SEMANTIC SIGNIFICATION AND PRAGMATIC IMPLICATURE IN PERSONAL NAMES IN IJO LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of Ijo Personal naming system from the semantic and pragmatic perspective. Although quite much has been done on **onomastics**, not much scholarship on Semantics and Pragmatics of Ijo Personal Names has been done. And this is the gap this work intends to fill. The study employs Austin's Speech Act Theory as a tool in the analysis and interpretation of Ijo personal names as it relates to its locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary forces. It also employs the felicity conditions with attention to the sincerity, preparatory, executive and fulfillment conditions which justify the names and naming procedure among the Ijo. Data for this study are obtained through interview, few works written on names and personal observation. Findings from the study show that names have different locutionary forces couched in structures such as NPs, VPs, sentencial, imperatives, elliptical, interrogative. The study reveals onomastic in Ijo language and culture reveal embedded meanings and pragmatic implicatures beyond being mere signification and identification labels. This essay is significant as it foregrounds the cultural, sociolinguistic and pragmatic magnitude of names.

Keywords: Onomastic names, semantic signification, pragmatic implicature, speech acts, Ijo

1. Introduction

This study examines the semantic signification and pragmatic implicatures of Ijo personal names. Personal naming practice or onomastics is a universal tradition, as Philip (2019 p.56) reiterates. Names are embedded in languages, and these languages carry the culture, beliefs and origin of persons, that is, the name bearer. Lyons (1977, p. 32) describes language as an instrument of communication. A name is a signifier of individuals in society and that is why every human being is given a name at birth a personal identity and by which an individual is distinguished from other people or things (Olatunji, Issah, Noah, Muhammed &

Suleiman, 2015). In addition, names are usually coined as phrases, clauses and sentences, and in which case, they carry illocutionary force.

As a people and a language, naming is natural among the Ijos. As a component element of language which carries the culture of the owners, name largely exude and reflect the worldview of the linguistic community as the Ijos. Therefore, naming is as important to the Ijo people as the birth of a child and parents express all their expectations in life in the name they give to their child/children. From the name children bear, one can guess the intention/life experiences or expectations of the child's parents. Basically, Ijo people give names to their children based on what they have passed through in life, what they are going through, and their expectations of the future (circumstance naming). A typical example is the name and ***Nimiweriyananagha*** meaning 'had I known, I wouldn't have married (her)". This name is has pragmatic interpretations. The name was given to the child because he felt he would not have married the woman/ child's mother if he had known, so it is through the name given to the child he announces his regret of marrying the mother of the child. The semantic signification and pragmatic implicatures of names in Ijo are also espoused in Kwokwo, (2009 p15) According to him, names are an integral part of language and they identify specific, unique, and identifiable individual entities. Names being part of the language of a people are intrinsically part of their culture. Mbonu (2010 p15) defines a personal name in Igbo as a story. She opines that a name functions as a place-holder, social location and a part of belonging in most African societies.

A name defines a person, gives a sense of identity to who a person is as well as the communities they belong, and their place of birth. Some of them establishes the nativity of an individual, a person's place of birth, the supremacy of God as protector and provider, and the power of their deities. Names are more than a bunch of letters grouped together to sound pleasant to the ear because every name carries power and significance, in such a way that a positive name portends positive outcomes, while a negative name brings negativity. Names perform a variety of discourse and pragmatic functions, such as requesting, commanding, questioning/inquiring, and stating/informing. However, some of the discourse and pragmatic functions names perform in Ijo society are praise and worship of God or gods, expression of wishes, testament of place, circumstances of birth, praise of self and demonization of others (Kwokwo, 2009). In Nigeria, names are used to convey certain messages, either to an individual, family members or a community. It is observed that majority of the Ijo names show in one way or the other the people's awareness of their complete dependency on the spiritual being, namely

the supreme God, minor deities and ancestral spirits. Names are an incredibly important part of our identity. Whatever God created on earth ought to have a name.

