

Etulo Personal Names as a Mirror of Culture

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Abstract

This study is an investigation into Etulo personal names. Personal names just like language and Literature perform the function of mirroring the culture in which they are acquired and given especially in African communities. It is therefore no doubt that names are vital in most African communities as they give a clear view of what is obtainable in the culture of a particular people. The paper is thus an attempt to justify that names are not given and taken in Etulo culture only as labels of identity, but also as a means for the expression of thoughts, beliefs, daily practices and experiences which exist within the same culture. Sixty (60) names are collected using personal interview as a tool for data collection. The names are classified into proverbial, circumstantial, animal, title, borrowed/socio-cultural, and religious/appreciation names. The paper addresses Etulo names within the Linguistic relativity framework of sociolinguistics. The study observes that through naming, the Etulo world view is uncovered. The paper thus focuses on the Etulo people of Benue State and the names that exist within the Etulo people's culture.

Keywords: *Linguistic Relativity, Sociolinguistics, Etulo, Personal Names*

Introduction

Everyone in the universe has a name. This is because name serve as an identity marker and have some cultural connotation backed by belief systems in every society. Acquiring a personal name entails bringing culture, language, history etc to play. That is why name in Africa is considered a beauty to behold as it contains a very rich pool of social, cultural and historical factors which serve as a means of data for linguist, philosophers, psychologist and anthropologist. There is no culture or a group of people without names. By Personal name, according Wikipedia is meant a name or set of names by which an individual is known with and which is peculiar to only one person in a sociolinguistic setup. Names, therefore, exist in every land and culture, and are intimately associated with values, traditions, hopes, fears and events in people's lives as used within the context of the bearers.

It is pertinent to note that the act of naming has existed since the creation of man as recorded in the bible in the book of Genesis chapter 3:20 thus "Then the man Adam named his wife Eve..."(NLT). Naming as a practice exists all over the world. It is a practice that involves giving and acquiring names. However, the practice of naming differs across cultures, societies and even countries. While others simply bear and give names, others bear and give names within the context of naming ceremonies.

The study of personal names called Anthroponomy has therefore received the attention of many scholars ranging from Anthropologists, Psychologists, Sociologists, and Philosophers to Linguists, each dwelling on different approaches. According to Alford (1998:2) personal names are cultural universals. Ayuwo (2004:2) in agreement with Alford asserts that there is so much in a name, especially African names. This is more so if cognizance is taken of the denotative and the connotative meanings of African names. Biobaku in Ansa (2014) mentioned that interesting interaction between language and culture is presented in naming on the one hand and language, culture and history on the other hand.

It is indeed true that names in African cultures are meaning carriers closely linked with values, traditions, hopes, fears and events in people's lives. Names have more implications than they generally mean. That is why Steward (1996) stated that "While western names are chosen for their aesthetic values, African names are selected taking additional factors into consideration. These factors may include beliefs and world view, ethical and social values, events or circumstances at the birth of the child, place as well as manner of birth".

The objective of this paper therefore is to justify that names are not just given and taken in Etulo culture basically as labels of identity but also as a means for the expression of thoughts, beliefs, daily practices and experiences within the Etulo culture. The paper is thus a contribution to Sociolinguistics as it deals with aspects of culture. The data for this work is from the primary and secondary sources. Primary source are from the interview with the Etulo native speakers and the secondary data are derived from already existing works on names by different authors.

