Original Paper

Syntactic Metaphors as Common Features of Most Nigerian Indigenous Names

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Abstract

African names are reflections of many factors at work, because beyond the fact that they identity symbols, the indigenous Nigerian Society believes that names shape a person's character, mold their social identity and even influence an individual's destiny. This explains why this study examined the peculiarities associated with most Nigerian indigenous names, focusing especially on the syntactic features of these names. The names used in this study were drawn from the two major Nigerian Languages of Yoruba and Igbo, and the third language, is the Edo Language of the Benin Kingdom. Consequently, when these names were translated into the English Language, using the parsing tools of Systemic Grammar of S- Subject, P- Predicator, C- Complement and A- Adjunct, the findings revealed that while most Nigerian indigenous names are singular words in their native entities, when these names are translated into English Language and analysed, they are complete sentences in the shape of subject, predicator and complement or subject, predicator and adjunct, in some cases a subject and a predicator. The findings buttress the fact that Nigerian indigenous names are classics, because they are like film – reels that reveal the cosmopolitan world view of the Nigerian indigenous societies. This highlights why these meanings are connotatively metaphoric, because a peoples thought, experience and what they do every day is very much a matter of metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3).

Keywords

Syntax, Metaphor, Indigenous, Names and Structuralism

1. Introduction

Over the years many linguists and philosophers have held the opinion that there is nothing to a name, but a mere signpost. The basis for this assumption is the school of thought that is shaped around the French Philosopher, Ferdinand de Saussure who believes that:

The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, or more simply, that linguistic sign is arbitrary', it means unmotivated. By "signifier", the concept that the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image (p.100 [p.66-69]-103).

De Saussure and his followers are of the view that sounds or concepts are what we choose when we name an object, since what A means in one environment, could mean B in another. De Saussure succinctly captures it thus:

Psychologically our thought – apart from its expression in words – is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognizing that without the help of signs we would be unable to make clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language, thought is vague, uncharted nebula. There are no preexisting ideas and nothing is distinct before appearance of language (p.161 [pp 111-112]).

What this study has established thus far, is the fact that, to this school of thought, names are arbitrary signs that are admitted by symbolic conventions. However, to the African and most especially to a Nigerian, names are social phenomena that convey meanings. According to (Saville- Troike, 1987 cited in Adegbiya, 1997, p. 92) language is "a phenomenon that is grounded in social experience".

2. Statement of the Problem

In the western world, very few socio-cultural factors influence the dynamics of name giving; hence they shrugged-off, almost the rhetorical question, "what's in a name?" They are entirely interchangeable and unrevealing. But in Nigeria and other West African Cultures, many factors are at work in the naming process and seemingly simple name can hold someone's entire biography. In Nigeria and other West African Cultures name is much more than a simple, functional tag to identify someone, it is a symbol, an emblem. A name can shape a person's character, mold their social identity and even influence their destiny. The meaning attached to a name will determine much about the present and the future of a child. One can often refer someone's socio-cultural aspects from their name: their ethnicity, their gender, but also their day or date of birth, their family's occupation, their social and political class, the religion and deities they follow, the hopes and dreams of their parents, etc. It can also express the values, ethics, and beliefs of the culture they are born into. A name creates an expectation and an attitude in those that hear it, even before they meet the name bearer. This is partly why, when introduced to people of different ethnic groups, many Nigerians will not only say their names but explain its meaning, so that it is clearly understood regardless of language bearers. This supports the statement of Galadima, when he says names "operate on theoretical and cultural praxis" (2023, p. 5). Similarly, John Biggers in "Family Arc" asserts:

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Baby naming ceremonies are specially held seven to ten days after birth, not only to allow the mother time to recuperate, but also, and more importantly to make sure the baby intends to stay in the World of the living. Until an identifying word is attached to an infant's body and soul, it doesn't truly exist, doesn't truly have a place in the World. Muslims will often give their children names of Arabic origin such as Mamadu…, Fatima, Ali or Mariam. Christians often adopt names from the Bible such as Joseph, Mary or John. Despite this trend of using foreign names for religious purposes, many people still embrace native, traditional naming methods for their children, regardless of religious affiliation (2019, p. 1).

