Chapter 13

A diachronic analysis of the socio-semantic features of Igbo personal names

Esther Nwakaego Oweleke

Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt

This paper examines Igbo personal names from the perspectives of anthropological linguistics, socio-semantics, pragmatics and diachrony. It traces the evolution of name-giving within three major eras, pre-Christian (before the 1850s), early-Christian (from 1857–1960s) and Pentecostal (1960s to date) among the Igbo. The data for the study are 300 personal names sourced through interviews with both old and young members of the Igbuzo-Igbo community as well as from class registers of some nursery, primary and secondary schools in Port Harcourt. This paper reveals three interesting and important findings. First, indigenous Igbo names are culturally, semantically and pragmatically significant. Second, the principles and practice of name-giving have undergone some drastic changes through the eras. During the early-Christian and Pentecostal eras, the forces of Christianity, modernization and globalization have resulted in new names that reflect these changes. Third, indigenous names which belong to the core vocabulary of the language are seriously endangered. The paper concludes that if the indigenous names that are replete with meaning, and portray the values, identity and the beauty of the Igbo culture are allowed to die through lack of intergenerational transmission, then this aspect of the language and culture will also die.

1 Introduction

In Igbo society, personal names (anthroponyms) are not mere resources for identifying human beings. They encode information about the socio-cultural values,

beliefs and world views of the people. The events surrounding the birth of a child, the physical appearance of the child, the state of mind and experiences of the parents, time and place of birth, as well as the shared values and beliefs of the society are all encapsulated in the names given to a child. Thus, the name a child bears says a lot about him and his parents. The name *Àgịlịga* , for example, tells us that the child is the second of a twin birth and *Àtọ* the third of a triplet. *Àdịmàbụa* reveals that the father of the child is an only male child of his own parents. *Nwaèlège* is given to a slim and slender female child and *Àlịàm* to a fair complexioned child. If a child is given the name *Nọ̀dụ*, it signifies that the parents have had other children before him who died before their naming ceremonies; that is, less than eight days after birth. *Òkelekē* is reserved for a male child born on the Èke market day.

Name giving is an aspect of the language which has attracted the attention of anthropologists, linguists and lately language documentation specialists. The practice and principles of naming have over the years provided a great resource for investigation in many African languages. Some Igbo writers like Ezeanya (1967); Ubahakwe (1981); Onukawa (1999; 2000); Iwundu (1994); Ezeude (2000); Nwigwe (2001); Okafor et al. (2008) and Onumajuru (2013) among others have described and documented Igbo anthroponyms. They believe that Igbo names reflect the value systems of the people. Madu (1996) notes that it is possible to understand, to a large extent the social, religious, historical and political issues in Igbo society through Igbo names. Consequently, Igbo names cannot be fully appreciated without adequate knowledge of the Igbo world view. In consonance with this view, Achebe (1975 as cited in Onukawa 2000) explains that, to know how life has treated an Igbo man is to look at the names his children bear, because they reflect his hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, and even his grievances against others. Similarly, Ekwunife (1989) observes that African names express African cosmology, social, economic, political, and religious values of the society, the tensions and struggles of man in society. From another perspective, Onyema (1999) sees Igbo names as being responsible for forming conscience and consequently determining the character of the bearer. Personal names include the first or given name (the name given to a child at birth by his/her parents), middle name, and family name or surname (the name normally inherited and shared with other members of the family).

The process of name giving in Igbo has witnessed a dramatic change as many indigenous names (especially given names) which reflect the core values, cultural identity and beauty of the Igbo language have been abandoned for the so called modern, "sophisticated" and "stylish", Christian, English, or French names, as well as names that reflect the Pentecostal movement and ideology. Before the

advent of colonialists and missionaries to the shores of Africa, all Igbo names (both first and family names) were indigenous to the culture of the people.

The motivation for this study comes from a sarcastic expression used by some Enuani-Igbo speakers around the 1970's: *Nwaùkpò abūhọ nwatà* 'Nwaukpo is not a child'. More specifically, it means, 'a woman named *Nwaukpo* is not a young woman'. Just before the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), most women who bore this name were already in their late thirties. The name was no longer found among children or young girls at that time. Thus, it readily revealed the age of the bearer. A woman in her thirties and unmarried in the African setting was stigmatized. The element, *ùkpò* 'throne' or a 'raised platform' usually inside the house is a metonymy for kingship. A contemporary replacement for the name is *Adaeze* 'Princess'. As significant as the name is, it is no longer borne by young girls. This is just one of the numerous Igbuzo indigenous names that are rarely given today as either a first or second name.

This study traces the names and name-giving trends within the three periods specified. It describes the socio-semantic and pragmatic features of Igbo traditional names; highlights the social and semantic changes that have taken place within the period, and examines the factors responsible for the drastic change and the reasons for non-generational transmission of both given and family names. Earlier works in Igbo anthroponomastics (the study of personal names) have largely adopted a synchronic approach, concentrating on the description of the semantic, syntactic, morphological analyses, and socio-cultural dimensions of Igbo personal names. This study however, takes a diachronic approach. It focuses on the content of names and its influence on social-cultural, pragmatic and semantic shifts, and so, investigates the implications of the trend to language endangerment. Therefore, it is relevant to Igbuzo-Igbo language documentation and contributes to general Igbo studies.

