

Linguistic and Cultural Perspectives on Color in Ósósò

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Abstract

Color terms are a vulnerable aspect of linguistic heritage, particularly within minority languages like Ósósò, spoken in Edo State, Nigeria. This study investigates the linguistic and cultural conceptualization of color in Ósósò, focusing on its symbolic, cognitive, and environmental dimensions. The aim is to examine how color is represented in Ósósò linguistically and culturally, with objectives that include uncovering the socio-cultural logic behind color naming and understanding how language shapes perception. Eight consultants were purposively selected from the four quarters of Ósósò village and interviewed using structured questionnaires through the Key Informant Interview (KII) method. Additional data was gathered from a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on color concepts. To interpret the metaphorical nature of Ósósò color expressions, the study draws on Cognitive Linguistics, specifically Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Findings reveal that Ósósò color terms are deeply tied to cultural experience and local surroundings, relying on metaphor and comparison rather than abstract vocabulary. Expressions such as àbí óbè (“like leaf”) for green and àbí òzè (“like blood”) for wine reflect environmental and cultural associations. This research contributes to the discourse on indigenous knowledge systems and semantic diversity. It recommends documenting and integrating Ósósò color expressions into educational and cultural initiatives to help preserve the language and safeguard the community’s heritage

Keywords: Ósósò language, Color terminology, Conceptual metaphor, Semantic diversity, Language and Culture

1. Introduction

Color is a fundamental part of universal human perception, yet its linguistic representation and cultural significance can be surprisingly different across cultures. According to Nahum (2012), color can be seen

as a sensation produced in the eye by rays of decomposed light, hence, color is the result of how human eyes and brain respond to light. When light hits an object, some wavelengths are absorbed while others are reflected, it is the ones that reach our eyes that create the sensation of color. Typically, three main qualities are used to describe color: hue, which refers to the name of the color (such as red, blue etc.); saturation, which indicates how vivid or dull a color appears; and brightness, which describes how light or dark the color looks. Although color is grounded in the physical properties of light, its perception is also shaped by psychological, emotional, and cultural factors. This complexity is why color is studied across multiple disciplines, from science and psychology to art, design and more, with each exploring how color affects the way humans think, feel, and communicate.

While languages spoken around the world like English, have a long list of color terms, others, especially African languages, employ more nuanced, context-driven systems rooted in environmental and cultural referents. They describe colors through everyday experiences, natural elements, and cultural references. From Berlin and Kay's (1996) study of colors to works in ethnolinguistics, there has been a sustained debate on whether color categories are universal or shaped by culture. According to scholars like Kay, Berlin & Merrifield (1991), Mullagayanova (2013) and Sandford (2016), the idea of color names is universal but often the name itself is influenced by several factors such as culture, emotions and attitude. Color is a key topic in discussions about linguistic universals and linguistic relativity. Interestingly, contemporary research continues to affirm that color naming is deeply tied to local ways of seeing and interpreting the world (Lucy, 1997; Wierzbicka, 2006). Consequently, color names oftentimes show how languages pull meaning from the environment and shared experiences (Hardin & Maffi, 1997).

By responding to the question, "How do the Ósósò people conceptualize and name colors, and what cultural logic underlies this system?", this paper explores the linguistic and cultural strategy and the semantics involved in color naming and comprehension by Ósósò speakers. It demonstrates how color naming reflects deeper patterns of thought, identity, and worldview. This study therefore seeks to contribute to works on color, broader discussions on semantic diversity, indigenous knowledge systems, and the interplay between language, cognition, and

the richness of human expression system. At this juncture, it is essential to know about the Ósósò people and their language.

2. Ósósò people and Language

Ósósò (ISO 639-3: *oso*, Glottolog: *osos1238*) is spoken in Ósósò community, Akoko Edo Local Government, Edo State, Nigeria, by approximately 100,000 native speakers (Ethnologue 2025) in a rocky, elevated landscape by a people steeped in cultural tradition on one hand and modernization on the other. Beyond its linguistic features, the community maintains rich ceremonial practices including the Itakpo male initiation ceremony and the Ovbiko maiden initiation rite, which marks transitions in gendered roles and socially acceptable identity. Within the community, modernization introduces external pressure on the language that endangers it as it is predominantly oral, transmitted mainly through everyday exchange, storytelling and ritual. Though orthographic standardization is underway, literacy is often ad hoc, borrowing writing systems from Yoruba, Edo, and English. The name “Ósósò” itself, rightly pronounced /ósósò/ by the people and /ósósò/ by outsiders and diasporic speakers is the name of the people, the place and the language.

