

Anthropological study of Àlà names in Igbo

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Abstract: *Ala names or anthroponyms used to be personal names given to male children. These names bear testimonies to the overwhelming influence of Ala over the various aspects of Igbo life. The Ala names in this study were collected from various parts of Igboland, within the south east of Nigeria. The Igbo world view is examined so as to place the study in proper perspective. The names are then categorized to reflect the various dispositions of the name givers. A de-sentential source is postulated for each name, while samples are selected for linguistic analysis. The analysis shows that the processes of simplification tend to obscure the meanings of some Ala names. The study notes that Ala names have ceased to be borne as forenames since the advent of Christianity. The names are now used as patronyms by those whose fore-bearers had Ala names as forenames.*

Key words: *Ala, anthroponym, forename, patronym, fore-bearer.*

I. Introduction

The Igbo are found in the south east of Nigeria, within the states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. However, a cluster of them are found in Rivers and Delta states. The name Igbo is used to refer to both the people and their language.

The Igbo, like other Africans, bear names as a means of being uniquely identified. Names are usually given to children at birth by their parents, especially the father. Such names are referred to as personal names or forenames (anthroponyms). In addition to being a means of identification, names also serve as a pointer to the societal values. Thus, one is not regarded as a proper human being if he/she does not bear a name (Obeng, 2001: iv; Agyekum, 2006: 208). According to Ubahakwe (1982:27) “an indigenous African name on the whole personifies the individual, tells some story about the parents and/or the family of the bearer; and in a more general sense, points to the values of the society into which the individual is born.” This view is equally expressed by Mphande (2006:109) who describes African names as “statements about religion and beliefs of the speakers and their relationship with the supernatural.”

In view of the foregoing, it is believed that through anthroponyms, language functions as a tool through which a people’s social and cultural world is evaluated and reproduced. In this regard, names are said to have indexical relations to places, peoples and events. They function as mini-narratives about the past or future (Duranti, 1997:19).

Based on the available literature, a number of studies have been conducted on Igbo anthroponyms. Such works include Ubahakwe’s (1981) study of the structure and meanings of Igbo names. His subsequent study (1982) is on the culture content of Igbo personal names. Also, Onukawa (1998) conducted an anthropological study of the Igbo market-day names. He further worked on the significance of the verb kwe (agree, consent) in Igbo names (Onukawa, 1999(a)) and the anthropological evidence of chi names in Igbo (Onukawa, 1999(b)).

The present study, unlike the previous ones, focuses exclusively on Àlà anthroponyms. These are personal names given to children at birth in honour of the earth goddess, Àlà. Àlà names however are no longer borne as forenames but are now used as surnames (family name/last name) by those whose fore-bearers had such names as their forenames. As a result of the advent of Christianity in Igboland, the use of Àlà names as forenames has become obsolete. Parents have resorted to giving Christian names and other Igbo names that have no bearing with Àlà or other Igbo deities for that matter. This trend is not restricted to Igbo Àlà names. It has equally been observed in Yemeni Arabic personal names. According to Al-Zumor (2009: 16) “personal names occur in any language and they basically change, develop, and die out, and they have a life cycle similar to that of the other lexical items of the language.”

This study is significant because it shows how Ala names constitute an index of the cultural world of the Igbo. It equally looks at the cultural insights which necessitated the bearing of Àlà names. The study also examines and sheds light on the linguistic processes involved in deriving Àlà names from their individual sentential sources. These processes have been identified as the source of brevity of the names as borne by the bearers.

The data for this study was drawn from various parts of Igboland (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states). The names were collected by the 2009 graduating class of the Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. However, a greater number of the names were collected from Anambra and Enugu states. This accounts for the preponderance of the variant forms, Ànà and Ànì, as opposed to the more general form Àlà.

For the presentation of data and analysis a sentential source is posited for each Àlà name. The meaning of each de-sentential name is derived compositionally from its formatives. Each name is cited as it is written and spelt by the bearer. It is placed alongside its formatives. Beneath this is a presentation of the morpheme-to-morpheme gloss. The next line is the English translation of the name. This is followed by the line which shows the various processes of simplification involved in the derivation. The study also adopts the Green and Igwe (1963) tone-marking convention.

