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## HONORIFICS: AN IGALA PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

*Employment of respect in interactions is one interesting aspect of language use in human interaction. In Igala, honorifics is a fundamental means of showing respect to each other. The Igala people, like other users of language, have numerous polite terms that are used to show respect to people in the process of interaction. This paper discussed types of honorifics in Igala Language and factors that determine choice of honorifics among Igala people. It should be noted that beyond verbal honorifics, people could show respect to each other, or attempt to earn same through nonverbal means. The paper concluded that in spite of the influence of modernism, the Igala people, especially at family level, still employ and value honorifics in everyday interaction.*

### Introduction

In using language we have special terms or behavioural patterns that are employed to prepare the ground for a smooth relationship in the process of interaction. In the case of vocatives (or address forms), we observe that in most languages, difference in the choice of address forms correlates to the degree of the speaker’s deference towards the addressee. (Harada 2016:499-500). For example, a name preceded by a title (e.g. *Enegbani* Otulukpe, Dr. Otulukpe) is a more polite address form than mentioning just the mere name without the title (Otulukpe). Even in some instances, the title (Onu-chief) is accompanied with a greeting formular (Annu) mentioned without calling the first name, especially in face-to-face contact with the person. In greeting the chiefs and in-laws, one should, as a mark of respect, remove one’s foot wears and *danyeku* (Squat) properly before uttering the *awa* or *agba* formular to the addressee (Etu, 2019:61).

Honorifics refers to ‘special linguistic forms that are used as signs of deference toward the nominal referents or the addressee’. (Asher and Simpson, 2014:1600). Honorifics are also used to refer to specially selected forms that are employed to depict the high social status of individuals (Crystal, 2013:176; Grundy, 2018:185) and Jibir-Daura, 2018:185). Honorifics are verbal modes of address that depict deference and politeness towards the addressee. They also refer to the enactment of nonverbal behavior that show high regards or respect for one’s conversational partner.

### Factors that Determine Choice of Honorifics

The major factors that determine the choice of terms to use in addressing one’s conservational partner include: Kinship, traditional (political) leadership, religion and context. Honorifics are an interesting longstanding components Igala language and observance of their roles in society continues in the modern time. Honorific is a word, title or grammatical form that shows a respect or social deference. The major factors that determine the choice of terms to use in addressing people include: Kinship, traditional (political) leadership, religion and context.

**Kinship:** The human family starts with a boy or a man going into courtship relationship with a lady. During courtship - a relationship that is mostly characterized by shyness – parties to the marital bond are very careful regarding which honorifics to adopt in calling each other’s attention to kick start a conversation. The man, especially if he is far older than his prospective wife, could



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call her by her first name. If the age gap between them is not too wide, the boy could call the lady *Oma Oja,* mothers-in-law’s daughter. At this point, the lady will not adopt any particular honorifics in referring to the suitor: She could say *Uwe na ka i,* I am addressing you, to start a conservational exchange with the man.

Immediately the marital relationship is established, the couple would choose what names to call each other. The wife will normally address the husband as *Iya,* my elder brother, or call, him *Baba,* father, if the man is old enough to father her. The man may wait for his wife to have a baby after which she will be addressed as *Mama Ocholi,* Ocholi’s mother, henceforth. In a polygamous setting, wives are mostly named after the places they were married from to differentiate which of them is being referred to in family discussions or which is being invited. As a result, we could have *Yawo Ankpa* (for the wife married from Ankpa), *Yawo Abocho* (for the one married from Abocho) or *Yawo Idah* (for the one married from Idah), etc. Simply put, the husband/wife (ves) relationship in Igala is characterized by multiple naming (MN) (Robinson, 2012:125). In other words, Igala couples have a range of honorifics from which they could chose to call each other.

As children and their parents’ relationship grow older, they find themselves coming into closer contacts with other members of the extended family. Hence, they learn and imbibe newer modes of addressing and behaving towards older members of the family. Kinship terminologies that are common in the Igala extended family are given in the table below.

