

Surnames as Markers of Identity among the Yorùbá Sub-Ethnic Group Members

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine surnames that serve as markers of identity among some Yorùbá sub-ethnic group members. We show that this present work is different from the previous works because the earlier works focused on Yorùbá personal names in general, and the present work locates the Yorùbá surnames within particular sub-ethnic groups to show that though all the names described in the previous works are Yorùbá names the previous works do not distinguish tradition-based names that are today surnames and also do not tell us where the names can be found within the Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups. We argue that surnames form one of the parameters that can be used to distinguish the Yorùbá sub-ethnic group members from one another. We also show that surnames which indicate Yorùbá sub-ethnic group affinities are tradition-based personal names and that each of the tradition-based surnames is structurally a combination of a noun phrase and a simple clause or a noun phrase and a simple clause. We further show that the noun phrases depict traditional religions or deities that were peculiar to each sub-ethnic group before the advent of Christianity while the simple clauses, in some cases, consist of lexical items that are also peculiar to each sub-ethnic group dialect. We also argue that the introduction of Western or European address forms into Yorùbá whereby the use of surnames is emphasized has helped in preserving the Yorùbá religious thoughts, beliefs and variation in Yorùbá dialects. This is because, in some cases, the tradition-based surnames serve as reminders or are full of reminiscences of the religious activities of the Yorùbá people before the advent of Christianity in Yorùbá land.

Keywords

Surnames, Tradition, Religion, Dialect, Ethnicity, Yorùbá

1. Introduction

Yorùbá is a nomenclature that refers to the entire sub-ethnic groups that speak the Yorùbá language in Nigeria. It

should be understood also that the Yorùbá language has different dialects and each dialect group forms a distinct sub-ethnic group and the different sub-ethnic groups existed as independent nations or entities before the incursions of the British missionaries into the South-western part of Nigeria. It was the British influence that was responsible for the amalgamation of the different Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups into a single nation or entity (see Johnson, 1921; Adétúgbò, 1967; Òkédìjì & Òkédìjì, 1970; Fresco, 1970; Oyètádé, 1983; Abíódún, 1992; Olátéjù, 1997; Olómólà, 2005; Olúwátáyò, 2010; Ìkòtún, 2013). However, the consensus of opinion that the Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups have a common descent from Odùduwà, the progenitor of the Yorùbá nation, appears debatable in view of the political and ethnic boundaries which existed among the Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups before the incursions of the British missionaries into the South-western part of Nigeria. But, the linguistic, religious and cultural evidence that is available lends credence to the claim that the Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups must have had a common origin (see Johnson, 1921; Ìdòwú, 1962; Òkédìjì & Òkédìjì, 1970; Yémitàn & Ògúndélé, 1970; Vidal, 1986). Although there are Yorùbá ethnic groups in both Kwara state and the Republic of Benin, it will be recalled that the Western State created by Gen. Yakubu Gowon in 1967¹ is now split into Ògùn, Òyó, Òṣun, Oṅdó, Èkiti and Lagos (Èkó) states. The state creators did not ignore the fact that members of the Yorùbá ethnic groups live in Kwara, Kogi and parts of Edo states. Members of the Yorùbá ethnic groups therefore, are Òyó, Ìjèsà, Èkiti, Ifè, Ìjèbú, Ègbá, Lagos (Èkó), Ìlájè, Àkúrè, Oṅdó, Ìgbómìnà, Òwò, Àkókó, Ìkálè, Owé, Yàgbà, Ìjùmú, Ìbòlò and Òṅkò (see also Adétúgbò, 1967; Abíódún, 1992; Ìkòtún, 2013).

