

PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF HYPOCORISM FOR MARRIED WOMEN IN TIV

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Abstract

This study titled ‘Pragmatic Analysis of Tiv Hypocorisms for Married Women’, sought to determine the factors that influence the selection and use as well as the classifications, meanings, communicative significance and pragmatic functions of Tiv hypocorisms for married women. The study employed the qualitative means of data gathering through unstructured oral interviews. Fifty (50) married couples who are Tiv native speakers were interviewed to find out the motivation for Tiv hypocorisms, their sources, meanings and functions. The data gathered were analyzed descriptively using pragmatic theory which provides adequate interpretation of the hypocorisms for married women in Tiv. The study found that emotions and traits of married women contribute immensely to the selection and use of Tiv hypocorisms for married women. The study also found that Tiv hypocorisms for married women are not mere linguistic expressions but are also pragmatically meaningful, which provides a window to understanding the marital cultural mindset of the Tiv. The study also discovered that Tiv hypocorisms provide a window to show love, emotional connection and bond enjoyed among married couples in Tiv society. The study, concluded that hypocorism in Tiv are not only a cultural phenomenon but are the bedrock of successful marriages in Tiv communities. The study recommends that more studies should be carried out on the linguistic study of hypocorism. There is also need for cultural renaissance through awareness creation and support for the use and preservation of this valuable and cherished culture of hypocorism in Tiv, in order to serve as records of knowledge of the Tiv language, culture and tradition for the future generation.

Keywords: Hypocorism, Marriages, Pragmatics Tiv, Women

Introduction

The pragmatic study of any aspect of language is quite essential as Tiav and Jighjigh (2020) point out that, pragmatics studies language in use and describes linguistic expressions in terms of human activity. They believe that the goal of pragmatics is to study speech acts with situations in which they are fulfilled, and other things that might influence meaning beside the semantic system. Thus, the major concern of pragmatics is the choice of linguistic means from the available repertoire for a better expression of one’s thoughts, and feelings for a better influence on the listener or reader in order to convince or affect him in different ways. This is why Abell and Smith (2016) point that pragmatic approach to the study of language helps to reveal the communicative role of intended expression, its usage by the addresser as a means of impact, and its correlation with the addresser’s behaviour and activity. Hence, this

study is a pragmatic study of Tiv hypocorisms for married women. It is concerned with hypocorisms for married women among the Tiv people predominantly found in Benue State of North Central, Nigeria.

According to Ezebube, Chukwuneke and Onuagha (2020), hypocorism is a branch of onomastics that refers to 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 (Ezebube, Chukwuneke & Onuagha, 2020). 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 and are used to signify the importance of one to another. Thus, pet names are remarkably universal methods of being demonstrative, showing affection and projecting

tenderness. However, although a lot has been done on the study of personal names (anthroponyms in the onomastic literature) in Tiv and beyond; regrettably, hypocorism as an aspect of onomastics has rarely been studied by linguists. It is in view of this that the present study examines from a pragmatics point of view, Tiv hypocorism for married women. The study examines the factors that influence the selection and use; the sources, categorization or classification; the meaning, communicative significance and pragmatic functions of Tiv hypocorism for married women.

The term 'Tiv' assumes three varying meanings. It refers to the ancestral father of the Tiv race of central Nigeria. It also refers to the ethnic group which is the descendant of Tiv. Lastly, it refers to the language spoken by this race (Udu, 2009). The Tiv people believe that they are all descendants of one man called 'Tiv'. According to Ngutswen (2013:2), the word 'Tiv' has a Bantu origin which means "a beloved child". Tiav (2017:16) claims that the word Tiv is derived from *Tive* meaning "their name". This means that it is a name for the Tiv race. Tiv constitutes approximately 5% of Nigeria's total population, and number over fourteen (14) million individuals throughout Nigeria and Cameroon. Most of Tiv speakers are found in Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa and Plateau States. The Tiv people, according to Wegh (2003) are bordered on the East by Jukun, and Chamba of Taraba State; to their West are the Idoma of Benue State and Igala of Kogi State respectively; to the North, the Tiv share border with the Ankwe, Alago and Koro of Nasarawa State; and to the South, they are bordered by a congeries of ethnic groups which they call Udam. Tiv also shares boundaries with four (4) other states namely: Nasarawa State to the north, Taraba State to the South, Enugu State to the South-West and Kogi State to the West. The Tiv people occupy fourteen (14) Local Government Areas out of the twenty-three Local Government Areas in Benue State. The Local Government Areas occupied by the Tiv people are Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer, Gwer-West, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi, Tarka, Vandeikya, Ukum and Ushongo.