1.1 The Igbo language and its speakers

Igbo is the native language of the Igbo people, an ethnic group of South-Eastern Nigeria. It is spoken as a major and regional language in the states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Igbo is a minor language in Rivers and Delta states, and it is spoken as a second language by many non-Igbo speaking people within and outside Nigeria. It is one of Nigeria's three major languages; the others are Hausa and Yoruba. Igbo is spoken by 20–25 million people in Nigeria. It has numerous and divergent dialects that share a high degree of mutual intelligibility. Some of dialects include Owere, Onitsha, Orlu, Afikpo, Ngwa, Oguta, Ika, Ogwashi-Ukwu, and Igbuzo. Manfredi (1989) identified seven dialect zones

namely: Delta, Enyom Central, Plains, Oshimili, Omanbala, and Savana. The Igbuzo variety of the Enuani cluster has been chosen for the study. Igbo, like many Nigerian languages, is a tone language. It has two basic tones: high and low, as well as a downstep tone. The standard also referred to as Onwu Orthography of Igbo is used in this study for representation. The orthography consists of thirty six letters of the alphabet, made up of 28 consonants and 8 oral vowels, given in this normal order:

(1)　a.　Orthographic symbols:
⟨a b ch d e (ẹ) f g gb gh gw h i ị j k kp kw l m n ṅ ny nw o ọ p r s sh t u ụ v w y z⟩

　　b.　Phonetic representation:
[a b tʃ d e (ɛ) f g ɓ ɣ gʷ h i ɪ dʒ k ƥ kʷ l m n ŋ ɲ ŋʷ o ɔ p r s ʃ t u ʊ v w j z]

This is necessary to help non-native speakers with a linguistic background comprehend how to phonetically interpret the names. In this paper, high tones are left unmarked, low tones are marked with a grave accent [ˋ] and downstepped tones with a macron [ˉ] in line with the standard convention of Igbo orthography. Igbuzo dialect like many other Igbo varieties makes use of the ninth oral vowel ẹ/ɛ used in this paper.

1.2　Methodology

For this study, 300 personal names of both old and young members of the Igbuzo-Igbo community were collected through group interviews with Igbuzo men and women, living in, and outside Igbuzo town. Lists of registered students of the Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt as well as those of some primary and nursery schools in Igbuzo and Port Harcourt were examined. Clarification on the meanings and contexts of some specific names especially the philosophical and proverbial types were further elicited from personal interviews with bearers and some older members of the community versed in the traditional meaning of the names. Data collection was supplemented by investigator-based introspection of a competent native speaker. The three major eras identified for the study are Pre-Christian (before the 1850s), Early-Christian (from 1857–1960s) and Pentecostal (1960s to date). The Pre-Christian era is the period before the introduction of the white man's God in the religious concepts of the Igbo. The study shows how these three different periods have influenced name giving in Igbo. Three sets of data were used to reflect the pattern of the changes. Both literal and non-literal interpretations of the names are presented.

2 Some features of Igbo culture

The culture of a people is the totality of their ways of life. It includes their beliefs, ideas, language, religion, practices, attitudes, social behaviours and even the social/religious objects shared by them. Other aspects of culture include music, dance, clothes and food. Nida (1975 as cited in Surakat 2009) classifies culture into ecology, material, religious, social and linguistic culture. Language is an aspect of a people's culture. The words, idioms and proverbs found in a language are used for expressing the beliefs and practices of the people. Language is a custodian of the cultural realities of a people and a medium through which culture is generationally transmitted. This explains why indigenous Igbo names reflect the culture of the people.

Culture is dynamic and so is language; it is not static. As a society changes, so does its language. A language is complete for its indigenous culture, but as speakers make contact with new concepts, civilizations and languages, new terms emerge in the language to cope with new realities. No matter how homogenous a community/society is, culture changes since societies do not exist in isolation. The Igbo contact with Western culture is largely responsible for its change in cultural values.

2.1 Religion and the Igbo culture

A study of the religious culture reveals that Igbo traditional religion is polytheism. The people believe in and worship the supreme God, *Chukwu* or *Chi Ukwu* also known as *Chineke* (the Creator of all things), *Chukwu Òbièmè* (the Great achiever), *Òsàebùlụwà* (the Owner and Sustainer of the universe) as well as other deities, and spiritual forces. They worship deities such as *Àlà* – the Earth goddess, river gods/goddesses, *Anyanwū* – the Sun god, *Àmadị Ọhà* – Thunder, *Igwe* – the sky god, *Àshì* and *Chi* – personal gods and a host of others. *Chineke* or *Chukwu* the Supreme God was considered to be too high up and too far from the people to worship directly, so they needed intermediary beings to reach him. This situation explained the strong affinity the Igbo had to certain gods or deities that influenced the names they gave their children in the traditional setting. The belief in ancestors also pervaded the ethos of the period. According to Aligwekwe (1991), ancestors were the deceased members of the community who from the land of the dead could influence their family members.

