

## **A Morphosemantic Study of Death-Related Yorùbá Anthroponyms**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the Yorùbá conceptualisation of death as reflected in personal naming practices, particularly among those who adhere to specific cultural beliefs. It explores the morphosemantic structures underlying death-related anthroponyms within the Yorùbá-speaking communities of West Africa. These names are primarily associated with the notion of *àbíkú*—a child fated to die and be reborn repeatedly—a belief deeply embedded in Yorùbá traditional religion. Such names encapsulate the emotions of name givers, who express love, grief, desperation, or resignation through their naming choices. Additionally, the study considers names linked to *ìpadàwayé*, signifying the reincarnation of a deceased ancestor.

The dataset comprises purposively sampled names from the admission lists of universities and degreeawarding institutions across southwestern Nigeria over a five-year period. The analysis highlights the ways in which naming practices are influenced by the lived experiences and perceptions of death and rebirth among the Yorùbá. Name givers may plead with, admonish, appreciate, or even condemn the returning child through the name assigned at birth. Furthermore, death-related names tied to consanguinity serve as linguistic markers of ancestral reincarnation within families.

While modernity has influenced traditional naming conventions, remnants of this practice persist. This study contributes to the broader understanding of the cultural, linguistic, and symbolic dimensions of death in Yorùbá society. It provides a framework for semantic mapping of death-related lexemes, examines sociolinguistic factors affecting the adoption and retention of such names, and explores their broader cultural implications. Additionally, its findings have interdisciplinary relevance across fields such as anthropology, psychology, folklore studies, and literary analysis, enriching the discourse on death-related naming traditions in the Yorùbá context.

**Keywords:** Anthroponyms, Onomastics, Death, Yorùbá, Personal names.

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## Introduction

Yorùbá is a major language spoken in West Africa, with a significant population of first- and secondlanguage speakers across Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. Additionally, Yorùbá lexicon is employed as a ceremonial language in Santería, Candomblé, Umbanda, Kélé, and Trinidad Orisha religions, as well as in various AfroAmerican religious traditions in North America. The language, also referred to as Aku, Alaata, Anago, Nago, Lucumí, Terranova, Yaraba, and Yourriba, belongs to the Kwa subfamily of the Niger-Congo language family. Some estimates place the number of Yorùbá speakers in West Africa alone at over 40 million, making it one of the largest linguistic groups in sub-Saharan Africa [21].

Language functions as a vehicle for meaning, with words serving as essential units of communication. Names, which are grammatically classified as proper nouns, play a crucial role in this system. The analysis of names through a morphosemantic approach—a synthesis of morphology and semantics—enables an examination of their internal structure and meaning. Morphology concerns itself with the form and structure of words, while semantics deals with their interpretation. Words can be broken down into morphemes, the smallest units of meaning, which allow for a deeper understanding of how names are formed and what they convey (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011).

Cultural beliefs find expression through language, rituals, taboos, ceremonies, and symbolic systems. Among the Yorùbá, cultural heritage is transmitted across generations through myths, folklore, proverbs, and wise sayings. Naming practices constitute a significant aspect of this heritage, as names in Yorùbá society often convey specific messages and reflect the circumstances surrounding a child's birth (Ogunwale, 2012). This is exemplified in the Yorùbá saying: *Bí kò bá sí idí, obìnrin kù jé Ikúmuólú* ("It is for a reason that a woman bears the name *Ikúmuólú*"). The name *Ikúmuólú* (literally, "death has taken the household head") typically signifies the loss of a family's breadwinner. This pattern aligns with naming traditions in other African societies, where names encapsulate social conditions, evoke responses, and initiate discourse about the bearer's circumstances within the broader society [14], [15], [9], [12], [22], [5].

The birth of a child is generally considered a joyous occasion; however, the loss of that child elicits profound grief, despair, and, in some cases, hope for a subsequent birth. In Yorùbá cosmology, death is often attributed to spiritual forces, as captured in the saying: *Ikú d'óró* ("Death brings sorrow"), which encapsulates the grief associated with the loss of a loved one. The death of a child, whose birth had been eagerly anticipated following months of pregnancy, is no less painful than the loss of an elder. For families deeply rooted in their cultural traditions, the naming of a newborn reflects their belief system. This is exemplified in Yorùbá proverbs such as: *Ilé làá wò kí a tó sọ ọmọ l'òrúko* ("The family background is considered before naming a child"), *Òrúko ọmọ ní ro ọmọ* ("A child's name influences his character"), and *Òrúko ọmọ ni ijánu ọmọ* ("A child's name serves as a moral restraint"). These expressions underscore the various considerations involved in naming a child. Given the intricate connection between birth, death, and naming traditions, this study examines the morphosemantic features of death-related personal names among the Yorùbá people.

