

Ethnographic Analysis of Major Characters' Names in Wole Soyinka's *King Baabu*

Idowu ODEBODE

Department of English,
Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper analyses Wole Soyinka's *King Baabu* from an onomastic (study and science of names) perspective. Five major characters' names from the text, serve as the data corpus for the study. The names are dissected, drawing upon the theory of ethnography of communication (i.e. SPEAKING acronym by Hymes and Gumperz). Findings indicate that the preponderant setting and participants are Guatuna and Guatunans respectively. The dominant act is informative; the foremost key is satirical; the major instrument is verbal and the key instrument is conversation. The study also indicates that Basha/Baabu is the principal character as the end and norm analyses point to him textually and extra-textually.

Key Words: charactonyms, nominal determinism, King Baabu, Wole Soyinka, onomastics

1. Introduction

Studies on Wole Soyinka have focused primarily on his literary and linguistic versatility to the exclusion of his onomastic resources. This study is an attempt at filling this gap. The work aims at unraveling five major charactonyms (names of characters) in *King Baabu*, a satire based on the regime of the former Nigerian military dictator, General Sanni Abacha (1993-1998). The plot deals with coup and counter coup by Generals Rajinda and Bash respectively. The actions of the coupists indicate the theme of betrayal and treachery. Bash's regime is characterized by other themes of nepotism, corruption and rebellion. The General is assisted in wickedness by his wife, Maariya; his son, Biibabae; his orderly, Fatasimu and his teacher, Tutor-motivator. These names are our preoccupation in the present study. The research

hopes to contribute to a body of knowledge on onomastic studies and shed light on Soyinka's aspect of nominal determinism i.e. "an intention on the part of an author to use the names he gives his characters to predict what their actions will be" (Nelson, 2014:24).

2. Theoretical Framework

The ethnography of communication is an approach to language and social interaction that seeks to "discover the cultural particularities and general principles of communication" (Carbaugh, 2007:1). As a discourse analysis theory, it dwells largely on situational contexts to unearth the meaning of words, the channel of communication, the purpose of the message, the norm of interaction and the act involved in communicative events among others. The theory was popularized by Gumperz and Hymes who believed that language is culture dependent and not just a formal system of grammar. Thus, Gumperz and Hymes (1972: 35-71) propose the following taxonomy of situation components known as the SPEAKING model or ethnography of communication.

In the acronym, 'S' stands for setting and it refers to the general circumstance in which the communication event takes place (including time and place) and the psychological setting of the event (formal or informal, serious or festive). 'P' indicates the participant(s), a term which refers to the role- relationships between participants in a speech event: the addresser/speaker, on the one hand, and the addressee/hearer/audience, on the other. However, it is possible for the participants to change roles. 'E' which connotes ends, refers to the outcome of a speech act. 'A' stands for act sequence and it refers to the form and content of the message of text. The form has to do with how it is said while the content has to do with what is said. 'K' is the key and it captures the tone or manner in which a textual message is delivered. Speech events may be different if one is performed perfunctorily while the other is painstaking. 'I' points to instrumentalities – These constitute the different channels of speech transmission e.g. oral, written, telephone, e-mail etc. 'N' refers to norms i.e. the conventions of social and speech behavior which could be linguistic and non-linguistic; universal or culture-specific. 'G' is the

genre which indicates the linguistic form employed in the speech situation, such as poem, letter, story etc.

3. Literature Review

Several scholars have worked on names in several media and discourse domains using different approaches. For instance, Hernandez (2013) takes a pragmatic-cognitive approach to study brand names. He analyses a collection of Rioja wine names as case study, with the aim of considering the pragmatic and conceptual mechanisms underlying their semantic configuration. He discovers that brand creators can exploit the set of cognitive operations in order to design powerful and suggestive names. The study indicates that the semantic extension of a brand name within a particular language can be largely predicted by the workings of a finite set of cognitive operations such as domain reduction, comparison and domain expansion among others. However, the study indicates that semantically based brand names are not always translatable or understood by speakers of different languages; hence its limitation. The research finally suggests that branding experts should employ a number of pragmatic maxims and cultural models. The study updates our knowledge on another aspect of pragmatic onomastic studies i.e. branding. Also, it is different because while it considers generic naming, the present study is based on a literary text by a popular African playwright. Finally, while the study uses pragmatic-cognitive approach, the present study adopts the ethnography of communication as its theoretical framework.

