

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF SENTENTIAL ÍGÁLÀ PERSONAL NAMES

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Abstract

There are lots of evidences today, indicating that names are an embodiment of rich linguistic information and so this area has been receiving lots of scholarly attention. In other words, it has become necessary to investigate scientifically the rich linguistic properties of names across languages of the world. This paper in the light of the above, investigates sentential Ígálà personal names (IPNs henceforth). It is a descriptive study as data for the study were elicited from class attendance registers of students across Departments in Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba. A total of five (5) departments were sampled. Out of one hundred and thirty-five (135) names obtained, forty-three (43) that were most relevant to the study were selected and analysed. The study reveals among others that there are sentential names are largely simple and they perform the sentential functions such as declarative, imperative, interrogative and exclamatory. It also reveals the interdependence of sound, word and sentential levels in the derivation of these IPNs. The study concludes that IPNs are not just labels and/or single words, but they have rich linguistic information that reflects the grammar of the language and could be very useful for teaching and learning of the language at all levels. This paper is a contribution to the grammar of Ígálà language. It also advances the frontiers of knowledge in the sentential structures of names across Nigerian, African and world languages.

Keywords: Descriptive, Ígálà, Name, Personal Name, Sentential

Introduction

Ígálà is a language spoken by the Ígálà people situated east of the River Niger and River Benue confluence and astride the Niger in Lokoja, Kogi State, North-Central Nigeria. By virtue of this location, Ejeba (2006) explains that the Ígálà territory shares boundary with neighbours such as Idoma people of Benue state to the Northeast, Gwari and Epira people of Kogi State to the Northwest, the Igbo speaking people of Enugu and Anambra states are Ígálà neighbours to the Southern and Edo people to the South. Among these neighbours of the Ígálà people, the Edo, Idoma and Igbo have had significant contacts with Ígálà giving the language the avenue for

borrowing that has established marked varieties of the language, especially at the periphery.

Ígálà belongs to the West Benue–Congo group within the large Niger–Congo phylum. It is a language spoken by the Ígálà people. The language according to Williamson (1990) is one of the main languages spoken in Nigeria, spoken beyond her political and geographic boundary in Kogi East Senatorial district of the state. Specifically, the language is spoken in nine (9) Local Government Areas namely: Ankpa, Bassa, Dekina, Ibaji, Idah, Igalamela/Odolu, Ofu, Olamaboro and Omala. The language is also spoken in other neighbouring states. Omachonu (2000) as cited in Ejeba (2016) provides a list of the various locations in other states of Nigeria where Ígálà is spoken: Ebu [èbù] in Delta State, Olohi [ólóhí] and Ifekwu [ífèk^{wu}] in Edo State, Ogwurugwu [óg^{wu}úrúg^{wu}ú], Ojo [òdžó], Iga [Igá] and Asaba [àsábá] in Enugu State, Odokpe [òdòkpè], Njam [ńdžàm], Inoma [ìnóma], Ala [àlá], Igbedo [ìgbédò], Onugwa [ónúg^{wá}], Igbokenyi [ìgbòkèni] and Ila [ilá] in Anambra State.

Studies so far in the language reveals that the language has a total of (30) thirty phonemic sounds, (23) twenty-three consonants and (7) seven vowels. (Omachonu (2011), Ejeba (2016), Omachonu (2000)). V, CV, CVV, and N have been identified as the syllable structure of the language. Phonologically, the language allows vowel sequence, vowel lengthening and vowel harmony but does not permit consonant clusters. The language is a tone language and it operates the three register tone: high, mid, low with instances of rising and falling and there could be instances of contour tone in the language. Again, the operation of tone in the language has been proven to perform both lexical and syntactic functions. The syllable is open. (Omachonu (2000) and Ejeba (2009)). In addition, the language attest to several phonological processes such as assimilation (consonant assimilating vowel features, vowel assimilating consonant features, vowel assimilating vowel features, and consonant assimilating consonant features), vowel elision, vowel insertion, vowel harmony and vowel lengthening.

Morphologically, the major word classes are nouns and verbs. The language is not very rich in inflectional morphology as it lends itself more to derivational morphology. Several morphological processes are attested in the language such as borrowing, compounding, affixation, and clipping. The basic constituent order in the language is SVO (subject-verb-object), tense is more of aspectual or grammaticalized and the time of action is expressed using adverb of time. The language also makes use of a sequence of two or more verbs to express a unit of action or process in what is technically called Serial Verb Construction (SVC).

