

## A SOCIOLINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION OF GENEALOGICAL NAMING SYSTEM IN IGBOLAND

**Nnaji, Charles Ikechukwu**

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages  
University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria.

[ike63nnaji@gmail.com](mailto:ike63nnaji@gmail.com)

### Abstract

African names are used to record and trace genealogical relationships. This is achieved in *Nkanu* Igbo through the culture of ‘ogbo’. This study investigates the *Nkanu* traditional naming system and how it interfaces with their sociocultural norms of preserving and recycling parental names among their children. The ethnographic theoretical framework was adopted for the study. Data for the study were sourced from four communities in *Nkanu* land: *Amagunze* and *Nkerefi* from *Nkanu-east* local government Area and *Akpugo* and *Agbani* from *Nkanu-west* Local Government Area, all in Enugu State, South-east Nigeria. Participant and non-participant observations, personal structured and non-structured interviews, and conversations with name-givers and name-bearers were the methods used for the elucidation of the data. Findings are that the practice is under severe threat from lack of understanding by the youths and unwillingness to sustain it caused by Christianity and western education. It was revealed that traditional names are used in *Nkanu* land to mark the order of birth, sex, marriage relationship, genealogy and acquaintanceship.

**Keywords:** Igbo names, naming ceremony, ‘ogbo’ tradition, name-giver, name bearer, genealogical system, *Nkanu* people.

### Introduction

African names tell tales. They are not mere identification labels or tags as in European or American cultures. Most African names have stories behind them ranging from emotional to historical, generational to circumstantial. In the same manner names among the Igbo people are replete with accounts of the life of the name giver, family, history, genealogy, values and orientation. A name is a precious and marvelous gift, a person without a name is not regarded as a human being (Chauke, 2015).

A name is used to fit or locate an individual into his ancestry. The mention of a particular name points to the person’s place of origin, lineage, family or parentage. This is because names in Igbo land generally and in

*Nkanu* land specifically are used to reveal the identity and genealogy of a person. It is moreso because, as it is the case with language, traditional names are people and geographical area specific. Most traditional names are limited in space and lineage and as with names of members of a religious group they are distributed only among members of the group. Some names run in families, geographical area, tribe or lineage. Names can be used to strengthen kinship relationships and family bonds, and function as a means of promoting and sustaining the lineage system from one generation to another (Mensah, Owan, Tiav and Ishima, 2020).

The drive to work hard and struggle is propelled by the propensity to be satisfied, to influence others and to be remembered and so is the vaulting ambition for political and economic domination. Every culture has its own way of acknowledging their past heroes and everyone strives to be one. The belief that mention, memory or remembrance will not seize when one dies is a life tonic worth pursuing. This long memorial could be achieved in Igbo culture by so many ways among which is by having a child named after one. This culture of namesake is similar to that of the Ashkenazi Jews except that they avoid naming children after a living person. The practice among the Sephardic Jews, however, is exactly like that of the *Nkanu* Igbo people who name their children after relatives, both living and dead. The Greeks also name children after relatives living or dead.

### ***Ogbo tradition and Naming in Igboland***

*Ogbo* is a naming practice or culture among some if not all parts of Igbo land. It is at the same time an aspect of their culture, practice and tradition. '*Ogbo*' can be translated as "namesake" in English but it connotes more than that. It is both patronymic and matronymic eponym. The full meaning and details of it cannot be known without the knowledge of the naming culture, pattern of inheritance and representation and the role of a "child" in their life among other things.

*Ogbo* takes its root from the traditional naming ceremony. Igbo, traditionally, organizes their naming ceremony on the eighth or twelfth day of the birth of a child. It is on that day that the *Ogbo* is made known or declared. The nurturing periods of the *Ogbo* name vary with people, though some seem to be automatic in some places as noted in a related study among the Afikpo Igbo people that (Emeka-Nwobia (2006)

Names are almost always predictable in Afikpo. This is because every first male is expected to answer the paternal grand-father's first name (Nnannia + real name). The second child goes by the

maternal grand father's name (Ogonnia + real name). The first female also answers the paternal grand- mother's name (Nnannia + real name) and the second female goes by the maternal grand- mother's name (Nnenne + the real name) (p.97).

