A socio-onomastic categorisation of Erei personal names

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    Abstract: This study explores the sociocultural categories of Erei personal names and investigates naming from the account of socio-onomastics theory, which interrogates names in relations to the social contexts in which they are given and used. The data were generated through participant observations and semi-structured interviews involving 36 participants, using a purposive sampling method. It is observed that the names and naming system in Erei are conceived in diverse meaning orientations, informed by the different situational contexts at birth, experiences and historical resonances. As elements of social communication, the names bear sociological, pragmatic and communicative significations that perform situated social functions that interconnect with Erei's common origin, collective existence and shared experience. The article

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concludes that personal names in Erei are reflections of the complex realities and the sociocultural identities of the Erei people.

Keywords: Ethnographic study, socio-onomastics, naming tradition, personal names, Erei.

De la catégorisation socio-onomastique des noms de personnes en Erei

Résumé : Cette étude explore les catégories socioculturelles des noms de personnes en Erei et examine la dénomination du point de vue de la théorie socio-onomastique, qui interroge les noms en relation avec les contextes sociaux dans lesquels ils sont donnés et utilisés. Les données ont été générées à partir d'observations de participants et d'entretiens semi-structurés impliquant 36 participants, en utilisant une méthode d'échantillonnage intentionnel. On observe que les noms et le système d'attribution des noms en Erei sont conçus dans diverses orientations de sens, informées par les différents contextes situationnels à la naissance, les expériences et les résonances historiques. En tant qu'éléments de communication sociale, les noms portent des significations sociologiques, pragmatiques et communicatives qui remplissent des fonctions sociales situées, liées à l'origine commune, à l'existence collective et à l'expérience partagée d'Erei. L'article conclut que les noms personnels en Erei sont le reflet des réalités complexes et des identités socioculturelles du peuple Erei.

Mots-clés : Étude ethnographique, socio-onomastique, tradition de dénomination, noms de personnes, Erei.

Eine sozio-onomastische Kategorisierung von Erei-Personennamen

Zusammenfassung: Diese Studie untersucht die soziokulturellen Kategorien von Erei-Personennamen und untersucht die Benennung anhand sozio-onomastischer Theorie, die Namen in Bezug auf die sozialen Kontexte, in denen sie vergeben und verwendet werden, hinterfragt. Die Daten wurden durch teilnehmende Beobachtung und semistrukturierte Interviews mit 36 Teilnehmern unter Verwendung einer gezielten Stichprobenmethode gesammelt. Es konnte beobachtet werden, dass die Namen und das Namenssystem im Erei in unterschiedlichen Bedeutungsorientierungen verankert sind, die von den verschiedenen Kontexten bei der Geburt, bestimmten Erfahrungen und historischen Kontexten geprägt sind. Als Elemente der sozialen Kommunikation tragen die Namen soziologische, pragmatische und kommunikative Bedeutungen, die situierte soziale Funktionen erfüllen, die mit der gemeinsamen Herkunft, kollektiven Existenz und geteilten Erfahrung der Erei in Verbindung stehen. Der Artikel kommt zu dem Schluss, dass Personennamen im Erei die komplexen Realitäten und die soziokulturelle Identität des Volkes der Erei widerspiegeln.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Ethnographische Studie, Sozioonomastik, Namenstradition, Personennamen, Erei.

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1. Introduction

Although naming practice is a universal phenomenon, there are remarkable variations and idiosyncrasies in the naming system across cultures that communicate the peculiarity of the bearers, users and name-givers. Onomastic communication is a cross-cultural phenomenon that encompasses the historical origins of names and their interconnectedness with the sociocultural context of the people that bear them (Bright 2003). Cultural differences determine the variety of names and naming system that account for how people give, bear, view, interpret and use names in sociocultural contexts.

