

What is in a name? An analysis of the semantics of Lulogooli personal names

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Abstract

The study establishes that Lulogooli personal names have both denotative and connotative meaning. When we come to the question the meaning of Lulogooli personal names, we have to learn the origin of all such names i.e. place names, names of natural phenomena such as famine, poverty, and so on. Naming derives meaning from existing phenomenon. Connotative meaning creates a mental picture, which at the origin of such names, has negative and positive attributes.

Why study names?

Whether or not names have a meaning has remained a puzzle to many a linguist most of whom view names to be merely signifiers and arbitrary to people and things they name (Crystal, 1995; Lyons, 1989). This study sought to establish the semantics of Lulogooli personal names. This is significant in that it addresses philosophers' questions as concerns the meaning of personal names. Shakespeare poses a question; 'what's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet', (Shakespeare II. 43); while Crystal (1995) and Lyons (1989) strongly state that "as interesting as the origin of a name may be, it exercises very little choice and it is of very little value in the study of naming trends". To qualify or disqualify this view, this study sought to investigate whether Lulogooli personal names have meanings.

Mostly, Lulogooli personal name formation is semantically motivated. A sizeable number of Lulogooli personal names have meanings. For instance, names such as: 'Ilamenya' literally mean 'inhabitant/stay/live', 'Bwosi' means 'all', 'Mwiruki', 'one who runs away', and so on. Other Lulogooli personal names originate from man made as well as natural phenomena such as famine, poverty, wars, seasons, social activities, political activities and so on. On the other hand, most of the Lulogooli personal names are derivatives from Lulogooli verbs, nouns and adjectives. This study therefore, investigated the meaning of Lulogooli personal names and the connotations implied in such personal names.

Semiotics Theory as a naming framework

Semiotics is the study of signs and sign-systems. This includes the investigations of apprehension, prediction and meanings; how is it that we develop meaning, make predictions, and apprehend the world. General semiotics is the theory of the production and interpretation of meaning. It's basic Principle; is that meaning is made by the deployment of acts and objects which functions as 'signs' in relation to other signs. Semioticians generally understand signs to have meaning within larger system. The words and phrases of a language, for example, have meanings within the language; and have meaning only because of their place in that languages structure' (the wikipedia @ tend f.co.uk). These systems of signs are constituted by the complex meaning-relations that can exist between one sign and other primary relations of contrast and super ordination/subordination (e.g. synonymy, homonymy, antonymy, meronymy, hyponymy, and so on).

Signs are part deployed in space and time to produce 'texts' whose meanings are construed by mutually conceptualizing relations among sign. Text is both a product and a process. It is a product in sense that it is an output within a certain construction represented in systematic ways, and a process in the sense of a continuous process of semantic choice made in a network of further potential choices, an interactive event, a social exchange of meaning. Similarly, it is both an object and an instance.

A text is (Halliday and Hassan, 1989);“a product of its environment, a product of a continuous process of choices in meaning.... if we treat both text and context as semiotic phenomena, as ‘modes of meaning’, so to speak, we can get from one to the other in a revealing way.”

The lexical loading of Lulogooli personal names was studied as a text and in context. This is because names and their connotative meaning is a product of the environment. Therefore it becomes important to study how different sign systems are physically and semiotically integrated in ‘Lulogooli ‘texts’. One approach is to analyze various sign-systems separately then study about their integration. Much recent work in semiotics theory has been strongly influenced by the writings of C.R- Pierce. In his studies, Pierce calls semiotics a theory of ‘signs’ or ‘signification.’ This developed into analysis of signaling systems. In his theory, Pierce recognized up to seven different classes of signs, with further subdivisions. But these were based on intersecting criteria. We shall be concerned with only one dimension of his classification, which yields a distinction of three kinds of signs: symbols, icons and indices.

