

DIMINUTIVE REFERENCES IN PERSONAL NAMES AMONG ABAKALIKI PEOPLE OF EBONYI

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Abstract

Personal names are identity labels for both the individuals bearing them and their cultural societies. This study is aimed at exploring the etymologies of the *nwa* names among the Abakaliki people of Ebonyi State, with a view to determining their meaningfulness or opacity. Data are drawn from observation, oral interviews with forty (40) learned and culturally informed participants, and library and internet secondary sources. Content analysis and systematic review are deployed in the analysis of the gathered data. The study leans on JS Mill's theory of Connotation vs. Denotation Distinction (CDD) to argue and show that personal names, including the *nwa* names among the Abakaliki people, have both connotative and denotative meanings and references amidst complexity. The analysis proves the meaningfulness of the *nwa* names on cultural and pragmatic grounds and thereby shows that the names are not diminutive as erroneously or narrowly perceived by many. The study concludes that the references to various non-human entities are what make many people in contemporary times to consider most African indigenous names as being diminutive, but they are actually not. The study calls on Africans to uphold and promote their indigenous systems and identities, such as the *nwa* names among the Abakaliki people, across generations regardless of the sustained contact with the West and the emergent trends of globalisation.

Keywords: Diminutive, References, Personal names, Abakaliki people, Onomastics

Introduction

Names are identity labels for individuals, groups, humans, the non-humans, things, places and phenomena. This statement has been captured by Zawawi (1998), who says, ‘nothing on this earth– and in much of the heavens– exists without a name’ (p. xii). Names are identity labels bearing distinct and universal cultural traits (Agyekum, 2006). Names are affirmed to be labels used to identify and describe people, roads, buildings, play grounds, businesses with trademarks, and other objects and facilities (Wakumelo et al., 2016). Agyekum (2006) has posited that whoever or whatever has no name does not exist. Thus, the Abakaliki people of Ebonyi State in South-Eastern Nigeria have names for human beings and everything in their world. This statement is made to reiterate the point made by Emeka-Nwobia (2007) that what does not exist in a particular area has no name among the people. That is why the names of some things had been borrowed centuries ago by a given people from another. It follows that the indigenous names of certain people are inherent to them and had been coined many centuries ago by the people, based on different circumstances.

Stewart (1997) has affirmed the centrality of names and the attached practices in the lives of Africans. Every name, whether popular or not, has had a circumstance behind it, which remains the onomastic reference of the meaning (etymology) of each given name. Thus, names have historical narratives behind them. These days, the common concern about human names remains with their meanings, with little or no attention paid to their histories and ground circumstances. Even though most scholars and other individuals pay little or no attention to the etymologies of names, all human names have their etymologies. Opacity is frowned at, while meaningfulness is considered prime in names, particularly among the contemporaneous of present-day cultural societies of the globe (Anderson, 2007). All human names, like different phenomenal names, have their etymologies. Phenomenal names, in the parlance of this work, are those that refer to places and things other than human beings. The etymology of names is the thrust of onomastics or onomatology.

Therefore, this study seeks to know the etymologies of the ‘nwa’ names among the Abakaliki people, with a view to determining their meaningfulness or opacity. Some other parts of Igbo, such as the Awka people of Anambra State, bear the *nwa* names, such as *Nwaeke*, *Nwaoye*, *Nwaafo* and *Nwankwo*, derived from Nkwo, Eke, Oye and Afo. However, this study concerns itself solely with the *nwa* names among the Abakaliki people of Ebonyi State. The scope of ascertaining the etymologies of names, particularly the *nwa* names, among the Abakaliki people extends to ascertaining and analysing the remote circumstances behind naming persons the ways in which they are named, as among the Abakaliki people. If the names are found to be characterised by opacity, the study will submit that the *nwa* names among the Abakaliki people are diminutive. The otherwise finding would undoubtedly prove them to be meaningful and thereby sustain the meaningfulness of the names among Abakaliki people, which are erroneously or ignorantly considered diminutive.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the etymologies of the ‘nwa’ names among the Abakaliki people. Its specific objectives are to:

- (i) Determine the meaningfulness or opacity of the *nwa* names among the Abakaliki people of Ebonyi State;
- (ii) Determine whether or not the *nwa* names among the Abakaliki people are diminutive or not;

- (iii) Make an exposition of the *nwa* personal names in relation to their references and meanings among the Abakaliki people;
- (iv) Ascertain the circumstantial factors behind the *nwa* names and naming practices among the Abakaliki people of Ebonyi State.

Conceptual Spadework

Names are identity labels that point to the bearer, which could be humans, trees, places, concepts (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2018). A name differentiates its bearer from all other entities bearing other names. In other words, a person, a thing, a place, etc. is known distinctly by the name it bears. The names of human beings are regarded as (proper) personal names. These are individualised identity labels given to every person at birth. Blount (2015) states that personal names differentiate individuals from others right from birth, point to their families or ethnic groups known with the peculiar names. The birth given name of everyone is their first name. Basically, while some people practise a single name identity, others practise a dual form. That is, some persons are given just a single name, being their respective first name. Those practising dual name identity usually give a child a first name and a second name.

A second name can also be taken or given to oneself at maturity. A baptismal name also serves as some persons' second, middle or other name. Both first and second names are attached to a family name that serves as the surname of all the members of a given family. Whether a person bears one, two or more names besides their surname, one cannot say my names are. Rather, the one, two or more along with the surname make up a person's name, not names. Thus, what is right to say is that my name is, not are. Among the Igbo, the tradition of formal naming ceremony for new born babies is compulsorily practised. A name is given on the day of the naming ceremony that comes immediately after birth or at the end of seven market weeks (the Igbo four-day market week: Eke, Oye/Orie, Afo and Nkwo), twenty eight (28) days (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2018).

As Emeka-Nwobia (2016), Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2018) and Uzoagba et al. (2022), among others, rightly point out, Igbo names are at times, names of departed family members of either parent, believed to have reincarnated in the baby. At other times, they are: praise names for the gods and ancestors; names that mirror the worldview, beliefs and perception of the Igbo as a whole or those of a particular Igboland; those point to the child's destiny; and the ones that make reference to the birth circumstances of the child. In what lends credence to the foregoing, Osuji (1998) has noted that:

The Igbos attach great significance to names hence newborn babies are given meaningful and significant names. The Igbos invariably do not believe that there is nothing in name. Rather they believe, and their culture supports it that a person's name has a lot to tell about him, his background or about his parents (p. 157).

