

A Linguistic Appraisal of Igbo Anthroponyms

by

Ifeoma Emmanuela Udoye

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University

Igbariam Campus - Nigeria.

Faculty of Arts

E-mail: *i.udoeye@yahoo.com*

Abstract

Naming has many times been relegated to the background whenever a linguistic study is involved. It is assumed that names are mere referent, therefore, are not useful in linguistic analysis. But, in actual sense, names are significant as they reflect on the social aspect of the society. Wakumelo, Mwanza & Mkandawire (2016:270) noted that "...names or odonyms are not just mere signposts, they reflect the social, political, and cultural ideologies maintained by the name givers". In other words, names form a major part of the culture of any society and the Igbo people in particular in terms of their values, ideas, reflections, meanings and thoughts. Names identify, motivate and aspire the bearers. This paper discusses personal names among the Igbos of Nigeria and considers naming as an important aspect of the Igbo society. The paper looked at Igbo names within the purview of the grammatical categories. It was noted that Igbo names, like most names in Africa are mostly lexical, phrasal or compound with sentential underlying structures which make them unique and distinct from European personal names.

Key words: Personal names, naming, language, grammatical categories, Igbo

Background

Ethnographic Information

Igbo is the language of the people called Ndigbo. Igbos are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. According to Echeruo (2001), Igbo language is spoken by 20 million Nigerians. It is also one of the eight major languages spoken in Benue Congo group of African languages. The Igbo speaking people are mainly found in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. The states where Igbo is spoken are Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, Abia, Imo states and some parts of Delta and River states. Igbo language is incorporated in the school system and it is a compulsory subject from Primary to University levels especially, in Igbo speaking states such as the Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli, Anambra State.

Igbo Anthroponyms

Anthroponymy is the study of personal names which is a branch of Onomastics that deals with proper names, their forms and usage (Algeo, 2010). Names are used to identify and describe people, roads, buildings, play grounds, businesses with trademarks and other objects and facilities (Wakumelo, Mwanza & Mkandawire, 2016). Furthermore, Chanda-Tembo (2017:115) reported that “business names like brands and trademarks are economic devices that play instrumental roles in differentiating businesses from other businesses in the course of trade”. Similarly, personal names like business names, play significant roles in people’s lives as they are used for identity and other social commentaries. For instance, in the case of Igbos, personal names are symbolic. They provide an insight into their culture, philosophy, religion, language and environment. Igbo personal names like most African

names have all the qualities, attributes and world view which Igbo men and women cherish and honour. The main focus of the paper was to provide some Igbo names and analyse their grammatical structures. The names were presented and examined under three main headings: lexical, phrasal and sentential personal names.

The Nature of Names

Lexical Personal Names

Lexical personal names are those names which are structured to have simple nouns. One characteristic feature of these lexical personal names is that such names have vowel initial syllable. Consider the following examples:

- | | | | |
|----------|---|-------|------------|
| (1) enyí | - | V-C-V | ‘elephant’ |
| (2) egū | - | V-C-V | ‘tiger’ |
| (3) egwé | - | V-C-V | ‘sky’ |
| (4) egó | - | V-C-V | ‘money’ |
| (5) ugò | - | V-C-V | ‘eagle’ |

The personal names ‘elephant’, ‘tiger’, ‘sky’, ‘money’, ‘eagle’, represent the idealised subjective perceptions which the giver of the name had in mind hence, personal names are said to connote the aspirations the giver has for the child. The giver of the name wants the bearer to have the qualities of the animals which they are named after. Enyi ‘elephant’ is regarded as very strong and brave, Odum ‘lion’ is brave, Agu ‘tiger’ is a strong fighter that is fearless’. It is believed that the names would spur on the bearers to conform to the expectations of the name.

Phrasal Personal Names

A phrase is a syntactic unit that can be headed by a noun,

adjective, adverb, verb or preposition. Phrasal personal names are those names that are derived from verb phrase or nominal compound. According to Quirk et al (1985) there is no clear boundary between a noun phrase and a noun+ noun compound. They further observed that the decisive features are stress on the first syllable (in case of Compound) and possibility of substituting one for the second constituent (in case of a phrase). Also, Lees (1960) opines that nominal compounds indicate the difference in grammatical form embedded within the compounds. Therefore, in this paper, all personal names with noun+ noun phrases are treated as nominal compounds.

The Nominal Compound

Noun according to Fromkin et al (2003) is a lexical or syntactic category of words that function as the head of a noun phrase. It is also known as nominal. The following are examples in English Language:

- (6) Philip
- (7) Agnes
- (8) America
- (9) Dog

While, compounding is effected when two or more nouns are joined together to form one word. A compound noun is made up of two or more nouns that function as a single noun which can either be written as separate words or linked by hyphens. Examples are provided below:

English Compounds

- (10) Black-board
- (11) House coat

- (12) Arm chair
- (13) Book-shelf

Igbo Compounds

The examples below reflect the Igbo compounds. Note that a full form is provided, followed by analysis.

