria) He discovers that Nigerian names originate from several multicultural factors such as marriage. According to him "a woman who is married into another culture tends to swap her maiden surname for her husband's" (Odebode, 2021).[29] He also discovers that religion is one of the bases for multilingualism in Nigerian naming system. While the influence of colonization and trans-Saharan trade have not been erased either. He further discusses some circumstantial names, imitative names and names generated from effect of emigration. He concludes that names in Nigeria, and Africa at large, have become the "instruments of multilingualism, creativity, historicity, ethnicity and memorability." (Odebode, 2021, p.449).[30]

Petrovic-Savic (2021)[31] studies 173 personal nicknames from the Jardar region in order to examine the names and discover if they could be classified based on semantics and discover the stories behind the selected nicknames. He recommends the registration of personal nicknames for record purpose. Petrovic-Savic's (2021) research is an important one because it delves into a basic onomastic aspect and adds to our knowledge on nicknames but differs because while we are studying characters' names, he studies personal nicknames.

Sliz and Farkas (2021)[32] work on Hungarian given name system of the modern period. They trace the history of the Hungarian names in line with its

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[26] Neethling, B. "Onomastic multiculturalism: Anthroponymy and toponymy in South Africa." In *Names and naming*, Felican O, Bughesiu A. eds, (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. 2021) pp. 243-260.

[27] Ibid., p. 259

[28] Odebode, I. "Multicultural aspect of name and naming in Nigeria: A sociolinguistic study" In *Names and naming,* Felican O, Bughesiu A. eds, (2021) pp. 437-453.

[29] Odebode, I. "Multicultural aspect of name and naming in Nigeria: A sociolinguistic study" In *Names and naming,* Felican O, Bughesiu A. eds, (2021) pp. 437-453.

[30] Odebode, I. "Multicultural aspect of name and naming in Nigeria: A sociolinguistic study", p. 449.

[31] Petrovic-Savic, M. "Personal nicknames from the Jadar region". *Onoma,* 56 no. 6, (2021) pp. 107-121. DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.56/2021/6

[32] Sliz, M & Farkas, T. "Dynamics of the modern Hungarian given name system". *Onoma, 56*

composition. Their study focuses on obvious changes in the structural aspect of Hungarian name system in the last fifty years and they delve into the 'name-building' aspects such as compounding, suffixation and back-formation as well. They discover in their study that over the years, the given name set has reduced due to official rules inability to expand. The gender related name sets change at different pace in mildly different ways as well as the gender name stocks. Other names as well have experienced one change or the other. Their study establishes the fact that change is inevitable. Sliz and Farkas' (2021) study is important to the present study because it is a recent onomastic work while it differs from the present study because it deals with Hungarian names while we are dealing with names in Ahmed Yerima's *Ikudeti.*

Smith (2021)[33] examines multiculturalism in Shakespeare's names and discovers his 'diverse use of names, especially among minor characters" (Smith, 2021)[34] He delves into Shakespeare's plays based on English history such as *Macbeth*, Lear and Cymbeline. He also studies other plays with other settings where he discusses the names "Shylock, Othello and Caliban. Smith's research is however similar to the present one because they both deal with names of characters. Although, while Smith studies how Shakespeare uses names in his plays, we are studying Yerima's use of names in *Ikudeti*.

In a related study, Oduyoye (2024)[35] invokes the praise names and personal names (anthroponyms) of the Yoruba people. He unravels the etymology of names and the characteristics of the praise names, circumstantial names and religious names, particularly the Christian, Islamic and traditional names. He discovers that rather than using their real names, most people prefer the use of attributive names which are more popular because such names express what the child is or what he or she is hoped to become; hence the aspiration of the name givers for the child is what metamorphosed into *oriki* (praise name). Enshrined in the *oriki* are the family linage history and exploits among others. The work updates our knowledge of the Yoruba names and etymology. However, while it treats generic names, this study is designed to consider literary names.

Data Presentation and Analysis

At this juncture, a list of data to be examined based on the cast in the play, is presented in table 1 below. This is followed by a detailed analysis of each name respectively.

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[33] Smith, G.W. "Multiculturalism in Shakespeare's names". In *Names and Naming,* Felican O, Bughesiu A. eds. (2021) pp. 467-481. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73186-1_30
[34] Ibid., p. , p.468
[35] Oduyoye, M. "Oriki and oruko in Yoruba tradition" In Afolayan, M. (ed), *Adebisi Afolayan: The celebration of a living legend-his life, works and everything in-between.* Austin: Pan African University Press. (2024), pp. 113-124.