Onomastics or onomatology is an interdisciplinary field concerned with studying the etymology, history and use of proper names (Anderson, 2007). It also engages with the truism or reality of names and their references. A person who studies the history of names is called onomatologist. As an interdisciplinary field, onomastics has many professionals. They include linguists, dialectologists, historians, archivists, folklorists, archaeologists, sociologists, ethnologists, philosophers and psychologists. Some science professionals are also involved in onomastics. These include cartographers, demographers, genetic scientists, geographers, space analysts and computer programmers.

Uzoagba et al. (2022) define onomastics as ‘an integral part of lexicology, which is concerned with the origin, history, and use of proper names, either names of persons or places’ (p. 2). The personal names of persons are regarded as anthroponyms; those of places are called toponyms; the names of domestic animals, ethnic and religious groups are known as ethnonyms (Makondo, 2011; Emeka-Nwobia, 2016). These are all aspects or branches of onomastics. They are concerned with origins, etymologies, uses and forms of names (Emeka-Nwobia, 2016; Agyekum, 2006). Like many other scholars, Uzoagba et al. (2022) state that toponymy and anthroponymy are the basic branches of onomastics. According to Uzoagba et al. (2022), ‘toponymy investigates the toponymic lexicon, through the study of motivation and origin of the proper names of places,’ while ‘anthroponymy deals with people’s names, proper names of individuals, either parental or last names and nicknames’ (pp. 2-3). Algeo (2010) states that anthroponymy is the branch of onomastics that deals with proper (personal) names, their forms and usage.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Mill’s (1949) theory of Connotation vs. Denotation Distinction (CDD hereafter). CDD is chosen to be the theoretical framework because John Stuart Mill’s distinction between denotation and connotation is a popular reference in onomastics. As Emeka-Nwobia (2016) agrees, even though latter day Western onomatologists made a shift from Mill’s distinction project to categorical polarisation, Mill’s (1964) theorised postulations continue to serve as a substantial theoretical framework for explaining personal names among Western and non-Western peoples alike.

By categorical polarisation, this study means that in a bid to improve on Mill’s stance while at the same time criticising it, the latter day Western onomasticians polarised CDD with opposition rather than distinction between connotation and denotation. They consider the denotation to be lexical meanings, which are meanings of generic words, and connotation to be connotative meanings that apply to names. They are of the view that proper names are independent of lexical meanings, just as lexical meanings are devoid of onomastic meanings. Although the distinction made by Mill (1964) differentiates the two sets of meanings, it does not polarise the categorisation as such. Rather, it differentiates or emphasises the differences between the two sets of meanings, which apply to the meanings of generic lexical words and onomastic names.

This present study argues that connotative and denotative meanings apply to both lexical words and proper names, as context, society and circumstances, among other factors, all come to place in the meanings of words and names alike. Batoma (2006) has noted that names in Africa have three meanings: lexical, onomastic and pragmatic. For Houis (1983), African names have significations or signifiers that do not differentiate them from lexical words, whereby names are signs of the languages housing them, just like other words that act as signifiers at morphological, semantic and pragmatic levels of analysis. The foregoing is captured by Rymes (1996), who sustains Ferdinand de Saussure’s position that linguistic signs have arbitrary connection with their referents. To that end, Rymes (1996) and Emeka-Nwobia (2016) contend that there is no any functional correlation between names and culture, between linguistic signs and their referents, and between meanings and their referents.

Emeka-Nwobia (2016) states categorically that names have no correlation with the behaviour of their bearers. This means that she agrees with this current writer that names have no effects on the bearers. Thus, whatever stories told about names being what affect the bearer or determine their fate in life are fallacious, misleading, subjective and mythical. Such stance derives from narrow religious view or conception of names and the absence or poor knowledge of the onomastic groundings and realities of names. Being

grounded in onomastic knowledge of names would undoubtedly make it possible for one to know how to use names appropriately. McPherron (2009) has advised that names should be used well. When names are not used well, language misuse obtains too (McPherron, 2009; Ames & Rosemont, 1998). That is, not using names well implies not using language effectively. In view of the foregoing, Ames and Rosemont (1998) have stated that ‘when the exemplary person puts a name to something, it can certainly be spoken, and when spoken it can certainly be acted upon’ (p. 162).

In light of the above view held by Ames and Rosemont (1998, p. 162), Emeka-Nwobia (2016) and McPherron (2009) hold that names convey the languages of peoples to others, exhibiting meaning construction in and the meaningfulness of the languages. This does not imply that names have any real, except perceived, effects on the bearers. That is why there is no correlation between the meanings of names and the behavioural traits or life situations of the bearers. Nevertheless, in the words of Emeka-Nwobia (2016), there is ‘a stiff connection between names, language and the people’s culture’ (p. 96). On the other hand, many Western scholars claim that proper names have no meanings (e.g. Mill, 1949; Ziff, 1960; Searte, 1971; Krippl, 1977; Andrews, 1993). They argue that names are mere identity labels that are not any part of a person, and have neither meanings nor real references.

In the words of Searte (1971), ‘proper names do not have a sense; they are meaningless marks; they have denotation but not connotation’ (p. 134). This study disagrees with Searte (1971) and his fellows on names not having meanings and connotation. Names have connotations, because they are characterised by pragmatic context, signification, circumstantial determination, societal use of language and conventions. If names have no meanings, words in general have no meanings too. Also, if names have no meanings, they also do not have denotation. The foregoing arguments advanced by this study are given credence by Wakumelo et al. (2016), who note that ‘names or toponyms are not just mere signposts; they reflect the social, political, and cultural ideologies maintained by the name givers’ (p. 270). This does not imply that the meanings of names reflect the behaviour and/or life situations of the bearers.

It is imperative to stress that if names have denotation, as affirmed by Searte (1971), they have meanings too. The complexity of meaning and referent does not justify the claim that names have no meanings. Of course, denotation has to do with meaning—literal meanings. This study argues further that names have both denotation and connotation. This study agrees that names have no sense because they are abstract entities that fall short of sense or sensory cognition. It follows that Mill’s CDD is a suitable theoretical framework here because it implicitly affirms the reality that names have denotative and connotative meanings regardless of the distinction between connotation and denotation. Okeke et al. (2019) prove that Igbo names, as in those with *onwụ* ‘death’, have connotations, and represent indigenous experiences about death and their conception of death as an animate entity.

