



PRAGMALINGUISTICS STUDY OF NAMES IN THE GHOMALA' LANGUAGE OF CAMEROON

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Abstract

This article presents a pragmalinguistic aspects of names in the Ghomálá' language spoken in Cameroon. A pragmalinguistic study of names is an analysis of the use of names in a specific social and cultural context, taking into account the way they convey meaning and intentions. In Ghomálá'-speaking communities, people, places, groups, plants, animals and other entities are assigned names that reflect circumstantial, contextual, historical, social, temporal and cultural perspectives. We want to understand how names in the Ghomálá' language contribute to the construction of cultural and social identity, and how they are used to convey information about the relationship between the speaker and the named identity. This study aims to provide the meaning and function of these names in order to preserve our rich cultural heritage. The theoretical framework is based on the principles of pragmatics and sociolinguistics which highlight the role of context in shaping language use and meaning. The methodology employed in this study combined qualitative and quantitative analysis. Data were collected from interviews with native speakers of the Ghomálá' language and text analyses. The pragmalinguistic analysis reveals that names in Ghomálá' language serve not only to identify specific entities but also to convey information about the relationship between the speaker and the named entity, as well as the cultural and social context in which communication takes place.

Key words: pragmalinguistic-names-language-function-onomastic

Introduction

Names are an integral part of human communication enabling us to identify individuals, groups and places. In social context names play a crucial role in creating and maintaining social relationships. Ghomálá' is a Bantu Language of Western group, spoken in the departments of Mifi, Koung-khi and the Hauts-plateaux of West Cameroon. It is one of the major native language in Cameroon. It comprises fourteen dialects, namely Bandjoun, Bahouan, Baham, Bafoussam, Bayangam, Batie, Bansa, Bamendjou, Bameka, Baleng, Bamengoum, Badenkop, Bapa, and Bafounda. In the Ghomálá' language – speaking communities that we listed above, we say that names can be used to nickname individuals who have made an impact on us. People may have names related to circumstances or names can be related to status in the society. Names also designate groups, places, plants and weather conditions in the society. The use of names in Ghomálá' language – speaking communities is not well understood, and there is a need to investigate the significance and functions of names in these communities. Our goal is to categorize and classify the various names used in these communities, with the aim of subsequently analysing and interpreting their meanings and functions within the cultural context in which they are used.

Despite the importance of names in Ghomála' culture, there is a dearth of research on the pragmatics of naming in this language. Previous studies or naming practices in African languages have highlighted the complex and multifaceted nature of naming systems (example: Akinnaso (1980); Oyebade (2001)). These studies have primarily focused on naming practices in languages such as Yoruba and Igbo, and there is a need for research on naming practices in other African languages including Ghomálá'. In the context of pragmatics, the study of naming practice can provide insights into the ways in which language is used to create and negotiate social relationships. As noted by Levinson (1983), Pragmatics is concerned with the study of language in



context, and the analysis of naming practices in Ghòmálá' can reveal how language is used to construct and maintain social identities.

To achieve the objectives of this study, a qualitative approach was used. The study employed a case study design, focusing on the Ghòmálá' language and culture. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, observations of naming practices and analysis of relevant documents. The results of this study show that names in the Ghòmálá' language are deeply linked to the culture and history of the people. As far as this study limitations are concerned, we say that the geographical scope is restricted to the Ghòmálá -speaking communities in the West of Cameroon.

I- LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research on names in African languages has shown that names play a crucial role in African cultures, reflecting social, cultural and religious identities Eru (2008); Kouega (2018) publication entitled: "Names and identity in African cultures, with a focus on Cameroonian names. He examines the structure, semantics and pragmatics of names in Cameroon, highlighting their role in shaping identity, culture and social relationships. George Echu (2008) in his-article titled "names and practices in African cultures explores the significance of names in African cultures, including their role in shaping identity, culture and social relationships. In the context of Cameroon, Echu's research highlights the importance of names in reflecting cultural identity and social status. He also examines the structure and semantics of names in various Cameroonian languages. The paper of Eric A, Anchimbe (2011) titled "on not calling people by their names pragmatic undertones of sociocultural relationships in a post colony" discusses name, avoidance by Cameroonians, and some of the socio-pragmatics impacts it creates. Focus is on five items that are often used in place of personal names – Manyi (mother of twins) Tanyi (father of twins) Moyo (in law, especially male), Mbanya (co-wife in a polygamous marriage), and Mbombo (namesake). The article identifies some of the contexts in, and the purposes for, which these terms are used. Eyoh Mensah and Solange Mekamgoum (2017) in their article entitled "the communicative significance of Ngêmbà personal names" present personal names as communitive acts that mirror a wide range of human experience within its socio-cultural context. They trace the stories behind these names, investigate their communicative and socio-onomastic significance and analyse their ethno pragmatic meanings. Mapeh Joan (2023), in her paper entitled "the socio-linguistic implications of personal names in Mokpe" investigates the semantic aspects, naming criteria and typology of Mokpe personal names. Wega Simeu in his Article titled "Morpho-syntactic, lexical and semantic curiosities in the naming practice in Ghòmálá' identifies the various morphosyntactic structures of names, he aimed to discuss their semantic implications. He sensitizes the native speakers to enhance the value of their culture and identity through their family names. He also derogates the mental colonization and the excessive attribution of borrowed names to Cameroonian-children, which in fact is taking them away from their culture, language and identity. In our work, we plan to categorize these names based on their contextual appearance and then explore their cultural significance.

In our article entitled "Pragma linguistics study of names in the Ghòmálá' language of Cameroon", we aim to categorise the existing names as they appear in different contexts, this follows the onomastic-typology in order to describe them and provide their implications according to the Pragma and sociolinguistic approach.

As far as theoretical framework is concerned, let us first of all remind that this paper remains on the aspect of linguistics based on the theory that there is a strong interface between people's language and their cultural practices. In this presupposition, the premise is that language is both used as a cultural resource, practice and envisioned as a resource, used to view and understand the worldview and philosophy of a particular society. Agye Kum (2006) stresses that language can be used as microscopic lens to view and understand the society. People's language, culture and thought are intimately interwoven. In this linguistic anthropological intimacy, language is considered as a social



tool with the power to evoke realities beyond the literal linguistic content of what is uttered. According to Duranti (1997), language is a set of symbolic resources connecting the social fabric and the individual representation of actual or possible worlds; a cultural practice and verbal activities that link and fit verbal activities to the real world. Presumably, this is also true of Ghòmálá' names.

Since there is a very close connection between the world, which is reality and the word, which is language, linguistic signs are therefore representations of words and also to a greater extent the world. In the study, Ghòmálá' names are the linguistic signs, while their sociocultural interpretations represent the real world. Since language and sociocultural practices are dynamic, the Ghòmálá' people and their naming systems are eventually affected by this dynamism. As a manifestation and description of the complexity and diversity of way of life and practices, people's language is itself manifested in various ways. Such ways include their naming systems (the focus of this paper), marriage, family, kinship, political aspect, economic issues, occupational aspect, health systems, religious beliefs and practices, law, funeral persuasion. Linguistic anthropology may also be used to explain how language allows for and creates differentiations between groups, individuals and identities Duranti (1997). This is the case in sociocultural contexts specificity in the general theoretical frame of anthropology.

Though naming is considered as a universal cultural practice where every society in the world gives names as tags to its people, it is also specific because how the names are given the practices and rituals involved and the interpretations attached to the names differ from society to society and from one culture to another. This goes without saying that amid the fact that every society may have their unique naming system, societies with closely related culture ought to have closely related naming practices. Thus, being a Cameroonian national language, Ghòmálá' may share same naming system practices with other Cameroonian linguistic communities though uniqueness among them may still prevail.

This study was conducted within the premise of the principle of indexicality and specificity of sociocultural contexts. With the principle of indexicality, language is used as a tool through which people's socio-cultural world is constantly described, evaluated and reproduced Wardhaugh (2006). The Ghòmálá' naming system is an aspect of cultural indexicality in which names are connected to some aspects of the sociocultural contexts of the society. Ghòmálá' names can be described and receive pragmatic and sociolinguistic interpretations by referring to personal, temporal, spatial, plants and river names.

