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Identity Construction: An Onomastic Exploration of Church Names in Ghana

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Abstract:
A growing body of research has sought to examine the interface between language and identity construction from different theoretical perspectives. Located in the institution of religion, this study drew on Hall's (1997) representation model to explore how Ghanaian church names are constructed through language and the identities such names instantiate. One hundred church names were randomly selected as data for the study from charismatic and Pentecostalchurch billboards within the Agona West Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana and a qualitative content analysis approach adopted for the analysis. The analysis of data revealed that some charismatic and Pentecostal churches in Ghana use varied religio-linguistic signifiers such as "church", "ministry", "camp", "movement", "assembly", and "chapel" to enact and instantiate their identities. The study also showed that the religio-linguistic signifiers were employed to forge indigenous, transnational, international, incongruous and Christian religious identities. Further, different religio-linguistic resources are used to enact and instantiate diverse but distinct religious identities in different contexts. The study contributes to the scholarship on Sociolinguistics, in general, and the growing research on the identity construction of church names from an onomastic perspective, in particular. The study also has theoretical implication for the application of Hall's (1997) representation model to the study of identity construction in church names and further research on church names.

Keywords:Identity, representation, signifiers, indigenous, transnational, Christian religious identity

1. Introduction

Research on naming in language until recently has often been carried out from the purview of philosophy rather than linguistics. This is because scholars have had to contend with the issue of whether or not names actually have meaning. To this end, some scholars maintain that "names do not have meaning but only perform the function of denoting items once they become inactive" (Anderson, 2007, p. 276). Fox (2011) contends that "one of the strongest of all human passions is a passion for a name" (p.65). He avers that anything which has a name lasts long and remains indelible in the minds of people. Moscovic & Duveen (2000 cited in Fox 2011, p.65) maintain that names have "... solemn significance... to endow it with a geneology and to include it in a complex of specific words, to locate it, in fact, in the identity of matrix of our culture."

Names are captured through linguistic resources and this makes language a "vital instrument that aids the communicative ability of the members of any given society or geographical territory (Odebode & Dabi, 2015, p.17). Humans worldwide utilize both verbal and non-verbal means to accomplish everyday social life, including the enactment of identity. Hall (1997) posits that "...language is the privileged medium in which we "make sense" of things in which meaning is produced and exchanged" (p.1). This implies that our thoughts, ideas, and feelings within our cultural settings and general conceptualization of the world are construed through language; hence, language is pivotal in the meaning production process through representation and identity creation.

Indeed, language serves as a linguistic tool for enacting and shaping both group and individual identities. Khokhar, Memon & Siddique (2016), for instance, maintain that "language is not only considered the means of identity construction but with its help, understanding of others" identity is built," and it is " the site of identity and identities are the results of language; it is the chief arena for its co-operation" (p.235). This means that language enables its users to convey meaning about themselves and others, and to represent the world meaningfully to other people in any given society, using appropriate semiotic resources. Hall (1997) avers that meaning is produced through meaning producing-practices, including representational systems that reside in language.

Cerulo (1997) opines that identity studies have evolved and grown central to current sociolinguistics scholarship with the aim of exploring the interface between language and identity, and how language is used to enact identity. Some studies (Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2012; Cameron& Kulick, 2005; Edu-Buandoh, 2006; Khokhar, Memon & Siddique, 2016; Levon, 2015; Meyerhoff & Ehrlich, 2019; Ofosu-Mensah & Ansah, 2012; Richters *et al.*, 2014 and Simonsson, 2020) have

focused on using social identity theories to determine the role language plays in the conceptualization and legitimization of ethnic, sexual, queer, institutional, professional, and classroom identities from different perspectives. These social theories point to the fact that people usually enact and maintain their identities of self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, belongingness, efficacy and meaning when they are motivated (Vignoles *et al.*, 2006). Identity is defined as how an individual thinks about, understands, and judges her/himself as a social being (Heliot *et al.*, 2020) and consists of a person's interests, values, abilities, norms and what an individual ascribes to the self in a given social context.

Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman (2010) postulate that religious identity refers to the sense of affiliation with a religious group, which is often expressed through beliefs, values, and practices. In this paper, a religious group is taken to mean a church in general and a Pentecostal-Charismatic church, rather than mainstream Christian churches such as the Methodist, Catholic, and Presbyterian. The religion at play here, needless to say, is Christianity. The missionof Christian churches is to take the supernatural power of Jesus to the world and to make the kingdom ofGod the governing system of our social order, a social order operating biblicalprinciples as unifying and meaningful responses to the challenges and opportunities of life, thus making better citizens of the peoples of the world (Dada, 2018). Each religious group is distinct in terms of identity and representation and how it solidarizes with other religious entities with similar values, practices and beliefs.

