Ideological and Cultural Significance of Ọzọ Title Names in Igbo

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Abstract

The Ọzọ title in Igbo society represents a critical institutional framework for encoding ideological and cultural meanings through language. Despite extensive scholarly works on various dimensions of the Ọzọ institution in different Igbo cultural settings, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the ideological and cultural motivations underlying selected Ọzọ titles. Consequently, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Farzad Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics framework are deployed in this study to explore the ideological and cultural motivations embedded in Ọzọ titles in Isiagu town, Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State. Data comprised twenty-two title names obtained through secondary sources and oral interviews with thirteen Ọzọ title holders and five Igbo speakers from Awka South LGA. The titles were systematically categorised into six ideological frames: wealth and provision, character and integrity, custodianship of tradition, community and strength, bravery and protection, and destiny. Analysis reveals that Ọzọ title names function as cultural schemas that instantiate Igbo ideological beliefs about social achievement,

moral responsibility, spiritual authority, and communal obligation. The study demonstrates how language, through the medium of title naming, serves as a vehicle for transmitting and legitimising cultural values while simultaneously constructing and maintaining social hierarchies. Findings underscore the significance of Ọzọ titles as powerful linguistic and sociocultural institutions that preserve Igbo identity and facilitate intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge within a modernising context.

1. Introduction

Proper names and titles constitute fundamental linguistic and sociocultural phenomena that extend far beyond their referential function. As repositories of collective beliefs, values, and social structures, titles are deeply embedded within the fabric of communities and serve as vehicles for expressing ideological positions, cultural identities, and power relations (McConvell & Hendery, 2020). Names function not as arbitrary linguistic labels but as meaningful repositories of cultural conceptualisations that reflect, shape, and legitimise worldviews (Langacker, 2008; Sharifian, 2017).

In Igbo society, the Ọzọ title represents one of the most significant institutional systems for encoding cultural and ideological meanings. The Nze na Ọzọ society, alternatively termed the Agbalanze society, constitutes the highest and most important spiritual, religious, and social grouping in Igbo communities of southeastern Nigeria (Etu & Eyakndue, 2024; Mensah, Rowan, & Ekpe, 2024). Attaining Ọzọ status implies that the title holder has

achieved the status of *Nze*, a term signifying a living spirit and ancestral presence (Nweke, 2020). This transformation marks a profound shift in social position, ethical responsibility, and spiritual authority. Ọzọ title holders are recognised as custodians of truth, mediators in disputes, arbiters of justice, exemplars of moral rectitude, and representatives of ancestral wisdom within their communities (Madukasi, 2018; Okoye, 2022).

The Ọzọ institution embodies ideologies rooted in ancestral veneration, spiritual purity, leadership, community ethics, and hierarchical social organisation. These titles are symbolic expressions that confer authority, spiritual responsibility, and elder status upon their bearers (Etu, Offong, & Eyakndue, 2024). As Ebeogu (1993) articulates, Ọzọ titles are "not mere linguistic expressions but are also indicators of experiences which reveal much about the political attitudes and practices of the traditional Igbo". Rather than being inherited positions or arbitrary designations, Ọzọ titles represent earned positions of honour achieved through demonstrated years of service, personal integrity, economic capacity, and community contribution. In other contexts, such as the Ibibio or Javanese, names and titles encode family lineage, gender roles, and adaptation to historical change (Widodo, Suyatno, Mohamad, & Ismail, 2025; Mensah et al, 2024). This institution encompasses both ideological and cultural significance, deeply rooted in the unique sociopolitical and spiritual framework of Igbo society.

The linguistic structure of Ọzọ titles warrants scholarly examination, as these titles function as meaningful combinations of words reflecting important concepts central to Igbo cultural values and societal aspirations. Language, as articulated by Utin (2016) and Etuk and Urujzian (2018), represents the primary medium through which humans communicate their feelings, desires, and

beliefs. It functions as "the medium through which realistic societal experiences are captured and/or recreated" (Asukwo, 2018). In Igbo communities, each locale establishes its own parameters for honouring and categorising Ọzọ titles, with these parameters shaped by the cultural and religious orientations of the community. The linguistic structure of these titles whether functioning as personal appellations or honorifics, serves as a crucial vehicle for transmitting cultural values, beliefs, and societal norms across generations (Oboko, 2020; Onumajuru, 2016).

While previous scholarly works have examined various dimensions of the Ọzọ institution, the field remains limited regarding the ideological and cultural motivations encoded within specific title nomenclature. Madukasi (2018) examined the patriarchal underpinnings of the Ọzọ institution; Okoye (2022) analysed the Ọzọ title in Igbo-Ukwu, examining its initiation rites, cultural reconstruction, and role in preserving Igbo identity amid colonialism and religious influences; Etu et al. (2024) focused on informal wealth-related title names among young Igbo businessmen, exploring their perceptions of wealth and social status; and Oboko (2020) highlighted the linguistic structure of titles as a vehicle for cultural transmission. The present study addresses a gap in this literature by investigating the ideological and cultural motivations that underlie selected Ọzọ title names in Isiagu, Anambra State, utilising analytical frameworks that explicitly foreground the relationship between language, ideology, culture, and social meaning-making.