Related Literature

Uzoagba et al. (2022) examine the socio-cultural underpinnings of toponyms (*Mkpụ nánọ Nsụ ká, Ìdèkè*) in Nsukka in Southeastern Nigeria. In other words, the study is aimed at ascertaining and describing the factors that determine the names given to places in Nsukka. It argues that toponyms in Nsukka are not arbitrarily awarded. The analysis proves that toponyms in Nsukka are determined by some socio-cultural factors, which include geographical landscape, ancestral or genealogical relationships, location of the place, past events, and experiences. The study concludes that Nsukka people of Igboland have high regard for ancestry and reverence for the Supreme Being in the naming of places. These factors identified by

Uzoagba's et al. (2022) study apply to personal names among Abakaliki people of Ebonyi State. Thus, their study relates to the present one to a reasonable extent.

Gibka (2018) shows with literary proper names of characters that names are identity labels, stressing some personal proper names in literary works are permanent or play permanent functions, while others are temporary or play momentary functions. Her proof tallies with the answer given by Joanne Kathleen Rowling about *Harry Potter*. Rowling said, 'The characters came first, and then I had to find names to fit them' (Fraser, 2002, p. 24). The statement is an indication that names are not given arbitrarily, as several considerations are taken cognisance of. One of the considerations is ensuring that names fit bearers. That is more obtainable in literary context.

Chanda-Tembo (2017) report that 'business names, like brands and trademarks, are economic devices that play instrumental roles in differentiating businesses from other businesses in the course of trade' (p. 115). This view affirms that names are indeed identity labels for persons, animals, places and things. Thus, it reflects the stance of this study on names being identity labels. Its concern with business names makes to be entirely different from the present study. In the same year, Knezovic and Alujevic (2017) examine old toponyms of Split, a city in the centre of the Croatian region of Dalmatia. Sourcing data from oral tradition, written records and old charts, they show that old toponyms of Split are preserved in street names, and in the names of museums, parks and amusement centres, schools, etc. Although their study reflects the present one in terms of engaging with toponyms, just as the latter (the present study) does, it differs from the latter in scope, preoccupation and approach. While it sees to revitalising the old toponyms of Split, this study looks at names and naming practices among Abakaliki people of Eastern Nigeria, focusing on the *nwa* prefixed names among these people.

Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2018) makes a sociolinguistic exploration of trends in Igbo personal names. The study affirms that personal names portray social identity and reflect a people's and an individual's ideology, beliefs, values and norms. It reveals that Igbo indigenous names are being eroded by the trends of westernisation and globalisation. It argues that 'some of the current trends in naming strip the names of their cultural, social, religious and political relevance, and blot the identity of the bearers, while others violate the norms of naming in Igbo culture' (p. 167). In conclusion, the paper holds that some Igbo names have lost their meanings and correlation with their references, while others have got westernised. The major recommendation is taking up sustained awareness campaign to educate contemporary Igbo on the intersection of names, language, culture and identity, which would make them uphold meaningfulness and relevance over Western and globalisation fashion in personal names. The study relates to the present one but for scope being the major difference. It makes it clear that some diminutive names among the contemporary Igbo have been made so by westernisation, globalisation and the violation of classical naming conventions among the Igbo. This clarification is the base of its agreement with the present study.

Oha et al. (2017) compare Nigerian and Indian toponyms, with a view to establishing their socio-cultural divergence and development. Their study reveals that Nigerian toponyms, unlike those of India, have been influenced and altered by English phonological and morphological features. The alteration is evidenced in names such as Oka, Owerre and Wori having Westernised English versions as Awka, Owerri and Warri respectively. The situation is quite different with India toponyms, such as Tilak Nagar, Majavir, Nagar, and Rajiv Chowk, which are indigenous and have no alien or Western versions or representations. The study differs considerably from the present one, particularly in terms of scope and main theme.

The onomastic exploration of Afikpo by Emeka-Nwobia (2016) offers a solid background to this study in that it (the former) looks at the Ehugbo (Afikpo) people of Ebonyi State, just as the present study engages with the onomastic exploration of 'Nwa' name proper names among the Abakaliki people of Ebonyi State. The study indicates that names are grounded by naming conventions among different peoples of the globe, which differ considerably. Names, like naming systems, portray peoples' cultures and languages along with their inherent worldviews and conventions. The study reveals that the trends of westernisation that came with colonialism, globalisation, urbanisation, Western religion, and contemporary intellectual ideological perspectives have continuously altered the names and naming practices of the Ehugbo people of Ebonyi in contemporary times. It makes a specific analytical concentration on namesakes among the Ehugbo people.

Emeka-Nwobia's (2016) study concludes that following the negative impacts of the aforementioned trends, namesakes practice is being eroded or made extinct in contemporary Ehugbo. It relates to this present study in that the affirmed trends account for the consideration of the *nwa* names among the Abakaliki people as diminutive names in contemporary times. The study also tallies with the present one in that it captures namesakes, which obtain among the Abakaliki people, as in the many *nwa* names among them. The informants confirmed that the practice of namesakes is what made the *nwa* names become common names and intergenerational names that are now both first names and surnames.

Kadenge et al. (2014) look at the naming of albinos in African societies, stressing that socio-cultural and religious contexts of birth are the best parameters for understanding derisive personal names of albinos. This means that they consider context and circumstances as justifiable factors behind names and naming in African societies. Fitzpatrick (2012) rightly notes that names and naming among African peoples have spiritual, psychological and physical significance. This observation applies to the Abakaliki people of Africa in Eastern Nigeria. Their names are affirmed to have social roles and status relevance, portray identity and technically convey several messages about the bearers and their tribes (Fitzpatrick, 2012).

Anyachonkeya (2014) explores naming in Igbo land from linguistic and cultural angles. In it, he shows that personal names reflect the cultural norms and practices of the people using and bearing the names. This position is also held by Nwoye (2014), Agyekum (2006) and Achebe (1982). He observes that naming among the Igbo showcases their fears and aspirations, joys and hates, ideals and values, and cultural and spiritual values. It follows that Igbo names are rooted in their worldviews, cultural values and norms. Nwoye (2014) identifies ritual objects associated with Igbo naming, which are used during Igbo naming ceremony.

Makondo (2011) explores personal names, names of places, names of domestic animals, ethnic and religious groups, and those of their economic activities of production or manufacture. Mphande (2006) points out at the religious feature of the African names in relation to the worldviews of the peoples. This is what lies behind the beliefs, myths, tales, misconceptions and realities about names among African peoples in contemporary times, such that the religious (especially most clerics) often claim that names have effects on bearers in terms of their meanings. Meanwhile, such persons do not consider or fail to explain circumstances behind referents of meanings.

