

## Honorifics and humilifics in Ngwa-Igbo: A socio-semantic analysis

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### Abstract

The word *honorifics* refers to titles, behaviours and material objects that designate the dignifying status of a person. Honorifics contrast with humilifics, which downgrade the social status of the person that such words, acts, or objects designate. The objectives of this paper are to give a typology of honorifics and humilifics in Ngwa-Igbo and to demonstrate the socio-semantic import of their use in Ngwaland. The method of data collection for this paper is elicitation, where information is collated by consulting four elderly persons of the age range of sixty to seventy years by the researcher. The framework for the analysis of data in this paper is Ethnography of Communication. Some of the findings of this paper are: that honorifics and humilifics are part of the linguistic repertoire of the Ngwa-Igbo dialect, that a neglect to use the appropriate title for a person in Ngwa is seriously frowned at, that the type of honorific or humilific expression, act or object used for a person reflects the honour or dis-honour accorded to the addressee, that some honorifics in Ngwa reflect the sex of the person spoken to or talked about and that honorifics and humilifics can be expressed verbally, behaviourally and materially.

**Keywords:** Competence, ethnography, honorifics, humilifics, semantics.

### 1. Introduction

In society, different people are respectfully or humiliatingly referred to in speech, writing or act, which depict their different status as to who they are perceived to be, what they do or the position they occupy at home, school, work, religious or social organizations. It is thus, a sociolinguistic default when people by error of omission or commission fail to address a person properly with an appropriate title. Attention has not been given to the study of honorifics in Ngwa, though there are scattered information in linguistic literature on the

definition *honorific* and their instances in very many languages, showing that it is perhaps a universal human language phenomenon. cf. (Lyons 1977, Lyons 1989, Matthews 2007). This paper seeks to give a typology of honorifics and humilifics in Ngwa-Igbo.

*Ngwa-Igbo* is an Igboid in the Niger-Congo language family under the new Benue Congo. cf. Williamson (1989). The word, *Ngwa* refers to the language, the people, and geopolitical area known as Ngwa land. Ngwa people are found in Abia state in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. They are found in seven Local Government Areas of the state namely; Aba North, Aba South, Isiala Ngwa North, Isiala Ngwa South, Obingwa, Osioma, and Ugwunagbo. According to Nwankwo (2009, p. 180), “the Ngwa homeland measures about 512.8 square miles, and has one of the most beautiful and fertile table lands of the Igbo nations in Nigeria”. This implies that the Ngwa land has a large landmark. Research has shown that the Ngwa land is bounded in the west by the Imo River, which separates the Ngwa land from Asa Nteke in South-West, and their Mbaise kith and kin in the west. Northwards of the Ngwaland are neighbouring, Ọ̀hùhù, Ụ̀mùahíá and Bende clans of the old Bende. The Ndokis are in the South-East and the Anaangs and Ibibios are in the Eastern parts of the Ngwa land. The exact date of the settlement of the Ngwa people in their present location/homeland is not known, but oral tradition has it that the Ngwa people were a group of Igbos who left Umuneoha, a place in Owerri (Owere) in search of cultivable arable land, large space of land to hunt and better trading and exchange opportunities. cf. Nwankwo (2009) and, Ezeibe (2009).

This paper seeks to illustrate the typology of honorifics or humilifics used by Ngwa-Igbo speakers. The method of data collection for this paper is *elicitation*, where information is collated by consulting four elderly persons of the age range of sixty to seventy years by the researcher.

## 1.1 Conceptual review

Lyons (1968, p. 279) notes that: “The honorific dimension is introduced to account for the differentiation of the personal pronouns in certain languages, not in terms of their reference to the roles of the participants in the situation of utterance, but in terms of their relative status or degree of intimacy”. This means that honorifics vary according to the degree of closeness and non-closeness of the persons in communication which could be verbal or non-verbal. Lyons here goes on to add that honorifics are found in a few European languages like French, German, Italian, and Russia where the second person singular pronoun is used in addressing children and friends and the second person plural pronoun or some other

pronominal form as in the Spanish *usted* is used for more formal reference to the hearer. Lyons notes further that: “the use of a pronoun for honorific functions does not invalidate the distinction of number in the second person singular, or the distinction of the second person plural and third person in the singular. More so, not only is the recognition of these distinctions still required for the proper semantic interpretation of sentences containing the honorific form of the reference to the hearer, it is frequently required also in the statement of the syntactic rules for gender or number concord”. From the above observation by Lyons, one can see that a linguistic unit in language can serve more than one function or can be studied from different perspectives due to the embedded complex nature of a grammatical unit which can be clarified by the context of usage. Again Lyons (1977, p. 641-643), notes that: “social superiority may depend upon social role, (parents being superior to their children, teachers to pupils, and so on), sex (men being superior to women), age (an older person being superior to a younger person) and various other factors”. What Lyons means here is that there are variables that influence the use of honorific terms in the expressions of a speaker to an addressee, whether in spoken or written form. Thus, the use of honorifics in the society is conditioned by different social yardsticks, showing that the template for the use of honorifics in the human social order is not a fixed one.