The statement above explains why Nigerian indigenous names are metaphorical. They are metaphorical because, most time, they are contextual, situational and explain the world's view of the people. And when these names are translated into the English Language, they connote syntagmatic sequence that could easily be grammatically marked.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach to this study is structural linguistics. This is because structuralism provides a platform where all cultural activities, from political processes to literary works are conditioned by complex structures which can be analysed in their turn as though they worked like language. However, the theory is not limited to language, because it can offer a highly sophisticated and flexible means to analyzing cultural phenomena which relates individual features to the organizing structures of which they are part. Its goal is the identification of the functional features of system of meaning. Though its methodological model and conceptual apparatus is that of Saussure's linguistics, the material to which it can be applied need not itself be immediately language based. Structuralism stresses the functional, but not interested in details for themselves but only in so far as they contribute to and are contained within the overall system of meaning. This highlights why Troubetzkoy gave four focal points of structural linguistics: "first, structural linguistic shifts from the study of conscious linguistics phenomena to the study of their unconscious infrastructure, secondly, it does not treat terms as independents entities, taking instead as its basis of analysis the relation between terms; thirdly, it introduces the concept of system" modern phonemics does not merely proclaim that phonemes are always part of a system; it shows concrete phonemics systems and elucidates their structure", finally, structural linguistics aims at discovering general laws, either by introduction or by logical deduction, which would give them an absolute character" (1933, p. 243).

It is these general laws that stimulate character in most Nigerian indigenous names when they are translated into the English Language that is paramount to this study. In the words of Irvine and Gal (2009);

It has become a common place in … that linguistic forms, including whole languages can index social groups. As part of everyday behaviors, the use of a linguistic form can become a pointer to (index of) the social identities and the typical activities of speakers. But speakers (and hearers) often notice,

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rationalize, and justify such linguistic indices, thereby creating linguistic ideologies that purport to explain the source and meaning of the linguistic differences (p. 376).

4. Methodology

The study has an element of translation and because of this; the study's methodology is woven around Catford Linguistic Theory of translation (1965), using the grammatical and lexical translation principle. This principle is a restricted translation, in which the Source Language (SL) grammar of a text is replaced by equivalent Target Language (TL) grammar but with no replacement of lexis. The basis for equivalence here, as in total translation, is relationship to the same situation- substance (p. 71). In this case, our source languages in this study are Yoruba, Igbo and Edo, while the target language is the English Language.

5. Metaphors

The thrust of metaphor in this study is not limited to the literary concept writers or philosophers of language are used to. Because metaphors have become a linguistic and contextual tool, that is used to interpret universal phenomenon and beliefs. In the 80's many philosophers began by rejecting the assumption in many earlier theories that the ordinary, normal use of language is literal, from which metaphor is a deviation for special rhetorical and poetic purposes. Instead, they claimed that the ordinary use of language is pervasively and indispensably metaphorical and that metaphor persistently and profoundly structures the ways human beings perceive what they know, and how they think. This fact is supported by Cacciari and Glucksberg:

Figurative language is no longer perceived as merely an ornament added to everyday, straightforward literal language, but is instead viewed as a powerful communicative and conceptual tool (1994, p. 48).

The idea here is that, the more a figurative language is stretched, in this case metaphor, the further the extended meaning, because of its universal appeal. This is because metaphor gives meaning to form. Since language can have many meanings when applied in different contexts.

6. Syntax

The English language is a well-structured organized language that follows laid down rules. This fact is encapsulated in the statement of Ajulo (1994) "that form classes function as elements of structure in grammar, for example, S, P, C, A in clause structure" (p. 40). This strengthens our earlier argument that the English language is an orderly structured language, that is, the "Subject" of a sentence is followed by a 'Predicator', which is followed by a "Complement" or an "Adjunct".

With this, this study is now set to analyse some of the Nigerian indigenous names:

Names for Occupations or Economic Situation among the Edo people of Edo State:

> Abieyawa: Born / into Wealth
>
>   S   P

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S   P   C

Idemudia: I/ am/ financially stabilized

Among the Igbos there are names like:

S   P   C

Akubueze: Wealth/is/ the King

S   P   C

Nwaobuako: Child / carries/ wealth

Among the Yorubas there are similar names like the above:

S   P   C

Owoyemi: Wealth/ befits/ me

S   P

Owolabi: Wealth/ is born

NP   NP

S   P   C

Oluwolagba: The wealthy people/ are/ the eldest

NP   VP   NP

S   P   A

Ayewole: Wealth/ has entered/ our house

S   P   C

Olowoleni: Wealth/ is /admirable

Religious or Spiritual Names: children can also be given sacred names reflecting the divinities in change of their destinies especially those of traditional religions.