Igbo generally believe that each person has a personal god known as *chi* which controls his or her destiny and is responsible for what makes the difference between individuals. Ezeanya (1967) explains that *chi* "is a word used commonly to

denote the good spirit which according to the belief of the Igbo people is assigned to everyone from conception." According to Onukawa (1999) most Igbo scholars believe that the concept of *chi* is central to the thought and belief of the Igbo. The concept is enigmatic and has been interpreted by different Igbo scholars as an individual's fate, luck, guardian angel/spirit, personal life force or 'individualized providence' or even a man's destiny god. In Igbo cosmology, *chi* is believed to be responsible for an individual's success or failure, abilities or weaknesses, fortune or misfortune and even his wealth or health. Traditionally, the concept of *chi* is different from *Chi-Ukwu* or *Chukwu*, the Supreme Being. With the advent of Christianity, however, *Chi* came to stand for the Supreme God – *Chi-Ukwu* or *Chukwu* and consequently, Igbo Christians now use *Chi* as the short form for *Chukwu.*

The belief in reincarnation and *ọ̀gbanje* is another aspect of the religious culture of the Igbo. It is the belief that a dead person has the ability to come back to life, or be born again into his family. They believe that their ancestors can come back to the world in the form of a new baby. An *ọ̀gbanje* child is believed to have cycles of life and death; the same child can die and be born several times to the same mother. The views of reincarnation and *ọ̀gbanje* are in opposition to Christianity.

Other cultural activities apart from religion include marriage ceremonies, title taking, initiations, burial ceremonies, childbirth, naming celebrations and other political activities. Child-naming is an important activity in Igbo land that it is done amidst celebration and great joy. In Igbuzo different sections of the community also engage in celebrating different festivals such as *Ị̀gbā Ine*, *Ị̀chụ̄ Ụ̀lọ̀*, *Ị̀gbā Ekwensu*, *Ị̀gbā Iwū*, and *Ìfèjiọkū*, (thanksgiving ceremonies to mark the end of a planting season while awaiting harvest), *Ịwāji* 'New Yam festival', *Ị̀gbā mgba* 'wrestling contest', and *Òtùtù* 'annual fishing contest', among others. All these activities which define the Igbo are reflected in the names they bear.

3 Socio-semantic features of name-giving in the Pre-Christian era

This section focuses on the analysis of the religious, philosophical, metaphorical and contextual meanings of Igbo names within this period, before 1857. This analysis is adopted because it helps to establish the basic forms of the names before the changes.

3.1 Traditional names with religious meaning

Names in this era reflect the religious facts about the Igbo. The names are couched in concepts like *mmūọ* 'spirit being', *chi* 'personal god/fate', *àshì* 'destiny', *ànị* earth deity', and *ǹzè* 'deity/royalty'. A close examination of the names reveals the importance Igbo people attach to religion. It shows their relationship and dependence on spiritual begins (the Supreme Being, other deities and ancestral spirits). Before the advent of Christian missionaries in Nigeria, the Igbo did not believe in the Christian God even though they believed in the Supreme Being – *Chukwu, Chineke, Chukwu Obieme, Òlìsà, Olisaebuluwa*, etc. Indigenous names which reflect this belief abound in this era. A few examples from Igbuzo-Igbo will suffice. The phonetic transcriptions of the names have been included to aid pronunciation.

Table 13.1: *Chi* names

Names	Pronunciation	Literal meaning
Chijìndụ̀	[tʃidʒìndɔ̀]	'God is the owner/giver of life'
Chiegbūnẹm	[tʃieɓunɛm]	'God should not kill me'
Chinèdu	[tʃinèdu]	'God directs/leads'
Chibụ̀ọgwù	[tʃibɔ̀ɔgʷɔ̀]	'God the healer'
Anaènechī	[anaènetʃi]	'Let's look up to God (for mercy)'

Table 13.2: *Mmūọ̄* names

Names	Pronunciation	Literal meaning
Mụ̄ọdèbè	[mʊɔdèbè]	'God/gods/ the spirit preserves'
Mụ̄ọsìmdị	[mʊɔs̀md]	'God/gods/the spirit asked me to be/stay'
Mụ̄ọgàha	[mʊɔgàha]	'God/the spirit is my arbiter'
Mụ̄ọlòokwu	[mʊɔlòokwu]	'God/god/spirit has the final say'
Ẹnẹmūọ	[ɛnɛmʊɔ]	'Let's look up to God (god)'

Mmụọ names could refer to the Supreme Being or any of the lesser gods or ancestors. The term is generic and also refers to ancestral spirits. *Chi* and *àshì* names are closely related. They can be interpreted as an individual's personal god or guardian angel or force which determines the person's fate. Besides, the information elicited from Igbuzo informants reveals that the concept of *chi* is not synonymous with the Supreme Being in the traditional setting.

Names with *àshì* are prevalent in the Enuani-Igbo cosmology and sometimes can be used interchangeably with *chi* names in Standard Igbo. *Ânị* the earth deity is also highly revered in the Igbo society and given the status of a god. It is regarded as the being in charge of morality, agriculture, reproduction and fertility. The concept of *Ǹzè* has dual interpretation; first as a kind of deity and secondly as referring to royalty. *Òlìsà* is a traditional name for the supreme God, and has the short forms as *Òsà* or *Òsè̀* . Examples of Ashi, Ani, Nze and Ose names are given in Tables 13.3–13.6.

Names that express the Igbo belief in religious objects of worship, adoration and practice also abound in this era. Such objects associated with deities include: *Òkwutè* 'stone', *mkpụlụ iyī* 'pebbles', *nkumè* 'rock', *Anyanwu* 'sun deity', *Ọ̀fọ* 'symbol of innocence', *ugwu* 'hill', *Àkpaàlà* 'thunder deity', *Iyiocha* 'clear/clean running river' and some animals: *Agū* 'lion', *Agụ Iyī* 'crocodile', and *eke ukwu* 'python'. These are totems believed to have spiritual significance.