The study done by Onukawa (1998) engages with exploring the names of Igbo market days. His 1999(b) study discusses the significance of the verb *kwe* (agree, consent) in Igbo names (Onukawa, 1999a), and the anthropolinguistic evidence of *chi* names in Igbo (Onukawa, 1999b). The narrative functions of African names are stated by Duranti (1997). In other words, names among African peoples historicise a past, present

and future events among each of the peoples. Duranti (1997) considers names and naming from anthropological perspective, and coins what he calls 'linguistic anthropology, [which] is the study of language as a cultural resource and speaking as a cultural practice' (p. 2). According to Duranti (1997), the tenets of linguistic anthropology revolve around the three functions of language in culture, which are performance, indexicality and participation. Uzoagba et al. (2022) state that linguistic anthropology 'studies the links between language and culture, and how language relates to thought, social action, identity, and power relations' (p. 4).

Stewart (1997) makes an analysis of African indigenous first and last names and the associated naming practices. She offers African names from over twenty-five countries and a variety of ethnic cultures in Africa for persons of African descent, who were either forced to adopt or given Western names during the colonial era, and wish to assert their African identity through the reclamation of African names in the post-colonial era. She discusses and regrets the trends of modern naming practices and names among Africans, stressing the case of African-Americans whose names and naming systems changed during the late 1960's and 1970's in a constant movement of renaming and self-identification (Stewart, 1997).

While Ubahakwe's (1981) study looked at the structure and meanings of Igbo names, the study carried out in 1982 focused on the cultural traits and impulses of Igbo personal names. Ubahakwe (1982) has described peculiar features of African names, which include personifying individuals, narrating stories about individuals and groups, pointing at specificity of familial and tribal names and naming systems, and conveying societal values. Cecil Hume has noted in his *Black Identity* song that 'the first thing that is a shame [is/remains] African people with European name.' Late Cecil Hume, a Calypso artiste of Trinidad and Tobago, whose sobriquet was *The Maestro*, condemned in strong terms the vilification of Africans by stripping them of their name and true mark of identity (Maestro et al., 1973). The essence of reflecting on the above view is to call to mind the negative impacts of westernisation and globalisation on indigenous names, such as those among the Abakaliki, for which most of the names are now degraded and misconceived as being diminutive even though they are not in reality.

In his theoretical postulations on names and naming under the causal theory of naming, Evans (1973) has maintained that persons, animals, things and any entities do not just bear the names they are named for no reason(s). Rather, they are reasons for the name an entity bears. To him, the inherent property of a name is the exclusive preserved of the people who use the name. For him, since the people are those who know the reasons behind each of the names among them, they have to be left with the task of explaining the reasons behind each and accounting for the property of each name. According to Evans (1973), the meaning of a name is dependent on the available information about it, and determining the meaning of a name is dependent on the causal origin of the name. Thus, Evans (1973) sees the definition of a name to be what a community terms it to be among them across ages. That is, knowing that this or that refers to or means a particular name is dependent on the communitarian definition or description of it be what it is considered to be.

Names and the Symbolism of Meanings and References

Studies identify the following essential determinant features of meaning and referent: mode, discourse type, task type, task complexity and time, are pointed out as features of meaning and referent (Paños, 2015; Michel, Kuiken & Vedder, 2012; Michel et al., 2012; Gilabert, Barón & Levkina, 2011; Gilabert et al., 2011; Robinson, 2007; Chafe, 1985), which in any case present complexity. As Requejo (2007) notes, every word has different shades of meaning. Also, Requejo (2007) notes that context is affirmed to be what makes meaning to be ‘meaning in use’ and an element of ‘both semantics and pragmatics’. She goes on to note that both linguistically and situational, context is often considered as an a posteriori factor in linguistic analysis’ (Requejo, 2007, p. 169). Yet, when considering language in use, context comes before meaning and rather directs meaning right from the beginning (Requejo, 2007, p. 169). The complexity of the correlation between meaning and referent is affirmed in the literature. Paños (2015) makes valuable contributions to discourses on linguistic complexity. The study looked at propositional (i.e. sentential) complexity in the given statements made by speakers.

Ullmann (1959) has rightly observed, ‘it would be altogether impracticable to have separate terms for every referent’ (p. 118). Complexity is noted to be the most challenging one dimension of assessment and measurement of the performance of L2 users, particularly with regard to accuracy and fluency (Paños, 2015; Bulté & Housen, 2014; Housen, & Kuiken, 2009; Norris & Ortega, 2009; Palloti, 2009). Complexity is said to be of three types. These are linguistic, discourse interactional and propositional complexity respectively (Bulté & Housen, 2012; Paños, 2015). Bustamante-Ubilla and Arenas-Torres (2022), the sources of complexity are people, sub-systems and society. By that thought, they insinuate that people cause complexity. At other times, subsystems cause complexity. It follows that people cause the complexity of names on one hand and subsystems of society cause it on the other hand.

Again, Bustamante-Ubilla and Arenas-Torres (2022) are of the view that having evolved, ‘complexity had gained new associated concepts, which include particles, waves, waves, and surges appear’ (p. 1). These new concepts, according to them, these new concepts aim at ‘explaining the genesis of complexity and those factors that describe its evolution through attractors that move between order and chaos, generating structures catalytic or dissipative as required by society’ (Bustamante-Ubilla & Arenas-Torres, 2022, p. 1). In the end, the study regards the engagement with complexity as ‘complexity thinking’, which is theorised variously.

In many African cultures, names are not just given to children and even places. They are given based on prevailing circumstances, occurrences, time, place, parents’ expectations, family naming system (namesake practice), remarkable events, history, achievement, belief and perception, among others. Basically, these are names at individual level. These together ground meanings and references in names among African peoples, such as the Abakaliki African people of Nigeria. As Darlington (2015) rightly observes, at a societal level, names can tell us so much about gender, religion, class, caste, nationality and ethnic origin.

Looking at the origin of names and the changing choice of names can reveal much about a community or nation. This is a pointer to why some persons are or have been named after places [e.g. their places of origin]. For instance, Abakaliki people bear or share names of places, as in those who bear Nwebonyi, Nweke, Nwaizzi, Nwaiboko, etc. More examples shall be given under the data presentation and analysis section of the paper. The traditional of naming persons after places is not particular to Africans such as those in Ebonyi alone. Darlington (2015) states that there are British and Americans named after places in

their continents. For example, ‘the British celebrity couple David and Victoria Beckham named their first son, Brooklyn, after the district of New York in which he was conceived’ (Darlington, 2015, p. 45).

