



A MORPHOSEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF WANU PERSONAL NAMES

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Abstract

This study examines A morphosemantics analysis of Wanu personal name. The objectives of the study includes; to identify Wanu personal names, examine the semantics properties in Wanu naming system, explore the morphological formations of Wanu personal names, investigate three types of naming system in Wanu and to reveal cultural themes/values expressed through naming. Thus, the study adopts three theories (Morphosemantic, leipzig glossing rules and ethnolinguistic). The data were sourced via informant consultation and Wanu literatures, 80 names both male and female were analysed. However, the findings found that Wanu personal names are classified into three groups; 1.birth-order or twins name indicating a child's birth position as twin and sex as in (Adata/Adagba =male twins); 2.pet names (Adam= my father) and 3.christening or circumstantial names presenting the circumstances surrounding a child's birth as in (Waseku= beloved queen). The findings revealed that Wanu names replicate themes of divine reverence, resilience, lineage pride, kinship, wealth, bravery, gratitude, and survival. It was also revealed that christening or circumstantial names are predominantly applicable pattern in Wanu speech community. Morphologically, structural components such as noun-based compounds, verb-based compounds, and pronoun based, preposition-based compounds, and adjective-based compounds and their sub-categories were identified. The work has contributed to knowledge by giving insight on how Wanu personal names are formed and how meaningful the names are. More so, the study will serve as a reference materials and it recommends the documentation of indigenous naming practices to preserve linguistic heritage.

Keywords: morphology, semantic, morphosemantic, personal name and Wanu.

A MORPHOSEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF WANU NAMING

1.1.Introduction

Names are more than mere identifiers; they are powerful linguistic and cultural artifacts that encapsulate a community's worldview, history, values and aspirations. In many African societies, including various ethnic groups in Nigeria, personal names are rich in meaning, often reflecting the circumstances of birth, family lineage, religious beliefs, significant events, or even hopes from the child's future. This study focuses on the Wanu people, a dialect of Jukun language. Wanu literally means, 'riverine', which is how they are distinguished from the Jukun Wapan (the inland Jukun) and others dialect of the Jukun (Aboshi, 2010). They are riverine people who reside along the banks of Benue River and Niger River. Their Settlements are found across several Nigerian states, inclusively; Taraba, Benue, Nasarawa, Adamawa, chad and even Cameroon. The Jukun Wanu are traditionally known as fishermen and boatmen, due to their proximity to the rivers. Furthermore, the Wanu are Niger-Congo language in Nigeria, like all the Jukun, they trace their ancestry to historic Kwararafa Kingdom, one of the Powerful Sudanic Kingdoms in the region.

We propose a morphosemantic analysis of Wanu personal naming practice to unravel the intricate relationship between the linguistic structure of their names and the cultural meanings they convey. Such an analysis provides insights into the Wanu worldview, social organization and the dynamism of their language in response to internal and external influences. However, Mulyana (2011) states that, morphology is a branch of linguistics that studies about word forms, word changes, and the impact of their changes on the meaning and class of words. Words in language have different structures. Thus, words have different elements and parts as well. An element or part of a word called morpheme can be an object of morphological study. Hence, there are two morphological objects of study, smaller objects known as morphemes and large objects known as words. Cruse (2000), submits that semantics studies meaning, reference and truth in language. It examines the relationship between words, concepts and reality, and how language users understand and negotiate meaning in communication. The sign or symbol refers to linguistic sign or symbol in the form of phonemes. In a nutshell, semantics is a linguistic branch which studies the meaning

of language, the relationship between signs (significant) and what is marked (signified). Nicolaisen (1980b) states that personal names are ‘the very act of naming that has both communal and personal importance’. African names have always been there, and their innovation and creativity have always been very prominent within an onomastic context. According Aboshi (2010), Personal name is a kind of name that refers to an individual. It is a name, a word or group of words, often used by people to identify a particular person. They reflect the concerns and values of the society. Morphosemantics is formed from the word "morpho + semantics". Morpho is generated from the word ‘morphology’, which is a branch of linguistics that studies the structure of words and the process of word formation (Staff sites UNY, 2008). Semantics is a branch of linguistics that specifically pays attention and studies about meaning (Staff sites UNY, 2008). From explanation above, it can be concluded that morphosemantics is a branch of linguistics that studies the structure of words, the process of word formation, and the meaning of word.

