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Sociolinguistic study of kilba personal names

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Abstract

This paper delves into the sociolinguistic factors and semantic implications of Kilba names and naming systems. It explores how names are given in Kilba community, explaining the cultural and social meanings attached to names .The research method involves primary data collection from aged parents in the Hong local government of Adamawa State, as well as secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and online materials. Contextual and conventional theories of meaning were used as guide for the study. The analysis categorizes Kilba names names into five main groups based on their significance and origins. The findings highlight the importance of names as identifiers of individual personalities and reflect the unique circumstances or situations surrounding a child's birth. This study concludes that the significance of names to Kilba people is beyond mere labels, but a reflection of socio-cultural values, beliefs, and experiences.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics; Names; Kilba; Culture; Beliefs

1. Introduction

Naming in the African context is a serious matter. Names are projection of not only the imagination of the parents but also a window through which we mirror our lives and order of things. Names are related to ethics and culture in every region, as well as history of families and social groups. This means that name is a clue to an identity of an entity. Hence, every culture has its naming pattern and meanings based on their personal view of the world using their language this is to say that people are inspired to name a child by natural conditions, circumstances, virtues, future expectations, animals, days of the week, events, festivals and seasons. Naming is however a very important and vital process especially in a newborn baby's life because it gives the baby an identity that sets him/her apart from everyone. Hence, the meanings behind a name of a child should reflect something of greatness and purpose which prepares a child to the future unknown.Names are usually a reflection of one's identity, identity, cultural and social values. It is an embodiment of the norms/values of the referent. Names serve as identifiers for individuals, places, and concepts (Egbe 76). They carry important information about titles, gender, and cultural affiliations. Naming conventions vary across cultures, reflecting societal norms and values (Ahmad 34). In understanding the concept of names, Goffman (43) says name serves as crucial marker of identity, culture, and social interaction. Geertz (72) holds the view that names hold significance to historical legacy and societal norms. Also, Bourdieu (37) holds he view that names play crucial roles in power dynamics and social hierarchy, reflecting patterns of privilege and marginalization. Name is simply an identity tag as opine by John (2).

Thus, this research seeks to understand name, naming process in Kilba land . It seeks to unravel the relationship between the society, culture of the Kilba people and the names they bear i.e language This paper aims to address this gap by examining the socio-cultural, spiritual, emotional, and psychological factors influencing the naming practices in the community of Kilbans.

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2. Brief history of the kilba people the kilba people

Predominantly found in Hong Local Government Area of Adamawa State (formerly Gongola State) Nigeria. The Kilba people (also known as Hoba) are historically a mountain dwelling tribe. These mountain habitations for the communities were:- Mijili, Pella, Gwaja, Hong, Kulinyi, Garaha, Bangshika, Gaya-Jaba, Gaya-Maki, Gaya-Sikalmi, Gaya-Gou, Gaya-Fa'a, Ndlang, Hyema, Kinging, Motaku, Kwapor, Zah and Zivi, all in the present Hong Local Government Area.

The Hoba are found in Cameroon and the following Local governments: Hong, Gombi, Song, Mubi and Michika in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

It is stated in the ancient times, the Hoba tribe was a well-organized pagan kingdom second to none in the western Sudan. Their structure resembled that of ancient Egypt or Modern European kingdom. The structure took a shape of division and subdivisions into units with each unit governed by member of the ruling families. These administrations referred to as the Yerimas and the Shalls who serve as central ministers to these units, give a monthly report to the King (The Tol), who in-turn, gives the final word, further directives or take decisions and actions. By implication then, the socio-political structure of Hoba is bi-dimensional, with the Tol serving as the central or overall ruler and the Yerima serving as territorial administrators.

3. Review of Related Literature

3.1. What is a Name?

Name is a term used for identification. It is used to identify a person, class, category of things, a single thing or within a given context. The Webster dictionary defines Name as a word or phrase that constitutes the distinctive designation of a person or thing. This means that names is used to identity an person or an object it represents the person or thing separately from another without confusion. Thus, naming is an essential and universal process which is used to identify an individual, a thing or what surrounds them as a way of communication around the world.

Encyclopedia Britannica, sees name as a word or group of words that suggests a certain entity whether it's real or fictitious. This is to say, when a name is given to a person or an entity; it is reflected on its surroundings how the name says or views the person or thing named. Hence, our environment has a great impact as to how an individual perceives a given entity.

Similarly, the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines name as a word or sets of words by which a person or thing is identified, addressed, referred or known to. This therefore means that everything around us is identified through the reflection of socio-cultural, religious, family, and events as the case may be.

