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The Stereotyped Pattern of Bàtònū Traditional Personal Names: A Reflection of the Counting System

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Abstract

In many speech communities, culture influences naming conventions. Different cultures have different conventions for personal names. In Bàtònū ethnic naming convention, a personal name comprises of a given name bestowed at birth plus a surname or family name. The stereotyped nature of Bàtònū traditional personal names shows a unique pattern that reflects the ordinal counting system in the language. Bàtònū uses 'base five' in its counting system, however, the traditional personal naming convention follows 'base six'. The numerical order in which the traditional personal names are given is in 'base six'. Thus, the names of the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th children are formed by adding a positional-suffix morpheme "-mèrè" to each of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th names. Every child that is given birth to by a Bàtònū woman has his/her traditional personal name being culturally determined by the child's numerical position among other children from the same parents. Even though the language has no grammatical gender distinction, its naming system is gender sensitive. Each of the traditional personal names has its masculine and feminine forms. This paper discusses the correlation between the traditional naming convention and the counting system.

Introduction

Bàtònū belongs to the Gur (Voltaic) subgroup of the Niger-Congo family (Welmers 1952, 1973), Comrie (1987), and Sanusi (1983, 2002). It is spoken as a first language or mother tongue in two adjacent countries in West Africa: Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. In Nigeria, the neighbouring Yorùbá native speakers refer to the language as "Bàrìbá" or "Bàrùbá"; while the Hausa native speakers call it "Borgawa". Bàtònū native speakers in Nigeria are found in places like Kosubosu, Okuta, Gwanara, Yashikira, Ilesha, Chikanda, etc.; all in the Baruten Local Government Area of

Kwara State. The Bàtòṇū speaking areas in the Republic of Benin include Parakou, Nikki, Kandi, Natitingu, etc. The Nikki dialect is considered as the standard form of the language, while Nikki town is referred to as the cradle of the “Bàtòmbù” or the Bàtòṇū people. The Nikki dialect is the variant used for data collection in this study.

The traditional system of counting in a given speech community constitutes one of the sociolinguistic factors with which such a speech community is identified and differentiated from another speech community. Similarly, the traditional naming system varies from culture to culture. It is the sociolinguistic correlation between the naming system and the counting system in Bàtòṇū as well as the related cultural issues that aroused the interest of this writer. The culture of the language requires that every child given birth to by a particular woman must have his/her traditional personal name determined by his/her numerical position among other children from the same parents. It is worthy of note that the traditional naming convention is culturally sensitive to the issue of divorce and second marriage. In other words, the counting and naming of children from a particular woman are only valid for a particular husband. When a woman divorced and remarried, the numerical counting and naming of her children for the new husband will start afresh. In other words, the naming convention is culturally determined by the paternity of the children.

The Traditional Counting and Naming Systems

According to Girling (1958: 69), “Counting is nearly as old as speech and numerals are as old as writing”. Bàtòṇū uses ‘base five’ and a multiple of five as the basis upon which cardinal and ordinal numerals are derived. Using ‘five’ as a base, the numerals ‘six’ through ‘nine’ are derived based on ‘five’ plus ‘one’ through ‘four’, while ‘ten’ is regarded as a new unit (i.e. a multiple of five) (see Sanusi 1995). The cardinal and ordinal numerals in Bàtòṇū can be exemplified as shown in (1) and (2) respectively.

(1) Cardinal Numerals

- (i) tíá¹ 'one'
 (ii) ìrū 'two'
 (iii) ìtā 'three'
 (iv) ññē 'four'
 (v) n55bù 'five'
 (vi) /n55bù # kà # tíá/ → [n55bātía] = 'six' five and one
 (vii) /n55bù # kà # ìrū/ → [n55bāìrū] = 'seven' five and two
 (viii) /n55bù # kà # ìtā/ → [n55bāìtā] = 'eight' five and three
 (ix) /n55bù # kà # ññē/ → [n55bāññē] = 'nine' five and four
 (x) [ēkūrū]² = 'ten', etc.