The Etulo people and Language

The word Etulo is a tripod term that refers to the people, their language and the land they inhabit. According to Tabe (2007), the Etulo are indigenous to Benue State of Nigeria, and live on both banks of the Katsina-ala River, about 136 kilometers east of Makurdi, the Benue State Capital. Etulo is the language of the people called Etulo. The Etulo land (IkpeseEtulo) stretches from longitude 11 E to 13 E. They are one of the Jukunoid groups of people that formed the erst-while Kwararafa Kingdom in the Benue Valley in the distant past. The Etulos are the children of 'Ibagye' their progenitor to whom they also traced their descent. Their mother was Ato Ibagye who was believed to have children, one of who was "Itsikpe" who was known as the leader of his people. He also became the father of three sons. Tabe (2007) noted further that the language is closely related to the other jukunoid people who are the earstwhile Kwararafa kingdom who are scattered in more than eleven states in Nigeria. They speak their mother tongue known as the "onduEtulo". The Etulo people are the fourth largest ethnic group in Benue state after the Tiv, Idoma and Igede. They however make use of loan words from Tiv, Hausa and Jukun respectively, and are found in Buruku and Katsina-ala local government areas of Benue State.

Etulo Naming Practices

Names in African societies reveal a lot about the society in which they are borne and provide evidence about the cultural, religious and historical events in such societies. That is why Soyinka and Odebole in Ansa (2014) both agreed that naming is a critical business in traditional African society because names comprise meaning and history apart from being the intimation of hope and affirmation of origins. Naming is a universal phenomenon since people are given names in every society though the events preceding the acquisition of each name may differ across cultures. Names in Etulo are not ordinary and as such, children are not just given names. They are Linguistic expressions translated to use by the Etulo people for the transmission of their thoughts, beliefs and day to day practices as well as expressions which have gradually come to form part of the Etulo culture and philosophy. Oral tradition reveals that, in the past names were given to keep the memories and name of a lost loved relative alive.

Naming as done within the context of naming ceremony in Etulo called Iyiokiokio was done in the morning on the seventh day after birth. After a child is born, he or she remains indoors for six (6) days and is then brought out of the room on the seventh day to be named. The ceremony begins with the preparation of food called Akuta. This food is made from milled millet or sorghum, depending on the grain in season. It is usually served with sesame and smoked fish soup without palm oil. After the Akuta is prepared, it is dished out into two broken pieces of clay pot while a woman (not necessarily the mother of the newborn) takes the food with her hands crossed as she walks to the junction leading to the house with a little child flogging/whipping the woman lightly. On her return, water is poured on the roof made of dried spear grass. The baby is then brought out of the room and lowered for the water poured on the roof to drop on its body, after which the name is announced by the father of the child.

However, with the coming of Christianity and civilization, most Etulo Christians give and acquire names within the Christian context as the ceremony is presided over by clergy followed by prayers, exaltations taken from the bible and well wishes for the newborn. Gifts are presented to the newborn and refreshments served after which the invited guests depart.

Theoretical Framework

This study addresses Etulo names within the Whorfian framework of Linguistic Relativity. The hypothesis explores the relationship between language and culture. It asserts a systematic relationship between the grammatical categories of language a person speaks and how that person who both understands the world and behaves in it. This hypothesis is a proposition of a Linguist and Anthropologist Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee whorf. The hypothesis further explains that the nature of a particular language influence the habitual thought of the speakers of the same language and that their different patterns permits other thought patterns. This idea thus is an invitation that there is a possibility of portraying the world with Language because it proves that the mechanism of any language conditions the thought of its speaker's community. The Whorfian Hypothesis further is presented in two forms; the strong and weak forms or versions. The weak form shows that the structure does not determine the world view but is still extremely influential in predisposing speakers of a language towards adopting the world view. An opposite claim would be that culture of people finds reflection in the language they employ due to the fact that they value certain things and do them in a certain manner. They therefore come to use their language in ways that portray what

they value and what they do. Sapir thus acknowledges the relationship between language and culture and sums it up by stating that ‘ Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society’ (wardhaugh 2002). The hypothesis acknowledges the idea that people see and understand the world through the cultural lens of a language. It is on this basis that the hypothesis is adopted for this study since practice naming is language in use.