The Yorubas have examples of the following:

S   P   C

Sangoyemi: I/ am delivered/ by Sango (The god of thunder)

S   P   A

Ifagbamila: The Oracle/saves and blesses/ me

S   P   A

Ifawole: The Oracle/ has come/ home again

S   P   C

Oyalana: The goddess of the Niger river/ has opened/ the way.

S   P   C

Osundina: The goddess of water/ has blocked/ the way

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The Edo people also have names related to traditional spirituality and religion:

<div align="center">S   P   C</div>

Erinmwingboro: The spirit beings/ are not envious/ of humans

<div align="center">S   P   C</div>

Okungbona: Water god/ ensures/ wealth

<div align="center">S   P</div>

Osaro: God/ exist

<div align="center">S P   C</div>

Igbinosun: I/ seek/ the protection of Osun. (The god of healing)

The Igbos also infuse traditional spirituality into their names:

<div align="center">S   P   C</div>

Aniwela: Spirit of the land/ brought/ it

<div align="center">S   P   C</div>

Anizoba: Let the spirit/ continue/ to defend.

The belief in destiny can also guide Edo parents to seek names such as:

<div align="center">S   P</div>

Ehiosu: The guardian Spirit/ that guides

<div align="center">S   P   C</div>

Aizehinomo: A child's destiny/ is not chosen/ by the parents.

<div align="center">S   P A</div>

Ehinnwenma: My guardian Spirit/ is/ good.

<div align="center">S   P   C</div>

Aisagbonbuomwem: One's destiny/ is not determined/ in the world.

There are other names that praise the Supreme Being, the God of gods. Names like these are also acceptable to both Christians and Muslims, since the word God may not apply only to the Supreme Being of the traditional religion, but to the Christian or Islamic God.

In Igbo, there are two words meaning "God":

Chukwu, and Chi: both words are incorporated into names such as:

<div align="center">S   P</div>

Chukwuemeka: God/ has done well.

<div align="center">S   P</div>

Nwachukwu: Son/ of God

<div align="center">S P C</div>

<div align="center">6</div>

Chibuike: God/ is/ power.

       S   P   C

Chika: God/ is/ Great.

In the Yoruba language, names beginning with Olu – refer to the Almighty:

       S   P   C

Oluwamuiyiwa: God/ brought/ this

       S   P   C

Oluwaseyi: God/ does/ this

The traditional belief system in most Nigerian societies includes the belief in reincarnation. These names have prophetic quality. Traditionally, they tie the spirit and the life of a child to those of their ancestors, laying a path for their lives.

Igbo reincarnation names include:

       H   Q

Nnenna: Mother/ of the father

       H   Q

Nnanna: Father/ of the father

       H   Q

Nneme: Mother/ of the mother.

The structures above are examples of Noun Phrases (NP) with 'mother', 'father' and 'mother' as the heads of the structures and the other parts of the Prepositional Phrases (PP) as the qualifiers.

Among the Edo, some names suggest a reincarnated ancestral spirit:

    Iye: Mother NP

The above structure is an example of a Noun Phrase.

       S   P

    Iyorre: I/ have gone (and) come

The above analysis is an example of a compound sentence consisting of two main clauses. It is an elliptical structure consisting of the first part (I have gone), and the second (come). The second part of this sentence could also be written as 'I have come'. This is why it is an elliptical clause because the second part is an obligatory clause.

When a child is thought to resemble their grandparent, the Yoruba may name them:

       S   P   A

Babatunde: Father/ has come/ back

       S   P   A

Iyabode: Mother/ has come/ back

       S   P   A

Iyewande: My mother/ has come /back for me

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There are also deaths – defying names among traditional Nigerians. When a woman loses many of her infants through still births, miscarriages, and infant deaths, it is often thought that it is the same child who is repeatedly conceded by the couple, to be born and die soon afterwards. A good name can act as an anchor that will tempt or force the child to stay alive once and for all. The Edo people could name their baby thus:

          S   P   A

    Gumwendia: You/ remain/ (with) me

          S   P

    Onaiwu: This one/ will not die.