Picard (2015) considers French American *hagionyms* from an historical perspective. According to the researcher, the term *hagionym* derived from two Greek words: *hagio* (sacred or holy) and *onyma* (name). He discovers that most surnames in the present day France stem from *hagiotoponyms* i.e. sacred place names such as Saint-Jacques and Saint-Pierre. The names were initially nicknames borne by most settlers who were soldiers, and historically, such names were obligatory in the military and are today regarded as *noms de guerre* or *hagionyms* which are inherited by the offspring of discharged soldiers. The study is historically inundated while the present research is based on *faction* (a blend of fact and fiction) in a drama text.

Odebode (2015) does a pragmatic analysis of characters' onomastics in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*. He deploys the speech act theory as its theoretical framework. He discovers that most of the names are preponderantly informing and describing. For instance, he indicates that Odewale, a major character in the text, lives up to his name which denotes the hunter comes home. He comes home from a foreign country to fulfill his destiny of killing his father and marrying his mother. In the same vein, Aderopo (the crown takes over) by default is created to succeed Odewale who abdicates from the throne after discovering his fate. The study is similar to the present because it studies characters' names. It is different in theory and content. Its primary text is authored by a different African playwright, Ola Rotimi; while the present study considers a play by Wole Soyinka.

Odebode (2016) studies charactonyms (i.e. characters' names) in *Death and the King's Horseman* from an ethnographic perspective. He discovers that the names of the characters go a long way in unraveling the message, themes and conflicts of the play. Furthermore, he points out that the playwright deploys a lot of puns in naming his characters. For instance, Simon, the District Officer is realized as Simon, the strict officer in the universe of the text. Simon prevents Elesin from performing the rites of passage. This action spells doom for the community as it complicates the tragedy. Similarly, we have Iyaloja (market mother) where the market symbolizes the world or Oyo, the setting. Therefore, the woman is standing as the progenitor of the world. She mounts pressure on Elesin to leave the world (i.e. market) gloriously. However, the latter decides to tarry in the market; hence his assailant meets him there. The work finally discovers that informative is the principal act inherent in the characters' names. The study serves as a springboard for the present because the two studies consider similar theory, the same author but different texts.

4. Data Analysis

It cannot be overemphasised that the basic essence of a research of this nature is to show how data can be used in elucidating a theory and how a theory, in turn, can be used in explaining a linguistic data. Therefore, we are testing the ethnographic model on the names of some of the

round characters in our text. The selected names are: Basha Bash, Maariya (his wife), Fatasimu (Basha's orderly), Biibabae (Basha's son) and Tutor (later tutor Motivator). As observed by Fishman (1972) as well as Bloomer et al. (2005:82) certain questions are pertinent to any ethnographic discourse. The questions are: "who makes, what utterance, to whom, when, where and how." By applying these questions to our data, we shall be able to unmask the intended messages inherent in the names. Thus, we may come up with the following results in Tables 1-5:

Table 1: Basha Bash, later (becomes) King Baabu:

QUESTION	ANSWER	ETHNOGRAPHIC KEY
Where?	Guatuna	Setting
Over whom?	Guatunans	Participants
With what aim or why?	To transmute and have control over them	End
What type of act is the assertion?	Informative (giving information about Basha's political ambition)	Act
What is the tone of the utterance?	Satirical	Key
What is the choice of channel?	Verbal/speech act- since it is meant to be uttered.	Instrumentality
What are the expectations of the situation?	To transmute from army General to king (extratextually, to warn or have an indirect swipe at greedy rulers)	Norm
What linguistic event is involved (employed)?	conversation (humour/joke/drama)	Genre

From the locution "Basha Bash, later King Baabu" in Table 1, we may come up with the following pertinent pragmatic questions and answers: Where does Basha Bash later transmute to King Baabu? The answer to this question will give the setting of the play i.e. Guatuna. Next, we may ask: Basha becomes King Baabu over whom? Our answer to this question will give the participants in the ethnographic key. These are the Guatunans which include Fatasimu, Potipoo etc. We may further

query that with what aim? This answer indicates the end of the locution i.e. in order to perpetuate himself in power and have further control over the citizens. The next Ethnography of Communication's question is: What type of act is the assertion? It is an Informative Act (giving information about Basha's political ambition). Another WH Question that features is: What is the tone of the utterance? This elicits for the Key of the utterance. The key therefore is satirical because the playwright uses the character to parody an army General who was also a dictator in Nigeria. However, the choice of the utterance (which is the focus of our next WH Question) is verbal since it is meant to be uttered. Thus, the speech instrumentality is implied. Norm is the next ethnographic key. In this context, it is invoked by the question: What are the expectations of the situation? Contextually, it is to warn the Guatunans to get prepared for the second coming of a wicked and clod dictator (granted that Baabu is an Hausa word for nothing). As a wicked being, Basha speaks: "First thing now I bash them up and mash them up and smash them up, then flush them down the mess toilet" (KB p. 27). Extratextually, the author intends to warn or have an indirect swipe at the greedy African rulers, particularly in Nigeria. The final question is: What linguistic event is involved (employed) in the utterance? This is the ethnographic genre and it is both conversational and dramatic.

