

ONOMASTIC APPROACH TO TACKLING THE EFFECTS OF EMERGING TRENDS IN IGBO NAMING SYSTEM

Maureen Azuka Ezeani
Department of Linguistic
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nigeria
ma.chikeluba@unizik.edu.ng
+2348063454433

And
Esther Amarachukwu Iliemenam
Department of linguistics
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nigeria
estheriliemenam23@gmail.com
+2347014412529

Abstract

The names that Igbo people bear are of immense significance. Igbo personal names reflect and show the supreme importance attached to religion in the life of the Igbo people and promote their cultural heritage. For more than a century and half, the Igbo culture has been battered and bastardized by colonialism and activities of missionaries who invaded Igboland. The exposure to new forms of life brought changes to the people's worldview. The objective of this research is to showcase the beauty of Igbo names and to investigate those damages that emerging trends have done to naming system in Igbo land. Some of the current trends in naming deprive the name of their cultural, social, religious and political relevance and undermine the identity of the bearers, while others violate the norms of naming in Igbo culture. To provide a foundation for comparison, the researcher compiled regular and trending Igbo names from her personal contacts as well as from the social media, books, internet and the print media for a descriptive analysis. An interview was also carried out to get a deeper insight into the reasons behind the names from the bearers. It was observed that westernization of Igbo names and clipping have done a great damage on Igbo names and even the Igbo culture. It is recommended that educative seminars and awareness campaigns should be arranged to educate people on the interconnectivity of names, language, culture and identity so that they can place meanings and relevance above fashion and trends when it comes to personal names.

Keywords: Igbo, names, trends, westernization, culture.

1.0. Introduction

The history, philosophy, and ideology of Igbo people are encapsulated in the name they bear. Name is as important as a people's history, and Igbo people take pride in their culture and ancestry. Child naming is one of the most important rites of passage in most societies in Africa and across the world. Personal names in indigenous African societies are laden with meaning and may well identify the socio-cultural, political, professional and religious background of the person bearing the name and the person giving the name. Names are not just arbitrary labels but are socio-cultural tags that function as communicative tools. They carry a variety of semantic, pragmatic and socio-cultural information, and mete out the ethos of the people. Personal names are not just empty labels but are associated with certain interpretations that parents, the extended family and society at large give.

Indisputably, Igbo people share common cosmological beliefs towards the great creator popularly known as 'Chi' 'Chukwu'. The Igbo world view, philosophy and whole being can be seen in their naming system. This shows that there are so many associative and contextual meanings of Igbo names and these meanings are tied to the Igbo people's world. If the Igbo people (the African Jews) were known for their high rationality, meticulous execution planning and higher attachment to their cultural environment and that these features manifest in the names they give to their wards then the need for research into emerging trend in Igbo naming system is a matter of necessity. The Igbos as a people, richly endowed with unique but useful heritage face a major challenge posed by emerging trend in their naming system.

A cursory look at emerging trends in Igbo naming system reveal some problems capable of undermining the identity of the Igbo people in their traditional and customary stance in Nigeria and the world at large. The problem of deteriorating rich cultural values attached to Igbo native names these days points to a number of rising trends. Traditional Igbo names which are ancient names that portray the Igbo faith and belief in relation to their environment, have been changed to contemporary Igbo names. Such names are based on activities, events and experiences common to the ancient Igbo. For example, a man of great wealth in yam could name his son 'Njoku' after the God of yam or Ezeji etc. But today, many emerging trends have adversely influenced these traditional names. Westernization of native names such as blending, undue use of acronyms, creative respelling of native Igbo names etc have reduced the meanings and significance attached to these names to naught. The crave to westernization is not preserving our cultural heritage. Ndi Igbo that have such meaningful names as Obinna (father's heart) and Ikechukwu (God's power) prefer meaningless Obyno and Iyke respectively. Some other reasonable names of Igbo origin are clipped/shortened, abbreviated, blended and simplified into ridiculous jargons that tarnish the cultural image of the Igbo people in their naming system. Chinaza is shortened to Nazzy, Uchenna - Uchman, Nneka- Neki, Ngozi-Ngoo, Ebelechukwu - Eby etc. It is very obvious that these trends as clearly pointed out represent a serious clog in the wheel of progress within the Igbo naming system and cultural heritage, and the negating impact of this problem is the main thrust of this research.

