



An Onomastics Exploration of Relationship Names in Ibibio

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Abstract

The objectives of this research are to appraise and document relationship names in Ibibio as well as examine the cultural relevance of these variables to the Ibibio society. Basing this study on Sapir Whorf theory which addresses the intertwining nature of language and culture, this research analyses relationship names that are appreciated and the ones that are rejected within the Ibibio society. The data for this study were elicited intuitively and from secondary sources; the analysis was done descriptively. The Ibibio language has relationship names which express what the people see as sacrosanct practices, but abominable registers such as bestiality, lesbianism, homosexuality, and others are not captured in the language lexicon. The reason being that, these unholy practices are seen as eccentric as well as taboos and anyone caught in the very act is punished accordingly. This research has identified six (6) groups of relationship names and their meaning in Ibibio language. The result of this research shows that affiliations such as *asimaan* (kinsman), *ayenyin* (grandchild), *ukod* (in-law), or *asenawo* (visitor) are the most delicate of all the relationships in Ibibio land. The value and fragile nature of the above relationships have been prescribed by the ancestors and the reason why they attached so much importance to these relationships than others is divine. This study recommends that the onomastic exploration of other aspects of Ibibio culture that have not been investigated should be examined by scholars for the purpose of preserving our cultural heritage for posterity.

Keywords: Relationship names. Ibibio culture, Ibibio language, Register.

Introduction

Onomastics is a broad field of learning that studies different components of naming and the likes. It is an inexhaustible field of study that promotes and preserves the various features and nuances associated with human and non-human naming systems. Over the years, different fields of study including sociology, anthropology, arts/humanities, among others have gone into investigating the structures, typologies, etymologies, literature, and the significance of most indigenous names for the purpose of ascertaining their cultural, economic, religious, political, scientific, as well as their educational relevance to the literate and the non-literate society. Name as well as the naming system of a given locality is interwoven with the people norms and cultural values. They are heterogeneity relationship names whose pragmatic relevance broadens far beyond their primary usage.

Name is a form of ligament that keeps a relationship alive. It gives an existing relationship worth and value that the society accords it; such that, even when the relationship goes sore the name that existed during such relationship stands as an evidence. Hence, name is a stamp or a seal of an existing relationship. It would not be out of place to say that, where there is a relationship, naming is inevitable. Bariki (2009) agrees to the fact that African names have a lot of historical, socio-cultural semantic, ethnopragmatic and semiotic load that make them multifunctional communication tools.

Since names are complex form of traditions; its multifariousness is captured differently in different contexts and situations of human endeavours/experiences. It is worthy of note that an icon or element of a culture can represent or express several meanings depending on the context, forum, personality, and other incomprehensible traits that are beyond human imagination. Therefore, the study of human and non-human names and their intricacies are inexhaustible by any standard of investigation. The objective of this study is to document relationship names, examine the sociocultural significance of relationshipnames and also ascertain why certain relationship names are not captured in the language lexicon of the people.

Some taboos and abominable acts are so detested in Ibibio land to the point that the people do not have indigenous names for them. They can only explain what these concepts mean as it is shown in table (7) but they do not have name tags for these relationship affiliation in Ibibio. It is clear that these obnoxious relationship acts are becoming popular because of the advancement of science and technology. The idea that most scientific and technological concepts have been captured in Ibibio language lexicon and these obnoxious relationship acts have not be captured, means that the older generation did not approve these abominable practices and the new generation of Ibibio populace also frown at this unholy acts and that is why these relationship acts are not named like other relationship acts.

Who are the Ibibio?

The Ibibio people are very religious. Their traditional elements anchor on beliefs, norms, value, and ethic. There is no belief on any philosophy that does not regard the norms of the people. Nothing is of value to the Ibibio people if it does not suit the ethical standard of the

society. Hence the four traditional elements are interwoven and acculturate to all Ibibio indigenes. They recognized the existence of the supreme being, divinities, spirits, and ancestors. These beings are accorded due respect and worship regularly in order to keep enjoying their mutual support, benevolence, and commitment Ukpog (2007).