Another significant aspect of naming in the traditional religious society which is no longer in vogue is that which revolves around the concepts of reincarnation, *ọ̀gbanje* and ancestors. These names were unique, interesting and very popular in the pre-Christian era. Some of the names in Table 13.7 are given to pacify or appease the children. However, some parents in indignation of the repeated deaths of the babies give them unpleasant and repulsive names that stigmatize and probably forbid them from going back to the spirit world. Such names include: *Ùlìòmàgwụ* 'day-old chicks for sacrifice are finished', *Ikpontū* 'refuse heap' or *Afàadìàzị̀* 'no more names to give' or *Ùdenè* 'vulture'.

Generally Igbo names are predominantly sentential in structure. They are nominals usually derived from phrases, especially noun and verb phrases and sentences (simple, complex and compound), and may be declarative, imperative or interrogative. They may also be in the affirmative or negative form. There are rarely single-morpheme names. Most personal names are expressed in full sentences that are often times clipped, leftward or rightward, in a way that makes deciphering of meaning unclear to the hearer. Some names may be clipped from the right or left only or from both as shown in the examples (2a–e) below. Clipping may involve segments, syllables, words or phrases. So, to decode the complete meanings of the names the sentences must be properly analysed to bring out the

Table 13.3: *Àshì* names

Names	Pronunciation	Literal meaning
Àshìkọdì	[aʃikɔdì]	'It is one's destiny'
Ikedìàshì	[ikedìàʃi]	'My destiny determines my achievement'
Dìbeàshì	[dìbeàʃi]	'Accept your destiny'
Àshionyeèduē̄	[aʃionyeèduē̄]	'One's god determines his fate'
Àshìèdo	[aʃièdo]	'One's god designs or determines his fate'

Table 13.4: *Ànị̀* names

Names	Pronunciation	Literal meaning
Ànìkàmgbòlù	[ànìkàmɓòlù]	'I take refuge in the earth deity'
Ànìèmekẹ	[ànìèmekɛ]	'The earth deity has done well'
Ànìàgọluṃ̄	[ànìàgɔlʊm̄]	'The earth deity speaks for me/is my arbiter'
Kànịkwù	[kànɪkwù]	'Ani (the earth deity) has the final say'

Table 13.5: *Òlìsà/Òsà/Òsẹ̀* names

Names	Pronunciation	Literal meaning
Òsàelòkẹ	[òsàelòkɛ]	'God has been very thoughtful'
Òlìsàdebe	[olisadebe]	'God preserves'
Òlìsàèmekẹ	[òlìsàèmekɛ]	'God has done well'
Òlìsèàlụka	[òlìsèàlʊka]	'God has achieved much for me'
Ọdị̀akaòsẹ̀	[ɔ̀dìakaòsɛ̀]	'It is in God's hand. (God is my help)'

Table 13.6: *Ǹzè* names

Names	Pronunciation	Literal meaning
Ǹzèkwe	[nzèkwe]	'If Nze/deity agrees...'
Ǹzèegbùnè	[nzèeɓùnè]	'Nze (Nze) should not harm, kill or cause sorrow)'
Ǹzèkwuẹ	[nzèkwuɛ]	'Nze has spoken'
Ǹzèèmekẹ	[nzèèmekɛ]	'Nze (deity or royalty) has done well'
Nwanzè	[ŋʷanzè]	'child of a noble one' ('prince')'

Table 13.7: Names portraying reincarnation and Ọgbanje concepts

Names	Pronunciation	Literal meaning
Nnam̀dị	[nnàmdì]	'My father is alive'/ my father has come back'
Ọnọ̀chie	[ɔnɔ̀tʃiɛ]	'One has come to replace another'
Àbịagọm̄	[àbiagɔm̄]	'I have come/returned'
Ọnwọ̀dị	[ɔŋʷɔ̀dɪ]	'Let this one stay/live'
Ǹkẹàdị	[nkɛàdɪ]	'This one must be (live)'
Nwanọ̀luẹ	[ŋʷanɔ̀luɛ]	'May this child live to a ripe old age'

underlying structure and meaning. In the sentences, the structures enclosed in brackets are the ones clipped.

(2) a. Izuka: Izu ka (na ofu nne)
         'Consultation/Solidarity is best achieved among maternal siblings.'

     b. Ụgbaàjà: (Ụkọ nwa bùtẹ̀) ụgba àjà
         'The absence of a child is responsible for clay pots of ritual items.'

     c. Adiigwe: À(nyị) dị (na) ìgwè, ànyị̀ èmeliẹ dike
         'In great number, we defeat the valiant warrior.'

     d. Elofu: (Chukwu adị̄) èlofù (onye o kè)
         'God does not forsake the one he created.'

     e. Isitọa: Isi tọ̀a (ò lịẹ ezẹ̀)
         'If the head (a man) grows old, he will become the chieftain of his clan.'

3.2 Philosophical names in the Pre-Christian era

Igbo names given to children in this era were highly philosophical; they reflected the thoughts of the Igbo man about his worldviews. Thus, to decode the meaning of these names is to understand the traditional Igbo man's philosophy of life. Table 13.8 shows a few examples.

