



IDENTITY SHIFTS IN YORUBA TRADITIONAL HEALING: A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF SPECIALIST-CLIENT PRESCRIPTIONS IN IDANRE, ONDO STATE

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ABSTRACT

Compelling evidences have shown that the African medical discourse is predominantly different from the modern in that, while the former uses *declaration* to activate its medical condiments, the latter uses hypothetical tests. This work examines how the Yoruba people, especially the Idanre people of Ondo state identify the popular naming conventions of herbal leaves in the treatments of certain ailments; contextualise and account for identity shift in the prescriptive encounters; and account for the functions of acts and allopracts in the sequencing of the conventional shift. The study examines real-life traditionalist-patient interactions in treatments of infertility, malaria, poison, menopausal aid in three thousand patients in purposively selected traditional homes in Idanre. The researcher used majorly direct interviews and was presented as a learner and practitioner of traditional medicine. The work reveals that African indigenous treatment and substances, unlike those of modern medicine, have dynamic context-specifics, that are dependent on *who uses what*, *who says what* and *what is said*. The semiotic evidence of the ingenuity of African medicine is revealed through J.L. Austin's 1962 Speech Act Theory and Dopamu's concept of *Alá'bálólàse* (i.e., the religio-magical belief that they that make the wish possess the command). African traditional healers among other things use words in the form of *command*, *invocation* and *panegyrics*, as solely polylogical means to change the health conditions of their patients. Using data culled from traditional laboratories in the south-western Nigeria, this paper demonstrates how words are sequenced in form of proclamative declaration to correct severe medical conditions.

Keywords: Traditional laboratories; *Alá'bálólàse*; Traditional Indigenous Medicine; Polylogical; Declaration

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There have been compelling evidences of African native intelligence pertaining to medical innovations before and after colonialism. Emeagwali and Shizha (2014) distinguish between African and Western science in their literature. They explain that African science serves as a basic reference point for reckonings of the potentials of secret African knowledge and skills. For them, African science occupies a place alongside the miracles of the Scripture and magic, of what is usually referred to as Western or White science in its ability to transform the world in mysterious ways. Emeagwali and Shizha (2014) aver that African science and White Western science constitute two distinct aspects of human power to understand and shape the world. Living in a world where the “technological miracles” of computers, the remote control, mobile telephones are everyday realities, and where images of nuclear explosions and space travel are commonplace, no one doubts the power of Western science to effect action at a distance and transform the world. And all who live in it because of the physical existence of science laboratories attest to this. The African science though has such untagged laboratories such as the alcoves of herbal permutations by the medicine men and the workshops of intense iron and metal experimentations (metallurgy) by the blacksmiths. The story of African-Yoruba medical advancement, especially in terms of modern technology has been a debate amongst scholars.

Before the declaration of the World Health Organization in 2002 that 80% of the world's population depends on herbs for treatment of diseases, and that African herbs take about 60% credit, most studies on Medical Discourse from the field of linguistics have focused more on the language of modern medicine, given little or no attention to traditional medicine. Few studies have devoted its investigations to the power of the spoken word and its hidden symbolic and inexplicable implications importations of the utterance of which can itself produce the desired effect without the use of magical objects or apparatuses: Fadipe (1970), Maclean (1971), Idowu (1973), Adegbite (1991, 1993 & 1995); Dopamu (1977), Olatunji (1984), Oloruntoba-Oju (1996) and Alabi (1996). Immediately after the declaration of the WHO in 2002, there has been renewed interest in African traditional medicine, especially from the field of linguistics. Studies include: Odebunmi (2003), Faleke (2005), Adepoju (2005), Odugbemi (2006), Igoli (2005), Egunyomi (2005), Jegede (2010), Olagunju (2012) and Jegede (2021). All these investigated important communicative features of language usage in traditional herbal discourse including: implicature, locutions, and shared contextual beliefs in specialist-client interactions. In some of these studies, the essential role and efficacy of language use have been explicated. Most relevant of them are the studies of Adegbite (1991, 1993 & 1995); Jegede (2010) and Abimbola (1976). Adegbite (1991, 1993 & 1995) investigated the role of language in the practice of Yoruba traditional medicine considering the two main structures such as: polylogical and dialogical. Fadipe (1970) examined the use of spell and curse among the Yoruba to accompany medicinal preparation considering *ohùn* (word) as ingredient of traditional medical preparation. Jegede (2010) based her findings on the efficacy of incantations and herbal cures in *Ifa* divination. Jegede O. (2021) considered some medicinal plants used by Indigenous Yoruba people in treatment encounters and their therapeutic and morphological structures in determining their functions.