Table 1: Data Presentation

S/N	*Ikudeti*
1	Yeye Oba
2	Olori Kekere
3	Osugbo
4	Oluawo
5	Iya Mopo
6	Adifala
7	Elesin
8	Iku
9	Oba Agunlejika Ajantale
10	Oba Arabamibi Ikudeti Ajantale
11	Chanter
12	Dancers
13	Singers
14	Drummers
15	Oje

Source: Authors

Data Analysis
The data above are given an in-depth exposition based on the principle of the VARIES Model as follows.
Vocational Names
(i) Servanthood: these are names related to the act of servitude.

Osugbo in *Ikudeti* is the senior Ilari, that is, the senior royal servant who should accompany the king to the next world. He reveals his identity, pedigree and role through the following lines:

> OSUGBO: I say this is why I have come. In four hundred
> years… this has never happened. I was born to follow him as
> the most senior Ilari, It was my job also to follow him to the
> land beyond. But I am here. (*Ikudeti* p.75)[36]

However, in the play, death spares him, taking the king alone and leaving the latter in coma. Though some may argue that the Osugbo is not a servant but in the universe of the selected play, he is categorised as one. **Elesin** is another servant in the palace who should accompany the king to the land of the dead and 'cater for his little needs' as explained by Osugbo when asked by Yeye.

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[36] Yerima, A. "*Pegunrun Ikudeti Kutelu Osun (Four Plays)*," p.75

> YEYE: How about Elesin?
> OSUGBO: His task is to serve him…cater for his   little needs,
> beyond. But he too lives.
> That is why we have come to ask you about what we have to
> do. (*Ikudeti* p.75)[37]

This is the custom of 'Abobaku' (he who dies with the king) in Yoruba land where a king is expected to be accompanied with people who would help him in the land of the dead and thus whenever a king dies, the Abobaku, Elesin, Osugbo and the youngest queen are to die with him. Failure of which is regarded as shameful to the royal family and the town as a whole. It is considered a sacrilege for a king to die alone in Yoruba land prior to the advent of western civilisation which stopped the tradition of serving royalty in the world beyond. Yerima dramatises the concept of Abobaku by dividing it into four (The Abobaku is also known as Oloko Esin [he who fetches vegetation for the king's horse] or Elesin Oba [the king's horseman]) in the universe of his text. Thus, through dramaturgy by the playwright, we have Abobaku, Elesin Oba, Olori Kekere (the youngest queen) and Osugbo as the four personalities expected to accompany the king to the grave in the text.

(ii) Royalty and Politics

We have characters connected to royalty in the play, *Ikudeti*. These are Oba Agunlejika Ajantale, Oba Arabamibi Enitan Ikudeti Ajantale, Olori kekere (youngest queen) and Yeye Oba (King's mother) also known as Ifedayo Abebi. All these characters belong to the royal family in the play. **Oba Agunlejika Ajantale:** This refers to King Agunlejika Ajantale. The name **Agunlejika** connotes a man well-built especially in his shoulders. The name is typically used to refer to a good husband (a hard-working one) as a nickname in the traditional Yoruba setting. As pointed out by Odebode (2010, p.25),[38] "Aristocle, the Greek philosopher (c.427-347 BC) is far better known as 'Plato' because of his broad shoulders." Thus, Yerima also makes use of the Yoruba version of the name which is 'Agunlejika' to describe the late king.

Ajantale can be interpreted as 'E je kin tale' in Yoruba, that is, allow me to grow old. The two kings who bear the surname however did not grow old as the first one was poisoned by his wife while the second remains half-dead and half-alive throughout the play, *Ikudeti.* According to Yeye, she killed the first Ajantale, her husband thus:

> YEYE: I killed him after he married my sister's daughter.
> What was he looking
> for? He had twelve wives already. I was a mother to that girl.
> I could imagine it, he plunging both of us at his pleasure.
> Then one day on top of me he called me her name. It was
> enough. No woman can take that. My stomach turned, and
> hatred brewed. So, I paid Apena to do away with him.

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[37] Yerima, A. "*Pegunrun Ikudeti Kutelu Osun (Four Plays)*," p. 75
[38] Odebode, I.O "A pragmatic study of names of characters in selected plays of Wole Soyinka." (2010), p. 25.