Names are linguistic items whose meanings are beyond the denotative interpretations in many contexts. The linguistic meanings of names are denotative or connotative in some cultures and only offer the basis upon which other sociocultural meanings, including the motivations behind the names, branch off (Ntahombaye 1983; Batoma 2006, 2009). The linguistic considerations of names are not generalisable. The referents are the instances of the particular bearers; they do not show evidence of co-references, semantic entailments or ambiguity (Katz 1977). Names suggest more than arbitrary symbols to communicate the complex meanings transmittable in the given sociocultural contexts. What the assertion implies is that "names can have some central meanings other than the simple identification of the bearers" (Baltes 1991: 75). Some scholars are of the view that names do not possess lexical meaning but only refer to certain entities (Evans-Pritchard 1966; Geertz 1973; Kripke 1980). Others believe that names convey certain meanings which are interpretable in given sociocultural contexts (Darden 1983; Van Langendonck 2004, 2005, 2007; Colman 2014). In the African context, personal names are believed to convey meaning orientations, ranging from sociocultural, religious, cosmic, endearments, family genealogy, and memory to sociopragmatic (Akinnaso 1980; Ansu-Kyeremeh 2000; Vittmann 2013; Mensah & Mekamgoum 2017). Such meanings result from "complex social negotiations, learned, interpreted and reified through socialization" (Leslie & Skipper 1990: 273). The variables altogether form a network of interpretations that define the collective experience of the people.

Contact issues have an influence on naming practices. The geography of a people, their continuous co-existence in a changing world, and their contact with non-indigenous cultures, religions and languages are likely to have an

impact on the names they bear. Language contact has a symbolic influence on the less 'powerful' and recipient language. Mensah (2015), in a study on personal names in language contact situations in Cross River State, Nigeria, affirms that some personal names in the region are an aspect of the communities' increasing contact with other languages and cultures. Hough (2016) reiterates that contact issues often result in lexical borrowing which occurs in the borrowing of loan words and names. Kimenyi (1989: 9) ascertains that "a name may be a loan-word, that is a word from a foreign language" which English is in this circumstance. Uwen's (2019) study on English loanwords as lexical enrichment to the Erei language agrees that the English lexical elements and personal names in Erei are evidence of her contact with English. The bilingual and bicultural identities of some Erei people suggest their attachment to the Western language and culture; the personal names "reveal this in several levels of social interactions" (Uwen & Ukam 2020: 95). In such social interactions where the names mentioned, they demonstrate the "hybridised identities […] which is a colonial feature […] [that] tells us of how people are linguistically conscious of their environment" (Ellah & Uwen & Aboh 2021: 185).

Personal names are also aspects of individual and collective identity. At the individual level, personal name constitutes a privileged part of the social personality, an individualised identity and a symbolic representation of self upon which a person could be defined, described and located (Erny 1981: 61). Laing (1985) avers that since personal names communicate the different sociocultural practices of the bearers, the names in such contexts become the collective identity of the speech community. Personal names, as a property of a given society, are the symbolic representation of the group's identity labels that express the circumstances concerning the people and their peculiar beliefs (Dakubu 1981; Egblewogbe 1985; Wappa & Abanga 2013). The import of this is that personal names are representations of the identities of the users which could be linguistic, religious, cultural, social, and philosophical, and the reference to their origin and existence, which collectively define their uniqueness.

Personal name is a symbolic source of symbolic communication that conveys family and cultural information from the name-giver and bearer. Ngubane (2013: 165) argues that names and naming practices reflect the family and cultural background of any particular society. So, from the name bearer to the community where the name exists, a personal name has a communicative signification for the people and their social environment that marks the continuity of their genealogical and cultural preserves. Wappa & Wada (2019) have established that Africa has the referential naming practice which, aside from its connectedness with families and cultures, also accounts for the circumstances surrounding the child, the parent(s), or communal (un)pleasant experience. In events where the prevailing circumstances influence the names bestowed on the bearers, naming in such instances becomes the site for the expression of emotions by the name-givers.

