A LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE OF PERSONAL NAMES IN KAMBARI

Aliyu Ibrahim DANTATA
aiidantata@gmail.com
Department of English
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper explores the linguistic structure of personal names and their relationship with cultural and historical events in Kambari, a language cluster among the Niger-Congo family of languages, spoken in the Northern part of Nigeria. The paper argues that personal names in Kambari culture have to be understood from linguistic as well as historical and social perspectives. The study also adopts Horwich (2004) 'use theory of meaning'. It is evidently clear from the findings that most Kambari personal names are amalgam of verbs and pronominal, nominal and verbs, adjectives and accusatives, and/or compound words with a verbal base. These are copiously instantiated in the paper. One instance is *Lawamu,* a compound name with the constituents *Lawa+mu*. Literally, *lawa* means *leave* while *mu* means *me*. The name connotes a child who survived after birth while many before him/her could not survive. The name becomes an amalgam of a verb and singular accusative form of a pronominal.

Keywords*: Kambari, pronominal, anaphoric, nominative, accusative*

1. Introduction

The Kambari speaking community are predominantly found in Northern Nigeria, within the states of Niger and Kebbi. The name 'Kambari' is used to refer to both the people and their language. The Kambari, like other Africans, bear names as a means of being uniquely identified. In African societies, the birth of a child is an event of great magnitude (Mbiti 1975: 125). Great significance is, therefore, attached to the naming of a child. This is also applicable to Kambari where naming is considered to be of profound significance in that the name-giver chooses a name that truly

identifies the child as a person. Names are usually given to children at birth by their parents, especially the father. Such names are referred to as personal names or forenames (anthroponyms). In addition to being a means of identification, names also serve as a pointer to the societal values. Thus, one is not regarded as a proper human being if he/she does not bear a name (Obeng, 2001: iv; Agyekum, 2006: 208). According to Ubahakwe (1982:27) "an indigenous African name on the whole personifies the individual, tells some story about the parents and/or the family of the bearer; and in a more general sense, points to the values of the society into which the individual is born." This view is equally expressed by Mphande (2006:109) who describes African names as "statements about religion and beliefs of the speakers and their relationship with the supernatural."

In view of the foregoing, it is believed that language functions as a tool through which a people's social and cultural world is evaluated and reproduced. In this regard, names are said to have indexical relations to places, peoples and events. They function as mini-narratives about the past or future (Duranti, 1997:19). Based on the available literature, to the best of our knowledge, little studies have been conducted on Kambari names. Such work includes Dantata (2018) study on the 'naming and name-giving in Kambari culture'.

The present study, unlike the previous one, focuses exclusively on linguistic structure of Kambari personal names. Kambari names tend to relate to the users' personal histories including cultural background (e.g. *Azona* – a child born at the farm), while others include personal or family names. Renditions of names in Kambari include culturally accepted forms (e.g. *Vanumu* - a child born on a mission which was not successful) and those which are more unique to the user, names given to children at birth. It has equally been observed in Yemeni Arabic personal names. According to Al-Zumor (2009: 16) "personal names occur in any language and they basically change, develop, and die out, and they have a life cycle similar to that of the other lexical items of the language."

This study is significant because it shows how Kambari names constitute an index of their cultural world. It equally looks at the linguistic insights which necessitated the bearing of Kambari names. The study also examines and sheds light on the linguistic structure involved in deriving names from their individual structural sources.

The data for this study was drawn from various parts of Kambari communities (Niger and Kebbi states). However, a greater number of the names were collected from Magama, Agwara and Rijau Local Government Areas in Niger state, and Shanga Local Government Area in Kebbi state.

For the presentation of data and analysis, a structural source is posited for each Kambari name. The structure of each name is derived compositionally from its formatives. This is followed by the various processes of simplification involved in the derivation. The study also adopts Horwich (2004) 'use theory of meaning'.

2. Theoretical Framework

The current study identifies and adopts 'the use theory of meaning' by Horwich (2004) as well as the 'pronominal structure' put forward by Chomsky (1981) in Government and Binding theory (GB). The use theory, as it were, claims that the meaning of a word or an expression is determined by the context of its use. Eze (2016) further explains that the use theory of meaning contends that the meaning of any object at all is the use to which it is put in the society. Meaning as such is function-dependent. The proponents of this theory are Wittgenstein and Horwich. It is against this background that the study of Kambari names in this paper can be hinged on this theory considering the fact that most of Kambari personal traditional names are words that are structured linguistically in word classes such as pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and other word classes.