Literature Review

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is defined variously by different scholars. According to Wisniewski (2007), pragmatics is an aspect of linguistics which is concerned with meaning that words convey when they are used with intended speaker meaning as it is sometimes referred to. It is the study of the rules and principles which govern language in use in order to express the desired meaning and how it is perceived. Finnegan (2008) explains pragmatics as the study of the contribution of context to meaning. This shows that the meaning of any single word is to a very large degree dependent on its context. It is at this point that pragmatics demonstrates how humans communicate and how expressions will become very meaningful when they are analyzed on the basis of their contextual use. This is because the users of those expressions will have particular meaning in mind. Yule (2007:129) explains pragmatics as 'the study of intended speaker meaning'. This explains that meaning is not only a product of meaning of words; we have other aspects of meanings which are not derived mainly from the meanings of lexical items used in phrases and sentences. In other words, pragmatics is the study of 'invisible' meanings or how the listener or reader understands what is meant even when it is not actually said or written. This is achieved through the intended meaning of the speaker or writer, and the use of the meaning of words in combination and the context in which they occur in order to arrive at what the speaker or writer intends to convey.

An invisible meaning is an aspect of meaning which is not derived solely from the meanings of the words used in the phrases or sentences. When we read or hear pieces of language, we normally try to understand not only what the words mean, but what the writer or speaker of those words intends to convey, that is not reflected in the words used, is what is known as invisible meaning. It is also how we recognize what is meant even when it is not actually said or written. For this to happen, speakers or writers must be able to depend on a lot of shared assumptions and expectations (Tiav & Jighjigh,

2020).

Adegbite (2000) explains that pragmatic analysis of language can be the investigation into that aspect of meaning which is not derived from the properties of words and constructions, but from the way in which they are uttered. Pragmatics therefore, looks at language not as an abstract entity but as a means of communication that is being used by people interacting in specific situations with specific intentions and goals within specific contexts. Meaning in pragmatics depends not only on structural and linguistic knowledge like grammar and lexicon of the speaker and listener but also on the context of the utterance; any pre-existing knowledge about those involved, the inferred intent of the speaker and other factors. It looks beyond the literal meaning of an utterance and considers how meaning is constructed as well as focusing on implied meanings (Tiav & Jighjigh, 2020). Mey (2001:4) explains pragmatics as 'the use of language in human communication as determined by the condition of the society'. This means that language users require a good understanding of their society in order to attain communicative competence. Mey (2001:6) clearly states that:

Pragmatics is a systematic way of explaining language use in context. It seeks to explain aspects of meaning which cannot be found in the plain sense of words or structure, as explained by semantics. It is therefore, a way of investigating how sense can be made of certain text even when from semantic point of view, the text seems to be either incomplete or have a different meaning to what is really intended.

This view therefore, opposes the abstract, idealized rules of language such as grammar and the relationships between the abstract systems of language and language use. This actual domain of pragmatics is what Chomsky (1980) calls Performance, while Saussure (1916) calls it Parole which is the way an individual uses language. Thus, the language user is the center of attention in pragmatics, and language use on the other hand, is

whatever that happens when users are 'doing things' in and with language. Hence, pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of the society.

Hypocorism (Pet Names)

Hypocorism, sometimes also called hypocoristic or pet name is a name used to show affection for a person. It may be a diminutive form of a person's name, or it may be unrelated. Etymologically, the term hypocorism is from Ancient Greek 'hypokórisma' or 'hypokorízesthai' meaning 'to call by endearing names'. The prefix 'hypo' refers in this case to creating a diminutive, something that is smaller, while the root 'korízesthai' means 'to caress' or 'to treat with tokens of affection or in a tender or affectionate sense'. Thus, hypocorism is a pet name, nickname, or term of endearment that shows affection or closeness. A pet name is a hypocorism, and so is the addition of a diminutive suffix to the end of a person's name. Hence, some hypocorisms are as straightforward as changing the form of a word or name to a usually shortened or otherwise modified version; while, others are terms of endearment (Vocabulary.com, 2025).

According to Bechar-Israeli (1995), a pet name is a name we receive in addition to our legal name which is usually given to us by the people surrounding us. Etymologically, the term is derived from the Middle English term: "an eke-name", meaning an added name. Thus, the etymology of the word points to the fact that pet names do not go with the naming convention (for instance, christening of a child) in the society where it is used. Odisho (1997) points out that, pet-naming is an onomastic device practiced by adults in a fashion similar to contractions and abbreviations. It is simply a trend in the economical use of language to serve the function of intimacy, informality and perhaps endearment. Thus, it can be viewed as a system for self-reformation or identity reinvention. It can be a diminutive name (Idika & Iwuchukwu, 2018; Idika, 2020); that is, a diminutive form of a person's name, such as Izzy for Isabel or Rob for Robert, or it may be unrelated, such as best friends calling each other by an affectionate name

unrelated to given names like “twin star”, a husband and wife calling each other “baby”, or when a pet named “Tabitha” is called something unrelated to its root name such as “brownie” or “baba”, or related to baby talk pronunciations for longer words like Grandma becoming “gams”. It can also be descriptive, reflecting physical features and character traits or profession (Idika & Iwuchukwu, 2018; Idika, 2020). Thus, McDowell (1981) in Filani and Melefa (2014) asserts that pet names are widely distributed, and the practice of pet names is everywhere contoured to the cultural matrices in which they operate.

