

**BODY PARTS POLYSEMY IN IGBO LANGUAGE**

**BY**

**Divine-Grace NWACHUKWU  
ART2100798**

**DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS STUDIES,  
FACULTY OF ARTS,  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,  
BENIN CITY.**

**OCTOBER, 2025.**

**BODY PARTS POLYSEMY IN IGBO LANGUAGE**

**BY**

**Divine-Grace NWACHUKWU**

**ART2100798**

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
LINGUISTICS STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF  
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (BA) IN LINGUISTICS STUDIES IN  
THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN.**

**OCTOBER, 2025**

## APPROVAL PAGE

I, **DIVINE-GRACE NWACHUKWU**, a student in the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin, Benin City with Matriculation Number **ART2100798** have completed the requirements for the coursework for the Bachelor of Arts Degree of the University of Benin. The work embodied in this project is original and has not been submitted in part or whole to any other University or Institution.

\_\_\_\_\_  
DIVINE-GRACE NWACHUKWU (MISS)  
(Author)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
MR. A. EVBAYIRO  
(Project Supervisor)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Confirmed by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
DR. (MRS.) P. O. SOLOMON-ETEFIA

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## PLAGIARIM CERTIFICATE

I, **DIVINE-GRACE NWACHUKWU (MISS)**, with Matriculation Number **ART2100798** certifies that this project work titled, **Body Parts Polysemy in Igbo Language** has successfully passed the anti-plagiarism test and does not violate any copyright regulations.

---

**DIVINE-GRACE NWACHUKWU (MISS)**  
(Author)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to God, the author and creator of my life, for his enabling grace and glory that made this project a successful one, also to my dear parents Mr. and Mrs. Nwachukwu and to my ever-supportive siblings and friends.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, my special and sincere gratitude goes to God Almighty, my rock, strength, and provider the one who made this project a success. I am deeply thankful to my supervisor, Mr. Ali Evbayiro, for his patience, guidance, and support throughout this research. Your help and encouragement played a great role in making this project a success, and I do not take it for granted, sir. Thank you very much. My appreciation also goes to the Head of Department, Dr. (Mrs.) P. O. Solomon-Etefia, for her grace, leadership, and time. I am equally grateful to all my lecturers in the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin, for the knowledge and insight you have impacted in me.

Special appreciation goes to my wonderful parents, Mr. and Mrs. Nwachukwu, my pillars, for their endless love, prayers, and sacrifices. To my ever-supportive uncle, Mr. Emmanuel Idemudia. To my lovely siblings Nkem, Victor, Favour, and Wonderful thank you all for your love, encouragement, and for believing in me. To my dear friends Favour, Ebere, Amaka, Emike, Promise, Assurance, iyabo, Deborah, Precious, Danjuma, Blessing, Daniel, German, God's power, Celine, and especially Salamat, who graciously offered me her laptop to work on this project I deeply appreciate your kindness, love, and support. Finally, with joy in my heart, I say a big shout out to Linguaphiles 2025. You all made this academic journey a memorable and unforgettable one.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>APPROVAL PAGE</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATE</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
1.0. Introduction	1
1.1. Background of Study	1
1.2. Overview of The Igbo Language	3
1.3. Statement of The Problem	3
1.4. Research Questions	5
1.5. Aim and Objectives	6
1.6. Scope of Study	6
1.7. Significance and Justification of the Study	8
1.8. Methodology	9

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1. Introduction	11
2.2. Conceptual Framework	11
2.3. Review of Previous Studies	16
2.4. Concern of The Present Study	19

## **CHAPTER THREE: THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

3.0 Introduction	20
3.1. Prototype Theory	20
3.2. Conceptual Metaphor and Metonymy Theory	22
3.3. Relevance of The Theories to the Present Study	24

## **CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION**

4.0. Introduction	25
4.1 Presentation of Body Part Terms	25
4.2. Data Analysis	26

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

5.0. Summary	60
5.1 Summary of Findings	61
5.2 Conclusion	62
5.3. Recommendations	62

<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>64</b>
-------------------	-----------

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to examine body part polysemy in Igbo with a view to understanding how linguistic and cultural meanings are extended across contexts. The objectives of the study were to identify commonly used body part terms in the Igbo language that exhibit polysemous behavior, analyze patterns of semantic extension, investigate linguistic and cultural factors influencing meaning shift, and examine how these terms function in proverbs, idioms, and everyday expressions. Despite its insightful findings, the study is limited to selected body part terms in central Igbo and focuses mainly on semantic analysis, without covering all dialects, linguistic levels, or extensive data sources. The study also compared the patterns observed in Igbo with those reported in other languages. Using Prototype Theory and Conceptual Metaphor and Metonymy Theory as its theoretical framework, data for the study were gathered from ten Igbo native speakers aged 25 to 65 years through informal interviews, supplemented by participant observation. The findings reveal that body part terms in Igbo extend beyond their literal meanings and are used in proverbs and idiomatic expressions to convey cultural values and worldviews. This shows the deep connection between language, thought, and culture in the Igbo linguistic system. The study recommends that future researchers explore body part polysemy across other Igbo dialects and expand the range of terms analyzed using larger data sources. The study concludes that body part polysemy

in Igbo is both a linguistic and cultural process shaped by people's experiences and beliefs, reflecting how language mirrors culture and cognition.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Language is one of the most essential tools of human communication, serving not only as a means of expressing thoughts but also of encoding cultural knowledge, social values, and cognitive patterns. One of the remarkable features of natural language is its ability to convey multiple meanings through a single lexical item, a phenomenon known as polysemy. Polysemy, defined as the coexistence of two or more related meanings in a single word, is a common feature across languages and often emerges from patterns of usage shaped by cultural and experiential factors (Lyons, 1977; Cruse, 2004). A particularly fertile domain for polysemy is in body part terms. These terms, which at their core refer to specific anatomical parts, frequently extend their meanings to represent abstract, social and emotional concepts. For instance, in English, the word head may refer to the uppermost part of the body, a person in authority (head of department), or the beginning of something. In similar fashion, many Igbo body part terms demonstrate rich polysemous behavior. The Igbo word *isi*, which literally means “head,” can also mean leader (*isi obodo*), a source (*isi mmiri*), or even stubbornness (*isi ike*). These extended meanings arise due to both experiential factors and cultural conceptualizations (Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

The Igbo language, like many African languages, uses body part terms extensively in daily speech, idioms, and proverbs. Words such as *ányà* (eye), *áká* (hand),

òbí (chest/heart), ázù (back), and ùkwù (leg/foot) are deeply embedded in the communicative and expressive style of the language. They are used not only in their literal senses but are semantically extended to convey meanings related to perception, emotion, hierarchy, and more (Ameka & Wilkins, 1996; Emenanjo, 1978). For example, anya can mean “eye” but also attention or desire, while obi, meaning "chest", frequently represents emotion or courage. Despite the richness and cultural significance of these polysemous expressions, Igbo linguistics has seen limited investigation into this study. Most Igbo linguistic studies have focused on phonology, morphology, syntax, or general grammatical descriptions (Nwachukwu, 1983; Uwalaka, 1996). While some attention has been given to idiomatic and figurative expressions in proverbs, few studies have offered a focused semantic analysis of how body part terms develop multiple meanings within the Igbo language system. Moreover, existing studies often lack a theoretical framework for understanding the semantic and cultural mechanisms behind this linguistic behavior.

This gap in the literature justifies the present study, which focuses on body part polysemy in Igbo. The aim is to identify commonly used body part terms in the language, document their literal and extended senses, and analyze the patterns of semantic extension they exhibit especially within the social and cultural context of Igbo speakers. Ultimately, the study will help enrich our understanding of Igbo word meaning, contribute to African language documentation, and provide a base for further semantic linguistic research.

## **1.2. OVERVIEW OF THE IGBO LANGUAGE**

Igbo is one of the three major indigenous languages in Nigeria, spoken predominantly in the southeastern region. It belongs to the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family and is spoken by an estimated 25–30 million people as a first language (Emenanjo, 1978; Green & Igwe, 1963). Igbo is known for its rich oral tradition, tonal structure, and use of context in meaning-making. Due to its numerous dialects, Central Igbo has been standardized and adopted for formal expressions, educational instruction, and literary works. The language features a wide range of figurative devices, including proverbs, idioms, and cultural metaphors, many of which utilize body part terms. For instance, words such as *áká* (hand), *ányà* (eye), *ísì* (head), and *òbí* (chest/heart) are widely used in both literal and metaphorical contexts across various domains of communication including storytelling, proverbs, and everyday speech.

The creative and multifunctional use of body part terms in Igbo supports the investigation of polysemy, as these terms often express complex ideas related to emotion, behavior, responsibility, power, and societal roles. This justifies the relevance of this study within both linguistic and cultural contexts.

## **1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.**

While polysemy has been widely acknowledged as a natural feature of language semantics, its occurrence in specific lexical fields particularly body part terms remains unexplored in many African languages, including Igbo. Body part terms are among the

most commonly used lexical items in day-to-day communication and often gain additional meanings that extend far beyond their literal anatomical references. Although global linguistic research recognizes the productivity of body part terms in developing figurative or abstract meanings (Wilkins, 1996; Kövecses, 2002), such insights are largely based on Indo-European languages. These languages have provided the bulk of data for semantic theories and metaphor studies, leaving African languages like Igbo relatively unrepresented in the literature. As a result, we lack a comprehensive account of how meaning develops within this vital lexical domain in Igbo, particularly in relation to polysemy and cultural interpretation.

Existing studies on the Igbo language have primarily focused on morphology, syntax, phonology, and general semantics, with limited attention to how individual lexical items exhibit polysemous patterns (Nwachukwu, 1983; Emenanjo, 1978). While proverbs and idiomatic expressions in Igbo culture are rich in figurative uses of body part terms, these meanings are often taken for granted or casually referenced without any depth into the semantic processes involved. Such expressions as *isi obodo* (head of the town = leader), *aka oru* (working hand = hardworking person), and *anya uchu* (eye of hard work = diligence) all point to a system of meaning extension that has not been systematically studied. Furthermore, most of the previous studies that touch on polysemy in Igbo do not focus specifically on body part terms, nor do they offer a theory driven framework for understanding how these terms shift in meaning. Thus, the semantic

structures and cultural motivations behind these extensions remain an unfilled research gap in Igbo linguistics.

