



Pet-naming as Protest’s Discourse in Polygamous Yoruba Homes: A Socio-Pragmatic Study

Idowu Odebode^{1*}

¹ Department of English, College of Humanities, Redeemer’s University, P.M.B. 3005, Redemption City, Mowe, Ogun State, Nigeria.

* Corresponding author.

Received 11 December 2011; accepted 20 February 2012

Abstract

This study attempts a speech act analysis of names given to pets particularly by women in polygamous homes among the Yoruba, a popular ethnic group in Nigeria. Twenty-five names were selected for the study. The names were given in-depth analysis based on the theory of Speech Act by Austin (1962). The study indicates that the invented pet names, apart from their initial illocutionary function of insulting, perform certain other functions in their context of usage. Through naming or nicknaming, it is possible to direct, inform, advise and perform different discourse acts. It is also possible to take turns indirectly through naming such that one pet name elicits for another which serves as a reply to the previous. Finally, it is discovered that pet naming is a very significant communicative tool which is largely used by participants in polygamous homes in Africa as instruments of vengeance and protests.

Idowu Odebode (2012). Pet-naming as Protest’s Discourse in Polygamous Yoruba Homes: A Socio-pragmatic Study. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 4(1), 107-113. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/j.sll.1923156320120401.245>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320120401.245>

INTRODUCTION

The patriarchal system of authority in Africa has influenced a lot of other socio-cultural phenomena including

marriage. Thus, the male chauvinist is allowed to have more than one woman as his legal wives. These women (who are not happy at the turn of events in their matrimonial homes) are always at loggerheads with one another and with their husbands. In a bid to protest and retaliate, each woman buys one pet and exercises her (naming) power over the latter by giving it a symbolic name. Psychologically, these names are meant to mitigate the suffering and punishment that each of the participants is passing through in such a polygamous setting; socially, they serve as instruments of protest but pragmatically, they perform different illocutionary functions in the contexts. This study considers twenty pet names as used in polygamous Yoruba setting(s), with a view to underscoring their speech act functions.

THE YORUBA GROUP

The Yoruba numbered about five million people inhabiting the South western part of Nigeria. They are a major group of people with common language, cultural heritage and geographical boundary. They predominantly occupy six states (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Ondo and Oyo) out of thirty-six in Nigeria. They claim Ile-Ife (a town in Osun state, Nigeria) as their ancestral home, Oyo-Ile as their political headquarters and mythical Oduduwa as their progenitor. Among the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria, they are the most civilized and the most enlightened as far as western education is concerned.

POLYGYNY AND POLYANDRY

PET ADOPTION

It is insightful to know that the Yoruba have two major means of acquiring pets. A person may buy his/her pet (cat, dog, goat, donkey) from a seller. Alternatively, s/he may prefer adoption. The latter is a system whereby you are given a female pet by a neighbor or an acquaintance based on the agreement that you will be sharing the pet's offspring equally for the first three consecutive time of delivery. As all the players in polygamous homes will like to contribute to the discourse indirectly through pet naming, each woman buys at least one animal which is given one significant name. It is discovered that the greater the number of women in the house, the higher the number of the pets kept there. In fact, each animal represents the voice of each woman.

METHODOLOGY

In carrying out this research, I used two instruments namely participatory observation and interview. The tools were adopted because the researcher is a Yoruba man. So, the culture of naming in polygamous homes is not strange to him. Over the years, he has been able to observe and document some of these credible corpuses. Furthermore, he was able to unravel certain 'esoteric' names in polygamous contexts through oral interviews. This was possible as a result of his good mastery of the Yoruba language which endeared the respondents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the speech act theory by Austin (1962). According to Austin, words do not just occur, neither are they just uttered. More than ordinary passing of information, words (phrases, clauses, sentences) are used to execute certain functions in different contexts. To Austin, every utterance is a locution and they perform certain acts or actions in situations. For instance, the inscription "Beware of Dog" boldly written in front of a private residence is performing a warning action. Austin identifies three distinct levels of action beyond the act of utterance itself. These, he categorizes as: the act of saying something, what one does in saying it and what one does (or achieves) by saying it (which is a product of hearer's interpretation). These functions are realized as locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act respectively. This distinction is captured by Kempson (1975, p.51) as follows: "speaker utters sentences with a particular meaning (locutionary act) and with a particular force (illocutionary act) in order to achieve a certain effect (perlocutionary act) on the hearer."

