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REVIEW ARTICLE

CODE-TALKING IN THE NOVELS OF FÁGÚNWÀ: NAMES AS FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses names in Fágúnwà's novels in the perspective of code-talking – a kind of language game (Fromkin *et al.*, 2011). Name is very important to Yorùbá and the Yorùbá culture therefore, every concept in Yorùbá is given one name or the other. Yorùbá believe that name serves as identification for people and that name indicates who a person is and where he belongs. Name, to the Yorùbá, destines an individual for his future and what he will become in life. This is why Yorùbá will say “Orúkó ọmọ ní í ro ọmọ”. Meaning that ‘a man’s name predisposes him to do certain things’. Virtually all Yorùbá names have an underlying meaning apart from the surface one. Indeed, Yorùbá names are euphemisms. Data used in this present paper are extracted from the various novels of Fágúnwà. Each name presented is given a loose translation for the understanding of the reader. Even though many of the names used by Fágúnwà are restricted to the happenings in his novels, yet, they have consequences for the larger world. The paper therefore concludes that names in the novels are given to reflect the happenings in the larger society.

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INTRODUCTION

Yorùbá lay a great premium on names. They do not just give names to people, or to their children; they consider the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child before giving names. This informs the reason why the Yorùbá say that '*Ilé là á wò kí á tó sọmọ lóríkọ*' meaning that circumstances dictate what name a child is given. On this fact Olateju (2005:371) says: Among the Yorùbá, the names that a child is given are carefully considered as it is believed that the name that a person bears dictates his fortunes. Not only that, a child's name is meant to reflect his family history, their fortunes and misfortunes, hopes and fears as well as the circumstances of conception and birth of the child. Besides, every concept whether animate or inanimate is given names in Yorùbá. Names are given to human beings, animals, rivers, trees, stones, and many other things. This confirms Olateju's (*ibid.*) assertion that: In the Yorùbá culture, human beings are not the only creatures that bear names. Names are also given to a non-human creatures, such as domestic animals like dog, cat, goat, etc. which are kept as pets. Many scholars have carried out studies on the cultural value and significance of names in different races and societies. Such scholars include but not limited to Evans-Pritchard (1948), Searle (1958), Martins (1959), Goodenough (1965), Odugboye (1972), Ekundayo (1977), Akinnaso (1980), Alaba (2003), Adeniyi (2004), Ogunṣínà (2006), Abiodun and Olaogun (2010), Ikotun (2010, 2013), Ikotun and Aladesanmi (2013), and Abiodun and Aladesanmi (2013). All these scholars and many others view

names and naming from different perspectives. Names and naming are not just a peculiarity of a particular culture; it is a phenomenon that cuts across all cultures of the world. There is no nation, race or society that does not have the culture of naming. However, our focus in this paper is different from what others have written on names. We are going to consider names in terms of code-talking. In doing this, we shall use the various names giving to various entities by Fágúnwà in his various Yorùbá novels and relate those names to the conditions and situations prevalent in human societies. We are going to apply these names to what is happening in the societies and in the world at large politically, economically and socially. In other words, we hope to view names giving in the novels of Fágúnwà as describing the situation of humanity.

Code-talking

Various researches have shown that code-talking is a practice that is common in every tribe and culture. It is a way of giving out information without the use of a direct speech. Code-talking can be in form of proverbs, taboos, euphemisms and such like. When code-talking is employed, it is only the initiated that will understand what is being passed across. Code-talking, taboo and euphemism are a kind of tripod language use that gives aesthetics to language usage. Though these three uses of language are similar, yet, they are different in some significant ways. First, taboo has to do with words that cannot be uttered by the speakers of a language just anyhow without incurring some natural punishments either from the elders or from some gods. Euphemism is to put some softness on hitherto harsh and hard word to make it less fearful or terrifying while code talking is a way of saying something

