

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE OF ÍGALA FEMALE NAMES

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Abstract

This paper examines the structural patterns of Ígálà female names. It provides insights into the patterns and meanings embedded in these names, emphasizing their role as a reflection of Ígálà identity. Igala has a rich naming tradition that reflects the community history, values and social norms. Primary and secondary data were both used in this research and the primary data were elicited through oral interviews while the secondary data were collected from existing literatures. The data were analyzed using the descriptive method. This study establishes that Ígálà like every other language has female names and these names have their distinct structures. This study reveals that some Ígálà Female names demonstrate some of the features of Noun phrase structurally, some of the names appear as sentences as well as negative statements. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the Ígálà language and culture.

Keywords: Ígálà, female names, Structure of Ígálà female names

Introduction

Names are seen as well-defined nominals that express the speaker's presumption that their audience can pick out whom the speaker is referring to. Gegg-Harrison & Tanenhaus, (2016), for instance, posit “in order to refer to someone by the use of a name, speakers must believe that their addressee knows about the link between the name and the intended referent. Personal names, apart from acting as channels of communication, can perform various functions and purposes. A personal name, in particular, can be seen as a label by which an individual human being is identified and differentiated from others. Kotilainen (2012) reveals that names help in understanding and comprehension of oneself and one's social role as a member of a society and has always performed a key role in building individual's identity.

In agreement with Kotilainen, Achenreiner and John (2003) aver that the main purpose of naming is to provide a symbolic system of identification. Analogously, Agyekum (2006) contends that “naming can be considered as a universal cultural practice; every human society in the world gives names to its newborns as tags majorly as a means of identification. Olatunji, et al, (2015) support this by stating that a name is what somebody or something is called, it is a term or phrase by which somebody or something is known and distinguished from other people or things.

Names are classified as masculine, feminine or neuter through the term gender. Ígálà names like any other Africans are classified based on the circumstances surrounding a child's birth, including spiritual beliefs, social context, parental emotions and often reflect blessings or significant events that occurred at the time of birth. According to Francoise (2015), two types of gender marking occur cross-linguistically: grammatical gender and natural gender. He further clarifies that grammatical gender determines gender agreement between words, while individual words carry natural gender information. A good example is exhibited in French. Here, the articles that co-occur with nouns must agree with respect to gender. This is not the case in English. Instead of imposing gender agreement on occurring words, English demonstrates natural gender agreement which manifests only in third-person singular pronouns and a few words like prince/princess and actor/actress. Though, gender is marked in many languages, some languages do not classify nouns or pronouns in terms of gender. Ígálà is considered an example of such a language; it classifies pronouns in terms of person and number but not on the basis of gender. Though it is true that gender is not a general property of Ígálà nouns, however gender is differentiated in traditional names given to women.

The study of names has been receiving a lot of scholarly attention from different fields of study including linguistics. Linguists have realized that linguistic study of names provides sociocultural and linguistic component (morphology, syntax, phonology and others) within the language, both for researchers and indigenous speakers of the language. Despite the wealth of literature on names in other languages and Ígálà, female names in the language are yet to receive the desired attention. Most works such as "The Socio-Cultural Import of Ígálà Names" by E. A. Journals explores how Ígálà names are assigned based on spiritual and historical-social circumstances of birth, parental emotions, and other factors, emphasizing that these names often embody the individual's destiny (Ugbem, 2014).

Ígálà language: Classification, Structure, and the Cultural Significance of Naming

The Igala language is classified under the Yoruboid branch of the Niger-Congo language family, one of the largest and most wide spread language families in West Africa. It is closely related to languages such as Yoruba, Edo, and Idoma, indicating its shared historical and cultural connections with these groups (Williamson & Blench, 2000). The Igala language is tonal, with three primary tonemes: high, mid, and low, which affect meaning. For example, words with identical spellings can have entirely different meanings depending on the tone. Ígálà has a subject-verb-object (SVO) word order. Ígálà language has a rich vowel system consisting of seven vowels and it also employs prefixes and suffixes in word formation.

Ígálà is predominantly spoken in Kogi State, Nigeria, particularly in the eastern region of the Niger-Benue confluence. Its speakers are concentrated in the nine Local Government Areas of Kogi East Senatorial District, which includes Ankpa, Dekina, Idah, Omala, Olamaboro, Ofu, Igalamela, Ajaka and Ibaji. Additionally, smaller Ígálà -speaking communities are found in

neighbouring states such as Benue, Delta, and Edo. The geographical positioning of the Ígálà people makes them an integral part of the cultural and historical trade routes between northern and southern Nigeria.

