

Basà Personal Names: An Ethno-Pragmatic Survey

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Abstract

Basà language belongs to Western Kainji of Kainji language family. It is spoken in North Central Nigeria, that is, all the Federal councils; Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, and Benue states. The work studies Basà personal names from the ethno-pragmatic perspective. Naming practice, though universal or cross-cultural among human societies, it is remarkably idiosyncratic in style, custom etc. The paper argues that naming practices are not arbitrary labels, but sociocultural tags that show socio-cultural functions, roles and meanings. The paper categorizes the typology of Basà personal names into different types, such as circumstantial, death prevention or reincarnation, idiomstic, riddles and proverbial names. Data for the study were obtained through interviews, personal observation and analyzed using the Leipzig Glossing Rules. Findings from the research show that Basà names undergo different derivational processes and there is a strong interface between a people's language and their cultural practices, i.e. it mirrors how a language is used as a cultural practice and how it serves as a window to understanding the worldview and philosophy of a given people.

Keywords: Anthropology, anthrotoponymy, Basà, ethno-pragmatics, naming practice, personal name,

Introduction

Basà language is spoken in different locations in North Central Nigeria such as, the six area councils of the Federal Capital Territory; Kokona, Nasarawa, Toto and Doma Local Government Councils of Nasarawa State; Bassa, Dekina, Ankpa and Kotonkarfe Local Government Areas of Kogi State; Kontagora Local Government of Niger State, Agatu and Markurdi Local Government Areas of Benue State. Some of these locations are characterized by different dialectal variants, each is identified by

its name, but all varieties are mutually intelligible. Basà language is classified as belonging to Kainji language family, under the sub-phylum of Western-Kainji, also referred to as Rubasa (Basa Benue) (Crozier and Blench, 1992:32).

A name is what somebody or something is called or identified by. It is a term by which an individual or a thing is known and distinguished from other people or things (Olatunji, Issah, Noah, Muhammed and Suleiman, 2015). *The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (2005) defines the term *name* as a word or words by which an individual person, place or thing is identified; it is the nomenclature used in making reference to all the tangible or intangible, living or non-living, concrete or abstract, liquid or solid. Agyekum (2011:21) argues that:

Naming can be considered as universal cultural practices, every human society in the world gives name to its new born as tags, majorly as a means of identification, but how the names are given, the practices and rituals involved and the interpretations attached to the names differ from society to society and culture to culture.

Chucks-Orji (1972) and Suzman (1994) assert that, in African societies, great importance is attached to names because in general, the belief system of Africans is often anchored on the belief that the name given to a person determines his or her personhood and character. In consonance with this claim, Jayaran (2005) says, the meaning attached to a name plays a significant role in the definition of human self, which is anchored on the fact that a given name not only serves as a social identity, but also powerful enough to influence several aspects of an individual's life.

Each culture has an idiosyncratic perception of the experience of life, and language is the vehicle used to convey such cultural nexus. Personal name in Basà culture is a veritable linguistic medium for transmitting traditional heritage, because naming practice is best understood in the context of the people's culture and traditions. Personal names or practices in general, relate with the core part of peoples' culture to show solidarity, identity, social cohesion, history etc. This agrees with Kuschels' (1988) argument as saying that there is nexus between names

and the socio-cultural life of the people, because of the prevalent belief that institutions do not exist or develop in cognitive vacuum. Mensah and Offong (2013:42) hold that, "In Nigeria, it is easy to distinguish a Yoruba person from Hausa or Effik through his/her name, because names can define the concept of identity, whether individual or group identity". Thus, "names are important indices for reconfiguration of identity and ethnicity." Names in Basà, as well as other ethnic groups, especially, in Africa give insight into various cultures. There is a strong interface between the people's language and their cultural practices if it mirrors how language is used as a cultural practice and as a window to understand the worldview and philosophy of the society concerned.

Methodology

Data for this investigation were obtained through interview, students' register in various Basà extractions, personal observation and the researchers' native intuition. The data analysis was done following the Leipzig Glossing Rules i.e. morpheme-by-morpheme glossing system followed by discussions emanating from salient discoveries from the data.