However, in this paper, we are interested in the use of surnames as markers of identity among the Yorùbá people. Although attempts have been made to discuss personal names among the Yorùbá-speaking people, the studies have only focused on names generally and not on surnames that serve as markers of identity among the Yorùbá sub-ethnic group members (see Sówánde & Àjànákú, 1969; Èkúndayò, 1977; Akínásò, 1980; Babalólá & Àlábá, 2003; Ajíbóyè, 2009; Ìkòtún, 2010, 2013). This present work is radically different from the previous works because whereas the earlier works focused on Yorùbá personal names in general, the present work seeks to locate the Yorùbá surnames within particular sub-ethnic groups to show that though all the names described in the previous works are Yorùbá names, the previous works do not distinguish tradition-based names that are today surnames and also do not tell us where the names can be found within the Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups. In this paper therefore, we discuss surnames that serve as markers of identity among the Yorùbá people of South-Western Nigeria. We argue that although the Yorùbá people are linguistically and culturally homogeneous, Yorùbá surnames are pointers to the different sub-ethnic group entities that comprise the Yorùbá nation. This implies that upon hearing a particular name it is possible to easily identify the name with a particular Yorùbá sub-ethnic group. For example, “Sóyínká” (The god of the farm surrounded me) is traceable to only Ègbá sub-ethnic group. A surname is that name by which every member of a family is known, and that puts members of the family together as coming from one ancestor. Moreover, according to Turnbull (2010: p. 1503), a surname is the name that is common to a family often used with the English titles such as Mr., Ms., Mrs. or Miss. We can extend the Turnbull’s (2010: p. 1503) definition to cover names that are common to races or ethnic groups since such names are also used as surnames among members of the races or ethnic groups. So, in this paper, our pre-occupation is to discuss surnames as they relate to different Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups.

But, before we go further, it must be observed that surnames or generational names that are peculiar to a particular area may be found in another area as a result of wars and business activities. It will be recalled that during the Yorùbá inter-tribal wars, before the British incursions into the Yorùbá-speaking areas of Nigeria, some Yorùbá sub-ethnic group members who sought refuge remained and died in their new homes where they had fled to for safety and their children who could not go back to their ancestral homes lay claim to where they grew up. This is the reason why we have for example Ìjèbú surnames (e.g. Odùkòyà (The god of wisdom has rejected suffering)) in Ifètèdó—a town in Òṣun State². The situation described above is also peculiar to many of those itinerant merchants during the pre and post slave trade periods who, as a result of their business exploits, had refused to go back to their sub-ethnic towns or areas until their deaths and their children who were born and who grew up in the new towns or homes identified themselves with the new towns or homes that were not previously theirs, but retain their surnames that show Yorùbá sub-ethnic group affinities.

¹General Yakubu Gowon was the Nigerian Military Head of State between 1966 and 1975. He split Nigeria into twelve states in 1967.

²Prof. Íṣòlá Olómólà shed light on Yorùbá history and surnames among the Yorùbá people. Prof. Olómólà was a History lecturer between 1972 and 2005 at the Obáfẹmi Awólòwò University Ilé-Ife in Nigeria and, at present, a professor of History at the Èkiti State University, Ado-Èkiti, Nigeria.

2. Previous Studies

Information from some religious books shows that the Yorùbá people used to worship the Supreme Being through gods or deities or divinities before the advent of Christianity in Yorùbá land (see Ìdòwú, 1962: pp. 71-106; Fábùnmi, 1969: pp. 3-13; Káyòdé, 1984: pp. 32-35). Káyòdé (1984: p. 32) further says that:

... it is difficult to determine the number of these divinities, but over 400 lesser divinities and spirits are recognized by the Yorùbá, most of whom have their own priests and followers...

While we agree with Káyòdé (1984: p. 32) that it is difficult to determine the number of gods among the Yorùbá people and that the gods have their priests and followers, we want to add that some of the gods were very prominent and known among all Yorùbá ethnic groups by their different names. Some of the gods or divinities that were very prominent among the Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups were “Ògún” (The god of Iron), “Ifá” or “Òrúnmilà” or “Odù” (The god of divination or oracle), “Èṣù” (The law enforcer), “Qya” (The river goddess), “Òrìsà oko” (The god of farm), “Òsun” (Goddess of Òsun river), “Egúngún” (Masquerade), “Orò”³ (Orò cult) and “Sàngó” (The god of thunder).

We want to add also that the followers of the gods and their descendants were not difficult to identify because they used to adopt the names of the gods in the structure of their names (see also Adéoyè, 1972; Odùyoṣe, 1972; Èkúndayò, 1977; Akínàsò, 1980; Babalólá & Àlàbà, 2003). For example, **Ògúnbíyí** is a popular Yorùbá surname which consists of the name of a god (**ògún**), and a verb phrase that consists of a verb (**bí**) and an object noun phrase (**èyí**). Other examples are shown below.