This study is organised as follows. Section 1 is the introduction, section 2 examines the Igbo world view to enable one understand the role of Àlà in the life of the people. Section 3 deals with the categorisation of Àlà names on the basis of a common theme. Section 4 is the analysis of the linguistic features associated with Àlà names. Finally, section 5 forms the summary and conclusion.

II. Igbo world view

The world view or cosmology of a people is a reflection of how they think, visualize, conceptualize, and interpret the world or universe in which they live. A people's world view gives them a sense of direction and purpose. It enables them to act meaningfully in exercising control over their environment (Madu, 1996:1). A brief outline of Igbo cosmology comprises a distinct but interrelated three-tier structure. Their conception of the universe is in terms of elū (firmament), ùwà (world) and àlà (earth/land).

Elū is the domain of the principal god, Chinēkè (creative force)/ Chukwu (supreme god), who is believed to be worshipped in a vague way. Its deification is virtually non-existent as there are no idols to represent him. Also no festival is particularly devoted to him. He is rather approached by man through a pantheon of intermediary gods that superintend over some responsibilities. These gods include Anyanwū (sun god), Igwē (sky god), Àmadiòhà/Kamalū (god of thunder and lightning), Agwù (god of healing, divination and clairvoyance) and Àlà (earth goddess). The sky is the abode of Igwē. He showers the earth with rain to moisten it for human exploitation. According to Ilogu (1974:35) "Not much worship is offered to the sky god as he is often better known through his wife, the earth goddess, who happens to be the most important of all the other gods." Ùwà represents the tier which is inhabited by man, the flora and fauna, in addition to streams, rivers and some spiritual forces.

Àlà (literally 'ground') is another tier, headed by the earth goddess, Àlà. It is the dwelling place of man. According to Ilogu (1975: 14), Àlà "is the most important divinity in Igbo social and moral life." This goddess is responsible for procreation, sustenance of life, and moral well-being. Àlà is ascribed a feminine status because of the many good things attributed to her. Because the dead ancestors are interred in the earth, it is believed that the spirits of these ancestors, in conjunction with other spiritual forces, assist the earth goddess in providing "the moral code by which the community lives and regulates its affairs. The moral code as sanctioned by Àlà and the ancestral spirits as given in prohibitions and customary taboos, is spoken of in Igbo as nsò àlà (abomination) against this earth divinity" (Ilogu, 1975:41).

The Igbo avoid any untoward behaviour and whatever else that could lead to an abomination, a violation of the sanctity of the earth. Such abominations include theft of yams, from the barn or from the farm, a woman climbing a palm tree or kolanut tree, homicide (whether deliberate or accidental), a cock crowing at night, a wife throwing her husband on the ground in a fight, anyone altering land boundary in secret, any form of theft by a title holder, killing or eating of totems, suicide (especially by hanging), and incest, among others. The Igbo believe that these human actions defile the land and thus incur the wrath of Àlà. The reaction of Àlà could result in undesirable consequences like famine, pestilence, sudden death, and such other evils. Thus, an abomination requires cleansing to ward off the vengeance and wrath of Àlà.

In the event of an abomination, the onus of guilt rests squarely on the offender. The offender is usually helpless, no kinsman or friend, however influential, can intercede on his behalf. The appropriate rituals must be performed to appease Àlà. For instance, in Achebe's *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo's gun exploded during a burial ceremony. Accidentally, a shrapnel from the gun killed one of his kinsmen. The only option left for Okonkwo was to proceed on exile for seven years. Though it was an accident, but it was regarded as a crime against Àlà. In accordance with the custom, Okonkwo's house was besieged by an irate crowd at dawn. His houses were set on fire and razed to the ground. His livestock and yams were destroyed. In the words of Achebe (1958:87), the action of the irate crowd was in accord with "... the justice of the earth goddess and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman."

In the case of incest for example, the offenders would be stripped naked, beaten and taken round the whole community to face the public glare and scorn. They would later be subjected to a series of cleansing rituals. The public humiliation served as a deterrent to whoever might be tempted to commit such an offence. With regard to a cock crowing at night, the cock would be killed instantly and after some brief rituals, it would be eaten by only the titled male adults. The death of the cock would be regarded as a sufficient appeasement to Àlà (Olisa n.d:4).

