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A Semantic and Pragmatic Analyses of Igbo Names

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Abstract

The paper investigated the semantic and pragmatic contents of personal names and naming in the Igbo language and culture. The objective of the paper was to examine the structure of Igbo names and analyse their semantic and pragmatic contents. The data were sourced from Igbo language speakers in the South Eastern States of Nigeria. The data cut across Standard and dialectal Igbo names. Selected personal names were grouped structurally according to their forms in the following order: lexical (or monomorphemic) names, Noun-Noun phrasal names, Noun-Verb phrasal names, Noun-Verb Phrasal-Complement/Sentential names and Interrogation/Injunction names. The semantic and pragmatic analyses were made based on the structural data generated. The pragmatic analysis was handled by incorporating the context into the semantic contents. Findings showed that Igbo names structurally fall into three broad categories: lexical, phrasal and sentential. For Ndigbo, 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 the child as well as the parents' life experiences and world view.

Key words: personal names, Igbo, semantic content, pragmatic content, structure.

Background to the Study

The paper is an attempt to examine the structural, semantic and pragmatic aspects of meaning in the Igbo naming system. Igbo is a term which refers both to a people and to their language. For the people, the term is referred to as Ndigbo or Igbo people and for the language, it is referred to as the Igbo language. The language is spoken by Ndigbo who are one of the major ethnic groups in the South Eastern part of an entity known as Nigeria. The landmass of Ndigbo is divided into two unequal parts by the Niger River with the result that the greater portion lies in what constitutes the South Eastern State which comprise the following five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebony, Enugu and Imo. The smaller portion west of the Niger is part of what constitutes the present Delta State and parts of Rivers State but our data are drawn mainly from the Igbo spoken in the South Eastern States.

Name is as important to the Igbo as the birth of a child because the parents express all their expectations in life in the name they give to their children. From the names children bear, one can guess the intentions/life-experiences and or expectations of the parents. The Hebrews as well as the Igbos observe the naming ceremony with feasting and great joy. It takes place generally seven Igbo weeks (i.e. twenty-eight days) after the birth of a child. For the Hebrews as well as for the Igbos, the name-giver who is supposed to be one of the elder relatives takes into consideration the circumstances surrounding the family (the situation of the parents, the number of children and their sexes before the child in question, their social and financial standing). In fact, a lot of things are taken into consideration before framing a name for an Igbo child. Both male and female relatives are invited for the naming ceremony and they are well entertained. Two or more names may be given to a child depending on the family.

Naturally, every Igbo child has a name given to him/her by his/her 'chi' i.e. his or her personal god. This name is derived from the deity of the market day in which the child is born. Of the four native market days in Igbo (Afor, Nkwọ, Eke, Ori/Oye), any child born on any of these days has the name of the market day as his/her natural or general name whether he/she appropriates it or not. The other names that follow are always more significant and meaningful for the family and the relatives. It is so because of the choice the parents and relatives have to choose a name where they can express their mind to God, the giver of the child and as a result, such names are carefully selected so as to remember the circumstances and incidents of the birth. For this reason, Igbo name is a story, a book or a dictionary itself. The circumstances may concern the mother of the child, sometimes they may concern the father and sometimes again they may concern the entire family. In some cases, the circumstances may be religious. It is probably the prophetic situation that accounts for the divine presence in most Igbo and

Hebrew names. This is the most impressive characteristic of the two customs because it shows the people's close relationship and trust in God. The names in this context express the power and the mercy of God, the help expected from him, the feeling of kinship with him. Sometimes these names relate to their beliefs, the divine elements being understood.

A close examination of Igbo names shows the supreme importance attached to religion in the life of the Igbo people. There are however names which show revengeful spirits, indignation or jealousy, depending on the sentiment that is uppermost in the mind of the parents, relative or the name-giver at the time. The majority of the names show in one way or the other the people's awareness of their complete dependence on the spiritual beings, namely the supreme God, the minor deities and the ancestral spirits. Just as language gives expression to reality depending on the perspective of consideration, analogously names can be used to show what the name-giver thinks and feels about the person named.

Statement of the Problem

A name is naturally a story or history in the Igbo culture. It represents the essential events or circumstances surrounding individuals at the time of their birth. In recent times, many of these Igbo names appear to lose their meaning as a result of excessive clipping. The meanings of most of these names become opaque with time and some are completely lost. This paper investigates the semantic content of selected Igbo names by examining the structures through morpheme to morpheme analyses.

