

Nativisation of Arabic Names: The Yoruba Language as a Case Study

Jacob Oludare¹

¹ University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract

One unique characteristic feature of the Yoruba language, spoken in South Western Nigeria is that when words are borrowed into it from other languages, such words are nativised. Some scholars have discussed the rules that apply in such cases. However, this kind of study has not been extended to Arabic names borne by Yoruba people (to the best of my knowledge). This paper therefore discusses the rules that apply on some of these names. Thirty Arabic names are purposively selected for discussion here. The theoretical framework adopted is natural phonology which operates with phonological processes that are deemed to constitute natural responses of human vocal and perceptual systems to the difficulties encountered in the production and perception of speech. Yoruba speakers apply some phonological rules on Arabic names in an attempt to make them conform to the syllable patterns of the Yoruba language. Vowel insertions of two kinds take place. The first kind is epenthetic in nature, because it involves the insertion of an extra medial vowel to break consonant clusters. The other kind takes place at the word final position. This is done to prevent consonants from ending names since the Yoruba syllable structure is essentially an open one.

Index terms— yoruba language, arabic names, nativisation, natural phonology, phonological rules.

1 Introduction

Names reveal to us how people think and how they see the world around them. A child's name often says more about the people who gave the name than about the child itself. Every society has its own systems and modalities of naming. Essien (2004) opines that naming has been an important duty man has had to perform, not only to distinguish animals from Author ? ? : Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, Ibadan. birds but man from man, to facilitate linguistic communication. The more we know about names, the more we know about our language, history, values, traditional religions, our ethnic cultures and even about ourselves. Names serve to confer identity, history as well as character and a society's reservoir of names reflect its history, religion, literature and its culture.

2 II.

3 Arabic in Yorubaland

According to Malik (1995), the history of Arabic language is traceable to the advent of Islam in all Muslim communities that have embraced Islam. The implication of this is that the history of Arabic in Yorubaland began with the history of Islam in the area. It is a well known fact that the Arabic language, being the language of the Holy Qu'ran is inseparably linked with the Islamic religion. The exact date of entry of Islam to Yorubaland seems to be shrouded, though historical records confirm that mention was made of Muslims in Yorubaland as far back as the seventeenth century. Islam was established in Owu, Badagry, Ketu, Lagos, Igboho, Iseyin, Ikoyi,

Ogbomoso and Oyo before 1840. Thus the Arabic language became an instrument of teaching and reading the Quran in schools. As the language of Islam, the Muslims cannot do without Arabic. They have to recite the Quran in its original language, the Salat which every devout Muslim is expected to say five times every day are in Arabic, so also the confession of faith and other religious expressions. The summary of this is that every true Muslim must have some exposure to the Arabic language (Malik 1995). Every true Muslim is also expected to take an Arabic name as a mark of total conversion to the religion. However, when these Arabic names are given, they are nativised, that is, pronounced as if they are Yoruba names. This is the major preoccupation of this paper.

4 III.

5 Theoretical Framework

This work is situated within classical phonology, otherwise known as natural phonology which operates with phonological processes that constitute natural responses of human vocal and perceptual systems to the difficulties encountered in the production and perception of speech (Salami 2004). In classical phonology, a phonological process can be described as a mental operation which constraints segments by altering a single feature in its specification in order to make it easier to produce or easier to hear. According to Dziubalska-Kohczyle (2002: 11) the processes involved constitute natural responses of the human vocal and perceptual systems to the difficulties encountered in the production and perception of speech. These processes perform substitutions in order to adapt the speaker's phonological intentions to his phonetic capacities as well as enable the listener to decode intentions from the flow of speech. In the process of doing this, two opposing tendencies are simultaneously satisfied -that of ease of articulation and that of clarity of perception.

IV.

6 Methodology/Data Presentation

As hinted in the abstract, thirty Muslim names formed the data for this work. These names are the ones commonly borne by Muslims around. However, to really understand how these names have been tampered with, we had to consult two colleagues in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan who supplied us with the original forms of these names. Let us present these names as rendered in Arabic side by side with their forms in Yoruba.

