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Sokalikwenda – ‘Calamity That Moves’: Some Social Aspects of Tumbuka Personal Names

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Abstract:

Research on personal names, especially in non-Western societies has continued to attract scholarly attention due to the many facets revealed when these names are studied. This research ought to establish the social aspects that influence the selection and bestowal of Tumbuka personal names within the Tumbuka social and cultural setting. It was conducted using the qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Data were collected from existing records and through semi-structured interviews and introspection. Research participants were purposively selected based on their knowledge of Tumbuka culture. From the findings, it was established that among the Tumbuka people of Lundazi District Zambia, personal names are a reflection of various aspects of their society. Some of the messages reflected in the names analysed in this study show how Tumbuka culture and traditions influence the naming practices. Based on the findings, the study concluded that sociocultural motivation plays a critical role in the choice of personal names among the Tumbuka people.

Keywords: Personal names, Tumbuka, social aspects, anthroponomastics, culture, influence

1. Introduction

The study was grounded in Anthroponomastics. According to Koopman (2002:10) ‘The term anthroponym comes from the Greek word anthropos ‘man’ or ‘human’ and it refers to personal names.’ Anthroponomastics is therefore the study of personal names.

African cultures have various ways of naming children. Primarily, many ethnic groups have shown preference for ‘cultural-bound meaningful personal names that act as badges of ...basic group identity’ (Isaacs 1957:27) ‘that produce... a web of signification’ (Wittenberg, 2000:2). To borrow from Pritchard, it could be said that personal names are ‘... social documents which fix a person’s position in the social structure’ (Pritchard, 1939:237). They define who one is, where one comes from and make reference to events surrounding a child’s birth.

Taking the foregoing perspective, it can be noted that personal names serve a number of social and interactional purposes besides being reference devices. Just like any other category of proper names, personal names are oral records. An investigation into African names and naming practices is paramount because it helps in the recovery and/ or reconstruction of the African heritage as these are closely linked to a people’s culture (Makondo, 2008).

It has been contended that the process of giving names to a person is deeply social because of the customs and traditions particularly knitted towards the naming process. It is no wonder research into several generations would largely show that the whole history and development of a society are reflected in the proper names. For instance, people might react to changes in their life by deliberately selecting children’s names with meanings that reflect those changes (Bizhkenova et.al 2014:81).

2. Statement of the Problem

Scholars have established that most African personal names provide a wealth of information about the name bearers, society that ascribes them and the social environment they live in. It is no wonder African anthroponyms are said to have meaning and serve various functions in society. Despite the rise in the number of studies that have endeavored to highlight some of the intricacies and complexities as well as the creativity that underlies name giving in different Zambian cultures, there still is limited information on Tumbuka names. It is not known what social factors influence the choice of personal names among the Tumbuka people of Lundazi District, Zambia.

3. Research Questions

- What is the meaning of each name identified?
- How are the identified names chosen in Tumbuka-prone speech communities?
- What socio-cultural factors influence the choice of these names?

4. Literature Review

Most of the studies on language in Zambia have dwelt on discourse analysis. These include: Simwinga (1992), Njobvu (2010), Mwiinga (2015), Mumbi (2017), Mumbi and Simwinga (2018), Mumbi and Simwinga (2019), Kapau and Simwinga (2019a) and Kapau, Chilala and Simwinga (2019b) and Sinkala, Kaira and Simwinga (2020). As an inherent aspect of human society, language emanates from society and the same society uses language to communicate through words and symbols which enable people to evaluate and appreciate the world that they live in. One of the ways in which people use language to this appreciation is through the names that they adopt (Nyota and Mapara 2010). As an aspect of language, names can be used to fuel or minimise conflict because they become conduits through which people communicate their emotions and perceptions. Finnegan (1970: 170) pertinently captures this value of names when she stresses that different interpretations of names have ranged from the psychological functions of names, in providing assurance or working out tensions to their connection with the structure of society, their social function in minimising friction, or their usefulness in expressing the self-image of their owner or in providing a means of indirect comment when a direct one is not feasible.

