

Etymological investigation of tones in the Yorùbá personal praise names: *ORÍKÌ ÀBÍȘỌ*

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Abstract

To the Yorùbá in particular and African in general, a name is not just a means of individual identity, but it has social, psychological and behavioural effects on the life of the bearer. Yorùbá is a tonal language, in other words, the meaning of a name is greatly influenced by the tones on the name. Previous efforts have been made by scholars to classify Yorùbá names into: orúkọ àbísọ (name given on the eighth day), orúkọ ìnagijẹ (nick-name), orúkọ idílẹ̀ (family name), orúkọ ẹ̀sìn (religious name), orúkọ àmútòrunwá (name from birth circumstance and signs) among others Adéoyè (1982), Àlàbá (2007) and Oyètádé (1991). This paper focuses on the tones pattern of oríkì àbísọ (praise name given to a child on the eighth day), which is just a category out of the types of oríkì available to the Yorùbá. This is because oríkì can be realised as oríkì orilẹ̀ (lineage praise name), oríkì Bòròkìnní (praise name for important personalities in the society), oríkì àbísọ (praise name given on the eighth day) and so on. Till now, the root or origin of LLH (low-low-high) tone pattern on oríkì àbísọ shared by the male and female has not been discovered, the challenge that is taken up by this paper. Orúkọ àbísọ of LLH (low-low-high) tone pattern associated with both male and female are collected and analyzed based on the Two Tones Hypothesis (TTH). Large volumes of oríkì àbísọ are collected from Ògbómòşó, Òyó and Ìwó metropolis of Òyó and Òşun States of Nigeria. These States are where the oríkì àbísọ is most realised among the Yorùbá. In addition, some data relating to oríkì àbísọ are sourced from Adéoyè (1982) and Oyètádé (1991). The paper concludes that, tones of oríkì àbísọ evolve from a category of orúkọ àmútòrunwá associated with three children after Ìbejì (twins). These names are ÌDÒWÚ, ÌDÒGBÉ and ÀLÀBÁ. These names have no gender affiliation. Male or female child (exclusively associated with twins) bears any of these names. In other words, the tones on these names are proto-tones to tones on the oríkì àbísọ.

Keywords: *oríkì àbísọ, orúkọ àmútòrunwá, low-low-high tone pattern (LLH)*

Introduction

Orúkọ (name) is the linguistic symbol by which you identify an individual; while *oríkì* (praise name) is the literary form by which you identify an individual within the history of his family, clan and tribe, hence the genealogical content of *oríkì*. *Oríkì* (of any category), is a way of tracing an individual to his or her root, or to his genesis Lásẹbikan (1958), Ọlábímtán (1986), Babalọlá (2000) and Barber (1991). According to Odùyọyè (1972, p. 63), *oríkì* is for a child “a way of interacting him into a closely-knit web of family relationship and thus rescuing him from marginality”. It is clear that the potentiality of *oríkì* is wider and influential than *orúkọ*: as it links an individual to the root and the society at large. This puts *oríkì* into historical pedestal. To the Yorùbá, “ìtàn níí múnì tan, ẹ̀nì tí ò nítàn kíí pẹ́ẹ́ tán” (relationship is established by history, whoever has no history will soon be forgotten). *Oríkì* operates at the macro-level because of its genealogical power and influence on individual life; while *orúkọ* operates at the micro-level, as its scope is restricted to personal life and experience. Both *oríkì* (of any category) and *orúkọ* (of any form) are beyond means of individual identification. Ògúndẹ̀jì (1988, p. 79) sees *orúkọ* beyond a means of individual identification “but is believed to be the signifier of the historical, sociological and psychological behavioral patterns of characters.” *Oríkì* is realised as a deeper form of *orúkọ*.

Application of tones on the Yorùbá poems as it affects and influences meaning is addressed by Ọlátúnjí (2005) and Lásẹbikan (1956). Their observations are based on the impacts of the theme of a poem on the line-end tonal patterns. The unpredictability and irregularity of the tonal arrangements at the line-ends of the Yorùbá poetry is expressed by Bier and Gbàdàmọ̀sí (1959, p. 8) that “in most Yorùbá poems, there is no regularity in tonal pattern. The tonal structure therefore does not really take the place of European metre”. Bámgbóşé (1970, pp. 110&111) focuses his view on the effects of tonal configurations besides the deployments of tonal arrangement as a word-play. According to him, tones could be used as:

The device which consists in the use of contrastive tones through a deliberate choice or distortion of lexical items. It is done in such a way that some tones, or tone on the final syllable in one lexical items will contrast with the tone(s) in another item, ...

