

A Historiographical Account of Basà Toponyms: A Study of Selected Pristine Settlements in Kogi State

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Abstract

This article investigates Basà toponyms in Bassa and Kotonkarfe Local Government Areas of Kogi State, North central Nigeria. In the majority of Nigeria and Africa, each place name has a story behind it which together make up its symbolic identity. This research attempts to answer the question: What are the motivations and the narratives behind toponyms in the study areas? Ethnographic data for the study were sourced through interviews and metalinguistic conversations in the study areas. The investigation adopts the socio-onomastic model as its framework. The evidence from this study shows that, a historical linguistic method can also be used as an alternative perspective of studying toponyms in addition to other methods like oral history, archeology and geography. The findings show that place names are historical preserving strategies and tools among the Basà. The commonest sources of derivation of Basà toponyms are geographical features, water bodies, vegetation, and animals, among others. The study unearths, and preserves unknown stories encapsulated in these toponyms, and provides historical facts that can validate original ownership of territories which is an authentic means of preserving Basà sociocultural and linguistic resources.

Keywords: Basà; Geographical Names; Historiography; Kogi State; Identity; Toponym

Abstract in Basa: Tì'nyecì toḡâ tẹ shẹ ùwẹ shẹ̀ròkwòkwò shò òzòcù àshẹ̀p̀wòshẹ̀p̀ò àbàsà nà cẹ̀nẹ̀ tù Bassa keni Kontokarfe Local Government Areas nù Kogi State. Nà àshọ̀p̀wò Nigeria keni cẹ̀nẹ̀ tà atwà shìlì pàwòtò, cẹ̀nẹ̀ tù ùfwugwò tẹ̀ yagajẹ̀ àròkwòkwò nà nà pó ọ̀ pò ẹ̀ izècì. Tùsoso toḡâ tẹ̀ jishijẹ̀ ihentène nẹ̀ híẓ: imbe shẹ̀ àròkwòkwò nà name nù òzòcù àshọ̀p̀wò cẹ̀nẹ̀ tà Àbàsà? Tùsoso tọ̀ gá tọ̀ dace upapọ̀ Socio-onomastics. Tù to ùgbe maa òzòcù àshọ̀p̀wò Àbàsà a yagajẹ̀ shẹ̀ròkwòkwò shẹ̀ nà pó ọ̀ pò shù òzòcù. Meseyi iyi nẹ̀ ọ̀ pò òzòcù mọ̀ gá mẹ̀ shẹ̀ mènì mà àwapà, tọ̀bọ̀bà, isunjẹ̀ yò òhilo, nshama, òzòcù mà atwà

keni màshà mà cènjẹ. Tùsoso tọ gâ tọ tu to shèròkwókwo shẹ nà shẹ swákácẹ nù ñzòcù àshẹpwò cènjẹ tà Abàsà nà nà yà panà ọmatọ ikẹnyì, yà ‘nwútàngàna iyi ùvwòvwú keni rejẹmẹ rà rọbàsà.

Introduction

Basà language is used in various regions in North-Central Nigeria such as the six area councils of the Federal Capital Territory; Kokona, Nasarawa, Toto and Doma Local Government areas of Nasarawa State; Bassa, Dekina, Ankpa and Kotonkarfe Local Government Areas of Kogi State; Kotangora Local Government of Niger State; Agatu and Markurdi Local Government Areas of Benue State. Some of these locations are characterized by different dialectal variants and are identified by distinct dialectal names, but all varieties are mutually intelligible. The Basà language is grouped as belonging to Western-Kainji of Kainji language family also referred to as Rubasa (Basa Benue) (Crozier & Blench, 1992). Contemporary research in African studies involve unveiling traces of African culture and heritage contained in their naming traditions to recover and reconstruct African lost or threatened heritage. In most parts of Africa, names and naming are sources of oral records that can be carefully studied to make some remarkable discoveries about them and their history. The present study focuses on toponyms. Toponyms have durable or long life span which cannot be easily erased. Their durability makes them have fixed or permanent landmarks which, with time result in important information for cultural and historical studies. Batoma (2006) lists five facets of toponyms namely, geographical, historical, linguistic, symbolic and socio-political. This study focuses on the historical linguistic aspect of Basà toponyms.

Toponymy is a linguistic sign denoting the name of a topographic space. It is a compound of Greek origin derived from *topos* ‘place’ or ‘locality’ and *onoma* ‘name’. It is the study of place or geographical names (David 2011). Toponyms primarily serve to identify and differentiate specific locations from one another. Toponymy is a field of onomastics that studies place names and examines the history of individual names or of the names found in particular social groups to uncover the original meanings or to establish their social or geographical distributional patterns (Nuessel, 1992). Generally, it reflects the type of relationship language speakers mark with space. People name virtually every portion of space regardless of shape, topography, and location, and grant it the status of an identified delimited entity. The selection of toponyms can occasionally appear arbitrary or random; however, in the majority of instances, it is driven by intentional and systematic motivations. The subjectivity of the practice is unveiled by different names given to different places which show association with concept, entities, geographical features, and history. Thus, place names most generally refer to different factors namely, natural features, flora and fauna, ethnicity, and landscape (Laaboudi & Marouane, 2018).

