Review Article

Decoding the Practices and Beliefs of a People through their System of Naming: The Case of the Oku People in the North West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract: This article is conceived to state what is enclosed in a name in the Oku language. It analyses Oku names, their origins and meanings with intent to illustrate how the lexical choices of the Oku people determine their role relationships and suggest their patterns of life. It also examines the implications that follow and may follow from such a system of naming. Lyons (1977: 207) posits: Every utterance occurs in a culturally determined context-of-situation, and the meaning of the utterance is the totality of its contributions to the maintenance of (...) the patterns of life in the society in which the speaker lives and to the affirmation of the speaker's role and personality within the society. The meaning of a word is greatly determined by the context-of-situation. The participants involved in communication, their intentions of communication as well as their environment matter a lot for words and expressions to be meaningful and to achieve the goals of interlocutors. The same message, said in different contexts, will or may produce different effects. This is evident in the literal translation of words from Oku to English. Findings show that Oku people are a peculiar people with a peculiar language that was created by their founding ancestors to serve immediate and specific purposes and this language has kept on evolving with the evolution of time so as to meet contemporary needs. In the course of evolution, neologisms have been coined and integrated into the language system, and words and expressions have been borrowed from neighbouring languages and even from the English language to handle new realities. A critical exploration of the names in Oku shows that the culture of the Oku people is embedded in their system of naming.
Keywords: illustrate, lexical choices, utterance, language.

INTRODUCTION

Oku is a village and a subdivision in Bui Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. It comprises seven extended family groups, all from the Tikari ancestry, that nature converged from different biological relationships to form a large family that was later named Oku. The seven family groups that constitute Oku are the *mbele, ebdzeng, mbulum, ediom, ekem, ebdzeh* and *eblum.* One can travel to Oku either from Bamenda via Babungo, kom, Nso, Noni depending on one's geographical location.

Oku people use tropical plants traditionally to cure diseases. The Oku man values life and does all to preserve it by conceiving natural concoctions that are meant to heal and not to kill. They belong to most of the main religions in the world, especially the Christian faith (spearheaded by the Baptist, the Catholic and the Presbyterian sub groups), and the Muslim faith. Nowadays, emerging denominations are not left out in Oku. This is evident by the organization of miracle crusades in this area by Pentecostal denominations.

Oku people are intuitive geniuses, and when learned or reasoned knowledge is added to their intuition they become excellent intellectuals. The Oku man is so hard-working that one can hardly find a single family that cannot subsist without external help on a daily basis. They are engaged in livestock and agriculture. They cultivate enough irish potatoes and beans that is eaten and also sold. If an Oku man lacks a farm he/she cannot become a beggar as there is bee farming all over the sub division, especially in the Kilum Mountain Forests where special white honey can be harvested for business purposes. They are able to manage the farms at their disposal in season to earn a living. They are also good weavers. You can scarcely find somebody sitting on the streets in Oku and begging for food or money, even the disable. The disable are taken care of by their benevolent family members.

Oku is an effervescing area that vibrates with enthusiastic activities. One just needs to make a tourist visit to Oku; to observe and appraise the splendour of the Oku geographical landscape including - the beautiful legendary lake Oku, the attractive temperate mount Oku; full of medicinal trees and plants, the Oku palace and museum, the numerous handicraft centers, the Oku honey cooperative, the rocks, the beautiful hills, valleys, rivers, waterfalls and even the modern tourist attractions in that area. Apart from the ecological attractions, the Oku people have a rich legendary culture including their legendary traditional rites, masquerades, dances, songs, medicine among others. Their lexical choices are greatly conditioned by their cultural and ecological background, as the rest of the analyses will substantiate.

Review of Related Literature and Theories

The systematic study of names is termed Onomastics. Crystal (1987) defines the term Onomastic as a branch of semantics which studies the etymology of institutionalized [proper] names, such as the names of people and places. Crystal (ibid) calls the science that studies the names of people "anthroponomy" and that which studies the names of places "toponymy." The description of the naming system of Oku therefore falls within the realms of Onomastics.

The system of naming in the Oku culture is studied abreast the semantics of such names in this article, as the names are given intentionally to communicate meanings of various natures. Howard Jackson and Etienne Ze Amvela, 2001, p 4 says "pragmatic semantics" studies the meaning of utterances in context. This article makes attempts to study the meaning of Oku names and expressions.