7 Data Analysis

As could be seen from the data above, the Arabic forms of the names look very different from their Yoruba counterparts. This is because of the fact that we are dealing with two different languages with different sound systems. Before we go further, let us present the sound systems of the two languages side by side for comparison and contrast. As reflected on tables 2 -5, Arabic has 48 consonant segments, made up of 24 normal consonants and 23 geminates, whereas Yoruba has only 18. In terms of vowels, Arabic has only 6 vowels, 3 of which are short vowels while the remaining 3 are long. Yoruba on the other hand has 12 vowels, made up of 7 oral vowels and 5 nasal vowels. These differences in the sound systems of the two languages result in substitution. When consonants that are not attested in Yoruba are found in Arabic names, such consonants are replaced with the ones available in Yoruba which shares some features with the latter. Examples of these are /z/ replaced by /s/, and /q/ which is replaced by /k/, we shall see these examples shortly. As regards the vowels, Yoruba has more vowels than Arabic and this is demonstrated in terms of the number of vowels that appear in the names. For instance, the nasal vowels which are 5 in Yoruba are not available in Arabic. Apart from that, Yoruba has /e/, /o/, / / a nd / / which are not attested in Arabic. We shall see examples of names in which these vowels occur in the Yoruba forms shortly. Also, the Arabic language has long vowels which Yoruba does not have. These long vowels are replaced with their short counterparts in Yoruba.

8 VI.

9 Phonological Processes a) Clipping

A clip is a shortened form of a word; one or more syllables may be cut off. In English, nouns and verbs are the lexical items that are usually clipped, while in Yoruba, only personal names are clipped (Lewis 2004). This process of clipping personal names has been carried over to Arabic names. We have copious examples of this in our data. Let us look at some of them. Abdus-Sam?d ? sam du ? 'Abdul-Wahid ? waidi? 'Abdul-Maj?d ? m d idi 'Abdul-Jal?l ? d lili 'Abdul-Yaq?n ? j ki?i? 'Abdul-Bakr ? ba?are?

As could be seen above, the form 'Abdu' which means 'servant of' has been cut off. Thus, we are now left with the main names which in turn have been manipulated in different ways. In the above names, the forms that are clipped are used as prefixes to the names. We have another type of clips which involves suffixes. Let us look at some examples. a. Badrud-d?n? badi?u? b. Naj?m-d?n ? n d imu ? c. Quamar-d?n ? kam ru ? d. Misbau-d?n ? mu?ibaú?

The form 'di:n' which is attached to the names above means 'religion'.

After the clipping has been done the main elements are not left alone, they are manipulated in different ways to conform to the phonology of Yoruba.

10 b) Consonant Substitution

Consonant substitution is a natural process which is language universal. Generally, when words which contain consonants that are not attested in Yoruba? are borrowed from other languages. Such consonants are substituted with the ones that are available in the language. Let us look at some examples: Q?sim ? ka?u?u? S?diq ? sadi?u? Zub?ir ? sube?u? Zaynab ? si?abu?

As shown above, the consonants 'q' and 'z' have been replaced with 'k' and 's' respectively. The simple reason for this is that 'q' and 'z' which are attested in Arabic are not attested in Yoruba. So, the logical thing to do is to replace them with 'k' and 's' which sound very much like them and are available in Yoruba.

11 c) Vowel Insertion

Vowel insertion is introduced for two major reasons. These are: one, to break consonant clusters, because Yoruba? language does not permit consonant cluster in a syllable or even in words. As hinted in the abstract, this process is epenthetic in nature. Let us look at some examples.