## Death and Naming in the Yorùbá Worldview

In Yorùbá cosmology, death is perceived as both the conclusion of an individual's earthly existence and a potential transition into another life. While some deaths are regarded as sorrowful, others are not. [20] categorises the deaths of *òmodé* (young persons) and *ọdọ* (youths) as tragic, whereas the passing of *àgbà* (elderly persons) is considered natural and, in some cases, even celebratory. The funerals of the elderly are often marked by feasting, dancing, and music, as it is believed that the deceased has rejoined their ancestors in the spiritual realm. In contrast, the deaths of children are not

celebrated in this manner, as they are perceived as premature and as representing an unfulfilled destiny [1].

Several Yorùbá proverbs reflect the cultural aversion to the premature death of a child. It is considered an unnatural and sorrowful event, as expressed in sayings such as *Òmò kò gbòdò tójú iyá rẹ kú* (“A child must not die before its mother”) and prayers like *Mi ò ní f’ówó mi gbómò sín* (“May I not have to bury my child with my own hands”) or *Òmò ló máa gbèyìn mi* (“A child should outlive me”). These expressions underscore the societal expectation that children should survive their parents, reflecting the deep sorrow and misfortune associated with child mortality.

However, within Yorùbá traditional beliefs, the death of a child is not necessarily regarded as final. Instead, it is often interpreted as a temporary departure, with the possibility of the child returning in another birth cycle. Such children, believed to have undergone repeated cycles of birth and death within the same family, are referred to as *àbíkú*, meaning “one born to die.” Similar concepts exist in other West African cultures, with the Igbo referring to such children as *ogbanje* and the Hausa as *bizo* [16]. Parents or relatives of children suspected of being *àbíkú* often assign them specific names, which this study categorises as death-related names.

An *àbíkú* child is typically believed to die before reaching adulthood, returning repeatedly to the same mother, seemingly to torment her. In Yorùbá spirituality, these children are thought to belong to a mystical group known as *ẹgbé* in the spirit world, from which they derive supernatural influence over their earthly existence. They are said to succumb to various ailments or accidents, defying all attempts at medical or spiritual intervention. This belief is encapsulated in the saying: *Àbíkú sọ olóògùn d’èké*

(“*Àbíkú* exposes the medicine man as a fraud”), highlighting the perceived futility of attempts to prevent their untimely death. Parents seeking to break this cycle often resort to marking the child’s body with distinctive incisions, believing that if the child is truly an *àbíkú*, it will be reborn with the same markings. In extreme cases, the corpse of the deceased child may be burnt in the hope that this will deter its return, with some accounts suggesting that reincarnated *àbíkú* children appear darker in complexion and are subsequently ostracised by their *ẹgbé* (“spiritual kin”).

Beyond the belief in *àbíkú*, the Yorùbá also hold that the spirits of deceased adults continue to exist beyond physical death. It is commonly believed that while the body perishes, the soul remains active and may return in another form. [19] describe the afterlife as *òrun* (heaven), which they subdivide into *òrun rere* (good heaven) and *òrun apáàdì* (bad heaven). According to their interpretation, those who led virtuous lives ascend to *òrun rere*, from where they may influence the affairs of their earthly relatives. In some cases, their spirits are believed to return as newborns within the same lineage, particularly to provide guidance and protection to their descendants.

[2] further explain that adherents of traditional Yorùbá religion often consult diviners to determine whether a newborn is a reincarnated ancestor. This phenomenon, termed *ipadàwayé* (“ancestor’s rebirth”) by [19], is perceived as a spiritual mechanism through which departed elders return to the physical realm. Birth is thus considered a portal through which ancestors rejoin their families. [4] notes that when a child is born shortly after the passing of an elder family member, it is commonly believed that the deceased has chosen to return out of love for their kin. Such children are given names that explicitly reference their reincarnation, including *Babatunde* (“The father has returned”), *Yetunde* (“The mother has returned”), *Wande/Yewande* (“The mother has come to look for me”), *Iyabo* (“Mother has returned”), and *Dehinde/Sehinde* (“Come back later”). These children are often accorded special treatment within the family, as they are believed to embody the spirit and wisdom of the deceased relative.