Robert Dooley and Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Analysing Discourse: Basic Concepts*, Institute of Linguistics and the University of North Dakoto, 1999, p. 11, opine that the context for something is the situation in which it is embedded, in which it is seen as a part of a larger whole. In simple terms, language in context is the choice of language used within a particular milieu, at a given moment and for a specific purpose. In other words, it is those instances in social life which condition the specific use of language. The present article shows how the immediate vicinity, the intentions and objectives of the participants, events and situations condition the lexical choices of Oku people.

The study of meaning is also necessary in this study because of polysemous usage. There are instances in the Oku language where the same word has two or more different meanings, for example, the word ***yie.*** The word ***yie*** in the language in question collocates with other words and expressions to mean, ***to eat, to celebrate the birth of a baby, to succeed to somebody, to benefit from financial contribution, to accept a bride price, to spend money, to swindle,*** etc. as seen in the table below:

No	Collocations	Meaning
1	Yie ebfuayiene	eat food
2	Yie wan	celebrate the birth of a baby
3	Yie ndah / yie kebei/ yie ebtik/ yie ketie	succeed to somebody
4	Yie ngwa	benefit from financial contribution
5	Yie ebfuaketou ne wel	accept a bride price
6	Yie ebkwaa	Spend money
7	Yie ebkwaa wel	Extort money from somebody
8	Yie njung	Enjoyment
9	Yie ebwal	To go through suffering, maltreatment, oppression, to submit to torture or punishment, etc.

To communicate appropriately and suitably, the Oku language user must know how to collocate the word *yie* according to situations- of-communication depending on the intended message and the intended achievement. Dik (1989: 2) says the social capacity of a natural language user is that he or she "does not only know what to say, but also how to say it to a particular communicative partner

in a particular communicative situation, in order to achieve particular communicative goals."

Goddard (1998:1) thinks "Another concern of semantics is to shed light on the relationship between language and culture (...). Much of the vocabulary of any language, and even parts of the grammar, will reflect the culture of its speakers." The notion of *yie* in the Oku culture reflects the Oku customs. The main idea of *yie* in the expressions above is *consumption.* This supports the fact that Oku people usually eat and drink during socio-cultural and political gatherings. They use money and other items, and also share their experiences

when they interrelate. Others enjoy while some suffer, and others dominate while some endure. The word *yie* in the collocations above therefore announces both the good things and the bad ones that the Oku people experience or encounter in their interpersonal relationships.

Only the first expression above *(yie ebfuayiene)* has a surface meaning because we naturally eat food. The rest of the eight of them have connotative meanings in English. The table below gives the literal translation of the expressions with connotative meanings.

No	Expression	Literal Meaning
1	Yie wan	Eat the baby/child
2	Yie ndah / yie kebei/ yie ebtik/ yie ketie	Eat the house/ eat the compound/ eat property/ eat the throne or chair
3	Yie ngwa	Eat the money contributed
4	Yie ebfuaketou ne wel	Eat things of somebody's head
5	Yie ebkwaa	Eat money
6	Yie ebkwaa wel	Eat somebody's money
7	Yie njung	Eat goodness
8	Yie ebwal	Eat excrement/shit

The table above suggests that if the Oku language user is not aware of the culture of the Oku people he/she runs the risk of misinterpretation.

Meanwhile the system of naming according to Christian beliefs was instituted by God the creator when He created the heaven and the earth. In Genesis chapter 1: 5, God called the light Day and the darkness Night. In verse 8 God called the firmament Heaven. In verse 10 he called the dry land Earth. In Genesis chapter two verses 19-20 God asked Adam to name every beast of the field and every fowl of the air and all cattle. Adam obeyed God and named all these creatures, and it is believed that those names have been passed down diligently from generation to generation.