Morphosemantics, as a sub-branch of theoretical linguistics, combines morphological analysis (the study of word formation and internal structure) with semantic interpretation (the study of meaning). By examining how morphemes (the smallest meaningful units of language are combined in Wanu names and the meanings that emerge from these combinations, we can gain a deeper understanding of the Wanu people’s cultural tenet embedded within their anthroponym-onomastic system. This study explores the morphological structure and semantic meanings of selected Wanu names and the analysis seeks to highlight the cultural insights embedded within these names, since no work as such has been conducted in Wanu Jukun language.

2.1. Empirical review

Luka, John and John Peter (2013), examines ‘A morphosemantic analysis of Kamue personal names in order to show the Kamue (Kamue) norms and values as expressed in their naming patterns. A sample of 128 names for both male and female were used for the analysis. Susan (2020), surveys ‘A morpho-semantic study of anthroponymy: Turkana personal names. (B.A project). A morpho-semantic analysis of Okun names: implications for Okun linguistic identity; was conducted by Folorunso and Olushola (2021), the paper studies the linguistic structures of Okun exclusive names with a view to descriptively analysing how they are morpho-syntactically and semantically constructed, and how these constructions demonstrate clear ancient affinity with other Yoruba groups. Awolaoye (2023), investigate ‘ A morpho-syntactic analysis of personal

names in Ondo’ the underlying structural rules governing personal names across five local government areas in Ondo state was explored. Nancy, (2025) explores ‘A morpho-semantics analysis of Ithemposi personal names.’ it was a qualitative descriptive study, twenty (20) named were analysed. This study aligns with previous research while expanding scholarship through a focused morphosemantic analysis of Wanu personal names.

2.2. Theoretical framework

The research is established on three theories: The study adopts three theories; morphosemantic Theory, which combines morphological and semantic analysis, Leipzig glossing rules for the organization and coding for easy understanding of meaning of individual words used and ethnolinguistic Theory (linking language to cultural practice) These frameworks support the interpretation of names as meaningful structures and helps to examine how names reflect cultures, religions, social status.

3. Research methodology

The research was conducted using the consultant-informant technique. Eight (8) native-speakers from 8 Wanu clans which are Ankwa or Azyoko, Anmor, Agbodor, Ndosede, Ashuki, Anuhwa, Anyishi and Akachu clan served as consultants/informants. Each of the informants were asked to supply a list of at least fifteen (15) indigenous names as well as English glosses on such names. Afterward, the researcher harmonised the list thereby obtaining ten names per person (clan). Three informants were requested to supply the original pronunciation of the selected names. These were recorded and transcribed phonetically and orthographically. The selected names were subjected to morpho-syntactic and semantic analyses to promote Wanu language.

4. Data Presentation

In this section, we present selected lists of Wanu personal names, we also provide their literal and logical glossing based on Leipzig glossing rules to prepare the ground for their analyses.

Morphosemantic analysis of Wanu names

Wanu people, named their children in accordance with the circumstances of birth, household gods, historical event or place of birth of the child. Generally, name is regarded as a code of identification which a place or thing is easily known or indicated. It is imperative to know that among the Jukun-

wanu, names given to children are not just a code of identification but, it also in most cases, determines the fortunes, character and future of child. These names also have proverbial and figurative meanings.

Traditionally, according Aboshi, (2010), there are three sets of names that a child can possibly have, although not every child need to have the three names in Wanu kingdom. He identified the three names as follows; firstly, is the ‘birth order or twins name’: these name are reserved or given to only names, it is based on the other of their birth. Secondly, is the ‘cognomen or pet names’ this is an attributive names, expressing what the child is or what he or she is hoped to become. iii. Thirdly, ‘christening or circumstantial name. All children need not to be ‘born with a name’ but all must be named.

Part A. Birth order or twins name: Twins in Wanu traditional setting have their kind of names. The twins’ names have structural compositions such as:

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
1. Adagba/adata of the house	ada + gba/ta (for male twins)	father of strength/father	n + n
2. Ayikhe/yipe	ayi + khe/pe	mother of strength(fight)/ female twins	n + n

From the above analysis, number1 and 2 are names given to male and female twins. The names are compound names, the first morpheme ‘Ada and Aye’ means father and mother respectively. The second morphemes which are ‘gba/khe and ta/pe’ means ‘strength and house/pot. Thus, number 1 and 2 are belongs to noun-noun class.