The Yorùbá perception of death is deeply intertwined with their naming traditions, reflecting both spiritual beliefs and emotional responses to loss. The concept of *àbíkú* underscores the cyclical nature

of life and death, where certain children are believed to be trapped in an endless cycle of rebirth and early demise. Likewise, the notion of *ìpadàwayé* illustrates the belief in ancestral reincarnation, wherein deceased elders return through newborns to maintain familial continuity. These beliefs manifest in the names assigned to children, which serve as linguistic markers of grief, hope, reverence, or spiritual acknowledgment. While modernity and religious shifts may have influenced traditional naming practices, the persistence of death-related anthroponyms—especially in surnames—demonstrates the enduring impact of Yorùbá cosmology on personal identity. Understanding these naming patterns provides valuable insights into the intersection of language, culture, and spirituality within the Yorùbá worldview.

## Related Literature

This study is primarily situated within the field of onomastics, the scientific study of names. Several studies on Yorùbá personal names have been conducted, providing valuable insights into the linguistic, cultural, and sociological dimensions of naming practices.

[16] examines *àbíkú* names as represented on the social media platform Facebook. He observes that many bearers of such names perceive them as face-threatening, leading to a tendency to modify or anglicise them to mitigate potential embarrassment. For instance, names such as *Aja* (dog), *Anta* (giant lizard), *Igbokoyi* (bush rejects this), *Kusanu* (death has mercy), *Babatunde* (father reincarnates), *Yetunde* (mother reincarnates), and *Folorunso* (I gave God to watch over) have been transformed into *Ajah* (Aja), *Antar* (Anta), *Koy* (Igbokoyi), *Kusan* (Susan for Kusanu), *Babs* or *Teddy* (Babatunde), *Yetty* (Yetunde), and *Folly* (Folorunso), respectively. Unlike the study of [16], which focuses on social media adaptation and the Anglicisation of *àbíkú* names, the present research investigates death-related names as officially documented, exploring their morphosemantic structures and cultural significance.

[16] extends his analysis to naming practices within Nigeria's multilingual context. His study highlights the coexistence of names from multiple linguistic and religious backgrounds, with individuals often bearing names derived from local (Hausa, Igbo, and Yorùbá) and international (Arabic, English, and Hebrew) languages. He notes that naming patterns frequently reflect Nigeria's major religious traditions—traditional beliefs, Christianity, and Islam—while also demonstrating cross-ethnic and cross-geographical influences. This study is relevant to the present research in its exploration of the interplay between names and cultural identity, though it does not specifically address death-related naming conventions.

In a study of Yorùbá personal names, [18] underscores the communicative functions of names beyond mere identification. He classifies Yorùbá names based on their functions, identifying categories such as historical, appreciative, status-related, and instructive names. He argues that names can unify individuals, convey warnings, express aspirations, and even predict the future of the bearer. His study aligns with the present research in its emphasis on the significance of names in Yorùbá culture but does not focus specifically on death-related names.

Another perspective on Yorùbá naming traditions is provided by [17], who investigate names derived from *Ifá*, the Yorùbá divination system. Their study, based on data from four *Ifá* priests, reveals that *Ifá*-based personal names often emerge from divinatory processes such as *Esentaye* (a ritual performed at a child's birth) and *Igbori* (a ceremony seeking spiritual insight into an individual's destiny). They observe that such names, which traditionally hold profound spiritual and prophetic significance, are becoming less common due to the increasing influence of Christianity and Islam. Unlike the present study, which examines death-related names in a broader cultural context, their research focuses on divinatory naming traditions within Yorùbá traditional religion.

The reviewed literature demonstrates the richness and complexity of Yorùbá naming practices, highlighting their linguistic, cultural, and sociological significance. However, existing studies have not extensively examined the morphosemantic structures of death-related names within the Yorùbá worldview. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing an in-depth analysis of how personal names encode cultural attitudes towards death, reincarnation, and spiritual continuity.

## Aim and Objectives

This study aims to examine the morphological characteristics and semantic implications of death-related Yorùbá anthroponyms. Specifically, it seeks to:

- i. identify the morphological processes involved in the formation of death-related Yorùbá anthroponyms; and
- ii. analyse the semantic meanings conveyed by these anthroponyms within the Yorùbá cultural and linguistic context.

## Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are the morphological processes involved in the formation of death-related Yorùbá anthroponyms?
- ii. What semantic meanings are conveyed by death-related Yorùbá anthroponyms?

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach and employs a case study research design. The population consists of all Yorùbá-related anthroponyms, with data purposively sampled from the admission lists of tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria over a seven-year period (2016–2022). As a native speaker of Yorùbá, the researcher selected names based on their association with the notions of death or reincarnation. While an initial assumption might be to focus on names containing the morpheme *ku* (which often signifies death), not all such names necessarily convey death-related meanings. Therefore, a more nuanced selection process was adopted to ensure that only anthroponyms explicitly linked to death or reincarnation were included. The identified names were systematically recorded in a spreadsheet, categorised, and analysed to determine their morphological structures and semantic implications. The analysis involves both the literal and logical glossing based on Leipzig glossing rules.

## Results and Discussion

The death-related Yorùbá personal names are analysed morphologically and grouped into themes deducible from their meanings. The categories identified for this analysis include plea names, consanguine names, uncertainty names, informing names, insulting names, hopeful names, and bravery names.

Plea names are those given to a child with the implicit or explicit intention of pleading for the child's survival. These names are meant to convey a plea or request, either to the child or its spirit, urging it not to die or abandon the parents. The names in this category typically contain elements that reflect a personal appeal from the parent, often framed from the first-person singular perspective, reinforcing the emotional connection and desperation of the name giver. Such names often encapsulate the parent's deep concern for the well-being of the child and reflect a desire to avert the misfortune of losing the child prematurely. They represent the parents' emotional vulnerability and their earnest wish for their child's survival, health, and safety.

## “Console me”

“Stop my tears – over you”

“The one who came to console me”

“stay with me”

“With me”

“stay and enjoy life”

“Wait and bury me – when I am old.”

Duro = Dúró  
Stand  
“Stay”

Dairo =	dá	+	èyí	+	dúró	
	Prevent		this		leave PROG	
	“Hold this one down.”					
Maku =	Má	+	kùú			
	Do NEG		die			
	“Don’t die”					
Kudabo	=	ikú	+	dàbò		
		death		please		
	“Death please do not strike”					
Banjoko	=	Bá	+	mi	+	jókòó
	Assist		1SG.ACC			sit
	“Sit with me”					
Bamitale/Bantale =	Bá	+	mi	+	tó	+ alé
	Help		1SG.ACC		reach	night
	“Wait here till I become old”					
Orukotan	=	Orúkọ	+	tán		
	Name			finish PERF		
	“All names have been exhausted.”					
Kalejaiye	=	Kalẹ	+	jẹ	+	ayé
	Sit down		eat			world
	“Stay with me and enjoy the world”					
Mafikuyomi =	Ma	+	fí	+	ikú	+ yò + mí
	Do NEG		use		death	scorn 1SG.ACC
	“Don’t use death to scorn me.”					

Malomo serves as a poignant plea, requesting the child to stay and not to succumb to death. Remi conveys the desire for comfort and emotional reassurance, particularly in times of grief or despair. Remilekun is an even more explicit request to alleviate sorrow, reflecting a desperate plea for relief from sadness or loss.

Names such as Aderemi and Rotimi/Timi are directly framed as calls for presence and support. The parent or family seeks the child’s continued presence as a source of comfort, healing, and stability. Timi condenses this sentiment into a brief but powerful expression of dependency and togetherness.

There are also names that focus on the continuation of life and the hope that the child will stay with the family for a long time, as seen in Durojaye and Duro. These names evoke the wish that the child will thrive and share in the joys of life, rather than succumb to death prematurely. Durosi(n)mi is an

affectionate expression of hope that the child will outlive the parents and bury them in old age, turning the cycle of life on its head.

Some names, such as Dairo, Maku and Kudabo, are direct requests aimed at death itself, asking for mercy and intervention in preserving the child's life. These names demonstrate a more confronting relationship with the idea of death, where the child's survival is seen as a kind of defiance or resistance against the inevitability of mortality.

Names like Banjoko and Bamitale/Bantale further extend the idea of companionship and long life, with an emphasis on the child's role in staying alongside the parent as they grow older. Similarly, Kalejaiye reinforces the desire for shared experiences and the hope that the child will not be taken from the family too soon. Finally, Mafikuyomi represents a rejection of the unfairness and cruelty that death can bring, pleading for an end to the emotional torment caused by loss.

