

A linguistic study of Ígálâ death prevention names

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Abstract

This paper studies personal naming practice as a strategy for preventing death among the Ígálâ people of North-Central Nigeria from a structural perspective. In the Ígálâ language, it is believed that death prevention names can generate and maintain some level of assurance and security that is vital for the survival of a child, given the belief that certain spiritual forces are responsible for incessant child mortality. The study focused on the linguistic structure of such names. The qualitative approach was used with the study population and it is a descriptive theory (free approach). The primary data were obtained from 50 respondents comprising name bearers, name-givers whose ages range from 20-75 in Dekina, Ankpa and Idah local governments of Kogi state, Nigeria as well as introspection of one native and one non-native speaker supplemented by civil service registers in the study areas. The secondary data were obtained via the onomastic literature. It studies the structural characteristics of this category of names. It answers the question, what are the grammatical structures of death prevention names in ígálâ? This study discovered that personal naming among the Ígálâ people serve as appellations and a means of communication to the addressees who are usually ancestors or deities whose main aim is to forestall further mortality of the named infants. The study also discovered that death prevention names range from simple lexemes, complex words, root and synthetic compounds and sentences such as statement (affirmative and negative), interrogative, imperative (affirmative and negative) which are

not characterized by any unique structures different from conventional names, rather, some of them use imperatives to sternly command the spirit of death to avert or forestall further infant mortality.

Keywords: *Anthroponym, anthroponomastics, death prevention, Ígálâ, morphological processes, personal names and sentence structure*

Introduction

The Ígálâ language belongs to the Western Benue Congo, a Yoruboid subphylum spoken in different locations in North-Central Nigeria. It is a predominant language spoken in Kogi state by over two million native speakers in nine local government areas of the state namely, Dekina, Idah, Ofu, Ibaji, Olamaboro, Ajaokuta, Ankpa, Igalamela/Odolu and Omala. A sizeable number of speakers are also found in Bassa Local Government. It is also spoken in some communities outside Kogi State namely, Ebu in Delta State; Olohi and Ifekwu in Edo State; Ogwurugwu, Ojo, Iga and Asaba in Enugu State; Odokpe, Njam, Ala, Igbedo, Onugwu, Ode, Igbokenyi and Ila in Anambra State (Omachonu, 2012).

The father of one of the authors hails from Basà land. He was a missionary who served in several locations in Dekina Local Government in Ígálâ land, Kogi State, North Central Nigeria. On one of his trips, he heard a vocative call repeatedly made by a certain woman: ‘Àbachà! Àbachà! Àbachà! Ugbò ùwè dé?’ ‘Basà × 3, where are you?’ In the Ígálâ phonemic system, voiceless alveolar fricative (/s/) is not attested. Where it is contained in a foreign or non-indigenous word and requires pronunciation by the native Ígálâ speaker who are affected by mother tongue interference, it is usually approximated to the closest possible sound which usually is a voiceless affricate

sound (/tʃ/). Hence, *Basà* /basà/ is pronounced as *Àbachà* /àbatʃà/. The missionary who was familiar with this phonemic situation got curious desiring to know who was so called and why. He decided to approach the distressed woman who warmly received him with a seat and a bowl of water, being the tradition of Ígálâ hospitality. He thereafter identified himself, introduced his mission to the woman and asked who was called *Àbachà* and why s/he was so named. She sat down and gave him a full narrative by starting from the background of the family, how the family had suffered a big deal of infant mortality before the named child was born, adding that the repeated untold trauma they had suffered was believed to be orchestrated by the named child's spiritual parents who came to punish the named child's parents by the cycles of birth, mortality and rebirth. She added as saying, to forestall the ugly trend, ethno-culturally, a special and weird name should be bestowed on the child as a strategy to conceal its identity, so that when the killer spirits return, they will not identify the child. By this strategy, the killer spirits are schemed out giving the named child the privilege to live. The ethno-cultural belief paid off as the named child survived infant mortality which is believed to result from the strategy adopted which hid the identity of the named child from its spiritual parents.

