From 'Adeola' to 'HarDeyOlar': Unpacking the Effects of Self-Naming Trends on Identity and Language in GenZee Subcultures

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Abstract

This study explores the self-naming phenomenon among GenZee students in selected tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria, focusing on the alteration of traditional Yoruba names (e.g., "Adeola" to "HarDeyOlar") as a form of cultural expression and self-identity reconfiguration. Rooted in both postcolonial and sociolinguistic frameworks, the work examines how GenZees' engagement with self-naming reflects deeper issues of indigenous language use, identity transformation and the dynamics of modernity in postcolonial African societies. The study is situated within discussive paradigms regarding the impact of globalisation on local cultures, especially indigenous naming practices which signified traditional or cultural heritage, family history and social status within the Yoruba culture. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 60 purposively selected GenZee students from two universities and polytechnics (private and public) in Ekiti State, to capture the personal motivations behind name alterations. Using thematic analysis, the data were analysed to identify recurring themes such as perceived modernity, global identity aspirations, and the perceived obsolescence of indigenous linguistic forms. Findings reveal that self-naming serves as both an assertion of individual agency and a response to societal pressures favouring westernised or hybrid identities, potentially accelerating the erosion of indigenous language usage among youths. This study contributes to the discourse on cultural retention versus

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adaptation in African societies, highlighting self-naming as a significant factor in the negotiation between tradition and modernity. The implications of these trends underscore broader challenges in cultural preservation, language sustainability, and identity politics in Nigeria and similar postcolonial contexts.

Introduction

The concept of naming is considered as part of language use that helps to refer to persons, things and identities which is common to all societies, communities and cultures. However, this is used differently among the various cultures we have as it reflects our personal, cultural and historical being which gives us a sense of who we are in our various communities. Literally, names perform some functions which include: sense of identity, gender classification, religious affiliation, socialisation, conversation and respect. These functions may be used to get someone's attention or a very good way to start a conversation. Name is a universal phenomenon and can be said to have and even at times leave a significant impact on a person's identity, self-esteem, and how others perceive them. On the part of identity, it indicates a person's ethnicity and background and gives a hint where someone comes from or belongs to. They can also boost self esteem or otherwise for people who don't like their names. Names also influence how people perceive themselves and how they are treated by others. Subconsciously, it is a means of stereotyping, that is, an individual can be judged based on other people they have known with the same name.

Names can also reflect cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and societal norms which are passed from one generation to another. In some cultures, parents choose names for their children that convey specific qualities or virtues they hope their child will embody or manifest later in life. This is based on the notion that names can evoke assumptions that shape or form how individuals behave or are dealt with later in their lives. This was buttressed by Jayaraman (2005) as quoted by Olatunji et. al (2015) who agreed that the meaning attached to name plays a significant role in the definition of human self, since it is believed that a given name does not only serve as a social identity, but also influences several aspects of human living. Thus, names are expected to influence, mould and shape the character and personality of its bearer.

The significance of names is so evocative to the inner being such that as soon as a child is born, he or she is dubbed with a set of names which function as a pointer to a child's identity. Thus, this means that there is a connection between names and cultural identity which gives us a sense of who we are, the communities we belong, and our place in the world at large. However, the Yoruba people understood and believed that names perform more than identifying people but define selfness in human beings, that is, they have a cultural significance on the bearer which they claim to affect the child and everything connected to the child. They believed that names carry one's personality, value, and even one's charisma, and also serve as

connection to destiny. This ancestral belief translates to some of their adages that say *"oruko omo ni ro omo"* meaning "a child's name influences a child and affects the way he or she behaves", or *"ile la n wo, ka to s'omo loruko"* meaning "you consider the child's ancestral background before giving him or her a name". They also believed that *'Oruko rere san ju Wura ati Fadaka'* meaning, "A good name is more precious than gold and silver". All these are pointers to the fact that names play a very important role in a child's life in the Yoruba community.

In the same vein, some names in the Yoruba culture exhibit traditional heritage, family history, social status, situations and circumstances surrounding the child's birth, parental experiences which influence the type of name a child is given on the naming day. However, names are given to children based on the circumstances that surround their birth.

> Naming can be considered as a universal cultural practice; every human society in the world gives name to its newborn as tags majorly as a means of identification, but how the names are given, the practices and rituals involved and the interpretations attached to the names differ from society to society and from one culture to another. Agyekum (2006:211)

This explains the fact that the concept of naming varies according to societies and cultures. On this note, names are social emblems given to every human being no matter his/her nationality, religion, tradition, belief, sex or ethnic affiliation. In spite of the ubiquitous characteristics of the concept of 'name', each culture of the world has different traditions, beliefs, customs and practices of naming which result in a sharp contrast in naming practices and traditions across the world.