Significance

As earlier mentioned, different cultures perceive and conceptualize the experience of life in different ways, and language is a primary medium of this cultural nexus (Mensah and Offong 2013:42). Thus, the earliest studies on personal names in Nigeria, such as Oduyoye (1982), Ubahakwe (1981), Essien (1986), and so on, focus mainly on the meaning of etymology, typology and the circumstances surrounding personal naming practices in Yoruba, Igbo and Ibibio, respectively, Imoh 2019 focuses on the structure of Basà personal names but this is an ethno-pragmatics of Basà personal names.

Review of Related Literature

There are other works in the rich body of the literature of onomastics, especially, on the personal naming practices in Africa, such as Mensah (2009), who studies the structure and meaning of Nigerian names, Obeng (1998) and Agyekum 2006 who investigate the pragmatics and sociolinguistics of Akan

names; Ngade (2011) focuses on Bakossi (Cameroon) names in relation to its naming tradition and identity. Gebre (2010) studies the effect of contact on the naming practice of the Aare ethnic group in Ethiopia. Suzman (1994) and Koopman (2000) extensively analyze Zulu personal names in South Africa. De Klerk & Bosch (1995) and Neethling (1996) studied Xhosa personal names, nicknames, place names and onomastic theories. Personal names from the semantic point of view were studied by Olenyo (2011) and Dromantaite&Baltramonaitiene (2002). They argue that personal naming practices in Africa are contrary to the practice in the western cultures, where names serve as mere labels, rather, in African cultures, names, both with denotational and connotational meanings, stemming from existing phenomena have underlying interesting information. Mensah & Offong (2013:42) report Moyo (2012) on the effect that colonialism and slavery have on African personal names as saying, “such effects changed the ideological conceptions that were embedded in these names, in other cases, African names survived the onslaught of slavery and European domination” and that “African names, especially, in the diaspora, became elements of cultural retention, forms of resistance and means of identity on construction” (p.42). Essien (1986 & 2000) investigate the structure and meaning of Ibibio personal names and provide linguistic, as well as cultural explications. Maduagwu (2010) studies the Igbo naming practice from the morphological and semantic points of view, and analyses the Morphology and Semantics of Igbo language which is linked to the Igbo culture and social milieu. Mensah & Offong (2013) posit that naming practices have enormous socio-cultural, spiritual and psychological significance in Africa and beyond, because they are believed to have inherent power used to indexicalise the lives and behaviours of the people, both positively and negatively. This conforms with what Agyekum (2006) believes that names are pointers to peoples ways of life and socio-cultural experience that give deep insight into the cultural patterns, belief, ideology and the religion of the people concerned. He also believes that names also reflect how people relate with their social and physical environment, especially, in their relationship with cosmic powers. Purham (2002) discloses that there is a spiritual force that binds African people together, and guides their physical existence, and in the African culture worldwide, which is the essential factors

and essence of everything. This assertion,, precisely, describes the Basà naming practice given that the practice is a product of social, as well as spiritual factors. Spiritually, it is believed in the Basà ethnic group that life is cyclical. And language is the vehicle for transmitting this fact.

Imoh (2019) investigates the structure of Basà personal names where different structures such as lexical, phrasal, sentential (simple, complex, idioms, proverbs riddles are studied and the grammatical information underlying them as a window to understanding the Basà grammar.

In Basà language, native personal names have some significant socio-cultural importance. One major significance is to preserve the cultural heritage, as well as the naming system of the people. Names are preserved from generation to generation thereby reflecting and also preserving the history of a people. This is in consonance with Obeng (2004) that names, in African cultural systems are pointers to their users' hope, dreams, aspirations, and environment. In the words of Ukpong (1983), personal names are repositories of traditional wisdom.

Mensah and Offong (2010) further point out that, in Efik community, children are given names following days of the week, time of birth or circumstances surrounding the birth of a child can also determine the choice of a child's name. These phenomena are also true of the socio-cultural naming tradition of the Basà people.