Anthroponomastics is a sub field of onomastics that studies proper names, especially, personal names also called anthroponyms. Naming practice, though universal or cross-cultural among human societies, is remarkably idiosyncratic in style and custom. This work focuses on the structure of death prevention names as attested in Ígálâ ethnic group. Death prevention names are bestowed on children who suffer cycles of mortality and rebirth in the family. To forestall this happening, the people have to strategize how to overcome it by bestowing strange names on children. These names are believed to protect the name bearers from the spirit of death and other underworld

forces which are believed to control the spirit of the affected infants and their right to live to forestall further child mortality. This subtle strategy is a sociocultural method of daring or appealing to the spiritual or underworld forces to free the affected children from the cycle of death and reincarnation and allow them live. Though this approach is quite common among Africans, it portrays some sense of idiosyncratic strategy among the Ígálâ sociocultural practice in combating child mortality. The focus of this study is to unveil grammatical structures the morphology and syntactic structures of death prevention names in the Ígálâ language from the simplest to the complex ones in order to describe or present a narrative of their various structures. It aims to answer the question: What are the morphological and syntactic structures of death prevention names in Ígálâ? The motivation for the study stems from the fact that no such investigation has been carried out in the language.

Literature review

Names exist as part of the socio-cultural setting of every society. Being part of the society that gives them, they act as a window through which the world is understood and appreciated (Mutunda, 2014). They are used as conduits of information, especially, on society's attitudes or observation towards the named (Mapara et al, 2009:9). Musonda, Ngalande & Simwinga (2019) state that it is important that one has a good knowledge of the imagery and metaphor of the language to appreciate their names.

Studies on personal names have been carried out in the personal names onomastic literature in different disciplines such as linguistics: Akinnaso (1980), Ubahakwe (1981), Oduyoye (1982), Essien (1986), Aceto (2002), Agyekum (2006), Mensah (2013), (2015), and (2017) Mensah & Ishima (2020), etc.; Psychology: Steele (1988), Steele & Smithwick (1989);

Anthopology Bean (1990), Obeng (1998), Ukpong (2007) etc.; Sociology: Ngade (2011) and Suzman (1994),etc. There are also sociological, historical, philosophical, cultural and literary studies of personal names. Study on personal names is very pivotal to the socio-cultural fibre of every society as there is no known society in the world which does not give names to every child. The foregoing fact justifies the academic interest cultivated by researchers to study personal names as they are not just indices of identification rather, underlain by different forms of communication. Anderson (2004:435) presents a syntactic and morphological comparison of French, English and Greek names where he proposes the universality of names belonging to the category of determinatives such as pronouns and determiners but are inherently neither definite nor indefinite whose functions differ from regular argument of the predicator. Conclusively, he argues that each language varies. His argument reveals that the grammatical structure of personal names usually synchronizes with the grammar of the language. Mensah and Ishima (2020) argue otherwise that this may not always be true for all languages. They prove this with contemporary German names where Plank (2011:269) shows that family names in this language have “subtle but comprehensively severed ties with their ancestral word classes in their morphology upon attaining name status in spite of their origin in nouns and adjectives and in spite of retaining the phonology and syntax of their origin”. He (Plank) further argues that this manifests in inflection and derivation and thus, renders the traditional word class categorization of family names as a type of noun in languages, especially languages like German which can affect both the lexicon and grammar. In virtually all African naming systems, names have meaning based on semantic and pragmatic contents. Though this claim is contested and may not be applicable to all, but in most African names, it is true. This assertion is contrary to researchers like Searle (1958), Dixon and Lyons (1977)

whose opinion is that personal names do not have sense or meaning but what they only represent is unique and individuating. In the Ígálâ language and culture, all names have meanings based on semantic, pragmatic contents and contain the story of the bearer, family, etc.

