IGBO PERSONAL NAMES AS A CULTURAL TOOL FOR IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Identity is one important characteristic of any continent, nation or tribe. Thus, a nation without identity is bound to die and may not develop after all. Africa needs development like any other continent in the world hence the need for her to attain identity through personal names. Igbo is one of the major black races in Nigeria that believe in their culture and identity. These culture-values and identity are reflected in the personal names the Igbo bear surrounded by circumstances, culture and belief of the people. The aim of this paper is to examine with a succinct morphological analysis, how Nigeria can develop through the exploration of her personal names using Igbo race as a case study. The study will further classify the personal names into religion, education, economy, polity and social life of Nigerians. Nigeria personal names, especially of the Igbo are not mere labels but can rather be connotative, historic and circumstantial enriched by cultural heritage of the society. Thus, the extent of cultural and linguistic variables as a reflection of linguistic practice in Africa is determined by people's belief, identity and socio-cultural embodiment of their personal names aimed at the growth and development of the continent.

Keywords: Africa, Development, Identity, Personal names, Culture.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multilingual and multi-cultural nation following the existence of over four hundred indigenous languages in it (Adewuyi, 2000:396). Consequently, each of these mother-tongues has personal names as a way of expressing ideas on various fields of life. This is correct because personal names are words, and words serve as media, they carry strong socio-semantic cultural functions via man or other media.

The media are a way of cultural expression in their owning right and vehicle for the transmission of other cultural forms (LEE, 1971:12).

Igbo is one of the three major languages in Nigeria whose socio-linguistic functions are adorable. Other major languages are Hausa and Yoruba. Each of these major languages has in it, words which serve as names or labels for things (Palmer, 1981:17). Thus, Palmer maintains that the signifier is a word in the language while the signified is the object in the word that it stands for, refers to or denotes. Human beings are therefore identified by their names, otherwise personal names, since name is a word by which a person, animal, place, thing is known and spoken to or of (Hornby, 1974:559).
To this end, this paper is narrowed to culture-oriented values of Nigerian personal names, using Igbo names as a case study. The study of Nigerian personal names scientifically known as ‘anthroponomastics’ has all it takes to develop a nation.

According to Crystal (1978:112), ‘the science that studies name is known as onamastics usually divided into the study of personal names (anthroponomastics) and….’ Using Igbo as a case study therefore, the work will look at the concept of personal name and x-ray various classes of these names that can serve as identity and also contribute in the development of a nation. In doing so, the paper will also expose the values of Nigerian names, especially of the Igbo as a way of determining the choice of name-by people. Thus, showcasing the fact that Igbo personal names are not simple labels used as baggage tags for mere identification purposes but have high culture content according to owners’ belief. In his declaration, Ubahakwe (1989:99) says:

An indigenous African name on the whole personifies the individual, tells some stories about the parents or the family of the bearer and in a more general sense, points to the values of the society into which the individual is born.

No wonder Kaplan and Anne (1997:16) maintain that ‘names shape the language of the daily drama of gesture, a vowel, and inference that is part of our social life’. Many Igbo personal names are based on culture and belief. Others on religion and economy while some are still derived from the political and social life of the race. This classification is a naming tool for identity, development and betterment of the society.

Consider an Igbo personal name like:

i. Onwu + biko ————> Onwubiko  
   Death         please
   ‘Death I beg you’.

According to Osuala (2010:171), this name underscores the philosophy of the Igbo on ‘death’ as both mighty and dangerous. The name portrays ‘death’ as a wicked soul, with circumstantial connotation that the parent(s) might have been losing previous children to the mighty hand of death. Thus, the Igbo hold a strong belief and view that ‘death’ is mightier than human beings.

Statement of the Problem

The search for the etymology and reasons for bearing some Igbo personal names has remained a thing of concern to not only the Igbo but the entire Nigerian populace. It has also become a burden on how to develop a nation through personal names. To this end, people have continued to wonder what places, things and human beings in particular bear as names, why such names are borne and what context do these names emanate.