Language has numerous definitions due to diverse perspectives among linguists. Richards and Schmidt (2010) define language as a structured system of sounds for communication. Dom and Uche (2010) describe it as an arbitrary symbol system tied to cognition and expression. Ikenna et al. (2022) see it as central to social interaction and cultural expression. Generally, names are often mere identifiers or signifiers of real entities in the material world. However, in African and particularly Ijo culture, names carry deep meanings, believed to influence the bearer's destiny. This belief is shared by classical Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Roman traditions.

2. Statement of Problem

Onomastics or naming is a universal practice across cultures and languages since they are a means of signification and identification of human and non-human entities in the world. The importance of naming has generated significant volume of research but Ijo anthroponomy has received little scholarly attention, particularly from a pragmatic perspective. While some studies have explored the meanings of Ijo names - often highlighting their circumstantial nature - there is no evidence of a detailed analysis using pragmatic principles. Existing research tends to focus mainly on theophoric names, leaving a gap in the linguistic understanding of Ijo personal names. This study therefore aims to fill this gap by analyzing the semantic signification and pragmatic implicatures of Ijo names, recognizing their cultural significance and their linguistic contribution to Ijo identity.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine Ijo indigenous personal names in the context of culture
2. To ascertain the pattern of semantic signification of names
3. To identify various pragmatic functions names perform in Ijo language

4. Theoretical Framework

The research is hinged on semantics concepts of *signifier* and the signified, and pragmatic Speech Act theory relating to locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary utterances as well as the finer perceptive utterance typologies of assertive, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative utterances. The Speech Act theory is adopted in this study to underscore the fact that names in Ijo culture, being an integral part of the language as noted by some scholars

referenced earlier, are utterances or statements with pragmatic force and a story to tell.

A number of pragmatics theories have been propounded by many scholars and linguists over the years but this study is based on J.L Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory (SAT) in Pragmatics as it relates to its locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary forces in the analysis and interpretation of utterances. Some of the performative illocutionary speech acts, according to Searle (1999) are Assertives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives and Declaratives. Wardhaugh (2006) states that humans communicate through utterances couched in sentences which may be stating, questioning, requesting and exclaiming (p.284). Speech Acts (SA) are therefore, concerned with what utterances do and how we use them in conversation. Most utterances by speakers make propositions which may be true or false in a world of reality

Locutions are the actual words or utterances speakers use to communicate their ideas or make their propositions. Illocutionary acts express the desires of the speaker. It causes the listeners to want to do something, react to what the speaker has said. Out of these myriads of kinds of utterances, Austin identified Performative Utterance as a unique type of speech act. In a performative utterance, Wardhaugh points out that a person is not just saying something but is actually doing something if certain real- world conditions are met (p.285). Hence, if a speaker says *I name this building Margaret Ekpo Hall*, or *I pronounce you husband and wife* or *I sentence you to life imprisonment,* the person has not just said something but has actually done something. Hence, Speech act theory with its locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary forces is directly relevant to the task of naming and interpreting names of members of Ijo cultural society. This is because the naming of the child by the name-giver is a locutionary act as it involves the use of the actual words that constitute the bearers name. The name-givers intention is for the members of the community to know, recognize and call the bearer by that name.

Austin (1962) distinguishes a special kind of utterance in speech act as performative utterances or performative acts (Mabaquiao 2018/2019:11). These are utterances which do not just say something but through which the speaker actually does something if certain conditions are met. Performative utterances are action-packed. Austin prescribes that for performative utterances to be successful or have the desired effects on the listeners or hearers they must meet certain felicity conditions. These are real-world conditions that must be met before such utterances are acceptable and binding. Consequently, on the basis of the principles

of illocutionary point, direction of fit, and sincerity condition, Searle (1999, ctd in Mabaquiao, Jr. (2018/2019) identified the following basic types of speech acts:

(**1) Assertives**. E.g.: statements, descriptions, classifications, and explanations. Illocutionary Point: "[T]o commit the hearer to the truth of the proposition. **(2) Directives.** E.g.: orders, commands, and requests. Illocutionary Point: "[T]o try to get the hearer to behave in such a way as to make his behavior match the propositional content of the directive

(3) Commissives. E.g.: promises, vows, pledges, contracts, and guarantees. Illocutionary Point. For the speaker to commit "to undertake the course of action represented in the propositional content'

(4) Expressives. Some examples are: apologies, thanks, congratulations, welcomes, and condolences. Illocutionary Point: "[T]o express the sincerity condition of the speech act".

