ASSIGNMENT OF URBAN THOROUGHFARE NAMES: A COMPARISON BETWEEN MEANING AND APPLICATION.

CHUKWUNOYELUM OKPALA-OKAKA

DEPARTMENT OF GEOINFORMATICS AND SURVEYING, UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, ENUGU CAMPUS, ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA
E-mail: cokpalaokaka@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Urban thoroughfares are usually identified on the ground and in the map as street, crescent, drive, boulevard, avenue, close, way, road, court, etc. These are “generic” words, which combine with their “specific” counterparts to form compound geographical names for our urban thoroughfares. The “specific” aspects could be names of human or non-human elements. There are also simple geographical names which serve similar functions on our cities (or maps). Several examples of both types of geographical names were provided.

The definitions of some of generic names were given and these formed the basis for comparing the extent to which the definitions conform or depart from their applications on the physical nature of the thoroughfares in the cities (and on the maps). Nigerian and foreign maps were used for the study.

In conclusion it was noted that both Nigerian and foreign maps were lacking in the application of appropriate names of urban thoroughfares in respect of their generic definitions.

INTRODUCTION

In order to appreciate the meanings and information conveyed in the generic names of urban thoroughfares (Avenues, Street, Road, Drive, Close, etc.), it is necessary to understand the meanings (implications) of the prefixes and suffixes which form part of the compound structure of the names, in most cases.

Compound names, usually consist of two parts: the generic and the specific (ITC, 1974). The generic part generally indicates what kind of feature it is, while the specific part is the identifying element. For instance, in Mount Kilimanjaro, Mount is the generic part indicating that it is a mountain and Kilimanjaro is specific element asserting that it is named after Kilimanjaro and not after Atlas as in Atlas Mountain; in Aso Rock, Rock is the generic element showing that it is a rock, and Aso is the specific part differentiating it from Olumo Rock. Thus the specific part consists of human and non-human names after which the feature is named. Other notable examples of compound names are River Niger, Port Harcourt, Ogbunike Cave, Ora-Eri, Mambilla Plateau, Zik Avenue, Geoinformatics Department, etc. In all these examples, the generic part is either a prefix or a suffix of the compound geographical name.

A geographical name or toponym is a name by which a particular feature or populated place is known (ITC, 1974). It could be a compound name as explained above, or it could also be a simple name such as Enugu, Circle, Walk, Ibadan, Violet, Court, London, etc.

There are geographical names with ancestral origin for instance, Ora-Eri, (descendants of Eri) Abagana (Ebe-Agana or Agana’s place), Aguleri, etc; or names with tree origin such as Ukpo-Akpu (Ukpo of a giant cotton tree), Isingwu, etc. or names with events origin as in Ede-Oballa (place of blood-shedding during war) (Okpala-Okaka, 1998, Ogwo, 1997).
In the following paragraphs the author examines the definitions of generic names found in urban road names, and information derivable from them. The definitions of the generic names given below represent the histories behind those names. Where a street name does not reflect its definition or departs significantly from its generic meaning, it constitutes a pseudo geographical name, which conveys wrong information about the street.

**DEFINITION OF GENERIC NAMES OF URBAN THOROUGHFARES**

This paragraph provides a list of generic names that combine with different specific parts to form compound names of urban roads. The list contains names that are common on both Nigerian and foreign maps such as Avenues, Crescent, Drive, Lane, Expressway, Road, Street, Terrace, Way, Third, First, etc. There are however, simple names (i.e. one name) which alone constitute urban road names that are exclusively found on foreign maps and these include Knowe, Bonnie, Sally, Violet, Viewfield, Adline, Amen, Bergen, Berry, Cook, Inwood etc. Simple names are very rare or non-existent on Nigerian urban thoroughfares, and maps.

