

ANTONYMIC RELATIONSHIPS IN IGBO PLACE NAMES

By

M. Chibu. Onukawa Ph.D and **E. Ngozi Onukawa Ph.D**

08037611883 08038701999

email: mconukawa@yahoo.com onukawangozi@gmail.com

Department of Linguistics, Communication Studies/Igbo

Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria

Abstract

The descriptions of some places in Igboland, that is place names, occur in pairs. We observed that a lexical relationship of semantic opposition exists between the pairs of place names—the pair of place names are in antonymic relationship. In some cases the antonymic relationships are of the gradable type, meaning that the antonyms form instances of contraries and implicitly or explicitly invoke a field over which the grading takes place that is a standard of comparison. There are also some of the antonymic relationships that are of the non-gradable type, that is, they are complementary pairs. This study discovered that the antonymic relationships in the pairs of place names are consequent upon the need for distinguishing references to groups of migrants of common ancestries. The study also found out that the antonymic relationships in the place names constitute a tool for determining the pattern of migration—the group that remained in the ancestral base and the one that migrated to a new base.

1. Introduction: Derivation of the Antonymic Relationship in Place Names

In Igboland, some place names—names of communities, towns, villages, streets, avenues etc- occur in pairs and the pairs have oppositeness in their meanings. The said antonymic relationships between some pairs of place names were consequent upon migration. In the several past centuries the Igbo society was less sophisticated (like many other societies), and thus migration was quite common. It was easy for people to relocate to new areas (mostly areas proximal to their former bases). For people of same ancestry, not all members of the ancestry left the ancestral base. Some members migrated to a new place while others retained the ancestral base. Many factors compelled some people (groups) to relocate to a new base, and many factors also fortified the willingness of some others to stay put at the ancestral base.

Onukawa, (in press) has pointed out that:

As people migrated and settled down at a spot, others (especially earlier neighbouring settlers) had the need to refer to them (the later settlers). The references to the later settlers were made with regard to some prominent issues.

In the case of groups of same ancestry, (given that the two separate groups shared a common place name as assigned to them by earlier settlers), the migration created another need for the earlier settlers to further distinguish between the two (separated) groups. In some cases, the earlier settlers, in the course of referencing, grouped the later settlers into different levels of assumed importance, somewhat of “high and low”. There is also (assumed) sense of “senior and junior” or “super ordinate and subordinate” “in the antonymic relationship as connoted in the nominals that express the antonymy. There are also instances of the antonymic relationship (expressed in referencing) where “levels of importance” is not connoted, rather earlier settlers used just complementary pairs of antonyms to refer to later settlers.

In some cases the nominals that express the antonymic relationships function as modifiers (N_2) of other nominals (the main place name, (N_1)) in the derivation of the place names, whereas in others the nominals that express the antonymic relationships and the other nominals constitute associative constructions—“a nominal phrase that is made up of two nominals in which the meaning is roughly N_1 of the type associated with N_2 . This is shown in its structure as well as its tonal behaviour” (Emenanjo, 1978, Pp 35-37).

2. The Sources of the Terms for Antonymic Referencing.

Having noted that the various additional (antonymic) referencing was premised on migration, and applied to two groups that were of same ancestry, shared a common base, but separated by migrations; we follow up by examining the derivands (sources) of derivation of the antonymic reference terms. We observe that the factors that motivated migration of migrants from ancestral base to a new location served as sources from which early settlers drew the terms for the antonymic referencing. Specifically, the various terms for antonymic referencing were drawn from the following sources:

- a) Population of settlers
- b) Place of settlement
- c) Direction of settlement

We discuss each them with exemplifications:

2.1 Population of settlers.

The use of population as basis for distinguishing between the two groups (referred to above) resulted in gradable antonyms in referencing. One of the factors that compelled people to leave their ancestral base and relocate to a new base was high population density. In some cases, in the past some settlement may become populous to the detriment of environmental comfort of some settlers (common ancestry notwithstanding). There could be competition for scarce resources resulting from high population. In this situation there was need to decongest the original base. Actually, decongesting is synonymous with reduction, which is taking a small number (of an item) away, leaving a greater number in situ. Thus, in this circumstance, those that relocated were, as expected, smaller in number than those that remained at the ancestral base.