If however an abomination is concealed, Àlà will hold the entire community culpable and will indiscriminately inflict her punishment on the entire community with a succession of calamities or reverses which no one could account for and which are consequently regarded as manifestations of defilement. According to Olisa (n.d:5), “such occurrences as the repeated deaths of infants, several deaths from ‘bad’ diseases, repeated reverses in crop yields, constant epidemics of livestock or major epidemics affecting human beings, could strike terror into the community. ” However, when the land is devoid of any abomination, Àlà would bless them without any discrimination. It is in this regard that the Igbo bear the name

1 Àlamōkè < àlà + a- mā – ghī + okè
Ala vpf-know-Neg boundary
 ‘Ala has no bounds or restrictions’

Thus, the Igbo have a sacred regard for the earth on which they tread and from which their sustenance is drawn. Though the Igbo regard Chukwu as supreme, they however rate the earth goddess, Àlà as more powerful in view of her direct intervention in the affairs of man. In this regard, the worship of Àlà becomes a common denominator in all the Igbo culture area (ICA). This accounts for why “most public worship of various communities is offered to the earth goddess as well as seasonal celebrations which relate to the various seasons of the year. Her shrines are found in most homes and public squares of any village” (Ilogu, 1974:35).

2.1 Man’s position in the universe

As regards his position in the universe, the Igbo believe that man is at the centre of the universe. Man is exposed to the influences from the gods and the spiritual forces around him. There is no facet of his life which is devoid of the intervention of the gods. The belief is that in all circumstances- good health, ill health, fortune, misfortune, prosperity, adversity, among others- the gods invariably wield a lot of influence on man. That is why the Igbo, according to Onukawa (1996a:112) bear such names as

2(a) Agbàràkwe < agbàrà + kwe
 spirit agree
 ‘Let the spirits consent’

(b) Àlàkwe < àlà + kwe
 earth goddess agree
 ‘Let Àlà consent’

As the names in (2) suggest, man is conceived as a relatively weak partner in the entire universe of existence in relation to the influence exerted by the gods. For the Igbo therefore, man aspires to strike a balance with the gods in order to achieve his objectives. In what follows (sec 3), there is an attempt to categorize Àlà anthroponyms.

III. Categorization of Àlà anthroponyms

The categorization here is based on the issue of common theme drawn from the attributes of Àlà, Names which seem to address similar issues are grouped together. Based on this premise, the following are the categories identified for the purpose of analysis: providential, precatory and recognition names.

3.1 Providential names

Providential names are those that address such issues that relate to the kind and merciful disposition of Àlà towards the people.

3. Ànànfèhngwùlù < ọ + bù + ànà + nà + è- fe + ñgwùlù
 it be ana Aux vpf-hover homestead
 ‘It is Ala who shields/protects the homestead’
 /ànànfèhngwùlù > ànànfèhngwùlù > ànànfèhngwùlù /

4. Ànìbìkè < ọ + bù + ànì + bù + ike + mī
 it be ani be strength 1SG
 ‘It is Ala that gives me strength’

