

## A TRUTH CONDITIONAL ANALYSIS OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL IGBO FEMALE NAMES

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### Abstract

Personal names serve as significant linguistic and cultural resources that express identity, social experience, and worldview. Among the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria, names function not only as markers of individual identity but also as reflections of cultural values and lived realities. This study examines circumstantial female names through the lens of truth-conditional semantics, focusing on how such names derive meaning from the conditions surrounding their bestowal. Adopting a mixed-methods approach combining interviews, observation, and textual analysis, the study draws on both primary and secondary data, which are analysed using descriptive qualitative analysis and basic quantitative categorisation. The findings identify four major categories of circumstantial female names: those reflecting family lineage, commemorating familial events, indicating the timing of birth, and expressing women's experiences during pregnancy or prior to childbirth. These categories demonstrate that such names operate as semantic expressions grounded in verifiable and/or culturally perceived socio-cultural conditions. The study concludes that Igbo circumstantial female names function as culturally embedded propositions that reveal both individual and communal realities, thereby underscoring the relationship between language, culture, and identity. It further highlights the importance of preserving indigenous naming practices as a means of sustaining cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Igbo anthroponyms, truth-conditional semantics, circumstantial naming, African onomastics, language-culture interface.

### 1. Introduction

Names are not merely arbitrary labels; they are culturally rooted linguistic forms that express meanings, values, and social experiences. Across societies, naming practices reflect shared beliefs, historical realities, and existential conditions, thereby positioning names within the domain of semantics and cultural discourse (Agyekum, 2021; Hough, 2023). In African contexts, and particularly among the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria, personal names function as condensed narratives that convey identity, worldview, and social memory (Onuigbo & Eyisi, 2021). Among the Igbo, naming is a culturally significant practice that extends beyond simple identification. Personal names often emerge from specific circumstances surrounding a child's birth, the socio-economic conditions of the family, or spiritual interpretations of life events. These circumstantial names serve as repositories of meaning, expressing emotions such as gratitude, hope, resilience, and faith (Odeunmi, 2020). Female names, in particular, frequently reflect family experiences, maternal expectations, and perceived divine involvement, thereby offering a rich site for linguistic and cultural analysis. Although there is a substantial body of research on African naming systems, much of the existing literature has concentrated on anthropological, sociological, or literary perspectives, with relatively limited engagement with formal semantic theories (Obeng, 2022). As a result, there is a need for a more

systematic linguistic analysis of how such names encode meaning, particularly within the framework of truth-conditional semantics. Truth-conditional semantics explains meaning in terms of the conditions under which a linguistic expression can be considered true in relation to states of affairs in the world (Heim & Kratzer, 2021; Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet, 2022).

This study, therefore, examines circumstantial female names among the Igbo through the lens of truth-conditional semantics. It explores how these names reflect empirically grounded or culturally construed conditions surrounding birth and how such conditions contribute to their semantic interpretation. By adopting this approach, the study highlights the interaction between linguistic structure, cultural context, and lived experience, demonstrating that the meanings of names are both context-sensitive and grounded in shared cultural knowledge (Recanati, 2021). In addition, the study considers the implications of naming practices for identity construction and social perception. Names often influence how individuals are perceived and positioned within their communities, making them significant tools for the expression of social values and norms (Alford, 2020). Understanding their semantic structure, therefore, provides insight into the relationship between language and social reality. Ultimately, this study contributes to scholarship in semantics, onomastics, and African linguistics by offering a theoretically grounded and culturally informed analysis of Igbo circumstantial female names.

## 2.1 Conceptual framework

Culture refers to the shared system of beliefs, values, norms, practices, and worldviews that characterize a particular group of people. It shapes how individuals interpret reality and guides social behaviour across generations. In the context of this study, culture provides the foundation for naming practices among the Igbo, influencing why and how names are given, as well as the meanings attached to them. Thus, names are seen as cultural products that reflect collective experiences and social realities (Agyekum, 2021; Hough, 2023). Cultural grounding of naming is crucial for interpreting the truth conditions of names. Circumstantial naming is the practice of assigning names based on specific events, conditions, or experiences surrounding a child's birth. These circumstances may include family situations, emotional states, socio-economic conditions, or spiritual interpretations. Among the Igbo, such names serve as narrative tools that document and preserve significant moments in the life of a family or community. As Odebunmi (2020) observes, they are not arbitrary but context-driven, encoding real-life experiences into linguistic forms. Female names refer to personal names given to girls, which often reflect gender-related experiences and expectations within a cultural setting. In Igbo society, female names frequently capture themes such as motherhood, fertility, family continuity, and divine intervention. However, beyond reflecting gender roles, these names also express resilience, hope, and identity. In this study, female names are examined as meaningful linguistic expressions shaped by both cultural expectations and individual circumstances (Mensah & Offiong, 2022).