Aims and Objectives

This study will be baseless if it fails to find solutions to the problems identified above. In view of this, the study will among other things trace the etymology of some Igbo personal names. It will also try to find out the rationale behind such names and their influence on the bearers. The study will try to look at how a country can be developed and identified through personal names. It will also see whether there is any joy derived from Igbo personal names by people who name and bear them.
Research Hypothesis

Before embarking on this research, the researcher has got such assumptions like:

i. Every Igbo personal name has etymology.
ii. Circumstances surround Igbo personal names.
iii. Personal names may have effect on those bearing them.
iv. A country can be identified and as well develop through personal names.
v. Personal names serve as a reflection of people’s culture and belief.

Research Questions

The following are some of the questions meant for this research work.

i. Does an Igbo name have significance?
ii. Can Igbo personal name be influenced by circumstance?
iii. Is there any relationship between culture and belief of the people and their personal names?
iv. Do the Igbo believe in reincarnation?
v. Do deities have role to play in Igbo persona naming?
vi. Can certain language domain affect certain personal names in Igbo?

Research Methodology

Following the nature of this topic, there was a combination of tools for this research. This combination was however aimed at ensuring that ‘long awaited scholars’ yearning to know more about Igbo personal names are satisfied.

Methods used include interviewing, questionnaires and documentary sources aimed at looking at what scholars, linguists and historians have said on personal names especially of the Igbo. Interviewing included personal or face to face interview, self-administered oral questionnaire and telephone/mail. Personal interview selected key informants who were well informed and knowledgeable on the various issues surrounding Igbo names. Self-administered oral questionnaire was for the literate key informants whose information was significant to this study. Confidentiality was also promoted, and with the help of research assistants, self-administered oral questionnaire covered wide range of this study.

On respondents whose information were every important but could not be met either in the house or office, telephone was useful. It was also used to verify some mail questionnaire responses. Mail questionnaire was therefore used on key informants who could neither find time nor appreciate the long distance covered and the extra cost involved in further stay.

Documentary sources provided information about the survey population, individual units of enquiry and personal documents on “Personal Names” in Igbo land and English sentences. The documentary sources in this study included relevant books, journals, research works, national dailies and magazines, media documentary on names and simple sentences in English. These, it was believed, will provide a richness and details not achieved by other standardized methods used in this study.
Method of Data Analysis

An empirical research was used for this study covering different tools. The data obtained were analyzed using simple percentage (%). These data were from both primary and secondary sources. The simple percentage was therefore used to draw inferences and test the research hypotheses. About twelve questions were used on respondents who were chosen from different parts of Igbo tribe, Nigeria. Each item was analyzed separately.

Personal Name Defined

Osuala (2014:143) sees personal names as serving ‘as label, identity or signifier to the individuals that bear them’. He however maintains that these names are not ordinary labels, but connote a lot in the life of the bearer.

Kaplan and Anne (op cit) augment:

*Full personal names, first and last taken together, stand at the intersection of opposing pulls: they set the bearer apart as an individual but also provide the bearer with family and extended kinship ties, and so focus both the present and the past, and beyond this, they have an occult associate and symbolic power. They are charms.*

In the users perspective also, Nigerian personal names, as in any natural language, are potential language constructions used by the individual native speakers to identify one another. Distinctively however, Igbo personal names usually have further purposes of expressing attitudes, sentiments or historical facts, and serve as a linguistic evidence for reviewing the Igbo culture. Iwundu (1973:21) maintains that practically all Igbos find in personal names ‘a means of expressing in a very special manner, their personal joys or sorrows surrounding the event of child-birth and for making a comment on life or expressing an opinion about it’.

It therefore becomes evident that one could rely on names of the people to study to a reasonable extent, the social and religious affairs, historical and political issues in Igbo society. Because their names are simply stated and communicative. Iwundu (op cit) maintains that the communicative characteristic of Igbo personal names has shown that they are not just single nouns even though they function as such, neither are the names confined to mere etymological definitions which single words may represent in a natural language. Igbo personal names embrace different aspects about the life of the people. Thus, it becomes amazing how most names probe certain underlying realistic of Igbo culture.

