Article

The Representation of People in the Ibibio Anthroponymic System: A Socio-Onomastic Investigation

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Abstract: In the African cultural context and beyond, personal names are not just unique forms of identifying and individuating their bearers; they also provide relevant windows that resonate with the people's worldviews, values, and cosmology. From a socio-onomastic perspective, this article examines the representation of people and their description in the Ibibio cultural namescape, which is a source of their traditional epistemology. Personal names are symbolic linguistic resources that contain information about the Ibibio universe of meaning, where people are placed at the centre of every social relationship. Drawing on ethnographic data sourced through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 30 participants who were name-givers, name-bearers and name-users, this study reveals that the Ibibio naming tradition provides a medium for the dissemination of its traditional cultural scripts, which capture community solidarity, support, security and a sense of belonging. This article concludes that the Ibibio anthroponymic culture reflects people as sources of empowerment. People provide the foundation for understanding the past and a path for reaching one's life goals. This study offers significant entry points into the way the Ibibio act and react to the strength of its community and reinforces the belief that for the Ibibio, people-related regime of names is an important resource used to foster a positive sense of community and well-being.

Keywords: personal names; socio-onomastics; people; cultural script; identity; namescape; Ibibio

1. Introduction

There is a strong relationship between language and culture in the extant literature. Language provides a mirror for the expression of cultural values, mores and worldview, and culture is the vehicle through which speakers make sense of their language (Mensah and Silva 2016). Language is patterned by the culture of the people, and culture is transmitted through language. Names and naming are essential aspects of universal linguistic culture and are prominent sites for understanding the interface between language and culture. Names can be considered cultural artefacts, providing a range of information on every aspect of a culture. In certain cultures, for example, naming rituals mark the transition of an infant from a state of nature to a state of culture (Haviland et al. 2013). Gertz (1973, p. 363) captures this transformation more aptly when he argues that naming is an act of converting 'anybodies into somebodies'. Therefore, a name qualifies an individual for full personhood and as an authentic member of a society. Names are symbolic (cultural) resources that empower their bearers with identity and authenticity. The primary functions of naming, according to Alford (1988, p. 54), are to distinguish people, to emphasise family continuity, and ultimately to reflect the ethnopsychological conception of the self. Naming reconciles individuality and sociability; it helps to create a conception of social and personal identity. As forms of symbolic communication, names also convey deep cultural messages bestowed by name-givers.

The significance of names is also evidenced in shaping behaviour, as names are useful in the negotiation of everyday experiences. More broadly, names deeply resonate with people's behaviour and guide the bearers' model of rectitude (Mensah et al. 2021). It is generally believed in some cultural traditions that names can significantly influence the development of the personality of their bearers, and personal naming practice is a site for the expression of emotions (Mensah et al. 2021). Names are, therefore, essential tools for the socio-cognitive development of an individual, a family or a society. They can be considered as repositories of knowledge and social history that are vital to human development.

Personal names have further functions beyond their mere referentiality purpose; these include commemorative role (naming after a living or dead ancestor), genealogic value (in tracing family bloodline), etymological significance (understanding the origin of a family root) and linguistic consequences (expressing words, phrases and sentences in a language) (Seeman 1983). Names can also be considered as essential cultural symbols for negotiating social relations. The construction of identity and the expression of individuality are some of the primary roles of naming. Beyond these functions, personal names are also essential components of ideological and social systems for many communities of practice. Ogbulogo (1999, p. 61) views names as "veritable resources for decoding ideology". Some cultural norms, values, philosophies and worldviews have deep representations in names, and the information embedded in names offers an interpretative framework for the meaning, purpose and direction in life (Aceto 2002; Fakuade et al. 2019; Lusekelo and Muro 2018). This corresponds with the claim by Bodenhorn and vom Bruck (2006, p. 6) that "the power of names lies not in their linguistic meaning, but in the name itself". This power extends beyond the literal meaning of names, as there are other layers of signification which are based on locally constitutive meaning and cultural scripts or what Goddard (2002, p. 13) simply refers to as "culture-pragmatic facts". Names can establish one's social and cultural identity and help their bearers to cross boundaries, giving them community-like value (Bodenhorn and vom Bruck 2006). Boundary-crossing in naming practices often involves immigrants who bestow names native to their host country on their children for their social and structural integration of their children in the host country (Gerhards and Tuppat 2020). This social identity is an important locus of belonging, which is a fundamental aspect of how people give meaning to their lives. Bauman (2004) shows that social identity allows individuals to stratify their social experiences by linking them with various other communities of practice, which may also signal affiliation with other social capital like shared values, lifestyle choices, social bonding and cultural practices (Lukose 2005; Turner et al. 1987). In this regard, names and naming practices can be used to structure the environment and interpret the world.

Personal names can also have didactic and performative attributes. Names with deep emotional connotations can be bestowed on children as a way of guiding their lifestyle. Such names contain ethical and moral standards that name bearers are expected to carry into adulthood. In this way, names are motifs of familial culture, instilling values, personality, and lifestyle direction, which are also believed to protect the bearers through their lifetime. Names are also proposed to be speech acts, whereby they are used to warn, issue commands, give advice and maintain solidarity in different sociolinguistic domains. In some cultural contexts, personal names are used to amplify religious beliefs and the identity of the name-givers. Mensah (2020) maintains that such names are used to reflect family belief and to guide the spiritual development of name bearers. This is similar to Iloh's (2021) proposal that understanding one's name from God's perspective can be a source of personal encouragement and inspiration. Names, in some cultural traditions like the Tiv in north-central Nigeria, are believed to have divine essence based not only on religious aspiration but also the spiritual transformation of the bearers (Mensah 2020).

The present study investigates the representation of people in the Ibibio personal naming practice using the socio-onomastic theoretical approach. The initial starting point is to provide relevant social categories of people-related names and explore the ways that names are given and used within the complex sociocultural system of the Ibibio. The

article explores the pragmatic values of people-linked personal names among the Ibibio to account for the subjective connotations these names are imbued within the cultural context in which they are given and used. We have compared people-related names in the Ibibio culture with those in other onomastic traditions like Owe and Tiv in north-central Nigeria, where this regime of names is also in active use. Our aim was to see patterns and variability that may emerge. No previous studies on African anthroponyms, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, have engaged with the portrayal of people in the onomastic system to demonstrate the notion of collectivism as the foundation of social harmony, cooperation and well-being. This is the gap the present study aims to fill. This study intends to broaden our understanding of sociolinguistic, socio-onomastic and sociocultural insights that emerge from Ibibio people-oriented names, which create identities, maintain continuity and make social connections. Further, it demonstrates how names and naming are essential linguistic resources that can accentuate the importance of people in the Ibibio universe of meaning.

