

# SOCIOLINGUISTIC IMPORT OF NAME-CLIPPING AMONG OMAMBALA CULTURAL ZONE IN ANAMBRA STATE

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**Ngozi Ezenwa-Ohaeto**

Department of English Language and Literature  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

## **Abstract**

*This study examines the perceived but obvious manifestation of name-clipping among Omambala cultural zone of Anambra State. This situation has given rise to distortion of names and most often, to either mis-interpretation or complete loss of the original and full meanings of the names. This situation of misinterpretation is more prevalent among the younger generation of the indigenes of this speech community. As sociolinguistic tenets naturally impact on the growth/death of a nation's language(s), this study, through interview, intends to establish relationships between the prevalent loss and/or misinterpretation of the clipped names and language growth and/or death in the cultural zone in question. In addition to finding out whether age and social class are variables to this prevalent practice, this investigation, which adopts descriptive and survey approaches, equally attempts to find out if the practice significantly impacts on nation building.*

## **Introduction**

In traditional Igbo culture, names are, in themselves, embodiments of meanings. A typical Igbo name is not just seen as emblems or compulsory badges every person is expected to bear for identification. They are also used to divulge the way the Igbo view life in its entirety including personal, family and general life experiences which, most of the times, encompass cultural and philosophical undertones. Igbo names, which are derived from the Igbo language, (including names of pet animals like dogs, goats etc), have proven a veritable gate-way into another's life

experiences, relationships and personal philosophy. While writing about the semantic significance of African names, Bariki observed that:

In many African languages, personal names have a strong, socio-cultural and ethnopragmatic bearing that go beyond mere identity or referentiality... What is obvious is that African names have strikingly semantic and semiotic load. In other words, they have communicative functions. Personal names in Nigeria are multifunctional despite their mono-referential status. (mono-referential in the sense that they refer to one person only (46).

An Igbo name like '**Ochiabuto**' (laughter/salutation is not love) for instance, might turn out to be a way of expressing great disappointment on a trusted friend's betrayal of trust. Likewise a name like '**Kanyinebi**' is a subtle way of making a strong statement on, probably, a difficult family squabble(s). Thus, there is traditionally a naming ceremony whenever there is a new baby in a family and this act of naming babies is not arbitrarily done. It is traditionally a reserved privilege "to parents and grandparents whom it gives an opportunity to express the importance of the child in their lives or in general, to make a significant statement on their life experience, and to express deep-felt wishes or their future hopes and expectations for the child" ( Okere134).

### **Name Clipping**

Name clipping can be described as the act of pruning or shortening of names for personal reason. Name clipping is not peculiar to human names alone; it transcends names of objects and

places. For instance, 'Television' was pruned to 'Tele' and later pruned further to 'TV'. Some other shortened words include 'influenza' to 'flu', 'fantastic' to 'fan', 'advertisement' to 'advert' and further to 'ad', 'Transport fare' to 'TF', 'Laboratory' to 'Lab' and 'Refrigerator' to 'fridge'. 'Telephone' to 'Phone', 'Aeroplane' to 'Plane', 'Professor' to 'Prof', 'Facsimile' to 'Fax', "South Africa' to 'SA', 'United States of America' to 'USA', 'United Kingdom' to 'UK' and so on. The NamingNewsletter noted that "Sometimes, the clipped name is a kind of shorthand. **Jag** for Jaguar, or **Vette** for Corvette. The goal remains the same: To communicate the essence of the formal word in an abbreviated way" (Web). With the innovation of Mobile phone, clipping of words has become very pervasive among the users but the essence here is slightly different from that of name clipping; "to beat the limited space allowed for texting over a tiny screen on mobile phones and to curtail expenses" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 51)

The art of name clipping goes way back in language history across cultures. Among the Yoruba and Izon of Nigeria and the Akans of Ghana, a child is named in accordance with the circumstances of his/her birth. While citing Kofi Agyekum, Bariki describes Akan names as "iconic representation of complete social variables that indexicalize and relate to the name and the person" (46). Igbo names are as well circumstantial. A child may be named **Ogoebunam** (May my goodness/charity not kill me) if the parents had experienced ingratitude just before the child's birth or in remembrance of such experience. In showing appreciation to one's 'chi'; one's personal god or guardian god, as is believed in Igbo traditional religion that everyone has his/her own 'chi' which could be a source of the person's good/ill luck in all his/her life dealings a child could be named **Chidiogo**, (God is benevolent)