On the syntax of Ígálà, studies revealed that the constituent word order is subject, verb and object (SVO); serial verb construction (SVC) is highly attested; phrases in the language are head initial; nominal, relative and adverbials are instances of subordinate clauses; Ígálà sentences are classified into structural and functional types – structurally the independent clauses in Ígálà are simple sentences, whereas compound and complex sentences are non-simple sentence. The functional

types correspond to language functions such as statement, question, command and negation as represented in the mood system of the language. Several transformational processes such as NP movement in object demotion, prenominalization, reflexivisation and reciprocal function; non-argument transformation such as cleft and pseudo-cleft have been established. (see Omachonu(2006), Johnpaul(2016), Ejeba(2016))

Having shared some basic linguistic information about the language, it is important to understand name. Everything and everybody in the universe is identified by something known as *name*. Caesar (2019:54) asserts that naming is one of the cultural practices in societies. In the same vein, Alzamil (2020:127) describes names to be commonly viewed as cultural words or words that refer to elements deeply rooted within the culture of a given speech community. From the foregoing, we can say that name in the nomenclature for everything and everybody in the universe that is deeply rooted in the cultural practices of societies. It is an expression of not only the cultural practices but also the linguistic properties, history, world view and religion of the people/name bearers. For instance, Echukwube (2002:279) in Igboin (2014:27) explains that African names are not just signs but also symbols that evaluate 'nature, essence, characteristic, functions and orientation of an object, person or place relative to what role it plays in sight and understanding of the one who gives the name'. Similarly, Mensah and Offong (2013) explain that names and naming practices have enormous socio-cultural, spiritual and psychological significance in Africa and beyond. They also explain that name is believed to have inherent power that can indexicalise the lives and behavior of people, either positively or negatively. What this means is that the name people bear has a way of projecting what their lives and behaviours will be like.

It is important to note that, the practice of naming varies from society to society. As Agyekum (2006:21) puts it, 'naming can be considered as universal cultural practices, every human society in the world gives a name to its new born as tags, majorly as a means of identification, but how the names are given, the practices and the interpretations attached to the names differ from society to society and culture to culture.' What this means is that, there is idiosyncrasy in the practice of naming across human societies. This fact is also responsible for the several linguistic studies being carried out on names and personal names in particular in languages of the world. What follows, is a brief review on the linguistic study of names.

Literature Review

Anthroponomastics (the study of personal names) is an area that is currently receiving a lot of scientific exploration across languages of the world. For instances, Caesar (2019) studied the morphosyntax of Dangme allusive names, according to the researcher, morphologically, they have the form of single word, di-morphemic, phrase and clauses reduced to personal names and syntactically, their sentential

names can be simple, embedded or compound sentences which can function as declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences. Mensah and Ishima (2020) describe sentential names in Tiv, where they observe that Tiv sentential names are not mere referential expressions but also a reflection of the grammatical structure of the Tiv language. Mwangi (2015) studied the grammar of Gikuyu personal names. Some of the findings of the researcher were that personal names in Gikuyu are generated by the grammatical rules of the language. The analysis also shows that personal names are derived from nouns, verbs, nominal modifiers and even large elements like noun phrases, transformations like prefixation, suffixation, nominalization, passivisation and even reflexivization.

Mensah and Imeobong (2013) is also a related study on death-prevention names in Ibibio from the structural perspective. According to them, Ibibio death prevention names are often formed by specific morphological and syntactic rules which may also trigger semantic and phonological information. They added that knowledge of these names is synonymous with knowledge of the grammar of Ibibio. Anagbogu (2010) identified the following forms: lexical, verb phrase, nominal compound, sentential, imperative, and interrogative as structures associated with Awka personal and title names. Also, Udoye and Ofoegbu (2011) analysed the morphology of Awka personal names, sub-categorizing Awka personal names in relation to *Chukwu* 'God' into four (4) structures, namely:

1. God in sentence initial position
2. God in nominal compound structure like noun1, noun2, where it occurs as N2
3. V + N, where V represents an imperative verb and N represents God
4. Sentence final position, where God occurs sentence finally.

