

Socio-cultural Significance of Pet Names in Igbo Traditional Society

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Abstract: In the Igbo culture, a pet name is not a mere social label; it embodies socio-cultural signification. This study examines the socio-cultural values of pet names in Igbo traditional society. The article focuses on how societal ideologies influence pet name bestowal in Igbo society. It adopts an ethnographic approach using semi-structured interviews and participant observation with thirty (30) participants purposively sampled from the core Igbo States, namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Pet names were collected and categorized into relevant thematic frames. The analysis is based on a descriptive method driven by socio-onomastics theory. The findings reveal that pet names are not used only based on emotions. In the traditional Igbo society, pet names are given based on socio-cultural values and worldviews. The study concludes that pet names are not given because of their aesthetic value but because they reflect the bearers' and givers' socio-cultural identity and ideology.

Keywords: Naming; pet names; socio-onomastics; Igbo worldview; socio-cultural values.

INTRODUCTION

In Igbo society, names are how people express themselves and share their worldviews and ideologies. A name is not a mere label; it is a means of identification of a person, place, or object. It also reflects people's belief systems and ways of life. Every member of society is expected to live up to their name. According to Ota (2002), naming in an African context represents symbols of relationships, events, spatial units, beliefs, and ethical and social values. A name is more than a mere appellation; it reflects the giver and bearers' socio-cultural and religious beliefs. Ezeude (2000) notes that names could be given to someone for perceived beauty, goodness of heart, organizing or managing abilities, boldness, as a husband's companion, and a predilection for hard work.

Pet names are as significant as other types of names, such as personal names, nicknames, and family names, and they communicate the socio-cultural and religious values of the bearers in Igbo traditional society. Pet names express endearment, affection, emotional sentiment, and attachments between family members, lovers, and close associates. Pet names are not publicly used in most cases. Meanwhile, nicknames can be used just as pseudonyms—a name that replaces someone's name, usually made from what the person likes or represents. Pet names are given at birth, after an accomplishment, or after marriage by spouses, in-laws, or the community.

Igbo is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, alongside Hausa and Yoruba. Igbo refers to both a language and a people. The Igbo language belongs to the Niger-Congo language family (Williamson and Blench, 2000). The Igbo people are known for their rich cultural heritage, reflected in everything they do, including their names and naming practices. In Igbo societies, giving a pet name tells a religious and socio-cultural story; a pet name is meaningful as it resonates with the experiences of both the bearer and the giver.

According to Anyachonkeya (2014), naming in Igboland generally has social, linguistic, and philosophical colouring, which preserves cultural values. Igbo names express the society's cultural norms and religious values. Igbo people are religious and have rich cultural practices; even through pet names, they can express their beliefs and cultural practices. The impact of culture is reflected in their naming tradition. Ezebube, Chukwuneke, and Onuagha (2020) note that pet names replace affectionate names, which express how a person feels or sees another person. It shows the interpersonal relationship between the name-giver and the bearer. Instead of being addressed by one's name, the person is addressed with a pet name to communicate feelings, emotions, bonds, and affection. On the other hand, Idika, and Iwuchukwu (2018) see a pet name as a name one receives from people one is close with in addition to one's formal name. The authors note that pet names could be ironic, professional, or personal feature pet names. Pet names could be bestowed on people by their parents, friends, colleagues, and bosses. Pet names say a lot about givers' religious and cultural beliefs and their way of life.

Bechar-Israeli (1995) avers that pet names are given to people by others who are close to them in addition to their legal names. Traditional Igbo pet names have meaning and are cherished by the bearers and the givers since they contain information about the people's religious and socio-cultural beliefs and experiences. They signal character, identity, spirituality, behavior, and history. Pet names are universal to every Igbo society. Therefore, the study investigates the socio-cultural significance of pet names in Igbo society.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON NAMES AND NAMING PRACTICES

Igbo society bestows names with recourse to meaning. In most cases, names are given based on society's belief system. According to Akinnaso (1980), the primary reason for naming in a society is to provide a symbolic foundation for social interaction through individual identification. The naming process in Igbo society is to express the desire of the name-giver and deliver a message or messages from the name-giver to the entire family and the community. Cookey and Ijioma (2019) state that a name combines words by which a person's place, thing, body, or object is designed, called, or known. In essence, names are means of identification; they also convey messages, tell stories, and express the worldview of the givers and the bearers. Similarly, Igbo names can convey the circumstances of birth, the day of birth, and specific characteristics expected of the child. Igbo people are known for their rich cultural practices, which are reflected in their existence, like cuisine, culture, clothing, marriage, birth, burial, music, dance, and naming.

