

# An Ethnographic Analysis of Names of Round Characters in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*

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**Abstract**—This study attempts an analysis of names of round characters in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* from the ethnography of communication's perspective. It was discovered that the characters in the text bear different names which reflect diverse ethnolinguistic values. This, therefore, necessitated occasional translation from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) i.e. English. The names were further dissected contextually based on their discursive illocutionary acts. This subsequently revealed a preponderance of informative acts among others. The research further affirmed the submission of Schneider (2009) that conventional anthroponomastics approaches its subject ethnographically. The study therefore, brings about an interface of literary studies, pragmatics, linguistics and onomastics (the study and science of names).

**Index Terms**—anthroponomastics, onomastics, ethnography, Wole Soyinka, illocutionary acts

## I. INTRODUCTION

Several studies have been carried out on Wole Soyinka's literary texts, using different linguistic and literary-critical approaches without sufficient consideration for the texts' onomastic resources. Therefore, this study examines these resources in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* in order to reveal their significant pragmatic values in relation to the themes and style of the text. The text has been selected because it has not enjoyed enough attention from analysts as far as onomastics is concerned.

### A Synopsis of the Text

The setting of the play is an unnamed community where two strangers exist along with the natives. The first stranger is Eman, the school teacher and the second is Ifada, an idiot. At the end of each year, a rite is performed to expel the evil of the outgoing year and to approach the new year with a sense of purification. This necessitates the search for a carrier, the scapegoat, who will dispense with the evil of the year ending. As customs demand, a stranger is used for this purpose and Ifada is the apparent choice. But he is unwilling and Eman has to perform the task since he belongs to the lineage of the willing strong breed. The Old Man who appears to the exasperated Eman as a carrier sums up the play thus: "Ours is a strong breed, my son. It is only a strong breed that can take this boat to the river year after year and wax stronger on it." (p.25)

Maduakor (1986, p.249) observes that Soyinka exploits the carrier theme in *TSB* by using it as his main metaphysical ideology in *DKH*. His words: "Soyinka has earlier exploited the motif of the carrier in *The Strong Breed* (1964) and used it as the main metaphysical ideology in *Death and King's Horseman* (1975)". (Maduakor, *ibid*). But Ogunba (1982, pp.17-18) holds a divergent opinion about the carrier motif in *TSB*. In his view, Soyinka has used the traditional African event of purification through a carrier, to explore the career of a great artist in an evil laden community. He submits:

In this little play Wole Soyinka has, characteristically, taken a rather common place traditional African event – the purification of a community through a carrier to explore the career of the serious artist. The design of a purification festival helps to set in perspective a community conscious of the weight of evil but in which each person is too much of a citizen to dare the evil. (Ogunba, *ibid*).

He sums up rhetorically by asking: "For, what person brought up 'naturally' would make the effort to clean up a community?" It is in this situation that a true artist comes in and, unhindered by 'good sense' and 'natural loyalty', strikes a discordant note (Ogunba 1982, p.18).

### Ethnography of Communication

Gumperz and Hymes (1962, pp. 35-71) have proposed a taxonomy of situation components known as the model or ethnography of communication in order to account for both the textual and extra-textual meaning(s) of a concept. The model is a set of SPEAKING acronyms highlighted below:

**Setting/Scene**- This refers to the general circumstance in which the communication event takes place (including time and place) and the psychological setting of the event (formal or informal, serious or festive).

**Participants**- The term 'participants' indicates the role- relationship between participants in a speech event: the addresser/speaker, on the one hand, and the addressee/hearer/audience, on the other. However, it is possible for the participants to change roles.

**Ends**- These refer to the outcome of a speech act and it may be:

- (i) Results – intended and, or unintended.

(ii) Goals – individual and, or general.

**Act Sequence**-This refers to the form and content of the message of text. The form has to do with how it is said while the content has to do with what is said.

**Key**: This means the tone or manner in which a textual message is delivered. Speech events may be different if one is performed perfunctorily while the other is painstaking.

**Instrumentalities**- These constitute the different channels of speech transmission e.g. oral, written, telephone, e-mail etc.

