

An Ethno-Pragmatic Study of Ígálâ Death Prevention Names

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Abstract

This paper investigates personal naming practice as a strategy for preventing death among the Ígálâ people of north-central Nigeria from an ethnopragmatic perspective, that is, it seeks to identify and analyze certain names and naming pattern as a way of preventing infant mortality. In the Ígálâ language, it is believed that death prevention names can generate and maintain some level of assurance and security that is vital for the survival of a child, given the belief that certain spiritual forces are responsible for incessant child mortality. These names are believed to link the bearer with their past, ancestors and deities. The primary data were obtained from 50 respondents comprising name bearers and name-givers whose ages range from 20-75 in Dekina, Ankpa and Idah local governments of Kogi state, Nigeria as well as introspection of the researcher who has close to native knowledge of the language and supplemented by civil service registers in the study areas. The secondary data were obtained via the onomastic literature. Different factors are responsible for the bestowal of the first name, but this study focuses only on those influenced by death, particularly, those used to appeal to ancestors, deities and ancestors to spare the named children. The study discovered that personal naming among the Ígálâ people goes beyond mere personal labels to telling stories that index various social and psychological factors and circumstances surrounding the family and the birth of the name bearer, sometimes, these names serve as appellations and a means of communication to the deities and ancestors for the purpose of forestalling infant mortality.

Keywords: *anthroponym, death prevention, ethnopragmatics, Ígálâ, personal names, and onomastics*

Introduction

The Ígálâ language belongs to the Western Benue Congo, a Yoruboid subphylum spoken in different locations in North-Central Nigeria. It is a predominant language spoken in Kogi state by over two million native speakers in nine local government areas of the state namely, Dekina, Idah, Ofu, Ibaji, Olamaboro, Aja-okuta, Ankpa, Igalamela/Odolu and Omala. A sizeable number of speakers are also found in Bassa Local Government. It is also spoken in some communities outside Kogi State namely, Ebu in Delta State; Olohi and Ifekwu in Edo State; Ogwurugwu, Ojo, Iga and Asaba in Enugu State; Odokpe, Njam, Ala, Igbedo, Onugwu, Ode, Igbokenyi and Ila in Anambra State (Omachonu, 2012).

Names in Ígálâ, as other African cultures are indices to the bearer's religious belief, philosophy, geography, fears, culture, language, situations about their birth, family background, history etc. Among the Ígálâ ethnic group, as with Basà, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa in Nigeria, Luo in Kenya, Swahili in East Africa etc., certain situations surrounding the named child, family, politics etc. can be considered when naming a child. This point is in agreement with the idea argued by Madubuike (1974 & 1994) and Zawazi (1993). In the Ígálâ ethnic group, just as it in the practice in most African societies, a personal name is seen as an important pointer of the bearer's behavior and as an indicator of the bearers past, present and expectation. Obeng (1998:164), concerning Akan and Ebeogu (1993:133) concerning Igbo both submit that in these languages' names, "one's fate can be ruined by the kind of name given to person at birth". Thus, Obeng submits that "names are viewed as designation for the sum total of a person and capable of shaping the person's future accomplishment". This belief is found on the Christian scripture also. For instance, 1 Samuel 25:25, Abigail, the wife of Nabal Says "Please let not my Lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him..." In 1 Chronicles 4 V 9-10, the name Jabez implies bitterness given to him by his mother stemming from the prevailing situation when he was born. He prayed for divine intervention and a change of situation because of the unfavourable situations resulting from his name were prevalent. Above all, God Himself in Mathew 1 v 23, it is observable that God is very purposeful in personal naming e.g. "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they call his Immanuel which is translated, God with us." Mathew 1 V 21 "... she shall bring forth Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins".

The two personal names of the Lord Jesus Christ are for his person and function for which he was sent; in order words, God didn't allow even his biological parents to suggest who He was called, simply because of the importance of his person and ministry.

Death prevention names are resorted to if a couple has lost a number of infants either at birth or shortly after birth. They are believed to possess the ability to ensure the survival of the name bearer. They are not too structurally unique or distinct from other personal names, but are associated with certain weirdness and evoke an outburst of emotion, misery and indirect communication to deities and ancestors.