Naming in most traditional African societies is ceremonial. Naming is a meaningful ceremony that depends on the experiences of the family and the circumstances surrounding the birth of the name bearer. Naming is a process of giving a name, referred to as *igu aha* in Igbo, usually done 6-7 days after birth, but naming within 6-7 days of childbirth does not apply to pet names. A pet name could be given to the bearer at any time, depending on the relationship between the giver and the bearer. Among the Igbo, social, religious, or cultural background or the situation surrounding the birth of a child can influence naming. In traditional Igbo society, a name must be meaningful to the bearers, the givers, and the society.

Information about a person is in their name, and a presupposition about a person can easily be made based on their name. A person's name can create an impression about the person even before communicating with the person. In this way, names have psychological effects on society, which could be positive or negative. Names are also means of documenting family traditions, norms, and values, as they are in the Abiriba speech community of the Igbo language, where every first son and daughter retain the name of his father or mother. Alzumor (2009) states that names form an integral part of culture, and the survival of a culture and its language guarantees the survival of the names originating from the pair. Similarly, Odebode (2012) agrees that names do not only index characters but also are essential part of the cultural heritage they transmit from one generation to another.

Scholars have delved into the different areas of names and naming practices in different cultures. Fitzpatrick (2012) investigates African names and naming practices during slavery and their consequences. The study reveals that names were used as forms of suppression by slave masters and to reclaim and retain African identity by the enslaved Africans. The study reveals that although the colonizers assigned new names to Africans as a way of subjugating and committing them to perpetual servitude, Africans resisted the process of obliteration of their memories and deployed the practice of naming to survive hostility. In a similar study, Nwoye (2014) examines an ethnolinguistic exploration of naming ceremonies. He identified the principal ritual objects involved in the naming, which include Kola nuts, alligator pepper, cock, bottles of dry gin, and gallons of palm wine. He concludes that naming ceremony involves six-stage processes: announcement, preparation, presentation, naming, feasting, and departure. In contemporary Igbo society, naming and ritual depend on the socio-religious beliefs of the people involved.

Babane (2017) studies grief naming among Tsonga. The author examines the socio-linguistic practices in grief naming amongst Vaxhonga. He observes that every grief name has a unique meaning attached to it, which performs different functions by the name-bearer and the name-giver. The study reveals that grief names are given to children to send messages such as grieving the loss of a loved one, to demonstrate anger, frustration or sorrow by the parents or the experience a family went through, such as several deaths of infants leaving them sad and shocked.

Mensah (2016) studies nicknaming among female adolescents in Nigeria, focusing on the Calabar metropolis of Cross River state. The study adopts Lesile and Skipper's (1991) socio-onomastics theory and looks at the consequences of

nicknaming in group integration and solidarity. The study concludes that female nicknames are cultural symbols and styles adopted by female adolescents to express themselves as a form of resistance to the stereotype's women face. Names express emotions and narrate what is happening in society. Okoye (2015) maintains that personal names in Igbo and Chinese cultures are essential to transmitting cultural beliefs and values. He observes that just like the Igbo culture, names are not mere tags in Chinese culture. Names are given in Chinese culture to show location and time, personal characteristics, era, family continuity, kinship, and natural phenomenon. Mensah and Mekamgoum (2017) also believe that names are not mere tags. Mensah and Mekamgoum (2017) examine the communicative significance of personal names among the Ngemba people of western Cameroon. They discovered they bestow names on children based on historical events significant to the name givers. They observe that names also reflect the social struggle of the Ngemba cultural world.