In a lot many places in Igbo land the name of the first male child of a couple is among the automatic 'ogbo' names. The first male child of a man is usually named after his father. This makes the traditional or tradition-based names, according to Fakuade, Otun-Friday and Adeosun (2020), predictable and therefore agrees with the general observation of predictability in Western names. If the man's father's name is "Ani" then, the first male child would be 'Ani'. This situation gives rise to automatic nicknames like: "Ogbonna" (namesake of the father) and "Nnanna" (his father's father). It would be Ogbonna if only the father too was named after his own father. It becomes Nnanna only for a person named after his father. In the same vein, the first daughter is named after either of the two grandmothers of the child. In Efik naming tradition, only the first male and the first female are named after their grandparents. (Okon, 2018). This traditional and customary practice holds most of the time. It does hold where there is or was an untoward relationship between a parent and the child as when there was open expression of hatred against the child by a parent. In such a situation the father does not deserve the honour and would most likely not be so honoured. At times, a father dies so early in a child's life that the child does not know him. As far as the account reaching the man about his father is positive the man would still honour the father by naming his son after him. Such action may be a face-saving device employed to locate oneself in one's lineage. The practice in this form is highly appreciated in the society. Relatives appreciate and extol the practice in occasions like that and it lends credence to the deep feeling or nostalgia of having a child survive one as one proverb aptly has it: "Ọ bụrụ n'ọnwụ egbughi ji e ji chụọ aja, ọ ga-epu ome." (If the sacrificed yam does not rot it will germinate). It is good to remember that in Igbo land as in most traditional patrilineal societies, families are anxious to have male children who will perpetuate their names. The greatest calamity that could befall a person in this life is not to have a child (Anyachonkeya, 2014). Similar thing like the above happens too when a child is named to honour a woman who dies so early in the life of her child. Names almost forgotten are brought back to life on such occasions. According to Achebe as cited by Cott (1980, p.86):

In the past, our people, when a child was born, would go to a diviner to find out which of the ancestors it was who had

come again. They went back and said, ‘well, who’s this newcomer, this man’s father or this man’s grandfather?’ So this was not new. And once they established who the child was, they gave him all the respect. I don’t know how it operates; I don’t know whether it means that this is exactly the same person or just somebody who has aspects of the character. This is a mystery to me and it must remain a mystery to us.

The “Ogbo” does not apply to all the appellations of an individual which means that it is not all the names of a person that is ‘copied’ in ogbo naming culture as some people seem to misconstrue. The ogbo copies only the native or traditional name of the person one is named after. This is confirmed in the examples in the data below. The first name in each set of names is the traditional or native name of the individual while the name in parenthesis is the school name of the person. It could therefore be seen that the school and church affected the ordering of and use of the native names. But for the fastidiousness and dedication of the people to genealogical naming the practice would have been long forgotten. Nonetheless the continuation of the practice is not fully assured as some children now prefer to use their father’s English name for that purpose and some do not even believe in the practice. In order to add one’s parent to his or her name we usually prefix “nwa-” or “be-” to the father’s name as in:

Nwatu nwa Nnaji - Nwatu the son of Nnaji.

It is by the culture of ogbo that the indigenous names are kept alive. The ‘Ogbo’ (namesake) is the genealogical naming system used in the *Nkanu* Igbo society to perpetuate given traditional names. Family genealogical kinship and pedigrees that are usually obtained through so much financial expense in oral traditions research, review of historical records and medical and sociological analysis are rather cheaply and readily available to the *Nkanu* people through the ‘ogbo’ naming details.

Humanity is sustained by procreation and through it too the genealogical root is spread and sustained. Each individual is known by a given traditional name. McKnight (1962, p.121) also observed that ‘most Englishmen of the Anglo-Saxon period were content with a single name’.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework chosen for this work is ethnography. The roots of ethnography is in the anthropological works conducted in the early