This study, therefore, addresses the lack of focused analysis on body part polysemy in Igbo. It seeks to identify common body part terms that display polysemy, analyze how their meanings extend across different semantic fields, and understand the linguistic and cultural mechanisms behind those extensions.

#### **1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What body part terms in Igbo exhibit polysemy, and how are these terms used in both literal and non-literal contexts?
2. What types of semantic extension are observable in the polysemous use of body part terms in Igbo?
3. What linguistic and cultural factors influence the non-literal meanings of body part terms in Igbo?
4. How do the meanings of selected body part terms shift across various communicative contexts (e.g., proverbs, idioms, everyday speech)?
5. To what extent do the patterns of body part polysemy observed in Igbo align with or differ from patterns noted in other languages?

## **1.5. AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Aim and Objectives**

**The main aim of this study is to examine how body part terms in the Igbo language show polysemy, that is, how a single body part word can have both literal and extended meanings. The specific objectives of the study include:**

- 1. Identify commonly used body part terms in Igbo that show polysemous meanings.**
- 2. Describe both the literal and extended meanings associated with the selected body part terms.**
- 3. Analyze the different patterns of semantic extension that occur in the use of Igbo body part terms.**
- 4. Investigate the linguistic and cultural factors that influence how these meanings change or extend.**
- 5. Examine how body part terms are used in different communicative situations such as proverbs, idioms, and everyday speech.**
- 6. Compare the patterns of body part polysemy found in Igbo with those in other languages to see where they are similar or different.**

## **1.6. SCOPE OF STUDY**

The scope of this study is limited to the exploration and analysis of polysemy in body part terms in the Igbo language. While polysemy may occur across various lexical

categories and semantic fields in the language, this study restricts its focus to nouns that denote common human body parts such as:

- ísì (head)
- áká (hand/arm)
- ányà (eye)
- óbí (chest/heart)
- ázù (back)
- ìmí (nose)
- ntị(ear)
- ùkwụ(leg/foot)

A total of about 8 body part terms will be selected for analysis, based on their frequency of use and prominence in both literal and figurative speech forms. These terms will be examined to determine their literal meanings, and the various metaphorical or contextually driven extensions they display in different communicative settings. The study covers body part terms as used in: Casual/formal conversation, proverbs, idiomatic expressions and written/oral texts. Given the broad dialectal variation of the Igbo language, this study will primarily draw data from the standardized Central Igbo variety, while noting relevant examples from other dialects where applicable.

The study emphasizes semantic behavior and meaning extension rather than phonological, morphological, or syntactic aspects of the body part terms. It also does not aim to explore historical development of these terms, although such insights may be

briefly mentioned where relevant. The analysis relies on descriptive and interpretive methods, with theoretical support from semantic theory, including aspects of metaphor and cultural meaning. Informal interviews with fluent native speakers and references to existing Igbo dictionaries and texts are used as data sources.

## **1.7. SIGNIFICANCE AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

The study of body part polysemy in Igbo is important for both linguistic theory and language documentation, especially with regard to African languages, which are often understudied in global semantic research. By focusing on how Igbo body part terms extend their meanings beyond the literal to express abstract, emotional, social ideas, this work contributes to the growing field of lexical semantics and language use in African contexts. The significance of this study stems from its potential to deepen our understanding of how meaning is structured, extended, and understood within the Igbo linguistic and cultural landscape. Body part terms form a core part of natural vocabulary and occur in a wide range of communicative settings: formal, informal, traditional, and literary. Understanding how these terms exhibit polysemy shows the semantic flexibility and linguistic creativity inherent in the Igbo language. Furthermore, by examining both literal and extended uses of body part lexemes, the study adds to our knowledge of figurative language, especially within non-Western languages, where much of the existing semantic literature is still Eurocentric (Ameka & Wilkins, 1996; Heine & Kuteva, 2002). The study also contributes to the broader efforts in African language preservation

and revitalization, as body part terms often focus in oral literature, proverbs, customary communication, and traditional performance.

The justification for this research lies in the observable academic gap in detailed, semantics focused investigations of Igbo vocabulary. While previous works (e.g., Emenanjo, 1978; Nwachukwu, 1983) have described aspects of Igbo grammar and structure, there remains limited in-depth analysis of polysemous expressions, particularly those rooted in body part imagery. Figurations such as *isi obodo* (leader), *anya uchu* (diligent), and *aka oru* (hard-working hand) are linguistically meaningful, yet they have not been studied extensively within a semantic or lexical framework. More so, this study is timely and relevant at a period of increasing need for culturally sensitive and language inclusive research. It not only benefits Igbo linguistics but also provides useful insight for cross linguistic comparison, language teaching, translation studies, and intercultural communication.

## **1.8. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach aimed at examining how body part terms in the Igbo language take on multiple related meanings. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data include insights from native speaker intuitions, informal interviews, and observations of natural language use. Secondary sources comprise Igbo-English dictionaries, collections of proverbs/idioms and culturally significant materials available in Central Igbo. A total of eight body part terms were selected based on their frequent and figurative usage in the

language. These terms include *ísì* (head), *áká* (hand), *ányà* (eye), *òbí* (chest/heart), *ázù* (back), *ntị* (ear), *imí* (nose), *ùkwù* (foot/leg).

The analysis focused on identifying both the literal sense of each term and its polysemous extensions. Attention was paid to how these meanings shift across usage contexts such as proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and everyday communication. Patterns of semantic extension were interpreted using principles of descriptive semantics, with insights drawn from metaphorical and cultural associations, where relevant.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, we present a review of definitions and concepts that are important to this research. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section discusses the conceptual framework, including definitions and explanations of polysemy, body part expressions, and semantic extension. The second section reviews previous studies related to body part terms and meaning extension in language. The third section presents the concern of the present study, identifying the research gap and justifying the need for this investigation.

#### **2.2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This section outlines the major theoretical and conceptual terms that form the foundation for analyzing polysemy in Igbo body part expressions. Understanding how a single lexical item can acquire multiple meanings, especially within culturally significant domains like body terms, requires engagement with established semantic frameworks.

This section, therefore, explains the key concepts of polysemy, body part expressions, and semantic extension, as applied in linguistic analysis.

### **2.2.1. THE CONCEPT OF POLYSEMY**

Polysemy refers to when a single word possesses multiple but related meanings. Unlike homonymy, where two or more meanings share the same form but are unrelated, polysemous meanings are conceptually linked and can often be traced back to a common origin. In linguistic theory, especially within lexical semantics, polysemy is recognized as an essential feature of natural language that reflects both the flexibility and efficiency of communication (Lyons, 1977; Cruse, 2004). Instead of generating new words for every new context or concept, languages tend to extend the meanings of familiar words based on metaphor, association, function, or cultural usage. From a theoretical perspective, polysemy illustrates how language users interpret and apply existing words across abstract settings while retaining a shared conceptual foundation. For instance, in English, the word “head” denotes a physical body part but can also refer to a leader (head of a group), a starting point (head of a river), or the front of something (head of the table). All these meanings are structured around a central idea of physical elevation, prominence, or control. This expansion of meaning aligns with cognitive models of categorization, where a word gradually gives rise to extensions based on usage and context (Lakoff, 1987; Cruse, 2004).

In many African languages, including Igbo, polysemy is a prominent feature of body part terms. These words often carry both literal and extended meanings grounded in

shared cultural realities. For example, in Igbo, the term *isi* (head) represents not only the top part of the body but also leadership, origin, and even stubbornness. Similarly, *aka* (hand) may denote the physical hand, an individual's labor or effort, possession, or even dishonesty depending on the context. These extensions are not random but are deeply rooted in the community's worldview and reflect the richness of figurative language in Igbo cultural expression. Polysemy is more than a linguistic curiosity, it is a window into how societies structure knowledge and communicate ideas. Understanding polysemy, particularly in indigenous languages like Igbo, provides insight into the cultural logic, associative thinking, and communicative strategies of native speakers. It also challenges the tendency of global linguistic theory to focus primarily on Indo-European language models, making room for a more inclusive and descriptive approach to meaning in language. In the context of this study, polysemy serves as a crucial framework for interpreting how Igbo body part terms develop a range of context-dependent meanings, highlighting the interplay between language, culture, and cognition.

### **2.2.2. BODY PART TERMS IN LANGUAGE USE**

Body part terms constitute one of the most basic and universal lexical categories across the world's languages. They are typically among the earliest words acquired by children and are central to everyday communication, as every culture develops vocabulary to describe the human body. However, beyond their anatomical reference, body part terms often serve as rich sources of figurative and abstract meanings in natural language. This is because human cognition is deeply embodied; people understand the

world largely through their physical experiences. As a result, speakers frequently use body parts to describe not only physical states but also social roles, emotions, ideas, and relationships. For example, in many languages, the term hand is extended to mean help, control, or responsibility, head is used for leadership and authority, eye reflects attention, insight, or jealousy; and heart is linked to emotion, courage, or compassion. These extensions are predictable and systematic, showing that body part expressions are conceptually powerful tools in language (Wilkins, 1996; Kövecses, 2002).

In African languages, including Igbo, the figurative use of body part terms is particularly widespread and culturally encoded. Igbo proverbs, idioms, and everyday speech frequently draw on body imagery to express meaning. For instance, *isi* (head) can mean the top of something, a person in charge, or the origin of a thing; *aka* (hand) can refer to work, power, theft, or assistance; and *anya* (eye) may be extended to represent desire, vision, watchfulness, or jealousy. These forms are not arbitrary but reflect how Igbo speakers understand the relationship between the body and the world. The use of body part terms to express social, emotional, and moral ideas also enhances the expressive power of the language, making it possible to communicate layered meanings through familiar terms. Furthermore, the recurrence of these terms in Igbo oral literature, rituals, and interpersonal communication indicates that they play not just a grammatical role, but an important cognitive and cultural role within the speech community. Therefore, analyzing how body part terms are used in language not only reveals patterns of

polysemy, but also offers a valuable insight into the culture, worldview, and value system of a people.

