

## **IGBO PROVERBS AND PROVERB PERSONAL NAMES: MORPHO-SYNTACTIC AND PRAGMATIC ANALYSES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The paper investigates the form, content and use of proverbs as personal names among the Igbo people in Nigeria. It specifically examines the morpho-syntactic, pragmatic and ethnographic structures of this unique class of naming system as well as the derivational methods for shortening the names. A total of 100 proverbs were collected for data analysis from Igbuzo-Igbo language consultants, library sources and supplemented by the researcher-speaker intuition. The paper reveals that proverb-names which are indigenous to the language abound in Igbo and share significant stylistic features with other proverbs; most proverb names are rarely rendered in full; they are abridged, truncated or restatements of the full proverbs. Though they are de-sententialized nominals, (that is, nouns derived from sentences), competent speakers of the language intuitively recognize their full forms. Unlike some non-proverb personal names, the intended meaning of proverb-names typically realized metaphorically. Furthermore, the strategies employed for clipping reveal that initial and final clipping are most frequently employed. The paper concludes that proverb names which reflect the ethnolinguistic values, general world-view and social consciousness of the people are fast disappearing, and giving way to the new-generation names.*

**KEYWORDS: Proverbs, Names, Morpho-Syntactic, Pragmatic, Ethnolinguistic, Metaphor and Clipping**

### **Introduction**

Proverbs and personal names in Africa and Igbo in particular, have provided rich sources for researches in linguistics, literature, sociology, stylistics, anthropology, ethnography and diachrony. A number of excellent works in Igbo linguistics exist in the areas of structural, semantic and pragmatic studies of names, name-giving and proverbs. Igbo indigenous names are closely connected to proverbs as many

proverbs are employed as personal names. They are expressed in forms of shortened proverbs or restatements derived from recognized proverbs which share some stylistic features with ordinary proverbs. This has given naming practice in Igbo a unique characteristic. Extensive collections of proverbs are also attested in many African languages, in Bantu, Swahili, Congo and a number of West African languages. The Ganda of Uganda are said to have thousands of proverbs and proverb names. Musere's (1999) work – a comprehensive compilation and extensive description of seven hundred proverb names demonstrates that many Ganda names are of proverbial origin and a huge resource to African wisdom and culture, literary and language studies.

Scholarly and interesting works also abound in Igbo revealing the social, ecological, religious and cultural life of the people. These collections provide an insightful analysis of the structure, content and function of Igbo proverbs. Ogbalu (1961, 1978) have a huge collection of Igbo proverbs. His work, *Igbo Attitude to sex* is a collection of over one thousand proverbs only on sex. This shows that the Igbo language is rich with proverbs. Igwe (1986), Amadiume (1994) reveal a large collection of Igbo proverbs. Okwuechime (1995) has a collection of 1001 popular Enuani maxims and proverbs; Monye (1996) is also a collection of proverbs from the Aniocha dialects of Igbo, and Emenanjo (2012a, 2012b) are a huge source of over three thousand proverbs specifically in Igbuzo-Igbo dialect. Emenanjo (2012a) believes that if we have well over one thousand proverbs on sex as collected by Ogbalu (1961) from one area of discourse alone, then there are hundreds of thousands of proverbs in Igbo. Although proverbs and names have been extensively studied from the literary, stylistics, linguistic and ethnographic perspectives, the subject of personal names associated with proverbs has not been adequately explored in Igbo and African studies.

Significant works on personal names and naming system also abound in African and Igbo studies in particular. Madu (1996), Musere (1999), Onukawa (1999), (2000), Ubahakwe (1981), Okafor, Emeka & Inyama (2008), Ezeude (2000), Ezeanya (1967), Yuka (2008), Ayuwo (2014), Onumajuru (2016) and Oweleke (2021) are excellent researches in personal names and name-giving. They describe the linguistic, semantic, formal, functional, socio-pragmatic and ethno-linguistic features of names. Finnegan (1970:389), reports that significant collections of proverbs have been attested in Africa, especially in the Bantu area, Congo and West Africa. She further notes "that even though

proverbs are universal, they occur in rich profusion in some African languages". Similarly, Crystal (1997), reports that although proverbs are not commonly encountered in English, they are important and frequent elements in ordinary conversations in African languages.

It is worthy of note that proverb personal names are different from non-proverb names. Proverb names form a unique set of names which are derived from proverbs. In Igbo, not all proverbs can be used to derive personal names. Investigations of both oral and written works in Igbo on proverbs have shown a limited number of proverb names when compared to the non-proverb names. This style of naming system is not as elaborate or specialized in Igbo as in Luganda. The work of Musere (1999), a collection and description of 700 Ganda personal proverb names has revealed that deriving personal names from proverbs is an elaborate and prevalent system among the people.