Self-naming on the other hand is the act of renaming oneself in order to suit a purpose or changing how one is identified in order to reclaim one's identity. This is considered a social change especially among the GenZees. This social change is as a result of globalisation, revealing identities or showcasing creativity which affects the intended meaning of the original name that has been given to a child. Self name is a name or title that an animate entity (such as a person or group of people) uses usually by choice to refer to self. However, there are some factors that may influence self naming which is paramount among the GenZees and they can be said to be contextual. Some of these factors include personal choice, social pressures, religious beliefs and identity transformation.

Contributing to this fundamental literature, this study aims to examine and discuss the contextual impact of self-naming on local cultures especially among the GenZees in the Yoruba culture. Inspite of discussions on globalisation's impact on local cultures, especially concerning indigenous naming practices which have traditionally signified heritage, family history and social status within Yoruba culture, development and urbanisation have also influenced self-naming among the GenZers.

Literature Review

The act of naming is a concept that may be referred to as cultural indicators that are used to identify people or objects which may be said to perform some sociocultural functions and at times have some cultural implications on the bearers' lives and behaviour. It reflects and depicts the culture, traditions and serves as ethnic identity. According to Faloju and Fadairo (2020), "names are social emblems given to every human being no matter his/her nationality, religion, tradition, belief, sex or ethnic affiliation". This means that it is necessary that every human being should be given a name considering the fact that man is a social being. It is this name that will reflect some of the values embedded in him.

Ehineni (2024) in his own opinion stated that "names are not just linguistic tags or labels, they have deep sociocultural undertones which may show family situation, circumstances of birth, religious orientation, death situation, and even parents' profession. These form the basis that names are not just structurally or linguistically formed, but crucially, they are communicative acts in the sense of meaning, that is, they perform some communicative functions in our societies and serve as tools for expressing individual's identities, social statuses, experiences, and emotions. This according to him made the Yoruba have a popular maxim which says "*oruko rere sagba oye"*, meaning: "a good name is superior to any title or achievement underscoring the importance of reputation". This also emphasises the requisiteness of the social or essential context when naming a child. In another study, Ehineni (2019) in his own opinion supporting the importance of name agreed with the Yoruba adage that says "*ilé làá wò kat́o sÍ ÍmÍlórúkÍ"* meaning "the condition of the home determines a child's name". As a result, names are largely informed by sociocultural influence and considerations.

Names according to Fáléyò[1] and Adégbójú, (2012) as cited by Faloju and Fadairo (2020) "function as indicators of culture and consequently many interesting facts are implanted in them. Since names are significant items in the vocabulary of any language, they constitute an important part of its inventory". This asserts Ehineni's disposition on names and their importance in the society which has been a significant factor of social life and fundamentally used symbolically as means or ways of creating and maintaining social interactions among people. Obeng (1998) observed that names given to a child on the other hand may reflect his or her geographical environment where a child or the parents live as well as their religious beliefs and philosophy of life and death. He went further to explain that children's names may give insights into some important cultural or socio-political events surrounding their birth". This is why some names reflect cultural significance which varies according to cultures and tribes.

Olatunji et. al (2015) opined further that names given to an individual can deploy enormous influence on their general lifestyle and life prospects. This explains that names have effects and have that ability to reflect and reveal some hidden characters of an individual.

Relatedly, Al-Qawasmi, & Al-Haq (2016) considered naming to be an act that reveals many factors, such as, traditions, hopes, feelings, fears, and daily events. He further explained that there is a connection between a name and its bearer, which is created after choosing such

a name. This shows that names are words used as signifiers to the owner of the name and this varies across cultures. For example, naming among the western communities are not influenced by their socio-cultural factors unlike the African communities. Nkechi and Benjamin (2023) argued that in "most Western societies, names to be given to an infant are predictable because few socio-cultural factors influence naming dynamics in those societies. This might have influenced the conclusion that 'there is nothing in a name.'' This means that Africans especially Yoruba names are given based on the situations, happening, events that surround the birth of a child. This results to classification of names according to Faloju and Fadairo (2020:42) which are Orúkḭ AÌbísḭ (personal/given names), Îríkì (attributive/praise name), Orúkḭ Àbíkú (still born names), Orúkḭ AÌmútḭrunwá (natural/preordained names), Orúkḭ ÀpeÌlé, Orúkḭ AÌlaÌjé ò (nicknames/appellations). These classifications buttressed the fact that parents do not just give names to a child especially in Africa and Yoruba societies but consider circumstances that surround the birth of such child.