‘Chiadinizu...’ (If one’s chi does not sanction....). Igbo names are also means of either appreciation, prayer or showing resignation fate. Such philosophies are often reflective in names such as **Chiemeka** (God did well), **Uche**, **Chioma** (Goodluck) or **Nwamaka** (having baby is good). For disappointment or resignation for recurrent misfortunes like having only female children as in **Chima** ‘God may please Himself’, **Njideka** ‘to have something is better than not having anything at all’, **Odinakachukwu** (only God can decide), **Uchekukwu** (God’s will), or **Nwanyibuife** (a baby girl is equally as good), **Emenajo/Emefiena** (Do not indulge in bad deeds). Igbo names could also be used for expressing another side of wealth as in **Akubuilo** or **Akuezuilo** (Wealth can never assuage enmity) and so many others. They can also through names send salient messages like warning and advice, in such names as ‘**Onyeachonam** ‘Let no one distress me, **Echezona** (do not forget), **Chetachukwu** (Remember God), **Ifeonyemetalu** (a belief in the law of Kamah), **Emecheta** (a belief in remembrance of good and bad deeds), **Emembolu** (a belief in retaliation) etc’. An Igbo may want to express his/her disgust at a friend by naming his/her dog the friend’s name given the fact that, though dogs are deemed human’s best friends, yet they are still animals.

While commenting on the peculiarity and deep philosophical import of Igbo names, Okere who noted that Igbo names perform the social function of “lasting memorial” drew attention to Major Arthur Glynn Leonard’s observation of Igbo names as not just “a mere social or religious formality, nor is it only an ordinary petition, but an act which, from every point of view, is a perpetual landmark in the history of the house” (147). A. G. Leonard also noted that:

in nothing, not even in their customs, can we grasp the natural and ancestral conception so plainly as in these names which invoke, promise, threaten, praise, revive, satirize and sympathize, that in fact express and demonstrate all that is human, that is, all that is best and worst in them ( Okere 134).

Achebe also demonstrates in his epic novel “Things Fall Apart”, that there is something in names among the Igbo. He uses Okonkwo’s wife, Ekwefi, who experiences series of child mortality and as a result, resorted to expressing her experiences through the names she gave those children. Achebe writes:

The naming ceremony after seven market weeks became an empty ritual. Her deepening despair found expression in the names she gave her children. One of them was a pathetic cry, Onwumbiko, ‘death I implore you’. But death took no notice; Onwubiko died in his fifteenth month. The next was a girl, Ozoemena, ‘May it not happen again’. She died in her eleventh month and two others after her. Ekwefi then became defiant and called her next child Onwuma, Death may please himself’. And it did (55).

### **Locating Meaning of Igbo Names through Other Lenses**

There are yet other philosophers such as Asiegbu, who believe that though Igbo names could be meaning quintessential, they function actively only “in the culture devoid of scientific technique for recording history” (218). Asiegbu further states that “in the wake of the abundant opportunities to get educated, unlike

yesteryears when only few set out in quest of the 'golden fleece', the role of Igbo proper names as records of events and history will soon be over" (218). Asiegbu, after stating that "a proper name is a person's precious possession" (214), and also that this view is drawn from the social significance of names in Igbo culture as he explicitly portrayed the relationships between names and fame, names and personality, names and womenfolk, went ahead to make it clear that "none of these relationships faces down the problem of reference of names" (214). It is quite obvious that Asiegbu is a typical disciple of Referential Theories of Meaning as propounded by Frege. This present study completely disagrees with Asiegbu on the proposition that names are functional on a culture that is devoid of scientific and valuable technique for recording history. It becomes pertinent to state at this point that with or without scientific technique, names in Igbo culture will continue to function as effective and indisputable tool for chronicling history in Igbo culture in particular and African culture in general. Names have, over time, transmuted to the rich Igbo and African oral literature which other cultures are yet to beat. A better proposition would have been that the two media: naming and technology are complementary in their functions in record keeping. Names, in Igbo land, will continue to function, actively, as the irrefutable means of recording history and experiences as long as Igbo people and their language live.