**Norms**- Norms refer to the conventions of social and speech behavior which could be linguistic and non-linguistic; universal or culture- specific.

**Genre**- Genre refers to the linguistic form employed such as poem, letter, story etc.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Dasylva (1997) unravels Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* as one of the dramatic literary texts he considers in *Dramatic Literature*. He discovered that the language of a character provides insight into his traits, educational background, religion, occupation and social status. He explicates this with a character named Amusa, a police sergeant who, in the text, "occupies a lower rung of the social ladder. A messenger with a low education, if any, expresses himself in pidgin English or badly expressed English" (Dasylva 1997, p.86). The work of Dasylva is commendable as it serves a link between literary criticism and linguistic analysis. It is one of the pillars upon which the present study stands. Notwithstanding, the work is largely literary in perspective.

Olaosun (2000) studies "Language and Style in Dramatic Discourse: A linguistic stylistic study of Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*" as an M.A. Thesis. In his work, he pays particular attention to the semantics of names as reflected in the text. According to him, "names in Yoruba semiotic universe", which provides a background for the play, "are meaning potentials" (Olaosun 2000, p.57). He emphasizes that names are determined by certain elements of the wider situation, which include events, happenings and conditions. He argues further that most names of characters in *Kongi's Harvest* are mainly role names, which the playwright uses as a means of delineating their personalities. He agrees with Yule (1985, p.116) that names serve as "some sorts of containers carrying meaning components". Olaosun's work is inspiring as it is stylistic in nature while the present study is ethnographic in approach.

Bright (2003) takes an anthropological linguistic approach to the study of names among the North American Indians. He unravels the myth behind descriptive names turned anthroponyms (personal names) and toponyms (geographical names) respectively. The study also considers the grammatical peculiarities of toponyms. The work is insightful as it combines anthropology with linguistics in onomastics. It differs from the present research (which studies literary onomastics) because it .studies proper names in real life situations.

Schneider (2009) applies a generative approach to the study of human names which, according to him, is anthroponomastics. He dissects convetional anthroponomastics from generative anthroponomastics. He postulates that convetional anthroponomastics approaches naming from an ethnographic point of view, while the latter takes an analytical philosophical approach to the study of names. This work is related to the present study which seeks to analyse Soyinka's text from an ethnographic theoretical approach. It is different, however, because it dwells largely on generic naming while we are dealing with literary onomastics.

Odebode and Onadipe (2011) take a pragmatic approach to the study of *Abiku* naming phenomenon among the Yoruba. They discovered that certain politeness phenomena are either violated or obeyed in the course of naming the *Abiku* children. The study indicates that *Abiku* names are economical as more is communicated (within a few strands of letters) than said.

The study is both generic and sociocultural. Therefore, it is different from the present study which aims at studying names of characters in a literary text by Wole Soyinka.

## III. DATA ANALYSIS

It cannot be overemphasized that the basic essence of a research of this nature is to show how data can be used in elucidating a theory and how a theory, in turn, can be used in explaining a linguistic data. Therefore, we are testing the ethnographic theory on the names of some of the round characters in our texts. As observed by Fishman (1972) as well as Bloomer, Griffiths and Merrison (2005, p.82) certain questions are pertinent to any ethnographic discourse. The questions are: "who makes, what utterance, to whom, when, where and how." By applying these questions to our data, we shall be able to unmask the intended message inherent in the names. Thus, we may come up with the following tabulated results which start with the name Eman (denoting God with us) in *TSB*.