2. Current State of Research in African Anthroponyms

Names in many African contexts are products of culture with a granularity of meaning that cuts across every facet of human experience (Gebre 2010; Maduagwu 2010; Mandende et al. 2019; Oduyoye 1982; Ubahakwe 1981). Names and naming practices in Africa provide an important window into African philosophy and worldview in addition to how ethnic identity is constructed. As forms of communication, names and naming can express different levels of sociability and emotions. Further, names are useful elements in gender differentiation that can influence the socialisation of children. From the standpoint of belief and worldview, among the Bikpakpaan people of northern Ghana, personal names reflect a shift in the naming pattern based on new cultural philosophical convictions of name-givers (Bisikili 2018). Novel forms of names are used to deconstruct the notions of selfhood and personality alongside the social trajectory of name-bearers' lives. Akan names (Ghana) give sufficient insights into its people's culture and philosophy, whereby personal names uniquely carry personal, historical, familial and philosophical connections. For instance, a child born on a particular day is believed to exhibit attributes, stereotypes and a philosophy that is associated with a particular day (Agyekum 2006). Names can, therefore, be markers of beliefs and ideologies and can be best understood from a sociocultural perspective.

African names are a medium of communication that incorporates experience, history, conflict and folk psychology. Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000) corroborates this position that names among the Bono people of Ghana support human interactions as vehicles of human communication. He argues that names have communicative capacities, telling stories that range from circumstances of birth to elements of the natural environment. For example, names like *Bonsam* 'Satan' and *Dọnko* 'Slave' reveal the surviving children of parents who have experienced the successive deaths of preceding infants. This class of names is used to express a parent's disgust with the name-bearers' past disappearances. These are the instantiation of death-prevention names (Akung and Abang 2019; Doyle 2008; Mensah 2015, 2023a; Obeng 1998; Sagna and Bassene 2016; Yakub 2024). These particular types of names are often bestowed as spiritual survival strategies to ensure that children's lives are guaranteed, given the assumption that some spiritual forces are responsible for successive infant mortalities.

Mensah and Mekamgoum (2017) similarly examine the communicative significance of personal names among the Ngemba people of western Cameroon. The study explores how names are used as an alternative form of narrative that reflects past experiences and tensions encountered by the name giver, which may be either cruel or pleasant. Ngemba names re-echo significant historical circumstances that are useful in negotiating the notions of personality, selfhood and certain local principles or values. In this way, such names become sources of symbolic communication that convey cultural information from the name-giver to name-users. Some African names have been identified as prominent sites for the expression and interpretation of emotion. Mensah et al. (2021) demonstrated how

names among the Ibibio of south-eastern Nigeria define the psychological development of their bearers, providing the template in which lifestyle and behaviour are patterned. They also guide the name-bearers' sense of moral rectitude and socially conceived expectations that also guide the well-being of the name-bearers. A closely related study by Quaglia et al. (2016) analyses names as instruments for the investigation of thought-formation processes and as elements in the process of constructing personal identity. The study concludes that names have different values based on their perception by others and their bearers. Thus, the authors conceptualise names as 'signifiers' of the child–parent relationship while the relationship is the 'signified'.

Furthermore, personal names are used to distinguish people and perform various kinds of identity functions. Abubakari (2020) investigated Kusaal names in Ghana to show how various forms of identities are constructed through names. Names also influence thinking and people's perception of the world. A similar study by Boluwaduro (2019) reveals how the Ibibio people in Nigeria index ideologies and various shades of identity in their personal names, which are intrinsically localised given the juxtaposition of name meaning and the name bearer's lived experiences. Mensah (2020) also highlights how identity and ideology are enacted in religious naming practices among the Tiv people in north-central Nigeria. The study shows that religious names in Tiv culture reflect a personally determined system of representation based on a belief in spiritual practices, and such names reflect the strong symbolic association between the name-givers and their beliefs. It further demonstrates that religious names, beyond indexing religious identity, also permit adherents to project a healthy self-image and offer some sense of protection to name-bearers. The position here is that names are veritable linguistic and symbolic resources that people share to impact their lives, spirituality and social universe.

Names and naming practices are also useful in the negotiation of gender identity and ideology. This is evidenced in the assertion by Alford (1988), who states that names are used to effectively categorise individuals as either male or female. Parents use naming practices to confer gender-linked personalities onto their children, which can also shape the development of the gendered self. Alexander et al. (2021) affirm that gendered names can activate a process of gender socialisation whereby behaviour is shaped to conform to expected social roles. In some African societies where patriarchal norms are strong, gendered naming is an indicator of power dynamics in the family and community as a whole. Betiang (2019) argues that among the Bette people in south-eastern Nigeria, the naming of female children follows a pre-ordained ordering of the girl-child along patriarchal designs, thus making contemporary Bette woman appear marginal to other concerns of postmodern imperatives. It could be argued that this shows how female children's names are useful in entrenching patriarchal norms that subdue the named and privilege the name-giver. Further research on this naming practice (Mensah 2023b) reveals that it appears to be propelled by the desire to project heteronormativity as the only acceptable sexual orientation, especially when female children are bestowed names that reflect their future role expectations as wives, mothers, child-bearers and caregivers. This account shows that naming can be used as a power mechanism that is exploited to justify and promote gender inequality.

In summary, it is apparent that from the African perspective, everything is in a name, which challenges Shakespeare's (2008) seminal question in Romeo and Juliet: "What's in a name? That which we call a Rose by any other name will smell as sweet". This question conveys the impression that names are arbitrary or meaningless. However, in the African onomastic context, personal names are complex artefacts with deep nuances of meaning and resonate cultural, historical, spiritual, communicative and emotional values. Therefore, a name in some African societies is not merely a source of self-identity construction; it provides a window to the worldview, beliefs, norms, language and values of the people (Mensah and Ishima 2020).

3. The Ibibio People and Their Language

The Ibibio people are predominantly found in the mainland part of the Cross-River basin in Akwa Ibom State, south-eastern Nigeria. They occupy 19 out of the state's 31 local government areas (see Figure 1). Traditional occupations of the Ibibio include natural resource-based occupations, such as farming, fishing, hunting, carving and blacksmithing. The Ibibio people have a rich cultural heritage in the form of traditional cuisine, folksongs, folklore, rituals, secret societies and masquerades.
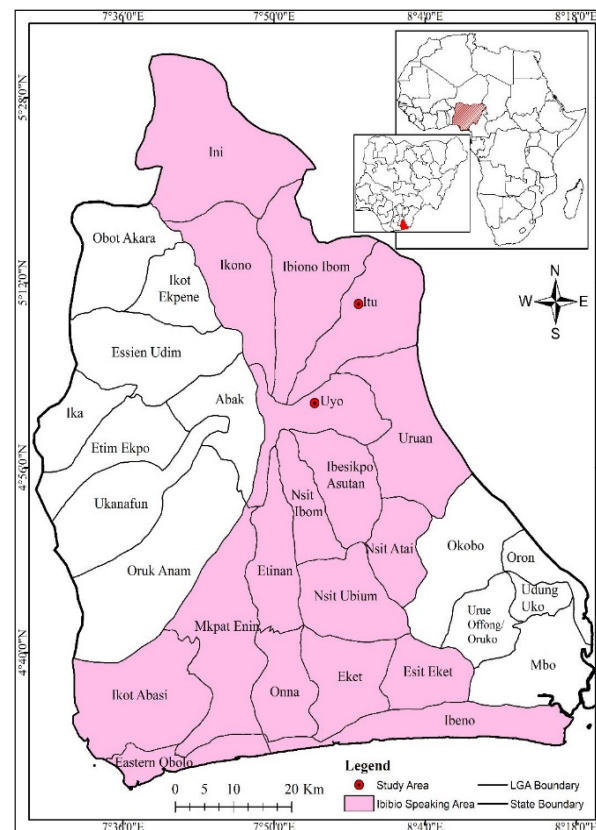

Figure 1. Map of Akwa Ibom State, south-eastern Nigeria, showing the study areas. Source: Department of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Calabar.

