

MORPHO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF NAMES OF VILLAGE IN OWEREZUKALA TOWN

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Abstract

Ndigho are known for preserving their culture and values through names that are peculiar to them and carry distinctive, remarkable meanings. In recent years, there has been notable growth and development in the study of indigenous names given to Igbo villages and towns. The village names in Owerezukala, a town in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria, are not left out of this discussion. The town consists of eight villages, namely: Mkputu, Ogwuada, Iyiafor, Isiafor, Okpoghotu, Lete, Okpu, and Ihie. The names of these villages were formed based on various cultural and historical conditions such as traditional figures, war, conquest, bravery, nature, birthright, personality, and afflictions. Data for this study were collected from two elderly men from each village, aged 50 years and above, making a total population of 16 respondents. The data collected were qualitatively analyzed, which contributed to the authenticity of the research findings. It was observed that the names of these villages in Owerezukala are neither ordinary nor given arbitrarily; rather, they serve as markers of historical events, indigenous identity, victory, and the town's touristic heritage. This study enhances the understanding of the morphology and semantics of Owerezukala village names and demonstrates how toponymy serves as a vehicle for meaning formation, traditional identity, and culturally significant narratives.

Keywords: Morpho-Semantic, Owerezukala, Ndigho, Semantics, Language

Introduction

Language is a principle means of human communication, a structured system of signs governed by rules Lyons (1995). Crystal (2008) defines language broadly in stressing on speaking, writing, or signing as mode of communication stressing its symbolic and functional aspects. According to Ofoegbu (2012) defines language as "the human system of communication. It is a means by which humans alone communicate. Nweke (2021) posits that as human beings, we communicate our ideas using language. Life has no meaning without language. Language is a means of interaction among people of the same community. The society as we know is a large crowd of people who leave together in an organized way characterized by common interest and may have distinctive cultures and institutions.

Ofoegbu (2012), building on his earlier works, defines language as "the human system of communication. It is a means by which humans alone communicate." He further emphasizes that "language is man and man is language. Man uses language for his everyday interaction." This definition underscores language as a uniquely human faculty, inseparable from human existence and daily interaction. Ofoegbu (2012), building on his earlier works, defines language as a system of communication for humans alone. In a later collaboration, Nweke (2024) says communication involves the practical skills of listening and expressing thoughts. Again, Nweke and Okeke (2023) submit that, in both writing and speech, language is structured to communicate meaning for specific purposes. Similarly, Ofoegbu and Udoe (2011) posit that humans use language to express emotions and feelings, which are reflected in their everyday linguistic practices. 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. The emphasis here remains on the exclusivity of language to humans and its indispensability in social life.

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 and Okoli (2022) describe "language as a means human beings have devised for communicating ideas, feelings, emotions, desires etc. through complex vocal or written symbols". This showcases the effective nature of language. It states its function not just for interaction but also for expressions. Ofoegbu and Okey-Kalu (2021) describe language as "a means which human beings have devised for communicating ideas, feelings, emotions, desires, etc., through complex vocal or written symbols." This highlights the symbolic nature of language, showing that it functions not just for interaction but also for the expression of inner states, emotions, and symbolic representations. 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." However, they extend the definition by situating

Ofoegbu and Usar (2018) revise the earlier definition of language that language is not only the way of communication but also a fundamental means of expressing human experience. The taught here remains that language is an important aspect of social life. Nweke (2024) opines that Language is an important tool in the society and thus, in its multifunctional ways, plays crucial roles in human life. It is fundamentally a communicative tool characterised by taking systematically into account the speaker's and hearer's side, and the communicative needs of the speaker and of the given language community. That is, it involves a systematic and continuous process of telling, listening and understanding. Also in Ofoegbu (2024) "language is man and man is language ". Life has no meaning without language. Nweke (2024) emphasizes that there is recognition of a relationship between language and society that has existed from the very beginning.

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. Nweke and Okeke (2025) articulate that language, in its multifunctional nature, enables individuals to participate in communicative acts with others; to assume roles and express or understand feelings, attitudes, and judgments; and to relate what is said or written to the real world as well as to other linguistic events. Ofoegbu and Okoli (2024) emphasize that man uses language to communicate his individual thoughts, inner feelings and personal psychological experiences and this is evident in this study

The study of names is referred to nematology which is of great importance to human existence, especially in Africa where people value culture, tradition, language and communication. Names are used as label to identify, persons, place, animals or things, and are equally historical witnesses and backgrounds. The name of a place may be used to trace culture, language, geographical location or region, occupation and family genealogy. Morphsemantic analysis of villages in Owerezukala Orumba South, Anambra State is the subject of this study, as they are formed based on birthright, war, conquest, afflictions, personality, bravery and nature. The names of the villages are analyzed based on morphological as well as semantic levels.