Table 2: Maariya, his wife

QUESTION	ANSWER	ETHNOGRAPHIC KEY
Where?	Guatuna	Setting
Over whom?	Guatunans	Participants
With what aim or why?	To assist and partner with Basha/Baabu in perpetrating rebellion.	End
What type of act is the assertion?	Informative	Act
What is the tone of the utterance?	Satirical	Key

What is the choice of channel?	Verbal/speech act since it is meant to be uttered.	Instrumentality
What are the expectations of the situation?	(to assist her husband as a wife; to complement his wicked deeds)	Norm
What linguistic event is involved (employed)?	conversation (humour/joke/drama)	Genre

Similarly, the binominal Maariya, his wife elicits the following pragmatic questions cum answers:

Where is Maariya his (i.e. Basha's) wife? This speaks to the setting of the play which is Guatuna. Who are involved in this speech situation? The participants include Basha Bash, Maariya and the Guatunans. The next question is: With what aim or why is she Basha's wife? The simple answer (which indicates the end of the locution) is to assist and partner with her husband in perpetrating rebellious activities. Meanwhile, we may probe further that what type of act is the assertion *Maariya [is] Basha's wife*? The utterance is an informative act. But by extension it is a direct speech act because it is an assertion which functions grammatically as a declarative statement. The next question which demands for the tone of the utterance has the answer satirical (key). This is because the whole episode is satirizing the real maximum ruler and a one time dictator in Nigeria, General Sanni Abacha. The next question that elicits for instrumentality is: What is the choice of the channel for the utterance? The answer is verbal speech act since it is a play and every word is meant to be verbalized including the names. We may probe further that what are the expectations of the situation? Answer to this question indicates the norm of the situation, which is to assist her husband as a wife and to complement his wicked deeds. The final question is: What linguistic event is involved (employed)? This indicates the genre of the locution which is humour.

Table 3: Fatasimu, Basha's orderly

QUESTION	ANSWER	ETHNOGRAPHIC KEY
Where?	Guatuna	Setting
To whom?	Guatunans	Participants
With what aim or why?	To protect Basha and defend his interest. To torture Basha's perceived enemies.	End
What type of act is the assertion?	Informative (giving information about Fatasimu)	Act
What is the tone of the utterance?	Melancholic	Key
What is the choice of channel?	Verbal/speech act	Instrumentality
What are the expectations of the situation?	(to protect his master's interests and inflict wounds on his captives)	Norm
What linguistic event is involved (employed)?	conversation (satirical-joke/drama)	Genre

The next name is Fatasimu which is a Yoruba African expression for "rub pepper in someone else's nostrils." Fatasimu is an inverted form or a distortion of *Musitafa*, a Yoruba way of pronouncing the Arabic name, Al Mustafa which denotes "a chosen one". (Odebode, 2010:85). The character parodies the chief security officer to the late General Sanni Abacha, Major Al Mustafa. Coincidentally, he is Basha's orderly in the play text. Based on this background, we may come up with the first ethnographic question: Where is Fatasimu Basha's orderly? Or where does Basha's orderly rub pepper in people's nostrils? The same answer will indicate the setting of the play which is Guatuna. The next question is to whose nostrils does he rub pepper? Our answer still will be the Guatunans as the participants in the play. In order to unravel our ethnographic key of end, we may ask: With what aim is he Basha's orderly or why does he rub pepper in people's nostrils? According to the text, Fatasimu's aim is to protect Basha,

defend his interest and torture Basha's perceived enemies. Another pertinent question is; What type of act is the assertion? A simple answer to this is informative act because the name as locution gives more information about the profession and action of the bearer. The next question is: What is the tone of the utterance? This elicits for the key in the SPEAKING acronym and it is melancholic. This is so because torturing of captives invokes sorrow and sadness. What is the choice of channel is our next question? Similarly, the instrumentality is verbal speech act. Another salient question is: What are the expectations of the situation? The answer speaks to the norm of the situation which is to protect his master's interests and inflict wounds on his captives. For example, after rubbing pepper in one of the captives' nostrils, Fatasimu retorts: "I try to live up to my name... When the pepper shot up his nostrils, he nearly suffered terminal convulsion" (p. 82). The final question is: What linguistic event is involved (employed)? The genre employed here is satirical-joke because the playwright is ridiculing an existed institution and its principal player.