The exploration of the interplay between language and religious identity construction has been an area in the field of language and identity studies. Though the field looks promising and fertile, it has not received much research. Haschele (2012) postulates that the "names adopted by Christian denominations customarily express elements deemed crucial for their identity" (p.87). His study underscores the fact that theological, historical, contextual, and linguistic factors are some of the elements that account for the stability or otherwise of church names and the dynamics in their identity enactment. This implies that churches do not select names arbitrarily to signify their designations but have identity loadings for specific purposes. Though some works (Brandt, 2018; Duderuja, 2008; Hoschele, 2012 and Lichterman, 2008) have been carried out to determine how linguistic resources are used for forging and enacting religious identities, the field remains under-researched, most especially, in the context of the Sub-Saharan region in general and in the Ghanaian context, in particular.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to explore how church names in Ghana are constructed through language and the identities such names instantiate. This study is premised on the assumption: "language enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of what goes on around them and inside them." (Halliday, 1994, p.106). The study hopes to contribute significantly to the growing research on the interface between religion and language and how these two concepts connect to enact religious identity.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Key Concepts and Theoretical Assumptions

Onomastics, as a field of study derived from both Semantics and Socioliguistics, is devoted to the etymology, forms, and uses of proper names (Crystal, 1999; Anderson, 2007). This field of linguistics is very helpful in data mining, with applications such as named-entity recognition or recognition of the origin of names. Awukuvi & Israel (2018) outline three subfields of Onomastics: anthroponomastics, toponomastics, and ethnonyms. While anthroponomastics studies personal names, their origin, evolution and usage, toponomastics deals with the study of place names. Ethnonym, on the other hand, deals with the study of names of various ethnic groups. Aside these branches, some scholars have identified other subfields of onomastics: socio-onomastics and literary onomastics. Whereas the former deals with the study of names within a society or culture, the latter investigates the names in works of literature and other fiction. This study is situated in the toponomastic domain of onomastics because the focus of the research is on church names.

Halliday (1994) maintains that language is a resource for constructing meaning and that it operates through the use of signaling meaning producing entities and representations. Beltran (2018) defines representation as meaning associated with mediated images and narratives and the production of meaning through language (Hall, 1997).Research on the interplay between language and representation on one hand and identity construction on the other has been studied from different theoretical orientations over a century now. The study of representation and identity has its roots in linguistics and philosophy, drawing from the works of de Saussure (1974) and Peirce (1965). Their works on semiology evolved and were adopted for linguistic analysis across the globe. Scholars from the structuralist perspective shaped and developed the semiotic model of assigning meanings to signs and entities and focused primarily on how meanings are created due to the associations formed by words in a given context. In the early 1960s, the structuralist model came under criticism from Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, and their criticism gave birth to the post-structuralist model which maintains that "there is no underlying structure of relationships that provides singular or set meanings to social phenomena" (Beltran, 2018, p.98).

Contemporary theoretical models such as Crenshaw's (2019) Intersectionality Theory, Gauntlet's (2008) Identity Theory, and Hall's (1997) Representation Theory have been employed by many researchers to study representation and identity creation. These researchers" primary focus has been on sexual, racial, queer, cultural, political, feminist, marginalized and disability identity enactment and legitimization where dominant social groups suppress those in the minority. In contrast, the minority groups also agitate for better treatment in representation and social parity so that suppression of the minority in society could be mitigated.

Gauntlet's (2008) Identity Model posits that identity is a complex concept, in that every individual has a distinct one. The theory postulates that individuals in a given society often tend to belong to larger groups whose beliefs and

practices are similar to theirs. The study further claims that societal factors such as the media do not construct identities but reflect them. This implies that individuals should strive to construct their own identities so that society can accurately represent them. Crenshaw's (2019) Intersectionality Theory, on the other hand, is a qualitative analytical tool developed in the late 20th century that focuses on how social identities intersect with systems and social structures of domination, suppression, misrepresentation and discrimination, most especially social structures which fight against the freedom of minority groups. This implies that the intersection of powerful social structures affects marginalized and vulnerable groupings within the society. This also means an individual's socio-cultural and politico-religious identities can intersect to forge distinct modes of privilege, belongingness, and discrimination. It also outlines merits and demerits that are experienced by people due to the combination of factors such as gender, race, and other socio-political variables.

This study is, however, premised on Hall's (1997) Representation Theory which posits that "representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language (p.17). He claims the interplay between concepts and language enables us to create mental pictures in the fictional world and refer to events and entities in the real world. Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) support this assertion with the claim that language is used to construe our world of experience. This model's thrust is that meaning does not inhere in things or entities in the world but it is constructed and produced. It is the result of signifying practices that make things meaningful.It is these signifying signs which are carried and are arranged into language to enable translation of our perceptions into meaningful syntactic structures for use. Without them, it will be impossible to interpret the concepts of the world meaningfully. The theory adds that there is, in fact, no absolute representation of people, events and entities in-text; however, there are several means by which these entities can be represented. As a result, producers of texts usually "fix" a meaning or create an identity for entities from their perspectives, which may not have true representation. They do so through ideological imposition or stereotyping and by so doing, several meanings are constituted in terms of what is present or absent.