However, the referential theories referred to earlier derive their inspiration on the identification of "meaning of an expression with its reference to things in the world rather than its expression of ideas in the mind" (Davis 206). The theories also derive strength on their belief that "the referential properties of language are not meaning itself, but a consequence of meaning" (207). The theories are in contrast with Tarskian reference rule. Tarsk who believes in

ideational properties of expressions insists that thought rather than sentences or expressions constitute meaning. This theory “locates meaning in language-mind link unlike the referential theory which locates meaning in language-world link (Davis 206).

In as much as this study is not poised for theoretical considerations, it is important to state, at this point, that meaning of names in Igbo culture is both referential and ideational in practice. Referentially, Igbo names are used as pointers, labels that designate the bearers. There are also some relational elements between some Igbo names and reputation. Some Igbo people name their children after great achievers and people who are notable for their principles, philosophies and world view. In Igbo speech community, it is gradually becoming common place to see children who go by the name ‘Chinua’, ‘Chimamada’ etc after the world class African writers, Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. They take these names not solely because of their semantic import but also because of the personalities who bear those names and who also popularized the names. That is the essence of Ozumba’s statement that “meaning, though, has an important link with reference and is not solely dependent on the rules of reference but has its independent mechanisms which confer meaning” (28). The Igbo believe that ‘ezi afa ka ego’ ( good reputation more honorable than wealth). Nobody wants to be identified with names of worthless people, criminals and the likes but would rather prefer taking names of the poor but upright people. Over and above these remains the fact that names have meaning amongst the Igbo and they are used as storehouse of experiences and belief. The Igbo are of the belief that ‘afa onye na-edu ya (a person’s name is his/her destiny). ‘Mkpoto nwa ogaranya ka ogbugbu ya’ (Character assassination is more

grievous/destructive than murder) .Therefore, an average Igbo strives to protect his/her personality which his/her name has become synonymous with.

### **What has Language got to do with Names?**

Language has got a lot to do with names and more so Igbo names. It has even more to do with it because names, whether proper or common, are linguistic expressions and they are put into use by the Igbo for the expression of their thoughts, beliefs and daily practices and experiences which have percolated into their culture and philosophy. Names serve as the vehicle which carries the weight of their culture-linguistic burden. To understand the meaning of Igbo names is to understand the language and the culture of the people. Appreciating meaning therefore, implies appreciating the several components of words and names. This, according to Ozumba “makes meaning independent of reference”. Ozumba further states that “meaning is linguistic while reference is logical. What it means is that meaning is mainly derived from linguistic rules governing the use and signification of words or sentences...” (29). Because Igbo names are inherently meaningful most of them turn out to be complete sentences in themselves. See the tables below which cannot, by any means, be seen as exhaustible of Igbo names:

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Names</b>	<b>Meanings</b>
1	Ngozichukwuka	God’s blessing is the greatest
2	Ndidiamaka	Being patient is good
3	Aghamelum	War kept me in this condition
4	Odimegwu	It is horrible to me
5	Ohaetolem	My kins have praised me
6	Chinwendu	God owns life

7	Onyinyechukwu	The gift of God
8	Ezewugo	Kingship is glorifying/gratifying
9	Ekenedilichukwu	May thanks be to God
10	Amaechina	May homestead not go extinct
11	Chinualumogu	May God fight for me
12	Ogoegbunam	May my good deeds not kill me
13	Oguejiofo	A fight/battle that is justifiable
14	Onyekachi	Who is greater than God?
15	Onyedikachukwu	Who is like God?
16	Onyebuchi	Who is God?
17	Onyerionwu	Who can overtake death?
18	Chijindu	God sustains life
19	Oraegbunam	May people not kill me
20	Obumselu	Am I the cause of the problem?
21	Ozoemena	May it not happen again
22	Ndukaku	Life is greater than wealth
23	Onwuamaegbu	Death kills blindly/senselessly

### **The Study Population**

The cultural group known as ‘Omambala’ derived their name from Omambala River. The term is a geographical phenomenon of the Omambala River. They are Anambra people that live around the lower part of the river around the region where the Omambala River confluenced with River Niger. This group claims the tradition of ancestral link and they exhibit similar cultural traits which include dialectal similarity. Presently, the whole of Omambala people of old Anambra Local Government have been split into four local government areas. Some of the towns that belong to this cultural group include: Nsugbe, Awkuzu, Nteje, Umunya, Igbariam, Anaku, Omoo, Omasi, Umolum, Ifite-

Ogwari, Umumboo, Aghamelum, Igbakwu, Umuleri, Aguleri, Enugwu-otu, Eziagulu-otu, Nando, Anam, Nzam, Ode, Inoma, Igbokenyi, Igbedo, Alanaonugwa.