In Ghòmálá' communities especially in the Bandjoun community, each type of rain (bèn) presenting different characteristics has its names. We have for example "bèn tîdzu". It is a name given to the rain that falls every time; in the night as in the day. It appears every month of August. We also have the temporal name "bèn tɔ kwo 'nyə" referring to the rain that comes without warning, there are also river names referring to Ghòmálá' communities. For instance, "Hèshyó in the Bandjoun village which is a purifying river. There is "Mghám" which is a sacred river where people do not enter, as their ancestral spirits reside within. There are plants names like "Pèkùdzum" that soothes red bottoms in children and "wùwù" that treats ringworm in children. Beyond description, these names can also have social and contextual meaning. For example, a woman who has given birth to two children is called "Mâgnè" and the man "Tâgnè". Some names clearly depict that the bearer comes from the royal family or from a particular clan. For a child born to the royal family and for somebody belonging to a clan. This paper therefore, seeks to document the contextual and social aspects of names, even though it associates the description of some initiatives like the Ghòmálá' language and Literacy committee which is committed to documenting the Ghòmálá' language in every possible area and means in order to preserve this very important aspect of cultural heritage.



II- METHODOLOGY

In order to carry out this study, we developed a rigorous methodology that enabled us to collect and analyse reliable data. In the following section, we will present the key elements of our methodology, including participants, instruments, and data collection procedures and data analysis.

Participants

“The participants in our data collection were ten people, mostly men. Some were notable figures, while others were indigenous community members. They were aged between sixty and eighty years old. These informants were receptive to our study and are all native speakers of the Ghomálá’ language. Participants consented to having their voices recorded, and we opted to keep them anonymous to protect their identities. We selected some of these speakers based on recommendations from people close to us, while others were chosen due to their cultural significance within the community. Nevertheless, we found that they all possessed valuable information about the meaning of names.

Numbers	informants	Traditional Status	sex	age	occupation	origin	Place of residence
1	DZUDOM Philippe	Notable	M	61	mechanic	West	Bandjoun
2	SOUOP FOADING	Notable	M	80	Traditional Doctor	West	Bandjoun
3	DESO Chretien	Village priest	M	64	Retired civil servant	West	Bandjoun
4	MAGNE Marie	Priestess	F	75	Female farmer	West	Bamendjou
5	MAFO Caroline	Priestess	F	60	Hair stylist	West	Baham
6	TALLA Ignace	Notable	M	61	Teacher	West	Bamendjou
7	TAYOU Paul	Notable	M	78	Farmer	West	Bandjoun
8	KAMDEM Arlette	Priestess	F	60	Teacher	West	Baham
9	TALOM Vieux	Local priest	M	74	Crop farmer	West	Bahouan
10	FOKOUÉ David	Notable	M	60	Trader	West	Bamengoum

Instruments

We collected our data using video and audio recording instruments, specifically cameras and dictaphones. We chose these tools to ensure that no information would be missed. The video recordings allowed us to discover contextual names derived from the ritual of accessing the stool in the Bandjoun and Bamendjou communities. After recording the sacrifice chair rituals, we conducted interview with some speakers, during which we obtained the meaning of the names assigned during the ritual. These interviews with resource persons gave us a certain level of assurance. With other speakers from these communities and through our audio record interviews, we were able to understand the meaning of other types of names.



Data collection procedures

Our data were collected through direct observation techniques of a few rituals and through interviews with speakers from communities who provided us information on the meaning of names within the contextual historical, social, temporal and cultural framework of the communities. These techniques enabled us to assemble a corpus. We opted for semi-structured interviews which involved asking close-ended questions that respondents had to limit their answers to the advantage of this type of interview is that it allowed us to obtain almost identical responses from participants to ensure the authenticity of the information, we interviewed at least three people from each studied community.

III- DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of data on proper names is a fascinating field of studies that allows for a better understanding of the origins and meaning of proper names. In this study, we propose to examine the data related to these different types of names, in order to identify trends and patterns that could help us better understand the mechanisms of naming and the processes of creating proper names. We will focus particularly on names of people, rivers, mountains, and times. The results of our analysis are based on the data from linguistic data bases: informants, data of our thesis, our resources and Ghomálá' dictionaries.

i. Typology of Ghomálá' names

This subsection presents the typology of some existing proper names in the Ghomálá' speech community. It is an empirical contextual and sociocultural descriptive study of names that exist in this communities. After categorizing them, we present the origin, morphological structure and variation of these proper nouns in speech communities. The results of our analysis are presented in the form of tables in order to facilitate understanding and interpretation of the data.