The language of the Ibibio people is Ibibio, which is classified genetically as a member of the Lower-Cross subfamily of the Delta-Cross family, which is a major constitution of the Niger-Congo phylum (Faraclas 1989). There are currently 3.7 million first speakers of Ibibio (Population Council 2007). It is claimed to be the fourth largest language spoken in Nigeria, after Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages (Essien 1990). Other languages in the Lower-Cross family include Efik, Anaang, Oro and Ekid. These languages are mutually intelligible, but the degree of intelligibility may be unidirectional (for example, Oro and Ekid speakers speak and understand Ibibio fluently but not vice versa) or bidirectional (Efik speakers speak and understand Ibibio and vice versa). The typological classification of Ibibio reveals its enriched phonemic inventory, a system of tonal contrast, complex morphological structure, SVO syntactic structure and a well-established semantic structure. The Ibibio language is learnt and taught at all levels of education in Akwa Ibom State and beyond. It is also an examinable subject in national examinations conducted by bodies like the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO) in Nigeria. The Ibibio language is also studied at Colleges of Education and at the University of Uyo in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a socio-onomastic approach for the investigation of the representation of people in the Ibibio naming system. The study of names varies across different disciplinary spectrums from historical, sociological, anthropological, sociolinguistic, cognitive, psychological and geographical accounts, with each field engaging the concept of names and rendering any interpretation based on its unique disciplinary perspectives. Socio-onomastics explores the relationship between names, culture and society. It interrogates names and naming practices as essential cultural currency for identification, categorisation and connectedness and examines naming protocols from a wide variety of social contexts (Rahman 2013; Rymes 1996; Sabet and Zhang 2020). It is concerned with the strategies for naming, shifts in naming patterns, social changes in naming traditions, the influence of globalisation on naming as well as name avoidance and taboo. This approach to the study of names foregrounds the social embeddedness of names in identity construction, the sustainability of lineage structure and the ethnopsychological conception of the self. Names have become important foci in an attempt to deal with fundamental questions such as selfhood, individuality and sociality (Nicolaisen 1985). They create a conception and reconciliation of personal identity and social identity.

Socio-onomastics, therefore, studies names in relation to the social contexts in which they are given and used. There are many socially motivated naming traditions, which include the social functions of names, the perceptions about certain regimes of names, the beliefs that are embedded in names, the psychology of names and the grammar of names, among other social aspects of naming. Contemporary and historical social relations of naming reveal the import of names as symbolic cultural and linguistic resources that intersect with traditional epistemology and worldview. This interplay of cultural elements in the naming process constitutes an essential aspect of onomastic capital for each culture or tradition. Further, Ainiala and Ostman (2017) conceptualise socio-onomastics as the role of names in the construction of social identity, taking into account the social, cultural and situational domains in which names are given and used. Similarly, Fenández-Juncal (2018) argues that socio-onomastics focuses its interest on the origins and types of names through to their use in the community, as well as their role in the construction of social identity and attitudes. Naming as a cultural practice is situated in a social space in which personal and collective identities are constructed.

Many studies on personal names, place names and the linguistic landscape from a variety of perspectives have examined these concepts using socio-onomastic theory to demonstrate how names are used and how identity is mirrored and negotiated in different sociocultural contexts. Kirk (2021) demonstrates through the prism of socio-onomastic theory how names are negotiated and resisted through identity work within an organisation. His study provides an understanding of the meaning and connotations of name conferral, and the tensions in being named as a global talent. Significantly, Khotso (2019) also explores how racehorse owners use naming to achieve certain socio-onomastic advantages over fellow competitors in Basotho, Southern Africa. For instance, racehorse owners bestow names on horses that they believe will enhance bravery in order to elicit maximum performance and efficiency in competitions. While equally reflecting their lived experiences and philosophies from racehorse names, horse names are used as advertising strategies to promote the business. Ramaeba (2020) also used socio-onomastic theory to explain an analysis of Setswana polemical names. The study identifies the social context in which these names are used, concluding that such names perform communicative and pragmatic functions in addition to their roles in identity construction. These reviews have highlighted the fluidity of socio-onomastic theory in accounting for social trajectories that underpin the application of names, and for providing an explanatory framework for understanding names and naming more broadly. Socio-onomastic theory aims to provide the theoretical foundation that will enable a situating of the representation of people in the namescape (the sum total of active names) of the Ibibio.

5. Methodology

This study adopted an empirical approach using a qualitative design for data collection and analysis. Data for this research were collected during a nine-month ethnographic fieldwork exercise in two Ibibio communities, Ofot and Oku Iboku in Uyo and Itu local government areas, respectively, of Akwa Ibom State, south-eastern Nigeria (see Figure 1). Owe and Tiv participants were recruited at Makurdi (Benue State) and Kabba (Kogi State), respectively. Participants for the study were recruited through purposive sampling based on their willingness to participate in the research, and by virtue of being Ibibio name-givers, bearers and users, coupled with their knowledge of the Ibibio personal naming system and cultural traditions. Thirty participants, comprising twenty males and ten females, were recruited for the study. This unequal ratio was hinged on the dominant role played by men in the naming process, as the act of naming among the Ibibio is a male privilege (Nugent 2010). The responsibility for name bestowal belongs to the father and/or the grandfather or the most elderly male member of the extended family. Women are culturally permitted to give informal names like pet names. The socio-demographic characteristics of participants, such as gender, age, occupation, marital status, education and religion, were recorded. The ages of participants ranged from 27 to 75 years. Participants' occupations were classified into three categories as follows: ten participants (representing 33.3%) were involved in natural resource-related occupations, such as farming, hunting, woodwork and fishing. Ten participants (33%) were civil servants, five participants (16.6) were artisans, and five participants (16.6%) were students in higher institutions like polytechnics, colleges of health technology and universities. Twenty-one participants (70%) were married, and nine participants (30%) were unmarried. The educational background of participants varied: sixteen participants (53.3%) were senior secondary school certificate holders, eight participants (26.6%) were graduates of higher institutions, four participants (13.3%) did not attend school beyond the basic primary level and two participants (6.6%) claimed to have been schooled informally. Twenty-seven participants (90%) were Christians and three (10%) were worshippers of African traditional religion. The participants gave informed consent for all observations, interviews and recordings in writing. Where a participant could not read or write, the consent statements were read and translated for them to sign. They also gave approval for the publication that will result from the data they generated for the research.