/àṅàbùikēm̄ > àṅìbiikēm̄ > àṅìbùike > àṅìbike /

5. Àṅìnwùba < ọ + bù + àṅì + nwè + ùba
it be ani possess wealth
'It is Ala who owns wealth'
/àṅìnwèùba > àṅìnwùba > àṅìnwùba/
6. Àṅìjùba < ọ + bù + àṅì + jì + ùba
it be ani hold wealth
'It is Ala who keeps/holds wealth'
/àṅìjùba > àṅìjùba > àṅìjùba/
7. Àṅìbùde < ọ + bù + àṅì + bù + ùde
it be ani be fame
'It is Ala that has/holds fame'
/àṅìbùde > àṅìbùde > àṅìbùde/
8. Àṅìnwùde < ọ + bù + àṅì + nwè + ùde
it be ani own fame
'It is Ala who owns/possesses fame'
/àṅìnwèùde > àṅìnwùde > àṅìnwùde/
9. Àṅàràdo < àṅà + a-ràdo -go + m̄
ana vpf uphold perf 1SG
'Ala has upheld me'
/àṅàràdogo > àṅàràdo > àṅàràdo /
10. Àṅìebùo < àṅì + e- bù -go + m̄
ani vpf grow perf 1SG
'Ala has made me prosperous'
/àṅìebùgom̄ > àṅìebùgo > àṅìebùo /
11. Àṅìegbòka (Ànegbòka) < àṅì + e- gbò -ka -lu + m̄ + mkpà
ani vpf provide surpass Appl 1SG need
'Ala has provided for my need exceedingly'
/àṅìegbòkalum̄mkpà > àṅìegbòkalum̄ > àṅìegbòkalu > àṅìegbòka (ànegbòka)
12. Àṅìgbogù (Ànàgbogù) < àṅì + e- gbò -go -lu + m̄ + ògù
ani vpf intervene PERF Appl 1SG fight
'Ala has put an end to my travails'
/àṅìgbògolum̄ògù > àṅìgbògògù > àṅìgbogù > àṅìgbogù (ànàgbogù)
13. Àṅèmekà < àṅà + è- me -ka -lu + m̄
ana vpf do surpass Appl 1SG
'Ala has done exceedingly well for me'
/àṅèmekalum̄ > àṅèmekà > àṅèmekà /
14. Àṅìàgozie < àṅì + à- gozi -e -le + m̄
ani vpf bless OVS PERF 1SG
'Ala has blessed me'
/àṅìàgoziem̄ > àṅìàgozie/
15. Àṅèkèzie < àṅì + e- kèzi -e -le + m̄
ani vpf bless OVS PERF 1SG
'Ala has endowed me with prosperity'
/àṅèkèziem̄ > àṅèkèziem̄ > àṅèkèzie > àṅèkèzie/
16. Àṅèmezìe < àṅì + è- mezi -e -le + m̄

ani vpf endow OVS PERF 1SG
 ‘Ala has endowed me with prosperity’
 /àṅjèmezielem̄ > ànèèmezielem̄ > ànèèmezie > ànemezie/

17. Àṅjètò < àṅj + è- tò -go + m̄
 ani vpf extol PERF 1SG
 ‘Ala has uplifted me’
 /àṅjètògom̄ > àṅjètògo > àṅjètò/

For example, the providential name in (3) above makes a strong claim as regards Àlà. It is she alone that guarantees the safety of life and property of those who have been faithful to her. This is analogous to the biblical psalm 127:1.

3.2 Precatory names The Igbo believe that there is constant divine intervention in every facet of one’s life. On account of this, the desire for positive divine influence is realized in precatory names by means of hortative expressions. The following are examples.

18. Ànesòṅà < àṅà + e- sò -ṅà + m̄
 ana vpf follow NEG 1SG
 ‘Let Ala not come against me’
 /àṅèsòṅàm̄ > ànèsòṅàm̄ > ànèsòṅà > ànesòṅà/

19. Àṅjèbōṅā < àṅj + e- bō -ṅā + m̄
 ani vpf accuse NEG 1SG
 ‘Let Ala not accuse me of any wrong doing’
 /àṅjèbōṅām̄ > àṅjèbōṅā/

20. Ànegbùṅà < àṅà + e- gbù -ṅà + m̄
 ana vpf kill NEG 1SG
 ‘Let Ala not kill me’
 /àṅègbùṅām̄ > ànèègbùṅām̄ > ànèègbùṅā > ànegbùṅà/

21. Àlegbū < àlà + e- gbū -chū -lē + m̄
 ala vpf kill premature NEG 1SG
 ‘Let Ala not kill me at the prime of age’
 /àlàègbūchūlēm̄ > àlèègbūchūlēm̄ > àlèègbūchūlē > àlèègbūchū > àlèègbū > àlegbū/

22. Ànachūṅà < àṅà + a- chū -ṅà + m̄
 ana vpf pursue NEG 1SG
 ‘Let Ala not come against me’
 /àṅàchūṅām̄ > àṅàchūṅā > ànachūṅà/