From these reviewed works, one can see the manipulation of tones in Yorùbá written poems and the manipulation of same to the advantage of the poet, as tones are not realised in this context as fixed or constant forms, unlike in *oríkì àbísọ*, where the tonal patterns and structures are realised in fixed forms.

Works of Oyètádé (1999) and Àlàbá (2007) examines twenty-seven (27) tone possibilities. Out of these possibilities, only LLH (low-low-high) tone possibility is identified to be peculiar and dominant with *oríkì àbísọ* and the only tone pattern shared by male and female (Oyètádé 1999). The LHH (low-high-high) and LMH (low-middle-high) tone patterns exclusively occur with either female or male only. However, the origin of *orúkọ àmútòrunwá* (which *oríkì àbísọ* is in this work discovered to be a category) has not been known. This view is corroborated by (Odùyọyè 1972, p. 85) that “we know the correct usage of the *àmútòrunwá* names, but their etymologies are in most part now obscure.” The challenge of etymological accounts of *oríkì àbísọ*, is open to cultural scholarship and is therefore taken up by this paper.

Definition and Limitations of Scope

Oríkì àbísọ, - is a nominalised tri-syllabic praise name given to a child on the naming day alongside with other names in the Yorùbá community. Three forms of tone patterns have been identified with *oríkì àbísọ* in general, the LLH, LHH and LMM (Oyètádé 1991 and Àlàbá 2007). This class of names is common among the indigenes Òyó and Òsun states of Nigeria and some parts of Èkìtì and Ìgbómìnà. These names are uncommon in most parts of Ègbá and in Ìjẹbú (Oyètádé 1991). Those who bear these names besides Òyó and Òsun States are likely to have been influenced by their cultural contact with Òyó and Òsun who are exclusively identifiable with these sorts of names (Oyètádé, 1991). But interestingly, names of the three children born after *Ìbejì* (twins: Ìdòwú, Àlàbá and Ìdògbé) are generally accepted and adopted throughout the Yorùbá tribes. Therefore, these names evolve as a form of *orúkọ àmútòrunwá* (name by signs and circumstances accomplishing the child’s birth). This then indirectly makes *oríkì àbísọ* of LLH tone patterns to be identified with the Yorùbá tribes in general. In other words, the source names (Ìdòwú, Àlàbá and Ìdògbé) of *oríkì àbísọ* LLH tone patterns are universal in the Yorùbá tradition. Other forms of *oríkì* along with the source mentioned above are peculiar to some Yorùbá tribes. The older persons are known to use *oríkì àbísọ* rather by child’s other names. This work then restricts itself to the LLH tone pattern.

Methodology: The Two Tone Hypothesis

There are two explanations on the use of only three tones (L, H and M). The first is the two tones Hypothesis (TTH), and the Guided Accident Hypothesis (GAH). The TTH supports that the existence of only two tones L and H need be seen as underlying tones in Yorùbá. Scholars like Stahlike (1974), Courtanay (1969) and Akinlabí (1985) note that there is a kind of assymetry in the distribution of the three tones in Yorùbá. According to Stahlike’s suggestion, the three-tone contrast in Yorùbá today may be accounted for by the two-tone language, if it is assume that the M (mid-tone) originates from the L (low-tone). Likewise, Courtenay notes that “the distribution of the object pronoun clitics in relation to the verbs in Yorùbá points in the direction of high tone versus low tone if we explain M of the clitics as a case of tonal assimilation” (Oyètádé, 1999, p. 59). Akinlabí is only disposed to two tones: High and Low. He

recognises the M as having no underlying status not because of historical postulation, but based on the principles of tonal under-specification. Therefore, the theoretical frame work adopted for this study is the Two Tone Hypothesis (TTH). This is because the theory is suitable to shed light on the tone conditioned of the LLH tone pattern of *oriki àbísọ*.

