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Morphosemantic Analysis of Oromo Personal Names

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Abstract:

A morphosemantics analysis of Oromo personal names was examined in order to show the Oromo norms and values as expressed in their naming pattern. A sample of 110 samples of 128 names for both male and female were used for the analysis. The data was derived from native speakers of Oromo and lists of Oromo students' names that come to attend Haramaya University, Department of Oromo language and Literature. Qualitative research design was used to analyze the data. The purpose of this study was to determine the structure and meaning of Oromo personal names. The objective of this paper is to describe features of the Oromo Personal names as a subcategory of word. In this article, morphological features, semantic interpretations and referential meaning of Oromo personal names are analyzed. The finding indicates that Oromo personal names are derived from nouns, adjectives, pronouns and verbs. It was also found that suffixes that are attached to the names are gender indicative marking morphemes. Oromo personal names have meaning. The meanings could be descriptive, associative or referential meaning.

Keywords: *Oromo personal names, morphological analysis, gender marker, semantic analysis and referential meaning*

1. Introduction

Ethiopia consists of a number of nations and nationalities or ethnic backgrounds and ways of life. The Oromo people are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia and account for 50-60% of the population of the Ethiopian Empire (Tilahun, 1992). According to the 2007 Ethiopian national population census, 36.7% of the Ethiopian populations are Oromos and 33.8% of them speak Oromo language as native speakers. Highlighting this, Gada Malba (1988) states Oromo people are one of the Cushitic speaking societies in East Africa who are mainly found in Ethiopia, in parts of Kenya and Somalia. Therefore, Oromo language is a Cushitic language spoken in most parts of Ethiopian empire and northern Kenya. It is considered one of the five most widely spoken languages in Africa (Gragg, 1982). The Oromo language has very rich vocabulary and it is the third most widely spoken language in Africa surpassed only by Arabic and Hausa (Gadaa, 1988; Hordofa, 2001; Mahdi Hamid, 1995). This language is grouped under the Afro-asiatic language family. So Afan Oromo or Oromo language is grouped along with Afar, Somali, Saho and other East Cushitic languages.

Afan Oromo is spoken as a native language (L1-first language) in one of the nine administrative regional states in Ethiopia called Oromia National Regional State. This regional state has 18 administrative zones: East Wollega, West Wolegga, Kelem Wolegga, Horo Guduru Wallaggaa, East Showa, West Showa, North Showa, South-West Showa, Finfine Zuria zones, East Arsi, West Arsi, Jimma, Ilu Ababora, East Hararghe, West Hararghe, Guji zone, Borana, and Bale Zone.

Although a considerable amount of literature has been published on Oromo language, little has been written on the morphosemantics of Oromo personal names. Besides, there has been relatively little literature published on meaning, structure and forms of Oromo Personal names. Thus, this study builds some concept on the morphosemantics of Oromo personal names.

2. Statement of the Problem

The study of names is referred to as onomastics or onomatology. It is essential to human existence in African people's culture in general and Oromo people's culture in particular, where people value culture, language and communication. Anthroponomy is the study of personal names and is related with broad disciplines of genealogy, sociology and anthropology. Anthroponomy is a subdiscipline of onomastics which deals with the study of proper names including their forms and use (Algeo, 1992:727; Crystal, 1999). Onomastics is a branch of semantics that studies etymology of proper names (Crystal, 1999). The issue of name is a multidisciplinary field which attracts the attention of philosophers, linguists, and anthropologists. Thus, personal names can be analyzed by combining philosophical, linguistical, and anthropological frameworks.

Personal names are indicators of the patterns of society's social and cultural organizations and world view. They give important insights about categorization of the new-born infant: sex, background, social group, and family or name giver (Alford, 1993:268). Oromo Personal names serve as a communication tool and storehouse for the culture and history of the Oromo society (Tesfaye, 2011). As personal names form a special group within the vocabulary of a language, they obey most phonological, morphological,

syntactic, orthographic and semantic rules. So, naming is a specific linguistic act, intimately linked with values, traditions, hopes, fears and events in people's lives. Names reveal the many preferences of their owners (or givers) in terms of real life objects, actions, features and beliefs (Rosenhouse, 2002).

