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# NEW FINDINGS IN WEST AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

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*In commemoration of the **50th Anniversary of the West African Linguistic Society (WALS)***

***Oye Taiwo*** and ***Lendzemo Constantine Yuka***

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*In commemoration of the*
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***the West African Linguistic Society (WALS/SLAO)***

**Oye Tairwo**
**&**
**Lendzemo Constantine Yuka**

*West African Linguistic Society (WALS)*
*La Société de Linguistique de L'afique de L'ouest (SLAO)*

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# 43 New Trends in Personal Names among Pentecostals In South Western Nigeria

*Oluwadoro, Jacob Oludare*

**Abstract**
Research attention has been devoted to personal names in different cultures all over the world. However, there is an emerging trend among the Pentecostals, which to the best of our knowledge has not been explored. This is the tendency to place more emphasis on how names sound, rather than the meanings of such names. This paper is devoted to this issue. Data were elicited from 20 parents (15 mothers and 5 fathers); overall 60 children with different names are reflected in the data. Halliday's Systemic Functional Theory (SFT) formed the theoretical background of the paper. Here, the emphasis is on the function and use which the user of language makes it to perform. In this case, the aesthetic function has an over-riding precedence over other functions, such as religion, harmony with fathers' names, and family backgrounds. Even though, all these are reflected in the names examined, but the sound component is more pervasive than any other. The morphological analysis of the names also reflects that four morphological processes are involved. These are Prefixation, Alphabetism, Clipping and Composition. There is a subtle revolution in naming practices being precipitated/initiated by Pentecostal parents.
**Key words:** *Trends, Personal Names, Pentecostal, South Western Nigeria*

## Background to the Study

Much research attention has been given to personal names in different cultures to the extent that it is almost impossible to find anything new along this dimension. In fact, in an international conference held in 2015 November, it was remarked that the issue has been overflogged and to this, I agree. For example take a look at the following scholarly works: Bangeni and Coetser (2000), De Klerk and Lagonikos (2002), Essien (1986) and (2004), Kaplan and Anne (1997), Kimenyi (1978), Martin-Doyle (2004), Mehrota (1979), Oduyoye (1972), Oluikpe (2004), Suzman (1994), Turner (1992), Ubahakwe (1981) Umoren (1975), Oluwadọrọ (2013), and so forth. However, when a new dimension is introduced to the study of a well-studied issue, then it is still acceptable in research. It may even be that a new theory is used to analyse an existing data.

One, this study focuses on current naming practices among Pentecostal Christians around. The motivation to carry out the research came some years ago, when the researcher heard his Pastor, W.F. Kumuyi said while preaching that during his courtship with his wife, the two of them agreed that they would have only two children and the two would be given names that have 'J' as the first letter in the Bible. So, when the first boy came, they named him 'Jerry'. When the second one came, they named him John. The researcher observed that this principle has guided many Christians around him. He himself has three 'D's' in his family – David, Deborah and Dorcas. Apart from this, people who have names associated with deities are now changing their names. As an instance, the researcher was 'Fadọrọ' until 2014 January, when he changed it to 'Oluwadọrọ'. His younger brother changed his to Jesudọrọ. These are new trends in the study of personal names. Fadọrọ means ifá (an oracle) di (becomes or creates), ọrọ□ (wealth). Oluwadọrọ means 'God creates wealth'.

## Statement of the Problem

Naming began with the appearance of the first man. According to the Bible, when God created the first man, He named him. Since then, naming has been a regular practice in every culture. According to Martin-Doyle (2004), naming has always been and will always continue to be an unstable art partly concerned with continuing an ancient tradition and partly concerned with striking out in new territory. This according to Coker (2012) is the reason prospective parents invest a great deal of time and conscious thoughts in naming their expected unborn children. Some parents are even known to change their minds about the names they had already chosen, once the child arrives.

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For instance, one of our informants, who is a senior lecturer in the University of Ibadan told us that when he was expecting his second child, the scan only revealed to them that the child was a boy. However, when the wife gave birth, two girls were born. Initially, he wanted to name the child 'Faithful', but he changed his mind and named the girls Fortunata and Faithfulness.