Consider the following:

i. Ihe + onu + na + aka —— Iheonunaka
   Thing mouth is saying
   ‘The vulgarism of the mouth’.

The above name, an indigenous name of the former Governor of a State in Nigeria, late Chief (Dr.) Sam Onunaka Mbakwe, depicts the uncontrollable way people talk erroneously and ignorantly especially when condition seems not to be favourable to a particular individual or group.

ii. Ebere + chukwu —— Eberechukwu
   Mercy God
   ‘Mercy of God’

In the same vein, as biographical as the name ‘Eberechukwu’ is, it rings eloquently that it is God and no other one who dispenses the gift of a child. In other words, child-birth is purely of Divine mercy. This name has helped to gain insight into the religious life of the Igbo.
With the above insight into personal names, we can now imagine other classes of Igbo personal names and their contributions to identity and development.

Identity

The concept of identity has remained the subject of discussion in different disciplines like sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, globalization, linguistics, to mention a few of them. However, there may be slight differences in approaches and handling of identity by different experts of various disciplines.

To Mendoza – Denton (2004:475), identity has been seen as ‘the active negotiation of an individual’s relationship with larger social constructs, in so far as this negotiation is signaled through language and other semiotic means’. Widdicombe (1998:191) sees it as ‘something that people do which is embedded in some other social activity, and not something that they are’.

It is therefore not surprising that personal names serve as identity marker when the people’s sociolinguistic life is considered.

In Nigeria, a multicultural and multilingual nation, personal names go a long way in identifying people based on the cultures and beliefs that exist in the country. For this and other reason(s) it does not require extra knowledge to identify people of Nigeria through their personal names.

Consider such names like:

i. Adamu - God’

First creature in Islamic religion. A name synonymous with the Hausa tribe whose eighty percent population is Muslims

ii. Onwu + ka + njo — Onwukanjo

Death more ugly

‘Death is worse’

The language in the above name is Igbo and the bearer is Igbo whose belief it is that ‘death’ is worse than any other condition one can find oneself.

iii. Baba + Tunde — Babatunde

Father Tunde

‘Tunde’s father’

In the above name, African belief especially of the Yoruba is showcased. The father of the bearer has belief in reincarnation. Thus, he has named his son ‘Babatunde’ where his own name is ‘Tunde’ whose late father is believed to have come back through reincarnation having died a long time.

This process of naming is an aspect of culture respect with a view to developing the nation. It showcases the life and personality of the people, Nigerians who are rich in culture.

Classification of IGBO Personal Names

For this purpose of this study especially as it concerns identity and development, Igbo personal names are etymologically and structurally classified into religion, economy, education, polity and social life of the Igbo.

Names Associated with Religion and Belief of the Igbo

Igbo people are culturally rich in culture and belief. This is reflected in their personal names that showcase the various aspects of their beliefs and religions.
Among such beliefs include the power of death, the sweetness of life, reincarnation, belief in Almighty God, belief in smaller gods, otherwise traditional religion, to mention a few of them.

Life and Death

Life according to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English is the period between a person’s birth and death during which he is alive. Thus, they believe that anything taken as someone’s while life depicts such thing or person as the most important thing or person in such a person’s life. The Igbo hold the view that life is the most precious possession of every human. Such belief is traced to the creation of human being by Almighty God when He created man and blew the air of life in him.

Then the LORD God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live (GNB: Gen. 2:7).

‘it is the state of existence as a human being; and a condition that distinguishes animals and plants from earth, rock, etc.’ (Osuala, 2013:6).

On the contrary, death comes in when life ceases to exist. In other words, there is death when there is no life. Suffice it to say that death comes in when the life-giving breath leaves man.

In Nigeria, especially in Igbo land, ‘life’ and ‘death’ are viewed as two important entities that surpass any other one. They are celebrated in such a magnitude that one wonders if there is any other thing that Nigerians on attach much more importance than these phenomena. Sometimes, these concepts are celebrated and in another time they are mourned.