In Figure 1, Goodman (1968) prescribes an ideal method for naming of urban streets (thoroughfares), and by implication, their suggested positions or locations within the urban setting. This method, however, is practicable only during land sub-divisions and planning, especially in the heavily industrialized nations. The generic names in Figure 1 road, drive, way, Avenue, etc. – are supposed to be designed and named in planned cities as illustrated therein. However, in sparsely industrialized nations for instance, Nigeria, some cities grew as small settlements that lacked any form of planning, and roads had to be superimposed on them later to synchronize old and new developments. It becomes difficult to practicalise in such cities the concept and design of the method suggested in Figure 1. Nevertheless, land subdivision and planning of cities have been carried on in both sparsely and heavily industrialized nations around the world, and naming of urban streets is a sine qua non of such exercises.
In the following paragraphs, the definitions of several generic names applicable to such city roads are given as provided in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary and the Multilingual Dictionary of Current Terms in English. The essence of these definitions is to compare them with their applications on the streets and by extension on the maps. In other words, to understand how their applications conform or depart from the true meanings of the (generic) names. In making this comparison, the author relied mostly on examining maps of different cities around the world. However, many examples were drawn from Nigerian maps particularly that of Enugu (the author’s residence) where several on-site visits and assessments of streets were made in situ. The following names (among others) were considered.

**Crescent**: It is defined as “something shaped like the curve of the moon in the first quarter.” From this definition, the curve of the moon in the first quarter could look like a semi-circle – Figure 2. The implication is that any urban thoroughfare that has “Crescent” as part of its compound name must have a shape that is exactly like or similar to Figure 2.

![Figure 2 Curve of the Moon in the First Quarter](image)

Figure 3, illustrates some examples of roads (thoroughfares) called Crescents. The examples are taken from different city maps around the world. In the illustrations diagrams (a), (b), (d) and (h) are good examples of Crescents and the rest are either fair enough, such as diagrams (e) and (g) or totally inappropriate diagrams (f), (l), and (j). Diagrams (c), (i), and (j) could have been rightly called “close” in Nigerian context because they are dead-end streets. An ideal Crescent street should have its ends (entrance and exit) abutting the same road as in Figure 3 (a), (b), (d), and (h).

**Close**: “a narrow passage or street; a blind alley; a cul-de-sac (a street or lane open only at one end. A situation with no exit except only in front)” . Obateru (1986) explains that “Culs-de sac (dead-end streets) should not be provided indiscriminately. They may be provided only in restricted areas such as odd parcels of land or where noise exclusion is very necessary. If dead-end streets are used, they should have a maximum length of 125 metres with a turning diameter of at least 15 metres for the cars of residents.”

In examining the nature of “close” in this paper, it is clear that culs-de-sac could have diverse forms and constituents. First is the simple cul-de-sac described above by Obateru. Such is called “close” on Nigerian maps – Figure 3(c) (i), (j), could have been good examples, and 5 (c) . (Elgin Dr and Forest Dr.) The use of the word “close” is totally absent on foreign maps examined. Figure 4 presents some examples of a “close” as applicable on Nigerian Maps. Secondly, there is the complex cul-de-sac in the sense that it consists of culs-de-sac within a cul-de-sac. These are prevalent on foreign maps examined and are severally called Court, Drive, Avenue, Place etc., (see Figure 5). In this Figure both diagrams (a) and (b) have only one entrance each which serves other dead-end streets within them. In Enugu, there is only one “court” (Rose Garden Court).

In the illustrations in Figure 4 diagrams (a), (b), and (c) are good examples of a “Close”. However, (c) has two parts; one part is a full fledged street, while the other part is a dead-end street. The names should have been separated as in (b). Diagrams (d), (e) and (f) are bad examples of what a “Close” should be, because each of them has an entrance and exit which are characteristics of a “street”. It could be that they were really “Closes” at the time of their construction, initially. But as a result of expansion and development of the area over time, the dead-ends were opened up. Where such was the case, the names should have been revised thereafter to reflect the present situation on the ground.