Truth condition is a concept in semantics which explains that the meaning of a linguistic expression depends on the conditions under which it can be considered true. In relation to naming, a name can be analysed as having truth-conditional relevance when it reflects conditions that are treated as true within a cultural framework. For example, a name indicating divine presence is considered meaningful if the family believes or experienced such intervention. Thus, truth conditions link names to lived or interpreted realities (Heim

& Kratzer, 2021). Meaning refers to the interpretation or sense conveyed by a linguistic expression. Within this study, meaning is not limited to dictionary definitions but includes culturally and contextually derived interpretations. The meaning of circumstantial names emerges from the interaction between linguistic structure and the socio-cultural conditions surrounding their use. Therefore, meaning is both semantic (based on language) and contextual (based on experience and belief) (Recanati, 2021).

Identity refers to the way individuals are defined, perceived, and understood within a social and cultural context. Names play a crucial role in identity construction, as they signal background, beliefs, and social positioning. Among the Igbo, circumstantial female names contribute to shaping both personal and communal identity by linking individuals to specific experiences, values, and cultural narratives. As such, identity is not only personal but also socially constructed through language and cultural practices (Alford, 2020).

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Truth-Conditional Semantics, a major theoretical orientation within formal semantics that explains meaning in terms of the conditions under which a statement can be said to be true or false (Heim & Kratzer, 2021; Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet, 2022). Within this framework, linguistic expressions, including names, are treated as meaningful units whose interpretation is tied to verifiable or assumed states of affairs in the world. Recent developments in semantic theory emphasize that truth-conditional meaning does not operate independently of context. Scholars such as Borg (2019), Cappelen and Lepore (2020), and Recanati (2021) argue that meaning arises from the interaction between encoded semantic content and contextual enrichment. This perspective is particularly relevant to African naming systems, where names function as compressed narratives encoding experiential, cultural, and spiritual realities. Applying truth-conditional semantics to Igbo circumstantial female names involves identifying the real-world or perceived conditions that justify such names. For instance, a name like Chinonso ('God is near/with us') is interpretable as meaningful when it reflects an experience or belief in divine presence. Similarly, Nneoma ('good mother') encodes expectations or recognition of maternal virtue, while Ugochi ('God's glory') reflects beliefs in divine favour. These names can therefore be analysed as propositions whose truth values are grounded in socio-cultural realities.

Beyond their propositional content, Igbo names operate within a broader socio-cultural and pragmatic framework. African anthroponyms are deeply embedded in cultural epistemologies, serving as vehicles for transmitting values, beliefs, and collective memory (Agyekum, 2021; Obeng, 2022). In this sense, the truth conditions of names are not merely individual but communal, reflecting shared understandings of spirituality, morality, and identity. Furthermore, insights from onomastics and linguistic anthropology suggest that naming is a performative act (Alford, 2020; Hough, 2023). Naming does not simply describe reality; it actively shapes identity and social perception. Thus, the assignment of a circumstantial name is both descriptive and constitutive: it records a condition while simultaneously projecting expectations and influencing how the bearer is perceived within the community. Although truth-conditional semantics has been critiqued for limited sensitivity to contextual variability (Carston, 2019; Dupre, 2020), its analytical strength lies in its systematic linkage between linguistic expressions and states of affairs. In this study, the

theory is applied alongside cultural and contextual considerations to provide a comprehensive account of meaning in Igbo circumstantial female names.

### 2.3 Empirical Studies

Empirical studies on African naming systems, particularly within the Nigerian linguistic landscape, have consistently demonstrated that personal names are culturally loaded linguistic expressions that encode history, belief systems, and social experiences. Nigerian scholars have made significant contributions to understanding how indigenous names function as meaning-bearing structures within their cultural contexts. In the Igbo linguistic tradition, Onuigbo and Eyisi (2021) provide empirical evidence that Igbo personal names are deeply rooted in socio-cultural realities such as spirituality, family history, and existential experiences. Their study shows that names function as condensed narratives that communicate the circumstances of birth and the worldview of the naming community. However, their analysis remains largely descriptive and does not systematically apply formal semantic theories such as truth-conditional semantics.

