

## MORPHOSEMANTICS ANALYSIS OF IHEMBOSI PERSONAL NAMES

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### ABSTRACT

Personal names in Igbo society function as linguistic texts that encode history, belief, identity, worldview, and social experience. This study investigates the morphosemantics of twenty personal names from Ihe mbosi, a town in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. Emphasis is placed on names that share common root morphemes, as well as circumstantial names derived from specific life events. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, data were collected from twenty respondents aged 40 years and above who are indigenous residents of Ihe mbosi. Through morphosemantic analysis—combining morphological decomposition and semantic interpretation—the study identifies the dominant morphological processes in the selected names, including compounding, derivation, and semantic extension. The findings reveal that Ihe mbosi names reflect themes of divine reverence, resilience, lineage pride, kinship, wealth, bravery, gratitude, and survival. Circumstantial names encode lived histories and serve as oral archives of family experiences. The study concludes that personal names in Ihe mbosi possess rich morphological structures and deep cultural meanings, reinforcing the interconnectedness of language and identity in Igbo society. It recommends the documentation of indigenous naming practices to preserve linguistic heritage.

**Keywords:** Morpho-semantics, Ihe mbosi, Personal Names, Cultural, Circumstantial names

### INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of symbols and rules that enables humans to communicate complex ideas and feelings. Ofoegbu (2021) posits that the human language is very unique because it has its own structure and its own system of organizing its component units into meaningful patterns. This simply means that there are rules governing the organization of sentences in a language. Ofoegbu (2012) defines language as the human system of communication. It is a means by which humans alone communicate. Language is man and man is language. Man uses language for his everyday interaction. Ofoegbu and Usar (2018) repeat and expand this definition, stressing that language is not only a system of communication but also a fundamental tool for expressing human experiences. Again according to Ofoegbu and Usar (2018), language is essentially a human system of communication that is shaped by both linguistic behaviour and extralinguistic norms across different social groups.

According to Ofoegbu (2024) language is man and man is language. Life has no meaning without language. Language is a means of interaction among people of the same community. Ofoegbu and Ishima (2024) reaffirm earlier views, calling language “the human system of communication ... man and man is language ... man uses language for his everyday interaction.” Again Ofoegbu (2025) posits that Language is a system and this means that it is an organised human behaviour built on inherent structures and that language is purely a human attribute which, serves primarily as a means of communication.

Names are important linguistic and cultural symbols in African societies, especially among the Igbo people, who view naming as a meaningful process that reflects the collective and individual identity of a person. In Igbo cosmology, names are not arbitrary labels; they are semantic statements, philosophical reflections, historical markers, and cultural metaphors. Hence, names embody meaning and communicate messages that reflect the circumstances of birth, emotional states, religious beliefs, moral values, or communal expectations.

Ihe mbosi is a culturally rich town located twenty miles southeast of Onitsha and seven miles south of Nnewi. It is situated in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State and bordered by Okija, Ukpok, and Ozubulu. Historically, the people of Ihe mbosi are descendants of ancient warriors known for bravery, resilience, and intellectual resourcefulness. These attributes shape their worldview and, by extension, their naming conventions. Ofoegbu (2018), asserts that semantics deals with how meaning is encoded in language, especially in words and lexical forms, and how semantic relations or creativity are realized in communication. Ofoegbu (2022) defines Semantics as the study and analysis of meaning and the meaning of a word is the idea a word conveys in the heart or mind of the speaker or hearer. Ofoegbu (2011) says that some words have peculiarity of phraseology approved by usage and having a meaning other than its logical or grammatical one. Morphosemantics is a branch of linguistics that involves the analysis of morphological structure in conjunction with semantic interpretation. Because Igbo personal names often contain meaningful morphemes, morphosemantic analysis provides an effective approach for understanding how form and meaning are fused to produce culturally relevant names.

Ofoegbu and Usar (2017), demonstrate how words derive their meanings and how they are structured around morpho-semantics.

This study explores the morphological structure and semantic meanings of selected Ihemبosi names. It focuses on names built from common Igbo root words—such as Nwa, Uka, Obi, Aku, and Ilo/Ilu—and also examines circumstantial names that reflect life experiences. The analysis seeks to highlight the cultural insights embedded within these names. It must be noted that Ofoegbu and Udoe (2011) worked on a morphological analysis of Awka personal names and they anchored their study on morphology.

### **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The overarching aim of this study is to conduct a morphosemantic analysis of twenty personal names from Ihemبosi to understand how morphological structures encode cultural and contextual meanings.

Morphological rules are the building blocks of language. They determine how smaller units of meaning (morphemes) combine to form new words or modify existing ones. According to Aronoff and Fudeman (2011), morphology studies the internal structure of words and the mental processes involved in word formation. Morphologists analyze morphemes and examine inflectional and derivational processes that form meaningful expressions. This knowledge is essential for understanding how Igbo personal names derive their meanings from their structural components.

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify the morphological components of twenty selected Ihemبosi names.
2. Analyze the morphological rules used in forming these names, such as compounding, derivation, and semantic extension.
3. Interpret the semantic meanings encoded within the morphemic structures of the names.
4. Investigate circumstantial naming practices among the people of Ihemبosi.
5. Reveal cultural themes and values expressed through naming.
6. Contribute to ethnolinguistic documentation by preserving indigenous naming traditions.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature on Igbo anthroponymy highlights names as cultural expressions deeply rooted in tradition, context, and worldview. Igbo personal names are widely recognized as linguistic constructs that convey complete semantic messages (Nwachukwu, 2018).