Presentation: Tonal Pattern in *Oriki Àbísọ*

For the purpose of this work, I have restricted the tonal pattern in Yorùbá *oriki àbísọ* to LLH. This is because, only this pattern is observed to be exclusively associated with tone pattern on the children born after *Ibejì* (twins) male or female as explained earlier. According to Oyètádé (1999, p. 58), LLH tone pattern of *oriki àbísọ* is discovered to be the dominant form of *oriki àbísọ*. “It is by far the commonest. It is observed that the pattern is used for both male and female.” Looking at the tonal patterns of *oriki àbísọ*, one may want to view the distribution of LLH as supporting the TTH because, the representation of L and H are exclusively established. The representation of L and H are also more frequently used than M in other forms of *oriki àbísọ*: LHH and LMH. However, since the scope of this work excludes LHH and LMH patterns, it gives in strong terms the TTH credit. In other words, there is no exception of *oriki àbísọ* with LLH pattern (for male and female). Oyètádé (1988, Pp. 197-267) had earlier asserted “that the M in Yorùbá does not take part in a number of tonal processes - including the L and the H.” Examples of LLH (male and female) pattern that supports the exceptionalness with occurrence in *oriki àbísọ* collected from Ògbómòsọ, Òyọ and Íwó communities of Òyọ and Òsun States of Nigeria are rendered below

LLH pattern (male)

- (i) àlàgbé
- (ii) àdíó
- (iii) àjàmú
- (iv) àlàdé
- (v) àkànbí
- (vi) àkànní
- (vii) àdigún
- (viii) àlàó
- (ix) àmòó
- (x) àjàó
- (xi) àyíndé
- (xii) àyínlá
- (xiii) àtándá
- (xiv) àjàgbé
- (xv) àlámú
- (xvi) àjàní
- (xvii) àlàbí

LLH pattern (female)

- àwèké
- àdùbí
- àdùfẹ
- àbẹní
- àbẹfẹ
- àbẹbí
- àkànké
- àmòrí
- àlàké
- àdùké
- àmòpẹ
- àrìnpẹ
- àbẹké
- àpẹké
- àwẹní
- àwẹró
- àmòké

(xviii) àdisá	àyòkà
(xix) àkàngbé	àṣàké
(xx) àkànjí	àbẹ̀mú
(xxi) àjàdí	àṣàkún
(xxii) iyàndá	àbẹ̀jẹ
(xxiii) àlání	àdùnní
(xxiv) àkàndé	àṣàbí
(xxv) àkànmú	àbẹ̀ó
(xxvi) àjàsá	àmòsá

The above *oríkì àbísọ* are among the available ones. From the sampled list of *oríkì àbísọ* above, we can observe these common features among or within the male and female names of *oríkì àbísọ*:

- (i) they are tri-syllabic in structure
- (ii) ‘à’ is mostly used as prefix, while ‘i’ is occasionally used as prefix in their formation
- (iii) their tone patterns are exclusively LLH for male and female.
- (iv) they are of two verbs combinations - the first verb with low tone while the second verb contains high tone.

Discussion: Etymology of Llh Tone Pattern of *Orúkọ Àbísọ*

In contrast to the above data by this study, one can view that there is a close association of the above data with these data below.

LLH

Ìdòwú (a male or female child born after the twins)

Àlàbá (a male or female child born after *Ìdòwú*)

Ìdògbé (a male or female child born after *Àlàbá*)

It is observed from this work that, these names are a separate category of *orúkọ àmútòrunwá*; because their names come into being in connection with their birth circumstances. Looking at the structures of these names with the earlier sets listed above, one can equally say that:

- (i) they are tri-syllabic in structure
- (ii) ‘à’ and ‘i’ are used as their prefixes
- (iii) their tone patterns are exclusively LLH for male and female.
- (v) they are of two verbs combinations. The first verb with the low tone while the second verb contains a high tone.

In the Yorùbá tradition, *oríkì àbísọ* is supposed not to be given on the eighth day (as it is presently canvassed in this work), because, the signs or circumstances of birth have culturally established the *oríkì*. Mere formalisation is only required or observed on the eighth day in regards

to *orúko àmùtorunwá* in which I have recategorised *oríkì àbísọ* in this work because of their affiliation with the LLH tone pattern of the three children born after the twins.