Meaning is basically dependent on and determined by context. It is in view of this assertion that Doyle (2007) notes that ‘it is fairly uncontroversial to assert that context affects meaning’ (p. 4). This implies that context undoubtedly impacts on meaning. As Osuchukwu (2022) notes, context shows varied references. This means that besides determining meaning, context also determines the referents of meanings. That is to say it the base of meaning and reference. In other words, meanings and referents are determined by context. It follows meanings and referents of names are dependent on and determined by context. Just as Osuchukwu (2022) asserts that words have meanings imbedded in them, names also have meanings imbedded in them. The meanings imbedded in names include the symbolic representation of significations, codifications and circumstances of names, which vary among different cultural contexts.

Meaning is what basically grounds the message encoded and passed on by the speaker to the listener. This implies that the meanings of names are the symbolic messages encoded and passed on to the public by the originators of different names. The meanings of most of the names we have today were contextually constructed or encoded according to circumstances and/or referents prevailing the naming of children after them, which thereafter became intergenerational names among certain peoples of the globe. For example, personal names having snakes referents among different peoples of the globe were given by the originators with no consideration of the word or etymological meaning of the names of the snakes. Polash (2023) identifies forty-five (45) names that mean snakes or have snake referents, which include Ekeko, Cobra, Leviathan, Nag, Sarpa, Viper, Zmok, Ananta, Basilisca, Echidna, Frida, Ijapa, Lif, Medusa, Ophion, Tiamat, Uma, Boa, Apep, Ladon, Naga, Slither, Tut, Uraeus and Varanus. Others include Lynda, Lindie, Fani, Fanee, Egle, Brecklin, Chumana, Athelina, Belinda(h), Berda, Donnelle, Nyoka, Seshadri, etc. Polash (2023).

It is quite interesting to know that there are over four hundred (400) personal names in English, Greek, Hebrew, Celtic and other languages having snake referents, which differ in meanings, as their meanings do not take up the etymological meanings of their snake referents (Woods, 2019; Nelthropp, 2023). Let us consider several examples here. Adder is an English male proper name, which refers to a venomous snake in ancient Europe. While the snake is the reference (referent) of this proper name, its meanings are not dependent on the original lexical or semantic meaning of the word ‘adder’. Rather, from inference, it is understood that the originator of the name ‘Adder’ had used it pragmatically or contextually and metaphorically to a male child, who had shown courage, fearlessness, self-defence and calmness until being provoked, just like the snake. One name that is the synonym of Adder is Anaconda, a proper name in Latin and Sinhalese referring to a large non-venomous ‘whip snake’ found in tropical regions. The name signifies strong, unique, power, primal energy, and a connection to water and nature (Nelthropp, 2023). Clearly, symbolism is an essential element of naming in that without signification would remain impossible.

Naming circumstances and the symbolism of meanings and references manifest in different snake names, whereby their referents are snakes, but their meanings are something else. Consider following examples. Adishesha, having the referent ‘first snake’, connotes ‘religious’ and ‘beautiful’ in Sanskrit. Ananta is likewise, as it connotes ‘religious’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘elegant’. The snake that is its referent means ‘without end’ in Sanskrit. Aspasia is a Greek snake name for females that connotes ‘beautiful’, ‘elegant’ and ‘strong’ and originally means ‘snake woman’. Ahi in Sanskrit originally means ‘snake’, being the referent. It is

considered to signify ‘cute’, ‘simple’ and ‘unique’. Amaru, which originated from Quechua and has ‘snake’ referent, connotes ‘mythical’ and ‘Baddas’.

The Egyptian snake names ‘Apep’ and Apophis’ both mean Serpent, but symbolise eternal battle between order and disorder and connote ancient, unique and mythical or mysterious (Nelthropp, 2023). In order to move on to considering the examples of other names having references different from their etymological meanings, other snake referent names include Amazon, Amos, Astika, Basiliks, Cadmus, Ceto, Corra, Drake, Darvi, Dexter, Ekans, Edna, Eopsin, Frann, Frank, Fafnir, Fang, Garter, Gilbert, Gorgon, Isaami, Medusa, Hissandra, Hisser, Honey, Inadunai, Jake, Jelly, Ju-Ju, Kaa, Kaliya, Karai, Krypto, Maddie, Mamba, Manasa, Mara, Medusa, Mika, Magic, Monty, Mushussu, Ophion, Pythia, Racer, Rattler, Rex, Salazar, Shenlong, Striker, Xiangliu and Zoe (Woods, 2019; Nelthropp, 2023).

Also, there are names making references to death, misfortune, gods and goddesses, misery, rivers, seas, mountain, sorrow, etc. Lola is a popular female name of Spanish and Latin origins, which translates as ‘sorrow’. The originator of the name never meant that the child was, is or will be sorrow(ful). Rather, being in a state of sorrow as at the birth time of the child had warranted the originator to name the child ‘Lola’. Others took up the name after the first named ‘Lola’. Mallory, a very popular name in the USA during the 1980’s, is of French origin and means ‘without good fortune’ (i.e. unfortunate, unlucky or ill-omen). Also, misfortune or ill-luck is never the reference of this name. The referent is the parent(s) of the first bearer of the name, who were probably until the birth of that particular child had lived without fortunes. That is, unlike other persons around them having fortunes in life, their life had seemed to be without fortunes. As such, when they had the baby, they decided to name her Mallory. Abiba is an African name referring to a child born after the death of her grandmother.

Bacia, a Ugandan name meaning ‘family deaths ruined the home’, does not have death as its meaning but reference (referent). This is because the originator made reference to the situation or ruin the death of his/her family members had caused him/her. This is more like the Bekwarra name Ekpenukpang (let him survive first) or Akpenmare (he is yet to survive or live), which had been given by the originator to his child born after losing several erstwhile ones to death. This name among the Bekwarra people of Northern Cross River in Nigeria does not mean or suggest that the bearer will not survive or live. Rather, the parent(s) gave the name to the child so as to remind themselves that they needed not to be too sure of the child’s survival yet, since others had come and gone without staying and growing up with them in the family. Iye (world, suffering) is another name among the Bekwarra, which does not refer to the bearer but serves as a symbolic reference to suffering or shocking worldly occurrences. Iripia (praise, gratitude) is a Bekwarra name given to a child to remind the parents of the need to be unceasingly grateful to God (and the ancestors) for one or more spectacular fortune(s), deed(s) or feat(s).