An honorific word is a title that conveys esteem or respect for positions or ranks when used in addressing or referring to a person. Sometimes, the term honorific is used in a more specific sense to refer to an honorary academic title. This implies that honorifics are signifiers of whom an addressee is, thus helping to prepare the mind of the audience for the processing of the information that a speaker presents about a person. (cf. Matthews 2007). The following are instances of honorific titles in the English language:

- 1 a. Mr. (Mister): this is a title used for men irrespective of a person’s marital status in English.
- b. Mrs. (Misses): this is the title for a female married person
- c. Ms. this is the title for a female whose marital status is unknown or where it is not desired to be known
- d. Mx (Mix)/Ind. (Unindicated)/ Misc. (Miscellaneous): this is the title that is used where there is avoidance to express gender through honorifics.
- e. Master: this is the title for young men or as a style for the heir to Scottish peerage. It may also be used as a professional title for

example, for the master of a college programme or the master of a merchant ship.

- f. Miss: This is the title for girls, unmarried women and (in the UK) married women who continue to use their maiden name (although *Msis* often preferred for the last two). In the UK, it has been traditionally used in schools to address female teachers, regardless of marital status. It is also used, without a name, to address girls or young women and (in the UK) to address female shop assistants and wait staff. In the U.S., these terms are styled with a period: Mr. or Mrs. The argument for this is that these honorifics were originally abbreviations of *Mister* and *Mistress*, while in Great Britain, periods are typically not used.

Honorifics that denote a person's occupation in the English language are Doctor, Esquire, Captain, Coach, Officer, Reverend, Rabbi, and so on. In academia, holders of academic Doctorate such as PhD/DPhil/MD/DO are addressed as *Doctor* abbreviated as (Dr.), Professor, abbreviated (Prof.). Some honorifics, one must note, that replace a person's name are Sir, Madam, Ma'am, Your Honour, Your Majesty, The Right Honourable, Your Excellency, The Chancellor, The Vice-Chancellor, The Secretary, The Prime Minister, The Senator, The Legislator, Your Holiness, The Pope, His Beatitude or The Most Blessed. The above honorifics are used as prefixes before a person's name. An example of a post-nominal honorific is QC (Queen's Counsel) which is used to refer to a judge or barrister in the Queen's or King's Counsel. For heads of schools, the following honorifics are used in the English language: Headmaster/Mistress, Principal, Master, Warden, Dean, Head of Department, Regent, Rector, Provost, Director, and so on. Honorifics for the ecclesiastical order in the Christendom are: Most Reverend, Eminence, Reverend, Priest, Reverend Father/Father, Reverend Sister, Archbishop, Bishop, Pastor, Shepherdess, Elder, His Grace, Deacon, Deaconess, President, Presbyter, Brother, Knight, Lady, Dame, Rabbi/Grand Rabbi, Chief Rabbi, Rebbetzin (A Rabbi's wife) Cantor, Master, Rav, and so on. For the Muslim clergy, the following honorifics are used: Imam, Shaykh, Mufti, Hafiz/Hafizah, Qari, Mawlana, Haji, Sayyid/Sayyidah, Sharif and so on. The armed forces all over the world have honorific terms by which every office holder is designated. The honorific terms used for the armed forces are also referred to as ranks. In Nigeria, military officers are referred to by the following honorific terms starting from the lowest position to the highest: Recruit, Private, Lance corporal, Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, Warrant Officer, Army Warrant Officer, Lieutenant, Captain, Major, Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, Brigadier, Major General, Lieutenant General,

General and Field Marshall. cf. (2019 Latest Current Affairs 2019). Other armed forces in the country have their various honorific terms, but since this paper is not on honorifics in the Nigerian armed forces, one will stop here.

In the French language, the following honorifics are found Monsieur/Messieurs, Madame/Mesdames, and Mademoiselle/Mesdemoiselles. In the French language, general titles are used when talking about a person and may or may not be followed by the person's last name. However, titles are only capitalized when followed by a name in the French language. By implication, it means that titles can be used without a person's name in the French language. cf. (Pratt, S. A. M. and Quénum, O.B.1981, Ayorinde, D.; Tijani, M. A.; and Abidogun, O. 2000, and Fayemi, 2005).

Honorifics can also be grammaticalized by being suffixed to a stem. In the Bengali language spoken in Bengali, the honorific for ordinary men is the suffix: *Babu*, used with the person's given first name. For example: Shubhash Basu would be *Shubhash-Babu* For men with whom one has a more formal relationship, the suffix *-Moshai* is used with the person's family name. Thus, Shubhash Basu would be *Basu-Moshai*.

In East Africa, where the Bantu language like Swahili is spoken, *Mzee/Babu* is frequently used for an elder to denote respect by younger speakers. *Babu* is also a honorific prefix used by younger ones to the Elders, but it may also mean grandfather. In Swahili, there is also a honorific prefix used for brother or a close male friend known as *ndugu*, while the honorific suffix *dada* is used for sister or a close female friend. Thus, John will be: *Ndugu John* 'brother John/my friend John' and Jane would be: *Dada Jane* 'sister Jane/ My dear friend Jane'. The implication of this, is that for one to qualify to be a close friend he/she must be as good as a true brother. These honorifics thus, demonstrate the closeness of a relationship in the Swahili sociolinguistic system. In Ghana, the speakers of the Akan language have a honorific prefix: *nana*. This prefix amongst the Akan and Twi speakers is used as an aristocratic honorific pre-nominal used by the chiefs and elders. Thus, one could have: *Nana Kwame Nkrumah* 'Chief/His majesty Kwame Nkrumah'. In the English language, it has been observed that it is customary for children to use the kinship term *uncle* and *aunt* honorifically, when addressing adults instead of their first name, even if he or she is not a biological uncle or aunt. cf. <https://kidsswag.ca/collections> > n... and <https://www.akandictionary.com> > n...

