

## A SURVEY OF SOCIO-ONOMASTIC FEATURES AND ECONOMIC VALUES OF PLACE NAMES OF BARUTEN IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Place names have the potential to reveal the identity of a place and people. This paper investigates the place names of Baruten, focusing on their socio-onomastic characteristics and how they reflect the economic activities of the region. Using the gatekeeper research procedure of historical toponomastics and conducted within the socio-onomastics theory, the paper identifies the underlying meanings embedded in the place names and what they reveal about identity, the region's economic potentials, and its people. It also analyses their morphological concatenations, pointing out implications on language, economy, and identity. The paper calls for documentation of the place names of indigenous people to preserve their original cultural, economic, and linguistic significations.

**Keywords:** Baatombu, Linguistics, Socio-onomastics, Regional economy, and Identity.

### Tokéréké

Yam isinu muko kpen mu yam ka tɔmbun dédéru ukia. Tire teni ta kaso kua wa yam isinu sɔɔ barutem mo mata uswaa tiē wāsina ka dim kaso kokosu sɔɔ ka demi dim kasosu komanu sɔn berami. Sanka gatekeeper n kason nubu swin yam isinu kaso ka kaso swaa yebamo socio-onomastic theory, tire teni ta kasu wa mbanna yam isinu geruwa ka mbana nu ukia tombu wasina ka dimkaso swaa sɔɔ. Mata kpan buura demi barum, dimkaso and tombu nuru sāsine ka yam isinu. Tire teni ta sokumo mi tomba kasosu kowo yam isinu wɔnlɔɔ su ka kpin su ka béré mbanna isini nu gerumo dééma, dimkaso ka barum swaa sɔɔ.

**Garin Kpini:** Baatombu, barum kaso, yam isinun kaso, kaso ka waaru, dééma.

## 1. Introduction

Onomastics is the study of names in general, and toponyms or place names are ordinary linguistic elements with which places are labeled and distinguished from others. Socio-onomastics theory is interested in how and why people perceive, receive, and use names and also name entities (Ainiala, Saarelma, & Sjöblom, 2016: 56). A socio-onomastic investigation of the place names of a region, therefore, can be helpful in delineating the society, discovering new ways of appraising identity issues, and gaining a deeper comprehension of the cultural milieus, economic values, and practices of a people and place.

This paper aims to conceptualize and document aspects of the cultural heritage and economic values of the geographical space called Baruten in Nigeria and what this reveals about the land and its people. Our materials for taking up this task are the place names of the area, and we shall also be looking at the linguistic characteristics of these place names, especially their morphological features, with a view to pointing out implications on the region's cultural, linguistic, and economic mix.

Toponyms have links to events and activities that have bearings on language, economy, and cultural identity (Muhammad et. al., 2020: 2427). They often serve as capsules for a community's tangible and intangible heritage, such as the physical features of the area and oral traditions respectively (Udoye, 2019: 86). Toponyms can aid the reconstruction of aspects of the culture and history of a people (Alabi & Aleru, 2010: 149-162); play significant role in linguistic revitalization and preservation of ethnolinguistic groups (Haashim & Bell, 2005: 27-32); and they can offer insights into the history, socio-economic values or activities, and beliefs of a people (Udoye, 2019: 86). According to Kovacs (2010), toponyms are sometimes derived from personal names, meanwhile Bishop and Oupra (2011) opine that there is a link between toponyms and eco-linguistics. This reveals that places do not only get their names from personal names and the physical attributes of a place—it implies that the motivations for toponyms of a region are many.

Toponyms can also provide insights into the grammar of a language (Patrick, 2021; Udoye, 2019; Möller 2019; Mensah, 2015 & Obeng, 1998). Obeng (1998: 163) contends that names are not merely linked to culture and tradition but also embody linguistic structures and pragmatic significance. According to Mensah (2015: 102), place names are not just simple words: they could be complex words, such as inflectional and derivational structures, in the form of phrases, clauses or even sentences. These, according to him, are either copied whole or adapted into the naming inventory of the recipient culture, to enhance their acceptability and usage by a speech community.

Möller (2019: 5) notes that cultures incorporate a number of loanwords as names, as a result of increasing contact with other languages and cultures. In his study of the place names of southern Africa, the scholar reported that as many places in southern Africa were found to reveal cultural and linguistic contact between Bushmen (San), Khoikhoi, Bantu and European language speaker over many thousand years ago. Like Mensah (2015), he avers that a number of the place names were complex and their origins and meanings were only recognizable often only by being able to decipher their linguistic adaptations through other names.

Meanwhile, Patrick (2021: 83) asserts that toponyms contain a wealth of ancient language elements that preserve information about the history of settlement, economic activities, and political developments. Like Udoye (2019), Alabi & Aleru (2010), and Kovacs (2010), he opines that toponyms can be derived from various sources, including physical location, association with prominent personalities, and flora and fauna.

