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Motivations for personal naming among the Sukuma of Shinyanga, Tanzania

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This article examines Sukuma personal names by focusing on the factors which motivate their selection and bestowal on children. It argues that personal naming is systematic, and that it is carefully and consciously handled by the Sukuma-speaking community. In addition, the personal naming process is rule-governed, and its execution is influenced by certain factors which may vary or coincide among communities. The findings suggest that the choice of baby names among the Sukuma of Shinyanga is motivated by diverse factors, including the sex of the child, the manner and order of birth, circumstances at birth, parents' experiences, place and time of birth, seasons and events in a year, and national or global events. The motivations for baby naming in Sukuma not only point to the considerations that parents and/or name-givers make before selecting a name, but also provide important clues about their meanings. Consequently, understanding the motivations for baby naming draws us closer to knowing the meaning of names and the contexts or circumstances under which babies in Sukuma are named.

Introduction

Names and naming practices are linguistic and cultural aspects found in all human societies. Among the Sukuma (F.21) (Maho, 2009), personal names are assigned according to specific criteria, as is the case with several other communities. We are, for example, informed by Batoma (2020: 194) that 'names are semiotic strings that can be composed of language signs such as words and sentences, or they might mimic a sound such as in the case of onomatopoeia'. These signs represent meaning about people's lives which are only accessed by those who understand the language in which the signs are rooted. Personal names are regarded by Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000) as channels of communication for supporting human interactions. Consequently, every individual in any society across the world bears at least one name. In other words, all people in all societies bear names primarily as identity tags for which they are recognised and known. Personal names are significant in all societies and cultures (Ennin & Nkansah, 2016), and they are conceptualised by Mphande (2006) as tools people can use to know or talk about reality. The reality in question includes, but is not limited to, the people's beliefs, culture, ideology, religion, language, thought and philosophy. Thus, naming practices in most, if not all, African communities often reflect these realities in these communities. Igboin (2014) says that names in many African societies are reservoirs of memories of historical events, just as they represent personal reality or current family conditions, or echo the situation of birth.

Personal naming, the significant practice of bestowing or giving a name to a person as a symbol of permanent identity (Ngubane & Thabethe, 2013; Mutonhori, 2014; Viriri 2019), is an act that is handled with much care in Sukuma and in many African societies. The reason is that personal naming

in many African societies is associated with certain beliefs and spirituality of these societies. Moreover, African personal names are meaningful as they give important insights into various aspects of their givers and/or bearers (see Agyekum, 2006; Al-Zumor, 2009; Mapunda, 2014; Mutunda, 2016). Aspects like the circumstances at birth, people's beliefs, culture, ideology, religion, aspirations, language, thought and philosophy are reflected in personal names. It follows, therefore, that such an important cultural practice cannot be done haphazardly. It must be done systematically, and there must always be some motivation(s) or compelling reason(s) for a certain name choice and bestowal. Mutunda (2011: 21) argues that '[n]ames are rarely given to children randomly, but rather are carefully chosen by parents and relatives so as to reflect and reveal the social circumstances in which the baby is born'. This truism reflects fairly well, at least among African societies and the Sukuma society in particular.

Mutunda (2016) posits that during the selection of personal names, different factors are taken into consideration by different societies. This article examines the motivations for personal naming among the Sukuma of Shinyanga. The underlying thesis is that the naming of people is an act always motivated by certain factors. It is worth noting, however, that though the choice of personal names for newborns in every language or culture, especially in African societies, and the Sukuma community in particular, is always determined or motivated by certain factors, such motivations are not universal. Some of the factors may be shared across cultures, while others are culture-specific. When individual families share the same culture, the motivations for baby naming may not necessarily be the same. The truth of this resides in the fact that each family may have different experiences and circumstances prior to or during the birth of a child, and such experiences and circumstances are the immediate motivations for naming the baby.

Previous studies on personal naming in Africa attest fairly well to the argument about the dynamic nature of personal naming on the continent. For instance, in South Africa, De Klerk and Bosch (1996) examined the naming practices of three major language communities: Xhosa, Afrikaans, and English. Their study establishes that the reasons for name choices in these communities include commemorating important personalities, the circumstances at birth, hopes and wishes, religion, originality, politics, personal taste and tradition. Likewise, Suzman (1994) investigated the factors that influence the choice of personal names among the Zulu, and observed that names record several important events in the history of a family, their aspirations for continuing the family line, their happiness at having first a boy and then a girl, problems in the marriage, the birth of a child relatively late in life, and the mother's uncomfortable pregnancy.