It was from this fact of the population of the two groups that the earlier settlers drew the reference terms to distinguish between them. They (earlier settlers) assigned the nominal *Ukwu* (largeness/bigness/greatness) to the more populous group (the group that remained at the ancestral base), and *Nta* (Smallness/littleness/fewness) to the less populous group (the group that relocated). We have the following as examples: Before we give some examples we indicate that *Ukwu* and *Nta* are adjectival nominals, modifying the place names. Thus we have the general gloss of X UKWU (X of Largeness i.e, Large X) versus X NTA (X of Smallness, i.e Small X), where X= PLACE NAME.

Place Name ¹ (Ukwu)	Place Name (Nta)	LGA/State in Igboland
Lọọkpa ukwu	Lọọkpa nta	Umunneochi/Abia
Umụọmaj ukwu	Umụọmaj nta	Isiala Ngwa North /Abia
Amụzụ ukwu	Amụzụ nta	Umuahia North/Abia
Afara ukwu	Afara nta (Afarate)	Umuahia North/ Abia
Akaeze ukwu	Akaeze nta (Ihie nta)	Ivo/ Ebonyi
Ibina ukwu	Ibina nta	Bende (Igbere)/Abia
Dike ukwu	Dike nta	Umuahia North /Abia
Amainyi ukwu	Amainyi nta	Ihite uboma/Imo
Ama ukwu	Ama nta	Bende/Abia
Akiriika ukwu	Akiriika nta	Ukwa/Abia
Ibere ukwu	Ibere nta	Ikwuano/ Abia
Itu ukwu	Itu nta	Ikwuano/Abia
Eze ukwu	Eze nta	Bende /Abia
Qssah ukwu	Qssah nta	Obingwa/Abia
Mbụtu ukwu	Mbụtu nta	Isialangwa South /Abia
Mgbọkọ ukwu	Mgbọkọ nta	Obingwa /Abia

Onwukwe and Nweze (2017, p83) discuss some issues related to the above, which for us, are mistaken analyses We state their views and also our disagreement and reasons for it. They state as follows:

We observe that toponyms in Ngwa occur in pairs of antonyms (opposite in meaning). This antonymic relationship reflects two aspects namely: seniority and position of settlement. According to an informant, some settlers who first settled in a place refer to those who came after them as their junior while the latter group refers to those they met on ground in a particular position of settlement as their senior. These designations are represented with the nominals *nta* (junior in settlement), *ukwu* (senior in settlement).

The thesis of Onwukwe and Nweze (2017) is that the antonymic terms: *ukwu* and *nta* in the place names are premised on “the order of settlement”; and that those that bear *ukwu* settled before those that bear *nta*. We consider this as a mistaken analysis, based on the following: i. The two groups that bear the *ukwu* and *nta* names are of the same ancestry, and thus couldn’t have been making references to themselves in naming. ii. No one or group makes reference to himself/itself. Names places bear were given to them by others in the course of referencing. iii. The two groups that bear the *ukwu* and *nta* names have a “root” place name to which the nominals, *ukwu* and *nta* were attached when the need for distinction arose (we have this name as X above). This name could not have been given to them separately (if “*ukwu* had settled first and *nta* settled later”)

2.1.1 The occurrence of one member of the pair of antonyms (*ukwu* or *nta*) in place names

We observe that there are cases where place names contain one of the antonymic terms (*ukwu* or *nta*) without the other occurring overtly or covertly in same place names to constitute the said antonymy. In which case we may have *Xukwu* without *Xnta* or *Xnta* without *Xukwu*.

2.1.1.1 Ukwu without Nta

Place names that have *ukwu* without the corresponding antonym, *nta*, overtly or covertly, include the following:

Place Name	LGA/ State in Igboland
Umụonye ukwu	Mbaitolu/Imo
Obodo ukwu	Ideatọ Nth/Imo
Ezi ukwu	Aba/Abia
Mgbala ukwu	Ọhaọzara/Ebonyi
Umuezeala ukwu	Nkwere/Imo
Umụeze ukwu	Abọ Mbaise/Imo
Agụ ukwu	Ahịazụ Mbaise/Imo
Alau kwu	Obingwa/Abia
Ndiuduma ukwu	Ọhafia/Abia
Ihiteafo ukwu	Ahịazụ Mbaise/Imo

Most (if not all) of these names are not the original names of the bearers, as given by the earlier settlers. In some cases, *ukwu* was attached to the original place name by the people (owners of the place) for the following reasons: i to distinguish their community from another with which it has some perennial disagreement and, ii. to distinguish their place names from similar place names that occur elsewhere (of no ancestral link). Other place names with *ukwu* are either products of outright changes of the original names that were considered by the bearers as pejorative; or that *ukwu* was an original component of the name of an ancestor or guardian/leader from whom the place name was derived by “prefixing” a settlement term (eg. *umu*. or *ndi* See Onukawa in press) . The bottom line of most of the additions of *ukwu* to place names here is self-aggrandizement.