Literature Review

Morphological analysis is an attempt made to capture the structure of language at the word level. Ofoegbu (2022) views are on morpho-semantic analysis. He sees it as mainstream linguistics. Semantics is the study of meaning in language, particularly how words, morpheme and expressions convey meaning. In his morpho-semantic works, He reveals how meaning comes through processes of word- formation, coinage, compounding and borrowing. Indicating that Semantics work hand in hand with morphology and context. 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. Again Ofoegbu and Okoli (2018) assert that semantics deals with how meaning is encoded in language, especially in words and how semantic relations or creativity are realized in communication. Ofoegbu (2011) says that some words have peculiarity of usage and have meaning other than its logical or grammatical one. Ofoegbu and Usar (2017), demonstrate how words derive their meanings and how they are structured around morpho-semantic, choices that are carefully selected to achieve meaning in language use.

Mohammed and Badejo (2000) satisfy that names depict the belief and cultural values of a people. They also identify that is possible to other lexical items to form names. Semantic analysis generally deals with meaning in language as the relationship between words form and extra linguistic entity it represents (referent) its traditional meaning. The relationship is regarded as being psychologically real since it manifests in the speakers or hearers mind as a concept, which is regarded as a crucial intermediary between word form and its referent Raper (1987:105). Proper names according to Varnai (2003) do have a kind of semantic content and it has to be cultural in meaning. The establishment of this meaning according to Raper (1990:267) cited in Ntuli (1992a) is considered as the first necessary step required in onomastic investigation.

Types of Toponymy

1. **Geographical Toponymy:** These are names that feature places such as mountain, river, lakes, island, cave e.g. Ugbaukwu cave in Owerezukala town.
2. **Settlement Toponyms:** These are names of human settlement such as;
 Cities e.g. Onitsha.
 Town e.g. Owerezukala
 Villages e.g. Mkputu, Ihie, Okpu, Ogwuada, etc.
3. **Cultural Toponymy:** These are names that reflect cultural or historical significance of a place. In Owerezukala there are some villages with cultural toponyms.

S/N	Name of Village	Cultural Toponyms
1	Mkputu	The village has a lot of utu fruits
2	Iyiafor	Iyiafor was born on afor market day

3	Lete	The son of Owerezukala has small stature
4	Okpu	The village has more of stony grounds.
5	Ihie	The most handsome son that brought Ihie (Light) to Owerezukala town.

4. **Descriptive Toponyms:** These are names that describe the physical features of a place such as:
Rocky points e.g. Okpu village
Sandy Beach
Hilly area e.g. Ihie village.

Importance of Toponymy

- Cultural Heritage:** Place names can reflect the history, language and tradition of the people who named them.

Village name	–	Ihie
History	–	Last village created in Owerezukala
Language	–	Igbo dialect
Tradition	–	Celebration of light and breakthrough in the village
- Geographical Features:** Toponyms can describe the physical characteristics of a place.

	Village name		Physical Features
i.	Okpu	-	Stony ground
ii.	Mkputu	-	Land full of utu fruits
iii.	Isiafor	-	The head of afor market day
iv.	Iyiafor	-	River that restricts visit on afor market day
- History:** Place names can show significant events, or people.

	Village name		Physical Features
A.	Ogwuada	-	A celebration of victory of a break warrior
B.	Ihie	-	A celebration marking the season of light
C.	Isiafor	-	Rituals on every afor market day
D.	Okpoghota	-	The first son (Okpara) of ogbombiaka, the father of Owerezukala

In studying toponyms, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of complex relationship between language culture and geography.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through combination of oral interviews, direct observation, recording media and newspapers (Daily sun Newspaper) 'view in Owerezukala Ugbaukwu cave'. The touristic nature of Africa and history analysis of Owerezukala kingdom. Oral interviews were conducted with ten indigenous men from 50 years above from each village which gives the totality of 16 men as the population of the study. Other supporting participant include women and children who have contributed or witnessed the cultural activities of the town and recordings were made on this premise. The informants were not aware that the conversations were being recorded or that the interactions were being documented.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual theory of semantics has it that meaning arises from the mental concept and representations that underlie language. This story suggests that words, phrases and sentences are associated with mental concept, which are derived from experience, perceptions and cognition, Pinker (2000).