half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by researchers like Malinowski (1922), Margaret Mead (1932), and Evans- Pritchard (1951). It has extended into sociology, health, business, and education and has metamorphosed and split into critical ethnography, feminist ethnography, focused ethnography and confessional ethnography, auto-ethnography and virtual ethnography. Through ethnography researchers examine behavior, language, and consider the potential tension between what they do and ought to do, and what they make and use, such as artifacts (Spradley, 1980 as cited in Heigham and Sakui, 2009, p. 93). A common definition of the term in linguistics, according to Heigham and Sakui, is the study of people's behavior in naturally occurring, ongoing settings, with a focus on the cultural interpretation of behavior (Watson-Gegeo, 1988 as cited by Heigham and Sakui, 2009). Boluwaduro (2020) explains that linguistic ethnography incorporates people's social situation into ethnographic studies. Social situation according to Silverman as quoted by Boluwaduro (2020, p. 2234) is an 'attempt to understand folk (ethno) methods for organizing the world ... and locate the artful practices through which people come to develop an understanding of each other'.

Ethnographic research allows researchers to explore how people create, sustain, change, and pass on their shared values, beliefs, and behavior – in essence their culture (Heigham and Sakui, 2009). The aim of ethnographers is to develop an understanding of the particular cultural worlds which people build and live in and explain them to people outside those worlds. The framework is therefore capable of explaining the idea behind the naming pattern of the Igbo people shown outwardly by the recurrence of the traditional given names of the people as it passes on from generation to generation.

Ethnographic research provides a detailed and profound understanding of a given culture. It is fluid and flexible. Ethnographic research is generally conducted from within a target community therefore allowing the recording of behavior as it occurs rather than depending on secondary reports of others.

## **Method**

The data for this study were sourced at Nkanu land in Enugu state of Nigeria between October, 2019 and September, 2020. The technique used for the elicitation of the data were interviews and participant and non- participant observations. A purposive sample of twenty carefully selected respondents representing ten different communities were used for the study. The sample consisted of people who are believed to have experienced it all from infancy

to their present age. The respondents covered the various strata of the society, the children, the youth and the advanced in age. The selected respondents were experienced in the tradition and practice of using names to keep lineage ancestry alive either as beneficiaries or name-givers. They bore witness that the practice had remained intact since the day of their birth to date. However, the children and youths were pessimistic that the tradition is under threat of extinction due to non-adherence to it by the younger generation caused by Christianity and Western education. Christianity regards all indigenous practices as pagan including the non-Christian names and the process of giving it. Consequently, new converts were prevailed upon to adopt Christian names and drop the native names. Educational institutions toe the same line as they prefer English names to the native ones for new school enrollees. It is feared that if traditional name revitalization drive is not mounted and sustained, the lineage system through naming would go extinct.

## **Analysis and Findings**

### **The traditional Naming patterns of the People**

An Igbo child's major or traditional or cultural name is chosen for the child and given on the naming day. It is only one name that is assigned to the person on that ceremony. It is also the major name with the namesake. The name is also the name of the person the namesake is named after and on and on like that till the first person who bore the name in the lineage. This type of names system runs in lineages or families. It is cyclic. It keeps going round and round like that unless when there is a break in the transmission. The break is caused by pre-mature death or lack of male successor. As a result of the antiquated history of some of such names and lack of written record to fall back to in search of their meanings, it is usually difficult to pin down the meanings of some of them or describe succinctly the origin. Such condition accounts for the discontinuation of the use of some names as noticeable nowadays. Some that survive do so because of the strong reverence and allegiance of the younger ones to their forefathers and their roots despite vogue feelings. Still others become extinct because the meaning they convey has become self-derogatory as in the following:

Table 1: Derogatory Names that are no longer in Use

Name	Gloss
<i>Ọ̀tọ̀kọ̀rọ̀</i>	Graveyard/burial ground
<i>Àjà</i>	Sacrifice
<i>Íféré</i>	Shame
<i>Ñs(h)í</i>	Poison
<i>Égwù</i>	Fear
<i>Ñwítè</i>	A child destined for the pot
<i>Ọ̀mábé</i>	Name of a kind of masquerade
<i>Èvù</i>	Armpit
<i>Mkpókóró</i>	'Calabash' – a child destined to die in infancy and thrown into the evil forest in a calabash

The meanings of the names alone are sufficiently and derogatorily scaring to make people run away from adopting them. A child was named “Ọ̀tọ̀kọ̀rọ̀” (graveyard/burial ground) before now in families where children die as soon as they are born. That is a situation where children hardly survive infancy – a phenomenon known as “Ọ̀gbanje” in Igbo land. The derogatory and negative name is given to the child to dissuade death from killing the child as before. Except in cases of dramaturgical flashback in theatrical performance such a name does not appeal to name-givers today. Children in the years gone by were given names like those but the present generation of Igbo people do not give such names anymore. The high mortality rate among children those days was said to have been caused by low or zero medical knowledge pertaining to blood incompatibility, genotype problems, infant killer diseases like measles, influenza, chickenpox, pneumonia, diarrhoea among other major diseases and lack of medical hospitals and facilities.