The investigation is guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Farzad Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics framework. These frameworks, when applied in

concert, provide robust tools for uncovering the complex ways in which language encodes cultural conceptualisations and serves as a mechanism for constructing, legitimising, and perpetuating ideological positions within social organisations. The selection of these frameworks was motivated by their demonstrated capacity to investigate the interplay between language and culture, elucidate the roles of language and symbolic systems in shaping ideologies, and examine how power, religion, and social structures are instantiated through linguistic practice.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Language Ideology and Discourse
The concept of language ideology originates within North American linguistic anthropology and provides a framework for investigating the "mediating connections between social structures and modes of communication" (Johnson & Milani,2010). This conceptual framework has attracted sustained scholarly attention across diverse fields. Stromberg (1990) defines ideology as an "organised system of symbols that, upon interaction, results in a transformation of identity". In this formulation, ideology represents the observable behaviours of individuals shaped by their commitment to specific sets of organised symbols within societies, organisations, or groups.

Haviland (2003) offers a complementary definition of language ideology as "the structural and conceptual diversity of languages, understood as codes that serve as intricately organised mechanisms for depicting various physical, social, and cultural realities, thereby acting as potential means for articulating and perpetuating conceptual distinctions among groups of speakers." This perspective suggests that language ideologiesor the concepts through which participants and observers interpret linguistic

varietiesexert significant influence on how these interpretations are applied to individuals, events, and activities of significance to language communities.

Etuk and Urujzian (2018) examined language ideology through analysis of number plate slogans representing Nigeria's 36 states and Abuja. Their investigation illuminated how such slogans encapsulate hidden ideological meanings by examining them from historical, sociological, cultural, and political perspectives. The authors demonstrated that slogans function as mechanisms of positive self-representation while simultaneously creating polarity between in-groups and out-groups. Extending this insight, Etuk and Akpan (2023) argue that ideology typically functions to project and protect specific interests, whether social, cultural, or political in nature. Within the context of Ọzọ titles, the prestige associated with these positions elevates the social status of both the individual and their family structure (Etu et al., 2024).

2.2 Culture, Cultural Values, and Their Linguistic Expression

Nwosu (2011) conceptualises culture as "that which encompasses the complex of social behaviour, tradition and norms shared by a group of people, which is transmitted through language and influences every aspect of human interaction." From a complementary perspective, Nwagbara and Umor (2012) assert that culture exists when "a distinct way of life shapes what a group of people believe in, values and does." Culture influences all aspects of human experience—language, cognitive processes, worldview interpretation, and social interaction. It encompasses the "learned, shared, and transmitted ways of life that give meaning and structure to human societies," functioning simultaneously as "a product of collective history and a dynamic

force shaping present and future behaviours and identities" (Nwagbara & Umor, 2012).

The relationship between language and culture represents a fundamental concern within linguistic anthropology. As established in onomastic studies, proper names function as carriers of cultural information and markers of ethnic identity (Anastasiya, 2025). The culture-specific information embedded within proper names can be extracted through comprehensive linguo-cognitive analysis of conceptual constituents, including detailed examination of notions, values, images, associations, and interpretational aspects in terms of comprehension and cultural mediation (Maslova, 2018). Thus, onomastic vocabulary—the vocabulary of names—constitutes a translator of cultural information and a primary carrier of people's nationally specific features and ethnic identity.

2.3 The Ọzọ Institution in Igbo Society

The Ọzọ institution stands widely recognised as one of the most sacred and socially consequential title systems in Igbo society, binding moral authority to spiritual purity and communal leadership. This institution represents "the highest and most important spiritual, religious and social grouping in the Igbo Society of Southern Nigeria" (Nze na Ọzọ, 2011). In contemporary Igbo society, initiation into the Nze na Ọzọ society marks an individual as nobility, and the attainment of Ọzọ status marks a profound transformation in social identity and spiritual status (Nweke, 2020). Across scholarly documentation and cultural preservation efforts, Ọzọ titles are consistently depicted as embodying a covenantal status—demanding in both ritual and responsibility, designated for individuals whose proven public

integrity, honesty, and service warrant elevated positions in adjudication, ritual leadership, and the guardianship of tradition. Nweke (2020) underscores that "Ọzọ title men are recognized for their exemplary lives, keeping in mind their respect for their clan. They prioritize the welfare of their clan's members and that of the institution. Consequently, they conduct themselves with dignity in all their actions and interactions."

The Ọzọ institution operates holistically across spiritual, civic, and ethical dimensions. Titleholders are perceived as living ancestorsmen who have experienced a symbolic rebirth during initiation ceremonies and serve as intermediaries between the physical and spiritual realms. The rituals associated with the title, which include libations, ancestral reverence, and ritual sacrifices, underscore a worldview that merges material and spiritual domains. Importantly, the Ọzọ title is linked to the Ọfọ, a revered symbol of truth and ancestral authority. Only men of established integrity are entitled to possess the Ọfọ, and the Ọzọ title affirms their qualification, ensuring that moral integrity and social order remain intertwined within traditional Igbo society (Nnewi city, 2025). Although there are differences across Igboland in ritual practices, rank classifications, and symbolic elements, the essence of the Ọzọ title remains fundamentally unchanged. It represents a "sacred covenant between the titleholder, his community, and the ancestral spirits" (Nnewi city, 2025). The Ọzọ institution has shown remarkable resilience as a cohesive element throughout Igboland. In certain areas, such as Nri, Awka, and Enugu-Ukwu, the Ọzọ title carries significant spiritual implications; in others, like Onitsha and Nsukka, it highlights leadership, community service, and civic responsibility. Despite such local variations, the

institution has survived generations of transformative change, persisting through colonialism, religious conversion, and modernisation pressures to remain an enduring emblem of Igbo identity and cultural continuity (Eze & Ofili, 2025).