It is stated that the practice of assigning names to locations such as cities, avenues, and plazas is among the most commonly utilized naming strategies, which seek to create a sense

of appropriation, affiliation, or delimitation between individuals and their environment. Laaboudi & Marouane (2018: 108) further posit that “When people’s names are given to a place, the intention is either to honour the person whose name is given to the place or show a kind of affiliation of the place by the people who named it”. This assertion is true of many place names in the study area and Africa. Linguistically, place names are significant because they unveil and preserve linguistic identity the history and culture of the communities who live within the space. They exhibit evidence of the isoglosses that exist between communities and ethnic groups speaking various languages or dialects. This suggests that the prevalent place names derived from a specific language within a region or geographical area indicate that the residents of that location are or were part of that ethnic group or language. (Laaboudi & Marouane, 2018). Significantly, toponyms from different languages show that different ethnic groups coexist or coexisted in the area. This can be supported by the claim of Curchin (2011) who pointed out that toponyms tend to be conservative remains in use for centuries after their original meaning have been forgotten. He maintained that they thus serve as linguistic fossils, preserving traces of all the language groups that settle in a particular geographic location.

Some people view place names as mere labels convenient for users to identify features on the map or as sign posts. Geographical or place names, however are established part of linguistic, ethno-cultural and historical features of a region. Handcock (2011) believes that toponymy is concerned with the origins and meanings of all geographical names and with the changes these names have undergone, in form, spelling and pronunciation. He further argues that the latter qualifies place names as a field of linguistic inquiry. Place or geographical names are as old as humanity. They originated in the primitive society. Their creation was factorized by the need to distinguish one place from the other. Toponyms are chronological and factual evidence of the historical events of those who created them. They have the potential to change over time in form, content and their spread depends on certain historical occurrences. Conflict, fertile farm land, natural disasters, migrations, ethnolinguistic or/and ethno-cultural contacts usually leave a trace on toponyms. Geographical names occur as a result of certain historical conditions whose origin is closely related to the social life of the people who live in the areas concerned. Historical situations, languages and peoples’ change as well as their areas affect the geographical environment of human habitation. Every place name is historical and never accidental thus, a cultural monument of the society that invent them. Hence, place names narrate the historical stages of settlements and migration of the people, their business activities, interethnic contact, conflicts, politics, socio-economic situations, geographical features, general characteristics of the areas including those that have disappeared or gone into extinction. Hence, it is generally believed that toponyms serve as a mirror that reflects the diversity of the natural environment. Generally, it is common in Africans to use various oral traditions such as culture, songs, narratives, language, names, naming traditions to preserve their history. This is highly relevant in the Basà toponymic context.

The significance or relevance of this investigation is the need to preserve the culture, ethnonymy, and history of the Basà people which reflect in their toponymy. Collecting, studying and systematizing the corpus will help to preserve them and pass the information to subsequent generations. More importantly is the fact that they are unexplored area of study in North-Central Nigeria. Furthermore, in a disputed land situation, this information could serve as evidence that can be used to resolve the crisis and determine the true owner of a geographical space whether locally or in the law court. This study is holds significance as it reveals and safeguards the origin of some specific names that have persisted through times, the meanings of which were previously known, while also uncovering the stories that lie beneath them. It unearths and preserves the etymology of certain names that have survived over the years whose meanings were unknown and also to unfold the narratives underlying them. This study attempts to uncover the motivations behind place names; unearth the historical narratives behind the Basà geographical names and the sources for nominating or deriving toponyms in the study areas. The investigation will unearth, remind, teach and preserve unknown stories encapsulated in these toponyms, provide historical facts that can be useful in the named places and the entire ethnic group or society generally.

Literature review

Names exist as part of the socio-cultural practice of every human society. As part of the society that gives them, they act as a lens through which the world is comprehended and appreciated (Mutunda, 2011). They are used as a channel of information, particularly regarding the society's perspective or observation concerning geographical or place names (Mapara, 2009). Toponyms are a special class of proper names which encode special linguistic and extralinguistic information unveiled via linguistic expression. They form part of core sociolinguistics. Within them is a spectrum of significant and meaningful information such as, historical, psychological, social, and ethnocultural. The toponymic vocabulary is a very informative component of onomastics of linguistic and cultural terms. Toponyms include the names of all natural attributes such as rivers, mountains, islands, lakes, and bays,. They also include man-made places or features such as towns, cities, villages, parks, bridges, and roads. Handcock (2011) asserts that general categories such as families, places, islands or mountains are referred to as generics. Names of individual features (spoken, written or understood) are called specifics. This, Handcock (2011) exemplifies thus, in the toponym 'Signal Hill' *Signal* is the specific part, whereas *Hill* is the generic. He says, the name *St. John's* uses only the specific part of the toponym but a listener or reader is expected to know that the name refers to the place of a settled community, in this case, a city. He reveals that naming convention vary by language. In French, the word order permits the generic to occur first, whereas, in English, it is most common to put it last, though names which are of French origin were adopted in English usage and they often retain linguistic evidence of their original forms, example, *Harbour Grace* (originally, *la Harvrede Grace*) or *Portde Grace*.