### **2.2.3. SEMANTIC EXTENTION**

Semantic extension refers to the process by which a word or expression broadens its meaning over time to cover new, often abstract, domains while retaining a conceptual link with its original sense. It is one of the primary mechanisms through which polysemy arises in natural language. Rather than remaining fixed to a single meaning, many words expand their semantic scope based on cultural usage, functional associations, and figurative meaning. These extensions are not random but follow predictable patterns, often rooted in metaphor, metonymy, context, and cultural interpretation (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Traugott & Dasher, 2002). For instance, the Igbo term *aka* literally means "hand," yet is used in extended contexts to refer to skill or ability, to be involved in something, ownership or possession, for example:

o nwere *aka* n oru *aka* – he is skilled in handwork

o no n *aka* m – it is in my hands

o nwere *aka* na okwu a – he has a hand in this matter.

These extended uses are semantically justified because the hand is functionally associated with human activity. Similarly, *isi* (head) can extend semantically to imply leadership, beginning, or origin, based on the physical position and control function of the head in the human body. In many cases, the way of semantic extension involves metaphor, where physical experience is projected onto abstract domains (example, head

→ leader), or metonymy, where one concept is mapped onto another within the same domain (example, hand → action). These processes allow speakers to derive new meanings without introducing entirely new vocabulary, enriching the expressive potential of the language. In Igbo, semantic extensions are culturally embedded and often reinforced through proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and frequent usage in speech communities. Unlike basic literal usage, these metaphorical and cultural extensions reveal how meaning evolves through context and conceptual reasoning. Therefore, understanding semantic extension is key to interpreting how and why body part terms in Igbo become polysemous forming a basis for analyzing patterns of meaning shift in this study.

### **2.3. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES.**

Polysemy has been a major subject of interest within lexical semantics, linguistic theory, and meaning analysis. Scholars such as Lyons (1977) and Cruse (2004) laid early foundations by distinguishing polysemy from related concepts like homonymy and vagueness, while emphasizing the connection of polysemous senses. Lyons described polysemy as involving a network of related meanings within a single lexical item, which can vary but are conceptually linked. Cruse offered a framework for differentiating discrete senses from contextual variations, showing that polysemy is context sensitive but semantically organized. The cognitive linguistic approach has especially influenced recent thinking on polysemy, with figures like Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposing that language is shaped by metaphor and embodied experience. Their Conceptual Metaphor

Theory (CMT) suggests that the meanings of many lexical items, including body part terms, evolve through conceptual mapping from concrete to abstract domains. For example, HEAD IS CONTROL, EYES ARE AWARENESS, and HEART IS EMOTION are widely recurring metaphorical structures in languages across the world (Lakoff, 1987; Kövecses, 2002). These frameworks have been found particularly applicable to body part polysemy, as physical terms extend into emotional, social, and psychological domains.

In typological and cross-cultural studies, researchers like Wilkins (1996) and Heine, Claudi, and Hünemeyer (1991) observed that body part terms are commonly extended to serve temporal and grammatical functions. In many languages, terms like hand, eye, and mouth have different meanings used to indicate concepts such as direction, perception and speech. Wilkins' comparative survey across languages like Arrernte (Australia), Ewe (Africa), and Japanese showed common patterns of semantic extension based on human embodiment. Such studies also underscore that body part terms are frequently involved in grammar, taking on syntactic or functional roles in addition to their lexical meanings (Heine & Kuteva, 2002). Several studies on African languages have addressed the figurative and metaphorical use of body terms. Ameka and Wilkins (1996) explored the semantic systems of body part expressions in African languages like Ewe and Akan, arguing that their communicative power lies in their cultural embedding. Body part polysemy is closely tied to social norms and indigenous philosophies in these languages. Mbiti (1990), in his work on African religion and language, also highlighted the symbolic importance of body metaphors in constructing meaning in traditional

African thought, especially in proverbs and orature. However, despite the rich cultural and linguistic uses of body part terms in Africa, the literature on Igbo body part polysemy remains relatively sparse. Most Nigerian linguistic research has concentrated on morphosyntactic, phonological, or grammatical issues. For instance, Nwachukwu (1983) examined Igbo syntax, while Clark (1990) and Uwalaka (1996) focused on tonal and verbal systems respectively. While important, these studies do not directly engage with how body part terms function semantically.

Emenanjo (1978) provided general descriptions of Igbo vocabulary and sentence structure and acknowledged the figurative potential of Igbo expressions, but did not undertake a focused analysis of polysemy as a lexical-semantic process. Mbah and Mbah (2007) discussed semantics in Igbo from a general standpoint but covered topics like synonymy and antonymy more than polysemy and metaphor. Okolo (2006) and Anyanwu (2016) addressed idiomatic expressions in Igbo and noted that many of these involve body members, but again the treatment was superficial. Similarly, Eze (2019) explored the figurative meaning of proverbs and idioms in Igbo but did not isolate body part polysemy as an object of systematic semantic inquiry. Furthermore, cognitive-oriented research in Igbo semantics remains limited. While scholars like Mensah (2009) and Ugwueye (2015) have acknowledged metaphor in Igbo religion, politics, and ritual language, most of these works focus on discourse analysis rather than structural lexical semantics. As such, there exists a clear research gap in the semantic analysis of how body part terms in Igbo develop multiple related meanings through processes like metaphor,

metonymy, and grammatical extension. This study responds directly to that gap, offering a descriptive account of body part polysemy in Igbo. It draws from actual language use such as proverbs, dictionaries, native speaker interviews, and literature to reveal the patterns, motivations, and cultural logic behind these expressions. In doing so, it also contributes to the underdeveloped field of African cognitive-semantics, where Igbo and other Nigerian languages can speak into global linguistic theory and diversify our understanding of how meaning is structured in the mind.

#### **2.4. CONCERN OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

The review of existing literature has shown that while the concept of polysemy has received significant attention in general linguistics and cognitive semantics, there remains a lack of focused research on polysemy involving body part terms in African languages, particularly in Igbo. Many previous studies in Igbo linguistics have been largely structural, concentrating on syntax, phonology, verb systems, or general grammar, with limited attention given to word meaning in context. Although some studies have touched on figurative expressions and proverbs that involve body parts, few have examined how these terms develop multiple related meanings or how such patterns reflect broader cultural and communicative practices.

This research is therefore concerned with analyzing polysemy as it occurs specifically in Igbo body part terms. It investigates how these words function both literally and figuratively in everyday language and cultural expressions, identifying the patterns of semantic extension and the factors influencing meaning shift. In doing so, the study addresses an existing gap by contributing to the understanding of Igbo semantics, especially in terms of lexical flexibility, cultural symbolism, and language structure. This focus offers not only descriptive insight into Igbo lexical behavior but also a foundation for richer theoretical modeling of meaning in African languages.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

This study adopts the theories proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Rosch (1975). These theories cover the areas identified for the purpose of the present research including body part, metaphor, metonymy, conceptual mappings etc. Details of these theories can be seen below.

#### **3.1. PROTOTYPE THEORY**

Prototype Theory, developed within cognitive linguistics, offers insights into how categories particularly lexical meanings are mentally organized. Originally proposed by

Eleanor Rosch (1975) in cognitive psychology and later extended into linguistics by Lakoff (1987), the theory argues that categories are not defined strictly by shared features, but by best examples or “prototypes.” These prototypes serve as cognitive reference points from which other, less typical members of the category radiate. This model contrasts sharply with classical theories of meaning, which define categories using fixed and necessary features. In prototype-based categorization, category membership is a matter of degree, not absolutes. Applied to semantics, Prototype Theory explains how a single word can develop multiple related meanings that vary in centrality. For example, in the case of polysemous words, one meaning tends to be the core (prototypical) sense, while others are marginal or extended senses. This model is particularly useful for analyzing polysemy in natural language because it acknowledges that speakers tend to mentally associate words with their most typical or frequent use, using that as a basis for understanding more abstract or contextual meanings.

In relation to this study, Prototype Theory helps explain how Igbo body part terms such as *áká* (hand), *ányà* (eye), or *ísì* (head) can serve multiple semantic functions. The literal anatomical meaning typically serves as the prototype, while the figurative uses such as *áká* for effort, *ányà* for desire, or *ísì* for authority are secondary extensions. These extended meanings maintain a conceptual tie with the prototype and are cognitively derived through cultural and experiential associations. For instance, the hand is associated with doing work therefore, *áká ọrụ* (working hand) metaphorically references industrious or diligence. Similarly, *ísì òbòdò* (head of the town) reflects the prototype of

ísi as head, now culturally extended to signify leadership or governance. The strength of Prototype Theory lies in its ability to model semantic categories as fluid and gradient rather than fixed. This theoretical flexibility is essential in analyzing a language like Igbo, where metaphor, cultural embeddedness, and context shape the range of meanings a word can assume. Thus, the theory complements lexical semantics by providing a cognitive explanation for how related meanings within a single lexical item are accessed, interpreted, and accepted by native speakers.

### **3.2. CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR AND METONYMY THEORY.**

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) originated from the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By*. The theory proposes that metaphor is not merely a literary device or stylistic feature of language but an essential part of human cognition. According to CMT, people understand complex or abstract concepts by mapping them onto more concrete, physical experiences. This process is called conceptual mapping, and it is grounded in what is known as embodiment the idea that our bodily experience informs and shapes how we think and speak. In metaphorical language use, one domain of experience (called the source domain) is used to understand another domain (called the target domain). For example, in many cultures, the human

body is a common source domain, while concepts such as power, leadership, or emotion are target domains. In this cognitive framework, body part terms like head, heart, hand, and eye are often used metaphorically to structure how we talk about non-physical phenomena.

In the Igbo language, such metaphorical conceptualization is evident in expressions like:

- *ísì òbòdò* — “head of the town” (leader)
- *áká ọrụ* — “working hand” (hardworking person)
- *ányá úfù* — “eye of envy” (jealousy/envy)
- *òbí útó* — “sweet chest/heart” (happiness)

These metaphorical uses extend the literal meanings of body part terms to abstract domains like social hierarchy (leadership), emotional state (happiness), morality (greed), and human quality (diligence). The metaphor THE HEAD IS THE LEADER and THE BODY IS THE SELF are examples of universal metaphorical models that also apply in Igbo. These repeated mapping patterns contribute to the polysemous nature of such terms.

Metonymy, on the other hand, involves meaning extension based on contiguity or association, rather than similarity. Whereas metaphor relies on "A is understood in terms of B", metonymy works on "A stands for B because A is associated with B". It often links parts to wholes, causes to effects, or instruments to functions. In linguistic terms, metonymy explains why expressions like *áká ya dị ócha* (“his hand is clean”) can mean “he is innocent” not because hand and innocence are conceptually similar (as in

metaphor), but because clean hands are culturally associated with being truthful or innocence.