This is to say that cultural background, attitudes, beliefs and physical environment are non-linguistic factors of naming such that every society and tribe has its our traditions when it comes to naming their new born. Parents tend give names to their children that will not violate their social norms and customs such that certain names are passed on within the same family to prevent the name from dying. This serves as a reminder to the real origin of the names as a signs of continuity and remembrance which is why children are named after their grandparents, great grandparent, uncles, aunties or even distant relatives which is a come factor in the Izere culture.

3.2. Relationship between Language and Culture

It is generally agreed that language and culture are closely related where language is viewed as a verbal expression of culture. Language and culture provides us with many categories used for the expression of thoughts and the way a person views the world. This however, shows a relationship of the Afizere Culture and howit influences the language. Language is therefore, formed by culture while culture is influenced and impacted by language.

Furthermore, not only is language an expression and display of heritage and history, it is also the component of culture that makes it unique and creates a difference from one to another. Culture and language shapes ones identity and personality. Zdenek (15), is of the opinion that, each human being is born in the same way and experience the same stages in life. The difference is in the environment in which each individual grows up and the language to which he/she becomes accustomed to. This creates identities of certain culture and language, differing one from another.

Wardhaugh (225) believes that we can assume culture possess the ability to allow a speaker say anything... provided that the speaker is willing to use some degree of circumlocution. That is, an indirect way of saying something like it is

commonly said; beating around the bush. Hence a speaker of a language speaks based on the structure as posed in his/her language. For instance the Izere language and English language have different language structures.

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis relatively describes the relationship between language, culture and thoughts. The core idea is that man's language shapes his perception of reality. People tend to see the world in the way their language describes it.

3.3. Concept of Sociolinguistics

Different scholars have given varying accounts of sociolinguistics as a concept. Hymes (195) confirms this that the term sociolinguistics means many things to different people, and no one has an all inclusive definition. Sociolinguistic as sub-field of linguistics studies the relationship between language and society and between the users of the language and the social structures in which they live. To Crystal (18), sociolinguistics studies language variation and use in relation to the cultural patterns and beliefs of man. Holmes' view, sociolinguists are interested in explaining why we speak differently in different social contexts, and their major focus is identifying the social functions of language and the ways it is used to convey social meaning (1). This therefore gives an insight into the way language works as well as the social relationship that exists among users in a linguistic community. In the same vein, Akindele and Adegbite (3) define sociolinguistics as the relationship which exists between a language or languages and the culture and tradition as well as the politics of a particular community. They further observed that it examines the interaction between the use of the language and the social organizations' behavior. It is obvious from the different accounts that language and society are key terms in sociolinguistics.

Moreover, Hudson (1) sees sociolinguistics as a field of linguistic study that gained prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This shows how recent the field is. Crystal (440-441) gives an all inclusive definition of the term as a branch of linguistics which studies all aspects of the relationship between language and the society. It further studies matters such as the linguistic identity of social groups, social attitudes to language, standard and non-standard forms of language, the patterns and needs of national language use, social varieties and levels of language use, social barns of multilingualism and so on. Sociolinguistics equally studies how language varieties differ between groups segregated by social variables such as ethnicity status, gender, literacy level, age and how creation and compliance to these rules can categorize individuals in social or socio-economic classes. Language use therefore varies among social classes just as its use varies from place to place.

William Labov is considered to be one of the proponents of sociolinguistics who has great influence in its development. He is known for introducing the quantitative study of language variation and change and for making the sociology of language a scientific discipline (Labov, 2007).

Sociolinguistics as a discipline provides answers to such questions as who speaks what language to whom and when and to what end? In addition, it seeks to provide an answer to the question of what accounts for differential changes in social organization of language use and behaviour toward language. It equally tries to explain why and how this organization and behaviour have become selectively different in the same social networks of communities on two different occasions. For instance, it explains why one particularly addresses a semi-literate audience in pidgin and another audience, an elite one, in impeccable English.

Above all, sociolinguistics describes the general patterns of language use within a monolingual or multilingual speech community so as to show the systematic nature of the alternations between one variety and another among individuals who share a repertoire of varieties. In monolingual speech communities, the linguistic repertoire of particular social groups may consist of sexual social class varieties of the same classes, e.g. occupational and educational varieties, and regional varieties of the same language. For instance, distinction can be made within a given speech community between administrator and teachers who speak the same language and petty traders who speak the same variety.

In another development, two trends have characterized development of sociolinguistics over the past several decades. First, the rise of particular specializations within this field has coincided with the emergence of more broadly based social and political issues. Thus, they focus on the subject matters such as language and nationalism, language and ethnicity, and language and gender have corresponded with the rise of related issues in society at large. Second, specialists who examine the role of language and society have become more and more interested in applying the results of their studies to the broadly based social, educational, and political problems that probably gave rise to their emergence as sociolinguistics themes to begin with. Sociolinguistics thus, offers a unique opportunity to bring together theory, description, and application in the study of language.