TABLE 1:  
EMAN (GOD IS WITH US), ASTRANGER-

QUESTION	ANSWER	ETHNOGRAPHIC KEY
Where?	unnamed community	Setting
With whom?	the villagers	Participants
With what aim or why (is the utterance made?)	to affirm that there is a substitute for Ifada, the unwilling carrier	End
What type of act is the assertion?	Informative	Act
What is the tone of the utterance?	Sarcastical	Key
What is the choice of channel?	verbal	Instrumentality
What are the expectations of the situation?	that Eman will replace Ifada as a carrier	Norm
What linguistic event is involved (employed)?	Joke (conversation)	Genre

Eman is a clipping from Emmanuel, which according to the *Holy Bible* denotes ‘God with us’ (Matthew 3, verse 25). Just as the Messiah (Jesus Christ), Eman prefers to die for his society in place of Ifada, an idiot and an unwilling carrier. Eman’s action therefore brings about the theme of scapegoatism in the play. Also, Eman is a teacher just as Christ was. He is addressed as follows by Jaguna: “Teacher, open your door ...” (p. 18). As Christ (Emmanuel) was crucified among thieves for the sins of the world, Old Man tells Eman, “you will use your strength among thieves” (p. 26). Addressing Eman further, the Old Man says: “Son, it is not the mouth of the booster that says he belongs to the strong breed. It is the tongue that is red with pain and black with sorrow.” (*TSB*, p. 25).

Therefore, by applying the SPEAKING acronym to this name, we shall have the following import demonstrated in Table 1:

If Eman is truly a stranger (or god with us), the pertinent question is where? Then, our answer speaks to the setting of the play which is the unnamed community. Furthermore, Eman is a stranger with whom? The answer to this question gives the participants in the ongoing discourse. These are the villagers like Jaguna, Priest and Oroge. Then, if we regard the name as a locution, why is the utterance (Eman is a stranger or god is with us) made? Any answer to this question will speak to the end of the conversation which is to atone for the sins of the people as a willing carrier instead of the unwilling ifada in the context. To the next question “what type of act is the assertion (Eman is a stranger)?” “is the answer informative (act). The next WH question demands for the tone of the (name as an) utterance (i.e. Key) which is sarcastical. This is so because Eman is being teased by Jaguna, the representative of the villagers that there is only one stranger apart from Ifada as follows:

JAGUNA: ... There is only one other stranger in the village, but I have not heard him offer himself. [spits] (*TSB*, p.20)

From the table, the next couple of WH question s demand for the choice of channel (Instrumentality) and expectation of the situation (Norm) respectively. The channel is verbal while the expectation of the utterance is that Eman will volunteer himself to replace Ifada. Finally, the last question has to do with the linguistic event employed (Genre) which obviously is joke in form of conversation.

TABLE 2:  
SUNMA, JAGUNA’S DAUGHTER

QUESTION	ANSWER	ETHNOGRAPHIC KEY
Where?	unnamed community	Setting
With whom?	(Sunma), Oroge and Jaguna	Participants
With what aim or why (is the utterance made?)	to distinguish her from other girls and to prove her qualities; also to warn Jaguna not to kill her	End
What type of act is the assertion?	Informative	Act
What is the tone of the utterance?	harsh/ironical	Key
What is the choice of channel?	verbal	Instrumentality
What are the expectations of the situation?	that Sunma will display the attributes of a soldier’s daughter	Norm
What linguistic event is involved (employed)?	conversation	Genre

An analogy of summer (the end of a period in a year), this name (Sunma) dictates the time of the play. Similarly, the name is homophonous with the phrase; “Sun Man”. The latter is the denotative meaning of the Biblical Samson. Componentially, the sun has the following attributes: +harshness, +heat, +light. These attributes combined with “man” to form “sun man”. That the bearer is a lady and Eman’s girl friend (*TSB*, p.17) indicates an irony of naming in the play. As a light in the village, she is the only person who does not approve of her people’s culture of annual human sacrifice. As a strong and stern person, she is also the only person who engages her father, Jaguna (Army chief) in physical combat in the text. Therefore, by applying our WH questions to the locution (Sunma [is] Jaguna’s daughter), we may come up with the following ethnographic (SPEAKING) result as shown in Table 2:

The setting is the unnamed community while the participants in this context are Sunma, Jaguna and Oroge. The end is to distinguish her from other girls (as represented by A GIRL in the cast list on pages iii and 21) and to prove her qualities; also to warn Jaguna not to kill her as implied in the words of Oroge below after Sunma reprimands her father for torturing Eman (as a carrier) by saying: “Murderer! What are you doing to him?. Murderer! Murderer!” (*TSB*, p 28).