Socio-onomastics studies in Nigeria have also revealed similar sociocultural orientations in personal names and naming systems which depend on the ethnolinguistic backgrounds of the name givers and bearers. For instance, Akinnaso (1980), Adeniyi (2004) and Ikotun (2010), in separate studies, reveal that Yoruba personal names are reflections of the sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts of the people which account for the unique experience of the name-givers and bearers. Furthermore, Essien (1986) reveals that the structure and meaning of Ibibio personal names are socioculturally conceived and provide clues to knowledge of aspects of the language. In another study, Mensah (2009), citing Ibibio, Igbo and Yoruba as examples, argues that Nigerian indigenous personal names reflect the cultural beliefs and the lexical, phrasal and clausal aspects of the languages. Onomajuru (2016) claims that Igbo names wield cultural meanings and perform social functions within the worldview of the Ibos. Similarly, on same Igbo names, Mensah & Iloh (2021) examine the representation of wealth as an aspect of the cultural values, beliefs and expectations in the Igbo naming system. Imoh (2018) argues that Basa personal names in North Central Nigeria are reflections of their sociocultural values, philosophy, historical and linguistic preserve and the beliefs that communicate their collective existence. Chamo's (2013) study on the pragmatic and symbolic nature of Hausa personal names shows that they are based on the sociocultural and ethnopragmatic contexts that reveal the interface between the names, the language and the cultural practices of the people. Personal names of Nigerian origin, as the sources have revealed, bear situated meanings that are connected to their sociocultural enclaves. They serve as social identities and referents to particular people and circumstances. The personal names in various contexts appear to play multiple sociopragmatic roles: first as a referent to the bearer, as interpretable by his or her ethnic group, and as an identity marker that defines the ethnolinguistic origin of the bearer. Erei appears to follow the naming pattern of some ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria.

Erei is a generic name for a minority ethnic group and their language. The language belongs to the Benue-Congo phylum of the Western subgroup of the Upper Cross River languages and is spoken by Erei people in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria (Inya 2011; Uwen 2018). The Erei people have rich cultural heritage and festivals that are seasonal, circumstantial, gendered, religious, hierarchical and archetypical. Erei occupies the Westnorthern flank of Biase, having boundaries with the Igbo, Ubahara, Agwagune, Adim and the Bahumono. Intermarriages and cultural contacts with their neighbours, the impact of colonialism and Western education have had remarkable influence on Erei culture. The people are seasoned farmers, fishermen, petty traders, and patrilineal in nature where the men are bestowed with the power to give names to their children eight days (or above) after birth and circumcision. In such ceremonies, the relatives and elders are mandatory attendees to give optional approval as the culture prescribes. There is no known (accessible) study(ies) on the names and naming system in Erei. The dearth of

studies on the ethnographic and socio-onomastics account of Erei personal names and the naming system informed this study. The study aims to fill the missing link by providing clues to the socio-onomastics of Erei personal names through their thematic categorisation and meanings within the sociocultural context of the people.

2. Theoretical framework

Socio-onomastics is the relevant framework in studies on personal names in ethnographic research. The theory accounts for the history, origin, variations and contexts of names in relation to the name-givers, bearers and users. The variables are derived from "different societal and cultural registers" (Nicolaisen 1985: 123). Commenting on the insights, Hough (2016) asserts that socio-onomastics offers new insights into names, naming, naming systems and the varieties related to their etymology senses. Clark (2005: 452) corroborates this, averring that before a word qualifies for a name, "it has to be separated from the etymological sense, in such a way that the sound-sequence, no matter how complex its structure or plain its surface, meaning becomes a pointer."

The plainness or complexity of the names points to situated meaning derived from certain interpretable criteria which have mutual intelligibility among the given society that bears and uses them. Socio-onomastics investigates the variety and use of personal names in relation to the sociocultural and situational contexts of their usage. It has been reiterated that socio-onomastics research in personal names is meant to explore the variation in the popularity of names, name-giving, grounds, names practices and the situational variations upon which they occur (Hough 2016; Ainiala & Östman 2017). These insights provide clues to the fact that naming practice is a universal event that vary across cultures in terms of the types of names, the structural compositions, the sociocultural meanings and the sociopragmatic functions they perform within the worldview of the name bearers, users and givers.