The Ibibio language is prompt in capturing fairly the socio-cultural, religious, political, and economic beliefs, norms, value and ethics of the people. Ibibio is spoken by about six million people following 2012 census. The Ibibio speaking people is classified into six sub-groups which are Eastern or Proper Ibibio, Western Ibibio or Anaañ, Northern Ibibio or Eniong, Southern Ibibio, Delta Ibibio, Andoni-Ibeno, Riverain Ibibio or Efik (Forde and Jones, 1950:67 in Ekong (2001). Majority of the Ibibio speakers live in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. The language is the medium of communication in commerce, religion, second language for education and the judiciary.

What Constitutes Relationship Names in Ibibio

Relationship names are mostly names used to describe an affiliation and affinity that a person has with another. It is a well-known and accepted norm in Ibibio culture. Most of the relationship names are used as personal names. Evidence of this is found in most literary works written by Iwaketok such as Ikp??ñIfonno (2019), IdñAkpanadiama (2023) and Adiaha Udo (2025). Relationship names are culture specific and language generic which means, they are culturally base. The words that form the inventory of this register are often novel, not loanwords (Ekong, 2001). Essien (1986:30) penned that Ibibio names “reflect not only the practices that arises from the religion and philosophy but also from the religious and philosophical ideas accepted by the people”. The act of given names to relationship that existed between two or more persons among the Ibibio is as old as the people themselves. **Although, there is no collaboration between the Ibibio relationship names and their meaning,** the fact remains that when an affiliation between two or more is recognized, a name is designated to such and the practice is culturally recognized in the society. This goes on to explain the fact that any affiliation or relationship between two or more persons that is not captured in the language register is most likely not applauded norm in Ibibio land. Few among such affiliations are Lesbianism, homosexuality, gay marriage, incest, bestiality, and others. It is not that these practices were not or are not observed by some unscrupulous elements in Ibibio society but, the reality remains that anyone caught in any of these acts faces the full wrath of the community where they reside. And because the people do not welcome these abominable acts, they are no indigenous names identified with these kind of relationship acts to the best of my knowledge. The truth remains that these unrecognised affiliations are taboos and are detrimental to the spirit of the land.

The significance of this research to Ibibio culture and the language is in agreement with what Sapir Whorf asserts that the language of a people is conditioned by the culture of the people. In other words, the language of a people expresses the regular and irregular, present and past experiences of the people as well as project the future expansion as they interact with other ethnic groups. Relationship names set to reveal intrigues beliefs and value of the Ibibio society.

In Ibibio traditional setting, some relationships are very fragile than others and in order not to incur the wrath of the gods, the people tread with caution in such kinship. Ekong (2001:130) acknowledges that “the traditional Ibibio ... was organized around intrinsic fear of the unknown. Hence most deviant behaviours and occurrence were generally regarded as sinful or sacrilegious and likely to invoke the wrath of the gods on the people either in the form of famine, pestilence, and disease, natural disasters, death or a combination of these.” Thus, any harm done against an imaan (kinsman), ayɲnyen (grandchild), ukod (in-law), or asenawo (one's visit) were regarded as very demeaning act. Any culprit found inflicting any kind of harm to any of these fellows was punished severely. Rejecting a grandchild request or talking harshly to him/her attracted an instant punishment from the gods. Grandchildren were and are still seen as gift and their position in any family is not to be contested for. The reason being that during war or fracas between communities; grandchildren were or are used to champion peace and harmony to disagreeing communities.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research adopted a qualitative research approach. The data were elicited from secondary sources namely textbooks, internet, journals. Six groups of relationship names in a tabulated form has be presented in this study. Each table takes care of a particular relationship name as identified in the language.

The Neo-Whorfianism is adopted for this research. This theory is a new and revised version of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis of 1929. Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis comprises two concepts which are linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity. Linguistic determinism is a stronger version of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis which states that language determines the way we think, while linguistic relativity the weaker version of the hypothesis argues that the differences recorded in a language are not established in any other language. It further explains that differences in languages affect the comprehension process of most concepts. This notion had been turned down by many researchers on the bases that culture is a universal phenomenon and linguistics has expression limitation and barrier because of ecological factor (Brown, 1957). Others postulate that language(s) is/are created based on need and so what a language does not express cannot affect the assimilation process of concepts. The Neo-Whorfianism has come to take care of the inadequacies of earlier linguistic relativity. This revised model is birthed by a comparative linguist Stephen C. Levinson who avers that “human spatial thinking is quite heavily influenced by culture and more specifically by language” (Levinson, 2003, p. 18). Heremodelled the idea that culture influences the thought pattern of people, but does not determine people's world view of the concepts that they do not have in their native language. The discussion of this study settles around linguistic relativity. Certain phenomenon happening around the world had been programmed before the existence of man. While some cultures experience civilization early, others had theirs quite late. Also, many relationship phenomena are yet to be recognized in most African grammar log even when these phenomena have gotten wide acceptance and codification in most languages of other continents of the world. The understanding is that most of the relationship experiences are strange and unacceptable to some societies. And so most languages and cultures are yet to have native name to these concepts even though they might understand the idea behind the concepts. This