Afful and Nartey (2013: 92) 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”. The use of these names differs from couple to couple due to social, emotional, psychological and marital factors. Hence, Tiav and Jighjigh (2020) note that, the terms of endearment are among the reasons there is also the phenomenon of name-sake in pet names. They pointed out that some husbands appreciate certain qualities or attributes of some women and name their newly married wives after such women’s pet names with the hope and expectations that they will imbibe such attributes of their pet name-sake; for a pet name is an important indicator of the bearer’s behaviour, qualities or state of being. It also suits the overall circumstances surrounding the lady. This suggests a close affinity between the name and the bearer of the name. For instance, as seen in Tiav and Jighjigh, (2020) in Tiv, one is not only called the pet name *Kùndú-m-yòl* ‘I am comfortable’ except such a person brings comfort or is a source of comfort to the husband and the family. Tiav and Jighjigh (2020) thus, emphasize that pet names are expressions of affection and other forms of endearments used only in a marriage relationship by husbands to strengthen their emotional link or union and commitment. They pointed out that pet name is a normal healthy thing for husbands who are happy, satisfied and passionate towards their wives.

Ezebube, Chukwuneke and Onuagha (2020) buttressed this by giving an instance that,

when a husband calls his wife “my treasure”, he feels the wife is a rare gem and a gift to him. They pointed out that, when this happens and the wife feels the husband addressed her rightly, it increases the level of attraction she feels for the husband. Thus, they gave examples of some other pet names, especially in Igbo like ‘mummy’, *obidiya* ‘her husband’s heart’, *ugom* ‘my treasure’, *asampetem* ‘beauty beyond measure’, *oyiridiya* ‘her husband’s resemblance’, ‘angel’, ‘mine’, ‘darling’, ‘baby’ (for women) and ‘daddy’ (for men), *nke m* ‘my own’, *di m oma* ‘my good husband’, *odiukonamba* ‘rare gem’, *obiajulu m* ‘sweetens my heart’, *onyemjiribiri* ‘my care giver’, *oga m* ‘my boss’, *nwokeoma* ‘a good man’ (for men). This gives the couple a sense of attachment to each other.

Studying the ethnopragmatics of Tiv pet names for married women, Tiav and Jighjigh (2020) had shown that pet names are given based on the positive qualities of the married woman. This is why Rosenhouse (2002) maintains that pet names index positive affection for they are used to express the love and affection experienced in a marriage by couples. It is a normal healthy thing for couples who are happy with each other, satisfied and passionate towards each other to use pet names. The names are very useful in building intimacy in the marriage or relationship but not to reinforce gender power dynamics. Rather, pet names can be approached anthropologically where relationships are reinforced by rituals such as nicknames and other forms of language used and understood by the couples and family members to reinforce peace in the marriage and family (Tiav & Jighjigh, 2020).

Tiav and Jighjigh (2020) also pointed out that, Tiv use pet names for married women to show the positive qualities of beauty love, reliability or truth, hard work and unity exhibited by the wife in the family. These qualities lead to the development and success in the marriage and family. The pet names function as desired virtues to drive the behaviour and personality development and to radiate love and affection in her social relationships with others (Mensah, Rowan, Tiav and Ishima, 2019). Pet names like Kwagh-u-ken-shima ‘something in the heart’ connotes a special

intimacy and love that is reserved for your partner. Pet names are therefore, sweet and kind words used to show affection and project tenderness. If a husband calls his wife a pet name, it can increase the affection and attraction she will have on him. Those who are used to pet names claim that they are another simple and warm way of keeping the relationship or marriage alive, as the names are pleasing to the couples (Tiav & Jighjigh, 2020). However, a pet name depicts the importance of a wife to a man. It helps to build trust, cooperation and loyalty of the wife to the husband, and enhances a sense of belonging thereby, enforcing individual and relational identities (Tiav & Jighjigh, 2020).

However, a pet name is a name that is used instead of someone's usual first name to express fondness or familiarity. It is a substitute for the proper name of a familiar person, place, or thing, for affection or ridicule. A pet name can be a shortened or modified variation on a person's real name. It may be contractions of longer names; for instance, Benjamin to Ben, Nwakaego to Ego, Margaret to Maggie, Chukwuebuka to Ebuka. It is an informal name given to someone by their family or friends for affection; it can also be a way of reinventing one's identity (Idika & Iwuchukwu, 2018; Idika, 2020). Pet names are mostly used among married couples and individuals in intimate relationships. The names are expressions of affection and endearment, used within a restricted set up of marriage and intimate relationships. They are associated with marital satisfaction by most couples who are in a very happy relationship. Pet names serve as bonds between the couples and the family in general. It is also a human way of expressing love. It is used to strengthen an emotional bond between relationships of partners that are committed (Tiav & Jighjigh, 2020).