Bakr ? ba?are? Badru ? badi?u? Ishm??l ? sumo? Abdu-? abudu? As shown above, the consonant clusters in the Arabic forms have been broken through the process of vowel insertion. This process is referred to as epenthesis. The second kind of vowel insertion is introduced to prevent consonant from ending words. Yoruba? language does not allow consonants to end words. When names that end with consonants are brought into the language, vowels are inserted to end such names. Let us look at the examples below:

S?mad ? sam du ? Wah?d ? waidi? Jalil ? d li? Yaq?n ? j ki ?ni ? Naj?m ? nad imu ? Y?nus ? ji?u?a? As shown above, vowels have been inserted at the word final position to prevent the names from ending with consonants. Also, long vowels symbolised by a dash on top of the vowel ?, ? and ? are replaced by short ones. According to ??wolabi (1995), the process of vowel insertion is not arbitrarily done. There are rules involved. For instance, if the consonant that ends a word (name) is labial, then the vowel to be inserted is 'u'. If the vowel that precedes the last consonant is a front vowel, then either of 'i' or 'e' is to be inserted. On the other hand, if the vowel that precedes the last consonant is a back consonant, the vowel to be inserted is 'u', which itself is a back vowel. If the last consonant and the vowel that precedes it are labial or they have anything to do with the back of the mouth, then 'u' is the vowel to be inserted. Let us briefly look at our data in the light of Owolabi's postulation. The names above all have 'i' which is a front vowel in their root, thus they attract 'i' as the inserted element. Maybe this is the reason why 'halim' attracts 'i' inspite of the final consonant 'm' which is [+ labial].

c. Back vowels at the root e.g. 'o' and 'u' tend to attract 'u' as the inserted element. Examples:

i. Abdul ? abudu? ii. Zaynab ? si?abu? iii. Junayd ? d inadu ? iv. Sa m ?d ? sam?du ? As seen above, 'u' and 'o' which are back vowels attract 'u' as the inserted element.

12 d) Prothesis

When an extra initial consonant is inserted in the root, the process is referred to as prothesis. In our data, we have two instances of this process. In the two cases, the consonant inserted is 'l'. Let us look at these examples:

Abdul-Az?z ? ?asi?i? ? ?ai?i? Abdul-Am?d ? Ham?d A look at the form prefixed to the names 'abdul' which means 'servant of' suggests that the inserted 'l' derives from the final consonant of the prefix.

13 VII.

14 Morphology and Syntax of Arabic Names

Before concluding this paper, it would be necessary to look at an aspect of the morphological and the syntactic analysis of Arabic names. This will serve to differentiate between Yoruba? names and Arabic names. At the morphological level, the distinction between the male and female gender is made manifest. Let us look at the following examples: A look at the data above suggests that the female gender is indicated on the names by the morpheme 'ah' which is prefixed to the roots. In Yoruba, the difference between the names of males and females does not usually manifest at the morphological level like the above, except in some cases, the difference is often implied. In fact, there are names which I used to regard as exclusive to males but in recent times, this does not seem to be so. Some of these are: In recent times, I have come across ladies who bear these names, which I used to assume were only for men. At least there are still names whose feminine attachment is sure.

At the syntactic level, a look at the meanings of many of these names suggests that they are phrases as opposed to Yoruba? names which are mostly sentences. Let us take a look at the following examples:

15 G)

The summary of all the above is that the process of vowel insertion is not arbitrary. It is systematic and highly rule governed.

16 ? ?

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17 Conclusion

This paper has examined the phonological processes involved when Arabic names are nativised by the Yoruba? people. These processes are clipping, consonant substitution, vowel insertion, one of which is epenthesis, while the other one takes place at the word final position and prothesis which involves consonant insertion at the word initial position. Following Owolabi (1989), we have observed that the process of vowel insertion is not an arbitrary one. It is rule governed and systematic.

The kind of vowel that is inserted would depend on the vowels and consonants that are found in the root of the names on which the process of insertion is to take place. Consonant substitution, on the other hand, is necessitated by the fact that the consonants that are replaced do not exist in the sound system of the Yoruba? language. We have also taken a brief excursion into the morphological component in which '-ah' suffixed to a root indicates the feminine gender. This as we have observed does not apply to Yoruba? where mostly the distinction is implied. The distinction is usually clear when pet names (ori?i) are involved.

