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Semantic Typologies of Lexically Transparent Setswana Personal Names

Abstract

African personal names, particularly those in Sub-Saharan, are generally motivated by external forces like the circumstances surrounding the family at the time of the pregnancy or the birth of the child. Consequently, these names are often lexically transparent as they derive from the vocabulary of the language, as well as the culture and traditions of the societies they exist in. Sub-Saharan naming practices therefore have a distinctive pattern because they reflect their societies, an observation made by Bangeni and Coetser (2000) regarding Xhosa names. Naming in these societies, including that of Botswana, is a well-structured process with the names deriving from semantic categories that are influenced by the local traditions. This article examines the meanings and motivations behind Setswana's lexically transparent names. The data for this paper comes from a PhD study, which analysed 1,995 Botswana names and categorized them into 19 semantic categories. Six of these categories which have proven to be the most common in the data are outlined and discussed: situational names, which derive from events and situations around the pregnancy and the birth of the child, symbolic names and the names which derive from names of common objects of symbolic meaning, activity names, God-related names, occupation and position in society names, and virtue names. This analysis indicates that Setswana names are a direct reflection of the culture, traditions, and the overall structure of their communities.

Keywords

Botswana, Setswana, personal names, lexically transparent, semantic categories

1. Introduction and background of the study

Names and naming as universal processes have been explored from many perspectives in different societies of the world. According to Hanks et al. (2006), a person's given name is a badge of their cultural identity, which is connected to their religious identity and language, both of which are often key factors in choosing a name for a child (p. xi). Furthermore, Guerini (2005) asserts that "because traditional name systems reflect the values and beliefs of respective societies, their analysis reveals the fears and concerns of those societies, including hopes and expectations for the newborn" (p. 5). From this assertion, it is clear that name giving is a deliberate, well thought out process and that names do more than just identify their bearers. The names are also powerful communication tools, particularly in African societies where they are mainly lexically and semantically transparent.

This paper explores a semantic typology of the most common Setswana lexically transparent names and their motivations. This paper regards a lexically transparent name as one whose meaning is easily identifiable because it exists as a form of a word or a combination of words in contemporary use, although as a name it is not regarded as an ordinary word or combination of words. This, however, does not mean that the meaning of the word as an item of the lexicon ceases to exist in the speaker's mind. The presence or absence of meaning in personal names has been a contentious debate across many societies. It can be argued that a name can be both lexically transparent, if it is identical to a word in the lexicon, and semantically opaque, if people do not ascribe any meaning to its use as a name. In this instance then, names would be labelled as either semantically transparent or semantically opaque. However, for the purposes of this paper, the terms lexically transparent and lexically non-transparent will be used to refer to names with a readily accessible meaning and those with an opaque meaning.

According to Ramaeba (2019), the general conclusions about African names having meaning and European names having none are imprecise because European names do have meaning or did at one time; it is only that the meanings have become opaque over time. For example, the meaning of the name *John* can be traced to its Latin and Hebrew forms in the New Testament meaning 'God is gracious'. These types of meanings are not easily

accessible to many users hence the assumption that such names do not have meaning. Coates (2017), The Pragmatic theory of Properhood (TPTP), with its central idea that proper names lack sense, would probably explain the current state of European names. According to Coates (2017), “proper names are best defined on the basis of their referential function rather than on the basis of their denotation, and that, crucially, they lack sense altogether” (p. 9). As indicated earlier, the presence or absence of meaning in a name is a debatable issue that requires an in-depth discussion. Similarly, the general assumption that African names have a readily available meaning is to some extent inaccurate because there are names such as the Setswana name *Tshedifatso* which means ‘to bring light’, whose meaning is less transparent. The unique structure of this name makes its meaning a bit opaque. The blanket statement that African names have meaning while European names do not should be used cautiously considering this observation. However, it is acknowledged that most African names are lexically transparent while those in the European context are mainly lexically opaque, as illustrated by names in Botswana and Scotland (Ramaeba, 2019).