Table 4: Biibabae, Basha's son

QUESTION	ANSWER	ETHNOGRAPHIC KEY
Where?	Guatuna	Setting
Over/Like whom?	Basha/Baabu	Participants
With what aim or why?	To take after his father and assist him in wickedness.	End
What type of act is the assertion?	Informative	Act
What is the tone of the utterance?	Melancholic	Key
What is the choice of channel?	Verbal/speech act-since it is meant to be uttered.	Instrumentality
What are the expectations of the situation?	(to resemble and take after his father in wickedness)	Norm

What linguistic event is involved (employed)?	Proverb (likes beget likes)	Genre
---	-----------------------------	-------

Biibabae is another Yoruba African expression which denotes “like his father.” Its combination with the phrase Basha’s son is significant to this study. It sheds more light on the personality of the bearer and it also reduces heuristic task on the side of the reader/listener in interpreting the name and the role of the bearer. Therefore, we may apply the first ethnographic question to the name: Basha’s son is like his father where? This question similarly speaks to the setting of the play which is Guatuna. Who are the participants involved or over whom does his action seem to bear? Or the boy is like whom? The answer to this question will be Basha/Baabu who happens to be the name-bearer’s father in the text. With what aim or why should he be like his father? Answer to this question presents the ethnographic end of the name locution, which is to assist Basha/Baabu in wickedness. Similarly, what type of act is the expression *Biibabae*? The act involved in this locution is informative because the writer seems to be informing the reader/audience that “this character is like his father.”

The next WH-Question demands for the tone of the utterance and it indicates the ethnographic key. We may deduce from the utterance/name that the tone is melancholic. The reader/audience is presented with the second wicked character who is as cruel as Basha/Baabu, hence the full potential of his name, *Biibabae* i.e. “exactly like his father.” Baabu testifies to this when he says, “The boy born a genius! He takes after us, which is as it should be.” (p. 83). The next question demands for the choice of channel for the utterance. A cursory look at the locution will indicate that it is a verbal/speech act since it is meant to be uttered and someone is meant to answer to the name. The next ethnographic question demands for the expectation of the situation. As a norm, it is expected that the character will resemble and take after his father in wickedness. Finally, the genre or linguistic event involved is proverb because likes beget likes.

Table 5: Tutor, later Tutor Motivator

QUESTION	ANSWER	ETHNOGRAPHIC KEY
Where?	Guatuna	Setting
Over whom?	Basha/Baabu	Participants
With what aim or why?	To train Baabu	End
What type of act is the assertion?	Informative (giving information about Tutor's transmutation to Motivator)	Act
What is the tone of the utterance?	Satirical	Key
What is the choice of channel?	Verbal	Instrumentality
What are the expectations of the situation?	(To indicate that not only Basha changes office in Guatuna; also to show that Basha cannot act alone except he is tutored. That is why he is also called Baabu i.e. a moron.)	Norm
What linguistic event is involved (employed)?	conversation (humour/joke/drama)	Genre

Denotatively, a tutor is an instructor or a teacher. Its combination with motivator in our primary text is significant. It points to the fact that the addressee i.e. Basha/Baabu who is being taught by this character or name bearer, is so daft that after he has been tutored, he has to be motivated again to act. This probably is the reason that he is named Baabu i.e. an Hausa African expression for nothing. Therefore, we may apply the first question: Where does Tutor later become Motivator? The answer still remains Guatuna (setting). Then, over whom does he become the motivator? The answer will be Basha/Baabu (participant). Furthermore, why does Tutor later become Tutor-Motivator? The reason or end of the locution is such that the bearer might train and reason for the nonentity/ daft King Baabu. What type of act is this assertion? It is an informative act as it provides additional information

about the previous and new roles of the bearer. We may infer however, that it is his role changing from a tutor to motivator that affects General Bash also to change to King Baabu. The next WH-question demands for the tone/key of the utterance. The key is satirical because it satirizes the character and government of the late Nigerian dictator, General Sanni Abacha. Another question demands for the choice of the channel (instrumentality). This is also a verbal utterance as it is a name meant to be uttered in a (dramatic) linguistic encounter. The pertinent ethnographic question at this juncture is: What are the expectations of the situation? The answer is to indicate that not only Basha changes office/name in Guatuna; and that Basha cannot act alone except he is tutored. That is why he is also called Baabu i.e. a moron. The final question which addresses the genre is: What linguistic event is involved? The genre employed is conversational joke/humour because it is comical to discover that the same tutor is the person thinking and acting for a whole head of state.

