

## Personal Name Customisation Among the Youth in Benin Metropolis, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** “Personal Name Customisation” is one of the latest linguistic practices among the youths in Benin metropolis. It is non transient, and currently in vogue in both verbal and written conversations. Though some studies have looked at Anglicism, code switching, code mixing, and slang as youth language practice in some African and European languages, the practice of customisation of names has largely been under-researched. This study investigates personal name customisation among the youths in Benin metropolis, Nigeria with a view to finding the link between name customisation and the youths who make use of them.

**Keywords:** Name Customisation, Linguistic Practices, Benin Metropolises, non-transient

### Introduction

For some time now, the emergence of new linguistic practices among the youths in our societies has caught the attention of linguists. In this regard, Ayeomani (2011), states that multilingual environments encourages this phenomenon. Youth language has received considerable attention from previous studies. For instance, in Arhus, the second largest city in Denmark, Mette Vedsgaard Christensen conducted a study of ‘language use and language choice among adolescents in multi-ethnic areas’. Christensen focused on a neighborhood called Gellerupparken, where most linguistic influences come from Arabic languages. She argues that what could appear to be language mistakes are in fact signs of an emerging local ethnolect of Arhus (Christensen, 2002, 2003).

In a comparison of L2 (ethnolect) speakers and L1 (nonethnolect) speakers, Christensen finds that the L2 speakers in their ethnolect – use significantly more traditional Arhus dialect features than do the L1 speakers (Christensen, 2010). This interesting finding tells us that multiethnic language practices are locally bound and should not be treated in isolation of their local speech environments or communities. The major gap between this present study and previously researched studies is that this study is interested in the Benin youths in Nigeria, recently exhibiting these new linguistic practices of name customisation. Most researched areas were on code-switching, code-mixing, among the youths in Danish and Turkish codes Jergenes (2003), Maeganard, (1998), Moller et al (1998). The findings of their study was that

code switching and intra sentential switching, is a sophisticated linguistic competence that is used mostly by those who perform well in both their first and second languages.

This study focuses on Benin metropolis as a case study for examining the reality of the existence of name customisation among the youths. It examines factors such as economic and socio-political stability of Benin City which are taught to encourage migrations of youth into the city, creating a multilingual situation. This situation in turn encourages practices like slang, vulgarism, swear words, borrowing and name customisation. Available data are analysed to further strengthen the postulation in this study, which is socio-linguistic in context.

However, the changing trends in youth language in Benin City have been under-researched. This study therefore investigates some recent linguistic practices which are evident in youth language within the city. Specifically, this investigation identifies and analyses new trends in name customisation among the youth in Benin with a view to establishing the identity of youth language in the city.

### **The Language Situation in Benin**

The name 'Edo' has become predominantly a linguistic and ethnic label, referring in scope to the language and people of the entire Benin Division. In addition 'Edo' however, has continued to serve as the indigenous name for the state Agheyisi, (1986).

The name 'Edo' is used by some writers to refer to all the languages of the Edoid group of languages, but a writer like Greenberg (1966), on the other hand, did not use the name Edo at all in any of his classifications but merely listed the languages of the group by their individual names, using 'Benin' for 'Edo' language. Melzian (1933) in his famous dictionary of the language refers to the Edo language as Benin following various controversies which are not relevant to this work. At the 1974 seminar on Edo language which took place at the University of Lagos it was suggested that the designation "Edo Benin" be used in formal writings to eliminate its confusion with the language group. With this agreement, 'Edo' was to be used to refer to the single language spoken among the seven local areas of Benin only. It is also very important to point out that 'Edo' is intended to refer to both the people and the place where they live.

The Edo language is today spoken natively throughout Benin metropolis as it was spoken in most of the territories conterminous with the Benin Division of the former Mid-Western State of Nigeria. This area has now been demarcated into: Oredo, Egor, and Ovia North East. These areas constitute the permanent core of the Benin metropolis today and constitute the area of the study as mentioned earlier. Benin metropolis as a big city harbours very many language groups. As a result, new linguistic practices like slang, vulgarism, swear words, name-customisation, borrowing or loaning, and pidgin are highly noticeable among the people particularly the youths. Nigerian Pidgin (NP) is highly and predominantly spoken in

this city because of the heterogeneous nature of the city. Nigerian Pidgin (NP) as well is a lingua franca of most states in the southern part of Nigeria and Benin metropolis is not excluded from the list.