What these scholars have in common is that toponyms often serve as footprints with which we can testify of human beings' interactions with fellow human beings, place, and the physical environment. Hence, a good knowledge of toponyms can lead to a greater comprehension and appreciation of the link between place, identity, and language. We can also glean from their submissions that place names could be useful protectors of human cultures, civilizations, and languages, particularly in this era of increasing globalization, human migrations, and onomastic contacts. The latter view corroborates the contention of Helleland (2002: 2) that place names and their original spellings, structures, and meanings should never be left undocumented and unexplained.

In Baruten, the people's heritage, language, and identity face existential threats from urbanization. The area, a border territory between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin, attracts numerous visitors and permanent residents from other ethnolinguistic groups within and outside Nigeria. Its fertile soil, Guinea Savannah, and many rivulets make her a hotspot for farmers, Hausa/Fulani cattle headers, and merchants from within Nigeria and the Republic of Benin, Togo, and Burkina Faso, which accelerates the threat.

The federal government of Nigeria recently approved a major road infrastructure project to link up Baruten with Lagos, Nigeria's economic capital ("BUA gets FG approval", 2023). The project, which the people have been looking forwards to for several years, is intended to harness the economic potentials of Baruten and boost the Nigerian economy, particularly her international market with her francophone neighbours. The Kwara State government is also thinking ahead and strategizing to take advantage of this emerging international economic hub along its borders. The government has sited a faculty of agriculture of the state-owned university in Baruten to help improve local agricultural production, which is the mainstay of the Baatombu people and the primary source of export and the reason for the infrastructural investment by the Nigerian government. By the time these projects are completed, they will attract more capital infrastructural investments and increase the human population and diversity of the area. This will further put pressure on the already endangered heritage of the Baatombu people.

Preserving the place names of the people and their heritage at this stage is essential a strategy for two reasons: (1) to mitigate the potential negative impacts of the imminent urbanization and the impending cultural and linguistic imperialism on this region, and (2) to appraise the place names of the region diachronically as urbanization looms—so we can look back years later at what we have documented about this region's past and future potential. These two goals align with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names' (UNGEGN) call for the documentation of place names and their characteristics as a long-term strategy to prevent the intangible aspects of cultural heritage from further deterioration, loss, and potential extinction (Helleland, 2002: 2; Cantile, 2015). Place names like personal names are mnemonics of the heritage and are susceptible to these influences.

## 2. Background of the Study Area

Baatombu people in Kwara State Nigeria trace their origin and history to the Republic of Benin, especially Nikki kingdom and the Parakou areas. Today's Baruten is an amalgam of people of various linguistic groups, such as Fulani, Yoruba, Dendi, and Nano descents. These have footprints on the place names of the area. The Baatombu people speak Baatonum, a Niger-Congo language, which is also the lingua franca of the area. Other Nigerian languages spoken

in the area include Hausa, Fula, Yoruba, Dendi and Nano. Code-mixing between Baatonum and these other languages among the natives is not common, which is an indication of language maintenance among the people. There is also the influence of Arabic on Baatonum (Okuta, 2013: 6-15), which is deepened by the over 90 percent Muslim native population.

The vegetation of Baruten is a mixture of Guinea Savanna and tropical forest. The area is characterized by woodland, trees, shrubs and grasses, timber, raffia palm, camwood, and baobab trees. Buffaloes, antelopes, elephants, leopards, lions, and monkeys were once present in the area, likewise hippopotamus and crocodiles in riverine parts. Important birds included eagles, ostriches, parrots, and weaver birds. The area's landscape is generally undulating, with numerous hills. Some parts of Baruten exhibit very low and swampy soil, with the bank of River Niger and Moshi rivers being flooded for many miles between July and September. There are also various streams and ponds, which are used for various purposes, including as irrigation for crops farming and livestock farming, and for domestic purposes. Some streams and ponds hold historical and religious significance in the locality. Some were meant for worship. Rainfall in Baruten is about 70-100 inches per year. All these social and geographic characteristics influence place names and naming practices in the area.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Grammarians think of a name as a proper noun. This could be a single word (e.g., London, Seoul, and Cairo) or a combination of words (e.g., Republic of Benin, Trinidad and Tobago, and Umbuso weSwatini). They also agree that other lexical categories, such as common nouns, adjectives, and verbs like United Nations, Nigerian, Facebook, Shoprite are used as proper nouns (see Dalberg, 2008: 2-8; Helleland, 2002: 2); and that a proper noun could be a phrase or clause, like Ekpeinkiri, "the land of Ekpein" and Azibaoguanasi, "God does not change" (Anderson, 2007: 436-439 & Van Langendonck, 2007: 7-8). Coates (2017) avers that the context of a word also determines whether or not it is a name (e.g., lucky vs. Lucky). Coates' view is known as the pragmatic theory of names. The theory holds that a culture and its people decide what expression it is to call a name, and that members of a speech community know and can identify which linguistic sign is a name and which is not when they see or hear one. To illustrate this view for example, it means that a Yoruba native speaker can distinguish between when the expression "adetokumbo", "the crown has returned from overseas" is used as a name versus as a sentence (e.g., Adetokumbo vs. Ade ti okun mbo).

