



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: G  
LINGUISTICS & EDUCATION  
Volume 14 Issue 5 Version 1.0 Year 2014  
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal  
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)  
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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

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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.

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*GJHSS-G Classification : FOR Code: 200399*



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Dr. Fadoro<sup>α</sup> & Jacob Oludare<sup>σ</sup>

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It is categorically clear that the same rules that apply on words that are borrowed from other languages to Yoruba also apply on Arabic names commonly used by the speakers of the language, so the process is rule-governed and highly systematic.

**Keywords:** *yoruba language, arabic names, nativisation, natural phonology, phonological rules.*

## Preamble

You (Muslims) will be called on the day of resurrection with your names and the names of your father, so let your names be good and nice. Prophet Mohammed.

## I. 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

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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.

## II. 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.

## III. 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. 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.

Table 1 : Data Presentation

Arabic Name	Transcription	Yorùbá Form	Transcription
Ishmā'il	iʃma'i:l	Súmóílà	súmóílà
Badrud-Dīn	badrud-di:n	Bádírù	bádírù
Qādr	Qa:dr	Kádírì	kádírì
Luqmān	luqma:n	Lúkú (clipping)	lúkú
Abduş-Şamad	abdus-samad	Sàmódù	sàmódù
'Abdul-Wāhid	abdul-wa:hi:d	Wáídì	wáídì
Abdur-Razzāq	abdur-raza:q	Ràsáki	ràsáki
Abdul-Majīd	abdul-madzi:d	Mòjídì	mòdʒídì
Qāsim	qa:zim	Kásúmù	kásúmù
Sādiq	sa:diq	Sádíkù	sádíkù
Zabayr	zubajr	Sùbérù	sùbérù
Zaynab	zajnab	Sinábù	sinóbù
Sa'īd	sa'i:d	Sáídì	sáídì
'Abdur-Rashīd	abdur-raʃi:d	Ràsídì	ràsídì
Ḥasān	hasan	Aásàni	aásàni
Ḥuzayn	huzajn	Òsèni	òsèni
'Abdul-Jalīl	abdul-dʒali:l	Jèlìlì	dʒɛlìlì
'Abdul-'Azīz	abdul-azi:z	Làsìsì	làsìsì
'Abdul-Hāmīd	abdul-hami:d	Làmídì	làmídì
'Abdul-Yaqīn	abdul jaqi:n	Yèkìni	jèkìni
Kāmīl	ka:mil	Kámílù	kámílù
Ghazzālī	Gazali:	Kàsáálí	kàsáálí
'Abū Bakr	Abu:-bakr	Bákàrè	bákàrè
Junayd	dʒunajd	Jínádù	dʒinádù

Note: A dash (-) put on the top of a vowel signifies length.

Apart from the above, fifteen other Arabic names are used to exemplify morphology and syntax.

#### V. DATA ANALYSIS

As could be seen from the data above, the Arabic forms of the names look very different from their

Yorùbá 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.