The elaborate use of proverbs in speech is a predominant feature of African languages and in Igbo a mark of competence. The strength and beauty of a speaker's oration is judged by his effective use of proverbs. In the words of Achebe (1975), 'proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten'. This expression depicts the significance attached to the use of proverbs in traditional discourse. Achebe thus, compares the indispensable role of palm oil in the life of an Igbo indigene. Producing and comprehending proverbs are virtues held in high esteem in Igbo land as speeches punctuated with proverbs are highly appreciated in the community. A person who uses proverbs frequently and accurately is regarded as having wisdom and a good command of the language.

Proverbs are intimately linked to a people's culture, given their internal lexical content which draws upon a specific traditional experience. They constitute a repository of a people's linguistic, religious, social, political, ecological and material values. Thus, proverbs are constructed around the fauna and flora of the people; they reflect the socio-cultural events and relationship of the people, belief system, values and general world view of the people are usually couched in proverbs. This explains why only those familiar with the traditions, values, history and world views of the people are able to understand and also responsible for the difficulty in translating them.

Proverb-names are quite often shortened forms of proverbs, derived from the proverb-sentences that make them up. However, some

other proverb names are rendered in full. Igbo has a substantial part of personal names that are derived from these proverbs. Though the names appear on the surface as shortened, the bearer, the giver of the name and competent speakers of the language are aware of the full form, its structure and full meaning.

For example, a competent Igbuzo speaker who hears the name, *Kaashie* knows that it is derived from the sentence: *Kà ànyị shie nwanne abũhọ ùsịà* – ‘A call to brotherhood is not an expression of greed’ which by implication emphasizes family cohesion and support.

Though a good number of Igbo proverbs and personal names have been collected, documented and analysed by both linguists and non-linguists, researches on Igbo proverb-names are scarce, and yet to be given adequate consideration. This study therefore, provides an insightful investigation of the derivational processes of proverb name-giving, the pragmatic and ethnographic structures of this unique class of Igbo proverb names. The work is therefore significant in the areas of de-sentential nominal derivation, socio-pragmatic study of the language, Igbuzo-Igbo documentation, language typology and to language studies in general. It also provides relevant insight into the elaborate metaphorical nature of the communicative competence of the Igbo.

## **Methodology**

The data for the study are one hundred proverbs from which one hundred and twenty proverb-names were derived. The proverbs and proverb-names were collected from Igbuzo-Igbo language consultants who are competent speakers of the language, through personal interviews with the bearers of the names and library sources. Information on the specific contextual interpretation of the names and proverbs were also elicited from the bearers of the names and older male members of the community who are eloquent in the use of proverbs. Much of the information was supplemented by the researcher’s native speaker intuition. A descriptive method of data analysis was adopted to establish the morph-syntactic, pragmatic and ethno-linguistic features of the proverb names. In addition, the literal and non-literal (metaphoric) interpretations of the proverbs and proverb names were provided to explicate how meanings of linguistic units are determined by their context of use coupled with the vast background of cultural information available to the participants.

## **Proverbs and proverb-names in Igbo**

Definitions of proverb abound in the literature. A proverb is a group of words, typically sentences that succinctly express some basic truth about life. Fennigan (1970:393) one of the foremost writers on African literature and culture, defines a proverb as 'a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by popular acceptance of truth, tersely expressed in it'. Similarly, Grauberg (1990) sees a proverb as a traditional saying which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and pithy manner. According to Crystal (1997), proverbs are "nuggets of popular wisdom in the form of succinct sayings". Emenanjo (2012) considers proverbs as special phraseological or fixed collocational units of short pithy traditional sayings that are culture-specific in their lexical contents. He adds that they are used to transmit oral traditional wisdom, truths and morals from one generation to the other. Proverbs are typically allusive to historical events, people and places. Apart from revealing the basic truths about a people, they are contextual in nature. The context in which a proverb is produced may be situational, verbal or socio-historical. Proverbs frequently occur in songs, poems, riddles, folklore, and traditional oral literature, in personal, praise and pet names.