Mensah (2020) investigates religious identity and ideology in Tiv's names. The study reveals that personal names show religious beliefs and orientation and express society's diversity of religion, culture, and social values. The different names given by religious groups in the society communicate to the people the belief system and the religious and cultural diversities in the society. Cultural values are expressed through names. Anyanwu and Oha (2017) also agree that the meaning of a name depends on culture. Anyanwu and Oha (2017) also argue that romantic pet names are gender biased in many cultural areas and depend on usage. They observe that Igbo names have gender markers, which is sometimes reflected in the use of romantic names. They observe that romantic names in the Igbo worldview go beyond marriage and companionship; they portray meaning with social signification that engenders positive attributes in the bearer. The romantic name conveys meaning beyond romance, admiration, or lust to the users.

Yakub (2020) examines the morpho-syntactic features of names of domestically tamed animals (pets) in Nzema society. In analysing the morphological structures of Nzema, Yakub adopts Haspelmath's framework-free theory of grammatical analysis. The study found that pet names include single-root morphemes, lexical compounding, derivational and inflectional processes, lexical borrowing, and reduplication. Pet names in the Nzema language follow morphological and syntactic rules. Yakub focuses on the structure of pet names in his study. At the same time, Alagbe and Asaolu (2022) investigate structure and worldview in their study of pet names among Yoruba people to unravel the structural units of and the motivations cum worldviews behind the names. The study used observation and interviews as instruments for data collection. Thirty names were given to dogs and goats in some towns and villages in Oyo and Kwara States of Nigeria, randomly selected for analysis. The data were analysed from the perspectives of onomastics and linguistic anthropology. Findings show domestic pet names are in sentences, noun phrases, adjectival phrases, and nouns. The authors maintained that domestic pet names demonstrate God's benevolence and supremacy, promote good neighbourliness/interpersonal relationships, and are used to identify destructive behaviour and adore wisdom.

The review above shows that studies on names and naming abound in different cultural contexts, especially in Africa. However, there has not been any known research on the socio-cultural significance of pet names in Igbo traditional society, hence the need for the present research. The study focuses on the socio-cultural significance of pet names from the Igbo perspective by adopting a socio-onomastic approach and considering the socio-cultural significations of pet names. Studying Igbo pet names adds a different perspective on the use of pet names globally and contributes to our understanding of their socio-cultural significance in Igbo. The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the different forms of pet names in the Igbo traditional society?
2. What motivates name-givers about their choice of pet names in Igbo society?
3. What is the socio-cultural significance of pet names in Igbo traditional society?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Socio-onomastics studies names from the sociolinguistics and onomastics perspective. It examines how society influences naming and naming practices. According to Ainiala and Östman (2017), socio-onomastics investigates the social origin and use of different forms of names within various situations and contexts in each society. It considers the socio-cultural values and norms of the society concerning naming. Walther (1971) introduced socio-onomastics. He defines socio-onomastics as the study of the social origin and use of different forms of proper names within various situations and contexts, considering the name-giver, name-bearer, and name-user. Socio-onomastics is the sociolinguistics study of names. It studies names from the sociolinguistics perspective by looking at how society perceives names and naming. Akselberg (2012) notes that socio-onomastics adopts a macrosocial approach to society in which language use is taken to reflect the social stratification characteristics of a speech community. It examines the influence of names and naming customs on individuals, considering their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, education, and gender within society.

In recent times, the study of names has been investigated from the socio-onomastics dimension by looking at society's influences on names and naming practices, unlike before, when the study of names focused on the historical construct. The development of the study of names about society, where meanings and societal values can be expressed through names, is a core principle of the socio-onomastic theory (Lombard, 2015). Socio-onomastics considers the social norms and values that guide names and naming. The different forms of names, such as personal names, nicknames, place names, and pet names, are studied from a socio-onomastics perspective.

This approach is relevant to this study as it allows us to understand how names, as linguistic entities, reflect and shape societal cultures and worldviews. The study also draws on sociolinguistics and onomastics, which explore the role of names

(anthroponomastics) in shaping societal language practices, given that names are essentially words, phrases, or sentences that exist in the lexicon.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts an ethnographic approach using semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Thirty (30) participants, aged 40-70 years, were purposively sampled from the core Southeastern Nigeria Igbo States of Abia (20%), Anambra (20%), Ebonyi (20%), Enugu (20%), and Imo States (20%). Six participants were selected from each of the states. The age group is selected because they are conversant with traditional pet names due to their knowledge and cultural experience. The participants were 15 males and 15 females.