Patronymic names

A patronymic name can be defined as a family name that is transmitted from generation to generation, usually based on the paternal lineage. It is also called a surname. In Western Cameroon, the attribution of patronymic names is often linked to local culture and traditions. Names in most communities are given in a dynastic way. (That is a name is given to a child because someone else had that name). The attribution of the name consists of perpetuating the lineage, to perpetuate the name so that it is not lost. Names can also be given in relation to the reality, of life. The name "Sokoudjou" in Bamendjou community is a royal name. It can be attributed to a child to pay homage to the Chief. This means that the twin who bears this name is as powerful as the Chief. But let us say that the name in itself is meaningless. We present on the table below, patronymic names from their origin before giving their implication and content.

Junior names	twin's	Circumstantial names	Theophoros names	Stereotypical names
Málá Kõngnè Kuátè Kouetche Bakam Kemogne		Bõnyè Sûmãfò Nyàplã'á Dzwîjyè Mótyè'jyè Fàmdyè	Fosí Gaëcwésí Ghõmsí Dzwîsí Nòmsí Da'sí Sîmò	Sokoudjou Djomo Kamga Foadjo Chîmcwà' Fokam Gâmnyè



In some communities speaking the Ghomálá' language, younger twins are given specific names that are traditionally reserved for them. The names Málá, Kǎṅnè and Kouetche are attributed to younger twins in Bamendjou. Málá' is exclusively for girls and Kouetche for boys. The proper name kǎṅnè can be borne by both girls and boys. In Bandjoun community, we have the names Kuátè for boy and Bakam for girl. In Baham community, we have Kəṁmogne for girl and boy. The variation observed shows the evolution, richness and even the diversity in the language. Let us talk of morphological structure of the name "Bakam". It is made up of two names: Bá and Kam. "Ba" means calabash and "kam" means "dignitary". Where Bakam means "the chief's calabash". Let us also say that "kuátè" in Bandjoun is the equivalent of "Kouetche" in Bamendjou.

The name "Bonyə" is given circumstantially to a child in Bandjoun community when the parent of the child has been repeatedly victimized by the jealousy of their neighbors. This name can vary as "Bonyəṅkà", which literally means "jealousy of the world" or "hatred of men of earth". The proper name "Dzwíjyə" is composed of "Dzwí" that means woman and "Jyə" meaning "forbidden". It literally means "forbidden woman". This name was given to children born on a specific day of the week in the community. The day is "Dzədə", it is a major market day when it was forbidden to go to work. The name may vary by Mətyə'jyə. This variation in the name shows the evolution of the language. Other circumstantial names include: 'Famdyə', 'Súmàfò', and 'Nyàplă'á'. During the rite that grant access to sitting on the stool, which we participated in Bandjoun and Bamendjou communities, we received circumstantial names such as Nyaplă'á and Súmàfò in Bandjoun and Bamendjou respectively. These surnames were given at the end of the rite by the officiant to the daughters of the concession who were made to sit on the stool. "Nyaplă'á" literally means the one who arranges the concession. As for the other, "Súmàfò" means the friend of the Queen. These surnames given in the ritual context will be evoked to refer to the circumstance. Also, with the aim of reminding them of their mission. That of bringing peace and being a friend to the Queen. Another circumstantial name includes "Famdyə" which literally means "abandoned house". A child who receives this name is one whose father died while the child was still in his/ her mother's womb. It is the circumstance that is at the origin of this name. Therefore, a child who still has both parents cannot bear this name at birth. If there are children bearing this name without being in this situation, it is because we have a habit of giving our child the name of a family member or friend in a dynastic way, who likely came into the world under these circumstances.

Theophoric names such as Ghəmsí (word of God); Dzwîsî (wife of God); Nəmsí (animal of God); Fosí (Chief of God) in the Bandjoun community; and Gaəcwə'sí (I have cried out to God) in Bamendjou community are names that refer to a deity, God. These theophoric names often have morphological structures that combine a name of God with another name.

