



EMERGING PRINCIPLES GUIDING PERSONAL NAMING PRACTICES IN SUKUMA LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the intricate principles governing personal naming practices in the Sukuma language, a prominent linguistic community in Tanzania, mainly concentrated in five administrative regions, including Shinyanga. It contends that personal names, as linguistically infused entities, intricately reflect various sociocultural aspects of human existence. The process of selecting these names is not random but guided by discernible principles, often subtly ingrained within linguistic systems. Utilising a case study approach, a sample of twelve native Sukuma speakers was selected through purposive sampling methods. Data collection involved focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis adopted an interpretative paradigm, subjecting the collected data to thorough scrutiny and categorising it into thematic clusters that resonate with various factors influencing individual naming. These factors include birth timing, geographical location of birth, infantile features and behaviour at birth, ecological elements, and birth circumstances. Collectively, these factors form the foundation of the principled framework that shapes personal naming conventions in the Sukuma context. Findings emphasise the multiplicity of principles underlying the intricate process of personal naming among the Sukuma people. While some principles align with cross-linguistic patterns for instance the salience principle, others exhibit uniqueness to this linguistic milieu like the iconicity principle. These findings highlight that personal naming is a systematic, methodical endeavour guided by well-defined principles in the Sukuma culture. The conclusion made is that this study underscores the meticulous and principled nature of personal naming customs among the Sukuma. The study proposed that further investigation is essential to elucidate, validate, and extend these principles to diverse linguistic paradigms. This endeavour promises a comprehensive exploration of the systematic foundations that characterise naming conventions.

Keywords: Kemunasukuma, Naming conventions, Personal naming, Principles, Sukuma culture, Sukuma language

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1. Introduction

This paper embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the underlying principles that govern the intricate practice of personal naming within the Sukuma language. The advent of a new child within a family invariably precipitates the necessity for a name to be bestowed upon the individual. This critical aspect underscores the universal nature of personal naming, wherein each individual is endowed with a distinctive appellation. Names, beyond their linguistic significance, serve as potent tools of communication, profoundly shaping human interaction and experience. The assignment of names is a fundamental attribute of human existence, extending across diverse cultures and geographical boundaries. For instance, within the Akan cultural milieu, Adomako (2015) observes the allocation of dual names to each child, comprising the day name and the family name, signifying the cultural significance of nomenclature. Similarly, among the Bono community, Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000) elucidates the practice of ascribed and bestowed names. This



paradigm further extends to the Sukuma population, wherein children commonly bear two names. The primary appellation, termed *lima lya mukaya* 'home/clan name', is imparted post-birth by grandparents, parents, or relatives, serving as a prominent identifier acknowledged primarily within familial circles. In tandem, the secondary designation, termed *lima lya nyazunya* 'baptismal name' or 'modern name', reflects a contemporary or religious name, attributed by the child's parents based on their religious affiliations. This appellation typically finds utility within church congregations or schools/colleges during registration.

In a global context, personal naming emerges as a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon traversing all societies and cultures. The act of naming confers a distinct identity upon an individual, which, in essence, remains immutable throughout their lifetime. Names assume an integral role in recognizing and distinguishing people's histories, cultures, and origins across the expanse of the globe (Agyekum, 2006; Manyasa, 2009). The assertion made by Shigini and Mapunda (2023:74) underscores the pivotal role of names as "tools that people use to understand, communicate, and embrace reality about individuals' lives." Within this framework, personal names constitute an intrinsic component of every linguistic lexicon, encapsulating multifaceted dimensions of culture, aspirations, beliefs, and sentiments. As aptly encapsulated by Chipalo (2019:75), personal names function as "storerooms for keeping historical records and sustaining the shared beliefs and identity of a community." Thus, personal names serve as the primary conduits of individual identity, concurrently serving as repositories of communal narratives, encapsulating both collective and individual experiences.

Evidently, the process of personal naming, particularly within African cultural contexts, assumes an elevated status, warranting meticulous consideration by the community. Mashiri et al. (2013) aptly depict the act of name-giving as a profound, mindful, and intentional endeavor intricately interwoven with cultural beliefs, customs, aspirations, and events. This reverence for the naming process is accompanied by the scrupulous selection of names, governed by well-established principles, methodologies, and patterns (Mutegi et al., 2017). This cultural practice is predicated upon the deeply rooted belief that names possess an inherent mystical potency capable of shaping character and influencing an individual's destiny (Musonda et al., 2019). Names are not mere linguistic constructs; rather, they serve as vessels harbouring spiritual energy. The gravity attributed to personal names within numerous African cultures is highlighted by the assertion of (Saarelma-Maunumaa, 2003), positing that an individual only truly attains personhood upon receiving a fitting appellation. Consequently, the nomenclature assigned to an individual is a product of an intricately woven naming framework (Mheta et al., 2017).