Empirical Review

Ezebube, Chukwuneke and Onuagha (2020) conducted "A Sociolinguistic Study of Pet Names used among Couples in Nsukka Metropolis". It sort 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. The study examined pet names used in six selected areas in Nsukka metropolis: Echara, Ngwuru, Ihe n'Owerre, Amaeze, Nru, and University community. This study adopted 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; and sociolinguistic factors such as age, gender, occupation, region and educational background are identified to serve as determinants as to why couples use pet names. However, the study concludes that, 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. The study therefore, recommends that pet names should continue to be used among couples depending on what they want to achieve with the pet names they employ.

Tiav and Jighjigh (2020) carried out a study on the "Ethnopragmatic Analysis of Tiv Pet Names of Married Women". The study examined the motivation for the pet names among the Tiv people, their sources, social categorization or classification and above all, the significance of such pet names in the Tiv society. It also explored the various experiences and emotions that pet names convey, and looked at the culturally and contextual meanings in the interpretation of the pet names discussed in the study. Data for the study were gathered from the Tiv speaking area of Benue state, Nigeria through personal interviews, conversations with the pet name bearers and givers, and through participant observations; and analyzed based on ethnopragmatic meaning rather than semantic or denotative meanings of the pet names, with the pet names grouped based on their sources for easy analysis. The findings from this

study show that pet names are expressions of affection and other forms of endearments used only in a marriage relationship by husbands to strengthen their emotional link or union and commitment; and it is a normal healthy thing for husbands who are happy, satisfied and passionate towards their wives. The study found that, pet names are very important in Tiv culture; they are reciprocal expressions of love by husbands to appreciate their wives, and the sources of pet names are based on emotion and beauty of life, comfort and enjoyment, consolation, and expectation as well as the qualities of the married women such as value or worth of the wife and reliability and dependability. However, the study concludes that pet names exhibit intimacy and love between the bearers and the givers of the names, and provides a window to show the love, comfort, support, consolation and the elegance enjoyed among couples and their families in Tiv society, which also provide a window to understanding the cultural mindset of the Tiv, as far as issues of wife taking and what expectations she is to bring into the man's life are concerned. Thus, the study recommends that, the bearers and givers of pet names are good living examples that other couples should emulate for they instill sanity, peace, unity and harmony in marriages and families.

However, the literature gap exposed from the reviews is in terms of the fact that, there is scanty literature on hypocorism; that is, the study of pet names; although the few available studies have made valuable efforts and contribution towards this area of onomastics; that serves as foundation in the study of pet names used in social relationships, especially within the Nigeria and African context. In the light of more recent data on hypocorism for married women in Tiv society, therefore, the present study is an improvement on the previous study and serves as an addition to the body of knowledge and literature on hypocorism for married women and couples in Tiv.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the ethno-pragmatic theory. The theory enables proper understanding and analysis of the communicative significance and ethno-pragmatic functions of the hypocorisms for married women. This theory was developed by

Wierzbicka (2010) and is on examining cultural aspects of language and communication from an insider's perspective without relying on universal concepts, such as politeness and directedness or indirectness which can be foreign to many cultures. It defines the ability to communicate and interpret language in social interactions. Hence, ethno-pragmatics is a branch of pragmatics that focuses on studying language use in specific cultural and social contexts. According to Goddard (2006), some of the different aspects explored in ethno-pragmatic analysis include:

- i. **Politeness:** This aspect focuses on how individuals communicate politeness and show respect towards one another in different cultural settings. Ethno-pragmatic analysis investigates the cultural norms and strategies used in politeness exchanges, such as the use of indirectness, honorifics, or deferential language.
- ii. **Face and Identity:** Understanding how individuals construct and negotiate their social identity within a cultural group is another important aspect of ethno-pragmatic analysis. It explores how linguistic choices reflect social hierarchies, group affiliations, and the negotiation of face or social status.
- iii. **Intercultural Communication:** Ethno-pragmatic analysis also examines communication styles across different cultures and how individuals from different backgrounds interpret and respond to each other's messages. It investigates the challenges, misunderstandings, and strategies for successful intercultural communication.
- iv. **Context:** Context plays a significant role in language use, and ethno-pragmatic analysis explores how cultural, social, and situational factors impact communication. This includes analyzing the effect of contextual elements such as gender, age, power dynamics, and social norms on language use within a specific cultural group.
- v. **Multimodality:** Ethno-pragmatic analysis takes into account various means of communication beyond verbal language, including nonverbal cues, gestures, facial expressions, and body language. It examines

how these nonverbal elements interact with language use to convey meaning within a cultural setting.

- vi. **Speech Acts:** Ethno-pragmatic analysis examines how speech acts (such as requests, apologies, and compliments) are performed and interpreted within a specific cultural group. It looks at how meaning is conveyed through language and how social norms and values shape these interactions.