Hall (1997) outlines three main approaches to exploring how language is used to enact identity or representation: the reflective, the intentional, and the constructionist approaches. The reflective approach underscores the fact that meaning resides in objects, persons, and entities in the real world and language is used as a medium through which the world's true meaning can be construed. The approach draws from Plato's mimetic philosophy that language works by merely reflecting or imitating the already existing truth. This approach proposes a direct and explicit relationship of reflection between signs and entities.The intentional approach contrasts the reflective approach in its understanding of meaning in representation. The second approach holds that it is the speaker or author who uses language to "fix" their distinct meaning and interpretation on the world.This implies that meaning depends on the intention of the speaker or the author. The intentional theory reduces representation to the intentions of its author or subject. This means that meaning resides with the speaker or the author and they impose the meaning on the experiential world.

The third approach perceives language to have a social character. It postulates that there is a complex interrelationship between entities in the world, our conceptualization and language. Cultural-linguistic codes influence the overlapping between these three layers: the material, concepts and signifying and this interplay is what actually produces meaning. Hall (1997) maintains that meanings do not exist in nature but are created by social structures and systems. This means that it is the individuals who construct meanings for entities to be meaningful. This is because entities do not have meanings residing in them but they are imposed by social systems and practices. The model recognizes that neither things nor language users can fix meaning in language, but meanings are constructed using concepts and signs.

From Hall's third approach, this paper believes that church names on billboards are constructed through language for different representational and signifying purposes. In summary, the notions above give a clear indication of how religious identity can be enacted through language, drawing from Hall's tripartite layers: the material being the church billboards, the signifying mode being the intention for the choice of the name and, lastly, the language used as resource for making meaning (Halliday, 1994).

2.2. Previous Studies on Religious Identity Enactment

Earlier studies on the onomastics of churches have traditionally been noticed in the United States of America (USA), with many of them cursorily dealing with identity construction. In the USA, these include studies on storefront church names (Stronks 1962, 1963; 1964) and names of Episcopalian (Anonymous, 1891), Lutheran (Ferguson, 1966), Protestant (Rogers, 1963), EatsrrnRite Roman Catholic (Stump, 1988), Baptist churches in New Orleans (Fairclough, 1960), and a more recent study on Chicago churches (Zelinsky, 2002). Zelensky's study particularly addresses the issue of identity by markedly observing how the Black naming practices deviates from that of the dominant population. Cazarin's (2017) participant observations in migrant initiated Pentecostal-Charismaticcongregations located in Spain (Bilbao) and South Africa (Johnnesburg) call attention to church names found in posters. Specifically, as Cazarin argues, the names of these churches are inspired by inspired Pentecostal-Charismatic discursive approach to a borderless Kingdom of God, with words such as "international", "embassy", kingdom", ""reign", and "diplomat". Unlike Cazarin (2017), the local and global names are however found in Christian groups on university campuses in Ghana (Boafo,2015). These "geographical markers" have been foregrounded in a very recent study by Akoto (2021)

A considerable number of studies have been carried out to explore how language is used as a tool to forge religious identity and identity in general from different conceptual and theoretical perspectives across the globe in different contexts. King (2003), for instance, in a study explores how religion affects adolescents" identity construction. The study presents a model for the conceptualization of how religion provides a contextual setting for adolescent identity enactment. The paper contends that religious context provides the basis for the enactment and negotiation of positive identity among adolescents and provides the adolescent with an ideological, social, and spiritual milieu that aims to orient

them in their critical period of identity creation and self-actualization. The study further argues that though religious context helps in the enactment of positive identity, it can equally impact negatively on the identity of an individual.

Adopting the sociological approach to studying religious identity construction, Duderija (2008) examines the factors that underpin the delineation of religious identity construction among western-born generations of Muslims. He maintains that the sociological approach integrates socio-cultural use of religion and scriptural interpretation to enact religious identity among western-raised generations of Muslims. This accentuates the fact that religion, as a concept, plays a prominent role in the enactment and negotiation of one's personal identity, both in the sense of "believing" and "belonging". The study observes that Western Muslims have different religious identity, an identity which is not homogenous. It further argues that variables such as scriptural interpretation, the assumption of difference, categorization and distinction in religious symbols and scriptural hermeneutics greatly affect the religious identity construction of western-raised Muslims. These factors, therefore, help in determining the mechanisms and processes used in the identity negotiation of Muslims.

Lichterman (2008) investigates how religion influences the construction of civic identity. Adopting the participant-observation approach, the study explores how people use religion as a tool for demarcating the boundaries of relational and group identities. The study argues that most religious groups and faith-based social services that provide welfare support to countries do so to forge and enact civic identity. The study reveals that religion can either enhance or obstruct integration across the social and religious strata.

Hoschele (2012) explores the naming dynamics in the global Christian tradition. The study specifically chronicles the origin and rationale of Christian denomination names and other designations connected with the church, especially in Europe. Hoschele's work selects the Seventh-Day Adventist church for a case study and reports that church denominations" names trace their root to their founders, doctrine, historical or geographical origin, and patterns of church administration, typical activities, sociological perspectives, theological current and many others. Hoschele also observes that theological, historical, contextual and linguistic factors play a significant role in the enactment of religious identity. The study further points out that denominational church names are characterized by interdenominational relations, theological, and missionary challenges which significantly affect the way churches enact their identity to the experiential world. The present study draws much from Hoschele (2012) since both follow a similar trajectory. However, while Hoschele's work uses the Seventh-Day Advent Church as a case study, the present study selects one hundred charismatic and charismatic and Pentecostal based in Ghana for a qualitative content analysis.