As demonstrated, the act of conferring personal names upon newborns is a widespread cultural practice, resonating universality across diverse communities. However, the manner in which these names are bestowed, the motivating factors underpinning their selection, the connotations attributed to them, and the accompanying rituals exhibit substantial cultural variation (Adjah, 2011; Agyekum, 2006; Al-Zumor, 2009; Mashiri et al., 2013; Mutunda, 2016). This variance highlights the existence of cultural practices that traverse diverse societies, alongside idiosyncratic practices that remain culture-specific. This divergence can be attributed, in part, to distinct conceptualisations and understandings of the world, inherently shaped by individual knowledge, lived experiences, and contexts, all of which converge within the fabric of the bestowed personal names.

Despite scholarly acknowledgments, such as those presented by Mutegi et al. (2017), Mheta et al. (2017), and Mashiri et al. (2013), regarding the methodical nature of the personal naming process, the central focus has predominantly rested upon the semantic and emblematic dimensions of personal names as tools of communication and agents of identity. While these dimensions have been extensively dissected, the implicit bedrock upon which name-givers scaffold their selection of personal names remains unexplored, applicable across cultures or languages, including Sukuma. The elucidation of the foundational tenets guiding the choice of personal names has paramount significance, enabling the comprehension of cultural knowledge, convictions, suppositions, and philosophies encapsulated within the nomenclature. Furthermore, the understanding of these guiding principles stands pivotal, serving to illuminate the inherent methodical essence underpinning personal naming. This study is thus poised to examine the guiding principles

governing personal naming practices within the Sukuma language, representative of the more than 150 indigenous languages spoken within Tanzania. The Sukuma community, constituting the largest ethnic group in Tanzania, systematically imparts personal names, with its epicentre in North-western Tanzania, prominently encompassing Shinyanga, Mwanza, Geita, Simiyu, and some areas of Tabora. It is important to note that individual Sukuma speakers, and those of other languages, are also dispersed across other Tanzanian regions due to fluid mobility dynamics (Shigini, 2020).

2. Literature Review

The exploration of personal names and naming practices has captivated the attention of scholars across diverse disciplines, including linguistics, history, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy, spanning several years. Consequently, a multitude of studies have been conducted globally on personal names and naming practices, with a pronounced focus on the African continent, Tanzania, and particularly the Sukuma ethnic group. Scholarly investigations into personal names span geographical boundaries, with researchers worldwide delving into multifaceted aspects, using diverse methodologies and theoretical frameworks. For instance, Al-Zumor (2009), investigating the Yemeni community, scrutinised the semantic, sociolinguistic, and morphological dimensions of female personal names using a questionnaire. This study discerned that names are imbued with meaningful connotations, debunking the notion of arbitrary nomenclature. In a similar vein, Rahman (2013) undertook an ethnographic exploration to unravel the intricate interplay between personal names and societal variables such as power dynamics, belief systems, and identity in Pakistan. By contrasting Al-Zumor's (2009) questionnaire-based approach, Rahman's (2013) investigation illuminated the intricate sociocultural tapestry underpinning the significance of names.

Drawing upon the interconnectedness between cultural practices and language, Devi (2018) delved into personal names within the Khurkhul community in India. This inquiry unveiled a direct correlation between personal names and their bearers within this society. Moreover, Aljbour and Al-Haq (2019) employed a synchronic and comparative methodology to analyze the sociolinguistic implications of Indonesian female personal names across three generations: grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. The findings revealed substantial generational disparities in name implications. In the realm of morphological analysis, Tahat (2020) applied the Item-and-Process morphological theory to dissect the morphological patterns underpinning Jordanian personal names, emphasising derivation and inflection as predominant formative processes. Al-Sayyed (2021), in contrast, explored the causal relationship between personal names and their usage through a causal theory of names. Employing a survey, this study established a substantial bond between a name and its pragmatic application. Within an African context, a plethora of investigations have extended to various African languages. Lungu et al. (2022), employing interviews and focus group discussions, illuminated the multifaceted motivations behind Namwanga personal names, embracing factors such as death, religion, birth events, order and manner of birth, birthplaces, and conflicts. Diden (2021) delved into Dawro personal names, highlighting the influence of social, cultural, and economic contexts on name choices. Furthermore, a morphological inquiry was conducted by Exeudo et al. (2021) on Onitsha personal names, unveiling syntactic and morphological structures primarily formed through prefixation, suffixation, and clipping. Kinyua (2020) and Minkailou and Abdoulaye (2020) examined the structure and meaning of Turkana and Songhay personal names respectively. Kinyua (2020) reported that Turkana personal names have prefixes, infixes, and suffixes attached to roots, and have denotative or connotative meanings. Minkailou and Abdoulaye (2020) exposed that the traditional personal names in Songhay have structures that go from simple words to complete sentences.

