

Sociolinguistic Study of Pet Names among Couples in Nsukka Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract—This paper conducts a sociolinguistic study of pet names used among couples in Nsukka metropolis. It seeks to identify the pet names used among couples within Nsukka metropolis, examine the implications of the identified pet names, identify the sociolinguistic factors that contribute to the differences in the use of pet names among couples, and ascertain the language used by couples within Nsukka metropolis in communicating pet names. This research studies pet names used in six selected areas in Nsukka metropolis – *Echara, Ngwuru, Ihe n'Owerre, Amaeze, Nru, and University community*. This study adopts the descriptive method in analysing the data gathered. From the findings, it is observed that couples within Nsukka metropolis use both English and Igbo pet names in addressing their spouses. The identified pet names are used by the couples in communicating what they feel for each other; either to express the masculinity or femininity of their partners or to express how beautiful or handsome their partners are, and to portray their respect for their partners. Sociolinguistic factors such as age, gender, occupation, region and educational background are identified to serve as determinants as to why couples use pet names. In conclusion, couples within Nsukka metropolis use pet names they feel are suitable in communicating their feelings for their spouses and also use the language they feel is appropriate in communicating the said feelings.

Index Terms—sociolinguistics, pet names, terms of address, Nsukka

I. INTRODUCTION

To everything that exists in the universe, there is a unique identity. Names can identify a class, category of things or a single thing either uniquely or within a given context. It can also mean a word or combination of words by which a person is designated or called. This implies that a person, thing, body or class is known by the name it bears. Invariably, a name refers to a word or term used for identification. It serves as a renewable label for a thing, person, product (brand name), even an idea or concept normally used to distinguish one from another (Olieh, 2001). The names of individuals are meaningful and they are as important as the persons that bear them. Humans are given names at birth that reflect something of significance or describe the course of their lives. The importance of a name cannot be over emphasised. In view of this fact, Bing (1993) opines that “besides having psychological roles in establishing a person’s identity, names convey to those who know their origins and meanings, the social and cultural experiences of the people who created them” (p. 1). Names can be personal names, assumed names, Christian names, designated names (titles), family names, nicknames (sobriquets), pet names (affectionate names or terms of endearment) etc.

Naming is a universal cultural practice in the sense that every society has the habit of placing names on persons, objects and entities for distinction. The concept of naming is the process of assigning a word or phrase to a particular object, entity or property. This can be quite deliberate or a natural process that occurs in the flow of life as some phenomena come to the attention of the users of the language. Onomastics, which means the study of names has other branches which include; Anthroponomastics- the study of anthroponyms (proper names for a person or a group of people), Charactonym- study of names given to fictional characters in a piece of literature, Cryptonym- study of secret name which is used for the protection of the name bearer, Pseudonym- study of alternative names given to or used by a person in addition to or instead of an official or legal name, and Hypocorism- the study of pet names. For the purpose of this study, emphasis will be on hypocorism - the study of pet names or terms of endearment.

Pet names are names used by those who love or have affection for one another. It can also be seen as an affectionate substitute for a proper name. Therefore, it is a name that is used instead of someone’s usual first name to express fondness or familiarity. Such names show how a friend sees the other or what they think of each other. These names also exist among couples; they are used to signify the importance of one to another. Nsukka is a town and a Local Government Area in the South Eastern Nigeria of Enugu state. Towns that share common borders with Nsukka are Eha Alumona, Edem, Alor-uno, Opi, Orba, Ede-Oballa, Obukpa and Obimo. Other nearby towns are Enugu Ezike, Obollo-

Afor, Nimbo, Adani, Uzo Uwani and Mkpologwu. Nsukka town is the site of the University of Nigeria; which is also inhabited by the educated and the non-educated, the young and the old, the single and the married.