In recent times, it appears there is a clear departure from what obtained in the past among Pentecostals. For instance, many of our informants, most of them do not believe that one has to set the eight day or a special day apart, and invite a pastor to name a child. To them, as soon as the child is born, the child already has a name, since this had been planned at the pre-natal stage. So, they do not conduct any special naming ceremony for their children. As people are visiting them to congratulate them, they tell them their babies' names and inform them there would be no naming ceremony. This is an instance of new trend in naming practices that engage our attention in this paper.

**Contribution to Knowledge**

As made clear in the background to the study, many studies have been carried out on personal names in different several factors that are taken into consideration before naming is done; such as the condition of the parents, circumstances that surround the birth, events that coincided with the birth, the day, week or the month of birth, the status of the parents at time of baby's birth, expectations they have of the child when he grows up, and so on and so forth. The focus of the present endeavour is an emerging trend – the tendency of parents to pay more attention to how names sound, rather then what they mean. Nowadays, parents seem to be more concerned with ease of pronunciation and the aesthetic value inherent in the names. To the best of our knowledge, this has not been explored by previous scholars.

**Methodology of Data Collection**

Data for this study was collected through personal interviews with parents. 20 parents (15 mothers, 5 fathers) were interviewed from four Pentecostal churches in Ibadan metropolis. The churches are: The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Deeper Life Bible Church (DLBC), Winners Chapel (WC) and Living Spring Chapel (LSC). five parents were selected from each church. However, mothers were more willing to grant the researcher interviews than fathers. The fathers consulted preferred to keep such a delicate issue confidential, whereas, women yielded much more easily when they knew that the interviews were basically for research. That explains why more women (15) were represented than men (5). Questions relate to their beliefs about naming practices, the number of children they had, the names given to the children and reasons they gave such names to their children.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on Halliday's (1970) Systemic Functional Theory of Grammar (SFTG). The focus of this theory is on the function and use of language in the society. According to Halliday, the nature of language is closely related to the function it has to perform. These functions are specific to a culture even though, underlying such specific instances of language use are more general functions which are common to all cultures. He also posits that we all use language as a means of organising people and directing their behaviour.

This theory is organised around two basic and common sense observations namely that language is part of the social semiotic and that the people use it to talk to each other. Here, language is seen as more than a set of sentences, rather, it is seen as text and discourse. The exchange of meaning is in the interpersonal context as the creativity of language is found in this exchange. It is therefore a grammar of meaningful choices, rather than of formal rules. This particular theory is relevant to the study of personal names because naming is an activity in which a language is made to perform a specific function. Apart from this Halliday's position that language is used to control

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other people and direct their behaviour is relevant here. For instance, when a father asked why he named his daughter 'Fortunata' and what it means. He said that it is the feminine form of 'Fortunate', and that he wanted the child to bring fortune to his family. When parents name their children, they are organising and directing these children by making their wishes and expectations from them to reflect on the names they are given.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Table 1: Names that have similar first letters**

| | Informant | Educational Background | Church Affiliation | Names of Children | Reasons for the Names |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Mother | School Certificate Holder | RCCG | Joy<br>John<br>Joshua | People called me Mummy 'J' after my first child, so I decided to make the other names start with 'J', so that the trend would continue. |
| 2. | Mother | University Graduate | RCCG | Oluwapelumi<br>Oluwajuwon<br>Oluwabusayo<br>Oluwatobi | We wanted our children's names to be uniform and connected with God. |
| 3. | Mother | University Graduate | DLBC | Daniel<br>David<br>Deborah<br>Dorcas | We wanted the initial letter of their names to be the same for uniformity sake. So, we are called Daddy and Mummy 'D, D, D, D'. |
| 4. | Father | University Graduate | DLBC | Favour<br>Faith<br>Fortunata<br>Faithful | We wanted the initial consonant to rhyme. |
| 5. | Mother | University Graduate | DLBC | Emmanuel<br>Emmanuella | The children were twins and I wanted their names to rhyme. |
| 6. | Mother | Non-Formal Education | DLBC | Victor<br>Victoria<br>Victory | We wanted the names of our children to rhyme. |
| 7. | Mother | University Graduate | DLBC | Peace<br>Praise<br>Precious | We wanted the first consonant of their names to rhyme and reflect the victory God has given us. |
| 8. | Mother | University Graduate | WC | Mathew<br>Mark<br>Michael | We wanted to give our children names that have the same first consonant and such names should be taken from the Bible. |
| 9. | Father | University Graduate | WC | Omoayenye (we live for the child).<br>Omohuwe (child is life).<br>Omonegho (child is better than money).<br>Omozuwa (child brings wealth). | We wanted names that have 'omo' (child) as prefix for uniformity sake. This parent is from Edo State. |
| 10. | Mother | University Graduate | LSC | Justina<br>Justice<br>Justine | We wanted names that sound similar. |
| 11. | Mother | University Graduate | LSC | Daniel<br>Daniella | They were twins and we wanted their names to be similar. |