In the Yoruba language, honorific terms abound such as: the Alafin, Oba Ogbeni, Oloye and so on. Amongst the Efik people, honorifics do also exist in different forms. In Efik, a person can bear up to six names categorised into: enyin emana (birth name), usio

enyin (given name), udori enyin or nditi enyin (nick name), enyin ufok or enyin akparawa (honorific or pet name), enyin uduok-mmon (baptismal name) and enyin edisono confirmation name, if he/she is a Christian. The following are some honorific terms in Efik:

- 2 a. Eteyen ‘father of the child’.
- b. Mmete/Nnete/Ekaete ‘father’s mother’.
- c. Ete akamba ‘big/grandfather’.
- d. Eka eka/Nnenne/Nne ‘mother’s mother’.
- e. Ufan ete ‘father’s friend’.
- f. Koko ete ‘father’s name sake’.
- g. Ete nne/ete anwan ‘mother’s friend’.
- h. Eyeyen ‘grandchild’.
- i. Etinyin/Etete ‘father’s father’.
- j. Mma/Nne/nene/Nnene ‘mother’.

Sometimes too, *Ete* or *Mma* may be prefixed to a person’s regular name in order to effect respect for the person that is being spoken to. For example:

- 3 a. Ete Mkpang ‘our father Mkpang’.
  - b. Mma Effiom ‘our mother Effiom’.
- cf. <https://linguistics.stackexchange.com>>

Honorific as a term contrasts with the term humilific. In the next subsection, this term will be briefly discussed.

## 1.2 Humilifics

Humilifics are anti-honorific words, acts or objects that debase the status of the person that is being addressed. Humilifics, like honorifics also show the relationship of a speaker and an addressee. Humilifics are disreputable, debasing words, acts or objects that humiliate, embarrass and cause a person to be ashamed of him or herself. According to Matthews (2007, p. 179), “humilifics are humiliatives or words that speakers use in self-abasement, of

themselves, their relatives, and so on”. This means that humilifics can be used by a speaker to humble himself or others before a hearer. Matthews gives the example below:

4. My humble dwelling.

From the expression above, one can see that the speaker, abases or humbles himself before a hearer. The speaker presents himself as an ordinary person of a low status.

Humilifics are also known as despectives. A despective word, is a contemptuous, derogatory, defamatory or demeaning word that indicates a speaker’s tendency to look down on the person spoken to. <https://academic.oup.com>chapter>. Humilifics, can also be derogatory epithets (names or nicknames), that characterize a place, a thing, or a person. It must be mentioned here that epithets in literary works refer to adjectives or phrases accompanying a name or that modify the names of a person, place or thing. Epithets, as adjectives or qualifiers, can be honorifically (positively/esteemly) used, or humilifically (negatively/derogatively) used. Examples of epithets are:

- 5 a. *Fair-haired* Lucy.
- b. Alexander *the Great*.
- c. *Light-fingered* Margaret.
- d. John *the Beloved*.

The italicized words are epithets which modify the proper nouns in the construction in which they occur. *Fair-haired*, modifies Lucy, *the Great* modifies Alexander, *light-fingered* modifies Margaret, and *the beloved* modifies John. The essence of the explanation here is so that in this paper, the term *epithet* should not be taken as a generic term for honorifics and humilifics, but that epithets can be seen as fond names when used positively or as humilifics when used derogatively. [https://www.wordnik.com/words/humilific\(2020\)](https://www.wordnik.com/words/humilific(2020)).

Also, the internet source: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>...>, notes that humilifics are linguistic forms that humble an addressee. It contrasts with honorifics which elevates the social status of a person that is spoken to.

### 1.3 Semantics

According to Lyons (1981, p. 136) “Semantics is the study of meaning”. This means that semantics is concerned with the interpretation of the meaning of every lexical,

morphological and syntactic unit in language, for communicative effectiveness. Lyons went further to add that meanings are ideas or concepts, which can be transferred from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the hearers by embodying them, as it were, in the forms of one language or another. According to Robins (1989, p. 19) “meaning is an attribute not only of language but of all sign and symbol systems, and the study of meaning is called semantics which, therefore, embraces a wider range than language alone.” From the above assertion by Robins, Semantics studies, not only human language but also other signs and symbols which may include road signs or mathematical notational symbols. Palmer (1996, p. 1) notes that the term Semantics made its first appearance in 1894 in a paper read to the American Philological Association. The French version of the word Semantics is ‘Semantique’ coined by Michael Breal in 1897 who was the first person to treat Semantics as the science of meaning rather than as the study of language concerned with changes in meaning from a historical point of view. Thus, semantics is not a new concept in the study of language. Kreidler (1998, p. 3) notes that “Semantics is the systematic study of meaning and linguistics Semantics is the study of how languages organize and express meanings”. This means that Semantics is a field of study that is concerned with identifying how the human language organizes linguistic units to be able to effect meaningful communication. O’Grady, W., Archibald, J., Aronoff, M., and Rees-Miller, J., (2001, p. 245), refer to Semantics as “the study of meaning in human language”. This means that Semantics is concerned with the analysis of utterances in human language. O’Grady et al (2001, p. 245), also add further, that “... there is more to language than just form. For language to fulfill its communicative function, utterances must also convey a message; they must have content”. This means that every utterance has a semantic function that it must satisfy in every communication. Lobner (2002, p. 3) refers to semantics as “...the part of linguistics that is concerned with meaning”. In Other words, the focus of semantics is just to account for the meaning of every linguistic unit and not the morphological form of that unit. Lobner goes on to add that ‘meaning’ is a notion with a wide range of applications, some of which belong to the field of semantics while others lie beyond it. This means that semantics could exclusively be concerned with the meanings of linguistics entities such as words, phrases, grammatical forms and sentences or other non-linguistics units like actions or phenomena according to the context of use. Ejele (2003, p. 1) notes that “Semantics is the branch of linguistics that studies meaning”. This indicates that the other branches of linguistics: phonology, morphology and syntax are mainly concerned with the form of linguistic units in their specific area and not with the content of a linguistic unit. Ejele (2003, p. 5) also mentions that, “the term ‘semantics’ originates from the Greek word ‘Semantikos’ which means ‘significant’. Thus, semantics, is concerned with content, referent, implied meaning and not form or structure. According to