In Igbo, *áká* (hand) is commonly used in metonymic ways:

- *áká ória* (sick hand) may refer to someone who has wronged another.
- *áká ékpè* (left hand) can imply negativity, disrespect, or inferiority.
- *áká nrí* (right hand) may refer to respect or strength.

These figurative uses reflect culturally meaningful associations between the body part and an abstract idea or moral judgement. Metonymy in these cases reflects functional or cultural links rather than metaphorical similarity. In summary, both conceptual metaphor and metonymy are key processes through which semantic extension and polysemy occur in natural language. In the analysis of body part terms in Igbo, these processes help explain how literal referents like hand, eye, head, or heart/chest gain figurative meanings related to identity, power, emotion, behavior, and status.

### **3.3. RELEVANCE OF THE THEORIES TO THE PRESENT STUDY**

The theories outlined above provide a comprehensive and integrated framework for analyzing body part polysemy in Igbo. Lexical semantics allows for a structured analysis of meaning, categorization, and sense relations, which are essential for identifying polysemous patterns. Prototype theory supports the classification of literal versus extended meanings and helps account for gradience in meaning. Finally, the conceptual metaphor and metonymy theories explain how body part terms can undergo

meaning transformation through cultural experience, metaphorical projection, and functional association. Each of these theories works together to offer different but complementary angles for understanding how a single word in Igbo such as *áká* or *ísì* can mean multiple things depending on usage. They help uncover the cognitive and linguistic systems underlying word usage, particularly in a culturally rich language like Igbo. Therefore, these theories are not just relevant but foundational to this research, enabling a deeper and more effective semantic analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is concerned with the analysis of the data and the discussion of the findings. The focus is on selected body part terms in Igbo that exhibit polysemous behavior using relevant categories and groupings, the data is organized under five headings namely: literal definition, extended or figurative uses, proverbs, idiomatic

expressions and cultural meanings. The essence is to create a clear cut distinction between the concepts captured within the context of usage of polysemy under analysis.

#### **4.1 PRESENTATION OF BODY PART TERMS**

The following body part terms were selected based on their frequency of use and semantic richness in Igbo:

- ísì (head)
- áká (hand)
- ányà (eye)
- òbí (chest/heart)
- Ntĩ (ear)
- ùkwù (leg/foot)
- ìmí (nose)
- ázù (back)

#### **4.2. DATA ANALYSIS**

##### **4.2.1. ISI (HEAD)**

The Igbo word ísì refers, in its most basic sense, to the head the uppermost part of the human body that houses the brain. In this literal usage, it belongs to the domain of physical anatomy. However, in actual language use, ísì has gone beyond its anatomical reference to acquire a range of meaning extensions, many of which are rooted in Igbo cultural beliefs, symbolic associations, and conceptual reasoning. Through frequent use

in proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and everyday speech, *ísì* has become one of the most semantically productive and polysemous terms in the Igbo lexicon. At its core, the literal meaning of *ísì* is easily understood by every Igbo speaker as “head.” For example, *ísì mmádù* means the head of a person. This is the prototypical sense from which other meanings emerge. The centrality of the head in human physical structure being on top, containing the brain, controlling the senses is not lost in Igbo conceptualization. As observed by many scholars of semantic typology (Cruse, 2004; Ameka and Wilkins, 1996), body part terms often extend metaphorically and metonymically into abstract domains such as leadership, knowledge, emotion, or morality. In Igbo, *ísì* does exactly this.

#### **4.2.1.1. EXTENDED MEANING OF ISI.**

The word *ísì* in Igbo literally refers to the head the topmost part of a human or animal body where the brain, eyes, and mouth are located. However, as is common in Igbo, *ísì* has extended well beyond its biological meaning to cover a wide range of metaphorical, symbolic, and functional meanings. These extensions are semantic, cultural, and cognitive. This is because, in both cognitive and cultural systems, the head is viewed not just as an organ, but as a seat of reason, control, authority, and spiritual essence.

In its extended usage, *ísì* is used to represent:

1. Leadership and governance: *Ìsì óbòdò* (head of the town = leader)
2. Pride or arrogance: *Ìsì yá dị élù* (his head is high = he is proud)
3. Source or origin: *Ìsì mmírí* (source of a river)

4. Wisdom or intellect: Ìsì mára ihè (a head that knows = intelligent person)
5. Destiny and spirituality: Ìsì bụ ébè chí nọ́ (the head is where one's spirit resides)
6. Responsibility or accountability: Ìsì anàghì áfú ọ̀nụ̀... (you cannot shift personal responsibility)

These meanings evolve through semantic extension, where the core or literal meaning of a word is adapted into metaphorical or context-driven usage over time. In Igbo, the productivity of *ísì* reflects its central role in both communication and cosmology.

#### 4.2.1.2. PROVERBS INVOLVING ISI.

The following are proverbs where *ísì* is used in culturally meaningful or figurative ways. Each expresses moral, social, or intellectual values. The head functions not only as a noun here, but as a symbol of thought, power, and personhood.

##### 1. Ìsì na-ébù nwá táá kà é shà

“It is the head of a child that is shaved in public.”

**Meaning:** This means a child is raised and corrected in the community. This goes to show that a child is not raised alone by his/her family but by the society. The society plays a role in the upbringing of a child.

##### 2. Ìsì anàghì ágbà ná ọ̀nụ̀, màkà mmádù kà é béré yá

“The head does not run away from the mouth, for it belongs to the person.”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that every individual must bear responsibility for themselves and their actions. Just as the head cannot leave the body to fall into the mouth,

a person cannot escape their own destiny or accountability, it also serves as a reminder for self-control in speech (not every thought in the head rush into words).

### **3. Ònye akpòrò ìsì n'úkwù àhùhù, é lè kwùbìrì ò na-èbí ndú**

“Whoever carries the head wrongly on the leg suffers, but still lives”.

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that when a person handles responsibility or life in a wrong way, they suffer hardship. The image of carrying the head on the leg symbolizes a life lived out of order or without wisdom. The proverb also talks about human resilience: despite the suffering caused by missteps, life continues.

### **4. Ìsì àtò anàghì ágbà mgbà n'òtù àzú**

“Three heads do not wrestle on one neck.”

**Meaning:** Too many leaders in one place cause conflict. In igbo thought, the “head” symbolizes individuality, destiny, and leadership, therefore the saying emphasis need for unity of direction and the recognition that each person has their own role or place in life.

### **5. Ìsì na-ébù úzò, úkwù na-èsò yá**

“The head leads, the legs follow.”

**Meaning:** This proverb shows the harmony between leadership and followership. The head symbolizing thought and direction, goes before, while the legs, symbolizing action, follow. It teaches that wise leadership must guide action, and that followers must align with the path set by the leader for progress and order.

### **6. Ìsì na-àkòwá mmádù**

“The head defines a person.”

**Meaning:** This proverb means that a person is known or defined by their head, which symbolizes destiny, character, and leadership. It shows the igbo worldview that the head carries a person’s essence and determines how they are perceived.

### 7. Ìsì anàghì àtù àzú

“The head does not face backward.”

**Meaning:** The proverb teaches that life moves forward and not backward. Just as the head naturally faces forward, a person should focus on the future rather than the past. It emphasizes vision, progress, and the importance of forwardness in leadership.

### 8. Ìsì gbàwàrà àgwùlà ndú

“When the head breaks, life ends”.

**Meaning:** This proverb means that the head is the seat of life and destiny. When it is destroyed, life ends. In a broader sense, it teaches the importance of protecting one’s life, destiny, and leadership, since the loss of the head brings the end of all else.

### 9. Ìsì bụ ébè Chí nọ

“The head is where destiny (Chi) resides.”

**Meaning:** The proverb shows the sacred role of the head in igbo thought. It is regarded as the seat of a person’s Chi (their destiny). To honor the head is to safeguard one’s destiny, while to harm is to threaten life itself.

### 10. Ìsì mmádù kà à na-èbòlitè mgbè é mèsìrì

“It’s a person's head people raise in celebration.”

**Meaning:** The proverb teaches that a person’s honor and destiny eventually comes to light. Though one may face hardship or humiliation, in the end it is the head (the symbol of dignity) that is lifted up. It emphasizes patience, resilience, and the certainty that honor is revealed over time.

#### 4.2.1.3. IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS INVOLVING ISI.

Idiomatic expressions containing *isi* are very common in Igbo. They rely on figurative understanding and shared cultural meaning to be fully appreciated. Below are examples:

<b>IGBO EXPRESSIONS</b>	<b>TRANSLATIONS</b>	<b>MEANING</b>
Ìsì íkè	Strong head	It means when someone is stubborn or hard to convince.
Ìsì mgbákà	Broken head	It means when someone is confused or stressed.
Ìsì mára ihè	Knowing head	It is used to show someone who is intelligent or wise.
Tínyé yá n’ìsì	Put it in the head	It means to take something seriously.
Ìsì yá adìghì mmà	His head is not good	This is used when someone acts irrationally.
N’ézí okwu, ìsì m	Honestly, my head stood	This used when someone is in shock or

kwùrù m	still	amazed.
Léé ànyá gị mà gwá ìsì gị okwu	Use your eye and talk to your head	It means to be wise and to pay attention to avoid regret.

#### 4.2.1.4. CULTURAL MEANINGS AND SYMBOLISM OF ISI.

In Igbo traditional belief, the head is sacred. It is seen as the container of destiny, decision-making, and one's spiritual path. At cultural ceremonies, elders offer blessings over the head. A common prayer is “Chúkù gòzié ìsì gị” which means ‘May God bless your head’. The ìsì is also a significant part of naming rituals, burials, and chieftaincy titles. In burial rites, the head of an elder is anointed or lifted symbolically, sometimes referencing the proverb “Ìsì bụ ònye.” (The head represents the person).

In traditional religion, the head is metaphorically the "home" of a person's chi (their personal god or destiny-guide). Disturbances associated with the head are believed to deeply affect one's fortune or life path. Due to this, ìsì becomes more than just a word it becomes a language carrier of cultural philosophy. Its polysemy reflects how language evolves not just through structure, but through belief, ritual, and worldview.