PART B. Secondly, cognomen or pet names. This names are given to show affection for a person, this is an attributive names, expressing what the child is or what he or she is hoped to become. It is endearment or praise. These names are intended to have a stimulating effect on the individual.

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
3. Ayim	ayi + m	my mother	pronoun + noun
4. Adam	ada + m	my father	pronoun + noun
5. Angom	ango + m	my child	pronoun +noun

It is obvious that number 3-5 are Wanu pet's names, these names belongs to pronoun-noun class. The three names bears single pronoun which is 'my' while the second morpheme which are 'ayi (mother), ada (father) and ang'o' (child), even though the 'm' pronoun comes at the later position while in English the pronoun takes the initial position. The three names are phrases.

PART C. The last set of names as identified by Johnson is christening names. All children need not to be 'born with a name' but all must be named. Names are not given at random because of their cultural symbolism; not merely because a distinguished member of the family or of the community was so named, but from a set purpose from circumstances connected with the child itself or with reference to the family fortunes at the time. The names then are significant, either with reference to the child itself or to the family. In Juku-wanu, names are given to children to signify fortress either with reference to the child or to the family. However, this third is the most predominantly name in the Wanu kingdom. As seen below.

Prefix with 'b'

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
6. Abawa	aba +wa	they have in abundance	n + v
7. Abise	abise	later generation	n
8. Abenwushido	aben+ wushido	shelter of the almighty God	n + n

From the above analysis, only number 6, has a 'noun + verb class, number 7, has only 'noun' and it has a single morpheme. Number 8, has 'noun + noun classification.

Names with 'da' prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
9. Adako	ada+ ko	grandfather	n
10. Adagashi	ada + gashi	father (God) is fearful (awesome	n+ v+ n
11. Adayiku	ada + yiku	father (God) is king	n + v+ n

From number 9-11 has 'da' as a constant prefix. 'Da' in this context connotes 'father'. However, 'from number 9-11, all are di-morphomic in nature. 'Adako' means grandfather and 'adagba/adata' means father of strength or the father of the house'. As for word classification,

only example 9, has a noun class. While example 10 and 11, have ‘noun + verb+ noun’ class as seen above.

Names with ‘ku’ prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
12. Akuyekhe	aku + yekhe	kings are finish	n + v + n
13. Aku nghazyi	aku + nghazyi	the king has passed the final verdict	n + v + n
14. Akuyini	aku + yini	a king is in existence.	n + v + n

In Wanu ‘ku’ connote ‘king and hen’ but in this context our focus is the ‘ku’ as ‘king. Thus, the three examples here are all ‘noun + verb + noun’ classification. The three examples are di-morphemic words. Example 12 Akuyekhe ‘kings are finished’, 13, ‘Akunghazyi’ the king has passed the final verdict and lastly, 14, Akuyini ‘a king is in existence’ these entails the Wanu people value kingship and they are not lawless people.

Names with ‘n’ prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
15. Ngbede	n + gbede	I am pleased or thankful	prn + n
16. Ngbedeyishido	ngbede + yishido	thank God	n
17. Narigu		blessing	n
18. nwumtashuma	nwum + tashuma	peace of mind	n
19. nwu’mboh	nwu + mboh	happiness	n
20. anwu’shido	anwu + shido	God’s heart	n
21. Nwundo	nwu + do	good manner makes home	n + v + n
22. Nkawado	n + kawado	I am above them	prn + prp + prn
23. Nsakawa	n + sakawa	I am beautiful than them	prn + n + prn
24. Anusazyi	anu +sazyi	good utterance	n + n
25. Anupa	anu +pa	people’s utterance	n + n
26. Anagu		blessing	n
27. Anamozyi	ana + mozyi	I slept over the problem	prn+ v + n

In this part, number 15 is a compound word or di-morpheme and a ‘pronoun + noun word class’, example 16,17,18,19 20 and 26 are all single ‘noun’ word class. Number 21 belongs to ‘noun + verb + noun class, number 22 is ‘pronoun + preposition + pronoun word class, 23 is ‘pronoun + noun + pronoun class’. While 24 and 25 fits into ‘noun + noun word class, lastly, 27 is a ‘pronoun + verb + noun word class.