Toponyms usually serve as a source of rich information for scientific data for researchers and facts in conflict situations. They serve also as expressions of external forms, specific features, quantity and quality, internal structure and essence, belonging, locating and other important properties and signs of natural and other objects (Turaevich, 2021). Toponymic evidence is a reflection of facts or those elements the peoples' ethnolinguistic, ethnocultural, material, spiritual culture that have either survived or disappeared for centuries past. They are a relic heritage of past generations which are essential historical events such as channels of spiritual culture, ceremonies, rituals, religious belief (Turaevich, 2021). This assertion is supported by what Pospelov (2021) describes as historical geography which stood at the beginning of toponyms and the early toponyms were historical. Hence, it is believed that history, geography and toponymy are inextricably related or intertwined. Geographical names or toponyms serve as old monuments of material culture which have been preserved for many decades and serve as facts of history of settlement and of the people who invented them. Toponymic facts aid in resolving controversies of the ethnic history of people by tracing their etymology or origin (Imoh & Dansabo, 2022). According to Pospelov (2021, p.1),

In some cases, toponymic materials contain more information than archaeological written monuments and acting as the primary sources, give unexpected results. Here, a special place is occupied by ethnotoponyms associated with monuments of materials and spiritual culture, which reflect a certain part of people's lives... In the absence of permanent settlement, such objects were often water-rivers, lakes, streams,... However, archaeological monuments, unfortunately, are mute: while telling about material culture and event about languages of the creators of these cultures.

Turaevich (2021) reports an axiom true of many place names in the world as saying, geographical names exist long before they are in documented sources. In most cases, it is impossible to find ancient geographical place names in the sources since they are not included there. The problem is that they are created by different languages according to the derivational models of the national language, but when they are pronounced or fixed in sources by representatives of the languages, they lose their originality. From a chronological point of view, the oral form of a place name is basic and earlier, and its written form is a way of storing the oral word, which appeared later with the development taking the form of a document. The view of Turaevich (2021) confirms the belief that historical conditions which comprise external factors affect the development of the society which is reflected in the toponym, changing it and giving it a different form, thus, contributing to the appearance of a double word.

Turaevich (2021, provide the page) outlines five factors that can ensure the stability of toponyms namely: the acquisition of a documented form; the long-term existence of the geographical which determines its stability; the connection with specific historical event and personality; the public significance of the object during the period of its naming and

the spread of the toponyms to other territories. The geographical name becomes a kind of language of the earth and does not lend itself to falsification. Even though toponymy is primarily a linguistic science, in the process of etymologizing it using linguistic analytic method, it is imperative to take into account the historical and the geographical dimensions as well as other features of the area. A method of study that is purely linguistic without taking cognizance of historical and geographical information may result in a report that is not etymologically reliable or valid. Thus, toponymy is a field of study that stands on the tripod of linguistics, history and geography (Walther, 1971).

Toponyms are normally categorized into two groups namely, nature and cultural names. Nature names are those whose referent is a natural place (example, sea, mountain or forest) and cultural names are those whose referent is a place built or formed by humans (example, a field, road, or house). Nature names are further typically divided into two groups- those on land and those related to water: topographic names (example, the name of a marsh or of a rock) and hydronyms (example, the name of a lake or of a ditch). Cultural names are usually categorized into settlements (such as homestead or village names), cultivation names (example names of fields and meadows) and artifact names. The last category includes names of roads, bridges, dams and other structures (Walther, 1971). Imoh & Dansabo (2022) study recounting history through selected Basà settlements in Toto, Nasarawa state which spurred the researcher to investigate toponyms in all Basà speaking settlements in Kogi State to uncover variations, history, pattern of naming and some inter-ethnic variations as a way of making a valuable contribution to African onomastic literature and linguistic scholarship in general.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on socio-onomastic framework. The term socio-onomastics (or sozioomastik in German) was first used by Hans Walther in 1971 in *Namenforschung heute*. He defines the two main missions of socio-onomastics as “The study of social origin and use of different variants of proper names within various situations and name-user” (Walther, 1971, p. 45). It can be defined as the sociolinguistic investigation of names. It explores the use and variation of names. Socio-onomastics is a subfield of onomastics (the study of names) that examines how names are used and understood within social and cultural contexts. It explores the social and cultural, situational factors that influence name choices, usage, and meanings people attach to names. These include personal names, place names, commercial names and even nicknames to understand their social significance. The socio-onomastic research method takes into account the social, cultural and situational fields in which names are used (Debus, 1995; Naumann, 1989).

