

## SPELLING ERRORS IN IGBO NAMES AND THEIR EFFECT ON MEANING

DIMEJESL, SOPHINA IJEOMA

Department Of Nigeria Languages  
College Of Education

### Abstract

*Name is a special endowment a person receives at birth from his parents or elders. No person exists without a name. A nameless being is a faceless being. Names are always peculiar to the persons bearing them. According Wikipedia, name is a word or words by which a person is designated or distinguished from others. Towns, cities and countries are also given special names which distinguish them from others. Names are not given arbitrarily. Names especially humans go with meanings depending on the circumstances that associate with the person at birth. There is no known name without a meaning. So meaning is of paramount importance in name selection in Igbo culture for instance. However, these meanings as crucial as they are, are being distorted due to wrong spellings of most Igbo names. This has resulted in much obscurity and is highly regrettable. This paper therefore tries to correct the wrong impressions whereby most Igbo people become so lackadaisical in the spelling of their names. The paper discusses as well the indispensability of name and the concept of meaning, then goes ahead to highlight some of the observed spelling errors in most Igbo names. Also insight to morphological processes that operate in Igbo names are given. Finally, a list of a number of names with their meanings and correct spelling are also given.*

### Introduction

Name permeates all facets of human and non-human endeavours. The study of names is called onomastics or onomatology. Onomastics covers the naming of all things including place names (known as toponyms) and personal names (known as anthroponomy). Name and the art of giving names is as ancient as world creation itself. Adam, as was empowered and inspired by God was the first being to give names to human beings, animals and other creations of God (Gen 2:19). This is to show how powerful and profound name is as God himself saw the need for it.

Meanings are crucial elements in name. And for these meanings to be preserved and cherished, there must be spelling consciousness. Names must not be misspelt otherwise a lot of confusion could be misinterpretation. Parents give names to their children based on what transpired during the child's birth. According to Arua (2009), the meaning of names resides in the message they convey, the wishes they express, the histories they record and the gratitude to God they express.

Name depicts cultural and tribal identity. It actually denotes where a person comes from. No wonder, names like Femi, Sola, Bola, Yetunde etcetera are quickly identified as Yoruba names, while names like Abubakar, Musa, Aliu, Aisah and so on cannot but be Hausa names. Oghene, Ruigewe, Ejiro are unarguably Urhobo names. So also names like Eze, Uche, Obi, Ngozi and the rest which are Igbo names.

In writing of names, each tribe follows their orthographic rules and conventions. They use different letterings and wordings using proper spellings. Yoruba people for instance spell their names correctly, while employing the necessary diacritics like vowel lengthening, dots and other tone-marks.

Regrettably however, most Igbo names are bastardised or worse still anglicized. Names that are not of Igbo orthography are being smuggled in, in most names. Orthographic morphological rules such as vowel lengthening and other diacritics as earlier mentioned are abandoned while pursuing other people's cultural identity. Most Igbo people want to be more English than the owners. According to Apakama (2016), most worrisome is the believed erosion of the English culture by the Igbo thereby allowing indigenous practices to vanish.

The high point of this discussion therefore is to alert the Igbo on the need to preserve their God given cultural heritage in which name and concept of naming constitute a part. Names should be properly spelt so as to unravel the actual meaning inherent in such a name. The writer therefore calls on the Igbo to hold tenaciously their God given identity and be proud of it.

### **Indispensability of Name and the Concept of Meaning in Igbo Culture**

Name forms an integral part of human existence. This means that human beings and creatures of God cannot do without name. Every human person is endowed with that precious and great gift called name. A moment a person is born, the next thing is naming and naming is a mandate. According to Nuessel, choosing a name for a newborn is an activity of utmost importance. In other words, the act of naming a newborn is an important rite of passage in life. It is a process of individualization in which a person becomes a separate entity who will eventually develop into a unique personality.

In the Anthropology of Names and Meanings, this significance is upheld. The right to a name is enshrined in the UN convention on the right of the child, recognizing the implications of carrying a name that begin at the earliest moments of social beings. Names help tie a new child into a family identity.

Igbo names are unique and unequivocally versatile and rich in meaning. According to Nuessel (1996), one of earliest written comments on the peculiarity and deep import of Igbo names was made by the British colonial officer, Major Arthur Lyon Leonards in his book "The lower Niger and its Tribes: Names as Building Blocks for African Philosophy". In his remarks, he opines:

In nothing, not even in their customs can we grasp the natural and ancestral concepts so plainly expressed as in those names which invoke, promise, praise, revile, satirize, sympathize, and in fact demonstrate all that is human.