***Table 1:*** *Igala Kinship Terminologies*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Reference** | **Address** | **Category of Relationship** |
| Ata | Baba/Ubaba | Father |
| Omaye Ata | Baba/Ubaba | Father’s Brother |
| Iye | Oja, Mama | Mother |
| Omaye Iye | Oja, Mama | Mother’s Sister |
| Achogba enekele | Enegbani | One’s elder brother |
| Okekele | Odu un: They are addressed by their first or personal names | One’s younger brother or sister |
| Achogba Onobule | Iya, Oja | One’s elder sister |
| Omehi | Omehi | Father’s elder or younger sister |
| Omenyi | Baba | Mother’s elder or younger brother |
| Oma (*Pl Amoma*) | Addressed by their personal names |  |

*\*\*Source: (Apeh 2019:44) with slight modifications by the writer.*

The table above shows that Igala children, even in modern times, do not call their parents and other elders, who may not be close relations, by names. Parents and other elders could call the younger ones by their names. But in a situation where children are named after a dead and highly respected person or deceased parents, they are not called by their (inherited) personal names; they are addressed as *Baba*

**Traditional Leadership:** Another source from which honorifics are got is from the traditional political institution. The Igala traditional political institution is headed by the Ata Igala, father of



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the Igalas, who resides at Idah. The Ata has a number of *Odu Ukpahiu,* names, which he bears as a mark of his power and authority. (Boston, 2018:233-234; Etu 2013:117 and Idegu, 2015: 16-17). They are used to praise or address the monarch. They include:

1. *Ata, agabaidu/Ga-a-aba-idu:* Ata, lion of lions

This is the standard form of salutation used by all Igalas for the Ata.

1. *Ata, a ka abale ki a che abale:* Ata, does whatever he likes.
2. *Ata, ododo k i ma maja n:*Ata, the red blanket that is very prominent in the market.

*Ododo* is the name of red felted cloth traditionally reserved for the king and his councillors. A piece of it worn or displayed for sale in the market would stand out from all other cloths because of its colour and association with rank.

1. *Ata, i no giili, i kpa giili:* Ata, pounces suddenly and kills suddenly.

The Ata Igala gives, in consultation with members of the Igala traditional council, honorary chieftaincy titles to deserving Igala and non - Igala people who have excelled in their chosen careers or have contributed tremendously to the development of Igala land. Titles given by the Ata eventually form part of the honorifics borne by the title holders. Examples are given in the table below.

***Table 2:*** *Honorific Titles given by the Ata Igala to some Persons*

**Category A:** Male

### S/N Name Profession Honorific Greeting

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | | **Formular** | **Conferment** |
| 1 Ahmadu Ada Ali | Military, Politics | Ochada Ata Igala | Tokula | 2016 |
| 2 Shehu Shagari | Politics | Oga Ata Igala | Ede | 2011 |
| 3 Sylvester Onu | Law | Omachi | Wali | 2013 |
| 4 Prince A. Audu | Banker, Politics | Adu oja | Edee |  |
| 5 Ibrahim Idris | Politician | Omachi-Ata | Waali |  |
| 6 Prof Francis Idachaba | Academic | Amana Orah Attah | Aboor | 1982 |
| 7 Dr. Sani Shaibu | Businessman | Olimene Attah | Doogah | 2013 |
| 8 Yakubu Okolo | Businessman | Omachi Attah | Waali | 2014 |
| 9 Capt. Idris Wada | Politics | Eneki Yabuja Attah | Waali | 2015 |
| 10 Friday Idachaba | Businessman | Okwo Attah | Doorgah | 2022 |
| 11 Peter Idu | Businessman | Eju Attah | Doorgah | 2022 |
| 12 Abdulkarim Asuku | Politics | Ogohi Attah | Edee | 2022 |

**Year of**



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**Category B:** Female

**S/N Name Profession Honorific Greeting**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | **formular** | **conferment** |
| 13 Rakiya Okpanachi | Law | Omiya Kekele Ata Igala | Adebu | 2013 |
| 14 Rosemary Abdullahi | Medicine | Atama Ebule | Atta | 2013 |
| 15 Rebecca Tanor | Medicine | Omiya Kekele Unana | Adebu | 2017 |
| 16 Haj. Salamatu Baija | Businesswoman | Atama Ebuve Attah | Adeebu | 2022 |

**Year of**

One significant point about these honorary awardees is that the Ata, on the day of their investiture, gives them some paraphernalia which they wear on special Igala ceremonies as the symbol of honour bestowed on them by the highest traditional institution in the Ataate. They include:

a.) Wrist beads (Oka)

b.) Neck beads (Odugbo) c.) Fly- Whisk (Otihi)

d.) Long Red Cap (Oluma-ada) e.) Flowing Gown (Acheba-ebo)

f.) The Red- Feathered Crown (Ikebe) g.) The Staff or Sceptre (Okpa-onu) h.) The Turban (Alawoni)

(Egbubu 2011:75)

**Religion:** Religion is another source from which people derive their honorifics. Among the Igala, both *Akpa* and *Malam* are used for any male Muslim. An *abakpa lile* or *Shehu* (from *Shaikh*) is an Islamic scholar of very high repute. One who leads the five daily prayers is called an *Imam* or *Olimamu. Alhaji* and *Hajiya* are titles borne by Igala Muslim males and females who have gone on pilgrimage to Makkah, Saudi Arabia. Titles such as Deacon, Evangelist, Pastor, Reverend Father, and Reverend Sister up to Bishop are borne by Igala Christians who occupy difference positions in the various Churches that they attend and serve.