A few examples of how the family lineage is traced with tangible persons include:

Table 2a: Family Ancestral Kinship A.

<i>Ñnájì Nwá Nnàmàgá (Patrik Nnamaga)</i>	Nnaji the son of Nnamaga
<i>Ñnàmàgá Nwá Árùm</i>	Nnamaga the son of Arum
<i>Árùm Nwá Nnàmàgá</i>	Arum the son of Nnamaga
<i>Ñnàmàgá Nwá Nnàm</i>	Nnamaga the son of Nnam
<i>Ñnàm Nwá Ànì</i>	Nnam the son of Ani
<i>Ñnàmàni Ègá</i>	Nnamani the son of Ega
<i>Ñnàmàni Ègá</i>	Ega the blacksmith.

Table 2a shows the lineage of Ozo Patrick Nnamaga whose native name is given before the parenthesis as Nnaji. The ancestry lineage would run like: *Nnaji Nwa Nnamaga, Nwa Arum, Nwa Nnamaga, Nwa Nnam, Nwa Ani, Nwa Nnamani, Nwa Ega Nwuzu*(*Nnaji* the son of *Nnamaga*, the son of *Arum*, the son of *Nnamaga*, the son of *Nnam*, the son of *Ani*, the son of *Nnamani*, the son of *Ega* the blacksmith). All the children in table 2a above trace their origin to one primordial father of the lineage, *Ega Nwuzu*. The ‘Nwuzu or Nwa uzu’ is the professional epithet used to identify the head of the lineage. ‘Uzu’ means blacksmith, so the man must have been a very popular blacksmith in his time. Observed gaps must have been as a result of death before getting a male successor or death in infancy or inability to have a male child. There was apparently no son after Nnamani and that was the reason his name did not recur.

**Table 2b: Family Ancestral Kinship sample from Umúégakindred, Amagunze.**

Nnàmchí Nwá Nnàjí (Felix Nnabuchi)	Nnamchi the son of Nnaji
Nnàjí Nwá Nnàmchí	Nnaji the son of Nnamchi
Nnàmchí Nwá Òtúrú	Nnamchi the son of Oturu
Òtúrú Ntá Nwá Ògbúú	Oturu (small) the son of Ogbu
Ògbúú Nwá Ègá	Ogbu the son of Ega the blacksmith.

A careful examination of the names will reveal the duplication of all the names in table 2b. What that means is that all the people had male successors. The story would change with Nnamchi Nwa Nnaji because he is a catholic priest. He has no wife and would therefore not have an offspring. His name would not be repeated. The second observation pertains to the refashioning of ‘Nnamchi’ to ‘Nnabuchi’. It probably must have been because of finding a more believable semantic explanation for the old surname in Christian understanding.

The data were from the same kindred as in table 2a. A kindred is called ‘*umunna*’ in Igbo and it is used to depict children of a common ancestor. That explains the reason why the lineage ended with the same name. The implication is that though they have individual lines of ancestry they all eventually merge at the end since they are all descendants of the same person.



Table 3: **Family Ancestral Kinship sample from Ndiègu Akpugo**

Njòm Bé Nnàmàni	Njòm from the family of Nnamani
Nnàmàni Bé Njòm	Nnamani from the family of Njòm
Njòm Bé ókénwá	Njòm from the family of Okenwa
Ókénwá Nwá Ógbódò	Okenwa the son of Ogbodo

The striking thing in the data in table 3 is the use of ‘be’ which means ‘house or the family of ...’ Beside that, the names recurred in all the instances.’ The recurrence of the names is a pointer to the tradition of *ogbo*. The recurrence is higher where the individuals involved are the first male children of the affected families. The data are authentic and are from individuals who are alive today tracing their descent to the original founder of the family lineage.