More often, the language of proverbs is highly figurative, frequently employing metaphors, hyperbole, paradox, simile, personification, symbolism, metonymy and others. Every proverb contains imagery; a type of word picture through which the message is communicated, and the meaning of a proverb is usually embedded in the imagery. A common feature which clearly defines and makes proverbs elusive is the presence of metaphor. Interpreting proverbs is characterized by two levels – literal (surface) and non-literal (deep). Scholars believe that the non-literal can be classified into contextual and philosophical and others think it can be contextual, philosophical and figurative. This makes meaning of proverbs ambiguous and difficult to decipher. Proverbs are usually expressed in short sentences thus, the adjectives frequently used in the literature to describe proverbs include pithy, succinct and terse. Their wordings are relatively fixed and this makes it easy for speakers to recall them in full, when only part is mentioned. Though not using too many words, proverbs express their meanings quite clearly and effectively. Allusion, a common feature of proverbs, usually refers to historical, social, religious, ecological issues and events in the society; hence allusive wordings are highly metaphorical. Based on the features

of proverbs, scholars have argued that proverbs are more poetic than prosaic. They, quite often employ repetition, parallelism, assonance, alliteration, rhythm and antithesis which quite often define poetry. These features set proverbs apart from ordinary speech, and describe an accomplished user of proverb as a poet.

Researchers have shown that among the Igbo, indigenous proverbs play vital roles in the language and communication system of the people. They represent the avenues through which their philosophy of life, culture, technology, civilization, moral and general world view are transmitted, stored and retrieved. Proverbs provide psychological, social, pragmatic and historical functions. According to Onwuchekwa (2013), for the Igbo man, reality itself is proverbial; whatever does not exist in proverb does not exist at all. Proverbs add style to discourse; they serve to preserve eternal truths that could have been lost without its use in proverbs.

### **Approaches to the study of proverbs and personal names**

Approaches adopted in the study of proverbs and personal names in Igbo include stylistic, diachronic, ethno-linguistic, syntactic, morpho-semantic, socio-semantic, and pragmatic, either in isolation or combination. The field of Translation Studies has also offered another avenue through which Igbo proverbs have been significantly explored. Recent works have shown that proverbs can be translated using the techniques of Equivalence, Adaptation and Cultural Substitution, Vinay and Darblenet (2004), Baker (2011), Ajunwa (2014), and others. Proverbs and indigenous personal names belong to the linguistic aspect of culture. An ethno-linguistic analysis gives opportunity of analyzing proverbs in relation to socio-cultural activities and ideologies of a people. Works like Achebe (1975), Ubahakwe (1981), Madu (1996), Onukawa, (1999, 2000) have shown that Igbo proverbs and names are relevant to the understanding the social, ecological, material, religious underpinnings of a people. Most of these works overtly or covertly apply Hyme's SPEAKING Schema to the study of proverbs and names. Linguistic researches also abound, in which researchers have explored morpho-semantic, morpho-syntactic, pragmatic features of names and proverbs. Furthermore, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) has also been frequently applied to the study of proverb meanings. This theory has offered explanation to the understanding of an idea in terms of another, and demonstrates that understanding of metaphor in everyday communication is shaped

by the ideological orientation and cultural worldview of the speakers. These fields of study have provided rich resources to the study of metaphors in general and to Igbo proverbs and personal names.

### **Interpreting proverbs and proverb-names**

Interpreting proverbs involves the interface of both semantic and pragmatic analysis of utterances. While semantic interpretation refers to the abstraction of linguistic meaning, pragmatics handles meaning in context. At the semantic level, the meanings of the lexical items that make up the proverbs are handled, while the metaphoric or figurative significance which captures the intended meaning of the proverb is given at the pragmatic level. The presence of metaphors in proverbs is responsible for the ambiguity and wrong interpretations. Applying semantic rules alone to proverb analysis would create absurdity and misinterpretation. Hence users of Igbo proverbs and proverb-names require both linguistic competence as well as communicative competence.

Some scholars classify levels of meaning interpretation of proverbs into two – literal and non-literal. Whereas, the literal refers to the linguistic environment of the lexical items, the non-literal refers to the pragmatic or contextual use of the proverbs. In the literature, the non-literal is further classified into figurative, contextual and philosophical. Emenanjo (2012) classifies meaning level into three - literal, contextual and philosophical. According to him, the philosophical refers to the universal property of the proverb which he argues transcends the contextual level. He believes that there is a universal underlying meaning or message inherent in every proverb. Esimaje, Masagbor and Ezirim (2014) on the other hand identifies the non-literal level of proverb meaning as figurative and contextual. He posits that the literal level is the shallow level and the sum of linguistic units that make up the proverbs; the figurative refers to the metaphorical and the contextual to the factors of context – participants, situation, their verbal non-verbal actions and shared background knowledge. He argues that it is these facts of the context that reveal the intended meaning of the proverb. Scholars believe that it is the non-literal, contextual meaning that is considered as the real meaning of the proverb not the literal.