Pragmatic Context and Meanings of Names

Meaning is the thrust of both semantics and pragmatics. Contextual meaning is ‘the linguistic manifestation or situation that moves meaning from semantics to pragmatics’ (p. 158). As far back as the 1930’s, Firth (1935) wrote on context and meaning. In linguistics, his work is considered the pioneer work on context. For Firth (1935, p. 37), the complete meaning of a word is usually contextual. This means that beyond the literal or lexical meaning of every word is its contextual meaning (Osuchukwu, 2022, p. 157). This means that proper personal names also have both semantic and pragmatic meanings. Since context determines and as well influences meaning (Osuchukwu, 2022), the meanings of names are largely determined and

influence by context. That is why a word can mean different things or have different references among different people(s). To that end, a proper name can mean different things and be pronounced differently among different people(s). Such differentials are to pragmatics, not semantics.

As Song (2010) notes, ‘different linguists define context from the point of view applicable to their fields, with a view to answering the inherent questions regarding context in their fields and in such ways that justify their own ideas and theories’ (p. 876). Osuchukwu (2022) defines context as what ‘refers to the secondary multifaceted phase of meaning, which derives from setting and various factors other than the elementary linguistic factors behind language users’ construction, understanding, interpretation and analysis of meaning’ (p. 161). She notes that all the meanings arising, or derived, from context are secondary, while literal meanings are primary. The literal meaning is the etymological or original meaning that is to semantics. Different factors come to place in the construction of context meaning. These include background, setting, worldview, mindset, attitude, mood, tone, manner, previous and internalised knowledge, experience, idiolect, literature, association, postural gestures and registers, among others. Among these, Song (2010) points at environment or circumstances to be what contextualises a discourse and a meaning with its reference.

Context, for Cook (1999), refers to ‘factors outside the text under consideration’ (p. 24). This definition is the narrow sense of (Cook, 1999). In the broad sense, context refers to factors [a form of knowledge of the world about] and other parts of the text under consideration, also regarded as ‘co-text’ (Cook, 1999, p. 24). That is, as Cook (1999) holds, context is a form of knowledge of the world, which can be used in both broad and narrow senses. This reality applies to the knowledge of names and naming systems cum practices. This thought is captured by Yule (2006), who describes context ‘as the physical environment in which a word is used’ (p. 128). Thus, Abakaliki is a physical context in which the names among the people had evolved and are used across ages.

Further, Widdowson (1996) has defined context as ‘a schematic construct residing in the mind’ (p. 63). This point makes it clear that the meanings and references of names reside in the minds of individuals of particular places. The fact that there are circumstances behind names is reiterated by Widdowson (1996), who states that ‘context is one of those aspects of the circumstances of actual language use which are taken as relevant to meaning’ (Widdowson, 1996, p. 126). It follows that circumstance are relevant elements of proper names. As such, disregarding the circumstances behind meanings and references implies failing to explore the onomastics of the names among a given people of a contextual place or location— as in Abakaliki cultural context, location or place. Also, Widdowson (1996) states that context is ‘a schematic construct’ used for achieving pragmatic meaning by ‘matching up linguistic elements of the code with the schematic elements of the context’ (p. 126). Put simply, conceptual views highlight the existential relationship between meanings and references of names among different peoples of the globe.

The view by Yule (2006) words derive their meanings from co-words in a discourse or any other speech context in which they appear lends credence to the thinking by this researcher that circumstances are determinants of the meanings of names and other words referring to different phenomena. Like Yule (2006), Nordquist (2018) also talks about co-text meaning derivation, whereby words derive meanings from the meanings of other words in co-occurrence with them in discourses and linguistic strings like sentences. Nordquist (2018) agrees that context determines the meaning of a given discourse. Requejo (2007) avers that context is not some extra information that we turn to when bare semantics is not enough. Rather, in real uses, context always comes first before a given linguistic unit can be interpreted (Requejo, 2007).

Shedding light on Requejo's (2007) view, Osuchukwu (2022) notes that before the construction of a given linguistic unit or structure, some pieces of information had already been available to discourse participants, which directs them on the process of meaning construction and determines the possible sense to be made of and/or selected from the available information variables.

Doyle (2007) has noted that meaning construction is characterised by presuppositions. By implication, there are presuppositions about proper names, which include the assumptions that some names among the Abakaliki people are demeaning. Meanwhile, in reality or when given onomastic exploration, one realises that names are not demeaning (diminutive) but meaningfully dignified. Thus, it is quite obvious that context has a valuable place in meaning construction, conception, codification, cognition, comprehension and interpretation. The meanings of words derived from or determined by context are broadly regarded as contextual meanings. This paper argues that just as words for things have contextual (associative) meanings so also proper names have contextual meanings, which are pragmatically constructed or brought to place. These include the meanings of names derived from the circumstances behind the naming a child as this or that.

Pragmatic context began to gain appreciable scholarly attention in the 1970's (Osuchukwu, 2022). Notable among the 1970's scholars are Bransford and Johnson (1972), whose studies roused significant attention to context in language studies (linguistics). Bransford and Johnson (1972) argue that understanding a sentence depends on both the knowledge of the language in use and that of the world around us. This implies that understanding and appreciating or valuing the meaning of proper names depends on background linguistic knowledge and that of the world around where the names obtain. That is why most names that are perceived today as being demeaning were never conceived so those days, when the names evolved. Also, Bransford and Johnson (1972) have noted that 'semantic anomalies only occur when it is impossible to establish a relationship between a sentence and some relevant aspects of our knowledge of the world' (p. 1973). This statement of theirs implies that the semantic anomalies of names arise when individuals or groups are unable to establish or determine the existential, linguistic or functional relationship between names and the knowledge of the world around where the names are bore.

People of different linguistic backgrounds also differ ethnically, socially, philosophically, politically, contextually and otherwise. The differentials among them are to the largest extant contextual. The differences include variances in names, naming practices, culture, behaviour, idiolect, accent, perception, worldview, cultural orientation and so on (Emeka-Nwobia, 2007; Chaika, 1994). It should be noted that the type of context involved in a communication event (conversation) is usually shaped by the people involved in the given conversation(s). Essentially, the influence context exerts on, or the role it plays in, meaning construction is the manifestation of pragmatics (Osuchukwu, 2022). Kadenge et al. (2014) confirm the place of context in personal names, as they narrate how contexts determine the names and naming of the albinos among African peoples.