A personal name in this study refers to a name given to a baby after birth which identifies him/her as an individual. Such kinds of names can be found in all languages of the world (Ghaleb AL-Zumor, 2009:15). Personal names indicate a social structure which makes reference to some important features of the name giver's life (Suzman, 1994:259). Brennen (2000: 142) explains that personal names show a particular linguistic act which is connected to values, traditions, hopes, fears, and conditions in a society. This may suggest that people express their fortune, failure, wishes, aspiration, hopes, fears, views, and life styles via the name they give to a baby. Thus, a personal name is one of the important linguistic media for the transmission of the people's traditional heritage since names and naming practices can best be understood in the context of existing cultures and traditions. There is nexus between names and the socio-cultural life of a people. Names, therefore, relate with other parts of culture. They are marks of identity, solidarity and social cohesion. In Ethiopia, for instance, it is easy to identify an individual in one ethnic group from other through his/her names possibly define the concept of identity, whether individual or group identity. In addition, Zelealem (2003:82) states that personal names have semantic content and reference which are highly tied to the socio-economic and political situation of the society in which a baby is born. This implies that personal names have meaning which is derived from content words. Oromo personal names may have meaning which is morphologically motivated. This study, therefore, investigated the morphosemantics of Oromo personal names.

3. Morphological Analysis of Oromo Personal Names

This section deals with the word category from which Oromo personal names are derived and the gender distinction morpheme that is added to derive Oromo personal names both masculine and feminine.

Morphological analysis is an attempt made to capture the structure of language at the word level or concerned with the 'forms of words' (Matthew, 2000). Morphology has its origin in Goethe according to Lyons (1968:195) as cited in Agbedo (2000), and it was first used in the study of the 'forms' of living organisms in biology (Yule, 2009). However, many Oromos, the focus group of this study, are unaware of the meaning and structure of their personal names.

Morphology deals with how different word categories are composed, i.e. how morphemes are arranged during the developmental stage of a word. If the morphemes are poorly arranged, that particular word will lack recognizable meaning in that specific language. Personal names are nouns, and by virtue of the fact that they are made up of meaningful sequences of sound (morphemes) which carry meaning. A root morpheme is that important part of a word which carries the basic meaning. It is the last unit of the word which remains when the word has been stripped off all its affixes. Words are constituted of prefixes, roots and suffixes. It is through these affixes that words become meaningful (Bonvillain, 1999; Fromkin & Rodman, 1993; Kosch, 2006; Rankhododo, 1999; Guma, 2001; Haspelmath, 2002). These scholars define a morpheme as the smallest unit/constituent of a word that cannot be further analyzed or broken down. This indicates morphemes play a central role in assigning meanings to words.

It is difficult to devise the naming process without the use of language as a means of communication, especially among Oromos. Naming is part of the language and culture. Whenever morphemes are put together to produce a new word, this new word is carefully coined to carry the message transmitted by the name-giver. In this case, the feelings and intentions of the name-giver are immediately revealed through the name. When the morphemes are combined together to form a word, be it a verb, adjective, noun, or pronoun, they follow a particular pattern. Haspelmath (2002) describes morphemes as morphological atoms, the ultimate elements of morphological analysis.

Morphemes such as prefixes and suffixes, when affixed to a root, modify the meaning of the root in terms of class, gender, place, and time and word category. These suggest that morphemes can also be regarded as meaning molders. When Oromo personal names are closely analyzed, one discovers that they are derived from different word categories; namely: verb, nouns, pronouns and adjectives. The combination of these different word categories during the formation of personal names sometimes not only reflects issues of social/national importance but also generates gender-related personal names.

4. Personal Names Derived from the Verb Base

Verb stems carry the meaning of the sentence. They show the action carried out by the subject of the sentence. The verb stem consists of the root and verb suffix. The important element of the verb stem is the root because the meaning of the verb stem is assigned by the root. Root is the key element to which other parts of the word are added (Coates, 1999:27).