In Benin metropolis, English language is the official language used in schools and governmental activities but “name customisation” discussed in this study is influenced by the presence of those other languages brought in by their speakers who presently inhabit Benin either as students in the institutions of higher learning or as labour workers, farmers, or domestic-helpers.

It is important to note that most of these domestic workers from East speaking areas like Calabar, Ogoja, Mali, and Niger-Republic all in the quest to survive come to dwell in the urban city. They communicate in their languages alongside the language of the environment thus, creating new names, or infusing words from their own languages into the Nigerian English/ Pidgin that they can manage to speak, thus creating new forms for personal names.

### **Objectives**

1. Draw attention to the existence of new linguistic practices among youths in Benin City.
2. Demonstrate that linguistic practices like name customization are the result of multilingualism and bilingualism.
3. Identify strategies used by youth in Benin in the formation processes of personal name customisations,

### **Name Customisation as a Linguistic Practice**

Name customisation is a recent area of study in linguistics. It is the use of personal names in some kind of stylistic form for specific identification. Though very few works has been done in this regard, but Essien (2004) did an explanatory linguistic analysis of Nigerian naming system from Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Ibibio. In the work, the researcher posited that names mirrors grammar of Ibiobio language. According to Essien (2004), “if one was to collect all Ibiobio names, one would have collected a significant part of the grammar of the language. It is therefore possible to learn basic Ibiobio through a collection of the names”. Mphande (2006), supports Essien’s observation in the following words “names are the most meaningful lexicon in the vocabulary of any language, and they are an important part of the language inventory”.

Geertz (1873) as cited by Akinnaso (1980) identifies two extremes and series of intermediate stages of degree of linguistic complexity and semantic – cultural significance of personal names. On the one extreme are names that do not carry any meaning while on the other extreme are names that are loaded with meaning. According to Geertz (1973), some names in some cultures bears meaning while some names that are arbitrarily meaningless with syllables which makes no reference to conceptual or social reality nor express any concrete characteristic of the individuals to whom they are applied.

Blount and Sanches (1977), Mehrotra (1980), Oyetade (1995) and Ikotun (2010) have all reported cases of names change as an aspect of language change. To Mehrotra (1980) the socio-cultural norms are never static. They keep on changing and these changes reflect in the naming patterns. Blount and Sanches (1977) touch on socio-cultural dimensions activating such changes and identity factors such as change of social customs, cultural norms, names difficult to pronounce, impact of forces of modernization, influence of new values and ideologies of modern urban civilization, education, secular and democratic thinking, press, cinema, TV and other means of communication with strong tendencies of influence.

Ikotun (2013), discusses name change/modification among the Yoruba and identifies Christianity as its principal activator. Mehrotra (1980) discuss the phenomenon of name adoption as an aspect of name change and describes the trends and situational constraints it has in Hindi for example;

- a.) Dropping the earlier name altogether in favour of the new one. This could be due to such factors as when a person finds his name nonsensical, strange, embarrassing or humiliating, change of religion, a person becoming a monk, rejection of names that by tradition are considered lowly, and development of progressive attitude and thinking.
- b.) Adopting a new name without dropping the earlier one, the use of both being situational determined. Examples of such names include;
  - i. Name given to a new wife by her in-laws when the bride's name is the same with any of her in-laws
  - ii. Name a person entering into film industry or artiste bears and in the course of time he/she becomes known by it.
  - iii. Name a professional criminal bears to protect his or her real identity Oyetade (1995) and Ikotun (2010) describe the phenomenon of name Anglicization among the younger generation of Yoruba. According to Oyetade (1995), the phenomenon is used as index of "civilization".