3.4. Language and Society

Society according to *Thesaurus* (2006) is seen as a human being considered as a group in an organized community. It is also an organized group of people with common aim and interests. Human development is hence, greatly enhanced by language and its development.

Since language is entrenched in the society, there are many possible relationships between them. Based on this, Wardhaugh (17) submits that social structures may have a good influence on linguistic structure and behaviour. He maintains that the age grading phenomenon in which young children speak differently from older children and in turn children speak differently from adult. Studies have therefore shown that the varieties of language used by speakers reflect such matters as their regional, social, or ethnic origin and sometimes their sex or gender; and other studies which demonstrate the particular ways of speaking, choice of words and roles for conversing are greatly determined by certain social requirements.

Wardhaugh further presents another relationship that is opposite to the former, linguistics structure, which he says may influence social structure. This aspect to him is behind the Whorfian hypothesis, the claims of Berustein and others who argue that languages rather than speakers of these languages can be sexist. It is in agreement with the foregoing that Trudgill (20) believes in gender differentiation in a language because language as a social phenomenon is closely related to social attitudes. Man and woman are socially different in that society lays down different social roles for them and expects different behavior patterns from them. Language, hence, simply reflects social facts. The third relationship between language and society is that the influence is bi-directional. This means that language and society can influence each other.

3.5. Speech Community

According to Gumperz (68), a 'speech community' is "any human aggregate characterised by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage". Gumperz also argues for regular relationships between language use and social structure where he says, "The speech varieties employed within a speech community form a system because they are related to a shared set of social norms" but may overlap language boundaries (69).

Labov (36) explains that "The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms. These norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behaviour, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage."

However, Hudson (58) says that the term 'speech community' misleads "by implying the existence of 'real' communities 'out there', which we could discover if we only knew how...our socio-linguistic world is not organised in terms of objective 'speech communities." Furthermore, he holds the view that, "It is impossible to understand the relationships that really matter to a sociolinguist except at the micro level of the individual person and in some cases, only when the individual linguistic item turn out to be too fluid and ill-defined" (58).

Bucholtz (103) adds contrarily that in sociolinguistics, social theory is rooted in the concept of the speech community... a language-based unit of social analysis... indigenous to sociolinguistics (which) isnot connected to any larger social theory.

From the foregoing, speech communities are groups of people who share linguistic norms and interact regularly through speech. Different definitions of speech communities emphasize shared language use, social interactions, and attitudes toward language forms.

3.6. Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and Descriptivist theory of names as the theoretical framework. The Sapir- Whorf hypothesis claims the relationship between language and culture which determines the way in which the speaker of a language views the world. Sapir acknowledges the relationship between language, culture and the world. He maintains that they are inextricably related hence one cannot understand or appreciate one without the other. The idea in this hypothesis is that, every human being views the world by his own native language Sapir (200).

In Whorfs' view, the relationship between language and culture is a deterministic one; that social category we create and how we perceive events and actions are constrained by the language we speak. Different speakers will therefore

experience the world differently so far as the languages they speak differ structurally. One claim is that if speakers of one language have certain words to describe things and speakers of another language lack similar words, and then speakers of the first language will find it easier to talk about those things. Another claim is that, if one language makes distinctions that another does not make,and then those who use the language will more readily perceive the relevant differences in their environment. Hence, a speaker's world view is solely dependent on how he/she views the world through its language but also at the same time limits such perception. Speakers of different languages therefore have different worldviews.

4. Methodology

The study utilizes both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through interviews with aged parents in the Kilba community identified, Hong is the Kilban Community chosen for the study ,while secondary sources include literature from books, journal articles, and online materials. The collection of primary data was done through the use of tape recorder and the transcription of the recorded audio for presentation. Following the tabular presentation of the data collected from the field, a descriptive approach was used to analyse the data based on their socio-cultural significance.

4.1. Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected for this study are presented in the following table, categorizing Kilba names into seven groups based on their origins and meanings:

4.2. Names based on physical appearance

These are names given by the Kilba people based on the physical appearance of infants at birth or at the growing stage of a child. These names not only describe the physical attributes of the child but also serve as markers of uniqueness and distinction within the community. Often times the infants are birthed with striking characteristics . Names based on physical appearance at birth include:

- Birba – given to a child born with torn lips
- Kwachi – given to those having six or more fingers
- Liwir – A child that was born pre-matured.
- Names are also given later in life based on the stature of individuals.
- Dunama: given to a child who is physically tall and strong.
- Others are: Takura Sal: Stallion, giant.
- Gwaba: a giant
- Dzagum/Falafala: also a giant.
- Duwal: Adolescent.