That said, Adam might have named these creatures using the language that God impacted or equipped him with at the time of divine creation. The Bible continues in Genesis chapter 11: 1 that the whole world used one language and one speech until when they unanimously conceived and agreed to make bricks and "build a city and a tower whose top may reach to heaven "so as to make for themselves a name so that they were not scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

The attitude of "the children of men" (Genesis 11 verse 3) suggests that language is a significant weapon of interpersonal relationships. Language users cannot operate effectively as well as use the language appropriately and suitably; when

need arises; in a given context of communication; if they do not possess linguistic competence. Genesis 11: 4 insinuates that the children of men possessed both linguistic competence and performance. They were able to conceive their ideas and thoughts, pass this information to one another, reason together over their ideas and unanimously agree to put their ideas into practice for a mutually beneficial outcome. The attempted construction of the tower of Babel after critical thinking shows one of the most significant function of language use, that of making societal realities possible.

The decision of "the children of men" also suggests that the use of one language integrates, unites, empowers and strengthens individuals. This verse suggests that people who speak the same language can use it to do exploits, do impossible things, plot schemes against those who do not understand them; they can use it to keep tribal secrets, to carry out their projects unbeknown to others and do things without external influence and so on.

After the linguistic confusion and breakdown in communication at the Tower of Babel, verse seven suggests that there will be incomprehensibility among people who do not speak the same language at a given context of communication or at a specific communicative event. Consequently, they cannot reason together and cannot do things that can improve their well-being. No matter their efforts to cooperate, they will

not be sincerely united as would those who use one language. They will be lack of psychological, cultural and emotional cordiality. Consequently they cannot do exploits because of their linguistic barriers.

This substantiates why "the children of men" stopped building the city and were scattered abroad from there over the face of all the earth when God confused their language and they no longer understood one another's speech.

Many languages cropped up after the divine confusion of the use of one language at Shinar. The Oku language was subsequently created as a result of the possibility of language pluralism granted at Shinar.

OKU NAMES, THEIR ORIGINS AND MEANINGS

The Oku language also called in Oku 'eblam ebkuo' was created by the early Oku people, from the seven family groups earlier mentioned, in order to use for their interpersonal activities and relationships. These family groups that converged in this area surely had their original mother tongues, but when destiny merged them in that land that later became Oku, they gradually and unanimously elected to borrow some vocabulary from their former vernaculars, coined new vocabulary and also borrowed some vocabulary from their neighbouring villages. They used it to carry out their village projects, discuss their family issues, talk about issues that concerned their immediate vicinity, carry out traditional rites, do customary businesses, negotiate pending issues, instruct, deliberate matters, take resolutions and so on.

The Oku language has evolved abreast other languages. This evolution is partly due to language interference, language borrowing, language extensions, language shifts, code switching, among others. However what interests the present analysis is the naming system in the Oku Language.

The origin of the Oku language is obviously linked to the origins of the seven families earlier mentioned as well as their interpersonal relationship with their neighbouring villages. The Oku Language interferes with neighbouring languages including the Kom, Banso, Noni, Mbesa, Babungo and Akeh languages. There are many words and expressions in the Oku language that are also identified in the Kom, Akeh, Mbesa, Banso and Noni languages.

Oku people also create some words bearing in mind their experiences with their neighbours, for instance, the word *albino* in English, is *kembanghe mbesei* in the Oku language. The literal translation of the Oku word *kembanghe mbesei* is the *Whiteman of*

Mbesei in the English language. *Kembang* in the Oku vernacular means *Whiteman* in the English language and *mbesei* is the Oku appellation for the name of the village called *Mbesa*. *Whiteman* is an English word and *Mbesei* is the name of a village that shares a geographical boundary with Oku.

It is interesting to note that the word Oku hasn't got a meaning in the Oku language. The name Oku was coined by their colonial masters who could not pronounce the word like the indigenes. It is even more interesting to assert that the original name of Oku was given by a group of persons from neighbouring Banso. The name Oku was Veku and which means plaster remover in Lamso, the language of the people of Banso. This name was given to the present Oku by angry Banso brothers who were not satisfied with the treatment given them after work well-done. These people are said to have plastered the royal Oku palace and the Oku leader and his notables did not serve them food. In their anger, they threatened to remove the plaster they had put. Though they didn't undo the plaster, they did it in the word veku. The colonial masters in turn corrupted the name to Oku, which apart from referring to the village in question, has no semantic meaning in the language of the concerned. History suggests that lamso has lent its vocabulary either consciously or unconsciously to the Oku language as exemplified below.