2. Literature review

Despite the naming process being a timeless phenomenon, the study of names in the African context is a fairly recent development, which, according to Neethling (2005), only saw a significant rise in the early 1980s. Despite this, the growth of the field of onomastics has generally been notably slow in the Southern African region, particularly in Botswana. This is because the earliest studies on Botswana names seem to have emerged in the late 1990s and these included Mathangwane and Gardner (1998), who looked at the use of English and Setswana names in Botswana to establish the motivations behind the giving of names in each language. Their subsequent paper (1999) determined that an English name attracted both negative and positive attitudes, while only positive attitudes were associated with African names. Rapoo (2003) explored gender in the Setswana naming system and concluded that the system displayed some gender bias which tended to favour males over females.

Otlogetswe (2008) did a statistical analysis of English and Setswana names to reveal the most popular and least popular name tokens in Botswana at the time. Almost a decade later Ramaeba and Mathangwane (2015) explored the new trends in the Setswana naming system and concluded that there were new names in the Botswana onomastic space which had not existed ten or so years earlier. The paper showed significant changes in the morphology and semantics of the emerging names. Ramaeba (2020) explored polemical Setswana anthroponyms and revealed that they function at two levels: firstly, they denote their bearers and secondly, they perform communicative and practical pragmatic functions through indirect conversational exchanges.

The purpose of the current paper is to contribute to the Botswana onomastic research space by exploring Setswana personal names from a different perspective from the above discussed studies. The paper explores the meanings of Setswana names to highlight the semantic categories that most of them belong to, taking into account their literal meanings and the motivations behind them. The motivation of a name is critical in deducing its meaning because in most cases the literal meaning is not enough to reveal the entire meaning of a name. An example of two children named *Thapelo* ‘prayer’ for different reasons may be invoked. One was so named because the mother had a complicated pregnancy and birth and believed that the child survived only because of her constant prayers. The other child was named *Thapelo* after his brother who died on the same day that he was born. The name was given to keep the memory of the departed brother alive. Even though the children had an identical name with the same literal meaning, each name had a different motivation because of the context under which it was given. It is for this reason that both aspects of a name, the literal meaning, and the motivation need to be considered to reveal its meaning in its entirety.

Previous studies in the African context which have explored the motivations behind African names in order to categorise them semantically include Neethling (2005) on Xhosa names of South Africa and Pongweni (1983) on Shona names of Zimbabwe amongst many others. The general observation from these studies is that most African names derive from common motivations because they are largely contextual. Pongweni (1983), concluded that “Shona names can be classified into six categories, depending on the circumstances prevailing in the family or clan at the time of one’s birth” (p. 2). This observation about Shona names being context motivated can be generalised to most African names as revealed by previous studies: Guma (2001) on Sesotho names

of Lesotho, Neethling (2005) on Xhosa names of South Africa and Ramaeba (2019, 2020) on Setswana names of Botswana. The interest of this paper is to reveal the most common semantic categories of Setswana personal names using both their motivations and their literal meanings.

3. Methodology

This paper is part of a PhD study (Ramaeba, 2019), whose data was collected between May and August 2016 in Mahalapye and Molepolole, villages in Botswana. A total of 1,995 name tokens were collected through questionnaires and oral interviews. A preliminary analysis revealed that 1,829 (91.7%) name tokens and 908 (87.2%) name types were lexically transparent. The lexical transparency of the names was determined firstly by the information given by the respondents and secondly by the competence of the researcher who is a native speaker of Setswana and a fluent speaker of English. These names were then placed in relevant semantic categories using their lexical meanings and motivations. The names were categorised into 19 semantic categories. This paper discusses the six most popular semantic categories in the data.