In Nigeria, Ehineni (2019) reports that in the Yoruba community, the choice of personal names is motivated by factors such as family situations, birth circumstances, religion, profession and death situation. In Algeria, Azieb and Qudah (2018: 14) note that naming practices relate to aspects of religion, politics, family, history, culture, the musicality of the name and some other unspecified reasons. Moreover, in Ethiopia, Dideni (2021) argued that the social and cultural contexts and the economic circumstances into which a child is born determine the personal names that Dawro speakers select and bestow on their newborns. Furthermore, in Kenya, Malande (2011) observed that Lulogooli names originate from well-known good or bad phenomena such as poverty, locust invasions, divorce, death and the harvest.

In Zambia, Mutunda (2016: 78) observed that personal names among the Luvale are given to children based on 'the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child, social aspects of the family, hopes, traditional beliefs, and wishes for the child, or the expression of gratitude to a deity, and happiness and sufferings endured by the family'. Similarly, Lungu et al. (2022: 1) report that the bestowal of first names among the Namwanga people is determined by numerous factors: 'events or circumstances surrounding a child's birth such as social and ethical values; child's place, period, order, and manner of birth; expression of social caution and conflict; death; fertility; modern innovations; connotations of love, consolation, requests, and hope; and religion'.

In Tanzania, Buberwa (2017) studied the meaning and social circumstances behind Kiswahili personal name selection. She revealed that parents do not select Kiswahili names for their babies haphazardly. They always select names that mirror the social circumstances in which a child is born. The circumstances include the time of birth, the order of birth, parents' beliefs, the place of birth, the manner of birth, the parents' relationship with society, and the parents' expectations or wishes for their children. Msuya (2021) examines the criteria for naming and the meanings of personal names in the Chasu speech community. The paper reports that the Chasu speech community bestows names on children based on diverse criteria like birth circumstances, life experience, seasons, mannerisms, religious or cultural beliefs and physical appearance. All these factors are reflected in the kind of names Chasu parents bestow on their children. Regarding Sukuma personal names, a few studies

have been conducted. These studies have focused on the meaning embedded in personal names (Manyasa, 2009; Athanas, 2019; Shigini, 2020; Shigini & Mapunda, 2023a), the principles guiding personal naming practices (Shigini, 2023), and the morphology of personal names (Shigini & Mapunda, 2023b). This suggests that none of the available studies on Sukuma anthroponomastics addresses the motivations for baby naming.

Olatunji et al. (2015: 78) sum up the whole issue regarding the factors that motivate personal naming in African societies. They provide a general list of the factors that influence name choices and bestowal in Africa. The list comprises factors such as

belief in the individual spirit, belief in reincarnation, environment, social class, lineage system, ethnic affiliation, gender, day of the week, day of the month, time of the year, conditions of parents at birth, conditions of the child at birth, circumstances surrounding the birth, historical events, family occupation; family deity, family name, economic situation, etc.

The choice and bestowal of personal names on children by parents and/or name-givers in African societies generally revolve around these motivations. However, it is obvious from these previous studies that the motivations for personal naming are diverse across languages and cultures, though some of them may be shared between languages or cultures. It is for this reason that the present article investigates the motivations for baby naming in Sukuma.

It can be deduced from all these studies that the motivations for naming are rooted in whatever transpires in a particular community. Correspondingly, the social, political, cultural and economic contexts at a national level and the family situation at a local level vary significantly between communities and families. Since what transpires in one community may not necessarily be the same in the others, the difference or similarity is always mirrored in the names given to children between distinct communities or families. The fact that the motivations for personal naming are diverse across cultures or communities, and that studies on the same do not exist in Sukuma, leaves a question about what factors motivate the choice of names among the Sukuma. The current article examines the motivations for baby naming in Sukuma. Understanding the motivations for the choice of personal names in Sukuma is crucial in deciphering the diverse contexts in which names are selected and bestowed on children, and their meanings.