Again, Imoh (2019) explains the structure of Basa personal names. He revealed that Basa names have different structures such as simple words, complex words, ideophones, idioms, riddles, clipping, compounds and proverbs, each undergoing various derivational processes. Umar, Muhammed and Abraham (2017) investigate the structural properties of Agatu personal names. They revealed that noun phrase and sentential names such as questions, declaratives and calquing or desententialisation are the structural properties of Agatu personal names. Ogunwale (2021) discusses Yoruba proverbial expressions whose linguistic forms and discursive roles have permitted their usage as Yoruba personal names. He observes that Yoruba name-forms could be generated from two basic syntactic rules:

Nominal – name
Sentence –name

On studies of IPN, we must understand that not so much has been done on its linguistic description. For instance, Onuche (1984) who wrote on *Ígálà* theophoric names where he made a list of about sixty-two (62) names and their meaning in English without any linguistic analysis. In the same vein, Okwoli (2013) wrote a book on *Ígálà* names, their meaning, sources and some Christian foreign names. Just

like Onuche (1984) there was no linguistic comment or analysis on these names. Also, Oyibo (2014) researches on traditional onomastics as veritable tool for ethnic rediscovery and identity from the Ígálà perspective and emphasized that naming is one of our most viable means of identity. Similarly, Solomon (2015) wrote on Ígálà theophorous names from a socio-cultural perspective. It is pertinent to say that not much has been done in this area of research as the major concern of researchers who have worked on names in the language only focused on the lexical-semantic characteristics of personal names with little or nothing on the linguistic characteristics of personal names in Ígálà.

Furthermore, Achoba (2015) is a related study as far as the linguistic study of names in the language is concerned; the study examined the shades of meaning that are associated with names and naming in Ígálà; it analyzed Ígálà names as elements of the language grammar and any other lexical item in the language. The study revealed that the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child plays a major role in determining the name it is given. On the shades of meaning associated with names in Ígálà, the researcher showed that some names possess descriptive meanings that are associated with the physical features of the child; others connote certain things in the language which the people hold as the meaning of a name. Achoba (2015) further categorizes Ígálà names into grammatical classes and only provided the English translation of these names without any in depth grammatical analysis or description of the names; we only understand from the heading the linguistic description of the names but the various structural elements were not properly described/analysed. This is a gap that the current study has identified.

Similarly, Opega (2017) is a study on the structure, pragmatics and meaning of Ígálà indigenous personal names. The work explores Austin's Speech Act Theory (SAT) as well as the Felicity Conditions in its analysis and interpretation of Ígálà indigenous personal names. The study shows some structural components embedded in Ígálà personal names and also demonstrates the fact that Ígálà personal names are not mere identity tags but carry great semantic load with cultural content. The study further establishes twenty-five categories of Ígálà personal names and reveals that Ígálà naming pattern conforms to J.L. Austin's Felicity conditions in his Speech Act Theory (SAT).

Studies on Ígálà names by Achoba (2015) and Opega (2017) are very resourceful because they provide some background information for the present study. However, these works cannot be said to have exhaustively discussed the linguistic properties embedded. A careful study of the above shows that it was only the linear ordering of the personal names that were analyzed; no sufficient discussion on the structure, principles and processes involved in the derivation of the names were explained.

A recent study, Johnpaul (2022) is on the morphological description of proverbial Ígálà personal names. The study discovers among others that Ígálà proverbial names do not just contain philosophical and cultural values, but are morphologically

compound, complex and compound-complex words derived in part from the full proverbial expression embedding rich linguistic information that are useful for understanding the grammar of the language.

Again, Imoh, Johnpaul and Dansabo (2022) investigate Ígálà death prevention names. The focus of this investigation was on the structural characteristics of this category of names. The study reveals that this category of names serve as appellations and a means of communicating with the addressees, who are usually ancestors or deities whose main aim is to forestall further mortality of the named infants. The study also discovers that death prevention names range from simple lexemes, complex words, root and synthetic compounds as well as sentences such as statement (affirmative and negative), interrogative, imperative (affirmative and negative).

The above previous studies among others are indications that besides being a universal nomenclature for identifying living and non-living things, names have both cultural and linguistic idiosyncracies. It is of utmost importance therefore that all aspects of the cultural and linguistic properties of names of any human language should be studied. To this end, this paper studies the sentential IPN. Preliminary investigation on IPN reveals that they can underscore grammatical and other linguistic information about the language. It is based on this premise that this study is geared towards an investigation into sentential IPN, analysis the structural, functional and other sentential information embedded in IPN. The present study therefore fills this gap by presenting and discussing issues relating to sentential IPN. This study aims at contributing to the body of existing knowledge and this knowledge shall go a long way in increasing the status of the language as well as an avenue into understanding, teaching and learning the sentential structure of the language. The following questions guide this study:

1. What is the sentential structure of IPN?
2. To what extent does the structure in (1) align with the sentence structure of the language?

Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative approach within the descriptive linguistics framework. Data for the study were obtained through a purposive sampling method; the researcher selected IPNs that were suspected to be sentential from class attendance registers of students across departments in Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba. A total of five (5) departments were sampled. Out of one hundred and thirty-five (135) names obtained, forty-three (43) IPNs that were suspected to be sentential in nature were selected and analysed. The choice of this data is to check the level of awareness and compliance on the advocacy to assign and use indigenous names as a mark of identity especially in this 21st century; although, this is not the core objective of this paper. All of these were supplemented by introspection based on the researcher's native speaker competence. As earlier stated, the study is descriptive and therefore theory free. The researcher

adopts the Leipzig Glossing Rule in presenting data, followed by morpheme-by-morpheme glossing, and then semantic/pragmatic interpretation. Consequently, this study limits the scope to only the structural description of IPNs.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

IPNs are here analyzed into their sentential structures classifying them structurally as simple, compound and complex; functionally as declarative, imperative, interrogative and exclamatory sentences. What follows is a discussion of the sentential structure of IPNs.

IPNs as Simple Sentence

- i. *ójó nyi* → *ójónyi*
 God(N) create(v)
 ‘God creates’
- ii. *ójó ne imi* → *ójónimi*
 God(N) get(V) breath
 ‘God owns life’
- iii. *ójó de omọ* → *ójódomọ*
 God(N) be(Cop.V) there(Adv)
 ‘God is there’
- iv. *ójó che gbẹ* → *ójóchegbẹ*
 God(N) do(Cop.V) much(Adv)
 ‘God do much’
- v. *ójó ma ugbo* → *ójómugbo*
 God(N) know(V) where(Adv)
 ‘God knows where’

The data (1) are simple sentences having several structural components: (i) is made up of noun and an intransitive verb (subject and verb): structurally these two elements are the most important elements of a sentence; (ii) exemplifies the basic word order of the language (SVO) and finally, (iii-v) comprises of subject, verb and adverbial particles of place and quantity respectively. The various structure of the names discussed above perform some syntactic function which are discussed under functional sentences.

IPNs as Declarative Sentences

- 2i. *imi de ọwọ* → *imidọwọjọ*
 breathe(N) be(Cop.V) hand(N) God(N)

The data (3) has a negative marker ‘n’ at the end of the name. However, some users of the language and name bears sometimes leave out the negative marker. But every indigenous speaker of the language knows that these names are negative declarative sentences because they trigger the denial of a positive proposition in the entire sentence meaning.

IPNs as Imperative Sentences

4i. *jɛnwu* *ójó* → *jɛnwuójó*
 praise God
 ‘praise God’

‘you will praise God’

ii. *fu* *èdò* *je* → *fèdòje*
 AUX(IMP) heart eat
 ‘be patient’

‘ you will be patient’

iii. *chí* *úbì* *yá* *ójó* → *chúbìyójó*
 open(V) back(N) lean(V) God(N)
 ‘lean on God’

‘you will depend on God’

iv. *te* *mu* *ójó* → *temójó*
 V V N
 Draw(near) catch God

‘you will draw near to God’

‘ this child will always draw near/be by the Lord’s side’

v. *tu* *ójó* *ubi* → *tójóbi*
 V N N
 follow God back

‘you will follow after God’

‘ I will follow/worship God all the days of my life’

The data (4) indicates that there are no overt subjects, but the verbs here are in the imperative mood which is the characteristics of any imperative sentence. The data shows that like other languages, imperative sentences have empty category in their subject positions; they are formed in Igala by combining the verb(s) and noun(s) to form compound names in the language. The imperative sentences in (4) begin with the verbs and they are formed as compound names in Igala. The compound here

align with Owolabi's left-member rule, as the head of the compound is the verb complemented by an NP to form the imperative construction. As explained by Pavey (2010:295) in Mensah and Ishima (2020:8), imperative constructions expect future actions from the hearer and so they are quite often not marked for tense at all. Names that function in the category are used to give command, express suggestion, wish or desire. The subject of this name is usually the name bearer and sometimes the name giver or the circumstances that surround the birth of the name bearer.

IPNs as Interrogative Sentences

5i. *éne* *bi* *ójó* → *enébójó*
 who resemble God
 'who is like God?'

'who has the capacity to act like God?'

ii. *éne* *dẹ* *efu* *ójó* → *enẹdẹfuójó*
 who be(Cop.V) stomach God
 'who is in God?'

'who can know the mind of God?'

iii. *éne* *che* *ójó* → *enéchójó*
 who be God
 'who is God?'