Part of the cultural traits which bind this group together is the phenomenon of name clipping. The indulgence of name clipping is not atypical of this cultural zone. Other cultural zones also practice it but the Omambala people's way of doing it is very spectacular and it makes them unique in the general Igbo speech community. NamingNewsletter stated that "a successfully clipped name present the core of the word" (Web). But when names are clipped in Omanbala, there is often a total shift in both form and articulation. The shift is so remarkable that one hardly associates most of the clipped names with the original source and once the clipped form does not relate to the original source, it more often than not lack morphological link with the name where it is derived. The resultant effect is loss of the original meaning. More often than not, the clipped names are semantically barren. The questions that arose as a result of this situation are:

- (1)What gave rise to this cultural trait among this people?
- (2)What do they achieve by this practice?
- (3)If this people are part of the larger Igbo cultural group, does the essence of meaning of names still have essence in their speech communities?
- (4) Are they aware of the damage this practice poses to their language?
- (5) What effect does this practice have on their dialects in relation to quality control of the dialects?
- (6) By extension, what are the implications of this practice to the building of Nigerian state and its various cultures?

Examine the under listed Omambala names, with their clipped versions as shown in the table A:

**Table A**  
**Some Omanbala Names, their Meanings and the Clipped Forms.**

1	Name	Meaning	Clipped Forms
2	Tabansi	Endure	Taansi
3	Iwegbunam	May I not be killed by anger	Iweene
4	Nwaotite	Child of Otite(Otite is a deity)	Ote
5	Okafor	A male child born on the Igbo market day of Afor	Okaa
6	Okonkwo	A male child born on the Igbo market day of Nkwo	Okuo
7	Tabugboo	Today is early enough	Taagboo
8	Oraegbunam	May people not kill me	Oree
9	Ogoegbunam	May my good deeds not kill me	Ogue
10	Obumseluogu	Did I cause the quarrel/fight?	Obumse
11	Akwanya	Greed	Akwaa
12	Anichebe	May the Earth-goddess protect	Achee
13	Nnaemeka	God/Father did well	Nneeka
14	Nwadinanso	Child is very near	Nwanso
15	Ofodile	The efficacy of justice/Justice that is effective(depending on syllabic emphasis)	Oole
16	Obidigboo	The homestead has been	Obiigboo/obi

		in existence	
17	Chidilim	May my personal chi stand by me	Chidii
18	Madukam	People are greater than me	Maakam
19	Maduka	Kins are greater	Maaka
20	Madubuobi	Humans are homestead	Maabuobi
21	Okwuchukwu	God's Decree	Okwuchu
22	Mboelile	Revenge is never late	Mbele
23	Nwabunwanne	Child is one's kin	Nwaune/Nwaanne
24	Emenaka	Don't behave as if...	Emeka
25	Igwenagu	Hunger for number	Igwaa
26	Anikwensi	If the Earthgoddess permits evil	Ekwensi
27	Nnaluemuno		Olum
28	Anikwue	Let the Earthgoddess speak	Akwue
29	Nnaemeka	God/Fathether has done well	Nnaeeka
30	Nnaedozie	Father has planned well	Edozie
31	Oguguamakwa	He/She has consoled me	Ogua
32	Adeze	King's daughter	Adee
33	Uvearo		Uva
34	Nwagbapuluonwu	You shouldn't run away because of death	Nwagba
35	Uzuegbunam	May popularity not destroy me	Uzum
36	Udeegbunam	May popularity/power not destroy me	Udee
37	Ikegbunam	May strength not destroy me	Ikee
38	Elumuno	I have arrived home	Elue
39	Anyakora	The eye that is greater	Anyaora