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that has a meaning applicable in some particular ways. We can, therefore, say that code-talking is a speech form that is uttered of which the surface meaning is weaved in such a way that it will appear as having a different meaning from the intended one. Isòlá (1982) looks at code-talking differently from our own view here in this paper. He (Isòlá) looks at code-talking in terms of phonological and grammatical perspectives. Corroborating on this, Isòlá (*ibid.*:44) says: Ènà – code-talking in Yorùbá offers very interesting insights into the phonological and, to some extent, the grammatical nature of the Yorùbá language. But above all, it reveals some basic poetic features of the language. He thereafter gives the following examples among others as what he views as code-talking in the Yorùbá language. *Bígí mogó bágá déngé, mogó fégé lögó sógó kongo.* (ie. Bí mo bá dé, mo fé é lọ sóko) If I come, I would want to go to the farm *Súngún mógán nigin làgá ágá mógàn sege ege nígin Ègè nígin yàngàn gbógó kègè règè nígin yìngí* (i.e. Sún móni là á mose èni, èniyán gbókèèrè níyi) Moving closer, we know the deeds of a person, people look honourable when watched from afar. As we have mentioned, our view on code talking in this paper is different from the one presented by Isòlá. Whereas, Isòlá's discussion focuses a stylistic feature of code-talking, we are not going to border ourselves in line with the stylistic feature of code-talking.

Our focus in this present paper is code-talking as it relates to names in Fagunwa's Yorùbá novels and how these names are exposing the ills of the society. Our line of thought follows the submission of Odébòdé (2012:113) that: ...names are very significant communicative tools in African context, in particular among the Yorùbá. Through naming or nicknaming, it is possible to direct, inform, advise and perform different discourse acts. Code-talking is therefore a phenomenon that is common in the day to day usage of Yorùbá language. Code-talking is normally employed either to confuse a language neophyte or to make secret some salient things from the consumption of those that are not initiated. Code-talking is a kind of language game (Fromkin and Rodman 2011). It is used to create a secret language (Isòlá 1982) so as to make the speech an interesting one. Code-talking incorporates taboo, euphemism and some other aesthetic uses of language (see Oyetade (1994)). All these usages of language can only be understood by the initiates. This, exactly, is one of the things that brought about the dichotomy between linguistic competence and communicative competence. According to Gumperz (1972:205): Whereas linguistic competence covers the speaker's ability to produce grammatically correct sentences, communicative competence describes his ability to select from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him, forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behaviour in specific encounters. This quotation is evidence of the fact that those who are not part of a linguistic ethic group may not be able to know the meaning of particular usages in such a language. Having said this, we shall now turn to the usages of code-talking as it relates to names in Fagunwa's novels. In the novels of D. O. Fagunwa, instances abound on the use of code-talking. However, what we want to look at in this paper is the use of different names in the novels of Fagunwa in a codelike manner. Therefore, what

we want to emphasise in this paper is code-talking in relation to names in the Fágúnwà's novels.

The novels of Fágúnwà

Different books, papers and journal articles have been written on the novels of Fágúnwà at one time or the other (see Bambose 1974, 2007), Irele (1975), Bámiṣilé (1987), Ògúnṣínà (1992, 2002), Adélékè (2011) and many others). Each of these scholars has written extensively on culture, religion, name, stylistics, etc. phenomena that are noticed in the various novels of Fágúnwà. However, none of these scholars has related the names found in the novels of Fágúnwà to the ills of the society, a view this paper has taken. Fágúnwà, in his life time, wrote many books. Some are in the form of primer used by the primary school pupils; while some are pure and full fledged story books. One of such primers is *Táiwò àti Kéhindé*. In fact it is these story books that made Fágúnwà popular in story writing. Fagunwa wrote five major story books in his life time. The books are *Ògbójú ọdẹ nínú igbó Irúnmolè*, (*Ògbójú*) *Igbó Olódùmarè*, (*Igbó*) *Irèké Onibùdó* (*Irèké*), *Irínkérindò nínú igbó Elégbèje* (*Irínkérindò*), and *Àdiítú Olódùmarè* (*Àdiítú*). All these books are classical books and very interesting to read. Fágúnwà, in each of these books, makes use of many names to describe the various characters in the story he presented. Looking at these various names in passing, one may see them as part of the Yorùbá culture. But on a second look, one will discover that the names are used in a coded form to either satirise the society or to teach the readers some lessons on the happenings in the society. We intend to explore these names with the intent of relating their meanings to our world.