Tanzania has also been a fertile ground for scholarly investigations into personal names and naming practices. Lusekelo and Manyasa (2022) explored Nyamwezi and Sukuma personal names, affirming the meaningful nature of these linguistic forms. Chipalo (2019), Msuya (2021), Charwi (2019), Buberwa (2018), Lusekelo (2018), and Asheli (2017) undertook parallel inquiries in various community languages, affirming the embedded meanings mirroring sociocultural realities within their respective communities. Notably, within Sukuma, scholars such as Shigini and Mapunda (2023), Shigini (2020), and Athanas (2019) have explored the meaningfulness of Sukuma personal names, shedding light on the sociocultural intricacies encoded within. Evidently, existing research underscores the essential role of personal names as carriers of

sociocultural meanings, mirroring multifaceted aspects of individuals' lives and their cultural contexts. This body of work emphasises the meticulous nature of personal naming, governed by implicit principles that are integral to this linguistic endeavour. While prior studies have enriched our understanding of various facets of personal names and naming practices, they have not yet comprehensively elucidated the guiding principles that underscore the assignment of names, particularly within African and Tanzanian languages, including Sukuma. Therefore, this study undertakes a pivotal step in bridging this gap by investigating the principles that steer personal naming practices in the Sukuma language. Anchored in the understanding that personal names are imbued with profound sociocultural realities, the guiding premise posits that these names are selected in a manner guided by inherent principles, often implicit within language systems. By scrutinising the Kemunasukuma dialect, this research endeavours to unearth and articulate these guiding principles, shedding light on the systematic nature underpinning Sukuma personal naming practices.

2.1 Theoretical Approach

This study employed the cognitive semantics (CS) approach, a facet of cognitive linguistics, as its theoretical foundation. Central to cognitive semantics is the notion that the meanings of words are not independent entities but are deeply intertwined with the individuals who generate and employ them. This perspective posits that meaning is situated within the realm of human cognition, attributed to the creators and users of language rather than residing solely within the words themselves. Originating in the 1970s as a response to the truth-conditional semantics of formal linguistics (Evans & Green, 2006), CS takes a departure from the focus on explicit truth conditions to delve into the intricate interplay between linguistic meaning and conceptual structures (Croft & Cruse, 2004). CS is fundamentally concerned with the interrelation of conceptual systems, human experience, and the semantic structures encoded within language (Evans, 2007). At its core, CS examines the processes of conceptualisation and the underlying cognitive structures that facilitate this process (Evans & Green, 2006). This approach strives to unravel how language reflects and structures human knowledge, serving as a reflective mirror of our experiential understanding. The pivotal tenet of CS is that linguistic meaning emanates from the cognitive processes that shape an individual's comprehension of the world, encompassing perceptions, emotions, and somatic sensations (Evans & Green, 2006). Anchored in this framework, four key principles delineate the CS paradigm:

- (i) Embodied Conceptual Structure: The organisation of concepts within human cognition stems from bodily experiences, wherein the meaningfulness of a concept is intertwined with the somatic experiences associated with it.
- (ii) Semantic Structure as Conceptual Structure: Rather than referring to external entities, linguistic meaning is rooted in the internal cognitive concepts of language users.
- (iii) Encyclopedic Representation of Meaning: Linguistic components serve as gateways to extensive cognitive repositories, enabling the synthesis of complex experiences and knowledge through language.
- (iv) Meaning Construction as Conceptualization: Language does not merely encode meaning but prompts a dynamic process of meaning construction, drawing from an individual's background knowledge and cognitive engagement.

In the realm of cognitive linguistics, personal names' meanings are seen as embedded within cognitive models, often framed as frames (Fillmore, 1982) or idealized cognitive models (ICMs) (Lakoff, 1987). These frames or ICMs encapsulate organized bundles of knowledge, beliefs, and behavioural patterns that facilitate the interpretation of experiences (Fillmore & Baker, 2010). One such cognitive model is metonymy, an intricate feature of cognition often guided by underlying principles. Metonymy involves utilizing one entity to symbolise another entity, signifying a 'standing for' relationship (Cienki, 2007). Metonyms enable a more nuanced comprehension by directing attention to specific aspects of the denoted concept. Cultural wisdom is encapsulated within the framework of folk theories, which guide behavioural norms and perceptions within a particular society. Saliency, both cognitive and ontological, reflects the preference for familiar or prominent examples as reference points for understanding categories. Iconicity shows the alignment between linguistic form and its corresponding meaning, often exemplified in personal names reflecting observable traits of the name bearer. The bond between a source domain and a target domain (Croft & Cruse, 2004), whereby the meaning of one entity is defined in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson,

2003) is captured within the framework of metaphors. Construal principles emphasize the multifaceted nature of human interpretation, allowing for diverse representations of the same situation based on individual perspectives. Central to this approach is the notion that language serves as a conduit for conveying not only meaning but also the cognitive processes and cultural values that shape an individual's worldview. The CS lens facilitates a comprehensive examination of how personal names encapsulate profound sociocultural meanings and cognitive models, offering insights into the principles underlying the process of personal naming. By applying CS, this study delves into the intricate interplay between linguistic structures and human cognition, unraveling the principles that guide the assignment of personal names within the Sukuma cultural context.