The conceptual theory of semantics can be applied to toponomy, the study of placenames, to gain insight into how people conceptualize and understand geographical meaning of places, (Bishop et al, 2011). Toponymy provides a significant impact on building the native people's characters towards their environment. This is identifiable from their feelings of attachment and self-belonging towards cultures, traditions and historical events around the region.

Morphsemantic analysis of village names in Owerezukala town, Orumba South Anambra state.

S/N	Name of village	Morphological	Composition	Semantic analysis
1	Mkputu	Mkpu ↓ A home (mudhouse)	+ Utu ↓ Sweetened fruit	Mkputu A home of sweetened fruit
2	Ogwuada	Ogwu ↓ Thorn	+ Ada ↓ Can't fall	Ogwuada A thorn cannot fall. Named after their father who was a brave warrior.
3	Iyiafor	Iyi ↓ River	+ Afor ↓ Third market day	Iyiafor River dedicated to the gods of the third market day afor
4	Okpoghot	Okpo ↓ Dry	+ Ghota ↓ Understand	Okpoghota One is to understand the quality of something when is dried. The name of Owerezukala first son.
5	Isiafor	Isi ↓ Head	+ Afor ↓ Third market day	Isiafor The leader of warriors. This war normally take place every afor day. Name after the war that takes place every afor market day
6	Lete	Le ↓ Look	+ Te ↓ after	Lete He was the youngest of Ogbonbiaka sons. The name was due his small statue that his father named him leteyanya. Meaning elder ones should look after him
7	Okpu	O ↓ Unleveled ground	+ Kpu ↓	Okpu The village was named okpu because it is an unleveled ground full of stones and hills.
8	Ihie	I ↙ ↘ Light	+ Hie ↙ ↘ Light	Ihie He is the most handsome son ogbonbiaka the father of Owerezukala whose handsome depicts light in the village

Findings

The morphsemantic analysis of the eight villages in owere-zukala town reveals that names of these villages are not meaningless but carry semantic properties that shows a deep indigenous identity, cultural heritage, traditional backgrounds and historical memories.

A. Indigenous Identity:

Owerezulaka is a town in Igboland where indigenes of Igbo are found. It reflects the indigenous identity and land inheritance. 'Okpoghota' is the first indigenous son of Ogborbiaka the father of owerezulaka, 'Mkputa' is a home of sweetened fruits, utu also indicating a sweet home to be.

B. Cultural heritage:

Owerezulaka has some remarkable cultural heritage in some villages like:

'Ihie' – this is a cultural heritage that are as a result of birth of Ihie to mark the beginning of light and breakthrough in the village

C. Traditional Background:

Some villages in Owerezulaka came as a result of traditional background that surrounds it like;

'Iyiafor' – A river dedicated to the gods of the third market day 'Iyiafor'.

'Isiafor' – The name was after a brave warrior that leads his army in battle and conquest over his foes. Dedication was made on afor market day in honour of the warrior bravery.

D. Historical Memories:

Some of these villages have strong historical memories, and whenever the stories of their origins are told, there is always excitement on the faces of the listeners. Villages such as Ogwuada, Lete, and Okpu have particularly rich historical backgrounds.

Ogwuada – A thorn that cannot die or fall. Named after their father who was a brave warrior that even thorns cannot make him shake in battle.

Lete – The youngest son of Ogbonbiaka who is very handsome. The name implies 'look after'. The father tells his older siblings to always look after their youngest brother.

Okpu – From history that area has been an unlevelled ground full of stones and rocks. These natural resources have been a source of economic wealth in the village.

The findings reveal that villages in Owerezukala has a great semantic features that have contributed to their cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

The study of onomastics is both sociolinguistic and applied in nature. The morpho-semantic analysis of village names in Owerezukala Town, Orumba South, Anambra State, shows that these names emerged under various circumstances and conditions such as birthrights, conquest, cultural background, and historical identity. The morphological analysis of these village names is based on their structural formations, and their categorization is determined by their structural components. These components reveal the morphological and semantic features embedded in the names—features that, in some cases, represent the combined meanings of compound elements, while in others, the meanings are more abstract. The names Mkputu, Ogwuada, Iyiafor, Okpoghota, Isiafor, Lete, Okpu, and Ihie are not meaningless; rather, they carry significant semantic weights that reflect their morpho-semantic attributes, which range from war, conquest, afflictions, rituals, birthright, nature, and tradition.

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