#### 4.2.2. AKA (HAND).

In Igbo, áká refers to the hand, which is the upper limb of the human body used for grasping, holding, and manipulating objects. It is one of the most frequently referenced body parts in language and society because of its central role in action, labor, giving, receiving, and physical contact. In both spoken and written Igbo, áká appears in a

variety of constructions that go far beyond its physical reference, showing that the term carries rich figurative and cultural meanings. Due to its high functional nature, the hand (áká) becomes a convenient metaphor and metonym for power, assistance, effort, identity, theft, sin and blessing.

#### 4.2.2.1. EXTENDED MEANING OF AKA.

Just like *ísi*, *áká* undergoes semantic extension, especially through metonymy (association by function) and metaphor (symbolic mapping). Below are common extended senses of *áká* in Igbo:

1. **Labor and Effort:** *Ákà órù* (Working hand = a symbol of hardworking individuals).

By extension, *áká* represents manual work, effort, and dignity in labor.

2. **Assistance / Help:** *Ì nyere m ákà* (You gave me your hand = You helped me).

Here, *áká* becomes a symbol of support.

3. **Theft / Negative Actions:** *Ákà òjọ́* (bad hand = a destructive or thieving person).

This shows how *áká* can be used in a negative way.

4. **Blessing and Favor:** *Kà ákà Jèhòvà nọ gị* (May the hand of God be with you).

This links the hand with protection, divine help, or power.

5. **Ownership / Identity:** *Ọ jí ákà yá mée yá* (He did it with his own hand).

This expression signifies intentional action or accountability.

#### 4.2.2.2. PROVERBS INVOLVING AKA

1. *Ọ na-abụ nwá táá kwàchà ákà, ọ sọrọ òkènyè rié nri*

“When a child washes his hands, he dines with elders”.

**Meaning:** This proverb means that a young person who disciplines and prepares themselves can stand among elders and be honored. It emphasizes self- preparation, maturity, and reward of respect that comes with good character.

## **2. Ọ na-abụ ákà ékwè kwúó okwu, ákpụ ákpụ na-àkwò ákà**

“The hand pounds the fufu and the fufu nourishes the hand”.

**Meaning:** This proverb means that labour sustains the laborer. Just as the hand that pounds food also eats from it, a person benefits from the fruit of their own effort. It emphasizes reciprocity, reward, and the dignity of work.

## **3. Ákà ọchà adighì ébùtù ihè jòrò njọ**

“A clean hand does not bring about evil”.

**Meaning:** This proverb emphasizes that integrity protects one from blame. A person of clean hands cannot be rightly accused of wrongdoing, so uprightness is the best option against shame or punishment.

## **4. Ákà ákparà ákà wèé kùó òtù ákà, ọ dàghì ụdà**

“When one hand joins another hand and they clap, there is sound. Alone, there is no sound”.

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that unity and cooperation are necessary for meaningful achievement. Just as one hand cannot clap by itself, individuals must work together to create impact and harmony in society.

## **5. Ákà na-akpọ mmádù n'ùlò, anàghì akpọ yá àzú**

“The hand that invites someone in does not push him out”.

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches sincerity and steadfastness in human relations. A hand that welcomes should not later reject, reminding us that true goodwill does not change with circumstances.

**6. Ákà nri kwóó ákà ékpè, ákà ékpè akwóó ákà nri, hà àbùó à wòrò ànyá**

“When the right hand washes the left, and the left washes the right, the two of them becomes clean”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that cooperation and reciprocity are essential in life. Just as the right and left hands must wash each other to become clean, people must help one another to achieve success and well-being.

**7. Ákà na-emé, ákà na-èrì**

“The hand works, the hand eats.”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that reward follows effort. Whoever work earns the right to enjoy, while idleness has no share in the harvest. It is a call to hardwork and personal responsibility.

**8. Ákà méré ihè, ihù èriélà yá**

“The hand did something, now the face is suffering.”

**Meaning:** The proverb teaches fairness as it shows that responsibility should be borne by the doer of an action. Just as the face should not suffer for what the hand has done, innocent people should not be punished for the deeds of others

**9. Ákà égbù egbùghì mmádù, ànyá ekwètàghì yá**

“The hand didn’t kill anyone, but the eye says otherwise.”

**Meaning:** The proverb teaches that only concrete actions or results command belief and respect. Words or intentions without proof are not enough as people believe what they see.

**10. Ka aka dị ọcha, ka e si asọpuru mmadu**

“The cleaner the hand, the more a person is respected.”

**Meaning:** This proverb emphasizes that respect flows from integrity. Just as clean hand is honorable, so a person of upright character naturally commands respect in society.

**4.2.2.3. IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS INVOLVING AKA**

S\N.	IGBO EXPRESSIONS	TRANSLATIONS	MEANING
1.	Ákà yá dị ọchà	His hands are clean	He is innocent.
2.	Ọ tìnyéré àkà	He put hand	He got involved.
3.	Ákà ọjọọ	Bad hand	A thief or dishonest person.

4.	Nwètàrà yá nà ákà yá	He got it with his hands	He worked hard for it.
5.	Ákà yá jùrù n'ìhè	His hands are full	He has many responsibilities.
6.	Ákà dì mmà	Good hand	A generous or capable person.
7.	Ákà arùpùtàrà	The hand worked	Indicates personal effort.
8.	Gwá ákà gị okwu!	Speak to your hand!	Use wisdom\think about your actions.

#### 4.2.2.4 CULTURAL MEANINGS OF AKA

In Igbo culture, the hand is more than a physical tool it is a symbol of action, spiritual alignment, and moral accountability. Traditionally, when blessings are being offered, one prays that "Ákà dì óchà chíé jí échi" which means "May a clean hand lead your tomorrow." This refers to both literal and moral cleanliness. During kola nut presentations, after someone breaks the nut, it's said "áka ruru unyi" (the hand has received clay). It may sound simple but implies spiritual contamination or accountability, depending on who partook or what the situation involved.

When someone swears innocence, they often lift their hands in the air and say, "Ákà m dì óchà" again confirming that the hand is the proof of actions done or undone. In cultural functions, gifts are offered with the hand, and offenses are committed by hand showing that áká is not only anatomically functional but also symbolically active in Igbo symbolic practice.

### 4.2.3. ÀNYÁ (EYE)

In the Igbo language, *ányà* refers to the eye (the organ used for vision). Literally, it denotes the sensory organ that allows individuals to see. However, like many body part terms in Igbo, *ányà* has grown semantically through metaphor and cultural associations. It now functions in discourse to reflect not only sight, but everything connected to perception, attention, emotion, desire, jealousy, knowledge, and even beauty or worth.

#### 4.2.3.1. EXTENDED MEANING OF ANYA.

Here are major figurative meanings that *anya* assumes in Igbo contexts:

**1. Attention or Focus:** *Kwé m ànyá* (Look at me / Pay attention to me)

The eye becomes the metaphor for mental focus and listening.

**2. Desire / Lust:** *Ànyá ùkwú* (Greedy eye)

Refers to excessive eagerness or insatiable want.

**3. Jealousy or Envy:** *Ànyá òjọ́ọ́* (Evil eye)

Used for describing someone envious or spiteful.

**4. Surprise / Amazement:** *Ànyá emèghè* (His/her eyes opened)

Means a sudden revelation or shock; not just physical, but mental awareness.

**5. Emotional Sensitivity:** *Ànyá mmírí* (Tearful eye)

This is used to express sadness, pain or compassion.

**6. Charm / Beauty:** *Ànyá mára mmà* (Fine eyes)

This represents facial beauty, or physical attraction.

These meanings show how *ányà* is used to express feelings, emotions, social awareness, and internal states.

#### 4.2.3.2. PROVERBS INVOLVING ANYA

##### 1. *Ànyá anàghì ágbà ọkú, mà ọ na-àgbà mmírí*

“The eye does not spark fire, but it sheds tears”.

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that power is expressed in different ways. Just as the eye cannot produce fire but can shed tears, human beings have their strengths and weaknesses. It reminds us to respect natural roles and not to demand impossible things from others.

##### 2. *Ànyá bụ ùzò ọbì*

“The eye is the path to the heart”.

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that the eye is the gateway to inner feelings. What one sees affects the heart, showing deep connection between perception and emotion.

##### 3. *Ọnwèé ihè ànyá nṣurú ntì kà ànyá agàghì àhù*

“There is nothing the ear hears that the eye will not see”.

**Meaning:** The proverb teaches that what is heard will eventually be seen. Words, warnings, or hidden truths eventually comes to light, showing the link between hearing and seeing in human understanding.

##### 4. *Ànyá éjú éjú esìghì ikè*

“The eye is never full, but the stomach gets filled.”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that desire or visual satisfaction alone cannot sustain a person. True strength comes not from what the eye beholds but from what is possessed, used or worked for.

#### **5. Ònye ànyá na-anèghì ànyá, adìghì égwù ijè**

“A person who has eyes but no real eyes does not fear walking.”

**Meaning:** The proverb warns that lacking foresight is dangerous. A person who sees only with the physical eyes, without wisdom, moves carelessly through life, unaware of hidden dangers. True sight is not just vision but understanding.

#### **6. Ànyá anàghì àtù ùchè**

“The eye does not think.”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that sight alone is not wisdom. The eye perceives, but only thought gives meaning. True understanding requires more than seeing; it requires reasoning.

#### **7. Ànyá rjòghì, èzè ekwùghì**

“If the eyes do not see, the mouth won’t speak.”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that speech must be backed by evidence. One should not speak about what has not been seen or verified. It promotes truth, honesty, and responsibility in communication.

#### **8. Ànyá mmádù anàghì mụta ihè nzuzò**

“One’s eyes do not learn secrets.”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that the eye is limited to surface appearances and cannot uncover secrets. It stresses that true wisdom and understanding go beyond sight reminding us that some truths are hidden, and not everything is revealed by what we see.

**9. Ànyá na-èfé éfé apùghì ihù ihè n'ìmè**

“The wandering eye cannot see what is inside.”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that people who are restless, distracted, or overly concerned with surfaces appearances lack the ability to perceive the deeper truth or essential value of things. It emphasizes the importance of focus, patience, and attentiveness in order to gain true insight.

**10. Ànyá na-apùghì ígòtá ọbì**

“The eye cannot understand the heart.”