The 19 semantic categories used are mainly original to this study because they were influenced by the data. A bottom-up process was used; this means that the data was used to come up with the categories and not the other way round. As a result of this, all the names in the data were allocated to semantic categories. The use of an existing model would have resulted in some of the names being discarded for not belonging to any relevant category. The categories were, however, not all new as some, such as Animal and Bird names, Biblical names, Plant and Flower names and Virtue names already existed. Some of these existing categories are from what Pulgram (cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 98) called Hilka's 'fairly comprehensive list' of sources of names which arose from his analysis of Sanskrit names of India. The category of *The realm of nature* includes names that derive from plants, animals, minerals and other elements while that of *Human conditions* include names that derive from the people's way of life, and activities such as religion, science and public service.

4. Theoretical framework

The main objective of this paper is to reveal the most popular semantic typologies of lexically transparent Setswana names in Botswana. The Botswana naming systems are highly influenced by the culture, traditions, and events of the society because they are contextually motivated. Therefore, there is a direct connection between the ways of life of the people and the names; these two influence each other and cannot be dealt with in isolation. As Ainiala (2016) has rightly pointed out, “names are not only part of language; they are part of society and culture, as well. Names are always born in the interaction between people, the linguistic community, and the environment” (p. 371). It is for this reason that this paper has been situated within the field of socio-onomastics which studies names from the perspective of sociolinguistics — there is a need to study the relationship between societies and names and socio-onomastics offers that platform. Socio-onomastics is a fairly new field of onomastics and according to Ainiala (2016), the term was first coined in German (*Sozioonomastik*) by Hans Walther (1971). Kehl (1971) was one of the early researchers to link sociolinguistics to onomastics in a study where he explored Chinese nicknaming behaviour from a sociolinguistic perspective. Van Langendonck (1982) started to use the term ‘socio-onomastic’ and the approach consistently in name studies and that is how it came to be fully appreciated and actively used.

5. Analysis and discussion

This section presents and discusses the most popular semantic categories of lexically transparent names in Botswana in the order in which they appear in Table 1, according to their popularity. The 6 semantic categories represented below are out of a total of 19 categories used in the original study; 1,412 name tokens are from a total of 1,829; 718 name types used are from a total of 908 identified by the main study. The semantic categories are further discussed individually below.

Table 1. Top 6 Semantic Categories of Lexically Transparent Names in Botswana

Semantic category	No. of tokens	% of tokens	No. of types	% of types
Symbolic and symbolic objects	287	15.7	138	15.2
Virtues	272	14.9	73	8
God related	270	14.8	130	14.3
Activities	219	12	136	15
Occupation and position in society	203	11.1	95	10.5
Situation	161	8.8	146	16
Total: 6/19	1,412/1,829	77.3	718/908	79

Source: own work based on Ramaeba (2019).

5.1. Symbolic and symbolic objects names

These are names that derive mainly from common nouns and expressions in Setswana language but convey meanings that are far beyond the literal sense because they are used symbolically. The meanings of the names are metaphorical and so it was important to consider their motivations as given by the respondents. For example, the name *Sepatela* derives from the word which means ‘hospital’, a common word in the Setswana vocabulary. The symbolic meaning of the name is that the child was the first in the family to be born at a hospital as the elder siblings were born at home. This was a symbolic occasion that the family needed to celebrate and appreciate, and they did so through the name of the child. Although names in this category generally derive from common nouns, they can further be divided into smaller subcategories. The first subcategory denotes physical features and natural environment like *Loapi* ‘sky’, *Sekaka* ‘desert’, *Naledi* ‘star’ and *Letsibogo* ‘ford’, each with its own unique motivation. *Loapi* and *Naledi* refer to the physical beauty of the children while *Sekaka* was motivated by the fact that the child was born at the cattle post with no water and suitable amenities for a birth to take place. *Letsibogo* was named after his father who was very ill at the time of the birth.