(5) Declaratives. E.g.: "I pronounce you man and wife," "War is hereby declared," "You are fired," and "I resign." Illocutionary Point: "[T]o bring about change in the world by representing it as having been changed"

5. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on selected Ijo personal names. The research work has been limited to investigating the semantic and pragmatic functions of Ijo personal names in communities in Kolokuma and Opokuma clans in the Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area in Bayelsa State. Communities in Kolokuma and Opokuma clans are used in this study because Kolokuma dialect of Izon has grown to become the mainstream dialect as it is used in education and the mass media.

6. Literature Review

Naming dates back to Creation, with Adam as the first name-giver (Gen. 2:19–20). Biblical naming, such as Cain, Esau, and Jacob, reflects descriptive theories where names match traits or circumstances. Saeed (2003) notes that while English names perform identity functions alone, African names reveal culture, beliefs, and aspirations. There is a dearth of onomastic studies in Ijo language. However, Kwokwo's (2009) article entitled Socio-Cultural Significance and Discourse Functions of Names in Izón Culture is a rare exception. In this paper, Kwokwo argues that Names are an integral part of Language ant they identify specific, unique and identifiable individual is entities. He expresses the view that "names do not just serve as identity or signifiers but embed in perform some other deep

social, cultural, religious and philosophical implications". Kwokwo's study explored socio-cultural and discourse functions of names in Izón culture.

Kwokwo (2010) identifies the following socio-cultural and discourse functions of names in Izon language: expression of religious belief, expression of wishes and prayers, testament of place and circumstance of birth, the mysticism of the reincarnation and linguistic symbolism. He concludes that, people often use name and language to locate themselves in a multi-dimensional social space, just as Hudson (1980:195) argues, in his book *Sociolinguistics* that people use speech (and names being words of the language, and part of the speech) as a source of information about the speakers or a third person's social circumstances.

7. Data Presentation and Analysis

The data presented is a random selection of names. The data is in form of typology names, semantic denotation and pragmatic essence in a tabular form below.

Table 1: Semantic and Pragmatic Typology of Names

Name Typology	Ijo Names	Semantic Meaning	Pragmatic Speech Act
Theophoric	Woyengikuro	The power of God and his supremacy	Assertive illocutionary Speech Act making a statement or proposition of truth
	Woyengiebi	The goodness of God	Assertive illocutionary Speech Act making a statement or proposition of truth
	Woyengidinipre	God protect for me	Directive illocutionary Speech act. This is a request or prayer to God.
Belief and Worldview	Fiibara	Forget death or Death forget me	An order; Direcitve illocutionary Speech Act. Expecting the hearer to act in a particular way.

	Mawaikumo	Do not return (to the land of the dead)	An order, Directive illocutionary Speech Act
	Mawaigha	Will not return (to the land of the dead	Locutionary (commissive) Speech Act – speaker makes a statement, declaration or a promise
	Youkori	One to stop 'crying' or tears or sorrow	Illocutionary performative speech Act. It is an action stopping someone from crying or stopping someone's sorrow.
Deity Oriented	Egbesuye	A child belonging to the Egbesu deity	Constative or Assertive illocutionary Speech Act making a statement or proposition of fact.
Testament of birth place or nativity	Odiowei	A man from/ of Odi	Assertive illocutionary speech act. The implicature is that the bearer is a native of Odi town or was born in Odi Town.
	Kaiamaere	A woman of kaiama	Assertive illocutionary speech act. The implicature is that the bearer is a native of Kaiama town or was born in Kaiama Town
Adversarial	Ilakimifa	Nobody is as good as me. Nobody is up to me (in wealth or importance)	Assertive illocutionary Speech Act with implicature of talking down on some perceive adversaries
	Toboulayefa	Nothing equal to (having) a child	Assertive illocutionary speech act. The implicature is money or wealth cannot be compared to children. A Locutionary Speech Act of

			fact
	Bubarayelayefa	Nothing is as good as having yours	Assertive illocutionary Speech Act; The implicature is money or wealth cannot be compared to children. A Locutionary Speech Act of fact