Children that die shortly after birth are believed to be spirit beings that relate with mortal beings. This is similar with the Igbo belief (in Eastern Nigeria) it is called *Ogbanje*, in Yoruba (Western Nigeria) called *Abiku*, in Efik (South Nigeria) *Eka Abasi*. In a situation as such, the earthly parents create measures to stop further infant mortality by inflicting a cut on the deceased before he/she is buried. This belief is to ensure reincarnation of the deceased child and subsequent survival of other children. Otherwise, a survival name is given to a child to ensure his/her survival. Others are sourced from traditional royalty which are exclusively for members of royal families; notable among them are royalty names and royalty titles which double as names.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the branch of onomastics, namely anthronomastics which specifies that there is a strong interface between a people's language and their cultural practices. It mirrors on how language is used as cultural practices and it is used as a powerful tool to view and understand the worldview of a particular people or society. One can therefore use language as a microscopic lens to view and understand the practices of the day-to-day activities of the society. As a microscope, the language travels beyond what is expressed and settles on what is practiced in the real sociocultural world. Foley (1997:3) aptly summarizes the linguistic role of anthropology and its functions thus: "anthropological linguistics is the sub-field of linguistics that is concerned with the place of language and its wider social and cultural context, its role in forging and sustaining cultural practices and social structures, hence, it reveals the meaning behind the use, misuse etc. of language". "It is an interpretive discipline peeling away of language to find cultural understanding" (Agyekum, 2006:210).

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section deals with presentation of data and interpretation of the analysis of Basà personal names. It is an empirical and sociocultural description of names attested in the Basà community, thus, the investigation explores the sociolinguistic meaning which relates to the sociocultural background of the people. The names are categorized into different typological types or classes, though, the study is not a structural one, and still, the morphological structures of the names will also be interpreted.

Typology of Basà Personal Names

Birthday Names

Agyekum (2006:213) describes this category as "the first and automatic name every child gets based on the day he/she was born even before he/she is officially named." This pattern of naming marks the day on which a baby is born (Al-Zumor, 2009). This type is not very productive among the Basà ethnic group but a few names are used to typify this. The following names are quite common in the Basà speaking area.

1. i.Ládè 'Sundry' (Fem)

- | | |
|--------------|------------------------------|
| ii. Zúma | 'Friday' (Fem) |
| iii. Ndâzúma | 'Friday' (Masc) |
| iv. Lârûba | 'Wednesday' (Fem) |
| v. Dukwo | 'market' (Fem) |
| vi. Sharia | 'name of the largest market' |

This practice is more common in rural places than urban settlements, especially, in the contemporary era.

Family Names/Reincarnation

Family names in Basà are never idiosyncratic in nature. Culturally, it is believed that members of the family reincarnate when they die by being born again into the same family, hence, divination (òshègà) is done to inquire from the ancestors or gods who exactly reincarnates in form of a new born child. The ancestors through the oracles reveal the member of the family who reincarnates and the same name of the deceased is given to the new born child.

Another way this is done is, when a child is born, members of the family sit down to determine what name of the deceased members of the family is to be given to the new born. This is done to immortalize members of the family, especially, those who are held in high esteem as a result of their contribution to the family, age etc. Hence, there are no special names for this category, rather, inheritors of these names are given names of those they wish to honor or immortalize (see Mensa & Jijigh 2020:5).

Circumstantial Names

This is a category of names that are given based on the circumstances surrounding the conception, birth and happenings at these periods such as, place of birth, events taking place at the moment, festivals, manner of birth, etc.

According to Blum (1997:364), "These names are viewed as governing the child's fate in some ways, they should harmonise with time and often place of the child's birth..." In line with Agyekum's (2006) categorization of these names, the author groups names under the following categories (a) anthro-toponyms, (b) temporonyms, (c) manner of birth and (d) death prevention and survival names.

(a) **Anthro-Toponyms:** This sub-category deals with the place of birth of the child in question. In Basà, this sub-category is quite productive and can be exemplified in (2) below.

2. i. Zùgbè
- ii. Sheria
- iii. ikèndé → Ékèndé
- iv. Dècína
- v. Shádamò
- vi. Jegwére
- vii. Dògbò
- viii. Shèjé

Examples (2) are names of places which are also given to persons for certain circumstances. Some of them e.g. *Zùgbè*, *Dècína* etc. are names of the first occupants of those places. Others are given because of the circumstances surrounding the birth of a baby in a certain place. Some of these places could refer to, not necessarily settlements where people live, but farms, markets, roads etc. Examples:

3. i. Dukwo 'market'
- ii. Shádamò 'location of a major hospital'
- iii. Yòkwó 'road'

Dukwo 'market', *Shádamò* and *Yòkwó* 'road' are given to children based on the circumstances surrounding their birth. *Dukwo* 'market' is given to a child born, either in the market or on the major market day. *Shádamò* is a town in Ofu LGA of Kogi State, North Central Nigeria where a major missionary hospital was established to which referrals of birth-related issues were made. Thus, some children who were birthed in that institution were called thus, this line of thought can be confirmed where the same name was given to children delivered in their satellite stations like Kpáncé, a village in Bassa Local Government, simply because health services in the satellite stations were rendered by Ochadamu Missionary hospital. Even the market that was established to transact business with the medical clients was called *ùdukwo- Shádamò* 'Ochadamu market'. *Yòkwó* 'road' is

given to a child born on road while the mother was on a transit to a particular place.