A careful look at the names above shows that each group sounds similar, especially with regards to their initial part. This agrees perfectly with the reasons given by the parents. That means their major emphasis is uniformity rather than the meanings of the names. In the past parents were

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more concerned with the meanings of the names they gave to their children than how the names sounded. Here, language is made to function aesthetically.

**Table 2: Theosphorical names**

| | Informant | Educational Background | Church Affiliation | Names of Children | Reasons for the Names |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. | Mother | University Graduate | WC | Mathew<br>Mark<br>Michael | We wanted Bible names that sound similar. |
| 13. | Father | School Certificate Holder | WC | Jesujuwon (Jesus is superior) – 'JJ'<br>Tijesunimi (I belong to Jesus) – 'TJ'<br>Mojolajesu (I enjoy the benefit of Jesus) – 'MJ' | We wanted names connected with Jesus which could be aesthetically shortened. |
| 14. | Mother | University Graduate | WC | Oluwatobi (God is great)<br>Oluwatoba (God is king) | The God we serve is Great and we wanted names that reflected God's name. |
| 15. | Mother | University Graduate | LSC | Oshiomole (God owns everything).<br>Oshiakpemi (it is God we thank).<br>Oshioghimheyo (God is with me). | We wanted to associate our children's names with God in appreciation of what he has done for us. |
| 16. | Mother | Non-Formal Education | LSC | Oluwatimileyin (God supports me)<br>Oluwatobiloba (God is a great king) | God has always been good to us and we wanted names that are associated with God. |

Names in table 2 above are names that are associated with Jesus and God. According to our informants they gave their children names that reflect their faith in Jesus and God, and also to show their appreciation to God.

**Table 3: Names made to conform with father's names**

| | Informant | Educational Background | Church Affiliation | Names of Children | Reasons for the Names |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17. | Mother | University Graduate | RCCG | Mofiyinfoluwa (I give God the praise) (MF)<br>Mofopefoluwa (I give thanks to God) (MF)<br>Mofolafoluwa (I give honour to God) (MF) | Their father's names starts with latter 'F'. So, we wanted names that could be clipped in such a way that the initial letter will be 'F' so that it matches their father's initials. |
| 18. | Mother | University Graduate | RCCG | Oluwadarasimi (God is good to me).<br>Oluwadabira (God wrought wonders)<br>Oluwadamilare (God justified me) | Their father's name starts with letter 'D'. So, he wanted names that could be clipped in such a way that they would start with letter 'D'. |

According to the informants 17 and 18 above, their intention as parents was to give the children names that would conform to their fathers' names when clipped in a way. Names 17 could be clipped as 'Fiyin' (Give praise), Fọpẹ (Give thanks) and 'Fọlá' (Give honour). So that the first letter would be 'F' to conform to the first letter of their father's name. The same thing applies to number 18 where letter 'D' is the first letter of the name of the father. When clipped, these names would be pronounced Dára (good), Dábírà (wrought wonders) and Dámiláre (justified me), so that

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they all start with 'D'. To some extent, this could be said to be aesthetic in nature. So, language is used here to perform a rhyming function.