By studying these different aspects, ethno-pragmatic analysis aims to provide insights into how language functions within specific cultural contexts and contributes to our understanding of cross-cultural communication (Goddard, 2006). Ethno-pragmatics is necessarily intertwined with cross-linguistic semantics because the whole idea is to understand speech practices which make sense to the people concerned in terms of indigenous values, beliefs and attitudes, emotions and so on, which can be better understood by reference to certain concepts and ways of speaking in their respective cultures (Kwarpo, 2023; Togbenou, 2024). Such concepts are called cultural key words (Wierzbicka, 2010).

The ethno-pragmatic theory, therefore, fits perfectly into this pragmatic study of Tiv hypocorism for married women as it constitutes hidden meanings that require pragmatic competence to be understood. Hence, the various aspect of the ethno-pragmatic analysis is relevant to this study. This is in the sense that the whole idea of pragmatic analysis is to understand speech practices which make sense to the people concerned in terms of indigenous values, beliefs and attitudes, emotions, and so on which can be better understood by reference to certain concepts and ways of speaking in their respective cultures (Kwarpo, 2023; Togbenou, 2024). Ethno-pragmatic theory examines the cultural context in which the Tiv hypocorisms are used which requires the understanding of social norms, values, morals and emotions of the hypocoristic name givers.

Research Methodology

The descriptive research design is employed in this study. The primary and secondary sources are used in gathering data for

this study. The primary means of data gathering include interviews, discussions, observations and meta-linguistic conversations, as fifty (50) married couples who are native speakers from Tiv speaking areas of Benue State, Nigeria, particularly, five (5) Local Government Areas of Benue State, including: Gwer-East, Gwer-West, Gboko, Katsina-Ala and Ukum Local Government Areas, were interviewed and meta-linguistics conversations and discussions undertaken for data collection. The secondary method includes the internet, history resources, journals and books. Thus, the qualitative research method and ethnopragmatics theory were used in the analysis of the data collected for the study. Data is presented in tables and analyzed descriptively. This pattern of analysis focused on the socially-based assessments, beliefs and interactional principles that underlie language use and interpretation of hypocorism for married women; and is chosen based on its capacity to bring out the pragmatic meanings embedded in Tiv hypocorism for married women.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents and discusses the categories of Tiv hypocorism for married women. The Tiv hypocorisms are grouped into different categories to reflect their meanings, communicative significance and pragmatic functions or interpretations. The groupings include: Names based on emotion, beauty, comfort, consolation, value and worth, reliability and dependable qualities, joy and happiness, strength and resilience and expectations.

Tiv Hypocorism based on Emotion

A number of Tiv hypocorism for married women show the level of affection of the husband towards his wife, based on the emotional feeling of love and endearment. Such names reflect the emotion of the husband. The emotion here is the endearing feeling that the husband has from his relationship with the wife. The emotion is usually positive in nature. Such hypocorisms include the following in table 1:

Table 1: Tiv Hypocorisms showing Emoti

S/N	NAME	MEANING
i.	Shímàyám	my heart
ii.	Shímàkwé	my heartbeat
iii.	Dòòshímàwàm	my love

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

In Table 1 (i), Tiv hypocorism *Shímàyám* ‘my heart’ is an expression signifying that the wife is the most cherished and beloved, holding a place of profound importance in his life and emotions. In Tiv worldview, the word ‘heart’ is often used metaphorically to represent the core of a person's being, their emotions, and their deepest affections. Thus, the Tiv hypocorism conveys a deep level of love and devotion, suggesting that the wife is the source of the husband's joy. Similarly, in Table 1 (ii), the Tiv hypocorism, *Shímàkwé* ‘my heartbeat’ means that this woman is so important to him that she represents the very center of his life, essentially controlling his emotions to the extent that her presence is as vital as his own heartbeat. More so, in Table 1 (iii), the Tiv hypocorism, *Dòòshímàwàm* ‘my love’ means that the husband believes that the wife is the object of his feelings and that they are deeply attached to each other, often implying a strong and meaningful relationship. These Tiv hypocorisms signify deep, passionate love and connection.

Tiv Hypocorism based on Beauty

There are a number of Tiv hypocorisms for married women that show appreciation of the physical appearance, features and beauty of the woman. They include the following:

Table 2: Tiv Hypocorism that express Beauty

S/N	NAME	MEANING
i.	Mdóòm	beauty
ii.	Dìònkwàsé	beautiful woman
iii.	Shídòò	epitome of beauty
iv.	Nyíàndòò	fairly-complexioned
v.	Úvìngír	well shaped
vi.	Áfàkòndòn	tall and beautiful

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

The Tiv hypocorisms in Table 2 are names that showcase appreciation of beauty, based on the physical features possessed by the wife. These are adjective descriptions of those physical qualities possessed by the wife; especially those that evoke

a sensuous feeling of adornment that captivates the husband; hence the attributive use of the Tiv hypocorism such as *Mdóòm* ‘beauty’, *Dìònkwàsé* ‘beautiful woman’ and *Shídòò* ‘epitome of beauty’ in Table 2 (i – iii). Tiv hypocorisms such as *Nyíàndòò* ‘fair complexioned’, *Úvìngír* ‘well shaped’ and *Áfàkòndòn* ‘tall and beautiful’ in Table 2 (iv–vi), are hypocorisms given based on the physical appearance and attributes of the woman. The husband, being obsessed with these qualities in his wife, pet names her as such. Thus, such names are among the physical features of the wife which the husband find characteristically alluring. However, on certain occasions, the woman may be so endowed that the husband has several hypocorisms for her, each depicting a particular physical attribute of the woman. Thus, the Tiv hypocorisms in Table 2 demonstrate those rare physical attributes possessed by a wife. Of course, since those hypocorisms are attributively praise adjectives, their invocation hinge on worthiness, satisfaction and contentment experienced by the husband. This prompts the wife to feel special and continue to give her best in the marriage.