**Meaning:** This proverb highlights the limitation of outward appearances. What the eyes see does not always reveal the true intentions, emotions, or inner thoughts of a person. It teaches that human- beings should not judge solely by what they observe, because the heart (inner self) is deeper than what meets the eye.

**4.2.3.3. IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS INVOLVING ANYA.**

S/N	IGBO EXPRESSIONS	TRANSLATIONS	MEANING
1.	Ànyá yá éjùòlà	His eyes are full	This is used to express content.
2.	Ànyá na-àchàá	The eyes are sharp	This describes awareness or suspicion.
3.	Ànyá àfò	Eye of the stomach	This is used to show appetite or greed.
4.	Ànyá mmírí	Wet eyes	This is used when someone is sad or is weeping.
5.	Ànyá òkìrìkìrì	Rolling/wandering eyes	This is used to express restlessness.
6.	Ànyá é ghùzí yá	He didn't see it	Blind to a situation or unaware.
7.	Tínyé ànyá n'ihè gí	Put your eye on your thing	To pay attention or to be responsible.

#### 4.2.3.4. CULTURAL MEANINGS OF ANYA

In the Igbo cultural framework, the eyes are seen as the windows of judgment, perception, character, and morality. A person who looks away while speaking may be seen as dishonest. Saying “ànyá gí kwùrù” (your eyes spoke) can imply disapproval or silent communication.

Elders often say “Ànyị bụ mmádù ànyá kà ànyị jí áma mmádù.” which means “We are people, and we judge others by the eyes.” This underlines the evaluative and spiritual symbolism of the eyes in Igbo society.

During traditional ceremonies, especially marriages, eye contact is used symbolically; a bride lowering her gaze symbolizes modesty; sharp eyes from an elder symbolize warning or wisdom.

The eye also represents jealousy, especially when negative energies are believed to be transferred through the “evil eye” (ànyá òjọ́). Thus, in some parts of Igbo culture, protective charms are worn to "blind" the destructive eye of envy. These deeply cultural uses make ányà more than a sensory organ; it's a symbol of many abstract experiences, hence, a perfect candidate for polysemy and metaphorical extension in Igbo.

#### **4.2.4. OBI (CHEST/ HEART)**

In Igbo, the word òbí has a literal meaning as the chest or heart the central part of the human body that houses the lungs and the physical heart. But in practice, òbí functions far beyond anatomy. It is one of the most symbolically and metaphorically rich body part terms in Igbo language and culture. Its usage covers a wide range of domains, such as emotions, thoughts, willpower, conscience, courage, sorrow, compassion, and

composure. Linguistically, this is typical of body part terms associated with internal organs, which are global metaphors for emotions and inner states (Kövecses, 2002).

#### 4.2.4.1. EXTENDED MEANINGS OF OBI.

The literal òbí (chest) becomes extended in context to represent:

**1. Emotion / Feeling:** Words like Óbì útò (heart of joy) indicate happiness, while obi mgbawa (broken heart/chest) suggests emotional pain or sorrow.

**2. Thought / Mind / Intention:** Óbì yá èzùghì ókè means His heart/chest is not full (He is restless / unsatisfied). Here, òbí represents inner thought, yearning, or conscience.

**3. Courage / Strength:** Óbì íkè (A strong heart). Here obi means bravery or fearlessness.

**4. Compassion / Mercy / Empathy:** Óbì èbèrè (Soft heart). Here obi means a person who is merciful or forgiving.

**5. Worry or Disturbance:** Óbì adìghì yá mmà (His heart is not good). This means He is troubled or unsettled.

These meanings are accessed by speakers based on context, tone, and shared cultural knowledge classic features of polysemy and pragmatic inference.

#### 4.2.4.2 PROVERBS INVOLVING OBI

##### 1. Óbì àbùò adìghì áma ùzò

“A heart with two minds doesn't know which way to go.”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches about the danger of indecision and double-mindedness.

When a person is torn between two choices or lacks focus, they lose direction and clarity

in life. It emphasizes the importance of having a single, firm resolve in order to succeed or move forward.

## **2. Ọ̀bì ómà kà é jí áma mmádù**

“It’s by a good heart we know a good person.”

**Meaning:** This proverb emphasizes that the true value of a person is not measured by wealth, status, or appearances, but by the goodness of their heart. In igbo, obi (heart) symbolizes character, kindness, and moral integrity. Thus, a person with a good heart earns respect and recognition in the community.

## **3. Ọ̀bì mgbàwà bụ ùzò ọ̀nwụ́**

“A broken heart is a road to death.”

**Meaning:** This proverb underscores the destructive power of grief, worry, or emotional turmoil. In igbo thought, the obi is the seat of life, strength, and well-being. When it is shattered or weighed down, it can lead to physical or spiritual decline, even death. This saying teaches the importance of emotional balance, resilience, and peace of mind for survival.

## **4. Ọ̀bì dị nà yá, sị yá mềé**

“If he has the heart for it, let him do it.”

**Meaning:** This proverb stresses courage, determination, and will power lie within an individual. If someone truly desires or is capable of something, their obi(heart) should move them to act. It reflects the igbo view of obi as the seat of strength, resolve, and

responsibility, teaching that no external force should be blamed when one has the inner capacity to act.

### 5. **Ọ̀bì ń̀tò bụ ọ̀gwù ndụ**

“A joyful heart is life medicine.”

**Meaning:** This proverb highlights the healing and sustaining power of joy and inner peace. In igbo worldview obi (heart) is the seat of emotions and vitality, while ogwu (medicine of life) represents well-being and survival. Thus, a cheerful heart brings health, strength, and long life. It teaches that cultivating happiness and contentment protects a person from harm and sustains their existence.

### 6. **Ọ̀nye ọ̀bì ọ̀chà adìghì échè ihè ọ̀jọ́**

“One with a clean heart doesn’t think evil.”

**Meaning:** This proverb stresses moral purity and sincerity of character. In igbo worldview, obi ọcha (clean heart) symbolizes innocence, honesty, and goodness, while iche ihè ọjọ́ (thinking evil) represents malice and wickedness. Thus, the saying teaches that a person whose heart is pure cannot harbor harmful intentions towards others. It reflects the igbo moral value that a person’s worth is measured by the state of their heart.

### 7. **Ọ̀bì na-àkpò ọ̀yì agàghì échètà ihè ómà**

“A cold heart does not remember good.”

**Meaning:** This proverb describes ingratitude and emotional hardness. In igbo, a cold heart (obi na-akpo oyi) symbolizes lack of compassion, warmth, or appreciation. Such a person forgets kindness and fails to value other’s good actions. The teaching is that

gratitude flows from a warm, receptive heart, while ingratitude arises from a hardened one.

### **8. Óbì na-enèwé nsòpụrụ nnwèrè mmuó**

“A respectful heart has spirit.”

**Meaning:** This proverb shows the spiritual and moral strength that comes from humility and respectfulness. In igbo, obi is the seat of character and inner life. When the heart embodies nsòpụrụ (respect, reverence) it reflects a person’s connection to the spiritual essence (mmuo). It teaches that respect is not just social politeness but moral and spiritual quality that defines a person’s dignity and humanity.

### **9. Óbì tọ̀pùtàrà, okwu agwùlà**

“Once the heart has let go, the matter is over.”

**Meaning:** This proverb emphasizes that true feelings or intentions (obi) are openly expressed, there is no further need for excessive speech. In igbo, the obi is the core of a person’s inner truth. When it is made known, arguments, pretenses, or justifications come to an end. It highlights sincerity, transparency, and truth.

### **10. Ọ̀ bụrụ̀ na ọ̀bì gbàwàrà, égbùbèghì ìsì**

“If the heart is broken, the head cannot be cut off.”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches resilience and the separation between inner defeat and physical destruction. In igbo, the obi is the seat of courage, will, and emotion, while the isi represents life and identity. The saying implies that even when the heart is troubled,

broken, or weak, life itself does not necessarily end as the head which is the life force remains intact.

#### 4.2.4.3. IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS INVOLVING OBI

S/N	IGBO EXPRESSIONS	FIGURATIVE MEANING
1.	Óbì yá dì mkpà	His is a thoughtful/serious person.
2.	Óbì yá jùrù	He is satisfied/fulfilled.
3.	Óbì yá na-àgbà mgbà	He is struggling internally.
4.	Óbì yá gbàwàrà ágbàwà	He is emotionally broken.
5.	Óbì yá esighì íkè	He lacks confidence.
6.	Óbì yá dì óchà	He is innocent.
7.	Óbì yá dì fèchàá	He is softhearted or forgiving.
8.	Óbì jùrù okwu	He is filled with unspoken thoughts.
9.	Óbì yá àdà mbà	He is discouraged or heartbroken.

#### 4.2.4.4. CULTURAL MEANINGS OF OBI

Among the Igbo, the obi is not only a body part; it is the center of existence, both physically and emotionally. Traditionally, obi also refers to the central hall or hut in a man's compound (the place where elders meet, decisions are made, and guests are received). This architectural symbolism mirrors the concept that obi is the seat of thought, judgment, and knowing. It gives physical backing to the cognitive metaphor: THE CHEST/HEART IS THE SOURCE OF HUMAN EMOTION AND INTELLIGENCE. In

spiritual terms, the obi is prayed for during rituals. Saying “Chúkwù mée kà óbì m jùrù n’ùtò” means “May God fill my heart with sweetness”. Even in mourning, the obi is at the center. Elders speak of “ìsọ obi” (sweeping the obi) to remove grief.

#### 4.2.5. ÀZÙ (BACK)

The Igbo word àzù literally refers to the back, the rear part of the body opposite the chest. Anatomically, it’s the part of the human body that supports posture and allows for movement, protection of organs, and physical lifting. However, in Igbo language and culture, àzù has evolved beyond its anatomical meaning to include a vast range of symbolic and metaphorical meanings. In discourse, àzù expresses support, betrayal, shame, memory, reserve, neglect, and protection. It is deeply associated with the internal moral state and social relationships.

##### 4.2.5.1. EXTENDED MEANING OF AZU

The various meanings of àzù in Igbo language and communication include:

1. **Neglect / Disregard / Betrayal:** Ì tọ àzù yá — “You turned your back on him”  
**Meaning:** You betrayed or abandoned him.
2. **Being Behind or Left Out:** Ò nọ n’azù — “He is at the back”  
**Meaning:** He is behind in progress, rank, or inclusion.
3. **Support / Strength:** Àzù bụ úkwù — “The back is the pillar”  
**Meaning:** The foundation or support of a system.
4. **Shame or Disgrace:** A méré yá n’azù mmádù — “He was shamed behind others”  
**Meaning:** He was humiliated or disrespected secretly or publicly.