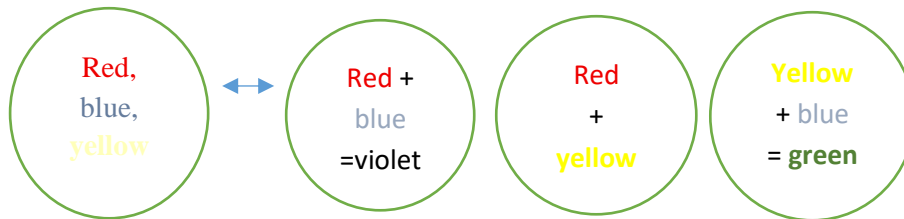
3. Literature Review

With a universally accepted classification system that divides colors into primary, secondary, and tertiary categories, with white and black typically regarded as neutral, Color has long been a foundational element in visual studies, design, and aesthetics. This classification is widely accepted and forms the basis for how we understand and work with color (De Bortoli & Maroto, 2001). Red, blue, and yellow are considered the building blocks of all other colors and consequently called the Primary colors. The three cannot be synthesized or created by mixing other colors. When combined in equal proportions, however, they yield secondary colors such as green, orange, and violet. There are tertiary colors also; a blending of a primary color with a secondary color which results in a broader spectrum that includes shades like lemon, purple, lilac, wine, pink, and turquoise. Mixing red and violet will, for instance, produces purple while a mixture of blue with green yields turquoise, and yellow with green creates lemon. These combinations of colors form the basis for complex visual compositions, essential in design, art, and aesthetics. Below is a schematic representation of colors as explicated:

a. red + blue = **violet**
+ blue = **green**.

b. red+ yellow = **orange**

c. yellow



Schema 1: A schematic representation showing primary colors to the left and secondary colors to the right of the arrow.

Berlin and Kay's (1969) seminal work which investigated the universality and evolution of basic color terms proposed that there are universal patterns in color term development and that languages progress in stages with naming as they acquire new colors. Using their experience working on three unrelated language families, they concluded that the color words found in these languages were just too great in terms of semantic similarities to allow for coincidence. Consequently, they suggested that the eleven basic colors below are the basic colors from which all color terms arise.

Data 1:

- | | | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. white, | 2. black, | 3. red, | 4. yellow, |
| 5. green, | 6. blue, | 7. purple, | 8. pink, |
| 9. brown, | 10. Orange | 11. Grey | |

Berlin and Kay's (1969) identified seven stage3, languagesictions' in color terms development claiming that at stage 1, all languages have words for 'black' and 'white', while red will be the third in languages with three terms, by stage 3, languages with four terms will have yellow or green, languages with five, there will be terms for yellow and green, languages with six will be all the foregoing plus blue. Languages with seven colors named will have 'brown' as the seventh and languages with eight or more will include purple, pink, orange or grey or a combination of the colors. This showed some colors in different languages are underlying and they

have order, a claim Carroll (2004) seems to support when he said that when a language has two colors only, they will be black and white. If a third exists in a language outside of these two, it will be red.

Despite its influence on understanding of colors, their cross-linguistic research, later expanded in the World Color Survey, faced vigorous critique. Some questioned its Eurocentric assumptions and argued that it imposes Western standards on non-Western languages. Lucy (1997) and Anna Wierzbicka (1992, 1999) emphasized the cultural and experiential basis of language, asserting that the way communities name colors reflects environmental salience and metaphor, not abstract categories. Wierzbicka suggested that color naming often starts with prototypes rooted in shared cultural experiences like blood, soil, and vegetation but some authors posit a four-way dimension to color distinction, insisting that color terms have other values and they are not merely denotative, but have other typical referential values added. Color black has its referential value in darkness, white in lightness, red in dryness and green in wetness.