Àbíkwú is an Ígálâ sociocultural concept derived from three morphemes à 'an agent morpheme used to derive an agent noun from a verb'; *bí* is a verb 'to give birth' and *kwú* is the verb 'to die' which implies, giving birth to children that will die. In the Ígálâ sociocultural belief system, it is believed that every Ígálâ child has two sets of parent namely, biological and spiritual (ancestral). It

is believed that spiritual parents or ancestors who are believed to be ancestors are supernatural beings and stronger than the biological parents and decide whether or not a child survives. Thus, the spiritual parents decide which children survive no matter the number of children born by the biological parents. This sociocultural belief holds that if parents repeatedly loose children, it is the same child who repeatedly or successively comes into world and returns to spirit world. In order to forestall this repeated cycles of birth, death and rebirth, a death prevention name (DPN) is given to a child most of which are weird, i.e. unlike conventional personal names, to secure the survival of the named child. This category of names (DPNs) deceives, tricks and outwits the death god thereby diverting his attention from the child and subsequently allowing the child live (Obeng, 1998:166).

Ígálá DPNs, like those of Basà, Akan, Hausa, Swahili, Duo-Luo, Yoruba etc. appear derogatory and refer to worthless things, animals/births inanimate (Crane 1982), names of this ethnic group.

The communicative strategy deployed in this kind of naming practice involves some indirectness such as sarcasm, and satire (Obeng 1994). The surface meaning of the names given “may insult, ridicule, question, or reprimand the child” (Obeng 1998:169). DPNs in Ígálá, like many other languages suggest that the name bearer is not wanted. However, the names in reality express the depth of love the name givers have for the named child.

Another strategy deployed by this ethnic group is the Àbíkwú mark (DPN mark) marked on the chick of the name bearer which sometimes goes with an Àbíkwú name. The mark is diagonal in shape marked from the base of the nose to the chick on the right. It was also gathered that another strategy deployed after a child dies is to incise or mutilate the body of the deceased child which is intended to stop further death. It was said that the next child to be born usually returns with a mark on the exact part that was mutilated or where incision was made on the body of the deceased child. This is the fact they have to prove their belief that the cycle of birth, death and rebirth revolves around the same child.

This study sets out to analyse Ígálá death prevention names, henceforth (DPN) from the ethnographic and ethnopragmatic perspectives which are traceable to the belief in reincarnation; a very common belief pattern among African culture/tradition and spirituality. It is believed that Ígálá DPNs are psychological antidotes which can secure the survival of the named child. Just as it is a universal belief, the concept of death is a social and spiritual reality among the Ígálá ethnic group. They believe that death is not the end of life “but the beginning of a fresh embodiment in another realm” (Udo1983:32). Anderson (2005:1) argues in support of this view as saying,

Death does not alter or end the life or the personality of an individual, but only causes a change in its conditions. This is expressed in the concept ‘ancestor’, people who have died but who continue to live with their families.

Linguistic onomastics is a sub field of onomastics that studies proper names, especially, personal names also called anthroponyms; place names, referred to as toponyms and animal names, technically called zoonyms. Naming practice, though universal or cross-cultural among human societies, is remarkably idiosyncratic in style, custom etc. This subtle strategy is a sociocultural method of daring or appealing to the spiritual or underworld forces to free the affected children from the cycle of birth, death and reincarnation and allow them live. Though this approach is quite common among Africans; it portrays an idiosyncratic strategy among the Ígálá sociocultural practice in combating child mortality.

Research Questions

This research intends to answer the following questions:

- i. Why are weird names bestowed on some new born babies among the Ígálá ethnic group?
- ii. What is the implication of these names on the bearers?

Literature Review

Names exist as part of the sociocultural setting of every society. Being part of the society that gives them, they act as a window through which the world is understood and appreciated (Mutunda, 2011). They are used as conduits of information, especially, on society’s attitudes or observation towards the named (Mapara et al, 2009:9). Musonda, Ngalande & Simwinda (2019) state that it is important that one has a good knowledge of the imagery and metaphor of the language under consideration to appreciate their names.

Mensah and Ishima (2020) argue that in the African context, little attention has been paid to the grammatical description of personal names. They reported that (Nwangi, 2015:259) undertook a linguistic study of Kikuyu grammar and observes that the coding of information into names is basically characterized by lexical, syntactic and pragmatic roles of the language. He demonstrates in his investigation that Kikuyu grammar is largely contained in its personal names. His investigation was based on certain morphosyntactic phenomena like compounding, affixation and reflexivisation which show how the feminine names in the language are grammaticalized. This plausible fact reveals that names are words that are attested in the lexicon which have semantic structure

and exhibit morphosyntactic characteristics of lexical items; thus, constitute abstract properties of grammar (Mensah & Ishima, 2020).