ADIFALA: How did he die?
YEYE: Apena lacerated his head with poison as he prepared
him for the Ojumo
festival. He dried up in his sleep…not a trace. I killed him for
me.
(*Ikudeti* p. 87 emphasis ours)[39]

Meanwhile, his supposed son, **Oba Arabambi Ikudeti
Ajantale,** who shares the same surname (Ajantale) with him,
remains in coma.

OSUGBO: Dead? Still. His back turned on our cravings. His
ears turned off our noises, but he remains half-dead. (*Ikudeti*
p.72)[40]

The name **Arabambi** on the other hand simply means 'Ara ba mi bi' that is, 'my
people helped me to procreate him.' The name is enough message to the
villagers in *Ikudeti* that he was not the biological son of the king but they seem
blind to the meaning of the name.

(i) Music

Chanter, Dancers, Singers, Drummers, Oje

The popular Yoruba saying *orin ni siwaju ote* (songs precede intrigues)
foregrounds these role names. The names are taken together because they deal
with music which resonates a great deal in any African palace. The presence of a
king is noticed in a Yoruba setting by chanting, singing, drumming and dancing.
Since our primary text deals with the issue of kingship and royalty, the author
deliberately uses these characters to enliven the setting and the play. The
analysis at this juncture includes Oje because masquerades are notable for
dancing in many cultures across Nigeria. Annually, masquerades (as the spirits
of the ancestors) are celebrated among Yoruba Africans. During this occasion,
each masquerade must dance and entertain the king in his palace. This
buttresses the words of Izevbaye (198, p.168)[41] that "whatever difference exists
between literature and life can be explained as a difference of the contexts in
which naming takes place. Because drama imitates realities, fictional names are
often taken directly from actual names in use."

Age Related Names

We have some age-related names in the play such as; Yeye Oba (King's mother),
Olori kekere (youngest queen) and Iya Mopo (the leader of the witches) in
Ikudeti. The name Yeye Oba, suggests the age of the bearer as the bearer must

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[39] Yerima, A. "*Pegunrun Ikudeti Kutelu Osun (Four Plays)*," p. 87
[40] Ibid., p. 72
[41] Izevbaye, D.S. "Naming and the character of African Fiction" In *Research in African
Literature,* (1981) 12 no. 3, pp. 162-184.

be a woman who is old enough to give birth to an adult who could rule a kingdom. Olori kekere is also suggestive of the bearer's age as a young lady or queen while Iya Mopo is culturally known as the 'goddess of beauty'. However, in the text, she is the head of the witches.

Religious Names

In Nigeria, we have three major religious groups viz, traditional religion, Christianity and Islam. While Islam and Christianity are foreign religions, traditional religion is native to Nigeria. This is why Ahmed Yerima makes use of a high number of the Yoruba traditional names in his text.

(i) Traditional Names

In *Ikudeti*, we have the following traditional names:

Adifala (This name is usually given to herbalists or Ifa family. Adifala means 'A da ifa la' one who divines to get wealth. Adifala is a Yoruba traditional priest who divines to make a living). He divines for the characters, particularly Yeye, in the text. **Oluawo** (Oluawo is the head of the traditional ritualists in a town in Yoruba land). He performs rituals in the universe of the text. **Oje (**Oje is a name related to masquerade and masqueraders). Yerima probably uses the trio of Adifala, Oluawo and Oje to draw a distinction among the names and to clarify their roles in the extra textual contexts of the text. This is necessary because people often misconstrue the roles of the traditional names for one another. On the other hand, **Iya Mopo** is the goddess of beauty according to Yoruba cosmology. However, in the text, Iya Mopo is the leader of witches. The character is probably named after the Iya Mopo hill at Igbeti in Oyo State, Nigeria. According to Yoruba history, Iya Mopo was a goddess who turned to the beautiful hill.

Informal/Formal Names: These are names that are either formal or informal in the play. Any name that has a title is regarded as a formal name while the informal ones are without titles. In a typical Nigerian setting, everyone wishes to be addressed with one title or the other. Thus, we have a replica of this in the play. There are four formal names in the text. These are: Yeye Oba, Olori Kekere, Oba Agunlejika Ajantale and Oba Arabambi Ikudeti Ajantale. All the names are equally royal names and they are evenly divided between two kings (one senior, and his successor) and two queens (one experienced and the other young).

Ethnic Names: This includes names that depict a particular ethnic group in the play. Ethnic names in *Ikudeti* include: Yeye Oba, Olori Kekere, Osugbo, Oluawo, Iya Mopo, Adifala, Elesin, Iku, Oje, Oba Arabambi and Oba Agunlejika. Thus, all the names are actually taken from the Yoruba linguo-ethnic group.