### Market Day Names

The market day names Igbo people give to their new born babies are God-given names because only God determines the day a child is born. The Igbo people have a four-day week namely: Eke, Oriè, Afò and Nkwò. As a result of this, the first names naturally come out as either: “Nwaeke”, “Nworie”, “Nwafò” or “Nwankwò”. There is no sex differentiation in those market day names. The prefix “nwa-” means child or ‘son or daughter of ....’ So, “Nwaeke” means a child born on an “Eke” market day; “Nworie” means a child born on an “Oriè” market day; “Nwafò” means a child born on an “Afò” market day while “Nwankwò” means a child born on an “Nkwò” market day. Such names are also known as birth names or maternity home names/forenames/childhood names by other writers (Emeka-Nwobia, 2016; Chauke, 2015). It falls on the baby naturally but has a significance in the life of the baby. Parents can refashion the name to their preferred form or taste as in the following:

Table 4: **Instances of where Market Day Names have Variation**

Market Day Names	Market Day Unisex Names	Market Day Male Name Forms(1)	Market Day Male Name Forms(2)	Market Day Female NAME Form(1)	Market Day Female Name Form(2)
Èké	Nwéké	Òkéké	Òkéréké	Mgbééké	Èkémàmà
Óríé	Nwórié	Òkóriè	Nil	Mgbóórìè	Nil
Àfò	Nwáfò	Òkáfò	Òkéréké	Mgbáfò	Nil
Nkwò	Nwánkwò	òkónkwò	Òkórónkwò	Mgbánkwò	Nil

In table 4 you can notice sex differentiation. Anglicization has affected the form of some of the names like “Okafọ” now spelt as “Okafor” or “Okafaw” and “Okonkwọ” now spelt as “Okonkwo”, rendering “ọ” as “or” or “aw”.

Market day names, though not given to children by their parents overtime have gone to become the surname of a lot of people in Igbo land. However, Emeka-Nwobia (2016) observes that:

Due to the uniqueness of Afikpo-Igbo naming convention, it is possible to see a child born on ‘Nkwo market day bearing the name ‘Eke’ or one born on Nkwo day answering ‘orie’. This is because even before a child is born he or she already has a name, irrespective of the day he is born (p.98).

The Afikpo practice is peculiar. They have the right to practise what they believe. It does not really negate the more general practice of the majority as explained earlier.

The use of market day names as surnames is not unexpected as some nicknames, praise names etc. have become surnames as well after long usage. It is also because surnames as they are used today are foreign to the people. Besides the market day names there is also another form of name that serve as surnames by all intents and purposes, the surrogate father’s name - which is not true surnames.

### **Surrogate or Pro tem Father’s Name**

There are ‘surnames’ that the people bear which are not the true names of their biological fathers or grandfathers or family names. Those non-biological or ancestral or lineage names are what we refer to as surrogate or pro tem father’s names. In the cultural practice of the people, children are shielded from human and spiritual attacks by having an innocent young person stand in lieu of the father. This is used to confuse the enemies of the parents as they will not readily relate the child to the parents, therefore, protecting the child from would-be attackers or parent enemies. It is impossible by that practice to identify one’s true father by the mere names the child bears without deep acquaintanceship.

In the days gone by, when the labour room used to be at every woman’s backyard or hut, immediately a baby is delivered, bathed and brought into the building, it is the father of the baby that welcomes his child before others. Where that is not the case whoever performs that role is culturally seen as the father of the child. Children are excited by the practice to the extent that they compete for it. The competition brings in wits and manipulations into the practice to the extent that a child at the middle of line of boys racing to perform the ritual or the one at the rear may eventually win

the competition by flinging a morsel of food, biscuit, stone or stick ahead of those in the front into the mother's hut to win the competition. If the baby is "Nweke" and the little boy that won the race is "Nwatụ", the new borne baby would then be known and addressed as "Nweke Nwatụ". According to the English order of presentation of names "Nweke Nwatụ" means that "Nweke" is the child of "Nwatụ". "Nwatụ" is the surrogate or pro tem father of the child in line with the culture and tradition of the people. The child will grow up to address the surrogate or pro tem father as "Nna m" (my father).