Most of the Oromo personal names that fall into this category reflect the feelings of the name-giver, and how he/she has been treated by his/her relatives. For instance, *Beekuu* (v) is a verb which means to know. *Beekaa* is personal name. *Beek-* is root word and *-aa* is the suffix added to the verb. It further indicates masculine gender. When *-tuu* is added to the base word *beek-* it gives a name *Beektuu*. In this name *-tuu* is a feminine gender indicator. See the following table

Personal name	Gloss	Base/Root	Suffix	Gender
Toluu	she who is to be kind	tol-	-tuu	female
Tolaa	to be kind	tol-	-aa	male
Tolasaa	His kindidness	tol-	-isaa	male
Lataa	One who grows/multiplies	Lat-	-aa	male
Lattuu			-tuu	female
Latii			-ii	female
Latjiisaa	Made him multiply	Lat(tj)-	-is-aa	male
Lalisaa	One who expands/grows	Lalis-	-aa	male
Lalisee			-ee	female
Lalistuu			-tuu	female
Beekaa	Wise/knowledgeable	Beek-	-aa	male
Beektuu	Wise/knowledgeable		-tuu	Female
beekan	(They) have known		-an	male

Gammadee	to be happy	gammad-	-ee	female
Gammannee	We became happy	Gamma(n)-	-nee	female
Gammattuu	Happiness	Gammatt-	-uu	male
Gammattjis	Make happy	Gammatt-	-is	male
Gammattjiiftuu	One who make happy	Gammatt(tj)-	-tuu	female
gammattjisaa	One who make happy	Gammattjis-	-aa	male

Table1: Oromo personal names derived from verb

Latuu is a verb. As can be seen from above names like *lattuu*, *lataa*, *Latjiisaa* and *latii* can be derived from this word. Lat- is the base for these words. Here in the name '*Latjiisa*' -is- is a causative morpheme and -aa- is a gender indicative marker. The name *tolasaa* is formed from a verb '*toluu*' which means *to be kind* and '*isa*' is he. So *tolasaa* is formed from the verb *toluu* and pronoun *isa* which means he. This indicates that Oromo personal name can be formed from verb and pronoun.

When different word categories are formed from other parts of speech in Oromo Language, the new formations in most cases undergo a morpho-phonological process through which some sounds will change, as in the examples below. *Beekuu* is a verb. The root verb of this word is *beek-*. Personal names such as *beekaa*, *beekan*, and *beektuu* are derived from this verb. Suffixes such as -an, and -aa are male gender indicator. Whereas, -tuu, are female gender marker. Zungu (1999:66) argues that is about the sound changes that occur when new nouns are formed. When sounds come together in speech, they tend to influence one another thus producing sound changes (phonological changes) that show up as word formation rules (morphological changes).

The Oromo draw many of their personal names from word category. Mostly they reflect social issues among their culture. In this section the focus is the form of these names. In terms of their structure, they are formed from a verb root plus suffix, for example.

Beek- the root verb from which the personal names such as *beekaa*, *beektuu*, and *beekan* are derived. When the suffix -aa is added to this root verb the name *beekaa* is formed. -aa is a male gender indicative suffix. When the suffix -tuu is added to this word the name *beektuu* is formed. *Beektuu* is a female name. Likewise, the *Tol-* is a root verb '*toluu*' from which personal names such as *tolaa*, *toltuu*, *tolafee*, *tolasaa* are derived. Suffixes such as -aa, *saa*, are male gender marker. Whereas, -tuu, -fee, are female gender marker. From the verb *gammaduu* to become happy names such as *Gammadaa*, *Gammannee*, and *Gammattuu* can be derived. In the name *gammannee*, the phone /d/ becomes /n/ because of the influence of the neighboring phoneme /n/. Thus, d→n/-n. Likewise from verb '*gammattuu*' personal names such a *gammattuu*, *gammattjis*, *gammattjisaa*, and *gammattjiiftuu* are formed. *Gammattuu* is an adjective. When the causative morpheme -is added it become causative verb. *Gammattjis*-is is a causative verb. When suffixes such as -aa, and -tuu it become personal names. This indicates that Oromo personal names can be formed from causative verbs.