The phenomenon of name customising is a very recent development among the Nigerian undergraduates and young artistes entering into entertaining industry. Name customising allows for a bearer of a name to create a personalized variation of the real name. From the point of view of orthography, most customised names look unintelligible and meaningless to youths outside of the profession and environment of the study population. The main motivation for the name includes among others the need to strategically distinguish self from others bearing the same name, to allow bearer bond with his /her social group and to create fun among peers

### **Youth Identity**

Youth is not merely a biological age, but a social institution, which is specific to the modern era, and is usually conceived of as a transition period between childhood and adulthood. Within adolescence, a distinction is frequently drawn between activity spheres controlled by adults.

Earlier approaches across the social sciences relied on broad and abstracted conceptualizations in describing youth, which implied that young people within a culture live a largely undiversified experience, Mead (2001) with divergences from a normative youth category generally framed as “deviance”. However, the situation of youth varies widely even within cultural groupings, and individuals as well as groups may confront specific historical and cultural processes in different ways, based on their subject positions. Recent studies of youth have expressed more sensitivity to the particularities of culture and locality and to the increasingly fluid and unstable nature of social relations.

These approaches acknowledge the ways in which material and semiotic commodities function as cultural resources whose meanings are generated at the level of everyday practices, and which young people employ in the interactional making and remaking of their public image and social identity (Frith, 1989). This line of work is often coupled with a focus on lifestyle choices emerging around aesthetic preferences, hobbies, and commodities within the context of globalization, especially as the latter relate to popular culture and new technologies in the formation of these lifestyles. (Potter,1995). A common denominator of these new approaches is the assumption that youth identities cannot be understood outside their particular socio-cultural context. While the global span of cultural belief express a great concern with the ways in which globally available resources are actively and creatively appropriated by social actors in local contexts and how youth engage with, push back against, or otherwise negotiate externally generated social forces. One such arena where young people have dramatically taken the initiative is the process of “globalization” Robertson, (1995).

More generally, the increasing circulation of mobile social actors and social resources has led to the disruption of fixed national, ethno racial, cultural, and linguistic boundaries and to the construction of youth identities that creatively respond to these new circumstances. Although, some scholastic view concerning youth identity is that of Mary Bucholt and Elena Skapoulli (2009), according to them, youth identity has been the subject of an enormous amount of research over the last fifty years and more.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **A Model of Research**

Perhaps the most efficient model of research, called the SPEAKING model, was put forth by Hall (2002) who aimed at finding a way to describe systematically the links between language form and context in a communicative event. The purpose of this model is to connect linguistic forms to cultural practices and to discover what ideologies about the world may be hidden behind the practices of individuals. Each letter of the SPEAKING model represents one component of the communicative event:

- *Situation* – physical and temporal setting and scene as well as its cultural definition. The situation can determine the topic, the verbal behaviour and expectations of the participants according to the manner in which they interpret the respective situation.
- *Participants* – their identities in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, social status, etc. and their roles, relationships and responsibilities as participants in the event. In point of roles,

the speech event could have the speaker and listener, writer and reader or in more general terms addresser and addressees, performer (emitter) and receiver. Stern (1983) remarked that some speech acts such as the monologue, thinking aloud or prayers are not dyadic as they do not include an addressee. Speech events could also be triadic involving a third participant, hearer or audience.