2.4 The Ideological Power of Titles and Naming Practices

Titles and names function as powerful instruments for expressing and shaping ideology within cultures. Empirical studies indicate that the occurrence of ideologically driven names increases during times of heightened politicisation, highlighting the function of names as "social cards" that convey shared beliefs and adapt to historical changes (Widodo, Suyatno, Mohamad, & Ismail, 2025). In post-Soviet Kazakhstan, the transition from Russian to Kazakh and English event names signifies a profound reconfiguration of language hierarchy and challenges to prior linguistic supremacy, demonstrating how naming conventions can legitimise new social realities and contest existing power dynamics.

In the context of Igbo culture, the interplay between naming, culture, and identity has garnered increasing academic interest. The Omuma Igbo of Oru East Local Government Area illustrate how Igbo naming customs adhere to established prescriptive rituals and operational modes grounded in traditional religious beliefs. The names given to children reflect not only parental choices but also encapsulate the social, historical, linguistic, and philosophical aspects of parental experiences and perspectives.

The semantic framework and purpose of proper names extend well beyond their role of identification. Names embody cultural significances that arise from individuals' engagement with names as cultural constructs during social-linguistic socialisation. Through repeated exposure, individuals cultivate name competence a refined form of cultural, pragmatic, semantic, and

morphological understanding regarding naming systems. This competence encompasses a wealth of knowledge about the world, society, other individuals, and collective identity (Schmitz, 2020). The cultural significance of names is inextricably linked to the formation of human identity both individual and collective. Names that exhibit linguistic and cultural constraints are crucial in shaping identity, thereby closely intertwining the identity-denoting and identity-forming functions of proper names with cultural meaning.

In African traditions, names carry profound cultural significance that is deeply intertwined with values and identities. They convey attributes and circumstances related to an individual's birth, encompassing themes such as heroism, prayer, contrition, hope, despair, acceptance, rejection, heritage, dynastic succession, wisdom, philosophy, justice, equality, and beauty. The strong links between naming practices, identity, self-worth, value, and personality illustrate how language encapsulates essential elements of human experience and social structure. Therefore, names whether they are personal or titular serve as more than mere referential tools; they act as holistic representations of cultural understanding and ideological stance (Schmitz, 2020).

Apart from cultural identity, Igbo names and titles reflect:

- **Moral Responsibility**: Many titles emphasis truth, justice, and integrity, showing that leadership is tied to character.
- **Social Achievement:** Titles often highlight wealth, bravery, or wisdom, marking the bearer's contributions to society.
- **Spiritual Connection**: Some titles link the holder to divine or ancestral forces, reinforcing the sacred nature of leadership.

- **Communal Recognition:** Titles are conferred by the community, meaning they represent collective approval and respect.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study demonstrates the analytical power of integrating van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA with Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics. This integration reveals how linguistic forms (titles) encode cultural knowledge (schemas, categories, metaphors) while simultaneously functioning as ideological discourses that construct, reinforce, and transmit power relations and social values. This integration enables the study to move beyond purely linguistic analysis to a comprehensive understanding of how language functions as a social institution.

3.1 Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) represents a contemporary branch of linguistic inquiry that has achieved significant prominence in recent years. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach was selected as a foundational framework for this investigation due to its methodologies that investigate the interplay between language and culture while elucidating how language and symbolic systems, including power and religion, function in shaping ideologies. In the year 1998 the approach was systematically developed and formalized in his book *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, which is widely cited as the definitive statement of the socio-cognitive model.

CDA's overarching goal centres on representing the dialectic relationship between language, power, ideology, and the influential role that language plays in the emanation of power and the

legitimisation of social inequalities. The approach serves as a method for uncovering concealed meanings and structures of domination while fostering transformation in the ways power is exercised, sustained, and perpetuated within social organisations and relationships.

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of CDA approaches discourse analysis as ideological analysis—the principal theme of this approach by examining how language is used to construct and disseminate discourse-ideologically specific representations of aspects of the world (van Dijk, 1995). The model integrates investigation of how language enacts hegemonic social dominations (Fairclough, 1993, 2000; van Leeuwen, 2005) while simultaneously constructing and enacting social identities.

The socio-cognitive model operates through three integrated dimensions: the text level (linguistic features and structures), the cognitive level (mental models, knowledge, and beliefs of discourse producers and consumers), and the social level (broader social structures, power relations, and ideological formations) (van Dijk, 2008). By examining discourse at these three levels simultaneously, researchers can uncover how discourses operate strategically to achieve social action, how mental models mediate between individual cognition and social structures, and how ideological systems are reinforced through linguistic practice.

The selection of van Dijk's approach for this study was motivated by its capacity to examine how discourses and ideologies are reflected within specific discourse contexts, utilising cultural knowledge and theoretical-political considerations as interpretative tools. The framework enables detailed analysis of how semantic meanings in titles encode ideological positions and how these

encoded meanings function to construct social reality, legitimate hierarchical relations, and transmit cultural values.

3.2 Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics Framework

Farzad Sharifian's theory of Cultural Linguistics provides a robust multidisciplinary framework that explores how language is deeply rooted in cultural conceptualisations. According to Sharifian (2017), Cultural Linguistics engages with "features of human languages that encode or instantiate culturally constructed conceptualisations encompassing the whole range of human experience." The framework offers both theoretical and analytical tools for investigating the cultural conceptualisations that underlie language use.