In an ethnographic study, Faimu (2017) investigates how religious identity is enacted and negotiated through performative acts of testimony given in selected Pentecostal and charismatic churches and ministries. The study focuses on the ways by which religious testimonies could help forge different shades of religious identities, including individual, communal and institutional religious identities. The study observes that religious identity and legitimization are incorporated in the narration of the testimonies. The paper postulates that "the sharing of a religious testimony has an agentive function of extending the social relationships between an individual believer, other believers and the religious community within which the testimony is shared" (p.1).

Other studies (Brandt, 2018; Heliot et al., 2020; Hunt, 2002; Greenfield & Marks, 2007; Stets & Burke, 2000; and Vignoles et al., 2006) have made wonderful strides in theorizing models for the conceptualization and analysis of religious identity construction. For instance, whilst Brandt (2018) presents a proposition for an adoption of a multidimensional approach for the analysis of the interplay between psychology of religion and spirituality. Stets & Burkes (2000) expound the main tenets and assumptions of the identity and the social identity theories and call for an integration of the two models for an effective conceptualization of the self.

Awukuvi & Israel (2018) adopt the Semantic Frame as a model to carry out a qualitative investigation into the names of thirty charismatic churches in the Bosomtwe District of the Ashanti Region in Ghana. The study revealed that charismatic churches in Ghana have a unique trend of giving names to their places of worship and that delineate them from other religious bodies. The study further observes that the names carved by the charismatic churches in Ghana evoke ecstatic emotionalism and upward spiritual expansiveness and that giving such names is motivated by several factors. Their work, though an attempt to contribute to the growing studies on church names, limited the size of the population to just charismatic churches in the Bosomtwe District. Similarly, it is observed that the sample size of thirty churches is not representative enough; thereby, making generalization of the findings problematic. The study considered the linguistic, morphological, and semantic paradigms of church names, but it failed to identify how identity is enacted through the linguistic choices made in such names.

Though previous studies have attempted to explore the interplay between religion and identity enactment from different perspectives and contexts, there is still much work to be done in the area of religious identity construction and how language is used to forge and negotiate religious identity in West Africa and Ghana in particular. This area looks promising yet it is still under-researched. From the literature review, it is observed that Hoschele (2012) and Awukuvi & Israel (2018) are among the few studies that provide an empirical underpinning for future research on language and religion and how the two entities intersect to enact an identity. The present study will contribute greatly to the scholarship in the field of religion and identity construction in Ghana. To the best of our knowledge, the present study is also one of the few studies to adopt Hall (1997) from an onomastic perspective to explore how Ghanaian charismatic and Pentecostal churches use language to carve their names and the identities such names depict.

3. Methodology

This section discusses the research methodology chosen for the present study. Attention is devoted to pertinent issues such as the research design, source of data, data collection procedure, and procedure of data analysis.

3.1. Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach to analyse the language used to enact religious identities. Creswell (2013) believes that qualitative research deals basically with the meaning of the data. It involves what Creswell (ibid) calls "explanation building", in which the researcher looks for causal links and explores plausible or rival explanations and attempts to build an explanation about patterns. This means that qualitative researchers investigate how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world. This study focuses on how to construct meaning out of the data under study. The choice of this design is informed by the exploratory nature of the study. Creswell (*ibid*) notes that qualitative research is the appropriate design for exploring and describing phenomena that are not known to the researcher.

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

One hundred charismatic and Pentecostal church names from billboards dotted across the Agona West Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana constituted the study's data. Snapshots of these names were taken in 2021. They often maintained a basic pattern according to the orientation of eachchurch even in the midst of slight variations. The 2021 billboards were chosen as a representative sample because they are the most recent productions. In advertising, designs fluctuate with the tide of time according to societalvalues, personal/organizational innovations, creativity, and the dynamism of digital technology. Moreover, selecting one hundred charismatic and Pentecostal church names in Ghana's context for the present study is justifiable since it presents a fair representation of how language is used to construct church names and enact an identity which makes one denominational church different from the other.

3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

The snapshots of the names were first typed on an excel spreadsheet for easy coding and categorization. To begin the analysis, the church names were assigned numbers for easy identification and referencing. The data were closely studied and emerging patterns from the data were identified and categorized. Hoscheles (2012), Vignoles *et al.* (2006), and Zelinsky (2002) were employed as analytical tools to determine the signifying elements in the church names. Lastly, a discussion on how language is preferred to instantiate different identity ensues. The data were carefully examined in terms of re-sorting and regrouping of the signifying elements in the church names so that the results of the analysis were neither compromised nor skewed. Similarly, the actual locations of the selected churches and details about them were not disclosed so as to ensure confidentiality.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the linguistic resources for enacting church names and explores the identities that are instantiated through them by the selected churches.