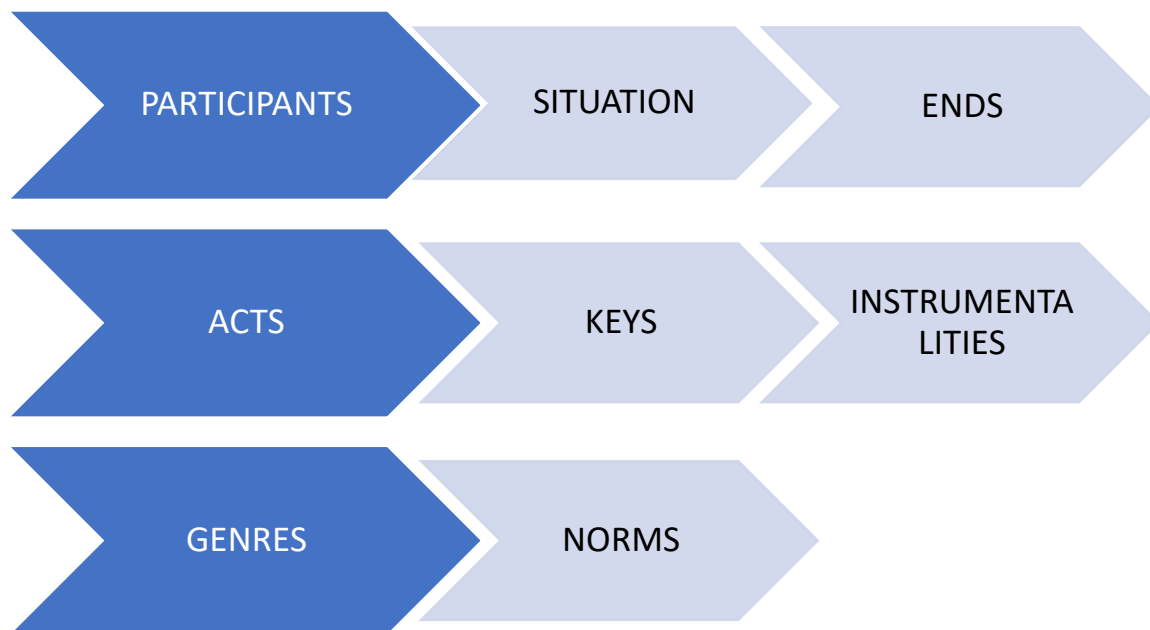
- *Ends* – (expected) outcomes of the event, group and individual participant goals.
- *Acts* – form, content and sequential arrangement of the speech acts that constitute the event.
- *Key* (tone) – humorous, serious, playful, solemn, ironic, formal and informal.
- *Instrumentalities* – tools that are used in the construction of the speech event: code (language or language variety) and channel (vocal or non-vocal e.g. oral – written, verbal or non-verbal means e.g. prosodic features versus body movements).
- *Norms* – of interaction and interpretation of language behaviour including turn-taking patterns
- *Genre* – genetically different speech acts such as storytelling, gossiping, joking, lecturing, interviewing, poem, myth, tale proverb, riddle, curse, prayer, oration, commercial, form, letter, editorial, etc (Hall, 2002).

Obviously, this is a very comprehensive model that could have a practical application in this research conducted on the Benin youth. Perhaps some of these aspects represent guidelines for this research. It must be acknowledged that it covers a wide range of components which are inextricably connected to the speech event and which could add valuable information about the purpose, function and nature of the message that is being transmitted by the youths in Benin. The diagram below presents the components of the model of Ethnography of Speaking as used in this study. ‘The very dark blue’ columns indicate the components of the model the researcher employed in the analysis of the data. The choice of these components is necessitated by the fact that the research goal is to;

- i. Identify name customisation in Benin metropolis
- ii. Identify those who use name customisation (PARTICIPANTS)
- iii. Identify the genetically different speech acts and context (GENRES) Hall (2002).

Figure.1

#### ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPEAKING



**Propose model (Evbayiro, 2017)**

### **Methodology**

The data was collected using audio recording tape from three purposively selected interactions via the participant observation method. Field notes were also used to collect data. This represents the most realistic picture of the presence of name customisation in the youths of Benin. The notes are records from face book chats, statements, expressions, and names used at different context by Benin youths on a daily basis as observed by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

#### **Customisation of Names**

Name customisation is a linguistic practice that has recently developed among the Nigerian youth, most especially those in the tertiary institutions and the entertainment industry. The phenomenon involves coining a personalized variant of one's name, (personal, surname or both). In most cases, the customised names pronounced with English accent. The names customised have no restriction to language, religion, and sex. The youth in the tertiary institutions announced the customised forms by printing them on articles of clothing (especially polo- shirts and vest), school bags, notebooks, textbooks, and as tattoos on their bodies. The names are re-created in such a way that persons bearing the name would indicate it differently, and this of course, makes such names look like abnormal syllables. In this study, names in Benin are not only a means of identification, but they are semantically loaded with some stories to tell and some shared assumptions and expectations of members of the community to reveal. Names provide copious information about their owners, their position in the family, the circumstances surrounding their birth, parental/ family situation, family

hopes desires, expectations and aspirations, financial situation, links with departed family members and ancestors, ancestral history and origin and a way of keeping records.