Tiv Hypocorism based on Comfort

A number of women have positively influenced and changed the lives of their husbands by virtue of marriage. These women work hard to ensure that they support and encourage their husbands in various aspects of life. The husband's acknowledgement of the wife's sacrifices and contributions evokes a psychological and emotional satisfaction, which makes him to give his wife Tiv hypocorism based on the comfort that the wife has brought into his life and family. Thus, a man who has attained success, particularly by virtue of being married to his wife will surely appreciate the wife who enabled him to attain success and a comfortable life, by giving her hypocorisms such as:

Table 3: Tiv Hypocorism that reflects Comfort

S/N	NAME	MEANING
i.	Mśúrshímàwàm	my comfort
ii.	Ákùndúshímà	peace of mind
iii.	Mmèshímà	rest of mind
iv.	Kúndúmyòl	I am comfortable
v.	Kpémýòl	I have rest of mind

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

The Tiv hypocorisms in Table 3 reflect the comfort and peaceful life enjoyed by the couple as a result of the marriage; hence, the Tiv hypocorism *Mśúrshímàwàm* ‘my comfort’ as in Table 3 (i). The comfort is usually reflected in the man’s internal state which brings about the expression of his innermost feelings through the Tiv hypocorism such as *Ákùndúshímà* ‘peace of mind’, *Mmèshímà* ‘rest of mind’, *Kúndúmyòl* ‘I am comfortable’, and *Kpémýòl* ‘I have rest of mind’ as in Table 3 (ii – v). Thus, the pragmatic reading of these names is that the name giver (husband) uses these names to express past experiences and acknowledge being liberated from hard experiences and now testifies the abundance of wealth, comfort and peace in his life and family. The implication for such names is that they are context based and relate to the previous experiences of the husband and the changing social and economic fortunes accompanied by a sense of psychological well-being, thus warranting such hypocorism. The Tiv hypocorisms in Table 3 indicate the changed state of the husband from a previously uncomfortable life to a comfortable and peaceful one.

Tiv Hypocorism of Consolation

Another category of hypocorisms are the ones that are used as a means of expressing consolation. A number of husbands and families suffer great loss and disappointments in life looking for relief from such depression and grief. If a woman provides such a relief, the husband will give her any of the hypocorisms in Table 4:

Table 4: Tiv Hypocorism expressing Consolation

S/N	NAME	MEANING
i.	Sùlúshímà	console my heart
ii.	Kúndúshímà	calm my heart
iii.	Kámdóòshímà	good to my heart
iv.	Tèráshímà	crossed my heart
v.	Zèréshímà	tie my heart

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

The Tiv hypocorisms *Sùlúshímà* ‘console my heart’ *Kúndúshímà* ‘calm my heart’ and *Kámdóòshímà* ‘good to my heart’ in Table 4 (i – iii), help to express that the emotional problems experienced by the husband, that has been caused by grief and tragedy are taken away by virtue of having a good woman as his wife. The Tiv hypocorism such as *Tèráshímà* ‘crossed my heart’ and *Zèréshímà* ‘tie my heart’ in Table 4 (iv and v) also serve to facilitate recovery from such losses and redirect focus which is usually championed by the attitudes and activities of the wife. The name giver (husband) gives the hypocorism based on what emotional alignment he feels the wife brought into his life that warrants a change in fortune or the state of mind. This goes to further explicate the Tiv cosmic view that there is an emotional and even spiritual affinity between the husband and the wife; that in order to survive or be successful in life, one needs a wife who will emotionally and spiritually accentuate the husband’s yearnings and aspirations in life; and when this happens, the husband’s sense of fulfillment and satisfaction leads him to give such hypocorism expressing consolation.

Tiv Hypocorism that show Value and Worth

There are also Tiv hypocorism given to women by husbands to show the value or worth of their wives to them and the family. The value or worth is based on a number of conditions which are fulfilled by the wife. For instance, these conditions may include the abilities of the wife to give good advice, number of children (male(s) inclusive), industrious, and standing firmly with the husband and the family in times of difficulties, etc. These achievements or contributions of these women to the development of their husbands and families are acknowledged by the husband that makes him to give such hypocorisms as seen in

table 5.