By this provision, it is possible also, as it is in the African context, that Erei personal name bestowal is informed by diverse factors which account for certain situated experience(s) in the complex environment of the people, ranging from the individual to the community. Erei is known for her cultural heritage, natural environment and the occupations they engage for the sustenance of their lives, which are believed to manifest in their naming practice. These insights are useful to the socio-onomastics and ethnographic analysis of personal names in Erei. Socio-onomastics theory is relevant to the study because the perceptions position Erei as a distinct sociolinguistic environment with people of multiple and collective experiences that shape their naming practices that express their worldview in the meanings the bear and the social functions they perform. Many studies dwell on socio-onomastics in the analysis of Nigerian indigenous names. For instance, Ikotun (2010), Chamo (2013), Onomajuru (2016) and

Imoh (2018) depended on the insights from socio-onomastics in the explication of Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo and Bassa personal names respectively.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative method for data collection and analysis that elucidate the participants' opinions based on the communicative relevance of the selected Erei personal names. Data were collected in the ethnography-based field work in Erei natural (native speakers) environment for a period of six months. A total of 36 participants were recruited and willing to participate in the research. The participants willingly indicated an interest in participating in the exercise by writing (and after interpretation) before they were interviewed. The criteria for their selection were their in-depth knowledge of the sociocultural context of the Erei naming practices. The participants were the name bearers, givers and users. The participants' ages ranged between 18 and 80, purposively decided by the researchers to provide the diachronic trend of the names if necessary. Ten participants were selected, each within the age range of 18–40 and 41–60, while 16 were drawn from the age range of 61–80 to give 27.8 percent, 27.8 percent and 44.4 percent respectively. Other demographic data of the participants considered by the researchers include education (26 were educated with Secondary School Certificate and above while ten were not educated, representing 72.2 and 27.8 percent), gender (20 are males while 16 are females, which represents 55.6 and 44.4 percent), occupation (24 were farmers, eight civil servants and four were engaged in petty trading, representing 66.7, 22.2 and 11.1 percent) and religion (26 were Christians while 10 were traditionalists, representing 72.2 and 27.8 percent) respectively.

Ethnographic research methods were used to source the data. They include participants observations, semi-structured interviews and field notes. The questions were informally structured to elicit information on the meanings and motivations for the personal names. The methods served different purposes. For instance, participant observation enabled the researchers to freely observe the participants' use of their names in the native speaker context. The semi-structured interviews helped the researchers to know the sociocultural meanings, contexts and other motivations that informed the names. Finally, the field notes were used to record some salient aspects of the interviews and interactions. The relevant data that aligned with the conceptions and views of the participants were coded based on the motivations that informed the bestowal of such names before subjecting the entire data to interpretive analysis. The interpretive approach is integral to qualitative research because it offers in the desired explication of the collective realities of the personal names in Erei.

4. Data analysis and discussion

In this study, the factors that influence the naming and name-giving practices in Erei are subdivided into eight categories. The categorisation is based on motivations for the names. There are names motivated by religious factors, Anglicisation, commemoration, circumstance(s) at birth, days of birth, the immediate environment, kingship affiliation and birth order.

4.1. Religious names

The first category of personal names considered for analysis is religious-based and believed to be associated with colonialism. Colonialism has had enormous influence on Nigeria, particularly on its religious and linguistic legacies. Consequently, there are names associated with the Christian religion.

Table 1: Religious names

Name	Erei version	Gloss
Joseph	*Jo'sefu*	'May God add more'
Jeremiah	*Je'rimaya*	'God will rise'
Samson	*Sam'sin*	'Sunlight'
Sarah	*Si'ra*	'Princess'
Salome	*Sa'lomi*	'Peaceable'

In the religious sphere, Mazrui (1986) observes that Western (Christianity) has transferred to Africa its own concept of Christian, Euro-Hebraic, Semitic or Biblical pool of names to choose from. In the Erei context, Uwen (2019: 58) sees religious names as aspects of lexical enrichment to the Erei language:

> English names that Erei bear [are a] a result of Christianity which is the prominent religion in the area brought by the White missionaries […] the names are Christian names originating from the implantation of the religion through the people's encounter with the early missionaries […].