While there exists a rich tapestry of discourse encompassing aspects of traditional medicine such as implicature, locutions, and shared contextual beliefs in specialist-client interactions, a

significant void remains in the scholarly exploration of the herbal traditional medicine. Addressing this void would help in the understanding of the importance of language to medicine in general. Drawing upon the seminal theory of J.L. Austin's (1962) Speech Act theory and a Traditional concept of *Alá'bálólàse* by Dopamu (1977) as analytical lenses, this paper scrutinizes how language in form of declaration changes the realities of specific herbs in the prescriptive traditional medical discourse in the Yoruba parlance.

2.0 Methodology

The work draws upon the seminal theories of J.L. Austin's (1962) Speech Act theory and Dopamu's concept of *Alá'bálólàse* (1977). Aspects of descriptive design are used to handle the qualitative nature of the research. It allows the research to identify categories of acts and allopracts, characterise sequences and shift in the contextual convention of the prescriptions of herbs. It also enables the discussion of various linguistic features of conventional identities of herbs and functions. The data derive mainly from one hundred and fifty encounters in Yoruba traditional healing sessions of direct observation and recording of natural specialist-client healing encounter and direct interviews of practitioners of indigenous Yoruba traditional medicine, considering their functions and naming shift in use. The treatment-encounters of 3000 clients were purposively studied over a varying period of time depending on their ailments. The researcher used direct interview method with selected clients that had general ailments and indirect interviews (i.e. questioning the specialists) on some complicated diseases. For ethical measures, the researcher was mostly presented as a learner and practitioner of traditional medicine. The ones represented are common and identifiable herbs which afford readers the opportunity of using prior social knowledge in identifying the herbs to be sampled. Also, to verify and compare epistemological knowledge, a Professor of Ifa Cosmology from the Federal University, Oye (FUOYE) was contacted. These samples were also compared among specialists to ascertain naming conventions.

The study examines real-life traditionalist-patient interactions in treatments of infertility, malaria, poison, menopausal aid in selected traditional homes in Idanre.

3.0 Aim and Objectives

The present study aims at looking at identity construction and shift in prescription conventions in Yoruba specialist-client treatment encounters. The specific objectives are to:

- i. identify the popular naming conventions of herbal use in treatments of certain ailments;
- ii. contextualise and account for identity shift of herbs in treatment prescriptions; and
- iii. account for the functions of acts and allopracts elicited in conventional identity shift.

4.0 The Concept of Yoruba Medicine and Alá'bálólàse

Orunmila is acknowledged as the founding father of Yoruba medicine, although the title is accorded to *Osanyin*, a priestly creature gifted in communicating with herbs. In the Yoruba tradition, *Osanyin* had the ability to study and know the usefulness of whatever herbs there were through his extraordinary means of perception of their vibrations. As a younger farmer, *Osanyin* would refuse to cut grasses whenever it was his turn to do so because he was sensitive to them. As he grew, he started using the energy of herbs to effect changes in human bodily conditions. Because of his renowned and unique power in hearing the herbs speak, *Osanyin* would respond by chanting

about their sacredness and beauty. One of his profound findings was that, to evoke the potency of any herb, one needs not only to be attuned to its energy but also know the name by which such can be called and so be called loudly to its hearing in order to awake its potency. In many chronicles of Ifa, it was revealed how *Osanyin* used herbs to heal various illnesses. Thus, the concept of *Ewé* (plant) among the Yoruba people considerably evolved (Oral sources).