The next subcategory is that of traditional artefacts and activities such as *Lebeana* ‘a part of a broken clay pot’, *Lere* ‘walking stick/crutch’, *Tuuetso* ‘ululation’ and *Legofi* ‘applause’. The name *Lebeana* symbolises a Setswana

traditional household chore for a girl child. Traditionally homesteads shared fire in the form of hot coal because families could not afford to buy matchsticks, so when the fire in one homestead died, people would go to a neighbouring home to get hot coal. The coal would be carried in a broken clay pot called *lebeana* which is a poor heat conductor. The carrying of hot coal from one home to the other was a chore for young girls so the name symbolises this activity. The name *Lere* was given to the only son in the family with the expectation that he will be his father's support system in the father's old age. He would literally lead his father when he is old and blind and also take over all of his manly responsibilities. The other two names, *Tuuetso* and *Legofi* are symbolic of the happiness that the child brought in the family as they are activities that are associated with happy occasions. Some of the names refer to the number of children in the families, and sometimes indicating their gender. The name *Letshego* 'pillar/three-legged stand' was given to a boy child who was born after two girls to indicate that he will be the parents' pillar and supporter. The word *phôlo* in Setswana means a huge harvest and a child was so named because the mother was appreciative of the many girl children she had. She regarded her daughters as a good harvest and was appreciative of that even though she did not have a son. The motivations of these names are varied and quite unique to each name and situation and all indicate evidence of drawing from the cultures and traditions of Botswana society.

5.2. Virtue names

The second most popular semantic category at 14.9% is that of *Virtue* names which derives from words that denote human virtues or qualities. These are desirable qualities that parents wish and hope for themselves or their children expressed through the children's names. The names generally refer to desirable attributes which do not denote any negative connotations. This semantic category exists in other cultures of the world as Hanks et al. (2006) have observed in English-speaking cultures particularly with lexically transparent names such as *Joy*, *Happy* and *Felix*. Setswana names in this category, just like those in the previous category of *Symbolic and symbolic objects* names, derive more from nouns than from any other grammatical category. Many of the motivations for the names in this category indicate the hopes and wishes of the parents for themselves or for the children. For example, *Kutlo* 'obedience'

was given with the hope and wish that the child would grow up to be obedient and respectful, and the same is given for names *Botho* ‘good behaviour’ and *Tlotlo* ‘respect’. The name *Botlhale* ‘intelligence/cleverness’ was given because the parents hoped the child would become intelligent while *Kagiso* ‘peace’, *Tshegofatso* ‘blessing’ and *Tsholofelo* ‘hope’ were also motivated by the hopes and wishes that the parents had for themselves and their children.

However, other names had motivations that were rather unique, for example, a mother named her son *Phenyo* ‘victory/win’ because she gave birth at the height of the HIV/AIDS scourge in the country, and she felt victorious that she and the baby were free of the virus. A grandmother named her grandchild *Maatla* ‘strength’ because the mother of the child died at birth and the name was a plea to God to give the grandmother the strength to care for the child. An unmarried mother named her child *Tshepiso* ‘promise’ as a promise to herself to not have another child out of wedlock. A father named his child *Setho* ‘human nature’, because he got married first and did not have children out of wedlock. The name emphasises that it is customary to do things in that order. All these names were motivated by the social contexts that the name givers were in at the time, so even though they derive from virtues they are also context motivated.

A significant factor that is revealed by these names is that those that refer to qualities that denote strength, power, and success such as *Phenyo* ‘victory/win’ and *Nonofo* ‘strength’ are mainly male specific while those that denote humility, gentleness and kindness are female specific. Examples include, *Bonolo* ‘gentleness/kindness’, *Maitseo* ‘good behaviour’ and *Boineelo* ‘dedication/resignation’. A similar observation is made by Rapoo (2003), who notes that “a female’s worth is measured by her looks and polite behaviour. In comparison a male should be strong, fierce, and must display leadership potential and signs of power” (p. 43). Although this might not be a deliberate intention behind such names they tend to influence and emphasise the inequalities between genders that already exist, particularly in patriarchal societies. The name givers might not be conscious of such gender stereotyping during the naming process, but it subsequently comes to the fore either way. This demonstrates how socialisation processes directly or indirectly influence the giving of names and naming patterns. Naming presumably reinforces such stereotyping as well as responding to it.