Finally, we have examined the fact that at the syntactic level, Arabic names are mostly analysable into noun phrases whereas Yoruba? names are mostly analysable into sentences. Definitely, there would be some exceptions to this analysis, this can form the basis for another work of this nature. In conclusion, the Process of nativisation of Arabic names Achieve two major purposes. One is ease of pronunciation and the other one serves orthographic purpose in that there is no confusion on how these names would be written down in Yoruba. This reminds us of the confusion and problems involved in the spelling of same English words. Most of these problems are traceable to the fact that when these words are borrowed, no attempt is made at nativising them in terms of spelling even though that might have been done in pronunciation.



Figure 1:

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[Note: Apart from the above, fifteen other Arabic names are used to exemplify morphology and syntax.V.]

Figure 2: Table 1 :

2

Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation	Yoruba?		Arabic	
Plosive	Bilabial		b		b b:
	Alveolar	t	d	t t:	d d:
	Velar	k	g	k k:	g g:
	Labio -velar	kp	gb		
	Uvular			q q:	
	Glottal			? ?:	
Nasal	Bilabial		m		m m:
	Alveolar		n		n n:
Affricate	Palato -alveolar		d?		d? d?:
Fricatives	Bilabial				
	Labio -dental	f		f f:	
	Dental			? ?:	? ?:
	Alveolar	s		s s:	z z:
	Palato -alveolar	?		? ?:	
	Uvular			? ?:	? ?:
	Pharyngeal			? ?:	? ?:
	Glottal	h		h h:	
	Lateral	Alveolar	?		?: ?
	Trill	Alveolar	r		r
Approximant Lateral	Palatal		j		j j:
	Labio -velar		w		w w:

Figure 3: Table 2 :

3

Figure 4: Table 3 :

4

Figure 5: Table 4 :

5

Male	Female	Meaning
(Muti)'	Mutiah	The obedient one
(Rafi)'	Rafiah	The elevated one
(R?bi')	Rob ia h	The fourth child
(R?sh?:d)	Rosheedah	The righteous person
(Sh?kir)	Saakirah	Reminder (of God)

Figure 6: Table 5 :

8

Names	Meanings	Gender
		Male/Female
Olu?a?ti?	The Lord has remembered me	M/F
Olu?e?mi ?le ?ku ?	The Lord has wiped my tears away	M/F
Olu?a yo ?	The Lord creates joy.	M/F
Oluda ?e	The Lord justifies me.	M/F

Figure 7: Table 8 :

6

6

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Arabic Names	Meanings	Syntactic Analy- sis
Misbau-d?n	Lamb of religion	Noun Phrase
Shamsu-d?n	Sun of religion	Noun Phrase
Qamoru-d?n	Moon of religion	Noun Phrase
Najmu-d?n	Star of religion	Noun Phrase
Abdur-Rah?m	Servant of the most merciful	Noun Phrase
Abdur-Al?m	Servant of the most knowing	Noun Phrase
Abdul-Ghaff?r	Servant of the all forgiven	Noun Phrase
Abdul-Bas?r	Servant of the all-seeing	Noun Phrase
Abdul-Kab?r	Servant of the greatest	Noun Phrase
Abdul-Jab?r	Servant of the compeller	Noun Phrase

Figure 8: Table 6 :

Yoruba? Names Meanings		Syntactic
		Analysis
Oluda?e	The Lord justifies me	Sentence
Ade?o?a?	Crown attracts wealth	Sentence
Ayo?tu ?de?	Joy has come again	Sentence
Olu?e?m is i ?	The Lord honours me	Sentence
Olu?ako?ede?	The Lord has brought goodies	Sentence
Mojola Je ?u ?	I enjoy the goodness of Jesus.	Sentence
Fo?lo ?u n s Fa ?doro	I commit him to God for safe keeping	Sentence
? Oyeta ?de ?	Ifa creates wealth	Sentence
Adejumo?	Royalty surpasses knowledge	Sentence
?		
VIII.		

Figure 9: Table 7 :

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