In the Yoruba creation cosmology, it was believed that *Orunmila*, the father of Yoruba medicine was the one with *Olodumare* at the creation of the earth and that the word used in the creation was *Ifa* itself. The Yoruba believe strongly in the potency of one's tongue and the elderly amongst them usually say *Enu eni lase* (there is power in the tongue). The potency of the tongue gives rise to the concept of *Alá'bálólàse* (May my wish be done) as coined by Dopamu in 1977. *Alá'bálólàse* is the belief in *ipin iseda* (fate) and *akoole* (predestination). The Yoruba believe that every child at birth chooses what they would become on earth and whatever they choose, they become. Not only are their choices binding, there is also an Arokin, a kind of histographer at the gate of predestination that keeps records of one's choice in heaven (Prof. Bifatife, 2023; oral source).

4.1 Speech Act Theory

In his seminal paper, *How to Do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin (1962) establishes the notions that in an attempt to express oneself, one does not only produce utterances containing grammatical structures and words. Rather, one performs actions via those utterances. According to him, language is used to convey different kinds of meaning: propositional, stylistic, social, affective, and so on. There are many different things that speakers can do with words; in every utterance, a speaker performs an act such as stating a fact, stating an opinion, denying, confirming, promising, ordering, requesting, thanking, congratulating, advising, etc. He also affirms that language can be used in performing actions.

Austin distinguishes between *constatives* which are utterances whose truth or falsity can be proven from the real world and *performatives*, utterances which imply doing an act with words. The performatives are considered as the core of speech acts as the term suggests. Searle (1969, 1976), improves on Austin's categorizations of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary and gives a clearer classifications of speech acts as: representatives (how a speaker expresses her belief about the truth of a proposition), directive (how a speaker tries to get the hearer to act in such a way as to fulfil what is represented by the content of the proposition, commissives (how a speaker becomes committed to act in the way represented by the propositional content), expressives (how a speaker expresses the sincerity and condition of their illocutionary act) and declarative (a speaker's utterance results in a change in the external nonlinguistic situation. The declarative is germane to our analysis.

Declaratives are interactional acts by means of which utterances realistically provide into existence immediate changes to the world and bring about a correspondence between propositional content and reality (Searle, 1979, p. 19). They are also acts that are virtually conducted if only the utterer adequately possesses the authority not only to issue declarative utterances; but to turn the utterances into facts in correspondence to the world reality. The interactional achievement of

utterances with the belief that utterances can be lexicalized as declaratives, if the criteria are legitimately brought into performativity; officially binding imported and affecting changes in the state of affairs. Mey (2001:117) avers that declaratives are acts that institutionally change the world via utterances in which the utterer has to have a special institutional role in specific context. Searles (2002) says declaratives are feasibly sub-classified into linguistic declaratives and extra-linguistic declaratives, both of the subclasses are linguistic speech acts in the sense the are pinpointed on creating new fact. However, linguistic declarative acts are sufficiently performed by the institution of language and need no further non- linguistic institutions for validating their execution; thus, anyone can state, order, and announce at any time. Conversely, extra – linguistic declaratives are insufficiently empowered by means of language alone; but instead fairly stipulated by non-linguistic institutions of authority, conventional occasion, rituals, etc. for example, adjourning a meeting can only counted in certain occasion; declaring wars can only be pronounced by authorized person...etc. (Searle, 2002, p. 169).

For declarative acts to be validly materialized, these conventional conditions must be met:

1. The right context has to be matched with the right form of words
2. A person duly authorized and recognized as authorized by audiences has constitutively to utter declaratives for bringing them as facts in real world
3. A more formal occasion is causally entailed for some declaratives in which the speaker has to utter the right expression in its special ritual phase
4. Extra socio – linguistic institution along with utterance production for putting declaratives in continual performative status in bringing about the desired changes
5. The speaker's intention must connotatively own a declarative status that plausibly creates the world immediate changes as it is availed in the propositions.

4.2 Speech Act Theory and the concept of Alá'bálólàse

The study considers Dopamu's (1977) concept of *Alá'bálólàse* as derived from the belief in word. A concept that bears relevance to J.L. Austin's Speech Act theory (1962) where mere words translate to actual action of *doing* in the real world. The theory of speech act is hinged on the notion that human beings make things happen with the use of words. Aspects of both theories are adapted for the analysis.