Objective

The objective of the paper is to examine the structure of some Igbo names and establish their semantic and pragmatic content.

Methodology

A corpus of both male and female Igbo names is constituted. The names are grouped according to their structure: lexical, phrasal and sentential names.

Review of Literature

Lyons (1977 Pg.32) describes language as an instrument of communication; he defines meaning as a pre-theoretical intuitive term. Crystal (1997 Pg. 213) describes language as the concrete act of speaking, writing or signing (sign language according to him) in a given situation. Yule (1996 Pg. 114) exposes different aspects of meaning and describes the conventional/conceptual meaning as meaning conveyed by the use of words and sentences in the language.

Mbonu (2010 Pg. Xiv) defines a personal name in Igbo as a story. She opines that a name functions as a place-holder, social location and a part of belonging in most African societies. Ezeanya (1994 Pg.9) states that naming is as important to the Igbo as it was to the Hebrews of old. He remarks that a person receives a new name to indicate a change in his rank or in his appointment to a new post.

Following Ezeanya, Mbonu (2010 Pg. 70) reiterates that in Igbo tradition, given names represent a family story while taken names express a person's current history. She argues that personal names in Igbo society are powerful symbols and words that act as markers.

Nwigwe (2001 Pg. 75) discloses that the names of the four market days in Igbo (Afor, Nkwọ, Eke, Orié/Oye) derive their names from divinities and that a child born on any of these days automatically adopts the market day name as his/her natural or general name. He however maintains that the other names given to the child are more significant and meaningful for the family and the relatives and as a result, such names are carefully selected so as to remember and incorporate the circumstances and incidents of the birth.

Structural Description of Igbo Names

This section attempts a structural analysis of selected Igbo names. By convention, there are separate names for male and separate names for female children. There are however cases of shared/unisex names where male and female children are given the same name. But whether they are male or female names, it is observed that each Igbo name can be structurally analyzed. All Igbo names are lexicalized sentences and so they are written as one word.

Procedure for the Structural Description

We draw some male, female and unisex names and group them as observed in the Igbo name structure as in the following order:

- Lexical names
- Noun-noun phrase
- Noun-verb phrase
- Noun-verb-complement/sentential
- Interrogative
- Imperative/injunction/exaltation

By lexical names, we mean one word names which though were sentences but were clipped for so long that people tend to forget their components. The following are examples of lexical names:

- Obi, Ada, Eze. Ibe, Uba, Agu, Ugwu, Egwu, Ilo, Enyi etc.

A. The following is a group of noun-noun Igbo names designed for male children:

| Name | Components |
|------------|---|
| Dike | di 'husband' + ike 'power' (courageous/powerful person) |
| Ezeuzo | eze 'king' + uzọ 'way/road' (king of the road) |
| Igwedibia | igwe 'multitude'+dibia 'doctor/diviner' (a renowned doctor/native doctor) |
| Ikechukwu | ike 'power' + 'chukwu' 'God' (God's power) |
| Nwachukwu | nwa 'child' + 'chukwu' 'God' (child of God) |
| Obinna | Obi 'heart' + nna 'father/God' ('father's heart) |
| Okechwukwu | Oke 'share' + Chukwu 'God' (God's case) |
| Okwuchukuw | okwu 'word' + Chukwu 'God's (God's case) |
| Ugochukwu | ugo 'glory' + Chukwu 'God' (God's glory) |
| Osondu | Oso 'race' + ndu 'life' (race of life). |
| Uzondu | uzo 'way' + ndu 'life' (race of life) |

B. The following is a group of noun-noun Igbo names for female children:

| Name | Components |
|-------------|---|
| Adaaku | - ada 'daughter' + aku 'wealth' (daughter of wealth) |
| Adaeze | - ada 'daughter' + eze 'king' (king's daughter) |
| Adaobi | - ada 'daughter' + obi 'palace' (Daughter of the palace) |
| Adaora | - ada 'daughter' + ora 'people' (The people's daughter) |
| Ebelechukwu | - ebele 'mercy' + Chukwu 'God' (God's mercy) |
| Egooyibo | - ego 'money' + oyibo 'foreign' (Foreign money) |
| Nwaaku | - nwa 'child' + aku 'wealth' (child of wealth/fortune) |
| Ugboaku | - ugbo 'vehicle' + aku 'wealth' (vehicle of wealth/fortune) |