There are also other theories of properhood. These are the reference (Coates, 2009), causal (Kripke, 1980), and indexicality theories of names (Frege, 1949 & Russell, 1951). Reference theory posits that a name is a denotation and nothing else; causal theory (Kripke, 1980) affirms that a name is a "rigid designator"—that it identifies only one (not two or more) unique referent in the world; and indexicality theory states that a name has both denotations and connotations. In other words, a name has multiple meanings, senses or unique identities. As Russell (1951: 347-350) puts it, a name is "really abbreviations for descriptions", that without a proper noun, "we can express the whole of theoretical physics, but no part of history and geography". In other words, as soon as a thing is named, it acquires some overt and/or covert properties. Unlike Russell, Frege (1949), distinguishes between "sense and reference." According to him, the reference of a name is the entity referred to, whereas the sense is its meaning. Frege believes that every grammatical name has a referent and sense, and that the sense of a name is its contribution to the meaning it expresses.

The indexicality theory of names could be credited for laying the foundation for contemporary name theories, such as socio-onomastic and the pragmatic theories. Both favour the argument about the meaningfulness of a name, even though the pragmatic theory emphasizes the onomastic competence of a name user to identify a name when they see or hear one. The socio-onomastic theory, on the other hand, focuses on analyzing the functions and perceptions of a name in the speeches of the users.

Both the pragmatic and socio-onomastic theories of names conform to the African's idea of a name. In most African communities, as among the Baatombu people, a name is a shorthand for a story. Most Africans believe that a name is not a mere tag, as reference theorists would argue; neither it is a rigid designator, as the casual theorists put it. To most Africans, a name is a summary of many a cultural and linguistic characteristic. A name is a metaphor or a symbol to be studied diachronically and synchronically in relation to a people and a place.

This research is conducted within the framework of socio-onomastics, because (1.) its scope is broader than the pragmatic theory. This makes it more suitable for the diverse themes of the topic of investigation. According to Ainiala (2016: 106), a foremost researcher on this theory, socio-onomastics investigates how cultures perceive, receive, and use proper names. She contends that the theory studies names and naming as part and parcel of trends in society. In other words, the framework seeks to scientifically describe how people tend to conceptualize and make meaning of themselves and the world around them using names and naming. It implies, in essence, that when people name places and use names, they are making memories of their ways of thinking and looking at the world around them.

The strength of socio-onomastics lies in its multidisciplinary nature. This perhaps informs it being projected as an independent approach to appraising language related issues in society (Ainiala & Östman, 2017: 16). The approach, like sociolinguistics or applied linguistics, draws from aspects of theoretical linguistics. Helleland (2002) spells out the elements of the theory succinctly, that he is of the view that philology, the study of history and origin of words, is indispensable to socio-onomastics. He contends that philology, which also benefits from theoretical linguistics, is the yardstick to reaching the depth of a name and identifying names and naming characteristics.