The surrogate parentage arises from the traditional or superstitious belief of the people that enemies abound in persons and spirits but could be easily deceived by the use of surrogate. We could recall that the people were practicing their traditional religion. Then and even now the society is believed to be full of marauding malevolent spirits scouting for whose life, children or wealth to devour. They have their targets whom they know by their names but they avoid little children and strangers. Their intention is usually to wreck great havoc in the life and family of their targets and cause unending sorrow and agony in their families. One of the ways of effecting that perpetual sorrow in a family is to kill their young ones on arrival. They know when a new child enters a family and can identify and trace them with their names associated with the target. If the child is associated with the true father's name they strike and kill. But when the baby is named after another person they become confused and do not transgress. The evil spirits do not hurt or harm either of the two innocent children. Consequently innocent children's names are used to safeguard other young innocent ones from harm and attack. The practice is not limited to the Igbo people alone as St. Francis de Sales (1973) observed about the Egyptians and pagans despite Pharaoh's autocratic order that they should murder the children of the Hebrew women saying: "they feared to offend God by such barbarous and unnatural cruelty as the killing of so many little children would have been." (p. 196)

Some people use the surrogate or pro tem father's name throughout their lifetime. Authentic examples in our society today include: "Nwite Anjafu"; "Nweke Ani"; "Ngene Nwomeji"; "Nworie Nnamani"; and "Nworie Akpam". Biologically "Nwite Anjafu" is "Nwite Nwa Ubagu"; "Nweke Ani" is "Nweke Njom"; "Ngene Nwomeji" is "Ngene Nwa Nnamchi"; "Nworie Nnamani"; is "Nworie Nnaji" and "Nworie Akpam" is "Nworie Nwatụ". In all the examples above the first names are the true marketday names of the bearers of the names but the second names are not their real names but those of the surrogate or pro tem father. Some other people use the surrogate appellation for some time and drop it believing,

perhaps, that they have successfully and permanently deceived the malevolent spirits. When the surrogate or pro tem father's name is dropped the user reverts to the lineage name.

Another way of tracing genealogy is by naming ancestral relationship line like:

- (a) Mba nwa Nnaji nwa Ogbu nwa Nnamchi nwa Anigbo nwa Ani nwa Njoku
- (b) Chifuoko nwa Aniji nwa Ogbodo nwa Ede Nnajiigwe nwa Egaani.

The “nwa-” prefix before the father's name was commonly used to identify people before coming of the missionaries in large numbers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The prefix “be-” on the other hand means “house/home or the family of ...” The regular use of surname “so-to-say” began with the missionaries. The regular use of surnames which was copied from the English reduced the use of “nwa-” for distinguishing between individuals. A name like Jim Nwobodo was “James nwa(the son of) Obodo - the first civilian governor of former Anambra state (1979-1983). Onoh Nwa Ngwo (Onoh the Ngwo son) referring to the second civilian governor of Anambra state (October 1983 to December, 1983, Chief C. C. Onoh). When the use of surname was thus accepted the given or traditional name of a person's father served as the surname. Surname among the people simply refers to a father or grandfather. Over the years, however, a family surname has come into existence but essentially it was adopted for a purpose. The adoption was precipitated by the motive to make people aware of their descendants. The practice encouraged by nepotism and favoritism everywhere, in politics, in the society, religion etc. Even among the English people as observed by McKnight (1962, p.121) ‘the use of surname did not become customary until late in the Middle Ages.’ He went further to add that the Norman Conquest of England led to the adoption of the use of surnames and that:

The development of surnames was a practical necessity. With the widening of interests involving a whole country, new means of distinguishing names have become more and more indispensable. The use of a second element in a name, a surname, for a time satisfied needs, but in later times additional means have been found necessary. The use of a third, or middle, name which was adopted in England in the eighteenth century, but which did not become frequent much before the nineteenth, has now become a general practice (p.126).

It is noted elsewhere that ‘historically surnames evolved as a way to sort people into groups – by occupation, place of origin, clan affiliation,

patronage, parentage, adoption, and even physical characteristics' (<https://www.ancestry.com>). In the society under study traditional names serve the purpose.