Two research assistants were deployed to assist the researcher in interviewing the participants in the study areas. Participants demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, education, occupation, and religion, were documented. An equal number of participants were selected to avoid gender bias. Participants' names were anonymized to protect their identity and confidentiality. The research adopted purposive sampling in selecting the participants based on their willingness to participate and their deep knowledge of Igbo pet naming practices.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews conducted to get the participant's opinions. The interview took place in the palaces of some traditional rulers and the houses of farmers, traditional priests, title holders, and other participants. As an Igbo, the researcher also collected data by participating in ceremonies like naming ceremonies, new yam festivals, weddings, birthdays, and where pet names were given and used. The interviews were structured to capture the significance of pet names in Igbo. Questions were asked about the different pet names in Igbo that communicate socio-cultural values. Questions were also asked about the givers' motivations for the pet names. 36 pet names were collected and analysed. Digital recorders and field notes were used in data collection. Data were transcribed and categorized into different themes. The pet names were also tone-marked, and gloss was provided for easy pronunciation and understanding for non-Igbo speakers. The analysis is based on a descriptive method driven by a socio-onomastic approach.

DATA ANALYSIS

The pet names were collected and categorized into relevant thematic frames, such as those that express religious beliefs, societal expectations, gender ideologies, show fortune, and reflect social status. The paper adopts descriptive methods based on a socio-onomastic approach to analyse and discuss the data. The descriptive method gives flexibility in the data's presentation, description, and analysis.

Religious pet names

Religious pet names are pet names given based on the religious beliefs of the giver and the bearer. Igbo people are generally religious people. They believe in Chukwu, the supreme God; therefore, Chukwu is used as a prefix or suffix to show their religious beliefs. Apart from the supreme God, everybody is believed to have his or her Chi

(personal god), which guides the person's affairs. This belief system is also reflected in pet names in Igbo.

Table 1. Pet names that portray religious affinity.

Names	Gloss
Ùgòchínyèrè	Eagle given by God
Ùtòmsìnàchí	My sweetness is from God
Ùtòchī	Sweetness of God
Ányáómáchī	Beautiful eye of God
Ngózíchīm	My blessing from God
Íhúómáchī	Good luck of God

The participants believe that one's presence in the life of another could bring blessings from God. Therefore, if things turn around for good, the name giver may give the person a pet name to express his or her belief in God. Ùgòchínyèrè, as a pet name in Igbo, means that only God can provide a rare gift for a woman. Ùgòchínyèrè is usually used as a pet name by a man who marries a woman he adores and values very much. The eagle (Ùgò) in Igbo cosmology is a bird that is rarely seen, but when seen, it is referenced. In the words of a participant, "In the Igbo cultural setting, the rareness of Ùgò underscores the uniqueness of the pet name Ùgòchínyèrè." Other pet names such as Ùtòmsìnàchí (my sweetness is from God), Ùtòchī (sweetness of God), Ányáómáchī (beautiful eye of God), Ngózíchīm (my blessing from God), and Íhúómáchī (good luck of God) reflect the belief that every good thing comes from God. According to the pet name-givers, these pet names affirm God's supremacy and the name-giver's transcendental identity. Based on the findings, these names manifest the emotions of the name-givers based on their religious beliefs. Mensah, Dzokoto and Rowan (2021) opine that names express emotions and construct the personhood and identity of the name-bearer. These religious pet names (Table 1) show religious affiliations and appreciation to God. From the socio-onomastics point of view, the study notes that pet names are ascribed to Igbo people, taking into consideration their religious beliefs and emotional dispositions.