Theoretical perspective

This study is based on the assumptions of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) which was developed by Halliday in the 1960s, and which has been updated over the years (Davies, 2014). Since its development, SFL has been used in related fields such as discourse analysis, social semiotics and lexico-grammar. SFL as a theory views language as an important tool in creating meanings in a particular context. The theory explores how language choices echo and shape social structures, stressing the role of context and communicative purposes in linguistic analysis. Language, as viewed by Eggins (2004), is a network of interrelated systems of meaning that permit interlocutors to select when in communication. This theory adopts a functional approach.

Accordingly, Shonhayi (2019) argues that structure and form are undeniably pointless without the functional dimension of language. The major claim of SFL is that language functions as a system of choices, and the name bestowal process in Sukuma hinges upon this. Parents or name-givers always have a number of name choices at their disposal, but arrive at a certain name having considered a number of factors. This article looks at this assumption in an attempt to scrutinise the various motivations that drive name choices among the Sukuma of Shinyanga. Put differently, SFL theory offers a framework under which name choices by parents or name-givers are made. SFL theory further hypothesises that people's economic and social systems influence both their language and choices. This entails that language speakers, like the Sukuma, make language choices under the constraints of the semantic stock drawn from their personal and/or cultural experiences. Thus, SFL theory was considered adequate and relevant as the base for the inquiry into the motivations for name selection and bestowal among speakers of Kemunasukuma.

Material and methods

This study adopts a qualitative research approach in both the collection and analysis of data. Qualitative research methods, according to Mack et al. (2005), are beneficial in gathering and analysing cultural-specific data concerning the opinions, values and social settings of a particular society. The data collected was inherently textual (personal names). The study was conducted in Tanzania in the Shinyanga Region, mainly in Shinyanga Rural District, and specifically in the Imesela ward in three villages: Nyika, Imesela, and Maskati. The data were collected from a sample of 12 older, competent and reliable Kemunasukuma native speakers of either sex (50 years old and older) selected from these villages. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with four elders from each of the villages were conducted between October and November 2022. The choice of participants was based on the premise that they were native speakers of Kemunasukuma who were born and dwell in villages where the dialect is spoken. By virtue of their age, these participants were considered to have knowledge about typical Kemunasukuma personal names and Sukuma naming practices in general. The interviews were the method used for data collection in this study. The method was used because Sukuma personal names in general and Kemunasukuma names in particular are still not officially documented. Moreover, introspection was employed to supplement the data collected through interviews as the first author of this article is a competent native speaker of Sukuma. The collected personal names were grouped into themes that reflect the various motivations for baby naming in the community under study.

Results and discussion

Personal naming is a systematic activity that is carefully handled in many African societies and Sukuma society in particular. It is rule-governed and its execution is influenced by diverse factors which, in most cases, contrast between cultures and/or societies, yet a few of them coincide (see

Mandende, 2009). The Sukuma are always alert to what occurs around them, and they would wish to document it through the names they select and bestow on their newborn children. The Sukuma, like many African communities, were an oral-based society in which knowledge was transmitted by word of mouth. They used personal names as archives for storing all the significant truths about their daily activities and history; a tendency that still exists today. Mandende (2009: 22) posits that names that children are given are 'like short stories in most African traditional societies'. Stories whether short or long are usually composed creatively. Therefore, names, as short stories, are not randomly given or assigned to newborns; there are always significant factors that are considered before names are selected and bestowed on children.

Motivations for baby naming in Sukuma

Among the Yoruba speakers of Nigeria, there is a well-known maxim that says: *ilé làá wò kató sọ ọmọlórúko* which means 'the home's condition determines a child's name'. This maxim underscores the significance of the social and/or circumstantial context when naming a child (see Ehineni, 2019). Put differently, personal names are not randomly selected and bestowed on children; their selection is informed by different sociocultural considerations which include whatever transpired before and during the child's birth. On that note, the process of name selection and bestowal on newborn babies among the Sukuma is motivated by factors such as the sex of the child, time of birth, place of birth, manner of birth, circumstances at birth, parents' behaviours, parents' expectations/wishes, parents' experiences, seasons and events in the year, flora and fauna, the child's appearance and/or behaviour at birth, and national or global events.