3. Research Methods

This study employed a case study design within the qualitative research paradigm for data collection and analysis. The case study approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of a case, event, process, program, or individual, prioritizing depth of understanding over breadth of coverage (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This qualitative research approach is particularly suitable for investigating culturally or linguistically specific data that shed light on the opinions, values, and social contexts of a particular society (Mack et al., 2005). The study was conducted in the Shinyanga Region, with a primary focus on the Shinyanga Rural District, specifically within the Imesela ward encompassing Nyika, Imesela, and Maskati villages. For matters of specificity, this study focused on Kemunasukuma (F21a), one of the four dialects of Sukuma (F21) (Maho, 2009:44). The selection of the study area was, thus, motivated by the prevalence of the Kemunasukuma dialect and its relative distance from the district headquarters, thereby minimizing the influence of Swahili on the linguistic context.

Data were gathered from twelve participants who were elderly Sukuma native speakers, aged 50 years and above, selected through purposive sampling across the three villages. This sample size was considered sufficient for qualitative research, aligning with the range of participants suggested by Daymon and Holloway (2010). The snowball technique was employed to locate eligible participants due to the researcher's unfamiliarity with the study area. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with four elders from each village, complemented by three focus group discussion sessions (one from each village). The selection of participants was rooted in their native fluency in Sukuma, their birth and residence in the respective villages, and their age group, ensuring a deep familiarity with Sukuma personal naming practices. The interview method was the primary data collection tool, allowing the researcher to delve into participants' perceptions, interpretations, and constructed realities (Punch, 2009). This approach facilitated a comprehensive analysis of Sukuma personal names and naming practices. In parallel, focus group discussions were employed to attain a more nuanced understanding of social dynamics, including personal naming, adding depth and validation to the data collected from interviews (Nyumba et al., 2018).

Data analysis was undertaken using an interpretative approach. The collected data were meticulously examined and organized into categories that corresponded to the diverse factors influencing the selection and bestowal of Sukuma personal names, such as birth circumstances, geographical locations, time of birth, baby's appearance, and behavior at birth. The identification of these categories of personal names facilitated a comprehensive interpretation of the guiding principles underlying the Sukuma personal naming process.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and deliberates upon the findings of the present study. The investigation elucidates that the process of personal naming among the Sukuma community is not a haphazard endeavor, but rather adheres to a spectrum of distinct naming principles. These principles, although subconsciously applied, play a decisive role in guiding parents or name-givers in their selection of personal names for newborns. The elucidation of these principles can be gleaned from various influencing factors, encompassing the time of birth, birthplace, birth circumstances, parental aspirations, and cultural conventions, which collectively influence the naming process. The ensuing discourse presents an in-depth analysis of the salience, iconicity, metonymy, folk theory, metaphoricality, and construal principles that underlie the Sukuma personal naming practices.

4.1 The Principle of Salience or Prominence

The principle of salience emerges as a pivotal guiding force in the realm of personal naming within the Sukuma cultural milieu. Salience, as explicated by Lakoff (1987), entails the propensity to utilize well-recognized or conspicuous exemplars as cognitive reference points for various categories. In essence, salience is predicated on the phenomenon of a cognitive unit attaining focal prominence in one's perceptual sphere. This implies that certain entities possess an inherent aptitude to capture attention more effectively than others, thereby qualifying as salient constructs (Schmid, 2007). It is discerned that Sukuma children are bestowed with personal names that draw reference from salient attributes associated with their moment of birth. Illustratively, this principle manifests through two distinct categories of personal names as follows:

The first category corresponds to the temporal aspect of birth. During the extensive interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs), participants unveiled that the Sukuma community systematically records the temporal facet of birth via the personal names accorded to infants. As enunciated by one respondent, ...*likanza umujisukuma liliβugaβe ng'hangala itano: dnyu, kasana, lūmi, mhindi, na βujiku* 'Time in Sukuma is categorised into five: early morning, late morning, afternoon, evening, and night. Children are named according to time of birth'. This temporal classification seamlessly translates into personal names such as *Dnyu* 'early morning', *Kasana/Misana* 'late morning', *Lūmi/Malūmi* 'afternoon', *Mhindi* 'evening', and *Majiku/βujiku* 'night'. Evidently, these personal names symbolise the distinction of birth timing from other contextual elements at the juncture of a child's emergence. This phenomenon highlights the heightened propensity of birth timing to command the attention of name-givers, rendering it a salient determinant.

The second category pertains to personal names linked to birth locales. Informants expounded that certain personal names denote specific birthplaces, encapsulating a spectrum of diverse scenarios. For instance, one participant's statement resonates, ...*galiho amiina gangi ayo βaginhagwa aβaana gajilanigije naho oβyalitwa ung'waana* 'There are names given to children that express birthplaces. There are children who were born along the road, on a journey, near a lake, on a farm, or under a tree'. This culminates in the attribution of personal names like *Nyanzila/Mayila* 'of road/roads', *Lugendo* 'journey', *Lugutu* 'cowshed', *Magulilu* 'markets', *Kalwinzu* 'wellspring', *Kanumba* 'small house', *Kanyanza* 'small lake', and *Matongo* 'farms'. These personal names symbolise a diverse array of salient birthplace situations or settings, which resonate with name-givers' predilection for conspicuous and noteworthy birth-related factors. The concept of salience, intrinsically tied to attention allocation, fundamentally underscores the prominence of birth timings and locales in capturing name-giver's attention and subsequently influencing personal naming practices.

