Some Linguistic Features of Chi-Prefixed Igbo Personal Names

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Abstract

Some scholars have carried out research on Igbo names, few on chi prefixed Igbo personal names. This study is thereby set out to make a database on 'Chi' prefixed Igbo personal names as they are predominant in the Igbo naming system, build up a semantic categorization and ascertain the predominant mindset of the Igbo people through a frequency count. The data used in this research were gathered through interactive sessions with some individuals. Two theories were employed. The causal theory of names which emphasizes that African names have causal relationship with their usage and Frege's descriptive theory of proper names which is of the view that semantic content of proper name is identical to the description associated with it by its speakers. This research made a significant contribution to study by being able to gather 158 Chi prefixed Igbo personal names, categorized them into praise, thanksgiving, testimony, prayer and declarative groups. This study ascertained that experiences form philosophies and belief in the contemporary Igbo naming System. Tone, orthography and phonological issues were also discovered in name structure.

Keywords: chi-prefixed Igbo names, linguistic features, semantic categorization, frequency count.

Introduction

The Igbo land is located in the south eastern part of Nigeria and the Igbo language belongs to the Niger-Congo phyla of Joseph Greenberg's Classification of African Languages, Specifically Kwa group. The states under the south eastern are Anambra, Abia, Imo, Ebonyi and Enugu States. Their territories extend westward across the Niger to the regions of Aniocha, Ndokwa, Ukwuani and Ika in present- day Delta State.

Igbo has a total of about 30 million speakers as at 2020 (Ellen, 2018). Igbo names are influenced by different factors such as royalty, religion, experience before birth, myths & beliefs etc. For the Igbo people, a name is not just a tag of identity or personal label but a story and an expression of the events and circumstances surrounding the birth of a child as well as the parent's life experience and world view. Our focus therefore is on Igbo names that are chi-Prefixed. The "chi" is a mysterious concept in Igbo and this had accounted to the various interpretations and translations of its meaning by scholars. "Chi" is seen in Igbo philosophy as one's individual driving force, a sort of leading companion, one's destiny creator, an inevitable fate, a link with one's spiritual identity, the one who fights, helps and rescues the individual.

It is also been seen as a person's deity, one's identity in the spirit land which complements his human identity. The "Chi" concept is believed to be the most important deity in Igbo mythology. The word "Chi" overlaps semantically because in some context it can be used as a short form for Chukwu in Igbo, This "Chi" is a part of Chukwu that resides in human beings who the Igbos believe to be their intermediary between The Supreme God known as 'Chukwu' in the Igbo language. Moreover, the Igbos also believe in this proverb "Otu nne na-amu, mana obughi otu Chi na-eke", this directly translates to "A single Mother gives birth to

children but not one God creates them", which means that 'every child has his or her own God'. Chi-prefixed names are popular in the Igbo Culture, given to the strong belief in the traditional perception of "Chi" coupled with the religious inclinations of contemporary Christianity .Scholars have delved into the meaning of Igbo names, including the Chi-prefixed names. However a semantic grouping or classification and frequency count on Chi-prefixed Igbo names seem not to have been carried out. This classification is necessary to ascertain the predominant mindset of the Igbo people with regards to communicating to a higher being, 'God' in the scenario of Child naming .This work attempts to draw this clarification, given the collected data and also carry out a frequency count to know the most prevalent group.

Names and naming are universal concepts. Every culture and society assigns names to persons, things and abstract concepts. There is no particular documentation of when human beings began to use names, though the act of naming is very old and obviously dates in to the pre-ancient times. The earliest written texts and mythologies contain examples of names. Most names had etymological meanings, which means they were originally based on words .All cultures use names, though naming cultures vary greatly. In some situations, they are very simple just like the Indonesians who bear only one name. On the contrary, the traditional Chinese naming practice were very complex or intricate. The Chinese men were given different names at various times in their lives, in addition to a family name and sometimes a generation name (Al-sayyed 2021).

Names are of different purposes, primarily naming helps in differentiating individuals from one another; it is unimaginable how hard it would have been to refer to people without using names. So instead of saying "Ebuka" we should have had descriptions like "the

big headed guy who lives by the school". The Igbos have a way of constructing their names; they are mostly historically and traditionally modelled. In the former times, the Igbo people named their children after the four market days (eke, órìè, afọ, ǹkwọ) in Igbo land. For instance: Mgbeke, Mgborie, Mgbafọ, Mgbankwo, Nwaanyinkwo, Nkwoja and Ugweke, are for Women, for the males we have market day based names too like Okori, Okonkwo, Okafo, Okoroafo, Okeke,, Nwafo, Okoli, Nweke etc.