Names with ‘pa’ prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
28. Apa’iku	apa + iku	human being is a king	n + v + n
29. Apakhe	apa + khe	people have finished/warlord	n + v + n
30. Apavo	apa + vo	something to hold on	prn + v
31. Apakhi	apa + khi	man is mortal	n + v + n
32. Apawuziyoo	apa + wuziyoo	trouble free person	adj

The ‘pa’ prefix in Wanu signifies ‘people or person’. Thus, number 28, 29 and 31 are ‘noun + verb + noun word class, 30 is ‘pronoun + verb word class. Lastly, 31 is an adjective.

Names with ‘shi’ prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
33. shidohyiku	shidoh + hyiku	God is king	n + v + n
34. shidohfakhim	shidoh + fakhim	God has answered my prayers	n + v + n
35. shihdobani	shidoh + bani	God has everything	n + v + n
36. shidoshom	shido + shom	God loves me	n + v + n
37. shidoyini	shido + ini	God lives	n + v
38. shidokaku	shido + kaku	God is greater king	n + v + n
39. shidosasan	shido + sazan	God has help me	n + v + n
40. shidohsam	shido + sam	God is good/beautiful to me	n + v + n
41. shido’wanto	shido + wanto	God has reward me	n + v + n
42. Shidokani	shido + kanni	God is the greatest	n + v + adj
43. shidosanni	shido + sanni	God has done it	n + v + prn
44. shidokogbam	shido + kogbam	God has grant me strength	n + v + n

45. shidokado	shido + kado	God is enough	n + v + n
46. shidoyino	shi + yino	God knows	n + v
47. Shidosaka	shido + saka	God is able	n + v + n
48. Shidosasa	shido + sasa	God is good	n + v + n
49. Shidoyi	shido + yinni	God's gift	n + v + n
50. Shidokui	shido + kui	God is our protector	n + v + n
51. Shidomgba	shido + mgba	God I salute	n + prn + v
52. Shidolonte	shido + lonte	God has save me	n + v + n

The above names belongs to the 'shidoh' prefix class, this prefix means God, the Wanu people so much believe in gods before the coming of the colonials missionaries and after their encountered with the missionaries they embraced the new God (Jesus) wholeheartedly, which trigger them to begin to give their children better names, meaningful names and some of this names are making reverence to God the supreme being as seen in the above examples. Thus, all the names here are compound names of 'Shido + another thing' as seen above. Number 33,34,35, 36, 38,39,40,41,44,45,46,47,48,49,50 and 52 are all 'noun + verb + noun word class. 37 and 46 are 'noun + verb' word class, 42 is 'noun + verb + adjective' word class, 43 belongs to 'noun + verb + pronoun' word class and.

Names with 'I' prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
53. Iva'shidoh	iva + shidoh	lets ask God or prayer	v + n
54. Ishoshido	isho + shido	let love God	v + n

In this part, the two numbers are all verb-noun classification.

Names with 'so' prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
55. Asoh	asoh	beauty	n
56. Asso'inwu	asso + inwu	beauty is in the heart	n + v + n
57. Asoshidoh	aso + shidoh	God's gift	n

From the above example ‘so’ is the anchored prefix, in the name ‘Asoh’ is a single word which means beauty and beauty belongs to the noun class, while 55 ‘Asso (beauty) + inwu’ (in the heart) = beauty is in the heart, it is a ‘noun + verb + noun class’ and 56, ‘Aso (gift) + shidoh (God) = God’s gift. Thus, 56 and 57 are compound names.

Names with ‘vo’ prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
58. Avoso’ishidoh	avoso + shidoh	God’s favor	n
59. Avo’shidoh	avo + shidoh	God’s hand	n
60. Avyo/shosho		love	n

In this part, 58 and 59 are compound word, while 60 is a single word name. Thus, the three names are ‘single noun names’.

Names with ‘wa’ prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
61. Awaseku	awa + seku	beloved queen	n
62. Awaku	awa + ku	queen	n
63. awazyina	awa + zyina	first impression	adj
64. awando	awa + ndo	woman is home. It is wife/woman that makes the home.	n + v + n
65. Awu’shido	awu + shido	God’s own	n

In this part, number 61, 62 and 65 are single noun word class as in (waseku=beloved queen, awaku=queen and ‘Awu’shido’= God’s own), even though they are all compound word. Number 63, is the only example here functioning as adjective and lastly, 64, is the only one with ‘noun + verb + noun’ word class.