The table below shows customised names and their real forms as used by Benin youths in their conversations,

Table 1: Lexically customised names from real names

Customised Names	Real Names
Turn double,	Ivineva
Titibobo	Titi and Boy
Sazy	Osazee
Ef,, wealth, Gods wealth	Efe, Efeosa
Regie, child is wealth	Omorogie
God's Strenght, Ost	Osaretin
God big, sakpolo	Osakpolo
Sayi, yise	Osayimwese
Nahnah	Hannah
G&C	Grace
Jim Iyke	James Ikechukwu
Titi, moti	Omotiti
Yiro	Evbayiro
Kugbe, Unity	Akugbe
Kest, Kst	Kester
Lady g	Gladys
BIU	Benson Idahosa University
Igbins	Igbinedion

The names in the right column are the real names whose customised forms are represented in the left column. The meanings of those names are translated into English forms in their derivations. Some are abbreviated and basically meaningless.



**Consider this excerpt below for contextual usage**

**Excerpt 1:**

(At the motor pack at Ring Road in Oredo)

DRIVER: BIU! BIU! BIU!

PASSENGER 1: Driver will you pass Igbins Hospital?

DRIVER: Which one bi Igbins Hospito?

PASSENGER 2: He is talking about Igbinedion's Hospital

DRIVER: O.k! my son I will pass there.

PASSENGER1: (Facing passenger 2) my guy, thank you! (Turning to the driver), Oga sir, abegna the house wei face the hospito I de go.

DIVER: O boy I don hear.

PARTICIPANT; 1. the driver is an elderly man from the term "oga sir" as used by the passengers.

2. the passengers 1&2 are youths who probably are students considering the genre of their conversation.

GENRE: Information seeking about direction, correction

SPEECH ACTS: 1. here, pidgin was used by the driver to address the passengers. But the passengers used good English to address themselves, but used pidgin when addressing the driver. This change of act is an indication that speech acts indicate status and peer.

2. the use of *BIU*, *Igbins* are clear instances of the use of Name Customisation among the people in Benin, particularly the youths. From the excerpt, the driver an elderly man did not understand the use of *Igbins* a customised form of Igbinedion because the term is strictly used by the youths.

3. the term *my guy* is a slang used by youths to refer to their peers.

**Strategies for Customising Names**

The youth use several strategies to customize their names. The key strategies are spelling strategies: respelling reverse spelling, spelling swapping, transcription, truncation, mathematical symbolization, conversion, interlingual translation, lexicalization of abbreviation, initialism, blending, affixation and reduplication. These are also combination of these strategies.

## Respelling Strategy

This strategy involves substituting a letter or sequence of letters representing a particular sound with another letter or sequence of letters whose pronunciation resemble the substituted segments. In some cases a letter may be doubled or another letter added to it. The following patterns are attested in this study.

**Table 2:**

Oral vowel	Substituted forms	Some examples
A	har, ha, ah, ar, al, era e	Harlarbal (Alaba), Hadedarer (Adedara)
E	eh,eye ay (koreday)	Kourehday, (Korede), Hadeylekay, (Adeleke), Dheley, (Dele), Heyneharphe
I	he, e, ey	Henitan, (eniitan), ehyitorpheh (Eyitope), Phemmy (Femi)
I	e, y, ee, ie, hi	Phesaryor (Fisayo), Routymee (Rotimi), Rotymie, Hiffeh (Ife) Efesayo
O	o, ho, ol, ou	Kolfoh, (Kofo), Houllu (Olu), Holludaerey (Oludare)
O	hor, hur, ur, or, our, aw, o	Horlawsur (Olosoo), (Hurmollaryour) (Omolayo) Omoayo
Consonant letters	Substituted forms	
B	Bh, bb	Dhebbollar (Debola) Edeuzola
D	Dh, dd	Dhedgy, Harddeyhi (Adeyi)
F	Ph, v, ff	Phemmy (Femi), Hiffeh, Iveh (Ife)
S	Ss	Pheyhissarra
S	Ch, s, sh	Shegzy, Chegun (Segun), Sholly (Sola)
T	Th	Thommy (Tomilola),thorpeh (Tope)
W	Wh	Whaley
Y	Yh	Yhinks