Literature Review

Naming is an important topic of research for many including linguists, Anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and philosophers, each hinging of different approaches. A research into this review proves that studies have been carried out on naming by Nigerians, other Africans and non Africans alike. Instances include: Fitzpatrick (2012) researches on African Names and Naming practices during slavery and its aftermath. She examines the centrality of names and naming creating suppressing, retaining and reclaiming African identity and memory. The study reveals that though the colonizers assign new names to Africans as a way of subjugating and committing them to perpetual servitude, Africans resist the process of obliteration of their memories and deploys the practice of naming to survive the hostility.

Abdul (2009) works on Yemen Arabic personal names within a socio-cultural and linguistic boundary where he investigates female personal names as striking to a person who does not know much about the culture of the region. Finnegan (1970) argues that names are a great significance in that they can express joyful sentiments and a sense of personal aspiration for oneself or others. She further states that names may also contribute to the literary flavor of formal or informal conversation adding a depth of succinctness through their meanings over tone or metaphors.

Elsewhere in Africa, Chauke (2015) in his study on personal names and Naming practices among the Vatsonga observes that personal names and naming practices among Vatsonga are not just mere tags but provide more insights into important social, cultural and political events at the time of birth. Okyere (2015) on his *A Linguistic Survey of Types of Names among the Babukusu of Kenya* opines that it is the society that gives names and so they determine what a person or thing be named. Agyekum (2006) deals with naming as an important aspect of Akan society and looks at Akan names within linguistic and anthropological framework. He concludes that names are not arbitrary labels but socio-cultural functions and meaning.

Within Nigeria, Ogie (2002) investigates Edo personal names where he argues that they are used to affirm certain aspects of Edo culture. The study breaks names into its constituent’s morphological parts to reveal their meaning. Anyachonekeya (2014) examines naming in Igbo land and opines that names of children born are a projection of not only the whims of parents but a window through which they mirror their lives and concatenations. Aruegodore (2005) researching on Urhobo names and their meaning observes that every Urhobo name given to a child has a meaning attached to it, though not done within the context of a naming ceremony. He thus groups names into spiritual or religious names, names that connote challenge to self or others, names that reflect honor, appreciation, names that are philosophical, others gender specific and others weather. Still on the Urhobo names, Onoawrie (2015) writing on Urhobo naming practices opines that naming is practiced in Urhobo like others in many parts of Africa and Asia are both a cultural and linguistic phenomenon. He concludes that apart from fulfilling the essential function of identification in society, these names as forms of language construction, can also be relied upon for understanding the various social-cultural forces that govern the life of people in communities.

The review above shows that though name has been an interesting subject of research for many people, especially in Africa, there has been no known investigations into the naming practices of the Etulo people. The research therefore aims at filling this loophole.

Classification of Etulo Names

The importance of names cannot be overemphasized. That is why Oduyoye cited in Ansa (2014) established that ... “a name is a mark of identity. He further observed that to be nameless is to be without an identity”. According to him, a name identifies the person and is a linguistic symbol to be used in remembering an individual. Etulo names therefore do not fall short of this assertion as they represent important signposts of information about the people, their cultural and religious background, beliefs and customs as well as the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. Etulo names are thus classified: Religious/Appreciation names, Circumstantial names, Borrowed/Socio-cultural names, Proverbial names, Title names and Animal names

Religious/Appreciation Names

These are names given in recognition and thanksgiving to God who is believed to be the giver of children. The Etulo people of this age give and take names in thanksgiving to God and to also show the religions they are part of. Such names amongst the Etulo Christians are: Patience, John, Grace, Barnabas etc. Among the Etulo Islam, names such as Abdul, Aisha, Haruna, Musa etc exist. They also bear names in the Etulo language showing appreciation and portraying their religion of affiliation. Examples of these names and their meanings are:

Name	Meaning
Mse	Blessing/Beauty
Ewe	Wisdom
Mgbasho	God
Mgbede	I am grateful
Tishi	Good
Ikpen	I like it
Ishemese	Big in the world
Oshebe	Morning star