Sex of a child

The sex of a child is crucial in determining the name choices (Asheli, 2017; Shonhayi, 2019; Viriri, 2019). Perhaps the first thing that comes into the minds of parents and/or name-givers during name selection is the sex of the child that is to be named (Agyekum, 2006; Viriri, 2019). Just as sex differentiates men and women, some names as part of human identity indicate the sex of their bearers. It is very unusual to find, for example, a baby boy named Josephine and a baby girl named Joseph in English. Likewise, babies in Sukuma are named according to their sex; a baby boy is given a name that befits him as a boy, and so does a baby girl.

However, though the names given may be sex-differentiating, the semantics of such names may be shared if they are derived from a single source. For example: a baby born on a rainy day is named *Kaβula* (female) or *Maβula* (male); *Dɪɪyu* (female) or *Kasana* (male), for a baby born in the morning; *Lɪɪmi* (female) or *Malɪɪmi* (male), for a baby born in the afternoon; *Mhindi* (female), for a baby born in the evening; and *Njiku* (female) or *Majiku* (male), for a baby born at night. Also, the baby whose mother died shortly after giving birth is named *Kalekwa* (female) or *Mlekwa* (male); *Nyanzala* (female) or *Mayala* (male) for a baby born during starvation; and *Mayige* (male) or *Nyanjige* (female) for a baby born when locusts invaded the community. It is worth noting that, among the Sukuma, there are personal

names that are unisex (e.g. *Kulwa* 'firstborn twin', *Dotto* 'second-born twin', *Kashinje* 'legs first', *Mhoja* 'comforter', *Shija* 'spare', *Njile* 'goer', etc.), male personal names (e.g. *Masanja* 'who gathers people', *Maganga* 'of herbs', *Malale* 'fields/farms', *Katemi* 'ruler/chief', *Nyanda* 'boy', etc.), and female names (e.g. *Nshoma* 'warn', *Kang'wa* 'hare', *Buholo* 'dull', *Ng'washu* 'of excrete', *Milembe* 'deceiver', etc.). Unisex names, in most cases, share the same meaning, while those which strictly belong to a certain sex have distinct meanings.

Time and place of birth

The Sukuma also name their children according to the time and place of birth. This tradition is not unique to Sukuma, but is also found in numerous African societies. For example, Mutunda (2016) and Hussen (2018) report that among the factors influencing naming among the Luvale and Oromoo is the time or day a child is born. Similarly, Asheli (2017) is of the view that the Kuria and Iraqw name their children based on the time of birth. Agyekum (2006: 219) uses the words 'temporonyms' and 'anthro-toponyms' to refer to names that relate to the time and place of birth.

With respect to 'temporonyms', in Sukuma, the day is divided into five time blocks: *dizyu* 'early morning', *kasana* 'late morning', *lizimi/likula* 'afternoon/lunchtime', *mhindi* 'evening', and *βujiku* 'night'. Depending on the time a child is born, they may be given a name that relates to one of these times. For instance, a child born early in the morning or late in the morning is named *Dizyu* or *Kasana* respectively; one born in the afternoon or during lunchtime may be named *Lizimi*, *Malizimi*, *Lizimihagati*, or *Likula*; one born in the evening is named *Mhindi*; and one born at night may be named *Njiku*, *Majiku*, or *βujiku*. For children born during the night, names such as *Gizti* 'dark', *Masonda* 'stars', and *Ng'weeji* 'moon' may also be bestowed on them.

As already mentioned, the place of birth is also considered in name selection in Sukuma. For example, a child born on the road or path is named *Nyanzila* (derived from *nzila* 'path') or *Mayila* 'paths'; or when on a journey is named *Lugendo* (or simply *Gendo*). Moreover, *Geeni* 'foreign' or *Mageni/βageni* 'guests' is given to a child born while their mother or father was not in the home village. In short, names like *Lugutu* 'cowshed', *Malale/Matongo* 'maize farms', *Masaka* 'bushes', *Maβuga/Malago* 'paddy farms', *Kalwinzizi/Luzwizilo* 'wellspring', and *Kanyanza/Inyanza* 'small lake/big lake' are bestowed on children born in or near those places. However, it should be noted that most of the names given here are predominantly male names. This suggests that the considerations for selecting names for children also varies depending on sex, that is, names for female children are selected with more care and consideration than those for male children. The participants mentioned folk theory as the reason for the observed variability. There is a widespread folk theory among the Sukuma that a female child should be exemplary and attractive in all senses, including her name. It also reveals why the Sukuma have a famous song with the words: *kuβyala ng'wana nkizima akwilolelwa βanhu kaganda kaganda* 'Giving birth to a female child will be watched by people in groups'.