The analytical tools of Cultural Linguistics are shaped by three primary constructs: cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural metaphors. Each represents instantiations of broader cultural conceptualisations. Cultural schemas, according to Sharifian (2017, p. 11), constitute "culturally constructed subclasses of what is known in cognitive science as cognitive schemas." Rather than representing universal cognitive patterns, cultural schemas are culture-specific organisational frameworks of knowledge and expectation that shape how individuals within a culture perceive, interpret, and respond to phenomena.

Cultural categories refer to culture-dependent classifications encoded within human language. Unlike culturally neutral categories, cultural categories are inherently constructed to reflect culture-specific ways of organising and understanding the world. They are manifest through lexicon and conceptual organisation. Cultural metaphors are exhibited in a cultural group's thought processes and behavioural patterns, revealing how cultures employ

metaphorical extensions to understand abstract or unfamiliar domains through reference to more concrete or familiar domains.

The three analytical tools of Cultural Linguistics schemas, categories, and metaphors interact to encode cultural conceptualisations within language. Sharifian (2017) argues that numerous language features, ranging across morphosyntactic, pragmatic, and semantic dimensions, are rooted in cultural conceptualisations instantiated through these three mechanisms. This framework enables researchers to systematically analyse how cultural knowledge, beliefs, and values are embedded within specific linguistic forms and how language, in turn, reinforces and perpetuates cultural conceptualisations across generations.

3.3 Integration of Theoretical Frameworks for Data Analysis

The integration of van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA with Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics creates a comprehensive analytical framework particularly suited to investigating Ọzọ title names. Van Dijk's CDA provides tools for examining how titles function as discourse that encodes ideological meanings, constructs social identities, and maintains power relations. Simultaneously, Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics offers mechanisms for analysing how titles encode and instantiate culturally constructed conceptualisations through cultural schemas, categories, and metaphorical extensions.

In practical terms, the integrated framework functions as follows: Cultural Linguistics tools facilitate the identification of cultural schemas and categories embedded within title semantics such as how a title like *Akuruonó* (wealth reaches home) exemplifies a cultural schema that encodes collective Igbo beliefs that one's wealth is truly counted as proper wealth when brought back home to use to develop home community and help kinsmen. Van Dijk's

approach allows for analysing how these schemas operate ideologically that is, how the schema justifies certain understandings of wealth, social obligation, and community responsibility while marginalising other conceptualisations. Collectively, these frameworks support a thorough analysis of Ọzọ title names as spaces where cultural knowledge, ideological meaning, and social power converge and are reinforced through language.

4. Methodology
4.1 Research Design and Approach
This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically utilising content analysis supplemented by thematic analysis. Content analysis constitutes "a research method that systematically analyses any written material, from documents to interview transcripts, and can be applied to large numbers of texts" (Sándorová, 2014). This methodological choice reflects the study's emphasis on identifying meaningful patterns and themes embedded within onomastic data while maintaining systematic rigour in data interpretation.

4.2 Data Collection
Data collection involves both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through participant observation and semi-structured oral interviews conducted with Ọzọ title holders and Igbo speakers from Awka South Local Government Area. The secondary data were obtained from published and online materials examining Ọzọ titles, Igbo naming practices, and related cultural institutions.

Sample: The study included interviews with thirteen Ọzọ title holders and five additional Igbo speakers from the community, providing both elite and community perspectives on title naming practices and meanings. Participants ranged in age from their mid-50s to late 80s, representing multiple generations with deep knowledge of traditional practices. The age range of participants ensured access to individuals with extensive personal experience with Ọzọ institutions and naming practices.

Interview Protocol: Interviews followed a semi-structured format, with participants encouraged to discuss their own titles and explain their meanings, the reasons for their selection, and the cultural and ideological significance they embodied. Interviews were conducted at locations selected for participant comfort, typically lasting 10 to 20 minutes. The interview approach prioritised participant voice and allowed for emergent themes to arise organically from discussion rather than being restricted to predetermined categories.

Data Sample: Investigation yielded twenty-five initial title names, from which twenty-two were selected for detailed analysis. The selection criterion prioritised titles with distinct semantic meanings; variants sharing substantially similar meanings were consolidated to ensure analytical clarity and prevent artificial category inflation.

4.3 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed a systematic process integrating deductive and inductive coding approaches. The analysis proceeded through the following stages:

Stage 1: Familiarisation and Initial Coding. All title names and their translations were reviewed multiple times to develop comprehensive familiarity with the data. Initial inductive coding identified linguistic and semantic patterns without imposing predetermined categories.

Stage 2: Categorical Organisation. Drawing on initial coding and theoretical frameworks, data were organised into categories reflecting distinct ideological themes. Six primary ideological categories emerged: wealth and provision, character and integrity, custodianship of tradition, community and strength, bravery and protection, and destiny.

Stage 3: Theoretical Application. Each category was examined through the lens of both theoretical frameworks. For each category, researchers identified:
- The cultural schemas instantiated within titles in that category
- The ideological meanings encoded within the schemas
- The cultural categories reflected in title semantics
- The metaphorical extensions employed to convey meaning
- How titles function within van Dijk's three-dimensional framework (text, cognition, social structure)

Stage 4: Integration and Synthesis. Analysis focused on identifying how ideological frames constitute "major paradigms by which the Isiagu people express important ideological and cultural indicators for constructing identities through naming." The analysis examined relationships among categories, considering how different ideological frames intersect and reinforce one another.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis
5.1 Overview of Categorical Analysis

Data analysis revealed that Ọzọ title names in Isiagu constitute a significant social practice that mirrors the collective ideologies and cultural concepts prevalent in Awka South and broader Igbo society. The six ideological frames identified through analysis demonstrate how titles function simultaneously as linguistic forms, cultural expressions, identity markers, and power-constituting discourses. Each frame reflects distinct cultural schemas while collectively instantiating a comprehensive ideological system encompassing wealth, morality, tradition, community, courage, and spiritual destiny. All identified titles reveal how names serve as powerful linguistic symbols imbued with cultural, historical, social, and political significance simultaneously reflecting and shaping societal beliefs and power structures.