Colors also carry psychological and cultural significance, influencing how people perceive and respond to visual content calling for more nuanced understanding of color terminology and its relationship to culture and perception. Studies have shown that certain colors evoke specific emotions or associations, red for example often signals passion or urgency, while blue tends to convey calmness and trust (Jalil, Yunus & Said, 2012). Beyond scholarly discussions, these associations of colors with emotions play a crucial role in branding, advertising, fashion, and even user interface design. Moreover, the context in which a color appears, including its combination with other hues, saturation, and brightness, can dramatically shift its impact. For example, pink may be perceived as playful or romantic depending on its tone and surrounding colors. This dynamic nature of color perception highlights the importance of understanding not just the science of color mixing, but also the emotional and symbolic layers that colors bring.

In African linguistic contexts, metaphor and sensory imagery play a vital role. Many languages deploy associative naming rather than fixed lexical color items. Yoruba uses *ewé* 'leaf' to express green, while Igbo relies on *ọbara* 'blood' for red. In Hausa, color concepts are often expressed through phrases like *ruwan zinariya* 'water of gold' for yellow. Segerer and Vanhove (2021), in their typological study of over 400

African languages, noted widespread use of colexifications with one term spanning multiple sensory domains and ideophones that evoke emotional and visual response rather than strict categorization, further shedding light on universal and language-specific aspects of color cognition.

Despite its linguistic richness, Ósósò remains underrepresented in scholarly literature, with most attention given to phonology (Reuben 2008, Ewekeye 2016, and Legbeti 2022). By focusing on its color lexicon, this paper contributes to a growing body of work that seeks to decentralize global semantic typologies and foreground indigenous cognitive system within color discourse. To ground this study in theoretical context, the next section discusses the framework adopted by this study.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Cognitive Linguistics, specifically Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as its theoretical framework for analyzing color conceptualization among the Ósósò people. Cognitive Linguistics views language as deeply rooted in human experience with meaning arising from embodied interaction with the world (Evans & Green, 2006). As a fundamental framework within Cognitive Linguistics, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits that abstract concepts such as like ideas, emotion, or color values are often understood through metaphorical mappings onto more concrete, familiar experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, Kövecses 2002). These mappings are called conceptual metaphors, and from the schema below, the target domain is color, and the source domains are culturally familiar objects like leaf, blood, charcoal, sky, etc.

TARGET DOMAIN (abstract) ← → SOURCE DOMAIN (concrete)

COLOR ← → OBJECTS IN NATURE (e.g. leaf, blood etc)

Schema 2: illustration of CMT conceptualization of color mapping, from abstract to concrete

When applied to this work on color analysis, CMT helps reveal how, by referencing objects that embody those colors, the expressions derived by Ósósò speakers in naming colors shows how they conceptualize them as metaphoric. Rather than relying on abstract or universal color categories, speakers use cultural objects to express color concepts. This reflects a

cognitive strategy where color is not merely a perceptual phenomenon, but a conceptual construct shaped by environment, culture, and experience. CMT offers a powerful framework for analyzing the complex and multifaceted nature of color meanings, highlighting the dynamic interplay that is between language, cognition and culture. Having established the theoretical foundation, the section that follows discusses the methodological approach employed in this study.

5. Methodology

This study applied Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to gather in-depth information from eight purposively selected consultants based on competence. Since the language is mostly spoken and has very few written resources, the research relied heavily on direct interaction with the eight knowledgeable and fluent Ósósò speakers, above sixty years, and an observation of the everyday language as used in naturalistic settings within the Ósósò community while on a week's visit for yuletide. The yearly colorful Ósósò carnival that often takes place within that period also provided easy access to youth's color terms. These varied data ensured generational diversity and capturing of both diachronic variation and synchronic usage since older speakers tend to be more traditional speakers compared to younger ones who might use newer or borrowed expressions.