Manner and order of birth

The way children come to see the daylight and the order in which they are born into the family influence name choices in Sukuma and many African societies. In Sukuma, as also observed by Asheli (2017) and Mutunda (2016) among the Kuria and Luvale, the names of first- and lastborn children are fixed, that is, they are readily available. For example, the firstborn child is named *Tangi* 'one who comes first/before others'. The Sukuma also refer to this child by a phrase, *jilugula βula* which means 'one who opens the womb'. The lastborn child is named *Kwangulija* (or *Kwangu*, for short) 'one who comes last/scours the womb'. This child (lastborn) is sometimes referred to by a Sukuma phrase, *jilaga βula* which means 'one who bids farewell to the womb'. Thus, the lastborn child is sometimes called *Walaga*.

Moreover, with respect to the order of birth, the birth of twins, *maβasa* (sing. *izasa*), in Sukuma is connected with divine powers. This makes them respected and feared and they are handled with care. Mutunda (2016: 79) reports that twins among the Luvale 'are not viewed with disfavour, rather they are regarded as miraculous gifts from the ancestors; they are welcomed and cherished'. The same is true among the Sukuma. Mutunda adds further that 'the arrival of twins in a family indicates that the ancestral spirits are happy and proud about the parents'. This is why the Sukuma cherish and regard twins as double blessings from *Kuβe* 'God'. Apart from having fixed names for first- and lastborn children, the Sukuma also have fixed names for twins. This is also true in many African societies, as Mutunda (2016) also had the same observation among the Luvale. In Sukuma, the firstborn twin, regardless of sex, is named *Kulwa*, and the second-born twin is named *Doto* (or *Doi*, for short). The Sukuma also respect and regard the child who is born abnormally, that is, born legs first. This child, irrespective of its sex, is named *Kashinje* (or *Shinje*, for short). Due to the respect accorded to twins, the birth of twin children resets the whole trend of naming other children in the family. For example, the child who was born before the twins, despite having another name, is renamed *Kaβika*; the child who follows immediately after twins is named *Shija* 'spare'; then *Mhoja* 'comforter', *Kamuli* 'light giver', and *Kasanda* 'chaser' in that order. Furthermore, the child who is born normally (face down/head first) is named *βundala* or *Munde*. Additionally, premature births are common in all societies and may be described differently. In Sukuma, children who are born prematurely may be named *Ndeβile* 'incomplete', *Kaβisi/βizisi* 'unripe', or *Kanagana* 'unripe'.

Circumstances at birth

According to Mutunda (2016), the name selection is also determined by the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child. It is a common determinant for naming children in many African societies (Olatunji et al., 2015). Agyekum (2006) says that circumstances (prenatal and antenatal) and social contexts (the family situation/condition) during the birth of a child may compel the parents and/or name-givers to give a name X but not Y. Parents or name-givers are always cognisant of everything that transpires in the family or community at the time children are born, or during pregnancy. As a result, the names given to children reflect the circumstances that were prevalent during pregnancy.

or at the child's birth. The Sukuma, like other African societies, select names for their children based on different circumstances. For example, if a mother dies shortly after giving birth, the surviving child is named *Kalekwa/Mlekwa* 'one who is abandoned'. *Yombo/Mayombo* 'quarrels' is a name for a child whose birth occurred shortly after parents had some misunderstanding, and *Lukuβa/Nkuβa* 'thunder' is a name for a child whose birth was preceded or coincided with thunder and lightning. If a child is born soon after the demise of a family member, it is named *Mujizka/Miziki* 'one who buries', derived from the verb *jizka/βizka* 'bury'. The child may also be named *Shilizlo* 'mourning', which is derived from the verb *Izla* 'cry' or *Kayange/Iyanga* 'mourning'. This trend of naming children is also reported among the Maasai, Iraqw, and Kuria (Asheli, 2017), Gogo (Chipalo, 2019), Akan (Agyekum, 2006), Vatsonga (Chauke, 2015), Oromoo (Hussen, 2018) and Luvale (Mutunda, 2016), though the circumstances may differ across families or communities.