### **The Appreciation Visit**

The naming ceremony sparingly hold in the presence of the person after whom the child is named. On many occasions the child is even named after dead relatives. When the 'ogbo' is no longer alive the celebration of the event is short but if the 'ogbo' is alive it could be elaborate.

When a child is named after a living relative or friend or admirer it is followed by celebrations. The person who received the blessing of having 'ogbo' spontaneously shows his joy and happiness and as soon as possible would go and behold his or her ogbo and shower him or her with gifts as much as he or she could afford. The gift items could include goat(s), calves, chicken, baskets of yams, baskets of cocoa yams, baskets of water yams, pigeon pea, fish, meat, clothing materials, shoes, drinks and money or even palm trees. The senior ogbo is usually escorted to the house of the child by an entourage by relatives, friends, men and women, young and old to appreciate the father of the child and his family who named a child after him or her.

At the house of the newly named the entourage is usually joyfully received and entertained. On arrival they present their gifts and express their joy and feelings about the event that brought them. The senior ogbo can use the occasion to unfold his or her plans for the namesake. He or she is usually at liberty to take the child for nurturing as soon as he or she is weaned. It is a unique system of adoption in that area of Igbo land.

The appreciation is not a one off programme. It is a continuous cerebation throughout lifetime. It involves a time to time check on the family, assisting in their work and providing things lacking in the family to the best of one's ability. This happens even when the namesake has been taken custody of by the senior name sake. It is like providing the services the child was to have been providing had he not been given up to his 'ogbo' or namesake.

Family relatives and friends who were not present either when the child was named or when the first appreciation visit was paid to the family of the younger ogbo would take time to visit the family of the young ogbo to get acquainted with him or her and to give their own gifts. This is very important for proper identification, acknowledgement, greeting and cordial felicitation

in future meetings. This is an aspect of the communal aspect of life of the people in the towns and villages.

### **Ogbo and Adoption**

The 'ogbo' culture or practice allows children to be adopted by the person they are named after with the full consent of the biological parents of the child and their society. The beneficiary could be somebody with other children or a person without any child. It applies to both male and female children. It increases the number of children for the person who has other children and relieves the pain and anxiety of childlessness for the person that has none already. When a child is named after someone, the person (the beneficiary) is at liberty by the local custom and tradition to take over the responsibility of bringing up the child (nurturing him or her) from the any time after the child is weaned if capable. It is not obligatory. By all intents and purposes the child serves as the child of his 'ogbo' throughout his life.

The adopted child lives in his or her ogbo's house fully aware of his or her parents and free to interact with them without hindrance. In the olden days some little force was applied to make the young one comply. It is practiced more among the less privileged ones as a way of seeking better life for their children. The problem however is as Dike (2009) averred with respect to customary child adoption among the Ekpeye the future of the adopted child is not always fully guaranteed.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing it is clear that the naming system of the *Nkanu* Igbo people is unique and interesting. The use of surrogate father's name is limited to them and the culture of automatic names for the first two male children and the first two female children are theirs only. In Afikpo culture, it involves only the first male and the first female children. The culture of giving only one name to a child during naming ceremony because of the 'ogbo' culture is also unique to them. It is responsible for retaining, securing and maintaining family or traditional names among the people. Post naming ceremony inter-family celebration is remarkable in the area.

The native or traditional name which is used in genealogical tracing while still prevalent among the people is under serious threat of lack of use in schools and formal occasions and would likely slide into oblivion if the current trend is not checked. We need local advocacy initiative to promote popular use and adoption of native names in all spheres of life, formal and informal otherwise it would be lost. The Christian names and forenames

should be put in their proper place in the society. People must not abandon their native names to be Christians. Personal as well as the community identity is linked to the name.

The adoption of ‘ogbo’ as a son or daughter among the people is a spectacular phenomenon not found anywhere else. The practice in that manner reduces stress of not having children in the society and saves people of having to adopt children of unknown parentage. The practice of allowing ‘ogbo’ to partake in vertical inheritance is without equal. In other climes adopted children are not allowed to inherit properties. ‘Ogbo’ does not lose out in genealogical tracing. Their unique position is asterisked and also accorded its right of place in the genealogy of the family.

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