The names presented in the table above are categorized in to three broad classes, namely theophoric, beliefs and worldview, geospatial testament. Deity worship is also theophoric, in a sense. But, more important they are statements that carry different pragmatic illocutionary force. For instance, the names Woyengikuro and Woyengiebi are both theophoric as they refer to some quality of God Almighty. However, in terms of pragmatic illocutionary force, both are Assertive illocutions. This means that they are just statements of fact irrespective of their truth condition status. The name Egbesuye reflects the traditional religious belief by stating that the entity so named belongs to "Egbesu" deity. Therefore, it also possesses Assertive illocutionary force.

Names classifies as identification of nativity or place of birth are commonplace in Ijo language. It can indeed be said that such names are geospatial indicators of nativity and/or place of birth. The names Odiowei and Kaiamaere in the table above are some examples. Beyond their semantic significations of the individuals who bear the names, they also carry pragmatic implicatures. Since they simply make a statement, they are said to be Assertive in illocutionary force.

Adversarial names are names that tend to address some unseen perceive enemy competitor of adversary in an attempt to indirect elevate oneself above others. For instance, a name such as Ilakimifa is a statement that nobody is like me or up to my standard in anything especially wealth. As a statement, pragmatically, in terms of speech acts, it is an Assertive. It has an assertive illocitonary force even as it indignant and resentful of others persons. Similarly, the name *Igbaseimokumo* is adversarial because it addresses an imaginary adversary not to talk evil of or demonise the speaker. In terms of illocutionary force, it is a Directive, a kind of order, plea or entry.

8. Semantic Signification of Names

This section analyses semantic signification of names. This analysis is thematic in orientation. Names may be theophoric or religious, reflecting beliefs and worldview, or geospatial as testament of nativity or place of birth. They are explained in the subsections below.

8.1 Theophoric Names

Theophoric (God-oriented names) Ijo indigenous personal names acknowledge the existence and supremacy of *Woyengi,* the Almighty God, the creator of the universe who controls the destiny of man. The Ijos believe in the existence and complete dependence on the Almighty God. Therefore, they give God-oriented indigenous personal names to their children. Examples of Woyengi-related names include.

Table 2 Theophoric Names

S/N	IZON NAMES	LITERAL MEANING
1.	Woyengidinipre	God wash over/protect for me.
2.	Woyengitari	God's love.
3.	Woyengibarakemi	In the hands of God.
4.	Woyengidoubara	The will of God.
5.	Woyengilayefa	Supremacy of God top.
6.	Woyengimienseindo	God has done it all.
7.	Woyengidenmodo	God has overpowered them.
8.	Woyengiebimoimomoemi	The goodness(es) of God are with me.
9.	Woyengizwode	God has saved me
10.	Woyengiegberi	God's word

8.2 Deity Oriented Ijo names

Apart from the Supreme Being, the Almighty creator of the universe, the Ijos believe in the existence of small gods or deities which they worship. Before the coming of Christianity and Islam, there existed (and still exist) shrines where traditionalists go and make sacrifices to deities (gods). Names of these gods and their priests are often given to Ijo children as personal names.