In most African societies, names are perceived to be beyond words by which a person, animal, place or thing is known, and do not fundamentally connote designation, reputation or identification of one individual from the other person. To support this view, Guma (2001), cites the Basotho in Southern Africa whose names and the naming process is a sociocultural interpretation of historical events and embody individual or group social experiences, social norms and values, status roles and authority, as well as personality and individual attributes. Cultural meaning of personal names and their relationship is based on historical events. According to this scholar, names and the naming process in this society serve as social-cultural clarification of the concepts of self, person, and individual. On these bases, the current study looked into aspects that are evident pertaining to what sociocultural elements are embedded in Tumbuka personal names and how their meanings can be interpreted. This further led to the establishment of whether or not there is a possibility to decipher the various categories upon which names are bestowed purely in relation to how the Tumbuka people experience their social life.

A study carried out by Ogie (2002), examined Edo personal names as they manifest in the Edo culture, and related them either directly or by extended interpretation to the worldview of both the ancient and contemporary Edo awareness. His argument is that names are used to affirm certain aspects of Edo culture. In the findings, it was established that in naming their children, Edo people make fundamental statements about their beliefs, the world around them and their everyday experiences. Naming in the Edo context is therefore a major tool for transmitting beliefs, family and communal history as well as moral and societal values in a society where tradition is passed from one generation to another through the oral medium. In particular, Ogie (2002) tried to show that Edo personal names, as part of Edo culture and oral literature, provide useful information about the ethos of the people. Reviewing Ogie's study was relevant to this research because it helped in unraveling how people in the study area make fundamental statements about their belief systems and the world around them.

In Zambia, Mutunda (2011) carried out a study among the Lunda people of the North-western province of Zambia where he attempted to provide an interpretive analysis of traditional Lunda personal names. In his research, Mutunda indicated that among the Lunda people, personal names are the foundation of one's identity. Their meanings and circumstances in which they are chosen suggest that they are not mere linguistic phenomena or arbitrary labels without *any* meaning. Rather they convey the social and cultural existence of the Lunda people. In his findings, he established that names are rarely given to children randomly but rather are carefully chosen by parents and relatives so as to reflect and reveal the social circumstances under which the baby is born.

Mutunda (2011) has further argued that a name is like a document where one can read the history, culture and heritage of the individual or the family in time and space. This is a similar view to other views discussed in the paper from scholars that have pointed out that personal names provide an important component of African cultural identities. He states that besides having a psychological role in establishing a person's identity, names convey to those who know their origin and meaning, the social and cultural experiences of the people who created them. Above all, names depict how members of a community regard themselves because they reflect values, traditions and events in people's lives.

Chola, Ngalande and Simwinga (2020) looked investigated the meanings of Tumbuka death daring personal names within the Tumbuka social and cultural setting. It sought to identify and analyse meanings of selected names and to find out the socio-cultural implications of the names and naming patterns and/or strategies that are used among the people in the study area. The qualitative approach was used and the researcher used semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observation of and interaction with the study population as well as introspection to collect primary data. Findings showed that, among the Tumbuka people, the first name is bestowed on a child after detachment of its umbilical cord, with the father and grandfather of the child's father being the sole name-givers. First name bestowal arises from different factors, but the study focused only on those names that are influenced by death, with particular reference to those that are used to taunt death. Using the Unified Theory of Names, generated data was analysed. In relation to the findings, it was deduced that personal names in Tumbuka-prone speech communities go beyond being mere personal labels, to expressions and stories that mark the various social and psychological milestones and circumstances surrounding the birth of a child to be named. This in turn makes personal names an integral meaningful part of the Tumbuka cultural heritage which should be explored by scholars.