	gods	verbs	object NP
a.	Ògún	wá	ilé → Ògúnwálé (The god of iron has come home)
b.	Ifá ⁴	bùn	mi → Fábùnmi (The god of wisdom has given me)
c.	Ifá	wọ	ilé → Fáwọlé (The god of wisdom has come home)
d.	Odù	gbè	mí → Odùgbèmi (The god of wisdom has favoured me)
e.	Odù	kọ	iyà → Odùkọyà (The god of wisdom has rejected suffering)
f.	Èṣù	rí	èyí kẹ → Èṣùríyíikẹ (The law enforcer has seen this to treasure)
g.	Èṣù	bí	èyí → Èṣùbíyíi (The law enforcer has given birth to this)
h.	Qya	wá	ilé → Qyáwálé (The river goddess has come home)
i.	Qya	rí	inú → Qyárinú (The river goddess sees the heart also)
j.	Oṣó	yí	mi ká → Sọyínká (The god of farm surrounded me)
k.	Oṣó	gún	ilẹ́ → Sógúnlẹ́ (The god of farm landed)
l.	Òṣun	dá	ohùn sí → Òṣundáhùnsi (The goddess of Òṣunhas intervened)
m.	Òṣun	bí	èyí → Òṣunbíyíi (The goddess of Òṣunhas given birth to this)
n.	Egúngún	ní	ùsì → Eégúnlúsì (The masquerade has fame)
o.	Orò	bí	èyí → Oròbíyíi (The Orò cult has given birth to this)
p.	Orò	wá	ilé → Oròwálé (The Orò cult has come home)
q.	Sàngó	bí	èyí → Sàngóbíyíi (The god of thunder has given birth to this)
r.	Sàngó	rí	èyí kẹ → Sàngóríyíikẹ (The god of thunder has seen this to treasure)

³Orò is a rattling Yorùbá deity believed to be worshipped at night and women are forbidden to see him.

⁴Essentially, there are sixteen Ifá verses called “Odù”. Hence, we have “Odù Ifá”. It is also an alternative name for Ifá. While the Ìjẹbú sub-ethnic group endorses Odù as the NP of some of their names other Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups endorse Ifá. Fábùnmi (1969: p. 13) also reports that Ifá is the nickname or alias of “Òrúnmilà” which means “òrun ló mọ àti là” (only heaven knows the means of salvation).

We want to observe also that some followers of some gods adopted the names of the gods as their personal names. Some examples are “Erinlẹ” (The god of land) and “Olókun” (Literarily, the owner of the sea but this is another name for Ifá-the god of oracle).

However, [Ajíbóyè \(2009\)](#) remarks that some Yorùbá Christians delete the NPs of some tradition-based Yorùbá surnames and replace them with “Olúwa” (Lord) which is the Christian “Olúwa” (Lord) or Jesus Christ. Some examples are shown below.

-
- | | |
|----|---|
| s. | Ògúndáre → Olúwádáre (The god of iron has judged me to be right) (The Lord has judged me to be right) |
| t. | Fágbémiró → Olúwágbémiró (The god of oracle has uplifted me) (The Lord has uplifted me) |
-

Similarly, [Ìkòtún \(2013: pp. 77-79\)](#) observes that if the Europeans who brought Christianity to Nigeria had not introduced the use of first names with surnames in formal situations such as schools, for example, the tradition-based Yorùbá personal names would have become extinct by now. This is because while most Yorùbá Christians still retain the Yorùbá gods as the NPs of their surnames, none endorses any of the gods as the NP of his or her first name. Therefore, we argue that the introduction of Western or European address forms in Yorùbá land, whereby the use of surnames is emphasized, has helped in preserving the Yorùbá religious thoughts and beliefs. This is because the tradition-based surnames serve as reminders or are full of reminiscences of the religious activities of the Yorùbá people before the advent of Christianity in Yorùbá land. In this paper, we show that the use of tradition-based Yorùbá surnames can help to distinguish one Yorùbá sub-ethnic group member from another. But we need to remind ourselves that though [Şówándé and Àjànàkú \(1969\)](#), [Odùyoyè \(1972\)](#), [Èkúndayò \(1977\)](#), [Akínnàsò \(1980\)](#), [Babalólá and Àlàbá \(2003\)](#), [Ìkòtún \(2010, 2013\)](#) and many others have, in their research works, focused on Yorùbá personal names in general, the present work discusses the tradition-based names that are today surnames as well as where the surnames can be found within the Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups. But we shall focus only on Ifè, Òyó-Ìbádàn, Ìjèbú, Ègbá, Èkiti, Ìjèsà, Òyó-Alááfin, Oṅdó, Àkúré and Ìlájẹ dialect groups.