4.2.1. Names that are tittles.

In the Kilba tradition and culture some names are honorific and serve as titles. Usually these names are associated with the Royalty . Names that serve as title and are honorific in Kilba are as follows:

- Badawu- a messenger.
- Charghambal –a messenger.
- Kwatam – Princess
- Yirma – Prince
- Kwatam and Yirma are children born in the royal family. These names also serve as titles in the royal clan and is as old as the Kilba tradition. Sharndama (2021) opine that some titles which serves as names include:
- Gundiri – King maker
- Yadema – Head of king makers
- Dzarma – Horse rider
- Midala – Army commander

4.2.2. Historical names

Twins are always named Bala and Gwandi; if both are males. If the twins are male and female, the naming system changes:

- Male twin: Bala
- Female Twin: Kwagwandi

The naming system adopted for twins by Kilba people has been practiced from time imemorial. However at the advent of Christianity, such traditional naming system declined drastically. Those having such names were given western names in addition to the traditional ones.

4.2.3. Names from family circumstances/situations

There are some names given as a result of circumstances surrounding the family or situations. Shardama (2021) asserts that such   names are carefully chosen to suit the situation or circumstance.

- Chagyadani: Let him leave it to me. The referent of him in this context is God.
- Suku: given to a male child born on a market day.
- Yahi: born when the father was away on a trip.
- Chataindi; chafiya, chagyadani: given to a child after the death of many siblings. The meaning of such names is, let him live.
- Datsu: A male child born after five or six siblings were born but died.
- Yahi   -   Born after father's death
- Shall laku   -   Born on the road (male)
- Kwa laku   -   Born on the road (female)
- Adarki   -   Born when the father was away

4.2.4. Unisex names

In the Kilba language certain names are given to either of the sexes . They are considered unisex names and as such can be used to address a female and a male child . The meaning of the names remain the same irrespective of the sex . The names are as follows :

- Chimda   -   My Hope
- Hyelda   -   There's God
- Chatramada   -   God before me
- Chataimada   -   God is my protector
- Falinyi   -   Praise God

Apart from the unisex names , there are names peculiar to each gender and it would be considered an aberration to see another gender bearing such a name . They include the following :

4.2.5. Female names of the olden days

- Kwabala   -   First female twins
- Kwagwandi   -   Second female twins
- Kwahir   -   Last female daughter
- Anati   -   God has given
- Chataimada   -   God before me

4.2.6. Male names

- Bijida   -   There is time for everything
- Dunama   -   Strength (Strong man)
- Bala   -   First born male (Twin)
- Ada Hir   -   Last born (Male)
- Zuola   -   First born son

4.2.7. Names with Spiritual Importance

Kilba names often carry spiritual significance, manifesting traditional beliefs and reverence for the divine. These names serve as a link between the individual and their spiritual heritage, imbuing them with a sense of identity and connection to their cultural roots. Some of the names highlight the community's deep spiritual ethos and the importance placed on faith and tradition within the Kilba culture..

4.2.8. Prevalent names and meanings

- Mivanyi   -   What else
- Aitiya   -   I love it
- Wadiya Hyel   -   Who's greater than God
- Chatramada   -   God is my guide
- Chaguziyada   -   God keeps me
- Chabula   -   God protects me
- Dugalpi   -   Long Life
- Abiyama   -   at the fore front
- Wadiya   -   Who is greater than God
- Anaticha   -   God has given me

particularly within the scope of this study, are made up of Islam and Traditional Gwandara religions. This is because all the names analysed on the theme of religion justify this finding. **Findings and Discussion**

From the above analysis, it is evident that naming system in Kiba language is closely tied to the culture of the people . From the kinds of names used by the Kilba people , it is evident that the culture plays an integral role in the naming practices , naming re given based on not just the belief of the people associated to their ancestors , events or circumstances, physical appearance and also names as honorifics .

It is also seen that Kilba names serve as custody where history and experiences are kept. The names remind parents of their ordeals and tell the society that some brave men existed in the past. They also reflect postures that sometime represent the true behaviour or picture of the bearer.

5. Conclusion

The investigation into the sociolinguistics of Kilba names and naming systems reveals the intricate interplay between language, culture, and society. The findings underscore the significance of names as more than mere labels, but as reflections of socio-cultural values, beliefs, and experiences. Additionally, further research in this area could explore the evolving trends in naming practices and their implications for language preservation in the Kilba community.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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