Two ethnographic methods, participant observation and semi-structured interviews, were used for the collection of data. Participant observations allowed access to the natural environment of the participants. The authors were engaged as passive participants and objective observers while participating in activities and events that involved naming or mentioning people's names such as naming ceremonies, pouring of libations, dedication of farmlands and young women's' rites of passage. We observed and recorded participants' naming traditions without active participation in any particular event. This immersion process enabled the researchers to gain an understanding of participants' discourses of naming, including the symbolic significance of names, naming in different social scenes, and participants' beliefs and perceptions of their own names. Semi-structured interviews were used to frame questions and elicit data on the sociocultural functions of Ibibio names, their pragmatic status, and emotional values. This data collection approach also assisted with tracing the sources of Ibibio personal names, identifying the social and cultural influences on names and illuminating their social categorisations. We attempted to compare and contrast the patterns of people-related personal names in other onomastic traditions in Nigeria, like Owe and Tiv. Participants in these cultures were given the same interview questions as the Ibibio participants. A corpus of 150 personal names was collected in the field. A digital audio recorder was used to record all interviews and conversations. Field notes were used to document interview transcripts and participant metadata, including date, time and place of interviews. Textual data were sourced from Essien (1986, 2000), Ukpong (2007), Clasberry (2012), Mensah and Iloh (2021), and Mensah et al. (2021) to complement the field data.

The data were coded and categorised into relevant thematic frames. They were checked for accuracy, transcribed and translated. Native speakers of the Ibibio language who were also field linguists confirmed the accuracy of the data. Experienced transcribers and translators converted audio recording to texts using Amberscript and Sonix (transcription software) for accurate captions and speed. Ibibio–English translation was rendered verbatim as in the participants' own words. A descriptive method of analysis was adopted for the interpretation and discussion of data. It permits access to participants' views, opinions and perspectives in their own words. This approach enables the interpretation and discussion of the main features of data in-depth. The analysis is driven by the socio-onomastic theory.

6. Data Analysis and Discussion

In the analysis that follows, an investigation of the social categories or typology of Ibibio names that reflect the value for people and their description from the perspective of the socio-onomastic framework is presented. The relevant thematic tropes are identified and discussed as follows:

6.1. The Importance of Children

Among the Ibibio, as in most African cultures, children are highly valued as sources of stability in marriages. This is because marriage is an important aspect of human life and in the African cultural tradition. It is a means of ensuring procreation and continuity of the human race (Maponya 2021). A marriage with many children is usually appreciated, whereas a childless marriage has many negative social consequences. Ibibio names that represent the value of children are displayed in Table 1 below. Children in all marriages are sources of joy and marital satisfaction. Among the Ibibio, children confer the status of ancestors on their parents and fore-bearers within the extended family system when they die. They offer social security, assist with labour, secure rights of property and inheritance and provide continuity through reincarnation and the maintenance of family lineage (Dyer 2007). Children have other social responsibilities to their families and the community as a whole. According to one participant:

> The essence of Ibibio marriage is to raise children to be responsible adults, and if you as a couple do not have children to raise, it means that your marriage is a failure. So child-related names are used to acknowledge the role of children in the family and community as a whole. (Inibehe: Female 47)

A familiar stereotype that describes childless marriage as a failure is often used to stigmatise childless couples and accentuate the value of children in African heterosexual marriages, given the assumed social, economic and political benefits.

Table 1. Names that reflect the value of children.

Name	IPA	Gloss
Àkànénɔ̀	[àkànénɔ̀]	A child is a greater gift
Údóró	[údóró]	(A child is) profit from marriage
Ḿkpénié	[ḿkpénié]	I wish I have this child
Áyénédìnié	[áyénédì:nié]	A child is a source of wealth
Ńsóidóetí	[ńsóidóetí]	What better blessing than a child
Ànìékpón	[ànìékpón]	Children make their parents great
Íném	[íném]	A child is a source of joy
Áyénódóubọng	[áyénódóubọñ]	A child is a source of glory
Ènɔ̀ábàsì	[ènɔ̀ábàsì]	A child is God's gift

Based on the interview reports, children are believed to be the greatest investment of their parents due to their economic contribution to the household and community at large. This belief resonates in the Ibibio proverb, *Áyín ákédò àkọ̀d ádúbọ́ọ́k* "A child was meant to grow and cater for the parents". This is because the Ibibio believe that a child is the

property of the parents, and the only way the parents can recoup their investments in a child is for him or her to support them in old age. One participant explained why children in Ibibioland are given the category of names in Table 1 in this way:

> These names reflect the perception of the value of children among the Ibibio. Children are bridge builders; they sustain family continuity, contribute to social organisations and are sources of affection. Every family desires children to build their community. (Inyang: Male 49)

Based on the interview transcript, a name like *Ḿkpénié* 'I wish I have this child' is usually bestowed on children in families that experience cases of infant mortality in quick succession. The name reveals the temporality of the name-bearer's being and the frustration of the name-giver who wished to see the name-bearer alive and healthy. Mensah (2015) argues that such a name reveals a feeling of incapacity and is often used to acknowledge the existence of unresolved conflict with some spiritual forces that are believed to be responsible for infant mortality and to express the desire for reconciliation that will ensure the survival of the name-bearer. From observations, it was also discovered that parents give names like *Áyénédìnié*, 'A child is a source of wealth' to reflect their aspirations for their children's future. Based on the socio-onomastic reading, this belief is hinged on the assumption that the acquisition of wealth permits access to secure livelihood. It also enhances one's social status and accords power and influence. Such a power framework reinforces the prestige of people who control wealth, as the study discovered. A name like *Áyénódóubọng* 'A child is a source of glory' is a metaphorical expression that connotes power, wealth and supremacy and such names are believed to cause their bearers to make some positive influence in the world. Other names in Table 1 recognise children as gifts (from God), sources of blessing, pride and joy to their families. Children play important roles in Ibibio cosmology as they offer social security and provide continuity of the family lineage. This justifies why they are reinscribed in the anthroponomastic system as sources of wealth, greater gifts and forms of blessing among others. A participant further attempted to justify the claim that children are sources of wealth among the Ibibio in the following way:

> When one has female children who are ripe for marriage, they will attract suitors from far and near who will pay bridewealth, establish social connections and strengthen bonds between families. These are worthy investment and sources of tangible and intangible wealth. (Aniebiet: Female 65)

This account demonstrates that parents look forward to having supportive relationships, connecting families, encouraging a sense of community and ultimately improving well-being as some of the deliverables from their (female) children when they are married. This position reinforces a socio-onomastic reading that sees names as inseparable elements of society, which cannot be viewed in isolation (Bramwell 2012). Names like *Íném*, 'A child is a source of joy' and *Áyénódóubọng* 'A child is a source of glory' are used to alert parents of their responsibilities towards the well-being of their children. A participant (Etuk: Male 60) averred that "such names are used to challenge parents not to fail in their responsibility in preparing their children for the future and guiding them to responsible adulthood". Significant aspects of this parental care include giving children attention, teaching them positive values and showing them love. It is only by imbibing these virtues through familial orientation and socialisation that children can live according to the dictates imposed by their names. This is believed to promote their development and enhance the future well-being of the society.