4.1. Linguistic Resources for the Enactment of Church Names

The analysis showed that the selected churches used different religio-linguistic resources and signifiers to construct their names, thereby giving them unique identities. The table below shows the distribution of these religio-linguistic signifiers used for the construction of the church names.

Religio-Linguistic Signifiers	Frequency
Church	42
Ministry	26
Chapel	13
Centre	6
Camp	2
Mission	2
Assembly	2
Movement	2
Dual Signifiers	1
None	4
Total	100

Table 1: Religio-Linguistic Signifiers for Constructing Church Names

The above table (1) shows that a greater number of churches constituting about 40%, constructed their names using the signifier "church" to designate their Christian faith, the body of Christ or their place of worship. While a greater number of the churches used this signifier as the noun head, others used it as a premodifier in an attributive sense to project their identity. The following examples sampled from the data show how the signifier "church" is used as noun head to enact a religious identity:

- [13]. Royal Gate Church

- [15]. Christ Faith Church
- [24]. Four Square Gospel Church
- [79]. Calvary Methodist Church
- [94]. Deeper Life Bible Church

It was further observed that the signifier "church" was still used as noun head but with both pre-modification and post-modification, giving the churches a definite and precise identification and identity which marks them out from the rest of the churches. Here are examples:

- [14]. The Church of Pentecost
- [18]. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Days" Saints.
- [26]. The Church of Christ
- [91]. The Church of Apostles Revelation Society

The second preponderant signifier for the construction of church names was *Ministry*, a term denoting an activity undertaken by Christians to propagate their faith. It appeared 26 times representing about 25% of the total data analyzed. Like the *church* signifier, the *Ministry* signifier was used as noun head only to signal one or more Christian activities including prayer, healing, propagation of the gospel and performance of miracles, amongst others. Most of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches usually adopt this signifier to show what they stand for and what they do as a religious body. The examples below exemplify how the signifier, *ministry*, was used in the enactment of church names:

- [1]. Gospel Prayer and Healing Ministry
- [4]. God the Eye of the World Ministry
- [16]. Amazing Love International Ministry
- [83]. True Christ Ascension Ministry
- [92]. High Praise Prayer Ministry
- [98]. Life Gate Evangelistic Ministry

In furtherance to the above, a section of the selected churches (about 13%) of the data constructed their names incorporating the signifier, *Chapel*. With the exception of one member of this category of churches, the rest added "international" to their names, a signal for international portrayal, recognition and identification. The following are examples extracted from the data for illustration:

- [3]. Gilgal Chapel International
- [6]. Mountain of Praise Chapel International
- [17]. Makers House Chapel
- [21]. Light House Chapel International
- [93]. Royal House Chapel International
- [100]. Action Chapel International

About 6% of the selected churches have embedded in their name construction *Centre* as a signifier to indicate their place of worship or the faith they profess. The signifier is mostly modified by intangible celestial entities such as God, Holy Spirit, God's power and abstract concepts including praise, prayer, wisdom, faith and miracle, which are all predominantly Christian-based concepts. These elements designate the churches as centres for praise, prayer, and miracle performance. Majority of these churches with the *centre* signifier are well-known in terms of their prayers and anointing services for those who patronize their service. This designation makes them distinct in terms of beliefs and practices. Below are some examples extracted from the data for illustration:

- [3]. Christian Praise International Centre
- [8]. Nyame wɔ Tumi[God has power] Prayer Centre
- [37]. Holy Ghost Miracle Centre
- [50]. Faith Fire Worship Centre
- [71]. Liberty Jordan Prayer Centre
- [73]. Divine Wisdom Prayer Centre

The rest of the churches, constituting about 13% of the data, enacted their names using the religio-linguistic signifiers *camp*, *mission*, *assembly*, *movement,* and a combination of "assembly" and "church". The signifier, *camp*, was used for worship places whose focal business is daily prayers for the adherents as in *Divine Hope Prayer Camp* and *Holy Pentecostal Prayer Camp*. Two churches, *Freedom Assembly Chapel International* and *The Christ Chapel International Mission*, have their names characterized with vaguity and this blurs the identity and image they forge for themselves. The findings above sync well with Hoschele's (2012) assertion that "from the time when followers of Christ were first called "Christians", such a vast number of terms have been used to name them [churches] (p.87). From the analysis, it is realized that most of the churches under study construct their names using the lexical resources *church*, *ministry*, *chapel*, *and centre*, among others to make them distinct from others in terms of identity enactment. This observation is in line with Hoschele's claim above. From this, it can be inferred that church names are enacted and legitimized through varied religio-linguistic resources with the ultimate aim of establishing and maintaining a sense of differentiation from others (Vignoles, Chryssochoou & Breakwell, 2000 cited in Vignoles *et al.*, 2006).