5.0 Analysis

Below is a list of herbs used in the treatment prescription of ailments such as ectopic pregnancy, poisón, infertility, menopause and hard labour. Their common names, identity construction and shifts based on functions in specified prescriptive conditions are stated. Also, the practs and allopracts of the shifts are explained using shared cultural knowledge.

Sample 1

Jatropha Curcas- Ewé Làpàlápá

This herb is used in the treatment of chronic migraine, poison and deep wounds.

Ailment	Name shift	Context	Acts
Chronic Migraine	<i>Ìyálóde</i>	<i>Ìyálóde</i> translates as astute woman. In the shared cultural knowledge of the Yoruba traditional parlance, a strong woman is always chosen to see to the affairs of other women in the society. This woman usually possesses some terrestrial power that cannot be rivalled. <i>Ìyálódes</i> are known as revered women-rulers.	Praising, eulogizing, revering and invoking
Poison	<i>Ìsòfè</i> / to fart without obstructions	The name has the act of commanding whoever it is used for to pass out unwanted substances. Whenever Yoruba elders fart, they are usually greeted and hailed as having passed out unwanted gas that makes them heavy.	Commanding, describing and declaring
Spiritual arrow/wound	<i>Bótifò</i> / as said	<i>Bótifò</i> has the act of command ‘May it be as we have said...’ it is the use of <i>ohùn</i> to assert that whatever that has been said be done. It is used by mostly initiates to cap-up a preparation.	Implicit commanding and asserting

Table 1.0

Table 1.0 shows the usage of *Ewé làpàlápá*, in the treatment of certain ailments. To evoke the potency of the leaf to act as antidotes for spiritual arrows, wounds, poison and chronic migraine, its representation changes to accommodate what it is meant to do. Normally, the name *Ewé làpàlápá* is popular for cure of ringworm on children but researches have shown that it is effective in the treatment of more ailments if well situated. Its other names include: *Ìyálóde*, *Ìsòfè* and *Bótifò*. For the purpose of non-Yoruba speakers/scholars, *Ìyálóde* is a metaphor for traditional woman leader. In the Yoruba rulership setting, after the king, the other most powerful person is a woman, who is like a warrior and mother to even the king. An *Ìyálóde* is said to belong to the most powerful occultic group and thus feared by all. The leaf has been metaphorically labelled as *Ìyálóde* to show its prowess over witches and other extra-terrestrial forces. The share cultural knowledge is that the

victim may have offended a witch to have been so afflicted. The leaf, in order to invoke its potency is praised as the most powerful woman. *Ìsòfě* is used in the identification of *jatropha curcas* for use in removal of venoms. The name has the acts of commanding and directing. It is a directive to ease off whatever pain by releasing unwanted gasses from the body. The Yoruba belief in farting is powerful. Whenever an old man farts, the youths always acknowledge the privilege by saying *agility to the elderly*. Also, *botifo* means *as said*. It has the pract of commanding. *Botifo* is used as representation in the purpose of removing spiritual arrows.

Sample 2

Hog-Plum- *Imi Esú*

It has an erect structure of herbaceous annual with white flowers. The stems are covered with fine white hairs. The leaves are useful in the treatment of boils, leprosy, skin diseases as well as pain killer and eye inflammation. The leaves are also used in wound healing.

Name shift	Ailment	Context	Acts
<i>Pákírdudu</i> /cure totally	Cure for pain	It is imploring the leaf to make the healing total and perfect.	Commanding and imploring
<i>Alágbájo</i> /hired to dance for one	Removal of a day bullet	Rebuking death	Representing, rebuking
<i>Ìgbónwonrě</i> or <i>Ìyónir</i> pacifying	Peace with the world	That the enemies should look away from all the wrongs committed by a person	Requesting and pleading,
<i>R'érinkòmí</i> /laugh for me	Wounds and boil	Open wounds often bear semblance to wide mouths. It is thus a metaphor.	Asking
<i>Apaasa</i> / to be kept secret	Gonorrhea	It means underwear in conventional Yoruba language. and underwears are usually not exposed	Euphemizing, pleading and concealing