Hussein (1997:25) submits that personal names are ambiguous properties of every linguistic community given that names are words (with expression character) that exist in a language which are an essential part of the linguistic repertoire of their bearers, users and givers and are valuable carriers of identity that reflect the dominant attitude and sociocultural value of a community. Names are founded on people's cultural heritage, and therefore reflect major currents in their history and worldview. For this reason, they show deep attachment to indigenous traditions and embed significant psychological and pragmatic attributes. It is also believed that names in Africa have deep spiritual context and cosmology (Obeng, 1988; Mensah, 2015). Mapara, (2013:15) opines that personal naming in Shona culture practice is seen as a rite of passage marking the transition from the womb into the community. This opinion is supported by the claim of Mensah and Ishima which says that personal naming practices, especially in Africa, "act as narrative discourses where stories that provide insights to live experience are told" (2020:4). To Haviland et al, they define it "as a social transition from a state of nature to a state of culture" (2013:130).

Just the way it is in most African cultures, in Ígálá naming tradition, personal names are given based on certain social and cultural parameters which require reflecting the situation or circumstances surrounding the conception and birth of a child, the situation surrounding the parents, family, community etc. Imoh, 2019 studies the structure of Basà personal names where he outlines the various structure of Basà personal names, namely; words, phrases, sentences etc. Imoh and Dansabo (2020) study the ethno-pragmatics of Basà personal names where they did a general investigation into the language and socio-culture of Basà naming practices; Imoh and Dansabo (2020) examined Basà sentential names, focusing on those names that are composed in sentences and undergo complex morphological and morphosyntactic operations to derive their surface forms; Imoh (2020) surveys onomastics and names as indirect communication in Basà, where he studies anthroponyms, toponyms and zoonyms as a strategy of indirect communication in Basà language. Imoh, John Paul and Dansabo (forthcoming) study the structure of Ígálá death prevention names. This work differs from the former in that it seeks to dwell mainly on the ethnopragmatics of death prevention names in Ígálá.

In the onomastic literature of African naming practices, especially the aspect of grammatical description, there are a number of related studies in linguistic onomastics such as Mensah & Ishima (2020) who investigate sentential names in Tiv and categorized Tiv names into several categories of sentences, examining the semantic, pragmatic, social and spiritual meanings. Their inves-

tigation shows a reflection of grammatical structure of Tiv language. Mande (2009) discovered that in Tshivenda, names have referential and cultural meaning composed from nouns, verbs, adjectives and larger units like phrases, compounds and relativization. He claims that in this language, naming forms an indispensable part of grammar. Linguistically, Mapara argues that names are part of language and constitute phrasal, clausal and sentential categories. He further argues that they may be semantically characterized in complete statements, questions, or commands which are appropriately situated in the realm of language study. Kamu, Jauro & Wappa (2013) undertook a structural study where they categorized names into their morpho-semantic attributes namely, word, classes and studied their semantic and pragmatic meanings.

To the best of the author's knowledge, ethnopragmatics of DPNs has not been studied in the language, though Opega (2008) did a study on the structure, pragmatics and meaning of Ígálá personal names where he mentioned few DPNs. This work differs from his in that it focuses on the ethnography of DPNs. Hence, this study aims at exploring to fill the existing gap on the ethnography and ethnopragmatics of Ígálá names as a way of contributing to the linguistic onomastic or the onomastic literature in general.

Concerning meaning of names, Oluwale (2005:9) argues that "in Africa, there is so much meaning in a name. If you are given the right name, you start off with certain indefinable but very rear advantages". This supports the assertion of Mbiti (1975:213) that says, naming in Africa is a big social event being that it is characterized by numerous roles.

Personal names in Bantu, according to Moyo (1996), especially the Ngoni-Thmbuka ethnic group in Malawi, prefers names with historical undertone such as *Mopara* (wilderness, named after several deaths of infants) and *Tafwachi* (what is wrong with us?). They are based on the family or society's antecedents.

Koopman (1990) undertook a study on the Zulu society, reached a conclusion that name givers and bearers are aware of the names, that the ability to read between the lines depends on the cultural continuity in which language is embedded which is not applicable or known to all. It is argued therefore that pragmatics comes into play complimented by semantics.