Austin started his speech act classifications by identifying constative utterances and performative utterances. The distinction between the two, in Austin's view, is superseded by that between saying something and doing

something with what is said. Constative utterances make use of constative verbs (deny, assess) as in the statements: "He denies the allegation" and "They assess the situation." Constative utterances are not used to perform (immediate actions), rather, they are oftentimes used to make statements, describe situations and report events. Hence, 'deny' and 'assess' (in the examples) can be categorized as retractive and descriptive constative verbs respectively. Alternatively, performative utterances employ performative verbs and are used to perform actions as in "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" said in the process of baptizing the addressee. Furthermore, Austin distinguishes between an implicit performative utterance and an explicit performative utterance. The former contain no performative verbs, but can be used to perform an action in a sense. For instance, "Out!", said by a cricket umpire. This utterance can be used to perform an act (of sending out a player) by the cricket umpire. The same goes for the utterance "Ten dollars" which a card player can use for a bet. On the other hand, explicit performative utterances include:

We promise you to be there.
I appoint you the assistant coach.
I name this boy John.

A number of tests are proposed by Austin in identifying performative utterances (and verbs), in particular, the explicit performatives. These include:

- (i) the insertion of "hereby" as in – I hereby appoint you the assistant coach;
- (ii) the use of first person (singular or plural) subject as in- / We hereby...;
- (iii) the use of active (and not passive) statement(s);
- (iv) the use of the present tense verb form otherwise, the immediacy of the action will no longer be valid; rather the statement will be odd (e.g. *I hereby named this boy John), reporting, untimely and infelicitous (e.g. I named this boy John).

Austin (1962) further proposes a taxonomy of five categories of speech acts: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behavitives and expositives. But Austin's pupil, Searle (1969) criticizes his master's taxonomy for being clumsy and overlapping. Consequently, he proposes five alternative classifications captured by (Osisanwo, 2003:60) as: assertive (assert, allege, declare), directives (ask, implore, invite), commissives (swear, vow, bet), expressives (express, state, convey) and declaratives (baptizing, knighting, firing [from a job]). Searle (1969) therefore concludes that speech acts involve:

acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises and so on; and more abstractly, acts such as referring and predicating...made possible by and in accordance with certain rules for the use of linguistic elements. (Searle, 1969, p.16).

It should be noted that participants in polygamous homes deliberately coin names for their pets. These names

are not only meaningful, but they also communicate sense and perform certain illocutionary acts in the contexts, hence the relevance of the speech act theory to our study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abel (2004) studies the nicknames of American Civil War Generals. He discovers that the nicknames given to the warlords stem from a number of qualities. These include biographical antecedents (e.g. ethnicity, pre-war profession), physical appearance (e.g. hair, height), affection (first names, last names), character (aggressiveness, dependability), internal motivation (childhood, wordplay) and unknown origin. Abel maintains that writers prefer using the nicknames to anthroponyms in reference to the Generals in newspapers and fictional works. One significant aspect of the study is its in-depth treatment of animal metaphor/association as part of the (character) nicknames of the Generals. For instance, "George Henry Thomas (USA)" and "David Emmanuel Twiggs (CSA)" were given Lion-hearted Thomas and Tiger respectively for their bravery. Similarly, "Benjamin Franklin Cheatham (CSA)" as well as "Thomas Casimir Devan (USA)" were called Bulldog and Horse respectively. (Abel, 2004, p.274). The study proves the possibility of one War General maintaining several nicknames, or changing nicknames overtime. "This is especially so for Ulysses S. Grant, who later went on to become the President of the United States and acquired a whole set of nickname in doing so" (Abel, 2004, p.266).

The study has enriched our knowledge on onomastics. Paradoxically, it is similar to our work because it considers (in part) how names are given to humans while the present study emphasizes how human beings (women in polygamous homes) give circumstantial names to pets.

Crozier (2004) investigates school teachers' nicknames bestowed on them by their students. With a sample of more than a hundred students, he discovers that most of the nicknames are negative in tone and directed often at disliked and unpopular namees. He contends against the namers' subjective and temperamental judgments that seem to characterize their attitudes before nicknaming their teachers. The research is related to the present study in a major way. Just as the students exercised their naming power on their teachers based on certain traits, this study is designed to reveal how Yoruba women in polygamous homes exercise their naming power over pets in order to reveal their inner grudges against their rivals and, or their husbands. Crozier's work differs from our study because while he researches on generic names of students, we are analyzing names given to animals by their owners.