Ainiala & Ostman (2017) report that towards the 19th Century, onomastics became popular as part of the national romanticism movement. Researchers were in search of their ancestors, their history, and looking at elements in language were seen as an instrument by which one could get closer to one's past. Language variants (dialects) were seen as older forms of

language, thus studies of dialects should reveal important aspects about the past. Particularly place names and also personal names were also seen as forming a direct relationship with the past. They argue that place names do not automatically change if new settlers come to a place. They further assert that, in addition, names can help in studying the tracks of old settlement routes. “By examining the lexicon included in place names and the circulation of name types, it is possible to conclude what region those who migrated to an area came from”. “Names have, in addition to their practical function, an extremely strong socio-cultural function” (Ainiala & Ostman 2017:3).

Socio-onomastics started is a subfield within onomastics, the study of names. It has been developed as a systematic perspective on the dynamic study of names and naming. Whereas onomastics traditionally has largely focused on the etymology of names, socio-onomastics focuses on how names are used. Although socio-onomastics acknowledges the historical dimension of names and naming, it focuses on the construction of (social) identities.

Socio-onomastics stresses the importance of looking at the use of names in every day intervention namely, variation in name usage, why some names are avoided, why some names are coupled with particular pejorative attitudes and how some name users themselves looks at the very names they use. It looks at account the social, cultural and situational domains in which names are used, and this applies to all kind of names, place names, personal names, commercial names and names of ships, pet names etc. (Ainiala & Ostman 2017). Notably, social and situational variations are studied and the reasons why certain names are known and examined. The study of attitudes and stance towards names and name usage are also part of socio-onomastic research. Socio-onomastics utilizes various linguistic tools to analyse names and their usage, including semantics, pragmatics and discourse analysis. It is a natural continuation of the typological research into names, and often draws insights from other fields, such as sociology, anthropology and history to provide a comprehensive understanding of names and their social roles. It can be applied to various types of names including anthroponymy, place names (toponymy) and commercial names. In essence, socio-onomastics offers a framework for the understanding of the rich and complex relation between names and culture.

Socio-onomastic studies by Walther (1971) and some scholars in Eastern German were done within the framework of Marxist linguistics. From the start, it was meant to be rooted in the structuralist (Labovian) model, and it was in particular the interaction between names and the society at large that were under discussion. Names were seen to undergo different kinds of formal alternation and to differ in many ways. In German, beside the ‘sozioomastik; the term ‘Namensoziologie’ was also used (Naumann, 1989; Seibicke, 1982; Wtkowski, 1975). The two terms (socio-onomastics and sociology of names) were used interchangeably since there was no substantial difference found between them. From the beginning, anthroponymic and toponymic variables were at the heart of all socio-onomastic endeavours, but with focus on issues of variation and variability (Nicolaisen, 1985). Name variation and name variability are core issues in socio-onomastics. Research

on this theme has mostly focused on synchronic variation, even though diachronic variation is also studied (historical sociolinguistics for some details) Socio-onomastic research on place names acknowledges that individual differences always exist. Referencing by names is highly context-sensitive and not simply a matter of name competence. This considers how context in which a name is used affects its meaning and interpretation. A name might be used differently in formal and informal settings or by different social groups.

Pristine and historiography

The study on pristineness of place is quite scarce. Udoye (2017) asserts that lack of interest in the study of pristineness is responsible for its dearth. Though academic investigations on the subject are scanty; only a few were found. Other researchers describe the concept as a place that is untouched or spotless (Nash, 2012; Paul, 2013). This view is in support of Gibson (2011) who states that it is a place that is ancient, primitive, good, old, uncorrupted and with unspoiled beauty. Paul (2013) adds that ‘pristine’ stands for an environment that is untouched by human hands and untouched over thousands of years. The context of the researcher in the concept ‘pristine’ is not the strict sense of pristineness as there is no place that is purely pristine but pristineness in the toponyms of the study areas.

A major challenge, yet most basic needs in place names is recording names used in regions or communities by consulting older residents who either invented the names or inherited them from their older generations. Handcock (2011) states that once the names are recorded and defined by location (geo-positioned, given a geographical position reference) names are securely preserved and can be considered for official use. Toponymic records not only assist in expanding data bases for mapping and other practical purposes such as mining exploration, travel and recreational uses, search and rescue operation, emergency measures, national security and land use planning, it is also effective in preserving and securing vital information about culture, history which can be lost with the death of the elders who are custodians of history and the demise of traditional life orchestrated by modernity. This is one of the various reasons why the researchers regard the recording of toponyms as study that has to be undertaken now being an important aspect of cultural heritage and identity. This view agrees with the assertion of Handcock (2011, p. 3) which argues that “Traditional names in their cultures had to do with survival, identifying hunting and fishing sites, sacred places and providing other important information about history of their respective areas”. He further states that toponymy, thus provides a main link to the ancestors and ancestral lands and is a central theme in the history of a people.

Historiography is the writing of history, especially the writing of history based on critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination. It is the study of the method of historians in developing history as an academic discipline, and by extension anybody of historical work on a particular subject. It is a

specific topic that covers how historians study a particular topic using particular sources, techniques and theoretical approaches.