Study Design

The research used Saville Troike’s (1997) Ethnographic analysis procedures. Ethno methodologists are interested in the processes and techniques that people use to interpret the world around them and to interact with the world. They are interested in trying to discover the categories and systems that people use in making sense of the world. Therefore, they do not conduct large-scale surveys of populations, devise sophisticated theoretical models of social organization, or hypothesize that some social theory or other will adequately explain social organization. Instead, they focus on the phenomena of everyday existence, “actually on various bits and pieces of it, in an attempt to show how those who must deal with such bits and pieces go about doing so” (Wardhaugh, 1990)

The study area is Maragoli which covers Sabatia and Vihiga constituencies in Vihiga district, Western Province of Kenya. Lulogooli area is surrounded by other speech communities. Although we have a total of 797,000 Lulogooli native speakers (See Kebeya, 1997) which roughly translates to at least 797,000 names (i.e. one per person), most of these Lulogooli names are shared and cut across all the community’s ages, sexes, and sub-clans. Therefore, the spread of similar names across Maragoli land makes it possible to study the area.

Secondly, we got informants who were born and bred in Maragoli who, using their institutional memory-intuition they provided the most reliable meanings of the personal names and their origins.

Thirdly, this area is familiar to the researcher, having been brought up and partly educated there. This enabled him select the sample and ease any tension that arose in the informants by building confidence among them as one of them.

Fourthly, there is no significant dialectal difference among the Lulogooli speakers in Sabatia and Vihiga (i.e. North and South Maragoli respectively). “Thus the variety of Lulogooli spoken by the informants’ and the informants’ location are insignificant variables in the study” (Malande, 2006).

Denotative meaning of Lulogooli personal names

The relation of denotation holds between a lexeme and a whole class of extra – Linguistic objects. For example, Lyons defines the denotation of a lexeme as “the relationship that holds between that Lexeme and the persons, things, places, properties, processes and activities external to the language system”. (Lyons 1977).

Lulogooli assigns names as ‘signifiers’ to the ‘signified’ (people). The names, thus act as identifiers and sources of institutional memory (record happenings).

Nearly all Lulogooli personal names have a denotative meaning. The naming of the children and members of the community is therefore an important occasion, which is often marked by ceremonies in the community. The collected data could be categorized as follows:-

Names that mark the occasion of the child’s birth

‘Ambura’	A name for boys that stands for ‘Rain’
‘Imburani’	A name for girl that stands for ‘Rain’
‘Chukumazi’	Male for born near water mass
‘Mugera’	‘River’
‘Inyanza’	‘Lake’

Personal names that relate to traveling:

'Mung'aya'	'Wanderer'
'Chukunzila'	'Road'
'Mugeni'	'Stranger'
'Kavai'	'Wanderer'
'Kivahiru'	'Wanderer'
'Nanzila'	'Roadside'

Personal names that relate to natural phenomena

'Isigi'	'Locust'
'Inzala'	'Hunger' or 'Famine'
'Tsingungu'	'Army worms'
'Manyonyi'	'Many birds'
'Endegure'	'Weevil'
'Mage'	'Termite'
'Tsinjenga'	'Maize particles'

Names that denote poverty, lack and need:-

'Mudaka'	'Poor'
'Mudavi'	'Condemned'
'Akidiva'	'Perish'
'Agusioma'	'Mourning/weeping'
'Ambuku'	'Mole'
'Adamba'	'Frustrated'
'Chahonyo'	'Naked'
'Mung'afu'	'Emaciated'
'Nanzere'	'Poor'

Names that denote seasons

'Agesa'	'Harvest'
'Misoga'	'Seeds'
'Isindu'	'Birds'
'Muhizi'	'Hunter'
'Kihima'	'Hunter'
'Nang'ame'	'Milking'
'Embego'	'Seeds'
'Manyonyi'	'Birds'

Names that describe personality

'Kahugani'	'Wonder/Shock/Worry'
'Agalomba'	'Organizer'
'Muhitsi'	'Hunter'
'Minyovi'	'Straighten'
'Umugasu'	'Good'
'Mudidi'	'Clan name'
'Lugano'	'Story teller'
'Indizu'	'Eagle'
'Muyera'	'Choosy'
'Mangidi'	'Chimpanzee'
'Davadava'	'Wonderer'
'Iriko'	'Untidy'
'Mahonga'	'absentee'
'Agadonya'	'Talkative'
'Omega'	'Break'
'Chisisia'	'Darkness'
'Mudurengani'	'Feeble'
'Aguvasu'	'Daytime'