Temporonym: According to Agyekum (2006:219) “The period of birth may also relate to important festivals...” In Basà language, there are names that are associated with festivals given to children born at such periods. Examples:

4. i. ùgunu → Gúnú ‘dance festival’
- ii. ùnyizòùfo → Nyizòfwo ‘new year’
- iii. Êzù mí ‘fasting festival’
- iv. Tàtàré ‘chief flute’

These names are given to children born during Basà festivals. In (4) *Ùgunu* is a major festival in the Basà tradition. A male child born at such period can be named *Gúnú*. The basic word is *ùgunu*, the derived name is *Gúnú*. Two morphological processes are involved namely; elision of the initial sound and syllable and modification of the penultimate and last syllable from HH to LL. *Ùnyizòùfwo* is derived as *Nyizòfwo*. The initial sound (high back vowel) elides. This name is given to a female child born during the New Year festival. *Êzù mí* is a feminine name given to a female child born during fasting festival. *Tàtàré* refers to the chief flute; a name given to a child with marks that symbolize the *Ùgunu* festival marks.

Names Associated with the Order of Birth

A few names are used as indicators of the order of issues in birth, i.e. the ordering of children in the series of issues Al-Zumor (2009). Examples:

5. i. Shigàba ‘leader/head’
- ii. erèce → ‘Ricé’ ‘last’ (Fem)
- iii. She mèwê → Shémèwê ‘last’ (Fem)
- iv. Àtá ‘last born’
- v. Jímà ‘twins’ (Masc)
- vi. Gàmbó ‘child born after twins’

Shigàba ‘leader’ in (5i) is given to the first male child or the first male after female children. This shows how a male child is

cherished, hence the name *Shìgàba* ‘the head’. It is said to be a borrowed name from Hausa *Shùgàbá* which has undergone an adaptation process where the vowel of the first syllable (back high vowel) is replaced with a front high vowel. (5ii) *erèce* means last card, a term usually used in a local/native game, it is the base where *Ricé* is derived. The processes are: the initial vowel elides and the penultimate syllable is replaced with a high front vowel. In (5iii), *Shémèwè* is derived from the phrase *she mèwe* ‘be last’. It also shows that the bearer of such name is the last female child. *Àtá* is unisex which refers to both last female and male children. *Jimbà* is a masculine name given to a male child who is a twin. *Gàmbó* refers to a name given to a male child born after a set of twin.

Manner of Birth

This is the category of names that depicts the manner of birth of the bearer, and generally, the story characterizing their birth. Such names in Basà ethnography contain the story that describes the pregnancy of the child, the process of delivery, especially, if it is associated with complications. Majority of such names in Basà are composed in sentence structure such as a statement or question, though they may be clipped. Examples:

- 6.i. *Shìgírì* ‘sudden’
- ii. *Rúwo* ‘despair/despondency’
- iii. *Bàùta* ‘suffering’
- iv. *ùwè ñ ndáma* → *Wàndáma* ‘a surprise’
something 1SG surprise
- v. *Ñ zàajemè* → *Zájemè*
1SG NEG.have talk ‘speechless’
- vi. *ùwè i zhe* → *Wèzhe*
something AGR go.PST ‘answered prayer’
- vii. *Ñ ta hànsà* → *Táàsa*
1SG CONT think ‘I’m still thinking’
- viii. *Ì ñ shinji* → *Shinji*
3SG ISG fed up ‘I’m fed up’
- ix. *Ûwanainje* → *Wananjé*
Sun AGR do.PST ‘The Sun (God) did it’

- x. Ñ záiyimè →Zhêmèhien
1SG NEG thing to say 'I have nothing to say/I'm speechless'