The Igbo people also attach value and great importance to their names, from the personal names they bear to that of the society they occupy. Mostly, the Igbo community in the Igbo land obtain their names from landmarks, forefathers, rivers/streams, markets, deities, hills, while on the other hand some families and individuals derive their names after family members, market days and known heroes and heroines (mostly the dead heroes).In addition, families name their children to symbolize their experiences in life or situations surrounding the birth of such children .Time, place of birth and belief in reincarnation of deceased family member are also among the bases for naming in Igbo community.

Catholic Church has a combination of western names, principally saints and traditional Igbo names. Initially, the church tried to insist that only saints' names were used and then shifted to saying that children must, if they have a traditional name, also have a Catholic saint's names for baptism. This transition became easier as people transformed their perception of traditional Igbo names to refer to the Christian God. As seen above, it can be said that it is during this time that "Chi" prefixed names began to take place in the Igbo Naming system.

Theories on Names

The descriptivist theory of proper names (also descriptivist theory of reference) is the view that the meaning or semantic content of a proper name is identical to the descriptions associated with it by speakers, while their referents are determined to be the objects that satisfy these descriptions.

Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege have both been associated with the descriptivist theory, which is sometimes called the *mediated reference theory* or *Frege–Russell view* Sikander, (2010). In the 1970s, this theory came under attack from causal theorists such as Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam and others. However, it is seen as something of a revival in recent years, especially under the form of what is called two-dimensional semantic theories. This latter trend is exemplified by the theories of David Chalmers, among others. Gibka et al (2018) wrote an article on functions of proper names in Television series. She wanted to develop the theoretical framework introduced in her first article and verify whether it could be applied to genres other than novels, however the two pairs have some elements in common.

Having shown the applicability of the theory of two acts to two forms of human creativity. Gibka et al (2018) intend to confirm whether the methodology can be used to study all group of onyms. This research employed the causal theory of names which emphasizes that African names have causal relationship with its usage and also Frege's descriptive theory of proper names which is of the view that semantic content of proper name is identical with the description associated to it by its speakers. According to Vincent (2009) a proper name is an element of a particular language which also belongs to a respective onymic subsystem. He says that proper names are formed (as a secondary plan of a language) with the background of appellative vocabulary. Anyabuike (2020) worked on

Igbo world view and the translation of Igbo names with the attempt to examine the meaning of Igbo names in order to unravel the philosophical world view and meanings the names carry. 163 Igbo names were analyzed and translated. The result shows that there was extension of understanding of Igbo world view through these names, proving that Igbo names are invaluable sources of information in Igbo tradition.

The present studies, agree with the result of this work and will go a step further to categorize these names and check their frequency. Imoh (2021) worked on the Onomastic study of the Basa personal names. This was examined within the purview of linguistics onomastics and the complex lexical morphological and syntactic properties and processes which provide a window to the grammatical process of Basa language using the Leipzig glossing rules. In the paper, he also attempted to answer the question 'what are the lexical and grammatical structure of Basa personal names? His findings show that the names have different structures such as simple words, complex words, idiophones, idioms, riddles, clipping, compounds and proverbs. This present work is also on Igbo personal names but specifically the 'Chi' Prefixed ones. It differs with Imoh (2021) research on Basa language   in terms of focus.

Okagbue et al (2017) worked on personal names in Igbo culture, creating a database of randomly selected personal names with statistical analysis and discussions. Aniagbaoso (2015) worked on the fast disappearance of African culture and identity with focus on Igbo names usage and their attitude towards the use of Igbo names. Using 32 Igbo names the writer realized that some Igbo people give names to their children but coin an English version of it to suit the contemporary trend and style, thereby discarding the meaning, identity and the language features of those names. The paper also exposes the mentality of some Africans that feel they

have to be identified with the white culture to be relevant. The misconception in the changing of some traditional names to English Christian names e.g. David John with no recourse to Igbo Christian names, supports the claim.