The word *toukouni* which refers to a local meal of porridge and pounded Irish potatoes, mixed with beans is borrowed from Lamnso. *Tou* in Lamso means *Irish potatoes* and *koun* means *beans*. In the Oku Language Irish potatoes is known as *etouk* and beans is *ekoun*. This intimates that *toukouni* in lamnso is *etouk ekoun* in the Oku Language. *Katikati* is the name of a traditional meal in some parts of the North West. This meal comprises roasted chicken, palm oil, onion, salt, and maggi, tomatoes, garlic, ginger and other spices if necessary, depending on the cook or chef. The word *Kati* in lamnso means *to sever*. *Kati* in Lamnso means *kakte* in Oku. Therefore *katikati* in lamnso is *kaktekakte* in eblam ebkuo.

Once upon a time, around the late eighties and early nineties, an agricultural organization offered motorcycles to agricultural workers in Oku and the Oku people named these bikes *a for forn* meaning in Lamnso *they have been offered. A for forn* in lamnso means *ghe for forn* in Oku.

When a woman is delivered of a baby in Oku, the song of relief and joy sang is *boyfernjo* which means in *Lamnso free from risk/danger/misfortune.* Pregnancy is usually considered a risk, so when a woman finally gives birth safely, relatives express their happiness and

satisfaction in this expression. Irish potato has two appellations in the Oku Language, namely *etouk* and *febves*. The Oku villages around Noni and Kimbo often use *etouk* while those who live towards Mbessa and Akeh often use the word *febves.*

Apart from borrowing and code switching with neighboring languages, the Oku language even borrows from the Pidgin and the English Languages. Many names of fruits are called in the English Language no matter the poor English Language pronunciation. The fruit names orange, pear, mango, pawpaw, for example, are pronounced *olen, mangoule, bia, popo* respectively.

The Oku Language also has a wide range of names of people. The system of naming of personal names in Oku varies as one moves from one Oku clan to another, from one family to another, from one religious background to another and from one parent or couple to another. The following names are typical of some particular families in Oku; *Chung, Ndishangong, Mbuh, Yang, Yungong, Buji,* most often are names of people related to Jikejem village, *Jick, Nkoua,* etc are names of people related to the Ichim Village. *Njioh* are people related to Nkvei, those who bear the name *Ndifon* are most of the time related to the Jiyane and Lui villages, *Yengo* is a name that is peculiar to the Ibal village, *Kegham* is mostly the name of people from Mboh village, *Nsanen* is mostly from Mbam, Ngwayu is mostly from Kevu *Ngum, Ngek,* and *Mnkong* are related to the palace and so on.

Some names that vary from one couple to another or from one parent to another are exemplified in the following table:

No	Name in Oku	Meaning in English
1	Bellefeyin	Thank God
2	Cherkediy	Laugh and cry
3	Dorte	Dirt
4	Ebkuolukoh	Oku is in the forest
5	Eykouh	Death
6	Fofeyin	God gave/God gives/It is God who has given
7	Giefeyin	The voice of God
8	Giese	Voices
9	Jai	Mistake
10	Jaiji	Miss the track/road
11	Jingte	Stupid, foolish
12	Jofende	Who is better/well?
13	Keferh	New
14	Kefeyin	God knows
15	Kende	Who knows?
16	Ketan	Poverty
17	Konghende	Who loves/ likes?
18	Koyen	Take and see
19	Lon	Ill luck
20	Mai	Abandon/throw
21	Meikawe	If it were you?
22	Nchak	Prison
23	Ndise	Insults
24	Neitebef	Trouble shooter considered as trouble maker
25	Nsakse	Judgments
26	Ntumfeyin	God's message
27	Nyingchia	Overrun
28	Suygisse	Give more information than needed
29	Suynde	Who is saying?
30	Tokoh	Run into the forest

Such a system of naming resembles that of Nigeria where some names are expressions, for example, the online document entitled "*Nigerian names and meanings*" indicate that the following names for instance, *nnakeme, oghenekohwo* and *samira* mean *God has done well, God is the giver and celebration* respectively.