These plea names together express love, fear, hope, and a strong desire for the child's survival, linking the child's existence to the well-being of the family. These names are often given in the hope that the child will stay, not just physically, but emotionally, offering comfort and connection to the family for years to come.

## Consanguine Names

Some death-related personal names are linked to the recent death of a consanguine relative. In such instances, the newborn is viewed as the reincarnation of a deceased family member, such as a grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, uncle, aunt, or other close blood relatives. These names signify the family's belief in the return of the deceased relative through the child, reflecting the notion of ancestral continuity and spiritual connection within the family unit.

Babatunde	=	bàbá	+	tún	+	dé		
		Father		again		come		
		“Father has returned”						
Yetunde	=	ìyá	+	tún	+	dé		
		Mother		again		come		
		“Mother has returned”						
Omotunde	=	ọmọ	+	tún	+	dé		
		Child		again		come		
		“The child has returned” (Also Motunde)						
Tunde	=	tún	+	dé				
		again		come				
		“reincarnate”						
Babarinsa	=	bàbá	+	rí	+	mi	+	sá
		Father		see		1SG.ACC		run
		“Father passed away at my birth.”						
Babajide	=	bàbá	+	jí	+	didé		



	Father		awake		stand	
	“Father has resurrected”					
Jide =	jí	+	didé	=	jínde	
	awake		stand		resurrect	
	“resurrected”					
Iyabo =	ìyá	+	bò			
	Mother		return PERF			
	“Mother returns”					
Iyabo(de) =	ìyá	+	bò	+	dé	
	Mother		return PERF		arrive	
	“Mother has returned”					
Yejide =	ìyé	+	jí	+	dé	
	Mother		awake PERF		arrive	
	“Mother has resurrected.”					
Yeside =	ìyé	+	sí	+	dé	
	Mother		still		return	
	“mother returns still.”					
Yetunji =	ìyá	+	tún	+	jí	
	Mother		again		wake	
	“mother reawakened”					
Yewande	=	ìyá	+	wá	+	mi + dé
		Mother		search PERF	1SG.NOM	come
	“Mother looked for me.”					
Tunji =	tún	+	jí			
	again		wake			
	“reawakened”					
Dehide	=	Ikú	+	da	+	èyìn + dé
		Death		turn		back + come
	“Death makes him/her come last”					

(ikúdèhindé)

Sehinde = şe + èyìn + dé

Make back come

“Replace later”

Sehindemi = şe + èyìn + dé mí  
+

Make                      back                      come                      1SG.ACC

“Replace me later”

Babatunde is given to a male child born after the death of his paternal grandfather, symbolising the return of the family patriarch. Similarly, Yetunde and Yewande are feminine names given to girls born following the death of their maternal grandmother. While Tunde, the shortened version, is common, it is predominantly used for boys.

Names like Omotunde and Tunde encapsulate the broader belief in the return of a family member, where the child is thought to carry the spirit or essence of the deceased. These names not only evoke the memory of the dead but also express hope and continuity within the family lineage.

In cases where a parent dies close to or during childbirth, names such as Babarinsa poignantly reflect the family’s grief and the complex relationship between life and death. Similarly, Babajide conveys a sense of rebirth, as the child is believed to bring the father’s spirit back to life, symbolising the cycle of life and death within the family.

Other names like Iyabo and Yejide further reinforce the idea of reincarnation, with the child symbolising the return of the deceased mother or grandmother. Iyabo(de) and Yeside convey the notion that the mother is perpetually present, whether through rebirth or spiritual continuity.

Names such as Dehinde and Sehindemi reflect a more temporal concept of reincarnation, with the belief that the deceased will return in the future, particularly when the newborn child is seen as the “replacement” of the deceased parent.

All these consanguine names serve not only to honour the deceased but also to affirm the ongoing connection between generations. They act as a bridge, where the past and the present intertwine, offering both comfort and continuity to the family in the face of death.

## Uncertainty Names

Uncertainty names are those that reflect the parents' uncertainty regarding the child's survival. These names are given with the hope or expectation that the child will survive, yet they acknowledge the possibility that death may still occur. The names convey the parents’ emotional bet on the child’s survival, encapsulating both the vulnerability and the hope that the child will defy the odds and live.