2.1. Data Collection

Studies conducted on Yorùbá personal names as well as Yorùbá people by previous researchers formed part of the data that we used in this work. The researchers are [Şówándé and Àjànàkú \(1969\)](#), [Odùyoyè \(1972\)](#), [Adéoyè \(1972\)](#), [Èkúndayò \(1977\)](#), [Akínnàsò \(1980\)](#), [Johnson \(1921\)](#), [Ajíbóyè \(2009\)](#) and [Ìkòtún \(2010, 2013\)](#). In addition, *The Nigerian Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board's (JAMB)* lists of applicants seeking admission into Èkiti State University, Qbáfèmi Awólówò University, Qlábísí Qnábánjo University and University of Ìbádàn were used. In the lists that were sent by the Nigerian Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) between 2005 and 2011, first and surnames or generational names and states of origin of the candidates considered for admissions are clearly shown. We also consulted some historians who are university lecturers and some Yorùbá traditionalists on naming among the Yorùbá people. The lists of staff of Èkiti State University, Qbáfèmi Awólówò University, Qlábísí Qnábánjo University and University of Ìbádàn which contain their bio-data as well as information from interviews that were conducted with some users of some Yorùbá surnames were similarly considered. It is believed that the number of students with staff of the four universities is sufficiently representative of all the Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups.

2.2. Data Presentation

In this section, we present our data. The data or names are just some examples of names that were used as surnames or generational names, and they are as follows:

- 1) Omíşakin (The river goddess has performed gallantly).
- 2) Omírèmilékún (The river goddess consoled me).
- 3) Elúfídípè (Elú⁵ has used this to compensate).
- 4) Elúfísóyè or Elúfíoyè (Elú has made him a chief).

⁵Ifè ethnic group is believed to have been divided into seven groups and the seventh is called “elú”. The NP “elú” can form the NP of the name of any one that comes from the seventh sub-ethnic group.

- 5) Òráfídípè⁶ (The god has used this to compensate).
- 6) Òráfídíyà (The god has given this in replacement of suffering).
- 7) Fádiórà (Ifá is a thing that we use money to buy).
- 8) Olágbajú (Riches are popular).
- 9) Oláfaré (Riches have brought fortune).
- 10) Adégbajú (The crown is popular).
- 11) Òkèbùkólá (Hills have added to honour).
- 12) Òkégbèní (Hills have favoured me).
- 13) Qnàbówú (Designing has met jealousy).
- 14) Òkúsànyà (Death has compensated for the suffering).
- 15) Odùkaḷè (The Ifá divination has been established).
- 16) Qṣítólú⁷ (The god is equal with a special child/Lord).
- 17) Ògúnsanwó (The god of iron paid a debt/money).
- 18) Ògúnnáikè (The god of iron is in the house).
- 19) Ògúnbádéjò (The god of iron resembles crown).
- 20) Ògúnbánjò (The god of iron assembles with me).
- 21) Adénúgà (A crown in the palace or a place).
- 22) Bámgbósé (Help me to carry the god of divination's tool).
- 23) Ògúnḃewón (The god of iron has begged them).
- 24) Ògúnḃékùn (The god of iron has met a leopard).
- 25) Ògúnbánwòó (The god of iron has helped me to look after him or her).
- 26) Šóyínká (The god of farm surrounded me).
- 27) Šówùmí (I love the god of farm).
- 28) Šógúnḷè (The god of farm has landed).
- 29) Akiṣya (The valiant of the river Niger).
- 30) Akínmolúsìn (The valiant knows who is a true worshipper).
- 31) Akínrelèrè (The valiant has returned to his house).
- 32) Adéfùlùùrè (The crown loves its people or town).
- 33) Akín-inkúgbé (The valiant did not die in vain).
- 34) Akín-indùtìrè (The valiant has struggled for his/her own).
- 35) Akín-núbi (The valiant has removed the bad thing).
- 36) Akínḷsótù (The valiant went to war).
- 37) Awé (A praise name).
- 38) Òní (Literally, “Òní” means “Today” but culturally, it is a traditional name given to a child who is very small in stature at birth and who, ceaselessly, cries day and night).
- 39) Òla (Literally, “Òla” means “Tomorrow” but culturally, it is a name given to a child that is born after “Òní”).
- 40) Òtúnla (Literally, “Òtúnla” means “the day after tomorrow” but culturally, “Òtúnla” is the younger sibling to “Òla”).
- 41) Qlómólá (Whoever has children of his/her own is wealthy).
- 42) Ògínní (Descriptive name).
- 43) Òbémbé (Descriptive name).
- 44) Olúmílúà (My special child has good behaviour).
- 45) Adémilúà⁸ (My crown has special character).
- 46) Ògúnjémilúà (It is the god of iron that enables me to have special behaviour).
- 47) Awóṣùsì (A traditional priest has done famously).
- 48) Adéparúsi (The crown has seen fame at last).