5.3. God-related names

Names in this section have a lot in common with Biblical names because they relate to the semantic field of religion although they do not derive from the Bible. Hanks et al. (2006) assert that “the most widespread of all given names are those taken from a biblical origin” (p. xiii), and this is the case even in Botswana (Ramaeba, 2019). However, this paper does not explore biblical names because they are lexically non-transparent. *God-related* names are as such the most closely related in motivation to Biblical names hence their popularity. *God-related* names are seen as tools through which name givers communicate their appreciation of, and praise for God by creating their own names rather than relying on those from the Bible or ones linked to it. *God-related* names are the third most popular name category in Botswana with 14.8% name tokens. According to the 2011 national population census, Christianity is the most popular religion in Botswana at 79.3% (Statistics Botswana, 2014, p. 327), so it is to be expected that names that make reference to God and Christianity would be popular. Names in this category exist in different syntactic structures and the most common are in the form of abstract nouns, e.g., *Thapelo* ‘prayer’ or *Thero* ‘sermon’; phrases, e.g., *Wamorena* ‘of God’; and clauses, e.g., *Goitsemodimo* ‘God knows’.

The most common motivation for the names is that of acknowledging God and appreciating the child. Name givers acknowledge the presence of God in their lives as well as his power and might through names like *Goabamang* ‘who gives’, which emphasises that it is only God who has the power to give children to people. *Gorenaone* ‘He (God) reigns’ acknowledges the presence of God in the lives of the people. *Omphile* ‘He (God) has given me’ was given to a child who was highly appreciated because she was the only girl born after eight boys in the family. The motivation behind the name *Kesaobaka* ‘I still praise him (God)’ is that God should be praised at all times, even when one is in difficult situations, and the name *Gaoswabise* ‘He (God) does not disappoint’ emphasises that God never lets anyone down.

The other popular name motivation is context based as it refers to the family and birth circumstances despite the names still being God oriented. This category groups names motivated by the circumstances and events at the time of the pregnancy or of the birth. Examples of names in this category are *Omphemetse* ‘He (God) has protected me’, *Goemeone* ‘It is him (God) who stood for me’ and *Thapelo* ‘prayer’, all of which were given because the expectant

mothers experienced difficult pregnancies and were acknowledging God's protection. The names *Oduetse* 'He (God) has paid' and *Ogomoditse* 'He (God) has comforted' were given to children born immediately after a death in the family. The idea behind the names is that God has replaced what he had initially taken and has also comforted the family. *Ontibile* 'He (God) is looking at me' was given to a child whose mother had struggled to conceive, so she was thankful that God had been watching her struggle and had finally answered her prayers. The name *Gaomodimo* 'You are not God' is a rather unusual one as it does not refer to God but seems to be addressing a specific person or situation, so its motivation is more polemical. The name was given because several people in the family had near-death experiences before this child was born so the parents were addressing the devil or evil force behind these experiences. The message behind the name is that the devil was not God so he would not succeed in whatever he was trying to do. Although all the names discussed above are God related, each had a specific motivation depending on the circumstances of the name giver at the time. This demonstrates that names could belong to the same semantic categorization but each with a specific meaning that can only be decoded through appreciating its motivation. Using the bottom-up categorization process helped in this regard because both the literal meaning, and the motivations of the names were taken into account.

This semantic category has highlighted that Batswana do not only rely on biblical names to praise and acknowledge God as they are able to create names that successfully do that. The section has also indicated that Setswana names are largely contextual, even those which are religion or God related. Context plays a significant role in the naming process across a wide range of the semantic categories.

5.4. Activity names

This category is original to this study, and it is therefore different from that on Hilka's list of name sources which falls under the category of *Human conditions* that include *wealth, joy/love, happiness*, and of course *activities* which refer to religion, science and public service. This study defines an *Activity* name as one that denotes any kind of activity taking place and deriving from a verb. Names in this category appear as different syntactic structures: base form of the verb, *Bitsa* 'call'; infinitive form of the verb, *Gobona* 'to see'; first

person indicative form, *Keamogetse* 'I have received'; and interrogative forms, *Kedirileng* 'what have I done?'. The names contain different verb forms to indicate an activity taking place. *Activity* names are the fourth most frequent category of lexically transparent names in Botswana at 12%.

