

**AN ANALYSIS OF A NEW DIMENSION OF PERSONAL NAMES AND
DOCUMENTATION
IN IBIBIO FOLK PHILOSOPHY: AN EXERCISE IN LINGUISTIC PHILOSOPHY**

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ABSTRACT

Names form a significant aspect of the thought system of the Ibibio Folk philosophy and metaphysics, and play a significant role in determining the future of an individual negative or positive, as names were given indiscriminately before now. However, a recent discovery shows that a new dimension in naming has found its way into the heuristic belief system of the Ibibio which tilts towards only names that are carefully given, and which affects the individual positively. This paper explores this assertion with a view to ascertaining its importance in the Ibibio thought system.

Introduction

The Ibibio belief or thought system and metaphysics forms an essential ingredient of African philosophy. Proverbs and wise sayings are pregnant with meanings and are constructed with the aim of repositioning, conscientizing and sensitizing man, so as to inculcate a sense of direction as he manages to get along with the complexities of his life, (Ncha, 12). In understanding the Ibibio thought system and world view, names are used as linguistic terms to describe these beliefs, and names play a functional role in moulding and giving meaning to the African world view and reality. To this end, the Ibibio linguistic philosophy provides a medium through which we can have an insight into reality. This may be why Egbeke posits that one role of philosophy is that it enables us to develop the ability to see all aspects of situations (1).

It is germane to point out that names as sounds or words, form a major part of the Ibibio language used in passing or transmitting knowledge, and can be situated within linguistic philosophy or philosophy of language. It was Searle who said that there is hardly any demarcation between the two, except to see linguistic philosophy as a method and philosophy of language as a subject matter (1). Now, since names are important aspects of language of a given people, let us first of all look at what language in itself means.

Language may simply be given as a means of communication between humans, through the use of sounds and symbols. Hoppers defines language as “the principal instrument of communication”. According to him, language as an instrument is composed of words which are the smallest unit of meaning (2). For James, Christian, Language as sounds and printed symbols is a human’s primary symbolic tool for expression and communication (285). Robert Esther sees language as the most conservative social institution and as such shapes both perception and behaviour, influencing our thoughts and actions (33). These, she

says are done through meaning, interpretation and shaping of behaviour. In a similar perspective, Ozumba defines language as “the means of communicating knowledge which is both an art and science”. Further, he sees language as consisting of words as carriers of ideas and thought, making meaning, whether spoken or written. Language is a science because it is not fortuitous but systematic, coherent, and follows a discoverable pattern with roles and expectations (14).

The definitions above, as far as this paper is concerned are logical and ground clearing, since personal names in Ibibio cosmology are words that connote meaning, interpretations, knowledge and reality, with inferences of determinism and sometimes freewillism James Christian’s list of the roles of language lends credence to this assertion. According to him: language plays the following roles:

- (1) Expresses emotions
- (2) Draws out silence
- (3) Enjoys the sounds of language
- (4) Establishes a feeling of belonging
- (5) Establishes relationship
- (6) Effects or manipulates others emotions
- (7) Affects others behaviour
- (8) Suggests insights
- (9) Communicates facts and ideas
- (10) Effect word magic

As we are going to see, apart from defining and helping to mould the world view of the individual in Ibibio folk philosophy and psychology, personal names elicit the word magic effect much more than any other, especially within the culture of a new dimension of naming and documentation. This also means that names have deterministic effects on the bearer and tend to act as a compass of life to such an individual. This means that there is a force in names that appears to control the individual, depending on the type of name one bears or answers.

To buttress this point, generally, African metaphysics postulates the reality and independent existence of spirits. The relation between a thing and its spirit is often compared to the relation between a canoe and its steer man, for it is the spirit that controls and directs the thing’s behaviour (Ncha, 133).

Names form obvious means of establishing a people’s identity. Persons and groups are distinguished through their names. The giving of a name can be part of the acceptance of an individual into a particular religion, Thomas Singh et al. (2004). Personal, proper, common and abstract names form part of the vocabulary of a language, and the possession of a personal name has always existed. Ullman argues that, no one whether low or high goes nameless once he has come to this world. Personal names project the perception of aspects of people’s lives and general world view. Essien posits that the more one knows the language, history, values, religion, ethics, culture and world view of a people, the better for such an individual.