A study by Emmelhainz (2013) posited that personal names can express a wide range of social values. In his all-encompassing definition, he maintained that names can serve individuals as:

> Scripts for their lives, expressions of the beliefs and expectations of their parents, clues to where they fit into society and what their duties are. Names are human artifacts that can tell us much about the namers' beliefs about religion and magic, social order, what parents want from children, how they seem often to value males over females, and how the members of the society regard the world in which they live. In short, names are full of historical, cultural, and sociological information. (Emmelhainz 2013:170)

This explains the different functions performed by names that are given to children by their parents, starting from identification, symbolising relations between people and portrayal of a person's life. However, Al-Qawasmi1 and Al-Haq (2016) in their view averred that "names during the seventies and eighties were strongly linked to the culture and the values, religious or social, in which the people believed in". They noted that recently, peoples' directions towards naming their children have changed due to the advent of globalisation, urbanisation and modernisation.

Similarly, Folami et. al (2024) in their studies affirmed that the importance of naming has been eroded by civilization, westernization, foreign religions, and globalisation as against names functioning as a means of identification, social arrangement, social engagement, and social structure among the Yoruba of West Africa.

Akintoye, (2021) observed that the advent of Western and Islamic religions and civilization initially brought modification or change to some YoruÌbaì names. However, these modifications have led to what is known as self-naming among the younger generation or the GenZees. This affords individuals greater autonomy to choose their identity leading to significant shifts in Yoruba cultural practices and heritage. Oyeronke and Girma (2024) explained that "names

and naming as not only serving nomenclature purposes, rather they claim that the meanings behind name and naming play critical roles in the performance of old and new religious identities". In their own view, "the performance of naming in Africa is very intentional because it connects the past to the present and makes enough space to accommodate the future".

Jayatissa, (2023) captures that "the GenZees are born between the late 1990s and early 2010s and are known as digital natives who are proficient in using technology and social media. They also possess unique characteristics such as being entrepreneurial, socially conscious, pragmatic, and diverse". In his study, he shows that their sub-themes chatacteristics include job hopping, global connectivity and societal change. They differ from previous generations in their various aspects of lives such as their views, goals, and habits, these sub-themes have paved way for self-naming among the GenZers.

The concept of self naming according to Chibuwe, et. al (2021) referred to a conscious choice of a name or a change of name that is different from the legitimate name given to an individual by his or her parent(s). This may be considered as an act of one exercising power over him or herself in the community. According to Emmelhainz (2013), "name changes act symbolically to mark a shift in identity or manifest a complex self-narrative in the social context. This means that when an individual changes or alters his or her name, his or her identity is equally changed from what people tend to know him or her. Relatedly, Moyo (2012) agreed that the act of naming oneself reveals that names serve as indicators of a broader social change. These names are devices which explain and classify patterns of domination and submission in the lives of people. The act of self-naming affects the intended meaning of the original name of an individual life, actions and behaviours. In the words of Maulucci and Mensah (2015), naming is seen as a political act of ascribing identities to oneself and others in ways that may liberate, maintain, or dehumanize the bearer. They explain self-naming in two perspectives. From a Western perspective, it is knowing, defining and redefining the bearer whereas from an indigenous perspective, self-naming stems from "a desire to be free, to escape definition, to be complicated, to develop and change, and to be regarded as fully human". These explains and corroborate the features of GenZees and their attitude in the society.

A study by Hasjim (2023) affirmed that self-naming system is a form of social change in millennial society and this can be traced to advances in science and technology, globalisation flows, parental education, and motivation to give good, competitive, and dignified names. He explains that development and growth of a society have caused the dynamics of the community to undergo many changes which self-naming is a part of. Studies (Ikotun, 2010, Osisanwo & Akinade, 2024) have paid attention to self-naming in constructing identity, the new dimensions in Yoruba personal names and the effects on Yoruba culture and heritage. Against this background, this paper examines the effects of self-naming trends on indigenous identity and language in the world of GenZee. It also explores the type of linguistic usage in self-naming among the GenZee.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the speech acts theory proposed by John L. Austin (1962) and developed by J. R. Searle. Speech acts is a subfield of pragmatics that believes that language is not only to inform or describe things, it is also used to do things and to perform acts. Speaking a language or uttering any word is performing speech acts. According to speech acts proponents, the act of naming focuses on the action performed by the utterance, rather than the literal meaning of the word(s). Naming therefore involves the act of assigning a name to something and can be viewed as a performative speech act, where the utterance itself brings the naming into existence. John L. Austin explains that there are two kinds of utterances: constatives and performatives. Constatives are statements that describe and inform while the performatives utterances are used in performing actions rather than merely saying them. This theory helps to understand the context, purpose, and potential effects of naming in communication. There are three acts in speech acts: locutionary, illocutionary and the perlocutionary acts. The locutionary is the act of saying, that is, the literal meaning of the utterance. The illocutionary act is the active result of the implied request or meaning presented by the locutionary act while the perlocutionary act is the effect of the utterance on the hearer. Naming therefore can perform the following functions: giving name to a person, baptism, giving a nickname or pet name, giving a brand name or business name. However, there are certain conditions to be met for a speech act to be successful. This is referred to as felicity conditions. For naming to be carried out, the person naming must have the authority to do so, and the name must be appropriate for the entity being named.