Pet names are remarkably universal methods of being demonstrative, showing affection and projecting tenderness. For instance, when a husband calls his wife “my treasure”, he feels the wife is a rare gem and a gift to him. When this happens and the wife feels the husband addressed her rightly, it increases the level of attraction she feels for the husband. Some other names like mummy, *obidiya*, *ugo m*, *asampete m*, *oyiridiya*, angel, mine, darling, baby (for women) and daddy, *nke m*, *di m oma*, *odjukonamba*, *obiajulu m*, *onyemjiribiri*, *oga m*, *nwokeoma* (for men) give couples a sense of attachment to each other. Afful and Nartey (2013) further observe that terms of endearment refer “to words or expressions used in an interactive, dyadic and face-to-face situation by a speaker to address or describe a person for which the speaker feels love or affection for” (p. 92). The use of these names differs among couples due to social, emotional, psychological and marital factors. Therefore, the aim of this research work is to conduct a sociolinguistic study of pet names among couples in Nsukka metropolis, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- i identify pet names used among couples in Nsukka metropolis;
- ii examine the implications of pet names used among couples in Nsukka metropolis;
- iii identify the sociolinguistic factors that contribute to differences in the use of pet names among couples in Nsukka metropolis; and
- iv ascertain the language of communicating pet names among couples in Nsukka metropolis.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that studies language in relation to the society. Hudson (1996) defines sociolinguistics as “the study of language in relation to society” (p. 4). Thus, in sociolinguistics, one studies language and society in order to find out as much as one can, what language is all about. However, Holmes (1992) says that “the sociolinguist’s aim is to move towards a theory which provides a motivated account of the way language is used in a community and choices people make when they use language” (p. 16). For example, when one observes how varied language use is, one must search for the causes. These causes are known as their social correlates. In her own opinion, Mallinson (2015) believes that sociolinguistics aims “to study the effects of language use within and upon societies and the reciprocal effects of social organisations and social contexts on language use” (p. 13). Sociolinguists view language and society as being mutually constitutive; each influences the other in ways that are inseparable and complex.

Language is used in addressing people as well as communicating emotions. Addressing sometimes takes an emotional tone; addressees are called with friendlier, more passionate and more amiable tones. This marks the intimacy between the addresser and the addressee. Yule (2006) posits that words or phrases for a person being talked to or addressed are known as terms of address. More so, they are linguistic forms people use in a conversation use in addressing themselves. It indicates certain relationships between people and also shows the difference in identity, position and social status. Mahzad (2012) further notes that terms of address are linguistic forms that are used in addressing others or to attract their attention or for referring to them in the course of conversation. These address terms are socially driven; they mirror the complex social relations of individuals in a speech community. Terms of address are also used in different contexts. For instance, terms of address used by couples may be different from those used by peers. Forms of address are correlated with the social status and interpersonal relationship between the addressee and the addresser. It is worthy to note that the address forms used to address someone depend on the relationship of the participants, their attitude to each other and the situation in which the conversation is happening. Thus, Holmes (1992) says that “the variation depends on the participants, setting, topic and function of the talk” (p. 12). It is also affected by mood or feelings of participants. For Kriengkrai (2007), terms of address can be variously called ‘vocative’, ‘address terms’, ‘address forms’, ‘forms of address’ and ‘theory of address’. According to Braun’s (1988) classification, terms of address can be divided into three main categories or three word classes as follows: ‘pronoun’, ‘verb’ and ‘noun’.

However, names as forms of address terms show the relationship between language and the society (Salihu, 2014). Names play important roles in the society because they symbolise a man’s social position in relation to the people around him and his status is readily recognised. Thus, terms of address used to express intimacy can be called terms of endearment, pet names, sweet words, affectionate talk or terms of affection. Agnieszka (2015) posits that “terms of endearment serve to convey two main functions; on one hand, in some areas, they are part and parcel of everyday speech and one may find it unusual if they are left out because they express emotions and strengthen ties; on the other hand, such words may be perceived as disparaging or condescending, as they may imply incompetence, foolishness or weakness of addressee”. Thus, it is a form of address; a word or phrase employed either to address or describe a person, animal, or inanimate object for which the speaker feels affection. Laudau (2015) observes that the use of pet names is a good thing in relationships because partners who have developed pet names for their romantic partners use these names in expressing their affection for each other and also as an inside language when they are alone. Agnieszka (2015) subdivides terms of endearment into smaller sets. The vast majority of the sweet words fit into the mechanism of animal metaphor called ‘zoosemy’. They include chick, chuck, bunny, turtle, dove, lamb, duckling, lambie, kitten, mouse etc. Others belong to ‘foodsemy’ - honey, cupcake, honey pie, sugar, muffin, cookie, peach, sugar pie etc.; ‘Plantosemy’ - buttercup, pumpkin etc.; ‘toy endearment terms’ - doll, baby doll etc.; ‘royal terms’ - queen, princess, duchess, king etc.; ‘sky terms’ - star, sunshine, sun etc. Rakhman and Setiawan (2014) further note that terms of address are considered to

be polite and familiar terms used to show great intimacy. They maintain that address terms can be first name, nicknames, last name, title, multiple names, kinship terms, endearment terms and zero terms.