23. Àṅjèfūṅà < àṅj + m + e- fū -ṅà
 ani 1SG vpf lose NEG
 ‘Let me not lose my inheritance’
 /àṅjèfūṅà > àṅjèfūṅà/

24. Ànekwèṅà < àṅj + e- kwè -ṅà
 ani vpf consent NEG
 ‘Let Ala not consent (to my adversaries)’
 /àṅjèkwèṅà > ànèèkwèṅà > ànekwèṅà/

25. Ànàzòṅwū < àṅà + zò -ṅ + m̄ + onwu
 ana rescue OVS 1SG death
 ‘Let Ala rescue me from death/danger’
 /àṅàzòṅwū > ànàzòṅwū > ànàzòṅwū > ànàzòṅwū/

26. Àṅjèchèbe (Àchèbe) < àṅj + chè -be + m̄
 ani guard CONT 1SG

‘Let Ala continue to guard/protect me’
/àṅìchèbēm > àṅìchèbe >(àchèbe) /

27. Àṅìkpe < àṅì + kpè -e -lụ + m̄
ani arbitrate OVS Appl 1SG
‘Let Ala arbitrate on my behalf’
/àṅìkpèelụm̄ > àṅìkpèelụ > àṅìkpèe > àṅìkpe/
28. Ànàgbàta (Àgbàta) < ànà + gbà -ta -lụ + m̄ + ọsọ + ènyèmaka
ana run forthwith Appl 1SG race help
‘Let Ala hasten to my rescue’
/ ànàgbàtalụm̄ọsọènyèmaka > ànàgbàtalụm̄ọsọ > ànàgbàtaọsọ > ànàgbàta >(àgbàta) /
29. Àlàgbamkpū < àlà + gbà -ta -ra + m̄ + ọsọ + mkpū
ala run forthwith Appl 1SG race distress call
‘Let Ala respond promptly to my distress call’
/àlàgbàtaram̄ọsọmkpū > àlàgbàtaram̄mkpū > àlàgbàtamkpū > àlàgbamkpū /
30. Àlàdum̄ < àlà + dù -be + m̄
ala guide CONT 1SG
‘Let Ala continue to guide me’
/àlàdùbēm̄ > àlàdum̄/
31. Àlàkwe < àlà + kwe
ala consent
‘Let Ala consent’
/àlàkwe/

The foregoing Àlà names are replete with exhortation. Each name makes a passionate appeal for the prompt intervention of Àlà, the awe-inspiring earth goddess. For example, the name Àṅìchèbōnā (19) expresses the wish that it is better to be indicted by a fellow man than to be accused by Àlà.

3.3 Recognition names

Recognition names confirm the intervention on the part of Àlà in the lives of the people. Such names were given in order to bear testimony in appreciation of the supportive role of Àlà.

32. Ànègbògù < ànà + e- gbò -go -lụ + m̄ + ọgù
ana vpf intervene Perf Appl 1SG fight
‘Ala has intervened in my dispute’
/ànègbògolum̄ọgù > ànègbògolum̄ọgù > ànègbògom̄ọgù > ànègbògoògù
> ànègbògù > ànègbogù > ànègbògù /
33. Àṅìkwèche < àṅì + kwù + è- che + m̄
ani stand vpf wait 1SG
‘Ala is standing by me’
/àṅìkwùèchen̄ > àṅìkwèèchen̄ > àṅìkwèèche > àṅìkwèche/
34. Àlamòkè < àlà + a- mā -ghị + okè
ala vpf know NEG boundary
‘Ala does not discriminate’
/àlàamaghịokè > àlàamàokè > àlàamòkè > àlàamòkè/
35. Ànelīngō < àṅì + a- dī è- li + ngō
ani vpf NEG vpf eat bribe
‘Ala does not accept a bribe’
/ànàadīèlingō > ànàelīngō > ànèelīngō > ànelīngō/
36. Ànamīlō (Àmilo) < ànà+ a- mā -ghị + ilo