The Significance of Names

Names are very important in human community. There is no nation, creed or society where they do not give names to various concepts be it human or non-human. Names are for identification. Names identify one as part of a particular society. Names also differentiate people from one another. This is in line with Akinnaso (1980) when he argues that names given to people in every society is a system of individual identification. He goes on to say that the linguistic and cultural implications of names vary from one culture to another. Some names are given to show the happenings as at the time a particular individual is born. This is why the Yorùbá will say *Ilé là á wò kí á tó sọmọ lóríkó* (loosely translated to mean that 'the circumstances dictate what name a child is given'). However, the various names we come across in the novels of Fágúnwà do not appear to take this proverb into cognisance. If at all, he takes them into cognisance; it is the whole community of humanity that Fágúnwà considered in giving the names. The names Fágúnwà gives to the characters in his novels follow neither ethnicity nor creed. The names are given to portray the phenomena that are present in the world. Fágúnwà's idea is summarised in the opening passages of his book *Ògbójú ọdẹ nínú igbó Irúnmolè* (the forest of a thousand demons) when he says that *Bí òwe bí òwe ni a n̄ lu ilù ògidigbó, ológbón ni i jō o, òmòràn ní sì i mò ó* (i.e. *Ògidigbó* drum talks in proverbs, only the wise can dance to it and only the knowledgeable can decipher the meaning). Our earlier assertions conform to this quotation that the uninitiated cannot

understand what is said through code-talking. The various names that Fágúnwà gives to the characters in his various novels can be divided into two broad parts; those given to the animate objects, especially human beings, and those given to the other animate objects, apart from human beings and the ones given to the inanimate objects. Each of these spheres of names will be taken in turn for discussion on how they go along code-talking and how they apply to the human society.

Names given to animate objects

As we have mentioned, animate objects include human beings and other living beings. For the human beings, we shall discuss some of the names given to individuals in the novels.

Names that relate to individuals

In *Ògbójú*, we have the names of the brave hunters sent by a particular king sent to *Oke Lángbòdó*. Seven names were mentioned relating to each of the hunters. The names are: *Kákó* (*oníkùmò Ekùn*), *Ìmódìoyé*, *Àkàrà Oògùn*, *Olóhùn Iyò*, *Elégbèdè-Ode*, *Èfòyé*, *Àràmàdà Okùnrin* (*Ògbójú* pgs 55-57). All these names are important and relevant to the journey the hunters embarked upon. Fágúnwà, in giving these names to the hunters, though in a code talking manner, must have considered series of things that pertain to the world of human beings. This view is significant when considering the dangers inherent in the journey of the hunters. One, they were going to a place where not much information has been given before; two they would pass through a forest that is both a mystery and dangerous, therefore, there was the need to get different people of different characters, powers and abilities to carry out the assignment of the king. The name for the individual hunter, which is symbolic, gives credence to what human beings face in the journey of life. For instance, in a weird world, there is the need for one to be strong and brave. Not only this, it is also good to be focused and determined. This is what the name *Kákó* depicts. *Kákó* is a type of tree that grows to be tough and hard. It is a tree that is used as the handle of hoe, cutlass and some other farm implements because of its hardness and toughness. *Kákò*, as a tree, is not easily bent or broken. And this toughness is seen in *Kákó* the hunter after leaving home without telling his wife. When eventually his wife found him and begged him not to leave her, in spite of his refusal to go back, he bravely killed her so as not to constitute a hindrance to him. Not only that, wisdom is needed when dealing with situations that call for diligence and thoroughness, therefore, the name *Ìmódìoyé*. There are times you must show some audacity and bravery in some things that want to hinder one in the journey of life, thus, the name *Àkàrà-oògùn*. Of course, there are times of relaxation from the hustle and bustle of life when you have to sing and rejoice. Therefore, there must be a kind of *Olóhùn Iyò* to accompany in the journey of life. The name *Elégbèdè Ode* talks of multifarious prowess of a hunter. A person must bring a little slipperiness to the ways of life so that one is not caught easily and cheaply. The names *Èfòyé* and *Àràmàdà Okùnrin* are to show the unpredictability of a man that will succeed in what he embarks upon. One must be able to know when to fly away from a particular danger and when to change one's colours when things become terrific and horrible. In giving names to characters as we see in Fágúnwà's novels, he has

surreptitiously taken cognisance of the Yorùbá culture and traditions where names that are given show who the bearer is. That is why characters like *Ibènbé Olókùnrùn* (*drum of illness*), *Igbínènìyàn*, (a snail man) are not able to survive the rigours of the journey of these brave hunters to *Òkè Lángbòdó*. In the same vein, characters like *Obiriaiyé* and *Ìpónjúdíran* in *Àdìítú* could still fall into penury after some period of affluence. A code-talking like this shows us that changes abound in the world and that being in affluence today does not mean that the same person cannot be in penury tomorrow.