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Participants

For purposes of this research, a total of 42 participants were purposively selected from five villages in Lundazi District of Eastern province, Zambia. Lundazi District was deliberately chosen because it is a Tumbuka-prone speech community, hence helped to provide the required cultural context in which to carry out the investigation. Research participants were selected based on their age and rich cultural knowledge.

5.2. Data Generation

Data for this study was generated through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and introspection. All the recordings made during the semi-structured interviews were noted down in a notebook for easy identification on the recorder and when transferred to a computer.

5.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis commenced as soon as the data collection process started taking shape. This was to avoid getting overwhelmed by analysing all the collected data at once. All recordings were transferred to a computer. In order to gain insight from the collected data, NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software was used. A sociolinguistic analysis of names that were selected for the study was then done.

6. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses findings of the study in line with the objectives. Categories of names have been presented in themes.

6.1. Names that are Related to Fertility

In this category, the names that have been discussed are those that are given to children to express a couple's struggle with childbirth. All examples of names below suggest that usually, women are the ones that are traditionally held responsible for a couple's childlessness in a home.

It is no wonder all the measures taken are directed towards them. This is partly because of the pressure that women encounter amidst sentiments such as '*A woman's glory is crowned in childbirth.*' Therefore, there is emphasis on a woman seeking help from the elders of the family and/or community, traditional healers and the ancestors because childlessness in a home is only associated with barrenness of a woman.

6.1.1. Kamunkhwala

The name *Kamunkhwala* is derived from the noun *munkhwala*, which means traditional herbs or medicine in general. This name is given to the first-born male child after the parents' long search for a child. This happens in instances where a woman experiences fertility-related challenges such as miscarriages and/or infertility. Normally, traditional herbs are used to help her prevent miscarriages and/or help conceive if she was not able to. Alternatively, she would be treated with rituals aimed at enhancing fertility. The name *Kamunkhwala* is so because it is assumed that the medicine would have finally worked. Such names are meant to show how effective *munkhwala* can be and the need to continue preserving certain herbs because they are deemed special.

6.1.2. Chimika

Just like *Kamunkhwala*, there is a name for the first-born female child born under similar circumstances. The name is *Chimika*, which loosely translates to 'mixing various herbs.' This was explained by a respondent who said that 'Ngatinimwanamwanakazinyengozinyakenyumbaikasuzga, mpapoyasoba. Papitanyengocomenekutimuntuyuraakalenantumbo. BasibapitakumankhwalakutiuyuanakalekonamwanambwenuChiutawandangilaulamuntuwakalanamwana. Ulanwanabakutin iChimika, ngatinimwanakazi. Chimikacifukwabacitamikisi'

Which can be translated as [When for a woman sometimes a home becomes difficult, motherhood is missing. Time passes without that person having a child. Then they resort to using traditional herbs then God answers and that person finally bears a child. That child is named *Chimika*, if it is a girl. Because they have mixed.] The whole process of using traditional herbs in order to help a woman conceive is known as called *kuChimika*. In this name, one thing that is apparent is that the Tumbuka people believe in both the use of herbs and in a supernatural being who intervenes in people's affairs. From this, it can be inferred that names such as *Kamukhwala* and *Chimika* are reminders to the people on the need to continue preserving certain herbs, and also encourage people to never lose hope so that even amidst childlessness they should keep believing in the power of the supernatural.

6.1.3. Fumbani

The literal meaning of the name *Fumbani* is 'ask'. For the Tumbuka speaking people, there are names embedded in allusions of what happened to a woman before pregnancy. They may depict the bitterness that characterised the relationship that existed between a couple mostly due having remained childless for a long period of time in their marriage life. It could also be due to the mockery the new mother had received from the relatives, neighbours, community members and/or co-wives, in case of a polygamous marriage where each wife competes with the other(s) to have the most children

because she wants to prove to the co-wives that she is their husband's favourite wife. Thus, when a woman who remained childless for a long time finally gets to have a child, she will name the new born *Fumbani*. Although this name means ask, at a deeper level, it acts as a message to her enemies. That is, all those who used to mock her for having remained childless because her giving birth is a triumph and puts her considered enemies to shame because their expectations have not fallen through. The name is also meant to boast about her achievement. In this name is an element of sarcasm as the woman tells people to ask her about when she would conceive or finally give her husband a child.