Participants were prompted to describe the colors of familiar local items such as leaves, wine, soil, cloth, and animals while also articulating how they would describe unfamiliar or abstract colors. This elicitation strategy facilitated the documentation of both indigenous color terms and borrowed expressions, often adapted to Ósósò phonological and semantic norms. By combining linguistic elicitation with cultural inference, this methodology provides a holistic account of how color is conceptualized and culturally embedded in Ósósò discourse.

5.1. Cultural and Linguistic Insights

Beyond just collecting words for colors, the study incorporated a focus group discussion on color and everyday conversations. These sources were analyzed for color-related expressions, metaphors, and idiomatic constructions. Particular attention was given to associative descriptors such as 'àbí' which reflect culturally embedded ways of interpreting color. These expressions often reveal symbolic associations tied to local

ecology, material culture, and social practices. They reflect how Ósósò indigenes think, feel, and relate to color in their daily lives.

5.2. Analytical Approach

The elicited data were thematically analyzed under descriptive form, lexical form or English modified form to identify patterns in color terminology and investigate how it is described and understood. The goal is to explore not just the vocabulary, but the cultural mindset behind color naming among the Ósósò people and show how language and worldview are deeply connected.










6. Data Presentation and Analysis

















This section explores how color is linguistically represented and culturally interpreted in Ósósò by analyzing lexical representation of color, cultural and symbolic associations, metaphorical and idiomatic usage. The section starts by presenting a minimized view of the 550 languages purportedly named in English



Fig 1: a maze showing some of the 550 colors in English language. Source: [List of Colors: 550 Color Names and Hex Codes / Color Meanings](#)

Based on the available data, speakers of the Ósósò language interviewed in the village exhibit a unique linguistic adaptation in expressing certain color terms. They modify the English word *color* into *ìkólò* which is then placed before the actual color term as a pre-lexical marker. This practice was consistently observed, even among the three elderly native speakers consulted during the study. Their usage suggests a community-wide linguistic convention that adopts the influence of English but deploys local phonological adaptation. However, determining how far back this practice dates lies beyond the scope of this paper. Below is a tabular representation of the color forms in Ósósò based on available data:

s/no	Colour description	shades	Ósósò	Remark
A.	Primary colors			
1.	Red		Ólòlò	Lexical form
2.	Blue		ìbúlù	modified from 'blue'
3.	Yellow		èkpò	Lexical word
B.	Secondary colors			
1.	Violet		ìkólò ètà	'like fire' - Descriptive form
2.	Orange		ìkólò òròmí	'like orange' - descriptive
3.	Green		àbí ébè	'like leaf' - Descriptive form
C.	Neutral colors			
1.	Black		Óbibì	Lexical form
2.	White		óófò	Lexical form
D.	Tertiary colors			
1.	Amber		-	Not significant to be named

2.	Brown		àbí ekhẹ	'like earth' descriptive form
3.	Burgundy		àbí òzẹ	Seen as same as 'wine' color
4.	Charcoal		'àbí uyi'	'like charcoal' descriptive form
5.	Coral		-	Not significant to be named
6.	Fuchsia		ìpínkì	Seen as related to pink
7.	Grey/Ashes		àbí èmùè	'Like ashes'
8.	Gold		ìkólò ìgólù	'Color gold' English modified
9.	Indigo		ìbúlù ó jé wò	Blue that is deep (that entered)
10.	Lemon		ìkólò òròmí (òkékè)	Seen as related to oranges of small size (lemon)
11.	Lilac		-	Not significant to be named
12.	Magenta		-	Not significant to be named
13.	Mauve		-	Not significant to be named
14.	Mint		-	Not significant to be named
15.	Olive		-	Not significant to be named
16.	Peach		-	Not significant to be named
17.	Pink		ìpínkì	modified from 'pink'
18.	Purple		ìkólò ìpópùlù	modified from 'purple'
19.	Rust		-	Not significant to be named
20.	Sky blue		ìkólò édèdá	'Like the sky' descriptive



20.	Silver		ìkòlò isílìvà	'like silver' descriptive
21.	Wine		àbí òzè	'like blood' descriptive

Table 1- a color spread following universal colors and their classification (in alphabetical order)

6.1. Linguistic perspective

One notable color naming strategy employed by Ósósò indigenes involves the phonological adaptation of English lexical items to ensure the name conforms with the phonotactic constraints of the Ósósò language. Specifically, the language disallows onsetless syllables and complex consonant clusters. The deployment of various phonological processes to accommodate borrowed forms will be examined next.