Epstein and Kole (1998:26) maintain that "every utterance occurs in a cultural determined context of situation". Hence, the meaning of a name can only be understood by the knowledge of the context in which naming is based. It is therefore important as the meanings of names are based on "complex social negotiations, learned and interpreted through socialization." Thus, this implies that only those who are members of the society and participate fully in its ac-

tivities can construe the deep meaning embedded in the names and such communicative interactions (Battie, 1957:37).

Finegan (1976:173), considering names whose meanings are not deciphered from their surface suggests that “the colourful, often figurative quality of many of these names should be brought out. There are, of course, many names which are relatively straightforward with little overt meaning. Others, however, are richly allusive” in deciphering their meaning adequately.

Musonda, Ngalande & Simwinga (2019) maintain that one should have adequate knowledge of the language’s imagery and metaphor to fully appreciate the aspect of naming. Matunda (2011) asserts that a name is like a document where one can read the history, culture and heritage of the individual or of the family in time and space. This view is related to the current investigation as it is used to unveil the bearer’s cultural identity. He further says that in addition to psychological role in establishing a person’s identity, names convey to those who know their origin and meaning the social and cultural experiences of the people who created them. These names, in addition, show how members of the community regard themselves because they reflect values, tradition and events. A similar assertion to that is what Mashiri et al (2013) made, saying that naming in African societies always reflects sociocultural and ideological realities of the societies that give or bear them. This, according to Musonda, Ngalande & Simwinga (2019), shows how sociocultural factors play a major role in the selection and bestowal of names.

Names and naming practices have enormous sociocultural, spiritual and psychological significance in Africa and beyond. It is so because names are believed to have inherent power that indexicalize lives and behaviour of people positively or negatively (Mensah, 2015). Names are believed to be pointers to people’s way of life and sociocultural experience and give deep insights into the cultural patterns, beliefs, ideology, and people’s religion (Agyekum, 2006). Parham believes that, among the African people, spirituality serves as a bond that binds them and guides their physical existence, and in the African cultural worldview, the essential ingredients and essence of everything, including humans, is spirituality. This view aptly describes the Ígálá situation because naming is a product of social, cultural and spiritual realities.

Theoretical Framework

It is not arguable that Ígálá DPNs do not contain semantic properties which make significant semantic contribution but it is arguable that the underlying meanings of these names do not depend on those that are entirely literal or semantic. They are characterized by sociocultural peculiarities that can be construed ethnologically and pragmatically. This makes the study to be rooted in

the frame of ethno-pragmatics or what in the view of some linguists is referred to as ‘anthropological pragmatics (Lacastro, 2012:5). This concept is concerned with the expression of the speech practice which begins culture-internal ideas, which are shared valued, norms, and assumptions of certain speakers, rather than any meaning that is presumed universal. This refers to those rules that offer full interpretation that goes beyond literal sense of meaning and assigns illocutionary value to utterances or sentences (see Goddard, 2004:4). It implies that aspects of meaning that is not surface meaning but language in the context of its use. Mensah (2015) refers to it as arbitrary and real-word-world knowledge of a language (p119). To Raper (1986) “... the association and connotations which became attached to a name via its referent” (267). The component of the concept ‘ethno’ of ‘ethno-pragmatics’ implies the sociocultural context of language use which includes an understanding of specific linguistic activities as embedded in and constitutive of locally interpretable events (Duranti, 1994:167). Thus, Mensa argues that it assumed that ethnopragmatic meaning of names includes associative (referential), affective (emotional), and sociocultural (stylistic) components.

In this language, beyond semantic sense of names, there are strong pragmatic factors that determine the choice of DPNs which are contextualized and better understood in terms of the belief system of the Ígálá people which are usually connotative and contain a broad spectrum of information that reflect their worldview, culture, environmental factors, etc. consequently, being deficient in the knowledge and culture of the ethnic group and proficiency in the native or local communication will leave one handicap in construing the meaning underlying this category of names.

Research Methodology

Data generation and research participants

The study was conducted using the qualitative research approach and employed an ethno-pragmatic framework. The primary source of data elicitation included oral interview, partial integration, observation, metalinguistic interaction and focus group discussion with the sample population. The data elicited were verified by native speakers and the researcher, given his close to native intuitions of Ígálá language. All the recordings were done during the interviews and were jotted down in a note book for easy identification. In some instances, the data were gathered through discussions and these discussions aided the researcher to verify the authenticity of the data gathered. These procedures were also supplemented by introspection, based on the fact that the researcher has

close to native intuition. The field work was carried out in Ígálâ speaking areas of Kogi, North-Central Nigeria. The data were analyzed in four tiers, namely, the raw data presentation follow by interlinear glossing i.e. morpheme-by-morpheme glossing (Leipzig Glossing Rules), then the semantic meaning and finally, the pragmatic meaning.