C. The following is a group of noun-verb Igbo names designed for male children.

| Name | Components |
|-------------|--|
| Akakuru | - aka 'hand' + kuru 'carry'+ 'nwa' (let hand carry child) |
| Chukwucheta | - Chukwu 'God' + cheta 'remember' (let God remember) |
| Ibekwe | - ibe 'Kinsmen' + kwe 'agree' (if kinsmen agree) |
| Ifeedi | - ife 'something' + di 'is/remain' (let the head remain upwards) |
| Isiguzoro | - isi 'head' +guzoro 'stay/remain' (let the head remain upwards) |
| Nnamdi | - nnam 'my father' + di 'lives' (my father exists) |

- Onukwube - Onu 'mouth' + kwube 'start talking' (let the mouth start talking)
 Onumajuru - onuma 'anger/rage + juru 'cease' (let anger cease)
 Udoka - udo 'peace' + ka 'surpasses' (peace is supreme)
 Umekwulu - ume 'miscarriage/abortion'+kwulu 'cease' (let the untimely death Cease), etc.

D. The following is a group of noun-verb Igbo designed for female children

| Name | Components |
|----------|--|
| Chimalu | - Chi 'God' + malu 'gives' (God gives) |
| Chinenye | - Chi 'God' + nenyé 'gives (God gives) |
| Chinyelu | - Chi 'God' + nyelu 'has given' (God has given/God's gift) |
| Chisom | - Chi 'God' +som 'follow me' (God follows me) |
| Chitoo | - Chi 'God'+ zoba 'begin to save' (let God save) |

The noun-verb Igbo names of male and female are exactly the same with sentential names. The difference is that the complement is not overtly expressed in the noun-verb as it is in the sentential. We separated them here for structural analysis but will combine them in the semantic analysis. The noun-verb constructions are the more lexicalized form of the sentential constructions.

E. The following is a group of noun-verb complement names designed for male children.

| | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Agha War | Di be | N' prep | Uno house | Aghadinuno 'War is in the house' |
| Aka Hand | Na aux | Egbu kill | Akanegbu 'Hand is killing' | |
| Ako Wisdom | bu be | Ndu Life | Akobundu 'Wisdom is life' | |
| Ani land | Agba Neg. | Oso run | Anagboso 'Land does not run' | |
| Azu back | Bu be | Ike power | Azubike 'Support is strength' | |
| Chi God | Bu be | uzo road/way | Chibuzo 'God is road/way' | |

| | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-------------------------|--|
| Chi God | bu leads | uzo road/way | Chibuzo 'God leads the way' |
| Chi God | Ji hold | oke share | Chijioke 'God apportions gifts' |
| Onwu death | bu be | alili regret/torment | Onwubualili 'Death is a torment' |
| uzu | akpu | ndu | Uzuakpundu 'Blacksmith does not weld life' |

F. The following is a group of sentential Igbo names specially designed for females.

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|
| Mma Beauty | gwu finish | lu past | aku wealth | Mmagwulaku 'Beauty that exhausted wealth' | |
| Ndidi Patience | a pref | maka beautiful | Superlative | Ndidiamaka 'patience is very good' | |
| Nwanyi woman | a Pref. | bia come | Nwaanyiabia 'a woman has come' | | |
| Nwa Child | bu be | Ugo glory | Nwabugo 'child is glory' | | |
| nwa Child | ka pass | ego money | Nwakaego 'child surpasses money' | | |
| nwa Child | nne mother | ka pass | Nwanneka 'relation surpasses all things' | | |
| O He/she | Bia come | Ga aux | E Pref | Li eat | Obiageli 'she comes to enjoy' |
| o He/she | bia come | na prep | uju plenty | Obianuju 'She comes in abundance' | |
| Uzo Road/way | a | ma pref. | Ka Good pass | Uzoamaka 'the road/way is very good' | |