Here are some examples of morphological structures of theophoric names listed above:

- i. Noun + name of God: "Dzwîsî" (wife of God)
- ii. Noun + name of God: 'Nəmsí' (animal of God)
- iii. Noun + name of God: "Fosí" (chief of God)
- iv. Pronoun + verb + name of God "Gaəcwə'sí" (I have cried out to God).
"Si" stands for "God"; "Dzwî" means "woman"; "Nəmə" means "animal" and "Fo" stands for "Chief". "Gaə" means 'I', Cwə' means 'to cry'.

These morphological structures can be used to create theophoric names that express a relationship or divine characteristic. This way of giving names is specific to communities speaking Ghomálá' languages in particular and African communities in general.

There are names given to children considered as special in the community. That is twins and some children born with certain physical characteristics, such as feet-first. In the Bandjoun and



Bamendjou communities, twins are given the names of village chiefs, regardless of whether they are alive or dead, the royal names Sokoundjou in Bamendjou and Fokam, Gâmnyè, Foadjo and Djomo are given to twins in Bandjoun community. These names are given to pay homage to chiefs, signifying that the twins bearing the names are as powerful as the chief. Similarly, some children born feet-first are given the name “Cîmcwà” in both Bandjoun and Bamendjou communities. There are considered to be as more powerful than twins. Let us recall however, that the following stereotypical names have no meaning. They are: "Foko", "Foadjo" in Bandjoun community and "Sokoudjou" in Bamendjou.

Crononym

It is used to describe a specific period of time. In Bandjoun community, names are given to describe timeframe; this during raining and dry season. Raining season called “KâpSôp” in Ghômálá’ is characterised by different rains. As we can see in the table, dry season called “Kâp Lôm” also have period that we can see indicated in the table.

Raining Season	Meaning	Dry Season	Meaning
Bèṅ tîdzũ	Continuous rain that falls day and night typically in August.	Kákkák nàm	Bright sun
Bèṅ mkamkàm	Rain that marks the end of the rainy season, typically in October	Kékê nam	Early morning sun
Bèṅ tã kwó’ nyə	Sudden rain	Nàm kópák	Sunset
Bèṅ zhwəmsəṅ	Heavy rain with strong winds that causes damage.	Nàm bèṅ	Sun shining through the rain
Bèṅ mwe	Rain with hail	Kapcwə	Famine or food scarcity
Bèṅ gwǝ’sám	Rain that brings out termites	Bě̀nàm	Late afternoon
Dòmnyə bèṅ	Flood	Tsənàm	Sunrise

Toponym

It is the study of place names. It evolves examining the origins and history of names of geographic features. They are presented in the table below

Mountains names	Origin	Meaning	History
Hù	It is formed by the accumulation of fresh or brackish water in a depression in the terrain	Marsh	It has played important role in human history in the sense that it provides resources such as fish, birds, medicinal plant and building materials for community living near
	Rivers, streams and water run off can all	Canyon	It is used for traditional



Kənyətsu'	contribute to their formation		ceremonies, rituals and ancestor worship.
Kəkəŋ	It can be created or modify by human activity such as construction	Landfill mound	The current hills are the result of geological processes that occurred during this period of geological history including mountain formation and erosion
Pfəpfəp	It can originate from erosion, deposition, tectonic activity	Lowland	Plains have played a significant role in human history, often serving as fertile agricultural areas, habitats for wild life and routes for trade and migration

Hydronym

It is a proper noun that designates a watercourse, lake, ocean or any other hydrological feature. It can be names of rivers, lakes, seas, ocean. Most of the water courses existing in the communities speaking Ghomálá' are natural and have existed since the creation of the lands of these communities. It is certainly true that some appear during the rainy season and disappear during the dry season. These watercourse names do nothave meaning in English. Their meaning remains within the context of the language. A body of water originating from another community's area flows into different communities and has different names in each community. We present below in a table the existing watercourses in Bandjoun community, along with their origin. We will describe these watercourses before exploring their cultural significance.

Watercourses	Origin	Description	Cultural significance
Mnuɔ	It is a water source that flows from the Noun River	It is located in the country side, not far from where the women farm	It is a watercourse that changed its course due to a sea crab (kómnyɔ) that was the totem of the former village chief Foadjo. It is used to treat diseases.