          P   S   A

    Sonarae: Leave/ this one/ behind.

The structure above has a unique order of arrangement, where the predicator is coming before the subject and yet the meaning of the name or structure is not altered. This shows that a predicator is an obligatory element in any clause.

The Igbo names of this kind are:

          Ci   S   P   C

    Onwubiko: Death/I/ implore/you

The structure above has an Indirect complement coming before the subject 'I', because the emphasis of the name is on 'Death'. This is a plea on death to allow the child to live, after several children must have died.

          P   A

    Nonyem: Stay/ with me.

          A   S   P

    Ndukwe: If /life/ agrees

The above structure is an example of a subordinate clause that is dependent on the main clause that in this case, is not given. This is because the name is a rhetorical one that could take the shape of any of the following: 'if life agrees, this child will not die', 'if life agrees, this child will be great', or 'if life agrees, the destiny of this child will not be tempered with'.

Among the Yoruba, such children are called:

          S   P   A
    Kokumo: He/ will not die/ again

          S   P   C
    Ikunmafayi: Death/ do not /fake this

          S   P   C

    Arikuyeri: A person who/ escaped/ death.

A name can also reflect an entire society's ethical framework, reinforcing the values that it holds, by placing on its members, the responsibility to look up to in their names.

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Among the Edo people, one can find names such as:

NP

Ekpen: Bravery

S   P   C

Akugberetin: Unity/ is/ Strength

S   P   C

Egbenayalobele: The path to success /is /rough.

Among the Yoruba people, one might call their child:

S   P   C

Akinwunmi: I/ love/ bravery.

S   P   C

Akintolu: Bravery/ is/ great.

NP

Omoluwabi: The virtuous one

Likewise, the Igbos have names like:

S   P

Ikemefono: Let my strength/ not be lost.

P   C

Edekola: Do not hang/ your heart.

S   P   C   A

Ejike: We/ do not use/ power/ in doing things of the world.

In certain societies in Nigeria, names can reflect political aspects of the culture, particularly the supremacy of leaders and the right to governance. The Edo people for example, have names like:

S   P   A

Osagiobarre: The king/ is ordained/ by God.

S   P   C

Obasogie: The king/ is /greater.

S   P   C

Obayanto: The king/ is /the owner of the land.

7. Findings

The findings of this study reveal that while these indigenous names are singular words in their native nomenclatures, it is the contrary, when they are translated into the English Language. From the above analysis, it is discovered that the names are wholesome sentences that are structured into patterns of: subject, predicator, subject, predicator and complement and subject, predicator and adjunct. And even in some cases, we have a pattern of predicator, complement or predicator adjunct. There are also

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instances where the predicator is coming before the subject because of the literal translation of the name into the English language. However, this instance does not change the meaning of the name. These findings support the fact that Nigerian indigenous names are sentence like, when they are translated into the English Language.

8. Conclusion

The act of naming in Nigeria illustrates several beliefs and traditions, to the average Nigerian it is an effective way to sharpen a blunted world that is reflected in the cosmopolitan anthropology of a people. Kluckhohn (2010) sums up this fact when he says:

The total way of life of a people; The social legacy the individual acquires from his group; a way of thinking, feeling and believing; an abstraction from behavior; a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave; a storehouse of pooled learning; a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems; learned behavior; a mechanism for the normative regulation of behavior; a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men; a precipitate of history; and turning, perhaps in desperation to similes, as a map, as a sieve, and a matrix (p. 236).

In the thinking of kluckhohn, culture is a scientific way of any given society that expresses their models and beliefs. And through it, their amusement, behaviours, expressions, and concepts are reflected. And the Nigerian society is no exception; it is a philological one as expressed in the names above. Because these names universally represent the Nigerian cultural norms, ethos and values. Secondly, when these names are translated into English as shown in the analysis above, they are not just singular words but complete syntactic structures. This is why they are syntactic metaphors.

Notes

For the statement of the problem, please refer to the importance of a "Good Name" in Bapteme: Ces Prénoms tirés des croyances ancestrales. Mehiwels. https://www.mailweb.net/category.php?NID=52693. published November le, 2009. Accessed February 11, 2019.

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