Some babies are given specific names in Oku at a given period owing to prominent happenings, for instance, when the Fon (His Royal Highness) of

Oku 'dies', all the babies born during that time are named *Durmse* for girls and *Durmbi* and *Mbibe* for boys. *Durmse, Durmbi* and *Mbibe* literally mean *steaming* or *heating, inflaming or puffing, the world is heating* or *steaming* and *the world is bad* respectively. Children born after the late Fon's funeral rites are named after the Fon himself. If the Fon's real name was *Ngum,* for example, all the children born after his funeral celebration will be named *Ngum.* It is worth mentioning that in Oku, once enthroned Fon, the real name of the person is no longer used until he passes on. When enthroned, the person immediately takes the name of his father, who was also a Fon, and uses that name till he dies. Immediately he dies, his real name resurfaces and then children born around that time are named after him.

It is necessary to note here that in Oku the Fon does not die, he gets missing according to the Oku expression that refers to the death of a Fon. When the Fon dies in Oku, it is said in Oku, *ebfon ley* meaning in English *the Fon is missing.* That is why the words *'eykuoh'* and *'ngvurme'* in Oku (death and burial in English) hardly collocates with the word Fon in the Oku language since according to their tradition the Fon does not die.

Apart from names according to ancestral lines and names according to the death of the Oku Fon, other names are coinages. Oku people coin names and give their children for many reasons including: contemporary happenings and experiences, frustrations, celebrations, states of minds at given moments. For instance, *nyingchia, mai lon, ngek* meaning *overrun, abandon, suffering* and *ill luck* respectively.

Oku people also, but scarcely name their babies after acquaintances, and renowned personalities, for example, if an Oku family admires somebody for various reasons, they can decide to name their child after that individual irrespective of their family line or even tribe, for example, the name *Nyamkema* was given to a baby because he was delivered on the day the Divisional Officer for the Oku sub Division named *Nyamkema* was installed.

Oku people also borrow names from neighbouring villages partly because of inter-tribal marriages, and partly because of interpersonal relationships. Some borrowed names from neighbouring villages include names in Lamnso like, *wirba, tehwiy, dzerem, beri, jaika, yongka, tankwa, kinyuy, winkar, wirba, fonyuy, jaidze, tanla, tanka, fanka, sileyka, Njoko, kongla, ngalla, ayuni, ngoran, etc.* Some borrowed names from neighboring Boyo include *ful, nkwan, mbah, nyangha, newiy, ndum,* *nayah, kah, etc.* Borrowed, names from neighbouring *Noni* include *ngwanyi, ndiba, fon, kofi, etc.*

Oku people use various expressions to call their relatives. Sala and Ubanako (2010:107) say the situation of naming where the father is most often called *"father of"* and the mother *"mother of the eldest born son"* is referred to as teknonymy. Teknonymy is a system of naming that is very much effected in the Oku tradition. Oku fathers are called by their wives and others *ba....* The word *ba* means father of, for instance, *bangum* means father of *ngum, bangek* means *father of ngek,* etc . Oku mothers are referred to by their husbands and others as *no...*The word *no* means *''mother of'', for instance, nochung* means the mother of *chung, nondifon* means the mother of ndifon etc. For romantic purposes, the Oku woman refers to her husband as bai instead of babey, to appeal to his emotions.

In Oku the system of naming called patronymics [Sala and Ubanako [2010:107] exist orally but is not exhibited clearly in true names given to individuals except in a few cases, for example, the name *wandum* which means ndum's child. Patronymics refers to a pattern of naming derived from a father's given name. The idea of *son of* is not very clear in this name because *wandum* could also refer to the daughter of *ndum.* The notion of *son of* or *daughter of* is in the mind of the speaker referring. What obtains in Oku are names that are given to people apart from their real names in birth certificates. Such names designate or determine people according to their enlarged family relationship, for instance, *wandi, wandifon, wantong, wantock, ghonenjioh, ghonembuh, ghonendi, ghonembele, ghonembulum, ghonebdzeng. Wan* is used before the family name or clan name to refer to one person and *ghone* is used before such names to refer to more than one person from the family in question. *Wan* and *ghone* mean child and children respectively.