6.2. Names Related to Marital Disputes

In this category, there are three sub-categories of names related to marital disputes that have been presented. The first category discusses names that depict unpleasant circumstances that could have transpired between the husband and wife, usually being a form of reaction from either partner. The second is a group of names meant to encourage the couple to reconcile after unpleasant circumstances in their marriage, while the third category has names with connotations of a couple standing up for itself to fight the criticism from the family members and the community at large

6.2.1. Chabudikha

In the literal sense, name translates to 'it has collapsed'. It is given to a child born to a woman who at one point had offended the husband who then decided that the only way of them reconciling is by getting intimate. However, the woman was not agreeable at the time because she was on her menses, because during this period, tradition does not allow a woman to get involved sexually as menstrual blood is considered unsacred. Therefore, if the husband forcefully decides to have it his way and the woman supposedly conceives from that encounter, the child is named *Chabudikha*. The name *Chabudikha* is given in order to show that the child was born under particular collapsed or hostile circumstances in a home. On a deeper level, the name acts as a woman's indirect protest towards the husband's aggressive behaviour and also to urge him to work on his conduct and how he generally treats his wife because this has led to his household receiving a child in one way the community considers unpleasant. This name is sometimes also given to children born to women that conceive from cases of sexual harassment in general, even if the offender is not the partner.

6.2.2. Chimbizgani

The name is derived from the verb *kuchimbizga*, which means 'to intimidate or threaten.' It is given to a child born in family where a woman is receiving threats of being divorced because the husband plans on taking a new wife. Thus, a child born amidst this turmoil is named *Chimbizgani*. At first glance, the name is suggestive of the woman telling her husband to chase her. This interpretation can be true if it is understood to mean that the man is being dared to chase his wife knowing that she just gave birth, a decision that society frowns upon. However, the name is culturally meant to plead with the man not to chase his wife.

6.2.3. Jumbani

The name is derived from the word *kujumba* which means to 'complicate or to endanger.' This name is given to a baby born to a woman whose husband had a sexual relationship with another woman during the period his wife was pregnant. In Tumbuka tradition, this is believed to cause complications during delivery and can sometimes lead to the death of the woman and/or her unborn child. When there is strong suspicion of such, the husband is asked to confess and the couple is given herbs that are treated as the spell breakers in order to allow the woman to have a safe delivery. The name is meant to talk about the difficult situation under which a child was born and speak against a man's infidelity in a home, especially at such a crucial point in a couple's marriage life.

6.3. Names Related to Happiness

Like in most African societies, child-bearing is highly valued among the Tumbuka people. Thus, a woman who gives birth to a live child after an exceptionally difficult delivery or simply after a long period of childlessness or other challenges in her marriage life will show gratitude to God or the ancestral spirits for granting her a child.

6.3.1. Sekelele

The literal meaning of the name Sekelele is 'rejoice.' This name is given to a child to show a family's euphoria over what could have transpired in their lives. It could be that a couple had remained childless for a long period of time, but finally managed to have a child or other especially bad events that a couple could have endured. Once such a couple receives a baby, it is named Sekelele to show that a family is happy to welcome that child because it is the silver lining of the dark cloud that had befallen the family. The child becomes symbolic of the happiness that is deemed therapeutic.

6.3.2. Kondwani

Means 'be happy.' The name is meant to urge the parents to the new born to embrace their child as children are a blessing.