- (14) $\acute{u}l\grave{o}\acute{a}kw\acute{u}kw\acute{o}$ ‘a school’ ($\acute{u}l\grave{o}\acute{a}kw\acute{u}kw\acute{o}$ is a compound word)

$\acute{u}l\grave{o}$	$\acute{a}kw\acute{u}kw\acute{o}$
house	book

- (15) $nwada$ ‘a girl child’ ($nwada$ is a compound word)

nwa	ada
child	daughter

- (16) $nw\grave{a}nn\bar{e}$ ‘my brother/sister’ ($nw\grave{a}nn\bar{e}$ is a compound word)

$nw\grave{a}$	$nn\bar{e}$
child	mother

- (17) $nw\grave{a}j\acute{i}$ ‘small yam’ ($nw\grave{a}j\acute{i}$ is a compound word)

$nw\grave{a}$	$j\acute{i}$
child	yam

- (18) $\acute{a}k\acute{a}\grave{e}kp\grave{e}$ ‘left hand’ ($\acute{a}k\acute{a}\grave{e}kp\grave{e}$ is a compound word)

$\acute{a}k\acute{a}$	$\grave{e}kp\grave{e}$
hand	left

- (19) $\acute{o}ny\acute{e}nk\acute{u}z\acute{i}$ ‘teacher’ ($\acute{o}ny\acute{e}nk\acute{u}z\acute{i}$ is a compound word)

$\acute{o}ny\acute{e}$	$nk\acute{u}z\acute{i}$
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person teacher

(20) nwáéhí ‘calf’ (nwá éhí is a compound word)

nwá éhí
child cow

it is important to note that the nominal compound has two names labelled as noun 1 and noun 2 (N1 +N2). This group is most productive in Igbo personal names. Example:

N1 + **N2**

(21) Àdáèzè ‘first daughter of a king’ (Àdáèzè is a compound name)

Àdá èzè ‘
first daughter king

(22) Ódùágú ‘a precious child’ (Ódùágú is a compound name)

Ódù ágú
tail tiger

(23) Ùgòchúkwú ‘God’s eagle’ (Ùgòchúkwú is a compound name)

Ùgò Chúkwú
eagle God

(24) Àdáùgò ‘a daughter of high esteem’ (Àdáùgò is a compound name)

Àdá ùgò
daughter eagle

(25) Ùgòékè ‘a pretty child born on Eke market day’ (Ùgòékè is a compound name)

Ùgò ékè

eagle traditional Igbo market day

- (26) *Ákáchúkwú* ‘handiwork of God’ (*Ákáchúkwú* is a compound name)

Áká *chúkwú*
hand God

- (27) *Ányándù* ‘eyes of life’ (*Ányándù* is a compound name)

Ányá *ndù*
eyes life

- (28) *Àkùézè* ‘wealth of a king’ (*Àkùézè* is a compound name)

Àkù *ézè*
wealth king

- (29) *Úzòchúkwú* ‘God’s path’ (*Úzòchúkwú* is a compound name)

Úzò *chúkwú*
road God

In Igbo personal name, there is no complementary distribution restriction placed on ‘Ugo’ as could be found in Igbo title names. ‘Ugo’ could occupy either the N1 position when the N2 is [+animate] nor is it relegated to N2 position whenever it co-occurs with a [-animate] noun. Example:

- (30) *Ójǐùgò* ‘a beautiful wife’ (*Ójǐùgò* is a compound titlename)

Ójǐ *ùgò*
kolanut eagle

Becomes ungrammatical and unacceptable when it is in reverse order

- (31) *Ùgò ójī
 eagle kolanut

However, ‘Ugo Oji’ is a grammatical acceptable personal name borne by many people.

Prefixation of Nouns

Anagbogu et al (2010) defined prefix as an affix which occurs in word-initial position. In Igbo language, prefixes are only attached to the verb (Agbedo, 2000). However, in Igbo personal names prefixation could be attached to a verb or a noun which are usually found in Igbo Ukwu (and other Aguata towns) and Awka personal names. In Igbo Ukwu, a dialect of Igbo, ‘Ume’ (Eze ‘king) is obligatorily prefixed (Okafor, Emeka & Inyama, 2008).
Examples:

- (32) Úméíbè ‘king of my neighbour’ (Úméíbè is a
 personal name)
 Úmé Íbè
 king clan
- (33) Úménwéké ‘king of the child of Eke’ (Úménwéké is a
 personal name)
 Úmé Nwéké
 king child of Eke (a god)
- (34) Úméánòwái ‘king of with time the truth will be
 remembered’ (Úméánòwái is a personal name)
 Úmé Ánòwái
 king with time the truth or cherished value will
 be remembered