5.2 Group A: Wealth and Provision

Cultural Schema and Ideological Significance: Titles in this category instantiate a cultural schema of wealth as a communal resource rather than individual possession. The schema reflects deep-rooted Igbo cultural values, emphasising communalism and mutual obligation. Wealth in this ideological frame is not simply personal accumulation but rather represents the capacity and responsibility to provide for extended kin, the community, and cultural institutions. A total of six titles were selected for analysis under this schema.

Group A: Wealth and Provision

Title	English Meaning	Ideological Significance	Instantiated Schema
Akuruouno	Wealth that reaches home	Wealth builds and sustains the home; prosperity is validated through communal benefit	Wealth Circulation Schema
Onwanetiriora	The-moon-that-shines-for-the-people	One whose wealth extends universally to everyone; the benefactor's light illuminates all	Universal Benefactor Schema
Akajiaku	Hand that holds wealth	Responsibility to manage and distribute wealth for societal benefit	Stewardship Schema
Nwajiaku	A child who holds wealth	Achievement of material success at an early life stage; demonstration of acumen	Precocious Achievement Schema
Ezeakunobi	King of wealth and heart	Generosity combined with material success; the union of economic power and moral virtue	Virtuous Wealth Schema
Akunatakasi	Wealth bites	Wealth possesses a transformative and potent force; its effects are significant, whether positive or negative	Power and Agency Schema

The titles in Group A collectively encode the cultural schema that wealth represents a social phenomenon rather than a purely individual achievement. This schema reflects historical Igbo emphasis on communalism, expressed in the concept *Igwebuike* (collective effort is strength). The titles construct an ideological position wherein individuals who have accumulated wealth are expected to demonstrate their status through redistribution and communal support. This ideology simultaneously legitimises wealth accumulation (as a marker of achievement and capability) while constraining its expression through demands for public generosity and communal obligation.

Van Dijk's three-dimensional framework illuminates this dual function: at the textual level, titles employ familial (*Akuruouno*) and cosmic metaphors (*Onwanetiriorah*) to represent wealth; at the cognitive level, these metaphors activate mental models connecting wealth to communal welfare; at the social level, titles function to legitimize the wealth of Ọzọ men while prescribing specific social obligations for wealth holders. The prestige associated with these titles simultaneously celebrates individual achievement and constrains individual autonomy through communal demands.

The ideological work accomplished through these titles is significant: they naturalise wealth inequality (some individuals possess greater material capacity than others) while simultaneously containing its social consequences through ideological insistence on redistribution. This represents a sophisticated ideological mechanism through which communities manage class distinctions while maintaining the fiction of fundamental communal equality.

5.3 Group B: Character and Integrity

Cultural Schema and Ideological Significance: The four titles selected in this group instantiate a cultural schema of moral character as the fundamental basis for authority and community leadership. Unlike wealth, which can be inherited or obtained through fortune, the schema emphasises character as an achieved status requiring consistent demonstration of virtue. This schema reflects Igbo cultural values prioritising truthfulness, reliability, and the alignment between inner virtue and public conduct.

Group B: Character and Integrity

Title	English Meaning	Ideological Significance	Instantiated Schema
Enyidiuru	A valuable friend	Importance derived from relational integrity; being a reliable support system	Dependability Schema
Ekwueme	Talk and do	Aligns with keeping promises, being honest, trustworthy as a foundation for all other virtues	Integrity and Reliability Schema
Ezinwanne	Good brother	Extending moral qualities beyond biological kin; universal orientation toward goodness	Universal Moral Schema
Akajiugo	The hand that holds the eagle	Strength combined with moral authority; the integration of power and righteousness	Integrated Virtue Schema

These titles instantiate what Sharifian would recognise as a "culture-specific schema" regarding the nature of authentic leadership and social authority. Within Igbo cultural conceptualisation, leadership authority cannot rest upon wealth alone, nor upon inherited status or age. Rather, legitimate authority emerges from demonstrated moral character. Truth and integrity are fundamentally tied to concepts of morality, justice, and social harmony. Integrity and truthfulness are parameters that define individual character. For Igbo people, good character is everything, and it is necessary for harmonious and prosperous community; they play a role in decision-making processes.

Enyidiuru is a title that bothers on importance and influence. The title *Ekwueme* (Talk and do) particularly exemplifies the ideological centrality on consistency in words and deeds. This title connects to the philosophical principle *eziokwu bu ndu* (truth is life) a foundational principle in Igbo ethical systems. The embedding of this principle within a title of honour encodes an ideological message: individuals who consistently speak truth, particularly in contexts where truth-telling and integrity may prove costly, merit the highest forms of social recognition and authority. This operates at the van Dijk level of ideology it legitimises a particular configuration of power (vested in truth-speakers) while potentially marginalising alternative forms of authority or expertise.