'Aduvaga'	'Troublesome'
'Enonda'	'Follower'
'Luvai'	'Tour/Visitor'
'Osore'	'Peacemaker'

Children named after the dead:

'Tsimonya'	'Whispers'
'Mwenyelitsi'	'Search'
'Adala'	'Lazy wanderer'
'Akiruga'	'Loves cooking'
'Avagarwa'	'Spread out'
'Kigaro'	'Palm'
'Adembesa'	'Fibble'
'Arwanda'	'Rock'
'Anusu'	'Half'
'Avohebwa'	'Recipient'
'Mugata'	'Lazy one'
'Bunifu'	'Tidy/Clean'
'Musiru'	'Fool'
'Aguda'	'Big belly'
'Chore'	'Baldness'
'Kibara'	'Flat head'
'Litu'	'Leaf'
'Malande'	'Spread'
'Mululu'	'Hostile'
'Mahonga'	'Absentee'
'Musumba'	'Bachelor'
'Arunave'	'Sticky'
'Omega'	'Break'
'Mwasiagi'	'Split'
'Itiilu'	'Pillar'

Names that relate to state of pregnancy:

'Akweveta'	'Hidden agenda'
'Akwivisa'	'Hiding'
'Alusa/Mulusa'	'Crave'
'Ayuya'	'Turn'
'Arekwa'	'Left/Abandoned'
'Atsivirwa'	'Many words'
'Avagarwa'	'Spread out'
'Eregwa/Keregegwa'	'Despised'
'Mujukane'	'Turn'
'Mugala'	'Grabber'
'Sieva'	'Dancer'
'Tsimbasi'	'Kicks'
'Ilamenya'	'Stay/Inhabitant'
'Mihiga'	'Stay'
'Igunza'	'delay'
'Kavita'	'Pass'
'Asiena'	'Step on'
'Asiema'	'Liar'
'Kaveshi'	'Liar'
'Jahenda'	'Worry'

'Isambe'	'Roast/burnt'
'Kayere'	'Reject/Loss appetite'
'Mavisi'	'Unripe/raw'
'Muyera'	'Choosy one'
'Mwavali'	'Carry/embrace'

Names that relate to time of day:

'Abudiku'	'at night'
'Kisundi'	'Darkness'
'Aguvasu'	'Daytime'
'Chisisia'	'Darkness'
'Mahagira'	'Dawn'

Personal names that relate to vegetables:

'Mutere'	'okra'
'Likuvi'	'Cow peas'
'Ligaraba'	'Beans leaves'
'Misoga'	'Green beans'

Personal names from physical features, natural and man-made phenomena:

'Imbalabala'	'Road'
'Amunavi'	'Tailoring'
'Agamu'	'Glue'
'Irangi'	Paint
'Ijai'	'Tea'
'Ligare'	'Train'
'Mage'	'Termite'
'Embego'	'Seed'
'Kisala'	'Tree'
'Angote'	'Big maize'
'Muhambe'	'Captive'
'Mudome'	'Black beans/Chicken droppings'
'Siringi'	'Shilling'

Connotative meaning of Lulogooli personal names

Connotative meaning is the associative meaning/evaluative loading of personal names. The following is an analysis of Lulogooli names that have distinct associative/evaluative/connotative meaning:

Two names may largely share a denotation in referring to a particular entity, but they may have divergent associative or emotive meanings. Take English words Push and shove; their denotation largely overlaps – forceful propulsion forward; but shoves connotes roughness or haste, which push does not. Here are some further pairs that differ in their denotations or connotations:

The names 'Ilamenya' and 'Mihiga' both refer to a condition whereby the mother stayed for a long time before giving birth to a child. Yet 'Ilamenya' could mean 'Inhabitant' whereas 'Mihiga' 'years'. 'Mujukane' and 'Ayuya' refers to a condition where the fetus made movements in the uterus. For 'Ayuya', the condition was up – bottom and bottom – up movements (somewhat unidirectional), whereas 'Mujukane' was multi – directional. The child could move or turn in all directions. 'Malova' and 'onde' connotatively refers to a condition whereby children (babies) died as soon as they were delivered. The parents would expect the newly born to die. However, denotatively, 'Malova' and 'Onde' refers to 'Soil' and 'burry' respectively.