Supporting this, Eme and Mbah (2019) argue that Igbo anthroponyms are linguistic reflections of socio-cultural identity, revealing that names are structured expressions of belief systems, particularly in relation to God, destiny, and communal survival. Their findings emphasize that naming in Igbo society is not arbitrary but guided by culturally meaningful motivations. In a broader Nigerian context, Adeoye (2020) examines Yoruba personal names and demonstrates that names often arise from situational experiences such as childbirth conditions, parental aspirations, and spiritual interpretations of events. His study confirms that Nigerian naming systems generally operate as meaning-making tools grounded in lived realities, a finding that aligns with the present study's focus on circumstantial naming.

Similarly, Ubahakwe (2018) highlights that Igbo names are embedded in the communicative structure of the language and function as semantic units that reflect cultural philosophy. His work shows that names are not only identifiers but also linguistic representations of communal thought systems and moral values.

More recently, Nwankwo and Okafor (2022) investigated naming practices in southeastern Nigeria and found that female names often reflect emotional, spiritual, and socio-economic conditions surrounding birth. Their study emphasizes that female naming is strongly linked to family experiences and cultural expectations, reinforcing the gendered dimension of naming practices without reducing them to stereotypes. Additionally, Eze and Chukwu (2023) explore the pragmatics of Igbo naming practices and argue that names function as speech acts that perform social actions such as thanksgiving, lamentation, or testimony. Their findings support the view that naming is both linguistic and performative, shaped by context and intention.

Despite these contributions, most Nigerian studies remain within sociolinguistic, anthropological, or pragmatic frameworks. Very few apply formal semantic theories, particularly truth-conditional semantics, to systematically analyze circumstantial female names. This gap is significant because it limits the explanatory power of existing studies in accounting for the logical relationship between naming expressions and the conditions that give rise to them. This study addresses this gap by integrating Nigerian empirical insights with formal semantic analysis to provide a more structured and internationally relevant interpretation of Igbo circumstantial female names.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research design incorporating a descriptive survey approach. The mixed-method design was considered appropriate because it enables the integration of qualitative insights and quantitative presentation of data, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of circumstantial female naming practices among the Igbo. The descriptive survey design was employed to allow the researcher to systematically describe and interpret existing naming practices without manipulating any study variables. This design is particularly suitable for cultural and linguistic studies where the focus is on naturally occurring social phenomena.

Data for the study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from rural dwellers across selected Igbo-speaking communities in Eastern Nigeria. The instruments and techniques used for primary data collection include structured and unstructured face-to-face interviews, participant observation, non-participant observation, and introspection (used reflexively to complement insider cultural knowledge), given the researcher's position as a member of the Igbo cultural community. The secondary data were derived from relevant textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, and credible internet sources on Igbo culture, onomastics, and sociolinguistics. These materials were critically reviewed to complement and contextualize the primary data.

The study was conducted in ten (10) autonomous communities Ebonyi State in Eastern Nigeria. The selection of communities was purposively done to ensure representation of areas where traditional naming practices remain active and culturally significant. From each of the selected communities, ten (10) respondents were purposively selected based on their knowledge, experience, and cultural familiarity with Igbo naming traditions. This yielded a total of one hundred (100) respondents for the study. The sampling technique adopted was multi-stage purposive sampling, as it involved selecting communities first and then identifying knowledgeable participants within the communities.

### 4. Data Presentation and Analysis

This section analyses Igbo circumstantial female names using a truth-conditional semantic approach, where each name is interpreted based on the socio-cultural conditions that make it meaningful. Rather than merely describing meanings, the analysis explains the underlying truth conditions, pragmatic motivations, and identity implications embedded in each category.

**Table 1: Circumstantial Female Names of Family Lineage**

S/N	Names	Meaning
1	Ogbonne	Mother's namesake
2	Nnenna	Father's mother
3	Adaora	First daughter of the family
4	Adannaya	Her father's pride
5	Mgbekenta	Young maiden of the family
6	Nkemdilim	Let what is mine remain with me
7	Ikwunma	Showing that beauty runs in the family

Source: Author, 2025

Names such as Ogbonne, Nnenna, Adaora, Adannaya, Mgbekenta, Nkemdilim, and Ikwunma reflect kinship structure and family continuity. Their truth conditions are anchored in genealogical relations and family roles. For example, Ogbonne (mother's namesake) is only meaningful if the child is perceived as a continuation or symbolic representation of a maternal figure. The truth condition is therefore genealogical replication of identity within the maternal line. Similarly, Adaora (first daughter of the family) encodes a structural truth within the family hierarchy; its validity depends on the child's position as the first female offspring. Names like Nkemdilim (let what is mine remain with me) shift from descriptive lineage to existential possession and insecurity, reflecting a truth condition of emotional attachment or fear of loss. Thus, lineage names function not only as identifiers but also as semantic statements about family structure, continuity, and emotional ownership.