The activities described by the names are varied as they express an actual physical activity such as *Atarelang* 'receive with cupped hands', in Setswana culture, receiving with cupped hands is a sign of appreciation and respect for the giver. Many of the names may be loosely synonymous with each other, but each name carries its own semantic and cultural connotations which distinguishes it from others. This is exemplified by the names *Amogelang* 'receive' and *Atarelang* 'receive with cupped hands', which basically express the same idea though differently. Other names that express practical activities are *Rwesang* 'place on/put on somebody's head', *Didimalang* 'keep quiet' and *Iphe* 'give yourself'. The names can also indicate mental activities like *Kereeditse* 'I am listening', *Boifang* 'fear/revere' and *Lemogang* 'be aware'.

This semantic categorisation, as has been previously mentioned, has been informed by the current data, and is entirely original. The most significant challenge is that there are fuzzy boundaries between the categories, which may result in some overlaps. *Fuzziness* is a recognised characteristic of category analysis. Fuzziness acknowledges that an element can belong to more than one category because sometimes there are no clear-cut boundaries between the elements (Taylor, 2003). The main motivating factor has been to try to assign the names to what seems to be their primary category and not their secondary one. For example, a name like *Rapelang* 'pray' can also belong to the category of *God-related* names because the general belief is that people pray to God, but it is acknowledged that people belong to different religious denominations besides Christianity, and they can pray to different higher powers. In the African Traditional Religion, for instance, people submit to their ancestors, so this categorisation was trying to encompass all these varied aspects of the names. A name like *Kealeboga* 'I am thankful' could belong to the categories of *Activity* and *Appreciation* but was categorised under the latter. The reason is that the act of being thankful is more a mental state than a practical state. If the gesture of being thankful is accompanied by a practical activity, then it would be more of an activity than an appreciation.

Motivations of names in this category are varied and unique to the names and they include those influenced by meanings of Setswana proverbs. The Setswana language is rich in proverbs which carry meanings intended to teach,

guide and inform, therefore it is fitting that it would have names deriving from proverbs. This category has two examples of such names. One is *Eephutha* 'it organises itself'. This is derived from the Setswana proverb 'Tau e iphutha metlhala fa ele nosi, fa e na le ditawana ke mafaratlhatlha' which literally means that one can take stock and organise one's life when alone and not when there are many people around. This name was given to an only child in the family and the parents were justifying this choice. The decision to have one child was a conscious and deliberate one as the parents wanted to lead an organised life without distractions that may be brought about by many children. The other name derived from a proverb is *Oaipetla* 'it moulds itself'. This derives from the proverb 'Moremogolo go betlwa wa taola, wa motho o a ipetla' which means that no one can mould another person into a better individual, but it is the responsibility of an individual to do that. The name is a kind of piece of advice to the name bearer that he should strive to make himself a better person and not expect anyone else to do it for him.

5.5. Occupation and position in society names

This section discusses names that derive from words that denote occupations and positions in society. The occupation may be a formal job or an informal activity that exists within the cultural and family setting influenced by the day to day lives of the people. The position in society may also be in a formal or informal setting. Names that denote a type of formal occupation include *Lesole* 'soldier', *Moanamisi* 'broadcaster', *Kgosi* 'chief' and *Tautona* 'president'. The two latter names *Kgosi* and *Tautona* also denote positions in society. The names *Moagi* 'builder', *Morongwa* 'messenger', *Moithaopi* 'volunteer', *Motsumi* 'hunter' and *Modisa* 'shepherd/herd boy' derive from informal vocations or activities which are part of the daily lives of the people. Other names include *Molaudi* 'district commissioner', *Moreri* 'preacher' and *Mokolobetsi* 'baptiser'. The names are generally in the form of nouns as they mainly refer to the person who does the activity and not to the activity itself.