Table 1

Circumstantial names

These are the category of names with elements of prophecy given to their bearers because of the circumstances surrounding the birth of the bearer. Names in this category could also relate to place and manner of birth. Bloomfield in Agyekum observed that these names are viewed as governing the child's fate in some ways, they should harmonize with the time and place of birth... Examples of circumstantial names are *Igyo* – it is okay. This name is usually given to last male child especially when it is perceived that a woman has too many children. Oye – Male. A name given to children who were born after the demise of a loved one. Other examples are:

Name	Meaning
Iku	Death
Ikili	Hatred
Abe	Names predestined for male twins
Odu	
Gombo	Born after twins
Ikpen	Am happy
Shitikwu	Be patient
Mtsengye	Witchcraft has come to an end
Ikpatsé	It is over
Gbewebi	Take care
Oieie	Last (given to the last born children of both gender)
Ishemese	Big in the world
Ayuwi	Shame/Shyness

Table 2

Borrowed Names

These are names taken due to the influence of foreign cultures on the Etulo people. This may also be as a result of boundaries, intermarriages etc. examples are

Names	Origin/source	Meaning
Iorpenda	Tiv	People kept/keep
Iornumbe	Tiv	People played
Tyodugh	Tiv	Nominated by elders
Sani	Hausa	Second child
Gowon	Hausa	Born during the regime of Gowon
Allah	Hausa	God

Table 3

Proverbial Names

These names express the feelings of the giver and are often times indirect speeches geared towards people. They may express unhealthy relationships existing between the giver of the name and his surroundings as well as his personal experiences. These names have deeper meaning than the words expressed. Examples of such names include:

Names	Meaning
Omasi le katsi	The day breaks for a reason
Olizilibe	Good deeds become bad
Sendu	The world is scattered
Adagadaku	Death does not postpone its arrival
Ozinakatse	The load in the mind is heavier than the one on the head
Olagebeshabota	A dangerous fire that nobody dares
Efu	Who is the master of the house?
Akanyoel	Where will you pass?
Emeyi	Who knows tomorrow?
Emezema	God is there
Adagadakwu	Death neither knows children nor adults
Esekwe (from Eselekwu)	The world is a small place (invariably saying that the world is a circle)
Ondube	They connived
Ako	Where are they?
Aginei	Blood in the tooth (given to mean that nothing sticks closer like a sibling)

Table 4

Animal Names

Another cultural aspect of naming among the Etulo people is in respect to animals considered to possess qualities of power. Example of such names include;

Names	Meaning
Mini	Hippopotamus
Mni	Elephant
Ogizi	Python
Gbaka	Mamba
Ugaba	Lion

Title Names

Other Etulo names are title names. These names may sometimes not be true names of the bearer given to them by the parents but are acquired as a result of the position they hold in Etulo land. Examples of such names are;

Names	Meaning
Otse-Etulo	Lion of Etulo (referring to king of Etulo)
Okpape	District head
Amotse	1st class chief
Arupomo	Chief's messenger
Ojude	A person who keeps or looks after the King's belonging
Ule	Chief
Owata	The King's wife

Conclusion

This paper treats naming in Etulo as aspects of Linguistic Anthropology as well as Sociolinguistics. Naming performs the function of mirroring a particular culture since the act itself is language put to use. Language is thus a strong means through which we can view and understand the worldview of a particular people. Etulo personal naming practices serve as a mirror of the people's belief, culture, philosophy, thought and religious practices. An individual's name is of paramount importance to the whole community as it is not just a tag or label of identity but a revealer of the aspects of the cultural patterns and behaviour of the Etulo culture. The various classifications of the Etulo names include Religious/appreciation names, circumstantial names, Borrowed/Socio-cultural names and proverbial names. Every Etulo individual bears at least one of these names. However, names in Etulo are not limited to the classification stated here, as Christianity and civilization have also come to have some impact of the naming system of the Etulo culture.

This paper thus concludes that Sociolinguistics is a very vital tool for analysing personal names since names exists within the context of language. Language on the other hand exists within a society and culture, beliefs and customs are transmitted through a language.

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