Makondo (2008) examines the role of Zimbabwean (Shona) women in naming children in the patriarchal Shona society. He discovers that Zimbabwean (shona) women are innovative as they manage to devise personal

names that denotatively and connotatively put across their wishes, grievances and preference among others, in acceptable and non-confrontational ways with the aim to counter patriarchal dominance. As examples, Makondo cited the names *Murambiwa* (the denied one) and *Muvengwa* (the hated one) as denoting and connoting that the name-giver was denied entry into the new family either by the husband or his relatives. The names suggest poor treatment that initially greeted the mother at the point of marriage. On the other hand, *Hamunamoyo* 'you do not care' is a direct swipe at the non-challant husband.

Personal names (of children) particularly in polygamous situation, therefore, become protest statements directed either at the husbands, the concerned two families or at neighbours who might be against the marriage. The study further argues that Shona personal names form an important mode of access as they are used to redress imbalances. The work serves as a springboard for the present study because it addresses naming culture in polygamous settings. It differs because it centers on Zimbabwe, another African setting (different from Nigeria which is our present focus).

Odebode (2010) takes a socio-semantic approach to the study of twins' names among the Yoruba. He discovers that the coming of (the) twins into a family is significant because it marks an onomastic revolution in a family. The naming system of such a family changes automatically as new names evolve and old ones are either modified or dropped. Such (new) names are patterned after the "ibeji" (twins) i.e. 'ibi' denoting to deliver and 'eji' meaning two. Thus we have names like *Kedunwale* (s/he who brings twins home), a nickname given to the twins' elderly one; and *Idowu*, a name denoting "s/he who was born after twins". The study concludes that twinning transcends ordinary and multiple birth(s) among the Yoruba. It cuts across their religious beliefs, socio-economic activities and serves as a marker of deference to the twins' family.

Although the present study is based on the Yoruba, it differs from Odebode's (2010) because the former considers how human beings are named by their fellow. But the present study is considering how animals are named by human beings with the aim of contributing to the constant discourse in polygamous homes.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section is devoted to data analysis of the twenty-five pet names which have been selected for our discussion. The names are analyzed based on our theoretical framework as follows:

Kelenusonu

This name denotes (You should) keep quiet or watch your mouth. It is largely used by the most senior wife in a polygamous setting. This is so because the senior wife is more or less the next to the husband in domestic power

and influence; hence, she exercises her authority on the younger wives by ordering them to keep quiet or watch their utterances. Although she does this with great tact by allowing the name given her pet to speak out the words. The illocutionary act of the name is therefore warning.

Sogbae

Sogbae is a Yoruba expression that means watch over your calabash. Calabash keeping is a common phenomenon among the Yoruba women. The calabash is kept for different purposes. It serves as a miniature bank where the wife keeps her valuables like trinkets and money. A big calabash is also used as a tray where guests' food items are placed while a small one serves as a cup in which palm wine is poured to entertain visitors with. Certain calabash (*Kete*) can also be used to fetch water from rivers. Therefore, women place a great value on calabash in Yoruba land. Contextually, the owner of the pet that bears this name is indirectly warning the second woman to mind her business; hence the illocutionary act of warning underlining the name.

Ajeloge

Ajeloge simply means wealth is beauty. The name is adopted for a pet by a wife who is rich or prospering in business but barren. As she is being provoked by the different names given to other pets in her matrimonial home by her rivals, she also seeks a solace in her wealth. Therefore, she gets a pet which she proudly named *Ajeloge* which is a metaphor of love and beauty in the context. The speech act of the name is thus asserting.

Ojuloge

This name denotes face is beauty. It is often given to pets by wives who are barren but beautiful. It presupposes the existence of other "elements or qualities" of beauty like wealth and children which the rivals of the name-giver often pride in. The giver believes that she is able to sustain and conquer her husband through her charm. Thus the speech act of this locution is asserting.