Beyioku =      Bí      +      èyí      +      ò      +      kú  
                     If                      this                      do NEG                      die

“If this one did not die.”

Biobaku =      Bí      +      kò                      +      bá      +      kú  
                     If                      3SG do NEG                      act                      die

“If he/she doesn’t die.”

Betiku =      Bí      +      é                      +      ti      +      kú  
                     If                      3SG                      have                      die

“As long as he/she doesn’t die.” (variant common in Ijebu)

Bioku =      Bí      +      kò                      +      kú

If 3SG do NEG die  
 “If he/she doesn’t die.”

Beyioku captures the uncertain nature of the child's survival. It reflects a conditional hope, where the possibility of death looms but the name giver expresses a desire for the child to overcome it. Similarly, Biobaku and Bioku are expressions of hope, relying on the condition that the child will survive, but with no certainty. These names convey a sense of uncertainty and the recognition that life is fragile.

Betiku expresses a similar sentiment, with an emphasis on the ongoing wish for survival. It suggests that as long as the child lives, they are not bound to the fate of death, indicating the volatile nature of existence, especially in the case of children who may be perceived as particularly vulnerable.

These uncertainty names highlight the delicate balance between life and death in the face of a child's survival. The naming convention encapsulates both the optimism for life and the recognition of death's potential, making them poignant reflections of the family's emotional state in the wake of loss.

## Informing Names

Informing names serve to communicate to the public the impact that death has had on the newborn and the family. These names provide insight into the giver's attitude towards death, revealing emotional responses such as grief, acceptance, or resignation. By assigning such names, the giver shares a form of social commentary, informing others of the circumstances surrounding the child's birth and the family's emotional state in relation to the loss experienced.

Afikuyomi = A + fī + ikú + yò + mí  
 1PL use death scorn 1SG  
 “I was scorned because of multiple deaths.”

Kuforiji = ikú + fī + orí + jì  
 Death use head hit  
 “Death forgives”

Kuye = Ikú + yẹ  
 Death shift  
 “Death has been averted.”

Kumuyi = Ikú + mú + úyi/iyí + wá  
 death bring this come  
 “Death brought this particular one” – hence he/she is untouchable

Muyiwa = (Ikú) + mú + úyi/iyí + wá  
 Death bring this come  
 “Death brought this particular one”

Dehinde = Ikú + da + èyìn + dé

		Death	turn	back	come
		“Death makes him/her come last”			
		(ikúdèhindé)			
Ikúṣeka	=	Ikú	+	ṣeé	+ ká
		Death		can	win
		“Death has been curtailed”			
Kuponiyi =		Ikú	+	pa	+ oní + iyì
		Death		kill	the bearer of honour
		“Death took the valuable one”			
Kupoluyi	=	Ikú	+	pa	+ oní + iyì
		Death		kill	the bearer of honour
		“Death took the valuable one”			
Jenyo (Ikujenyo) =		(Ikú) +	jé	+ mi	+ yọ
		Death		make	1SG escape
		“Death saved me”			
Kudaisi	=	Ikú	+	dá	+ èyì + sí
		Death		keep	this alive
		“Death didn’t kill this one”			
Kukoyi	=	Ikú	+	kọ	+ èyìí
		Death		reject PERF	this
		“Death rejected this”			

Afikuyomi conveys the feeling of scorn experienced due to recurring deaths within the family, illustrating the pain and public scrutiny that often accompany such losses. Similarly, Kuforiji suggests a relationship with death where it is perceived as an inevitable yet forgiving force. Names like Kuye inform others that the threat of death has been successfully avoided, expressing relief and triumph over mortality.

Names such as Kumuyi and Muiyiwa highlight the resilience and uniqueness of the individual, with Muiyiwa also being a shortened form of names that might not directly relate to death such as Olumuyiwa, Ademuyiwa, Famiyiwa, Odumuyiwa, Ogunmuyiwa and so on, which show subservience to various deities. The names suggest that despite the presence of death, the individual has emerged untouched, almost as though death has chosen them for a special purpose.

Dehinde and Ikúṣeka further emphasise the symbolic struggle with death, signifying a person who has been affected by death but is positioned as resilient or ‘protected’ from it. Kuponiyi and Kupoluyi inform the public about the loss of a significant and cherished person, underscoring the sense of honour attached to the deceased. Names like Jenyo and Kudaisi convey feelings of survival

or triumph over death, while Kukoyi asserts the idea that death has bypassed the individual, symbolising their survival.