Mensah & Ishima (2020) argue that in the African context, little attention has been paid to the grammatical description of personal names. They reported that Nwangi, (2015:259) undertook a linguistic study of Kikuyu grammar and observes that the coding of information into names is basically characterized by lexical, syntactic and pragmatic roles of the language. He (Nwangi) demonstrates in his investigation that Kikuyu grammar is largely contained in its personal names. His investigation was based on certain morphosyntactic phenomena like compounding, affixation and reflexivization which show how the feminine names in the language are grammaticalized. This plausible fact reveals that names are words that are attested in the lexicon which have semantic structure and exhibit morphosyntactic characteristics thus, constitute abstract properties of grammar (Mensah & Ishima, 2020).

Hussein (1997:25) submits that personal names are ambiguous properties of every linguistic community given that names are words (with expression character) that exist in a language which are an essential part of the linguistic repertoire of their bearers, users and givers and are valuable carriers of identity that reflect the dominant attitude and socio-cultural value of a community. Names are founded on people's cultural heritage, and therefore reflect major currents in their history and worldview. For this reason, they show deep attachment to indigenous traditions and embed significant psychological and pragmatic attributes. It is also believed that names in Africa have deep spiritual context and cosmology (Obeng, 1988; Mensah, 2015). Mapara (2013:15) opines that personal naming in Shona culture practice is seen as a rite of passage marking the

transition from the womb into the community. This opinion is supported by the claim of Mensah & Ishima which states that personal naming practices, especially in Africa, “act as narrative discourses where stories that provide insights to live experience are told” (2020:4). Haviland et al define it “as a social transition from a state of nature to a state of culture” (2013:130).

In the personal names onomastic literature of African naming practices, especially the aspect of grammatical description, there are a number of related studies in linguistic onomastics such as Mensah & Ishima (2020) who investigate sentential names in Tiv and categorize Tiv names into several categories of sentences, examining the semantic, pragmatic, social and spiritual meanings. Their investigation shows a reflection of grammatical structure of Tiv language. Mandende (2009) discovered that in Tshivenda, names have referential and cultural meanings composed from nouns, verbs, adjectives and larger units like phrases, compounds and relativization. He claims that in this language, naming forms an indispensable part of grammar. Linguistically, Mapara argues that names are part of language and constitute phrasal, clausal and sentential categories. He further argues that they may be semantically characterized in complete statements, questions, or commands which are appropriately situated in the realm of language study. Jauro, Ngamsa & Wappa (2013) undertook a structural study where they categorized names into their morpho-semantic attributes namely; word classes and studied their semantic and pragmatic meaning.

Akung & Abang (2019) also recorded a typology of DPNs which they generally define as “children who are believed to be at risk of dying in their infancy, to ensure their survival” (p.54). The two categories are:

- i. Children who are believed to have supernatural powers and a strong link with the supernatural world

of spirits and ancestors to which they belong. They are believed to have the ability to choose to return to the supernatural world by dying shortly after birth. They differ from normal children in that they have the power to be born from the same mother, only to die when they choose. As soon as the supernatural power is diminished through a ritual, the link with the supernatural world is broken and the child is expected to survive. Thus, the death prevention name is part of the strategy to break the cycle of birth and death and ensure their long-term survival.

- ii. The second category of children considered at risk is those who are victims of external forces especially, witchcraft. The children are not believed to have any supernatural power. They are also given death prevention names as a strategy to avert death and protect them from malevolent forces.

Signa & Bassene (2016:46) opine that death prevention names in Gújjolaay Eegemaa (Senegal), among other things improve the understanding of, not only the meaning of names but also the belief system, including the conceptualization of the different supernatural forces that can affect the life of a newborn and those who can protect it.