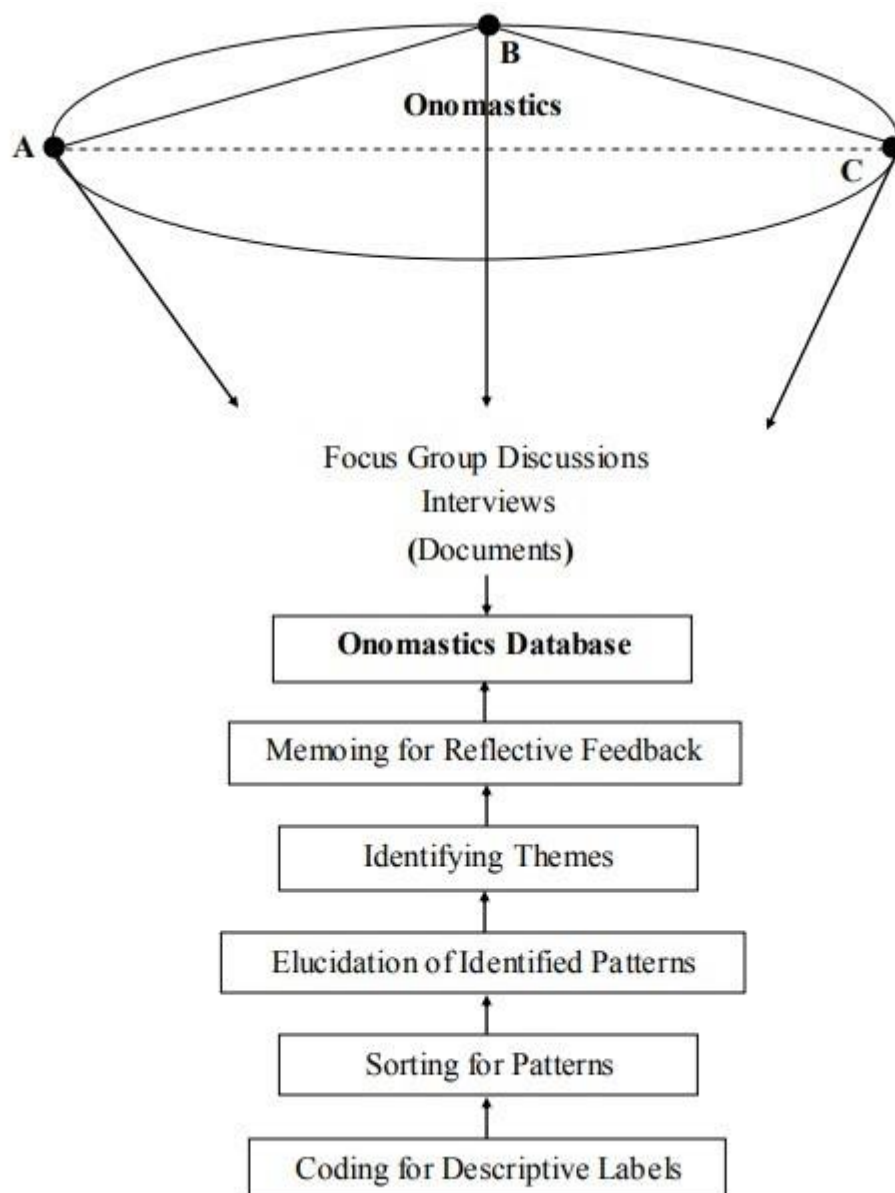
Unlike Helleland, Blonar (2009: 89) asserts that a proper name carries in itself dual or “binary” frames. One is the socio-onomastic sign, and the other is the grammatical sign. The first is the cultural feature of the name, that is, what the name actually represents in the society or say about the people. The second is the vocabulary of a language (or its linguistic properties). Blonar (2009) observes that grammatical analysis of proper names is often investigated independently of the socio-onomastic (see Van de Velde, 2009: 219-241; Van Langendonck & Van de Velde, 2016: 1-24), even though the latter dominates onomastic studies as a subfield of linguistics. He notes that socio-onomastics often relies on the structural aspects of language and applies same in its investigation of names in society.

This paper draws on the theoretical opinions of Ainiala and Östman (2017), Ainiala (2016), Blonar (2009) and Helleland (2002) on the socio-onomastics theory and Van de Velde (2009: 219-241), Van Langendonck, and Van de Velde (2016: 1-24) examples of linguistic description of names. By combining socio-onomastics and descriptive linguistics, especially morphological description of names, we investigate, analyze, and explain the place names of Baruten, pointing out their linguistic and cultural significances. The paper is a groundbreaking work on the toponyms of Baruten, as previous studies have focused instead on the personal names of the people.

#### **4. Methodology**

This paper contributes to a series on Baatombu onomastics. So far, the series has explored only anthroponyms (personal names) of the Baatombu community. The current one hopes to close the gap with the investigation of toponyms of the region. The research spanned between 2018 to 2020, but the researcher encountered a brief interruption to observe COVID-19 protocols during the height of the pandemic in 2019. During the period of the research, the author surveyed 77 out of the 100 place names across the four districts of Baruten—Ilesha, Okuta, Gwanara, and Yashikira—for their pragmatic and cultural significances. However, not all the place names are used to illustrate ideas in this particular study.

The sampling method employed for the study was the “stratifying criteria” (Bryman, 2008: 458), where place names were randomly selected from each of the four districts based on their usefulness to the study. Baruten constitutes the main set. Data collection was primarily through interviews and focus group discussions with carefully selected knowledgeable native informants in addition to naturalistic observation. Group discussions range from three to ten participants, and were carried out in the research environment. Naturalistic observation, such as sighting the topography and farmlands, was utilized to supplement the primary methods. Oral discussions were organized from one community to another to gather more comprehensive and informed data about toponyms—such as their motivations and the significance each holds for a place and the people. Approximately 200 informed natives aged 35 and above participated in this survey. All these followed a five-step data gathering and interpretation template adapted from ethnographers Genzük (2003), Harvey and Myers (1995), Sangasubana (2011), and Shagrir (2017). We shall call this methodology the Gatekeeper.