These names altogether act as vehicles for the name givers to inform the community about their emotional response to death, whether it be one of scorn, avoidance, survival, or a sense of victory over mortality.

## Insulting Names

Insulting names are those given to a child with an underlying tone of frustration or disdain, often in response to the recurring death and rebirth of an *àbíké* child. These names seem to convey the giver's dissatisfaction or anger towards the child's continual dying and rebirth cycle, perhaps hoping to make the child take heed of their repeated mortality.

Kosoko	=	Kò	+	sí	+	òkó
		There is NEG		exist		hoe
		“No more hoes” – for digging graves any more				

Kosoko is a name implying there are no more tools for digging graves. This name suggests a form of verbal rebuke, possibly aimed at a child who has repeatedly died, with the giver expressing exhaustion over the cycle.

Kilanko =	Kí	+	ni	+	à	+	ń	+	kó
	What		be		1PL		do		christen
	“What’s the need for a christening ceremony?”								

This name expresses a dismissive attitude towards the ritual of christening, potentially suggesting that the child may not survive long enough to warrant such a celebration. Ajah = Ajá

“Dog”

This name, which may carry an insulting connotation, could reflect a sense of disdain or frustration, as dogs are often seen as unimportant or expendable in many cultural contexts. The name is harsh and conveys contempt for the child's death-related circumstances. While the name Ajah may also refer to a locality in Lagos, it seems to retain its death-related connotation in this context, especially given the other names suggest the bearer's Yorùbá identity.

Ewetan=	Ewé	+	tán
	Leaf		finish
	“No more leaves – to bury you.”		

This name implies that there are no more leaves (likely symbolic of burial rites) for the child, echoing a sense of finality or exhaustion with the burial process, associated with death.

## Hopeful Names

Hopeful names reflect the parents' optimism. They are given to children with the anticipation that they will survive and remain in the world. These names express gratitude towards the Creator for

allowing the child to survive and convey the parents' hope that their efforts in giving birth to the child will not be in vain.

Abayomi = Òtá + ibá + yò + mí + ògbón  
 Enemy might have mock 1SG but

Olóhun + kò + jé  
 God do NEG allow

“Enemies would have mocked me but God didn’t allow that.”

Ajìtoni = A + jí + ti + òní  
 We wake CONT for today  
 “We’re waking to see this day”

Ajeigbe = Ajé + kìí + gbé  
 The god of wealth do NEG waste  
 “All the resources have long spent”

Igbékoyi = Igbé + kọ + èyí  
 the bush reject this  
 “The bush rejected this”

Kukoyi = Ikú + kọ + èyí  
 Death reject PERF this  
 “Death rejected this”

Ekundayo = Èkún + di + ayò  
 Cry turn CONT joy  
 “My sorrow turns to joy.”

Oluwaremilekun = Olúwa + rẹ + mí  
 God console 2SG

“God has relieved me of sorrow.”

These names embody a sense of divine intervention, resilience, and transformation, symbolising the parents’ hope for the child’s continued existence. For instance, Abayomi conveys gratitude to God for preventing the mockery of enemies, while Ajìtoni expresses joy in simply witnessing the child’s survival. Ajeigbe reflects the family’s belief that the child’s birth has been a blessing and not a waste, with the divine protection of the god of wealth. Similarly, Igbékoyi and Kukoyi metaphorically describe the child’s victory over adversity, with Igbékoyi symbolising triumph over harsh circumstances and Kukoyi signifying the rejection of death. Ekundayo and Oluwaremilekun both convey the transformation of sorrow into joy, highlighting the parents’ relief and gratitude towards the divine for alleviating their grief.

## Bravery Names

Bravery names are given to individuals to signify their courage or defiance against death. Unlike other death-related names that focus on reincarnation or survival, bravery names celebrate an individual's strength, resilience, and their triumph over the fear of death. These names are typically given to living persons as a way to honour their bravery in facing life-threatening situations or challenges that could potentially lead to death.

These names may symbolise not only physical courage in the face of danger but also mental and emotional fortitude when confronted with mortality. They convey the family's admiration for the individual's strength and the belief that the person possesses the fortitude to overcome the most daunting of life's challenges, including death itself.

