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SEMANTIC APPROACH TO CHILD-NAMING IN THE IGBO CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines child naming in Igbo culture. Naming reveals the people's sociological and ideological culture, their folkways, fears and aspirations, joys and hates, ideals and values and their cultural and spiritual values, which they hold dear. The objectives of this paper are: to study different names which parents usually give to their children in Igbo society, to discover the meanings of these names and different reasons why parents give these names to their children. This study adopted the theory of LoCatsro (2012) notion of Anthropological Pragmatics. The data for this study were gathered through interview of some aged people and introspection of the researchers who are native speakers of Igbo. Some data were also gathered through review of related literature. This study assumes a position that the Igbo people do not give names to their children anyhow. Rather, the names that they give to their children have social, linguistic, historical, religious and philosophic colouring. It finds out that Igbo people name their children based on their belief in God Almighty, belief in reincarnation, their philosophy about life, domestic violence, death as evil, importance of children, beauty of babies, throwing of questions to the society and circumstances surrounding the birth of a child. Also, Igbo people express recognition for wealth, four Igbo market days, people's position in the family in their naming system. It conclude that Igbo names serve as windows through which information about an individual or a group is generated and also have some histories attached to them.

Keywords: Child Naming, Igbo Culture, Values, Semantic Approach.

1. Introduction

The Igbo culture is quite rich which can be seen in numerous rituals, rites, traditions and ceremonies which they perform to mark every milestone in their lives. One of such events is Child Naming which comes up as soon as a child is born, within two to three weeks after the birth. This ceremony serves as a formal presentation of the child to the extended family members. It usually begins with ancestral recognition, the naming of the child and the planting of a live plant which connotes survival, blossom and long life. After that comes the customary breaking of kola nut, prayers for the new born, for her parents, for everyone who

came to the ceremony. Then, finally thanking the ancestors for being present and imploring them to protect the child. These events highlight the culture and tradition of the people which is presented through language. Names are significant as they reflect on the social aspect of the society. Wakumelo, Mwanza & Mkandawire (2016, p.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.

Igbo people do not give names to their children anyhow. Rather, the names that they give to their children usually have social, linguistic, historical, religious and philosophic coloring. These names are sometimes a projection of not only the whims of the parents but also a window through which we mirror their lives and their experiences. According to Onumajuru (2016), in Igbo land, a name is not just a tag of identity or personal label but a story and an experience of the events and circumstances surrounding the birth of the child, as well as the parents' life experiences and worldview. Names in Igbo land are carefully constructed in a semantic sense to depict their beliefs, state of mind, culture and the ecstasy of the Igbo man. Naming reveals the people's sociological and ideological culture. It also shows their folkways, fears and aspirations, joys and hates, ideals and values, as well as their cultural and spiritual values which they hold so dear. Naming of children in Igbo land is determined by various circumstances such as tradition, political affiliation, religious inclination, social interaction, ambition, as well as other factors surrounding the parents of the child. It could also be as a result of the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child which could be birthmark, resemblance to a certain person, promises of reincarnation from a certain person, a dream, a present or past condition of the family. An Igbo family that believes so much in the traditional religion, names its children in such a manner that their belief system is reflected in the names of their family members.

The origin of naming can be traced to the creation of first man in the Garden of Eden who was given the duty of assigning names to all created beings by God. The first assignment given to Adam by God was to name "all the beasts of the field and the birds of the air" (Genesis 2: 19, 20). Essien (2004, p. 104) observes that Eve took a cue from her husband and so named her first son Cain, which means "with the help of the Lord, I brought forth a man". From this earliest linguistic function, Essien infers that "We can therefore see that even from the very beginning, naming had been an important duty man had to perform not only to distinguish animals from birds but man from man to facilitate linguistic communication. Brothers had to be distinguished from brothers. Sisters from sisters and siblings from siblings, especially in the ancient days when polygamy and concubines were normal and pro-creation in large number is seen as a virtue".

This paper therefore studies the semantic analysis of Child Naming in Igbo culture. The semantic analysis here means expressing the literal meaning of some of these data structurally presented above. In this paper, we shall discuss the semantic meaning of these names. Only data with embedded meaning should be discussed. This paper is therefore designed to discover the meanings of these names which the Igbo people give to their children and in so doing contribute to knowledge beyond what earlier scholars have done.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Concept of Igbo

Igbo refers to a people who are indigenes of Nigeria. According to Adibe (2009), Igbo are a major tribe in Nigeria and occupy the South Eastern states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo as well as parts of Delta, Akwa-Ibom, and Rivers states in the South-South region of Nigeria. Following Rafiu and Adekunle (2020), Igbo belongs to the Kwa language Family. This Language is spoken by about 24 million people in the South eastern part of Nigeria. It is also spoken in the northeast of Delta State and southeast of Rivers State.