**Figure 1:** The Gatekeeper: A Data Collection and Analytical Framework

The Gatekeeper method (Figure 1) is interpreted as the researcher (point A) enters the research environment, symbolized by the circle. He then approaches a gatekeeper (point B) who helps him to recruit informed natives (point C) to gather information about the place name. B represents a head, leader, owner, or name-giver of a place. B may possess linguistic and ecological knowledge of the place name and the environment, or they may only have ecological expertise. B could reach out to associates, represented by C, to assist with information on a name or group of names. C is an individual or group of people who have extensive knowledge of the language, culture, and ecology of the area, sometimes even more than B. Such individuals may be difficult to find by chance, except where the researcher is very familiar with the research environment. Hence, the motivation to meet C through B is to gather comprehensive information and to mitigate potential suspicion between B and C, as well as between the researcher and members of the host community.

The three downwards arrows point to the specific tools that the researcher used to retrieve the data. They also point to the toponymy of the region, and the tools the researcher used for the analysis and interpretation of the data. These include (i) coding for descriptive labels, (ii.) sorting for patterns or connecting strands, (iii.) elucidation of identified patterns or

connecting strands, (iv) identifying themes and constructing theories, and (v) memoing for reflective feedback.

In other words, the downwards flowing arrows from A, B and C into the rectangular box dubbed “Onomastics Database” show the direction of data collection via the qualitative techniques (i.e., interviews and focus group discussions) used. The five upwards flowing arrows show how the analytical tools fed themselves up to the final step of the data analysis. The first two were used to identify properties in names and also patterns of naming (qualitative and quantitative) respectively. Both are data sorting techniques that often lead to further data collection. The last three were used to scrutinize, generalize, and validate qualitative and quantitative information during fieldwork for quantitative and qualitative explication. The three were used for the interpretation sub-component of the data analysis, leading to identification and discussion of the findings of the paper. Adopting this method, the kings represent point B because they were the leaders of the communities and the first persons the researcher met on the field. They helped the researcher to recruit the other natives (point C) that took part in the discussions. Where a king was absent or indisposed, a member of his cabinet or a prince was allowed to take over the responsibility of recruiting the other members of the focus group.

## 5. Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

Blanar (2009: 89) asserts that a proper name expresses dual functions or “binary” frames. One is a socio-onomastic function, and the other is purely a linguistic function. This paper argues for the both. First, that place names can function as indexes of human interactions overtime with fellow humans and the physical, economic, and linguistic environment; and second, that as elements of language, they can offer insights on linguistic contact and into the morphology of a language. Thornton (1997: 209) also contends that place names tell us something not only about the structure and content of the physical environment itself but also how people perceive, conceptualize, classify, and utilize that environment. His views mesh with Blanar’s (2009) socio-onomastic frame, and as to why this study is anchored on the socio-onomastics theory. Place names of Baruten tell us about the composition of the environment, such as the flora and fauna and hydro sources (i.e., streams and rivers) found in the environment. As socio-onomastic elements, toponyms of Baruten have both pragmatic and linguistic contents with lasting implications on the identity and the kind of economic activities in the region. Section 5.1. sets out to explore these.

### 5.1 Toponyms as insights to place, people, and economic value

The goal of the Gatekeeper research procedure as explained in section four was to ensure that the researcher gets the most authentic and reliable pragmatic information possible about the toponyms of Baruten. This was necessary as almost all the toponyms were undocumented. Using this research procedure, we were able to unravel socio-onomastic, linguistic, and pragmatic information about the toponyms as follows:

We found that the toponym **Gobo** was derived from the name of a nearby river called *Gobodaru* <“Gobo river”>. The river connects Baruten and Yoruba land. It has been a landmark used to mark the boundary between Kwara and Oyo states. **Ningurume** is another toponym influenced by a stream in the location. It means “dirty water.” According to our focus group, the founders of the place were Poki, Sabi, and Gobi Yonba (his title). They opine that while the men were debating over where to settle, one of them suggested that the team settle at the place where they saw the stream containing the “dirty water.” “Nin” is the Baaatum word for “water.” It is often used together with the class marker “-me”. The stream still exists and is said to contain fishes that have earring. West of *Ningurume* is a community called **Gbabe**. The place was originally called “*Koku*”. It was inspired by the name of the stream/river in its land. Also, in Gwanara <Gbanaru> district of Baruten is **Danoru**. It was founded in the early 1970s. The source of this place name is a nearby dam where cows were usually brought to drink water. “Da” means “cow”, “nora” is the verb “to drink,” and “-ru” is a class marker for place in Baaatum language. We learned from the elders of this community that the place was formerly called “*Angiradeburu*” <*angira* —“to stop over somewhere”— + *deba* —“to be satisfied” + *-ru* — “class marker for place”>), because their founders, who migrated from the Republic of Benin and moved from one place to another, finally felt comfortable in the place.