Based on the findings, the bestowal of names in Table 1 does not merely reflect the value and worth of children in the Ibibio cultural tradition but more broadly emphasises the importance of heterosexual marriage, which is characterised by shared power dynamics and traditional division of labour. There is an unequal power relation and rigid sex roles between the husband and wife, and children are also assigned social and cultural responsibilities as part of the traditional expectations of marriage. This role expectation gives rise to the claim that heterosexuality is an essential component of the traditional conception of

marriage, especially in the context of Africa (Hawkins et al. 2002). In other words, these names are used to communicate the importance of heterosexual marriage among the Ibibio in line with Brydon's (2017) postulation that marriage in Africa is basically a means of reproduction. Heterosexual marriages that are blessed with children are generally sources of status and power given the priority accorded to children in such unions. Children empower their parents and their community to derive significant benefits in terms of social status and unique life experiences.

Certain names are carefully selected not only to reflect the value of children but of male child preference, specifically to reinforce the historical claim of male children privileging among the Ibibio. Such names include Úbọ́kúdóm 'My right hand person', Ìbèrèdèm 'My support' and Ásághá 'One that leads the way' (Izugbara 2004). Male children are believed to perpetuate family lines and patriarchal models in the Ibibio cultural context. Some of these beliefs are products of discriminatory interpretation of religion. This category of names are used to accentuate gender imbalance because more power, control and authority are accorded to their bearers in the family as a demonstration of the patriarchal structure of the Ibibio. Participants generally considered that such naming practice represents a bias towards female children because it prevents them from withholding access to wealth, family inheritance, education and economic opportunities. In this way, naming can be used to embody inequality between genders.

6.2. Value for People (Family)

The Ibibio onomastic tradition also emphasises the importance of people in building a meaningful community. Value for people, cooperation and communality have deep representations in Ibibio names and help promote a healthy and supportive community. Examples of names that reflect the value of people are presented in Table 2 below. Participants maintained that people are the most prized assets in the development of the society. They are viewed as sources of social empowerment and also increase a sense of belonging. They have been identified as individuals, family, relatives and community members.

Table 2. Names that depict value for people.

Name	IPA	Gloss
Ówó	[ówó]	Person/People
Ówóédímọ́	[ówóedí:mó]	People constitute wealth
Ówódiọng	[ówó:dióñ]	People empower others
Ìkpọ́ng	[ìkpọ́:ñ]	Loneliness
Ínyénékéowó	[ínyénékéówó]	He/she does not have people
Édéhéúdìm	[édéhéúdìm]	There is strength in people
Únánáòwò	[únánáòwò]	Lack of people
Ówóedíúbọ́ng	[ówó:díubọ́ñ]	People are kings
Ówóedínié	[ówòedí:nié]	People are riches
Ùbòn	[ubon]	Family
Ímàn	[iman]	Relative

From our observations, collective responsibility towards families, group members and community members is still cherished more than individual responsibility as a basis for harmonious social relationships. This category of names emphasises the benefits of having people in addition to the social, economic and political significance of interdependence and communal partnership, which can help to improve understanding, enhance cooperation, and reduce conflicts and wars (Mensah and Eni 2019). This principle of interconnectivity emphasises inclusivity and network building. It expands kinship relationships and provides support structures for one another in line with Mbiti's (1990, p. 141) maxim, "I am because we are, since we are, therefore, I am". This accounts for the centrality of people in the Ibibio social universe and community of practice.

A participant (Uduak: Female 59) stated that in Ibibioland, people help build trust, social relationships and a sense of community. From the data in Table 2, people are represented as the greatest source of wealth as seen in names like *Ówóédímọ̀* 'People constitute wealth' and *Ówóédínié* 'People are riches'. Participants believed that this regime of names is used to highlight the value of cooperation among the Ibibio people. The names create the awareness among community members to aim for achieving goals that benefit everyone and to work effectively as a team, collaborate with one another and join forces to make collective decisions. Names like *Édéhéúdìm* 'There's strength in people' are used to demonstrate the need to build strong relations and unity. According to the participants, unity reinforces belonging and inclusion, strengthens cultural ties and offers equal social opportunities that signify a sense of fairness, which ultimately promotes peaceful co-existence.

The danger of social isolation is exemplified by names like *Ínyénékéowó* 'He/she does not have people', *Ìkpọ̀ng* 'Loneliness' and *Únánáowò* 'Lack of people'. A participant during an interview session, justified why the value for people takes centre stage in the Ibibio personal naming system thus:

> Human beings are sociable beings, and as they say, no man is an island. We need one another to achieve our goals in life. These names speak to the dynamics of unity, cooperation and solidarity which can promote shared interest, connection and belonging. They are tremendous benefits in having people and enjoying supportive relationships. People provide encouragement and lower feeling of loneliness. (Nkereuwem: Male 66)

The views of this participant align with the claim of Wray-Lake et al. (2014), which states that people convey a feeling of connection to community membership and belonging and "belonging to something larger than oneself is a fundamental human need" (Baumeister and Leary 1995, p. 1103). Participants described loneliness as the lack of social connection with people as a result of a damaged state of mind and outlined its attendant consequences, which cause people to feel empty and unwanted. It also causes people to withdraw from family and friends and may lead to depression and risk of anxiety. They argued that these names are bestowed using reverse psychology that encourages people to always form connections with others in order to grow society effectively. The Ibibio see people as paramount in providing support and learning from one another. These are potential investments in well-being and can also bring about positive change in community's lives more broadly. The position above justifies the claim within socio-onomastic theory, as Sabet and Zhang (2020) claim, that names do not make sense unless the social context is involved. In this regard, the name is in the social and the social is in the name.

Some names are used to spotlight the significance of the family in the Ibibio (African) context. Examples of such names are *Ùbòn* 'Family' and *Ímàn* 'Relatives', which construct the family as a pillar of strength, support and security to its members. A participant (Okon: 57 Male) contended that "...the family is the most important social institution in our society, and those names are used to strengthen family bond and connection". Based on this account, participants discussed how the family substantially impacts its members and the community generally. According to one participant (Ekaete: 58 Female), "the family increases relationship quality; guides its members on the path of morality and offers a sense of direction". In this way, the family helps to provide, protect and shape the lives of its members. Relatives were described as a supportive network of family members by participants and they greatly influence children, especially in teaching good habits and valuable life lessons through personal experiences and words of wisdom. They provide a foundation for love, respect and hospitality to family members. From these accounts, the role of people remains sacrosanct in the everyday world of the Ibibio community.