Ndimele (2007, p. 1), “Semantics is an area of linguistics which studies the meaning of words and sentences in language”. This implies that the study of meaning in a language could be either at the word or sentential level. Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (2008, p. 227), define Semantics as “the study of linguistic meaning”. Thus, to them, Semantics targets at studying the organization of meaning in human language. A linguistic unit could be: phonological, morphological, lexical or syntactic. Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010, p. 204-9) equally assert, “that Semantics is the study of meaning”. Thus, the study of the content of a linguistic unit is the preoccupation of semantics. Finally, for this paper, Omego (2011, p. 4) asserts that “linguistic semantics is the scientific study of all aspects of meaning encoded in natural languages, from the meaning of individual words to the meaning of words grouped into phrases and clauses in context within the lexical and grammatical structure of specific languages”. Thus, from this definition of semantics, it is a study of human language that studies individual words or groups of words in phrases and clauses. Omego also mentions that there are different types of meaning such as conceptual, connotative, collocative, reflected, stylistic, affective, and thematic meanings. In this paper, the literal, idiomatic, and contextual meanings of honorifics and humulifics in Ngwa-Igbo will be given. The literal meaning is the ordinary or denotative meaning, the idiomatic meaning is a nonliteral meaning of a word, and the contextual meaning is the collocative meaning of a word. It is the meaning a word has depending on the linguistic units before and after a word. Having seen some definitions of what semantics is, it is pertinent that the study of semantics has come to stay as an indispensable part of the study of human language. In the section that follows, the framework under which the data in this paper is considered will be discussed.

#### **1.4 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework used in this paper is the Ethnography of communication. Ethnography of communication, also known as *ethnography of speaking*, is concerned with the rules about the way in which language should be used in social interactions. It is a sociolinguistic study that focuses on communicative norms. For instance, it is normal amongst English speakers for the answerer of a telephone call to speak first, but in Japan, the caller speaks first. cf. Trudgil (1983, p. 130). O’Grady et al (2001, p. 713), note that: “Ethnography of communication is a type of discourse analysis that concentrates on how language is used to achieve communicative goals in particular social situations”. This means that ethnography of communication is aimed at finding the purpose for the choice of utterances people make in speech. Matthews (2007, p. 127), also refers to ethnography of communication, as *ethnography of speaking*. He mentions that this approach to language

study introduced by Dell Hymes in the 1960s, is concerned with the uses and patterns of speaking in a society as distinct from the account of the language system. In other words, the ethnography of speaking is a sociolinguistic approach to language study rather than a, phonological, morphological, semantic, or syntactic view. Matthews goes on to mention some of the areas of study in the Ethnography of speaking (communication) as: ritual utterances, central features of ceremonial occasions, formal insults used by close friends, verbosity in speech, direct and indirect requests, and so on. Thus, the area of study in Ethnography of communication is varied. Holmes (2008, p. 365), notes that; “The ethnography of speaking (also known as ethnography of communication too), is an approach to analyzing language which has been designed to heighten awareness of culture-bound assumptions”. This implies that that every speaker of a language carries with him some cultural rules that helps him to detect what is socially acceptable or unacceptable of the language he speaks. Holmes notes that in the Ethnography of communication the following sociolinguistic issues can be discussed: genre, topic, purpose, setting, tone of the discussion, participants, message, ordering of speech, and norms of interpretation. This also shows that the study area in Ethnography of communication is vast. According to Okeke (2017, p. 160), “the sociolinguistic approach to language study known as Ethnography of Communication was developed by Dell Hymes. Ethnography of Communication is not concerned simply with the structure of language used in communication, but with its use paying extra attention to underlying socio-cultural rules that form the basis of language use”. This means that context and indigenous knowledge system all have a part to play in the use of every language. In Ethnolinguistic study, Communicative Language Teaching holds that during language acquisition or learning, what is learnt is not just the linguistic forms, but beyond the linguistic forms are social-cultural forms which show how to properly use language to perform the kind of function that people in the society do, using language. Ethnography of Communication evaluates the place of culture in predicting the behaviours of individuals in a particular cultural setting in line with the taboos of that society. Thus, one of the premises on which Ethnography of Communication is established is that, the expression and understanding of a behaviour is mainly entrenched in the socio-cultural system of a society of which language is a part of. Ethnography of Communication describes the forms and functions of verbal and non-verbal behaviours within the cultural settings of a people. It is within this framework that every datum in this paper on honorifics and humilifics in Ngwa-Igbo will be considered. In the next section that follows data on honorifics in Ngwa-Igbo will be presented.