- (35) Úméúdé ‘king of fame’ (Úméúdé is a personal name)
Úmé Údé
king fame
- (36) Úméánòlíéfó ‘king of people to be remembered for their good works’ (Úméánòlíéfó is a compound name)
Úmé Ánòlíéfó
king people remembered for their good works

On the other hand, Awka dialect has the prefix ‘nwa’ which occurs with all [+animate] entities and names. However, prefixation of ‘nwa’ is not mandatory. Example:

- (37) Nwáíféómá ‘child of good thing’ (Nwáíféómá is a personal name)
Nwá Íféómá
child good thing
- (38) Nwáchíómá ‘child of good god’ (Nwáchíómá is a personal name)
Nwá Chíómá
child god good
- (39) Nwáòkèchúkwú ‘child of God’s apportionment’ (Nwáòkèchúkwú is a personal name)
Nwá Òkèchúkwú
Child portion God
- (40) Nwángózí ‘child of God’s blessing’ (Nwángózí is a personal name)
Nwá Ngózí
child blessing

- (41) Nwánkírúkà ‘child of the best is yet to come’
(Nwánkírúkà is a personal name)
Nwá Nkírúkà
child what is in front

Awka indigenes have wondered how prefixation of ‘nwa’ became a pattern for addressing all other names, except for the names that specify the four native week Nkwo, Eke, Oye and Afo and individuals bear such names as *Nwaeke*, *Nwaoye*, *Nwaafo*, *Nwankwo*.

Sentential Personal Names

Sentential personal names are those names that have sentences as their base. Grammatically, sentential personal names can also be called sentential nominalisations. Sometimes, some sentential personal names may appear to be lengthy by the bearer who may shorten it as observed by Kammelu (2008). Example:

- (42) Chétàchúkwú ‘remember God’ (Chétàchúkwúa
sentential personal name)
Chétà chúkwú
remember God
*Cheta ‘remember’
- (43) Mmésòómáchúkwu ‘God’s goodness’
(Mmésòómáchúkwu is a sentential name)
Mmésòómá chúkwu
goodness God
*Mmèè ‘blood’
- (44) Oguàghaláriam ‘may war never fail me’ (Oguàghaláriam
is a sentential name)

Ogù àghaláriam
war left me
*Ogùàghá ‘war failed me’

But, the bearer often answers ‘Cheta’ which is the reduced or shortened form. Sentential personal names can be grouped into three broad sentence types such as declarative, interrogative and imperative.

Declaratives Sentence Names

Declarative is the normal way to conveying a statement in a language. It makes a statement of opinion or fact in an assertive way. Consider the example below:

(45) Ngozi is a bank manager.

Personal names in this category are most numerous. They vary from simple sentences of the N-V-N structure to more complex sentences. However, the N-V-N sentence structure is very commonly used.

N V N

(46) Chíbùézè ‘God is the overall king’ (Chíbùézè is a declarative personal name)

Chí bù ézè
God is king

(47) Chíbùísí ‘God is the head’ (Chíbùézè is a declarative personal name)

Chí bù ísí
God is head

(48) Chíbùàkù ‘God gives wealth’ (Chíbùàkù is a declarative personal name)

Chí bù àkù

God is wealth

- (49) Chíbùndù ‘God is the giver of life’ (Chíbùndù is a declarative personal name)

Chí bù ndù

- (50) Chìjìnwa ‘God holds the child’ (Chìjìnwa is a declarative personal name)

Chí jì nwa

God holds child

- (51) Chínènyénwá ‘God gives children’ (Chínènyénwá is a declarative personal name)

Chí nènyé nwá

God gives child

- (52) Chúkúwùbùnnà ‘God is fatherly’ (Chúkúwùbùnnà is a declarative personal name)

Chúkúwú bù nnà

God is father

- (53) Ézèbùchí the king is a god ’ (Ézèbùchí is a declarative personal name)

Ézè bù chí

king is personal god

The declarative personal names above perform two functions. The first one is that it is a lexicalised sentence and the second one is that the names are used to denote an entity just like a single lexical item.

Interrogative Personal Names

Interrogative is primarily used to ask question which is often accompanied by a question mark Ofomata (2007). Additionally, the listener is expected to give answer to the question asked. Crystal (2003) classified interrogatives into three main types which are: Polar questions, Wh –questions and the Alternative questions.

In interrogative statements or sentences, the hearer is expected to provide some information for the speaker in a situation whereby the sought information may already be accessible to both the speaker and the hearer, interrogatives would now be used to emphasise the intention of the speaker. Example

(54). Ò zùrùóhíégó? ‘did he steal money’

(55) Ò gbàràégwú? ‘did she dance?’