Hoschele (2012) posits that denominations (churches) construct their names by making reference to their founders, particular doctrine, historical/geographical origin, patterns of church administration, typical activities, sociological dimensions, theoretical current and various ways expressing a relationship to God and Christ. From the analysis, it is observed that only one church, *Osama-Di Church Ghana*, constructed its name after its founder and this

corroborates Hoschele"s claim that churches construct their names by making references to their founders. However, a great deal of the numbers constructed their names using the personalities that constitute the Trinity (God, Christ and the Holy Spirit). These celestial names foreground the Christian religion and the source of its belief and give credence to the faith the church professes. These names also add a spiritual dimension to the physical and social identities the churches have enacted for themselves and position the churches as true religious bodies with a strong spiritual underpinning. The examples below illustrate this claim:

- [4]. God the Eye of the World Ministry
- [15]. Christ Faith Church
- [19]. Jehovah Jireh International Church
- [27]. Church of Christ
- [37]. Holy Ghost Miracle Centre International
- [102]. Christ Life Faith International Church

Similarly, a few of the churches used the attributes of Christ for the construction of their names and the enactment of their identity. This possibly was done to contextualize the church within the parameters of Christianity and this, to a large extent, projects their identity. Church names like *Lion of Judah Herbal Prayer Centre*, *Voice of Christ Mission*, *Royal Blood Gospel Church International*, and *The True Way Church of Jerusalem* are examples of how churches forge their identity in the names they adopt. Besides using the word "Trinity" and attributes of Christ to forge their identity, we further observed that two churches constructed their names, using biblical and saintly personalities like *Elijah* and *Anthony*, respectively as in *Elijah Ministries International* and *St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church*. The use of these names projects the churches" image concerned and enacts a credible identity for them since their beliefs and practices basically reflect the philosophies of these personalities and the life they led.

The study also revealed that the use of locative signifiers is another important means of enacting church names. This involves the use of geo-historical places which are crucial in the belief system of Christianity. From the analysis, it was observed that some churches constructed their names, using locative signifiers which pointed to historical and geographical locations, mostly important ancient spots, towns, and cities in biblical Israel. Most of these places are very significant in the sense that they portray a specific event in the history of the Christian religion. There were, however, a few churches which traced their root to Ghana and Africa at large, evoking the geographical markers in Akoto (2021). The examples below illustrate this:

- [7]. Gilgal Chapel International
- [39]. Bethel Prayer Ministry International
- [54]. African Faith Tabernacle Church
- [59]. Holy Church of Bethlehem
- [60]. The True Way Church of Jerusalem
- [66]. Apostolic Divine Church of Ghana

From the above, it is realized that *Bethel, Bethlehem, Jerusalem* and *Gilgal* are historical places in ancient Israel with significant roles in the history of Christian religion. The use of Ghana and Africa depicts a kind of belief propagated and held on to by the black race, a faith that may not be found elsewhere. Again, this finding synchronizes with Hoschele's claim that historical and geographical origins play vital roles in the naming of churches. In association with the locative signifier is the spatial signifier for the religious name enactment. It is observed from the analysis that about 40% of the church names analyzed enact their identity, using the spatial signifier "international" though in some cases, the said churches do not have branches elsewhere other than Ghana. The use of the spatial signifier *international* has a lot of identity implication and it is explained in detail in the next part of the discussion. Churches with the spatial signifier identified in the analysis include *The Apostle Continuation Church International*, *House of Power Ministry International*, *Triumph Bible Church International*, *Praise Divine Church International*, and *Light Shine Chapel International*.

Another key observation from the analysis is that a greater number of the churches used power-packed and miracle-driven signifiers to construct their names with a possible aim of persuading the public to patronize their activities and manipulating the conscience and emotions of the general public. Words such as "fire", "power" and "miracle" in the names seem to present faulty reasoning, false promises, contradiction in content, and misinformation (Fuertes-Olivera *et al.,* 2001). Some examples are provided below:

- [5]. House of Power Ministry International
- [33]. Fruitful Miracle Bible Church International
- [40]. One God Fire Zone Ministries
- [45]. Royal Gate Fire Chapel
- [52]. Redeemed Fire Power Ministry International
- [74]. Unique Life Fire and Miracle Church International

Furthermore, the study observed that several churches constructed their names by employing appealing descriptive linguistic signifiers, mainly attributive adjectives. These painting words attract the public and further highlight the churches in terms of beliefs and practices. Further catchy words like *divine, sacred, amazing, anointed,* and *royal* often create a positive identity for the churches which bear them. They are used to describe entities like hope, life, action, love and seed, making them real and tangible even though they are not and the general public is persuaded by the assurances embedded in these names. Here are examples:

- [9]. Anointed Seed International Church

- [16]. Amazing Love International Ministry
- [56]. Divine Hope Prayer Camp
- [63]. Sacred Action Church
- [72]. Royal Blood Gospel Church International
- [95]. Victorious Crown Chapel International

As a way of creating a very good relational identity, sometimes these churches shorten their names and are, therefore, identified by the descriptive linguistic signifiers they possess as in *Amazing Love*, *Divine Hope*, *Sacred Action*, *Royal Blood*, *Anointed Seed,* and *Victorious Crown*. The finding is in sync with Akoto's (2018) position that linguistic expressions or "languages that are selected by people for communication provide signals about the identities of such persons or institutions" (p.187).