The personal names convey the religious orientation of the Erei people and "are meant to express religiosity and contextually devised to communicate the religious consciousness of [the Erei] interlocutors" (Uwen 2020: 124). An octogenarian participant revealed that "we were practicing our traditional religion when the English missionaries came with the Christian religion, they converted us, and gave us baptismal names, and encouraged us to believe in their religion, this is the origin of Christian names in Erei". In Table 1, *Joseph*, *Jeremiah*, *Samson*, *Sarah* and *Salome*, adapted into the orthographic structure of Erei, are examples of Christian religion-based personal names that re-enact and emphasise the people's affiliation, attachment and belief in the tenets of Christianity.

4.2. Anglicised names

The implantation of English in Nigeria has created linguistic pluralism and the preference for everything that is English. On this, Uwen & Bassey & Nta (2020: 399) posit that "this multifactorial influential situation has created the pressure for the stimulation for a changing linguistic behaviour that enhances the preference of English." The contact between English and Erei has an enormous influence on the Erei naming practice. Examples of English names that Erei people bear are demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Anglicised names

Name	Erei version	Gloss
Edwin	*E'duwin*	'Rich and happy'
Edith	*'Editi*	'Rich and happy'
Lawrence	*Lo'rensi*	'Bright one'
Fortune	*Fo'tun(u)*	'Asset'
Glory	*Gu'lori*	'Magnificence'

The names in Table 2 are examples of Anglicised personal names that Erei people give and bear as loan names (words) to express their bilingual, bicultural and sociocultural identities. *Edwin*, *Edith*, *Lawrence*, *Fortune* and *Glory* are phonologically adapted to Erei among the many personal names that are Anglicised, and suggestive of the people's contact with the English or English language. *Fortune* and *Glory* (English words) belong to an emerging category of English names in Erei that are deviations from the English naming practices. A participant lamented that "English names are gradually taking over the position of our traditional first names and even surfacing in our middle names; this is not a good trend." On the pronunciation of the indigenised English names, as reflected in the Erei version in Table 2, a participant said, "although we borrow English personal names because of our contact with them, we pronounce the names in our way." On the view of the participant, Mensah (2015) acknowledges that borrowed names can be phonologically adapted into the onomasticon of the recipient language(s). Hough (2016) corroborates that loan names are regularly adapted to the sound system of the recipient language, which occurs as a translation or is substituted by similar sounds in the L1 of the speakers. Personal names have associative meanings through their phonological shape, Englishization and globalization because of the English origin (Zenner et al. 2015). As the participant reveals, the endangerment English poses to Erei names is the same threatening trend with other Nigerian indigenous languages where advocacy is needed to preserve. However, the emerging variation in the naming culture is in agreement with the dynamics of the society. The use of English personal names in non-native environments is what Gottlieb (2014) describes as Englishization (see also 4.2). By so doing, Erei name-givers have indicated their cultural identification with English (language) and its culture from where the names originated.

4.3. Commemorative names

Another category of Erei personal names consists of those borne to commemorate the dead and living loved ones as a way of immortalising them.

Table 3: Commemorative names

Names	Gloss
`Udimé	'He/she is not forgotten'
Ákeasém	'The mother of her own father'
Ákeakém	'The mother of her own mother'
Áseakém	'The father of her own father'
Áseasém	'The father of her own father'