Table 3: Deity Oriented Ijo names

S/N	Names	Meaning
1.	Orukari	worship the deity
2.	Oruye	belonging to the deity
3.	Orukipreye	gift from the god
4.	Oruegberimo	the words of the gods
5.	Orudiowei	one who looks after the god
6.	Oruodubogbaowei	servant of the deity

8.3 Belief and Worldview

The issue of child mortality was common knowledge and experience in the under-developed countries in Africa of which Nigeria and of course the Ijos were not an exception. The major cause was poor health-care services. But the incidence of Waibodei, children who are born-to-die and stubbornly repeat the spiritual cycle of rebirth, is a common belief among the Ijo. Families that have the misfortune of having such spirit-children that plague them give names that express their plight in forms of "pleas, despair, courage and hope". In fact, this was deeply rooted in the belief and worldview of the people about the world of the living, the world of the dead and the world of the unborn. The incidence of dying and returning is known as Wabode, Ogbanje or Abiku in different languages and cultures. Table 4 below illustrates this category of names:

Table 4: Belief and Worldview

S/N	Names	Meaning
1.	Fidude	Death has ended
2.	Binabo	One's relative
3.	Mawaigha	(I) will not return back
4.	Mamugha	I will not go back

8.4 Testament of Nativity and Birth Place

Some names reflect the nativity and/or place of birth of the bearer. Such names are a kind of social statements an individual who bears the name of a town or clan is an indigene of such geospatial location. That is why it is a testament of nativity. Secondly, names may also be an historical record by reflecting the place of birth of an individual. It also therefore performs a geospatial referential function in terms of functional linguistics. This is the reason behind such names as boukozi, Igbedikimi, Odiere, Odiowei, Kaiamaere, Gbarainowei, Oporomaowei, and even distant places as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Kaduna, Zaria, etc.

Table 5: Names of Nativity and Testament of Place of Birth

S/N	Names	Meaning
1.	Boukozi	Birthed in the bush
2.	Igbedikimi	A man from Igbedi community
3.	Odiere	A woman from Odi
4	Odiowei	A man from Odi
5	Olobiri	Born in Olobiri
6	Port Harcout	Born in Port Harcourt
7	Kaduna	Born in Kaduna
8	Lagos	Born in Lagos

8.5 Adversarial Ijo names

Adversarial names are subaltern in names. They tend to address or speak to an unseen person, an imaginary adversay. Such names makes statement in a manner of challenging someone or responding to some persons. The examples in Table 6 estify to this point of view.

Table 6: Adversarila Names

S/N	Names	Meaning
1.	Kemeikankumor	Nobody should envy me
2.	Inekuronaka	I did not take it by my power
3.	Itariweribakumo	Don't pretend to love me and end up killing me
4.	Igbaseimokumo	Do not condemn me with spoken words
5.	Warikimibah	Insult does not kill a person
6.	Zinakedou	I have reclaimed mine through birth

Discussion

Human statements can either be a constative of performative speech act. A constative speech act is an utterance and the performatives are divided to locution, illocution and perlocution. Searle (1999 further identifies five illocutionary perfomative acts, namely assertive, directives, commissives, expressive and declaratives. Most Ijo names are clausal or sentential. Therefore, are mostly likely to fall into one or the other of these illocutionary performative speech acts

Naming a new child is both a semantic signification and a speech act, a performative utterance. As a speech act, its success depends on the felicity conditions that justify the names given by the name-giver who must have the knowledge of not only the culture of the people but also the linguistic code and the contextual background of the cultural society. Some of the felicity conditions are sincerity, preparatory, executive and fulfillment. For example, if a priest, in the process of naming a baby-girl Joy pronounces Jezebel, the parents will definitely reject such a name because it does not fall in line with the socio-cultural reality of the people. In this case, the name-giver has committed a socio-cultural atrocity by giving a child a name associated with crime or social injustice. The implication is that the name-giver must be familiar with the socio-cultural norms of the people since there is a strong interface between names and the culture of the people as a name is an identity tag of its bearer.

Contribution to knowledge

The study may, to a great extent, change the negative attitude of Nigerians and act as a re-awakening stimulus especially to the Ijo elite and the urban dwellers who, as said elsewhere, are afflicted by cultural schizophrenia. This research, therefore, is a call to cultural renaissance, using language studies as a tool for enlightenment and education. The study may create an opening for scholars and students who may wish to embark on further research on any aspect of the research not adequately covered by the current study. The findings list will serve as reference for Ijo baby names. Findings from this study can impact knowledge in Ijo language learners and persons writing orthographies for Ijo personal names.

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