

A NEW DAWN IN ETCHE NAMES: A CULTURAL THREAT

Michael Alozie Nwala (Ph.D)

Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt

ABSTRACT: *The paper investigates anthroponym- a type of onomastics in Etche. Anthroponym which is the study of personal names including their forms and uses is described differently cross-culturally. Using a descriptive research design, the paper describes one hundred and three (103) Etche personal names categorised into three broad socio-cultural groups: experience, theophoric and admonitory/salutary. Contrary to the Americans and Europeans belief that given names are mere tags and mark of identity, the paper holds that in Etche as it is in most African nations and Nigeria in particular, given names describe the world of the name givers and control the world of the name bearers. The paper therefore concludes that the dawn of a new naming system in Etche is an affront on the culture of the people and portends a great danger to the unborn generation*

KEYWORDS: Onomastics, Anthroponym, Theophoric, Experience, Admonitory, Name, Culture.

INTRODUCTION

Given names or first names as popularly called are tags carried by individuals which serve as mark of identity. In cross-culture generally, given names are what the parents (biological or adopted) call their children which such children carry all through their life time. In some cultures, like the Western world, given names are mere accidental tags which are associated to nothing, but in Africa, (especially, Nigeria) given names have socio-cultural implications. Such implications define the experiences of the carrier's parents before and even during the birth of the carrier. The name of a person is always an indelible ink which eternally reminds the name-givers of their experiences in life.

The second belief associated with given names in Nigeria (Etche in particular) is the fact that the world of the carrier of a particular name is always ruled by his or her name. This simply means that the name a person bears controls him and defines to some extent his destiny. This second colouration of given names inform the ageless aphorism among the Igbo people (a sister tribe of Etche) that *aji aha onye ama onye*, that is, one is defined by ones name. The belief that one's name controls one's destiny has turned to become a serious challenge facing names and naming in Etche. Parents no longer give names which define or capture their experiences in life or which reflect their socio-cultural beliefs. Of late, there is a massive abandonment of names which are believed to portend bad reflexes or are associated to ill-luck. Little wonder that people no longer bear such names in Etche as Nwagbara (the child of a deity), Nwanjoku (the child of the yam goddess); Ndidi (Patience or Endurance), Nwaonuma (a provocative child), Onwudebe (may death spare) Omesurum (I am not the first victim) among others. In place of the above names, carriers and givers now prefer such names as Goodluck, Goodness, Favour, Blessing, Victory, Blossom, Winner, Beauty to mention just a few.

The fundamental question which this paper presents is: to what extent has the new order of naming turned around the destiny of the bearers? Is the socio-economic well-being of the new

generation name bearers and those of their givers priceless better than those of the older generation and those who resist the band wagon of new names? What is the socio-cultural implication of this new order of name and naming system to the Etche nation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of works have been done on onomastics. Onomastics or onomastogy is the study of proper names of all types and the origin of names. The words onomastikos and onomastology – ‘of or belonging to naming’ and from ‘name’ are of Greek descent. A branch of onomastics which is the concern of this paper is anthroponym –the study of personal names which includes their forms and uses.

Every nation and race has a motivation for naming. In America and Europe, names or given names as the case is are signpost of identification. A name is a tag, a mark of identity and recognition designated to distinguish people, (Agyekun, 2006). According to Agyekun, names are purely referential and only considered arbitrary labels that refer to certain signified entries. Therefore, the signifier and the signified may not share certain intrinsic qualities, and this accounts to why two people bearing the same may behave differently. This aligns with De Saussure’s linguistic view that signs are arbitrarily linked to their objects/referents, and Rymes (1996) assertion that names have no functional correlation with culture.

This belief of the Americans and Europeans inform their opinion that the African belief is narrow. For them, a person’s name has nothing absolutely to do with the person. “Proper names or personal names do not have any sense, they are meaningless marks; they have denotative but not connotative meanings”, (Searle 1971,p.134) As a tag, given names are held not to show any form of reference with the bearer but a mere symbol of recognition which any other such tag can do.