The Igala people like most other African people attach importance to names and naming system. According to Egbunu (2016), in Ígálà cultural thought pattern, names are more than mere tags or nomenclatures, articles of recognition and identification. They are very significant in a person's life. One's name is likened to a person's spiritual good or evil garment that he/she unconsciously wears (Egbunu 2016). In Ígálà traditional setting, names are given to children during traditional naming ceremonies. They do this with utmost care so as to reflect the historical import or epoch, social relevance or tie, spiritual significance or ancestral link, and even the moral motivation or boost involved in the various circumstances associated with the birth of the child in question. The birth of a child in the Igala traditional society is greeted with great joy. This is due to the importance attached to childbearing and the gift of children.

On the day of the ceremony, the members of the extended family gather from all over the villages and hamlets at the family compound. The diviner who consults the oracles is then contacted to disclose the mind of the ancestors in respect of the appropriate name to be given to the child. The diviner could be there in person or must have been contacted earlier before the disclosure of the name at this gathering. In most cases, the parents of the child usually suggest the names, bearing in mind the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. The diviner then picks any of such names that appeals to the ancestors. In this manner, the diviner is supposed to reveal to them which among their deceased relatives or ancestors re-incarnated.

According to Okwoli (2013). The Ígálà believe in re-incarnation. ... They believe that children are ancestors reborn on earth. When a new child is born, it is through divination that people know who has been re-incarnated. Once the ancestor who was reborn is identified, that particular ancestor becomes the spiritual godfather or godmother of the new child. Names in Ígálà could be given by indices of even a wish or an emotional expression and sometimes to immortalize a loved one. In this case, through people's names, their family or clan roots could be traced (Egbunu, 2016). Names are therefore important vehicles of cultural identity. In other words, such names link them to their past or future. It is strongly believed in Ígálà culture that bad fortune or good fortune lies within names. They can make or mar a person's whole life and destiny. It is believed that names have the propensity of spelling a person's fame or framing his/her "hell" in this life and even to some extent, the hereafter. It is on this note that Egbunu (2016) states that name creates some space for the bearer, binds the fellow with not only the living members of the community but even the ancestors and the yet-to-be-born members of the community.

Research Methodology

Data used for this research include both primary and secondary data. The primary data were elicited through field research from native speakers

within the Igala speaking communities in Kogi State. Two native speakers assisted in conducting the oral interview. The secondary data were sourced from a body of literature in the field of onomastics documented by other scholars. The participants were randomly selected, covering the Igala speaking communities in Kogi State. Their names and the names of their children were collected; with further enquiry on the circumstances surrounding the preferred choice of name. The study was conducted using quantitative research approach within a descriptive linguistic framework.

Data presentation and Analysis

Structure of Ígálà Female Names

This section is divided into: Ígálà female names as nouns, as common nouns, as abstract nouns, names as verbs, names as adverbs and so on.

Ígálà Female Names as Nouns

Ígálà female names as nouns are presented as follows. However, not all the female names are presented here. Even though the names are nouns, there are names that exhibit specific features that could be easily identified as nouns owing to their structural make up or components.

Ígálà Female Names as Common Nouns

1

- i. *Íyé*– ‘mother’
Mother
- ii. *Àjànìgò*- ‘spectacle’
- iii. *Àjífà* – ‘silver’
Silver
- iv. *Òdódó* – ‘flower’
Flower

Like common nouns that refer to names of objects which can be seen and touched, Ígálà female names in this group are names of objects or things that could be seen and touched given to female children as names. The names here are given particularly for distinct qualities of such an object as hoped to be reflected in the life of the child named.

Ígálà Female Names as Abstract Nouns

2

- i. *Uyò* – ‘joy’
- ii. *Àlì* – ‘character’
- iii. *Ényò* – ‘blessing’
- iv. *Íbè*- ‘wisdom’
- v. *Éjúrà*- ‘Pleasure’

Like abstract nouns that refer to names of things we cannot see physically or touch, Ígálà female names in this group are names of things we cannot see or touch given to female children. These names are expressions of the family’s desire or wish for the child.