research finds the argument in this hypothesis viable to support the discussion of this investigation. In this paper, we explicate why some relationship names are readily captured in the language lexicon and others are not.

Analysis of Data and Discussion

This section focuses on the data analysis to explicate the cultural belief on relationship names in Ibibio land. The relationship includes:

Table 1: Blood/Family Relationship name

S/N	Ibibio	Gloss
1	Ayakka	Any close or distant relations
2	Ayineka-eteawodeen	Uncle
3	Ayineka-eka awoañwaan	Aunt
4	Ayinayen-eka (awodeen)	Nephew
5	Ayinayen-eka (awoanwaan)	Niece
6	Ayinayen-eka	Cousin (from my maternal side)
7	Ayinayen-ekaete	Cousin (from my paternal side)
8	Ayinete	step brother/sister
9	Ayineka	Sibling
10	Añwaan	wife or sister-in-law
11	Ayin	One's child
12	Ete	Father
13	Eka	Mother
14	Ebe	husband or in-law
15	Ekam	Grandmother
16	Etebom	Grandfather
17	Ekaete	Mother of one's father
18	Eteeka	Father of one's mother

This form of relationship names are given to people who have blood affinity within the family. In Ibibio land, every member of the family is in a relationship with one another, and so there are assigned nomenclature useful and needful to differentiate one family relationship from another. *Ebe* (Husband) and *añwaan* (wife) are the first family relationship that brings about other family members within the family and the society at large. *Ete* (father) and *eka* (mother) come after *ayñ* (child) or *ndit?* (children) have been brought into the family. I can say that these are primary members of any family. Just like *ete*(father) and *eka* (mother);*etubom* (grandfather) and *ekam* (grandmother) are relationships established after *ebe* (Husband) and *añwaan* (wife) procreate, and they give their parents *ayñyen* (grandchild) or *ndito-ayñyen/ndit?-ayñ* (grandchildren) respectively. *Ayineka-ete-awodeen* (uncle), *ayineka-ekaawoañwaan* (aunt), *ayinayñ-eka-awodeen* (nephew), *ayinayñ-eka-awoanwaan* (niece), among others presented, come after a child or children have been brought into a family union and the family becomes expanded.

Theoretically, this shows that Ibibio recognizes and approves these family kinships and the people are very familiar with the privileges and benefits of the kinships and their names within the bloodline.

Table 2: Marriage Relationship names

S/N	Ibibio	Gloss
1	Ayinebe	Foster child of the husband
2	Ayinañwaan	Foster child of the wife
3	Añwaanete	Step mother
4	Ebe eka	Step father
5	Ete ebe	Father-in-law of the husband
6	Ete añwaan	Father-in-law of the wife
7	Eka ebe	Mother-in-law of the husband
8	Eka añwaan	Mother-in-law of the wife
9	Ukod	In-law
10	Imaan	Kinship
11	Añwaanufib	Co-wife
12	Awo mmebe / Awo mmeañwaan	A relative from the husband/wife side
13	Nditgete	Step brothers/sisters

The names in this category emanates from marriage relationship. There are also blood-related names. When a man or woman gets married in Ibibio as well as other cultures of the world, he or she acquires a new statue and relationship. Marital relationships are well recognised in Ibibio with the names that portray the affinity. *Ebe* (husband) and *añwaan* (wife) are the first marital relationship names in Ibibio marriages. *Ete-ebe* (father-in-law of the husband) and *ete-añwaan* (father-in-law of the wife), *eka-ebe* (mother -in-law of the husband), and (mother-in-law of the wife), *añwaan-ufib* (co-wife), and others come after a marital union has been formed between the *ebe* (husband) and *añwaan* (wife). Relatives from the husband and the wife sides know themselves as *ukod* (in-law). Marriage relationships are greatly valued and respected in Ibibio land.