## 2. Honorifics

Recall, that *honorifics* have been defined as a term used to describe the social superiority accorded from one person to another in the forms of polite or elevating nomenclature, behaviours and material objects that designate the dignifying status of a person, as appropriate by the context in question.

### 2.1 Nominal honorifics

Nominal honorifics are the honorifics that are expressed in communication as titles that are used by Ngwa-Igbo dialect speakers to indicate the status of a person that is being addressed. Examples of these honorifics are given below:

	Ngwa-Igbo	Literary Meaning	Idiomatic meaning	Contextual Meaning
6 a.	Ézè.	‘A king’	‘A king / a highly honoured person irrespective of the sex of the addressee’	‘king/a highly honoured person irrespective of the sex of the addressee’
b.	Ugòézè	‘the king’s wife’.	‘a highly honoured/respected woman’	‘the kings wife/a highly honoured/respected woman’.
c.	Ópára	‘first son’.	‘a male child of great honour’	‘first son/a male child of great honour’.
d.	Àdhá	‘first daughter’	‘a female child of great honour’	‘first daughter/a female child of great honour’.
e.	Ódù ńwá/ímē úsò	‘last born’.	‘A greatly beloved child of a family’	‘last born’/a greatly beloved child of a family’.
f.	Dèèdé	‘big/senior brother’.	‘a title for a respected male person, irrespective of age.’	‘big/senior brother/a title for a respected male person’.

g.	Dáà	‘big/senior sister’.	‘A title for a respected female person irrespective of age’	‘big/senior sister/a title for a respected female person, irrespective of age’.
h.	Ńná m /Ńnáányị úkwú	‘my/our big father’.	‘A highly honoured man or a provider of ones needs’	‘my/our big father’/a highly honoured man or a provider of ones needs’.
i.	Ńné	‘mother’	‘A woman who gives one emotional succour’	‘mother/a woman who gives one emotional succour’.
j.	ògò m	‘my in-law’	‘A dearly beloved person that is not biologically related to a person, but by a contract of marriage’	‘my in-law/a dearly beloved person that is not biologically related to a person, but by a contract of marriage’.
k.	Ókéné	‘the child of our daughter’	‘A distant relation that one must not hurt’	‘The child of our daughter’/a distant relation that one must not hurt.
l.	Ńnánná	‘grandfather’.	‘A reincarnated father’	‘grandfather’/a reincarnated father’.
m.	Néné /Ńnéne	‘grandmother’.	‘A reincarnated grandmother’	‘grandmother’/ Reincarnated grandmother’.
n.	Dí m	‘my husband’.	‘a dear male person/child’	‘my husband/a dear male person/child’
o.	Nwáányị m	‘my wife’	‘A fond name by a male person to a beloved female one’.	‘A fond name by a male person to a beloved female one’.
p.	Ényì m	‘my friend’.	‘a confidante/a beloved person/a’	‘my friend/ a confidante/a beloved’

			brother or sister/ a trusted one.	person/a brother or sister/ a trusted one.’.
q.	Óríákù	‘the wife of a man’.	‘a highly beloved woman of a man/an heir’	‘the wife of a man/‘a highly beloved woman of a man/an heir’.
r.	Ónyé ísí	‘the head/the chairperson’.	‘the director/ controller of affairs/the master planner	‘the head/the chairperson/‘the director/ controller of affairs/the master planner’.
s.	Ónyé údò	‘A peace maker’	‘A lover of peace’	‘ A peace maker/a lover of peace’
t.	Ónyé ísí ńchùjà	‘A ‘chief priest’	‘A high priest/a person of high religious order’	‘A chief priest’/a person of high religious order’.
u.	Ógbú ágú	‘Lion killer’.	‘A very strong person’.	‘Lion killer/A very strong person’.
v.	Ọhà nà ézè	‘The rich and the poor/com mon’.	‘The head/a general representator’	‘The rich and the poor/common/‘The head/a general representator’.
w.	Ónyé ndú	‘A leader’.	‘A good guide /An organizer’	‘A leader/A good guide/An organizer’.
x.	Ọchírí ọ̀zùọ̀	‘A philanthropist’.	‘A very kind /a large hearted person	‘A philanthropist/A very kind /a large hearted person’.
y.	Òdògwú	‘A person of high calibre’	‘A wealthy person’	‘A person of high calibre/a wealthy person’

## 2.2 Behavioural non-verbal honorifics

Behavioural honorifics as the name implies, are behaviours that designate respect to persons without any oral expression, according to status, fondness or context. Examples of these are given below in Ngwa-Igbo:

	Ngwa-Igbo	Literary Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Contextual Meaning
7	a. Íjì ákà ábùọ́ íkélé ókémádù ékélé	'Shaking an elder or a person of high social status with two hands'.	'An act of high honour for a person'	'An act of high honour /Respect for a person'.
	b. Íshìrì mádù sí fùrù íchè.	'Preparing a special meal for a person'.	'An act that shows a that a person is special'	'An act that shows that a person is special and loved above others.
	c. Íghùfọ̀rọ̀ nwá mádù mírí áhù, mà ò bù kwà írífọ̀rọ̀ nwà rímádù sí.	'Giving a left-over bathing water to a child to bath with, or a left-over food, is a great sign of love and honour to that child'.	'To show that a child is greatly beloved and honoured'.	'It shows fondness and love for a child'.
	d. Íbìlìtèrè óké mádù8 l'óchè.	'Standing up from a chair so that an elder can sit down is an honorific act'.	'It signifies honour and respect for one's age and social status'.	'It signifies honour and respect for one's age and social status'.
	e. Íjìdèrè mádù mírí l'ábùbá tà ókwọ́ọ́ ákà.	'Holding the water for a senior person to wash his/her hand.	'It implies respect and honour'.	'It implies respect and honour'.
	f. Íjì éféré fùrù íchè ényé mádù sí.	'Serving a person with a special plate.	'It signifies honour and special love'.	'It implies honour and love'.