Olomololaye

Unlike Ajeloge and Ojuloge, this namer believes that children are more important than a combination of beauty and wealth in any polygamous home. This is revealed through the full lexico-semantic potential of the name *eni ti o ni omo ni o ni aye* which is contracted as *olomololaye*, a name which denotes "she who has children owns the world". It presupposes the existence of other "things (beauty, wealth)" which people value in this world, but which cannot be compared to child bearing. The name-giver therefore comes out to discredit other values and affirm the importance of having children in matrimonial home(s), in particular, a polygamous setting. The illocutionary act of the name is therefore asserting/discrediting.

Maromi Pin

This name denotes 'don't write me off' or 'don't give up on me'. As the case may be, the giver (probably a barren woman) is advising her rivals not to write her off and her husband not to give up on her because there is hope. In most cases the name serves as a reply to *Olomololaye*. The illocutionary act of the name is therefore advising.

E Pa'mopo

It should be noted that it is not only women that seek redress through pet naming in polygamous contexts. Occasionally, their husband often contributes to the discourse. He does this by naming his pet *E pa'mopo*, a Yoruba expression for "(all of you should) be united". The presupposition of the name is that there is an ongoing conflict among a plural number of people. The illocutionary act therefore is advising.

Ile l'o Ba Mi

In most cases, the first wife is respected as the "mother" of the whole house and "the second in command" to the husband. This consciousness often affects such first wives psychologically. Hence, they employ a name such as *ile l'o ba mi* (you met me in this house) for their pets. The name presupposes an addressee who came late and an addresser who arrived early. Furthermore, it has as affirming as its illocutionary undertone.

Lilo L'oolo

As in *ile l'o ba mi*, this name is being used by the first wife (for her pet). *Lilo l'oolo* is an expression in Yoruba which denotes "you will definitely leave (this house)". It is an indirect swipe at the second or younger wife that she must leave that home. It presupposes that other women have found it difficult to stay with the first wife in that house. Therefore, we may deduce phono-graphologically, the emphatic *lo* (leave) in the name *lilo l'oolo*. The speaker is thus affirming to the (indirect) listener that it is a matter of time, she will definitely leave that home. The speech act of the locution is therefore affirming (threatening).

Je N Lo'gba Temi

Like in spontaneous discourse situation, this name is more or less a reply to the previous (*liloolo*). The pet owner, being the younger wife, usually takes on the *iyaale* (the first or oldest wife as the case may be) with this name i.e. *Je n lo'gba temi*, a Yoruba expression denoting let me use/enjoy my time. This locution presupposes that the addressee had spent and enjoyed her period. The inference is that the period is now over. Therefore, it is the turn of the addresser to benefit from that matrimonial home. The illocutionary act of the name is thus warning.

Eke'olere

This name in its full text, *eke ko ni ere*, denotes deception does not profit. It is used by the namer to advise the addressees i.e. her co-wives in the same home. Usually,

deception with rebellion is the general characteristics of a polygamous home. Hence, the pet namer is saying it is not profitable. The illocutionary act of the name is therefore advising.

Riro

This name stem out of the saying ‘man proposes but God disposes’. In Yoruba, its full potential is realized as *riro ni ti eniyan, sise ni ti Olorun* (thought is man’s, action is God’s). It is used by a barren woman to reply her rivals who seem to be mocking her. The illocutionary act is that of affirming.

Magb’ara Lewon

The denotation of this name is “Don’t trust them/ don’t depend on them”. It is used by the husband to warn the youngest wife not to depend on the other women who are pretending to love her. This is in consonance with the Yoruba saying that “*orisa je ki npe meji obinrin ko de’nu*” (God, let us be two wives in this house is an insincere prayer by a woman). The illocutionary act of the name is therefore warning.

Eeyan Won

This name is a Yoruba expression which means ‘good people are scarce’. It is used by any of the wives to express her anger on her rivals (who are pretenders and usurpers) as well as their husband (who has disappointed her by multiplying women in the home). The name thus presupposes that nobody is good in that home, since good people are far-fetched. Therefore, the name-giver is trying to discredit her household by affirming the saying through pet-naming. The speech act therefore is affirming (discrediting).

Panumo

This name simply denotes keep quiet. It is therefore intended to serve as a warning to the rival of the name giver. It presupposes that the other woman has been nagging, talkative or garrulous, hence the importance of this warning. We may also infer a chaotic situation which largely characterizes polygamous homes in Africa, from this name. The speech act therefore is warning.