In *Ìrìnkérindò*, we have names like *Òmìgòdiméji*, (two foolish beings) *Òmìgòdiméta*, (three foolish beings); these are kings who reign over the people of *Èdídáré* (community of the foolish people). This is an indication that fools can only reign over the fools. If the citizens are no fools, they will not allow fools to rule over them and to stay on perpetually to the extent of passing the baton to his own son. And since the ruler himself is from the community of fools, therefore, he cannot be otherwise. In the story related by *Òpitánparapò*, three characters that depict the characters that we have in the community of men are mentioned. These characters are *Owólaiyémò*, *Aféaiyé* and *Òkánjúwàfèhíntì*. These names which are rendered in *Enà*, i.e. code-talking, express the evil that is bedeviling the world today especially the community of mankind. These three types of characters can be pinned down to those that we have in the helm of affairs. We have the embezzlers who embezzle for revelling. We also have those hangers-on who depend on those in government to share from the so called national cake. Code-talking is also a kind of metaphor; a linguistic situation in which an object, action or situation is described in a terminology proper to another (cf. Olatunji 1984:51). However, Olateju (ibid: 370) rightly observes that metaphor may not always capture the essence of meaning by saying that: However, a proper understanding of ...metaphors in Yorùbá goes beyond a mere definition. The contextual situation or condition under which ...metaphors are used is of paramount importance. From a psychological point of view, the usage and understanding of ...metaphor involves some perception of attitudes, experiences or dispositions of both the speaker and the addressee. For instance, the name *Ìrìnkérindò* (moving up and down) may not have any significance to a stranger of a particular language other than that it means moving to and fro. But it depicts the way some people labour in such a way that they do not have time to rest and eventually, they may not have anything to show for their labour. Their case will now be vanity upon vanity, all is vanity. Even if they made it in life, death will one day come calling and everything they have laboured for will be left behind to those who probably do not know when they laboured for the property. Therefore, code talking is not something a neophyte of a language can easily understand. It requires a mature mind to understand the deep meaning that names rendered in a code-talking refer. Not only this, those who are not of the tribe where such names are given may not know the deep meaning behind these various names we come across in Fágúnwà's novels.

Names given to animate and inanimate objects

We discuss, in this section, names that are given to animate objects other than human beings and inanimate objects. Like

any other race in the world, Yorùbá people derive much interest in giving names not only to individuals but to many other concepts that they live within. They give names to towns, villages, animals, pets, trees, rivers, mountains and so many other things. Olateju (*ibid*: 371) while commenting on this aspect of Yorùbá practice says: In the Yorùbá culture, human beings are not the only creatures that bear names. Names are also given to non-human creatures, such as domestic animals like dog, cat, goat, etc. which are kept as pets. Such names, as is usual with human names also reflect the wishes, aspirations and reservations of the pet-owner. So, it is common to find a goat with such names as '*kánísiúrù*' 'let us be patient'. In Fágúnwà's novels, names are given not only to individuals but also to communities. Among such names we have towns like *Èdídáré*, *Ìlákòṣe*, *Ìlú òkú*, *Iféhìntì*, *Èrò-èhin*, *Ajédiùbùlè*, *Àlùpàyídà* to name just a few. Each of these names shows the picture of various towns and villages represented in the world of humanity. *Èdídáré* means foolishness. In many parts of the world, the people under the rules of many leaders are very passive. Their passivism does not border on patience and hope but on foolishness and uncared attitude to what goes on around them; and that is why a tyrant can rule over them perpetually without any agitation from the populace. These habits are pervasive in underdeveloped world. The people in many countries of Africa, especially, are fond of giving up easily. It is either they anchor the hardship they are passing through (which is of course a man made one) on God or on fate. You hear them say '*Bi Olórùn sè kó niyèn*' 'that is how God wants it to be, so be it'. Or that *Àyànmó wa niyèn* 'that is our destiny/fate'. Therefore, people wrongly and ignorantly blame their woes on imaginary situations or on God. The name *Ìlákòṣe* adopted from the name of a species of snail which can never become big no matter how much it is fed, shows communities living in the midst of plenty but can never become rich or be in affluence. Instead of being in affluence, they are in penury. No matter what *Ìlákòṣe* eats, its stature will still be small. *Ìlú òkú* (the city of the dead), *Èrò èhin* (backward people), *Àlùpàyídà* (duplicity) go along the same line. *Ìlú òkú* is a code-talking depicting the inactive nature of the people. How can 'the dead' be active? Despite the fact that they are subjected to various degrees of degradation and ignominy, they only continue to remain passive.