The pattern described above is a sensitivity to and mimicry of the English orthography. In English, it is possible for a letters to represent different sounds. For instance, the digraph /gh/ represents the sound /f/ at the end of single-syllable single –morpheme words, such as cough (pronounced /kɪf/ in many dialects of American English. At the beginning of syllables (i.e. the syllable on-set), the digraph gh represents the sound /g/, such as in the word ghost (pronounced /gɒst/ or /gəʊst/. Again when representing a vowel, the letter ‘y’ in final positions represents the sound ‘ee’ in words which have been borrowed from Greek. However, the letter ‘I’ is usually used to represent this sound when used in non-Greek words. Thus, the word myth (pronounced /mɪθ/) is of Greek origin, while pith (pronounced /pɪθ/ is a Germanic word. Both words rhyme and the ‘y’ and the ‘I’ perform the same function. It is their origin which alters the representation of the sound in written English.

## Reverse Spelling

Table 3:

Real	Customised form
Etade	Eedafe
Root	Toor
Edetan	Natede
Osayi	Iyaso
Akugb	Gbuka

This process involves reversing the spelling of a name. In this process, the last letter of a name becomes the first letter, followed by the second to the last letter in that order. Examples are given below:

### Segment Swapping

Table 4

Real names	Customised form	Unit swapped
Dare	Daer	Segment r and e
Hannah	Nahhan	Syllable nah and han
Tobi	T-boi	Segment o, b, i

This strategy involves re-arranging the letters or syllables of a name to create a new name as shown in table 5, where ‘Hannah’ becomes ‘Nahhan’, ‘Tobi’ becomes ‘Tboi’. The vowels and consonants were swapped to create the new name. The following are examples.

**Table 5 Real Names and their Customised Form.**

Real Names	Customized Form
Agumoedia	Agudia, Ag
Uwadia	Uwadia, Ud
Ahie	Athere, Ah
Aghafona	Fona
Rosemary	Arose Rosy
Idahosa	Id, Hosa

These names are real personal names whose customised forms are derived from a part or a segment of the full forms. Idahosa becomes Id, or Hosa while Rosemary becomes Arose or Maryrose.

## **FINDINGS**

1. The findings of this research had further confirmed the assertion that linguistic practices (name customisations) are new and youth related in Benin.
2. And that their uses had become an indispensable means of communication not just in Benin City but spreading fast to all other parts of Nigeria.
3. Name customisations are the most resourceful among the language practices used by the Benin youths.
4. The use of customised names are now generally accepted by different categories of people whether educated or uneducated, rich or poor, old or young in the society irrespective of social status, tribe or ethnicity, religion or educational background of the individual.
5. These rich and elaborate name customisation practice in Benin can be documented for research purposes. We are of the view that the processes of formation and the morphological arrangement of these new names can form a good subject topic for Syntactic, Stylistic and Multilingual study at our secondary and higher institutions of learning.
6. It can also be used as parameters for youth identification within and outside Benin.

## **Conclusion**

Name customisation was common on social media and featured stylistic and morphological adaptations like coinage, clipping, shifting, segment-swapping, compounding; code-mixing, conversion, mathematical symbolization, the use of acronyms like; *IT* for 'Itohan', *IZ* for 'Iziengbe', *KST* for 'Kester', *D'banj* for 'Dapo Oyebanji' and linguistic heterogeneity. New youth linguistic practices were propelled by trendy use of language, language acculturation and juvenile exuberant display of stylistic and morphological skills. The music industry, particularly the hip-hop, reggae, and Christian genre also provide sources for these practices. The performances of stand-up comedians also constitute fora where youth harvest NYLP. Militant crisis in the Niger-Delta is a cause of mass migration of internally displaced persons into Benin metropolis. The youths engage in these practices for an identification badge and create peer awareness within Benin metropolis.

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