g.	Ízútàrà mádù ónyínyé fùrù íchè.	'Buying special gift items for a person.	'It implies willingness to care for someone'.	'It means love, care and honour for someone'.
h.	Íkélé mádù ékélé l'ùthùthù, íkété, l'ábàlì (màází/ǹdèéwó) mà ò bù mádù ǹríchàáí. (íshielá), mà òbù mádù ǹfùwá (gàánú óó), mà ò bù l̀tá ébé ò gàrà ( l̀l̀l̀l̀), mà ò b̀kwá í gó sí óbìómá là ñwé mádù mèèrè mádù (Íméélá óó).	'Greeting people in the morning, afternoon and evening or saying thank you to a person after a meal, or while going out of the house to a distant place or in return from a distant place'.	'Idiomatically, it means respect and honour'.	'Contextually, it implies respect'.
i.	Íkú ònú mà ñwé ómá m̀m̀rè mádù (ólólólóó, óóó, òòò).	'The exclamatory shout of victory, which is made at the accomplishment of a successful deed'.	'It idiomatically, signifies a great achievement'.	'It contextually, means success'.
j.	Ígbásá áká ábùó, íjí nàrà óké mádù ñwé.	'Opening one's two palms to receive an item from an elderly or a titled person.	'It idiomatically, signifies humility on the part of a person of low social status'.	'Contextually, it signifies honour to a person of high social status'.

k.	Ínò jìí mgbè óké mádù ndì ìbàrà ónyé ògbèdè m̀bhá.	'Keeping quiet when being scolded by a senior'.	'It idiomatically signifies, respect and submission on the part of a junior person'.	'It contextually, means respect'.
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### 2.3 Material honorifics

Material honorifics are objects which designate honour in a society. Some of these objects can be worn on the body or kept at a place. Examples of these in Ngwa-Igbo are:

	Ngwa-Igbo	Literary Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Contextual Meaning
8	a. Ókpù ézè	'the kings crown'.	'Honour'	'Honour'
	b. Úwéyí ézè	'the king's dress/regalia'	'Royal adornment/ Honour'	'Royalty/ Honour'
	c. Àgbàyi ézè	'the king's shoes'.	'Honour'	'Honour'
	d. Mkpàrà ézè	'the kings staff of office'/the kings walking stick'.	'Power/Authority'	'Power/Control'
	e. Mgbá lá áká ézè	'The king's bracelet'.	'Royal adornment/ Power'	'Royal adornment/ Power'
	f. Óché ézè.	'The king's chair/throne'	'Establishment/ power'	'Establishment/ power'
	g. Mpí/òdù éhí	'The horn /tail of a cow'.	'Power/festivity/c elebration/ honour'	'Power/festivity /celebration/ho nour'



Having seen some of the materials that designate honor in Ngwa-Igbo, the next section will consider humilifics in Ngwa-Igbo.

### 3. Humilifics

Humilifics, are words, acts or material objects that show the social debase of a person. Humilifics are also known as despectives. cf. Lyons (1977), Lyons (1989), and <https://www.wordnik.com/words/humilific>(2020). Honorifics and humilifics, have mainly been considered to be limited to the use of titles to designate the social status of persons, but there are also honorifics and humilifics that are behaviourally and materially exhibited. In the subsections below, there will be a presentation of nominal, behavioural and material honorifics and humilifics in Ngwa.

#### 3.1 Nominal humilifics

Nominal humilifics are names that designate the social debase of a person according to the type of ill behaviour that the person is involved in. Below are examples of nominal humilifics in Ngwa:

	Ngwa-Igbo	Literary Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Contextual Meaning
9	a. Ónyé óhí	‘A thief’.	‘An unreliable person’.	‘A bad person’.
	b. Ónyé àkwàrà	‘A prostitute’.	‘A loose person’	‘A free/loose person’.
	c. Ónyé n̄tùrù	‘A kidnapper’.	‘A betrayer/a mischievous person’	‘A betrayer/a mischievous person’.
	d. Ónyé ísí íké	‘A stubborn person’.	‘A disobedient person’.	‘A disobedient person’.

e.	Ónyé áshí	‘A liar’.	‘An unreliable person/ a fraudster’	‘An unreliable person’.
f.	Ónyé áká láábù/Ónyé nsí	‘A diabolic’	‘An evil person’	‘A bad person’
g.	Órí ngàrí	‘A monetarily corrupt person/bribe taker’.	‘A dubious person’	‘A corrupt person’.
h.	Ónyé ójóó	‘A bad person’.	‘An evil/bad person’.	‘A bad person’.
i.	Ónyé áká l’kpà	‘A pick pocket’.	‘A thief/fraudster’	‘A thief/fraudster’.
j.	Ónyé íbéríbé/ ǹz̀z̀.	‘A foolish person’	‘An unworthy person’.	‘A foolish person’
k.	T̀f̀j̀ák̀ẁá	‘God forbid/I curse you’.	‘God forbid/I curse you’.	‘God forbid/I curse you’.
l.	Ónyé m̀gb̀á lááb̀ù.	‘A person of double standard or an unstable person’.	‘An unreliable person/ a cheat’	‘An unreliable person/a cheat’.
m.	Ónyé áráb̀ù̀	‘A lousy person’.	‘A dirty /unserious person’	‘A dirty/unserious person’.
n.	Ónyé óhóóóóhó.	‘A foolish person/An idiot’.	An unintelligent person’.	‘A foolish person/An idiot’.

o.	Ónyé úmé ñgwú.	‘A lazy person’.	‘An unserious/ careless person’	‘A lazy/careless person’.
p.	Ónyé àmùmá.	‘A dirty person’.	‘An unhealthy person’	‘A dirty person’.