⁶The NP “Òrà” is taken from “Òràmfè” who was believed to have been the highest of the deities worshipped in Ilé-Ifè (see Fábùnmí, 1969: p 3). However, the NP “Òrà” that carries low-low tone contour changes to “Òrá”, a low-high tone contour because the tone that follows the second low tone is mid tone.

⁷The segment “olú” may have two interpretations. It may, for instance, mean “olú omọ” (a special child). It may also be a shortened segment of “Olúwa” (Lord).

⁸The NP “adé” in this context does not connote crown. Rather, “adé” is used as metonymy.

49) Eégúnlúsi	(The masquerade has fame).
50) Olúwasùsi	(The Lord has done famously).
51) Èbíbòwálé	(The family members have returned home).
52) Ògúngbàmi	(The god of iron has delivered me (from danger)).
53) Òkunnùwà	(The sea is well-behaved).
54) Ògúnderò	(The god of iron initiates an idea).
55) Ikúésàn	(Death is never a good thing).
56) Ikúéjúwalò	(Death does not allow us to go).
57) Adésidà	(The crown has not done wickedly/cruelly).
58) Adéḷegàn	(The crown does not have disdain).
59) Adégbònmírè	(The crown does not leave me).
60) Àfónjá ⁹	(A metaphorical name for a dangerous warrior).
61) Oládìgbòlù	(He/she is assaulted by wealth).
62) Gẹ̀sindé	(He/she arrives on a horse).
63) Gbádéḡesin	(Somebody who splendidly rides on a horse with a crown).
64) Şàngódiran ¹⁰	(The god of thunder is now for the whole generation).
65) Àjùwọ̀n	(Praise/Descriptive name).

3. Discussion

We have shown in the introductory section of this paper that Yorùbá is a nomenclature that refers to the amalgamation of Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups which include Ifẹ̀, Ìjẹ̀sà, Èkìtì, Òyó, Ìjẹ̀bù, Ègbá, Àkùrẹ̀, Ońdó, and Ìlájẹ̀, to mention a few. In this section, we discuss surnames that are used as markers of identity among Yorùbá sub-ethnic group members. As we have said earlier, we shall focus on Ifẹ̀, Òyó-Ìbàdàn, Ìjẹ̀bù, Ègbá or Abẹ̀òkúta, Ońdó¹¹, Ìjẹ̀sà, Èkìtì, Àkùrẹ̀, Ìlájẹ̀ and Òyó-Alááfin.

Among the Yorùbá people, if the NP of any Yorùbá surname or generational name is “omi” (water or river) or “elú” (family) or “òrà” (god), then, the addressee is most likely to have come from Ifẹ̀. This is because the gods or goddesses the Ifẹ̀ people worshipped before the advent of Christianity were “omi” (water or river) “òrà” (god) and “elú” (family). Some examples of such Yorùbá surnames are as follows:

NP VP

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 66) Omi | şe akin-Omişakin (The river goddess has performed gallantly). |
| 67) Omi | rè mí ní ẹ̀kún-Omiřemilẹ̀kún or Omiřemí (The river goddess consoled me). |
| 68) Elú | fí dí ipè-Elúfidípè (The god has used this to compensate). |
| 69) Elú | fí sí oyè-Elúfíoyè or Elúfíoyè (The god has installed him a chief). |
| 70) Òrà | fí dí ipè-Òráfidípè (The god has used this to compensate). |
| 71) Òrà | fí dí iyà-Òráfidíyà (The god has given this in replacement of suffering). |

Similarly, if the VP of any Yorùbá surnames is any of the ones shown below, the addressee is also from Ifẹ̀ in Òşun State.