They (Sagna& Bassene) also establish that symbolic ritual names are given to infants to prevent them from dying. They assert that these names are given to children who are believed to have supernatural power which enable them to come to life and die again and again from the same mother. In this language, they are called *Úññil* ‘flying children’ or ‘spirit babies’. The children, they add, are identified through unusual behavior, for instance, producing very strange screams regularly at night only. If they are old enough to speak, the way they talk about their imminent death to join ‘their real parents’ from another world can also be

an indication that they need special attention. They further submit that babies who need special names are those whose mothers have many unsuccessful pregnancies or have had children who died very early in their infancy. Another category they reported with death preventive names are those who are victims of external malefic forces like witches; this, they exemplify thus:

- i. *Gu-yyah*
Cl8-grave ‘grave’
- ii. *Ju-sotten*
2PL-deceive ‘you deceive’ (P.54)

Concerning this category of names, Sagna & Bassene say, “Although it may not be relevant whether a person can be wholly indifferent to a given name, it is important to note that an extensive range of reactions can be evoked” (p.52). This is in agreement with what Maenetsha (2004:1) says that, death prevention names are forms of devaluation which name-givers employ to protect children from ancestors who want to take them away. This, she (Maenetsha) exemplifies using her death prevention name *Mathakala* ‘Rubbish’, because she was born after a still birth. The name was a way of protecting her from spiritual forces of death. She reports as saying that this strategy was to devalue her essence and render her unattractive to the killer forces. Death prevention names therefore, are traditional identifying resources to connect with ancestral spirits as they offer name-givers a sense of protection and security (Akung & Abang, 2019:301). Names like *Ebèbè* ‘Nothing’, *Egbùdù* ‘Toilet’ and *Bùlèm* ‘satan’, according to them are death prevention names in Mbube which deeply reflect the anxieties of the people and their grief. Names such as *Adè* ‘Grandfather’ *Ené* ‘Grandmother’, etc. they argue, reflect the belief in reincarnation. They state that the names are given when the

newborn comes with striking features that are similar or have true resemblance to a dead relative.

Mensah & Offiong (2013) investigated the structures of Ibibio death prevention names, examining their morphological and syntactic structures. They discovered that these names range from simple lexical items (words) to complex sentences and provide a window to the Ibibio grammatical structure. They say, this category of names do not have any formal properties in common as distinct from ordinary names. They submit that, at the level of the lexicon, these names are primarily nouns and few adjectives e.g. *Sémé* ‘laments’, *wá* ‘sacrifice’, etc. and *Kari* ‘tricky’, *Táhá* ‘spirit’, etc. Some are complex words where affixes (prefixes) are attached, e.g. *í-sàñ* ‘journey’, *í-muk* ‘short’ etc. Another productive morphological process they observed is compounding; this, they exemplify as *Uruk-ikot* ‘(rope & bush) ‘snake’, *Òkpòrò-ìsìp* (nut + kernel) ‘palm kernel’ etc. Others are larger linguistic structures such as sentences. This category, they reported has the following sentence types: affirmative statements, negative statements, imperative sentences, interrogative sentences, cleft constructions, serial verb constructions and complex sentences.

In Ígálâ naming tradition, personal names are given based on certain social and cultural parameters which require reflecting the situation or circumstances surrounding the conception and birth of the child and the situation surrounding the parents, family, community, etc. Imoh (2019) studies the structure of Basà personal names, where he outlines the various structures of Basà personal names, namely; words, phrases, clauses and sentences. Imoh and Dansabo (2021) study the ethno-pragmatics of Basà personal names, where they did a general investigation into the language and socio-culture of Basà naming practices; Imoh and Dansabo (2020) examine Basà sentential names, focusing on those names that are composed in sentences and undergo complex morphological and

morphosyntactic operations to derive their surface forms; Imoh (2020) surveys onomastics and names as indirect communication in Basà, where he studies anthroponyms, toponyms and zoonyms as a strategy of indirect communication in Basà naming system. This work differs from the former in that it seeks to investigate the structure of death prevention names among the Ígálâ speaking people.

Opega (2018) studies the structure, pragmatic and meaning of Ígálâ personal names where he categorizes Ígálâ personal names into noun phrase, verb phrases, sentences, reincarnation, death prevention, female beauty, aquatic, descriptive historical, proverbial names, etc. This work differs from his in that it focuses on the grammatical structure of death prevention names. Though he briefly mentions and scantily exemplifies instances of DPNs, he never made any mention of their structure and how the deep structure relates or yields the surface forms, which is the crux of the present investigation.