5. **Retreat / Withdrawal:** Yá là àzù — “He went backwards”

**Meaning:** Withdrawal in fear, shame, or reconsideration.

#### 4.2.5.2. PROVERBS INVOLVING AZU

1. Èzè mbè sị na nsóbù bù nke yá; yá jiri kwórò yá n’azù

“The tortoise says trouble is its own; that’s why it carries trouble on its back.”

**Meaning:** Everyone must bear their own burdens.

2. Nwátà àkwù n’azù àmàghì na ùzò dì ànyá

“A child strapped on the mother’s back does not know the road is long”

**Meaning:** Someone sheltered from hardship is unaware of how long or hard the journey of life is.

3. Àzù kà éjì ébú mmádù íbú

“It is by the back that one carries a person’s load.”

**Meaning:** The back which equals support speaks to bearing responsibilities for others.

4. Àzù adìghì égbù égbù, màná ọ na-àkpò àhù nìlè

“The back does not kill, but it causes pain to the whole body.”

**Meaning:** A weak or injured support causes suffering for the whole group.

5. Ọ bughì n’ihù kà ìré sị bụrụ ngwòngwó; ọ bụ n’azù

“It is not in front but from behind the tongue carries lies.”

**Meaning:** This proverb tells that deceit comes from hidden positions.

6. Ọ bụ na m jí jí n’ihù, anàghì égbù m jí n’azù

“If I hold you at the front, I won’t stab you in the back.”

**Meaning:** This proverb tells that true loyalty means no betrayal.

#### 7. Àzù anàghì àtù ìsì ọ̀sò

“The back does not overtake the head.”

**Meaning:** This proverb tells us to respect natural order which means following leadership/ plan is the best and we shouldn’t act before direction.

#### 8. Ésí n’àzù élè ìhè, a hùghì yá n’ùzò

“Looking from the back doesn’t show the path.”

**Meaning:** this proverb means that facing forward means progress.

#### 9. Ònye é kpùrù àzù a anàghì émé kà ọ̀ bùghì yá.

“He who was talked about from behind must not act unaware.”

**Meaning:** This proverb teaches that avoiding responsibility or turning your back on an issue does not erase the fact that it concerns you. Even if someone pretends not to see or acknowledge a problem, it still belongs to them.

#### 10. Yá tú jí àzù, ì wéé mùò

“They turned their back on you, yet you succeeded.”

**Meaning:** This proverb tells that even when cast aside or unsupported, one can rise.

### 4.2.5.3. IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS INVOLVING AZU

S/N	IGBO EXPRESSIONS	TRANSLATION	MEANING
1.	Tù àzù	Turn one's back.	To betray or leave behind.
2.	Juò n'azù	Ask behind the scenes.	To seek hidden information.
3.	Nye yá n'azù ómà	Give good back.	To show support indirectly.
4.	A hùrù yá n'azù	To be seen from behind.	To act dishonorably.
5.	A búò yá n'azù	Carried at the back.	To be given full support.
6.	Gbàà azù	Back away.	To retreat or step aside.
7.	Àzù yá adìghì ikè	His back is not strong.	He lacks support.
8.	Chèrè n'azù	Wait behind.	To be left behind or sidelined.

#### 4.4.5.4. CULTURAL MEANINGS OF AZU.

In Igbo cosmology and social life, the back is symbolically divided:

1. It can be the place of protection and support,
2. Or the seat of betrayal, shame, and neglect.

For instance, in many traditional settings:

- Carrying someone " Àzù yá " (on their back) represents care or protection.
- But " Ítù àzù" (to turn the back) means you've abandoned or disgraced someone.
- Being slapped "n'ihu" shames openly, but "n'azu" shames secretly and worse.

The back is also the place people do not see symbolizing the unseen, the ofe oge (hidden battles), and vulnerability.

#### 4.4.6. ÌMÌ (NOSE)

The Igbo word *ìmí* refers literally to the nose, the body part responsible for breathing and smelling. As a facial feature, it is essential to human life, often representing physical vitality and sensory perception. However, within the Igbo language, *ìmí* extends far beyond biology, developing symbolic and culturally meaningful uses relating to curiosity, pride, interference, and spiritual awareness.

#### **4.4.6.1. EXTENDED MEANINGS OF IMI.**

Here are some extended or figurative meanings associated with *imi* in Igbo:

**1. Pride or arrogance:** *Mì yá dī élù* – “His nose is high”.

Associated with someone who is boastful or full of themselves.

**2. Inquisitiveness or nosiness:** *Ò na-etinyé ìmì yá n'ìhè na-adìghì yá àkà* – “He puts his nose in things that don't concern him.”

Indicates interference, intrusiveness, or curiosity.

**3. Perceptiveness or spiritual awareness:** To “perceive with the nose” can imply intuition, suspicion, or discernment just like “smelling trouble.”

#### **4.4.6.2. PROVERBS INVOLVING IMI.**

Let's look at Igbo proverbs that use *ìmí* metaphorically or symbolically:

**1. Ànyá béwé, ìmì ébéwé**

“When the eye cries, the nose cries too.”

**Meaning:** This means that when someone close to you is hurt (emotionally or physically) you feel pain too be it empathy or shared sorrow. It uses *imi* metaphorically; just as the

nose may run when the eye shed tears, so sorrow shared becomes physical/emotional in close relationships.

## 2. Ọ na-èsí ìmì yá ìsì

“He smells from his own nose.”

**Meaning:** A person’s flaws especially pride, arrogance or wrongdoing are evident as others can smell them, even if the person doesn’t see or acknowledge them.

## 3. Onwèghì ìhè ànyá nùrù ntị, kà ànyá agàghì hù

“There is nothing the eye hears with the ear that the eye will not eventually see.”

**Meaning:** This proverb explains that what is heard be it warnings, rumors or hidden truth eventually becomes visible or revealed.

### 4.4.6.3. IDIOMATIC EXPRESSION INVOLVING IMI

S/N	IGBO EXPRESSION	MEANING/FIGURATIVE USE
1.	Ìmì yá dì élù.	Arrogant person (his nose is high).
2.	Ìmì yá na-àmì ụtùrù	Gossiping/interfering in others affairs.
3.	Ọ na-etinyé ìmì yá n’ìhè	Always involving himself in other people’s business.
4.	Ìmì yá na-égbù yá	Overly curious person.
5.	Ìmì yá na-àsú	The nose talks (He reacts without thinking).
6.	Ìmì yá ekpùchìghì.	He doesn’t cover his mouth (Indiscreet or disrespectful).

#### **4.4.6.4. CULTURAL MEANINGS OF IMI**

In Igbo customs, while the nose does not carry deeply sacred meaning like the obi or isi, it is connected to ideas of sensitivity, boundary, and social behavior. Elders often rebuke children by warning them not to " etinyé ìmì hà n'ìhè ò bùghì hà" "put their noses where they don't belong". This teaches not just good behavior, but shows the cultural encoding of discipline through language.

#### **4.4.7. NTI (EAR)**

In its literal sense, ntĩ refers to the ear, the organ of hearing. It is essential for receiving auditory information and is associated with listening, awareness, and response. However, in Igbo language and culture, ntĩ takes on a wide range of figurative meanings, many of which relate to obedience, learning, or even disrespect. The semantic extensions of ntĩ reflect not just the function of the organ but the values and expectations placed on people, particularly in terms of how they listen, respond, or fail to heed instruction.

##### **4.4.7.1. EXTENDED MEANINGS OF NTL.**

**1. Listening / Obedience:** Ntị na-ègé ntị - “An ear that listens”

Symbolizes someone who obeys advice or heeds instruction.

**2. Disobedience / Rebellion:** Ntị yá adighì égé - “His ear does not hear”

Refers to someone who is disobedient or stubborn.

**3. Disrespect / Disregard:** Ìgé ntị ntị - This may be sarcastically used to suggest ignoring deliberately, or pretending to listen but not changing.

#### 4.4.7.2. PROVERBS INVOLVING NTI

##### 1. E kèlèè Ònye ntị chíri, élù anùghì yá, àlà ánù yá

“Greet the person whose ear is closed; if the heavens do not hear it the earth will.”

**Meaning:** Encourage doing the right thing even when praise or recognition is unlikely.

Even if the highest authority (the heavens) don’t notice others (the earth/ people) will.

##### 2. M agàghì éjì ànyá m hụ ntị m!

“I will not use my eyes to see my ears.”

**Meaning:** This is an exclamatory proverb used in drama and lamentation as the speaker expresses that the situation is so terrible that they cannot bear to see it with their own eyes or hear it with their ears.

##### 3. Ònye jùrù ntị, ọnú

“He who refuses to listen will ask the mouth”.

**Meaning:** This proverb is used to warn that ignoring advice leads to trouble.

##### 4. Ntị anàghì àghò ọnú

“The ear does not become the mouth”.

**Meaning:** This proverb means that hearing something is not the same as speaking out as restraint is wisdom. It encourages discretion and careful handling of information.

##### 5. Ònye jùrù ntị jùò ùzò

“He who refuses the ear will ask the road”

**Meaning:** This proverb means that ignoring good advice leads to confusion, forcing them to ask for directions later.

#### 4.4.7.3. IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS INVOLVING NTI

S/N	IGBO EXPRESSIONS	TRANSLATIONS	MEANING
1.	Ìrụ̀ ntị̀ ọ́kú.	To sharpen the ear.	This means to listen attentively.
2.	Ìkù ntị̀ àzù.	To turn the ear backward.	To ignore an advice or words.
3.	Ìnyé ntị̀ ntị̀ ntị̀.	To give double ear.	This means to pay rapt attention.
4.	Ntị̀ jùrù yá ọ́nụ̀.	His ears are filled to the mouth.	This means to be overwhelmed by too much news or talk.
5.	Ìdàbà n'ntị̀ mmádù.	To fall into someone's ear.	This means for news or secret to reach someone.
6.	Ndị̀ mmádù nnwèrè ntị̀ àbụ̀ò, ọ́nụ̀ òtù.	Man has two ears but one mouth.	This means to listen more than you speak.