Consistent patterns are discernible in studies by Asheli (2017) within Kuria, Iraqw, and Maasai societies, as well as Mutunda (2016) within the Luvale context. For instance, Asheli (2017) expounds that these aforementioned societies bestow personal names on children that spotlight significant circumstances or attributes that captured parents' attention at the moment of birth. Among the Kuria, names such as *Matiku* 'night', *Werema* 'cultivation', and *Mbusiro* 'sowing or planting' exemplify distinctive phenomena noted during childbirth. Analogously, Iraqw personal names such as *Boay* 'gathering', *Margwe* 'communal work', and *Maasay* 'sacrificial prayer' reflect distinctive events during childbirth. Maasai personal names like *Oloirien* 'African Olive tree', *Songoyo* 'sweet-smelling tree species', and *Oreteti* 'sycamore tree' mirror culturally salient entities. This collective narrative underscores the universalisation of the salience principle, albeit modulated by sociocultural distinctiveness across communities. The intrinsic variability in what is deemed salient underscores the role of cultural perspective in personal naming practices (Mutunda, 2016).

4.2 The Metaphoricity Principle

Metaphor is another principle that emerges as influential in guiding personal naming within the Sukuma culture. Metaphors serve as a means to establish a connection between a source domain and a target domain (Croft & Cruse, 2004). Essentially, this involves describing the meaning of one entity in terms of another entity. Metaphors are deeply intertwined with human thought, as they express our embodied experiences (Evans & Green, 2006; Feldman, 2006). Consequently, personal naming, which is an integral part of human experience and cognition, finds expression through metaphors. During focus group discussions (FGDs),

participants revealed that the Sukuma people employed flora and fauna metaphorically to describe various human qualities. For instance, the term *kang'wa* 'rabbit' is used metaphorically to signify intelligence. In this context, the attribute of 'intelligence', as envisaged for a child, is conveyed using the animal 'rabbit', which is commonly associated with intelligence.

Observations indicate that metaphorical principles in Sukuma culture manifest in personal names linked to flora and fauna. Personal names such as *Kadama* 'a small calf', *Kadogosa* 'a female cow', *Maßuli* 'large goats', *Makolo* 'sheep', *Mbiti/Maßiti* 'hyenas', *Kamunda* 'puppy', *Mashimba* 'lions', *Nhiga* 'giraffe', *Kasußi* 'small leopard', *Mapuli* 'elephants', *Ngoso/Magoso* 'rat/rats', *Ng'wandu* 'baobab tree', *Nshishi* 'tamarind tree', *Kasanzu* 'thorny tree', and *Lugomela* 'thorny grasses' represent various fauna and flora. These personal names are bestowed upon children to reflect a wide spectrum of human behaviors or attributes, whether positive (desirable) or negative (undesirable). The attributes of these plants and animals are directly attributed to individuals. In essence, the characteristics of the target domain (the named child) are comprehended in terms of the characteristics of the source domain (flora and fauna).

The data presented in this section underscores that the physical structures and behaviors of flora and fauna are drawn upon in naming children with personal names related to them (Agyekum, 2006; Kileng'a, 2020). Importantly, greater significance is often placed on the behaviors of the source domains (flora and fauna) than on their physical structures. For instance, *Ng'wandu* 'baobab tree' and *Nshishi* 'tamarind tree' are known for their resilience in harsh climatic conditions, typically growing in semi-arid regions with minimal rainfall. This attribute of tolerance is symbolically ascribed to children bearing these names. This highlights that personal names associated with flora and fauna are metaphorically applied and conferred. It is worth noting that such personal names persist not only within the Sukuma speech community but also in other communities, such as the Gogo culture (Chipalo, 2019) and Zezuru culture (Viriri, 2019). In the Gogo culture, Chipalo (2019) reveals that children are bestowed with names like *Nhembo* 'elephant', *Ndogowe* 'donkey', *Lebeleje* 'maize stalk', and *Sanula* 'flower', all of which reference flora and fauna. The presence of flora- and fauna-related personal names in various African communities suggests that metaphors constitute a shared cultural phenomenon across multiple societies. The practice of metaphorically naming children appears to be a universal phenomenon, at least within the communities mentioned, possibly because the naming process inherently reflects the primarily metaphorical nature of human thought, as described by Evans and Green (2006).