Names given to groups of people in the royal family in Oku include *bantock, nontock, wantock, ebvintock, nchintock*. The differences in occupations, responsibility and role relationship here is enclosed in the affixes *ba, no, wan, ebvi* and *nchi* meaning father, mother, son daughter, wife, and guard of the *fon* or of his majesty or royal highness respectively. The suffix *ntock* means palace. They are the various groups of people who play various roles in the Oku palace. *Ntock* refers to the palace and even to the royal majesty himself. Titles like *shey, yah, fai, ebchiofai* also portray royalty in the Oku tribe.

The suffix *nkfe* is used to refer to people who have lost their parents or spouses, for instance, *wiynkfe, lumkfe* and *wankfe* refer to widow, widower, and orphan respectively.

Clearly, the Oku language is eclectic and dynamic and continuous to evolve to meet the needs of the contemporary Oku native, for example, with the present uprising in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, the emergent local armed forces are called *ghone-ntie* meaning literally *children of the land or the soil* and government soldiers are called *ebkouy.*

In Oku, married women are identified by their husbands' names. The Oku expression *nondah* is closely translated in English *the mother of the house*. The Oku expression *nondah* or better still *the mother of the house* means in the English language *wife. This means that if the name of her husband is Ngum then his wife will be referred to in the Oku tradition as nondah ne Ngum, closely translated as, the mother of the house of Ngum and which signifies in the English language the wife of Ngum.*

Implications
The Oku expression *kembanghe mbesei* insinuates that albinos hardly existed in the Oku clan, but were found in Mbesa. As earlier mentioned, Oku has as neighbours Kom, Banso, Noni, Mbesa, Babungo and Akeh. If they chose to name an *albino the Whiteman of Mbesei*, and not the Whiteman of either Akeh, Banso, Noni, Kom, or Babungo, then it suggests that there was something peculiar about albinos and Mbesa. It is alleged that the Oku ancestors used to kill baby albinos immediately at birth because they considered them strange beings.

Truly speaking, in the late 70s and early 80s, there was only one prominent albino in Oku called Pastor Wongibe. This man was not regular in Oku, and I can remember that whenever we learnt that he was around, we rushed out to observe him with a lot of curiosity. After Pastor Wonghibe, we later on came in contact with a college mate in 1990, that was nicknamed "*Pope"* because he was an albino. It is necessary to state here that "*Pope"* and his brothers and sisters come from *Ichim Oku,* the closest Oku village to *Mbesa.*

Nowadays we have albinos in Oku and the contemporary Oku man is used to this phenomenon that was considered a taboo by the ancestors of Oku. The Oku vocabulary *Kembange Mbesei* may gradually die away giving way to other neologisms depending on how the future generation will see the notion of albino.

The use of Lamnso to refer to some traditional meals and other issues in the Oku language bespeaks the phenomenon of diglossia.

Probably, Lamnso is either consciously or unconsciously considered a superior language to the Oku Language. This relatively false conception by wanton Oku Language users seems to have stemmed from the fact that Oku had been politically and administratively governed from Banso from time immemorial. The Oku Language users were therefore influenced by the Lamnso users to call these meals in Lamnso, probably to romanticize or sound more romantic, more civilized and more closely related to the renowned Lamnso users at the time.

If Oku people do not belief in the death of a *Fon* (to them he does not die but gets missing) how can they talk about burial when there is no death and subsequent corpse? The comparison of the death of the *Fon* to the badness of the world and to the inflammation or steaming of the world provokes a vivid mental image that suggests the mysterious preeminence of their royal majesty whose passing on makes the world to inflame and get bad. It also insinuates that the Oku people see Oku as their biosphere.

It is easy to say the age of a person and to identify age mates in Oku if they are named because of the death of a *Fon*. It is necessary to note here that the names of *Fons* are given irrespective of family lineages. The Oku cultural system of naming suggests naming according to family ancestries; babies are named according to their ancestors and relations. So when a *Fon* dies, families who welcome new born babies are obliged to name their babies after the *Fon* no matter their relationships. In consequence, these names are later adopted into familial lines and future generations name them as ancestral names. This insinuates the attitude of submission to authority on the part of the Oku man and a hidden element of dictatorship in the Oku traditional leadership.