World View

Ibibio personal names fall or constitute one of the ingredients of the totality of their world view. It is therefore, not out of the way if we spare a minute or so to define what it is all about. A world view according to James Christian “in a broad sense, refers to one’s philosophy of life, an all-inclusive coherent way of looking at life and the cosmos. A sort of unconscious, total fabric into which one incorporates all his experiences and through which

he sees the world (649). Similarly, Singh defines world view as “a learned perception of reality, a mental framework for thinking believing and understanding reality (237). Simply put, a people’s world view is the way they perceive the world. It is shaped by a number of factors, which include their tradition, culture and heritage as handed down from generation to generation. This may include the values and norms of a society. A world view of a people may be altered due to the dynamism of life itself, basically because phenomena generally have an unsteady nature as change according to Heraclitus is the only permanent phenomenon, hence the slight changes in the personal names in Ibibio culture.

Documentation

The Oxford advanced learner’s Dictionary defines documentation as “the act of recording something in document”. Following this, such things as agreement, information on one’s property, land, in fact, moveable and unmoveable assets, events and programmes are recorded for the purpose of safety and future use. Documentation may also be seen as the acknowledgement one gives to the sources of research, the authors that one uses in carrying out a research work through methods such as APA, MLA etc, which are approved referencing methods.

Basically, pieces of information would be distorted, destroyed, mutilated or lost if not safely kept away on paper, video or audio tape, or software materials. So therefore, documentation in this way could be seen as the act of recording communicable materials which include in this context, aspects of a people’s culture, belief systems, values, and traditions which constitute ingredients for moulding a people’s world view. It is important to mention that all these could be done through language. Language is therefore used to communicate and can be said to carry communicable materials such as personal names and what they connote for the past, present and the future.

Linguistic Determinism

The Encyclopedia Americana defines Determinism as “the view which holds that whatever happens is universally, unexceptionally and completely determined by antecedent causes” (Vol 9, 1974). Basically, determinism denies that man is really free and that our actions are by-products of causes. There are various forms of determinism such as biological determinism, psychological, determinism, psycho-social determinism, theological, determinism, metaphysical determinism and linguistic determinism.

Linguistic determinism is a view which explains that sounds, and words such as personal names affect the behaviour of persons associated with such linguistic terms. From here, one can assert that the way one thinks is largely determined by the language one speaks. Whorf (1940) as cited by Salzmann (1998) asserted that the fundamentals of words and grammar in each language are not only duplicating tools for voicing ideas, but themselves the shapers of ideas.

According to linguistic determinism, the name-bearer’s world is structured by the name that the individual is given by his parents or community. Essien explains that in Ibibio metaphysics, there is a saying that supports or connotes linguistic determinism such as “enyin aasisop Owo” which means (a name can influence a person). This is common in Ibibio land and according to analysts, has a kind of moderating effect on any individual that bears a name. Generally, it is believed that the act of shaping people’s ideas forms an attribute of language in general and an aspect of the culture of bearing personal names in particular.

Ibibio

The Ibibio, found in the south-south geo-political region of Nigeria, constitute one of the minority tribes in the Niger Delta region, known for its rich natural resources. This ethnic group is found in Akwa Ibom State, which is also the indigenous home land of the Ibibio. According to Essien (1990), the Ibibio are the fourth largest tribe in Nigeria after Hausa Yoruba and Igbo. They are well populated, numbering about four million people going by the figures of the 2006 National population exercise. Although, AKwa Ibom State is their homeland where there are found in large numbers, Ibibios can also be found in the neighbouring Cross River and Abia States of Nigeria. Akwa Ibom state which is indigenous home of the Ibibio people is known internationally as one of the oil rich states in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Ukpong, draws attention to the fact that the Ibibio migrated to their present location from Usak Edet, a region in Cameroun. This is supported by a number of personal and common names shared by both communities in Cameroun and Nigeria. For instance the Banyang people of Cameroun and the Ibibio in Akwa Ibom bear such names as Isong, Ita, Akwa, and have common words like eturikan/ Utuenikan (lantern), ekpeme (bottle) and nkanika-time/clock (21). For Udo, the Ibibio are Afaha people visible in the distribution of 275 Afaha villages in Ibibio land. Within the traditional context, or what Ukpong refers to as that part of the world that has not yet experienced the full consequences of the industrial revolution, the Ibibio constitute a religious people who believe in a supreme being, divinities or deities, spirits and ancestors. The seeking of the face of these spiritual entities and acknowledging them in social functions is a common phenomenon among the people (43).