3. Methodology

The data for this study was drawn from primary source in various parts of Kambari speaking communities (Niger and Kebbi states). However, a greater number of the names were collected from Magama Local Government Area of Niger state, in Salka town where Kambari speakers are dominant and Shanga Local Government Area in Kebbi state.

4. Structure of Kambari Personal Names

Kambari personal names exhibit an interesting linguistic structure worthy of study. Kambari names like various words in the language have different structures. Some of the Kambari names are amalgam of verbs and pronouns and/or compound words with a verbal base. Likewise, there are

some personal names that can be studied as Kambari phrases and simple sentences, though in Kambari orthography a name is written as a single word as the case of Hausa personal names studied by Abbas (2018). However, some content of Kambari names when analysed critically are beyond a single word, they can be seen as phrases as well as sentences in the language.

4.2   Structural Analysis of Kambari Personal Names

Name	**Structure**	**Gloss**
1. Kunele	*kune + le*	they are tired with you
	Be tired + them = verb + 3plr accusative	

This name is formed by a verb root and a 3rd person plural accusative form of the pronoun. The cultural meaning of the name depicts a child who was born after prolong labour by the mother.

2. Lawamu	*Lawa + mu*	a child who stays alive after many children died
	To leave + us = verb + 1plr accusative	

Here, the name is an amalgam of a verb root and 1st person plural accusative form of the pronoun. The cultural meaning of the name shows that the child stays alive after many before him could not. *Lawamu* depicts that the spirits should leave *me* alone, I have come to stay.

3. Mindale	*minda + le*	be watching them
	To watch + them = verb + 3plr accusative	

The name is a combination of the verb base and 3rd person plural accusative form of the pronoun. The cultural meaning of the name depicts someone who is supposed to

4. Rochomu	*Rocho + mu*	thank me
	Thank + me = verb + 1sgl accusative	

This is an amalgam of a verb root and 1st person singular accusative form of the pronoun to show that the name is derived from two classes – verb and pronoun. The cultural meaning of the name implies someone that always extends a hand of fellowship to others.

5. Azolamu   *Azola + mu*   Someone that takes risk

Risk + me = verb + 1sgl accusative

The name combines a verb root and 1st person singular accusative form of the pronoun. Structurally, the name brings two word classes together to express cultural meaning of the word – someone that takes risk in doing certain things in Kambari society and/or community.

6. Bowayi   *Bowa + yi*   he/she comes to stay alive

Stay + S/he = verb + 3sgl nominative

The structure of this name indicates further that the name is an amalgam of a verb root and 3rd person singular nominative form of the pronoun. The cultural meaning of the name indicates that the bearer stays alive; the spirits were ready to make him/her stay alive.

7. Dammamu   *Damma +mamu*   Talk of the people

Talk + people = verb + noun

The structure of this name shows that it combines a verb root and a common noun. The cultural meaning of the name shows that many people talk about the bearer in different contexts, as in, body weight at birth, light in complexion, born with two teeth; defy the spirits, and many more.

8. Chigileshi   *Chiga + le + shi*   they don't love themselves

Love + them + not = verb + 3plr accusative/reflexive + negation

Structurally, this name is an amalgam of a verb root, 3rd person plural accusative form of the pronoun and a negation. The cultural and or traditional meaning of the name depicts a child who was born when parents no longer love one another.

9. Guzali   *Guza + ali*   someone from idol worshiping

Idol + one who worship

In this name, we have two instances of nouns coming together to form a compound name. The traditional meaning of the name implies one who worships idol. In Kambari traditional settings, they worship their deities and few homes become the custodians of the community's deities.

10. Dununale   *dannu + n + le*   stay with them

Stay/sit + with + them = verb + prep + 3plr accusative

This name structurally becomes a compound name and hence a phrase in its own right. The name exhibits a verb phrase with verb as the head and a prepositional complement. When the words are in isolation, we can see that there is a vowel change from /u/ to /a/ in *dunnu,* and an elision of a vowel sound after the preposition, but a name in Kambari must be written as one.