Pet names that express societal expectations

In the Igbo setting, names and naming are significant socio-cultural events because they are as important as human existence or the name bearer due to their essential societal roles. Societal roles Pet names signal ethnicity and reflect cultural dynamics. As evident in some Igbo Pet names, they portray a society's belief system and cultural values. Igbo people give pet names to express cultural beliefs and tell stories that reflect the circumstances surrounding the birth or life of the name bearer. A name sometimes signals gender, ethnicity, and class; they may connote personality characteristics and often reflect the person's cultural dynamics (Abdulganiy et al., 2015). The Table below presents pet names that express societal expectations.

Table 2. Pet names that express societal expectations

Names	Gloss
Ézènwáànyị	Goddess
Mmírímmā	Beauty from the water
Ìhèm	My light
Íkém	My strength
Díkē	Strong man
Díbùgwùm	My husband is my pride
Áhíāzūnwā	A child is not sold in the market

In Igbo, Ézènwáànyị which means “female ruler”, is bestowed on female servants of specific deities in Igbo. A priestess stated, “The deity is a Goddess representing the earth, water, and fertility”. The participants believed that Ézènwáànyị in Igbo cosmology generally represents strength and productivity. A name-giver stated, “They give their female children or partner Ézènwáànyị as a pet name to show the bearer’s purity, strength, and productivity which is expected of every female servant in Igbo.” Mmírímmā is a feminine pet name which means Beauty from the River. The name-givers also believe that the most beautiful goddess lives in the water; therefore, when they give birth to beautiful children or marry a lovely wife, they give her a pet name like Mmírímmā.

Traditional Igbo society is a patriarchal society that believes that the strength of a woman is dependent on whether there is a man in her life or not. Buçpapaj (2024) opines that across various societies, male names often carry connotations of strength and fortitude, symbolizing expected societal roles, while female names may suggest beauty and delicacy, signifying anticipated roles in society. A participant corroborated his claims by stating “Men are believed to be the pillars of the society, and this ideology is reflected in pet names like Íkém (my strength), Díbùgwùm (husband is one’s pride), and Díkē (strong man).” The participants stated that these pet names express the power and strength of the bearer. Also, a participant noted, “One’s parents could provide Íkém as a pet name based on the circumstances surrounding the child’s birth.” Áhíāzūnwā (A child is not sold in the market) shows that children are unique gifts of nature and an invaluable gift from God. Evidence from the research corroborates Ainiala and Östman (2017) claims that names are bestowed on users based on their uses in everyday social interactions.

Pet names that portray gender ideologies

The Igbo patriarchal society believes in the enactment of gender roles. Osuji (2023) notes that the Igbo patriarchal society upholds male authority, inheritance of properties, lineage continuity, and male-child preference. Patriarchy ensures the dominance of men in society. The roles of men as breadwinners and women as nurturers are evident in pet names that portray gender ideologies.

Table 3. Pet names that portray gender ideologies.

Names	Gloss
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Íkém	My strength
Ézēúdó	King of peace
Úgwùnnà	Father's pride
Òríàkù	Someone who came to enjoy wealth
Òdózíākù	One who secures wealth
Òbìàgērí	One that came to enjoy wealth
Ìkém	My own (mine)

Based on a socio-onomastic perspective, pet names are bestowed based on the role(s) each gender plays in society. The evidence from the field research shows that a pet name like Íkém (my strength) can be given by parents based on the circumstances surrounding the child's birth, and it is only given to male children. Also, a traditional ruler (name withheld) recounted that "Íkém could be given to a man by his wife to show that the husband is the strength of a woman." The participants noted that in Igbo traditional society, without a husband, a woman is considered powerless; hence, the pet name Íkém, which means "my strength". The name-givers believed that Ézēúdó (King of peace) is another gender-based name that shows that men are known for peace-making. Ézēúdó is a traditional head in society saddled with the responsibility of peace-making. Ézēúdó is, therefore, given to a male child who is expected to be a peacemaker in the family in Igbo.