In one of Chinua Achebe's remarks "one of the truest tests of integrity is its blunt refusal to be compromised", which is to say genuine integrity shows itself when a person absolutely refuses to bend their principles, even when there is pressure, gain, or fear

involved. Saying the truth fosters a sense of security and mutual respect and aids community cohesion. Importantly, such titles are given to men who live lives of value, integrity, honesty, and honour, leaving a positive legacy for posterity. *Ezinwanne* is one of the titles that evoke the image schema of human character between two entities: good and bad. The titles reflect the extension of people's good heart be it family, close friends and loved ones to others not blood related, helping in achieving greater heights.

The metaphor of the hand holding the eagle (*Akajiugo*) deserves particular attention. The eagle in Igbo symbolism represents strength, acuity, and dominance. The metaphor "hand that holds" demonstrates control. This metaphorical reversal encodes an ideological message: moral character must be powerful enough to contain and direct strength toward communal good rather than personal aggrandisement. The schema integrates physical/social power with moral responsibility, suggesting that true strength lies in the capacity to wield power righteously.

5.4 Group C: Custodianship of Tradition

Cultural Schema and Ideological Significance: The two titles represented in this group instantiate a cultural schema positioning Ọzọ title holders as living repositories of cultural knowledge and tradition. This schema reflects the ideological position that culture is not static or historical but rather living, requiring active custodianship by designated community members who bear responsibility for its preservation and transmission.

Group C: Custodianship of Tradition

Title	English Meaning	Ideological Significance	Instantiated Schema
Agbalanze	Custodian of Nze na Ọzọ institution	Formal responsibility for maintaining ritual practices and institutional integrity	Cultural Stewardship Schema
Ọzọkwesiri	Ọzọ that is well-deserving	Elevation to Ọzọ status based on demonstrated merit; rightful custodianship	Merit-Based Authority Schema

These titles encode the ideological position that culture requires active human agency for its continuation. Rather than culture existing as a historical deposit, the schema positions selected individuals as responsible agents charged with maintaining cultural practices, transmitting knowledge, and adjudicating disputes regarding cultural interpretation and practice.

At the van Dijk level of cognition, these titles activate mental models connecting individual identity with institutional responsibility. The title *Agbalanze* literally and semantically embeds the Ọzọ institution within the individual identity of the title holder—to be *Agbalanze* is to be inseparable from the institution itself. This ideological positioning simultaneously honours the individual (by recognising them as bearer of institutional authority) and constrains their autonomy (by subjecting their conduct to institutional demands and communal scrutiny).

The ideological work here addresses a fundamental challenge in oral societies: how to preserve complex cultural knowledge, practices, and values in the absence of written documentation or institutional permanence. The schema resolves this challenge by embedding culture within individual persons, whose social status depends upon successful cultural transmission and practice maintenance. This creates powerful motivations for cultural preservation while establishing criteria for social authority within the community.

5.5 Group D: Bravery and Protection

Cultural Schema and Ideological Significance: The three titles analysed under this category instantiate a cultural schema of courage and physical/social bravery as a foundation for leadership. The schema reflects historical Igbo warrior traditions while reconceptualising "bravery" in contemporary contexts as demonstrable courage in defending community interests and standing for justice.

Group D: Bravery and Protection

Title	English Meaning	Ideological Significance	Instantiated Schema
Dikedioranma	The good warrior of the people	Hero whose courage benefits the community; integration of martial prowess with communal service	Courageous Service Schema
Ebubedike	The glory of a warrior	Bravery as a source of honour and communal admiration	Honourable Courage Schema
Omekantinu	He who does so ears could hear	Heroic reputation extending throughout the community; demonstrated courage, earning widespread recognition	Reputation for Valour Schema

According to Kamalu, Onumonu, and Udisi (2024), traditional Igbo society maintained strong respect for warriors (*dike*) who demonstrated great feats in military contexts, wrestling competitions, and other activities requiring bravery and raw strength (*ike*). These titles transfer the cultural schema of warrior virtue into contemporary contexts where traditional warfare no longer occurs. The metaphorical extension allows modern individuals—who may never experience military combat—to access the cultural schema of respected courage through alternative demonstrations of bravery.

In contemporary application, these titles *Dikedioranma*, *Ebubedike* and *Omekantinu* are bestowed upon men who have undertaken exceptional actions demonstrating heroism—whether through protecting community members from danger, standing courageously against injustice, or defending community interests against external threats. The ideological schema establishes courage as a fundamental qualification for leadership and recognition, creating social motivation for risky, community-benefiting action. The metaphor in *Omekantinu* (he who does so ears could hear) suggests that true bravery produces effects so significant that they circulate through the entire community by word of mouth. This encodes an ideology wherein individual brave actions constitute social events that require communal witnessing and acknowledgement. The schema thus creates feedback loops reinforcing brave conduct through public recognition and status elevation. In cultural ideation tiles under this group are reserved for people with positive force within the community, earning respect through good deeds and leadership.

5.6 Group E: Community and Strength

Cultural Schema and Ideological Significance: There are five titles in this group, they instantiate a comprehensive cultural schema of communal interdependence and collective strength. The schema reflects the philosophical principle *Igwebuike*—the concept that collective effort produces strength superior to individual action alone.