Names with ‘yi’ prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
66. Ayishom	ayi + shom	my mother loves me	n + v + n
67. Ayisho	ayi + sho	the mother of love	n + n
68. Ayiko	ayi + ko	grandmother	n

69. Ayiku	ayi + ku	king's mother	n + poss + n
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The prefix 'ayi' or 'yi' means mother, the Wanu people holds high esteemed for their mothers. Thus, example 66, 'Ayi (mother) + shom (loves me) =my mother loves me, it has noun + verb + noun classification. Number 67, 'Ayi (mother) + sho (of love) is a noun + noun word class; number 68 'Ayi (mother) + ko (grand) means grandmother is a single 'noun' word class and 69, 'king's mother' is a 'noun + possessive + noun word class.

Names with 'z' prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
70. Azenu	aze + nu	boast/proud of your achievement	v + prn + n
71. Zadi	zadi	purity	n

From the above analysis, number 70 is a compound word or di-morpheme and its belongs to 'verb + possessive pronoun + noun word class and 71, 'is a single word with a single noun word class'

Names with 'm' prefix

72. Amisho	ami + sho	I love it	n + v + prn
73. Mambani	mam + bani	it is enough	adj

From the above analysis, 72 belongs to 'noun+ verb + pronoun and 73, belongs to pronoun + verb + adjective classification.

Names with other prefix't, p, s, chi, g and f' prefix

Name	morphological process	gloss	word class
74. Tsokhe	tso + khe	spear of war	n + v
75. Patashi	pata + shi	better	n
76. Sazanni	sa + zanni	helper	n
77. Achishido	achi + shido	God's star	n + poss + n
78. Achibekye	achi + bekye	rising or morning star	adj
79. Agbashidoh	agba + shidoh	strength/power of God	n
80. Fariwashido	fariwa + shido	hand it to God	v + prn + n

In this final segment, it comprises of six difference prefixes. Thus, 74 is a ‘noun + verb class’ while 75, 76, and 79 fits into single noun class, 77 fits into ‘noun + possessive + noun’ class; 78 is ‘an adjectival class’ lastly, 80, belongs to ‘verb + pronoun + noun class.

5. Conclusion

Earlier, the need to study morphosemantic analysis of Wanu personal names was embarked upon. Eighty (80) Wanu good and meaningful personal names were collected, analyse and interpreted. The study discovered that Wanu personal naming system are categories into three forms as Aboshi, (2010), states, there are three sets of names that a child can possibly have, although not every child need to have the three names in Wanu kingdom. He identified the three names as follows; i. the ‘birth order or twin name’: the name the child is known with (brought from heaven) when the peculiar circumstances of its birth may be expressed by a name which is applicable to all children born in that circumstances. ii. Secondly, is the ‘cognomen or pet names’. This is an attributive names, expressing what the child is or what he or she is hoped to become. iii. Thirdly, ‘christening or circumstantial’ name. All children need not to be ‘born with a name’ but all must be named. It was discovered that among the three naming system ‘christening’ name system is the predominant naming system adopted by the Wanu, and most of the names are attached to one circumstances or the other. Thus, the morphosemantic analysis of the Wanu personal names are based on their structural formations as their categorization is made according to the parts of speech the words belong to, this depends on their structural components which bring out their morphological and semantic features, which are, in some cases the sum total of the product of the compound names which are, in some cases, the meanings of the names while in some are not. However, it has been discovered that most of the Wanu personal belongs to this word class order ‘pronoun + noun’, ‘noun + verb’, ‘single noun’, double noun’, ‘noun + verb + noun’, ‘pronoun + noun’, ‘pronoun + preposition + pronoun’, ‘pronoun + noun + pronoun’, ‘pronoun + verb + noun’, ‘pronoun + verb’, ‘adjective’, ‘noun + verb + adjective’, ‘noun + pronoun + verb’, ‘noun + possessive + noun’, ‘verb + pronoun + noun’ and ‘noun + possessive + noun’ word classification. Lastly, the significant of this study, it will go a long way in showcasing Wanu linguistics, as it has not received much attention from linguists. To linguist and students of linguistics as well as native speakers of the dialect and the language at large, it will serve as reference material to researcher.

The study recommends the continued documentation and preservation of Wanu naming patterns, to safeguard linguistic heritage and promote deeper understanding of the cultural philosophies embedded in personal names.

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