Finally, the study observed that while a number of churches used queer and vague inputs to construct their names, a sizeable percentage used sentential/clausal linguistic inputs to create names for themselves. The vagueness of the names blurs the meanings inherent in them and the identity created therein becomes indeterminate. This means that one cannot actually point to the kind of entities these vague and queer names signify and as a result, the identity enacted becomes very difficult to determine. In the following examples, we find it difficult, deciphering the meanings elicited by these names due to the poor modification of the various noun heads and odd names whose meanings are unprecise, indistinct and indefinite:

- [40]. One God Fire Zone Ministries
- [50]. Faith Fire Worship Centre
- [62]. Four Square Gospel Church
- [70]. Musama Disco Christo Church
- [74]. Unique Life Fire and Miracle Church International
- [75]. The Church of Daystar Prayer Centre

It can be observed from the above that the names lack precision and their vagueness greatly affects understanding. This is because a reader may find it difficult to get the exact meaning inherent in such names. On the use of sentential/clausal linguistic inputs for the construction of names, the study revealed that imperative and declarative structures are used by some of the churches to construct their names. Those churches that construct their names using imperatives may constitute a group with radical identity giving direct instructions to their followers, whereas those formed with a declarative tilt toward persuasive identity. Here examples of such churches:

- [11]. Nyame Wɔ Tumi [God has Power] Prayer Centre
- [35]. Jesus is coming again prayer and Herbal Ministry International
- [77]. Transform Bible Miracle Ministries
- [87]. Return to Lord Ministry

In the examples above, it can be seen that examples 11 and 35 are declarative in structure and are used to persuade whereas examples 77 and 87 are imperative in structure, giving direct instructions to the adherents.

4.2. Identities Enacted through Linguistic Resources

The first part of the analysis explored the language adopted by churches in the construction of their names. In this second part, the study discusses the identities enacted through the linguistic resources identified in the previous section. The study showed that the identities enacted through the varied linguistic resources could be categorized into five ways, as depicted in Figure 1.
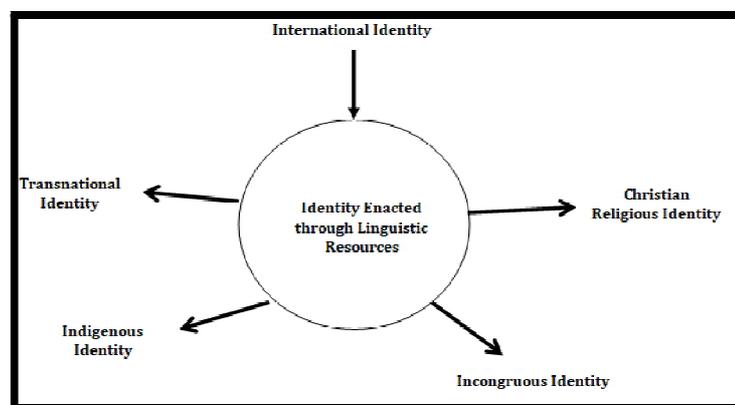

Figure 1

It can be observed from Fig. 1 that the five varied identities enacted through linguistic resources are indigenous, transnational, international, incongruous, and Christian religious in nature. The sections below provide a detailed discussion on each of the identities enacted.

4.2.1. Indigenous Identity Enactment

Identity is embedded in the culture of the people (Molina, 2007) and as a result, religious groups adopt local languages and other linguistic resources to signify their indigenous cultural identity. From the analysis, it was observed that church names like "Nyame wɔ Tumi [God has power] Prayer Centre", "Apostolic Divine Church of Ghana", "Osama-Di Church Ghana" and "African Faith Tabernacle Church" are used to enact Akan (Twi), Ghanaian and African identity in terms of belief systems and practices. This finding confirms Akoto's (2018) claim that local languages are usually used to enact local identities and to express ethnolinguistic identity. The expression "Nyame wɔ Tumi" (to wit, "God has power") and the words "Ghana" and "African" used in some of the church names contextualize the churches in terms of origin, beliefs and practices and give them indigenous Ghanaian-African religious identity.

4.2.2. Transnational Identity Enactment

King (2003) posits that "religions can offer a profound sense of connection that has great implications for self-concept" (p.200). The study revealed that some churches created special religious bonding with geographical names in ancient Israel, thereby creating a transnational identity for these churches. Some of these geo-historical names add credence to these churches" origin, their faith and object of worship. This, in a way, creates a Ghanaian-Jewish religious identity for the churches selected for analysis. Sometimes, as part of their Christian tradition, some of these churches annually visit these places through pilgrimage for Christian religious rituals to solidify the bond of relationships between them and the places they name the church after. Church names like "Gilgal Chapel International", "Calvary Crusaders Ministries International", "Bethel Presbyterian Church", and "True Way Church of Jerusalem" help forge this transnational identity. Mwinwelle *et al.* (2020) maintain that names that institutions and groups select help to establish "an affiliative identity among members" (p.79).