Methodology

The toponyms under study were collected from aborigines of Bassa and Kotonkarfe Local Government Areas of Kogi State, North-Central, Nigeria through oral narratives. The study adopts a qualitative research method towards data collection and analysis. The researcher adopted this method only since there is no existing document where information can be retrieved either from missionary or ethnographic or official/government sources. The information was sourced through in-depth interviews from 25 research participants: 10 traditional rulers, and 15 elders whose ages ranged between 55-85 years. They were selected purposively in the study areas as participants based on their deep cultural knowledge of toponyms, history, and culture of the Basà community in addition to their willingness to participate in the study. Their demographic information was documented. For gender, all of them were male, because they are better custodians of history, and knowledge of culture among the Basà. Information about age, education, occupation and religion were documented given that these factors were very important in the cultural information of these place names and their history. Educationally, three participants had higher education while others seven were not schooled beyond secondary school, eight participants were not schooled beyond primary school and the remaining seven were not literate at all. The researcher prepared an interview guide to steer the course of the interview. The participants were contacted to arrange a possible rendezvous for interview. Probing questions were further asked which were necessary in order to elicit further information and seek clarifications on issues that were not clear. The informants and researchers spoke Basà, their native language which necessitated the need to transcribe the raw data for analysis.

Two ethnographic approaches were used in data collection namely, participant observation and in-depth interview. Questions were asked about place names, their etymology, functions, beliefs, and superstitions associated with them. Data from each interview session were recorded with multimedia recorder and field notes were also used to augment the recording of the data. The data collected were coded based on social categories, situational, culture and nature transcribed and translated. The descriptive method was used in the interpretation and analysis of data. This approach enabled an in-depth interpretation of the data.

Results

Social categorisation of Basà toponymsⁱ

This section discusses the categories of Basà place names as attested in selected settlements in Kogi State, North-Central Nigeria. Place names in these areas bear strong traces of the

Basà language and people that inhabit or transited through them. They preserve their history and cultural heritage and contain documental character that can help settle historical issues and unveil historical event(s) that took place in the past. These factors and many more make place names important linguistic and symbolic resources. Information contained in these toponyms cannot be found in written historical sources. Consequently, certain valuable information about the Basà people, culture and history are not documented. Toponyms, therefore, help to unearth, infer and uncover the stories underlying them.

Toponyms of foreign origin do not prominently feature among regions or places populated or dominated by the Basà ethnic group. In this study, even where some place names do not seem to have features of the Basà language or bear some linguistic affinity, going through their etymology, it was discovered that the distortions resulted from inability of either the government officials, settlers or the missionaries pronouncing them correctly.

All appellative aboriginal names in Basà feature their natural environment and geographical origin, personalities, and history. In what follow, data analysis and discussion of data are presented.

Table1: Eponyms as toponyms

i.	Jegwéere	‘personal name’
ii.	Shemèje	‘personal name’
iii.	Dèchína	‘personal name’
iv.	Bèzhe	‘personal name’
v.	Gbànyanya	‘personal name’
vi.	Udàkwọ-Dómòzù→Dàkwọ-Dómòzù Island Domozu	‘Domozu’s island’
vii.	òshepwọ- Tèyẹ →Shepwọ-Tèyẹ town Teye ‘	Teye’s town’
viii.	Ùtayẹ Dájẹ stone Daje	‘Daje’s stone’
ix.	Èkpèkpêre Bòba dica nut Boba	‘Boba’s dica nut’
x.	Èkpèkpêrè Maza→Èkpèkpêre Maza dica nut Maza	‘Maza’s dica nut’

The toponyms in Table 1. are derived from personal names whose stories are contained in the names. Tent and Blaire (2009) called this category of names ‘eponyms’, that is, they are used to commemorate or honour persons by using their names as place names. They exemplify them with names such as *Maria Island*, *Tryall Rock*, and *Adelaide*. In the data in Table 1, are personal names, whereas, data are characterized by names of things or geographical features followed by the person honoured or commemorated which also shows possession of those items. Eponym refers to a person after whom a discovery,

invention, or a place is named or thought to be named; that is, a name or noun formed after a person. This category is generally productive in different Basà settlements.

Toponyms in Table 1 can be subcategorized into two subcategories namely, personal names and compounds. Data are personal names of people who were the first settlers in the named places whereas, are genitives characterized by a possessor on the right edge and a possessed noun on the left edge, where each group is headed by a personal name as the possessor and preceded by a possessed noun indicates an island discovered by *Dómòzù*, refers to a settlement belonging to or discovered by *Tèyẹ*. In, *ùtayẹ*, the possessed noun shows the rocky attributes of the named place belonging to *Dájẹ*. In the possessed noun *Èkpèkpèrẹ*, ‘dica nut’ (bush or wild mango) is a very valuable economic tree that produces fruit nuts used in preparing African delicious slime soup. This plant characterizes the dominant plants in the named environment belonging to *Bòba* and *Maza*. Each name in this category is meant to honour the persons associated with a particular resource.