As evident from the table, philosophical names are usually couched in rhetorical questions and figurative expressions. Metaphors, similes, metonymy, personification, and synecdoche are special strategies frequently employed. The names express Igbo maxims, aphorisms and are indeed proverbial. Like proverbial expressions, they are amenable to three levels of interpretation – literal, contextual

Table 13.8: Names depicting philosophical meanings

S/N	Igbuzo-Igbo Names	Literal meaning	Philosophical/Pragmatic Interpretations
1	Ọ̀nyekàozùlù	Is anyone all sufficient?	Name given in recognition of God's sovereignty and prerogative of distribution of resources/destiny.
2	Ọ̀nyepụ̀nụkà	Who can escape criticism?	No man is infallible. We all have our weaknesses.
3	Ọ̀nyejèbeolìsẹ̀	Who has ever visited God?	Diverse talents are given by God. You do not determine your fate.
4	Àkpàdòmònye	Am I inconveniencing anyone?	Response by a good and prosperous man who suffers extreme resentment from his relatives/neighbours.
5	Kahàmụ̀amụ	All that laugh/rejoice with you are not your friends.	Betrayal can come from one's household or a trusted friend.
6	Ọchụ̀kẹnyi	The one that pursues an elephant	The one who pursues a great vision about life (given to one envisioned to have great fortune in life.
7	Ụzụakpụnwa	A blacksmith cannot make life.	Man does not create life. To an Igbo, life is sacred and should not be destroyed.
8	Ọ̀nyekàọnwụfùjụ	Does death reject anyone?	The name describes the inevitability of death.
9	Ọnwụyàli	Death, please, let go...	Given in a family where many had died before the child's birth.
10	Ọnwụàchi	Death rules as master.	The Igbo recognizes the supremacy of death.

and philosophical. Given their internal lexical structure, they are culture specific and so only those familiar with the culture are able to understand the semantic nuances, hidden associations and allusions in the names. Thus, deciphering such names require the contextual implication surrounding the birth of the child. This is also responsible for the many interpretations these names could be subjected to.

Some Igbo names like the philosophical names are derived from proverbs that have undergone clipping. The clipped, short or surface forms are left when the other parts have been deleted. The proverbs, *Nwa fẹ̀ẹ nnà a, ò bulu isi nkā* 'If a child honours his father, he will grow to old age' and *Kà ànyị hà mụ amū abụhọ ọ̀sị̀* 'All that laugh/rejoice with you are not your friends' are shortened to *Nwafẹẹ* and*Kaham* as names. The bearers and members of the community know the full forms and meanings of the proverbs/names. Other examples of truncated proverbs have been given in Examples (2a–e) in §3.1. Similarly, Musere (1999) has a good account of this naming strategy among the Ganda people of Uganda. However, in Igbuzo, not all names are derived from proverbs or express the philosophical thoughts of the people.

The Igbo perceive *ọnwụ* as a mysterious and enigmatic phenomenon in the reality of existence. To express this view, most *ọnwụ* names as above employ personification, that is, in the names, *ọnwụ* 'death' is personally addressed. Quite often, the names remind the people of the inevitability, universality and humbling nature of death. Alternatively, *ọnwụ* is seen as merciless and vicious. Philosophical names in general find expressions in rhetorical questions because their answers are obvious and usually the only one possible. For example: Does death reject anybody? Is anyone all sufficient? The obvious answer is "No".

3.3 Contextual relevance of traditional Igbo personal names

Names that carry a high degree of contextual relevance characterized the pre-Christian era. In short, one can convincingly say that every Igbo traditional name had a covert or an overt contextual implication which told the story of the child, his family or his entire village. Context as a name-giving strategy refers to the physical features of the child, the place and time of birth, the sex of the child and the entire event surrounding the birth of the child. The four market days of *Èke, Olìe, Àfò̩* and *Ǹkwọ*, frequently formed very useful resources for naming both male and female children in Igbo land. The linguistic element *òko, òkolo* or *oke* in a name suggests that the bearer is a male and *m̀gbọ* or *àda* is used for females. Below are some names reflecting the four market days:

(3)   Female
    Ṃgbọeke 'born on Èke day'
    Ṃgbọnkwọ̀ 'born on Ǹkwọ day'
    Ṃgbọàfọ̀ 'born on Àfọ̀ day'
    Ṃgbọolìe 'born on Olìe day'
    Àdaòlìe 'born on Olìe day'

    Male
    Òkelekē 'born on Èke day'
    Òkonkwọ 'born on Ǹkwọ day'
    Òkoàfọ̀ 'born on Àfọ̀ day'
    Òkolìe 'born on Olìe day'
    Nwaeke 'born on Èke day'

In addition, some Igbo personal names reflect the place or time of birth of a child. A name like *Nwaọbọshị* 'child of Ọbọshị' or *Òkọbọshị* 'male child of Ọbọshị' a river deity in Igbuzo is usually given to a child in appreciation or dedication to *Ọbọshị* goddess by her devotees or to a child born by the *Ọbọshị* river. *Nwaozili* or *Ozili* is a name given to a child born along a tarred road. The names *Òkugbō or Nwandiògò* refer to 'a male child born in the farm', whereas *Òkeinē or Òkeụlọ̀* is a name for a male child. The names *Àdaụlọ/Àdaine* are give to a female born on *Ine* and *Ụlọ̀*, festivals in Ìgbuzo. Where a man finds respite from problems in his maternal family rather than among his kith and kin, he names his child *Ikwunnekàt* for 'mother's birth place is supreme/my respite', or *Ìzùkà-nàòfunnē* 'there is greater solidarity in maternal affiliation', or *Ǹnebụ̀ọ̀gọ̀* 'mother is kindness'. A child named *Nwaụ̄kọ* reveals that the child is born during famine or some scarcity. *Egobī* 'obi's jewel' is usually borne by the king's first daughter. To express physical appearance, Igbo use names such as *Òkọcha/Nwaokọcha-* 'a fair complexioned male', *Òkojiī/Òkonji/Nwanji/Òkonwanji* for a dark complexioned male child, *Nwalùpuẹ* for a plump and robust child, and *Mgbuude, Àlìàm,* or *Nwaèlège* for a slim, elegant and adorable child. These names are given as tradition stipulates on the eight day after birth.