In relation to this study, naming performs a perlocutionary act on individual, that is, if all felicity conditions are met. It is however observed that the act of naming falls under declaratives which according to Cruse (2011) as quoted by Yost, (2018) brings about a change in reality. Thus, most naming act would have fulfilled the felicity conditions because the act of naming can only be carried out by either the parents, head of the family or any religious leader, therefore, perlocutionary act is carried out.

Analysing naming through speech acts theory.

Names can be analysed through the speech acts theory by identifying the locutionary act (the utterance of the name itself), the illocutionary act (the intention of the parents behind giving the name) and the perlocutionary act (the effect of the name on the bearer). The knowlegde of these acts in addition to the cultural background will help to have a better understanding of the significance of the name(s) given to children. Illocutionary acts according to John R. Searle is classified into five categories and they are: representatives (which could also be assertive), directives (getting someone to do something), commissives (committing the speaker to a future act or action), expressives (expressing feelings and psychological state) and declarations (effecting immediate change in situations).

Using the speech acts theory, names can be a representative act by stating a fact or asserting a belief, family's history, hopes, and circumstances. It could also express gratitude, make a statement about riches or wealth or declare faith and hope in God. Examples are **Omolola, Ayomide, Opeyemi,** *Oluwadamilola, Babatunde, Oluwafemi*. Names that are directives commit the speaker to get the bearer of the name to do something and the action can be implied. Examples are *Mayowa, Fiyinfoluwa, Bamidele, Mofeoluwa, Akolade.* Expressives names express feelings and a psychological state on either the bearer or the parents. Examples are *Olajumoke, Adeyimika, olamiposi, Olamidipupo*. In some cases, names might function as commissives, implying a future promise or intention or future action. In other words, past history might be acknowledged. Examples of commissive Yoruba names are: *Ekundayo, Oluwaremilekun, Durosinmi, Makanjuola*. Names as declaratives are similar to representatives as they shape the identities of their bearers by declaring one thing or the other. Examples include *Olamide, Abidemi, Mobolaji, Oladipupo*.

Methodology
This study is a qualitative design and was carried out in Ekiti's two institutions; university and polytechnic (private and public): Afe Babalola University and The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti. A descriptive research design through a qualitative approach was adopted for the study. The qualitative method according to Schutt (2006) enables researchers to obtain a richer and more in-depth view of social reality than is possible with a more structured method. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 60 purposively selected Gen Zee students. Purposive sampling was used to select the study areas due to the fact that the students in both institutions are Gen Zee. The respondents were asked already designed questions to obtain answers pertinent to the research questions aiming to capture their personal motivations behind name alterations. Using thematic analysis, the data were subjected to content analysis in interpretation and presentation of the findings and were analysed to identify recurring themes. Interview transcripts were read carefully to know the general familiarity of the participants' narratives and opinions.

Discussion of findings
Data obtained from the fieldworks on the subject of discussion were analysed, presented and discussed. The discussions were done in line with the objectives of the research of the paper.

Importance of names
Findings showed that some of the students are actually aware of the importance of names especially Yoruba names. Most of the respondents have Yoruba names as their first names and they were given by either their parents or grandparents, hence, they prefer being called by it. This is supported by Folami et. al (2024) who stated that Yoruba naming could be

described as cultural heritage and the survival of the Yoruba race impinges on the survival of its culture including naming culture. Corroborating further, one of the respondents stated that he made an intentional effort to be called his Yoruba name when he got to higher institution. He said he was being called his English name from birth but having realised the importance of his Yoruba name, he prefers it to his English name.

Conception about naming and self-naming

The conception about naming among the GenZee actually contributes to their idea of self-naming. To them, some names sound feminine while some are too old for them. In order to feel among, they tried to self-name themselves.