Research methodology

Data generation/elicitation and research participants

The study was conducted using the qualitative research approach within a descriptive linguistics framework/survey that is, it is theory free. The data elicited were verified by two of the researchers, given their native and close to native intuitions of the Ígálâ language. In some instances, the data were gathered through discussions and these discussions aided the researchers to verify the authenticity of the data gathered. These procedures were also supplemented by introspection, based on the fact that one of the researchers is a native speaker and the other has close to native intuition of the language. The field work was carried out in Ígálâ speaking areas of Kogi State, North Central Nigeria. The data were presented using the Leipzig Glossing Rules

format; the raw data presentation followed by morpheme-by-morpheme glossing, then semantic interpretation and finally, the pragmatic meaning (where applicable).

Selection of participants was done randomly considering the fact that the participants are native speakers with native intuitions, who were between twenty 20 to seventy-five 75 years of age and their willingness to participate in the investigation. These randomly selected participants were both literate and non-literate native speakers of Ígálâ language. The selection was also based on their experience and good knowledge of Ígálâ naming convention and also vast knowledge of their socio-culture, both as name givers and bearers/users. Data for the study were elicited considering sociobiographical variables namely, gender, occupation, religion and educational backgrounds. Twenty eight men and twenty two women participated in the investigation whose levels of education, religions and occupation vary. The participants were graduates from accredited higher institutions, A-Level holders, secondary and primary school leavers and others, uneducated. Oral interview, focus group discussion and participant observation were the instruments deployed to elicit the primary data from the sample population. A non-structure interview method was adopted in which open or flexible questions were asked to elicit the targeted data on various categories of Ígálâ death prevention names. We further asked questions on the factors responsible for the use of death prevention names as well as their semantic and deep (pragmatic) meanings and their symbolism in the Ígálâ culture. Their responses were compared to validate their authenticity. A multimedia recorder, field notes were used in recording the information obtained. Out of seventy seven names obtained, the most relevant ones to the study were selected and analyzed. The data were coded, transcribed, translated and tone-marked.

Data presentation and analysis

Death prevention names can be studied from the morphological, morphosyntactic and syntactic perspectives. The approaches adopted in this work are both morphological and morphosyntactic because both operations apply. These names, like other categories of Ígálâ anthroponomastics range from simple lexemes to complex sentences which provide a window to the Ígálâ grammatical structure. The names are characterized by some complex phonological and morphological processes to derive personal names such as elision, insertion, apocope, syncope, vowel replacement, coalescence, tone modification, nominalization, desententialization etc. The category of names at the lexical level was very productive. This can be presented and analyzed in Tab (1) below.

Table 1: Nouns as names (simple words)

	Underlying noun	Derived form	Meaning
i.	Basà	Àbachà	Basà language
ii.	ògwó	Ògwó	deceit
iii.	òkwú	Òkwú	corpse
iv.	okiti	Okiti	anthill
v.	ányó	Ányó	shame
vi.	úgwúnú	Úgwúnú	vulture
vii.	ùdú	Ùdú	responsibility

The data in Tab.1 above are noun stems and share the same characteristics with their surface forms. Only (i) *Basà* undergoes some phonological processes such as, vowel insertion at the word initial position to conform to Ígálâ phonotactics for most personal names (where the initial syllable usually begins with a nucleus) and the replacement of voiceless alveolar fricative (/s/) (the initial sound of the second syllable which is inexistent is

Ígálâ consonant system) with a voiceless affricate (/tʃ/) in order to replace the nonexistent sound in the Ígálâ phonemic system with the phonetically closest sound. The name is meant to conceal the name bearer's identity. Data (ii-vii) are characterized by a devaluating sense of the name bearer who stands the risk of infant mortality. This is employed by name givers to protect the name bearer from ancestral spirits who are after the life of the named child. The names share some characteristics in common, that is, they are alien or strange, weird and ugly.