The most common motivation behind names in this category is the hopes and wishes of the parents for themselves and for the child. The name *Moagi* 'builder' was given with the hope that like a builder, the child will build and keep the family together. Interestingly, another *Moagi* in the data was so named because the parents hoped that he will become a responsible son

who will take care of them and build them a house. Although the names have a common motivation of hopes and wishes, the parents hoped and wished for different things specific to their situations. *Moanamisi* ‘broadcaster’, *Lesole* ‘soldier’ and *Moreri* ‘preacher’ were so named as these were the jobs that their parents wished for them. Similarly, *Monamodi* ‘rescuer’ was so named with the belief that he will rescue his family from poverty.

Some of the names make reference to the social context, including the pregnancy and birth circumstances. For example, *Motlhabakgomo* ‘the one who slaughters the cow’ which was given to a son who was born after the death of his two older brothers. The interpretation is that since he was now the eldest son, he was responsible for slaughtering cows in the family, which is a responsibility of the eldest son. This symbolically means that he will be responsible for providing basic needs for the family and performing other associated manly duties. The name *Watemo* ‘the one who ploughs/born during ploughing season’ was given to a child who was born when farm produce was abundant. A mother who moulded and sold clay pots for a living named her daughter *Babopi* ‘people who mould’ in reference to her way of life. A family that was experiencing marital problems when their son was born named him *Motshereganyi* ‘mediator’ with the hope that his birth will harmonise their relationship.

The general overview revealed by this category is that it is highly dominated by male specific names, in terms of tokens and types. This apparent imbalance could be attributed to the patriarchal nature of the society because traditionally women were homemakers and caregivers while men were the family providers. This means that women were not associated with names that denote a variety of vocations, jobs or positions in society. This does not mean that there are no female specific names that indicate occupations or jobs; the names do exist but are not as highly represented as those that are male specific, as indicated in the data. Another observation made is that there are very few gender-neutral names in this category, an indication that when it comes to occupations and positions in society, gender roles are clearly marked and there are rarely any fuzzy overlaps. The names overtly indicate the vocations and positions that are culturally and socially associated with each gender. Similar observations were made by Gardner (1994), Onukawa (2000) and Rapoo (2003), who all emphasise that such observations are common in patriarchal societies. For example, names that denote qualities of leadership, physical strength and intelligence are male specific. The names,

Kgosi ‘chief’, *Moeteledi* ‘leader’ and *Tautona* ‘president’ all signify leadership and position in society and are all male specific.

Furthermore, names that symbolise bravery and physical strength like *Lesole* ‘soldier’, *Motsumi* ‘hunter’ and *Mosireletsi* ‘protector’ are also all male specific. In fact, there were no female soldiers in Botswana until 2008 when the first batch of females was recruited into the army; therefore, it is not surprising that such names are male specific. On the other hand, names that symbolise nurturing, homemaking and household chores are mainly female specific. *Motshidisi* ‘comforter’ and *Monkgomotsi* ‘my comforter’, both of which indicate the quality of nurturing and sympathy, are female specific. Furthermore, those that refer to household activities and light physical activities like *Mositi* ‘pounder/grinder’, *Searongwa* ‘it is sent (messenger)’ and *Barobi* ‘harvesters’ are also female specific. The name *Searongwa* is morphologically interesting because its meaning suggests that the bearer is a ‘thing’ as the prefix *se-* (‘it’) in Setswana indicates inanimacy. The name bearer who is female is regarded as a ‘thing/object’ that is sent on errands and not as a person. The equivalent of this name is *Morongwa* ‘messenger’ which is gender neutral in the current data.