These titles collectively encode and reinforce the ideological principle that individual identity and value are fundamentally relational, defined through connection to and contribution toward the community rather than through individual accumulation or autonomy. The schema represents an ideological position fundamentally distinct from Western individualist frameworks that position individuals as autonomous agents whose primary loyalty is to personal interest. The title *Aka-na-edere-ora akwukwo* (hand that writes the people's book) is particularly significant. The metaphor of a "people's book" suggests a collective historical record to which individuals contribute through their actions and wisdom. This schema ideologically positions literacy and education as communal resources rather than individual possessions, creating obligations for educated individuals to use their knowledge in the service of collective memory and identity. The title establishes the educated person not as expert authority but rather as scribe or record-keeper for the community a subtle but significant distinction that constrains individual intellectual autonomy through communal obligations.

Group E: Community and Strength

Title	English Meaning	Ideological Significance	Instantiated Schema
Aka-na-edere-ora akwukwo	The hand that writes for the masses	Education and literacy as communal resources; the educated person as record-keeper of collective identity	Collective Knowledge Schema
Orabuike	The masses are strong	Community solidarity as a source of resilience and power; collective strength exceeding individual capacity	Communal Strength Schema
Omekannaya	He who acts like his father	Attributes from the previous generation carried forward; continuity through emulation	Generational Continuity Schema
Ochiriozuo	He packs and trains	Mentoring and capacity-building for community members; cultivation of collective capability	Educational Leadership Schema
Omeluora	One who does for the community	Consistent service orientation: individual action directed toward communal benefit	Service Orientation Schema

Van Dijk's analysis would highlight how these titles - *Orabuike,Omekannaya, Ochiriozuo, Omelu ora* function ideologically to construct and maintain communal cohesion while managing inevitable individual differences in wealth, status, and capability. The titles acknowledge inequality (not everyone is equally capable or accomplished) while subordinating inequality to principles of collective obligation and mutual responsibility. The ideology thus naturalises communal structures while constraining the social expression of individual achievement or advantage.

5.7 Group F: Destiny

Cultural Schema and Ideological Significance: The three titles analysed in this group instantiate a cultural schema of individual destiny as predetermined by spiritual or cosmic forces yet affirmed through individual action and community recognition. This schema reflects Igbo philosophical beliefs regarding the relationship between individual agency, ancestral influence, and divine predetermination.

Group F: Destiny

Title	English Meaning	Ideological Significance	Instantiated Schema
Akaraka	Destiny	Explicit acknowledgement of the predetermined nature of life trajectory; spiritual determination	Spiritual Predetermination Schema
Nnamelueze	The father who made a king	Inherited leadership destiny; predestined authority transmitted through the paternal line	Dynastic Destiny Schema
Nwakaibeya	A child greater than his mates	Exceptional destiny marked from birth; superiority determined by spiritual or cosmic forces	Exceptional Destiny Schema

The titles in Group F address a fundamental philosophical problem in Igbo thought: reconciling individual agency with spiritual predetermination. This represents what Oha (2009) identifies as a core tension within Igbo belief systems. Igbo tradition maintains that "one's destiny is believed to be unchangeable," yet simultaneously "subscribes to the notion that *Onye kwe, chi ya ekwere* (If one affirms, one's God also affirms)" (Oha, 2009, p. 108). This paradoxical formulation—that destiny is both fixed and

responsive to individual affirmation—reflects sophisticated philosophical reasoning about the relationship between fate and agency.

The title *Akaraka* (destiny) functions as an explicit acknowledgement of this schema. By selecting this as a title, an individual claims that their life trajectory and accomplishments represent the working out of a predetermined destiny. This ideological positioning accomplishes several functions: it explains success through reference to spiritual rather than individual achievement (deflecting potential envy and status-based conflict), it legitimises authority through appeal to spiritual rather than merely social authentication, and it establishes the titled individual as someone whose life constitutes evidence of spiritual favour and cosmic alignment.

The related titles *Nnamelueze* (father who made a king) and *Nwakaibeya* (a child greater than his mates) extend the schema across generations. The first position of leadership as destiny is transmitted through paternal inheritance, suggesting that ancestors continue to shape descendant life trajectories. The second emphasises that exceptional status is marked from birth, suggesting that spiritual forces have already determined an individual's elevated position. These titles encode an ideological message wherein contemporary accomplishment is understood as a manifestation of antecedent spiritual determination rather than individual effort alone.

This ideological schema serves complex functions within the community. It acknowledges the mysteriousness of success (why some individuals achieve prominence while others do not) while locating explanation at the spiritual level rather than attributing it to individual merit alone. This potentially mitigates status-based

conflict by suggesting that status differences reflect divine will rather than community preference or parental bias.

6. Discussion
6.1 Synthesis of Findings

The analysis of Ọzọ title names in Isiagu demonstrates that these titles function as comprehensive ideological and cultural discourses rather than simple linguistic labels. Across all six identified categories, titles consistently instantiate specific cultural schemas—organised systems of cultural knowledge reflecting and shaping how Igbo people understand core dimensions of human experience: wealth, morality, social organisation, courage, community, and destiny.

The integration of van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA and Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics enables a comprehensive understanding of how titles simultaneously function at multiple levels. At the linguistic level, titles employ metaphors, semantic extensions, and conceptual domains reflecting culturally specific ways of understanding the world. At the cognitive level, titles activate and reinforce mental models and belief systems that shape how community members perceive social reality. At the social and institutional level, titles function as mechanisms through which communities construct and maintain power relations, establish criteria for authority, and transmit cultural values across generations.

The findings confirm Sharifian's (2017) assertion that language features at all levels from morphosyntactic to semantic to pragmatic are rooted in cultural conceptualisations. Additionally, the analysis supports van Dijk's (2008) emphasis on the cognitive mediation between discourse and social structure. The titles

analysed in this study demonstrate precisely how culturally specific mental models and beliefs, instantiated through language, shape and reinforce particular social arrangements while marginalising alternatives.