Table 2: Noun phrase

Underlying noun	Derived form	Meaning
i. úkwú gbè gbè death great great	úkwúgbègbè	'great death/Death is very great'

The data in Tab. (2) above comprise a name that is a noun phrase. In our search, this category is not very productive. We were only able to elicit very few examples that are clearly noun phrases. In (i), the derived form is exactly a concatenation of the individual lexemes that constitute the grammatical category. There are no noticeable phonological processes. During the field work, few data were elicited where nouns were derived from verbs by various morphological processes. Tab. 4 below presents data for this category.

Table 3: Nominalization

Underlying verb	Derived name	Gloss
i. àgbényô N.PRE-forget	Àgbényô	to forget

In the course of our investigation, we came across another category of names where words are composed of two or more separate elements, i.e. a concatenation of two or more words to form another lexeme. There are two sub categories of this type. The first one is simple, that is, the two or more words are root words, whereas the second one is complex. The duo are furnished with the following data in tab. 4 and 5 below.

Table 4: Root compounding

Underlying verb	Derived name	Gloss
i. òkwú ónè dead person	Òkwúonè	corpse
ii. àtá òkwú father corpse	Àtókúwú	father of the dead
iii. úkwú tílâ death compulsory	Úkwútílâ	Death is inevitable
iv. úkwú ènya death reduce	Úkwènyà	Death reduces one
v. ólì ákpà stick corn	Ólìákpà	corn stump
vi. ójí ètà	Ójètà	dump hill

Examples (i-ii) comprise noun-noun concatenation where *òkwú* and *ónè* derive *Òkwúonè*. In (i) the tone of the initial syllable of *ónè* steps down in the derived form from high to mid. *Àtá* and *òkwú* combine to form *Àtókúwú*. (iii & iv) comprise *úkwútílâ* and *úkwùènyà* noun and adjective in each case to derive surface forms.

The other subcategory of compounds that was found in our search that is very productive in the Ígálâ language is synthetic compound also called compound complex (Omachonu 2012). To Fabb (2001), a synthetic compound is a compound whose head is derived from a verb by affixation, where the non-head fulfills the function of argument or complement of the verb. In what follows, we furnish this subcategory with data in Tab 5 showing its complexity vis-à-vis the simple forms in Tab. 4.

Table 5: Synthetic compounds

Underlying verb	Derived name	Gloss
i. àné úkwú N.PRE-keep/carry death	Ànékwú	‘nurtured for death’
ii. álè ewò N.PRE-go town/village	Álewò	‘going or traversing places’
iii. àlè ló N.PRE-go	Àlèló	‘Going and returning’
iv. ágwé ónè je N.PRE-cheat person eat	Ágwènejè	‘one who cheats’
v. àbí ló N.PRE birth go	Àbíló	‘the named child will go/die’

In Tab 5, the processes are characterized by double operations which seem to take place almost simultaneously; derivation and compounding in each case. The agents or action nouns are derived from verbs through the process of prefixation and merge with their objects or complements to form compound complexes. Example :(i) is composed of the agent noun *àné* ‘keeper’ and its object *úkwú* ‘death’. In (ii), the name *Álewò*, can be decomposed thus, *álè* ‘goer’ and *ewò* ‘town’. The named

child is believed to have transverse the two worlds by repeated cycles of death and rebirth in the same family. The same sense is typified in (iii), though location is not indicated here.

Tab. 5 contrasts with Tab 4 in that, in 4., the base lexemes are concatenated to derive compound words, whereas in 5, left-most lexemes are complex, being that they derive through the process of nominalization by affixing verb bases with an agent noun prefixes deriving agent nouns before concatenating with their objects or complements, the basic nouns are their objects which are in endocentric relationship with the heads, i.e. synthetic compounds.