5.6. Situational names

This category explores names that are rather difficult to categorise semantically without considering their motivations. Although the meanings of the names are lexically transparent, they can only be fully understood and interpreted using their motivations and contexts. They are categorised as *Situational* because they all seem to describe an event or situation that is related to the birth of the child or the life circumstances of the family at the time of the pregnancy or birth. Many of the names in this category are generally longer structures like phrases and clauses which seem to be addressing something specific. Examples are: *Gaebolae* ‘it does not kill’, *Gothata* ‘it is difficult’ and *Segadimeng* ‘do not look back’. Although their literal meanings are clear, their actual meanings cannot be deduced without context. If the context is not considered it is unclear, for example, what does not kill, or what is difficult, so it is essential that the motivations are considered when interpreting their meanings. Although the motivation of social situation is present in previously discussed categories, here it is regarded as a semantic category and not necessarily as a specific motivation for specific names.

Names in this category include those that were motivated by specific events that happened in the country, not necessarily to specific individuals or families. Names like, *Boipuso* ‘independence’, *Raboipuso* ‘father of independence’ and *Mmabotswana* ‘mother of Botswana’ were motivated by a major event in the country. They were given to children born in September 1966, the same year and month that Botswana gained independence. This was a much-celebrated event that was significant in the lives of the people. In addition to such events, some names refer to events and circumstances that are specific to the families such as family bereavements, reflected by names like *Matshedi-so* ‘condolences’ and *Obusitswe* ‘he has been returned’ both given to children born during or after a family bereavement. Other names refer to social circumstances such as poverty, illnesses, disputes, and squabbles. For example, *Tshotego* ‘suffering’ was given because the child was born during difficult times when the family had no proper shelter and food, and *Gothata* ‘it is difficult’ which also refers to the difficult times of poverty that the family was experiencing then. Those that were motivated by family disputes and spats are *Tlhoriso* ‘torment’, *Lekgobo* ‘shame’ and *Dipuo* ‘quarrels’.

Polemical names also fall in this category because they are situation motivated. However, unlike names that are motivated by general circumstances and events experienced by the name giver or the family, polemical names address very specific situations or individuals and so they often sound confrontational and provocative. Batoma (2009) refers to them as allusive names which people use to indirectly communicate their feelings and opinions in conflict-laden situations. According to Ramaeba (2020), the names may also exist in the form of back-and-forth exchanges between those involved by using the names of the same child or different children in the family. Polemical names can be used to perform several functions, one of which is to question the paternity of the child. For example, a father named his child *Gasenna* ‘it is not me’ because he suspected that his partner had an affair and was impregnated by another man, so he was not the father of the child. He was using the child’s name to raise his suspicions. Similarly, a mother named her child *Lesenotse* ‘it has been revealed’ because her partner suspected that he was not the father of the child, so he did not want to take responsibility. When the child was born, he had physical features that resembled those of the father and so the mother was happy that she has been vindicated as the truth had been revealed. Polemical names in the data are also used to express the name givers’ feelings about failed relationships or marriages. For example,

a woman whose husband deserted their matrimonial home during her pregnancy named her child *Gaebolae* 'it (broken heart) does not kill'. The message was directed at her husband to inform him that she would not die of a broken heart. Another mother named her child *Batsietsi* 'cheaters/cheats' after her boyfriend convinced her that he would marry her after she bore him a child only to desert her after the child was born.

6. Conclusions

This paper has outlined the most common semantic categories to which Setswana personal names belong. It should be clearly stated that the semantic categories discussed here are not exhaustive of Setswana names, but only the most common have been highlighted. It is also acknowledged that the categories may not be very distinct and clear-cut as some overlaps may exist because of name meaning and category fuzziness. However, individual name motivations as well as the literal meanings of the names were the primary guiding factors in assigning names to categories.

Furthermore, the paper has indicated that Setswana personal names are mainly context motivated, regardless of the semantic categories they belong to. This analysis has further demonstrated that the lexical meaning of a name is not its entire meaning, as its motivation or the context under which it is given also contributes to its whole meaning. The analysis has also illustrated that Setswana names and the Botswana naming process in general is highly influenced by the culture and traditions of the society, its religions and the daily lives of the people, as revealed by the semantic categories discussed. The interconnectedness of the contextual and linguistic meanings of names illustrates the importance of studying them from a socio-onomastic perspective to reveal their full meanings.

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