Death-Prevention Names

Basà, like some West African languages believe that, if babies live for a short period of time and die, then the reason is that it is the ancestral spirits or other evil spirits responsible for such infant mortality. To combat such infant mortality, the parents give strange names to new born children in order to forestall further death. Death prevention names in Basà are a form of communicative use of illusive names. It is a kind of verbal strategy that involves personal names as a strategy of indirectly communicating one's feeling and making prayers to deities appealing to them to allow the baby(s) in question survive. Examples:

7. i. Zháganàambè →Zhánàambè
go.2SG PRE bush/wood
'Go to the bush/woods'

- ii. Tàina →Tà'ínà
NEG.ImP lost
'Don't get lost'

- iii. Ñ ndámówo →Ndómówo
leave.1SG let.1SG die
'Leave me, let me die'

- iv. Bò zhanane →Zhanane
3SG go-again
'She is going again'

- v. tù'wo → Tù'wó
'death'

- vi. ùgbàje →Gbàje 'heap'

- vii. Bòtèzhe → Tèzhe
3SG still go.FUT 'S/he will still go'

All the names in (7) are death-prevention names (i) *Zhànáambè* means, the baby will be a victim of death and end up in the bush where it is believed the spirit of the dead goes for repose, (ii) *Tà'ínà* is an imperative, commanding the baby not to get lost (die) like others before him/her died, (iii) *Ndómówo* shows outright despondency of parents who have suffered the loss of infants and thus, to forestall further mortality, such a name is seen as a solution, (iv) *Zhanane*, this implies, as others have suffered child mortality, the bearer will equally suffer. *Tù'wó*, means 'death'; *Tèzhe* "will still go" i.e. the bearer will still go (die). This category is very weird and unpleasant but the name giver gives these names to babies to express their frustration and helplessness to God and their deities, appealing to them to forestall further infant mortality. This appears to be a reverse way of offering prayer and expressing faith in God or deities.

It is a general belief that where a couple suffers repeated child mortality, it is the same child who comes and goes repeatedly, thus, these names are used as a measure to stop the unpleasant situation. This, according to them, is proven when they incise on the body of the deceased child, the next baby born comes with a mark on the position where the deceased child was incised. This incision is another ethnographic way of curbing child mortality among traditional Basà.

Theophoric Names

Agyekum (2006:222) defines this categories of names as saying, "they depict and the belief in the supernatural beings and their power to give children, especially where parents have made efforts to get children for a long period of time, all to no avail children whose testimonies are characterized thus are given names such as:

- 8 i. Peni 'gift'
- ii. *Àkâzùga* 'blessings don't overdue'
- iii. *ùwè izhé → Wèzhé*
thing AGR go.PST 'answered prayer'

Peni 'gift' i.e. divine gift: i.e. God giving to a couple what no one can give them. *Àkâzùga* is a riddle whose meaning is blessings do not overdue but they come at God's appointed time. *Wèzhé* typifies answered prayer; only God answers prayers.

Names as Idiophones

Basà language uses vivid idiophonic representation of an idea, features, etc. in sounds as used in onomatopoeia or sound symbolism accompanied by extra linguistic or mimic effects (Crystal 2007:235). These words function like adjectives but lack features of full-fledged conventional words, but generally, they are descriptive of things, places, texture, and manner by symbolizing their nature of mimicking them (see Imoh 2019). They can be exemplified in (9) below:

- 9 i. Gbòngbó
- ii. Gbèm
- iii. Gwòsò
- iv. Kóró
- v. Gbokùngù

Each of the examples in (9) above is an expression that describes a situation surrounding the birth of a child etc. *Gbòngbó* is an exclamatory expression used as a name given to a child born immediately after something very great, tragic or very dreadful happens in a family or community, such as the death of a great leader, rich man, war outbreak or challenges such as famine etc. These words are used as an emotional expression to express surprise, shock, fear etc. Thus, these idiophones are used to name children in order to preserve history and serve as indices of important happenings during their birth. The same meaning underlies other names in (9) namely, *Gbèm* and *Gwòsò* in (9i & iii). *Kóró*, on the other hand, it is used to express God's sovereignty and supremacy over matters of life involving an indigent person and an influential person where justice is only decided by divinity. It is believed that truth will always prevail over injustice. This name is used when God vindicates the indigent and judges the delinquent and it is also used to name a child in order to also preserve history and express God's sovereignty.