6.2. Phonological Processes in color naming: Insertion and Elision in Ósósò

When sounds are combined to form words or other larger units, some segments end up being juxtaposed within the same morpheme boundary (Yul-Ifodo, 2014) and to facilitate smoother articulation, such juxtaposed sounds often undergo modification processes. These processes are widespread across languages and are typically motivated by the need to preserve euphony or resolve violations of phonological well-formedness (Oyebade, 2018).

In Ósósò, phonological processes play a crucial role in language adaptation, particularly in the integration of borrowed lexical items. These processes aid in simplifying pronunciation. These processes aid in simplifying pronunciation, maintaining rhythmic consistency, and aligning new words with the phonotactic rules of the language. The two main processes of insertion and elision deployed in color naming, and the consequent tonal changes shall be discussed in subsequent sections

6.2.1. Insertion in Ósósò

An additional sound, typically a vowel, is introduced into a word to resolve phonotactic violations or facilitate smoother articulation. In Ósósò, this insertion is frequently employed to adapt borrowed English words that contain consonant clusters or begin with onsetless syllables as both constraints are disallowed by the language's phonological rules. This

strategy ensures that borrowed forms conform to Ósósò's syllable structure, which favors CV (consonant-vowel) patterns and avoids complex onsets. The inserted vowel often serves as a phonological buffer, breaking up clusters or providing an onset where none exists. Such insertions are not random but follow predictable patterns based on the phonological environment and the need to preserve prosodic balance. For instance, when adapting the English word *blue*, which begins with a consonant cluster /bl/, Ósósò speakers will insert an epenthetic vowel between the consonants, yielding *bùlù*, to fit Ósósò's preferred syllable template. These insertion patterns show Ósósò prioritizes phonological harmony and articulatory ease, especially in the integration of foreign lexical items. To resolve phonotactic constraints and avoid onsetless syllables plus break up consonant clusters, the language typically inserts the high vowels /i/ or /u/ depending on roundedness feature. The table below illustrates how this insertion operates to the adapted borrowed English color terms in Ósósò.

Root Form	Insertion Type	Derived Form	Gloss
/kʌlə/	/i/-prothesis	/ikólò/	'color'
/blu:/	/i/ and /u/ insertion	/ibùlù/	'blue'
/pink/	/i/-insertion	/ipínki/	'pink'
/pɜ:pəl/	/i/and/u/-insertion	/ipópùlù	'purple'

Table 2- insertion pattern in Ósósò

The data presented in Table 2 illustrate the systematic application of vowel insertion in English loanwords. For instance, the root /kʌlə/ undergoes initial vowel insertion, resulting in /ikólò/. Similarly, the word 'blue' is adapted through both initial /i/ and medial /ù/ insertion, transforming it into /ibùlù/. These modifications are to satisfy Ósósò's requirement that prohibits consonant clusters and also disallows syllables from beginning with a consonant.

6.2.2. Elision in Ósósò

Elision is a phonological process whereby a vowel is removed to streamline pronunciation or enhance rhythmic fluency. It functions primarily as a boundary resolution strategy and does not typically apply within stems. Elision frequently occurs at morpheme boundaries, especially in compounding or rapid speech contexts. This pattern suggests that articulatory economy drives elision, particularly when adjacent vowels are phonetically similar or when tonal clarity can be maintained without redundancy. Legbeti (2022) observes that vowel elision in Ósósò is both systematic and predictable. In $V_1 + V_2$ sequences across word boundaries, the vowel preceding the boundary (V_1) is usually elided. This phenomenon is illustrated in the following example:

Data 2:

<i>Root form</i>		<i>by elision</i>		<i>derived form</i>	<i>gloss</i>	
a. Ìkóló	#	ìbúlù	→ Ìkólø	# → ìbúlù	Ìkólìbúlù	‘color blue’
V ₁	#	V ₂	ø	#	V ₂	Ìkólìbúlù