G. The following is a group of interrogative phrasal Igbo names designed for male children.

| | | | | | | |
|----------|------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| A Pro. | fulu see | Chi God | anya eye | Afuluchianya 'Does one see God'? | | |
| A Pro. | ma know | ndi those | a pref. | na Aux. | eze Avoid | Amandaneze 'Does one know who to avoid'? |
| O Pro. | bu be | na prep. | ike power | mmadu person | 'Does it depend on the power of man'? | |
| Onye who | bu be | chi God | Onyebuchi 'Who is God'? | | | |
| onye who | ka pass | chi God | Onyekachi 'who is greater than God' | | | |
| onye who | dika like | Chukwu God | Onyedikachukwu 'who is like God'? | | | |
| onye who | ka foc. | ozulu Sufficient | Onyekaozulu 'who is self-sufficient'? | | | |
| onye who | ma knows | echi tomorrow | Onyemaechi 'who knows tomorrow'? | | | |
| onye who | nwe posses | uwa world | Onyenwuwa 'who own the world'? | | | |

H. The following is a group of interrogative phrasal Igbo names designed for female children.

| | | | | | | |
|-------|----------|------------|---|--|-------------------------------|--|
| a pro | fulu see | enu heaven | anya eye | <i>Afulenuanya 'Does one see God'?</i> | | |
| a pro | ga Aux | egbu kill | <i>Agaegbu 'Does one need to kill'?</i> | | | |
| A pro | ma ma | Uche mind | Chukwu God | Amauche 'Does one know the mind of God'? | | |
| o it | bu be | m me | na prep | eke creator | Obumnaeke 'Am I the creator'? | |
| o it | bu be | m me | na prep | eme do | Obumneme 'Am I the doer'? | |

| | | | | |
|---------|------------|------------|-------------|---------------------------------|
| O it | le many | di be | mma good | Oledimma 'How many are good'? |
| o it | le many | ka pass | mma good | Olekamma 'How many are better'? |

Structurally Miscellaneous Other Names

The following is a group of Igbo names that can be grouped structurally as miscellaneous in other words, the names are expressed either as injunction, imperative, supplication or prayer.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Emenanjo | Don't do evil. |
| Ekwutosi | Don't talk evil/don't malign/blaspheme. |
| Ekwunife | Don't say anything |
| ChekwubeChukwu | Trust in God. |
| Nebeolisa | Look up to God. |
| Ikeegbunam | Let forces not kill me. |
| Onwuegbunam | Let death not kill me. |
| kaosisochukwu | As it pleases God. |
| Nkemjika | The one I hold is greater. |
| Mmesomachukwu | The kindness of God. |
| ogoegbunam | Let charity not kill me. |
| Uzodimma | The road is fine. |
| Onyeaghananwanne | Let no one abandon his/her relation. |
| Omanukwue | Let the one who knows speak. |
| odirachukwumma | Once it pleases God |

The above names can be given to male as well as to female children, they are unisex names.

Semantics and Pragmatics of Igbo Names

We shall in what follows attempt a semantic and pragmatic analysis of the data already presented above. The semantic analysis here means expressing the meaning (literal meaning) of some of the data structurally presented above without taking into consideration the circumstances/contexts of the choice of the names while the pragmatic analysis entails considering both the semantic

meaning and the context/situation. In this paper, we shall discuss both semantic and pragmatic meaning at the same time for convenience sake. Only data with embedded meaning should be discussed.

The lexical names need no explanation because they are explicit though they were compositions but having been shortened over the years by clipping, the bearers of some of the names may not even know the full meaning of the names they bear.

Noun-noun Igbo Names Designed for Male Children

Starting from our first data, noun-noun Igbo names for male children, it is observed that the name 'Dike' structurally glossed as di 'husband'+ ike 'power' literally means (husband of power) semantically stands for powerful and courageous person. Pragmatically, such names are given to children following the projections/aspirations of parents, either what they (parents) would have loved to be or achieved, or what they would like their children to achieve or become. Man is regarded as powerful in the Igbo culture and he imposes his authority on the wife as 'di' which connotes authority and power, that is why the interpretation of 'di' gives the impression or suggests powerful. For instance, Dinwenum ('di' husband+ 'nwe' possess+ nu 'enclitics' + 'm' me), (husband who own me) in Igbo means 'my Lord' which implies that di can also be glossed as 'lord'. The husband is in other words the Lord of his wife. It may be necessary to remark here that whatever 'di' is affixed to insinuates authority, power, force and strength in Igbo. The following examples elucidate further the point made:

- Dimkpa - A very strong man/courageous man
- Dimgba - A renowned wrestler
- Dinta - An astute hunter
- Diji - A great farmer, etc

The rest of the names on the first list of noun-noun section of male Igbo names are semantically explicit therefore may not need further analyses. They are self-explanatory, so we leave them as they are.