In what follows, Table 2 presents clan names as toponyms:

Table2. Clan names as toponyms

i.	Ambèrècè→Mbèrècè	‘clan’
ii.	Ùzóngúló	‘clan’
iii.	Òzhòmòkwú	‘clan’
iv.	Èdigeshi→Dígeshí	‘clan’
v.	Èkwubìrì→Kwúbìrì mole	‘clan’
vi.	Àkwâkwà→Ùkwâkwà	‘clan’
vii.	Ìhwẹ-Ekéjìyẹ house Ekéjìyẹ	‘house of Ekéjìyẹ’
viii.	Ìhwẹ-Àrénjẹ House Àrénjẹ	‘house of Àrénjẹ’
xi.	Ínìgwi Òmônò	‘Ínìgwi of Òmônò clan’
xii.	Àkpàta Òmônò Stream Òmônò	‘òmônò clan stream’

Each clan name in Table 2 is a proper name but some undergo certain morpho-phonological processes to derive their surface forms. It is noteworthy that just the way Basà ethnonym deifies and eulogies its totem, each clan is symbolized by a particular animal which has to be revealed by spiritual consultation. When such symbols are revealed, such animals are venerated, eulogized and used as totems by members of the clan. In data (v), the mole is used as the symbol as well as the name of the clan. This is based on its characteristic strength and smartness that though it cannot attack its enemy, it can easily dig a hole within minutes and escape into it and any attempt to assume that the hole is wide enough to accommodate the hunter to enter and pursue it further, the hunter may end up being the hunted and victim as it has the capacity and smartness of digging and escaping through the

exit, block the exit, and turn to the main entrance and block it also in order to choke the hunter. Stories were narrated of animals and people trying to hunt the mole who were killed simply by deploying its smartness against hunters and animals. Table 3 presents the category of animal names as geographical names.

Table3. Toponyms as animal names

i.	Àkpàkwó	‘tortoises’
ii.	ùdagba → Dagba	‘elephant’
iii.	Ègwègwèrì	‘kites’
iv.	Èkwubìrì → Kwúbìrì	‘mole’
v.	Ùgbàègbèrèjì → Gbégbèrèjì camp baboon	‘baboons camp’

Table 3 comprises names of animals used as geographical or place names. As earlier mentioned, toponyms are history preserving tools in the Basà ethnic group because they are used to mark important occurrences or contain certain narratives about the people, and event. Table 3 presents *Àkpàkwó* ‘tortoises’ which is so named because the place had a dominant presence of tortoises before and during the early period of settlement. This also applies to data. The animal names used as toponyms in these settlements had a history of dominance in the particular area, such as *Dagba* ‘elephant’, *Ègwègwèrì* ‘kites’, *Kúbìrì* ‘mole’, *Gbégbèrèjì* ‘baboons camp’. *Kúbìrì* ‘mole’ was derived from *Èkwubìrì* ‘moles’ which also features in Table 2 as a clan name. In the Basà ethnonyms, clans use certain animals or birds as totems to identify their clan. The identification is based on the uniqueness of the animal in question. For *Kúbìrì*, ‘mole’ it is seen as a very smart animal that can turn the hunter to the hunted as explained in Table 2 above.

Table 4 presents place names based on vegetation species which are called phytonyms (phytotoponyms). The category comprises different trees and vegetation which have economic value. They are used for fertility, spiritual protection, and the production of timber. They are also called flora.

Table 4. Flora as toponyms

i.	Òròkwò-Èsùlè
ii.	Iroko anogeissusleiocarpus
iii.	Òròkwò" ìvùṣe → Òròkwò-Vùṣe ‘Iroko giant grass’
iv.	Òròkwò-Ngbàlà ‘iroko rubber vine fruit’
v.	ù/òdògbò → Dògbò ‘wild spinage’
vi.	ùkéteshí → Keteshi
vii.	Èndéshí ‘locust bean trees’
viii.	Òwúbwò ‘barbered trees’
ix.	Òkpókpo ‘peppers’

- x. Ìshiwè ‘palm trees’
- xi. Òbùgwù ‘deleb palm tree or Borassusaetiopum (African fan palm, African Palmira tree)’

All the examples in Table 4 are generated from various economic trees or vegetations. *Òrókwò* ‘Iroko’ (i) *Dògbò* ‘spinach’, *Ìshiwè* ‘palm trees’ in (i-ix) are quality economic vegetation used for timber and vegetables. *Èndéshí* ‘locust bean tree’ in, is an economic tree used to make local seasoning for preparing local delicacies which is said to be very nutritious and rich in protein. *Òrókwò-Ìgbàlà* ‘iroko and rubber vine fruit’ is a compound name that comprises two species of phytonyms namely, *iroko* and rubber vine. From the participants’ narrative, the occupants of this settlement migrated from a settlement whose name was a phytonym *Ìgbàlà*. Settling down in a new land whose vegetation were dominantly iroko also called *Òrókwò*, there was a need to distinguish between the two settlements bearing the same name *Òrókwò*. Hence, for the purpose of distinction, *Òrókwò-Ìgbàlà*, which implies, *Òrókwò* of the people that migrated from defunct *Ìgbàlà* was adopted.