This study generally identifies strategies that would involve onomastic approach for tackling the effects of emerging trend in Igbo naming system. Specifically, it seeks to source and explore emerging trends in naming system in Igbo, ascertain the major guiding principles and ethics in the Igbo naming arrangement in the past and then find out how best to promote the cultural heritage of the Igbo people so as to return the interest of the Igbos to their native names.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The study is framed within Onomasiology. Onomasiology according to Coates (2005), studies the history of the names of individuals or names within particular social groups or areas with a view to discovering their original meanings, and establish their social or geographical distributional patterns. The linguistic devices that are used to create and keep names in circulation as an integral part of the language or languages of the community that uses them is part of the concern of onomastic studies. It examines current patterns and processes of naming, to establish the distribution and popularity of particular names or name-types, as well as knowing what proper names in general are and what they do (how they are used), in order to refine our understanding of their nature. It also studies the connotations of names, example, how or whether personal names relate to a peculiar personality or are subject to changes in fashion. Onomasiology investigates how different names may apply to the same entity, even in the same culture, for instance, in pet-naming or nicknaming, and the practical problems that arise when names are used across linguistic boundaries.

For place names, onomasticians may suggest international and standard usages to resolve disputes about them. The naming of persons, places and so on in second-order worlds such as myth, literature, film and in supernatural worlds, and how ordinary words and phrases can become proper names and vice versa; how they can be used metaphorically or become associated with entities which are not the original thing are all aspects of onomastic studies.

In adopting onomastic approach, the focus of this study is on the naming system and practices among the Igbo people as well as the meaning attached to the names they give. No Igbo name remains the same the moment it is shortened.

3.0 Methodology

The current study is grounded with qualitative analysis. Most of the names used in this study were collected from the personal contacts of the researcher with Igbo native speakers in Anambra State, Nigeria. Most of our respondents were engaged in a highly oral unstructured interview. The interviews were informal, in that, it is only the interviewer who knows what was going on while the interviewee was kept behind the screen. This method was chosen since it makes the respondent come out naturally with issues the way they are. Also, a formal method was applied in the collection of data from textbooks,

social media, print media, journals etc. Trendy young people and elderly ones are mainly used in the elicitation of information, believing strongly that it is only the old people that can give interpretative analysis of names in Igbo naming system and help in contextualizing them while the young people provided explanations to emerging trends.

A descriptive method of data analysis was adopted. Some selected Igbo names were presented, described and contextualized under facts associated with emerging trends in Igbo naming system. An exhaustive information is provided to explain/describe each contextual category so identified with the intent of examining meaning attached to Igbo names before and after the impact of emerging trends.

4.0 Discussion

The Igbo naming system is struggling against the defacing impact of emerging trends. The change in orientation of many Igbo people occasioned by the wind of westernization blowing across Africa has bastardized many Igbo names and stripped them of meaning and relevance in Igbo world view. The privileges of name giving by parents and grandparents are no longer an exclusive reserve for them. Youngsters rename themselves, clip and style their parents-given names or minimize same. In what follows, we are going to see some of the contextual categorization of Igbo names as carefully identified and the distortions suffered by these names as a result of emerging trends in Igbo naming system.

4.1 Clipping

In linguistics, clipping also known as truncation or shortening is the word formation process which consists in the reduction of word to one of its parts Ndimele (1999). According to Lieber (2010), clipping is a kind of abbreviation, a word formation process by which a new word is carved out of an already existing word or multiple syllables Clipping is generally considered a linguistic phenomenon consisting in cutting up, trimming or "mincing" a word so as to produce a shorter version of a word by loss of material. Clippings originally were labels adopted by special groups such as army, the medical professions, police, schools, and so on. Group slang clipping consist of the following type: back clipping, fore clipping, middle clipping or syncope, complex clipping, abbreviations and creative spelling.