> …I self-named myself Nnamdi because I love the Igbo tribe and this name has been part of me since and most people even think I come from the tribe.
> (IDI, Male, Student. The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti).

> …I like my Yoruba name (Bolaji) because it encourages me to focus on my studies, make money in future and be wealthy….. the idea of self-naming existed before now where people change their surname but the GenZee version does not really have proper meaning. (IDI, Male, Student, Afe Babalola University).

Existence and non-Existence of self-naming.

Existence and non-Existence of self-naming refers to the materiality and occurrence of self-naming especially among the younger generation. Findings from the interview revealed that self-naming among the GenZee exists and they are actually aware of it. While some of them opine that the notion of self-naming is still part of the naming practice. Thus, we have names like "Adebisi" changed to "Hardeybessy", "Alayo" changed to "Harlaryour", "Bolaji changed to "Borlarjee", "Opeyemi" changed to "Horpehyhemmie", "Aduke" changed to "Hardukeh", "Olayemi" changed to "Horlaryhemmy", "Funke" changed to "Funky", "Damilola" changed to "Dharmhielorlar". To some, this self-naming still reflects their original names and can be regarded as their names while some agree that the changed name cannot be regarded as original names but ways to fit in and be integrated in their subculture.

Motivation for self-naming

The participants agreed that the motivation behind self-naming is to funkify names and this is seen as one of the drivers for it. In an attempt to make names sound more interesting, unusual, stylish and spiced up, some of the participants self-named themselves. This was explained further from the excerpts of the participants that:

> **…** self-naming has been happening for long when some People change their surnames from names relating to gods and dieties to names relating to God. But talking about the GenZee names, most of the names do not have proper meaning,

> it is just to funkilise it. Some guys don't like their names because it reflects feminism. He explained further that he has a friend that bears Flourish but decided to abandon it just because it is more of a female name… And not to totally abandon it, he self-named himself "F-Boy"
> (IDI, Male, Student, Afe Babalola University).

Another motivation for self-naming among the GenZee according to one of the participants is the desire for wealth. In her words, she explained that:

> …I heard someone named himself "daddy Cheddar" meaning money. To him, he wants to have money. Also, the name 'Bolaji' is also changed to B-money by one of my friends. (IDI, Female, Student, Afe Babalola University).

In another opinion, a participant stated that: self-naming is a reaction of most of us due to societal pressures that most of our names are old and obsolete. And in an attempt to sound westernised, we tend to self-name ourselves. She went further to explain that some people want to have hybrid identities, that is, having different names and identity. This is common to people having different identities online (social media platforms) and offline.

Awareness of the cultural significance of names.
The participants opined that some of the GenZees are aware of the cultural significance of names especially the Yoruba names while some are not aware. This was supported as one of the respondents said that he prefers to be called his Yoruba name given to him by his parents as it reflects his culture and expresses a deep and significant meaning.

Effects of name alterations on Yoruba culture
Naming practices among the GenZees have adverse effects on some aspects of the Yoruba identity and culture as claimed by the participants. They laid hold on the fact that this practice could lead to cultural transformation, degradation, and at times loss of cultural values. It diminishes the Yoruba culture.
Corroborating further, a female student states that:

> …meeting people for the first time and hearing their names tells you more about their person. Therefore, names are pointers to people's culture and self-naming will kill their cultural identity and you have to make you question or probe them further about their culture/ identity and this can lead to cultural eradication.
> (IDI, Female, Student, Afe Babalola University).

> … self-naming can have a negative effect on the parents because I believed that some parents actually prayed or there may be circumstances or events surrounding the birth and naming of their child, having changed the name to a less meaningful name is disappointing. (IDI, Male, Student, Afe Babalola University).

Conclusion/ Recommendations

Over the years, Yoruba names are deeply rooted and embedded with meaning and significance reflecting both the individuals' identity, their place in society and also performing specific sociocultural functions in the lives of the bearers. Apparently, these meaning and significance have been eroded by self-naming practices by the GenZee, which is one of the challenges in their subcultures. Thus, it has been established in this study that the act of self-naming offers individuals to choose their names against the names given to them by their parents.

The study also affirmed and revealed that self naming among the GenZee can also reflect linguistic borrowing (adoption of names from one language to the other), hybridisation of orthograph (the mixing of the English and Yoruba), blending and hypocorism (alteration of names); in essence, Yoruba culture and heritage are being questioned and this self-naming among the GenZee will eventually lead to non-transfer of culture to the coming generations. Since names act as indicators to cultural knowledge and background, the study therefore recommends that parents should give Yoruba names to their children in order to preserve and uphold the society's beliefs and values.

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