Selection of informants was done randomly considering the fact that the consultants are native speakers with native intuitions, who were between twenty (20) to seventy-five (75) years of age and their willingness to participate in the investigation. These randomly selected informants were both literate and non-literate native speakers of Ígálâ language. The selection was also based on their experience, good knowledge of Ígálâ naming convention and also vast knowledge of culture, both as name givers and bearers/users.

Data for the study were elicited considering socio-biographical variables namely, gender, occupation, religion and educational backgrounds. Twenty eight men and twenty two women participated in the investigation whose levels of education, religions and occupation vary. The participants were graduates from accredited high institutions, A-Level holders, secondary and primary school leavers and some uneducated. A non-structure interview method was adopted in which open or flexible questions were asked to elicit the targeted data on various categories of Ígálâ death prevention names. Furthermore, questions were asked on the factors responsible for the use of death prevention names as well as their semantic, deep (pragmatic) meanings and their symbolism in the Ígálâ culture. Their responses were compared to validate their authenticity. A multimedia recorder, field notes were used in recording the information obtained. Out of all the names obtained, the most relevant ones to the study were selected and analyzed. The data were coded, transcribed, translated and tone-marked. The questions asked where to elicit information on the reason for the given names, their meaning (deep and surface), how the name bearers felt about the names, whether they would like to be renamed with conventional names etc. Their answers varied, i.e. some disliked the names and wished they could change them whereas; others would rather bear the names and live. Another category believed that they survived not because of the DPNs. The corpus were sorted and classified according to the kind of message[s] underlying them.

This study investigated how language “provides information about name-givers’ and name-bearers’ social networks and how sociocultural needs are reflected in the naming system” (Obeng 1998:171).

Data presentation and analysis

Ígálá DPNs can be categorized into different categories such as plants/agriculture, animals, physical environment, reincarnated ancestors, deities, emotion, objects in the physical world, concepts, etc. They are coined in different structures such as lexical items, phrases, compounds and sentences. The sentential names are of different types such as statement, interrogative and imperative. The Tab. (1) presents those that are agricultural produce.

Table 1: Names as agricultural produce

Plants	Meaning
1. Óláfàpà	corn stump
2. Ìgbógbo	chaff

Table 1 comprises names that connote thrash which is neither needed nor kept in the house but are thrown into the trash bin or taken to the outskirts of the village or town either to be dumped or burnt. It is considered unclean hence, it should not be accommodated in the house therefore, naming a child trash connotes lack of personal respect and implies the named child is not accommodated or needed at home rather, they belong to the trash dump. In summary, the name presents the named child as a worthless thing which is not accommodated among people.

Table 2: Name as animals/birds

Animals	Meaning
Úgwúnú	vulture

Table 2 comprises the name of bird (vulture). Animal names are part of the Ígálá death prevention anthroponymy. In some cultures is the lowest in the rung to talk about or accommodate or to take serious. It is a creature that typifies the imagery of ugliness and fifth. It has a terrible reputation as squabbling scavengers regardless of the terrible smell of the environments. Some particular species are characterized by devious appearance that is factorized to enrich our folklores in connoting negativity. Summarily, the vulture is not a friendly animal of human beings. It is known to be a carnivore that eats any rotten flesh including human corpses. There is no ethnic group known for eating it. This is how horrible the imagery of vultures is in most societies including the Ígálá society. The reason why this name is adopted as a DPN is to portray a filthy imagery to the killer god who hunts the life of the name bearer, thereby making it

very unattractive to them. By this strategy, the named child's survival is secure. This is what Obeng refers to as verbal indirectness (1994). The surface meaning appears to tell the named infant that their presence irritates them. Thus, in the Ígálâ socioculture, the indirectness involved is conventionalized.