**Table 2: Names Signifying Family Struggles**

S/N	Names	Meaning
1	Amaogechi	Who knows God's timing?
2	Akalele	Let us continue to watch.
3	Onuwaegbulam	People's words will not destroy me.
4	Onyinyechi	God's gift
5	Nmasichukwu	Beauty emanates from God.
6	Chinenyenwa	God gives children.
7	Nwabunkechukwu	A child belongs to God.
8	Nwamaka	A child is a good thing.
9	Ginikanwa	What is greater than children?

**Source: Author, 2025**

Names such as Amaogechi, Akalele, Onuwaegbulam, and Nmasichukwu encode experiential hardship and interpretive theology. The truth conditions of these names are rooted in culturally interpreted periods of difficulty, such as infertility, repeated female births, economic hardship, or social pressure. For instance, Onuwaegbulam (people's words will not destroy me) presupposes a social environment of criticism or stigma. Its truth condition is met when there is actual or perceived communal judgment against the family. Similarly, Chinenyenwa (God gives children) is not merely a religious statement but a proposition-like response to infertility or child-loss experiences. The truth condition lies in the contrast between prior absence of children and eventual birth. Thus, struggle-based names function as semantic testimonies, converting lived adversity into linguistic affirmation of survival, endurance, and divine intervention.

**Table 3: Stillbirth Names**

S/N	Names	Meaning
1	Nwanorodu	Let the child live.
2	Ekperekanma	Prayer is best.
3	Ejiturubasi	Let wait/pause for God.
4	Ekperedike	Prayer is powerful.
5	Etuosorochi	As it pleases God.
6	Chiagbanwe	God cannot change.
7	Uchechukwu	The will of God
8	Chinwendu	God owns life.

**Source: Author, 2025**

Names such as Nwanorundu, Ekperekanma, Ekperedike, and Chinwendu reflect reproductive loss and spiritual interpretation of mortality. The truth condition here is highly sensitive: these names presuppose previous experiences of stillbirth, infant mortality, or repeated pregnancy loss. For example, Nwanorundu (let the child live) expresses a conditional or aspirational proposition grounded in repeated non-survival of infants. Its meaning is only fully activated under conditions of prior loss. Similarly, Chinwendu (God owns life) expresses a metaphysical interpretation of survival and death. The truth condition is not only biological but also theological acceptance of life uncertainty. These names therefore operate as semantic mediators between grief and hope, transforming traumatic experience into structured linguistic meaning.

**Tables 4: Names Signifying Wealthy Families**

S/N	Names	Meaning
1	Adaaku	First daughter of a wealthy family
2	Erighuaku	wealth cannot be exhausted
3	Obianuju	A child born into wealth
4	Egodi	There is wealth
5	Nwakaego	A child is better than wealth.

**Source: Author, 2025**

Names such as Adaaku, Egodi, Obianuju, and Erighuaku encode economic status and material conditions. The truth condition for Adaaku (first daughter of a wealthy family) depends on the existence of recognised family affluence at the time of birth. It is not simply descriptive but performative, reinforcing class identity through naming. Erighuaku (wealth cannot be exhausted) expresses a predictive or generational claim about economic continuity. Its truth condition is satisfied if the family is perceived as financially stable or continuously prosperous. Importantly, Nwakaego (a child is better than wealth) introduces a value inversion truth condition, where emotional or existential value overrides material wealth. This shows that Igbo naming also encodes hierarchies of value, not just material description.

**Table 5: Names Signifying Family Victory**

S/N	Names	Meaning
1	Mmesomachukwu	God's good deed
2	Chinazaekpere	God answers prayer
3	Chinasaokwu	God answers for me
4	Udokanma	Peace is best
5	Chimeremmma	God did me well
6	Ihechiluru	What God has done

**Source: Author, 2025**

Names such as Chinazaekpere, Chinasaokwu, Udokanma, Ihechiluru and Chimeremmma reflect resolution of conflict, answered prayers, or overcoming hardship. The truth condition here is the transition from problem to resolution. For instance, Chinazaekpere (God answers prayer) presupposes a prior state of unmet need or distress, and becomes semantically true when relief or resolution follows. Similarly, Udokanma (peace is best) encodes a comparative truth condition: the family must have experienced or understood conflict for the value of peace to be meaningful. Thus, victory names function as retrospective semantic markers, encoding resolution as linguistic evidence of transformation.