Anikulapo =	A	+	ní	+	ikú	+	ní	+	apó
	One that		has		death		in		pouch
	“One with death in his quiver/pouch”								
Arikuyeri =	A	+	rí	+	ikú	+	yè	+	orí
	One that		see		death		avoid		head
	“One who sees death and avoids it.”								

The example, Anikulapo reflects a person who is perceived as holding death in their possession, indicating a sense of control over their own fate. This name signifies a warrior-like figure who can face death without fear. Similarly, Arikuyeri denotes a person who can evade death, emphasising bravery through skill and wisdom in overcoming life-threatening situations.

## Abbreviations

ACC—Accusative; NOM—Nominative; CONT—continuative marker; NEG – negation marker; PERF – perfective marker; 1SG – first person singular pronoun; 3SG – third person singular pronoun; 1PL – first person plural pronoun; PERF—Perfective; PROG—Progressive.

## Implications of the Findings

The findings from this study illustrate how Yorùbá death-related anthroponyms function as cultural mechanisms for coping with mortality, grief, and hope. These names, categorised into plea names, consanguine names, uncertainty names, informing names, insulting names, hopeful names, and bravery names, reflect a complex interplay between individual loss and communal resilience. By naming their children in relation to death, Yorùbá families engage in a linguistic process that both acknowledges the impact of death and attempts to exert control over it.

The results resonate with broader African naming traditions. Insulting names reported by [23], such as *ekplte* (“Vulture”), *Fovole* (“refuse dump”) and *Fuazinli* (“Rag”) in Nzema, Ghana are analogous to Yorùbá death-related names like Aja (“Dog”). Similarly, names like *Tichakunda* (“We shall overcome”) and *Tambudzai* (“Cause suffering”) among the Karanga people of Zimbabwe as recorded by [8] are like Yorùbá bravery names such as *Anikulapo* (“One who has death in his pouch”), express defiance against death and a determination to survive. Conversely, Yorùbá plea names such as *Malomo* (“Don’t leave anymore”) and *Maku* (“Don’t die”), which express a direct appeal to prevent further loss are documented by [7], among the Igbo people of Nigeria where names such as



*Onwubiko* (“Death, I implore with you”), *Onwuzuruike* (death, rest), and *Onwuegbunam/Onwuegbuchunam* (death, do not kill me/or kill me prematurely) attempt to bargain with mortality.

The Yorùbá practice of consanguine naming, as seen in *Babatunde* (“Father has returned”) and *Yetunde*

(“Mother has returned”), aligns with cross-cultural findings in Nigeria, with examples such as *Nnenna* (“Father’s mother”) in Igbo; and *Abaici or Audi or Mayau* (given to a posthumous child); *Talle* (“child whose father or mother died soon after his or her birth”) in Hausa reflect the belief in ancestral return, much like Yorùbá reincarnation names. [11], [5].

Informing names, which explicitly communicate the pain of repeated bereavement, are another crosscultural phenomenon. [6], identifies names like *Nantume* (“I have buried many”) among the Bakonzo of Uganda, which, like Yorùbá names such as *Afikuyomi* (“I was scorned because of multiple deaths”), serve as public testimonies of loss and resilience. These also represented in Hausa as in *Abarshi* (male) or *Ayashe* (female) (“one who has been spared”).

A particularly striking category is insulting names, which mock the child or death itself, possibly as a psychological strategy to break the cycle of infant mortality. Names like *Kosoko* (“No more hoes—for digging graves”) and *Kilanko* (“What’s the need for a christening ceremony?”) have close parallels in other African societies. Among the Ibibio people of Nigeria, [10] cites names like *Nkpó-Óbút*

(“shameful thing”) and *Mbád idioñ* “dirty divination” which equally express deep scepticism about a child’s survival. Similarly, [13] documents such sort of names among the Ngoni-Thmbuka ethnic group in Malawi where names like *Mopara* (“wilderness”, named after several deaths of infants) and *Tafwachi* (“What is wrong with us?”), given sarcastically after multiple child deaths, a practice comparable to the Yorùbá strategy of ridiculing mortality through naming.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Yorùbá death-related names are far more than personal identifiers; they are linguistic expressions of grief, survival, and resistance to death. The parallels with naming traditions across Africa reinforce the idea that names function as cultural artefacts, encoding societal responses to mortality. By situating Yorùbá death-related names within this broader framework, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how African societies use language to confront loss, preserve ancestral connections, and affirm life in the face of death.

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