Parents' behaviour

Among the Sukuma, grandparents (mostly paternal) or the grandparents' relatives hold a central role in the naming of children. The grandparents in particular are respectable figures in whom the powers and mandate of conferring names on newborn children are vested. This is based on the belief that by virtue of their age grandparents understand well the family lineage or the trend that naming follows. In that respect, grandparents, upon observing the behaviour of the mother during pregnancy or at birth, use these benchmarks for bestowing names on the newborns. Children may be given names like *Iβengwe* 'disrespect', *Nsonganya* 'instigator', *Maliganya* 'deceitful', *Mayombi or Nyombi* 'talkative', *Lutaja* 'misleading', *Kayeji* 'wanderer', *βulemela* 'naughty', *Lukenagula* 'destructive', and *Malonja* 'caring'. These names clearly depict different behaviours shown by the mother or both parents during gestation, at birth, or in their lives in general. Chauke (2015) supports this by commenting that children in Vatsonga are named depending on the behaviour of the mother, be it good or bad. Moreover, names derived from the behaviours of parents are also reported by Charwi (2019) and Msuya (2021) in the Datooga and Chasu communities respectively.

Parents' experiences

Parents' experiences in their lives or prior to having a child are yet another motivation for personal names and naming (Msuya, 2021). The experiences endured by parents and/or name-givers may be enshrined in the names that are bestowed on children. The experience may be pleasant or unpleasant, and may include, but not be limited to, suffering, being ignored or ridiculed, poverty, lack of clothes, starvation, delay in having a child, loss of other children, etc. For example, in Sukuma, the name *Makoye* 'problems/suffering' suggests and reflects the situation parents were going through prior to or after the child's birth. Sometime, the family may experience a difficult economic situation prior to and/or after the child's birth; the child born in such a situation is named *βuhaβi* 'poverty', or *Kahaβi/Haβi* 'poor'. Moreover, the names *βuzuka* 'lack of clothing', *Maduhu* 'empty' or *Dalali* 'nothing', *Ndalahwa* 'disrespected', *Kusekwa* or *Kaseko* 'ridiculed', *βugumba*

'barrenness', *Kulindwa/Shilinde* 'one who was awaited', *βusungu* 'labour pangs', and *Nengo* 'conception-helping herbs' are all suggestive of different experiences in life. Apart from the Sukuma, other communities like the Akan (Agyekum, 2006), Gogo (Chipalo, 2019), Yoruba (Ehineni, 2019) and Chasu (Msuya, 2021) also assign names to children based on parents' experiences.

Parents' expectations or wishes

The name selection and bestowal process among the Sukuma is also influenced by the expectations or wishes parents have for themselves, their children and the community in general. Such names, as Asheli (2017) observed, are analogous to prayers. Asheli (2017) reveals that the Maasai and Iraqw bestow names on their children that communicate the parents' wishes or expectations. Similarly, Chipalo (2019) reports that Gogo personal names carry within them parents' wishes or prayers for the named children. The same is also reported by Chauke (2015), Mutunda (2016) and Hussen (2018) among the Vatsonga, Luvale and Oromoo respectively. This shows that the naming of children based on the wishes of parents is not unique to Sukuma, but is a common practice in many African societies.

Sukuma parents and/or name-givers understand and believe names are not empty vessels, but contain magic powers that can affect the name-bearer's fate. This entails that naming is thus a way of expressing parents' beliefs in the names' spiritual powers; a name can impact the destiny of its bearer. Bestowing a child with a good name means conferring on the named child the good things or attributes the name carries. In that regard, it is obvious that parents do not bestow names on their children arbitrarily, but rather do so keenly and consciously. This may entail bestowing their children with names related to wishes or expectations through which the parents express what they wished to be or achieve in their lives. They wish their children to be or to achieve for themselves or society what the parents could not.

Based on these points, the Sukuma select and bestow names on their children like *Jilangi or Nangi* 'teacher', *Nsaβi* 'rich person', *Kasomi or Nsomi* 'educated person', *Kafumu/Nfumu* 'traditional healer', *Nkwaβi* 'wealth collector', *Kafula/Nfula* 'kindhearted person', and *Kalimi/Kalima* 'farmer'. It is evident from these examples that parents always have good intentions for their children; they always wish for their children to be successful, educated and good people in which the family or nation finds pride. Parents always wish or expect their children to be exemplary; people whom others can emulate in life. The argument put forward here is that the personal names that relate to parents' expectations or wishes are like prayers for achievement.