Gbo Tie

This name denotes mind your own. It is borne out of the illocutionary act of warning/advising for the namer’s rival in a polygamous setting to mind her problem and leave the name-giver alone. The name is therefore fulfilling a dual speech act of warning/advising.

Keeta

This is a contraction of the Yoruba expression *e sinmi keeta* meaning stop tale bearing. As implied, the name is given to a pet by the husband willing to advise/warn her/his household to be wary of tale bearing. The speech act is therefore advising/warning.

Tantolorun

The full potential of this name is *Taa ni o to Olorun* or *Tanitolorun*. It is a name with the meaning patterned after a rhetorical question “who is like God?” or “who is as big as God?” Oftentimes, it is used as a response to the taunting from a rival woman who is mocking the name giver either on childlessness, lack of beauty or poverty. The user is therefore responding to her rival that she is not like God who can take away her reproach because he specializes in impossibilities. The illocutionary act of this name is therefore questioning as well as indirect assertion that “you are not like god.”

Tanmola

This is another rhetorical question used as a name. Its full rendition is *Taa ni o mo ola* or *Tanimola* meaning “who knows tomorrow?” Indirectly, the name giver is telling her ‘enemies’ in the polygamous home that they do not know what can happen to her in future. Hence, we have a speech act of questioning with asserting. She is hopeful that her condition can improve regardless of whatever her rivals are saying or irrespective of their conclusion about her situation. Although this name is given to animal(s) in this context, questioning as naming is not uncommon among the Yoruba. Thus human beings are also given names such as *Adekanmibi?* (Is it my turn to be crowned?) and *Kilanko?* (what are we celebrating?). The former is used in royal families while the latter is borne by children ‘who are predestined to death’ known as *Abiku* in Yoruba.

Tanfeari

Tanfeari is a contraction of *Taa ni o fe ki a ni?* or *Tanifekani?* It is another name with the illocutionary act of questioning.

Arope

This is a metaphor of shortness. It is an illocutionary act of assertion targeted at a rival wife to indirectly tell her that she is too short.

Agoro

Agoro is a metaphor of tallness. It is used in the context to insult a rival wife who is too tall. It is an illocutionary act of assertion aimed at replying the addressee who gave *arope* to her pet.

Olo

This is a metaphor of fairness and freshness. It is borne out of Yoruba saying *olo oni eje tutu* meaning fair and cold blooded. The name is given to a brown dog or a fair goat. By this action, the namer is trying to appeal to her husband’s sense of aesthetics that she is fresh (young) and fair in complexion, hence beautiful. She is therefore praising herself. The speech act of the name is therefore eulogizing/asserting.

Adu

This is a metaphor of blackness or darkness and beauty.

Its full potential in Yoruba is *adu maa dan* meaning black and shining. It is used by the addresser to inform the addressees (her rival and their husband) that though she may be black, she is beautiful. This is probably necessitated by African men's preference for fair ladies. The speech act therefore is eulogizing/asserting.

Dejuoriwa

Dejuoriwa is an assertion in Yoruba which is fully realized as *de oju ki o ri iwa* meaning watch carefully and you will see (their) attitudes. Just as in *magbaralewon*, it is used by a husband to warn or advise his youngest wife. The speech act is thus advising/warning.

SUMMARY

In summary, twenty-five names are analyzed above with their attendant illocutionary forces (otherwise speech acts in this context). The names are given by participants in polygamous homes among the Yoruba Nigerians to their animals. Unexpectedly, the names speak volume in contributing to conflicting discourse in polygamous settings. They further elicit different illocutionary acts as represented in Table 1 following:

Table 1

Name	Illocutionary Act
Kelonusonu	warning
Sogbae	warning
Ajeloge	asserting/compairing
Ojuloge	asserting/compairing
Olomololaye	asserting/discrediting
Maromipin	warning/advising
Epamopo	advising
Ilelobami	affirming
Liloloolo	threatening/affirming
Jenlogbatemi	warning/advising
Name	Illocutionary Act
Ekekolere	advising
Riro	affirming
Magbaralewon	warning
Eeyanwon	discrediting/affirming
Panumo	warning
Gbotie	warning/advising
Keeta	advising/warning
Tantolorun	questioning/asserting
Tanmola	questioning
Tanfeani	questioning
Arope	asserting
Agoro	asserting
Olo	eulogizing/asserting
Adu	eulogizing/asserting
Dejuoriwa	advising/warning