Table 3.: Names as objects in physical or natural environment

Animals	Meaning
i. Òkwú	corpse
ii. Òkwùonẹ	dead person
iii. Okiti	anthill

In Table 3 (i & ii) òkwú ‘corpse’ and òkwùonẹ ‘dead person’ are death prevention names which imply that the name bearer, though alive is not considered a living soul because it is expected that they will die at infancy like other children preceding them. Though the names appear or sound very ridiculous, they attempt to ridicule death and make the bearers look worthless so that death will spare the child’s life and the parents the agony of losing it.

In Tab (3iii) okiti ‘anthill’ symbolizes a grave. What are symbolic of the grave in this instance are the colour and the projection of the physical structure. The grave shares the same colours with an anthill which are red, reddish-brown or yellowish-brown. Secondly, both the grave and anthill share some similarity of outcrop or projection above the surface level (i.e. protuberance or landform). This name metaphorically and euphemistically refers to the grave. This implies that the name bearer is not better than the grave where they will be buried when they eventually die. All of them are characterized by what Obeng (1998:177) refers to as “throwing dust in the eyes of death so that death will spare the child’s life and parents agony”. They indirectly put a resistance and protest to the spirit of death.

Another category is those that are names of deities or words used to eulogize or venerate deities. Though they were very scanty in our search, a few were elicited. Ígálâ has names of deities as personal names but most of them are not death-related or death-prevention bias. This category is furnished in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Names as ancestors/deities

Animals	Meaning
iv. Àdẹbú	used to eulogize gods
v. Ẹbọ	a god

Animals	Meaning
vi. Íchẹkpa	a spirit

In Tab 4 (i), Àdẹbú is used to eulogize or venerate gods and also used as a DPN. Ẹbọ and Íchẹkpa in (ii & iii) are names of deities which in our data gathering were said are used to secure the lives of bearers in a family that experienced frequent infant death mortality. In the case of (iii), the named child is preserved from death when the parents consult the Íchẹkpa priest for a sacrifice. After the sacrifice, the hair of the named child is left untouched and it grows into dreadlocks. Nobody has the authority to cut the hair until the child demands and insists it be cut, when s/he does, the parents consult the priest to verify the insistence of the child. When the priest confirms, the hair is eventually cut and it is kept in a calabash and worshiped, especially when the child is challenged spiritually or health-wise.

Table 5: Names as derogative concepts

Animals	Meaning
i. Ọgwọ	deceit
ii. Ẹnyọ	shame
iii. Ụdú	responsibility

Another category of DPNs are those that depict derogatory concepts. Mensah (2015) exemplifies this in Ibibio as saying “names like *Nkpó-Óbút* ‘shameful thing’ and *Mbád idioñ* ‘dirty divination’ strongly demonstrate this psychology” (p 129). The category of names in Tab 5 deceives the spiritual forces that the name bearer is useless or worthless typified by the name Ọgwọ ‘deceit’, Ẹnyọ ‘shame’ and Ụdú ‘negative responsibility (someone compelled to take responsibility or pay of something s/he is accused of damaging)’. These despicable names given by the biological parents are socioculturally and ethnoprismatically understood to mean, such rejection implies a motivation for the name bearer to escape infant mortality and be allowed to live. The next category of DPNs is those used to hide the identity of the name bearer from spiritual forces. They are names of ethnic groups.

Table 6: Names as ethnic group/concealed identity

Animals	Meaning
i. Ẹbachà	Basà
ii. Ẹkéchi	Hausa

It is claimed that this category of names render the bearer invisible to the killer spirits or spiritual parents / ancestors (Imoh John Paul and Dansabo (forthcoming)). Non-Ígálá names as demonstrated in Table 6 help to make the identity of the bearer invisible from spiritual parents or ancestors. It also helps to decoy or confuse the underworld forces and parents of the name bearer making it impossible to identify the named child as a result of the name it bears.

The next category of names characterized by different grammatical structures that is most productive in ígálá DPNs is those names which evoke emotional feelings. Mensah (2015) submits that in Ibibio socioculture, these names “reveal some feeling of incapacity are primarily meant to achieve two objectives, first, they acknowledge the existence of unresolved conflicts with the spiritual forces and also express the desire to subdue their pernicious affect or disruptive influence. Second, to the underworld forces, these names demonstrate the need for healing and reconciliation, and the moment such a desire has been established, the traumatic experience of the death of such a name bearer is averted” (p. 127). This is apt in the Ígálá ethnography of this category of DPNs. Death has a psychological or emotional impact on the parents. It is based on this effect that generated this category of names which implies tacit appeals to the underworld forces responsible for death and rebirth of children to mitigate or forestall further occurrence of infant mortality. It is a sociocultural strategy to subtly apply social pressure to avert the evil trend of infant mortality that traumatizes the name giver[s] and or the family. Tab. (7) exemplifies this category.