2.1.1.2 Nta Without Ukwu

Place names that have *nta* without the corresponding *ukwu* overtly or covertly include the following:

Place Name	LGA/State in Igboland
Elu nta	Bende/Abia
Eke nta	Bende/Abia
Owere nta	Isialangwa Sth/Abia
Ihie nta	Arọchukwu/Abia
Nkalu nta	Ikwuanọ/Abia
Umụọyọ nta	Obingwa/Abia
Ama nta	Afikpo Nth/Ebonyi

In this case the earlier settlers had considered just the size of the population of the later settlers (not necessarily in comparison with the population of any ancestral base) and assigned the term, *nta* to the place names.

2.2 Place of Settlement

One of the basic issues we have noted is that a group remained at the ancestral base as another migrated to a new location. Again several factors motivated relocation. One of the major factors was land fertility. From the foregoing we deduce two sub premises of “place of settlement” on which the antonymic relationships in referencing were based. They are: i. Ancestral place of settlement versus Non ancestral place of settlement. ii Non fertile place of settlement versus Fertile place of settlement. In this case the antonym in referencing is non gradable.

2.2.1 Ancestral place of settlement versus Non ancestral place of settlement

In Igbo, an ancestral home is *Okpuulo* or *Okpuala*². The word *Okpu* can be interpreted as “aboriginal”. Some culture areas of Igboland have the ancestral home just as *ulo/unu* or *uhu*. The actual opposite of *Okpuulo* (*Okpu unu*)/*Okpuala* is *Obiokuru*³ (New Settlement). Some areas of Igboland have the new settlement as *ohia/ofia, ikpa, awom, afagha, egbelu, ubi, egu/agu*-all referring basically to farmland. Also in some places, the term *isi* (premier, main) is for ancestral home, while *owu, ayara, nta* (scanty) are for the new settlement. Earlier settlers used the Igbo designations for ancestral home and new locations to distinguish between the group that remained at the ancestral home and the group that relocated. We give the following examples: we have a general gloss of X ANCESTRAL HOME versus X NEW LOCATION (X of ANCESTRAL HOME versus X of NEW LOCATION) where X is the main place name. This order is, however, reversed in the case of *isi* and its antonyms.

Place Name (Ancestral Home)	Place Name (New Location)	LGA/State in Igboland
Akpahia okpuala	Akpaahia Obiokuru	Um.Nth/Abia
Akaanu okpuala	Akaanu afagha	Obingwa/Abia
Ahiaba okpuala	Ahijaba ubi	Obingwa/Abia
Umudu okpuala	Umudu (obiokuru)	Umuahia.Nth/Abia
Umofa okpuala	Umofa egbelu	Obingwa/Abia
Umokpara okpuala	Umokpara egbelu	Obingwa/Abia
Amaiye uhu	Amaiye obilohija	Isu3/Abia
Obi ulu	Obi awom	Obingwa/Abia
Obi ulu	Obi ohija	Osioma/Abia
Obi ulu	Obi agu	Awka sth/Anambra
Okpu unu (okpuno)	Obi ofia	Awka Sth/Anambra
Oba ulu	Oba egu (agu)	Nsukka/Enugu
Opi ulu	Opi egu	Nsukka/Enugu
Ezimo ulu	Ezimo egu	Nsukka/Enugu
Imirike ulu	Imirike egu	Nsukka/Enugu
Obimo ulu	Obimo egu	Nsukka/Enugu
Ndianiche unu	Ndianiche ikpa	Ideato Nth/Imo
Isi ahija	Owu ahija	Obingwa/Abia
Isi egu (agu)	Ayara egu	Ivo/Ebonyi
Amaafu isingwu	Amaafu ihungwu (Amaafu nta)	Umuahia Nth/Abia

In Umuahia North LGA, Abia State we have *Amaafu isingwu* and *Amaafu Ihu ngwu*, which suggests erroneously that *ihu* (frontline) is an antonym of *isi* (premier). Professor Goddy Emezue (Pers.Comm)⁴ however, informed us that *Amaafu ihungwu* was originally *Amaafu nta*. This fact makes a clear case for ancestral home and new location. It appears that the people (of *Amaafu ihungwu*) inserted *ihu* (frontline) on the consideration of *nta* as pejorative.