Afful and Nartey (2013) observe that terms of endearment can further be derived from coinages relating to personal names of the addressees. They observe that such forms are coined either from deletion of a vowel or consonant sound (hypocoristic forms) or insertion of a vowel or consonant sound. They further note that there are instances of reduplication. Examples are Lam-Lam (derived from Lamar), Georgie-Porgie (derived from George), Markiiiiii (derived from Mark), Queeny (derived from Queen) and Narty (derived from Nartey). Afful and Nartey (2013) note that despite the fact that their research uses English as a major means of communication, most of the terms of endearment identified were rendered in other languages; thereby pointing the use of terms of endearment for socio-pragmatic purposes and multi-lingual situation of the University studied.

Umeodinka (2015) studies affective meaning as it relates to marital life in Igbo. The research work seeks to examine what affective meaning is, kinds of expressions that indicate positive and negative affective meaning, ordinary meaning of these expressions and the effects of their usage in the marital life of the Igbo. Umeodinka (2015) uses data elicited from twenty couples chosen using the purposive sampling technique. He observes from his findings that affective expressions can be either positive or negative. Again, he observes that the old generation wives emphasise strong and responsible husbands as against the young generation, whose aim is mainly on love and mode of wealth of their husbands. Also, between the educated and non-educated couples, he finds out that the educated use a mixture of English and Igbo expressions while the non-educated use Igbo expressions. For the urban versus the rural dwelling couples, Umeodinka (2015) notes that the urban dwelling wives reflect socialisation and sophistication as they use more of English emotional expressions than the rural dwelling wives who use less English expressions. From the study, he concludes that emotional expressions are used based on the expression of personal love and beauty, indication of personal mood, appreciation and pride, walking into husband’s psychology, promotion of youthfulness in marriage, maintenance of marriage fun and sexual pleasure, expression of annoyance etc.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts the survey design. This is to enable the researchers assess a wide variety of behaviours and other phenomena that can be studied in a typical naturalistic observation study. The area for obtaining data for this research work is Nsukka metropolis, Enugu State, Nigeria. This work focuses on couples (married men and women) within Nsukka metropolis; the educated and the non-educated. The choice of this population is to get first hand information on what pet names are used by these couples and what these names mean to these couples. This study adopts a random purposive sampling technique. This implies that from each of the regions, 15 couples are selected randomly to meet the need of obtaining necessary data for the study. Oral interview is employed in getting the required data for the research. Information gathered from the interview is analysed using descriptive method. This method is chosen because it is needful to explain and describe the pet names used by these couples.

IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

A. Presentation of Data

TABLE I
SHOWING PET NAMES IDENTIFIED IN THE STUDY AREAS

COMMUNITIES	PET NAMES FOR MALE SPOUSES	PET NAMES FOR FEMALE SPOUSES	PET NAMES FOR NEUTER GENDER
NGWURU	Daddy, <i>Pápáā m</i> , <i>Pap á</i> , <i>Nnà m úkwú</i>	Mummy, <i>Nnē</i> , <i>Òriàkù m/Òr ìkù m</i> , <i>Bèkèè m</i> , Missis	<i>Nkè m</i> , Darling
ECHARA	Daddy, <i>Pápáā m</i> , <i>Nnà m úkwú</i>	<i>S ɔs ɔ́ ɛ̀ ɔ̀</i> , <i>Lòòlò m</i> , <i>Nnē</i> , Mummy, <i>Nwáànyị ọm á/Nwáànyị ọm á</i> , <i>Òrièkù</i> , Missis, <i>Ọm áríchá m</i>	Dear, <i>Nkè m</i> , <i>Ọyòó m</i> , Bestie, Mine
AMAEZE	Daddy	<i>Bèkèè m</i> , <i>Nnē</i> , Mummy, <i>Lòòlò m</i> , <i>Òrièkù m</i> , <i>Ọm áríchá m</i> .	<i>Ọyòó m</i> , <i>Ọnyéè m/Ọnyé nkè m</i> , <i>Nkè m</i> , <i>Ọdìmnòbì</i> , My darling, Dear
NRU	<i>Pápáā m</i> , Daddy, <i>Nnà m úkwú</i>	<i>Òrièkù m</i> , Mummy, <i>Lòòlò m</i> , My queen	Dear, Sweetheart, <i>Ụtọ́ m</i> , <i>Nkè m</i> , <i>Ọyòó m</i> , Bestie
IHE N’OWERRE	Hubby, King (B.I), Daddy, <i>Nnà m úkwú</i>	<i>Nwáènyị ọm á</i> , Mummy, <i>Lòòlò m</i> , My queen	My world, <i>Ọdìmnòbì</i> , <i>Nkè m</i> , <i>Ọnyéè m</i> , Dear, <i>Ọyòó m</i> , My love
UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY	Daddy, My cute, Hubby,	Mummy, <i>Nnē</i> , My angel, <i>Bèkèè m</i> , My queen, <i>Ọm áríchá m</i>	Honey, Mine, <i>Nkè m</i> , My love, Best m, Dear, Darling, Sweetheart, <i>Ọyòó m</i>

The table above shows pet names used among couples in Nsukka metropolis according to the six regions under study. These regions include Ngwuru, Echara, Nru, Amaeze, Ihe n’Owerre and the University community. The pet names sourced are subdivided into; pet names used for male spouses, pet names used for female spouses and pet names for neuter gender (both male and female spouses). It is pertinent to know that most of these pet names occurred almost in all the regions. Most of the pet names like ‘daddy’, ‘mummy’, ‘*òyòó m*’, ‘*nnē*’ and ‘*nkè m*,’ are frequently used

On the other hand, most non-educated couples who have less or no contact with Western education often use pet names that are available in their dialect/language. Since these couples have no integrity to save, they make do with what is obtainable within their locality. These groups of couples use pet names like *nnē, nwáenyị ómá, ór íkù m, ùtó m, pàpáá m/pàpá, ónyéé m/ónyé nkè m, nnà m úkwú, missis, s à s òr ò ò*

4. Occupation

Different works people do also affect their use of pet names towards their partners. It is gathered from the study conducted that most business men and women use pet names like *nkè m, òyóó m, daddy, mummy, dear, òr íkù, pàpáá m*. Also, petty traders and way side traders use pet names like *sòsòrisò, nnē, nnà m úkwú, missis, òrièkù*. Couples who are civil servants, nurses, chemists and teachers often use pet names like daddy, mummy, dear, mine, best, bestie, honey, darling, sweetheart. However, the name '*nkè m*' is generally used notwithstanding the couples' occupations or societal classes.

5. Region

Another sociolinguistic factor that affects the use of pet names among couples in Nsukka metropolis is the region in which the people live. This could be a rural or urban area. For this study, areas under study like Echara, Ihe n'Owere, Nru, Ngwuru, and Amaeze are all rural areas. It is observed that pet names used in these areas are mostly Igbo pet names except for people who have had contact with other areas. Thus, prevalent pet names used in these areas include: *nnē, òyóó m, òr íkù m, sòsòrisò, pàpáá m/pàpá, nnà m úkwú, missis, nkè m, ónyéé m/ónyé nkè m, lóplò m, òdìmnóbì*. They also use English pet names like daddy, mummy, dear, darling, mummy, hubby, king (B, I) but these names are not often used. Most of the couples in these rural areas use other terms of address like *nwáenyị / nwáenyị hú*, calling their partners by their children's names or using their partners' first names.

In the University of Nigeria community, which is considered to be an urban area, it is observed that couples there use mostly English pet names; however, few of them use Igbo pet names. They use pet names like mummy, mine, daddy, my angel, my cute, my love, best, bestie, my queen, dear, darling, sweetheart, honey, and hubby. Some Igbo pet names used include *nkè m, bèkèé m, òyóó m, ómárichá m, nnē*. Also, it is observed that some of these couples address their partners using other address terms like calling them their children's names (tekonyms).