6.4. Names Related to Social Caution

In this category, the names that have been discussed are meant to remind people of the importance of being courteous when relating with others regardless of their background or physical appearance. Due to the fact that the future is full of uncertainties and no one knows who might help them in challenging times, the names in this category serve as

forms of advice to members of a family and/or community against allowing any form of differences between or among them cause friction in their midst. Thus, the names are aimed at urging people to treat one another with kindness and be in good terms with everyone around them without segregating.

6.4.1. Sokalikwenda

The name is derived from the noun *soka* or plural *masoka* which means 'calamity or calamities' respectively. It reflects unfortunate circumstances or events that surrounded the baby, its parents or family before, during or even at its birth. This name suggests that a form of calamity took place before, during or even after the birth of the child. *Sokalikwenda*, which means 'trouble/calamity walks' is intended to caution the family and community members that misfortunes can befall anyone and therefore acts as an appeal to people not to mock others because of the circumstances under which they were born. This name can also be given to a child born with physical deformities. When this is the case, the name is intended to caution members that anyone can be met by unfortunate circumstances, thus, it would be erroneous to treat a person based on his deformity.

6.4.2. Fumbanani

'Ask among yourselves' is the meaning of the name *Fumbanani*. This name is given to a child born to a couple or into a family that has been having disputes. Here, people take advantage of the birth of the newborn child to ask the people at loggerheads to resolve their conflicts. This is because disputes in a homestead and the general lack of peace in a home or family can lead to disintegration and in turn affect the upbringing of a child. *Fumbanani*, in this context then becomes a mediating name and in most cases proves effective. This could partly be attributed to the fact that the name brings to light to the community what might have been going among members of the family under consideration. Hence, people would strive to work towards mending the broken

6.4.3. Mangani

The name is derived from the verb *manga* which means 'build'. This name is given to a child born amidst misunderstanding either between a couple or among other members of the family. It is a request to the parties involved to reconcile and rebuild their once broken relationship.

6.5. Names Meant to Promote Unity

Amidst adversity and/or discord, receiving a baby in the family can be a source of strength. One way of helping to deal with such situations is by giving to the new-born child a name that carries therapeutic connotations that help members of a family or community still remain united by not allowing discordance or adversary cause disunity between them. Examples of such names have been discussed in this category.

6.5.1. Tikhore

The name *Tikhore* means 'let us hold.' It is derived from *kukhora*, which means 'to hold.' After experiencing hardships as a household, parents can name a child *Tikhore* as a way of helping to strengthen themselves. The named child then becomes a uniting factor of that family because away from the hardships, they have something to bring them together, and stay strong for one another even amidst tension. It can imply a family staying strong for or holding on to one another, which implies staying united.

6.5.2. Tinozge

Tinozge means 'let us do good.' The name is given to a child born into a family where members attempt doing good things for other people, but are always seemingly ungrateful. And because they feel that their efforts go unnoticed, they can name a child *Tinozge*, to imply that no matter how much of the good deeds they engage in, people are never appreciative. This name is meant to encourage the couple or members of the family to keep doing good regardless the response they receive from people. That is, them extending a good or kind gesture should not be dependent on how people perceive it. This helps deal with any ill feelings and frustrations that might spring from making efforts that go unnoticed, which in turn helps to avoid friction.

7. Conclusion

From the study, it can be concluded that Tumbuka personal names are indicators of the patterns of the Tumbuka people's sociocultural organizations and worldview. While in most instances the literal meanings of the names are directly related to the reason for giving them, the ability to read betweenlines in order to understand the social context behind each name requires one to be familiar with the Tumbuka culture. This means that the meaning of a name can only be understood by understanding the context within which it occurs. This is imperative because 'meanings of names are as a result of complex social negotiations, learned and interpreted through socialization' (Leslie and Skipper 1990:273).

8. Recommendations for Further Research

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

- To have other categories of names studied based on various branches of Linguistics.
- To have more research conducted to investigate various aspects of personal names, especially in minority Zambian languages as one way of preventing language death and preserving diverse cultures.

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