### 3.2 Behavioural humilifics

Behavioural humilifics, are nonverbal ways of showing dishonor, disdain or hatred to a person. Examples of these in Ngwa-Igbo are given below:

	Ngwa-Igbo	Literary Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Contextual Meaning
10 a.	Ífúchí íhú.	‘Frowning of the face at a person’.	‘Being angry at a person’	‘Being angry at a person /To be annoyed’.
b.	Ímá ósúrú.	‘Sighing/hissing at a person’.	‘To curse a thing’.	‘To curse /To dislike a thing’
c.	Ívù mádù ástù	‘Spiting at a person’.	‘To hate or dishonour a person’.	‘To dishonour a person’.
d.	Íwù mádù mírí mà ó bù ípó mádù ájá.	‘Pouring water or sand at a person’.	‘A dishonor and vexation at a person’.	‘Vexation at a parson’.
e.	Ílú mádù ósísí, ńkúmá, mà ó bù áhíhjá. ‘	Throwing stone, stick or any waste material at a person’.	‘A dishonour and vexation at a person.	‘Vexation at a person’.
f.	Ígbáchí mádù ńkítí.	‘Refusing to respond to a conversation’.	‘Vexation at a person’.	‘Vexation at a person’.

g.	Ídówàrà mádù shí l'íhú ọnú úzò. ụlò yá mà ọ bù l'élú óché.	'Keeping excreta in front of a person's house or on his chair'.	'poison/death/ dishonour'.	'Vexation and hatred at a person'.
h.	Ílùsị óké mádù ọgú mgbè ọ dì íbhàrà ónyé ògbèdèmbhá..	'Fighting back at a senior person when being beaten /scolded'.	'Dishonour/Disr epect'.	'Dishonour/Dis respect'.
i.	Ínyụ gídé óké mádù áhrụ.	'Farting in the presence of a senior person'.	'Disrespect'.	'Disrespect'.
j.	Íchùfù mádù l'óbòdó.	'Banishment from the community'.	'Rejection'.	'Rejection'
k.	Íwụ mádù nghà l'áká, mà ọbù ítú mádù mkpòrò.	'Tying someone's hand with a chain, or imprisoning a person'.	'Punishment for a great offence.	'Punishment for a great offence'.

### 3.3 Material humilifics

Material humilifics are objects that designate the low social status of a person in his social environment. Examples of these in Ngwa-Igbo are:

	Ngwa-Igbo	Literary Meaning	Idiomatic Meaning	Contextual Meaning
11 a.	Nghà	'Imprisonment'	'Severe punishment by incarceration	'Imprisonment'.
b.	Íkpù èkètè	'To be covered with a basket/to be disgraced publicly'.	'A public disgrace and shame.'	'A public disgrace and shame'.

c.	Mkpàkàrà ákwa	‘Torn clothes thrown at a person to designate disgrace/humiliation’.	‘Humiliation/ confusion’	‘Humiliation/ confusion.
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#### 4. Findings and discussion

In this section, findings on each section of the data presented above on honorifics and humilifics in Ngwa-Igbo, are discussed below.

On the nominal honorifics, it was discovered that, some of the titles were genderized as in: *nná/nné*, ‘father/mother’, *ézè/úgòézè* ‘king/queen’, *dèédè/dàá* ‘senior brother/senior sister. The nominal honorifics also showed respect in relation to what a person has achieved or done in life such as: *ógbú ágú* ‘lion killer’, *Ọchírí ọ̀zụ̀ọ̀* ‘a philanthropist’, *Ódògwú* ‘a person of high calibre’ and so on. This shows that nominal honorifics are nomenclatures that show the social status of a person. These titles are used in a positive, relaxed sociolinguistic environment, where there is peace and harmony.

On the behavioural honorifics, it was observed that these are acts of honour from one person to another. For example: *Íbìlìtèrè óké mádù l’óchè*. ‘Standing up from a chair so that an elder can sit down’, *Íjì áká ábụ̀ọ̀ íkélé óké mádụ̀ ékélé* ‘Shaking an elder or a person of high social status with two hands’, and so on. These honorific behaviours are in the social context of fondness and love.

On the material honorifics, it was found out that in Ngwa, specific materials, are used to depict respect. For instance: *ókpù ézè* ‘the king’s crown’, *úwéy íézè* ‘the king’s dress/regalia’, *àgbàyi ézè* ‘the king’s shoes’, and so on, which are found in the environment of royal adornment.

On nominal humilifics, it was discovered from the data that the despective titles designate the debased status of the bearer. For instance: *Ónyé óhí* ‘a thief’, which is used to refer to a person caught stealing or found to be involved in dubious dealings. *Ónyé àkwàrà* ‘a prostitute’, which is used in the context of a person who is not faithful to his spouse, or a person or who has multiple sex partners.