4.2 Changes Occurring in Names of Historical Connotations

In Igbo naming system, one frequently used category is simply to name the child after the day it was born. So, from the four market days that make up the Igbo week, namely; Eke, Orie, Afo and Nkwo, we have such names as Okoye, Nwoye, Okafo, Nwafo, Nwankwo, Okonkwo, Okereke, Okeke and Nweke for males. The corresponding female names would be Mgbeeke, Mgbofo, Nwanyinkwo, Nkwoja, Ugwueke and Mgborie etc. Besides names like Mgbeeke eliciting a lot of demeaning jokes in urban-Igbo places, in modern times the other names have spilled into names like Sunday, Monday, and Friday.

The problem of westernization as seen here erodes a bit of cultural values embedded in Igbo naming system. Some other historically intoned Igbo names abound. Nwaogu-son of War designates someone born in wartime, Nwigwe, Nwachukwu are names of boys whose conception and birth are attributed to the intervention of great oracles such as Igwekala of Umuahia and Chukwuabiana of Arochukwu. Emerging trends indicate that new generation churches have influenced their faith to drop such names, branding the oracles satanic in the way they work. As bible-names like David, James etc. keep coming up, the oracle names tied up with culture in Igbo naming system keep disappearing. Another category of names is the group designating the other of primogeniture (the state of being the firstborn) in both the male and female lines in the family. Okpara is the first born male whereas in the female line, the first is Ada. The second is Ulu and the third is named Ibari. None of these names has not suffered either minimizing or clipping. Ada is now AD, Okpara is Ok etc.

4.3 Emerging Trends in Girls Names in Igbo Land

A good proportion of names given to girls is usually metaphorical and context based either in praise or in appreciation of beauty. Parents would want the world to know that their baby girl is paragon of beauty and accordingly may name her after one of the best-known symbols of beauty in nature and art. Such names and what they are turned into nowadays are given below.

S/N	Igbo names	Meaning	Changed Version
1	Akwugo	The eagle's egg	Akwa nwa
2	Oduenyi	The valuable elephant	Enyi nwanyi/nwa
3	Nwugo	Baby eaglet	U.g
4	Nwuehi	The calmwood baby	No longer popular
5	Ugomma	The eagle beautiful	Mma
6	Nwogazi	Baby guinea fowl	Gazee
7	Udara	The peach fruit	No longer popular

Others may choose to celebrate in more poetic language, the impact of their little girls' beauty as follows:

S/N	Names	Meaning	Trendy Version
1	Nwaekuele	The eagle's egg	Nwaeku
2	Olujieigbo	The Igbo people will strain their necks to keep admiring your beauty	Olujie/Igbo
3	Nwanze	The child of the noble	Nze
4	Nwaku	Child of wealth	Aku
5	Uloma	Beautiful home	Oma
6	Olamma	Gold	Mma
7	Obianujuaku	Born in the midst of plenty riches	Uju

4.4 Names Showing Statement of Life Experience and Emerging Trends

Most Igbo names are really abbreviated statement of meaning and significance, interpretations of life, experience or of events in the history of the family. At times the name indicate that the birth of the child is a welcome landmark in the parent's lives especially after a long wait for a baby. These names and the changes that have occurred to them are as follows:

S/N	Names	Meaning	Trendy Version
1	Iheanacho	What is been sought for	Acho
2	Onwuegbunam	May death never kill me	Egbunam
3	Onwuegbuzina	Death do not kill again	Zina
4	Igwebuike	Strength abides in multitude	Igwe
5	Ibuchukwu	Are you God?	Ibu/Buchi

In other instances, the child's arrival is used as an occasion to boast and make statements of triumph over misfortune or of vindication over gossiping neighbors. Few examples are given below:

S/N	Names	Meaning	Trendy Version
1	Kamsiyochukwu	Exactly as I asked God	Kamsi
2	Ikegwuonu	Let the mouth get tired and stop talking	I.k/Ike
3	Ndukagba	Life surpasses strength of critics	Nduka
4	Somadina	May I not live in isolation	Dina

Sometimes names may be cast in the form of prayer to indicate that the child's birth is an answer to such prayer. Names of this sort and the effect of emerging trend on them are:

S/N	Names	Meaning	Trendy Version
1	Ahamefula	May my name not get lost	Aham
2	Amarachukwu	Grace of God	Amy
3	Nkemakonam	May I not want for what is mine	Nkem
4	Udemezue	May my fame be accomplished	Ude
5	Ejiofor	One who acts uprightly	Ofo

Also, some group of names in Igbo land reflect a background of past opposition and animosity. They voice a promise of greater achievement if only the enemies would give the family a chance as the case in the following:

S/N	Names	Meaning	Clipped form
1	Igbokwe	If only Igbo people (humanity agree)	Igbo
2	Ilohanwata	If only foes would let the child be	Ilo
3	Ilokwe	If foes permit	Ilo
4	Ibekwe	If kinsmen permit	Ibe
5	Uwakwe	If the world permits	Uwa
6	Ohakwe	If majority permits	Oha

One can see as depicted, in these names a social atmosphere of distrust and intrigue where people feel frustrated and threatened by others and most importantly a large extent of meaninglessness coming from the same names as a result of attempts at coming up with a trendy way of calling the names.

4.5 Emerging Trend in Names with Pro-child Connotations

Igbo culture is embedded in pro-life and pro-child bias. This is well known to anyone who has studied onomastic as it concerns Igbo naming system. In appreciation of the blessing of the gift of a child (nwa) as greater than any other blessing one may have, the under listed names are quickly given. Care should also be taken to observe how meanings attached to the names are outrightly removed in the event of utteration.

S/N	Names	Meaning	Trendy Version
1	Ifeyinwa	Nothing can be compared to a child	Ify
2	Nwakaego	The child is more valuable than money	Nwaka/Ego
3	Ginikanwa	What is more precious than a child	Ginika
4	Nwakauba	The child is more valuable than wealth	Uba

There are also names which show some of the motivations for having children. In guaranteeing posterity and inheritance by one's kins, offsprings acquire a religion and almost divine function. Having children seems to become both a right and duty. Some of such names revealing changes due to emerging trends are as follows:

S/N	Names	Meaning	Trendy Version
1	Nwaneli	The child inherits possession	Nely
2	Nwawilo	The child is the foundation of the house	Awilo
3	Nwokekorom	I lack male children	Nwoke
4	Amaechi	Who knows tomorrow	Meche
5	Okemaghalam	May my share never elude me	Okey

Among other things, life and death are privileged pair of concepts in which the Igbo people seem to have invested a lot of emotions, convictions, meanings and value. Life (Ndu) as earlier stated is acclaimed the greatest of all values. While the following names indicate the above, the infiltration of trends alter meanings of the said names.

S/N	Names	Meaning	Trendy Version
1	Ndukaaku	Life is worth more than wealth	Nduka
2	Ndubusi	Life is supreme	Ndu
3	Ndubuike	Life is strength	Buike
4	Chijindu	God sustains life	Jindu
5	Chinwendu	God owns life	Wendy
6	Ndubuzu	Living or surviving is plan	Izu
7	Uchendu	Thoughts of life	Uchman

Envisaging the circumstance in which certain names associated with death are given, Leonard (1998) writes that face to face with the painful and disheartening facts that all the children who were born previously before the arrival of the one snatched away by death were gone, despite the inevitable sacrifices and offerings duly made in such circumstances, the Igbo people do give names that suggest petitions to the spirit of death. These names not only beg the spirit to desist but implore it to take its dreadful hand off and spare the offsprings, so that they may live to perpetuate the name and the substance of the house. Such names include:

S/N	Names	Meaning	Trendy Version
1	Onwuha	Please death let go	Nwuha
2	Onwuaraezi	Death has held grip of the household	Arezi
3	Onwuzuruigbo	Death is everywhere	Igbo
4	Onwuamaenyi	Death knows no friend	Enyi
5	Onwuamaibe	Death knows no kin	Ibe
6	Onwuamaeze	Death knows no king	Amaeze
7	Onwuchekwa	Death wait	Chekwas

The number and rich variety of names based on death which by no means are adequately represented here, yield a complex harvest of attitudes and reflections based on context. It is worthy to note that these reflections are demonstration of philosophic and contextual nature rather than of a purely religious nature. But in these names, the religious perspective seems to recede to the background. Religion covers death with a cloak of optimism and so, in a way, denies death.

5.0 Findings

The category of names which we have studied are by no means exhaustive, but they are typical enough and they show that in the Igbo naming system, to name is to make a statement of meaning, ranging from the simplest and as a matter of fact to the deepest thoughts that probe the mystery of reality. These categories are conditioned by the context or environment surrounding the child's birth and are not indiscriminate tags of references as observed in today's emerging trends, minimizing, shortening/clipping etc. erodes the meaning that come native Igbo names of all kinds. Significantly, the meanings so undermined by emerging trends are culturally rich and traditionally unique. They account for the identity of the Igbo people and they cover a wide range.

From names that use markets to register birthdays and others used to recall historical events and landmarks, we encounter names showing the order of primogeniture and girls beauty names captured in bold metaphors. There are child-welcoming names, names celebrating triumph over misfortune and detractors, the triumph of prayers and the vindication of the innocent. The pro-life names affirm and glorify life as the ultimate good. The death names reflect man's anxiety, abhorrence and helplessness before the mystery of human mortality.

But for the emerging trends and the negative impact that come with them, native Igbo names would remain a rallying point of Igbo identity, culturally and in terms of tradition. It was found that the virus of emerging trends namely; apocoptation or back clipping, blending acronyms etc. have shifted the onomastic premium of native Igbo names. As earlier affirmed, all Igbo names are meant to portray meaning in certain background context. In the "chi" or God names, whether in the meaning of man's spiritual double or of the supreme God himself, there is affirmation of God's existence and of his attributes as the all-powerful and wise creator and dispenser of fortune, the provident and generous source of life and all its blessings and the vindicator of the truth. The various prayer names if not polluted by emerging trends, pay him worshipful homage.

These sample of names altered by emerging trends serve to give an idea of the potential vast area, the wide variety of subjects which Igbo names cover and the contextual implication of these names. They are context oriented, and demonstrate the power of special technique devised by an illiterate culture to put into record some of the best thoughts and ideas of its heritage.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, names serve several purposes; the most important of these is that they differentiate one from another. Emerging trend has placed names a mere tag of identification, names in Igbo culture form a great reservoir of sentiments, ideas and values. It is quite frustrating and most uncultured to see some parents and Igbo people give themselves names that have no meaning or its meaning is incomplete. Igbo names must be chosen with great consideration before parents gives it to their children.

5.3 Recommendations

Clipping and simplicity that are in-vogue have polluted principles and ethnics in Igbo naming arrangement. However, in every situation, there is bound to solution. It may take days, months or even years but the most important step to take is the first step. The question is; are Ndigbo ready to take that first step? It is then recommended that Igbo people should not only preserve but sustain the use of Igbo names which have thereby proven to be very rich sources of information about Igbo philosophy of life.

Another recommendation is owning up to their language, because I believe that why Igbo people minimize or slip their names is because they are not proud of their language. Examples: Chimamanda (Amanda), Kelechi (Kleture Kenchux), Chizitelem (zitel, Chikosoro (Kosor). How on earth would one know that these names are Igbo names? Educative seminars and awareness campaigns should be arranged to educate the people on the interconnectivity of names, language, culture and identity so that they can place meaningfulness and relevance above fashion when it comes to personal names. Finally, more research should also be done on the importance of Igbo names so as to promote the cultural heritage of Igbo people.

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