Names therefore have a lot to offer. However this aspect of rich cultural heritage is being eroded and not granted in terms of spelling errors, as we shall discuss next

### **Observed Spelling Errors in Most Igbo Names: Morphological Processes as Insight into Spelling Errors**

There has been serious and highly worrisome mistakes on spelling of Igbo names. Names are often spelled as nothing or something that does not matter. These spelling errors know no boundaries because both the educated and uneducated are involved in this blunder. Most of the names that they pronounce as names are far cry from what they spell.

The reason for this is Igbo people's perceived apathy towards their cultural values. Unfortunately too, most Igbo scholars fail to observe some interesting morphological processes that are inherent in Igbo names. Some of these morphological processes can be in the form of vowel lengthening, assimilation, or even compounding to mention but a few.

In Ezikeojiaku (1989:320), most of these names are wrongly spelt, hence their meanings mutilated, as exemplified below:

1. *Adake	instead of	Adeeke
2. *Mgbafo	instead of	Mgbaafo
3. *Nwugo	instead of	Nwuúgo
4. *Nwoha	instead of	Nwoohá
5. *Unegbu	instead of	Únèegbu
6. *Nwizu	instead of	Nwiizù
7. *Anelechukwu	instead of	Aneelechukwu

The asterisks in the above names indicate spelling errors. The wrong spellings given to them also blur their semantic interpretations. It is difficult to say what "Adake" for instance means. It even sounds like Yoruba utterance which means (we have stopped shouting), whereas it should have been simply spelt as "Adeeke" meaning a female child born on Eke, the first market day in Igbo.

Also when looking at name number 7, Anele as spelt, pronouncing it by a non-Igbo speaker will be extremely difficult and the meaning too is obscured. But the proper spelling which is "Aneelechukwu" gives a straight forward meaning which is, "Let's keep looking unto God".

Looking at the above data, numbers 1-7, we could observe assimilation and vowel lengthening at work. These of course take place simultaneously. Other examples are:

Assimilation and vowel lengthening

1. Nwa + osu	Nwaosu	Nwoosu
8. Mgbe+afo	Mgbeafo	Mgbáafo
2. Eze + ilo	Ezeilo	Eziilo
3. Nwa +Eke	Nwaeke	Nweeke
4. Nwa + orie	Nwaorie	Nwoorie
5. Ada + ugo	Adaugo	Aduugo
6. Eze+Udo+ogu	Ezeudoogu	Ezùudoogù
7. Eze+nwa+ugo	Ezenwaugo	Ezenwuugo

9. The type of assimilation displayed in the above names is regressive assimilation, a case of a stronger vowel assimilating a weaker one. So, Nwoogù, Mgbeeke, Mgbaafo, Únèègbù, Eziilo etcetera are the proper way to spell those names and not the other way round.

Other misspelt or anglicized names are:

1. *Offoregbu	instead of	Ofoegbu
2. *Uzorchukwu	instead of	Uzochukwu
3. *Azuborgu	instead of	Azuboogu
4. *Chidiogor	instead of	Chidiogo
5. *Jideoffor	instead of	Jideofo
6. *Okafor	instead of	Okaafo
7. *Mbagwu	instead of	Mbaagwu
8. *Nwadiakor	instead of	Nwadiáko
9. *Obiakor	instead of	Obiako
10. *Nwala	instead of	Nwaala
11. *Nwamuo	instead of	Nwammuo
12. *Chibuorgwu	instead of	Chibooogwu
13. *Umeh	instead of	Ume
14. *Ezeh	instead of	Ezè
15. *Ibeh	instead of	Ibè
16. *Morka	instead of	Mmuoka

In the above names, the use of "or" in stead of "o" is very apparent. Obviously, we all know that there is nothing like "or" among Igbo words. Igbo language does not also permit consonant cluster in words. So "ff" in "Offoregbu" is out of place. It should only be one "f" followed by "o" not "or". "h" in Ume, Eze and Ibe is a case of aspiration and it is not allowed in names.

No 7 name "Mbagwu" gives another connotation entirely and that is "let community members exist". Whereas Mbaagwu which is the correct spelling simply means "continuity of a community or kindred". The non inclusion of one "a" has distorted the meaning. So we see a serious spelling error in name construction can be. These morphological processes also describe that it is what we pronounce that we should spell. Ordinarily, we don't say "Azubuogu" or "Eziilo" for instance but "Azubuogu", "Eziilo" so also other names like that.

It is my submission therefore that consciousness should be there, that consciousness will always make us write or spell pronounceable and meaningful names.