4.3 The Iconicity Principle

The iconicity principle also plays a significant role in guiding the assignment of personal names among the Sukuma. Langendonck (2007) explains that iconicity is present when a sign's form reflects something in the world. In essence, iconicity establishes a connection between the form (the name/reference) and its meaning (the named/referent). This principle implies that some personal names directly resemble or are similar to their bearers. The findings show that certain personal names mirror specific features observed in newborns, often based on their physical appearances and behaviours. However, it is essential to note that this principle is applied sparingly, as iconic personal names are relatively uncommon. Newborns usually exhibit distinct physical characteristics and behaviours, such as tender skin, lightweight, small bodily size, or calm disposition at birth. These qualities often influence the personal names they are given. Personal names like *Kasheku* 'soft skin', *Kanagana* 'tender skin', *Ngandu* 'slim/skinny', *Kabuhu* 'lightweight', *Ndohele* 'small body size', and *Kalyehu/Kanogu* 'calm', are iconic, reflecting the appearances or behaviours of some newborns. Since these personal names describe the physical characteristics or behaviours of children, arbitrariness is largely avoided. As Asheli (2017) supports, these personal names are iconic because they establish a direct correspondence with the referent.

As mentioned earlier, the iconicity principle is less prominent in Sukuma and some other languages. For instance, among the three languages studied by Asheli (2017), it was only observed in Iraqw and Maasai, while it was absent in Kuria. Furthermore, the practice of naming children based on the Iconicity Principle varies across communities. In Sukuma, the findings suggest that children's appearance and behaviour at birth influence the choice of personal names, aligning with what Mutunda (2016) observed among the

Luvale. However, this approach is not observed in Iraqw and Maasai (Asheli, 2017), Datooga (Charwi, 2019), and Chasu (Msuya, 2021). For example, the Iraqw consider the child's colour, while the Maasai consider the child's physical appearance at birth (Asheli, 2017). Similar observations were made by Charwi (2019) and Msuya (2021) in Datooga and Chasu, respectively, where children are named based on their physical appearances. These findings imply that, even when two communities bestow personal names on newborns based on the Iconicity Principle, each community may have its unique interpretation of iconicity, as seen in Sukuma, Luvale, Datooga, Iraqw, Chasu, and Maasai.

4.4 The Metonymic Principle

In Sukuma culture, parents or name-givers also employ metonymic principles when assigning personal names to children. Metonymy serves a referential function, allowing one entity to represent another (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Agyekum (2006) reveals that conditions during both prenatal and postnatal phases, as well as social contexts within the family, can influence parents or name-givers to choose one name over another. These individuals are always aware of family or community events during pregnancy or childbirth, which often resonate in the personal names given to children. One common circumstance that influences PN selection is the occurrence of death within the family or community. During fieldwork, one interviewee explained, *...ulufu ulwene luli lo pyee aβanhu ahaweledo nulu ahawangaluke; βaliho βaana βangi aβo βaginhagwa amiina ayo guyombelaga lufu nulu nyanga* 'Death is common to all people; some children are given names that express death circumstances'. This quote suggests that death experiences influence the selection of certain personal names.

The findings in this study reveal that Sukuma children receive personal names related to various events and circumstances, such as *Mayanga* 'mourning', *Lukuβa* 'thunder', *Kalekwa/Mlekwa* 'abandoned/left behind', *Nyanjige/Mayige* 'of locusts/locusts', *Maβula/Kaβula* 'rain', *βukombe* 'dowry-paying celebration', *Shililo* 'sorrowful cry', *Mayombo* 'quarrels', and *Ng'hungwi* 'lamentation'. These personal names reflect the events occurring when the name-bearers were born and help provide insights into the prevailing circumstances at that time. Additionally, these findings align with the belief that names are not mere labels but carry certain mystical powers that can influence the destiny of their bearers. Parents bestow names on their children with great care and consciousness, either based on their own desires or as expressions of their hopes for the children's future. Sukuma children are often assigned personal names like *Laβu* 'caretaker', *Kafumu* 'healer', *Katemi* 'chief/ruler', and *Nkwaβi* 'wealth collector', which reflect their parents' aspirations. Other names relate to seasons and events in the year, such as *Lunyili* 'cold', *Magesa* 'harvesting', *Ng'hamo* 'drought', and *Malima* 'ploughing', all of which are metonymic.

These findings align with and confirm the findings of Asheli (2017) in Kuria and Maasai, indicating that metonymy is one of the guiding principles in bestowing names on children. The practice of giving children personal names that express various birth circumstances, parents' wishes, or seasonal events is also observed in communities like Vatsonga (Chauke, 2015) and Chasu (Msuya, 2021). For example, Msuya (2021) provides examples of Chasu personal names, such as *Senkondo* 'born during wartime', *Themhua* 'born during the rainy season', *Nzota* 'hunger', *Maxangu* 'suffering', and *Nyimpini* 'born during war', which reflect the prevailing circumstances at the time of birth. While metonymy appears to be widely employed in personal naming across diverse communities, it is worth noting that this principle does not apply universally, as evidenced by its absence in Iraqw, one of the three languages studied by Asheli (2017). This highlights that while a principle may be widely used, it does not necessarily make it universal.