Table 5: Tiv Hypocorism that show Value or Worth

S/N	NAME	MEANING
i.	Úwàm	my own
ii.	Hémbàmkwàsè	worth more than a wife to me
iii.	Zànríyákwàsè	wife with monetary value
iv.	Ìkpànyáryám	my treasury
v.	Kàsèvkyúndù	twenty women
vi.	Ítyòúghkyúndù	twenty heads

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 5 show that, Tiv hypocorisms such as *Úwàm* ‘my own’, *Hémbàmkwàsè* ‘worth more than a wife to me’, *Zànríyákwàsè* ‘wife with monetary value’ and *Ìkpànyáryám* ‘my treasury’ in Table 5 (i – iv), are given to a married woman by the husband to signify that she is considered something of great worth, like a valuable possession or a precious gem. It means the husband holds her in high regard, based on her value and worth. Sometimes, a hardworking wife’s achievement may be more than that of a number of wives put together. Hence, in acknowledgment and appreciation of the achievements, contributions and support of the wife, the husband gives her Tiv hypocorism as *Kàsèvkyúndù* ‘twenty women’ and *Ítyòúghkyúndù* ‘twenty heads’ as in Table 5 (v and vi). This in essence announces the value of the wife in comparative terms to equal that of twenty women or heads. This goes to agree that the contextual citation of such pet names lay closely with the Tiv cultural beliefs pertaining to marriage. The view upholds that marriage is a partnership and possession of those attributes that would help the husband to become great is quite necessary for the wife. Pragmatically, the Tiv hypocorism therefore display recognition of the valor displayed by such women that their husbands duly appreciate.

Tiv Hypocorism based on Reliability and Dependable Qualities

The Tiv hypocorisms in this category are those given to women to show that they are reliable and dependable. This means that the husband has confidence and can confide in them. This implies that the qualities of such women do not only

depend on their beauty but are also virtuous in nature, which makes the husbands to give such names that acknowledge and recognize their reliability and dependability. This means that the husband can beat his chest and say this or that about her even in her absence and it will be so. Examples of Tiv hypocorism in this category can be seen in table 6.

Table 6: Tiv Hypocorism expressing Reliability and Dependable Qualities

S/N	NAME	MEANING
i.	Wándùghgáwàm	my forever wife
ii.	Ìkìghírkwàsèyám	my one and only wife
iii.	Pèndàtyó	where you rest your head

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

In Table 6 (i and ii), the Tiv hypocorism, *Wándùghgáwàm* ‘my forever wife’ and *Ìkìghírkwàsèyám* ‘my one and only wife’ signifies a lifelong dedication to the wife. This means that the husband acknowledges that the wife is the only woman he is married to and loves, and that he does not intend to have any other wives; since, she is the sole love of his life in terms of marriage. This implies a deep commitment and exclusivity in the marriage relationship, and showcasing the recognition of the reliability and dependability of the wife by the husband. Similarly, the Tiv hypocorism, *Pèndàtyó* ‘where you rest your head’ in Table 6 (iii), when viewed pragmatically means that the husband feels secure with his wife. He can sleep with his head in her arms with his two eyes closed and without fear. He is assured of his secrets and his security in her hands. She cannot say one thing and do another. She provides enabling environment where the husband can rest his head. Thus, pragmatically, through this Tiv hypocorism, the husband is acknowledging that she is trusted, reliable and dependable.

Tiv Hypocorism based on Joy and Happiness

An important category of Tiv hypocorism for married woman is that which the husband uses to express his joy and happiness towards his wife. When a wife brings such joy and happiness to her husband and the family, the husband as a way of recognizing her efforts and contributions, appreciates her and acknowledges the joy and happiness she has brought to his life and family,

and gives her the Tiv hypocorism in Table 7 as follows:

Table 7: Tiv Hypocorism expressing Joy and Happiness

S/N	NAME	MEANING
i.	Sàànmóyòl	I am happy
ii.	M̀sààníyòlwà̀m	my joy
iii.	Dzwààhànáhànwà̀m	my always smiling woman

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

In Table 7 (i), the Tiv hypocorism, *Sàànmóyòl* ‘I am happy’, directly expresses that the husband is happy in the marriage. Likewise, *M̀sààníyòlwà̀m* ‘my joy’ in Table 7 (ii) directly expresses the husband’s acknowledgement of the wife as the source of his joy and happiness. It means that, the wife brings him a deep sense of happiness, fulfillment, and positive energy, essentially acting as the primary source of joy in his life; as her presence and connection with him makes him feel truly happy and content. Also, the Tiv hypocorism, *Dzwààhànáhànwà̀m* ‘my always smiling woman’ in Table 7 (iii), means that the husband is referring to his wife as the woman in his life who consistently appears happy and optimistic, often expressing her positive attitude through a smile. It signifies that her cheerful demeanor is a notable and endearing quality about her; portraying the woman as someone who brings joy and happiness to his life.