Almost all the scholars are of the opinion that the tradition in regards to the cultural enforcement of the *oríkì àbísọ* with LLH tone pattern is universal Adéoyè (1982 and 85) and Ògúnbòwálé (1979). According to Oládélé, Mustapha, Awórindé, Oyèrindé and Oládàpò (1986, p. 155):

Eni tí a bí lé àwọn Ìbejì, ibáá ẹ̀ ọ̀kúnrin tàbí
obinrin, ní a ń pẹ̀ orúko àmùtorunwá rẹ̀ ní
ÌDÒWÚ, ẹ̀ni tí iyá wọn bí tẹ̀lẹ̀ Ìdòwú ní
ÀLÀBÁ, ẹ̀ni tí ó tẹ̀lẹ̀ Àlàbá ní ÌDÒGBÉ.

A child born after the twins either a male or
a female, is referred to by celestial name as
ÌDÒWÚ. A child born after- *Ìdòwú* is *ÀLÀBÁ*.
The child that follows *Àlàbá* is named *ÌDÒGBÉ*.

While there are other religions and behavioural codes with these names, my concern in this work is the influence of their tones on the entire LLH of *oríkì àbísọ* shared by the male and female children among the Yorùbá. The historical nature of *oríkì àbísọ* makes it to be the base or basic form of LLH tone pattern of male and female. According to Martins (2007, p. 485) contrastive features between a Language and another or within a Language on the basis of syntactic, morphology, semantic or phonological levels, it is necessary that words in contrast must not be borrowed. In other words, those words of contrast must be local or cultural words. According to Martins, the contrast words must not be alien to the community, by this, one will be able to

...establish a basis for relatedness such as similarities in basic vocabulary and regular sound correspondences not resulting from chance or borrowing. Only then can the comparative method be applied to reconstruct the extinct protolanguage...

Both the first sets of data and the second sets above are Yorùbá local words. We are able to trace the present tone forms on the *oríkì àbísọ* by the past forms of the same words, since without the past there cannot be the present forms. In other words, the past words or names serve as experimental data to validate the originality of the present status of words or names. In another context, De Saussure (1959, p. 169) says “the vast majority of words are in one way or another, new combinations of phonetic elements torn from older forms.” Our analysis on etymology of a word or combination of words will not be complete without the past historical events. In other words, the veracity of the present forms of words, including the tones on such words is located in

the past of the historical development of such words before they are realised in their present forms.

Through the historical development of the present LLH tone forms on *orikì àbìsọ*, one is able to account for the fixed or constant LLH tones on *orikì àbìsọ*. These names are as old as Yorùbá history and religion; because, *Ìbejì* (twins) that serves as bedrock for *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá* and *Ìdògbé* is one of the Yorùbá earliest deities (Adéoyè 1985). Through this historical and genealogical event, we are able to account for the tone status of LLH on *orikì àbìsọ* in the Yorùbá tradition.

Summary and Conclusion

It has been found out from this paper that, all the Yorùbá human *orikì*: *orikì Bòròkinni* (praise name for important personalities), *orikì orilẹ̀* (praise name for one's clan), *orikì àbìsọ* (praise name given to a child on the eighth day) serve as trace elements. In other words, they offer a means of identity of locating an individual from the past or origin. It is discovered from this finding that *orikì àbìsọ* with LLH tone pattern evolves from *Ìdòwú*: a male or female child after the twins, *Àlàbá*: a male or female child after *Ìdòwú* and *Ìdògbé*: a male or female child after *Àlàbá*. In other words, tone on *orikì àbìsọ* originates from these names. The origin of these names equally has religion connections; since *Ìbejì* that brought about these names and their tones is an important Yorùbá deity.

It is further observed that these names (guided by their tones) are non-gender in nature. This is why there is a strict or exclusive application of the LLH tones for either male or female of *orikì àbìsọ*. Therefore, we are able to establish the LLH tones on *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá* and *Ìdògbé* as prototones. This form of tones has earlier been realised as the commonest of other forms of *orikì àbìsọ*: LHH and LMH are mostly associated with the female children. By this finding, we are able to establish the origin of *orúkọ àbìsọ* as a category of *orúkọ àmútòrunwá* (names by birth circumstance and signs). It has been discovered in this paper that the potentiality of the origin of LLH tone pattern of on the source of *orikì àbìsọ* with the present-day forms of *orikì àbìsọ* are similar. For instance, both the LLH tone patterns on *Ìdòwú*, *Àlàbá* and *Ìdògbé* and the realisation of tones on the present day LLH tone patterns on *orikì àbìsọ* remain unchanged. In other words, they are both of tri-syllabic form, their prefixes of word formation are 'à' and 'ì' and they both comprise two verbs with low tones.

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