Table 1.1

In table 1.1 above, the uses of Hog-Plum- *Imi Esú* is explicated. Such names as, *pakududu*, *alagbajo*, *iyonu* and *rerinkomi* are other identities given to *Imi Esú* depending on its prescription. It is known as *pakududu* in the treatment of pain. A declarative act that something be resolved

totally. It is known as *alagbajo* when it is to function as removal of a day bullet. The context is that of replacing the victim with another- a way of appeasing death that someone else has been used to replace them. When its identity is *igbonwonre* or *iyonu*, it is used to appease the wicked, euphemistically known as *the elderly/awon agba*. As *iyonu*, it is invoked to get good things easily. Its referent as *apaasa* in the treatment of gonorrhea reveals the ailment as private. Thus, the euphemism *underwear* “*apaasa*” is used. This is to request that every hidden disease that cannot be mentioned, be cured.

Sample 3

Sodom Apple is known as *Ewé Bomubómú*. It is used in the treatment of poisón, to nullify a case and to debar rain from falling.

Prescription	Name shift	Context	Acts
To ease pain	<i>Bomubómú</i>	When one closes their nostril, air is obstructed.	Directing
To nullify a case	<i>Ewé isó</i>	Farting is a way of releasing bad or contaminated gas from the body. It is indirectly requesting that every grudge borne against one be made gas.	Directing and requesting

Table 1.2

Ewé bomubómú is popular for treatment of nasal blockage. It is known as *Ewé isó* in the case of nullifying a strong legal case. *Ewé isó* has the act of directing. No matter how strong the stomach aches, once one farts, the pain eases. The context bears a metaphoric resemblance to the release of gas through the anus. It is a directive to nullify legal matters by making them like mere farts that dissolves into the air without a trace. *Isó*-fart is a metaphor for abstractness, something that can neither be seen nor touched.

Sample 4

Miracle-leaf- *àbámódá*

In the treatment of male infertility or high blood pressure, *àbámódá* becomes *àjìdèwè* (vigour of youthfulness)

Ailment	Name shift	Acts
Male infertility	<i>Ajìdewé</i>	Declaring
For the removal of snake poisoning	<i>àbámódá</i>	Wishing and desiring

Table 1.3

Àbámódá leaf is used to make wishes. It is called *ajìdewé* - *wake to become youth* in the prescription of male fertility and *àbámódá* in the removal of poisonous venoms from the body. The youth is believed to have sexual agility. In order to cure *idakole* (sexual weakness) or other causes of male infertility, the leaf is referred to as *ajìdewé*. *Àbámódá* is making a strong supplication in form of a wish. The Yoruba believe that whoever makes a strong supplication in form of *àbá/ wish* possesses the power to make it happen. The name, *àbámódá* is in form of making a desire or strong request.

Sample 5

Erythrophleum suaveolens- *Ewé Ajeofole*

It translates as ‘the witch cannot perch on this’. It is used in the control of witchcraft, to retain the potency of a charm and to wade off evil spirits.

Name shift	Prescription	Acts
<i>Òbò</i> /something slippery	To control witchcraft	Asserting, affirming
<i>Ajeobale</i> /witch cannot perch	To retain the potency of charm	Ordering, Asserting, declaring
<i>Ajeofole</i> / witch cannot perch	To wade off evil	Rebuking

Table 1.4

Ewé ajeofole is usually known as *òbò* in rebuking witchcraft. *Òbò* is something slippery. The belief in the traditional African knowledge that witches turn to birds, cats and other creatures to torment the innocent is evoked. The idea of the naming of *òbò* is to give an idea that no secret can

be hidden or held on to as long as the herb is termed slippery. In which case it reveals every secret. As *ajeobale*, it is a direct rebuke or implicit ordering that witches stay clear. The leaf is usually placed on whatever preparation of concoction in order to control witchcraft power in an environ which may want to nullify the potency of such preparation.