NP VP

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 72) Ifá | dí ó rà-Fádiórà (Ifá is a thing that we now use money to buy). |
| 73) Olá | gba ojù-Olágbajú (Riches are popular). |
| 74) Olá | fa iré ¹² -Oláfaré (Riches have brought fortune). |
| 75) Adé | gba ojù-Adégbajú (The crown is popular). |

Among the Òyó-Ìbàdàn people, the worship of “òkè” (hill) was the case before the advent of Christianity. Therefore, if any Yorùbá surname has “òkè” as its NP, the probability that it is an Òyó-Ìbàdàn name is high. Examples are:

⁹Babalójà and Àlábá (2003: p. 78) say, among others, that Àfónjá is a metaphorical name for a dangerous warrior : a person who, when carried up by an opponent, suddenly flies off.

¹⁰According to Ladipo (1970: p. viii), Şàngó was the fourth king that reigned at Òyó and because of his power he became a deified god when he died.

¹¹Ońdó, like Òyó, Bauchi and Enugu, is a name of a state as well as a name of a town in Nigeria. Ońdó as a town, almost speaks the same dialect with Ilẹ̀-Olújí, Ìdànrè and Okitipupa. So, in this paper, Ońdó, Ilẹ̀-olújí, Ìdànrè and Okitipupa are grouped together as one Yorùbá sub-ethnic group.

¹²The word fortune, in standard Yorùbá, is “iré” which has mid-mid tone contour whereas the Ifẹ̀ people will pronounce the word as “iré” which has mid-high tone contour.

NP VP

76) Òkè bùkún olá-Òkèbùkólá (The hill has added to honour).

77) Òkè gbè mí-Òkégbè mí (The hill has favoured me).

There are also instances where some Yorùbá surnames have words like “odù” (another name for Ifá divination process), “onà” (design), “òṣì” (god) and “òkú” (death) as NPs. Such addressees are certainly from Ìjèbù, a Yorùbá sub-ethnic group from Ògùn State as well as the Ìjèbù area that is annexed to Lagos state. Some examples include the following:

NP VP

78) Onà bí owú-Onàbówú (Designing has given birth to jealousy).

78) Òkú san iyà-Òkúsanya (Death has compensated for the suffering).

80) Odù ka ilè-Odùkaḷè (The Ifá divination has been established).

81) Oṣì¹³ tó olú-Oṣìtólú (The god is equal with a special child/Lord).

Similarly, if verb phrases like “san owó” (pay debt or money), “ní àikè” (inside the house), “ní inú igà” (at palace), “gbé oṣé” (carry Ifá tool), “bè wón” (beg them), “bá ẹkùn” (meet tiger) “bá adé jọ” (resembles crown), “bá mi jọ” (assembles with me) and “bá n wò ó” (help me look after him or her) are the VPs of Yorùbá surnames, then the addressees are also from Ìjèbù speaking area of Ògùn state as well as the Ìjèbù area that is annexed to Lagos state. Some examples also include the following:

NP VP

82) Ògún san owó-Ògún sanwó (The god of iron paid a debt).

83) Ògún ní àikè-Ògún náikè (The god of iron is in the house).

84) Ògún bá adé jọ-Ògún bá dé jọ (The god of iron resembles crown).

85) Ògún bá mi jọ-Ògún bánjọ (The god of iron assembles with me).

86) Adé ní inú igà-Adénúgà (The crown resides in the palace).

Bá mi gbé oṣé-Bámigbóṣé or Bámgbóṣé (Help me to carry the god of divination’s tool).

87) Ògún bè wón¹⁴-Ògún hẹwón (The god of iron has begged them).

88) Ògún bá ẹkùn-Ògún hẹkùn (The god of iron has met a leopard).

89) Ògún bá n wò ó-Ògún bánwòó (The god of iron has helped me to look after him or her).

In addition, the Ègbá people who are also in Ògùn state were worshippers of “òriṣà oko” (The god of the land) that is called “oṣó” (seer) before the advent of Christianity. This is the reason why common surnames which distinguish the Ègbá people from any other Yorùbá person have “oṣó” (god of farm) as their NPs. For example:

NP VP

90) Oṣó yí mi ká-Sóyínká (The god of farm has surrounded me).

91) Oṣó wù mí-Sówù mí (I love the god of farm).

92) Oṣó gún ilè-Sógúnlè (The god of farm has landed).

The way the word “akin” (valiant) is spelt, which may also be the NP of some Yorùbá personal names, can distinguish an Ègbá person from another Yorùbá person who is from another Yorùbá sub-ethnic group. While other Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups endorse the form “akin” (valiant) the Ègbá people endorse the form “aki”. For example:

NP NP

93) Akí oya-Akí oya¹⁵ (The valiant of the river Niger).