(2) Ordinal Numerals

- (i) gbûkîrū 'first'
 (ii) /yîrū + sèé/ → [yîrūsèé] 'second'
 (iii) /îta + sèé/ → [îtāsèé] 'third'
 (iv) /ññē + sèé/ → [ññēsèé] 'fourth'
 (v) /n55bù + sèé/ → [n55bùsèé] 'fifth'
 (vi) /n55bātia + sèé/ → [n55bātiasèé] 'sixth'
 (vii) /n55bāiru + sèé/ → [n55bāirūsèé] 'seventh'
 (viii) /n55bāitā + sèé/ → [n55bāitāsèé] 'eight'
 (ix) /n55bāññē + sèé/ → [n55bāññēsèé] 'ninth'
 (x) /5kūrū + sèé/ → [5kūrūsèé] 'tenth', etc.

As evident in (2 i-x) above, apart from the first ordinal number 'gbûkîrū', other ordinal numbers in the language are derived by adding the positional-suffix morpheme – sèé.

Traditional Personal Names and their Reflection of the Counting System

Bàtònū uses the ordinal counting system in assigning traditional personal name to individual child (male or female).

That is, a child is given a specific personal name based on his/her numerical position among the children from the same mother and father. Such individual name is also determined by the sex of the child. In other words, each traditional personal name has its masculine and feminine forms, as shown in (3) and (4) below:

(3) First Set of Children

Ordinal Counting	Male	Female
(i) bii gbííkó (1 st child) -	Wòrú	-Y55
(ii) bii yirūsèé (2 nd child) -	Sàbì	-Bònā
(iii) bii itāsèé (3 rd child) -	Bíḽ	-Bàké
(iv) bii nnēsèé (4 th child) -	Bònī	-Búyā
(v) bii n55bùsèé (5 th child)	-Sǎnī	-Dààdō
(vi) bii n55bātía (6 th child)	-Tòrí	-Bèrū

(4) Second Set of Children

Ordinal Counting	Male	Female
(vii) bii n55bāirū (7 th child) -	Wòrú-mèrè	-Y55-mèrè
(viii) bii n55bāitā (8 th child) -	Sàbì-mèrè	-Bònā-mèrè
(ix) bii n55bānnē (9 th child) -	Bíḽ-mèrè	-Bàké-mèrè
(x) bii òkūrū (10 th child) -	Bònī -mèrè	-Búyā-mèrè

The data in (3) above consist of the first set of six children with their specific traditional personal names; while the second set of four children, starting with the 7th child, have their names differentiated from the first set of children by the addition of positional-suffix morpheme “-mèrè” as shown in (4) above. To show that ‘base six’ is adopted for the naming system, the 7th child (i.e. Wòrú-mèrè) is a repetition of the first child’s name (Wòrú), except for the addition of the suffix morpheme –mèrè from 7th to the 10th child.

Findings from the Study

Following Pawlak (2011:1) and Babalola and Alaba (2003), the study of traditional naming system in a given language could be carried out within the framework of cultural linguistics or

ethnolinguistics. According to Pawlak (2011), the framework explores language data for drawing conclusions that are related to non-linguistic aspects of the culture.

Some of the ethnolinguistic issues that can be deduced from our discussion under (2.1) above include the following:

- (i) As revealed by our language helpers (Dr. Wòrú Umar Gunu (from Okuta), Mallam Wòrú Mohammed Tahiru (from Kósùbósù), and Mallam Wòrú Yakub (from Okuta), there is a cultural assumption in Bàtònū that a woman may not give birth to more than ten children in her life time; therefore, the traditional personal names, for either male or female children, do not exceed ten.
- (ii) The Bàtònū traditional personal names exhibit a stereotyped positional pattern determined by the numerical order of children from the same parents.
- (iii) There is a correlation between the ordinal counting system in the language and the traditional naming convention. However, while the counting system uses 'base five', the naming convention follows 'base six'.
- (iv) To differentiate the traditional personal names of the first set of six children in (3) above from those of the second set of four children in (4), a positional-suffix morpheme –**mèrè** is always attached to the names of each of the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th children from the same parents.
- (v) Unlike languages like Arabic, French, and Hausa, Bàtònū has no grammatical gender distinction. However, the traditional personal names in the language have both masculine and feminine forms. According to our language helpers, the gender distinction provided for the possibilities that children from the same parents may be all male or all female or a mixture of both male and female.