5. Personal Names Derived from Nouns

Morphological analysis is an attempt/is made to capture the structure of language at the word level or concerned with the 'forms of words' (cf. Matthew, 2000). Morphology was originated in Goethe as cited in Agbedo (2000) and first used in the study of the 'forms' of living organisms in biology (Yule, 2009). Morphology has the basic concept of word and morpheme. In this sense, words add prefixes or suffixes to other lexical items to form names. Many of the Oromo language personal names formed from nouns by inflection. The suffixes affixed to the noun indicate the gender of the namee. *Galanee*, for instance, is a name derived from the noun *galaana* which means a river. When the noun *galaana* is suffixed with -ee, it becomes personal name. This suffix indicates the feminine gender.

Name	Gloss	Base	Suffix	Gender marker
bariisoo	That morning	Bariis-	-oo	male
kennaa	gift	Kenn-	-aa	both
beektuu	wise	Beek-	-tuu	female
dararaa	Flower/flourish	Darar-	-aa	male
darartuu	Flower/flourish	Darar-	tuu	female
dagaagaa	(n) rich	Dagaag-	-aa	male
dagaagduu	became rich	Dagaag-	-duu	female
dagaagee	Became rich	Dagaag-	-ee	female
sooressaa	rich	Sores-	-aa	male
boodanaa	later	Boodan-	-aa	male
leentj'oo	The lion	Leentj' -	-oo	male
birbirsoo	The long	Birbirs-	-oo	male
kuulanii	attractive	Kuulan-	-ii	female
rabbiraa	From God	Rabb-	-rraa	male
Rooberaa	Has rained	Roob-	-raa	male
Lalisee	She who grows	Lalis-	-ee	female
Lalisaa	He who grows	Lalis-	-aa	male
Leemanee	Very thin and attractive	Leeman-	-ee	female
Leentfoo	lioness	leenc-	-oo	male
K'eeramsoo	leopardess	qeerams-	-oo	male
Coqorsoo	The grass	coqors-	-oo	male
Birbirsoo	big tree	Birbirs-	-oo	male
Leemanee	Very thin and attractive	leeman-	-ee	female
Gafarsoo	buffalo	Gafars-	-oo	male
Biiftuu	sun	Biif-	-tuu	Male/female
Ifaa	lighting	Ifa-	-a	male
Iftuu	lightning	ifa	-tuu	female
Gaadisaa	umbrella	Gaadis-	-aa	male
Roobee	raining	Roob-	-ee	female
Roobaa	raining	Roob-	-aa	male
Roobduu	One who rains	Roob-	-duu	female
Roobsan	They made to rain	Roob-	-san	male
waariyoo	Midnight	Waar-	-yoo	male
waaroo	Midnight	Waar-	-oo	male
waaritee	Midnight	Waar-	-tee	female
waarituu	Midnight	Waar-	-tuu	female

Table 2: Oromo personal names derived from nouns

6. Personal Names Derived from an Adjective Stem

Some personal names in Oromo formed from the adjectives stem and can be derived from adjectives by nominalization. This may involve the use of suffixes as in *sooressa* → *sooressaa*, *sooressa* → *sooromee* and *sooressa* → *soorettii*. The adjective stem is *soor-*. The suffix *-aa*, is male gender indicator whilst *-tii* and *-ee* are female gender indicator.

Personal Name	Gloss	Base	Suffix	Gender
Sooressaa	rich	Sooress-	-aa	male
Sooromee	Became rich	Soorom-	-ee	Female
Sooretti	The rich	Sooret-	-tii	Female
Duurettii	Very rich	Duur-	-tii	Female
Duuressaa	Very rich	Duur-	-saa	Male
Gammadaa	to come happy	gammad-	-aa	male

Table 3: Oromo personal names derived from Adjective stem

7. Personal Names Derived from Personal Pronoun + Verb Stem

Some Oromo personal names can be derived from a combination of the first person pronoun and verb or a second person pronoun and verb, or a combination of first person and second person. The emphasis placed by these types of names is on the name-giver not on the wishes of the bearer of the name. Even though Oromo personal names reflect the wishes, religion, economic and political status of

the family, most of the personal names that fall into this category reflect the feelings and psychological makeup of the name-giver. For instance, *Naabeeki* is a compound name which is formed from possessive form of first person and verb.