The names, as their meanings suggest, are commemorative. Seeman (1983: 237) agrees that "most names are conferred, in part, as an act of commemoration, an attempt to remember and keep alive a person who has died, an effort to ease bereavement by symbolic reincarnation, the creation of a namesake." Names in this category become a memory pointer to one's past (Alderman 2016). Aligning with Seeman (1983) and Alderman's (2016) stance, the personal names above are reflections on the dead ancestor who had (probably) reincarnated in line with Erei traditional beliefs. For instance, `Udimé reminds the name-givers of a dear one who cannot be forgotten; Ákeasém, Ákeakém, Áseakém and Áseasém are symbolic reminders of death and a rehearsal of reincarnation as an ideological preserve of the Erei people. Also, genealogical names like Úwèn 'divine guest', Èdadí 'planted to bear fruits', Ukám 'life tree' and Ílèm 'owned for our good,' among others, are commemorative because they represent families as identity preservation of their dead fathers. The personal names that have living referents are commemorative as admirable pointers to the qualities of or friendship with the name giver. A participant captured it this way "the only way we immortalise our ancestors is through our names, we do it to remember and honour them. And we also practice the namesake culture to remember the good deeds of friends and even strangers, so when the names are mentioned, we remember the person too." In the Erei naming system, as the participant has also revealed, a commemorative name is a form of honour conferred significantly on the dead and partly on the living within the traditional dictates of the naming practices of the people. It is a sociocultural mechanism of legitimising a past (or present) relative, dear one, an event, friendship or a relationship into the social context of the name givers.

4.4. Names based on circumstance(s) at birth

Erei also bear names that reflect the circumstance(s) at the birth of a child which could be (un)pleasant. Names in this category are demonstrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Names based on circumstance(s) at birth

Names	Gloss
Ètibu̩k	'Someone or family abandoned when they need help'
Wo̩so̩m	'Describes a family that is expecting a male child'
O̩bíni̩	'Suffering is bad'
O̩nyi̩	'A child born after a long wait'
Èffá̩o̩nun	'Describes life-threatening circumstance(s) at birth'
I̩mio̩dlo̩p	'A child born after a very long period of "barrenness"'
U̩tú	'Named after a child who was born after two more stillbirths'
Ádo̩nasé	'A child born when the father is so much in love with the mother'
Èjeko̩	'The day of war'
I̩gbé	'No more death'

Each of the names above accounts for one or more events surrounding the child, parent(s) or the community during the child's birth. For instance, *Ètibu̩k* is a reflection on the parents' abandonment while in need during the pregnancy, *Wo̩so̩m* represents a family that is expectant of a male child and *O̩bíni̩* connotes that no sort of suffering is worth experiencing. *O̩nyi̩* and *I̩mio̩dlo̩p* represent a (very) long wait by the couple before conception, *Èffá̩o̩nun* is a signification for a child who had life-threatening birth but was saved by God, while *U̩tú* and *I̩gbé* are an advanced rejection of death, associated with parents who had lost one or more children. Also, *Ádo̩nasé* is a child born when the husband is showing much love and devotion to the mother while *Èjeko̩* is a child born during a war.

Meanings explication of names in this category depend on the past experiences and situational context of the giver(s), especially the parents of the bearer. On this, a participant argued that "it is only the parents, family or community that can understand the different past experiences at the birth of the child which were the motivations of the name giver, we tie our past experiences to the personal names we bear." This agrees with the claim that "how individuals experience names cannot be fully understood without the revelation of situational and contextual exigencies" (Leslie & Skipper 1990: 274). Erei beliefs relate to the recreation of opportunities to account for and reflect the past, which helps in the realignment of the present and a projection for the future.

4.5. Day-based names

Erei naming practices are also influenced by the day and/or season of birth of the bearer. The days and/or seasons have sociocultural and traditional significance to the people as presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Names influenced by the day of birth

Names	Gloss
Eké	'First market day'
Ibụm	'Second market day'
Ikpọ	'Third market day'
Monday (*Mọnde*)	'Second day of the week'
Friday (*Fraide*)	'Sixth day of the week'
Sunday (*Sande*)	'First day of the week'