- ana vpf know Neg hatred
 ‘Ala does not harbour any hatred’
 /ànàamāghĩlō > ànàamāilo > ànàamĩlō > ànàamīlō > ànamīlō > (àmilo) /
37. Ànekwēnsī (Ekwēnsī) < ànị a- dī + è- kwe + nsī
 ani vpf NEG vpf consent to poison/evil
 ‘Ala abhors evil’
 /ànịadịèkwēnsī > ànịekwēnsī > ànèekwēnsī > ànekwēnsī > (ekwēnsī) /
38. Àlajūnwā (Ajūnwā) < àlà + a- nā- ghị + à- jū + nnwā
 ala vpf CONT NEG vpf reject child
 ‘Ala does not discriminate against any child’
 /àlàanāghịajūnnwā > àlàajūnnwā > àlajūnnwā > àlajūnwā (ajūnwā) /
39. Àladị < àlà + a- dī -ghị + mbugha
 ala vpf be NEG carry about
 ‘Ala cannot be displaced’
 /àlàadịghịmbugha > àlàadị > àladị/
40. Àlasōnwū (Àlasō) < àlà + a- nā- ghị + à- sọ + ọnwū
 ala vpf CONT NEG vpf abhor death
 ‘Ala does not abhor death (of a scoundrel)’
 /àlàanāghịàsọnwū > àlàasōnwū > àlàasōnwū > àlasōnwū > (àlasō) /
41. Ànịèkèokwu (Ànịèkè) < ànị + a- dī -ghị + e- kè + okwū
 anị vpf be NEG vpf share trouble
 ‘Ala does not deliberately inflict problems’
 /ànịadịghịèkèokwū > ànịadịèkèokwū > ànịèkèokwu > (ànịèkè)

In recognition names, the goodwill and righteousness of Àlà is affirmed. Through such names, the earth goddess is extolled.

IV. Linguistic analysis of Àlà names

This section sets out to examine and analyze some of the linguistic processes which feature in these Àlà names. As earlier stated in section 1, Àlà names are de-sentential. The constituent elements in each of the sentences are combined in a manner compatible with the process of sentence formation in Igbo. For each sentence, the meaning is derived compositionally from the semantically transparent constituents. In other words, the overall meaning of a particular name is computed from the meanings of the constituent elements. In what follows, the rest of this section sets out to examine and analyze the linguistic processes which feature in Àlà names. The processes give rise to the simplification and brevity of some of the names. The description of the processes will be centered on the last line of such example, the line enclosed in slashes. The simplification processes include: nominalization, (rank-shifting), vowel assimilation, clipping (de-syllabification), and segment deletion.

According to Stockwell (1977:51), nominalization is a process whereby phrases or clauses which primarily function as “full predications can be thought of as having been demoted to the secondary functional status single words....” Vowel assimilation results when features of one vowel change to match those of another vowel that precedes or follows (Matthews 2007:29). In clipping, there is deletion of one or more syllables in a poly-morphemic word, whereas segment deletion involves the deletion of an individual sound segment. Following from these processes are the resultant spellings of the names. Thus, the way some of the names are written appears to make them less transparent in meaning.

At this juncture, let us consider the entry in (3), repeated here as (42).

42. Ànànéfèngwùlù < ọ + bụ + ànà + nà è- fe + ñgwùlù
 it be ana ^{CONT} vpf shield homestead
 ‘It is Ala who shields/protects the homestead’
 /ànànéfèngwùlù > ànànéfèngwùlù > ànànéfèngwùlù/

The sentential names in (3)-(8) are instances of the focus construction, a discourse feature which is syntactically coded by clefting. The focused constituent, Àlà, occurs at the beginning of the second part of the cleft sentence. The cleft sentence begins with the expletive 3SG subject pronoun ọ, followed by the copula verb

bù (cf. Mutaka, 2000:216). The choice of the cleft sentence is to bring the subject NP Ànà (Àlà) into prominence. The name giver has used this discourse structure to enable him assert that Àlà is the sole source of protection.

Prior to nominalization, the cleft sentence undergoes simplification as the expletive 3SG subject pronoun *o* and the copula verb *bù* are deleted. Thereafter, the second part of the cleft sentence is nominalised. This is realized as the first entry in the line enclosed in slashes. The nominalised structure acts as input to the process of regressive assimilation as the third vowel (V) segment assimilates the qualities of the V segment to its right. The output of this process is further simplified by syncope involving the deletion of the assimilated V segment. The final output is now realized as the last item in the last line, which is the same as the first entry in the first line.