The foregoing points are captured by Song (2010), who classifies context into three: "linguistic context, situational context and cultural context, and emphasises that context eliminates ambiguity, indicates meaning referents and detects conversational *implicature*" (p. 877-8). Circumstances behind names are to situational context. Meaning and referents of names are to linguistic context. And, names among Abakaliki people as well as other people and naming systems and practices are to cultural context. Her (Song, 2010) identified three major functions of context are of relevance to onomastic research such as this one, because

they highlight the place (i.e. roles or functions) of context in names and their meanings and referents on one hand, and naming systems and practices on the other.

Requejo (2007), who considers context to be of only two categories: linguistic and situational contexts, observes that not only objective situational context should be taken into consideration; the individual experiences, beliefs, intentions and perceptions of the participants should be considered too, because they all affect how and the way in which meaning is constructed in a given language (i.e. communication) event. By implication, objectivity is required in considering the situational context of meanings, names and discourses. It is understood that she (Requejo, 2007) captures individual experiences, beliefs, intentions and perceptions under situational context, which doubles as situational context and cultural context for her. These four factors are basically psychological, social, religious and cultural, which undoubtedly apply to names and naming. Therefore, given the above exposition, context has a valuable place names, their meanings and referents, and naming systems and practices.

Indigenous Names and Naming Practices among Abakaliki Igbo People

Iwundu (1994), Oluikpe (2004) and Kammelu (2008) have identified broad categories of Igbo personal names viz: theophoric, ideational, monumental and testimonial names. It follows that Abakaliki names and naming practices fall under these aforementioned categories as well as other categories not captured by Iwundu (1994), Oluikpe (2004) and Kammelu (2008). Ubahakwe (1982, p. 30) has earlier identified the following categories of Igbo personal names:

- (i) God and deities, as in: *Chukwu* (God), *Ofo* (ritual object);
- (ii) The good and virtuous, as in: *Ngozi* (Blessing), *Ike* (strength);
- (iii) Kinship, as in: *Nne* (mother);
- (iv) Titles, as in: *Eze* (King);
- (v) Natural processes/phenomena, as in: *Onwu* (death), *Ndu* (life);
- (vi) Social entities/concepts, as in: *Mba* (people/town), *Ibe* (social group);
- (vii) Evil and non virtuous, as in: *Agha* (war);
- (viii) Calendar, as in: *Oge* (period/time), *Eke*, *Orie*;
- (ix) Natural physical objects, as in: *Osimiri* (stream), *Ugwu* (hill);
- (x) Parts of the body, as in: *Ukwu* (leg), *Isi* (head);
- (xi) Material assets, as in: *Ego* (money);
- (xii) Occupation, as in: *Nta* (hunt), *Uzu* (smith).

It is important to note that the above mentioned categories of Igbo names apply to names among the Abakaliki people, though this study focuses on the nwa names among these people. The Abakaliki people call each individual member by his/her original birth name and that of the father, and not only by the person's first name or surname. The children of each man bore his own first name as their surname, but never sustained it as the surname of his grandchildren and posterities. Girls and ladies would bear their father's name until they got married, when they are called with their husbands' names. Their husbands' first names would become attached to theirs, as their adopted surname. The male children would bear their first name and surname all through, regardless of the circumstances and/or meanings of their native or original names.

Names were given based on the circumstances, situations, places and occurrences of birth, prior or during the birth of the individual. The worldview of the people also reflected their names. Every proper name has

had a first bearer, who thereafter had several namesakes (i.e. those named after him/her). Each of the namesakes also begot other namesakes. That naming continued like that into the contemporary era and thereby made each of the names to have many bearers (namesakes). Today, the bearers of each proper name are many. Those bearing each of the ‘nwa’ names among the Abakaliki people of Ebonyi State are many. It should be noted that names that were given as first names had long turned to surnames. With practice of naming children after one’s parents, relatives, friends and even close neighbours and acquaintances, each of the then first names had long ago become a surname too. That is, each name given to a person by a given parents, both then and now, metamorphosed to a surname. While some people have each of them as a surname, others have each of them as a first name. In most cases, female children and great/grandchildren lose their surnames to those of their husbands.

The practice of giving names based on circumstances is changing in contemporary times. These days, the meaning of each name is what matters to most people. Another factor is the religious trace or root of a name. That is, most people value and name their children the names in the holy writs of their religions. For example, most Christians do not consider circumstances but the meanings and personalities of the bearers of certain biblical names. Against the above anomalies, Utietiang (2000), among other African-centred scholars, make a clarion call to all Africans for African philosophy of identity, African names and naming practices inclusive, for a new world order. African philosophy of identity is a philosophy that invites all Africans to come together as one. It demands that all Africans come together and agree on their own line of actions (Utietiang, 2000, p. 79).

Methodology

This study employs the qualitative method of research. The descriptive survey method and the text content analysis are employed. The primary data are obtained from forty (40) participants selected from among educated Abakaliki indigenous people working with the Ebonyi State University (EBSU), Abakaliki. This number of respondents makes up the study purposive population. These participants were engaged in objective oral interviews and thereby interrogated on what they know about the *nwa* names among them and their people. Their responses were tape recorded and some points from them written down. The data obtained from them were subjected to critical content analysis. Besides, observation was also employed. In addition, systematic review is deployed to analyse the secondary data sourced from library and internet sources. The analysis, which is qualitative rather than quantitative, also involves the use of interpretive, descriptive and analytical tools.

Data Presentation and Analysis: Nwa Names among Abakaliki People

Although the Igbo people of other parts of Ebonyi and Eastern Nigeria also bear the *nwa* names, here the data are solely on the *nwa* names among the Abakaliki of Ebonyi State.

Table 1: Names Having Place References

S/N	Nwa Prefix & Root	Name
1	Nwa + Ebonyi	Nwebonyi
2	Nwa + Izzi	Nwizzi
3	Nwa + Iboko	Nwiboko
4	Nwa + Ezza	Nwezza
5	Nwa + Eru	Nweru

Source: Author’s fieldwork, 2023

From the above table, it is quite clear that the Abakaliki people bear names that have references to places. This does not necessarily mean that the complexity of meaning and referent do not obtain in the naming situations obtained among these people of the state. That is to say this study has proven that the people bear names that have references to different places in Abakaliki land. Ethnocentrism, personal experiences, conviction and perception, and psychological factors are what had grounded the naming of children after major places in the land.