'who has the capacity to assume the position of God in anything or decide another's fate?'

iv. *éne* *tu* *ójó* *le* → *enətójóle*
 who pass God more
 'who is more than God?'

'who is greater than God?'

v. *éne* *mà* *ọna* → *enẹmọna*
 who know tomorrow
 'who knows tomorrow?'

'No man has the capacity to say or determine what happens even the next day.'

The interrogative IPNs above are WH-questions. The WH-word occur sentence initially and the basic word order of these names are SVO; they are structurally simple sentences and are merely rhetorical as the question asked is not directed at any particular person. Notice also instances of vowel elision/tone deletion and replacement. For instance, '*enéchójó*' there is the elision of the final vowel in '*che*'; '*enẹmọna*', the final vowel of '*mà*' is elided and the tone deleted and replaced with the initial

vowel of ‘òna’; showing the interdependence relationship as sound, word and sentential levels.

IPNs as Exclamatory Sentences

6i. *Otemeje* *ójó* → *Otemejeójó*

Very big God
‘the bigness of God’

‘the unquantifiable/abundance workings/acts of God’

ii. *Ukpahu* *ójó* *mi* *gbe* → *Ukpa-*
huójómigbe

Power God 1SG.Obj. much

‘God has much powers’

‘my God has great powers’

iii. *ójó* *che* *gbè* → *ójóchegbè*

God(N) do(Cop.V) much(Adv)

‘God do much’

‘God has done greatly/thanks be to God’

iv. *ójó* *che* *i* → *ójóchei*

God do this

‘God did this’

‘this can only be done by God’

The data (6) are names that express strong emotion and surprise. The structures of these names are simple sentences comprising of subject, verb and adverb as well as pitch variation. The names in (6) show affective-emotional attitudes of amazement, surprise, admiration and praise.

Discussion of Findings

Structurally, IPNs are largely simple sentences. The simple structure has these structural components: subject + intransitive verb, SVO and SVA. This is a reflection of the basic word order of the language as discussed in the review. It is largely noticed in the data presented that there are interactions between morphology and phonology and morphology and syntax in the derived IPNs projecting the fact that no component of linguistics can be completely studied in isolation of the others. (see Katamba and Stonham, 2006). This study observes the interaction between morphology and phonology in deriving sentential IPNs. For instance, the elision of the final vowel of the ‘*ne*’, ‘*de*’ and ‘*ma*’ in (1). Except for (1i and ii) where at the word

boundaries the initial phoneme of the succeeding word is a consonant. Other instances are in most of the data presented here. The process is known as apocope in phonology.

Again, IPNs that functionally qualify as declaratives, imperatives, interrogatives and exclamation were identified. The structural patterns of declarative sentences are mainly SVO; the tenses are in the simple present tense as is characteristic of declarative sentences and they make statements or state facts. As a result of this truth-value, these sets of IPNs also have semantic and pragmatic attributes. The negative declarative also has this pattern except that it has an unrealized negative maker 'n' at the end of the names that only exist in the mind of native speakers of the language. In the imperative IPNs, the second person singular common form is not overtly marked. It is the question word interrogative type that is highly attested in interrogative IPN, even though we still have the nexus type that seeks comment on the degree of truth of the proposition in the language. Also, it is observed that the use of the question word interrogative accounts for number in the name. For instance, *éne* 'who?' (sg) is highly attested and no evidence of *àbó* 'who' (pl) is used as the question word in interrogative sentential IPN. In addition, *éne* 'who?' (sg) interrogative pronoun contrasts in terms of tone with *éne* 'someone (sg)' indefinite pronoun as in *énenyo* 'good person' and *énojò* 'someone/man of God', among others. Finally, the exclamatory IPNs express affective-emotional attitudes of amazement, surprise, admiration and praise with interpretation best appreciated pragmatically.

Conclusion

Linguistic study of names exposes and deepens our understanding and knowledge of a language. This study reveals interesting linguistic information about IPN that further correspond with significant structural properties obtainable in the language. It is discovered from this study that sentential IPNs are mainly simple sentences and they function grammatically in terms of meaning such as statement, question, command and exclamation. It was also found that there exist structural relationship between individual lexical items in the name making it impossible to fully discuss sentential names without recourse to the interaction between morphology and phonology, morphology and syntax and phonology and syntax. Consequently, there are phonological and morphological processes involved which derive sentential IPNs. In all, naming is an important property of the Ígálà grammar and a study of this nature deepens native speakers' knowledge about the language. The overall aim of the study was mainly with their formal grammatical properties, there are still other areas that require further studies.

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