Coined names are given to children by their parents without third party influence. Coined names are more often than not reminiscent of both pleasant and sorrowful memories of the past, for instance, the name *nyingchia* (overrun) is usually given to a child that was born after the dead of his father or mother. *Dorte* which means dirt in English is given to a child that his/her parents had buried many babies. *Lon* is a name usually given to a baby that his/her parents have had a lot of predicaments, ordeals. *Mai* is given to babies whose mothers died after giving birth to them, etc. *Bellefeyin, Fofeyin, Ntumfeyin* etc, are given

to children whose parents are thankful and cognizant of divine providence.

Nowadays hopeful, faithful, and optimistic parents no longer give names that remind parents about sad events but give names that remind them about divine promises and happy events. Such a change in attitude is thanks to contemporary Christian doctrines of giving glory to God and revoking the devil. They scarcely name their children with words that have negative reminiscences but name their babies with words of assurance, hope, blessings and victory, etc. Some parents even go as far as renaming their children who had names with negative meanings and implications with optimistic and auspicious words and expressions. In consequence, religious conscious analytical people no longer name their children *ngek/suffering, eykuoh/death, lon /bad luck*, etc.

They only do so if they are naming the child to pay homage to their ancestors and no longer because they are regretting, or lamenting or complaining. Most of the time when they name the child with a pessimistic word in the Oku language, they deliberately give a positive Christian name or expression to the child, for instance *Ngek God's mercy, Jingte God's Brightness, Eykuoh Beatrice* etc. The idea is that the power in the consciously given name will overshadow the obligatory family name or the etymological inclined names. One cannot claim that it is a new phenomenon to rename children. It is clear in the *Bible* that God himself renamed people, for instance, *Abram/Abraham*, *Sarai/Sarah*, *Jacob/ Israel, Saul/Paul,* etc. Clearly, some Oku people get inspiration from the *Bible* to give names with positive promising attributes to their offspring.

There are some names that seem not to have clear meanings in the Oku language. Such names include: *Chung, Bungo, Yang, Ging, Yungong, Yunji, Kwang, Ngong, Ndongndei, Sango, Ngonjang,* etc. Such names are obviously owing to borrowing from foreign languages, naming according to acquaintances and events, etc.

The phenomenon of gender bias is evidenced in the naming system of the Oku language. While a woman is considered *nondah* (the mother of a house) her husband is referred to as *babey* meaning *the father of the compound.* This suggests the practice of gender bias and polygamy. A compound is usually made up of many houses belonging to various wives of one man. The word *babey* can also refer to *Mr* in English while the words *nuan* or *nowan* refer to *Mrs,* but the close translation of these words are *the father of the compound* and *the mother of the child* respectively.

Referring to the husband as the father of the compound and to the wife as the mother of the child insinuates gender discrimination and gender inequality. The man is uplifted as the owner of a compound while the woman is reduced only to the mother of a child. This suggests an element of the Oku custom whereby a woman has no right to own property. It is the man that has the right to own land. Women were meant to get married and bear children for their husbands. If a woman does not get married or if she divorces and comes back to her parents, she is not given the right to own property. In Oku, a woman neither owns property in her parents' compound nor in her husband's. She may only make use of what is at her custody at a given moment.

However, feminist advocates are gradually succeeding in influencing the Oku tradition as appellations like *nobey* are tolerated, especially because some widows no longer agree to remarry their brothers-in- laws who would have succeeded to their late husbands as it was the custom. Also, emancipated Oku girls and women are able to own personal lands and invest on them. For that reason they have the right to their compounds and property, and this gives them the right to be called *nobey* (the mother of the compound).

Like in Chinese, for instance, the names of people's professions in the Oku language are most often specified, for example, *dio Kegham*, kamenda *Ngek*, teller *Kenkoh*, pasetor *Kebuh*, docta *Ngeng. The words dio, kamenda, teller, pasetor and docta* are names of professions and mean in English D.O (Divisional Officer), carpenter, tailor, pastor and doctor *respectively.* Kegham, Ngek, Kenkoh and Ngeng *are given names.*

In Oku, the exact word for sister is jemte and for brother is lumse. The expressions *jemte yom* and *lumse yom* mean my sister and my brother respectively. The words *wanbaam* or *wanbai, wannoom* or *wanyi* and *ferfe* mean step - brother/step - sister, half-brother/ half -sister or brother or sister and co spouse respectively.