In Africa and Nigeria (our main point of reference), names are given different perspectives, ranging from nature, history, belief, experience and religion. According to Ubahakwe(1982,p.27)

An indigenous African name on the whole personifies the individual,
tells some story about the parents and/or family of the bearer;
and in a more general sense, points to the value of the society
into which the individual is born.

Abiodun (2012), reviewing the naming system in Yoruba from the pragmatic point of view, notes that names serve as veritable pragmatic resources for identifying and categorizing individuals. He further points out that in Yoruba, three naming ways are usually observed: Oruko (real names), Oriki abiso (cogenesis) and Oriki alaje (nick names from the lineage). Abiodun concludes that Yoruba personal names are part of genres that ensure continuity of identity and consistency of ethos in preliterate Yoruba society, and that names represent unwritten regulations for the individual members and the society on a number of issues like caution, limit of carnal man, the essence of man; kingship, absolute hope and trust in God, the pregnant nature of future life etc. As held in oral tradition, in Yoruba naming system is done with fun fare which is based on socio-cultural beliefs and events

Iwundu (1994,p.68) who attempt a classification of the semantic categories of Igbo names summarily alludes to the fact that like other typical African societies, Igbo personal names have cultural and religious connotations. Going by his position, Igbo names describe both the bearer and the giver, that is the circumstances surrounding them, which could be historical, belief, experience among others. Iwundu classifies the Igbo names into eight semantic categories: theophoric, monumental, relational, admonitory, ideational, testimonial, solicitor and tempore. Nwobia (2016) who toes the lines of Iwundu (1994) and Abiodun (2012) notes that in Afikpo (a tribe in Igbo) personal names are influenced mainly by birthday, physical appearances, circumstances, theophoric and fauna. But she decries that these adoring naming systems are now eroding away, being threatened by the influence of education, religion, globalization, urbanization and westernization.

Nwobia's regrets is a corroboration of Obuasi (2007) who notes the emerging trend of naming in Igbo, which according to her is bound to leave the youths like mediocre, being neither here nor there linguistically, and that of Abiodun (2012) that the pendulum of naming has change in the society. According to Abiodun, the Yoruba people no longer take on names as usual because of the changing societal perspectives, coupled with impoverished knowledge of the indigenous language, foreign religion and indigenous interest about naming practices.

From the examples of literature on African and Nigerian naming system, it is clear that it runs counter to those of the Americans and Europeans. In African and Nigeria in Particular, names are held to be important for what they reveal about the name givers, and the bearers; the choice people make in naming generally reflects the things around them, circumstances that are either important to them, their society, or what they prefer or what they want to always remember. This is why a particular person may have more than four names before he dies. It depends on the conditions and circumstances he finds himself and those of the people around him. But in America and Europe, names have no reflective connotation; they are tags and marks of identity, empty relationship between the signifier and the signified, hence the common sentiment: What is a name?

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Mill John Stuart's (1949) popular Theory of Denotative and Connotative Meaning. Denotative meaning describes ordinary, literary or conventional meaning. It is a type of meaning assigned to linguistic items or persons, which stands as an ordinary mark of identity (see Nwala, 2015). The connotative meanings are suggestive. They are meanings that are over and above ordinary meanings. Connotative meanings are associative; they are believed to influence and control the things they identify and by so doing, give deeper meanings (cf. Ndimele 1997). With regard to onomastics, the denotative theory of meaning is in consonance with the Western belief, which sees names or given names as mere tags and symbols of identity. The connotative theory of meaning agrees with the African belief that names are given by circumstances and that they reveal the world of the giver and control that of the bearer. The paper adopts this theory because it is able to place side by side the two global beliefs of given names and correctly also represents the meanings attached to names.