Child's appearance or behaviour at birth

The child's appearance or behaviour at birth is also a strong factor, enough to influence the naming process. It is commonly appreciated that children are born with distinct physical appearances and behaviours: tender skin, being lightweight, petite, or calm. The personal names that describe the appearance and behaviour may point to the newborn baby or the former bearer of the name as the tendency of naming children after departed or living

relatives is pervasive among the Sukuma. Names like *Kabuhu* 'lightweight', *Ngandu* 'slim/skinny', *Kasheku* 'soft skinned', *Kalyehu* 'calm' or *Kanogu* 'polite', and *Ndohele* 'petite' are good examples of personal names that describe the child's physical appearance or behaviour at birth. The tendency of naming children based on their physical appearance or behaviour at birth is not unique to the Sukuma. It is also observed among the Luvale (Mutunda, 2016), Maasai and Iraqw (Asheli, 2017), Datooga (Charwi, 2019) and Chasu (Msuya, 2021). Additionally, while naming children based on their skin colour is common among the Luvale (Mutunda, 2016) and Maasai and Iraqw (Asheli, 2017), it is absent among the Sukuma.

Prominent flora and fauna

Some of the names bestowed upon children are originally derived from flora and fauna (see Agyekum, 2006). Parents and/or name-givers in Sukuma give their newborn children flora and fauna-related names. In assigning such names to children, the issue of prominence or significance takes a central role. As such, it is only the flora and fauna that are prominent or significant to the Sukuma culture or at birth that are considered during name selection. Thus, every such personal name profiles only one flower or animal that stood out more than the others. In Sukuma, personal names like *Shimba* 'lion', *Kaβogo* 'buffalo', *Kasuβi* 'leopard', *Maβiti* 'hyena', *Nshishi* 'tamarind tree', *Kasanzu* 'thorn tree', *Ng'wandu* 'baobab', and *Gembe* 'mahogany' are good examples of names from flora and fauna. This finding is similar to the finding by Asheli (2017), who noted that names relating to flora and fauna are also common among the Kuria and Iraqw. The assigning of such names, especially those that relate to fauna, in these communities follows that either a particular animal appeared in the village, was killed, or invaded the village at the time a child was born. However, Agyekum (2006: 222) argues that in naming children with such names, 'it is their physical structures that are compared'. This implies that parents and/or name-givers use these kinds of names metaphorically. Furthermore, the use of names related to flora and fauna suggests that people in Africa have been engaged in animal trapping and hunting activities for a long time.

Historically, the Sukuma and many other African societies practised hunting and solely depended on plants for their livelihood as a source of energy. Different wild animals were hunted, trapped, and killed for food, medicinal needs, and in defence of domestic animals (cows, goats, sheep, etc.) from predators (lions, hyenas, leopards, etc.), or to defend crops from destructive animals like elephants. As a common practice in Africa, the Sukuma and many African societies depended, and still depend, on plants for traditional medicine, energy, or other uses.

Seasons and events in a year

The seasons in a year and the events associated with these seasons are benchmarks for personal naming not only in Sukuma, but also in many other societies. Different communities use the seasons and events in the year as benchmarks for naming children (see Chauke, 2015; Mutunda, 2016; Asheli, 2017; Charwi, 2019; Chipalo, 2019; Msuya, 2021). In the Sukuma speech community,

the name *Shidiku* 'rainy season' is given to a child whose birth happened during that period. The other personal name relating to the rainy season or a rainy day is *Maβula* or *Kaβula* 'rain'. *Malunde* 'clouds' is a name given to a baby born on a cloudy day. Also, the Sukuma name their children based on the different activities taking place in a specific season. For example, during the rainy season, the Sukuma practise crop cultivation which takes place in some stages: *Isenga* 'farm clearing', *ilima* 'ploughing', *ihamba* 'planting', *ngese* 'weeding', and *igesha* 'harvesting'. Such farming stages or activities translate into personal names: *Masenga*, *Malima*, *Kahamba*, *Magese*, and *Magesa* respectively. *Lunyili* 'cold', *Manyilizu* 'of cold', and *Kaβeho* 'mild cold' are names relating to the cold season; and *Manota* 'thirsty' relates to the dry season.