Proverbs are identified by copious use of figurative expressions such as metaphors, simile, personification, hyperbole among others, and these create a great deal of problems of ambiguity in translation. Of these,

metaphor is the most frequently explored. Just like idioms, the meaning of proverbs is rarely compositional. It is often impossible to guess the meaning of a proverb from the words that make them up. Even though meaning can be interpreted literally and non-literally, proverb meanings are not meant to be interpreted literally. The communicative import of the proverb is at the deeper, non-literal level. To fully understand a proverb lies in the interpretation of its figurative value. Thus, to obtain a satisfactory account of proverbs we have to investigate the language beyond the literal level, as a complete interpretation requires both shared background knowledge of the speakers as well as the context of the utterance. Since metaphors are generally context-sensitive,

### **Nominalization**

Nominalization is defined in the literature as both a morphological and syntactic process. Crystal (2008) sees nominalization as the process of forming a noun from other word classes or the derivation of a noun phrase from an underlying clause. Similarly, Trask (1992) defines it as a morphological process of deriving a noun from any other lexical category especially from a verb, and from the syntactic point of view, as a process of forming a noun phrase from another category particularly from a verb phrase or a sentence, and quickly notes that the syntactic-morphological distinction is not always clear. Nominalization therefore, is an operation that allows a verb, an adjective or adverb to function as a noun. It is a class-changing derivational process that allows the derived nouns so formed to function as the subject, object or complement of verb. Linguists believe that it is an internal resource for enlarging the vocabulary of natural languages.

Nominalization is a language specific process which can be achieved by a number of strategies - affixation, reduplication, compounding, tonal changes, segment modification and others, in isolation or combination. African languages select from these strategies to form nouns. The processes produce nominals that function as infinitives, gerunds – simple, complex, participles, agentives and instrumentals. Nominal derivatives may be simple or compound nouns. Taiwo (2013) and Oyebade have noted that through nominalization a whole sentence or clause can be reduced to a compound noun usually personal names in the Yoruba language. Similarly, Emenanjo (2015) reveals that de-sentential nominals are quite often names of persons in the language. He sees nominalization as a term used for the multiplicity of processes which result in the creation of nouns and nominals and reports that sources of



nominalization in Igbo include nouns, noun or verb phrases, sentences and acronyms, which yield de-nominal, de-verbal and de-sententialized nouns.

### **i. De-sentential nominalization**

De-sentential nominalization, according to Emenanjo (2015) is a specific process of deriving nouns especially compound nouns from phrases and clauses. Oyebade (2013) and Taiwo (2013) demonstrate that exocentric compounds, which may be nominal or verbal, are derived from full clauses. They identified the process as de-sententialization, and define it as a process in the Yoruba language by which a whole sentence or clause is reduced to a noun. According to them, noun compounds can be derived from a combination of single lexemes or from clauses and sentences. Combinations of single lexemes (noun + noun), (nouns + adjective), (+verb) form endocentric compounds except de-sentential compounds which are exocentric, and argues that only nominal compounds are derived from different types of sentences in Yoruba, and these sentences can be derived or underived. He pointed out that some scholars of the Yoruba language, Yusuf (2007) and Taiwo (2005) have identified various types such as derived, interrogative, declarative, imperative, sentences and relative clauses as the common productive sources of forming nominal compounds in Yoruba.

### **ii. Clipping in nominalization**

Clipping though, not purely a morphological process is an internal resource for creating new words from existing ones. It involves the shortening of the base of a word without actually changing the meaning or the lexical class from which the new word is derived; this is why clipping is also called truncation or shortening. The abridged version has the same denotative meaning as the full. Yuka (2013) in contrast has argued that the part retained after clipping is the most semantically significant part. The base of the word is usually longer than the form created from it. Some examples in English include: *exam* (from *examination*), *fan* (from *fantastic*), *flu* (from *influenza*), *fax* (from *facsimile*) and more recently, *blog* (from *web log*). Linguists have argued that clipping though a form of shortening is different from abbreviation and 'acronymization'. Beard (2011), believes that both input (the base) and the output (the clipped form) are semantically identical, and that both remain active in the lexicon. However, Bauer believes that clipping changes the stylistic value of the new word, and reports that though it is