The paper is a wakeup call to all Africans to avoid losing their African tradition on naming .This work was helpful to this research as it dealt on personal names, though focused more on avoiding the loss of African naming culture, this present research has more names with emphasis on their semantic categorization. Onumajuru (2016) worked on a semantic and pragmatics analyses of Igbo personal names. She investigated the semantics and pragmatics content of personal names and naming in the Igbo language and culture, her findings showed that Igbo names structurally fall into three broad categories which are lexical, phrasal and sentential. Onumajuru's research is relevant to this current work as it deals with semantic classification of Igbo personal names, such semantic classification is what this research has channeled to achieve in 'Chi' prexied Igbo personal names.

Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2021) carried out a research on Anglicization of written Igbo personal and place names with a view to highlighing the extent of spellings and pronunciation consistencies, He discovered the impact it has on learning and development of the language and also discovered ways the attitude of the people can be changed towards the language to forestall its death, he concluded that the Onwu orthography with regards to the spelling of personal and place names will complement the effort being made to sustain the language.

Orthographic and Phonological Aspects of Target Names

From the data gathered, it is observed that name writing does not follow any pattern. It is totally up to the name bearer or people

responsible for him/her. Some individuals disregard vowel assimilation when writing their names while some consider it. This is also observed in the homorganic nasal assimilation attainable in Igbo phonological processes. Consider these examples of no assimilation in 1 below.

Example 1

Chinweoge   /tʃínwèógè/- *God is the owner of time*

Chikaọsọrọ   /tʃíkàɔ́sɔ̀rɔ̀/ – *It pleases God.*

Here the underlined vowels in adjacent positions tolerate each other in peaceful co-existence.

Assimilation in Igbo vowels is usually total; therefore one would expect double identical vowels in every position of vowel assimilation. This may look clumsy and people just represent it with only one letter, that is, the letter of the sound that did the assimilation. This behavior may also be interpreted as vowel omission after the assimilation as proposed by Omozuwa (2021). See example 2.

Example 2

tʃí # nà # ènẹ́ ⟶ /tʃínèènẹ́/ ⟶ /tʃínènẹ́/ – *God gives*

V_1 V_2 V_3 V_4 Ø

Here the V_3, the vowel at word initial position of the third word, assimilates V_2, the vowel of the second word. Afterwards, V_2 is deleted. As consistent as possible this may look, the lengthening

perceived during the pronunciation may go a long way in justifying the option of total assimilation. Lengthening is presented as sound doubling '**ee**' in the transcription. Consider the example below:

Example 3: Chinaecherem / Chinecherem   - *God thinks for me/is thoughtful of me*

Chi # na # echere# m# ⟶ Chinaecherem⟶ Chinecherem

tʃí#nà#étʃèré#m̄ ⟶ tʃínàétʃèrém̄ ⟶ tʃínèétʃèrém̄

Identical vowels at word boundaries are represented with a vowel with contour tones in the transcription.

Example 4:

Chibuzo – God comes first

Chí # bù # úzọ̀ ⟶ Chibuzo ⟶ tʃíbŭzọ̀

The researchers also observed that most of these names can be grouped under different categories. This research tries to classify and group the 158 'chi' prefixed Igbo personal names used in this study looking at the semantic components and grouping them under similar headings. This study has deduced 5 distinct focus of expression in name giving. These are praise, prayer, testimony, thanksgiving and declaration of belief/life assertions. These were grouped based on the emotions, communicative genres, and the dispositions the names weep up when they are mentioned. In the case of praise, gratitude, joy, positive emotions are aroused. See Table 1.

Table 1: Praise category of Chi prefixed Igbo names

	Name	Transcription	Meaning
1	Chidiomimi	tʃídīòmìmì	God who is Mysterious

2	Chidiogo	tʃídīɔ̀gɔ̀	God who is gracious
3	Chinarotito	tʃínàrôtìtí	May God receive the glory

Praise is an important aspect of Igbo culture, however as it will be seen later on table 6(frequency count). There are few names on Praise in this work, this is attributed to the tonal pattern associated with praise names in Igbo. The names for praise in this study are seen to be direct and ascribe praise qualities to God. In Table 1 e.g. 2, the name / tʃídīɔ̀gɔ̀/ - 'God who is gracious' is more of a Praise name than / tʃídīɔ̀gɔ̀/ which is more of an assertion.