Sex Related Names : These are names that clearly indicate gender. Such names are either feminine or masculine in nature. **Yeye Oba** is a typical example because 'yeye' is obviously used to address the senior women. Other examples are Olori kekere (young queen), Oje (though a masquerade derivative name, the name is usually given to a male child in Yoruba land) and Elesin (the king's horseman; a role name meant for a man).

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From the analysis of the drama text with the VARIES model, it is discovered that the Vocational jargon has the highest frequency. In *Ikudeti*, we have a total of 13 names demonstrating the quality of vocational language out of 15 names. It should be noted, however, that some of the names possess more than one variable. For instance, the role name, Yeye Oba (mother of the king) is both traditional and age related. The percentage of each of the variables is calculated and explained in table 3 below.

Table 2: frequency and percentage of name variables

Name Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Vocational	13	31.7
Age related	4	9.8
Religious	5	12.1
Informality/formality	4	9.8
Ethnicity	11	26.8
Sex related	4	9.8
Total	41	100

Source: Authors

Based on table 2, we may submit that the text features a preponderant of 13 vocational names (31.7%). This is followed by ethnicity or ethnic related names which have a frequency of 11 (26.8%). In the same vein, religious names have 5 frequency (12.1%) while the trio of age related, informal/formal and sex related names have 4 frequency (9.8%) each. This analysis is captured by a bar chart in fig. 1 as follows:

Fig. 1: A bar chart showing frequency and percentage of name variables
Source: Authors (2024)

Source: Authors

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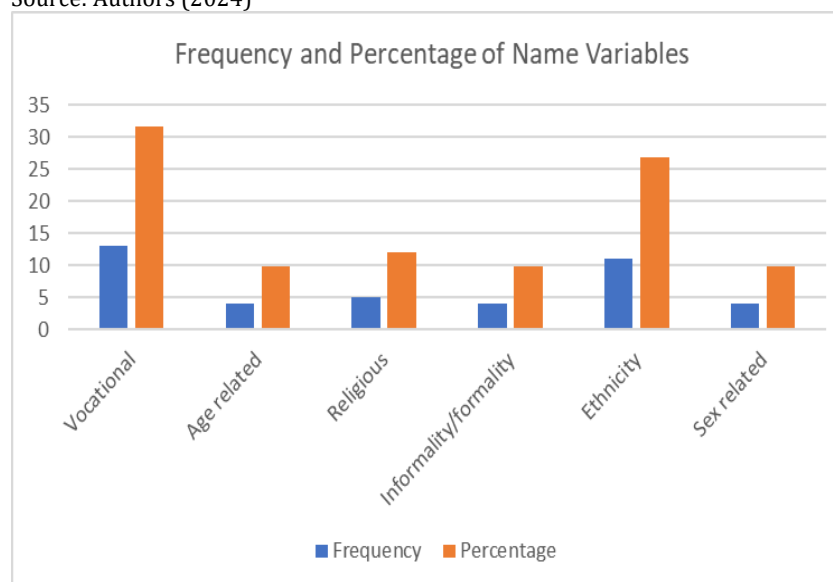
Summary

This study indicates that names are more than ordinary lexical items as they carry deeper meanings when closely analysed. The study discovered that most of the names used by the playwright are vocational with a blend of religious names; hence, the high percentage of vocational and religious names in the play.

Conclusion

So far, this work has been able to unravel the names of characters (characteronymy) as evident in Ahmed Yerima's text, *Ikudeti*.[42] The names depict various vocations in Yoruba land and exhibit the various sociocultural variables peculiar to the African setting. The major setting is the palace, hence the preponderance of royal names and dancing-related names, just as we have in the real life traditional Yoruba palace. The study discovered that the theme and general preoccupation of a writer can be captured by just one name in a play as the name *Ikudeti* embodies the totality of the playwright's intention. Finally, the study, from the onomastic point of view, has affirmed the popular Aristotelian saying that literature mirrors realities, and proved Odebode's (2010)[43] submission that a name is a social DNA because the few strands of letters can exhibit the occupation, religion, birth circumstance, geography, educational status and sex of the bearer among others.

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[42] Yerima, A. "*Pegunrun Ikudeti Kutelu Osun (Four Plays)*,".
[43] Odebode, I.O "A pragmatic study of names of characters in selected plays of Wole Soyinka". Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. (University of Ibadan: Department of English, 2010).