With these words, Sunma flies and claws at the shameless Jaguna’s face like a crazed tigress.

In retaliation, Jaguna “succeeds in pushing her off and striking her so hard on the face that she falls to her knees. He moves on her to hit her again” (TSB, p. 28). The above scenario brings about the following conversation between Jaguna and Oroge:

OROGE: (comes between) Think what you are doing Jaguna, She is your daughter.

JAGUNA: My daughter! Does this one look like my daughter? Let me cripple the harlot for life.

OROGE: That is a wicked thought Jaguna

JAGUNA: Don’t come between me and her

Oroge: Nothing in anger – do you forget what tonight is?

JAGUNA: Can you blame me for forgetting? (draws his hand across his cheek – it is covered with blood). (TSB, p. 28, emphasis mine)

...My own daughter... and for a stranger... (p.29)

Jaguna’s last statement in the extract above proves that Sunma is not only Jaguna’s daughter, but also Eman’s girl friend. Hence, she is defending her stranger friend. Meanwhile, the underlined clause in the excerpt indicates the tone of the utterance which is both harsh and melancholic. Oroge is cautioning Jaguna in a harsh tone while the latter is replying ironically. The act is informative and the instrumentality is verbal. The norm is that Sunma will display the attributes of a “sun like” person (i.e. soldier’s daughter) while the genre is conversational.

TABLE 3:  
IFADA, AN IDIOT

QUESTION	ANSWER	ETHNOGRAPHIC KEY
Where?	unnamed community	Setting
With whom?	the villagers-Jaguna, Sunma, Oroge	Participants
With what aim or why (is the utterance made?)	to indicate the worthlessness of the bearer in the society	End
What type of act is the assertion?	Informative	Act
What is the tone of the utterance?	Light /metaphorical/rhetorical	Key
What is the choice of channel?	verbal	Instrumentality
What are the expectations of the situation?	That Eman will release Ifada for sacrifice	Norm
What linguistic event is involved (employed)?	conversation	Genre

Ifada is a Yoruba expression *ifa da* denoting (the oracle divines or godsend), if we recall that the setting and the author of the play dwell much on the Yoruba socio-cultural milieu. In the play text, Jaguna says: “Ifada is a godsend.” (p.18). In the same vein, if we apply the SPEAKING acronym to the utterance Ifada, an idiot, we may come up with the following interpretation (captured in Table 3): The setting is the unnamed community and the participants are the villagers with Jaguna, Oroge and Sunma being the principal. The end is to indicate the worthlessness of the bearer in the society. This is stated in a light tone as follows:

EMAN: Yes. But why did you pick on the helpless boy. Obviously he is not willing.

JAGUNA: What is the man talking about? Ifada is a godsend. Does he have to be willing?

EMAN: In my home, we believe that a man should be willing. (p.18)

OROGE: Mister Eman... No one in his senses would do such a job. Why do you think we give refuge to idiots like him? ... You see there is a purpose in that. (p. 19 emphasis mine)

On a lighter mood, both Oroge and Jaguna explains the reason Eman has to give up the helpless Ifada. But rhetorically, Oroge demanded for the reason the idiot is being kept in the village from Eman. The answer is not far-fetched as it implies – to get him sacrificed one day. The instrument is verbal and the end is that Eman will release Ifada for sacrifice as a carrier. Similarly, the genre is conversational. Ogunba (1982:15) affirms that the carrier, in tradition, is a spiritual force and a fortunate scapegoat who passes through severe torments in place of others in order to become a spiritual super power. Ifada therefore is a real idiot by rejecting the path of greatness.