Ígálà Female Names as Verbs

3

- i. *Dúbí (Éné Dúbí Qjó)* “No one exists after God”
Behind (who back God)
- ii. *Jènyú (Ujènyú)* -“praise him”
Praise him (praise)
- iii. *Chúbíyó (ChúbíyóQjó)* – “lean on God”
Put back on (put back on God)
- iv. *Àtèkò – (Àtèkò Qjó)* –“Help from God”
Help (Help God)
- v. *Kédònó (Kédònójó)* “Have faith in God”
Believe (believe God)
- vi. *Chénémí (Qjóchénémí)* – “God is mine”
Be my person (God be my person)
- vii. *Urà (Urà ójó)* – “Enjoyment from God”
Enjoy (Enjoy God)

From the data (3i-vii) there are no female names as single verbs. The Data cited here are names shortened as verbs from names as verb + noun compounds. Names in this group are more pronounced in spoken form than in the written form.

Ígálà Female Names as Compound nouns (noun + noun)

4

- i. *Íyé-òmà - Íyòmà* - Reincarnation of mother / mother has reincarnated
Mother child
- ii. *Qmà - àtà - Qmàtà* - Her father’s Daughter
Child father
- iii. *Qmà- iyé- Qmàyé* – “sister”
Child mother
- iv. *Iko-ójó-Ikójó* “God’s time”
Time God
- v. *Qmà- ójó -Qmójó-* “God’s child”
Child God
- vi. *Ené- ójó- Enéjó* –“ God’s person”
Person God

From Data (4i-vi), we have instances of Ígálà female names as nominal compounds. Two nouns are combined to form the names. In the nominal compounds one of the nouns gains prominence and hence serves as the head word in the nominal compound. From the instances in view, the initial noun or terminal noun could serve as head word depending on how the names are structured. In data 4i, we have *Íyé* as head word of the nominal compound, in data 4ii *Qmà* as head words. Data 4v to vi have their head words in the Final position. Hence, *ójó* that appears at the final position serves as head word to the nominal compound.

Worthy of note in the nominal compounds is the syntagmatic relationship that holds between the nouns. To derive a name in Ígálà, the initial noun loses its terminal vowel so as to align properly with the second noun.

Therefore, nouns in this group go through vowel elision to derive a name. This is demonstrated in data 4(i to vi). In i, ‘e’, ii, ‘a’, iii, ‘a’, iv, ‘o’, v, ‘a’ and in vi, ‘e’ are all lost in the elision process in the respective names.

Female Names as Noun Phrases

The structure of the noun phrase consists minimally of a noun or noun substitute as a pronoun. It therefore refers to a group of words consisting of a noun and its modifier. Ígálà female names demonstrate some of the features of a noun phrase as observed in the data. In addition to the data presented here, examples of Ígálà female names under compound could equally suffice as examples of names as NP.

5

- i. *Oná+ègà–Onègà* “Female child born on the way to/from stream or near a stream/river”
- ii. *Ugánè + Qjó-UganQjó* – ‘God’s light’
Light God
- iii. *Qmá +iyè– Qmáye* – ‘sister’
Child mother
- iv. *Unèkwu+ Qjó- UnèkwQjó-* ‘God’s will’
Will God
- v. *Iko- Qjó- ‘God’s Time’*
Time God
- vi. *Ényò+ Qjó -EnyQjó* - ‘God’s goodness’
Good God

The data presented in examples (5ii–vi) demonstrate the existence of Ígálà female names as Noun Phrases. Ígálà female names as noun phrase do not consist of modifiers. The names in this group are nouns paired up with the initial noun losing its vowel at the terminal position to elision so as to form a name. This is experienced in all the examples used in this group. In example 5i, ‘a’ in *Qná* is lost to elision so as to form the name *Onègà*. The same process is experienced in example 5ii where *Ugánè* lost ‘e’ so as to pair up properly with *Qjó*. Haven gone through the phonological process (elision), the name *UgánQjó* is formed. In example 5iii,, the noun *lyè* lost the vowel ‘i’ to allow it pair with *Qmá*. Hence, we have *Qmáye* where ‘U’ is lost from the noun *Unèkwu* to form *UnèkwQjó* in example 5iv. In example 5v, vowel ‘o’ is lost in *Ényò* to form the name *ÉnyQjó*

Female Names as Statements

Ígálà female names in this group demonstrate the features of a sentence. Structurally, the names as sentences have subject, verb and object or complement as the case maybe. This assertion is demonstrated in Data (6 i to ix) below:

6

- i. *Qjó+-ágwonè+olá — Qjóágwonèolá* “God bathes someone”
God bathes body
- ii. *Ukwu+te+nọ– Ukwutẹnọ* - ‘death has left you’
Death left you

- iii. *A+nyájá – Anyájá* – ‘A girl born on the way to market or born on market day’
One that goes to market
- iv. *Éné +má +lí- Énémálí-* ‘The one who directs people on the right path, righteous child’
Who did not see
- v. *À+má +máh: Àmámáh* – ‘The one who knows, knows, technical person’
He know knows
- vi. *Ọjó + má - Ọjó má* – ‘God knows’
God know
- vii. *À+lè+lò – Àlèlò* – ‘the one who left returned’
Person go come
- viii. *À+chè+ènyò- Àchènyò-* ‘he/she that does good’
Person do good
Person that do good

The above Data show Ígálà female names as statements. Data 6i has SVO sentence structure. It is a sentence reduced into a name. The data in data 6ii, has the structure SVO. However, the verb built into the verbal elements the object. Here, the verb should have been to know but as a transitive verb that requires the action of the subject passed to an object, ‘ẹ’ takes the place of ‘o’ to realize the structure SVO. Data (6iii and v) all have the same structure of SVO. Data (6iv,vi and vii) have intransitive verbs. Therefore, they have SV as their structures.

Female Names as Negative Statements

A name as a negative statement indicates negation, denial or lack of consent. A negative statement contains negation words such as not, neither or nothing. This is demonstrated in 7 below.

7

- i. *Má+kédọ̀nò +n -Mákédọ̀nòn* – ‘not to be trusted’
3PL believe NEG
- ii. *Àbí+má+jẹ+n -- Àbímájen* ‘in the habit of giving birth but not surviving’
3SG did eat NEG

Names in this category are sentences reduced into names. To show negation, the names have the suffix ‘n’ attached to them. To show negation is not only a product the suffix ‘n’ attached to the names but is determined by the tone used on a given syllable of the names. For instance. Data 7i, *mákédọ̀nòn* shows negation with the suffix ‘n’ and the rising tone on *má*. If it were a positive situation, it would have a falling tone *mà* without the suffix ‘n’ attached to it. The same situation in Data 7i applies to example 7ii. Nevertheless, such female names are rare in Ígálà.

Female Names as Questions

There are basically two types of questions. They are polar questions or Yes/No questions and wh-questions or content questions. Polar or yes/no questions are different from WH-questions. This is because WH-questions are used to seek

for content information relating to persons, things, facts, time, place, manner and other relevant information. The data on Ígálà female names demonstrates the existence of WH-questions with the WH-operator occurring at sentence initial position. Consider the following examples:

8

- i. *Éné + má + kwu + n?* - *Énémákun* – ‘Who will not die?’
Who 3SG die NEG
- ii. *Éné + ché + Qjó?* - *ÉnéchéQjó?* – ‘who is God?’
Who 3SG do God
- iii. *Éné + má + ɔná?* – *Énéɔná* – ‘who knows tomorrow or future?’
Who 3SG know tomorrow
- iv. *Éné + á + bá?* - *Éné + á + bá?* – ‘who can stop?’
Who 3SG stop
- v. *Éné + dábu + Qjó?* - *ÉnédábuQjó?* – ‘who is like God?’
Who 3SG like God
- vi. *Éné + dẹ + ubi + Qjó?* - *ÉnédubiQjó?* – ‘who is as great as God?’
Who 3SG is back God

Conclusion

It has been established in this study that Ígálà like other languages has female names. These names, like words have their distinct structures. Also, the study demonstrated that Ígálà female names as nouns, exhibit some characteristics of nouns. It revealed some instances of names as common nouns, proper nouns, and abstract nouns. Like common nouns, Ígálà female names in this group are names of objects or things that could be seen and touched, given to female children as names. Some of the names appear as negative statements. To show negation, the names have the suffix ‘n’ attached to them. In addition to the suffix, negation is determined by the tone used on a given syllable of the names. For instance, data7i, *mákedonon* negation, the names have suffix ‘n’ negation, and the rising tone on *má*. If it were a positive situation, it would have a falling tone on *mà* without the suffix ‘n’ attached to it. The data on Ígálà female names also demonstrates the existence of WH-question with the WH-operator *ɛɛ* occurring at sentence initial position.

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