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Example 5
Word      / tʃídìɔ̀gɔ̀/              / tʃídìɔ̀gɔ̀/            Chidiogo
Tone        HDSLL                    HLLL
Word      / tʃídīòmìmì /            / tʃídìòmìmì /          Chidiomimi
Tone        HDSLLL                   HLLLL
H means high tone, DS, down step tone and L, low tone.
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In example five, it is observed that the high-down step pattern on the first two syllables characterize a direct speech to the second party while the high-low pattern follows an assertiveness of an experience. This is another phonological input in the classification of Igbo names. However, in Table 1 e.g. 3, Chinarotito /tʃínàrôtìtí/ does not follow this pattern but has inherent attribute of praise. This shows that aside the tonal patterns, inherent lexico-semantic properties are vital in the classification of Igbo names.

The second category deals with prayer. Names on prayer suggest total dependence on a supreme being and the vulnerability and helplessness of mortals over some circumstances of life. They sometimes portray the desire of humans to have God in their affairs, showing a trust-like confidence in God's presence. It is worthy to

note, as stated earlier, that the meaning of the 'Chi' in most of the names collected is that of the Supreme God rather than the personal deity 'chi' evident in the Igbo culture. The Table 2 below contains some examples of names on prayer.

Table 2: Prayer category of Chi prefixed Igbo names

	Name	Transcription	Meaning
1	Chinonyelum	tʃínɔ̀ŋélʊ̀m̄	God be with me
2	Chigozie	tʃígɔzíé	God bless
3	Chizoba	tʃízɔ̀bá	God save

Testimonies are generally confessions of God's help in one's life especially when a request is granted. This sometimes may be taken as thanksgiving but for the purpose of this research, only names that literally thank God will be grouped under thanksgiving. Tables 3 and 4 show the groupings of testimonies and thanksgivings respectively.

Table 3: Testimony category of Chi prefixed Igbo names

	Name	Transcription	Meaning
1	Chinazaekpere	tʃínàzáēkpērē	God answers prayers
2	Chinazom	tʃínàzɔ́m̄	God saves me
3	Chigozirim	tʃígɔ̀zìrìm̄	God has blessed me

Table 4: Thanksgiving category of Chi prefixed Igbo names

	Name	Transcription	Meaning
1	Chidaaalu	tʃídààlʊ́	Thank you God
2	Chialuka	tʃíàlʊ́ká	God has done well
3	Chimalume	tʃímàlʊ̀mé	God has done it well

In Igbo culture, names generally reflect circumstances of birth and significant life events; this is why most names are assertions and beliefs borne out of such circumstances. They could be assertions of ownership, character traits, affection, divine quality and life experiences, these assertions are products of the other four categories. See Table 5

Table 5: Declaration of Belief/Life Assertions category of Chi prefixed Igbo names

	Name	Transcription	Meaning
1	Chinaecherem	tʃínàétʃèrém̄	God thinks for me
2	Chioma	tʃíɔ́má	Good God
3	Chibuzo	tʃíbŭzɔ̀	God is first

The name on Table 5 column 1, /tʃínàétʃèrém̄/, it is an assertion that makes one know that the bearer or one related to her has passed through some life's situations and triumphed in such a mysterious way that could only suggest the well thought out plans of the Almighty. /tʃíɔ́má/ in the next column is a good trait of the Supreme shown in diverse ways to mankind. And the third column,/ tʃíbŭzɔ̀/, is a belief to place God first, an allegiance or form of loyalty to God.

The question, ***what is the most reoccurring category?*** needs to be answered because it is important to know the most patronized category among the Igbo people and why. This will be achieved using simple percentage. The distribution is given on appendix 2 but the frequency count is shown on Table 6 below.

Table 6: Frequency Count of the Name Categories

Category	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency Ranking Remarks
Praise	7	4.43	4th commonly used
Prayer	28	17.72	2nd commonly used
Testimony	27	17.09	3rd commonly used
Thanksgiving	5	3.16	5th commonly used
Declaration of Belief/Life Assertions	91	57.60	1st commonly used
Total	158	100%	

From the Table 6, we can see that Thanksgiving category have 3.16.% , followed by the Praise category which ranks 4.43% and then Testimony category which has 17.09 %, Prayer category pitched at 17.72 % and Declaration of Belief/Life Assertions category, 57.60%. This implies that the most commonly used category of names is that of Declaration of Belief/Life Assertions. This is not surprising because traditionally, Igbo people name babies mostly by circumstances surrounding the birth life experiences, or challenges of the family. Over time the lessons form beliefs and assertions used to express life philosophies, values and lessons.

The study was able to address its objectives. The first answer was a compilation of 158 chi prefixed Igbo names. These are seen on

Appendix I. orthography and phonological issues relating to the data were also discussed. The second research question grouped these names under different categories while the third ranked the frequency of these categories.