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		than the others	
40	Ndinekwumma	The people that stand by the truth	Ekwumma
41	Anikpee	May the Earthgoddess judge	Akpee
42	Anazodo	May the Earthgoddess protect	Azodo
43	Ekwuagana		Ekwua
44	Ekwutosi	Don't castigate	Ekwii
45	Odinikpo	He who belongs to the majority	Odikpo
46	Obiekezie	The homestead has done it well	Obie
47	Ovoora		Ovoo
48	Okuanata	Wealth has come back/returned	Okuata
49	Obalim	I have gained	Obaam
50	Izualor	The decision of the deity, alor	Izua
51	Nwakaego	To have child is better than wealth	Akee
52	Ekwealor	What the deity, alor has decreed	Ekwea
53	Chinelo	God plans	Chielo
54	Nkwoemeka	The market day 'Nkwo' did well	Nkweeka
55	Anigbankpu		Agbankpu
56	Anarado		Anaraa
57	Aloefuna	May advice not be lost	Alee
58	Igwenagu	Craving to belong to the majority	Igwaa
59	Chiemeka	God has done well	Chieeka
60	Anaemeka	The Earthgoddess has	Aneeka

		done well	
61	Anaara	The Earthgoddess has freed	Ara
62	Obaeche	The titled one(deseased) has protected	Obee
63	Okuefuna	May wealth not get lost	Okue
64	Obaaghanata	The titled one has reincarnated	Obaa
65	Nwadiogwa	It is pleasing to have mixed gendered children	Nwadoo

A critical examination of the clipped names will reveal that the majority of them do not show any relationship with the source of their derivation; not phonetically, morphologically, structurally nor semantically.

### **The Implication of the Name-Clipping on Omambala Dialects**

Data collected from interview of three Omambala indigenes strongly point out that this practice has led to loss of the wisdom and the circumstances that gave rise to the name and the messages that originally informed the names in the first place. The implication is that the names no longer portray the memorial tendencies that Igbo names are known with. In the course of this research, it was gathered that part of the explanation/rationale for the practice is because this cultural group is noted for their merry-making disposition which they usually exhibit, not only in their straightforward, undiplomatic and abhorrence of double dealings, but also in the way they find short-cuts to their seemingly ‘long names’. In other words, their worldview echo loudly in the way they call their names; easy-going group of people one may say. It was also discovered that they hardly give any thought to the

important role Igbo names play in Igbo culture so they are unaware of the consequences/impact of such practice to their dialects. Part of the discovery revealed that the majority of their younger generation are ignorant of the complete versions of the clipped names more so their meanings.

The researcher's questions turned out to be some sort of eye opener to the damage this wide spread and age long practice has done to their dialects. They discovered with dismay that the younger ones and some at those in-between the two age extremes could not interpret most of the clipped names including those that bear clipped surnames. Most of the younger generation expressed complete ignorance of the meanings of their surnames.

The effect is dialects at the fringe of losing a very important aspect of their language and culture. By extension, the practice is another dangerous blow on Nigerian state which is noted for its richness in multiple languages and cultures but out of neglect and ignorance is exposing part its cultural heritage to danger of extinction. With the on-going crusade of saving Igbo language from English hegemony, Omambala cultural zone should wake up and key into this crusade by encouraging the younger ones to develop the habit of asking questions about the meanings of the clipped names. When they understand what the names mean, they will learn to appreciate and maintain them and at the same time be confident to transfer the practice to future generation. The place to start this correction is in the homes. The home, according to Hinton "is the last bastion from which the language was lost, and the primary place where first language acquisition occurs. Those who dream of language revitalization ultimately desire the natural transmission of the language from parent to child and its use in daily life" (xiv). While Omanbala cultural zone maintains this very

unique attribute of clipping names, they should also not lose sight of developing a complementary habit of calling the names in full and at the same time explaining the meanings of the clipped versions for them to register in the minds of the younger ones and for purpose of safeguarding and strengthening the dialect.

### **Conclusion**

This study proves that clipping of names is a global linguistic phenomenon. It is a social practice born out of the need to shorten long names for convenience but which has turned out to be a weapon inadvertently used by the people of Omambala cultural zone of Igbo language to place their dialects among the endangered species. The negligence of the danger posed by the extreme clipping of names strips such names the major attributes with which Igbo names are known. They should also know that Igbo names are not just identification emblems but a means of preserving experiences and values. Igbo names serve the purposes of preserving and maintaining our historical events, a link between the past in relation to the present and probably helping in our actions in the future. Thus extreme clipping of names can be a subtle way of presenting death sentence to a language/dialect and by extension to a nation.

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