<i>Root form</i>		<i>by elision</i>		<i>derived form</i>	<i>gloss</i>
b. Ìkóló	#	ìpínkì	→ Ìkólø	# → ìpínkì	Ìkólìpínkì
V ₁	#	V ₂	ø	#	V ₂
					Ìkólìpínkì
					‘color pink’

As a color not yet significant enough to be named, across all age groups of Ósósò speakers interviewed, the color term *ìpínkì* ‘pink’ was interestingly realized without the expected epenthetic vowel that would typically resolve the consonant cluster /nk/ consistently. Given there are no syllabic nasals nor contrastive nasal vowels in Ósósò according to Legbeti (2021) and the language’s general avoidance of complex clusters, particularly in borrowed forms, this pattern presents a notable exception. The absence of vowel insertion in *ìpínkì* suggests either a lexical entrenchment aided by phonological tolerance specific to this lexical item or all items where a nasal consonant is followed by a plosive or it is a case of shift in phonotactic constraints influenced by frequent usage. Further investigation is needed to determine whether this reflects a broader trend in cluster accommodation or a secluded lexicalized exception within the domain of color terminology.

6.2.3. Cultural Metaphorical Perspective

As metaphors go, words or phrases are seen to be used in Ósósò Color to refer to something other than its direct or literal meaning based on some shared features or implicit similarities hence the language uses descriptive forms or phrases as shown table 4 below:

Ósósò Expression	Literal Meaning	Conceptual Metaphor	Color
àbí óbè	‘like leaf’	Vegetation	Green
àbí òzè	‘like blood’	Life giving Body Fluid	Wine
àbí èmwè	‘like ashes’	Material	Grey
àbí èkhè	‘like soil’	Cultural Object	brown

Table 4 – cultural metaphor and interpretation in Ósósò.

There is a documented link between color terms and elements such as plants, food, rituals, and the human body. Color perception is said to be influenced by ecological and culture with different cultures associating opposing meanings to same color hue sometimes. For instance, in Western cultures, white signifies Purity, innocence, weddings but in Eastern cultures (e.g., China, Japan), white signifies mourning, death, and funerals. This was expanded by Micheal and Usoro (2020:103),

in Western culture and religion, white is associated with purity and the presence of God, while black is linked to evil and the presence of the Devil. Red signifies fire and the flames of hell.

Within Nigeria, some traditions allow the use of white garments to be worn at funerals by the deceased family (usually to represent a celebration of the deceased’s life) but beyond mourning, white is also used to symbolizes purity and call to holiness of life especially during baptisms, ordinations, and naming ceremonies. By another metaphoric extension, a white cock presented by the groom’s family to the bride’s parents traditionally signifies the bride’s virginity, while a white flag serves as a

gesture of peace in times of war. On the other hand, red is commonly linked to danger. In Ósósò culture for instance, to ward off theft, particularly of crops like yams and fruits, or even livestock, a red cloth is often tied to the item in question. The use of red signifies a curse on anyone who steals or plucks fruit without permission, and the cost is the life-giving blood. In the olden days, oftentimes, the offender begins to swell, and without swift appeasement of the gods who were the cultural law enforcers, death may result. Modernization and Christianity has however dwarfed such cultural law enforcement.

Another culturally significant color among the Ósósò people is green. It is described as 'like leaf'. This color signifies fertility, fruitfulness or freshness. Traditionally, Ósósò people are hunters and farmers and despite the rocky topography, the interland is still used for vegetation with bountiful yields of great seeds or fruits occurring along with luscious greenery and this may have inspired associative connection. During the Òvbíkò female initiation rite, for example, the use of camwood pastes which is goldish and white powder pastes also conveys symbolic meanings of purity and transformation, but white reportedly marked spiritual affiliation with the water goddess. All these practices illustrate how color functions not only as a linguistic category but as a medium of cultural expression. In Ósósò therefore, some colors carrying deep symbolic meanings are:

- i. White: purity, peace, spirituality, virginity
- ii. Red: vitality, danger, ritual power, death
- iii. Black: mourning, mystery, ancestral reverence
- iv. Green: fertility, fruitfulness, freshness, growth and state of (un)ripeness