Mghóm	It is a natural sacred water that originated from Bayangam	This water flows in a sacred place, Hèshyó at Bandjoun	It is commonly referred to albeit inaccurately and is used for purification purposes.
Shyǎmghò	It originated from Baham it is water of strangers because a group of people settled in this area, and the water source there came to be known as “Water of strangers” due to the new comers being outsiders.	It is situated between two neighbourhoods, Shyálá' and Jyǎmghò. It also flows into the water located near the mosque in the area.	It is a sacred place where sacrifices are made and people are purified with water that flows
Hèeshyóshyó	Sacred place where Mghóm water flows. Water Mghóm is now called H because of its sacred status.	This water in the Noun placed is now called "Hèshyó"	It is a sacred place where sacrifices are made and people are purified with water that flows.

Phytonym

It is the study of plant names, especially the linguistic and etymological analysis of the names given to plants. This can include: the origin of plant names, their meaning. we present some of these plants and trees in the following table.

Plants and trees	Meaning and Description	Origin	Rôle
Thó dók	Eucalyptus: it is a tree native to Australia	It is an imported plant brought by the colonizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eucalyptus leaves have medicinal properties Eucalyptus logs can be used to make slats, planks
Tójom	It is a traditional remedy whose meaning remains within the context of the community.	The name “Tójom” was given to the remedy to remember the one who found the medicine that ended the plague in the Bandjoun community.	This traditional remedy is administered to children to cleanse their stomachs and prevent the plague that once affected the community.
wùwù	Greeping herb existing only in language	There is no story behind this traditional plant	It is used to treat ring worm in children



Tə̀ŋkə̀yú'	Medicinal plants	No story behind the traditional herb	The plants treat coughs and helps the umbilical cord stump fall off quickly in new-borns.
Fupàgras	Lemon grass	No story behind	Use for medicinal properties
Pfũ̀kə̀ŋ	Peace tree	It symbolized peaceful intention in a time of tribal wars. Leaders carried it to signal they came in peace, not war.	This plant holds spiritual significance and is used to symbolize a sacred site
Mghé kə̀dà	The king of herbs. It is a magical herb	No story behind the medicinal herb	It cures many diseases

Conclusion

In conclusion, this pragma linguistics study of names in the Ghòmálá' language of Cameroon has revealed the intricate relationship between language, culture and identity. The analysis of various types of names, including Patronyms, Toponyms, Chrononyms, Hydronyms and Phytonyms, has shown that names are not just mere labels, but carry significant cultural, historical and social meaning. The study of patronymic family names in communities speaking the language has allowed us to group them in context. We have names attributed to younger twins, circumstantial names, theophoric names and stereotypical names. The analysis of the morphological structures of the names allows for a deep understanding of them. The names are given in a dynastic way, in order to preserve the lineage and prevent names from being lost. Circumstantial names for example can be attributed to a child who has not experienced the circumstance. Names can also be given to socially characterize a man or woman. In the rite, giving access to sit on the stool, a name is given at the end of this rite to socially characterize the one being installed on the stool. The circumstantial name Nyàplá'á is given to the one who brings peace to the family. Certain names, although meaningless, are given according to the realities of life. This is the case with the stereotypical name Sokoudjou which is attributed to one of twins in Bamendjou community simply to signify that a twin is as powerful as a chief. All these attributions are rooted in tradition.

Regarding Chrononyms, let us say that each type of weather in communities speaking the Ghòmálá' language has a specific name. This shows the richness and diversity of the language from a temporal perspective. The names of places (Toponyms) derive their meaning from their origin, geographical feature and history. The majority of watercourses flowing through the communities are used either for purification or treatment. The majority of place names, time, rivers and Patronyms do not have meaning in English. Their meaning remains in the cultural context. This may be due to conventions and history in their language. Preserving this meaning in the context of the language helps maintain consistency and accuracy in referencing, this to avoid confusion. Let us say that this study on the meaning of names help us to understand how language works. It also helps us understand the cultural and historical context in which they were created and used.



Recommendations

To further this research and deepen our understanding of the language and name, we recommend: studying dialectical variations of the language and their impact on names, deepening the analysis of cultural and historical contexts of names in the Ghomálá' language. Documenting and preserving knowledge about the Ghomálá' language and associated names.

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