2.1.2 Concept of Name

A name is what somebody or something, or a place is called. It is someone's identity which is symbolic of his culture or tradition. According to Alderman (2016), naming is a powerful vehicle which is used for promoting identification of one's past and trying to locate oneself within the wider networks of memory. For Mashiri, Chabata et al (2013), "naming practices in African societies often reflect socio-cultural and ideological realities of the societies."

2.1.3 Concept of Semantics

According to Denham and Lobeck (2013), semantics is concerned with studying the rules of meaning based on sounds and signs in a particular language. Hence, semantics could be defined as the study of meaning which is language specific. For Saeed (2009), semantics is the study of meaning communicated through language. It is the study of the meanings of words and sentences.

2.1.4 Concept of Culture

Taylor (2007) defines culture as a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Ramiah (2006) defines culture as a valuable treasure that distinguishes humans from other forms of life in the universe.

2.2 Theoretical Studies

Many theories have been used by different scholars in their analysis of naming system. Some of the theories which can be used in studying child naming are Casual Theory, Descriptive Theory and LoCatsro (2012) notion of Anthropological Pragmatics.

Casual Theory was propounded by Saul Kripke in 1972. Kripke (1972) sees names as rigid designations which have a casual connection to items they name and hence foresees several different ways to name the same object regarding the fulfillment of the truth conditions. The theory is aired in Kripke's Naming and Necessity for the special case of proper names …"

The descriptive Approach refers to the method of analyzing and documenting languages as they are actually spoken or written by native speakers, without imposing prescriptive rules or judgments about correctness. For Allport (1983), descriptive linguistics focuses on observing and recording the patterns and structures of language, including phonology (sounds), morphology (word formation), syntax (sentence structure), semantics (meaning) and pragmatics (language use in context). This approach to language study is when one tries to explain things how they actually are. It tries to find out how language is used comprehensively, accurately and systematically. LoCatsro (2012) notion of Anthropological

Pragmatics is another theory which can be used in the studying of child naming. LoCatsro notion holds that the interpretation of semantic elements and properties are based on cultural peculiarities that can only be understood using the link between culture and contextual meaning of words. According to her, to understand pragmatic knowledge, it is necessary to interweave linguistic analysis, local contextual information, and sociolinguistic dimensions, such as socio-cultural and historical information.

2.3 Empirical Studies

Naming newly born babies is a worldwide phenomenon in which the parents have to make decisions to name their new babies with names that will accompany them throughout their life. Some studies have been carried out in this area of linguistics. Nnandi-Eruchalu (2018) carried out a study titled 'A socio-linguistic study of the emerging trends in Igbo personal names. The aim of the study was to examine the societal factors responsible for naming children in Igbo culture.

Ezeudo, Aboh and Idika (2021) studied a morphosyntactic analysis of Onitsha personal names. The study assessed the syntactic and morphological structure of some Onitsha personal names. The findings of the study show that clipping, prefixing and suffixing in an orderly manner characterize the personal names such that the meaning of the names are interpreted based on their structural components. Onumajuru (2016) carried out a semantic and pragmatic analysis of Igbo names. The study was designed to examine the structure of Igbo names and analyze their meanings. He observed that Igbo names structurally fall into three broad categories: lexical, phrasal, and sentential. The findings of the study show that names in Igbo are philosophical and some of the names are so complex that only the family of the bearer can decode the message passed across through the names.

Mmadike (2014) carried out an anthropolinguistic study of Àlà names in Igbo and the aim of the study was to examine the fate of Àlà names in Igbo culture. The findings of the study show that Àlà anthroponyms are found in Igbo, and the belief of Igbo people in traditional religion and the coming of Christianity and the new wave of Christian fundamentalism make the people uninterested in Àlà names. Nwigwe (2001, p 75) discloses that the names of the four market days in Igbo (Afor, Nkwọ, Eke, Orie/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.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this paper is LoCatsro (2012) notion of Anthropological Pragmatics. LoCatsro notion holds that the interpretation of semantic elements and properties are based on cultural peculiarities that can only be understood using the link between culture and contextual meaning of words. According to LoCastsro, to understand pragmatic knowledge, it is necessary to interweave linguistic analysis, local contextual information, and sociolinguistic dimensions, such as socio-cultural and historical information.