They soon adapt to whatever conditions they are subjected to; since no condition repels the dead. Therefore, they can never make any progress. They will always be at the back hence the name *Èrò èhin*. But despite the fact that they are backward, they are still deceptive in their character towards one another. This makes them to abide in the city of *Àlùpàyídà*. The implication of all these names shows that there is nothing good to be expected in the world of human beings especially in underdeveloped nations of the world. Just as the individual is deceptive, so is the community. This deceptive character manifests in *Àdìítú* where the man *Àdìítú* was sending money, cloth and some other things to his parents at *Ìlákòṣe* and the money and other things were not delivered to them. Having said all this, we need to say that this does not mean that there are no names in Fágúnwà's novels that portray goodness, honesty and hope, such names are given only to play down the evils that abound in the world. At least we have names like

Irànlowó (Help), *Ifé* (Love), etc. It is a fact that Fágúnwà, in his novels, loves to use names as symbols of events in the real world. In fact Fágúnwà uses names more symbolic than any other symbols used in his novels. Bamgbosé (2007:76) notes this and says: Perhaps the most favourite way of depicting character in Fágúnwà is through names. The author seems to believe in the use of names that immediately sum up a character or give a clue about his behaviour. Such names may refer to stock characters such as *Ikú*, *Èṣù* whose antecedents and propensities are well-known through folklore and Christian doctrine. It is this belief that makes Fagunwa to not only give names to tangible things but also intangible things. Apart from our discussions so far, there are phenomena that are given names by Fagunwa. These names, as we have mentioned are given in a code-talking version. Among the names given to concepts that are inanimate in nature are names like *Òkè hilàhilo*, *Igbó Olódumare*, *Igbó Irúnmálè*, *Gegele òkuta*, *Aginjú idákéróró*, *Aginjú mímó*, *Odò ejé*, and so on and so forth. Each of these names points at some significant issues in the real world. For instance, *Òké*, *Igbó*, *Aginjú*, *Odò* and such like them show that the world is full of high and low. And getting to the top requires perspiration. Anyone who cannot perspire cannot aspire and will never be a receiver of good things because he will eventually expire. Apart from this, the world is a wilderness. Some wildernesses are inhabited by weird creatures while some are guided by God the creator. However, every man will pass through either of these wildernesses in the course of his journeys in life. Summing up all these names and namings, Bamgbosé (*ibid*:77) says: These names therefore serve as a substitute for description or any other depiction of character. It follows, of course, that characters described in this way can only remain flat stereotypes which most of Fagunwa's characters are, in any case.

Conclusion

We have, in this paper, explained the concept of code-talking as it relates to names in the Fágúnwà's novels. We have shown how these names have implications on the phenomena that abound in the real world. However, we pointed out that not all the names given in the novels of Fágúnwà are evil intended, there are those that show that patience, hope, diligence and other good virtues are of great value. For instance, names like *Ifarádà* 'patience/perseverance', *Àánú* 'mercy, etc. are few of such names that motivate human beings to imbibe good virtues. We also reiterated the fact that Fágúnwà relishes names in his novels as a way of describing situations in the real world and to satirise the society. We therefore conclude that names are not only cultural based, names are also given in order to show the picture of the society, a nation and even the world at large.

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