Other names express the Igbo belief and views about longevity, strength and security, wealth, sustenance, bravery, respect for elders, filial affection, barrenness, and inestimable value for children, the importance attached to the male child above the female in a family, as well as names that express the practice of polygamy. All these are beautifully couched in the names children bore in Igboland in the pre-Christian period especially before the Nigerian Civil War. Names like *Ìlobàbaechìnẹ̀ (Ìlobàa), Òbòdòechìnẹ̀, Ụzọ̀echìnè, Òbiechìnè,* and *Afàmefùnẹ* are given to male children to express their parents' desire and prayer for con-

tinuity or preservation of the family name/lineage. Names as these were given to celebrate the goodness of the Supreme Being. A child is of inestimable value in Igbo and as such a woman without a child is ridiculed and considered as worthless or cursed. Thus, *Nwalọ̀kọ̀mobì (Nwalọ̀kọ̀)* 'child comforts me', *Nwakàegō* 'child is greater than wealth', *Nwanyèmume* 'child is my strength and security', *Nwaamaka* 'child is beautiful', *Nwaejìje* 'child is my jewel', *Giikànwa* 'what can be more valuable than a child', *Nwabụ̀ǹdò* 'a child is your shield/cover', and *Nwabụwà* 'child is the essence of life', are a few significant names common at that time which express the importance of child bearing in Igbo. However, women who had infertility challenges responded to the derision and scorn they suffered in the names they gave their children when they finally got blessed. Names like *Ajọ̄okwuàgwụ* 'ridicle, finaly came to an end', *Ọ̀kèdịnàchi* 'my lot is in God', *Ọnụwàegbunẹm* 'the reproach of my adversaries will not kill me' and *Ùwàkwuẹliẹ* 'the world/enemies should take back their criticism' are a few examples. As evident from the analyses, names in this era carry along with them high semantic-pragmatic import necessary for effective communication among members of the community.

4 Name-giving in the Early-Christian era

With the introduction of Christianity came monotheism and the change in faith, philosophy and the general world view of the Igbo. Apparently, the new religion was in opposition to the Igbo practice of polytheism. This crossroads gave rise to a partial acceptance of the Christian God. Thus, the Igbo imbibed Christianity but did not completely abandon their own traditional ways. They still practiced and worshipped their deities and ancestors in addition to the Christian God. The belief in ancestors, re-incarnation, medicine men, wearing of charms and amulets persisted. All of these events reshaped the practice and principles of the new sets of names that characterized the period. The naming system in this era therefore has witnessed significant social and semantic changes.

4.1 Social changes in naming-practices in the Early Christian era

A number of significant social changes have taken place. First, the addition of the Christian names to the traditional names was witnessed. Most people, who had two Igbo traditional names, at baptism, took on European and Christian names (names of saints for the Roman Catholics, or Bible figures for non-Catholics). Thus, Nwanze Òwèlèmekẹ and Mgbuude Ofili became William Nwanze Òwèlèmekẹ and Bridget Mgbuude Ofili. With time too, the Igbo middle names were

dropped for the English Christian names, e.g. Bridget Ofili. In some cases, both given and surnames were out-rightly replaced with English names in a way that it becomes difficult to identify the place of birth of the individual.

Second, their new belief in *Chi-Ukwu*, or, *Chukwu* (the Christian God) now finds expressions in the names given to the children. With Christianity, *Chukwu/ Chi* names became very popular. The concept of *Chukwu* now denotes the Christian God and faith. *Chi* names no longer refer to the bearer's personal god, some force or destiny, but to the God Almighty, the father of Jesus Christ. *Chi* is now taken as the short form of *Chukwu* and so *Chi* and *Chukwu* names are now used interchangeably. Impressionistically, *Chi/Chukwu* names account for about 60-65 percent of Igbo names, both given and family names. A name common in this era was: *Chukwudùmèbi* which translates to the biblical Emmanuel –'God is with us', and borne by most first born sons in many families. Others include:

(4) *Chinedu* 'God is my shepherd or God guides'
    Chukwumụanya 'God does not sleep/slumber'
    Ọlụchukwu 'The marvelous works of God'
    Uchechi 'God's will is supreme'
    Chukwudunzọ̄ 'God will fight for me'
    Onyinyechi 'God's gift (probably the gift of the Holy Spirit)'

Third, the *m̀mụọ̄, ànị̀, chi, àshì, òlìsà* and other names which represented deities, lesser gods, spirits, destiny and forces were substituted for *Chukwu/Chi* names since they are used interchangeably in the early Christian era. Names that portrayed the traditional religious practices of the people, religious objects, reincarnation and the *ọ̀gbanjē* concept were consequently dropped. More specifically, *chi* names no longer refer to one's personal god or destiny force, but to the Christian God. At this stage too, the names were no longer given to babies as first names, but were found only among the older members of the community. A few examples in Table 13.9 would suffice.