Unlike the English week system which has seven days, Erei week system has four days; *Eké, Ibụm, Irei* and *Ikpọ*, which are all market days. Except for *Irei*, which according to the participants, symbolises masculinity, the other weekdays are feminine and culturally symbolic. They are significations for femininity which connote fertility, productivity, serenity and hope, and are therefore assigned to females. The English weekdays, particularly Monday, Friday and Sunday, which Erei assign as personal names, are restricted to males. The indigenous weekdays are assigned to females while the English's are for males, but the common feature of both, irrespective of gender is that they are day-based. A participant and a civil servant reports that "the market days are named after women because the days offer them the opportunity to socialise among themselves and assist one another, and for us to create wealth which symbolically expresses femininity." This agrees with Schegloff's (1972) argument that certain names are informed by the gender of the bearer. This conception delineates gendered ideologies and advocates the development of the gendered self. The procreative role of women in childbearing is synonymous with the economic productivity embedded in the market days. These associative features informed the ideological and sociocultural motivations that informed the connection of the days (names) with femininity.

4.6. Names derived from the environment

Lyons (1977) notes that the essence of the subject of semantics is to account for meaning which particularly signifies the concepts, events, objects and other things around our environment. Erei personal names that are derived from the environment and its non-human inhabitants are listed below.

Table 6: Names influenced by the environment

Names	Gloss
Èkpe	'Lion'
Jép	'Crocodile'
Ụgo	'Eagle'
Èbụ	'Boa'
Udọp	'Flood'
Ịnyáng	'River'
Àbanị	'Night'
Ukpọ	'Ogbeche tree'
Ọdumúsọ	'Communal forest'
Ọ̀bin	'A highly valued species of yam'
Ètán	'Stone'

Personal names in Table 6 are referents to the physical environment, particularly flora and fauna, and other things within the Erei landscape. In the sociocultural context of the Erei people, each personal name is a symbolic referent to the associated qualities of the referred element. For instance, *Èkpe, Jép* and *Èbụ* are significations for bravery, courage, doggedness, exploit and the patriarchal notion of hunting for prey (food) for the family. This pattern takes the order of the Datoog naming culture that gives names of animals based on the associated characteristics (Charwi 2019). *Ụgo* symbolises feminine beauty and the quest to aim higher which are associated qualities of the eagle and synonymous with contemporary feminists' ideals. *Udọp* and *Ịnyáng* represent expansive annexation and fruitfulness. *Ukpọ, Ọdumúsọ* and *Ètán* signify God's given strength, longevity and indestructible nature. *Ábani* symbolises peace and long rest, while *Obin* represents the high value of bearer synonymous with (or even more than) the value Erei people place on that special species of yam. A participant reiterates that the livelihood and survival of the Erei depend on the environment and its habitat, and they have appropriated names to continuously connect them with flora and fauna. The topographic names provide the connectivity and interrelation between humans, plants and animals bound by the natural circle of life and mortality. The association of a high frequency of this category of names with the male gender recalls the people's beliefs on the sociocultural features of masculinity. Men's vigorous, adventurous, explorative, daring and persevering attributes get them closer to the environment and its habitats than the females. They explore flora and fauna in search of food for the family and items of economic value to sustain the family.

4.7. Names based on kingship terms

Erei language has a pool of kingship terms used as identification for kings. Names have been identified as linguistic items of a particular language, and in some instances, they are chosen from the pool of kinship terms (Seeman 1983; Houis 1983; Charwi 2019). Erei personal names that suit this categorisation are mentioned below.

Table 7: Names influenced by kingship ties

Names	Gloss
Ọnun	'King/a wealthy person'
Ènun	'Wealth'
Wọnun	'Related to kingship'
Úwomọnun	'The paternity of kingship'
Úlọnun	'The king's heir'
Úluọgbọgọnun	'The king's right hand (strength)'