Table 7: Names based on emotion

Animals	Meaning
i. Úkwúbègbè	great death/ death is very great
ii. Úkwútlá	Death is inevitable
iii. Úkwénya	Death reduces one
iv. Ànékwú	nurtured for death
v. Álewò	going or traversing places
vi. Ágwènejẹ	one who cheats
vii. Àbíló	the named child will go/die
viii. Yáló	S/he will still go
ix. Ọnaló	He will go (die) tomorrow.
x. Úkwúne	The named child belongs to death
xi. Úkwúnibe	Death be wise
xii. Úkwúnilẹ	There is gain in death
xiii. Úkwúnìkò	There is time to die

Animals	Meaning
xiv. Úkwúdàlè	Death has the verdict
xv. Úkwúlimé	Death sees you all
xvi. Úkwújàlè	Death is always right
xvii. Úkwúbílè	Death has brought misfortune to the world
xviii. Úkwúchùnmí	Death is rest
xix. Úkwúdómo	Death is real
xx. Ìnǎlímí	He called to see me
xxi. Úkwújèdòń	Death is not patient
xxii. Úkwúnetuń	There is no choice in death has choice
xxiii. Màyójón	God cannot be seen

In (i), the name úkwúgbègbè is an exclamatory expression of how strong/great, dreadful and devastating death is. Data (iii, xvii, xix) are used to demonstrate the weakness of a mortal man vis-à-vis the formidable power of death (ancestors); which implies conceding to matchless, and dominating power of death as an appeal to the ancestors to forestall infant mortality.

They also serve as the cognitive response to the killer forces in registering the name givers displeasure and grief. The next subcategory of the emotional category is a form of indirect resistance or protest against the unfairness resulting from frequent infant mortality. They are believed to forestall infant mortality and avert the agony and frustration orchestrated by death. Those are exemplified in examples (iv, v, vii, viii, x) etc. For instance, Ànèkwú ‘nurtured for death’, Àbíló ‘born to go/leave’ Ònaló ‘go tomorrow’ Yèlò ‘S/he will go’ are good examples of this subcategory. On the surface, they express hopelessness but are subtle prayers. Another subcategory of this group is those that are used to pacify the name givers or advise them to be hopeful regardless of the trauma they have suffered. These are exemplified with names in example (xii) Úkwúnìlè ‘death is gainful’, (xiii) Úkwúnìkò ‘there is time to die’, (xiv), Úkwúdàlè ‘death has the verdict’, (xvii) Úkwújàlè ‘death is right’ etc. The last subcategory in this category is those that are composed in a clause that requires an embedded clause to form a complex sentence but left hanging e.g. (xxiii) Màyójón ‘God is not visible/seen’. Obviously, though the statement looks complete, it requires another clause to complete it, e.g. *Mà ma lí Ójọ...* ‘If God could be seen...’ The second clause still remains incomplete and open ended deriving a rhetorical question i.e. a question asked in order to create a dramatic effect or make a point rather than to get an answer. The answer to this question is better known to the name giver[s] borne from the trauma of infant mortality, though those who are familiar with Ígálá ethnoculture/ethnography are not novices.

The last category of DPNs is those that demonstrate faith, positive declaration or optimism furnished with examples in Tab 8. Faith is strong belief or trust in God i.e. total or complete reliance on God; trusting in his infinite power, love, grace, mercy and believing in his teachings even through one does not understand all things. Optimism is hopefulness and confidence about the future or the success of something or expecting things to turn out well or belief to have the skill or ability to make things happen.