Family names (that is, inheritable surnames that pass through many generations, not patronymic) were also dropped in favour of Christian names. The naming system consequently witnessed a significant shift in this era as a good number of individuals changed their family names because of the negative meanings they consider them to connote in contemporary times based on the change in religious values. Names like *Nwaọ̀bọ̀shị̀* 'a child of Ọbọ̀shì deity', *Ânị̀èmekẹ* 'The Earth deity has done well', *Ọfọegbù* -'Ọfọ (deity) should not kill', and *Nwosū* 'child of òsu caste' have been dropped by their bearers. In addition to the surnames, first and second names were replaced. Consequently, names such as Nancy Immanuel, Mercy Johnson, David Harrison, Morris Jacobs, Michael Peters and Allen

Table 13.9: Substitution of traditional name for the Christian

Traditional Names	Early Christian Names	Meaning
Mmụọ̀mà	Chukẁumà	'God is all knowing'
Mmụọ̀zọ̀ba	Chizọ̀ba	'God is able to rescue'
Mmụọ̀ka	Chika/Chukwuka	'God is supreme'
Ònìsàdebe	Chukwudebe	'God preserves'
Anigbọ̀gụ	Chigbọ̀gụ	'God, our arbiter'
Ànìèmekẹ/Òlìsàèmekẹ	Chukwuèmekẹ	'God has don well'
Ònyebụàshì	Ònyebụ̀chi	'Who is like unto God'
Àshìèdu	Chinèdu	'God guides'

Moses and others that blur the socio-cultural identity and generational information about the bearer now abound. In the past you could determine the part of Igbo land that a person came from by their surnames. Such information has been completely obliterated by the new naming system in the Early-Christian era. The names, first, middle and last are now woven around the Christian doctrine and Western civilization.

4.2 Semantic changes in the Early-Christian era

Forces of Christianity, colonization and modernization all add up to influence the semantic changes that names have undergone. Christianity in Igbo has changed the traditional meaning of *Chi*/*Chukwu* names and eroded reference to other deities. First, I will examine the religious terms denoting the spirit beings:

In the traditional setting, *Chi* and *Chukwu* were not synonymous; *Chi* specifically referred to one's personal god or destiny and *Chukwu* to the Supreme-Being. Similarly, the Christian God and *Chukwu*, the Igbo supreme being were not equivalent terms. The *mmụọ̀, ànì, chi, àshì, òlìsà* names now no longer denote spirits, destiny or lesser gods but the supreme God of the Christians. These terms too have become polysemous, capable of more than one interpretation depending on the religious value of the one using the term (whether Christian or non-Christian). So the different senses now exist in the Igbo lexicon.

Words reflecting the religious concepts of reincarnation and *ọ̀gbanje* in the past have their original figurative meaning exchanged for the literal. *Abịagọm* – 'I have come/returned'; *Nọ̀sikē* 'Sit well'; *Anàzịà* 'Don't go anymore'. Their figurative meanings have become restricted. The concepts of *ọ̀gbanje* and reincarnation have been debunked by medicine and science and Christianity, so new

Table 13.10: Semantic changes in the early Christian era

S/N	Word	Old meaning	New meaning
1	Chi/chì	'personal god', 'fate', 'destiny'	the Christian God, every believer's God, the supreme God
2	Chukwu	'supreme being'	'the Christian God', 'the father of Jesus Christ'
3	àshì	'fate', 'destiny'	the Christian God, supreme God
4	ǹzè	'a deity'	'royalty'
5	ànị	'a deity', 'goddess'	'community', 'place of origin', 'birth place' 'earth', floor
6	m̀mụ̄ọ̄	a spirit being	'Holy Spirit', 'evil spirit'
7	ọnwụ	connotes extreme fear, mystery	a means to eternity

names that reflect the immediate realities of the time are now favoured. However, it is important to state that not all Igbo imbibed Christianity, and so, those who still practise traditional religion still favour the original senses.

Other words indigenous to the culture have become obsolete, less frequently used, or have changed their meanings, (that is, have their meanings extended or restricted). I give some examples in Table 13.11.

Words like *ùkpò* 'throne', *Nwukpò* 'personal name', *m̀gbọ* 'girl', *bàa* 'father', *nzọ̀lọ* 'consultation', *lọ̀kọ̀* 'console' and others are now obsolete and at the verge of extinction. Some others are more frequently used by the older members of the community. The younger generation use the newer equivalents. This situation has created temporal semantic variations in the language such as: *ọnwọ̀ ∼ nkẹà* 'this one', *ògò ∼ ugbō* 'farm', *ọ̀sị̀ ∼ ọ̀di mmā* 'goodness', *ùlìòm ∼ nwa ọ̀kụkụ* 'chick', *elò ∼ uchè* 'thoughtfulness' and others. Sets of existing pairs of temporal variants in the language have thus, created synonyms in the language.