Land forms or geographical feature are also good sources of toponyms. This can be furnished with the data in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Land forms as toponyms

i.	Ìshẹmẹ	‘mountain’
ii.	Ògodo	‘valley’
iii.	Gbùgbùdù	‘lowland/canyons’
iv.	Úhwáyẹ	‘sand’
v.	Ẹzhẹtẹ	‘gravel’
vi.	Ìsese Hwòo	‘dry valley’
vii.	Òtayẹ Dájẹ	‘Daje’s stone’
viii.	Àgbòdò	‘mud’
ix.	Òdakwò	‘island or anthill’
x.	Ògbòdò úkonàréé→Gbẹdikéké	
	mud one DEM EMPH.EXCLAM	
	‘There is a water lodge/miry land here’	

A land form is a natural or anthropogenic land features on the solid surface of the earth or other planetary body. Land form together makes up a given terrain. They include hills, mountains, valleys, canyons, shorelines, bays, and peninsulas. These are productive means in which the Basà people generate geographical names or toponyms. This category of names is demonstrated in Table 5. Here, *Ìshẹmẹ* ‘mountain’, *Ògodo* ‘valley’, *Gbùgbùdù* ‘lowland/canyons’ *Úhwáyẹ* ‘sand’, *Ẹzhẹtẹ* ‘gravel’, *Ìsese Hwòo* ‘dry valley’, *Òtayẹ Dájẹ* ‘Daje’s arock’ *Àgbòdò* ‘mud’, *Òdakwò* ‘island or anthill’ *Gbẹdikéké* ‘mud’ are generated from anthropogenic land features on the solid surface or the topography of the various

locations named. For those areas whose pristiness has been tampered with by modernity, though the original land form may be tampered with, still the original names may subsist. The subsistence of those names helps to preserve the history or narrative underlying them.

Table 6 is a combination of other general concepts which do not belong to any specific category which are used as names as found in the area. Table 6 presents a combine of different concepts and ideas commonly used as geographical names in the study area.

Table 6. Other concepts as toponyms

i.	Àkākana	‘junction/centre’
ii.	Àkanga	‘hot coals’
iii.	Ùwà	‘festival’
iv.	Ògbá	‘playground/camp ground’
v.	Àgwùmà	‘thatch’
vi.	Àshamanjẹ	‘dispute’

Àkākana (i) means centre or junction. The village is a geographical node located in a central location where roads from different directions meet. The narrative given by the participants attests to the fact that the name is transferred from *Àkākana* ‘wotọ’ the original or ancestral settlement from where the people moved from to the new location and retained their ancestral name. The new found land is still a central location and the old name is still suitable. *Others are* ‘coal’, *Ùwà* ‘festival’, which was named after a festival which was observed periodically; *Ògbá* ‘playground’, *Àgwùmà* ‘thatch’ the informants alleged that most of the houses in the named area were thatched; and *Àshamanjẹ* ‘dispute’ this name emanated from a land dispute between two villages namely, Pàrawo and Jegwéere claiming the ownership of named place .

An ideophone is a word in a certain word class that evokes ideas in sound imitation to express an action, or manner, which is common in Africa and few other continents like Australia. It serves as an intensifier of adjectives and adverbs. There are few idiophones identified as toponyms in this investigation. They are presented in table 7 below.

Table7. Idiophones and eulogy as toponyms

i.	gbúdugbùdu→Gbudúgbúdù
ii.	Ùkpolù→Kpokùdù ‘mole’
iii.	Gbòngbòrò ‘describes a big valley/gulley or a sound of something falling into a hole or gulley’
iv.	Gbáramọ ‘describes a big size’
v.	Kòngbò ‘describes heavy weight’
vi.	Jẹrẹnyá ‘describe tightness smallness in size’
vii.	Òwururu ‘descriptive of flowing water’

The data in Tab. 7 are so categorized because idiophones are multifunction words used to praise, eulogize and describe things and situations by their features and or characteristics. *Gbudùgbudù*, the people migrated from an original settlement whose condition was not pleasant. Upon sighting a new location, they migrated en mass and were accompanied by well-wishers. *Gbudùgbudù* is an idiophone that is used in Basà to describe a crowded scene or a confused situation orchestrated by an unorganized multitude which was used to etymologise the derived name *Gbudùgbudù*. This is descriptive of the crowd present at the inauguration of the new settlement. The basic word differs in tone with the derive proper name (toponym) by permuting or modifying the tones of all the tone bearing units as seen in Table 7 above.

Kpokùdù is a sizeable settlement belonging to the Òtundo clan. Each Basà ethnonym or clan is symbolized by a particular animal or bird such as eagle, lion, leopard, mole, whose ideology stems from their strength, smartness, craftiness, wisdom, and plants as their totem. The Òtundo clan is symbolized by *ùkpolù* ‘crow’. A crow is a bird of genus *Corvus*, black in colour and underlain with red feathers. It is believed to predict evil omen especially about the death of members of the clan and when it does, it is believed not to fail. Its feathers are used for religious activities in the shrine, not only by members of the clan but by Basà shrine operators. The Òtundo clan uses it as their symbol of identity or totem because of its sacrosanct prediction. Thus, it is used to eulogize the clan leader and the clan as a whole. According to the narrative of participants, the derived name *Kpokùdù* was adopted by the colonialists who were unable to pronounce the original name *Ùkpolùor* misinformation by the interpreters who were not Basà indigenes. The Basà ethnonym is categorized into a number of close-knitted groups of related families. Each clan has a symbol which represents its clan, that is, totem. Some clans operate a partial caste system where they are distinguished in certain activities, say, war, or hunting. Each clan selects a symbol that best typifies its expertise or belief in itself.