Child Naming in Igbo which is usually used as a means of group and individual identities usually reflect the experiences, wishes, religious beliefs, expectations, opinions, advice and caution among the peoples. This framework has helped in examining the meaning and circumstances surrounding the Child Naming systems among the Igbo.

3.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, there is presentation of data on Child Naming in Igbo land and the meanings attached to such names, using LoCatsro (2012) notion of Anthropological Pragmatics. Igbo people give their children names based on the situation surrounding the child's birth. It could be for festival, feast, culture, position in the family, belief or something else related to the child. They are sources of inspiration, or an embodiment of the Igbo culture, which helps in keeping it alive.

3.1.1 Names showing the experiences, emotions and opinions of parents before the birth of the child

Experiences of the parents can be reflected in the child's name. For Nkamigbo (2019) & Onumajuru (2016) "… Circumstances surrounding a child's birth determine the type or nature of name to be given , … are all indicative of the experiences and expectations of parents before and after the birth of a child". The name given to a child can reflect the parent's joy after haven taken so long trying to conceive a child. Examples are given below:

(1a) Chidalu is a name given to a child which simply means God be praised. It shows how grateful the parents are to God after waiting for so many years before giving birth. Also, in some situations where the parents witnessed multiple child deaths before the give birth to a child. The name of their child will reflect these conditions. For instance, the name. (1b) Ọganno, which means 'Will he stay?' The parents are afraid and are asking the child if he will live or leave like the others. (1c) Onukwube simply means let mouth start talking. This name expresses the experiences of the parents 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. (1d) 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 or 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'. (1e) '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.

Discussion: The data above show that personal names in Igbo reflect the experiences, opinions and emotions of the parents prior to the time the child is born as presented in 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d and 1e. For example, 1a portrays that the parents of the child bearing the name were highly grateful to God, specifically for the gift of the child. 1e portrays the parent's total trust in God's saving grace and so on. All these reflect the experiences, opinions and emotions of the parents

in consonance with the LoCatsro's notion that the interpretation of semantic elements and properties are based on cultural peculiarities that can only be understood using the link between culture and contextual meaning of words.

3.1.2 Names that show Igbo people's belief in Reincarnation

The issue of Reincarnation can also be reflected in the names given to children after birth. The Igbo people strongly believed in reincarnation. They believe that the non- physical essence of a living being can start in a different physical form of a body after biological death. According to Ilechukwu (2007) & Stephenson (1986), "the beliefs that certain children have the ability to reincarnate and be born several times by the same mother cause the death of their siblings, or make their parents impotent or barren have survived from the ancient to the modern Igbo. ...". This is reflected in the name they give to the child whom they believe is their dead loved one come back to them. For instance, the Igbo name (2a) Nnennaya simply means 'Mother's Father'. The name is usually given to a girl by a father who believes that she is the reincarnation of his biological mother. Another example is (2b) 'Nnanna' which means 'father's father'. It is also given to a child who is believed to be the reincarnation of the one's biological father. (2c) 'Nnenne'is also given to a child who is believed to be a reincarnation of one's mother and others.

Discussion: The data above show that personal names in Igbo reflect the experiences, opinions and emotions of the parents prior to the time the child is born as presented in 2a, 2b, 2c, and others. These data show the parents belief in the reincarnation of dead loved ones and their ability to come back to life. All these reflect the experiences, opinions and emotions of the parents in consonance with the LoCatsro's notion that the interpretation of semantic elements and properties are based on cultural peculiarities that can only be understood using the link between culture and contextual meaning of words.

3.1.3 Names that show Domestic Violence

Domestic violence remains a global issue. Some names in Igbo culture are reflections of what some parents, especially mothers, pass through in their matrimonial homes. For instance, a mother who suffered from domestic violence, named her daughter, (3a) 'Nwadomere' which literally means 'kept by the child'. In this name, the mother summed up the reason for remaining in an abusive marriage.

Discussion: The data above show that personal names in Igbo reflect the domestic violence that occurs in some homes before the birth of the child as presented in 3a and others. They are also in consonance with LoCatsro's notion that the interpretation of semantic elements and properties are based on cultural peculiarities that can only be understood using the link between culture and contextual meaning of words.