6.2 The Functional Role of Ọzọ Titles in Contemporary Igbo Society

The analysis reveals that Ọzọ titles, despite modernisation pressures and religious conversion, continue to perform critical functions within contemporary Igbo communities. These functions can be understood through the theoretical frameworks employed:

Identity Construction: Ọzọ titles function as instruments through which individuals construct and perform specific identities within their communities. By selecting a title that instantiates cultural schemas (wealth, courage, morality), individuals position themselves within established cultural frameworks. This allows them to communicate their self-understanding and desired social positioning to their communities.

Value Transmission: The titles function as vehicles through which communities encode, preserve, and transmit core values to younger generations. Each title instantiates cultural knowledge about what the community values (courage, morality, communal obligation, truthfulness). By naming and honouring individuals who embody these values, communities reinforce their importance and encourage their cultivation in subsequent generations.

Power Legitimisation: Van Dijk's analysis reveals how titles function to legitimise authority and power. Rather than establishing authority through force or wealth alone, titles locate authority in moral character, cultural knowledge, and communal contribution. This ideological framing provides what Fairclough

(1989) would recognise as "consent-based" authority power that communities willingly grant to individuals perceived as embodying community values.

Community Cohesion: The emphasis across multiple categories on communal benefit, generosity, and mutual obligation functions ideologically to reinforce communal bonds and mutual responsibility. Even titles celebrating individual achievement (in courage, wealth, or moral character) frame achievement as valuable precisely to the extent that it benefits the community. This ideological construction constrains individualism while promoting community solidarity.

Cultural Preservation: Particularly through titles emphasising custodianship of tradition, the titles function as mechanisms through which communities delegate responsibility for cultural preservation. This addresses the fundamental challenge of oral societies maintaining complex cultural knowledge across generations in the absence of written records. By embedding cultural responsibility within titled individuals, communities create powerful motivations for cultural transmission.

6.3 Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study focused specifically on Ọzọ titles in Isiagu, Awka South Local Government Area. While Igbo culture maintains broad principles regarding Ọzọ titling across regions, local variations exist. Future research would benefit from a comparative analysis of Ọzọ titles across multiple Igbo communities, examining how regional differences in cultural emphasis and modern influences shape title naming practices.

Additionally, this study focused exclusively on male title holders. While historical and contemporary Ọzọ institutions in most Igbo communities remain male-dominated, emerging research indicates

that some communities have begun conferring Ọzọ titles on women. Future research examining gendered dimensions of title naming would provide important insights into how communities negotiate tradition and changing gender relations.

Finally, longitudinal research tracking how title naming practices evolve would illuminate how communities balance cultural preservation with modernity and how younger generations reinterpret traditional cultural schemas in contemporary contexts. Such research might examine whether digital communication, global cultural influences, and economic transformations are generating new categories of titles reflecting emerging values and concerns.

7. Conclusion

Ọzọ title names in Isiagu, Anambra State, constitute far more than honorific designations. Rather, they function as comprehensive cultural and ideological discourses through which individuals construct identity, communities transmit values, and societies establish and legitimise power relations. The analysis of twenty-two title names across six ideological categories—wealth and provision, character and integrity, custodianship of tradition, community and strength, bravery and protection, and destiny reveals how Igbo language encodes sophisticated understandings of the conditions for legitimate authority, the relationship between individual and community, the nature of moral virtue, and the interaction between human agency and spiritual predetermination.

The integration of van Dijk's socio-cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis with Farzad Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics proved analytically productive, enabling examination of how titles instantiate culturally specific schemas while simultaneously

functioning as ideological mechanisms that construct and maintain social order. The analysis demonstrates that Ọzọ titles have ideological markers blending wealth, bravery, truthfulness, custodianship of tradition, destiny, character, benevolence, and communal service. They function not as mere decorations or referential acts but as significant social practices that mirror the collective ideologies and cultures maintained by name-bearers while demonstrating how society values achievement.

The titles analysed reveal cultural and ideological frameworks that prioritise communalism, moral character, spiritual authority, and communal obligation. They reflect Igbo values, emphasising that legitimate authority emerges not from individual accumulation alone but from demonstrated commitment to community welfare, consistent moral conduct, and cultural preservation. In this sense, Ọzọ titles constitute cultural technologies through which communities organise social life according to values and distribute status and authority according to demonstrated alignment with community ideals.

Despite significant social change including Christian conversion, Western education, colonial and postcolonial governance, and contemporary globalisation the Ọzọ institution continues to play an invaluable role in preserving Igbo heritage, fostering social cohesion, and embodying the ideological and cultural principles of respect, justice, integrity, and communal obligation. The persistence of Ọzọ titling across generations and contexts testifies to its deep cultural significance and its capacity to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining core ideological commitments.

For researchers, educators, policymakers, and community members engaged with African cultural preservation and identity

construction, Ọzọ titles offer rich material for understanding how language functions as a mechanism for encoding, transmitting, and legitimising cultural knowledge. For linguists and discourse analysts, Ọzọ titles demonstrate the necessity of integrating linguistic analysis with cultural and ideological investigation to achieve a comprehensive understanding of how language functions in human societies. For Igbo people themselves, Ọzọ titles represent ongoing opportunities for cultural expression, identity construction, and communal participation in the creation and maintenance of social order based on values refined across generations.

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