Memorable national or global events

National or global events which include natural disasters like hunger, drought, floods, pests and pandemics influence naming practices among the Sukuma. As Mandende (2009) considers personal names to be comparable to short stories, the Sukuma document the memorable events that inflict pain or suffering in their lives. Natural disasters are deadly, and thousands of people's lives are lost. Therefore, in Sukuma, hunger-related memories and stories are entrenched in the names *Mayala* 'hunger' or *Nyanzala* 'of hunger'; drought-related memories are echoed in the names *Ng'hamo* 'drought' and *Manota* 'thirsty'; the name *Kuβoja* or *Kaβoja* 'cause to rot' echoes flood-related memories; while pandemic-related memories are fused in the names *Kaswende* 'syphilis' or *Lumala* 'the finisher'. Chipalo (2019) notes that Gogo speakers use personal names to record or recall memories of past events, like the Sukuma. Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000) and Chauke (2015) agree that personal names give insights, and reflect important events in people's lives. It is thus common to name children based on a natural calamity that occurred coincidentally with the children's birth (Mutunda, 2016).

Discussion

As previously explained, SFL theory is premised on the assumption that language functions as a system of choices, and that people's economic and social systems influence both their language and choices. Reflecting on the theory in question, it is apparent that personal naming is a deliberate and conscious process constrained by the diverse considerations that parents and/or name-givers make before arriving at a particular name selection. Mutunda (2011: 21) says that 'names are rarely given to children randomly, but rather are carefully chosen by parents and relatives to reflect and reveal the social circumstances in which the baby is born'. He then concludes that 'sociocultural factors play a major role in the selection and bestowal of personal names'. The motivations for name choices presented in this article undeniably point to the diverse considerations on which parents' name selections in Sukuma are grounded. Parents and/or name-givers may have a large stock of names from which to choose names for the newborn children, but the choice depends to a large degree on the sociocultural experiences of the parents

and the message they intend to communicate through the names they give to their children. The factors presented in this article also point to the fact that the child's sex, despite being the first aspect to consider in name selection, is not the only determinant in the name choice; the process is influenced by many other factors.

Furthermore, based on what has been presented, it goes without saying that the motivations for name selection are numerous and some of them appear to be shared between languages, while others seem to be only unique to particular languages or communities. For example, one of the factors that motivates name choices in Sukuma is the seasons and the events in the year. This factor is also reported by Chauke (2015), Mutunda (2016), Asheli (2017), Charwi (2019), Chipalo (2019), and Msuya (2021) among the Vatsonga, Luvale, Kuria, Iraqw, Datooga, Gogo, and Chasu respectively. This reveals that seasons and events in the year are crucial and notable aspects of people's lives that are worth recording. Similarly, the circumstances at birth influence the choice of names in Sukuma and have also been observed by other scholars among the Maasai, Iraqw, and Kuria (Asheli, 2017), among many others, though the circumstances under which children are named may vary significantly across families and communities. However, whereas Asheli (2017) reports the baby's appearance (in terms of skin colour) can influence naming among the Iraqw and Maasai, the current study reports on the same aspect but with some variability: the body size, mass and behaviour of the baby at birth influence name selection. As already mentioned, the motivations for naming are rooted in whatever transpires in a particular community. Likewise, the social, political, cultural and economic context at a national level and the family situation at a local level vary among families and communities.

Conclusion

This article investigates the motivations for baby naming among the Sukuma. We pinpoint that personal naming practices among the Sukuma are not done haphazardly, but follow some vital considerations that are made by parents and/or name-givers before a personal name is selected and bestowed on a child. This demonstrates that personal naming in Kemunasukuma is motivated by many factors which include circumstances before or during the child's birth, parents' experiences, the seasons and events in a year, and national or global events. The present article is a contribution to the study of the Sukuma anthroponomastics, particularly on the factors or motivations for personal naming. The motivations for baby naming in Sukuma not only point to the considerations that parents and/or name-givers make before selecting a name, but also provide important clues about their meanings. It is thus argued, in this article, that understanding the motivations for baby naming draws us some steps closer to knowing the meanings of personal names and the contexts or circumstances under which children in Sukuma are named.

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