Table 2 : Yorùbá and Arabic Consonants

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

Table 3 : Arabic Vowel

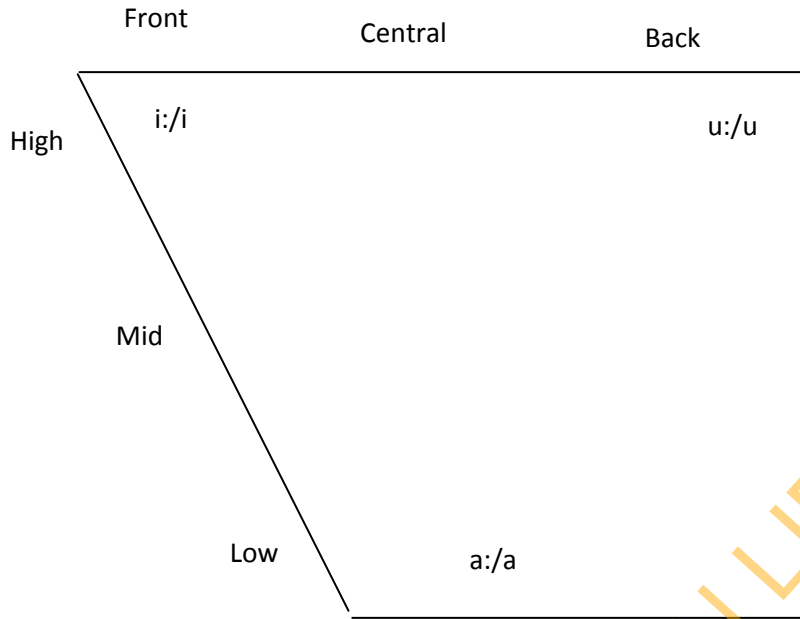
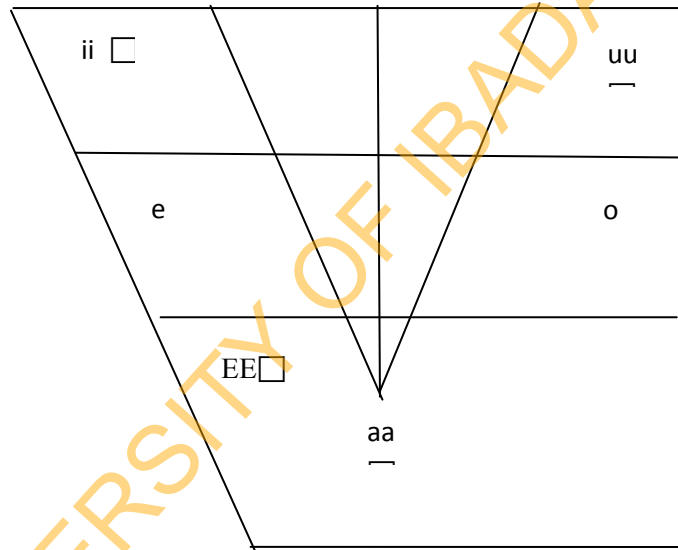


Table 4 : Yorùbá Vowel



As reflected on tables 2 – 5, Arabic has 48 consonant segments, made up of 24 normal consonants and 23 geminates, whereas Yorùbá has only 18. In terms of vowels, Arabic has only 6 vowels, 3 of which are short vowels while the remaining 3 are long. Yorùbá 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 Yorùbá are found in Arabic names, such consonants are replaced with the ones available in Yorùbá 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, Yorùbá 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 Yorùbá are not available in Arabic. Apart from that, Yorùbá has /e/, /o/, /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ which are not attested in Arabic. We shall see examples of names in which these vowels occur in the Yorùbá forms shortly. Also, the Arabic language has long vowels which Yorùbá does not have. These long vowels are replaced with their short counterparts in Yorùbá.

## VI. 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 Yorùbá, 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-Samād	→	sámɔ̀ ðu
'Abdul-Wahid	→	wáíḍi
'Abdul-Majīd	→	mɔ̀ dʒidi
'Abdul-Jalīl	→	dʒɛ́ lili
'Abdul-Yaqīn	→	jɛ́ kíni
'Abdul-Bakr	→	bákàrè

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.

- Badrud-dīn → bádṛiṛu
- Najīm-dīn → nɔ̀ dʒimù
- Quamar-dīn → kám ɔ̀ ru
- Misbau-dīn → músíbaù

The form 'dī: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 Yorùbá.

#### b) Consonant Substitution

Consonant substitution is a natural process which is language universal. Generally, when words which contain consonants that are not attested in Yorùbá are borrowed from other languages. Such consonants are substituted with the ones that are available in the language. Let us look at some examples:

Qāsim	→	kásúmù
Sādiq	→	sádíkù
Zubāir	→	sùbérù
Zaynab	→	sínábù

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 Yorùbá. So, the logical thing to do is to replace them with 'k' and 's' which sound very much like them and are available in Yorùbá.

#### c) Vowel Insertion

Vowel insertion is introduced for two major reasons. These are: one, to break consonant clusters, because Yorùbá 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 → bákàrè

Badru	→	bádṛiṛu
Ishmā'il	→	sùmóílà
Abdu-	→	àbùdù

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. Yorùbá 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:

Sāmād	→	sámɔ̀ du`
Wahīd	→	wáíḍi
Jalīl	→	dʒɛ́ lili
Yaqīn	→	jɛ́ kí'ni
Najīm	→	nádʒimù
Yānus	→	jínúsà

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 ā, ī and ū are replaced by short ones. According to Owolabi (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.