Sample 6

Papaya leaf- *Ìbépe*

Name shift	Treatment prescription	Context	Acts
<i>akō ibépe</i>	Child birth control	Fertility	Appealing
<i>akō ibépe</i>	For male strong erection	Agility	Invoking, praising, endearing
<i>akō ibépe</i>	Treatment of madness	Strength	Eulogizing, calming

Table 1.5

The papaya is known for its multiple birth. It is a clear knowledge that there is no categorization as touching the gender of the papaya except the one ascribed in healing prescription. Papaya is used in the healing of various ailments but usually referred as male papaya - *akō ibépe* in the treatment of male infertility, madness and in controlling childbirth. Because *ibépe* (usual female papaya) is known to carry many fruits, there is a reversed naming convention as *akō* (male) in that, a male does not get pregnant. In which case, a woman controls her menstrual cycle which serves as a form of family planning. When papaya is to be used for male strong erection, it is called *akō ibépe* to evoke the strength in the male genitals. Also, in the treatment of madness, the Yoruba differentiate between male and female madness. This is categorized along the severity of the ailment. The serious ones(*akō -were*) is usually countered with the use of *akō -ibépe*.

Sample 7

Mucuna Pruriens- *Yêrépě*

Name shift	Treatment prescription	Context	Acts
<i>Ēsisi</i>	To fast-track an event	<i>Ēsisi</i> burns and causes unease	commanding
<i>Ewé Iná</i>	To command a situation, to instill fear	Fire is an active destroyer that is feared and revered	Revering, priding and lording
<i>Opin</i>	To make one untouchable	<i>Opin</i> is an insect with thorns and so untouchable by other animals.	Priding and asserting

Table 1.6

Mucuna Pruriens- *Yêrépě*

is a common weed in thick forests and bushes. Many researches have shown that it is used in women infertility, antivenom for snake bites, contraception and so on. Specifically for this manuscript, its naming conventions are shown to vary as *Ēsisi*, *Ewé ina*(fire leaf) and *opin* in situations such as: fast tracking an event, making an instant declaration and becoming untouchable. As *Ewé ina*, its acts shows revering. The context of *fire-leaf* as transliterated is to show the dreadfulness and fearsomeness of fire not only as a destructive element but also as a thing to be revered.

Sample 8

Newbouldia laevis - *Ewé Oye*

It is used in the cure of infertility, diarrhea, dysentery, epilepsy, and convulsions.

Name	Prescription	Context	Acts
<i>Ewé Akòko</i>	Male fertility leaf	It takes longer for it to wither even after it has been detached from source	Praying and desiring
<i>Ewé Òba</i>	King making	Its context is both cultural and spiritual. Glocally, it is used in the installation of king in the Yoruba parlance.	Praising and praying
<i>Ewé òsanyin</i>	Forecasting	<i>Òsanyin</i> is the father of herbs.	Desiring and requesting

Table 1.7

Newbouldia laevis possesses many names in use, such as: *Ewé oba*, *Ewé akòko* and *Ewé òsanyin*. These names are used in the occasions of crowning, male fertility and forecasting respectively. It has become the symbol for kingship and as such, it is an important leaf in the Yoruba traditional parlance.

Sample 9

Hog plum- Ìyeeye

It is also known as yellow mombin. It is a small drupe fruit with a slightly thick skin and thin pulp surrounding its seed. It is popular for inducing labour.

Name shift	Treatment prescription	Context	Acts
Ìyeeye/ something alive	Female child birth	There is a folkloric mystery that there are spirits abiding in the <i>iyeye</i> tree that give usually female children because female children are usually fertile, productive and caring.	Praising, endearing and praying
Òkikan	To stop menstruation	Something repulsively sour	Rejecting, rebuking

Table 1.8

In the prescription encounters, the hog plum is referenced as *iyeye/ something alive* when the client desires a female child or a child but in the case of family planning or contraception, it is called *okikan/ something sour*.

Sample 10

Jute- *Ewé du*

Ewé du is synonymous to okra. It is consumed as vegetable and fibres. In the client-practitioner prescriptive encounters, the jute performs different functions as delineated in its naming conventions and contexts.

Situation	Name shift	Context	Acts
Easy delivery	<i>Abiwere</i>	Ease. The spinach is like the pseudo-water that covers the child at birth and aids easy delivery.	Declaring, asserting
Love	<i>Yoyo</i>	People rally round loved ones. As its name implies, a double felicitation for whoever uses it for love charm.	Inviting and commanding

Table 1.9

It is called *abiwere/easy delivery* in facilitating prompt delivery and *yoyo/* in making strong bond between lovers.