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Analysis of personal names and documentation in Ibibio folk philosophy

Africans generally have a unique way of assigning names to individuals within any community, tribe or ethnic nationality. This uniqueness, perhaps, is as a result of their belief system, in which the spirits, deities, and the totality of the spiritual entities headed by a supreme being and the environment go a long way in influencing and enforcing the behaviour and rules respectively, among the people. According to Edet, Africans have a similar naming system, and a large majority of them adopt patronymic rules when naming their children, that is children are given names after male parents or ancestors, or such a child may be named according to the circumstances of birth (21). It is important to note that names of people with doubtful reputation and questionable characters are no longer being adopted. Our interest or concern in this paper is not the naming system per se but what influence these linguistic terms have on the individual bearers, and the level of determinism involved, especially in the new dimension or system of naming and documentation in Ibibio. Basically, a lot of African names have a nostalgic and sentimental symbolism which articulate specific messages. What this means is that each name has an intention and meaning subsumed in it, and is sometimes loaded with the knowledge of the history and culture of the family. Personal names therefore can be seen as a reservoir of knowledge and acts as a path way towards knowing the culture and tradition of a community.

The Ibibio have a naming system that predates the Christian era, in which names are given, reflecting relationship with heavenly bodies, which was an aspect of the traditional African religion. The Ibibio like most Africans perceive the universe as circumcentric and multidimensional. They perceive the world as boundless in spatial terms with an ordered and mutually interdependent and ontologically fused planes of the deities, ancestors and mythological beings, John. Oduyoye enumerates such mythological names in Yoruba culture

and naming system. Such as *Ábòsède*- one who arrives on the day of rest, and *Ábíóná* – one who is born by the way side. Deitic names in Yoruba include *Ògunlàbì*, *Ògunsànyà*, *Òluwolé*, and *Òlùwátósin*, meaning God of Iron, God of Iron pay me, God enter, God is worthy to be praised, respectively.

Similarly, the Igbo, culture have personal names which reflect deitic attributes, such names as *Chukwemeka*, *Chiebunam*, *Chinenye*, *Chibuzo* etc. (Thank God, God did not kill me, God gives, God first, respectively). The first group of names is Yoruba, while the second group is Igbo.

In most African communities, there are certain categories from which names are selected in line with the belief system of such a place. Ubahakwe highlights eleven such categories from which personal names are selected. These include the good and virtuous, kinship, natural phenomena, social concepts, the calendar, Titles, evil, physical objects, parts of the body, material assets, and occupation.

A classification of *Ibibio* names into forty categories is given by *Ukpong*. These include: the supreme being, clan or group deities, spirits, the *Inam*, the *Ekong* or War society, the *Ibok* and *Idiong* societies or cults, the animal kingdom, the plant Kingdom and herbal medicine. Others include parts of the body, place of birth of a child, colour or appearance, morality and ethics, the importance of life, humans, and chieftaincy. Others are order of birth, marriage and family, social stratification, conflict, Death (of children), festivities, reincarnation, Karma, Luck or prediction, hunting, fishing, justice, equity and fair play, disregard for female children, currency and trade, periods of famine and plenty, age grade, gratitude and ingratitude. These groupings of personal names occurred during the pre-Christian era.

It is worth mentioning that this period reflects the character of the old dimension of naming and documentation. A significant difference between the old and the new is that while the old dimension reflects a negative determinism, the new dimension shows elements of positive determinism. That means that a particular personal name in the old dimension affects the individual's life negatively just as the name is or implies, while it does so in the positive within the new dimension given its positiveness as portrayed by the name.

The pre-Christian era (old dimension) of naming in *Ibibio* records only very few names associated with the Supreme Being.

Such names include:

Òbót		Creator
Ñsè		
Ánsú		
Ñsèòbót	}	
Ñsèábási		looking unto God
Ñsèóbóng		
Àbásiódù		God exists
Àniétiè		who is like God?
Ànièkpènò		who would give?
ífiòk		wisdom of God
Èdíkáń		victory

Apart from the examples above, other personal names during this era only reflect a naming system that is based on non-Christian categories common among the practitioners of African traditional religion. The following is a list of personal names borne particularly during that period and the categories from which they are selected, and their meanings.

Ìsemiń	The Awa-Imam deity.
Àbáſiatóì	The outside God
Èkùkinám	From Inam celebration
Úsènekòñ	A day of war
Íbók	Medicine (traditional)
Èkíko	A cock
ńím	A silk cotton tree
Údòkáy	A medicinal herb
Úsúngúrúá	The market road
Ìkpát	Foot
Ènwèwèn	Black/dark
Kúbíáná	Do not deceive!
ÀniéfiÓk	Who knows?
Úwémèdíímò	Life is wealth
Údóró	Profit
ìkpòdñ	Loneliness
Èsáñ	A staff
Àtát	The secret society
ÈtÙkúdó	Third born son (small udo)
Èdèmékà	The side of mother
Ñdàéyò	Dry season
Ídágá	Status
Ísók/ísóók	Oppress, Trample upon
ÙkpÚhó	Exchange/Replacement
Úsèndiá	Day of merry making
édét/Áfit	From Edet Obo (A day of the week)
Ákpábót	First of creation
Èmána	Entrance to life
ÁtáháÚdÓk	Worn out hoe
ìnwáñ	Farm
ìyírè	Fish net
Úruá	Market
Úbeń	Side
Sèèńó	What is given
Nwánákwo	Fight for yours
Èduèk	Bounty/plenty
Ñkáímáhá	Age grade members do not love themselves
étrèsó	What do you forget?