Life is seen by the Igbo as the most valuable thing a man can possess. It is therefore precious, and most valuable and should be regarded more than any other thing. Nigerians and the Igbo to be precise have divergent but numerous views about life; and this is evident in the names they bear. Such names are distinguishable from others because they express universal views on life in general including its nature, ethics and characteristics. Most of these names express the view that life is a priority for man’s achievement, and that it cannot be compared to any materials gains because the possession of ‘life’ is like being a king (Iwundu, 1994:11). Consider these personal names associated with ‘life’.

i. Ndu + bu + isi → Nduhisu
   Life is head
   ‘Life is the most valuable’.

ii. Ndu + bu + eze → Nduheze
    Life is king
    ‘One who is alive is a king’.

iii. Ndu + ka + aku → Ndukaaku
    Life more wealth
    ‘Life is greater than wealth’.

Consider also, a name that sounds as warning to the Igbo in particular, Nigerians at large and the entire society in general in relation to life.

iv. A + ghara + ndu (Kpaa + aku + onye + iro + erie) → Agharandu
    One leaves life (get wealth an enemy eat)
‘One who accumulates wealth at the expense of his health must lose the wealth to the enemy’.

v. Eziokwu + bu + ndu ——> Eziokwubundu
Truth is life
‘Truth is the essence of good life’.

vi. Ezi + ndu Ezindu
Good life
‘The good life’.

vii. Ako + bu + ndu ——> Akobundu
Prudence is life
‘It pays to be prudent in life’ which can also be extra positioned as
Ndu + bu + ako ——> Ndubuako
Life is prudence
‘There is no good life without prudence’.

In the same vein, Nigerians and the Igbo in particular use their personal names to showcase their views about death. They see death as both mighty and dangerous as in:

i. Onwu + biko ——> Onwubiko
Death please
‘Death, I am begging you’

It is a name that portrays the Igbo philosophy on ‘death’ as a wicked soul, with circumstantial connotation that the parents might have been losing previous children to the mighty hand of death.

There are other personal names in this category which serve as expressions of general ideas about the phenomenon, death. The philosophies expressed are therefore representatives of the Igbo traditions, customs and social norms as related to the concept death. Thus, death is considered an enemy, a threat, a teacher of lesson, a fearless being (when personified), a respecter of no man and indeed an incorruptible.

Consider the following names;

ii. Onwu + di + iwe ——> Onwudiiwe
Death is angry
‘Death is painful/death is wicked’.

iii. Onwu + ka + njo ——> Onwukanjo
Death greater ugliness
‘Death is more dangerous’.

iv. Egwu + a + tu + onwu ——> Egwuatuonwu
Fear not hold death
‘Death is never afraid’.

v. Onwu + a + nu + nupe ——> Onwuanumkpe
Death not hear plea
‘Death does not listen to pleas’.
vi. Onwu + a + ma + eze → Onwuamaeze
    Death not know king
    ‘Death has no recognition for even the king’.

Thus, the Igbo hold various views on ‘death’ manifested in their personal names.

**Reincarnation – Related Igbo Personal Names**

The Igbo also believe so much in reincarnation otherwise known as ‘life after death’. Consider names like:

i. Nne + nna → Nnenna (ya)
   Mother Father
   “Her father’s mother’.

ii. Nna + nna → Nnanna
   Father father
   ‘His father’s father’.

iii. Nne + nne → Nnenne
    Mother mother
    “Her mother’s mother’.

iv. Nna + emeka → Nnaemeka
    Father done well
    ‘My father has done well/Thank you father’.
    A name that appreciates the arrival of a late father.

**Strong Belief in the Almighty God**

There are also Igbo personal names that portray the Igbo as Christians who believe in the power of God. Consider the following:

i. Chi + nwe + ndu → Chinwendu
   God owns life
   ‘Life belongs to God’.

ii. Chukwu + emeka → Chukwu (emeka)
   God done well
   ‘God has done well’.

iii. Oge + Chukwu → Ogechukwu (ka mma)
    Time God (better)
    ‘God’s time is better’.