Theoretically, marriage relationship (names) are greatly endeared, honoured and accounted for in Ibibio language. It is observed that culture influences our sense of judgement. The Ibibio people value marriage relationship because the custom of the people accord any relationship that emanates from marriage dignity and honour.

Table 3: Business Relationship names

S/N	Ibibio	Gloss
1	Awoitie-utom/ndubeghe	Colleague/business partner
2	Awoudua mmi	Customer/my business partner
3	Udeb	Buyer
4	Andinyam/Anyamudua	Seller
5	Anie/Andiniendubeghe	Business owner
6	Awo isañ	Debtor
7	Awoutom	Labourer

Business relationship names are used to describe or address office-mate, business partners, co-trader or co-marketer and customers/clients who relates in doing one business transaction or the other and they are very few in Ibibio.

In table (3), using the Neo-Whorfianism, It could be observed that Ibibio language lexicon has relationship names that describe the various people that take part in different business transactions. Although the business relationship names in the language may be few compare to what is found in other languages like English; however, there is an evidence that the Ibibio accept and do also get involve in commerce and other endeavours.

Table 4: Relationship names within the Community

S/N	Ibibio	Gloss
1	Awoiɗaḽḽnnyin	my village person
2	Awoufɔkḽḽnnyin	Extended family relation
3	Awoekpəkḽḽnnyin	Extended family relation
4	Abɔɔḽḽ-ufɔk	Head of one's extended family
5	Abɔɔḽḽḽkparawa	Youth leader
6	Eka ibaan	Women leader
7	Ete id?ḽ	Village head
8	Abɔɔḽḽikpaisonḽ	Clan head
9	Ikaan	Ancestors
10	Aku/ḽkuku	Priest/priests
11	Amanaisoḽ	Indigene
12	Asenawo	Visitor
13	Ukod	In-law
14	Mboḽḽoidoḽ	Neighbour
15	Ndem	Deity
16	Mbia mfa	Soothsayers
17	Mbiaibɔk	Native doctors

Relationship names within the community are nomenclatures employed to express the connection that people within the community have. *Awoiɗaḽḽnnyin* (my town/village person), simply means the speaker and the addressee are from the same village/community. *Awoufɔkḽḽnnyin* means a member of my extended family. This kind of relationship comes by blood. *Ab??ḽḽ-ufɔk* is a recognizable extended family leader; the eldest male of the family who takes care of the family deity and maintain peace and order within the extender family. It is a statutory leadership position recognised by government. In the current political era, *Ab??ḽḽḽkparawa* (Youth leader) and *Eka ibaan* (Women leader - commonly known as woman leader) have become a very lucrative political position sought after by most male youth and women in the community. They opt for these positions so as to become relevant in government by using their office to draw the attention of the government of the day to the needs of the people that they represent. A person is elected into either of these offices depending on his/her commitment and dedication to his/her people and the approval of the government. These offices are also statutory.

In Ibibio community, both the physical and spiritual affinities are also recognised. Different deities, ancestors, custodians of customary rule of laws like the - village head, clan head, seers and native doctors have been fully captured in the language lexicon and their responsibilities in governance are well known and appreciated by the people.

Theoretically, it is observed that relationship names within the community exist in Ibibio culture. These names portray the type of communality that exist among the Ibibio people and the fact that in Ibibio society, an individual is not expected to live in isolation nor suffer alone. A person has different people to relate with both physically and spiritually as he or she has need of them. There is an Ibibio adage that says “*Ndāñndianaawoasekopufk idemawo*” (A neighbour perceives his neighbour's body adour)”, that is to say that a neighbour is of great value in Ibibio tradition.