Summary: Table 6

Ethnographic Key	Basha Bash, later, King Baabu	Maariya, his wife	Fatasimu, Basha's orderly	Biiababae, Basha's son	Tutor, later Tutor Motivator
Setting	Guatuna	Guatuna	Guatuna	Guatuna	Guatuna
Participants	Guatunans	Guatunans	Guatunans	Basha/Baabu	Basha/Baabu
End	To transmute	To partner/support Basha	To assist Basha	To support Basha	To train Basha
Act	informative	Informative	informative	Informative	Informative
Key	Satirical	Satirical	melancholic	melancholic	Satirical
Instrumentality	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal
Norm	To transmute from army	To assist her husband, Basha in wickedness	To protect his master, Basha and	To resemble his father, Basha	To teach his student, Basha and

	General to king		torture captives		change office
Genre	conversation	conversation	conversation	Proverb	Conversation

From the analysis so far, the following may be deduced from Table 6: The setting of the five names deployed is Guatuna. The participants are Guatunans except in Biibabae and Tutor which have Basha/Baabu as participants respectively. All the ends have something to do with Basha. Furthermore, the dominant act is informative. Meanwhile, there are three satirical keys as captured in the names Basha, Maariya and Tutor. In the same vein, Fatasimu and Biibabae are indices of the melancholic key. Similarly, every norm deployed has something to do with Basha (e.g. to assist, protect, resemble and teach him). Socially, the norm's columns also present the different faces of Basha: as an army General and a potential king (Basha), as a husband (Maariya), as a master (Fatasimu), as a father (Biibabae) and as a student (Tutor). Finally, all the names have conversation genre except Biibabae which has proverb. Thus we may submit in line with Nelson (2014) that the playwright uses nominal determinism i.e. "an intention on the part of an author to use the names he gives his characters to predict what their actions will be" (Nelson, 2014:24).

5. Conclusion

This onomastic study is based on Wole Soyinka's *King Baabu*. Five major characters' names served as corpus for the study. These are dissected based on the theory of ethnography of communication. Findings indicate that the author uses the names of the characters to predict what their actions will be. This is what Nelson (2014:24) refers to as nominal determinism. Furthermore, the preponderant setting and participants are Guatuna and Guatunans respectively. Besides, the dominant act is informative and the foremost key is satirical. Additionally, the major instrument is verbal and the chief instrument is conversation. The study also indicates that Basha/Baabu is the principal character as the end and norm analyses point to him textually and extratextually. We may therefore agree with Adams (2011: 31) that

charactonyms (names in fiction) “can resolve multiple associations within an author’s imagination and carry a surfeit of meaning”.

References

- Adams, M. (2011). Cratchit: The etymology. *Journal of Literary Onomastics* 1 (1): 31-51.
- Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carbaugh, D. (2007). Ethnography of communication. In https://www.researchgate.net/publication/33675167_Ethnography_of_Communication. Accessed January 22, 2019.
- Gumpers, J. and Hymes, D. eds. (1972). “Models of the interaction of language and social life.” *Directions in sociolinguistics: The ethnography of communication*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Pp.35-71.
- Hernandez, Lorena Perez (2013). A pragmatic-cognitive approach to brand names: A case study of Rioja wine brands. *Names* 61(1):33-46.
- Nelson, M. (2014). An onomastic approach to ‘The story of Edgar Sawtelle’: David Wroblewski’s transformation of Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’. *Journal of Literary Onomastics* 3 (1): 24-31.
- Picard, Marc (2015). On the origin of hagionyms in North American French surnames. *Names* 63(1): 37-43.
- Odebode, I. (2010). A pragmatic analysis of names of characters in selected plays of Wole Soyinka. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan: Department of English
- Odebode, I. (2015). A pragmatic analysis of Characters' Names in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame*. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*
<http://ijhcschiefeditor.wix.com/ijhcs#!volume-2-issue-1/c1ko3>
- Odebode, I. (2016). Ethnographic analysis of round characters’ onomastics in Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the king’s horseman*. *Marang* 27(16): 49-62.
- Soyinka, W. (2002). *King Baabu*. London: Methuhen.

About the author

Olusola Odebode is an Associate Professor of English (Language emphasis) in Redeemer's University. He had his first degree in English from the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; and both MA and PhD from the University of Ibadan respectively. His areas include Onomastics (the study and science of names), Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis and Stylistics. Idowu is also a Commonwealth Scholar who has been privileged to carry out research in the University of Glasgow among others. He is the founding president of the Society for the Study of Names in Nigeria and the first recipient of the American Name Society's Emerging Scholar Award.