Some pet names in Igbo are given to women by their spouses or wards to express the roles they are expected to perform. Women in Igbo society are seen as managers (Udeagha & Ozioma, 2019). According to a participant, "Women are expected to help their husbands manage their wealth while they enjoy it, which is evident in pet names Òdózíākù (one who secures wealth) and Òríàkù and Òbìàgērí (someone who came to enjoy wealth)". Female names are frequently selected to personify notions of beauty, grace, or moral virtues, reflecting societal expectations of femininity and the nurturing roles often associated with women (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). The participants state that Àhúdíyā and Ìkém are feminine pet names that show possession. The name-givers and traditional title holders stated that Ìkém was strictly for women in traditional Igbo society because a woman cannot possess a man. A female participant recounted "Women used pet names like Nna anyi (our father), Papa m (my father), and Nna m ukwu (my boss) to show respect to their spouses". The findings reveal that social factors such as gender and social status influence pet names in Igbo society.

4.4. Pet Names that portray fortune

Some pet names testify to the fortunes an individual brings into the givers' lives. Some pet names portray good omen, luck, wealth, childbirth, marriage, or adventure. Some pet names are brought by marriage. The participants noted that people give their spouses pet names based on how they bring fortune to them, either on the verge of marrying them or after marriage. These names are provided to sustain fortunes as names are believed to influence one's life. According to participants, the belief that

names influence one's life is one reason people bestow names ascribed to fortune in Igbo.

Table 4. Pet names that portray fortune.

Names	Gloss
Ùgègbèm	My mirror
Òbíánùjù	One that came amid plenty
Òbìàrànnāmmā	Arrived amid plenty/affluence
Ézíākū	Good wealth
Úrūdīyá	Husband's gain
Ézííhē	Good thing
Mkpúrúmmā	Seed of beauty
Úrùdīnānwá	There is gain in childbirth

Ùgègbèm, meaning "my mirror", is a pet name in Igbo society. The participants pointed out that Ùgègbèm, as a pet name, is used to adore a woman's beauty, and it is given mainly by a man in a romantic relationship. A name-giver stated, "In Igbo society, beauty could be physical beauty or being pleasing in character." He recounted that "Ùgègbèm symbolically portrays someone who brings light to the name-giver due to her pureness of heart." The participants believed that a pleasing character could bring light and fortune to the spouse. The belief that character brings light, and fortune is a testament to the belief system of the Igbo people. According to Mbisike (2024:25), "Culturally Igbo people believe that certain women carry good luck and positive aura that attract great wealth and progress to their husbands". The name-givers noted that Òbíánùjù (one who came in abundance of wealth) is a pet name given to someone who brought a turnaround or an unexpected breakthrough to the name-giver. It is a gender-specific name given to females by their spouses or loved ones. According to pet name users, Òbìàrànnāmmā (one that came amid plenty) is also a name that portrays fortune, especially one that is born in good time or into fortunes. The participants noted that Úrūdīyá is given by a man to his wife, which also signifies good luck. The traditional Igbo society believes that a good wife brings favor and gain; hence, the pet name Úrūdīyá. From a socio-onomastic position, the participants believe that social values, beliefs, and orientations are essential factors in bestowing pet names in Igbo society.

Ézííhē (a good thing) is a marital pet name in Igbo. This evidence shows that Ézííhē expresses the belief that a woman can bring good luck and fortune in the life of her husband. The findings from participants show that men bestow Mkpúrúmmā (seed of beauty) on their spouses due to their physical attributes of beauty or good character. Úrùdīnānwá (There is gain in having a child) is given from birth by the parents or grandparents of the name bearer. It is believed that in the Nsirimo speech community, that there is no gain as much as that of having a child, hence, the name Úrùdīnānwá. This claim justifies the belief that children, in most cases, are retirement plans for their parents as they are expected to take full responsibility for their parents in old age. However, it may not apply only to Igbo people.

Pet Names that reflect social status

Pet names in the Nsirimo speech community are not just labels but indicators of a person's social status. Sander, Lynn, and Podolny (2012) define social status as the level of social value a person possesses in society. Social values include educational background, occupation, marital status, wealth, and social influence. Refer to Table 5 for pet names that reflect social status.

Table 5. Pet names that reflect social status.