6.3. Kinship-Related Names

Kinship relations also form an important regime of naming children among the participants in this study. Such names, which are consanguineal (based on blood relationships) or affinal (based on marriage), are bestowed to strengthen family ties and social bonds

and to perpetuate the memory of important family ancestors. In the Ibibio anthropological image, every member of the extended family has an obligation to nurture children to grow and develop and know how to respond to their emotional needs. It is through this web of relationships that children are often socialised. The category of kinship-related names is exemplified in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Names that are based on kinship relations.

Name	IPA	Gloss
Ékáeté	[èkàété]	Paternal grandmother
Ékám	[ékám]	Grandmother
Été	[été]	Father
Èkà	[èkà]	Mother
Étébòm	[étébòm]	Grandfather
Ébéèkà	[ébé:kà]	Mother's husband
Ébé(bé)	[ébébé]	Husband
Ètòkébé	[étòkébé]	Little husband
Ákánèrèn	[ákánèrèn]	Elder (Old man)

Based on the findings, this class of names are said to be reincarnation-related names. They are used to immortalise living and dead ancestors in the family. They are also believed to strengthen paternity and establish a stronger connection between the named and the ancestors (Mensah 2015, 2023a; Mensah et al. 2020). A participant (Aniekan: Male 56) elaborated on this thus: "children are believed to be reincarnated ancestors and most likely take certain physical or biological attributes after a living or dead adult member of the family, and such children are often named after their forbearers". Children who bear the category of names in Table 3 are usually revered by every member of the extended family. They see such children as embodiments of their living or dead namesakes. Another participant explained his son's name, *Étébòm* 'Grandfather' thus:

> I just named him after my late grandfather because I grew up under his tutelage, and I enjoyed so much emotional intimacy and unwavering support from him. I gained knowledge, experience and stability while growing up with my grandfather. I also learned my family history and cultural heritage from him. My grandfather was my hero and I want my son to grow up to be like him. (Okon: Male 55)

This narrative detailed the role of a grandfather in the social and emotional development of a child. The grandfather was an inspiring cheerleader and a valuable resource for learning about family history, tradition and heritage. A child was, therefore, named after his late grandfather to perpetuate the memories of the man in the days to come. Based on field observations, some names like *Ákánèrèn* 'Old man' have a direct reference to the afterlife, which is a strong cultural belief among the Ibibio. Udo (1983) affirms this position when he states that death among the Ibibio is not the end of life but the beginning of a fresh embodiment in another realm. Participants maintained that these later names are used to accord the status of ancestors to dead family progenitors and to venerate existing ancestors in order to uphold harmony and balance in the social order. A socio-onomastic understanding of this belief is that doing this will guarantee the living a place in the ancestral realm. More broadly, parents among our sampled population have varied subjective reasons for the bestowal of kinship-related names. In the broad analysis of these names, it is demonstrated that they do not only vary in their linguistic structure but also in their sociocultural functions (Sabet and Zhang 2020). This means that the way names vary in representing elements of language structure like words, phrases, clauses and sentences is likened to the various social functions they perform within wide-ranging sociocultural domains.

Some names in this category are used to celebrate the historical and cultural values of motherhood. They include *Ékáeté* 'Paternal grandmother' *Ékám* 'Grandmother' and *Èkà* 'Mother'. These names reflect an expression of love and support to mothers for their roles in nurturing children into responsible adults and sustaining family lineage. Participants

believed that every married woman naturally wants to identify with motherhood but due to varied forms of challenges, some cannot attain this role. This position strengthens the claim that in the African setting, womanhood can only be attained through motherhood (Olayiwola and Adekunle 2013). This stereotyped belief qualifies one as a 'real woman' only if she is a mother. The role of a mother or caregiver in the development of the family cannot be overemphasised because every child grows and flourishes under the direct tutelage of its mother or sometimes, caregiver. Mothers and caregivers provide love, care and support in every state during the development of their children. Therefore, these names are used to appreciate the spirit of motherhood and caregiving.

Further, these names are also useful as representations of the afterlife. Participants maintained that name-bearers are believed to be reincarnated souls of their dead or living maternal ancestors, and such names are relevant in sustaining maternal bonds and connections. The cultural construction of husband is detailed in the name corpus in Table 3. These names include the following: *Ébéékà* 'Mother's husband', *Ébé(bé)* 'Husband' and *Ètòkébé* 'Little husband', which highlight the role of the man in heterosexual marriage that mainly indexes hierarchical relation of gender between both sexes with respect to power dynamics particularly in intra-familial relations. These names are used to communicate the domineering privileges and feelings of the man who controls financial and conjugal power in a heterosexual marriage. Participants believed that the independence, rights and identity of the woman are not only suppressed but exist by the will of her husband. These names are, therefore, used to reinforce differences and a hierarchy, which are rooted in age-long cultural norms. Therefore, Ibibio names have peculiar narratives encoded within them, and they reveal traditional conceptions of heterosexual privileges in an Ibibio marriage.

6.4. Physical Appearance

In this analysis, we focus on the description of people, which is an important regime of Ibibio names, and which also accentuates the characteristics of people in the onomastic system. The size, complexion and appearance of a child at birth can also determine the name it is given. Physical attributes such as beauty, ugliness, height or fairness are usually considered in this regard. In this study, three types of physical appearances have been identified: visible characteristics as in names like *Áfiá* 'Light complexioned', *Ùyài* 'Beauty', and *Idiọk* 'Ugly', height characteristics as demonstrated with names like *Ányán* 'Tall', *Ímúk* 'Short' and *Íkprók* 'Stunted' and body characteristics as shown in names like *Ókpón* 'Huge', *Ètòk* 'Tiny'. The names in this category are demonstrated in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Names that represent size, complexion and appearance at birth.

Name	IPA	Gloss
Áfiá	[áfiá]	Light-complexioned
Ètòk	[ètòk]	Tiny
Ùyài	[ùyài]	Beauty
Ídiọk	[ídiọk]	Ugly
Ókpón	[ókpón]	Huge
Úkó	[úkó]	Brave
Íkprọk	[íkprọk]	Stunted
Ésémá	[ésémá]	Beautiful to behold
Édímà	[édímà]	Beloved
Ímúk	[ímúk]	Short

Participants believe that this category of names offers a physical description of the name-bearers at birth, and the names in Table 4 reflect the perceptions and judgments of parents about body size and other physical characteristics of their children. A participant was asked the reason for naming his son *Ímúk* 'Short', and he responded as follows:

> I had a reason to worry when he was born with a brief body frame and weighing unusually low. These were not socially favoured physical characteristics but

features that indicated the likelihood of developing a certain illness. We have to name him so to always remember how he was at birth. (Effiong: Male 72)

The account of this participant shows the value parents place on the physical characteristics of their newborn children, which may be desirable or undesirable. Parents use such features to form the peculiar identities of their children. A participant (Angela: Female 48) maintained that female names like *Uyai* 'Beauty' and *Ésémá* 'Beauty to behold' represent features that indicate not just attractiveness but also signal healthiness and the procreative potential of the name-bearers. Participants maintain that the feminine beauty ideal is represented in names to give bearers a sense of aesthetic pleasure while appearing more attractive or appealing at the same time. Significantly, such a name is also used to express normative femininity, which is also an essential component of name-bearer's socialisation as a young woman. Conversely, a name like *Úkó* 'Brave' is bestowed as an indicator of masculinity, which symbolises the virtues of strength, courage and tenacity. Participants explained that such a name is actually given to a male child to socialise him with gender norms and stereotypes that see the male child as strong and assertive and the female child as submissive and emotional. This type of name, therefore, reinforces gender stereotypes, and also demonstrates how the family exerts fundamental influence on the propagation of gender norms and values. The socio-onomastic interpretation of these names enables access to layers of signification, which a cultural outsider may not readily comprehend. Although some of the stereotypes attached to physical appearance at birth may sound too simplistic, body image constitutes an important consideration in the naming of Ibibio children. This category of Ibibio names is richly endowed with both lexical and pragmatic meanings, which have a wide range of significance and indexical connection with people.