Ọnun and Wọnun are kingship names within the Erei sociocultural context. Because of this practice, Ọnun and Wọnun become prefixations and endearment terms attached to the family names of the bearer(s). Ènun (wealth) on the other hand, is a name associated with people of the kingship class. This is because beyond the possession of the prerequisite traditional characteristics, it is the common belief among the Erei people that kings are (or should be) wealthy in nature. This belief is linked to other cultures in Nigeria. For instance, Ibos "use personal names to reflect a set of values, beliefs, and experiences about the concept of wealth" (Mensah & Iloh 2021: 405). Úwomọnun connotes paternity in the kingship lineage which is considered for coronation where the king dies without a male child. Úlọnun is named after the king's heir, who is conferred with certain privileges as the Erei culture prescribes. Úluọgbọgọnun communicates the king's right hand which connotes strength. The context of kingship in Erei, as it is in most African names (particularly Zulu in South Africa) are influenced by "family and kingship structures" (Ngubane 2013: 165). In Erei cultural practice, the coronation of kingship is influenced by gender, age, paternal family lineage and social status. One of the most vital features of this category of names associated with kingship is that they are masculine in nature. A participant explains this aspect of Erei naming practice this way: "here, women cannot be kings, they cannot rule us. So, any name that is associated with kingship cannot be given to a woman". The Erei culture, in this aspect, reenacts patrilineal and patriarchal ideologies that set limits to the woman on leadership positions and responsibilities which is parallel with modern gender consciousness and advocacy for gender equality.

4.8. Names based on birth order

The final category of names is those influenced by the birth position of the child, which is especially pronounced in the names among male children. The names discussed here are explained below.

Table 8: Names influenced by birth order

Names	Gloss
Ogbán	'First male child'
Áhọasém	'The second son'
Áhọakém	'The first female child'
Ilemerei	'Third male child (in Ilem's family)'
Ugbairim	'Last born'

Names in Erei, depending on the factor(s) that influenced their bestowal, bear certain meanings and perform certain social functions. Birth order names in Erei have sociocultural relevance in terms of the social power it wields in the exercise of family and communal rights. For instance, Ọgbán (the first male

child) in Erei cultural context is recognised as the next to his father in terms of the structure and strata of social power. The first male child is bestowed with a quasi-father's authority and the customs permit him to get the largest portion of inheritance in the event of the father's death. To be accorded the authority, the father must subject the bearer to pass through specific *Ábu̱* and *Úhu̱m* initiations for the first male children. *Aḥo̱asém* is the second son, and in Erei tradition, he wields lesser authority but proportionately higher than the third male child (*Ilemereí*), while *U̱gbairim* (the last born) exercises the least among the (male) siblings. The construction of femininity among siblings is represented by the name *Áḥo̱akém*, bequeathed to the first daughter in the naming practice in Erei. In Erei customs, the first daughter only has entitlements from her mother's wealth during marriage, where she gets the largest gifts and in the event of death, tradition allows her to inherit the deceased mother's property. The unequal bestowal of cultural privileges to the male and female children reenacts the patriarchal structures that shape the cultural practices.

5. Conclusion

In Erei, personal names are cultural symbols to fill the individual identity space in the sociocultural context of the people and the realities that define them. Erei personal names are not mere linguistic labels but sociocultural identities for the social communication of the (shared) experience of the bearers and/or the name-givers. The personal names are categorised on the motivations for bestowing them on the bearers which include religious affiliation, contact with other languages and cultures, the day and circumstance of birth, birth order, kingship terms and those derived from the flora and fauna that sustain the livelihood of the people. All the categories collectively communicate the social identities which are explicated within the sociocultural worldview of the Erei people. The language of the people is also conveyed through the personal names they bear and become cultural devices for the preservation of some lexical elements. The names perform sociopragmatic functions and connect the people with their past and present, and re-root them with their sociocultural narratives. This paper is significant as a pilot study in the onomastics interpretation of Erei personal names; it has demonstrated the practices in Erei naming system, which become the basis for comparison with the naming cultures of other ethnocultural groups. The participants' cooperation in the aspect of data generation is pivotal to the success of this study which has situated the field of Socio-onomastics in the explication of Erei personal names. The study has positive implications for future research on Erei personal names because it has developed available insights and reference material for the scholarship. It is recommended that studies on the diachronic and synchronic patterns of Erei personal names be investigated to show the trend in Erei naming practice in the changing world.

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