accepted in general usage, it is more popular in informal setting. Crystal (1997), Yuka (2008), O’Grady & Guzman (2011), Taiwo (2013), Emenanjo (2015) and Kari (2015) all agree that personal names in Lamnso, English, Yoruba, Igbo and Degema languages respectively, are the most common products of clipping. In English, names such as *Liz*, *Ben*, *Sue* are common clipped forms of *Elizabeth*, *Benjamin* and *Sussan*, and in Igbo *Adim*, *Ngoo*, *Emeka*, *Ekene* are short forms of *Adimabua*, *Ngozi*, *Chukwuemeka* and *Ekenedilichukwu*. Since the parts of the base retained after clipping are not necessarily morphs, Bauer has aptly argued that clipping is not a part of morphology, even though it is used to create new words. Clipping can involve lone un-derived words, phrases, clauses as well as sentences. Several types of clipping have been identified – final, initial, middle and complex. In English *phone*, *bike* and *burger* are examples of front (initial) clipping where the front part of the word is retained, whereas, *gym*, *pub* and *exams* are examples of back (final) clipping. In complex clipping, a combination of processes is involved – deleting some syllables, blending and the addition of new syllables, eg *blog* from web log, *movie* from moving pictures, etc.

### Levels of meaning interpretation of proverbs and proverb-names

In this section, we examine three levels of meaning of our data – the literal, figurative and contextual. In Table1 is a set of proverbs with both their literal and non-literal analysis as well as the names derived from the proverbs. The contextual analysis is given after the table.

**Table1: Literal and non-literal interpretation of Igbo proverbs and proverb-names**

| Proverb/ Literal meaning   | Non-literal Meaning  | Proverb name   |
|--|--|----------------|
| Ụkọ nwā b̀t̀t̀ ̀g̀ba ̀j̀. ‘The absence of a child is responsible for clay pots of ritual items’. | Radical or extreme situations require drastic actions.       | <b>Ugbaaja</b> |
| Kà ̀nỳ sh̀ ̀nwan̄ ab̄h̄ ̀s̀. ‘A call to brotherhood is not an expression of greed/gluttony’     | This implies solidarity or family cohesion                   | <b>Kashiee</b> |
| Iwe hà nwanne j̀ te ǹt̀. ‘Malice makes the house of a relative far’                             | Envy and malice create a huge crack in family relationships. | <b>Iweha</b>   |

|  |  |                      |
|--|--|----------------------|
| Iwe anyā adī-ègbu ọkpìjò. 'Envy does not kill ọkpìjò (a type of ugly and poisonous fish)'        | This conveys the meaning of invulnerability of the bearer or the name giver.                                 | <b>Iweanya</b>       |
| Akwụ solu ibe ò gbaa m̄manụ<br>'One piece of palm kernel with others will produce palm oil'.     | The proverb suggests unity of purpose.   | <b>Soluibe</b>       |
| Apitì adī-èkpo apelete. 'A slippery ground does not accidentally slip apelete (typof bush rat)'. | One's enemies or detractors cannot prevail. No matter how complex a situation, the wise person will prevail. | <b>Apiti</b>         |
| Nwa dī alọ wa jì aka naàbò apa.<br>'The plump/weighty child that is carried with two hands.      | Something priceless or of inestimable value  | <b>Nwadio/ Dialo</b> |

It is clear from the table that the literal meaning (that is, the sum of the linguistic units) does not communicate the intended meaning of the proverb. The proverb, *apiti adi ekpo apelete*, implies that no condition or challenge can destroy or limit the person spoken of, that is, detractors cannot pull them down. The diction is remarkable as the linguistic units create a vivid picture from which the implied or actual meaning is drawn. The meaning of the metaphor *apelete* is required to understand the proverb, as it represents the features of a type of swift moving bush rat with short fore-legs and longer hind-legs which makes it easy for the animal to hop and so escapes being slipped off its feet. Furthermore, the shared cultural background knowledge of this animal makes the interpretation of the proverb clear. The actual context of the proverb is determined by the specific situation of the events and circumstances surrounding the child's birth. The name *Apiti* then be given by a parent who escaped some life-threatening challenge. The correct interpretation of the proverb is provided by the non-literal analysis. The names and other lexical units derived are also interpreted metaphorically as shown in Table 2:

**Table 2: Literal versus metaphoric meaning of proverb names and lexical units**

| Lexical Units | Literal Meaning                   | Proverb-Name        | Metaphoric Meaning of Proverb-Name |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| ugba àjà      | ritual clay pot                   | <b>Ugbaaja</b>      | 'effective strategies'             |
| Apitì         | slippery ground                   | <b>Apiti</b>        | 'detractors'                       |
| iwe anyā      | envy/anger                        | <b>Iweaya</b>       | 'criticism'                        |
| sòlu ibè      | move with mates                   | <b>Soluibe</b>      | 'family cohesion'                  |
| òfu nnē       | siblings of the same mother       | <b>Ofunne</b>       | 'unity.'                           |
| nwa dì alọ    | child is plump/heavy              | <b>Nwadio/Dialo</b> | 'priceless'                        |
| te òtìtè      | be far                            | —                   | 'broken relationship'              |
| ùkọ nnwā      | absence of offspring              | —                   | 'challenges'                       |
| Ọkpìjọ        | poisonous ugly fish with big eyes | —                   | 'indomitability'                   |
| akwụ          | palm kernel                       | —                   | 'a person'                         |
| apelete       | Bush mouse                        | —                   | 'dexterity'/'wisdom'               |

At the semantic level, the names expressed in the lexical units – *ugba àjà*, *apitì*, *apelete*, *iwe anyā*, *sòlu ibè*, *te òtìtè* and others take on other meanings based on cultural and situational contexts. Only competent speakers of the language are able to disambiguate the pragmatic nuances of the proverb names because they can easily recall the full form of the proverbs. This explains why proverbs are described as culture specific and content dependent. In addition, the other lexical units (*ọkpìjọ*, *akwụ*, *te òtìtè*, *ùkọ nnwā* etc.) all bear a metaphoric interpretation as shown in the table. To Igbuzo interlocutors the term carrying *ugba àjà* is associated with primary or secondary infertility which makes women or families indulge in ritual sacrifices to appease their ancestors or the gods of the land for children. Thus, *ugba àjà* metaphorically, implies specific strategies that can be taken to handle challenging situations. A child given the name *Ugbaja*, would have been born to parents who had secondary fertility or to parents who had face a major challenge that led to applying some drastic measures before surmounting the situation.

Unlike the English language where the truncated name and the full name have the same semantic value, the situation is different in Igbo. The derived name though the most semantically and pragmatically relevant part of the sentence does not bear the same meaning as the entire proverb but contributes to it. In addition, the lexical meaning of the proverb-name is different from the figurative and determines the real meaning.

### **Most frequently explored themes of Igbuzo-Igbo proverbs**

The data for the study reveal that proverb names frequently explore such themes as invulnerability, solidarity/ family love and support, accomplishment, beauty of character, of which may be physical, emotional and psychological, destiny, and virtues such as determination, steadfastness, respect for elders, humility, trust, patience, among others, and rejection for certain vices such as laziness, anger, jealousy, rivalry, hatred and others. These themes express the non-literal meaning of the proverbs which are not expressed in the surface. Few examples will suffice.

#### **i. The theme of invulnerability**

The theme describes the indomitable spirit of the Igbo which is reflected in their everyday language use are described in the proverbs. Metaphors that frequently explore this theme include those in Example 1

Example 1:

Example 2:

- a) Iwe anyā adī-ègbu ọkpìjò. **Iweanya**  
Envy does not kill ọkpìjò (a type of ugly and poisonous fish)  
The name bearer does not succumb to intimidation
- b) Ashìka egbē adī ègbu egbē. **Ashikaegbe**  
No amount of shouting or distractions will kill or stop the eagle from swooping and carrying its prey.
- c) Agogo adī èzo ọnū. **Agogo**  
Agogo (a type of musical instrument) does not hide its mouth.
- d) Ọnwụ adī ègbu ijèlì. **Ijelii**  
Death does not kill ijelii

- e) Ishu ùgègbè elū aji. **Ugegbe**  
The face of the mirror does not grow hairs.
- f) Nkili nkili kà wa nà-èkili odòdo. **Nkili**  
Flowers are meant to be admired.

The theme of invulnerability of the proverb appears to be expressed in the declarative negative sentence form which employs the use of an auxiliary negative marker *adj* and the participial vowel prefix *e/a* attached to the verb root, - (*adj egbu*, 'does not kill'; *adj elu aji* 'does not grow hairs'; *adj ekpo* 'does not slip' etc.) And this implies that the bearer or the giver cannot be defeated by any person or situation. They cannot succumb to any kind of intimidation. Though the proverbs share the same meaning, their context of use determines the specific and real meaning intended by the giver of the name.