Naa + *beeki* → *Naabeeki*

‘For me’ ‘know’

‘Know for me’

Name	Compound	meaning	pronoun	Gender
Naabeeki	Naa+beeki	Know for me	naa	male
Naafyaadi	Naaf +yaadi	Think for me	naaf	male
Naatolii	Naa+toli	Be kind to me	naa	male
siifan	Sii+ani	You and me	sii and ani	male
Firdiisaa	Frdii+ isa	His judgment	isa	Male

Table 4: Personal names Derived from Person pronoun and verb stem

8. Gender Markers in Personal Names

Few Oromo personal names are bestowed on people regardless of their gender. This group of personal names is regarded as neutral, such as *addunaa* (world), *kennaa* (gift), and *djandoo* (rain). However, there are personal names that denote gender which end with the suffixes: -aa,-oo, -ee, -is, -an, tuu,-tii, --uu, -nee. There is no Oromo personal name that begins with the prefix or infix. Suffixes -ee, , -tii, -tuu,---nee refer to females as in *beektuu*, *sorettii*, *boontuu*, *leemane*, *bareedduu*; whereas, names that end with the suffix -aa, -oo, -an-is refers to males as in *beekaa*, *beekan*, *leeman*, *boonaa*, *dafaasaa*, *boonsaa*, *gudinaa*, *guddatoo*, *guddataa*, *leenfoo*, and so on

9. The Semantic Analysis of Oromo Personal Names

Meaning is defined as what a word means, signifies, expresses and its inner and psychological importance. It is the idea of the word or the action. But in this article, the word “meaning” is used to embrace all aspects and circumstances that are taken into account when a personal name is bestowed on a child. For example, the name *kennaa* (Gift) might have different interpretations in two different families. *Birbirsoo* is a name derived from *birbirsa* literally means zigba tree. *Birbirsoo* has an extension meaning which mean very tall. *Darartuu* literary means one that flowers/blooms.. The associative meaning attached to this person who carries the name is very long. This indicates Oromo personal names have extended meaning. The meaning could be related with birth days, circumstances of birth, wishes, fate of the days of the month, and so on (Tesfaye, 2011). In line with this, Suzman (1994:253) states that personal names are given to indicate a range of people and circumstances that were relevant at the time of the child’s birth. Thus, the word “meaning” in article refers to these circumstances around the birth of the child which are recorded in the name that is bestowed on the child. See the following Table 5.

Names	Meaning Literal	Meaning Extension
leenč’oo	‘the lion’	‘brave/very strong/frightening’
k’eeransoo	‘the tiger’	‘heroic/fearless/irritated’
waangoo	‘the fox’	‘fighter/aggressive’
Hoolaa	‘sheep’	‘sympathetic/compassionate/calm’
jaldeessoo	‘the monkey’	‘ugly/unattractive’
K’abane	‘calm and quiet’	‘patient or tolerant’
Birbirsoo	‘zigba tree’	‘very long’
Biiftuu	‘sun’	‘very beautiful or nice-looking’

Table 5: Semantic Analysis of Oromo Personal Names

The above names indicate that Oromo personal names have metaphoric expression or meaning extension. This further shows that Oromo society does not choose or bestow names at random without connecting something important in their life. This in turn shows that Oromo personal names must carry meaning. This meaning could be descriptive or associative.

10. Referential Meaning of Oromo Personal Names

To classify names according to the social category to which they point, the name giver’s explanation of the name is indispensable. The referential value of names underlies idea of names as pointers (Suzman, 1994:261). In relation to this, the Oromo People give personal names that point to the grandfather, birth time, birth season, birthday, birth order in the family and birth circumstances. In this case, Oromo names have referential meaning.