On the second list of the noun-noun Igbo names are given to female children; we observed also that they are explicit except perhaps the last one; 'Ugboaku' (ugbo 'vehicle' + aku 'wealth') ugbo, which semantically means vehicle in Igbo can stand for any vehicle, in other words, the meaning it takes

depends on the determinant/adjective that follows it. Pragmatically, a child named 'Ugboaku' implies that through the birth of the child wealth has come to the family. Wealth in this case can be money or property/fortune. It all depends on what the name givers expect or have experienced through the birth of the child or the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child in question. Note also that the names Nwaaku/Adaaku have also the same semantic content as Ugboaku, the difference lies in the determined (nwa 'child', Ada 'daughter and Ugbo 'vehicle') as the determined remains the same (wealth or fortune/property) in each context.

Noun-Verb Male Names

In the noun-verb Igbo names for males we shall analyse the following names: Akakuru, Ifedi, Onuwkuba, Onumajuru, Umekwulu.

Akakuru semantically means 'let hand carry child'. Pragmatically, it may be that the parents before the birth of the child had agonized for children/childlessness, had prayed for the fruit of the womb, or might have visited many native doctors and prayer houses. When finally, the child arrives, it is like an exclamation: 'behold the child in my arm' (aka m kurunwa).

Ifedi semantically means 'something exists'. The 'Something' in this case may be positive or negative. It all depends on the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. Pragmatically, it may be that the environment was very hostile to the parents during the gestation period of the child, may be they suffered untold hardship before, during and after the birth of the child and not willing to explicitly describe their ordeal, remain implicit. This is a negative connotation of the name. The positive connotation is a situation where love abounds and the parents experienced unlimited love and assistance from God and their relations and neighbours before, during and after the birth of the child. To express this goodness and kindness they had received, the parents can simply acknowledge the name of that baby. In this case, it is a positive recognition of the goodness of God and man.

Onuwkuba literally means (let mouth start talking), this name expresses the experienced of the parents either before either before or during their marriage. People and other relations must have talked, slandered and defamed the character of either of the spouses in order to prevent them from getting married or for other reasons best known to them. If the couple eventually get

married and get children the tendency may be to express their experience through the names of their children. In this case, they are saying that people may start talking and continue whatever they want to say. This also may be positive or negative as the case may be.

Onumajuru/Onumajuru literally means (let anger/bitterness cease or let mouth relent). This expresses the state of mind of the name giver's anxiety. The situation that can bring about each of the versions of the names is varied; it is the tone that determines the intended meaning of the name giver.

For the first has to do with anger that being begged to cease, one possibility is seen in the family where there has been war/quarrel/malice for a long time, may be that they now want to make peace with one another, the name giver expresses his aspiration by this name that sues for peace. It may also be that this family has suffered various calamities, hardships, deaths and all sorts of difficulties which could be *traced* to the misdeeds/evils of some of their ancestors, having discovered the source of their agony, they express their anxiety through the names they give to their children hence, let the anger/bitterness of the gods or that of the brethren cease.

In the same vein, the second meaning that is appealing to the mouth to relent is making the appeal because either that there has been so much bitterness and people have been quarrelling, talking, slandering and maligning one another in the community, such situation can move a parent/parents in such a community to give such names to their children.

Umekwulu literally means (let miscarriage cease), this sort of name is normally encountered in a situation where a woman has experienced so many miscarriages (deaths of children either before birth or after birth at young age). When parents lose their children in other words, when children die before their parents, we say the parents are suffering from 'ume'. When parents have suffered this misfortune/loss for a long time, they spontaneously tell the 'ume'. To stop by giving the kind of name to their new born babies and it hears because the 'ume'. Most often stops.