## ii. Proverbs that express the theme of solidarity or family ties and support

Africans place huge value on family solidarity and unity and it is frequently expressed in the names they bear. A few of these proverbs are given below:

Example 2:

- a) Kà ànyị shię nwanñē abūhọ ùsịà. **Kaashie**  
A call to brotherhood is not an expression of greed/gluttony.
- b) Nwanne ububo ekweho ka ububu dalue ànị. **Ububo**  
Ububo, a type of aerial calabash does not allow another to fall to the ground.
- c) Òfu onyē adi ème mbànà. **Ofuonyeadi**  
One person does not make a community.
- d) N'ubòsị òkè nwanñē, òyị ànaa. **Oyianaa**  
A friend loses its relevance the day family matters are discussed. Blood relations are more significant in family matters.
- e) Onwē azụ kà o nwē ego. **Onweazu**  
The one who has *back* /supporters is better than the wealthy person.

### iii. Theme: Gerontocracy

Governance in Igbuzo today is still based on gerontocracy and so, some proverb-names reflect this traditional value. Attributes in proverbs are deep rooted in the culture of leadership by old people, and these are shown in the following examples:

Example 3:

- a) Nwa fẹẹ nnà a, ò bulu isi nkā. **Nwafee**  
'If a child honours his father, he will grow to old age'.
- b) Isi tọa, ò liẹ ezè. **Isitoa**  
If the head (a man) grows old, he will become the chieftain of his clan.
- c) Wà èji ndù efee ọba? **Ejindu**  
Do you serve or worship a king with your life or would you lay down your life for a king?
- d) Ilo baba echìnè **Ilobaa**  
Let the compound of the family head not to go into extinction.

Some other proverb-names reflect determination, benevolence, admiration of royalty, and other laudable virtues on the part of the bearer or name giver.

Example 4:

- a) Èjèkòmtẹ gà èlu ebe o jèkò. **Ejete**  
As long as one is moving or alive, they will get to their destination. (Determination)
- b) Ùkpakā na-agba nà udu mmili. **Ukpaka**  
The oil-bean seed that disperses in the raining season. (Uncommon blessing)
- c) Isi eke na-adọkpụ ogbè ahụ a. **Isieke**  
It is the head of the snake that drags its entire body. (Provider)
- d) Àkìdì amā okè. **Akidi**  
Akidi (a bean variety) does not recognize boundaries. (Benevolence)

- e) Ọnòdù ùgò adī-adī egbē mma. **Onoduugo**  
The status of the eagle does not befit the hawk. (rivalry/  
jealousy)

The common names derived from these proverbs include Apiti, Uzoogo, Ejete, Ukpaka, Isieke, Akidi, Onoduugo, Ububo and others. They have been highlighted for ease of reference. These proverb-names provide rich resource for studying the ethnolinguistic features of the Igbo language. They reflect the socio-cultural, political, religious and economic life of the people. Prevalent semantic fields used as metaphor for the proverbs and proverb names are those of fauna, flora, kinship, parts of the body, religion and royalty among others. They pervade the ethos of the traditional life of the people.

### Clipping in Igbuzo-Igbo proverb names

Clipping in Igbo personal names involve a morpho-syntactic process. Igbuzo-Igbo proverb names are largely compound nouns derived from phrases, clauses and sentences, as they are rarely lone words. Both simple and complex sentences lend themselves to clipping. The names are therefore usually shortened to make for easy pronunciation as well as writing. The data reveals initial, medial, final clipping as well as complex clipping. A few examples are given:

#### i. Initial sentence clipping:

- a) Apìtì amāhọ okèì. **Apìtì** (Noun)  
A slippery muddy or marshy ground does not respect an adult.
- b) Chi ejìnè wa adī-àkàlụ ụbòsì. **Chiejìnè** (Main clause)  
You do not consider a day fruitless or write-off a day before nightfall.
- c) Isi eke nà adọkpụ ogbe ahụ a. **Isieke** (Noun phrase subject)  
The head (smaller part) of the snake pulls the whole trunk.
- d) Ụzọ ògò abụhọ ụzọ nwa. **Uzọgo** (Noun phrase subject)  
Going to the farm early does not correspond to early child bearing.
- e) Ashia ọma na ele onwee. **Ashiaoma** (Noun phrase subject)  
A good product for sale in the market sells/ advertises itself.



## ii. Final sentence clipping

- a) N'ubòsì òkè nwanḗ, òyì ànaa. **Oyianaa** (Main clause)  
A friend loses its relevance when family matters are discussed.
- b) Ùkè dīka eme onyḗ, ò gaduḗ. **Gadua** (Verb phrase)  
If one is not beset with difficulties on the way, he will get to his destination.
- c) Ùkò nwā bùtè ụgba àjà. **Ugbaàjà**. (Noun phrase object)  
The absence of a child is responsible for clay pots of ritual items.
- d) Ọnwụ adị ẹgbu ìjèlì. **Ijelii** (Noun object)  
Death does not kill....