The name givers could bestow the name of grandfather to their babies; or instance, *saññii work’uu*, *k’anaatee saññii*. Here *Saññii* is the name of the grandfather of *work’uu* which was given to the son of *work’uu*. Moreover, there are names which indicate the day or time at which a baby was born. Such names point out to the day or time in which a baby was born; for example, *jimaataa* is a name derived from *jimaata* which means Friday. This name easily depicts the baby was born on Friday. That is *jimata* is Friday’ and -a is a masculine morpheme marker. So, *jimaataa* was a personal name indicating that a baby was born on Friday. Likewise, *waaritee* is a

feminine name derived from *waarii* which means midnight and *-ee* is a morpheme indicating feminine. Thus, *waaritee* is a personal name indicating the time at which a baby-daughter was born.

Contrary to the above discussion, there were names which point to the wider community. In this case, names referring to those outside immediate family may designate people either in the community or the extended family. So, naming babies after kinsmen serves as social function. In this regard, the Oromo people's system of naming babies after parental or maternal relatives serves to perpetuate the names of ancestors. Thus, the names given to individuals refer to historical events, experiences, emotions, status relations, and clan and kinship relations. In relation to this, De Salviac (1901) states that Oromo people give the names of the ancestor to the new born baby so as to retain their ancestors name. The following are some of clan names bestowed to a new born baby. These are *barisoo*, *guutoo*, *manniii*, *ʔatireessoo*, *diimmai*, *bidaaruu*, *baabbuu*, *ʔannoo* and so on. These kinds of names remind the family or the community that a baby is from that clan. So, according to the discussion of my informants, the person who is from the same clan does not marry from this clan as they are considered to be near kin to one another. This type of naming can enable one to suggest that name givers give children names that emanate from the social fabric of their lives. In this view, the social context within which naming is included becomes part of the name itself. To this end, Oromo names point back to the ancestor's. In this context, the individual's name points to towards community member along that ancestral line.

Moreover, Oromo naming system of the study area is an aspect of cultural indexicality. In this regard, the linguistic expressions such as Oromo personal names are connected to some aspects of the sociocultural context of the Oromo. Indexicality, in this case, is applicable in Oromo personal names since they have sociocultural interpretation. Therefore, some Oromo names refer to *personal*, *temporal*, and *spatial deixis*.

For example, *personal deixis* such as *dabala*, *ʔiittaanaa*, *lammessaa*, *dabale*:, etc indicate babies were the second children of the parents. The names indicate there was always a person whom a child was named after. In this case, the Oromo infer from the name there was a baby or person whom the baby was named after. With regard to *temporal deixis*, some Oromo names are very peculiar, because some persons have an automatic birthday name or seasonal name such as *Kamisoo*, *barisoo*, *galgaloo*, *arfaasee*, *bariitee*, *birraasaa*, *sanbatao*, *sanbataa* and so on point to the time, season, or day of the week on which a baby was born. For example, *kamiso* indexicalises 'Thursday' which is a day on which the baby was born. Likewise, *arfaasee* indexicalises a baby was born in Spring season.

There are also *spatial indicating names* which refer to local places within the Oromo society. Names such as *tulluu* (mountain), *č'aakkaa*(forest), *wallaggee*(wollega), *ʔimnee*(Jimma), *diččo*(Dicho), *leek'aa* (Nekemte), etc indicate where the people were born. This is what is referred to as anthroponyms. As it was stated in the review of related literature, in indexicality, language is used as a tool through socio-cultural world and is constantly described, evaluated and produced. Baye (2006) indicates stressing that the referential function of personal names is both to the individual person and to the society as a whole characterizing features which actualizes the social organization into which a child was born.

Therefore, the above discussion suggests that the Oromo personal names serve to indexicalise the temporal, social and personal. In this case, personal names refer to the various elements of human existence i.e. to an individual or a collective entity that it designates.

11. Discussion

Morphologically speaking, Oromo personal names may be constructed from different word classes. They can be identified as either self standing like *kennaa*, *birraaa* etc conveying the basic meaning as found in the lexicon, or as a combination of a cluster of elements (Tesfaye, 2011). A name that has the suffix *-oo* in the name *leenč'oo* 'the lion' conveys a sense of power, which is more favorable than what 'leenča' 'lion' means. Besides, 'birbirsoo' literally means a zigba tree. The meaning extension of this is the bearer is very huge. *K'eeramsoo* literally means the tiger. Its meaning extension is quarrelsome or arrogant man. This analysis indicates that apart from those gender markers the Oromo personal names reflect attitudes of the name-giver toward the bearer. It further revealed that Oromo personal names have meaning. There are no Oromo personal names that can be given to babies haphazardly.