4.5 The Construal Principles

Parents or name-givers in Sukuma also make use of construal principles when naming newborns. Construal principles are rooted in the idea that "meaning is conceptualisation," as articulated by Langacker (2007:431). These principles are based on the notion that people use various operations, termed "construal operations" (Croft & Cruse, 2004), to conceptualize the meaning of linguistic forms, including personal names. The critical aspect of the construal principle is that meaning is shaped by subjective perspectives. The choice of names for children is determined by what name-givers consider important when a child is born, highlighting the subjectivity inherent in the naming process.

Since personal naming involves assigning a linguistic form (name) as an identity to an individual, the construal of that linguistic form depends on the perspective of the name-giver. A name-giver's perspective is continually influenced by their experiences and worldview. This means that an entity may be construed differently by different people, or the same entity may have different construals by the same person. Similarly, two entities may be construed as the same or different by the same or different individuals. For example, parents in Kemunasukuma bestow personal names such as *Maβuli* 'goats', *Makolo* 'sheep', *Kasuβi* 'small leopard', *Kamunda* 'puppy', *Suβuya* 'antelope', *Mashimba* 'lions', *Mbitil/Maβiti* 'hyenas', *Mapuli* 'elephants', *Nhiga* 'giraffe', and *Ngoso/Magoso* 'rat/rats' on their children, drawing inspiration from the behaviours, appearances, or hunting instincts of specific animals. However, each animal is construed differently when attention is focused on its specific behaviours or attributes. *Nhiga* 'giraffe', for instance, is construed as visionary due to its long neck, symbolising the ability to see far and foresee danger. *Kamunda/Kawa* 'a puppy/dog', on the other hand, is construed both as a domestic animal used for security and as a symbol of sexual promiscuity. *Maβuli* 'goats' and *Makolo* 'sheep', despite both being domestic animals, are construed differently. A goat is viewed as disobedient but intelligent, while a sheep is considered obedient but lacking in intelligence. Similarly, *Mashimba* 'lions' and *Mapuli* 'elephants', although both aggressive and assertive animals, have varying degrees of aggressiveness and power attributed to them. It is noteworthy that these personal names are metaphorically assigned to children, but their construal is metonymic.

The observation that personal names in Sukuma are metaphorically assigned but metonymically construed suggests that personal names can exhibit both metonymic and metaphoric characteristics. This contradicts the findings of Asheli (2017), who reported that, while names like *Wandwi* 'of a lion' in Kuria and *Diraangw* 'lion' in Iraqw are metonymic, the name *Olowuaru* 'lion' in Maasai is metaphoric. The variation in these findings can be attributed to Langacker's (2007:431) proposition that "meaning is conceptualisation". Thus, the observed variation is a result of individuals' diverse conceptualisations of meaning. A similar trend to the one observed by Asheli (2017) is also reported in Chasu (Kileng'a, 2020) and Datooga (Charwi, 2019). Kileng'a (2020:26) mentions names of animals like *Kitojo* 'hare', *Kagoswe* 'rat', and *Nguve* 'pig', which are construed as clever, stubborn, and greedy, respectively, reflecting metaphorical instances in Chasu society. Similarly, Charwi (2019:100) reports that names like *Gidang'adid* 'lion' and *Gidamarird* 'tiger/leopard' are construed positively in Datooga, as they are bestowed on male children, symbolising their role as hunters and providers for the family.

4.6 The Folk Theory Principle

The last naming principle derived from Sukuma naming practices relates to folk theories, reflecting cultural wisdom and perspectives. Folk theories are an integral part of cultural understanding and often guide people's behaviour within a specific culture or society. According to Lakoff (1987), everyone possesses language folk theories with folk theories of reference. Folk theories not only reflect cultural understanding but also echo beliefs and perspectives.

In many African societies, including Sukuma, there is a tradition of naming children after living or deceased relatives. Interviews and focus group discussions emphasized that elders, who play a crucial role in the naming process, bestow newborns with personal names of departed relatives to ensure their memory is preserved and to honour influential figures within the family or clan. One interviewee noted,*amiina gaangi dugafunyaga ukobaana ga muβukoo nulu gamundugu; dugaβinhaga aβaana gugalinda gadizujimila* 'Some of the names we bestow on children are family names or names of relatives; we give them to children to protect them from getting lost'. Newborns are also named after living relatives to ensure that family names are passed down through generations. This practice is grounded in the belief that names serve as a bridge between the worlds of the living and the dead. Sukuma children often receive personal names of their deceased and living relatives, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and others, as a way of celebrating and preserving family lineage. personal names such as *Masonga* 'arrows', *Machimu* 'spears', *Magembe* 'hoes', *Lushinge* 'needle', *Lugoye* 'rope', *Kaβelele* 'stalk', *Cheyo* 'broom', *Ipembe* 'animal horn', *Kalang'ha* 'small stick',

Nongal/monga 'snail's shell', *Kayungilo* 'filter', *Kanundo* 'small hammer', *Lushu* 'knife', and *Chenge* 'wooden torch' reflect the cultural wisdom of the Sukuma but lack scientific evidence to support their selection.