In Ilesha district of Baruten we sampled the following place names inspired by stream/river: **Giniyanguru** means the upland of the valley/stream of Giniyan. **Ojola** is also the name of the stream/river in its suzerainty. **Yakiburaru** was formerly known as “Obe” which was from a nearby stream of the same name in the environment. According to the elders of this place, they changed the place name to the current one, in the 1990s, as a prayer for their farmlands to be more “fertile.” **Waguru** was derived from “Wa”, meaning a body of water, and means the upland/highland of “Wa”. The place is located on a highland overlooking the body of water in the valley below. **Moshi** also gets its name from the Moshi river, and **Bweru** is a name of a pond located in the area. The original inhabitants of this place moved there from the nearby Kaiama LGA of Kwara State.

The next set of names index the flora and fauna of Baruten. Udoye (2019: 88) describes such toponyms as those influenced by animals, fishes, plants, mountains and hills that are found in the environment. **Yanberekuru** started as a place where hunters kept their weapons <“berekuru”> which they used to hunt wild animals <“yan”>. **Yankparuru** means the abode of wild animals. The place name was derived from the enormous number of wildlife found in the area. Our focus group said that the place was a natural habitat for wildlife. But today the wildlife has reduced to the point that one could barely notice they once existed there. In contrast to *Yankparuru*, the earlier inhabitants of **Gbongboru** were a band of hunters. Its founder, Gobi Gbongorugi (his title), was a renowned hunter, hence he attracted fellow hunters to live in this place. Our participants further revealed that the place name was originally “gbongboru” which means a “place known for a particular activity,” which in this case was hunting. This shows the extent of popularity of the games trade in the area. We also learned from our focus group that there were several bands of hunters, each having a leader who leads the hunting party into the forest; and that as with most groups, the community splintered into the various hunting factions which led to the exodus of many a hunting party. These set of toponyms were mostly found in Okuta district of Baruten.

**Babane** (popularly called “Mure” by the locals) is located in Ilesha district. It is derived from “*Babaneƙperu*” <Babane stone>, which is the name of a mountain in the environment. According to the late King Serogobi Umaru whom I interviewed few months before he passed on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2019, the word “babane” itself means “a gathering of people”. According to him, the mountain served as a meeting point for hunters, farmers, traders and idol worshippers. Babane has also been called “Budondogo” <camp+tall → “the tall man’s camp” >) after the late King Umaru by mostly Hausa-Fulani people in the area. Late Serogobi Umaru was a Beninese hunter and immigrant to Nigeria, and founded Babane around 1977.

**Okuta** in Okuta district is a transliteration of the Baatonum word “kperu” which means a “rocky hill”. The place was originally called “Senrukperu” which means “a rocky hill in the shape of an egg.” **Gure** in Yashikira <Yashikiru> district is sloppy and hilly. The hills hitherto serve as shrines. Some argue that the toponym means a hill or a shrine in Dendi language. Lastly, **Kosubosu** <singular: “Kosi” or “kosa”>, headquarters of Baruten Nigeria was derived from bamboo trees and means “a colony of bamboo” trees. The place was known for its numerous bamboo trees.

Toponyms of Baruten exemplify what Russell (1951: 347) opines as “really abbreviations for descriptions”. The toponyms provide valuable insights into the region’s eco-linguistic and economic strengths. The abundance of place names derived from water sources, such as valleys, rivers, streams, and ponds, suggests that the area experiences significant rainfall throughout the year. Conversely, place names influenced by mountains, hills, and rocks indicate the region’s topography and as sources of water conservation. These water sources play a crucial role in sustaining Baruten’s vegetation and soil, which translates to boosting her agricultural economy. The streams, mountains, and valleys serve as reservoir of water on the land, maintaining soil moisture, serving as natural irrigation sources for farmers, and supporting vegetation for cattle grazing. During the dry season, the parched soil and vegetation create distinct economic opportunities for hunters and clay entrepreneurs. Blessed with a harmonious balance of wet and dry seasons, which is a feature of its Guinea Savannah, Baruten’s fertile land provides an ideal environment for a thriving agricultural sector and a multitude of entrepreneurial opportunities. The region boasts an abundance of commercially valuable trees, including shea butter, mango, cashew, orange, lime, baobab, moringa, and bamboo. Cultivated food crops encompass cassava, yam, rice, beans, corn, and millet.

Baruten's livestock sector contributes significantly to the region's economic vitality, with exports of cows, sheep, goats, fowl, and rabbits. The region's substantial economic contributions are aptly captured in its local slogan, "The food basket of Kwara State."

To harness the region's economic value, the government of Nigeria has renewed its efforts into the region's agricultural economic potentials through the new road construction projects. The roads were estimated to cost around N330 billion, according to government ("BUA gets FG approval", 2013). The roads include the Kosubosu-Kaiama-Bode Saadu highway (130km), the Bacita-Shonga-Lafiagi highway (83km), the Eyenkorin-Afon-Offa-OdoOttin highway (49km), and the Okuta-Bukuro Road connecting to Benin Republic (32km). Kosubosu-Kaiama-Bode Saadu and Okuta-Bukuro would link up Baruten with neighbouring States and Republic of Benin respectively. "BUA gets FG approval" (2023) reports that upon completion, these projects will revolutionize road transportation and facilitate the movement of goods and people, particularly agricultural produce, across Kwara State, neighbouring states, and Benin Republic. This will have a profound impact on economic development and food security in the region.