- If the last consonant in the word (name) is (+ labial), then 'u' is usually inserted.

Zaynab	→	sínábù
Qāsim	→	kásúmù
Najīm	→	nádʒimù
Habīb	→	ábíbù

As seen in the data above 'b' and 'm' which are (+ labial) attract 'u' as the inserted vowel. However, this is not always so. Let us look at the data below:

Wahhāb	→	wáhábì
Alīm	→	aáílmì

In the data above, even though the names end with 'b' and 'm' respectively, 'i' is inserted at their word final position.

- Front vowels at the root of the words (names) attract 'i' or 'e'. Let us look at the examples below:

Wahid	→	wáíḍi
Jalil	→	dʒɛ́ lili
Yaqin	→	jèkíni
Majīd	→	mòdʒidi
Rashid	→	àʃidi

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 → ábúdù
- ii. Zaynab → sínábù
- iii. Junayd → dʒinādu
- iv. Samād → sāmɔdù

As seen above, 'u' and 'o' which are back vowels attract 'u' as the inserted element.

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

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-Azīz → [àsísí] → [áísí]

Abdul-Amīd → Hamīd

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.

## VII. 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 Yorùbá 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:

Table 5: Gender as a morphological component

Male	Female	Meaning
(Muti)'	Mutih	The obedient one
(Rafi)'	Rafiah	The elevated one
(Rābi')	Robiah	The fourth child
(Rāshī:d)	Rosheedah	The righteous person
(Shākir)	Saakirah	Reminder (of God)

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 Yorùbá, 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:

Table 8: Examples of unisex names in Yorùbá

Names	Meanings	Gender Male/Female
Oluranti	The Lord has remembered me	M/F
Oluremilekin	The Lord has wiped my tears away	M/F
Olusayo	The Lord creates joy.	M/F
Oludare	The Lord justifies me.	M/F

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 Yorùbá names which are mostly sentences. Let us take a look at the following examples:

Table 6: Arabic Names as 'Noun Phrases

Arabic Names	Meanings	Syntactic Analysis
Misbau-dīn	Lamb of religion	Noun Phrase
Shamsu-dīn	Sun of religion	Noun Phrase
Qamoru-dīn	Moon of religion	Noun Phrase
Najmu-dīn	Star of religion	Noun Phrase
Abdur-Rahīm	Servant of the most merciful	Noun Phrase
Abdur-Alīm	Servant of the most knowing	Noun Phrase
Abdul-Ghaffīr	Servant of the all forgiven	Noun Phrase
Abdul-Basīr	Servant of the all-seeing	Noun Phrase
Abdul-Kabīr	Servant of the greatest	Noun Phrase
Abdul-Jabār	Servant of the compeller	Noun Phrase

When compared with the following Yorùbá names which are analysable into sentences, the difference is clear:

Table 7 : Yorùbá Names as Sentences

Yorùbá Names	Meanings	Syntactic Analysis
Olúḍàrè	The Lord justifies me	Sentence
Adémọ́lá	Crown attracts wealth	Sentence
Ayò tundé	Joy has come again	Sentence
Oluyémísì	The Lord honours me	Sentence
Oluwakòrédé	The Lord has brought goodies	Sentence
MójọláJesú	I enjoy the goodness of Jesus.	Sentence
Fọ́rúnsỌ	I commit him to God for safe keeping	Sentence
Fadọ́rọ	Ifa creates wealth	Sentence
Oyètade	Chieftaincy is equivalent to royalty	Sentence
Adejúmọ	Royalty surpasses knowledge	Sentence

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the phonological processes involved when Arabic names are nativised by the Yorùbá 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 Yorùbá 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 Yorùbá where mostly the distinction is implied. The distinction is usually clear when pet names (ofíkí) are involved.

Finally, we have examined the fact that at the syntactic level, Arabic names are mostly analysable into noun phrases whereas Yorùbá 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 Yorùbá. 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.

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