'Muderwa' and 'Changala' refers to a denotative situation whereby parents gave birth to one child of either sex. Whereas 'Muderwa' could mean only son amongst daughters, 'Changala' referred to only a son born, who didn't have brothers or sisters. 'Asiema' and 'Ungadi' denotatively refer to 'Liars'. But connotatively, 'Ungadi' was a nickname that had been given to a person for whom a child was named. Such nicknames became names. For 'Asiema', the mother's pregnancy made her a 'Liar' hence the child was called 'Asiema'. 'Lyayiya' and 'Magui' denotatively refers to stock borer insect. However whereas 'Magui' refers to a time when the insects infested houses, 'Lyayiya' was born when the insect(s) were making a lot of noise.

'Kayere' and 'Asurwa' both refer to 'reject'. However, 'Kayere' refers to a condition where the pregnant mother rejected or lost appetite on certain meals or food whereas 'Asurwa' is a condition whereby either or both the mother and child were rejected/extricated. 'Musagara' and 'Mwenyelitsi', refers to 'one who searches'. However, 'Musagara' is a name for one born during a period of 'searching' whereas 'Mwenyelitsi' was initially a nickname for a hardworking man who didn't tire looking for something.

The mental picture of Lulogooli personal names

This study established that many *Lulogooli* personal names originated from certain well-known phenomena- such were positive (good) or negative (bad). Phenomena such as Locust invasion, Poverty, Divorce, Harvest, Death, – created a mental picture that was chronicled in personal names.

Pierce's term for such non-arbitrary signs is icon. He defines 'An icon as a sign which would poses the character which renders it significant, even, though its object has no existence' (*Pierce, 1940*). By interpretant, *Pierce theory* refers to the mental effect produced by the sign: we may think of it as a concept associated with the signs in the triangle of signification-classified naturalisms of iconic signs is grounded in the users' knowledge or awareness of the convention.

There is some iconic features Lulogooli language, in addition to *Onomatopoeic*, which relates it to non-verbal signaling systems. If the relationship is one of form and meaning and the general principle of resemblance of some kind, the form may be described as iconic.

Examples of incidents of onomatopoeia in Lulogooli personal names

There is an actually recognized relationship between 'owl' and 'bad omen' among the *Abaloogoli* whereas 'owl' and 'wisdom' in Europe – this may or may not be based on anything on nature. Within the culture in which we live, however, supported as it is by convention, the above relationships are certainly not arbitrary. Since Naming is a life-long process among the *Maragoli* people, they acquire many names at every stage of an individual's development. The names could be nicknames or pet names both of which gradually gain acceptance in the societies naming system. The origin of such names was given directly dependent on an individual's character. For instance:

'*Lyayiya*' and '*Magui*' are names that are given to people who are unsettled. '*Davadava*' is a person who roams aimlessly in the process destroying relationships, plans and projects. Such people have bad characters. The sound produced when you articulate (pronounce) names *Lyayiya/Liajija/* and *davadava [davadava]* is synonymous with movements of the stock borer and a man walking on a muddy stretch respectively, hence onomatopoeic.

Semiotics Theory enabled the researchers to interpret, predict and apprehend meaning encoded in the *Lulogooli* personal names. These names create an immediate mental picture of whether a given name was meant to record a positive or a negative historical event.

Lexical Loading, whether positive (+VE) or negative (-VE), were for the first time expressed at the origin of the name. Names aura appears to have been watered down as generational users expanded and accompanied with adherence to family ties as opposed to →VE/-VE connotative meaning.

The once -VE personal names have acquired new acceptable status largely due to popularity attributed to previous name holders. The same is also true to some positive names that are getting out of use due to weaknesses in previous P.N holders. Names such as 'Luvai', 'Adamba', 'Kageha' and so on appear to have gained higher status whereas 'Chunguli', 'Inyanza', and so on appears to be loosing out. Respondents from south Maragoli agreed that 'Chunguli', a Buyonga sub-clan name had gradually been rejected because such name holders had been associated with societal vices such as: murder, suicide, drunkardness, divorce, alcoholism, robbery and so on. 'Inyanza' had since been admitted as a 'place name' in *Mungoma* location.