Table 2: Names Having Market Referents

S/N	Nwa Prefix & Root	Name	Glossary
6	Nwa + Nkwegu	Nwankwegu	A child named after Nkwegu Market, an Abakaliki market of ages
7	Nwa + Ophoke	Nwophoke	Ophoke is a remarkable market among the Abakaliki people and so children born on that market day are named after the market.
8	Nwa + Ibo	Nwibo	This name had originated from the infusion of nwa (child) into Ibo to become 'Nwibo'. Those bearing Nwibo are namesakes of the Nwibo Market.
9	Nwa + Eke	Nweke	A male child born on Eke day
10	Nwanyi + Eke	Nwanyeke	A female child born on Eke day
11	Nwa + Nkwo	Nwankwo	A male child born on Nkwo day
12	Nwa + Ojon	Nwojon	A particular market in Abakaliki land; those named after it.
13	Nwa + Igberi	Nwigberi	A market; its namesakes
14	Nwa + Edeoku	Nwedeoku	A market; its namesakes
15	Nwa + Idagu	Nwidagu	A market; its namesakes
16	Nwa + Igboji	Nwigboji	A market; its namesakes
17	Nwa + Ida	Nwida	A market; its namesakes

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2023

From Table 2 above, it is quite clear that the Abakaliki people have personal names having market referents (references). That is to say different major markets among these people had long ago begot human namesakes, following the birth circumstance of having had such children delivered of at these markets respectively. This practice is both individual and group based from time immemorial. As noted by 36 of the 40 participants (oral respondents), most of those who bear these names and others in contemporary times are the namesakes of the pioneer namesakes of the market.

Table 3: Names Having Deific Referents

S/N	Nwa Prefix & Root	Name	Glossary
18	Nwa + Obashi	Nwobashi	The namesakes of Obashi deity
19	Nwa + Ebo	Nwebo	A shrine; its namesakes
20	Nwa + Aliobu	Nwaliobu	A personal god worshipped by men in their compounds; its namesake
21	Nwa + Ifuru	Nwifuru	A deity; its namesakes

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2023

All the informants noted that although several other deific *nwa* names abound among the people, the four in Table 3 above are the commonest. The implication is that the Abakaliki people of Ebonyi State have personal names with deific references across ages.

Table 4: Names Having Animal and Plant References

S/N	Nwa Prefix & Root	Name	Glossary
22	Nwa + Ewo	Nwewo	Toad
23	Nwa + Oguji	Nwoguji	A certain snake
24	Nwa + Ambara	Nwambara	Edible frog, an open place
25	Nwa + Odo	Nwodo	Another edible frog
26	Nwa + Akiriko	Nwakiriko	A type of snail
27	Nwa + Ophuru	Nwophuru	Okra

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2023

From the data in the Table 4 above, it is gathered that the Abakaliki people bear personal names that have animal and plant references. This means that the people take cognisance of the existential relationship between humans and the non-humans. They never considered bearing the names of animals and plants as a repulsive practice. What determined their choice of certain animals and plants to be human namesakes was the value attached to them. Some children born under or near such trees were named after the valuable trees. The informants noted that biological features of plants and animals also came to play when naming persons after or with references to animals and plants such as those in the table above.

Table 5: Names Having Other Non-Human Ecological References

S/N	Nwa Prefix & Root	Name	Glossary
28	Nwa + Amini	Nwimini	Stream, when it's raining
29	Nwa + Okpuru	Nwokpuru	A pond
30	Nwa + uloegu	Nwulegu	Farm
31	Nwa + Igbo	Nwigbo	Big heap or mound of soil for crop plant
32	Nwa + Uda	Nwuda	Swamp
33	Nwa + Adjì	Nwadjì	Festival
34	Nwa + Angele	Nwangele	Stream
35	Nwa + Ogboduphu	Nwogboduphu	Centre of the compound
36	Nwa + Onunku & Nwa + Akpatanku	Nwonunku & Nwakpatanku	In front of a local kitchen constructed with woods

37	Nwa + Azunku	Nwazunku	Behind the local kitchen
38	Nwa + Azuphu	Nwazuphu	Backyard
39	Nwa + Igbakpo	Nwigbakpo	Pepper
40	Nwa + Eri	Nweri	Rope
41	Nwa + Uzo	Nwuzo	Road
42	Nwa + Oba	Nwoba	Barn, yam barn
43	Nwa + Okwu	Nwokwu	A child born during cultivation
44	Nwa + Okpoku	Nwokpoku	A small hut for family head
45	Nwa + Osisi	Nwosisi	Child of the tree

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2023

Again, it is evidenced from the above Table 5 that Abakaliki people having relating well with the non-humans of the ecosystem, which is why their ancients had laid onomastic foundation of relating with the non-humans without contempt. Also, apart from circumstantial factors behind naming children after the non-humans, the existential features of each of the non-humans were considered in making in/direct, metaphorical and/or personifying reference to them. For instance, as noted by most of the informants, naming a child 'Pepper' followed the realisation that the child exhibited the peppering feature of the non-human 'pepper'. In other words, such names or naming of children followed the use or disposition of metaphor, personification and even allegory by the ancient originators of such personal names.

Conclusion

The saying that 'knowledge is power' is made manifest in the course of this study in that the empirical exploration of the onomastics of the nwa names among the Abakaliki people has unveiled the hidden knowledge of these names. Without an empirical investigation and critical exploration of these names, one simply assumes these names to be diminutive. Interestingly, with the study undertaken on them, it is realised that they are not diminutive. From field-based findings and the evidence available in related literatures, it is logical to submit that the nwa names among the Abakaliki people are not diminutive, as many misconceive them to be. They are meaningful, as their meanings, like those of other names and words across the globe, are contextually, culturally and linguistically determined and assigned.

The meaningfulness of the nwa names among the people proves them to be the otherwise of what the layman considers them to be. That is to say that the nwa names among the Abakaliki people are not diminutive in reality, even though they ordinarily seem to be so. Understanding these names better requires empirical inquiry into the onomastics of the names. It is in doing so that the underground factors behind the real knowledge and realities of these names get unveiled. Circumstance, context, complexity, experience, psyche, values, conventions, worldview, language and culture are factors that characterise, ground and determine the meaningfulness or opacity of names and the kind of references apportioned to names by individuals and communities. Therefore, there is need to research into different personal names and naming practices among different people(s) of the world. Learning and deepening our knowledge of the indigenous systems of our societies would make us appreciate, uphold and develop them across generations.

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