In Igbo language, Emenanjo (2015) observed that Igbo interrogatives are marked by tone patterns particularly low tones. There are specific words in Igbo which are known as question words. They are:

(56) Gìnī - what

(57) Kèdú - how

(58) Òlèē - where, which, how, when

(59) Ònyé - who

Examples of personal names with *gini* ‘what’:

(60) Gínīkàchúkwú ‘what is greater than God?’

Gínī kà chúkwú
whatgreater God

(61) Gínīfòlù ‘what else remains?’

Gínī fòlù

whatremains

Personal names with *Olee* examples

- 62 Òléēkànmá ‘which is better’
Òléēkà nmá
which greater fine
- (63) Òlébùnné ‘which among them is the mother’
Òlé bù nné
which is mother
- (64) Òléjindù ‘how many people hold life’
Òlé jì ndù
which holds life
- (65) Òlékànjó ‘which is worse than others’
Òlé kà njó
which greater sin
- (66) Òlékàìbè ‘who is greater than his fellows’
Òlé kà njó
which greater fellow

Personal names with *Kedu*

- (67) Kèdúónyékáchúkwú ‘who is greater than God’
Kèdú ónyé ká chúkwú
who person greater God

Personal names with *Kedu* ‘who’ are scanty in Igbo personal names. However, it is hoped that new generation parents would

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coin names to reflect the question tag ‘kedu’.

Imperatives Personal Names

Imperatives give command, make a request or express a wish.

Example: Get out of my car

In Igbo, most imperatives use the verb stem without any prefix such as:

- (68) Nyé - give
(69) Gwá- tell

Imperatives can also be followed by a noun or pronoun. Example:

- (70) Nyé m égō - ‘give me money’
(71) Gwá m - ‘tell me’
(72) Kwùóyā - ‘say it’

Imperatives are punctuated with a simple full stop or exclamation mark depending on the strength of emotion the speaker wants to express. This sub-group is the least productive of all the sentence types involved in sentential nominalisations. The structure is an imperative verb +NP or NP +S.

Examples:

- (73) Zèéùwà ‘avoid the world’
Zèé ùwà (V+N)
avoid world

- (74) Zèlúnjọ ‘avoid sin’
Zèlú njọ (V+N)
avoid sin

- (75) Zèéíbè ‘avoid people’
Zèé íbè (V+N)

avoid relations

(76) Gwáchí ‘tell God about your problems’

Gwá chí (V+N)

tell God

(77) Gwánírú ‘talk to me face to face’

Gwá nírú (V+N)

tell face

From the above analysis of Igbo names, it is worthy to also highlight some obvious differences that exist between Igbo and British personal names. Because the linguistic structure of Igbo is quite different from the European personal names particularly the British personal names. British names cannot be analysed linguistically like the Igbo names above. Consider the examples below:

English Names

(78) Wright ‘carpenter’

(79) Green ‘wearer of green’

(80) Walker ‘thickener of woollen cloth’

(81) Hall ‘walker near a hall’

(82) White ‘fair hair’

Additionally, in British personal names, compound personal names only occur in surnames where women combine their parents surname and their husbands’ surnames. The reason for this combination is to enable them to preserve their family name particularly in families where there are no male descendants and also for inheritance of a family estate (Rosseinsky 2017). Some

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notable persons' compound names are as follows:

Name		Occupation
(83) Ralph Vaughan William	-	Composer
(84) Robert Hanbury Brown	-	Astronomer
(85) Kristin Scott Thomas	-	Actor
(86) Helena Bonham Carter	-	Actor

It is worthy to note that affixation of a hyphen is often optional in English compound personal names (Rosseinsky 2017). English names, unlike, Igbo names, reflect the etymology of names (Parkin, 2014) rather than the connotative use of names which is applicable in Igbo. Such names are derived from the bible, saints, Celtic tradition, and names brought in through invasion (Chursina, 2011; Reaney & Wilson 2006). English names are also used to distinguish class whether the bearer of the name comes from a working class or middle class or upper class family which is not obtainable in Igbo personal names (Reaney & Wilson 2006; Clarke & Cummis (2013).

Furthermore, British names have cognates. This implies that names have two variants one for a male and the other for a female. Consider the following examples

Male	Female
(87) Oliver	Olivia
(88) Christian	Christiana
(89) Emmanuel	Emmanuela

Conclusion

Naming is an important aspect of linguistics because there is hardly any meaningful linguistic discourse in a language that

does not make reference to proper nouns. With this, personal names can serve as a more authentic source of evaluating language. The paper sought to analyse Igbo anthroponyms from a linguistic perspective. The study discussed the various grammatical categories which revealed that some Igbo names are lexical items. The study also found out that nominal compounds are the most productive phrasal or compound personal names while declarative sentential names were the most numerous in number among the Igbo community. It was further revealed that imperative sentential names were the least productive.

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