In *Òwururu* derives from *wururu* which is descriptive of flowing water into a slope or gully. The prefix *ò-* serves as the derivative affix deriving a nominal from the stem (idiophone). It is derived from the description of a torrential flow of water from tributaries into a lake or stream.

Another category unearthed during this investigation was names as deities or sacred places. This category was characterized by utmost rarity as only a few could be elicited. Table 8 furnishes examples of names in this category.

Table8. Deities or Sacred Namesas Toponyms

i.	Shíkèrè	‘arrow’(deity)
ii.	Bókòrò	‘deity’

Table 8 exemplifies some deity names used as toponyms. This category of place names is very unproductive and scanty. Some places bearing such deities-related names have been abandoned due to modern religions, namely, Christianity and Islam. The children and

descendants of those worshipers have embraced the new foreign religions and some of those places named after certain deities, most of which were sacred have either been vacated or renamed and getting information about their history was really an herculean task because custodians of their etymological information are no more.

This investigation discovered that, apart from renaming and abandonment of certain places, this category of toponyms that has to do with deities is critically endangered those surviving are no more pristine due to two factors namely, modernity and religion.

Table9. Hydronyms as toponyms

i.	Yáré-yáré
ii.	Yímwă
iii.	Bùdùmbú

In table (9) there are three names taken from water bodies. In *Yáré-yáré* is an idiophone descriptive of the crystal nature of the stream such that looking through, one can sight various types of fishes in their various schools swimming. In *Yímwă* is another water body about the same size as. *Bùdùmbú* is another water body whose name is idiophonic; that is, it is descriptive of the strong force of flood characterized during heavy rains or flood. This work focuses on how names are used and perceived within social, cultural, and situational contexts, revealing information about identity, societal structures, and cultural change. It analyzes how naming practices reflect and influence social factors, such as migration, globalization, and cultural diversity, and the consequences names can have for their bearers

Conclusion

Geographical names such as ancient historical old places, historical villages, provinces, lands, mountains, rivers, and deserts contain most valuable rare, unique cultural historical information which can be used to preserve, protect culture and cultural heritage, which are typical of the Basà geographical names in the study areas. Most of these naming practices happened in ancient times when there was no writing and indigenous knowledge system was mainly oral. This study has provided information on geographical names and answers to certain questions about Basà geographical names, which is a worthy effort. The history of toponyms according to our consultants dates back to those periods when there were no historical documents whose information is out of reach except by gleaning it from the elderly. These toponyms help the indigenous people and ethnic groups and clans identify their homelands or place of origin in terms of history, culture, religion and myth in case of doubt. From the findings in this study, witnesses through these toponyms according to informants are the most effective and oldest way and process for the purpose of preserving information about the people, events, and culture As a result, it is the oldest method that

contains the oldest historical information and also carries different socio-cultural information which in most cases are hard to find in any written and unwritten sources. Toponyms are indispensable tools for the development of the society which are territories' sources of centuries-old folklore (folk art) containing within them unrecorded history of centuries past.

This study reveals that some ethnic groups in Kogi state have different sources for toponyms which reflect names of animals, birds, plants, water bodies, , geomorphologic (landforms) features, clan names, eponyms, deities and other self-concepts name givers have perceived about a place. The nomination of some of these names are based on progenitors of the land or settlements, others are based on mythology, culture, description and settlements. I found it difficult to accept the view of some participants who think some names are senseless. I feel some are perceived so because their ancestors did not pass the information underlying them to their offspring. Since this work is based on the contextual narratives underlying toponyms, emphasis was not laid on their grammatical structures and the grammatical processes underlying their derivations. Additionally, the study shows that these names are not mere tags for identification but bear some connotative meaning and reveal the way of life of the people. Where certain names do not sound indigenous, it was discovered that modernity played a role as the missionaries, or government officials who brought development could not properly pronounce and write them. This study is useful as it unveils the socio-historical values of the people in the study areas and also serves as sources of identification peculiar to certain regions. It is therefore recommended that local authorities should pass the information about the history of their domains to their offspring. As much as possible, historical names and meaning should be preserved because they are part of the history and culture of the people. The writing and pronunciation of ancient toponyms should not be anglicized or written and or pronounced according to foreign languages orthography.

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ⁱ Basà is a tone language characterized by three register tone levels and two contour tones. Tones in the language are phonemic, that is, tone variations cause meaning change in the language and they are also grammatical. Thus, the high tone is marked with an acute tone ['], the low tone with grave tone [ˋ], the mid tone unmarked, the falling tone is marked [ˊ] and the rising tone is marked [ˊˋ].