METHODOLOGY

Here, the paper adopted a simple descriptive design. A descriptive research design according to Olaitan, Ali, Eyo and Sowande (2000, p. 83), employs the study of large and small population by selecting and studying sample chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence distribution and interrelation of social psychological variables. Drawing from the foregoing, Aquino (2006, p.7) affirms that descriptive research design is ‘fact-finding with adequate interpretation. According to him, descriptive method goes beyond the gathering of data to include the objective and basic assumption of the data. Again, aptly captures .The importance of a descriptive research design is that it describes “what is, as it involves the description, recording, analysis and interpretation of the present nature, composition or processes of phenomena” (Manuel & Medal 1977, p.25).

The data for the paper were provided by the researcher himself, who is a native of Etche and who also fluently speaks Etche language. The names are categorised into three broad socio-cultural items: experience, theophoric and admonitory/ salutary. Each of the categories is clearly defined; the names which fall under it given, together with their meaning and cultural import.

Socio-cultural Categorisation of Etche Names

The Etche personal names can be categorized into three broad groups:

- a. Experience
- b. Theophoric, and
- c. Admonitory/salutary

a. Experience driven names

The entire life of an Etche man is defined by his experience. It may be experience of history, war, death, poverty, famine, childlessness, hatred, segregation, deceit, surprises, migration, birth among others. Name due by experiences help to keep the memories of such experiences, which serve as lessons to the experiencer and the generation to come. In this paper, we group names reflecting regrets and blames, plea and apology, hope, courage, caution and carefulness under the broad theme of experience. In what follows, we present some of such names:

Regrets and blames

Name	Meaning
Mbuonye	Who comes to my aid
Asonyegbu	Not afraid of anybody
Nwaehujhie	A child of pleas
Onwuamaegbu	Death is reckless
Enyuoazu	No helper
Anum	Mockery
Umenwa	The pains of childlessness
Asobirionwu	No longer afraid of death
Nnodimeleuwa	To be merely alive
Ikekanam	The victim of all

Ikpeazu	The last (born) person
Mbakaogu	Playing or wrestling is better the war
Uzodinma	A good and commendable road
Ukonwa	Childlessness
Ohale	Let the people judge
Onyemauche	Who knows the intention
Nnanyibinaonu	We are pretentiously one
Nduburuoke	If life were to shareable

Plea and Apology

Name	Meaning
Azuatalam	Let me always have a backbone
Umunnakwe	Let ones brethren allow one to be
Ohakwem	Let the people or crowd allow me to be
Onyeunam	Let no one rejoice over my misfortune
Onwukwe	If death allows
Onwuchekwa	Let death protect
Onwudebe	Let death keep or allow one to be
Iroegbulam	May hatred not keep me
Egbufo	Do not kill all
Egbuchulem	Don't block my destiny

Hope

Name	Meaning
Ndukaku	Life is greater than wealth
Nnochiri	Who does I prevent
Nwanyibuaku	Woman is a great wealth
Ejimole	How many do I have
Ezeguoha	Everyone wants to be rich
Oshilem	It is no more a new thing to me

Courage

Name	Meaning
Anufuro	What did I not hear
Azubuikwe	Support is one's strength
Asonyegbu	Not afraid of anyone
Azuatalam	May my back not be empty
Onyemaechi	Who knows tomorrow
Ozuruonye	Who has it all
Omesurum	I am not the first victim
Oshilem	No longer new to me
Onyejunwa	Who rejects his or her child
Ndidikanma	Patience or endurance is a great virtue
Iroanya	Mere hatred or an unjustifiable envy

Caution and Carefulness

Name	Meaning
Irondi	Be mindful of enemies
Zeruwa	Be care of the world
Onwuamaegbu	Death is senseless or mindless
Onwumernu	Death is the cause
Ekwuluo	When one offends through much talk
Adindueme	Success is only achievable when alive
Onyemaechi	Who knows what tomorrow holds