At the sentential level, Ígálâ death prevention names (DPNs) are very productive and demonstrate a number of structural types. In this language, sentential names are basically declarative, imperative and few interrogatives. This category of names is characterized by complex morphological processes to derive surface nouns from larger linguistic structures. In what follows, the data for this category are presented and analyzed unveiling their structures and intricate phonological and morphological processes as well as meanings. The structure of names in this category comprises subject verb (object or Complement) which is the basic word order in Ígálâ. They are the most productive source of names in the language. Examples are as follow:

Table 6: Affirmative declarative sentences as names: S → NP + VP structure

	Underlying verb	Derived name	Gloss
i.	yă ló 3SG go.FUT	Yăló	'S/he will still go'
ii.	òna yă ló tomorrow 3SG.AUX go	Ònaló	'S/he will go (die) tomorrow'

- v. úkwúje àle Úkwújàle ‘Death is always right’
 Death eat/win victory

In (i & ii), all the lexemes of the underlying form combine to form the names i.e. the underlying forms subsist in the surface form. Secondly, the phonological process of regressive assimilation applies to the verb base *nẹ* and also elides its vowels in order to align with the phonetic feature of the object-NP. The same process of elision applies to (iii & vi) i.e., the vowels of the verbs elide whereas, the sounds of the initial vowels of each objects subsist. The contrast is seen in (v) where the vowels of both the verb and the object subsist. This is because the object-NP of the verb i.e., *mẹ* is not preceded by a vowel. In our fieldwork, this category (Tab. 7) characterized the highest number of data elicited.

The structures in Tab.8 below are similar to Tab.7 in structure but differ in that the NP 2 in the former are subcategorized by the verb, but in the later, they are not subcategorized by the main verb rather, the NP2 or the adverbials serve as the subject complement required to complete the meaning of the sentence. Examples:

Table8: Affirmative declarative: subject verb complement structure

Underlying verb Derived name Gloss

- i. úkwú bíẹ ilẹ Úkwúbilẹ ‘Death has brought misfortune to the world’
 death spoil world
- ii. úkwú che ùńmí Úkwúchùńmí ‘Death is rest/ There is rest in death’
 death be rest
- iii. úkwú dẹ ọmọ Úkwúdómo ‘Death is real’
 death be there

In each of the examples in Tab. 8 above, the final vowel of the verb elides in order to be regressively assimilated by the sound feature of the following complement. Apart from that, every lexeme in the underlying representation features in the concatenation process of deriving the surface word.

We also observed another subcategory of affirmative declarative sentences where a simple sentence is characterized by a sequence of verbs within a clause, where the syntactic relationship between the items is unmarked. The verbs share a semantic argument without a conjunction or inflection to mark co-ordination or subordination. These subcategories of verbs found in our investigation have the syntactic status of main or lexical verbs. The process can be exemplified with an English utterance such as *I will go see him today*, where the verb phrase contains two lexical verbs (Crystal, 2008). This subcategory can be exemplified in Tab. (9) below.

Table 9: Affirmative declarative serial verb construction

Underlying verb	Derived name	Gloss
i. <i>Ọjọ gbà né</i> God take keep	<i>Ọjọgbàné</i>	'God, take and keep the child'
ii. <i>Ì kọ kwú</i> S/he refuse.PST die	<i>Ìkọkwú</i>	'S/he refused to die'
iii. <i>Ì nà kílí mi Ìnàlímí</i> 3SG stop.PST PRE.3SG.AGR-see me		'S/he called to see me'

In Tab. 9. i & ii, the two structures are characterized thus: the sentences are headed by *Ọjọ* 'God' and *Ì* '3SG' as the sentence subject-NPs and each sentence has a sequence of two verbs each in the VP slot, yielding the structure $S \rightarrow NP + VP$. The VP, though complex, does not subcategorize an NP because

both of them are intransitive. The derivational process involves the combination of each lexeme to derive the surface form. There are no overt phonological processes apart from the gliding tone in (iii) resulting from the elision of *kí* where its tone is inherited by the second syllable (*nǎ*). In (iii), the lexemes that constitute the sentence combine to derive the surface form; only the preposition *kí* deletes and leaves its tone on the verb *nà* whose inherent tone is low thereby changing its tone to rising tone in the surface form.

Some names are formed by negative declarative sentences, that is, they are opposite of affirmative declarative sentences. A few of this category were elicited in the fieldwork. This category can be furnished with examples in Tab.10 below.