Names	Gloss
Ézènwáànyị	Queen
Ùgódiyā	Husband's eagle
Àkwáùgò	Egg of an eagle
Ùgwùézè	Pride of a king
Ùgòézè	Wife of a king
Àdánṅē	First daughter/Mother's daughter
Ìlúnṅē	Second daughter

The name-givers and traditional title holders in Nsirimo stated that Ézènwáànyị (Queen or Goddess) is a feminine pet name given to one because of one's level of attainment in the family or society. Ézènwáànyị could also be given to priestesses of specific female deities in Igbo (refer to section 4.2; Table 2). This shows that context and the intentions of the name-giver play an important role in giving pet names in Igbo. Some name-givers opined that Ézènwáànyị could also be provided as a title that reflects one's religious belief but as a pet name that shows one's level of excellence. Ùgódiyā (Husband's eagle) is given to a woman by her spouse to express her worth to him. Àkwáùgò (egg of an eagle) can be given to any female in society, either married or single, to express how priceless and beautiful the bearer is. A title holder stated that "eagle is the most sacred bird in Igboland, and the pet name Àkwáùgò is given to one who is highly respected and appreciated."

According to the participants, names like Ùgwùézè and Ùgòézè could be bestowed on a married woman who married a king or one who believes and hopes to be married to a king in the future. Igbo society typically gives Àdánṅē (first daughter) to female children, especially first daughters. The participants argued that Ada is the family's representative and is also in charge of the management of the house. They state that Ìlúnṅē (second daughter) is bestowed on a second or third daughter to convey the bearer's position in the family. Names express how a culture perceives, receives, and uses names (Ainiala, 2016). The participants note that pet names reflect society's views and expectations about a person. This indicates that names carry cultural features and society's feelings about a person.

DISCUSSION

The paper discusses pet names and their socio-cultural significance in Igbo. From a socio-onomastic point of view, the paper demonstrates the cultural, social, and situational conditions that affect pet name usage in Igbo. The analysis of the religious

pet names (see Table 1) shows that pet names communicate social identity, societal expectations, and norms. The name givers agree that pet names are used to construct social identity and attitude. The analysis shows the role of religion in the bestowal of pet names in Igbo. Based on the data collected, pet names manifest the givers' emotions and thoughts based on the Igbo people's religious beliefs. The participants observed that these pet names show traditional values. Pet names portray belief in deities and patriarchal systems, as analysed in section 4.2.

The analysis shows that pet names portray gender ideologies. The study also shows that Igbo people believe in gender roles, evident in the pet names bestowed on the different genders (see section 4.3). The participants' perceptions corroborate Ainiala, and Östman's (2017) claim that socio-onomastics study socio-cultural functions in individuating their bearers as identification tools and devices for the social classification of their bearers. This position also underscores the role of pet names in portraying people's way of life. From the analysis, the name-givers, whose narratives provided context, reported that the circumstances surrounding the birth or the giver's life play a significant role in the bestowal of pet names in Igbo. The study noted that the context or situation of use influences pet names in Igbo, serving as an influential communicator of the social status of the bearer. They express their occupation, marital status, position, gender roles, and level of attainment in society.

CONCLUSION

Pet names are significant in Igbo socio-cultural practices. The cultural norms and values evident in pet names were identified and analysed, which is the concern of socio-onomastics. From the findings, the Igbo society bestows pet names to communicate gender roles, social status, and the worldview of the name-givers. In the Igbo society, socio-cultural considerations are made before giving pet names. Pet names portray religious beliefs, express societal expectations, communicate gender roles, express mindset, and reflect the bearer's social status. The paper also discovered that some pet names are gender sensitive and reflect the gender roles expected of each gender in society. From the findings, Igbo people believe in supreme beings (God) and the existence of individual gods(deities), which are reflected in their pet names. Also, Igbo people give pet names according to society's value system.

The findings agree with Ainiala and Östman (2017) that names reflect societal values, norms, and power dynamics. Cultural and social contexts influence pet names because pet names portray social hierarchies and identities.

Future research on pet names should focus on a comparative study of contemporary and traditional pet names in Igbo. However, this area could not be covered due to the scope of the present study. Traditional pet names offer socio-cultural significance; therefore, Igbo society should recognize the importance of preserving these unique pet names by upholding our values.

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