The Kwara State government is also proactively positioning itself to capitalize on the burgeoning international economic hub emerging along its border. To bolster local agricultural production, the primary livelihood for the Baatambu people and the region's primary export earner, the government has established a faculty of agriculture of the state-owned university in Baruten.

The completion of these two notable infrastructure projects is anticipated to attract further capital-intensive investments, leading to an expansion of the region's human population and diversity. However, this growth is also likely to exert increased pressure on the already endangered cultural heritage of the Baatambu people. Section 5.2 of this paper examines this synchronously by looking at the region's population diversity vis-à-vis morphological features of the place names of the area.

## 5.2 Morphology of Baruten Toponyms

Obeng (1998: 163-164) asserts that names are not merely tied to culture and tradition but also embody intricate linguistic structures and hold significant pragmatic value. Mensah (2015: 104) echoes this notion, emphasizing that place names transcend simple words and encompass complex forms, such as inflectional and derivational structures, phrases, clauses, and even sentences. Möller (2019: 5) further highlights the influence of cultural interactions, noting that the incorporation of loanwords into names is a testament to the increasing intermingling of languages and cultures. This section presents a snapshot of the morphology of the toponyms of Baruten. The section begins with showing ways by which place names in Baruten are formed. These include borrowing, compounding, clipping, and calquing. These mechanisms reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of Baruten as well as the linguistic outlook of Baatonum from a morphological viewpoint.

### Borrowing

Name borrowing entails taking a form from one language into another language, usually the host, as a name. According to Mensah (2015: 102), loaned words are either copied whole or adapted into the naming inventory of the recipient culture, to enhance their acceptability and usage by a speech community. Example from Baatonum is the place name Carpenter which has been localized as Kapinta. However, forms like Okuta, Timidire, and Akarun maintain their original forms. This is because Baatonum and Yoruba share more similarities than Baatonum and English.

### Source

YORUBA

**okuta**

**(Okuta)**

stone (a mountain).LOC

"The place of the stone (mountain)"



<b>akarun</b> PN “The name of founder”	(Akarun)
<b>temi-dire</b> life-good “A prosperous life”	(Temidire)
<b>kapinta</b> PN carpenter “The nickname of founder”	(Carpenter)

### Compounding

Compounding involves creating a new name from two or more different words of a host language. The first of the example below is a compound name of Hausa/Fulani origin. The second is a compound from Somusu “son” and English’s field “fidi.” Others are Baatonum compounds. This also points to the diversity of the area, and how names are used as markers of identity.

<b>Budo-n-Ayiki</b> camp-of.POSS-Ayiki “The camp of Ayiki”	(Budon-Ayiki)
<b>son-fidi</b> An ethnic.PN-field “The town of the Somusu people”	(Somusu + field→Sonfidi)
<b>ya-shiki-ra</b> Animal/beast-tomb-CLF “The tomb of the beast”	(Yashikiru)
<b>nin-gurume</b> water-dirty “The place of dirty water”	(Ningurume)
<b>daku-suanru</b> soil-red “The place of red soil”	(daku-suanru)

### Clipping

Clipping allows names to be reduced or shortened from otherwise long expressions. This is often done to ease pronunciation, identification, and recall. The examples below show that clipping can be both back and front, and reflects the inventory of the language, as shown by the last example “sonfidi.” Observe that the first-two examples were originally partial and total reduplicative before each was clipped.

<b>tum-buyan</b> frequent-pond “Place of repeated pond digging”	(Batumtumbuyan)
<b>yakiru</b> chaotic “Place of chaos”	(Yakiyakiru)
<b>son-fidi</b> An ethnic.PN-field “The town of the Somusu people”	(Somusu + field→Sonfidi)

**Calquing**

Lastly, calquing is where a sentence or phrase is compressed into a single name. Calquing is a characteristic of synthetic languages. We can see how a whole sentence and phrase was compressed to create the names below. The names carry in them the expectations and wishes of the name giver of the place, perhaps after a period of struggle, he or she felt at home in the place.