**Drive**: It is defined as “a road for driving on- especially a private one to a house”.

Figure 3 Shapes of urban roads called “Crescent”. Roads with pecked lines at the ends signify continuation. Ct. = Crescent. Source: See References: Nos 11, 6, 2, 7, and 1

Enugu (Nigeria)

Jos (Nigeria)

Lagos (Nigeria)

Figure 4 Illustrations of “Close” (Cl.) from Nigerian Maps. Pecked lines show Street continuation. Source: See References Nos 11, 2, and 15,
Driveway: “a private road through a garden or park to a house.” These definitions leave no one in doubt that a “Drive” leads to a private residence and by implication does not necessarily have to be wide. Nevertheless, it is common to find in our cities “Drives” of various widths which do not terminate in a private house. Figure 5 illustrates the various faces of “Drives” on both foreign and Nigerian maps.
In Abuja, Figure 5 (f), Ibrahim Babangida Drive, is in the heart of Wuse District, and it is long, wide and generally shaped like a hot–dog. In Madison (not in diagram), John Nolan Drive and Northshore Drive are in the outskirts of the city and are a continuation of the same wide road which do not lead to a private home.

The information to be gathered from these explanations is that a “Drive” may have the characteristics of a “close”, an “Avenue”, a “Street”, or a “Crescent”, and could be long or short. It could also be found in the central business district (CBD) or in the countryside of a city.

**Lane**: Defined as “narrow country road usually between hedges or banks, narrow street or alley between buildings.”
One common feature of a lane is its narrowness, whether on the boarders of the city or in the CBD. It could be motorable as in Figure 6(c) Carr Lane, or non-motorable, Figure 6 (a) Ogunbiyi Lane. “Figure 6(c), Carr Lane, is as wide as any other street or road around it and it is located in the CBD of Hull. On the other hand Figure 5(e) shows Rod Lane and Lark Lane which are actually located in the periphery of Carbondale, and they are not narrow as the definitions would have us believe.

**WAY:** “a road, street, path, track or other place of passage; length of space passed over, distance to be transversed, the course followed or to be followed between two places or to reach a place, etc”. These amorphous definitions suggest that the shape, length, location and constituent aspects of a thoroughfare that bears the suffix Way” do not matter. But in practice and specifically in Nigeria, “Way” has always been a suffix, in most cases, to “specific” names of influential individuals, very notable institutions, events, etc. For instance, Sani Abacha Way in Abuja, Tafawa Balewa Way in Kaduna, Murtala Mohammed Way in Jos and Lagos. These “Ways” were named after former Nigerian presidents. “Ways” named after non-humans include Woodside Way (Glenrothes), College Way (Enugu), and Enugu-Onitsha Expressway. All these “Ways” enjoy appreciable length, width and care, contrary to the simplistic meaning provided in the definition.

**Enugu (Nigeria)**

![Diagram of Enugu (Nigeria)](image)

**Hull (Britain)**

![Diagram of Hull (Britain)](image)

**Figure 6. Illustrations of “Lane.”** Pecked lines indicate street continuum. Ln = Lane. Source: See References 11and 13

**Avenue:** This is defined as “road with trees on each side especially the private road going to a large country house; wide street with buildings on one or both sides”. The definition suggests that an “Avenue” could be located anywhere within the city limits. It could be long and wide as in Figure 5(f), or comparatively short as in Figure 5(b). All these satisfy the definition of an “Avenue” which could be long, short, with trees or houses on the sides.

**Street:** “town or village road with houses on one side or both”. This definition makes most urban roads to qualify as a street including blind alleys or dead-end streets. A full-fledged “Street” in the opinion of this writer, should have
entrance and exit, (see Figure 6(c) in addition to having houses/trees at the flanks. A cul-de-sac named “Street” could therefore be misleading for urban navigation. For instance, in Figure 7, diagrams (a) and (b), Nwakoby street and Uli Street are all blind alleys. As shown in these diagrams the other end of Nwakoby Street is blocked by a solid wall while that of Uli Street is blocked by a stream. Thus use of the generic name “close” would have been more appropriate here as this would convey the information that the thoroughfares are dead-end streets (see Figure 4b).

**ENUGU (NIGERIA)**

![Diagram of ENUGU (NIGERIA)](image)

**Figure 7:** Wrong applications of “Street” on urban roads. Pecked lines indicate road continuity. 

**Road:** “specially prepared way, publicly or privately owned, between places for the use of pedestrians, riders, vehicles, etc. This definition is not only all-encompassing but also includes the colloquial usage of “Road” which includes footpaths. Consequent upon this definition, a blind alley is also a road as shown in Figure 4(d) where Bama Road and Jega Road are actually dead-ends streets. But such street names could be misleading. The ideal situations to use “Road” for urban thoroughfare names is to use it for naming thoroughfares leading to particular destinations, such as a Layout, an establishment, a city, or town. For instance, in Enugu (in Enugu State) there is Onitsha Road (leading to Onitsha metropolis in Anambra State), Ugwu Aji Road (leading to Ugwu Aji town in Enugu State), Ogui Road (leading to Ogui New Layout in Enugu) College Road (leading to an area designated for educational institutions in Enugu), etc. This could be the import of “Road” shown in Figure1.