## iii. Middle clipping

- a) Ashija zḗsija ùdenè ènweli ọdù. **Udene** (lexical - noun)  
When people disperse from the market, the vulture takes over.
- b) Wà èji ndù efee ọbā? **Ejindù** (Verb phrase)  
Do you worship a king with your life or / lay down your life for a king?
- c) Ọbù màkà ihìonū kà wa jì ẹgbu ọchù. **Ihionu**  
It is because of the mouth says that people commit murder.
- d) Akwụ sòlu ibè ò gbaa mmanù. **Soluibe** (Verb phrase)  
In the company of other palm nuts, one nut will produce oil.
- e) Ọnwụ ẹgbū nwa ùkètè ọ gà èlu kà òne nkwū. **Ukete/Ogaelu/Gelu**  
If death does not kill the young palm plant, it will grow to become a big palm tree.

## iv. Complex clipping

- a) Kà ànyị hà mụ amū abụhọ ọsì. **Kaaham**  
All that laugh/rejoice with us are not our friends'.
- b) Azụ amā ùyà. **Azuya**  
The back/ one's back does not know defeat.
- c) Èjèkòmtẹ gà èlu ebe o jèkò. **Ejete**  
As long as one is moving, they will get to their destination.

d) Ànyị dị nà ìgwè ànyị èmelie dikē. **Adigwe**

In great number, we defeat the valiant warrior.

Analysis has shown that constituents frequently retained as names are lexical nouns and noun phrases that form the subject or object of the sentences, as well as verb phrases or main clauses. Thus, only parts of the proverb are employed as personal names. Complete sentences employed as proverbs are few and they are made up of simple sentences only. Out of the one hundred proverbs collected for the study, only two are employed as names in their full forms, others are truncated. These are *Chi bù ùtùtù* 'The day is still morning/ not yet far-spent' and *Ụzụ akpụ nwā*. The blacksmith does not mould life. In each type, the constituent retained as the name is the most semantically relevant or most important part of the sentence. Oweleke (2021) has shown that proverbs can be expressed in simple, complex or compound sentences.

Furthermore, data for the study have shown that it is possible for two or more names to be derived from the sentence that make up the proverb. From the proverb, *Ọnwụ egbū nwa ùkètè ọ gà èlu kà òne nkwū*, ('If death does not kill the young palm plant, it will grow to become a big palm tree'), which implies where there is a will, there is a way, four proverb personal names are associated with it. A few examples are shown in the Table:3

**Table 3: Multiple derivation of proverb-names**

| S/N | Proverbs   | Proverb-names    |   |
|-----|--|------------------|---|
| 1.  | Ọnwụ egbū nwa ùkètè, ọ gà èlu kà òne nkwū. Where there is a will there is a way. | <b>Ọnwụegbu,</b> | 'if death does not kill                       |
|     |  | <b>Ukete,</b>    | 'young palm plant'/<br>'one's dream or vision |
|     |  | <b>Ogelu</b>     | It will become'/                              |
|     |  | <b>Gelu</b>      | will become'                                  |
| 2.  | Ìzùkà nà òfu nnē jì.   | <b>Izuka</b>     | 'solidarity'                                  |
|     |  | <b>Ofunne</b>    | 'unity'                                       |
|     |  | <b>Nneji</b>     | 'unity'                                       |
| 3.  | Nwa dī alọ wa jì aka naàbò àpa.  | <b>Nwadio</b>    | 'child is priceless'                          |
|     |  | <b>Dialo</b>     | 'weighty'                                     |

## Conclusion

This study has drawn attention to an area of scarce investigation in African and Igbo language studies. There are rich resources on Igbo proverbs and Igbo onomastics but not in the unique aspect of personal names associated with proverbs. Igbo proverb naming system, though not as elaborate and extensive as Ganda, as demonstrated by Musere's work on documentation of 700 Uganda proverb names is quite interesting and revealing. This paper offers a significant contribution to the linguistic processes prevalent in the nominal derivation of personal proverb names. Evidence from the investigation show that proverbs are relatively fixed and the derived truncated proverb-names call to mind the full forms of the proverbs, that the contextual, non-literal interpretation of the proverb is more relevant in name giving. Hence, the native speaker requires both linguistic competence as well as the communicative competence to interpret the full meaning of the proverb-names. The paper concludes that with lesser use of proverbs among the youth, this interesting and unique linguistic aspect of the name-giving among the Igbo is fast disappearing, and may go into extinction if unchecked through language documentation and revitalization programmes.

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