From the illustration above, one can see that such names connote a recording of the Ibibio people's social, political, economic, and religious culture. Furthermore, they reflect the philosophies, world view, perceptions as well as expectations of the people. An interesting thing about these names is that in the pre-Christian era, they were given

indiscriminately and often such names affected the individual negatively. For instance, for a person who bears Ekpo-(Devil), one would not be surprised, if he behaves like the devil with arrogant wickedness and heartlessness. In the thought system of the Ibibio, this could be seen as an aspect of negative determinism that often comes with its attendant dire consequences. However, this trend changed with the advent of Christianity, and gradually this thought system has given way to a new system of naming and documentation. Let us now briefly look at the new dimension.

The new dimension of naming and documentation

The new dimension of the Ibibio naming system within the folk philosophy of the people provides a refreshing contrast with the old system. The new dimension brought a change in the way reality is perceived, a new world view, a reorientation and repositioning, through the injection of names with positive determinism and a more purposeful and useful utilization of linguistic terms.

All these can be attributed to the introduction of the Church into the lives of the Ibibio people. It is believed that most of these recent names have spiritual powers that can rescue one from a situation of danger, and bring succour and relief in time of distress and worry. Such names are said to bring one closer to God and thus enable one to enjoy His endless blessings and favour. One's behaviour and activities, business; education etc depending on the type of name one bears, are favourably controlled by a benevolent spirit-God almighty. As we shall see in the subsequent pages, such names have magical powers that draw one closer to luck and as such impact positively on the individual and by extension, the family.

The claim that personal names have magical powers and encourage the belief in positive determinism among the Ibibio people is supported by the following account of an event involving an Ibibio person who incidentally was a friend. The person made a journey to Jos, the plateau state capital in the northern part of Nigeria. Unfortunately, this was the period when Jos was in crisis occasioned by ethnic squabbles, rendering time and its environs highly insecure and dangerous. Funny enough, he did not envisage the situation in that light but that was the reality. So, on arrival, he discovered there was a curfew and since his bus arrived behind time he was put in a situation of confusion, as he did not immediately know what to do. Now, in that state of fear and confusion something interesting happened, he instantly remembered that his name is ANIEKANABASI- (meaning who is greater than God). As soon as he remembered this, strange courage overwhelmed him and he was able to control the fear and confusion, and ultimately found a place where he passed the night. This, means that positive names have positive results and effects, and underlie the reasons for a change from the old to the new system of naming and documentation.

The position that names are believed to influence the bearer and circumstances surrounding him is supported by Essien when he warns that people should be careful in assigning personal names to individuals because they have psychological effects on the bearer. Overtime, there has been an increasing consciousness of the effect of fatalistic and ominous names among the Ibibio, and given the fact that the language one speaks shapes one's ideas about the world which affects his time, space and other phenomena relating to existence, the old naming system which does not give much cognizance to God almighty is gradually giving way to the new dimension which attaches much premium to God.

The following are few of such names in the new naming system which gives an insight into the changing belief system, philosophy and psychology of the people of Ibibio.

Àbàsìámá

God loves

Àbasiàkèmé	God is able
Àbasiákára	God rules
Àbásíánò	God gives
Ábásíákan	God is victorious
Ñsíkánábási	What is beyond God?
Mfónábási	God's goodness
Emèmábási	God's peace
Èdidíonǵabási	God's blessing
Ƙufrèábási	Do not forget God!
Ekèábási	God's own
Úyímèábási	God's will
Ítòròbòñ	The king/lord's praise
Tòròboñ	Praise the king/Lord
Ímèòbòñ	The king/Lord's patience
Ímáòbòñ	The king/Lord's love
Ènòbòñ	The king/Lord's gift
Úkèmèòbòñ	The king/Lord's ability
Dáráòbòñ	Rejoice in the Lord
Ábásíkpòñkè	God does not desert
Idáráòbòñ	The king/Lord's Joy
Úsènbòñ	The day of the king/Lord's
Íniobòñ	The time of the king/Lord
Òbòñámá	The Lord loves

We also have names which have neither Obong or Abasi, meaning (God) but refer to virtue. The examples include Abai (Pillar), Ntíkpo (good things), étí-édíionǵ (good blessings), Úyái (beauty), Mkpó Útó (precious thing), Uko (valour) etc. It is important to mention that the increase in such names flows from the dominant influence of the church on the culture of the Ibibio which has become documented in Ibibio language.