**Sian-sembu** (Siansembu)

Settle.PST-peace.ADV

“We have settled down peacefully”

**Angera-debu-ru** (Angeradeburu)

Stop over-satisfy.PERF-CLF

“A place of fulfilment”

Place-marker Morphemes	Allomorphs	Meaning/function	Source Language
-ru	-ra, -ro, -re	Settlement	Baatonum
-guru	-	Highland	Baatonum
-kparu	-	Land	Baatonum
Budo-	-	Camp	Hausa
Ga-	-	Land	Hausa
Tem-	-	Land	Baatonum

Table 1. Common Place-identifier Morpheme

Note that some place names in the area were influenced by English and other Nigerian tribes such as Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani, as well as tribes from neighbouring countries such as Dendi, Nano, and Somusu whose ancestry migrated to the area from Republic of Benin, Niger, and Togo. These examples including Table 1 show how Baruten is a confluence of heterogeneous linguistic groups with diverse cultures. This aligns with Möller’s (2019) statement that prevalence of foreign place names in a region is an evidence of increasing contact with other languages and cultures. Most of the migrants to Baruten were attracted to the area by its economic value. Table 1 also shows common place-identifiers. “-Ru” is the common place identifier. It is also the only one to have variants. According to our focus group, the variants came from the mispronunciations of non-native speakers. However, despite the influence of Arabic loan words on Baatonum, as noted in Okuta (2013: 6-15), the paper finds no significant influence of Arabic on the place names of Baruten.

Simple Words	Word Class/Meaning	Complex Words	Category/Meaning	Proper Nouns	Meaning
Okuta	Common noun/stone	Wundora	Phrase/fresh air/freedom	Akarun	A personal name
Kapinta	Common noun/carpenter	BudonAyiki	Phrase/camp of Ayiki	Gobo	A river
Gure	Common noun/hill	Sonfidi	Phrase/field of the Somusu people	Moshi	A river
Bukuro	Adjective/elder	Yashikira	Phrase/Grave of the beast	Baa	A family name
Gbabe	Nominal verb/upset	Ningurume	Phrase/place of the dirty water	Kunbi	A leaf
Donoru	Perfective verb/blessed	Dakusuanru	Phrase/place of the red clay	Bero	A tree
Subayo	Adjective/kind	Tumbuyan	Phrase/frequently digging of wells	Babane	A mountain

Bukaru	Adjective/ aged	Siansembu	Clause/Settled down peacefully	Tenge	A grass/leaf
Boriya	Adjective/best/favourite	Angiradeburu	Clause/stop over and be satisfied	Bweru	A stream
Fonfon	Common noun/stench	Sinatokoru	Phrase/place of the aged king	Teu	A stream
Yakiru	Adverb/chaotic	Gberebereru	Phrase/the impregnable fortress	Chikanda	A personal name

Table 2. Grammatical Composition of the Toponyms of Baruten

Grammatically, Table 2 shows that some of the place names are composed of single words and others consists of complex words. This follows Mensah's (2015: 104) assertion that place names are not only simple words: they could contain inflectional and derivational structures, and sometimes phrases, clauses or even sentences. Place names were also nominalized from common nouns, verbs, adverbs, phrases, clauses, and sentences. This echoes the view of Anderson (2007: 436-439), Van Langendonck (2007: 7-8), and Van Langendonck & Van de Velde (2016: 1-24) that names are proprial or grammatical linguistic items, and Coates' (2017) view that properhood is pragmatic and depends on the judgment of the people of a speech community.

## 6. Conclusion

Baatombu culture and heritage, like most cultures of Africa, face existential threat from globalization and urbanization. The goal of this paper has been to document the place names characteristics and identities of Baruten, to preserve and protect their linguistic and cultural significances from loss and interference. The other goal is to make this knowledge available and accessible for the purpose of research, reference, and transmission.

The first goal leads us to identify the pragmatic information encoded in the place names of Baruten, which we have presented looking at the social, linguistic, and economic values which the place names of the region are used to reveal. We also investigated the morphology of the place names and what they reveal about these values and the area's linguistic and cultural mix. Putting these together in this paper, the author hopes that the paper's second goal of knowledge transmission has been kick-started.

The paper also notes that spatial changes and cultural contacts could be used to measure the extent of human progress, and that positive changes coming from cultural mix are to be encouraged and promoted. However, it cautioned stakeholders on the benefits of being moderate which would help them to be aware of the attendant negative effects of globalization and urbanization—one of which is the creative destruction of human cultural, linguistic, and spatial identities.

The paper maintains that onomastics, especially toponymy, is invaluable a tool to cushion some of the negative effects of globalization and linguistic contacts on indigenous communities' tangible and intangible cultural knowledge—and should be given attention.

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## Acknowledgments

The author would like to express their sincere gratitude to Dr. Burour Ibrahim, a Baatonu French linguist at Kwara State University, for his invaluable assistance in translating the abstract of this paper into Baatonum. The author is also deeply appreciative of the esteemed Baatonu historian, Alhaji Hussaini Lafia, for his insightful clarifications on sociocultural matters. Furthermore, the author extends their heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Muritala Kora Mohammed, a cherished friend and brother-like figure, for his unwavering support in retrieving the appropriate term for keywords. The author acknowledges and assumes full responsibility for any shortcomings that may be found in this paper.