The noun-verb Igbo names designed for female children listed above appear explicit enough to demand further explanation. Semantically, they need no explanation or definition. Pragmatically, there is always some reason even for such names. Take for instance the name '*Chimalu*' literally glossed as 'let

God know'. One would ask, 'let God know what?' there must be a serious allegation/prejudice against the name giver or against the family which they had tried to explain or clear perhaps to no avail. The name giver/givers then resign the case to God by saying either 'let God know the truth'/'let God vindicate me/us.

'Chizoba' has perhaps a similar experience and similar explanation but instead of asking God to know the truth or to vindicate, asks Him (God) to save because may be in this case life may have been threatened. The rest of the names in this group are explicit enough to require explanation.

The Noun-Verb-Compliment/Sentential Igbo Names Designed for Male Children

Most of the names in this list though appear explicit, need some explanation because almost all of them are semantically loaded. Take for instance the name 'Aghadinuno', the term agha which literally is glossed war does not mean physical war. It means a psychological war waged in the family either amongst children and parents or against brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles or other relations. This battle is waged in the family in such a way that even children experience the absence of peace in the family/community. A child or children born into such a family/community at such a time will have no other name than what depicts the actual situation on ground. Similar names can be Anagbogụ (let land intervene in the war), Anagbọsọ (land cannot/does not run), and/or Akanegbu (it is hand that kills). The semantic and pragmatic implications of such names are borne out of the experiences of the ancestors.

The name Akọbụndụ (wisdom is life) depicts the parent's aspiration/projection for the children. the name shows that the parents prize wisdom above every other virtue and would want their children to be endowed with such virtues.

Azụbụike (literally glossed as back is power) signifies the importance of relations. Pragmatically, the name means that there is strength in cordial relationship. This name is synonymous with: Igwebụike, Ibebụike, Ụmunnabụike, etc.

Chibụzọ/Chibuzo can be literally glossed as God is the road/God is the way or God leads the way. Whether it is God is the way or God leads the way,

it is the realization of the supremacy of God. Pragmatically, the name-givers are simply expressing their total dependence on God.

Ọnwụbụalịlị (literally glossed as death is torment): Death at all times and everywhere is a great torment. It is context free across all cultures.

Ụzụakpundụ (literally glossed as blacksmith does not weld life): this name summarises the Igbo philosophy of life which believes that life is sacred and should not be destroyed. Because life is sacred, it is held in high esteem by all people.

The Noun-Verb-Compliment/Sentential Names Designed for Female Children

Under this group of names, we shall consider some of the following names: Mmagwụlụakụ, Ndidamaka, Nwaanyịabịa, Nwaanyịbụife, Nwakaego, Nwanneka, Ọbíanuju, Ọbịageli and Ụzọamaka.

Mmagwuluaku (literally glossed as beauty that exhausts wealth). This name has both present and future semantic interpretations. In the present, it may be that according to the parent's or name-giver's estimation, their daughter is very beautiful and that a lot of money has gone into that beauty. In the future analysis, it may mean that the beauty of the girl will cost a fortune or exhaust the fortune of the future spouse/suitor.

Ndidamaka (literally glossed as patience is very good). This name expresses the great importance/value of patience. The circumstances that can bring about such a name is where people have suffered and borne so much hardship, so many trials and triumphed without soiling one's hand, we say that he/she has borne the difficulty with patience.

Nwaanyịabịa (literally glossed as woman has come). This name announces the arrival of a baby girl in the family. Such names are normally given to children in families where only male children are born and the search is for female children. As soon as a female child is born in such a family, the exclamation is spontaneously: 'nwaanyịabịa' and sometimes this exclamation becomes the child's name.

Nwaanyibufe (literally glossed as woman is something). This name seems to be the contrast of the immediate past name we discussed. In this case, the family has had series of female children and the search is for a male child.

In the traditional African society, the search for a male child is more problematic and tortuous for the woman than that for the female because of heritage. An Igbo woman who does not have a female child does not risk being driven away from the family but a woman who has only female children can be sent packing by the husband and his people in a typical traditional African setting. The above name and other similar names like: *Ọbụmnaeme/Ọbụmnaeke*, *Nkechinyelu* are examples of names that agonizing mothers of only female children could give to their female children and the names automatically deliver the intended message of the name-giver/givers.