In the Oku tradition the English words brother, sister, uncle, aunt, etc. are often used as a mark of politeness, respect, attachment and humility to refer to elders. Meanwhile, elders hardly refer to their younger relatives as brother, sister, uncle and aunt. What obtains is that when an elder wants to cosset, pamper, persuade or flatter a younger person, he/she calls him/her *baam* or *norm*. The words *baam* and *norm* mean *my father* and *my mother* respectively.

Like in America and pre- Maoist China, Oku children officially inherit only their fathers' names and their mothers' names are lost. However in the Oku custom, a child can be described as the child of her mother, for example, *wan Ndem* meaning *the child of Ndem*, and *Ndem* being the name of her mother.

Leonard L. George et al assert that Asian systems of naming are entirely different from the American. According to them, in America, the individual's name comes first while in Asia, the family's name comes first. Most Oku people have three names, namely: the family name, the Christian/Muslim name and the given name, for instance, *Ngum Hilda Jofende*. *Ngum* is the name of the father, *Hilda* is the Christian name and *Jofende* is the given name. Even people who are not Christians in Oku have Christian names. The family comes first in the Oku system of naming like in America. Few Oku people do not respect this naming system. Oku people have middle names unlike Cambodians who do not.

Even though some Oku names are considered names of male while others are considered names of female, an Oku person who wishes to give the name of a male to his/her daughter and that of a female to his/her son does that at will without any restriction. So one cannot completely tell a male from a female simply because of a given name in Oku, for example, we have girls called *Chung* in Oku meanwhile *Chung* is originally the name of a boy. Both boys and girls in Oku bear the name *Konghende.*

CONCLUSION

This article is a limited corpus of the naming system in the Oku language. It analysed some names of Oku natives though mention was made of borrowed names of some issues into the Oku language. It was found out that names given to Oku people are meaningful depending on the circumstances or the communicative events that led to such a name. This means that names in the Oku language can recount historical facts. The names that do not have direct semantic meaning in the Oku language are names that came into existence owing to intertribal relationships, language contacts and language interference.

Jackson and Ze Amvela (2001:7) think that "the knowledge of etymology may help some learners to understand and retain new vocabulary items." Therefore, if research were to be carried out on such names, it would be discovered that they enclose a lot of meanings in their languages of origin. The case of the names of children of a girl from Oku who gets married to a man from the Bulu tribe in the South Region of Cameroon can substantiate this assertion. If a woman from Oku gets married to a man from Sangmelima, for example, and they bring forth children, some of those children will obviously be given names from Oku. Such names in the Oku language given to children of a Bulu man in future will not have any meaning in the Bulu language. Meaning in such a case could only be traced thanks to the source or the circumstances that led to the naming of such names. Oku names like, Belle (thanks) Konghende (who loves?/who likes?/who wants?) and Kende (who knows) are meaningless in the Bulu language but can be meaningful if the mother of these children who is from Oku were questioned about the meanings of such names.

R. WARDAUGH, *How Conversation Works*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985, p.101 states that the surrounding physical context (where the language is used, the objects there and the actions taking place), previous conversations between the participants, relevant aspects of their life histories, the general rules of behaviour the speakers obey, their assumptions about how the various bits and pieces of the world function, and so on (...), are important factors of effective communication. Names in the Oku language are meaningful like in other languages and the meanings depend on the communicative events and the participants that give them. These names greatly reveal the Oku tradition and civilization. J. LYONS, (opcit: 207) quotes Firth (1957a: 225) who states, "the most important thing about language is its social function. (…) normal linguistic behaviour as a whole is meaningful effort, directed towards the maintenance of appropriate patterns of life." The above illustrations about the system of naming in the Oku language show that the Oku people have created and have successfully maintained their cultural and social patterns of life through their lexical choices. The examples above of names, words and expressions suggest the patterns of life of the Oku people: they celebrate births, inherit property, succeed to predecessors, enjoy when possible, endure when they go through suffering, maltreatment, oppression, punishment, do not submit to torture and attack but make efforts to prevail, carry out monetary deals, mourn or lament when bereaved or bereft, commemorate events, pay tributes to deserved personalities, show love to others, are conscientious, perform rituals, superstitious, gender biased, and hospitable among others.

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