Table 5: Relationship names by Association

S/N	Ibibio	Gloss
1	Awoufok-Abasi (nnyin)	our church member
2	ikod mmi	My followers
3	Ayineka (ke Abasi)	My brother or sister in Christ
4	Mbed mmi	My disciples
5	Ufan (mmi)	(My) friend
6	Awo itieutom	A colleague
7	Amammi	My lover
8	Awonneme mmi	My gossipmate
9	Ayinufoknwedmmi	My schoolmate
10	Ayinuf?k	House help
11	Awoutom mmi	(My) employee
12	Awoatāñ	A member of one's compound
13	Asenawo/asenawoinuaesion	A visitor
14	Koko	Ones namesake
15	Awoidem	Ones acquaintance
16	Awo nnyin	a member of one unit/party
17	Awoinaa	Sex mate
18	Awombre mmi	My playmate
19	Awonsañā/nsañā mmi	Acquaintance
20	Ub?kudom	A confidant
21	edoñ mmi	My sheep

Names in this category emanates from common association like business, play, friendship, church fellowship, and others. People who share fellowship or have involvement with one another in places like the church, office, school, organization addresses their colleagues, schoolmates, clients, follower, visitors etc. with names that depict their involvement. These names are meant to clearly express the purpose of their involvements. A pastor can address his follower as *ed?ñ mmi* (my sheep). This shows that the addressee is his subject. A leader in Ibibio society can address his subjects as *mbed mmi* (my disciple). This kind of relationship name is peculiar to religious setting than to any other group. *Awombre mmi* (My playmate) is often used

by footballers in Akwa Ibom to refer to their colleagues. Other folks in Ibibio used the same name to address any person they know who is not their close acquaintance. Children or young people often refer to their play mate as *ufan mmi* (my friend).

Theoretically, it is observed that relationship names by association are names given to portray the type of association that the Ibibio people are involve in, and their meaning explain the purposes of such relationships.

Table 6: Relationship names by Age

S/N	Ibibio	Gloss
1	Akpoñka	Age mate
2	Nta	Peer
3	Da	Peer
4	Da awo	That person

Names in this table depicts rapport between people of the same age grade. The names also portray closeness and familiarity, no seriousness or offence is attached to this category of name tags when use by peers. Sometimes *Da* is used as nickname by some peers and even husband and wife. These are commonly used among young and adult folks who are peers in Ibibio community. Also, *Da* is used with *awo* to mean “that person”. *Da awo* is often used to refer to somebody or draw the attention of an addressee whose name is not known to the speaker.

Theoretically, this type of relationship names has been attested for in Ibibio language lexicon and culture.

Table 7: Odd Relationship Names

S/N	Ibibio	Gloss
1	Ewaanaete ye ayin/ndit?	Incest
2	Ewaanaawo ye unam	Bestiality
3	Ewaanainaaawodeenanieghe ye em?em?awodeen	Gay marriage
4	Ewaanainaaawoñwaananieghe ye em?em?awoñwaan	Lesbianism
5	Ndōawodeen ye awodeen	Same sex marriage
6	Ewaanainaaawoanieghe ye awokeet?kini	Hookup
7	Ewaanaufankeatummeiwaad	Boy/girl friend

The names presented in table (9) above are names that portray sexual relationship that are not captured in the Ibibio language lexicon. These type of relationships are seen as abominable acts in the land. The language only provides explanation for these kinds of relationship, no single term(s)/nomenclature(s) are assigned to these forms of affinity in Ibibio as it is with other relationship names presented above. The people frown at persons found to indulge in any of the above sexual relationship. It is against the spirit of the land. This study has discovered that these abominable acts had existed in the Ibibio community secretly long time ago, and most times, the culprits were punished secretly also.

Theoretically, this group of sexual relationship names are abominable and detested by the spirit of the land. No indigenous name is assigned to any of these sexual relationship acts. This means that the culture of the people plays a vitale role in determining what the language of the people communicate and how it is communicated.

Conclusion

The essence of this study was to document relationship names. The study has brought to limelight the inventory of almost all the relationship names in Ibibio and has explicated the cultural significance of Ibibio relationship names. It also explained why some relationship names are not captured in Ibibio language such as bestiality, incest, lesbianism, same sex marriage, and hookup and supported by Neo-Whorfanism theory that language elasticity is defined by the cultural accommodation and acceptability.

Seven groups of relationship names have been identified in this study. The most delicate of these affiliations are: *imaan* (kinsmen), *ayeny?n* (grandchild), *ukod* (in-law), and *asenawo* (visitor). It is not that other relationships are not valued, but the important and fragility nature of the above relationships had been prescribed by the ancestors and the reason why they attached so much importance to these relationships than others is unknown. Also, out of the seven groups of relationship names identified in this study, six groups are relationship names that the people value and accept. The seventh category has the odd relationship acts that the Ibibio culture frown at as well as punish anyone found to practice any of them.

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