Conclusion

A significant number of Lulogooli personal names have connotative meanings with positive or negative attributes. Whether such negative or positive attributes hold across all generations should be examined further. When we come to the question the meaning of Lulogooli personal names, we have to learn the origin of all such names i.e. place names, names of natural phenomena such as famine, poverty, and so on. All these factors inform meanings of lulogooli personal names and we must remember to link the name study to that of genealogy.

It may or may not be true, that most historical affairs had a genealogical side or meaning. In Lulogooli personal names were given and acquired through generations.

We have nicknames, but the area granted to this in discussing the meaning of names is severely limited. The habit of nick-name-giving is a peculiarity of many branches of human race. It is possible that in quite a number of cases a nickname has stuck. Such names, of course, are on the fringe between nicknames and names of occupation. We came across such L.P.N that started as nicknames but are now generally accepted in the naming vocabulary of Lulogooli.

There can be gross misrepresentations in the section of personal names. “*Malova*” has nothing to do with its denotation “soil” but was given to a baby born after the previous deliveries had ended up in infants’ death.

‘*Ilamenya*’ does not denotatively mean “inhabitant” but connotatively refers to a condition where the labour pains lasted more than a day.

‘*Kavita*’ does imply an ancestor who “passed by” but connotatively refers to a pregnancy that lasted more than nine months.

The historical significance between the surface meaning and hidden meanings deserves a critical study as far as the understanding of Lulogooli P.N. is concerned.

No matter how careful we are in our definition of the word we are bound to accommodate certain amount of vagueness of ambiguity which is inherent in the very nature of language in general and that of the name (word) in particular. The most important forms of ambiguity are: the generic character of the word, the multiplicity of aspects in the word, the lack of clear-cut boundaries in non-linguistic world and the lack of familiarity in the referent of the words. Not even the proper names, which may be considered the most concrete of all words, are also subject to such shifts in application: only the context will specify which aspect of a person, which phases in their developments which side of their activities we have in mind. Such shifts in application can easily lead to multiple meaning (ambiguity) or in extreme cases, misunderstanding. This case is well exemplified in a sizeable collection of names that one acquires along the way to adulthood, example: ‘*Adolwa*’ (bastard) and ‘*Kibara*’ (round/oval head) could be both a pet/praise and or derogatory names depending on the context.

Lack of familiarity with the ‘referent’ of a word (name) is, off course, a highly variable factor, since it depends on the general knowledge of the special interest of each individual since the vocabulary of any language is open-ended, i.e. new words can always be added to it, and since a single individual, no matter how learned, cannot be a specialist in all fields, nobody can pretend to be familiar with all the words (names) in a given language. This lack of familiarity can therefore be another source of ambiguity and may in some cases cause a serious breakdown in communication especially when names are used out of context. Examples ‘*Musungu*’ means denotatively as a European but connotatively as a friend, a long-expected son, one who doesn’t resemble relatives or born outside wed-lock.

Emotive overtones refer to the use of naming either to express emotions or to arouse them in others. This use of naming may be opposed to the purely communicative one, which is basically symbolic or referential. Whether users assume that both the communicative and the emotive uses of language contribute to the meaning of all names should be studied.

In Lexicology, the consequence of this dual aspect of language use is that of meaning of any word (name) may be modified by emotive overtones. Although this modified meaning may be considered secondary, it is nevertheless as important as denotative meaning of a word. In certain contexts, it may even be the determining factor for the most appropriate interpretation of a given name. However, because emotive overtones may be added to a name, this aspect of language does not lend itself to objective analysis.

For example, especially in cases where the mother had difficulties in pregnancy, names for the new-born are informed by such state. However, such names are also established among the institutional i.e. ‘*Agade*’ is a name given to a baby whose ‘expectant mother’ loved to lie; but at the same time it could have nothing to do with an honest relative whom a child was named (after).

Many Lulogooli P.N had etymologically, negative connotations when the name was first formed. However, the study established that many negative/positive connotated P.N have changed their status due to successes and or failures of previous name holders.

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