Sample 11

Bitter leaf- *Ewuro*

Ewuro is known for its bitter-sweet taste. Traditionally, it has been referred to as the father of all shrubs. The reason for this cannot be far reached, as it has been researched to cure more than 1000 ailments such as: insomnia, prostate cancer, stomach aches, infertility, fever, diabetes, high blood pressure and so on. In the prescription of chronic illnesses such as prostate cancer and infertility, its referent changes to *ba 'segun*/father of healing. It has such acts and allopracts as eulogizing and praising.

Sample 12

Field Sponge -*Iseketu*

Iseketu is used in the treatment of diabetes and intestinal pains.

Situation	Name shift	Context	Acts
Diabetes and intestinal pains	<i>Kankan ayaba/queen's sponge</i>	Cleansing	Rejecting, renouncing

In the client-practitioner prescriptive encounter, the referent *iseketu* changes to *Kankan ayaba* in the treatment of diabetes and intestinal pains. *Kankan* translates as sponge and its use is to clean dirt.

5.1 Explanation of Tables

The tables above have shown functional name shift, treatment prescriptions, contexts and acts of herbs in Yoruba healing encounters. The contexts are usually shared cultural knowledge which allow for meaning inference. For representation, table 1 presents *Ewé Lâpâlâpá* as *Ewé Íyálóde*, *Ísòfê* and *Apaasa*. *Íyálóde* (astute woman) is so called in order to invoke its potency. The act is an indirect speech act of praising the leaf over and above other leaves. *Ísòfê* is an indirect act of commanding the user to be light and agile. In table 2, *Imí Esí* is represented as *Pakududu*, *Alagbajo Igbonwonre* or *Iyonu*, *Rerinkomi* and *Apaasa*. While *pakuduku* is a command to act, the other referents are in form of supplication or appeal to do something. In table 3, the Sodom Apple has referents such as *Bomubómí* and *Ewé isó*, both have the functional act of requesting a change in the world. In 4, *àbámódá* is also known as *ajidEwé*, both having the functional acts of desiring and requesting. In 6, *yerepe* is represented by such referents as *Ewé esisi*, *Ewé opin* and *Ewé ina* which are all declarative on the surface but have functional implicit command. In 7, *Ewé akoko*, *Ewé oba*, and *Ewé osanyin* have the acts of asserting and declaring with the implicit functional act of commanding. Table 9 represents *ewudu* as *yoyo* and *abiwere*, with such functional acts of requesting and praying. The tables show that 90% of the acts generated in the treatment prescriptions of the Yoruba medical encounters are command. This depicts the implicit declarative function of words in the Yoruba medical parlance (calling things that were not to existence). Few of the acts show soliciting through praying, requesting, denouncing and desiring.

6.0 Discussion of Findings

The current work explains how the Yoruba people advance in medical technology through the use of words. The Yoruba belief in the efficacy of words according to Dopamu (2003), a religion scholar, explains that words are magical and potently embedded in a culture. The concept of *Alá'bálólàse*, is embedded in the belief that the desire of a person can translate to reality. In the literature, *Ohìrín* (Adegbite, 1991), *incantation* (Idowu, 1963), *Afose* (Adegbidin, 2017) are all examples of declarations through which Yoruba medical specialists enact their desires for treatment of ailments in the medical traditional parlance. *Doing things with words* as demonstrated in the study has revealed how common leaves are used in the treatment of diseases by renaming them in the context of use. With these theoretical tools, the work explained the identity and shift