4.2.3. International Identity Enactment

Brandt (2018) underscores the fact that "religion, like ethnicity or language, can serve to strengthen the boundaries between groups or even facilitate acceptance into an exclusive group" (p.140). The analysis revealed that about 40% of the selected churches in Ghana enacted their global/international identity using the linguistic resources *global*, *worldwide*, and *international*. International identity involves the set of linkages a person or a group establishes with people and places in other countries. The rationale is to reach out to the international world, a platform where the churches can propagate their beliefs and practices. This also denotes that these churches may have other branches in different countries across the globe. Significantly, these linguistic resources, as seen in church names like "Elijah Ministry International", "Global Evangelical Church" and "Worldwide Believers Prayer Movement", are used to negotiate trans-border identity and to give the churches "a sense of belonging to a worldwide culture" (Arnett, 2002, p.777 cited in Akoto, 2018). Again, they are used to ascribe a worldwide recognition to the churches and situate them in a global religious arena to enact a trans-continental identity. In the enactment of this global identity, the churches establish a relational identity with people across the globe and this helps them have an appealing international recognition, an identity that makes them visible across continents.

4.2.4. Christian Religious Identity Enactment

Hoschele (2012) maintains that "particular church names are often best understood by members, who comprehend the tradition behind inherited terms … denominational components invariably stand alongside references to general Christian identity" (p.102). From the analysis, it was observed that Christ/God-christened churches enacted a strong Christian religious identity by showing their allegiance to the source of their faith and belief. This depicts their loyalty to their object of worship, and their dependability and reliability on him and their preparedness to show devotion and commitment to his service. The identity forged also imposes on the respective churches the responsibility to adhere to the Christian principles in order to maintain the lasting bond that exists between the churches and the originator of their faith. The names selected by the churches shape their identities and solidify their trust in their object of worship. King (2003) opines that identity enacted out of "the ideological, social, and spiritual context embedded within religion is an identity that transcends the self and can promote a sense of commitment that not only fosters individual well-being but promotes the good of society as well" (p.197). This implies that the churches" allegiance to their object of worship shapes their spiritual and ideological position and understanding. This brings in its wake the diversified movements within the Christian faith, including movements like orthodox, protestants, Pentecostal-charismatic, reformist, and restorationist. These movements construct their identities through their allegiance to Christ/God from different theological and ideological perspectives. These perspectives impose a set of ideas and ways of living on their adherents, which informs their perception of Christianity and its tenets.

4.2.5. Incongruous Identity Enactment

Heliot *et al.* (2020) posit that "the state of identity incongruence is associated with identity conflict when two (or more) identities are in conflict, mutually exclusive, or incompatible" (p.162). From the analysis, we realized that church names like *Musama Disco Christo Church, Jesus is Coming Again Prayer and Herbal ministry, Foursquare Gospel Church, The church of Daystar Prayer Centre, and Gospel Prayer and Healing Ministry* portray an incongruous identity as a result of the queerness of their names and the incompatibility associated with them. The linguistic resources used in such names seem not to match with the religious identity intended to be forged. There seems to be a complete departure from the construction of mainstream church names to the enactment of queer multiple identities. The identities instantiated are

conflicting and not in keeping with the creation of religious identity. This is in sync with Heliot *et al.'s* claim that an incongruous identity is created when two or more identities are incompatible. For instance, while "Disco" and "Church" do not co-occur in the arena of Christianity, "Prayer ministry" and "Herbal Centre" also do not collocate. It is noted that the unusual collocation of these linguistic resources brings in their wake distinct queer multiple identities which are in sharp contrast with the mainstream identities enacted through religio-linguistic resources which are in harmony within the Christian religious milieu.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The study has demonstrated that "language structures can produce certain meanings and ideologies" and that "language form is not fortuitous" (Adjei, Ewusi-Mensah & Okoh, 2015, p.23) but for communicative purposes and "for enacting and instantiating identities" (Akoto 2018, p.188). The study observed that the selected churches in Ghana used varied religio-linguistic resources such as *church, ministry, camp, movement, assembly, chapel, centre* and other linguistic signifiers to enact and instantiate their identity. It was further observed that these resources were used to instantiate five distinct identities: indigenous, transnational, international, Christian religious and incongruous identities. The findings indicate that whereas some churches maintain their local Ghanaian-African identities (Boafo, 2015), others have enacted global identities (Cazarin, 2017) for themselves with a few others instantiating queer multiple identities that seem to blur their actual representation and identity.

The study has implications for theory and research. For theory, the study has established and affirmed Hall's (1997) assertion that meanings do not exist in nature but are created by social structures and systems. This further implies that church names on billboards are constructed through language for different representational and signifying purposes. Furthermore, the findings of the study confirm the social identity construction theory that "identities are not given, fixed, or unchanging, but are continually evolving products of material and social circumstances ..." (Cornell, 2000, p. 42). The study concludes that churches in Ghana use different religio-linguistic signifiers in diverse ways to enact and instantiate distinct religious identities across time and space.

On research, the study is a contribution to the heightened research on the exploration of the interface between religion and language and how they merge to instantiate identity. It also contributes to the existing scholarship on churchnames and will serve as a useful reference material for future research. Further research can be conducted on the morpho-syntactic and morpho-semantic analysis of church names in Ghana or elsewhere to reveal the motivation behind the choice of a particular name by a Christian religious body.

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