**Tables 6: Females Named after Days**

S/N	Names	Meaning
1	Mgbeke/Ekenma	A child born on Eke market day
2	Mgborie	A child born on Orié market day
3	Mgboaho	A child born on Aho market day
4	Mgbonkwo	A child born on Nkwo market day
5	Ukamaka	Sunday is good/a child born on a Sunday

Source: Author, 2025

Names such as Mgbeke (Eke), Mgborie (Orié), Mgboaho (Aho), Mgbonkwo (Nkwo), and Ukamaka (Sunday-born) are purely calendrical identifiers. Their truth condition is straightforward and verifiable: the child must have been born on the specified market day or Sunday. Unlike other categories, these names have low interpretive ambiguity and are grounded in temporal factuality rather than experiential interpretation. However, they still function culturally as identity anchors, linking individuals to the Igbo cosmological time system (four-day market cycle), thereby reinforcing cultural continuity.

**Tables 7: Widows, Experience**

S/N	Names	Meaning
1	Anamelechimanya	I am looking unto God.
2	Chibundum	God is my life
3	Kaosisochukwu	As it pleases God
4	Chimarankpam	God knows my need
5	Nwanyibuihe	A woman is valuable
6	Azuka	The back is stronger/ resilience has come
7	Ihedichinma	Whatever pleases God
8	Chinwendu	God owns life
9	Chinyeremaka	May God help me
10	Nchekwube	Trusting in God

Source: Author, 2025

Names such as Anamelechimanya, Chibundum, Azuka, Nchekwube, and Chinyeremaka reflect widowhood, grief, resilience, and survival during pregnancy or childbirth. The truth condition here is the loss of a spouse prior to or during pregnancy, combined with the emotional and social vulnerability that follows. For example, Azuka (The back is stronger/resilience has come) presupposes a real condition of widowhood and dependency. Similarly, Chibundum (God is my life) encodes existential reliance on spirituality during bereavement. These names function as semantic coping mechanisms, transforming grief into structured linguistic faith expressions. Importantly, they also demonstrate that naming is not only descriptive but therapeutic and identity-reconstructive, allowing widows to reposition themselves socially through language.

Looking at the data presentation and analysis, across all categories, Igbo circumstantial female names operate as truth-conditionally interpretable expressions embedded in cultural experience. Each name reflects a specific condition such as social, emotional, economic, temporal, or spiritual that validates its meaning. However, beyond truth conditions, these names also perform three key functions: narrative function preserving lived experiences; identity function shaping how individuals are socially perceived; and cultural function reinforcing Igbo worldview and collective memory. From the data, naming among the Igbo is not merely referential but semantically loaded, culturally grounded, and identity-forming.

### Summary of Findings

The analysis of circumstantial female names among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria reveals that naming practices are systematically structured around identifiable socio-cultural and experiential conditions. The study demonstrates that such names are not arbitrary linguistic labels but truth-conditionally motivated expressions that encode lived realities, collective memory, and cultural interpretation of life events. Findings show that Igbo circumstantial female names are broadly categorized into multiple interrelated groups including lineage, family events, temporal naming, reproductive experiences, economic status, and social transitions such as widowhood. The findings establish that circumstantial female names among the Igbo operate as culturally embedded truth-condition expressions, through which language, experience, and identity are intricately connected.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates that a truth-conditional analysis of circumstantial female names among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria reveals a relationship among language, culture, and lived experience. The findings show that names are not arbitrary labels but contextually grounded expressions with meanings anchored on social, emotional, temporal, and spiritual conditions.

The study confirms that Igbo circumstantial female names reflect family lineage, historical events, birth circumstances, and maternal experiences. As a result, these names function as cultural records that preserve shared memories and values within the society. Ultimately, Igbo circumstantial female names serve as meaningful linguistic expressions that shape identity as well as an interpretive framework that reflects the cultural worldview of the Igbo people.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Parents are encouraged to consider the socio-cultural and experiential circumstances surrounding childbirth when assigning names, as these conditions form the basis of meaning in Igbo circumstantial naming practices.
- ii. Contemporary Igbo people could embrace and preserve indigenous naming traditions, as these names constitute an essential aspect of cultural identity and heritage.
- iii. Parents should take responsibility for educating their children on the meanings and origins of their names in order to strengthen cultural awareness and identity formation.
- iv. Families should document and communicate the circumstances surrounding pregnancy and birth to ensure that bearers of circumstantial names fully understand the cultural and historical significance of their names.
- v. The semantics of indigenous names should be incorporated into the Igbo language curriculum at various levels of education to promote linguistic and cultural continuity.
- vi. Scholars and researchers are encouraged to expand academic work on Igbo naming practices, particularly through formal semantic approaches such as truth-conditional analysis, in order to enrich existing literature.

vii. Religious leaders and educated elites should promote balanced cultural awareness by recognising indigenous Igbo naming systems alongside foreign naming practices, rather than discouraging or undermining local traditions.

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