#### 4.4.7.4. CULTURAL MEANINGS OF NTI

In the Igbo culture, ntị (ear) is a symbol of social responsibility and moral behavior. A person who refuses to “hear” is often seen as dangerous not just to themselves but to others. Children are raised with the phrase “Nurù ntị” (listen well), which emphasizes how much value is placed on learning through hearing. Igbo society believes that true

wisdom begins with attention. Proverbs use *ntĩ* to stress the consequences of heeding or ignoring advice

#### **4.4.8. UKWU (LEG/FOOT).**

The Igbo word *ụkwụ* refers anatomically to the leg or foot, a lower limb of the body used for standing, walking, running, and balance. It includes both legs and feet in many dialects, unlike in English, where these are distinct. Literally, *ụkwụ* serves locomotive and supportive functions, but in Igbo discourse, the term has undergone rich semantic extension. It now carries both practical and symbolic meanings connected to movement, wealth, status and even burden.

##### **4.4.8.1. EXTENDED MEANINGS OF UKWU.**

**1. Movement or Escape:** *Ọ bú ụkwù jí mmádù ága ìjè* – “It is the leg that take a person on a journey”.

**2. Wealth:** *Ọ nọ n'ụkwù yá* - “It’s in his leg/foot”.

This means a person has the ability or means to succeed.

**3. Status / Respect:** *Ìkpò ụkwù n'ùlò nzùkò* – “To place the foot in the meeting house”.

This means to be influential or have standing in a society.

**4. Burden/Responsibility:** *Ụkwù jùrù íbú*- “The foot is filled with loads”.

This means someone is overwhelmed with responsibilities or challenges.

#### 4.4.8.2. PROVERBS INVOLVING UKWU.

##### 1. Úkwù nnwèrè ùché enwèghì ngàghàrì n'èbé ójọọ nọ

“The wise foot does not wander into trouble.”

**Meaning:** Smart people avoid unnecessary danger. Here Foot means decision to act/move.

##### 2. Úkwù mà ùzò, màná ìsì jùrù.

“The foot knows the path, but the head is confused.”

**Meaning:** One may have strength or opportunity but lacks direction or wisdom.

##### 3. Onye na-eru, ukwù gbachiri ya uzọ

“The traveler moves, but the leg blocks his way.”

**Meaning:** Inner weakness or mistakes ruin one's efforts.

##### 4. Úkwù gbùrù ókè; ìsì àchọghì yá n'ùlò

“The leg that killed the rat; the head doesn't want it at home.”

**Meaning:** When one does the dirty work, others may still show ingratitude.

##### 5. Úkwù ònye àmàmìhè èchékwàghì yá

“A man without knowledge is like a foot without protection.”

**Meaning:** Ignorance exposes one to unnecessary danger.

##### 6. Úkwù ójọọ agàghì ébí n'ùlò óbì

“A bad leg cannot rest in the house of peace.”

**Meaning:** Troublemakers don't belong where calm and unity are valued.

##### 7. Úkwù na-èfè èzè, àghótàrà yá

“The foot that serves the king is respected.”

**Meaning:** Service to authority brings prestige.

#### 4.4.8.3. IDIOMATIC EXPRESSION INVOLVING UKWU.

S/N	IGBO EXPRESSIONS	TRANSLATIONS	MEANINGS
1.	Ìtò ùkwù n'àlà.	To place one's foot on the ground.	This means to assert position or authority.
2.	Ìkpò ùkwù n'ùlò nzùkò.	To place foot in the meeting house.	This means to be recognized as a respected member.
3.	Ìkpù ùkwù àzù / Ìkpù ùkwù àzù àzù.	To draw foot backwards.	This means to withdraw support or back out of a commitment.
4.	Ìkú ùkwù ónú / Ìkwú ùkwù ónú	To put legs together or strike feet together.	This means to collaborate, conspire, act jointly which in all means to cooperate in action.

#### 4.4.8.4. CULTURAL MEANINGS OF UKWU

In Igbo cultural context, ùkwù is central to the language of action, journey, accountability, pilgrimage, and presence. A person's ùkwù is often described as either bringing peace or bringing trouble, depending on how and where that person shows up. In traditional marital introductions (Ìmé égo), when a man “sets his foot” in the woman's compound, it signifies serious intent and commitment.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.0. SUMMARY**

This study has presented a comprehensive, structural and semantic analysis of selected body part terms in igbo that were collected during the study. Polysemous words and body parts terms were identified where possible, creating a large frame of igbo part term polysemy data.

After a brief introduction to the study topic, we presented a review of the related literature to the study. This includes language and its role in meaning construction, semantics, pragmatics, the concept of polysemy and body part terms in language use. Details of the field sites and research participants were given. Similarly, prototype theory, conceptual metaphor and metonymy theoretical were presented. Overall, the theories were useful research tool, creating room for a dynamic different senses because of the mapping and schemas involved.

There was data presentation and analysis. A wide range of data was found to exist among body part, with a large number containing more than two elements. The data presentation and analysis showed that these body part terms convey a wide range of both physical and metaphorical meaning apart from prototypical physical senses and that meaning of these extended meanings abound in this study.

## 5.1 Summary of Findings

This study focused on how body part terms in Igbo carry more than one meaning, that is, how they show polysemy. From the findings, it was discovered that many Igbo body part terms such as *ísì* (head), *áká* (hand), and *ànyà* (eye) are not only used in their literal sense but also in non-literal ways to express different ideas. For example, *ísì* can mean the head of a person, but it can also mean a leader or the beginning of something. Likewise, *áká* can mean hand, but it is also used to mean help, work, or authority.

The study also revealed that these extended meanings happen through different types of semantic extensions like metaphor and metonymy. It was found that culture and language play a big role in how these meanings develop. The Igbo people use body part terms in many expressions, proverbs, and idioms that reflect their way of life, beliefs, and values.

It was also discovered that the meanings of these words change depending on the situation. In proverbs and idioms, body part terms usually have deeper or symbolic meanings, but in everyday speech, they are used in more direct and simple ways. Lastly, the study found that the way body part terms are used in Igbo is quite similar to how other languages use them, especially in terms of metaphorical meaning, but some meanings are special to the Igbo language because they come from Igbo culture and worldview.

## **5.2 CONCLUSION**

This study examined how body part terms in Igbo exhibit polysemy which explains, how one word can have multiple related meanings depending on context. The analysis showed that these terms go beyond their literal uses to express ideas related to leadership, emotion, thought, behavior, culture, and morality.

Using theories from lexical semantics and cognitive linguistics, the study explained how meanings extend through metaphor and metonymy. The meanings found in proverbs, idioms, and everyday expressions reflect how Igbo speakers use body parts to express complex thoughts and social values. The study concludes that body part polysemy in Igbo is both a linguistic and cultural process, shaped by people's experiences, beliefs, and the way they understand the world. This contributes to the understanding of meaning in African languages and shows how language reflects both culture and thought.

## **5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Future researchers should investigate body part polysemy across other dialects of igbo, such as Nsukka, Owerri, and Onitsha varieties, to provide a broader and more comparative understanding of semantic extensions within a language.

2. This study analyzed only a selected number of body part expressions. Future studies should include wider range of terms to reveal additional metaphorical and idiomatic meanings in igbo lexicon.
3. Researchers should combine semantic analysis with phonological, morphological, and syntactic studies to reveal the full linguistic show of body part terms in igbo.
4. Further research should make use of larger data sources, including written literature and electronic language data bases, to strengthen the validity and reliability of findings.
5. Scholars can extend this research by comparing igbo body part polysemy with that of other Nigerian or African languages to identify universal and language specific patterns of meaning extension.

## REFERENCES

- Ameka, F. K., and Wilkins, D. P. (1996). *“The grammar and semantics of body part expressions”*. Nijmegen: Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics.
- Anyanwu, O. C. (2016). *“Semantic change and lexical development in Igbo”*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press.
- Clark, M. A. (1990). *“The tonal system of Igbo”*. Foris Publications.
- Cruse, D. A. (2004). *“Meaning in language: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics”* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Emenanjo, E. N. (1978). *“Elements of modern Igbo grammar: A descriptive approach”*. Oxford University Press.
- Evans, V., and Green, M. (2006). *“Cognitive linguistics: An introduction”*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Eze, N. (2019). Metaphor and figurative language in Igbo proverbs. *“Nsukka Journal of African Languages and Linguistics”*, 5(2), 55–72.
- Green, M. M., and Igwe, G. E. (1963). *“A descriptive grammar of Igbo”*. Oxford University Press.
- Heine, B. (1997). *“Cognitive foundations of grammar”*. Oxford University Press.
- Heine, B., and Kuteva, T. (2002). *“World lexicon of grammaticalization”*. Cambridge University Press.
- Heine, B., Claudi, U., and Hünemeyer, F. (1991). *“Grammaticalization: A conceptual framework”*. University of Chicago Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2002). *“Metaphor: A practical introduction”*. Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *“Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind”*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., and Johnson, M. (1980). *“Metaphors we live by”*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lyons, J. (1977). *“Semantics”* (Vols. 1 and 2). Cambridge University Press.
- Mbah, B. M., and Mbah, E. E. (2007). *“Topics in semantics”*. Nsukka: AP Express Publishers.
- Mensah, E. (2009). Metaphor in Nigerian political discourse. *“Language and Ideology in Nigeria”*, 4(1), 28–42.

- Nwachukwu, P. A. (1983). *“Towards an Igbo grammar”*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Okolo, C. N. (2006). Idiomatic expressions in Igbo and their cultural underpinnings. *“Journal of Nigerian Languages and Culture”*, 8(1), 88–98.
- Rosch, E. (1975). *“Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories”*. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 104(3), 192-233.
- Traugott, E. C., and Dasher, R. B. (2002). *“Regularity in semantic change”*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ugwueye, L. E. (2015). Metaphorical extensions in Igbo ritual discourse. *“International Journal of African Linguistics”*, 7(3), 40–51.
- Uwalaka, M. A. (1996). *“The Igbo verb: Semantics, syntax, and morphology”*. Africa World Press.
- Wilkins, D. P. (1996). Natural semantic developments in the domain of body-part terms. In G. Goddard (Ed.), *“Language and conceptualization”* (pp. 47–73). Cambridge University Press.