There are other thoroughfares with the suffix “Road”, see Figure 6(c) Analby Road, Figure 7(b) Obiagu Road, Figure 3(b) Botswana Road, etc. In – as much – as the usage of “Road” in these road names are correct, this writer still regards such usage as an aberration from the ideal situation described above. It must be observed that whether under the ideal situation or not, thoroughfares with the suffix “Road” usually enjoy an added attention such as augmented width, all-season surface, and are the primary arteries of the city in most cases. These advantages could have arisen from the fact that the specific names unto which the generic name “Road” was attached were either names of persons of high profile in the society, or names of notable places, events, and institutions.

**CONCLUSION**

Geographical names have two classes: Compound and simple names. Within the compound name we find the generic and specific aspects. While compound names reveal the history and environment of the features named after them, simple names are totally silent on such information.

It could be observed that the definitions of the generic aspect of the compound names were not necessarily considered before assigning names to urban thoroughfares. Thus there are dead-end thoroughfares called “Crescents” or “Streets” while “Drives” and “Avunues” etc, could be located anywhere within the city contrary to their generic definitions. These observations are true for both Nigerian and foreign maps.

The reasons for these inappropriate naming of urban thoroughfares could be attributed to poor cartographic background of the urban planners or other such departements responsible for naming of urban roads. Recommendation. A cartographic department should be established within the Ministry of Lands and Town Planning to take charge of assigning and revision of urban thoroughfares names. Undergraduates of Urban Planning
Departments of higher institutions should take courses in cartography to have some basic knowledge of cartographic skills and theories.

REFERENCES

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Biography

After completing his primary education, Mr. Chukwunonyelum Okpala-Okaka continued with his secondary school education in 1963. This was interrupted by the out-break of the Nigeria/Biafra civil war in 1967. He joined the Biafra army and fought in the war. At the end of the civil war in 1970 he went back and completed his secondary education in 1971. He worked for a while as a cartographic draughtsman in the Survey Division of the Ministry of Lands, Survey and Urban Development, before resigning his appointment for further studies abroad.

Higher Education: Between 1974 and 1975 he obtained a C3 Cartographic Engineer Diploma from the International Institute for Aerial Survey and Earth Science (ITC), Enschede, the Netherlands. In 1977 he obtained a Bachelor of Science (BSc) Degree in Cartography from the University of Wisconsin, Madison USA, and a Master of Science (MSc) Degree in Geography in 1980 from Southern Illinois University (SIU) at Carbondale, USA. In 2001, he obtained a bachelor of laws (LLB) from the University of Nigeria Enugu Campus, and a Barrister at Law (BL) certificate, after being called to the Nigerian Bar in 2003.

Work Experience: Mr. Chucks Okpala Okaka has taught Urban Planning at Imo State University Ettiti in 1986. He is currently a senior lecturer in cartography in the Department of Geoinformatics and Surveying University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus having joined this University in 1987.

Membership of Learned Society: He is a member of National Executive Council of the Nigeria Cartographic Association (NCA) and is currently in charge of specification/standardization in the Association. He is also a member of the Nigeria Environmental Society (NES).
Service to Relevant Public Bodies and University Committees: Mr. Okpala-Okaka was a member of the Accreditation Panel for Higher National Diploma (HND) in cartography for Kaduna Polytechnic under the auspices of the Nigeria Board for Technical Education (NBTE), 1987. He has served the University in many capacities, at the departmental levels and as faculty (Faculty of Environmental Studies) representative in many committees. In March 2005, he was appointed a Consulting Editor of the Contemporary Who’s Who of the American Biographical Institute. Mr. Okpala-Okaka is married with children.