With the behavioural humilifics, it was observed that these were unspoken actions from one person to another that are disrespectful in the Ngwa-Igbo community. For example: *Ífúchí íhú*. ‘frowning of the face at a person’, *Ímá ọ̀sị̀rír* ‘sighing/hissing at a person’, and so on, which are actions that are used to demonstrate that a person is angry.

On material humilifics, these are objects that are used to demonstrate humiliation, rejection and disgrace in the Ngwa community. For example: *nghà* ‘chains/to be imprisoned’, *ìkpù èkètè* ‘to be covered with a basket/to be disgraced publicly’, which are objects that are used on criminals as a public disgrace, in order to caution others to refrain from evil. From the data on honorifics and humilifics in Ngwa-Igbo, it was observed that there is no difference between the idiomatic and contextual meaning for any honorific or humilific expression, while the literary meaning merely gives the denotative meaning of the word. For instance: *Ézè*, has the literary meaning as ‘king’, while its idiomatic and contextual meaning are the same, ‘king/a highly honoured person irrespective of the sex of the addressee’, *Ónyé árábùú*, has its literary meaning as ‘a lousy person’, and its idiomatic and contextual meaning as, ‘ a dirty/unserious person’. Finally, it was also observed that in Ngwa-Igbo, there are more nominal and behavioural honorifics and humilifics than material honorifics and humilifics.

From the above findings and discussions, one can see that in the ethnography of honorifics and humilifics in Ngwa-Igbo, the use of nominal, behavioural and material honorific or humilific, has a pragmatic implication of informing on the character or the social status of the person to whom such refers to.

#### 4. Conclusion

Honorifics are titles, actions or objects that designate the elevated status of a person, while humilifics are despectives that signify the debased position of a person in his sociolinguistic order. It was also discovered that Nominal honorifics are titles used in Ngwa-Igbo to designate different honourable and respected social relationships such as: *dím* ‘my husband’, *nwáányí m* ‘my wife’, *nné* ‘mother’, *nná* ‘father’, *nwá* ‘a child/a good person’. Thus, one can conclude that these titles are verbalized in the sociolinguistic behavior of the Ngwa-Igbo. It was also discovered that in the Ngwa-Igbo, behavioural honorifics and humilifics are nonverbal honorifics or humilifics, that individuals are expected to act out as part of the sociolinguistic behaviours that are operative in the Ngwa-Igbo dialect such as: a younger person standing up from a seat so that the senior/elderly person can sit down, shaking an elderly person or persons of high status with two hands, preparing a special meal for a person and so on. In these, it can be concluded that language can be acted out, while the message is still communicated. A close observation of the material honorifics in Ngwa-Igbo, shows that the clothes or ornaments worn by persons in Ngwa-Igbo, are insignias that point out the kind of position such a person holds. For example: *òkpùézè* ‘king’s/queen’s crown’, *àkhà* ‘a

special bracelet worn by kings/queens’, *m̀pí/òd̀ỳ éhí* ‘the horn/tail of a cow held by a king and his wife’ and so on. In other words it can be said that material objects can be used to transfer information. Thus, also helping to reaffirm that communication, can be verbal or non-verbal.

On nominal humilifics, it was found out that most of the nominal humilifics in Ngwa-Igbo, are expressions which inform one of the debased social orders that reflect the personality of the person that is being referred to. For examples: *Ónyé óhí* ‘a thief’, *Ónyé ashi* ‘a liar’, *Ónyé ákálàáb̀ỳ/ónyé ñsí* ‘a diabolic’, *Ónyé m̀gbálàáb̀ỳ* ‘a person of double standard or an unstable person’. It can therefore be concluded that nominal humilifics are negative titles or names that are used on outlaws in Ngwa-Igbo. With reference to behavioural humilifics, it was found out too, that they are nonverbal despectives that are used to humiliate individuals in the Ngwa-Igbo community. Examples of such are: *Ífúchí ihú*, ‘the frowning of a face at a person’, *Ímáósr̀r̀r̀*, ‘sighing/hissing at a person’, *Ív̀t̀mád̀ỳ ásr̀* ‘spiting at a person’, *Ígbáchí mád̀ỳ ñkítí*, ‘keeping quiet on a person’, and so on, can all be concluded to be used when a person is angry at someone. The literary meaning of honorifics and humilifics in Ngwa-Igbo from the data in this paper, gives only the lexical meaning of the word, action, or object that is being referred to, while the idiomatic and contextual meaning which are the same, give the connotative interpretation of the word, action or objection that is used. Finally, some of the Material Humilifics found in Ngwa are: *ngha* ‘chains for persons to be imprisoned’, and *Íkp̀ùèk̀è* ‘to be covered with a basket/to be disgraced publicly’ were observed. However, based on the framework of ethnography of communication, the paper has been able to account for honorifics and humilifics as sociolinguistic behaviours that are operational in the Ngwa-Igbo dialect. One can thus, conclude that honorifics and humilifics in the ethnography of the Ngwa-Igbo people can be communicated by names, actions and objects as symbols. This research therefore recommends further study on honorifics and humilifics in this dialect of Igbo in any of the following areas such as: ritual utterances, central features of ceremonial occasions, insults used by close friends, verbosity in speech, direct and indirect requests, literary genre, topic, purpose, setting, tone of discussion, participants, message, ordering of speech, and norms of interpretation. cf. Matthews, (2007, p. 127) and Holmes, (2008, p. 365). This is to unravel the sociolinguistic competence required for speakers to operate effectively in the Ngwa-Igbo sociolinguistic environment and to contribute to universal linguistic knowledge.

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