**Context:** The context or environment in which two people meet determines how they would address each other. (Trudgill 2016:108 and Holmes 2012:281). In an informal situation, say at home, one may not address one’s younger brother who is a judge in a court of law, y*our honour.* The elder brother is likely to call his younger brother by his personal name or he adopts a less formal honorific but while his brother is presiding at the court the elder brother cannot call him by his personal name. Doing so will be considered disrespectful.

### Nonverbal Forms of Honorifics

Nonverbal forms of honorifics are behavioural patterns that are put up by individuals as means of showing respect to others. Such behaviours come to play independent of, or in conjunction with, verbal expression of honorifics.

**Suitor and his In-Laws:** A suitor in Igala land relates with his in-laws in the following ways: a.) He removes his foot wears as he approaches the house or rooms where they live.

b.) He will *danyekwu nyonyo,* bend or bow properly, to greet them,

c.) He should not extend his hand to his father-in-law for a handshake. d.) He could help them on their farms, especially in the rural areas.

e.) If he sees any of them carrying anything from the farm, he should collect such and take it to the house.



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**Wife and the Husband:** A wife in Igala land does these for the husband as a mark of respect: a.) She takes the food and water to the husband.

b.) Takes the plates away after the husband has eaten.

c.) Cleans the place of droppings after the consumption of the food. d.) Takes bath water to the toilet for the husband.

e.) Takes away the bucket or pail used for bathing. f.) Washes the husband’s wears when they are dirty.

g.) She makes the bed before she retires to her room at night

**Husband to Wife:** A husband in Igala land does these for his wife as a mark of respect: a.) Provides food, shelter and clothes;

b.) Protects and stand by her and

c.) Sponsors her education (if she is uneducated).

d.) Takes charge of the lion share of her parent’s burial.

**Children and Elders:** Children are expected to respectfully relate with elders in the following ways:

a.) They should bend or bow when greeting the elders. b.) They should not initiate handshake with elders.

c.) They should not be in front when moving with elders. d.) They should remain silent and listen as the elders talk.

e.) Generally, they are expected to run errands for their seniors. f.) When eating with elders or their seniors:

i.) The junior should wait for the senior or elder to first cut the food.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Ogijo | A | Bu | Oje | Ogba |
| Senior/elder | Should | Cut | Food | Front/first |

ii.) The senior or elder should start eating the food before the junior takes his share. iii.) The junior holds the plate as the eating progresses.

iv.) The junior cleans the place of droppings.

v.) The junior takes the plates away after the meal.

### Conclusion

In spite of the tremendous influence of modernism on the western educated Igala, it is plausible to say that the people will not just drop the use of (their local) honorifics for now. At the family level, some western educated Igala wives who reside outside Igalal; nd could call their husbands by name. When some wives do not use *Onenyi/onedenyi,* Master of the house, as honorific for addressing their husbands, they automatically adopt ‘Darling’ as a substitute. We are saying in essence that majority of Igala wives do not call their husbands by their first names.

It is unthinkable that Igala children, especially of the highly educated ones, will call their parents by names. At least, they will call them ‘Daddy’ and ‘Mummy’. Such children, because of their upbringing in the urban areas, may not see their mothers do all that the rural Igala wife does for her husband, but they see Mummy prepare and place food on the table for Daddy to eat. They have learnt to open the car door for their parents and take items brought from the market into the house.

The traditional leadership is still held in high esteem by the people. Hence, we should not expect the traditional institution and the honorifics associated with it to disappear in the twinkling of an eye. One, when names of traditional rulers with or without fiefdom are mentioned at official



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functions as a matter of protocol by say, the master of ceremonies (MC) who is an Igala, we notice that a *repair* such as:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Odu | Che | Ina | N |
| Senior/elder | Should | Cut | Food |

‘I do not mean to be disrespectful to your highness’ accompanies the pronouncement. Two, the elite are hankering after traditional titles; and those who have got one already would want such to be mentioned in public or preface their names in writing. Religious leaders - and others who bear religious honorifics cherish such titles dearly. It is common to see a religious title, among others, coming before the personal names of religious men in Igala land.

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