**Table 4: Family background/Circumstances surrounding deliveries**

| | Informant | Educational Background | Church Affiliation | Names of Children | Reasons for the Names |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19. | Father | University Graduate | RCCG | Adeyemi (crown befits me)<br>Adewale (crown comes home)<br>Adekunle (crown fill house) | I was born into a royal family and I wanted my children's names to reflect royalty. |
| 20. | Mother | University Graduate | LSC | Molayo (I have joy)<br>Modupe (I give thanks)<br>Mojolaoluwa (I enjoyed God's goodness) | I had complications during pregnancies and deliveries of my children, but at the end, God gave me testimonies. |

Number 19 above reflects the background of the father of the children. He was born into a royal family. Parents with such background usually have 'Ade' (crown) as part of their names. When they start having children, they would prefix 'Ade' to the names of their children to reflect their royal background. However, few of them connect royalty with idolatry and fetishism, so they prefer not to reflect it in the names given to their children, rather they would reflect 'God'. To this category belongs the husband of informant number 2. According to her, even though the husband is from a royal background and his own name has 'Ade' (crown) prefixed to it, he preferred to acknowledge the sovereignty of God. He prefixed 'Oluwa' (Lord/God) to the names of the children.

**Morphological Processes involved in the Names**

Four morphological processes are involved in the names above. These are Alphabetism, Prefixation, Clipping and Composition. Let us discuss them one after the other. Alphabetism occurs when the initial letters that feature in the names are pronounced. The process is alphabetism when the letters are pronounced as separate entities e.g. MF for 'Mofiyinfoluwa', 'Mofopefoluwa' and 'Mofolafoluwa'; JI for 'Jesujuwon', TJ for Tijesunimi' and MJ for 'Mojolajesu'.

The second process is Prefixation. This occurs when a certain element, a morpheme or a word is attached to the beginning of another element, i.e. a morpheme or a word. In this category belong 'Adeyemi', 'Adewale' and 'Adekunle' in which the element 'Ade' 'crown' is attached to other items to reflect the fact that the children are form royal background.

The third process is clipping. This occurs when an element – a morpheme or a word is removed in order to shorten the names. This is the commonest process because parents will never pronounce the names of their children in full. Examples here are 'Pẹlumi' for 'Oluwapelumi', 'Yenye' for 'Omoayenye', 'Huwe' for 'Omohuwe', 'Tobi' for 'Oluwatobi', 'Fiyin' for 'Fiyinfoluwa' and 'Dare' for 'Oluwadare', etc.

Finally, most of the names are derived through the process of compounding or composition. This occurs when two or more morphemes are joined together in the process of forming names. Examples here are 'Oluwapelumi', derived from 'Oluwa' (Lord), 'pẹlu' (with), 'emi' (I), 'Oluwajuwon' from 'Oluwa' (Lord), 'ju' (superior) and 'won' (them), 'The Lord is superior to them'; 'Oluwabusayo' from 'Oluwa' (Lord/God), 'bu' (add), 'si' (to), and 'ayo' (joy), meaning 'The Lord has added more to my joy'. All these and many others are instances of composition or compounding.

**Conclusion**

One point that stands out clearly when the data above are examined closely is the fact that our informants have an overwhelming preference for names that rhyme in one way or the other. This is evident in items 1 to 20: Regardless of the different reasons given by parents one cannot but see this pattern cutting across tables 1 to 4. The implication of this is the fact that parents nowadays are more concerned with how the names they give to their children sound than any other thing.

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Each family prefers to give their children names that sound similar in one way or the other for ease of reference, Mummy 'J's', Daddy 'D's', Mummy 'M's', etc. This is a clear departure from what operated in the past. Twins for instance are no more referred to as 'Taiwo' and 'Kehinde' among Pentecostal parents, rather, they are given names such as Emmanuel and Emmanuella (5), Daniel and Daniella (11), Fortunate and Fortunata (4) to reflect the male and female distinction. Some other ones would choose neutral names from the Bible, for example 'Goodness' and 'Mercy'. This has a negative effect on the culture and our people in which names are consciously, thoughtfully and meaningfully given after careful considerations of many factors. Nowadays, parents devote little time and attention to naming. Parents now care less about the circumstances that surround the birth of their children in naming them. They are not also mindful of the fact that certain things are expected from children as a result of the names given to them. Attention is focused on how names sound.

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