Honour, Praise and Happiness

Name	Meaning
Jamuike	Praise or encourage me
Uzodinma	A good road is worthy
Nwokosiobi	A man is of a great stock
Nwaokoshiolem	I am used to a male child
Nnochiri	Who do I prevent
Iheanacho	What is every needful or one's aged long desire
Nwaonu	A child of great joy
Ugonna	The pride of the father
Nwalozieuwa	A well begotten child or a well re-incarnated child

Surprise

Name	Meaning
Akanwa	A long desired child
Anokwuru	What old age has caused
Onyeche	Who thought
Onyegurum	Who empathized with me
Nwauche	A child of great thought

b. Theophoric

These are names which reflect the belief of the people, their religion and faith. These names serve as not only reminders to the people but also a sort of honour, worship and reverence to their revered gods and goddesses. In Etche as it is in most African countries and even the Ancient Greek, theophoric names embed the name of a god, invoking and displaying the protection of that deity. One who bears the name of a god or goddess is literarily entrusted to that god or goddess for protection preservation and blessing. Apart from names that show the general experiences of the Etche people that are quite common, theophoric names form the second bases of naming. This is due to the general belief of the people that spirits and deities are supreme and also control the destiny of the people and their day to day activities. The common theophoric names in Etche are the birthday names.

Birthday and Position

Name	Meaning
Obashi	The son of Obashi deity
Nwaeke	A male child born on Eke market day
Nwankwo	A male child born on Nkwo market day
Nwanjoku	The son of Njoku deity
Nwaorie	A female child born on Orié market day
Nwafo	A female child born on Afo market day
Nwaaego	A child whose birth took a lot of money
Nwaebujuru	A child who caused the parents great pain and wealth before delivery
Nwanyimneni	What is the usefulness of a girl child
Nwauju	A child of great thought
Nwala	The son of the soil or an indigene
Nwancha	A beautiful child
Nwaechefu	A memorable child
Azunna	A male child born after the father death
Azuonwu	A child born after death
Mbeafo	A female child born on Afo market day
Mbeakwo	A female child born on Nkwo market day
Mbeorie	A female child born on Orié market day
Nwanyanwu	A male child named after Anyanwu (the sun god) deity
Nwaji	A female child named after the yam goddess
Nwosu	A male child named after Osu deity
Hnemnenachi	Things happen by destiny
Hneshiuloemne	Things happen from the home front
Nwaogu	A child oath—taken or a child of justice
Nwaorgu	A male child named after Orgu deity
Nwauzhi	A male child named after Uzhi deity

c. Admonitory and salutary

To admonish is to praise, appreciate, extol and to advise, while salutary is to applaud, exult, eulogize and to support. In life in general and in social engagements in particular, people get involved in all kinds of activities, it could be war, hunting expeditions, wrestling, farming or any other type of socio-cultural activities, which may or may not involve risk-taking but portrays some form of boldness, success and victory. In the traditional Etche culture, names are given to people as a mark of honour and acknowledgement. Such names do not only portray the bearers' landmark successes, they also salute their victorious exploits:

Name	Meaning
Obinna	The father's mind or hope
Onyeike	A great one
Ogbuaghu	A great and strong person
Ogbughu	A great achiever
Dike	A great warrior
Ezeji	A great farmer

Dinta	A great hunter
Nwancha	A beautiful child
Nwaonu	A child of great joy
Ugonna	The pride of the father
Nwalozieuwa	A well begotten child or a well re-incarnated child
Ihigbaa	A child that cleaned the sorrows and pains of the parents