11. Makoto   *ma + koto*   the children have finished

Child + finish = noun + verb

Structurally, the name is an amalgam of a noun and a verb joined to form a phrase. This is culturally in line with a child who becomes the last born by a woman. That is, there are no more children in her womb to bear.

12. Kopomu   *koppo + mu*   you should borrow me

Borrow + me = verb + 1sgl accusative

In this instance, the name is structurally an amalgam of a verb base and 1st person singular accusative form of a pronoun. The name forms a phrase to depict a child who was taken by another mother to be reared till s/he is grown up.

13. Tonoshi   *tono + shi*   don't mind them

Mind + not = noun + negation

Again, the structure of this name is a combination of a noun and a negation. The name culturally means a child born when there are many allegations labelled against the mother. Here, the woman seems not to mind anything that people say about the eligibility of her child, hence the name.

14. Banale   *bona + le*   escort them

Escort + them = verb + 3plr accusative

In this instance, the name is structurally formed a verb and 3rd person plural accusative case. The name culturally means a child

15. Damantsa   *damma + n + tsa*   enough of what I'm hearing

Talk + I + enough = verb + 1sg nominative + adverb

The structure of this name shows an amalgam of a verb, 1st person singular nominative case and an adverb. The name is structured as a phrase because of the meaning the compound name exhibits.

16. Jiyamu   *jiya + mu*   One who is thoughtful

Thoughtful + me = adjective + 1sgl accusative

This is an amalgam of an adjective combined with 1st person singular accusative case. The cultural meaning of this name shows one who is thoughtful in his dealings. The name is usually associated with a male.

17. Adama   a + damma   A girl talked about by people

They + talk = 3plr nominative + verb

In this name, there is a combination of a pronominal and a verb to form a sentence. The name depicts a girl who is extremely beautiful and she becomes the talk of the town. This can be due to her beauty or if there is any other characteristic that will make people to talk about her.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we demonstrated that Kambari personal names exhibit an interesting linguistic structure. Kambari names like various words in the language have different structures. Some of Kambari names are amalgam of verbs and pronouns, nominal and verbs, adjectives and accusatives, and/or compound words with a verbal base. Likewise, there are some Kambari personal names that have been studied as phrases and simple sentences in this study, though in Kambari orthography a name is written as a single word. However, some content of Kambari names when analysed critically are beyond a single word, they can be seen as phrases as well as sentences in the language.

From the discussion so far, we can deduce that Kambari personal names serve as a mirror that reflects the cultural values of Kambari people as well as the linguistic structure of their language.

Though most of the sources of Kambari personal names are culturally motivated but a deeper scrutiny of the names can reveal an interesting linguistic structure of these names.

References

Abass, N. I. 2018. Linguistic Connotation & Stucture of Hausa Personal Names. In Oye Taiwo (ed) *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria.* Vol. 21 No. 3 Pg. 167 – 174.

Agyekum, K. K. 2006. The Sociolinguistic of Akan Personal Names. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*. 15(2): 206–235 (2006)

Al-Zumor, A.W.Q.G. 2009. A Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Analysis of Yemeni Arabic Personal Names. GEMA *Online Journal of Language Studies*. 2: 15-27.

Chomsky, N. 1981. *Lectures on Government and Binding*. Dordrecht: Foris.

Dantata, A. I. 2018. Naming and Name-Giving in Kambari Culture. In Oye Taiwo (ed) *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria.* Vol. 21 No.1 Pg. 194 – 201.

Duranti, A. 1997. *Linguistic Anthropology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eze, C. N. 2016. 'The Use Theory of Meaning'. In *Theories of Linguistics.* Pp. 207-219. Mbah B. M. (Ed.). Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press Ltd.

Horwich, P. 2004. A Use Theory of Meaning. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 68*, 351–372

Mbiti, J. S. 1975. *Introduction to African Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Obeng, S. G. 2001. *African Anthroponymy*. Muenchen: Lincom Europa.

Ubahakwe, E. 1982. Culture Content of Igbo Personal Names. In Ogbalu, F.C. and E.N. Emenanjo (eds.). *Igbo Language and Culture.* II: 27-39. Ibadan: University Press Limited.