The results of the analysis revealed that Oromo personal names have meaning. This meaning may have a descriptive, denotative meaning, a connotative meaning and associative meaning. These varied meanings are identified based on how they are reflected in the culture of the Oromo society. The finding further reveals that the people expect the bearers to live up to their name. Hence, most Oromo people give names such as *sooressaa*, *soorettii*, *dagaagaa*, *sooromee*, *kumarraa*, *kumajaas*, *dagaagoo*, *galaanaa*, *galaanee* and so on. The meanings of these names are connected with developing or becoming affluent in cattle wealth.

The analysis revealed that Oromo Personal names express information about a person who possesses it. It tells us about the sex of a person, word category of Oromo, and gives clues about the social class (Hargreaves, Colman, and Sluckin, 1983:393). Personal names are not neutral in terms of gender though there are names that can be used for both sexes such as *kennaa*(gift), *siifan*(you and me), *naafjaad* (think for me), etc. Such names have no gender markers. Personal names that end in *_aa*, *-a*, *-is*, and *-oo* denote male, while those that end with morphemes *-ee*, *tii*, and *-tuu*,- denote female.

Names, like any other words, may have conceptual, descriptive or lexical meanings, but these meanings become irrelevant when the connotative or pragmatic meaning is attached to the name. For instance, *k'eeramsoo* literally means 'the leopard'. Yet its extended meaning is arrogant/ quarrelsome and impatient. This shows that Oromo people do not choose names at random without attaching something important in their life. This further indicates that Oromo names must carry some important message apart from meaning. It seems unlikely that an Oromo would have a personal name that is meaningless. This would not be regarded as a real name.

Oromo personal names being a part of Oromo language are able to transmit Oromo culture just as the languages of all cultures do. This means that names should not be undermined or regarded as a useless tool in Oromo society. When personal names are bestowed on babies, the name-givers are using them as remembrance of their culture. This in turn means that when names from cultures which do not have written documents are studied properly, they can, like oral literature (myths, legends, folktales, proverbs) help a researcher to reconstruct the people's history, in both cultural and eventful ways.

Oromos have no concept of family name and surname. Only a given name is used throughout one's life history. The Oromo personal name does not use prefixes or infixes. The full name in Oromo is written as: First name (given name) followed by the father's name, and last by the grandfather's name. The grandfather's name is usually used in official documents. The father's name is not considered a middle name. Instead, it is considered a last name. The same is true for females; they do not take their husband's last name. Personal names that refer to power such as *leenchoo*, *gafarsoo*, *qeeramsoo* etc are bestowed on males only. This is a characteristic of a patriarchal society.

12. Conclusion

Oromo personal names are an indispensable part of the language. In order to understand their meaning, the structure of the different word categories from which they are formed and the cultural background should also be taken into consideration. The Oromo personal naming process cannot be divorced from the context in which these names are created: their meanings depend on the context and culture. Though personal names are used universally to label and identify people, the component of meaning cannot be ignored, particularly when one is studying Oromo personal names. This part demonstrated how the meanings in the morphological composition of Oromo personal names can convey messages from and experiences of the name-giver and the society at large.

A few Oromo personal names are neutral and can be bestowed on both males and females. Many of Oromo names are gender specific. Names which ends with suffixes *-a*, *-aa*, *-an*, *-uu*, and *-saa*, refer to male and those which end with suffixes such as *-tii*, *-tuu*, *-ee*, refer to females. In Oromo, like some African languages such as Zulu and isiXhosa, prefixes are not used to determine gender. People use language to express themselves, and this is done through the use of words. This means that if there are no words, there can be no sentences and no meaning. Personal names are formed from words; therefore, personal names, like the language, are the carriers of meaning, particularly among the Oromo society. Identifying the motivational force behind personal names deepens one's understanding of the socio-cultural characteristics of Oromo community.

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