Table 10: Negative declarative sentences as names

Underlying verb	Derived name	Gloss
i. úkwú je èdòń death eat heart-NEG	Úkwújèdòń	‘Death is not patient’
ii. úkwú nẹ étùń death have choice-NEG	Úkwúnetùń	‘There is no choice in death’
iii. má yi/li Ọjọń 3PL see God-NEG	Máyojọń	‘God cannot be seen’
iv. úkwú mà ónúń death know king-NEG	Úkwúmonú	‘Death does not know or respect a king’
vi. úkwú nẹ íbẹń death have mind	Úkwúnibẹń	‘Death isn’t wise’

The high tone alveolar nasal (*ń*) attached on the direct objects in Tab. 10 is a negative operator that negativizes the entire proposition. Another common thing with the data in Tab.

10 is the fact that the process of syncope applies to all the verbs before merging with their objects to derive the surface form. In the case of (ii & iii), the inherent tone of the direct objects is high but in the derived form, the tone steps down from high to mid, whereas, in the case of (i) the inherent tone subsists. In (iv), all the lexemes combine to derive the surface name. The following underlying phonological processes characterize the derivation of the names: elision applies to the verb base *mà* in order to regressively assimilate the following object-NP which begins with an open-mid back vowel sound. In the same example, the elision process of syncope applies to the negative affix attached to the object *ónú*.

Another fascinating category found in our search is the imperative sentence where a name takes the form of command or request. This category was not very common in the field search. Tab. 11 presents examples and a detail discussion.

Table 11: Imperative sentence

Underlying verb	Derived name	Gloss
i. òna ló tomorrow go.IMP	Ònaló	‘Go, tomorrow’
ii. úkwú té yí nọ death leave DEM alone	Úkwútéyino	‘Death, leave this child’

Elicitation of some names proved very difficult, only a few of such were found. Imperative names were some of the unproductive difficult areas we encountered. Only few were found as shown in Tab. 11. One thing common with both data in (11) is the fact that all components that form the imperative sentences are combined to derive the surface form. Here, the name givers dare death by giving a stern command to death and probably the spirit behind it to spare the named child and allow

it live, even though (i) appears to be in support of the wish of the killer spirit, it connotatively implies the reverse sense of the surface meaning.

Conclusion

This study surveyed the grammatical structure of Ígálâ DPNs whose communicative understanding can deepen one's grammatical knowledge. This investigation shows that this category of names is characterized by important linguistic properties which can provide more empirical insight and facts into onomastics. It has demonstrated a systemic investigation of formal grammatical information on Ígálâ naming practices which has unearthed certain linguistic processes in the phonology, morphosyntax, semantics and pragmatics, and also stirs interest in other aspects of information beyond the domains of linguistics (extra-linguistics) that underlie personal naming. The study has exhumed facts about the intricate structures in the language which derive names by complex phonological, morphological and morphophonological processes such as elision, clipping, replacement, modification, compounding, affixation, desententialization, that is, grammatical units such as clauses, sentences and complex sentences shrunk into smaller grammatical units such as lexemes which derive DPNs. There are times desententialization may involve other morphological processes like clipping, coalescence etc.

Just as it held in most African ethno-cultural or socio-cultural beliefs, DPNs in Ígálâ are traditional identifying resources to connect to the ancestral spirits as they are believed to offer name-givers a sense of protection and security (Akang & Abang 2019).

The study described this category of names establishing that it does not have any properties that are uncommon with ordinary names. They are made up of nouns, complex words

(where affixes are attached to bases), compounds, noun phrases, sentences such as statements, imperatives and interrogatives. The study shows that only DPNs have interrogative sentences as names and very productive negative declarative structures. The category that differs from other conventional names is the imperative sentences, where name-givers dare death by giving it stern commands which stem from their unbearable frustration borne out of incessant infant child mortality.

Abbreviations

AGR- agreement

AUX- auxiliary

DEM- demonstrative

FUT- future tense

IMP- imperative

NEG- negative

NP- noun phrase

PST- past

S - sentence

VP- verb phrase

3SG- third person singular

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