Now, the entries in (9)-(17) will be illustrated with (9), shown below as (43).

43. Ànaràdo < ànà + a- ràdo -go + m̄
 ana vpf uphold PERF 1SG
 ‘Ala has upheld me’
 /ànàràdogom̄ > ànàràdom̄ > ànàràdo > ànaràdo/

The nominalised form is first simplified by the de-syllabification of the perfective marker *-go*. Subsequently, the 1SG pronoun *m̄* is deleted. In the form that emerges, the VV sequence is simplified by the deletion of the *pf a-*.

The names in (18)-(31) are hortative expressions. Example (25) is a canonical example of a hortative sentence which is realized by the HT open vowel suffix (OVS) which immediately follows the verb. This example is repeated here as (44).

44. Ànàzọnwū < ànà + zọ -o + m̄ + ọnwū
 ana rescue OVS 1SG death
 ‘Let Ala rescue me from death/danger’
 /ànàzọm̄onwū > ànàzọonwū > ànàzọnwū > ànàzọnwū/

The last V segment of the verb form *zọ* is a HT OVS which features in the Igbo hortative construction. The simplification of the nominalised structure starts with the deletion of the 1SG pronoun *m̄*, and that of the OVS. This is followed by the deletion of the penultimate vowel *o*.

The final examples will be drawn from (26) and (37), represented here as (45a) and (45b) respectively.

- 45a. Ànìchèbe (Àchèbe) < ànì + chè -be + m̄
 anì guard Cont 1SG
 ‘Let Ala continue to guard/protect me’
 /ànìchèbem̄ > ànìchèbe > (àchèbe) /

- 45b. Ànìekwēnsī (Ekwēnsī) < ànì + a- ðī + è- kwe + nsī
 anì vpf NEG vpf consent to poison/evil
 ‘Ala abhors evil’
 /ànìàðìekwensī > ànìekwēnsī > (ekwēnsī) /

In example (45a) the 1SG pronoun deletes. This is followed by the deletion of the second syllabic segment *nì*, giving rise to the form *àchèbe*. With regard to (45b), the NEG marker *àðì* undergoes de-affixation, resulting to a VV sequence. Subsequently, the initial VCV sequence (*ànì*) is clipped to derive the form *ekwēnsī*.

To summarise, it has to be noted that sententially, Àlà names are structurally simple. They exhibit the basic verb-medial word order of the language. There are however no pre and post modifiers. The personal reference in these sentences is restricted to the first person singular pronoun *m̄* which more often undergoes deletion (cf. Awoyale, 1982:79).

V. Summary and conclusion

This study has tried to draw attention to the significance of Àlà anthroponyms. These names were hitherto used as forenames given to children at birth by their parents. Through such names the Igbo expressed their belief and attitude towards Àlà, the earth goddess. The sheer number of Àlà names and their meanings bear

testimony to the people's belief in the overwhelming influence which Àlà exerted on virtually all aspects of their life.

From the point of view of linguistic analysis, the paper accounted for the de-sentential source of Àlà anthroponyms. The meaning of each name is derived compositionally, given the semantic transparency of the constituent elements of each sentence. A sample of these names was used to illustrate the various processes of simplification involved in the derivation. These processes give rise to the different pronunciations and spellings associated with these names. As a result, the meanings of some of these names tend to be obscured.

In conclusion, it has to be pointed out that people no longer bear Àlà names as their forenames. This is largely due to the erosion of the tenets of Igbo traditional religious life by the advent of Christianity and the new wave of Christian fundamentalism. Thus, Àlà names are now only retained and used as surnames by families whose fore-bearers had such names as their forenames. It is therefore advocated that serious attention should be given to Igbo anthroponymy as a means of documenting and preserving this aspect of the Igbo world view.

Abbreviations

APPL – applicative marker, CONT– continuative marker, NEG – negation marker, ^{ovs} – open vowel suffix, PERF – perfective marker, vpf – vowel prefix, C- consonant, V – vowel, 1SG – first person singular pronoun, 3SG – third person singular pronoun.

Notes

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