**LIST OF SOME IGBO NAMES WITH THEIR CORRECT SPELLINGS AND MEANINGS**

Amara	Grace
Ameechi	Who knows tomorrow
Amooge	Who know the time
Amuchechukwu	Who knows God's mind
Amanna	Father's daughter
Amamma	Beautiful daughter
Ameze	Princess
Amara	Peoples daughter
Amugo	Beautiful daughter as Ugo depicts beauty
Amoora	People's desire or expectation
Amazwu	This depicts handsomeness or great beauty or very light in complexion
Amara	Brave women or women deity endowed with great mysterious power
Amaka	Destiny
Amme	Mother's wealth
Amma	Father's wealth
Amudo	Peaceful or honest wealth
Amike	Wealth is power
Amooso	Shows earth's constancy, it also depicts bravery
Amoogu	One who enjoys relations
Amu (Crocodile)	BRAVE OR FEARLESS PERSON
Amaya	Surprise
Amachukwu	Perseverance in prayer
Amego	Relations are more valuable than money
Amabube	God is majestic
Amabere	God is merciful
Amamma	God is good
Amigo	God is benevolent and generous
Amo	May God praise me
Amike	God is the creator
Amere	God gave
Amenyennwa	God is giving child

32	Chiamaka	God is so good
33	Chibuuzo	God is the way
34	Chincedu	God leads
35	Chibiikem	God is my strength
36	Chibundum	God is my life
37	Chibeeze	God elevates
38	Chiboogwù	God is the divine physician
39	Chinaagorom	God is my vindicator
40	Chinèemerem	God is doing it for me
41	Chinèechèrem	God thinks of me
42	Chimoobim	God knows my heart
43	Chinaazam	God is answering me
44	Chinaazom	God is saving me
45	Chizárám	God answered me
46	Chinúa	May God fight for me
47	Chigboogù	May God settle the fight
48	Chisom	God is with me
49	Chioma	Favour
50	Chimeemma	May God favour me
51	Chukwu	The Supreme God
52	Chukwudi/Nnamdi	God really exists
53	Chukwuebùka	God is unimaginably big
54	Chukwuèmeka	God has done wonderfully well
55	Dimejesi	Be contented, don't imitate blindly
56	Dingba	King of wrestlers (shows a person with great skill and strength)
57	Diogu	War lord (depicts courage or fearlessness)
58	Dibia	Doctor
59	Dinta	Hunter
60	Echezonachukwu	Do not forget God
61	Ekwuníhe	Do not say anything
62	Ekwutosí	Do not blackmail
63	Emenanjo	Do not commit evil
64	Emenike	Do not use force
65	Ezè	King
66	Ezèamaama	Popular king or person
67	Ezèkwesírí	One whom kingship befits
68	Ezèobíohá	Most desired by people
69	Ezènáágu	One who hungers for kingship
70	(a) Ezùúdo (b) Ezùúdogu	Chief Arbitrator (or peacemaker)
71	Ezuugo	Epitome of beauty or handsome
72	Ike	Strength
73	Ikechukwu	God's power
74	Ienná	God's power
75	Ibè	Relation
76	Iheoma	Precious
77	Ihànaanya	Love

Itanaanya	Surprise, least expected
Ibeanyiichukwu	Nothing impossible for God
Ihooma	Favour, being fortunate
Ideofo	Be upright
Kaleechi	Thank God
Kiameelechi	Look unto God
Koosisochochukwu	As it pleases God
Wmesooma	The kindness of God
Wakuchukwu	Cling unto God
Wmasichukwu	God's wish
Wnaduabuchi	If men were God
Wbaamalu	Very popular
Wwaamaka	Child is precious
Wwakeego	Child is more precious than wealth
Wdakaaku	Life is more important than money
Wdibiisi	Life first
Wwoolu	The only child
Obinaali	Heart endures a lot
Obieze	Kings palace
Eiechine Obiechine, Obiefuna	That the lineage may not go into extinction
Obitadimna	Being hopeful or optimistic
Obiebube	God's miraculous work
Semtoochukwu	Magnify the lord with me

**Conclusion**

From the forgoing therefore, it is my humble submission that the Igbo should look back and begin to retrace their steps by being conscious of their rich cultural heritage. As exemplified above, we can see what spelling mistakes can do, meaning of names are distorted. Names like "Mbaagwu" with fine semantic interpretation (ie advocating for unity of a community or clan was misspelt as "Mbagwu" now gives a negative meaning interpretation as let community or clan go into extinction. Removing of one "a" in that name might about a very negative change in meaning. So people should be mindful of the orthographic rules and convention in writing names. Morphological processes which are also common in Igbo construction should be recognized, so that where there is assimilation or lengthening, we should take note and write the names as pronounced, not when we are asked to write "Adeeke" we write "Adake".

With the above examples in the list of some Igbo names, I think we should take a clue and proceed to write and spell Igbo names correctly.

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