It is interesting to note that names relating to the deities and ancestors, the Inam and Ekong or War society, the Ibok and Idiong societies or cults, and the animal kingdom have been erased from the new vocabulary of Ibibio names. The reason as earlier stated, is that it is believed that such names have negative effects on the life of the individual.

For instance, one who bears Ásábo (python) or Ékpè (Lion) is believed by that understanding to have and display the attributes of these animals, an attribute the individual received as a result of bearing such names. Following this, names relating to the part of the body, the plant kingdom, and herbal medicine have been abandoned, and only a few fetish Ibibios are still romancing with such as personal names. Again, names that are given from parts of the human body, or name like Úbókúdóm – which means right hand is still being used. Others like údóm (right), Ékot (back head), Ítoñ (neck), and Ikpát/Mkpát (feet) have all disappeared from the Ibibio naming system. Names based on reincarnation such, as Ákpábót (arrival), Ékám (Grand mother), Ákpan (first born son), Údó (second son), Àdiaghá (first daughter), and Étúkudó (third son) are no longer borne first names.

It is interesting to note that the effect of Christianity on the Ibibio naming system has almost wiped out names that do not positively determine and direct the life of an individual. In this case, names on reincarnation, kinship order of birth, hurting, farming and fishing. Such as Ìyìré (fish net) Ìnwáñ (farm) Àntighá (To shoot), are on the verge of extinction or are gradually moving towards total obliteration.

It is important to state that in the old naming system and documentation, the circumstances under which an individual is born was given serious consideration and as such, a child's circumstances of birth could form the basis for his name. By that understanding, this is a reflection of the folk psychology of the child's parents. Taking these names as examples, Ìdiok (bad), and Mbúk (Gossip talk), could be conjoined to mean Ébúkidiók (people spread bad news). Interestingly, some persons were given names such as Ìnó (Thief), and Ifot (witch or wizard). However, what necessitated the giving of such demeaning and seemingly immoral names, is shrouded in circumstances beyond superficial understanding. Given this scenario therefore, in the new naming system and documentation, other names have taken over the positions of these names since parents now give names that reflect the new way of life and hope as given by the tenets of Christianity. Such names as Údì (grave), Úfeń (suffering), Úkút (sorrow), Mkpá (death), Mbom (pity/sympathy), ìkpóń (Loneliness), have are taken over. Others are endearing names that have come to stay such as Mkpòutó (a thing of high value), Énó Utó (a gift of high value) Énóidem (my gift), Úkpóń (honour), Ifiok (wisdom), Ódúdú (power), Úkó (valour), Ìni-éké (when), Ini-ekem (Time has come). All these names and others not mentioned, dominate the new naming system of the Ibibio people, and are given with the belief that such names would have positive effect on the character of the individuals bearing it. It is also expected that such an individual would perform actions that bring honour and blessings to the parents, a belief in positive determinism. This shows the importance of such names within the culture of the people.

Conclusion

So far, we examined the new dimension of personal names and documentation within the culture of the Ibibio people. There is a common saying that "Tell me your friend and I will tell you who you are". This can as well be put this way "Tell me your friend's name and I will know who you are". This means that the identity of an individual through a name could go a long way in conveying information and knowledge about that person.

Basically, a name is simply a linguistic term that could be a tool or instrument for information and knowledge about a people's culture and tradition. From our analysis above, it can be seen that the Ibibio language through naming as an aspect of the Ibibio culture, carries the people's belief system and displays their world view and psychology. Certain names also reveal to an extent the metaphysics and philosophy of the Ibibio and show the interplay of the forces of positive and negative determinism.

This paper is of the view that just as life is dynamic, culture is also dynamic, and since the Ibibio naming system is undergoing change, which is the reality according to Heraclitus, there is an emerging Ibibio culture through the new dimension of naming. Therefore, it is germane for researchers of language to do a thorough appraisal of this aspect of language so as to carry out a proper documentation of the Ibibio psychology and heuristic belief system. This would eventually lead to the preservation for posterity, the relevant aspects of their philosophy and world view in which the past and the present are utilized in order to shape the future for the generations unborn. More so, this is needful, since language plays an integrative and important role in human life and progress as it forms a rendezvous for all aspects of a culture.

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