2.2.2 Non -fertile place of settlement versus Fertile place of settlement

The search for fertile land mostly motivated migration of the Igbo in the past. Subsistent farming was the mainstay of the people’s (Igbo) economy then, therefore there was the need for people to

move from a non fertile or less fertile land (*Ala ike/ Ala ojii*) to a more fertile land (*Ala ocha*). The fact that the Igbo traditionally obtained their subsistence basically from farming on the land, and thus prioritized land fertility in the course of migration, is evidenced by the fact that most of the designations for “new (non ancestral) settlements” in 2.2.1 above (*ubi, afagha, egbelu, ohua, awom, egu*) pertain to farming. As a group moved from the less fertile land, another retains it in consideration of some other factors like availability of water, and security. We have the following: we gloss them generally as X NON FERTILE LAND (X of NON FERTILE LAND) versus X FERTILE LAND (X of FERTILE LAND) where X is the main place name.

Place Name (Non Fertile Land)	Place Name (Fertile Land)	LGA/State in Igboland
Nkata ala ike	Nkata ala ocha	Umu.Nth/Abia
Um̄awa ala ike	Umuawa ala ocha	Umu.Nth/Abia
Okajuga ala ike	Okajuga ala ocha	Um.Nth/Abia
Um̄osu ala ojii	Um̄osu ala ocha	Ikwuano/Abia

2.3 Directions of Places of Settlement

In his discussions on the settlement of the Igbo with regard to direction, (Onukawa 2012, p.33), asserts that:

As the Igbo variously moved around within the area they presently occupy, in search of locations conducive to settlement, they did not make use of the compass as the instrument was not part of their culture and therefore not available to them. They rather oriented themselves according to the direction of the sun and the topography of their places of settlement. Based on the movement of the sun in terms of rising and setting etc, and also the topography in terms of the upwardness and downwardness of the land, the Igbo were able to refer to some of the places of settlement of their fellows. Such designations are still extant in contemporary Igbo society and I refer to them as “directional toponyms”.

Antonymic references to two related groups of later settlers by the earlier settlers was also based on the directions of their places of settlement as determined by either the movement of the sun or by topography of the land. Thus we have two types of directions of settlement: i. sun-based direction, and ii topography-based direction. We also have an instance of “Entry and Exit directions”.

2.3.1 Sun- Based Direction

The Igbo terms for the four corners of the world as determined by the movement of the sun are: *Onicha/Ama* (North), *Owere/Mgbaaja* (South); *Aba/Ikenga* (East), *Ihite* (West). The earlier settlers made references to the later settlers based on their (later settlers) movement to the various directions (North, South, East and West) as guided by the sun. We are somewhat handicapped in determining which directions were the ancestral homes and which ones were the new locations (unlike the cases of “population of settlers” and “places of settlement”) since according to Dr Felix Ike, Head of Geography Department, ABSU (Pers. Comm), there is no known theory of Geography on direction-guided migration. However, considering the fact that the Igbo were basically crop farmers and the availability of the sun boosts the fecundity of their crops, we believe that the people moved from the West (setting of the sun) to East (rising of the sun), again more arable lands were (and are still) located Southwards, for which, we believe, people moved from the North to the South.

We have the following antonymic place names based on the sun-based directions: the general gloss is X DIRECTION (or DIRECTION X for *Ezi ama Ossah/Mgbaaja Ossah*); X is the basic place name, and DIRECTION is either North, or South, East or West.

Place Name (Ancestral Home)	Place Name (New Location)	LGA/State in Igboland
Umuezeala ama	Umuezeala owere	Ehime Mbanjo/Imo
Osu ama	Osu owere	Isiala Mbanjo/Imo
Ihube Ihite	Ihube Ikenga	Okigwe/Imo
Ezi ama Ossah	Mgbaaja Ossah	Umuahia Nth/Abia

(Drawn from Onukawa 2012,p 36)

2.3.2 Topography-Based Direction

We also have the following Igbo terms for the topography-based directions: *Elu* (Upward direction) and *Agbo/Mgbo* (Downward direction). These directions may co-occur with or be associated (first with what Onukawa (2012) refers to as micro positions: *Ugwu* (Upward position), and *Ala* (Downward position). In some cases, the directions may antonymize with the micro positions. The earlier settlers also made references to the later settlers based on their movement towards the upward or downward directions. In determining which of the topography-based directions was the ancestral home of the migrants, we gathered from Geographers that it is a fact of geography that migration is/was usually from downward direction to upward direction. According to Dr Felix Ike, Head of Geography ABSU (Pers. Comm.), people migrate from lowland to upland for security and defense purposes. He also pointed out that this is evidenced by the fact that residents of upland areas are usually rebellious.