Furthermore, the contents of the VPs of some Yorùbá personal names which are common among the Oñdó, Ilè-Olújì, Òkitipupa and Ìdànrè people which also distinguish them from other Yorùbá ethnic groups are “mọ ẹni tí n sìn” (know who is a true worshipper), “re ilé rẹ” (return to his house), “fẹ ilú rẹ” (love his people or town), “kò kú gbé” (do not die in vain), “kò du tire” (does not struggle for his/her own) “nu ibi” (remove the bad thing) and “lọ sí òtù” (go to war).

NP VP

94) Akin mọ ẹni tí n sìn-Akínmolúsìn (The valiant knows who is a true worshipper).

¹³Babalolá and Àlábá (2003: p. 776) report that “Oṣì” can also be written as “Osin” and that it means the god of iron among the Ìjèbù people. However, some Ìjèbù people claim that the word means King and not the god of iron.

¹⁴Although the VP “bè wón” (beg them) is also used in the name “Jemibewón” (Let me beg them) which is a name peculiar to the Yorùbá in Kwara State, the name is not a real name but a nickname which later became a surname when formal education was introduced in Nigeria (see also Ìkòtún, 2013: p. 69).

¹⁵Isaac Akí oya was the Chairman of the National Sports Commission during Olúṣégún Obásanjó’s regime as Military Head of State. He was formerly a goal-keeper for the Nigerian Green Eagles’ Team and he is from Abéokúta in Ogun State.

- 95) Akin re ilé rẹ-Akínrelẹ̀rẹ̀ (The valiant has returned to his house).
 96) Adé fẹ̀ ilú rẹ̀-Adéfúlúúrẹ̀ (The crown loves his people or town).
 97) Akin kò kú gbé-Akín-in¹⁶kúgbé (The valiant did not die in vain).
 98) Akin kò dù tire-Akín-indùtirẹ̀ (The valiant has not struggled for his/her own).
 99) Akin nu ibi-Akínnúbi (The valiant has removed the bad thing).
 100) Akin lọ sí òtù-Akínlòsótù (The valiant went to war).

Among the Èkìtì and Ìjẹ̀sà sub-ethnic groups, the surnames with which the Èkìtì people can be identified with are also the surnames the Ìjẹ̀sà people can be identified with in some cases. One reason for this position is that the two sub-ethnic groups are culturally and linguistically related to a great extent. In fact, during the Yorùbá intra-tribal war, Èkìtì and Ìjẹ̀sà had a common force and they were called Èkìtì Parapò (The Èkìtì have come together). Therefore, the names that are common to the two groups are:

- 101) Awé (A praise name).
 102) Òbémíbé (A praise name).
 103) Ọ̀gíní (A praise name).
 104) Òní (Literally, “Òní” means “Today” but culturally, it is a traditional name given to a child who is very small in stature at birth and who, ceaselessly, cries day and night).
 105) Òlā (Literally, “Òlā” means “Tomorrow” but culturally, it is a name given to a child that is born after “Òní”).
 106) Ọ̀túnlā (Literally, “Ọ̀túnlā” means “the day after tomorrow” but culturally, “Ọ̀túnlā” is the younger sibling to “Òlā”).
 107) Ọ̀lómólā (Whoever that has children is wealthy).

But, if the standard Yorùbá word “iwà” (behaviour) is realized as “ùà” and it is the object of a verb in a Yorùbá sentential name, then, the addressee must be an Èkìtì person. For example:

NP VP

- 108) Olú mi ní ùà→ Olúmilúà (My Lord has good behaviour).
 109) Adé mi ní ùà→ Adémilúà (My crown has good behaviour).
 110) Ọ̀gúnjẹ mi ní ùà→ Ọ̀gúnjẹmilúà (The god of iron has made me to have good behaviour).

Similarly, if the standard Yorùbá word “iyi” (fame) is realized as “ùsì” and it is used as the object of a verb in a Yorùbá sentential name the addressee is also an Èkìtì person. Some examples are:

NP VP

- 111) Awó ẹ̀ ẹ̀sì→ Awóşùsì (The cult has done what is famous).
 112) Adé pa rí ẹ̀sì→ Adéparùsì (The crown has seen fame at last).
 113) Eégún ní ẹ̀sì→ Eégúnlùsì (The masquerade has fame).
 114) Olúwa ẹ̀ ẹ̀sì→ Olúwaşùsì (The Lord has done what is famous).