**Personal Names in Defence of Igbo Belief in Smaller gods**

Aside the belief of the Igbo in Almighty God, the Igbo also recognize the existence of other smaller gods whose power is above human being. This is evident in names like.
i. Ofo + di + ire → Ofodire/Ofodile
   ‘Ofo’ is real
   ‘Ofo’ is effective/efficacious’.

In Igbo tradition, Ofo is a wooden material that is held sacred, and regarded as a symbol of authority which also has the power to remote human being. It can save and as well destroy.

ii. Amadioha → Amadioha
   This is a reverent god in Igbo land associated with thunder and lightening. It is a personal name in Igbo land.

Economy – Related Names

There are also name associated with economy that showcase the Igbo as a vanguard of economic development.

i. Nwa + ka + ego → Nwakaego
   Child more money
   ‘Child is more valuable than money’.

ii. Aku + nna → Akunna
   Wealth father
   ‘Her father’s wealth’.

iii. Aku + amaka → Akuamaka
   Wealth good
   ‘Wealth is enjoyable’.

iv. Ego + ji + uka → Egojiuka
   Money hold talk
   ‘Money settles every problem’.

Socio-Cultural Features of IGBO Personal Names

Nigerian personal names especially the Igbo ones represent diversity. Thus, African fabrics have vibrant colours and are most often named after something or someone signifying their importance as part of our live among Nigerian ethnicities. The Igbo, inclusive, our personal names are also a blend of multicultural sentiment. Consequently, looking at name as a production for socio-cultural purposes, Igbo personal names are not without some socio-cultural/socio-semantic features since every Igbo personal name is socio-culturally meaningful.

Igbo Personal Names are both ‘Anthroponomastics’ and ‘Toponomastic’. Anthroponomastics refers to the science that studies personal names while toponomastics is a term for the study of place names. The claim that Nigerian Personal Names are both anthropomastic and toponomastic is based on the fact that places are often named after people and vice versa.

i. Umu + elem → Umuelem (place name)
   Children elem
   ‘Elem’s Children’
ii. Umu + dike → Umudike (place name)  
Children dike  
‘Dike’s descendants’

iii. Umu + duruozu → Umuduruozu (place name)  
Children Duruozu  
‘Children of Duruozu’

iv. Ama + Igbo → Amaigbo  
Compound Igbo  
‘Palace of the Igbo’

The place names in (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) are named after the men Elem, Dike, Duruozu and Igbo respectively. Interestingly, the name in example (iv) is hitherto a name of a person as well as a town. In a similar way, ‘Washington’ is named after a person and ‘Israel’ is sometimes used as a first name as well as a place. This is evidence that name as anthroponomastic phenomenon being extended to a toponomastic one is a universal phenomenon.

**Igbo Personal names are Historical**

The claim that history is made from personal names and that such names are for historical purposes has a clear culture content in Nigeria especially among the Igbo. Except in small cases of title names and names given after market days (as in the case of Igbo) the significance of most Nigerians personal names bears more on the parents or family of the bearer and less on the individual who bear the name. this consider this history-oriented name lineage in Igbo.

i. O + di + nke + m + mere → Odinkemmere  
Is there anything I did?  
‘Am I not innocent?’ Is the father of:

ii. Izu + nwolu → Izunwolu  
plot only one ‘plot against the only child’ who later gives birth to:

iii. Obi + alo + m → Obialom  
Hear come me ‘I am consoled’ whose own son bears:

iv. Uzo + ezie → Uzoezie  
Road good  
‘The road is now straightened’. Finally uzoezie’s child now bears  
Onye + ka + chi  
Who greater God  
‘Who is greater than God?’

The history involved in this list of names cannot be over-emphasized. It could be revealed that ‘odinkemmere’ is “Nwolu (‘the only male child of the father) who is exposed to hostility and oppression from other populous families. However, ‘Odinkemmere’ and ‘Nwolu’ became consoled with arrival of the next son named ‘Obialom’. The climax of their hope came when ‘Obialom’ has his own son hence he was named ‘Uzoezie’.
Igbo Personal Names are Traditionally more Important and serve as an Identity more than Family or Surname

This is a clear claim especially in the society where the bearer finds himself. ‘Ike + nna (Ikenna) Osu + ala (Osuala)’ may be more identified in his immediate country home with

i. ‘Ike + nna ——— Ikenna’ and not ‘Osuala’
   Strength father
   ‘God’s strength’

The British also follow this where ‘David Michael Smith’ would usually be referred to as ‘David’ (Crystal, 1987: 113).