Tiv Hypocorism based on Strength and Resilience

There are some Tiv hypocorism through which the husband acknowledges the strength and resilience of the wife. When a wife showcases these virtuous qualities, the husband may express appreciation of these qualities by giving her Tiv hypocorisms as follows:

Table 8: Tiv Hypocorism based on Strength and Resilience

S/N	NAME	MEANING
i.	<i>Tínèkwàsè</i>	stem wife
ii.	<i>Ányàmkwàsèwà̀m</i>	my tigress

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Women in Tiv society are known to be strong and resilient. They have severally been acknowledged to embody both masculine and feminine qualities of strength and resilience;

hence, the Tiv hypocorism, *Tínèkwàsè* ‘stem wife’ in Table 8 (i), which the husband use to acknowledge and appreciate the wife’s significant achievements. Likewise, in Table 8 (ii), the Tiv hypocorism *Ányàmkwàsèwà̀m* ‘my tigress’ is used by the husband to express and appreciate the fierce and wildly passionate nature of the woman.

Tiv Hypocorism based on Expectations

Another category of hypocorism for married women is that which expresses the husband’s expectations. Before a man marries, there are certain thing she expects, relating to the kind of woman he would marry and qualities he expects from the wife. The expectations may be about her ability to cook and entertain guests, her beauty, if she is fertile and can give birth to children, if she can make a good home and family, her ability to cope with difficult times and cooperate with the husband to have a good and peaceful marriage, among other expectations. These expectations of the husband may make him to give the wife such Tiv hypocorism in Table 9 as follows:

Table 9: Tiv Hypocorism based on Expectations

S/N	NAME	MEANING
i.	<i>Íjìngíyà̀m</i>	my mirror
ii.	<i>Ìshànpépè</i>	morning star

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

When the husband gives a wife the Tiv hypocorism *Íjìngíyà̀m* ‘my mirror’ as in Table 9 (i), it means that the wife reflects back to him a clear image of his expectations. Just like a mirror is a reflection of what is, the wife is as a reflection that helps him perceive his own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors with clarity. Likewise, the husband gives a married woman the Tiv hypocorism, *Ìshànpépè* ‘morning star’ as in Table 9 (ii), when she is a source of hope, optimism and new beginnings in his life; like the bright stars appearing in the dawn sky, signifying the start of a new day. Pragmatically, the Tiv hypocorism essentially means that she is a ray of light and brings positivity into his life.

Discussion of Findings

A pragmatic analysis of Tiv hypocorism for the married women is carried out in this study and the findings reveal that Tiv hypocorism reflect the social and cultural expression of love,

affection, endearment and other sorts of circumstances within specific social relationships such as friendship, courtship, marriage and other such intimate relationships. They bond the couples or parties in these relationships. As regards to Tiv hypocorism for married women, the findings reveal that, there are various factors that influence the selection and use of Tiv hypocorism for married women. The Tiv hypocorisms for married women are given by the husbands based on the level of affection of the husband towards his wife, observed physical and virtuous qualities of the woman that offer a form of emotional ease or relief, and other traits of the married woman that the husband cherishes.

The findings reveal various categories and classifications of Tiv hypocorism for married women, which include: Names based on emotion, beauty, comfort, consolation, value and worth, reliability and dependable qualities, joy and happiness, strength and resilience and expectations. These are the various sources from which Tiv hypocorism for married women are derived. Thus, the findings reveal that, the Tiv hypocorisms for married women are given by the husband to show love, affection and endearment to his wife. They are also an appreciation, recognition and acknowledgement of the married women by the husbands for their physical beauty, virtuous qualities as well as the efforts and contributions of the wife. However, the findings reveal that, pragmatically, Tiv hypocorism for married women perform the function of making the married woman feel recognized and appreciated for her role in the marriage and family. The Tiv hypocorism for married women builds the emotional connection and bond between the husband and wife which is necessary for a peaceful and successful marriage.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that hypocorisms are very important in Tiv culture. Hypocorisms are essential elements of successful marriages in Tiv. They are reciprocal expressions of love by husbands to appreciate their wives. The sources of the Tiv pet names are based on the qualities of the married women as reflected in the emotion, beauty, comfort, consolation, value or worth, reliability and dependability, joy and happiness and expectations which she has brought to the husband and the family. The compilation of the Tiv hypocorisms provides a window to show the love, emotional connection and bond enjoyed among couples in Tiv society. Above all, the Tiv hypocorism as discovered in this study, provide a window to understanding the cultural mindset of the Tiv, as far as issues of marriage are concerned, particularly as it relates to what is expected of a married woman in the marriage and the bond between husband and wife.

Consequently, hypocorisms in Tiv are not only a cultural phenomenon but are the bedrock of successful marriages in Tiv communities and should continue to be used and encouraged among couples, for they build emotional connection and bond between married couples. The study also recommends that, more efforts should be channeled towards the linguistic study of hypocorism as an area of onomastics, by indigenous scholars through research and publications. Also, there is need for cultural renaissance through awareness creation and support for the use and preservation of this valuable and cherished culture of pet naming in Tiv, in order to serve as records of knowledge of the Tiv language, culture and tradition for the future generation.

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