Idioms as Personal Names

Another category of personal names in this language are idioms. This category of names are made from a sequence of

words which are semantically and often syntactically restricted, such that, they function as a single unit. Semantically, the meanings of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole. Syntactically, the words do not permit the usual variability they characterize in other contexts. They are not very productive in the language, especially, in the contemporary time. Examples:

- 10 i. Òhulushírínèèseshì→Òhulushírínèseshì
 soul laid PREP junction 'a soul at a junction'
 ii..Bèshé-she òdùmòsùgòniyelè → Shòdùmòsùgòniyelè
 3SG be-NEG yam to pick PREP hand
 'He is not the kind of yams picked from the ground'

Names of this category are always chipped or desententialized because of their length. In (i), a junction is a place of convergence or a meeting point or a common place. When there is a difficult task to be undertaken that requires a volunteer, and where nobody is ready to undertake it, and those who can put a stronger resistance decline, such responsibility may be imposed on someone who is vulnerable on account of inability to put up enough resistance because of their age or economic or social status in the society against their will. In (ii), picking crops on the surface of the ground is an easier task than either climbing or digging to harvest. *Òdù* is a variety of yam that bears fruits on the branches and when they are fully mature, they fall and harvesting is done by picking it from the surface of the ground. Some one that is not vulnerable, maybe because he/she is rich, strong, or vocal is described as in (ii), it is a characteristic of someone who one cannot easily dare.

Proverbial Names

Closely related to the category of idioms are those presented in short expressions of wit, containing the wisdom of past generations in condensed form, often in rhythmic, easy to remember and pleasing to hear form. These expressions are the remains of the ancient wisdom delivered in a condensed form that can be easily remembered and memorized because of their rhythm Knappert (1989:2). They are considered as "ancient survivals in modern age." Cartey, (1999:1)

Proverbial names are multifunctional in nature. They are used to settle arguments, uncover axioms, settle disputes, give advice, make suggestions and observations or to make just judgments according to people's unwritten traditional or customary laws. The meanings of this category of names are invisible or implied. Examples:

11. i. Olubo ò hwōnsò
blind AGR distribute.PRES PART
Semantic: A blind distributor

Pragmatic: God is seen as a blind distributor who distributes blessings without favoritism. This means any one can be blessed as long as it is God that is involved. The name is given in a situation where a couple overcomes infertility and other huddles.

ii. Mānda mùùwana huriùgbàa nù ùkpakwo → Mānda
divine of Sun pass 5000 CONJ 200

Semantic: God is greater than 5,200

Pragmatic: God is more powerful than the whole world. A child is named thus when a miracle happens during delivery, especially in a situation beyond human solution (note that numeral system is restricted in this language hence, 5,200 connotatively stands for the whole world) (see Imoh 2019)

iii. Tògatò ndapeláné ukwede
food AGR stick plate

Semantic: Food sticks on the plate it is contained.

Pragmatic: It refers to two inextricable things bound by some factors, especially a couple with a serious marital crisis who endures the situation, where divorce is an option because of pertinent reasons, especially, to keep the family together.

iv. È híkéní-shiàme → Hikénishàme
3PL check-NEG stomach

Semantic: one cannot see someone's stomach.

Pragmatic: one can only see people but cannot determine their thought by their appearance.

In (iv), *Hikénishàme* is derived by eliding the third person plural subject *è* and the vowel of the negative operator *ì*. This

idiomatic expression means, individuals are seen but not their thought,

Riddles as Personal Names

Some Basà names are characterized by a special type of questions that describe things or people in extremely difficult and confusing ways, which are answered in clever and amusing manner. They are clever ways of teaching and are used as a game. These short and usually humorous puzzles, which are obscure and misleading, are understood only by ingenuity. Usually, they require an answer as the meaning of the riddle, followed by a deeper or pragmatic meaning. They are also used as personal and impersonal names for persons and animals. When such puzzles are given as names, it shows, they have meaning related to those puzzles by virtue of birth, politics, and parents' situations etc. at the time of birth and so on. This category of names can be exemplified in (12) below:

12.

i.

Riddle: *Àkaàzùga*

Answer: *Üwèbiyehùrí-shiihenù*

blessing pass-NEG time

Semantic: A blessing does not delay/overdue

Pragmatic: A blessing is never overdue or late i.e. God decides when to release blessings. A child is christened thus if it comes late or after a number of years of waiting.

ii. **Riddle:** *Nèkézèzé*

Answer: *Àbànakàinè botò Àgwatananáanàkàineé bo*

2SG grind POSS person God PROG grind POSS 2SG

Semantic: If you grind for someone, God will grind for you too.