3.1.4 Names that emphasize the importance of Wealth

The following names express a state of affluence or wealth among Igbo people: (4a) Ọ bịanuju which means one who came in affluence, (4b) Akunna which means 'wealth of the father' (4c) Ononujuaku which means 'one in the midst of plenty wealth' (4d) Obianujuaku which means 'one who was born to the family at a time of plenty.' (4e) Akuabata which means 'wealth has arrived'.

Discussion - The data show that the Igbo people attach a lot of importance to wealth. Therefore, these names demonstrate their feelings through the naming system as is presented in 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d and 4e. This pattern of child naming portrays that the way of life of the people and determines their choice of sematic elements and interpretation. The naming system is in consonance with LoCatsro's notion that semantic elements and properties.

3.1.5 Names that show people's belief in God Almighty

These names show the Igbo people's belief in Almighty God: (5a) Chekwubechukwu which means 'Trust in God' (5b) Nebeolisa which means 'Look up to God' (5c) Kaosisochukwu whichmeans 'As it pleases God' (5d) Mmesomachukwu which means 'The kindness of God' (5e) Odirachukwumma which means 'Once it pleases God.'

Discussion - These data show that Igbo names reflect the belief of the Igbo people in the supremacy and loyalty to the will of God Almighty as demonstrated in 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d and 5e. Also, Igbo people recognize divine protection and providence upon their lives. The child naming system above is a clear instance that children are christened in the Igbo culture based on the semantic elements in relation to the belief of the people in God almighty.

3.1.6 Names that emphasize the importance of children

These names emphasize the importance of children in Igbo society: (6a). Nwakanma which means 'child is better' (6b) Nwabundo which means 'Child is shelter' (6c) Nwakaego which means 'Child is more valuable than money' (6d) Nwamaka which means 'Child is precious'(6e) Nwadiuko which means 'Child is scarce.'

Discussion - The data portray children are very dearly to the Igbo people as presented in 6a, 6b, 6c,6d and 6e. The naming system suggests that the Igbo people can do everything to get a child and when the child is born, adequate care must be given to them since bearing a child is a priceless gift from God. The notion that children are important is reflected in the culture of the Igbo people and their personal naming system which agrees with LoCatsro's notion that culture and context have a role to play in the naming system of the Igbo people.

3.1.7 Names representing the Philosophy and worldview of Igbo people about life

The following names reflect the philosophy and worldview of Igbo people: (7a) Akọ̱bụ̱ndụ̱ which means 'Wisdom is life' (7b) Azubike which means 'Support is strength ((7c) Emenanjo which means 'Don't do evil'. (7d) Ogoegbunam which means 'Let charity not kill me' (7e) Igwebuike which means 'There is strength in number.'

Discussion - These data portray that certain names in Igbo are meant to express the philosophy and world views of the parents about life and societal happenings as can be seen in 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d and 7e. The Igbo naming system is closely linked with the way of life of the Igbo people. Thereby, the present study supports the notion by LoCatsro'notion that semantic elements and properties as well as their interpretation are predicated on culture.

3.1.8 Names in Igbo that depict the four market days

Some Igbo names depict the four market days of 'Eke', 'Orie/Oye', 'Afo' and 'Nkwo' is also given by parents to their children. Some examples of these names are given below: (8a) Nwankwo/ Okonkwo/ Mgbankwo - 'female/male child born on Nkwo day' (8b) Nwoye/

Okoye - 'female/ male child born on Orie/ Oye day' (8c) Mgbeke/ Nwanyieke - 'female child born on Eke day' (8d) Nwafo/ Okafo - 'female/male child born on Afo day' (8e) Okeke/ Nweke - 'male/female child born on Eke day'

Discussion - These data above show that the Igbo people recognize their market days as a way of preserving and promoting such markets through their naming system. The data; 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d and 8e show the market days when the people bearing such names were born into the world. Through such names, the bearers remember their birthdays and the names remind the society that the markets are important to the Igbo people and must be treated as such.

3.1.9 Names that emphasize on the beauty of babies

Some of the Igbo names which emphasize on the beauty of babies are shown below: (9a) Mmagwulaku which means 'Beauty that exhausted wealth' (9b) Ugonma which means 'The beautiful eagle' (9c) Olanma which means 'Ornament uf beauty' (9d) Agbomma which means 'Epitome of beauty' (9e) Olaedo which means 'Jewel of gold.'

Discussion - The above data show that the Igbo people have so much love for their children, thereby tend to praise the beauty of the children by giving them such names as presented in 9a, 9b, 9c, 9d and 9e. The love that the Igbo people have for children plays a role in their naming system which is a proof of LoCatsro's framework which holds that the way of life of a people determines their choice of semantic elements and interpretation.