Table 8: Names based on faith or positive declaration or optimism

Animals	Meaning
i. Ójògbàné	God, take and keep the child
ii. Ìkòkwú	S/he refused to die
iii. Úkwútéyìnò	Death, leave this child

In Tab 8 (i) *ójògbàné* ‘God take and keep’ is a sentence derived from a serial verb construction, where a child born to a couple who has suffered a big deal of infant mortality is so named. The belief is that whatever is kept in the hands of God is safe. The underworld forces of infant mortality cannot not access to them. (ii) Implies that regardless of the intention and activities of the ancestors, the so named will not die. *Úkwútéyìnò* ‘death, leave this one’ is an imperative declaration commanding the underworld killer spirit to leave the so named. The following category characterizes a different pattern of DPNs as it is not entirely ethnographic but based on optimism or faith whose sense may or may not be connotative but largely semantic. From the foregoing discussion, the function of death prevention names, in the Ígálá sociocultural belief system can be summarized as follows:

- i. Giving weird or despicable names to a child is a strategy to outwit or deceive the underworld killer forces making the child unattractive or worthless. Ethno- pragmatically, it is believed that such a strategy offers the name bearer the opportunity to surviving infant death, such example are *Úgúnú* ‘vulture’ *Òkwú* ‘corpse’ and *Ìgbógbo* ‘chaff’.
- ii. To conceal the identity of the name child from the underworld killer forces (Obeng 1998:167), examples are *Àbachà* ‘Basà (Imoh, John Paul Dansabo (forthcoming)).
- iii. To express verbal indirectness, where the semantic meaning serves as the reverse meaning of what is actually implied by the name givers, e.g. *Ọnaló* ‘go tomorrow’, *Yáló* ‘He will go’.

- iv. To demonstrate human handicap or incapacity e.g. Ànèkwú ‘nurture for death’, Úkwúnẹtúń ‘there is no choice in death’ etc.
- v. To provide succor for the trauma of frequent child mortality. Examples; Úkwújàlè ‘death is innocent’, Úkwúnìlè ‘death is gainful. Úkwúdàlè ‘death has the verdict’.
- vi. To demonstrate faith in God or deities, e.g. Ójọgbàné ‘God take and keep’ etc.
- vii. To ask rhetorical questions e.g. MáyÓjón ‘God is invisible’.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study focused on Ígálá DPNs from the ethnographic and ethnopragmatic points of view. It studied names, their functions and ethnographic belief about them. Death prevention names are therefore traditional identifying resources used to link or connect mortal beings with ancestral spirits and offer both name bearers and givers some sense of protection and security (Akung & Abang 2019:301). They are believed to serve as counter forces to neutralize the manipulative influence of spiritual forces who take children through the cycles of birth, death and rebirth. (Mensah 2015). The strategy of using these names has the power to hide the identity of the name bearer and incapacitate the killer forces from taking the victims through the cycles of death, birth and rebirth.

The study demonstrates that in Ígálá, just as is applicable to many other societies in Africa and beyond, death prevention names are not ordinary linguistic expressions or labels, rather are culturally meaningful and indices of a real life situations or experiences of name givers or the family. As shown in the analysis, this category of names reflect emotion or trauma, prayers, desires, situations and circumstances surrounding the named child, its birth etc.

The study also shows that despite the belief of the formidable and destructive power of death and ancestors, parents through the DPNs dare death by taunting it, deal with it defiantly as can be seen in the analysis of data. This is a way of expressing their frustration and trauma stemming from repeated death, birth and rebirth of infants e.g. úkwújẹdọń ‘death is not patient’, úkwúnibeń ‘death has no mind/ conscience’ etc. It is believed that deities are revered and feared and mortal men only receive instructions from them, but the frustration borne out of infant mortality makes them give stern command to spirits that are believed to be responsible for the death and rebirth of the named children e.g. úkwútéyinq ‘death leave this one’ etc.

This study also unveiled the fact that the Ígálá society reverences the power of death, they belief that spiritual forces, especially ancestors are not Omniscient because through DPNs they can be tricked or decoyed. This appears to be common in some African ethnography as cited in Oduyoye (1982) in Yoruba,

Obeng (1998) in Akan; Imoh (2020, 2021). Oduyoye (1982) exemplifies this in Yoruba as *Kusmo* 'death could not see me'.

This category of naming practice is deeply rooted in language and culture of the Ígálâ people which makes it difficult or impossible to comprehend without being grounded in Ígálâ socioculture and custom. This point ratifies the belief that the interface or bond of language and culture is inextricable (Suzman (1994), Oduyoye (1982) etc. DPNs in this study further ratify the interdependence between language and culture (Obeng 1997:184). It is in conformity with the belief that says African names are a reflection of circumstances and experience of name givers, name bearers and the family which is also supported by Obeng (1985:184). It is also confirmed by Oyetades (1997:178) which claims that:

Names are not given at random because of their euphony or merely because a distinguished member of the family or of the community was so named, but of a set purpose from circumstances connected with the child itself or with references to the family fortunes at the time.

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