Ọbịageli (literally glossed as she comes to eat/she has come to eat/enjoy). This name is normally given to baby girls born into wealthy families where there is affluence or where there are many other children before this particular child. It is an expression for a child in the midst of plenty. Similar names are as follows: *Ọbịanuju*, *Ọbịamma* etc. They all express a state of affluence.

A Group of Interrogative Phrasal Names Designed for Male Children

Some Igbo names are questions which also express the projections of the parents or the actual situation in the family at the time of birth of the child. The following are explanations of few of them:

Afuluchianya (literally glossed as is God seen?). This name is normally given to children in expression of mixed feelings; it may be positive or negative. Whether it is in the positive or in the negative circumstance, the question whether anyone has seen God suggests different degrees of despair or courage. Similar names are: *Ajuluchukwu*, *Amamchukwu*. It is difficult to guess the message that the name-giver/givers wish to communicate through this name. The names are semantically opaque and only the name-givers may decipher their message.

Amandianaeze (literally glossed as does one know who to avoid?). This name has some similarities with the former one but the latter is a bit clearer in that its reference is to the people. This name is given to children where in environments where suspicion, misunderstanding and diabolical practices abound. The name-givers use such names to express their doubts and lack of confidence on people.

Onyedikachukwu (literally glossed as who is like God?). This name is given to express the unlimited love, protection and mercy of God. It is given to show that God cannot be compared with any of his creatures in whatever way. However, kind a human being may be, he/she can never be compared with God. Similar names to this with some nuances are: Onyebuchi? Onyekachi?

Onyekozulu (literally glossed as who is self-sufficient?). This is given to express the limited power of man. It is normally given to children in situations where people oppress their fellow men. The oppressors may try to play God or prove that they are powerful, sometimes small natural trial puts them off. Then the oppressed may also wish to prove to them that they can never have absolute power, that even the rich cry and no condition is permanent. Similar names to this are: Onyenwūwa, Onyemaechi, Onyebuchi, Onyeneke etc.

A Group of Interrogative Phrasal Names Designed for Female Children

Majority of the names we encounter in this group are already discussed in the course of our discussion of other groups. We shall discuss the few that are different from the ones already treated.

Afulenuanya (literally glossed as of what use is a woman)? This type of name is encountered in situations where a woman is harassed for giving birth to only female children. We have also mentioned familiar names that are given to such female children like: Obumnaeme, Obumnaeke, Nwaanyibuife, etc.

A group of miscellaneous names that we classified for the purpose of this work as either injunction, imperative, supplication, wish or prayer. We shall simply group these names into parts: injunction/imperative and supplication/wish/prayer. We classify those names that appear as injunction or imperative as one and those that express personal wish and intention as supplication/wish/prayer.

| <i>Injunction/Imperative</i> | <i>Supplication/wish/prayer</i> |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Chekwubechukwu ‘hope in God’ | Ikegbunam ‘let forces not kill me’ |
| Emefiana ‘don’t transgress the law’ | Kaosisochukwu ‘As it pleases God’ |
| Emenanjo ‘don’t do evil’ | Mmesomachukwu ‘the goodness of God’ |
| Ekwunife ‘don’t say anything’ | Nkemdilim ‘let my own remain for me’ |
| Nebolisa ‘Look unto God’ | Nkemjika ‘let my own remain for me’ |
| Omanukwue ‘let he who knows speak out’ | Odirachukwunma ‘once it pleases God’ |
| Onyegbuna ‘let no one kill’ | Ogoegbunam ‘let kindness not kill me’ |
| Onyeaghanawanne ‘let no one abandon brother’ | Onwuegbunam ‘let death not kill me’ |

The above are simple classification of what we called miscellaneous names according to their semantic groups. This group cannot be exhaustive.

Conclusion

This paper is a modest attempt to investigate the semantic and pragmatic meaning of some personal names. Our data consisted of personal names that are borne by both young and old Igbo male and female. From our analyses, we discovered that names in Igbo are philosophical. Some of the names are so semantically opaque that it is only the name givers and their relations that can decode the message being expressed. Some of the names are compressed through clipping such that even the intended meanings are sometimes evacuated, lost, or forgotten by the children. Otherwise Igbo names as said earlier, are not personal labels as in some cultures where names are given just as tag of identity. From our analyses, it is observed that Igbo names serve as windows through which information about an individual or a group is generated.

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