Conclusion

This study has been able to investigate the chi prefixed Igbo names, the semantic components, the possible semantic category and the frequency count. Other factors that have been observed are the phonological options adopted by individuals in representing their names in written form, the reality of the dropping of the Chi deity in Igbo names and the adopting of the Supreme God in that stead. Examples of such include optional assimilation, cultural inclinations of naming in Igbo.

The study concludes that Chi prefixed Igbo names are packed full of semantic components that portray the cultural perspective of the Igbo people and as such, there is need for more documentations on them so as to preserve the nuances of the Igbo culture**.** This study recommends more enquiry into the Chi prefixed Igbo names especially creating a corpus on it for Natural language processing tasks like automatic spelling and pronunciation of names by Siri or Google and other text to speech functions. There is also the need to explore the phonological, morphological processes; and the tonal patterns involved in the formation and pronunciation of these names.

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APPENDIX I

S/N	PRAISE NAMES	PRAYER NAMES	TESTIMONY NAMES	THANKSGIVING NAMES	DECLARATION OF BELIEF /ASSERTIONS	
1	Chioma	Chinonyelum	Chizaram	Chidaaalu	Chinaecherem	Chikadibia
2	Chidiogo	Chigozie	Chinemelum	Chimalume	Chinenye	Chikasimma
3	Chidioramma	Chizoba	Chigozirim	Chimemela	Chibuzo	Chikaike
4	Chiolileanyam	Chigbogu	Chinyere	Chinarotito	Chibunam	Chikadibia
5	Chinemeremebere	Chimdeenaidimma	Chiemezie	Chiemeka	Chimazurum	Chidumebi
6	Chierika	Chimezie	Chialuka		Chimamkpa	Chimdike
7	Chidiomimi	Chinua	Chiebunigom		Chidumeje	Chinabaeze
8		Chibubeagha	Chizorom		Chinedu	Chibuonum
9		Chichebem	Chimeguzolam		Chinwendu	Chinomnobi
10		Chidoruo	Chiemezugo		Chimaluijem	Chisimbiri

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11	Chidozie	Chineyenwa	Chikumnaka	Chibudike
12	Chigboromogu		Chibuenyim	Chikaodiri
13	Chinuru	Chiagozikam	Chimkezirim	Chibuifem
14	Chimechefunam	Chigbanweremonodu	Chimnadindu	Chinomnazu
15	Chijidemkamgharaida	Chinazaekpere	Chimsimgolibe	Chikamma
16	Chilotam	Chinanuekpere	Chimzuruoke	Chiekezie
17	Chizimuzo	Chinazom	Chinaekwu	Chimsonari
18	Chimzamekpere	Chinazum	Chinomnazu	Chimamkpam
19	Chigaemezu	Chieleziemanya	Chinomnobim	Chimamanda
20	Chikamnene	Chimechetagom	Chiziterem	Chiemerie
21	Chikairanyelunaka	Chimeguzolam	Chimkalifa	Chibudom
22	Chidubenna	Chinagorom	Chimasoka	Chidiuto
23	Chimechefunam	Chinazum	Chimsimchia	Chijioke
24	Chinalulumogu	Chimechetagom	Chinobem	Chinonso
25	Chimgaebugharionodum	Chinaemezuokwuya	Chibinandum	Chinekwu
26	Chimkpoondiromoku	Chianugo	Chimdezirim	Chimpaike
27	Chikamchoro	Chigosirimife	Chikaelo	Chikaima
28	Chichebem	Chikaramobi	Chiadikaobiora	Chimbuchi

29	Chinwokem	Chidiebere
30	Chinasa	Chidera
31	Chimara	Chisimdi
32	Chikelu	Chinwendu
33	Chinememma	Chiamaka
34	Chinwuba	Chidimma
35	Chibundu	Chimazurum
36	Chijindu	Chima
37	Chidiebere	Chidi
38	Chinelo	Chibuogu
39	Chinemezu	Chimaobim
40	Chiagoziem	Chikamso
41	Chinemelumogo	Chiagozie
42	Chimnoralum	Chisom
43	Chika	Chidiebube
44	Chiwetalu	Chinweoge
45	Chizurukaemee	Chinemeze
46	Chidiegwu	Chikanaelo

47					Chieloka	Chikaeto
Total	7	28	27	5	91	