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

From the discussion so far, we may deduce that among others, eight major illocutionary acts (warning, asserting, affirming, advising, questioning, eulogizing, discrediting and threatening) feature prominently in our data. It should be noted that we have selected the very first illocutionary manifestation in each datum for ease of analysis particularly, in situations where a name has more than one speech act function (see Table 1). This situation is statistically represented in Table 2 and Fig. 1 below:

Table 2

Illocutionary Act Type	Frequency
warning	7
asserting	5
affirming	2
advising	4
questioning	3
eulogizing	2
discrediting	1
threatening	1
Total	25

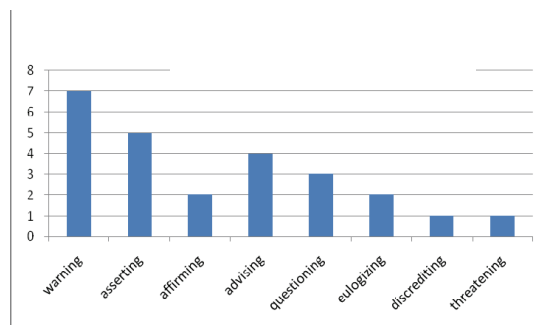


Figure 1
Illocutionary Act Type

From the table, it can be inferred that warning has the highest preponderance of frequency with seven occurrences. This is followed by asserting which has five. Advising attracts four; questioning, three; affirming and eulogizing, two each; discrediting and threatening, one each.

Furthermore, out of the twenty-five names studied, three (*Epamopo*, *Magbaralewon*, *Dejuoriwa* denoting “Be united”, “Don’t depend on them” and “Watch carefully and see their attitudes” respectively) are contributed by men (i.e. the husbands) while twenty-two are given by the wives. The three names are either advising or warning. This therefore presupposes that women participants in polygamous homes speak or complain more than their men counterpart. The situation further proves that women are the most cheated in polygamous homes because a man is free to marry many women. Fig. 2 illustrates the gender

distribution better as follows:

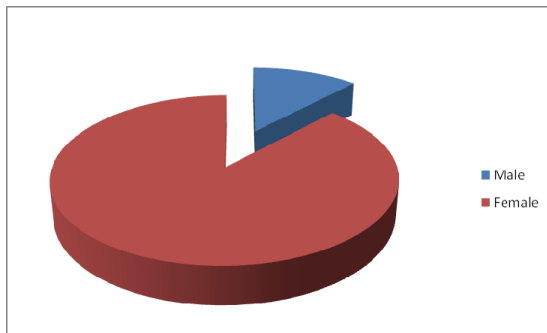


Figure 2
A Pie Chart Illustrating Gender Distribution

CONCLUSION

This study has proved that the invented pet names, apart from their initial illocutionary function of insulting, perform certain other functions in their context of usage. Pet naming, thus reveals the tact employed to communicate facts and protest in polygamous homes in Africa. We may therefore conclude that names are very significant communicative tools in African context, in particular among the Yoruba. Through naming or nicknaming, it is possible to direct, inform, advise and perform different discourse acts. It is also possible to take turns indirectly through

naming such that one pet name elicits for another which serves as a reply to the previous.

REFERENCES

- Abel, E. L. (2004). Nicknames of American Civil War Generals. *Names*, 52(4), 243-286.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do Things with Words*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Crozier, W. R. (2004). Recollections of Social School Teachers' Nicknames. *Names*, 52(2), 83-99.
- Kempson, R. (1975). *Presupposition and Delimitation of Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Makondo, L. (2008). Ethnicity and Matriarchal Protest: A Case of Dialoguing Shona Personal Names. *Names*, 56(1), 10-18.
- Odebode (2010). A Socio-semantic Study of Twins' Names among the Yoruba Nigerians. *Onomastica Canadiana*, 92 (1), 39-52.
- Osisanwo, W. (2003). *Introduction to Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics*. Lagos: Femolus-Fetop Publishers.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts: an Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shapiro, Warren (2009). *Partible Paternity and Anthropological Theory: The Construction of An Ethnographic Fantasy*: University Press of America (pp. 11-23). in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fraternally_polyandry#cite_note-7 Retrieved August 31, 2011