TABLE 4:  
JAGUNA

QUESTION	ANSWER	ETHNOGRAPHIC KEY
Where?	unnamed community	Setting
With whom?	enemies/strangers like Ifada and Eman	Participants
With what aim or why (is the utterance made?)	-to indicate the bravery and loyalty to profession of the bearer - to ensure a carrier is provided for the ritual ceremony	End
What type of act is the assertion?	Imperative/commanding	Act
What is the tone of the utterance?	harsh	Key
What is the choice of channel?	verbal	Instrumentality
What are the expectations of the situation?	That the bearer will fight with the strangers to the point of getting a carrier	Norm
What linguistic event is involved (employed)?	conversation	Genre

Jaguna is a Yoruba expression for “fight the ground battle” (an imperative mood). It is a contraction of *A ja Ogun ona* which denotes an Army Chief. Socio-politically, most Yoruba towns and cities were established through wars of conquest. The military titles (*Balogun*, (General), *Aare-ona-Kakanfo* (Generalissimo), *Abogunrin* (Aide de Camp),

*Ajaguna* (Chief of Army)) therefore exist in Yoruba lexicon. *Jaguna* in our text is Sunma's father and he is the assailant of the two strangers (Ifada and Eman) in the play. An attempt is made in Table 4 to test the WH questions and the SPEAKING acronym on this name. The result is as follows:

(*Jaguna* [You] fight the ground battle- Where? With whom, When? etc) The setting is an unnamed community. *Jaguna* is to fight with perceived enemies and strangers like Eman and Ifada who are the participants in this context. The end is to indicate the bravery and loyalty to profession of the bearer. In the play context, the end is to ensure a carrier is provided for the ritual ceremony. The act is commanding (imperative mood). The instrumentality is verbal. The norm is that the bearer will fight to the point of getting a stranger carrier. The genre is conversation. The bearer lives up to his name as he (and his men) trails about Ifada in page 17 of the text. He eventually gets a willing carrier in Eman. After Eman is finally entrapped, *jaguna* says: "He is surely finished now" (*TSB*, p. 36). He engages his daughter in physical combat and, as a military man, his language is always replete with a tone of command "go on, do as I say" (p. 18).

TABLE 5:  
OROGE

QUESTION	ANSWER	ETHNOGRAPHIC KEY
Where?	unnamed community	Setting
With whom?	villagers	Participants
With what aim or why (is the utterance made?)	To pacify a tensed situation	End
What type of act is the assertion?	affirming	Act
What is the tone of the utterance?	calm	Key
What is the choice of channel?	verbal	Instrumentality
What are the expectations of the situation?	That the bearer will mediate in quarrels	Norm
What linguistic event is involved (employed)?	conversation	Genre

Oroge is a coinage from the Yoruba expression "oro jeje (contracted as 'oro jee') with a sound modification in our text as Oroge. The Yoruba believe that "soft words attract kolanut from pocket while harsh words attract sword from sheath". By applying the SPEAKING acronym as well as our WH questions ([speak] soft words where, when etc) to the name, we may come up with the following ethnographic result which has been presented in tabular form in Table 5:

The setting is our unnamed community. Soft words are spoken to the villagers (participants). The aim is to pacify tensed situations like the arrest of Ifada and the dispute between *Jaguna* and Sunma. The act is affirming i.e. an affirmation of the Yoruba saying. The tone is calm with a verbal instrument the norm is that the bearer will mediate in quarrels and the genre is conversation. Oroge manifests all the qualities highlighted above in the play. In a smiling mood, he convinces Eman that Ifada will be "the most joyous creature in the festival" (p.20), if the latter can be released to him. He settles quarrel for *Jaguna* and Sunma in page 28 of the text. He cautions *Jaguna* (who advances aggressively) against the use of force on Eman as follows:

OROGE: Patience *Jaguna*...if you want the new year to cushion the land there must be no deeds of anger. (p. 17).

Oroge is so gentle that *Jaguna* even accuses him of not shouting at Eman (as a carrier) in the following extract:

JAGUNA: You were...looking at him...Why didn't you shout? (p. 27).

OROGE: You shouted didn't you? Did that catch him? ... S-sh ..... look!

Finally, Oroge throws more light on his name by cautioning *Jaguna* against being aggressive to Eman (as a carrier) and Sunma in the following words from the text: "Nothing in anger- do you forget what tonight is?" (p. 28).