CONCLUSION

Thus far, the paper has described given names and the different beliefs of people. The Western world (Americans and Europeans) sees personal names or given names as mere tags and symbols of identity, while the Africans (especially, Nigeria) see given names as what describes the world, history and experiences of the name givers and in turn, controls, influences and indeed, rules the world of the bearer. The Etche names, as the paper revealed, tell much about the people; their history, their experiences, their socio-cultural relationships with neighbours, religious beliefs, desires and generational or future wishes the name givers have for their children. The new trend that sees the people bear new names outside the cultural values or naming system of the Etche nation is worrisome. The influence of westernization and globalization is taking a damaging toll on the psych of the people; the youngsters believe that names indeed influence the world of the bearer and therefore would not take names related to any form of deity or market days. Instead, they go for names associated to Saints, beauty, fame and success. Those who were initially given cultural names such as Nwauka (one whose birth caused a lot of pains), Ndidi (Patience or endurance) Nwanyibuaku (a girl is a source of wealth) to mention just a few have abandoned such names. They have now replaced them with names such as Greatness, Grateful, Blessing, Gift, Blossom, Precious among others. The native or local names usually given to people, of late, take after the almighty God, called Chikwu (also Chukwu). It is a commonplace to see people bear Chididiegwu, *God is great*; Chidiebube *God is awesome*, Chidiebere, *God is merciful*, Chiamaka, *God is very good*; Chijindu, *God holds one's life*, Chinedu, *God leads*, Chinyere, *God gave*, Chizobam, *may God protect me etc.* The belief in the existence of a supreme God is not a source of worry for this paper because the names given after the almighty God to a large extent show the experiences of the people, which has been the way of naming before the advent of the Christian religion. What is worrisome is the radical departure from given names that showcase the traditional identity of the Etche people, contained in names after their local deities, market days, history, local and personal experiences, relationship with neighbours and friends. Such name transfers the history and belief systems of the people to the in-coming generations. The names a parent gives to the offspring can be used to summarize his history, life experiences and wishes for them. The names are usually remarkable; they serve big lessons which guide the socio-cultural behaviour of the bear and his relationship with people. All these values are now eroding away like a thunder flash. The relics of the culture of the Etche people in names and naming that have survived imperialism are now being washed away. This is a sort cultural annihilation, a social destruction of the life, history and genealogy of the people and a type of linguistic endangerment.

REFERENCES

- Abiodun, J. (2012). A pragmatic study of Yoruba personal name. In *Journal of Literary Onomastics*. Vol.2 Iss.1 PP. 24-32
- Agyekun, K. (2006). The sociology of Akan personal names. In *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 15, no. 12 pp. 206-235
- Aquino-Russeli, C. E. (2006). A descriptive phenomenological design. In I. Bourgeault, R. Dingwall & Raymond de Vries (Eds) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Health Research*. PP. 339-340. New Delhi: SAGE Publications
- Iwundu, M. (1999). *Igbo anthroponyms: A socio-semantic analysis*. Doctoral dissertation, UNN
- Manuel & Medal (1977). *Descriptive research design*. Retrieved (15th June, 2017) from <https://lprezi.com/descriptive-research>
- Ndimele, O. M. (1997). *Semantics and frontiers of communication*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press Ltd.
- Nwala, M. A. (2015). *Introduction to linguistics: A first course (revd)*. Obisco Nig. Enterprises: Port Harcourt.
- Nwobia, E. N. (2016). Dynamics of onomastics in Afikpo Igbo society. In *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 6. No. 12. pp. 95-103
- Obuasi, I. (2007). Culture crises in our youths: A result of linguistic alienation. *Journal of Nigerian Language and Culture*. Vol.9. No. 2 pp.251-119
- Olaitan, S. O., Ali, A., Eyo, E. O. & Sowande, K. G. (2000). *Research skills in education*. Obosi: Pacific Publications
- Rymes, B. (1996). Naming as social practice: The case of Little Creeper from Diamond Street. *Language in Society*. Vol. 25. (2) PP. 237-260
- Searle, J.R. (1971). The problem of proper names. In Steinberg, D. D. Jakobovits, L. A. (Ed) *Semantics: An introductory reader in philosophy, linguistics and psychology*. CUP.
- Ubahakwe, E. (1982). *Igbo names: Their meaning and their structure*. Ibadan: Daystar Press