The following are some of the antonymic place names derived from topography-based directions. The gloss is either X of DIRECTION (for the first two examples) or DIRECTION of X (for the rest), where X is the main place name.

Place Name (Ancestral Home)	Place Name (New Location)	LGA/State in Igboland
Qwọ ala	Qwọ elu	Owere/Imo
Arjam ala ala	Arjam elu elu	Ikwuano/Abia
Agbo ala umunnekwu	Mgbo elu Umunnekwu	Is3/Abia
Agbo ala Umuram	Elu uguwu Umuram	(Ohiya) UmSth/Abia

2.3.3 Entry and Exit Directions

In addition to migrations determined by the directions of the movement of the sun, and the one determined by the topography of the land; we also have migrations determined by the directions of entry (*Uga*) and exit (*Ula*) in a settlement. As in the other cases, the earlier settlers identified this and used it as a basis for referencing to both the group that migrated to a new location and the one that remained at the original base.

In terms of determining which of these directions (“entry” and “exit”) was the ancestral base from which one of the groups relocated, we draw from the somewhat related case in 2.3.2 to state that the exit (*Ula*) direction was the ancestral base, and a group moved from there to the entry (*Uga*) direction for security and defense purposes. The group may have been warlike, and thus, in addition

to some other economic considerations, it relocated to the entry direction to ward off hostilities. We have an example of this. The gloss is ENTRY X versus EXIT X. Where X is the main place name.

Place Name (Ancestral Home)	Place Name (New Location)	LGA/State in Igboland
Ụla Ekwuluọbja	Ụga Ekwuluọbja	Aguata/Anambra

3 Summary and Conclusion

This study has shown that Antonymy, which is a major lexical semantic relationship in the Igbo grammar, is also framed through place naming. The antonymic relationships in place names derived from the separation (via migration) of people that belonged to same ancestry; and the need to distinguish between them in referencing.

This study has revealed that the antonymic references to the people (which eventually metamorphosed to references to the places they settled) were determined by the factors that motivated their migration, namely: population density, land fertility, and direction (sun-based, topography-based etc). In the perspective of linguistic anthropology, this study reveals how place naming, which is an aspect of the language, relate to the people's cultural values and practices. This study concludes that the antonymic relationships in place names could be used as a tool in determining patterns and directions of migration in Igboland. Antonymic relationships in place names should, however, not strictly be considered as yardsticks for determining seniority among communities in Igboland.

Notes.

1. Some of the examples of place names in this paper are drawn from Anoka (ed) (1976)
2. We should point out here that slovenliness in the writing of the Igbo language (especially, not inserting the diacritics) has resulted in the misspelling and wrong interpretation of place names like *Okpuala Ngwa* (the ancestral home of the *Ngwa* Igbo), which is now written as *Okpuala Ngwa* (the hat/cap of Ngwaland).
3. While collecting data for this paper we had *Ngọ Okpaala* (*Ngor Okpaala*) as a place name in Imo State, and expected to find its antonym (*Ngọ Obiọhuru*). Mr Eustace Okere, a Ph.D student in the Department of Linguistics, Communication Studies/Igbo, ABSU, who hails from *Ngọ Okpaala* LGA, Imo State, however, informed us that there is no particular community called *Ngọ Okpaala*, rather there is a place called *Ngọ* and there is another (separate and different) place called *Okpaala*. The name, *Ngọ Okpaala* was created by the Nigerian government for administrative convenience, and refers just to the Local Government (Headquarters)
4. We are grateful to Prof. G.I.N. Emezue of the Department of English, ABSU, Dr Felix Ike of Department of Geography and Planning, ABSU, and Mr Eustace Okere, Ph.D (Linguistics) student, ABSU with whom we exchanged views on some aspects of this paper.

References

- Anoka, K. (ed) (1976). Pronouncing dictionary of Igbo place names. Owerri: Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports.
- Emenanjo, E.N. (1978). Elements of modern Igbo grammar. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
- Onukawa, M.C. (2012). Directional toponyms in Igbo: A preliminary study. Abia Journal of the humanities and social sciences. Vol 5 no 1.
- Onukawa, M.C (in press). Human settlement terms in Igbo place names, Uturu journal of languages and linguistics.
- Onwukwe, D.C and Nweze, C. (2017). Ethnographic study of toponyms in Ngwa. Preliminary notes. Odu Enyi: IMSU journal of linguistics, literature and Igbo studies. Vol 1.