D. Language of Communicating Pet Names among Couples in Nsukka Metropolis

Couples in Nsukka metropolis use both English and Igbo pet names in addressing themselves. Most of these couples use both Igbo and English pet names in addressing their respective partners. It is rare to see a couple who uses Igbo or English pet names exclusively. Furthermore, the use of these pet names differs due to some sociolinguistic factors like age, gender, occupation, region and educational background.

Older couples who have been married for 25 years and above use Igbo pet names majorly, though they also use English pet names that can be said to be general among couples like daddy, mummy, dear and sweetheart; while younger couples married for 1-20 years mostly use English pet names though some of them also make use of Igbo pet names. Couples married for 20-25 years are observed to use both English and Igbo pet names so far as they are able to communicate their feelings about their spouses. On the basis of occupational influence, couples that are civil servants mostly use English pet names while couples who are either business men or farmers mostly use Igbo pet names though there are traces of English pet names among these groups. Couples living in the rural areas tend to use more of Igbo pet names than those who reside in urban areas, who have had contact with both education and civilisation. Also, couples that are educated mostly address their partners using English pet names though some of them also prefer to use Igbo pet names that better convey their feelings for their partners. However, non-educated couples, though they make use of English pet names, employ Igbo pet names more due to their environment and occupation which is mostly business and farming.

Non-educated couples who reside in the rural areas, whose occupation is either business or farming, frequently employ Igbo pet names in addressing their spouses. These couples may fall under any of the duration used above; they might be newly married couple, middle aged couple or older couple, while educated couples who reside in urban areas, who are mostly civil servants, frequently use English pet names.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study is carried out in six regions of Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state, Nigeria; Ngwuru, Echara, Nru, Ihe n'Owerre, Amaeze and the University community. From the findings, it is observed that couples within these regions use (thirty-one) 31 pet names which co-occur among couples in these regions. From the study, couples who have lived for 1-15 years mostly employ English pet names due to their exposure to education and civilisation which couples that have lived together for 20 years and above might not have. Furthermore, in terms of regions (where these couples dwell), it is observed that couples living in rural areas like Ngwuru, Nru, Echara, Amaeze and Ihe n'Owerre use Igbo pet names more than those who live in Nsukka urban area like the University community. Unlike the non-educated couples, the educated couples employ pet names that showcase their integrity as educated people. They mostly employ English pet names. It is also pertinent to note that educated couples do not usually address their spouses using their children's names because they see it as archaic or out of fashion for educated or civilised people. Thus, factors like age, gender, educational background and region have been identified as sociolinguistic factors that determine which of the

pet names is used by each couple and how often they use these pet names in expressing their feelings towards their partners.

Furthermore, it could also be deduced that the languages of communicating these pet names among couples within Nsukka metropolis are the English and Igbo languages. The use of either of these languages is also determined by sociolinguistic factors like age (number of years the couples have lived together), gender, educational background and region. Couples who reside in rural areas employ Igbo pet names more those who reside in urban areas. This is because couples in urban areas have opportunities to formal education and civilisation than those dwelling in the rural areas. It is also important to note that couples also use a particular language; the Igbo or English language depending on the feelings they want to communicate to their spouses. They use the language that enables them express their feelings better to their spouses. Some educated couples who use Igbo pet names do so not because there are no available pet names in the English language rather, they want to use a suitable language to communicate their feelings. However, the language for communicating pet names among couples in Nsukka metropolis depends on what the couples want to achieve with the pet names they employ.

APPENDIX

Table showing meaning of Igbo pet names used among couples in Nsukka metropolis

IGBO PET NAMES	GLOSS/MEANING
Pápáá m̄	My father
Pápá	Father
Nnà m̄ úkwú	My lord
Nnē	Mother/Dear
Òriákù m̄/ Òriékù m̄	The one that consumes my wealth
Békéé m̄	My English baby
Nkè m̄	Mine
Sòsòrisò	Sexy queen
Lóòlò m̄	My queen
Nwáányị ómá/ Nwáenyị ómá	Good woman/ Beautiful woman
Óyóó m̄	My friend
Ọmárichá m̄	My finest
Ọnyéé m̄	My person
Ọnyé ñkè m̄	My personal person
Ọjímńóbi	The one in my heart

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