Conclusion

Based on ethnolinguistic approach to cultural studies, this paper examined the stereotyped pattern of Bàtònū traditional personal names and how the pattern reflects the ordinal counting system in the language. While the counting system uses 'base five', the naming convention adopts 'base six'.

Given the cultural assumption in the language that a woman may not give birth to more than ten children in her life time; the traditional personal names for either male or female children, as shown in (3) and (4) above, do not exceed ten. The particular traditional name that would be given to a child at birth is determined by the child's numerical position among other children from the same parents.

The major ethnolinguistic issues arising from the findings of this study were listed and discussed under (3.0) above. In addition to other sociolinguistic benefits that are derivable from this study, it is the opinion of this writer that given the correlation between the counting system and the traditional naming convention in Bàtònū, the traditional naming system, as a cultural phenomenon, is capable of preserving the traditional counting system in the language. This will possibly allay the fear expressed by Chan (2012) that the indigenous numeral systems of minority groups are particularly prone to be replaced by neighbouring politically and economically predominant languages.

Compared to other neighbouring languages like Yorùbá and Hausa, Bàtònū can be said to be culturally unique in both its counting and naming systems. While the counting system in Bàtònū is in 'base five', the counting systems in Yorùbá and Hausa are in 'base ten' as found in many other African languages.

Notes

1. Bàtònū has not been officially reduced into writing, published materials in the language are written with the I.P.A. symbols. As a tone language, tone marking in the language is as follows:

High tone:	[/]
Mid tone:	[-]
Low tone:	[\]

2. “ $\text{ṣṣ}kūrū$ ”, meaning ‘ten’ is a new unit (i.e. a multiple of five). It is not derived. Therefore, the language has no derivation like:
 $/nṣṣbū \# kà \# nṣṣbū/ \rightarrow *[nṣṣbānṣṣbù]$ ‘ten’ five and five

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This maiden issue of *Katsina Journal of Linguistic and Literary Studies* (KAJOLLS) presents a diverse collection of scholarly papers on language and literature, and written from a variety of theoretical perspectives. The journal's overwhelming aspiration is to be a veritable platform for the dissemination of the best academic research and discussion in the humanities, especially in the areas of language, literature, cultural studies, and textual scholarship in all its forms. In this task, KAJOLLS will provide a forum for serious and scholarly discussion of problems-fields, topics and themes in the humanities in general, including an opportunity for potential scholars, eager to cut their intellectual teeth, to present their work to the scholarly community across the world.

PROFESSOR IBRAHIM BELLO-KANO
Editorial Consultant, KAJOLLS

It is interesting for a journal to start off with a menu of very good articles and hopefully continue to print such for many years to come. This journal presents a menu of thought-provoking articles spread over a myriad of topics and languages, such as Arabic, English, French, and Hausa. Such a cornucopia won't fail to attract a legion of readers drawn from language and linguistics, as well as literature.

Tunde writes on marketing discourse, showing how persuasion is achieved through the use of the Gricean (1967) theory of the cooperative principle (CP). On the other hand, Bature explains how suprasegmental features are expressed in connected speech when they are used to achieve the desired meaning, especially in relation to stress and intonation.

Mastery of English among second language learners, argue Ibrahim and Buhari in their article, is dependent on teaching intonation, while Adamu stresses that age and class affect the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) in writing to young adults. Still on English, Sambo explains that, in translation of pharmaceutical leaflets from English to French, errors are often committed.

Bello-Kano, writing from the literature angle, supports Deconstruction as a theory more successful than Practical criticism, the New Criticism and Formalism. Abdullahi presents a view of Nietzsche's autobiographical text, the *Ecce Homo*, as a site of narrative self-consciousness, and as a structure that is necessarily conditioned by literary form. Also, literature-based is Almajiri's contribution- a survey into Hausa folksongs based on the prototype theory to argue that children are keen observers of behaviour.

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