construction in the treatment encounters and demonstrated how the use of words in orientation to shifting identity construction evinced by social performance in context of the herbal or treatment encounter contribute to the treatment negotiation of clients in the traditional Yoruba parlance. Apparently, the use of only Speech Act Theory may not produce the blend of treatment encounters, this informs the choice of a complementary African concept of *Alá'bálólàse*, a Yoruba Trado-Medical theory. The analysis has considered how the contextualization of wordings in the prescription of herbs for -infertility, poison, menopausal aid, pain and other forms of diseases projects a 'usage-based' perspective on language (Bybee 2006) and contributes to the pragmatic interpretation of speech act vis-a-vis the Traditional Medical Construction. By these, it has thus shown that, words in form of incantations, supplications, panegyrics, praise, spell, curse and eulogies can change things in the real world. The study has therefore established through the linguistic construct of Speech act and *Alá'bálólàse*, that words have strong connotative import not only to bring things to be but also capable of changing things that already exist in the world to usage-based materials as would be needed in such specialist-client based treatment encounters to reinforce the impression that identity construction and identity shifts contribute to the credence of treatment encounters in Yoruba traditional medical discourse. Our findings are consistent with some of the theoretical perspectives of Fadipe (1970), Warren, Buckley and Ayandokun Akintunde (1973), Adegbite (1991 & 1995) and Jegede (2010).

Adegbite (1995) considered the structure of text in some Yoruba genres in folkloric, literary, sociolinguistic and stylistics that relate to Yoruba Medical Discourse study. He investigated the role of language in the practice of Yoruba Traditional Medicine by considering the two main structures as polylogical and dialogical. It bears resemblance to the current work in that it considers the Yoruba traditional medicine but differs on the ground that the current work looked at construction and identity shift in the prescription of traditional treatment encounters. Fadipe's (1970) work on the use of spell and curse among the Yoruba to accompany medicinal preparation is close because it considers *ohùn* as an ingredient of traditional medical preparation, but differs on the ground that the latter uses physical materials that are already existent and merely changed their social contextual reality. Jegede (2010) studied the efficacy of incantations and herbal cures in *Ifa* divination. Also, the work of Jegede O. (2021) that considered how plant taxonomy and distinct structures greatly accentuate their curative relevance in addressing series of illnesses usually express their morphological and therapeutic essence in Yoruba land. that considered how plant taxonomy and structure accentuate their functions in treatments encounters of Yoruba people is also close but differs in that only their usages and morphological structures were investigated.

Our findings' reflection on the identity construction and shift of herbal functions in the treatment encounters bear semblance with Adegbite (1991 & 1995) role of language in the practice of traditional medical discourse. While Adegbite (1991 & 1995) did not account for name shift but predominantly at the structure of encounters, the current work looks at shift of the functions of existing herbs in context through such acts and allopracts as praising, eulogizing, commanding, euphemizing, requesting and thanking. The study thus demonstrates that words are not only capable of bringing things into the world according to J.L. Austin, it is also capable of changing things that have been in existence in the world with the advantage of theoretic insights from linguistic constructs of Speech Act and *Alá'bálólàse*, which are capable of complementarily accounting for the nexus between the context of word usages and reality construction. The study



has explored how Speech Act strategies are utilized to reflect identity and function shifts of traditional herbal medicine.

As demonstrated by the present study, words or verbal exchanges if properly situated are capable of making changes in the field of Medicine. While the medical practitioners, both indigenous and modern; clients and families need to positively address some situations and treatment prescriptions, the responsibility of ensuring healing and efficacy of medicine reside with everyone irrespective of their roles in treatment encounters, *enu eni lase* (one's tongue possesses healing substances).

7.0 Conclusion

The work has demonstrated that the Yoruba, especially the Idanre people of south-western Nigeria have their means of medical ingenuity which involves three stages of: proclamation, enactment and use. By exploring the concepts of J.L. Austin's Speech Act Theory and Dopamu's (1977) *Alá'bálólàse*, the work reveals that the Yoruba uses words in form of *declaration* as a major condiment for medical innovations, exploring how words used in the right context can help in changing herbal conventions. As a form of identity shift, herbs are renamed through such acts as believing, praising, invoking, commanding, supplicating and declaring in form of incantations, spell, curse, panegyrics and eulogies to convert every to day leaves to potent drugs for infertility, high blood pressure and malaria. The study reveals that among other things, words in form of declaration have dynamic context-specific healing conventions.

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Endnotes

- *Alá'bálólàse- They that desire possess the command.*
- *Ohìrìn - incantations*
- *Epe- curse*
- *Oríkì- panegyrics*
- *Enu eni lase- One's tongue possesses healing substances*