3.1.10 Names throwing a question to the society

There are some Igbo names which parent give to their children that threw questions on the issues bothering the society. Some of them are presented as follows: (10a) Onyebuchi which means 'Who is God? (10b) Onyemauchechukwu 'Who knows the mind of God?' (10c) Ibuchukwu which means 'Are you God?' (10d) Ginigaeme which means 'What can happen?' (10e) Onyekamma which means 'Who is better?

Discussion - Igbo names as presented in the above data portray that the Igbo people name their children based on the circumstances surrounding them by the time the child is born. The parents use such names as presented in 10a, 10b, 10c, 10d and 10e to advise the society in order to have a change of attitude, perception and ideologies among the people. The data show that naming system in Igbo supports the claim by LoCatsro whose notion is that semantic elements and properties as well as their interpretation are predicated on culture.

3.1.11 Names which recognize death as evil

Some of the Igbo names which recognize death as evil are presented as following: (!1a) Onwubualili which means 'Death is a torment' or 'Death is torment' (11b) Onwuegbunam which means 'Let death not kill me' (11c) Onwudinjo which means 'Death is evil', (11d) Onwuegbuchula which means 'Premature death should not come' and others.

Discussion - The above data show that the Igbo people see death as a great disaster. This is the reason why they name their children with names that reflects the tragedy of death as seen in 11a, 11b, 11c and 11d. These data show that naming system in Igbo supports the claim by LoCatsro whose notion is that semantic elements and properties as well as their interpretation are predicated on culture.

3.1.12 Names that show people's position in the family

Position in the family also determines the names parents give to their children. Some of the examples are stated below: (12a) Adaobi which means 'first daughter of the palace' (12b) Adanna which means 'first daughter of her father' (12c) Adaeze which means 'a daughter of a king' (12d) Adaaku which means' daughter of wealth', (12e) Adaora which means 'The people's daughter'.

Discussion - The above data show that the Igbo people give names to their children in recognition of their position in the family. This can be seen in the data presented in 12a, 12b, 12c, 12d and 12e above. These data show that naming system in Igbo supports the claim by LoCatsro whose notion is that semantic elements and properties as well as their interpretation are predicated on culture.

3.2 Summary of Findings

The data show that the Igbo people attach a lot of importance to wealth, therefore, they demonstrate their feelings through their naming system as is presented in 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d and 4e. Igbo names show the experiences, emotions and opinions of parents before the birth of a child as presented in 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d and 1e. Igbo naming system reflects the people's belief in reincarnation as presented in 2a, 2b, 2c. Igbo names show domestic violence as presented in 3a. Igbo names reflect the belief in Almighty God as presented in 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d and 5e. Igbo names show the importance of children as presented in 6a, 6b, 6c, and 6d. Igbo names represent the philosophy and worldview of the people about life as presented in 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d and 7e. Names in Igbo depict the four markets days as presented in 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d and 8e. Some Igbo names portray the beauty of babies as presented in 9a, 9b, 9c, 9d, and 9e. Some Igbo names throw some questions to the society as a way of appealing to the conscience of the people as presented in 10a, 10b, 10c, 10d and 10e. The Igbo naming system recognizes death as evil as presented in 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d. Some Igbo names that show the people's position in the family as presented in 12a, 12b, 12c, 12d and 12e. This pattern of naming children portrays that the way of life of a people and also determines their choice of semantic elements and interpretation. The naming system is in consonance with LoCatsro's notion that semantic elements and properties as well as their interpretation, are predicated on the way of life of the people.

3.3 Conclusion

This research work is an attempt to investigate the semantic approach to Child Naming in Igbo land. The naming systems in Igbo land is mainly based on their belief in Almighty God, belief in reincarnation, philosophy about life, domestic violence, death as evil, importance of children, beauty of babies, throwing of questions to the society, experiences and circumstances surrounding the birth of a baby or the parents at the time of the childbirth. The Igbo people also express recognition for wealth, four Igbo market days, people's position in the family in their naming system.

From this analysis, it is discovered that names in Igbo are philosophical. Most of these names have deep meanings and also make one to think about the messages that they pass across to the society. Some of these names are so semantically opaque that it is only the name givers and their relations that can decode the message being expressed. Also, Igbo names as earlier stated are not personal labels as in some cultures where names are given just as tag of identity.

It is also observed that Igbo names serve as windows through which information about an individual or a group is generated. It is also seen that names have some histories attached to them.

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