### Statistical Analysis of the Names' Speech Acts

In this section, we attempt a statistical analysis of the illocutionary (discourse) acts inherent in the names studied. The results are statistically indicated in tables 6 and 7 as well as figures 1 and 2 below. A brief interpretation of the tables and figures follows shortly.

TABLE 6:  
TABLE PRESENTING THE NAMES' SPEECH ACTS

Name	Speech Act
Eman	informing
Sunma	informing
Ifada	informing
Jaguna	commanding
Oroge	affirming
Total	6

TABLE 7:  
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF NAMES' ACTS

Speech Acts of Names	Frequency	Percentage
informing	3	60
commanding	1	20
affirming	1	20
Total	5	100

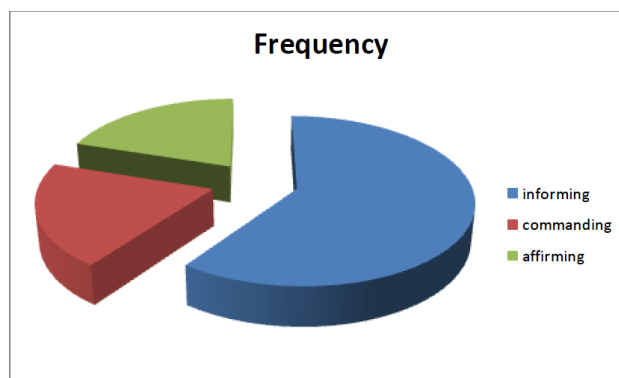


Fig. 1: Pie chart illustrating frequency of speech acts in the names

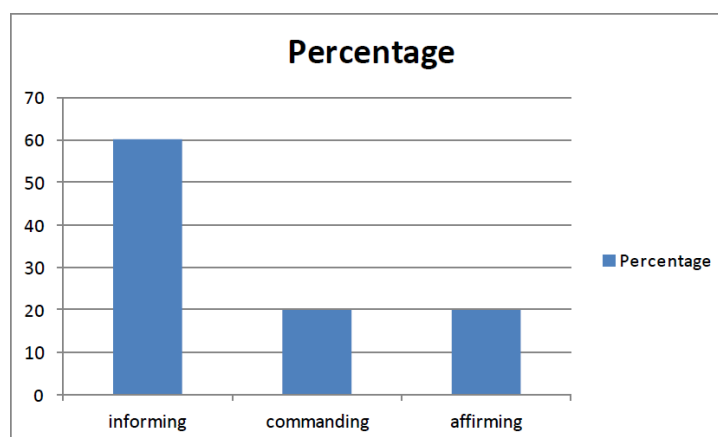


Fig. 2: Bar chart illustrating percentage(s) of the speech acts in the names

From table 6, three names (Eman, Sunma, Ifada) out of the five deployed have the informing speech function, one (Jaguna) has commanding and one (Oroge), affirming. Table 7 indicates the frequency as well as percentage distribution of the names' speech acts. Informing has the highest frequency of 3 which corresponds to 60%. Both commanding and affirming has 1 frequency and 20% each. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 illustrate these situations as they present a pie chart of the frequencies and a bar chart of the percentages respectively.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Our preoccupation in this study has been on analysis of names of round characters in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* from the ethnography of communication's perspective. It was discovered that the characters in the text bear different names which reflect diverse ethnolinguistic values. This, therefore, necessitated occasional translation from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) i.e. English. The names were further analysed contextually based on the postulation of Bloomer et al. (2005, p.101) that to interpret various speech acts (names) in texts, "we often need to go beyond literal meaning to get at speaker meaning. We often have to make inferences based on context". Considering the illocutionary acts of the names, out of the five names analysed, three are informing, one is commanding and one is affirming. We may thus submit that informing is the preponderant speech (discourse) act deployed by the playwright. This is significant because the playwright can be said to be informing rather than entertaining the reader (audience) through his naming techniques, hence, he is SPEAKING (encoded messages with the names) as a conventional onomast. We may therefore conclude based on the postulation of Schneider (2009, p.2) that while anthroponomastics studies human names, "conventional anthroponomastics approaches its subject ethnographically."

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