6.5. People-Related Anthroponyms in Owe and Tiv Onomastic Traditions in Nigeria

In the following analysis, we incorporate comparative perspectives of Ibibio people-related anthroponyms with the practice in other onomastic cultures like Owe (Yoruba) and Tiv, both in north-central Nigeria. The Owe and Tiv people have personal names that celebrate the essence of people, giving information on the sense of who they are and redefining their identities. People hold essential space in other people's lives. This position aligns with the belief by the Owe that "people are important not for themselves but for others. Just like the Ibibio, the Owe and Tiv people also have names that celebrate the value of children. In these cultures, children are seen as leaders and future decision makers. Their vision of children are those of individuals, bono fide family members and community members. A participant (Bamidele: Male 36) argued that children in the Owe culture are believed to represent the future and are essential to the sustenance of the society. Another participant (Tiav: Male 57) maintained that among the Tiv people, children are appreciated in their naming tradition because they contribute to passing values and knowledge to the next generation. Table 5 furnishes names that are used to celebrate children in Owe and Tiv families:

Table 5. Names that celebrate the value of children in Owe and Tiv cultures.

Name (Owe)	Gloss
Ọ́mọ́tugba	One child means two hundreds
Ọ́mọ́bulejo	A child befits this house
Ólọmọjọla	One with children enjoys wealth
Éhọmọloja	There's no child in the market (to buy)
Ẹ́sonikísọmọ	A child is not created by a person

Name (Tiv)	Gloss
Wándoo	A child is good
Wánhèmbé	A child is great
Námor	Give me a child (person)
Mô-víhí-n-gá	No child is bad
Tsè	Offspring

The Owe data project children as the most valuable assets from God. They cannot be bought or created by humans, and they accrue wealth and honour to their parents. They are believed to confer character and dignity on their family, and people who have children are said to have a voice. In other words, they cannot be short-changed or cheated based on a participant's view (Olu: Male 57). The Ibibio data highlight the greatness of children and the desire of (married) couples to have children. The participants believed that every family appreciates children because they are sources of support and care for their parents and other family members in old age. In this way, children will better the future of their parents and relatives. They will bring joy and hope and help make society a better place.

Another category of people that have been given pride of place in the naming culture of the Owe and Tiv people are relatives (people, family, paternal lineage, maternal lineage, etc.). These are people who enrich bonds within families and teach how to nurture respect among family members. Table 6 shows names that represent the importance of the family and relatives in the onomastic systems of Owe and Tiv:

Table 6. Names that represent the importance of family/relatives in Owe and Tiv.

Name (Owe)	Gloss
Ojuonéke	One with relatives is respected.
Ibídunni	Family lineage is good to have.
Ibimáwu	Family knows honour.
Elebínawu	One with family has clothes.
Olóneyi	One with will people stand strong.
Ehiutóni	Nothing compares with the human person.

Name (Tiv)	Gloss
Íorkohol	People have met.
Orkùmá	A person is enough.
Oryìmá	A person is not enough.
Ángbìándoo	Relation is good.
Ìgbádoo	Maternal clan is good.
Tyòdoo	Paternal clan is good.

Participants believed that the names in Table 6 are used to highlight the numerous roles family relations play in the life of children (who are the actual name bearers). They help to promote healthy lifestyles for children and adolescents. They also help children to cope with external influences. A participant (Bunmi: Female 47) argued that family relations give children guiding principles toward ethical and brilliant decisions, and the above names are meant to recognise the contributions of such people to the growth of the family. While the Owe data emphasise unity, wealth and strength as some of the benefits of having people, the Tiv data reiterate the value of numbers and the goodness of both paternal and maternal clans. Significantly, we have also seen names that are used to celebrate parents, especially mothers, in both Owe and Tiv cultures, just as in Ibibio. In Owe, such names include *Iyédunni* 'Mother is good to have', *Iyémọla* 'Mother knows fame', *Iyénọla* 'Mothers have elevated status', and *Iyésemi* 'Mother made me'. Our Tiv data also display similar name regimes such as *Ngôna* 'His/her mother', *Ngôdoo* 'Mother is good' *Ngôhèmbá* 'Mother is great' and *Tèrdoo* 'Father is good'. Participants argued that this set of names is used to acknowledge the role of parents in the development of their children. Parents have a profound impact on the lives of their children in countless ways. A participant (Ukeme, Female 43) maintained that parents are the first teachers of their children, and they shape their lives and behaviour for them to thrive. Elaborating on this point, this participant submitted that parents are protectors and providers who also offer emotional support, security and stability to their families in challenging times. In this respect, the names above are bestowed to celebrate the multifaceted role of parents in the growth and development of their children.

A similar naming trend in Owe and Tiv is the description of people based on body image and physical characteristics, as we found in the Ibibio data corpus. Such names in Owe include *Aléege* 'Standing out in beauty', *Ọ́mọ́rubu* 'Smallish in stature', *Pelébe* 'Thin', *Owéle* 'Tall but thin' and *Olojuréke* 'One with bright eyes', and the only example we could find in Tiv was *Kpòmor* 'Huge person'. These names emanate from thoughts and feelings name-givers have about their children's physical appearance and stature at birth. The participants argued that these names may convey positive or negative feelings or a combination of both. Therefore, such names are used to perpetuate memories of images of name-bearers at birth. A comparative perspective of people-related anthroponyms involving Ibibio, Owe and Tiv cultures reveals a similar trajectory where people provide a nurturing environment and form the foundation for the society to thrive. People are the pillars in the development of the society. They offer comfort, security and reassurance and guard others against harm and adversity. Having people conveys a sense of dignity and honour and offers windows of opportunity for others to develop their interests and improve their circumstances. These are the underlying messages embedded in people-oriented names in Nigeria.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

This study demonstrates the value the Ibibio place on human beings/people as inscribed in their cultural script of naming. People promote a positive sense of community, interconnection, interdependence, shared responsibilities and common goals (Ahern et al. 1996). Children continue the bloodline and have rights to their parents' inheritance. It is through children that family values, heritage and traditions are passed down to future generations. As names are viewed as social constructs, they must be considered within the social environment (Ainiala and Ostman 2017). Certain names are used to construct a gender hierarchy and maintain a social structure of power, such as to represent ideas that female children are inadequate and lesser valued than male children. This is because the Ibibio people broadly see female children as transient beings who will soon be married off. They are therefore not accorded a high status within the family or community structure. This is an indication of the lower status of women from infancy in the Ibibio patriarchal universe (Inyabri et al. 2022). There is preferential desirability and treatment of children, as exhibited by the naming tradition. Therefore, naming plays a reinforcing role in indexing gender-based inequalities. This exemplifies the social context and situational domain of the use of names as espoused by the socio-onomastic framework. The study has explicated the value of people with an emphasis on family, relatives and the community at large in the Ibibio onomastic system.