Igbo Personal Names are not Patronymic

This is a situation where a child’s name is derived from the father’s given/own name. In Russian, for example Ivan’s son would be known as ‘Ivanovich’ and his daughter as ‘Ivanovna’ because Russian personal names could be patronymic. In Igbo for instance, a person may add his father’s name to his personal name but as different morphemes (though optional) as in ‘Emeka – Ike Ogbonna’ for a person whose father bears ‘Ike (nna)’ and the surname (family name) is Ogbonna (Ogbonna). Osuala (2004: 101) comments:

…it is therefore assumed that while the bearer is ‘Emeka’ his father is ‘Ike’ and the family name is Ogbonna – ‘father’s rival or ‘father’s friend’. There will never be a time the name can be written into one morpheme as ‘Emekaike’ to indicate the father in his personal name. This of course, has no cultural basis neither does it have any semantic background. In Scots, ‘Mac/Mc’ – is used for ‘son of’.

Igbo Personal Names have no Limit to Parental Idiosyncrasy and Invention

Nigerian parents have the extensive opportunity of naming from various social values; and for the society to appreciate, criticize or blame. Look at these Igbo names:

i. Onwu + di + njo ——— Onwudinjo
   Death is bad
   ‘Death is dangerous’
ii. Ako + bu + ndu ——— Akobundu
    Prudence is life
    ‘There is life in prudence’
iii. Uwa + ndu ——— Uwandu
    World life
    ‘Lively world’

The three names above explain the different philosophies of life upheld by the person(s) who gave them. Thus, the exclusive right of parents in the choice of any philosophy is not restricted.
Igbo Personal Names are both Etymological and Statistical

This also operates in Britain and America, thus, making etymology of name to have a universal appeal. People are fascinated by the history of names, where their own name comes from and how its usage has changed over the centuries. Hilary for example, is from Latin ‘hilarius’ meaning ‘cheerful’. In the same vein, the Igbo name; Nwa + ka + ego = ‘Nwakaego’ is a name that compares ‘child’ with ‘money’ meaning ‘a child is more than money’. Again, such personal names can be a collection of important but meaningful words. In ‘Nwakaego’, we have:

\[
\text{Nwa + ka + ego} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{Nwakaego}
\]

Child \quad more \quad money

‘A child is more (valuable) than money’.

Thus, aside the comparative word ‘ka’, ‘Nwa’ and ‘ego’ have come together to make this important personal name in Igbo.

Durability Limit and Fashion Influence on Igbo Personal Names

Some Nigerians see some names as archaic, outdated and out of fashion. Thus, they consider such names as not suitable for their child(ren). In the 1950s, names like;

i. \( \text{Ofo + e + gbu} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{Ofoegbu} \)

‘Not to be harmed by the stick deity’

ii. \( \text{Amara + e + gbu} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{Amaraegbu} \)

‘Not to be killed by one’s kindness’

iii. \( \text{Nna + di} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{Nnadi} \)

‘Father is available’ were best personal names.

Today, fashion and advent of Christianity play vital role in naming especially among the Igbo. Most parents tend to choose names because of social attraction they have in others. This is common among ladies. In Igbo, a nick and social name like ‘Chi-chi’ for ladies commanded social attraction in the 1980s and 1990s. This forced many parents to give any name that is prefixed with ‘chi’ – to their daughters. Consider names like:

i. \( \text{Chi + oma} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{Chioma} \)

God \quad good

‘Good luck’

ii. \( \text{Chi + nyere} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{Chinyere} \)

God \quad gave

‘God’s given child’

iii. \( \text{Chi + nwe + ndu} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{Chinwendu} \)

God \quad owns \quad life

‘Life belongs to God’
The bearers of the above personal names and their likes will prefer to be addressed as ‘Chi; or ‘Chi-Chi’. Contrary to what it used to be, personal names above have taken over. Nigerian personal names can therefore have durability; and naming system changes with society.