While there's no universally agreed-upon list of symbolic colors, literary scholars often highlight roughly 13 colors that consistently recur across different cultures and genres. The resemblance found in the literature of how colors are used symbolically like red for passion or love, gold for glory, or black for mystery cannot be mere coincidence. Interestingly, this work finds symbolic use of color in literature virtually mirrors the Ósósò tradition, with colors carrying similar layered meanings and cultural resonance. This striking parallel hints at a deeper, perhaps universal, connection between language, symbolism, and human perception which

needs more investigation. Table 5 below illustrates the extent to which color symbolism appears to transcend cultural boundaries.














Color	Common Symbolism in Literature
 Red	Passion, love, anger, violence
 Orange	Energy, creativity, warmth
 Yellow	Joy, cowardice, illness
 Green	Nature, envy, renewal
 Blue	Sadness, calm, depth
 Purple	Royalty, mystery, spirituality
 Black	Death, power, elegance
 White	Purity, innocence, peace
 Brown	Earthiness, stability, simplicity
 Gray	Aging, neutrality, ambiguity
 pink	Romance, youth, tenderness/female gender
 Silver	Modernity, clarity, coldness
 Gold	Wealth, success, divine light

Table 5: colors and their symbolism in literature.

6.2.4. Non-Significant Colors

As seen in Table 1, over a dozen color terms found in English have no direct equivalents in Ósósò. This gap in vocabulary doesn't suggest that Ósósò speakers are less able to perceive these colors. Rather, it reflects the absence of those colors in their everyday environment, and by extension, in their cultural worldview. The Ósósò color system is shaped more by what is ecologically present and culturally meaningful than by the kind of detailed color categories found in English with colors such as mauve, lavender, magenta, mint, olive, peach, and burgundy, often associated with stylistic or complex shades, not holding lexical significance in Ósósò. In contrast, perceptually similar shades like indigo are treated as semantic extensions of more familiar categories. For example, indigo is often described as *ìbúlú ó jẹ̀ wọ̀* ('blue that enters' or 'deep blue'), indicating its

conceptual alignment with blue. Rather than emphasizing abstract or aesthetic distinctions, the lexicon prioritizes what is functionally and socially meaningful. In this way, the Ósósò color system offers insight into how language and perception are shaped by environmental and cultural factors, revealing what a community considers worth naming

7. Conclusion

This paper has investigated the color naming system of the Ósósò community. It demonstrated how linguistic categorization is intimately tied to ecological realities and cultural symbolism. It showed that the Ósósò lexicon has a limited set of basic color terms, which are: *ófò* (white), *óbìbì* (black), *ólòlò* (red), and *èkpò* (yellow). Other colors, such as green, brown, wine, and sky-blue, are expressed through descriptive relativism that reflects a perceptual framework grounded in the land and daily life (e.g., *àbí óbè*, meaning 'like leaf'). Still others are borrowed from the English color lexicon and modified to comply with the phonological rules of Ósósò. Color also plays a significant role in some of the rituals carried out in the community.

The study further observed a shift in color terminology among younger Ósósò speakers, who are increasingly adopting English color terms due to education, religious influence, and exposure to modernity. The analysis explored the phonological adaptation strategy of these borrowed English terms, such as *ibulu* (blue) and *ipinki* (pink), examining how they are reshaped to align with the phonotactic rules of Ósósò. This provides insight into the language's capacity for integration and innovation. Sadly, this linguistic evolution highlights the dynamic nature of language and raises concerns about the gradual erosion of indigenous color terms among the Ósósò people.

In conclusion, the paper has demonstrated that color naming among the Ósósò people is based on three strategies: convention (lexical names), relativization (descriptive names), and borrowing (with resyllabification). Despite modernization, the transmission of the cultural meanings discussed has surprisingly remained constant. By documenting the linguistic and cultural perspectives of color in Ósósò, the study has contributed to broader discussions on language, culture, cognition, and color naming. It also underscored the urgency of preserving culturally embedded linguistic systems, given the imminent erosion following the adoption strategy deployed by the youth in the face of globalization.

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