4.3 Name-giving in the Pentecostal era

With the introduction of Pentecostal movement and ideology (another form of Christianity) in the 1930s came a more drastic change in name-giving. The Pentecostal move offers a complete rejection of the traditional religious values of the Igbo and so, out-rightly opposes polytheism. Their mission emphasizes evangelism, miracle working, divine healing, conversion, dependence on the Holy

Table 13.11: Some indigenous Igbuzo words

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
lòkò̩	'console'	ùkpò̩	'throne'
bàa	'father'	ejìje	'jewel'
medu̩	'accomplish'	nzò̩lo̩	'consultation'
gbòlu	'protect/defend'	o̩bò̩	'vengeance'
elò	'thoughtfulness'	enū	'world'
kàlu̩	'slander'	mkpu	'condolence'
ngòli	'enjoyment'	ògò	'farm'
ùlìòm	'chick'	u̩gbā	'calabash plate'
mkpàmi̩	'appreciation'	ikwu	'kindred'
ò̩sì̩	'goodness'	èlège	'slim'/'elegance'
m̀gbo̩.	'girl'	ìlo	'lineage'
mgbuūde	'lustre'	gbo ògù	'arbiterate'
o̩nwò̩	'this'	àjà	'ritual items'
Èke	'first day of the week'		

Spirit, empowerment for the supernatural, passion for worship, praise and prayer and this has made the Pentecostals stand out from orthodox groups before them. Ironically, the doctrine downplays holiness and righteous living, and emphasizes prosperity of the body and so, Pentecostalism has been described as "feel good Christianity". The philosophy encourages positive confessions and rejects suffering, long suffering and persecution, and everything that is negative, as they argue that God is the author of all that is good. And so, such expressions as *I am blessed*, *It is well with me*, *There shall be no loss*, *I am highly favoured*, among others, quite often are common with Pentecostal adherents. A few examples of English and Igbo first names that reflect the ideology of this period are given in Tables 13.12 and 13.13.

4.4 Social changes in the Pentecostal era

The period introduced a more drastic change in name-giving. Names in this era, both English and Igbo reveal a great affinity to positive thinking and confession, and rejection of certain realities – poverty, lack, sickness, and barrenness. Popular names in the Pre-Christian and Early Christian era such as *Ndidi*, 'patience', *Ndidiamaka* 'patience is honourable', *Dibeashi* 'accept whatever comes your way as the will of God', and *Nebeolisa* 'look up to God' are no longer in vogue.

Table 13.12: Typical English Pentecostal names

Amblessed	Glory	Honour	Evidence
Everlasting	Prayer	Faithful	Miracle
Anointed	Excellent	Praise	Melody
Gracious	Precious	Warrior	Endwell
Brightness	Favour	Prosper	Godspresence
Redeemed	Worship	Marvelous	Trueson
Breakthrough	Godson	Rejoice	Winner
Steadfast	Goshen	Miraculous	Delight

Table 13.13: Typical Igbo names in the Pentecostal period

Somtochukwu	'Praise God with me'	Chukwuebuka	'God is awesome'
Busomma	'Be so good'	Chisom	'God is with me'
Chinaza	'God answers prayers'	Chimamanda	'My God will not fail me'
Munachim	'My God and I'	Chidera	'Steadfastness of God'
Chinaemezunkwa	'God fulfils his promise'	Tobechukwu	'Begin to praise'
Chinonyelum	'God be with me'	Chukwunonso	'God is near'
Ekenedilichukwu	'Thanks be to God'	Ogochukwu	'God's mercy/kindness'
Ọlụchukwu	'God's marvelous works'	Kamsiyochukwu	'As I implored of God'

In addition, unlike naming patterns in the Christian and traditional era, Pentecostal names given in English no longer tell stories about the specific events surrounding the birth of the child and the experiences of the parents. Names such as *Breakthrough, Brightness, Gospel, Beloved, Prayer, Praise, Steadfast*, and *Everlasting* do not portray any unique social relevance to the child.

Clipping, a major strategy of name-giving is used here to make the names sound sophisticated, foreign and stylish. The names, therefore, do not conform in both style and structure with Igbo words as shown in Table 13.14.

Table 13.14: Clipped forms of Igbo names

Names	Clipped form	Names	Clipped form
Somtochukwu	Somto, Somie	Kamsiyochukwu	Kamsy, Kamsie
Kosisochukwu	Kosy	Chimamanda	Mandy, Amanda
Ekenedilichukwu	Eky	Onyekachukwu	Katchy, Katch
Chinonyelum	Nolly	Chukwuemeka	Mekus, Chucks
Chukwunonso	Nonso	Chukwuebuka	Bukas, Ebus
Ọlụchukwu	Ollie	Uche	Utchay

Clipping in this era has surpassed the earlier period and has become more sophisticated and complex due to the adoption of English spelling and pronunciation. It is observed that the clipped or shortened forms leave the names meaningless and devoid of any socio-cultural associations. However, bearers assert that the forms make them feel good, more modern and attract more attention. Furthermore, data reveal that these clipped forms are registered officially. Clipping as a naming strategy has significantly changed the social-cultural and semantic import of naming practice and principles in Igbo.

5 Conclusion

Most works done in Igbo anthroponyms in the past decades have concentrated largely on the synchronic analysis of the socio-cultural import and linguistic features of personal names, but this paper has specifically examined Igbo personal names from a diachronic perspective. It highlighted the features that characterize the shifts in the practice of name-giving in the three periods chosen for the study. It reveals a number of interesting and significant facts about the evolving trends in the practice of name-giving in Igbo. In addition, the paper demonstrates

that name-giving, an aspect of the Igbo language is seriously endangered as the traditional names that reflect the core vocabulary of the language are fast disappearing. Facts about the core vocabulary items show a drastic reduction in the use of indigenous names that are replete with meaning and portray the socio-cultural values of the people. A significant percentage of the vocabulary is now limited to the older members of the speech community. Quite a good number of these words however, have been documented in this study. The lack of intergenerational transmission coupled with facts of globalization is largely responsible for the situation. We therefore warn that if the trend is not checked through documentation, a major aspect of the Igbo language and heritage would be lost.

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