**Igbo Personal Names can be Unisex and Comparative in Nature**

Most Nigerian personal names do not denote masculine or feminine gender. In other words, both male and female can bear such names. Consider names like:

i. Ngozi + chukwu $\rightarrow$ Ngozi(chukwu)
   Blessing God
   ‘Blessing of God’

ii. Onyinye + Chukwu $\rightarrow$ Onyinye(chukwu)
   Gift God
   ‘Gift of God’

iii. Kele + Chukwu $\rightarrow$ Kelechi/Kelechukwu
    Thank God
    ‘Thanks be to God’

In Yoruba, such names like ‘Ifoluwa’, ‘Kehinde’, ‘Taiwo’, ‘Ayobami’ have also been discovered to be unisex. This trend, however, is common to new era naming system which may not be unconnected with the propagation of Christianity. Again, Nigerian personal names have the ability to compare two things, the good and the bad; the good and the better’ or even ‘the bad and the worse’. Thus, message is sent to the society with the view to correcting social vices.

i. Chukwu + ka + dibia $\rightarrow$ Chukwuka(dibia)
   God more native doctor
   ‘God is greater than native doctor’

ii. Ndu + ka + aku $\rightarrow$ Nduka(aku)
    Life greater wealth
    ‘Life is more precious than wealth’

iii. Nwa + ka + aku $\rightarrow$ Nwaka(aku)
    Child greater wealth
    ‘A child is better than wealth’

iv. Igwe + ka + ala $\rightarrow$ Igweka(ala)
    Heaven greater earth
    ‘The heaven is better than earth’

In above, comparison is done between two things using the comparative word ‘ka’. It could also be noticed that the names could be shortened as the parenthesized morphemes are optional, another feature, in the use of personal names in Nigeria.
Igbo Personal Name vary Phonological across Dialects

Dialect differences in most Nigeria languages may be caused by variations in syntactic structures, word forms, word usage, tone pattern, aspiration, nasalization, as well as morphemic and phonemic transpositions. In Igbo personal names, for instance, the last two dialect variations are common. However, such phonemic or morphemic transpositions do not make meaning difference in Igbo personal names. Notable ones taken from Onitsha and Owerri dialect clusters, are:

i. **H** versus **F**
   
   Ihe + a + anyi                      Ife + a + anyi  ➔  Iheanyi/Ifeanyi
   
   (Thing not heavy)
   
   ‘Nothing is too heavy for God’ as in ‘ihe anyi chukwu’

ii. **H** versus **R**

   onu + oha                      Onu + ora  ➔  Onuoha/Onuora
   
   Mouth public
   
   ‘People’s spokesmen’

iii. **R** versus **L**

   Orisa + kwe                   Olisa + kwe  ➔  Orisakwe/Olisakwe
   
   God agree
   
   ‘May the Almighty agree’

iv. **Wa** versus **Ba**

   Ike + diwa                   Ike + diba  ➔  Ikediwa/Ikediba
   
   Strength stay
   
   ‘Let strength be kept aside’

Igbo Personal Names influence the Personality of the Bearers

In Nigeria, personal names are challenging to the bearers who would want to live up to expectations, and in order not to disappoint the society in which they live. It may seem unbelievable to notice that the bearer of

i. **Nwa** + **Chukwu**  ➔  Nwachukwu

   Child  God, meaning ‘Child of God’ is an idol worshipper. Again the Igbo believe that one’s fortunes are tied up with the name one bears. No wonder the child who bears:

ii. **O** + **bi** + **ga** + **eri** ➔  Obiageri/obiageli

   One come will eat
   
   ‘One who comes to eat’

iii. **Ngozi** ➔  ‘Blessing’ is expected some how in life to sail through life with much luck and ease. However, the converse is also believed to work. In other words, an ominous name is supposed to spell hardship and ultimate doom for the bearer. There is a classic example of a man named:
iv. Onwu + egbuto ➔ Onwuegbuto meaning ‘death has mutilated’ who was ugly, retarded and of course poor (Ubahakwe, 1981:108). Thus, the Nigerians, especially the Igbo have the saying as ‘E ji aha gugbuo ya’ meaning ‘he was ruined by the name given to him’. They also believe in the saying that ‘ihe a bara (guru) onye na – edu ya’ meaning ‘whatever that is given to one as name guards one’. The above illustrations may not be unconnected with the reason why ‘okpara’ (first male child) in Igbo is considered as the embodiment of manliness either as a personal or unique name. Ubahakwe augments.