Pragmatic: What you make happen for someone, God will make happen for you (be it good or evil).

iii. **Riddle:** *Kúrukàm*

Answer: *Àyé-she ògúgádàgà*

3PL eat-NEG inheritance undeserved

Semantic: Inheritances are not given to those who don't deserve them.

Pragmatic: There are defined rules or methods for doing things.

iv. **Riddle:** *Gûda*

Answer: Bò twánàbotò nùùhwana
3SG meet.PST PREP person PREP road

Semantic: S/he met with someone on the road

Pragmatic: This name is given to a child born after some one's death, especially, a member of the family; the new born is assumed to be a replacement of the deceased.

v. **Riddle:** *Kùtepè*

Answer: Ìyi ì biyegwome ùgbe to ta, ò bûtògbe bi zhe
báimàiyelè thing AGR good hard find to find if 2SG find 2SG
AUX 2SG hold hand

Semantic: Good things are not easily found but when found are jealously guarded.

Pragmatic: People value what they labour or struggle to get in life.

The foregoing riddles can further be discussed as follows:
Àkaàzùga could mean or refer to things or a situation where blessings such as wealth comes at a latter time in life or a couple who waited long for a child, especially, a male child. When eventually the expected breakthrough comes, it is believe that God is the ultimate judge who gives to men at his chosen time.

Nèkézèzé is a caution to people, a lesson or experience cautioning people not to do wrong things because God rewards people according to their deeds, if one does good to others, God will reward them accordingly. *Kùrukàm*, this is also a warning to people who are anxious to get things in a wrong way. Thus, the rule of inheritance is used to remind such people that you can only get an inheritance only and only if you are an heir in the family, i.e., there are laid down rules of doing things for acquiring riches or wealth. *Gûda*, this means taking turns, that is, as someone dies in the family, another person is believed to be sent by divinity to replace the deceased. It is used to console people who are bereaved that God will always fill the vacuum by sending a replacement. *Kùtepè* refers to the value people place on what they labour to get or the position they labour to attain. When a couple waits for a long time to have a child, especially a male child, *Kùtepè*, most appropriately expresses the yearning of such

a couple and when eventually the desired child comes, they protect the child and do everything possible to care for it.

Discussion

The categorization of Basà personal names, as presented in this paper is in support of the belief that the choice of personal names is based on social and cultural basis. It shows that there is no arbitrariness in the naming practices of Basà personal names. In Basà, each name has a definite meaning and not a label of identification. The foregoing categorization shows the Basà social naming practices in relation with their belief system and how it influences the choice of personal names.

Conclusion

This paper is a study of Basà linguistic anthropology situated in the theory which argues that there is a strong interface between a people's language and their cultural practices. It focuses on how language is instrumental in the culture of the Basà language and how language use is resourceful in naming and understanding the worldview and philosophy or believed system of the Basà ethnic group. The study confirms what Agyekum (2006:123) says "that language is used as a microscopic lens to view and understand the social practices and day-to-day activities of the society."

Basà personal names mirror the people's worldview namely, the people's belief, ideology, religion, philosophy, culture, thought pattern and grammar (see Imoh, 2019). This can be appreciated if one understands the ethno-pragmatic and socio-cultural norms as well as the language of the people. It is so because all Basà personal names refer to issues related to the people, society, experience and culture. The data presented and analyzed have shown that names in this language are not mere arbitrary and meaningless labels to identify the bearers, but are characterized by an indexical force that relates socio-cultural meanings, functions, places, people, event history etc.

From the foregoing, Basà personal names typify different contexts namely, festival, philosophy circumstances, survival/death prevention, proverbs etc. The work has made a scholarly contribution to a greater understanding of the anthroponomy, a branch of onomastic science among the Basà people and has discovered that naming practice is embedded in

the sociocultural system of Basà people; language serves as the source of personal names. It also reveals that the nature or sound of certain names, notwithstanding, may not be used to judge their beauty, i.e. some names may sound unpleasant but the deep meaning of such names in the giver's mind may be very significant and pleasant: "The beauty of the name has to be judged within the community of origin" (Al-Zumor, 2009:26). Personal names contain precious, literary, linguistic, and historical information of the family, and the community. This precious information of Basà culture in modern times is threatened by modern names, especially, those that are foreign.

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