Furthermore, the names listed below are peculiar to Àkúrẹ̀ people in Òndó state of Nigeria.

NP VP

- 115) Adé kò ẹ̀ idà→ Adéşidà (The crown has not done badly).
 116) Adé kò ní ẹ̀gàn→ Adélegàn (The crown does not have disdain).
 117) Adé kò gbọ̀n mí rẹ̀→ Adéegbọ̀nmírẹ̀ (The crown has not left me).

One of the reasons why these names are peculiar to Àkúrẹ̀ people is that the word “ikà” (wickedness) in standard Yorùbá is “idà” in Àkúrẹ̀ dialect and the standard Yorùbá verb phrase “fi mí sílẹ̀” (leave me alone) is “gbọ̀n mí rẹ̀” in Àkúrẹ̀ dialect¹⁷.

The words that are common in the NPs of Yorùbá surnames among the Ìlájẹ̀ ethnic group members are “ikú” (death) “ẹ̀bí” (family) and “òkun” (determination). Some examples of such names are:

NP VP

- 118) Ikú é sà→ Ikúésàn (Death is not a good thing).
 119) Ikú é jú wàlọ→ Ikúéjúwàlọ (Death does not allow us to go).
 120) Ẹ̀bí bọ̀ wá ilé→ Ẹ̀bíbọ̀wálé (The family members have come back home or are reunited).
 121) Òkun ni ùwà→ Òkunnùwà (the sea is well-behaved).

¹⁶The consonant [k] of the negative marker “kò” is deleted and progressive assimilation occurs between the nasal vowel [ɪ] and the oral vowel [ò]. This is also the case in example 98.

¹⁷The verb phrase “gbọ̀n mí rẹ̀” (leave me alone) is also used in Èkìtì dialect but the Èkìtì people do not adopt the phrase in their surnames.

Similarly, if the VPs of Yorùbá personal names are “gbà mi” (save me) and “dá èrò” (know everything) then the addresses are Ìlájẹ people. Some examples are:

NP	VP	
122) Ògún	gbà mi→	Ògúngbàmi (The god of iron has rescued me).
123) Ògún	dá èrò→	Ògúndèrò (The god of iron initiates an idea).

Finally, there are surnames that also distinguish members of the Òyó sub-ethnic group from other Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups. The surnames are as follows:

124) Àfónjá	(A metaphorical name for a dangerous warrior).
125) Oládìgbòlù	(He/she is assaulted by wealth).
126) Gẹsindé	(He/she arrives on a horse).
127) Gbádéḡesin	(Somebody who splendidly rides on a horse with a crown).
128) Sàngódiran	(The god of thunder has become the generation).
129) Àjùwòn ¹⁸	(Praise/Descriptive name).

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have shown that we are interested in surnames that serve as markers of identity among the Yorùbá people of South-western Nigeria. We argued that this present work is radically different from the previous works because whereas the earlier works focused on Yorùbá personal names in general, the present work locates the Yorùbá surnames within particular sub-ethnic groups to show that though all the names described in the previous works are Yorùbá names, the previous works do not distinguish tradition-based names that are today surnames and also do not tell us where the names can be found within the Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups.

We showed also that surnames which indicate Yorùbá sub-ethnic group affinities are tradition-based personal names and that each of the tradition-based surnames is structurally a combination of a noun phrase and a simple clause or a noun phrase and a simple clause. It is further shown that the noun phrases depict traditional religions or deities that were peculiar to each sub-ethnic group before the advent of Christianity while the simple clauses, in some cases, consist of lexical items that are also peculiar to each sub-ethnic group dialect. It is also argued that the introduction of Western or European address forms into Yorùbá whereby the use of surnames is emphasized has helped in preserving the Yorùbá religious thoughts, beliefs and variation in Yorùbá dialects. This is because, in some cases, the tradition-based surnames serve as reminders or are full of reminiscences of the religious activities of the Yorùbá people before the advent of Christianity in Yorùbá land.

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¹⁸The name “Àjùwòn” used to be a nickname/descriptive name but it is now used as a personal name by princes in Òyò town (see Babalólá & Àlábá, 2003: p. 115). However, from our present findings none endorses the name as a first name even among the princes in Òyò (see also Ìkòtún, 2013: pp. 79-81).

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