The Okpara (first male child) is considered the embodiment of manliness: sober, thoughtful and courageous, ruling by being ruled, firm but tolerant (Ubahakwe, 1981:108).

Igbo Personal Names are Language Domain Based

In attempt to designate the major clusters of interaction situations that occur in particular multilingual settings, many Nigerian personal names are influenced by some language domains. Such domains like family, church, street, etc. are prominent in Nigerian naming system.

(a) FAMILY: Family as a language domain affects the lives of the Igbo for example. A notable result of this effect is seen in names they bear in order to keep the family lineage, respect or show love for the family. Consider names like:

i. Aha + m + e + fula ➔ Ahamefula
   Name me not lose
   ‘May my name not be lost’.

ii. Aha + nna ➔ Ahanna
   Name father
   ‘Father’s name’

iii. Ama + e + chi ➔ Amaechi
   Compound not lose
   ‘May the family not be desolated’

(b) CHURCH: The Igbo believe in Almighty God, and as result reflect their belief in names they bear.

i. Ngozi + chukwu + ka ➔ Ngozichukwuka
   Blessing God greater
   ‘God’s blessing is greater’

ii. Chukwu + Emeka ➔ Chukwuemeka
   God done great
   ‘God has done greatly’.

(c) STREET/PLAYGROUND: There are also personal names connected with street, kindred, town or playground as in.

i. Obodo + di + mma ➔ Obododimma
Community is good
‘The beauty of the community’.

ii. Mma + ezi → Mmaezi
Beauty compound
‘The beauty of the street/compound’.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study has been able to make an anthroponomastic study of Igbo personal names tracing the fact that such personal names are not ordinary labels, but do many things in the world of linguistics. It has also showcased the interchangeable relationship that exists between names and languages, for names are found in languages and languages are contained in personal names. Thus, Igbo personal names are communicative since language itself is a communicative tool.

...a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols (Sapir, 1921:403).

Having traced the etymology of personal names in Igbo, and in order to restore the integrity of Igbo personal names, this study has the following recommendations.

Nigerians and indeed the Igbo should ensure that names they bear have origin. In other words, such personal names should be both etymological and statistical. This will in no small measure make the bearers to be proud of their names, and contribute in the development of the nation.

It is also the recommendation of this study that culture and religion be considered simultaneously in personal naming. In as much as Christianity, Islam or traditional practice is upheld we believe, culture and tradition should not be ignored so as to assist in nation building. We believe also that the culture of any society lies in their ways of life including the names they bear hence names are seen as vehicle which transmits culture to the society. In upholding culture however, cultures of negative impact should be avoided in order not to enslave or initiate children before they grow. In this way, names that are culturally rich will forever serve as an identity with a view to developing the nation.

Events bring history and history accounts for events. The importance of historical personal names cannot be over-emphasized. Names should be given so as to be used as a recollection of past events.

Finally, we wish to stress that this study has only done an aspect of Nigerian personal names and the Igbo in particular, and has not in anyway exhausted all that is needed in such a research work. We however, believe that the utilization of the few suggestions made above will go a long way in sanitizing the naming practice among the Igbo and Nigerians as a whole. When this is done, the development of the nation is purely guaranteed.

Igbo personal names are not mere utterances, they are connotative, communicative, synonymous and hyponymous. These names should attract respect from all since they are socio-semantically analyzable and rich in culture especially their service as an identity and contributions to the development of the nation.

It is only by knowledge, exploration and practicalization of these personal names including their cultural and social connotations that a country like Nigeria can develop.

References