The role of names in the construction of familial identity is also an important facet of socio-onomastic theory. As the theory emphasises the important role of names in everyday interaction, the family context provides a site where names are (given and) used on a daily interactional basis. From our findings, children are also named after relatives as a way of expanding kinship and sustaining strong extended family bonds and relationships. Furthermore, children's names are used to reward the life parents have received from their relatives. In this regard, names are used to create a sense of belonging that is essential to the mental and physical well-being of their bearers. Among the Ibibio, children's names are a vehicle through which social connections are maintained, meaningful relationships are cultivated and familial ties are reinforced. Brown et al. (2013) maintain that such names increase attachment bonds and perception of genetic relatedness. This evidence shows how naming can provide support and increase happiness and satisfaction if an appropriate interpretation of onomastic meaning is applied (Lombard 2015). Beyond providing a supportive network, naming children after relatives also helps to recreate meaningful memories. In the Ibibio tradition, children are named after living or dead ancestors who are or were better story bearers who pushed for a better world and prioritised a better quality of life for the next generation. Hence, children were named to commemorate their ancestors' past lives and contributions to the growth of the family. However, this privilege

is not accorded to 'bad' ancestors. This evidence further shows that naming is a social and reflective act that specifies how the name-giver wants the name-bearer to be identified, regarded and treated by others (Bodenhorn and vom Bruck 2006). The social environment, including culture and tradition, influences and shapes the bestowal of names. This position further re-echoes a primary principle of socio-onomastics, which regards names as products of, and part of, the society in which they are given and used and cannot be viewed in isolation from it (Bramwell 2012).

Physical attributes like appearance, complexion, size and height also form an important regime of personal names among the Ibibio. These traits are related to people and were used to perpetuate the memory of the name-bearer's physical appearance at the time of birth. Although some of these features, like beauty and braveness, may be desirable, others, like stunted growth, are not. Beyond exhibiting physical appearance, these traits are also employed as instincts of masculinity and femininity and, more broadly, to accentuate stereotyped gender roles through naming, thus highlighting the influence of gender identity on name selection (Obasi et al. 2019). A male child is named *Ûkó* 'Brave', and a female child is *Ùyàí* 'Beauty' to highlight qualities name bearers should embody based on their essential sexual nature. Based on our findings, developing an awareness of braveness or beauty through name bestowal, for instance, is empowering and liberating as such names become central to the bearers' self-definition and gender identity. They become reference points for interacting with their world and evaluating their experiences (Mensah et al. 2021). This evidence shows that all names in the Ibibio cultural context have distinct narratives behind them, and culture plays a dominant role in the social context in which names are bestowed.

This study spotlights the social functions and cultural significance of people as inscribed in the anthroponomasticon of the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State in South-eastern Nigeria from the perspective of socio-onomastic theory, which illuminates the way names are embedded in the universe of meaning of the people (Reszegi 2018). The results indicate that Ibibio personal names have many nuances and a multiplicity of meanings in which people are framed in collective lives. This supports the claim that names are cultural and linguistic universals and a principal support of personhood (Pina-Cabral 2010). There are unique stories behind Ibibio names which are related to people and body image: children, family, relatives and ancestors are deeply cherished. Naming constitutes an aspect of social relations that mediate between the living and the dead (ancestors). Children are named to commemorate the memories of dead and living family relations; thus, naming promotes continuity with the past and provides spiritual harmony and balance for the present. Some names are essential forms of indirect social interactions which engender emotional responses and draw connections between past familial or spiritual conflicts and tensions and the resolve to overcome them. Put more broadly, a socio-onomastic study of Ibibio personal names reveals how naming can be imbued with a valuable piece of knowledge based on the Ibibio universe of meaning and cultural scripts. We have demonstrated how Ibibio names model beliefs and ideologies that are centred on people. These names are collective representations of the Ibibio people in the course of everyday interactions. The naming narratives of the various participants in this study reveal the indexical link between names, cultural scripts and pragmatic meanings, which serve particular local purposes. The Ibibio attribute values to names and specifically use names as a foundation to build and maintain relationships. These names define the essence of the Ibibio unique personhood, selves and ethnic identities. They further communicate social relations and symbolise individual identity, which are meaningful within the Ibibio social context as espoused by socio-onomastic theory (Leslie and Skipper 1990). We have also investigated in comparative terms people-linked names in some onomastic traditions in Nigeria, like the Owe (Yoruba) and Tiv naming culture. Findings from these onomastic fields present similar results and trajectories.

Generally, people-related names also reference the social and cultural personae of their bearers and provide an atmosphere that promotes a sense of community and belonging.

This study provides a comprehensive approach to the study of African names and naming practices as rhetorical acts and broadens an understanding of how naming intersects with the lived experiences of its bearers, givers and users. For the Ibibio, people are the most important asset of society. They are sources of wealth; they build relationships, provide support systems and prevent isolation and loneliness. These benefits are essential in maintaining a healthy mindset physically, mentally and emotionally. This study recommends the preservation of Ibibio names, which are threatened by contact (with neighbouring languages and cultures), modernisation and exposure of young people to new media, which informs name changing trends on a larger scale. This study has implications for sociolinguistic, semiotic and pragmatic engagements of African names. From a sociolinguistic perspective, it broadens an understanding of the relationship between ethnic identity and language and provides insight into the patterns of social and cultural processes that inform naming. From a semiotic account, this study further reinforces the interpretation of names as indexical referents, given that names can be considered as a type of sign. Pragmatically, this study reveals the locally constitutive cultural meanings that are embedded in names and represent values and emotions of the particular community of practice. From a socio-onomastic account, people also constitute anthroponymic competence, and provide a symbolic system of individual identification that is specific to specific to the Ibibio and its conceptualisation of identity (Akinnaso 1980; Sabet and Zhang 2020). Further research on the personal names of the Ibibio may seek to investigate the way the Ibibio use personal names that reflect the natural world and support its protection. It is important to appreciate the findings of this study on the basis of its limitations. None of the authors is a native speaker of the Ibibio language who would tease out some nuances and subtleties of people-related names through interaction with participants in Ibibio. Significantly, we relied on native speakers for the translation of the name data. We acknowledge this as a limitation that may pose potential constraints in data interpretation.

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