#### **Morphology and Word Formation**

Aronoff and Fudeman (2011) identify morphology as the study of word structure and the mental grammar underlying word formation. Osuagwu et al. (1997) categorize morphology into inflection and derivation, noting that derivational morphology and compounding are critical in Igbo naming.

Morphosemantics, as discussed by Ofoegbu (2022), explores how morphological structures influence meaning. His morpho-semantic analysis of Igbo coinage and expression emphasizes combining form and content to derive deeper meaning.

Madu (2015) and Emenyonu (2017) argue that Igbo names preserve cultural values, events, and spiritual beliefs. Okeke (2020) discusses circumstantial naming as a means of recording family history and emotional experience. Names serve as historical documents, reflecting lineage, divine intervention, moral lessons, and experiences of survival (Nwachukwu, 2018). This perspective is essential for understanding names like Atuonyeilonduozutaonwu, which capture complex events.

This study aligns with previous research while expanding scholarship through a focused morphosemantic analysis of Ihemبosi names.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design, suitable for linguistic and cultural interpretation.

#### **Population and Sample**

Twenty adult participants aged 40 years and above were purposively selected from Ihemبosi. This age group was targeted because they are custodians of indigenous naming practices.

#### **Data Collection**

Primary data were gathered through oral interviews, discussions, and name elicitation. Respondents explained the meanings, origins, and circumstances surrounding each name.

#### **Analysis Procedure**

The analysis involved:

1. Identifying morphemes.
2. Breaking names into constituent parts.
3. Translating morphemes.

4. Interpreting cultural meanings.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on Morphosemantic Theory, which combines morphological and semantic analysis. Additional frameworks include:

Componential Semantics (breaking meanings into basic features)

Ethnolinguistic Theory (linking language to cultural practice)

These frameworks support the interpretation of names as meaningful structures shaped by cultural environment.

### FINDINGS

List of 20 Analyzed Ihemboosi Names

Name	Morphological Breakdown	Interpretation
Atuegwu	Atu + egwu	Fearful/Brave/one who reveres danger.
Ukaatu	Uka + atu	Word prevails.
Ukachukwu	Uka + Chukwu	God's word is supreme.
Azuka	Azu + ka	Experience is greater.
Ukaegbu	Uka + egbu	Fulfilled word.
Ukadike	Uka + dike	Mighty word.
Nwabueze	Nwa + bue + eze	Child is kingly/carries royalty.
Nwakaeze	Nwa + ka + eze	Child greater than kingship.
Nwakaego	Nwa + ka + ego	Child is worth more than wealth.
Nwanneka	Nwanne + ka	Sibling is supreme.
Nwafor	Nwa + ofor	Child of justice/lineage.
Obiekelenonu	Obi + ekele + n'onu	Heart that pleads/thanks openly.
Obieze	Obi + eze	Royal heart.
Obiukwu	Obi + ukwu	Great-hearted.
Obiakonamu	Obi + ako + namu	My courageous/wise heart.
Atuonyeilonduozutaonwu	complex compound	One who saves from death.
Akubueze	Aku + bue + eze	Wealth crowns like royalty.
Onuzurike	Onu + zuru + ike	Voice that brings rest.
Onumazi	Onu + mazi	Wise/noble voice.
Iloegbu	Ilo + egbu	Enemy cannot defeat.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Themes Identified

1. Divine reverence — Ukaatu, Ukachukwu, Ukaegbu
2. Lineage and kinship — Nwafor, Nwanneka
3. Royalty and honour — Nwabueze, Obieze
4. Wealth and success — Akubueze
5. Bravery and survival — Atuegwu, Iloegb
6. Emotional depth — Obiekelenonu, Obiukwu
7. Circumstantial history — Atuonyeilonduozutaonwu

Morphological Patterns

Heavy use of compounding.

Use of derivational roots such as Nwa, Obi, Uka.

Semantic extension, where literal meanings become metaphors.

Cultural Insights

**Names serve as:**

Historical records

Expressions of gratitude

Indicators of societal values

Identity markers

### CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that personal names in Ihemboosi represent rich linguistic structures embedded with deep cultural meanings. The morphosemantic analysis reveals that the people of Ihemboosi name their children using structures rooted in spirituality, lineage, bravery, wealth, kinship ties, and emotional experience. These names are not merely labels but function as cultural texts that convey social values, collective memory, and inherited worldviews. They document both personal and communal histories, serving as repositories of lived experiences and preserving cultural identity across generations. Circumstantial names, in particular, encode

significant life events, family narratives, and community encounters, thereby acting as oral archives that sustain historical consciousness.

The study recommends the continued documentation and preservation of Igbo naming traditions, especially within local communities such as Ihembozi, to safeguard linguistic heritage and promote deeper understanding of the cultural philosophies embedded in personal names. It further suggests that future research explore comparative naming patterns across Igbo subgroups to broaden scholarly insight into the linguistic and cultural diversity of Igboland.

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