Furthermore, the practice of bestowing personal names associated with parents' wishes or expectations on children can be considered an illustration of folk theories in Sukuma, a practice observed in other languages as well. Importantly, this practice is not grounded in scientific rationale. While children may receive names like *Mpanduji* 'path maker', *Nkumingi* 'wealth collector', *Kishosha* 'restorer', *Shilunguja* 'comforter', and *Nkumdi* 'victorious', it does not guarantee that they will necessarily fulfill the expectations inherent in their names. This practice is rooted in the belief that a name has the power to shape the destiny of its bearer (Mutunda, 2016; Asheli, 2017). This observation in Sukuma aligns with the findings in Gogo by Chipalo (2019), where parents' or name-givers' wishes and prayers are embedded within Gogo personal names given to children. As mentioned earlier, folk theories are prevalent not only in Sukuma but also in other languages. For example, Hussen (2018) revealed that the Oromoo people also have a tradition of expressing their feelings and desires through personal names. Additionally, children among the Vatsonga (Chauke, 2015) and Luvale speakers (Mutunda, 2016) are bestowed with personal names that convey parents' expectations or wishes. This implies that parents use personal naming as a means to express their desires or hopes for themselves and their children.

This paper aimed to examine the principles underpinning personal naming practices in Sukuma culture. The findings have illuminated the existence of multiple guiding principles in personal naming among the Sukuma. These results affirm the presence of implicit principles that guide name-givers in their selection of names for newborns. Furthermore, this study underscores that personal naming is a regulated process, not a random one, guided by unspoken principles such as salience, metaphoricity, and metonymy. Among the principles discussed in this paper, those of salience, metonymy, folk theory, construal principles, and metaphoricity appear to be more pronounced and prevalent in Sukuma culture than the iconicity principle, which is somewhat less emphasized. Consequently, this emphasizes that the principles governing personal naming practices may vary across communities and languages, with certain principles being applicable in one society but not necessarily in another. For instance, as previously noted, Asheli (2017) observed that the iconicity principle is applicable among the Iraqw and Maasai but not among the Kuria. This variation can be attributed to the deeply ingrained cultural orientation, perspective, and lived experience that influence personal naming practices.

One intriguing observation concerning construal principles is that a single entity may be construed differently by distinct individuals, and even the same individual may have varying construals of the same entity. Similarly, two entities may be construed identically or differently by the same or different individuals. For example, in Sukuma culture, *Mashimba* 'lions' and *Mapuli* 'elephants' are both considered aggressive and powerful animals, yet the degree of aggressiveness and power attributed to them varies. Notably, while these names are metaphorically bestowed upon children, their construal leans toward the metonymic. It is essential to recognise that whether a name is metonymic or metaphoric often depends on the specific society to which the name belongs. For instance, Asheli (2017) reported that while names like *Wandwi* 'of a lion' in Kuria and *Diraangw* 'lion' in Iraqw are metonymic, the name *Olowuaru* 'lion' in Maasai is considered metaphoric. The observed variations may be attributed to Langacker's (2007:431) proposition that "meaning is conceptualisation". Consequently, the differences observed can be attributed to diverse conceptualisations of meaning among individuals.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study delved into the intricate principles that underlie personal naming within the Sukuma community. The findings underscore the presence of a multitude of guiding principles shaping the landscape of personal naming practices among the Sukuma. A notable revelation arising from this inquiry is the substantiation of personal naming as a structured and systematic endeavor, wherein multiple principles interact harmoniously within a given linguistic context. These outcomes collectively indicate that the act of bestowing personal names is informed by a diverse array of principles, thereby imbuing the process with profound depth and significance. The pivotal contribution of this study lies in its unveiling of

the underlying principles that inform the Sukuma personal naming tradition. This elucidation not only underscores the methodical and potentially rule-bound essence of personal naming but also highlights its broader implications. The study has brought to light that several of these naming principles exhibit a cross-linguistic universality, transcending the confines of individual languages, while others remain confined to specific linguistic and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge the potential limitations inherent in the generalizability of the study's findings to encompass all languages and cultures. As a result, it is recommended that further research be undertaken to validate, ascertain, and explore the existence, applicability, and universality of these identified principles in diverse linguistic and cultural settings. Such investigations would contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intricate personal naming process. By extending the scope of research beyond the Sukuma community, scholars can draw a more comprehensive portrait of the underlying principles that govern personal naming practices. Additionally, comparative studies across various languages and cultures would shed light on both the shared and distinct aspects of personal naming, enriching the broader field of onomastics. Otherwise, this study has paved the way for an enriched comprehension of the intricate fabric of personal naming principles within the Sukuma community. The ongoing exploration of these principles, within a cross-cultural framework, promises to unravel a more comprehensive tapestry of human nomenclature practices, thereby enhancing insight into the fascinating realm of personal names.

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