



Research Article

NAMING AS A UNIVERSAL LINGUISTIC CULTURE: EXAMPLES FROM ENGLISH AND FULFULDE

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 9th November, 2016

Received in revised form 28th December, 2016

Accepted 24th January, 2017

Published online 28th February, 2017

Key words:

Naming, Universal, Linguistic Culture, English, Fulfulde

ABSTRACT

The human society is naturally endowed with the ability to utter, not just sounds, but words with distinctive meanings. This communicative tool called language serves for communication, for keeping history and reference such as naming and identification. In the languages within our reach, and especially English and Fulfulde, naming is an important linguistic habit. It is in this line of thought that this paper sets to investigate the traditional names of the above mentioned societies. The aim of this paper is to determine whether English and Fulfulde have traditional names and whether these names are products of circumstances surrounding a child's birth or a mere linguistic habit, attribution or accomplishment. For the method of investigation, traditional names have been collected from each language and then they have been classified according to categories such as circumstantial and professional names. Efforts have also been made to find their meanings in relation to the circumstances and reason for their attribution, and we came to realize that the two linguistic communities even though distant from one another, share the system of naming.

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INTRODUCTION

If having a child gives a joy to parents, giving a name gives even more joy and pride to the child later in his life. Some children even ask their parents the meaning of their names and why such names were given to them. The importance of giving a name is one of the reasons why expensive ceremonies are organized in order to rejoice and celebrate the naming of a new-born while photos are kept for the child to see. However, the importance of giving a child a name is far from being limited to ceremonies and merry making alone. Sources of such names comprise history, geography, prayer and the rest. Therefore, to give a name, either to a human, an animal or an object is an important social factor for purposes of organization, reference and identity. In this paper, we will investigate and determine some traditional names from English and Fulfulde communities. The objective is to ascertain the existence of traditional names in these linguistic communities and also to analyze their meanings in relation to their historical, geographical or prayerful significance in the linguistic society considered. As regards its etymology, and according to the website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Name#External_links "The "name" comes from Old English *nama*; akin to Old Hgh German (*OHG*) and Sanskrit (...) (*naamas*), Latin *nomen*, and Greek (...) (*onoma*), possibly from the proto-Indo-European (*PIE*) *nomn*."

For the sake of clarity, it is important to define the terms: *name* and *traditional name*. According to *Encarta*

Dictionaries (2008), name is "What somebody or something is called: a word, term, or phrase by which somebody or something is known or distinguished from other people or things. In this definition, one perceives generality and neutrality. However, the same *Encarta Dictionaries*, 2008, gives another category of name as "Uncomplimentary description word about somebody: an uncomplimentary or abusive word or phrase used to describe somebody". Whichever is considered from the two definitions above, the fact is a name distinguishes an element from other elements, even where the elements are of the same nature: for example, goat from other animals, Peugeot from the rest of cars, a woman from other humans, snake from other reptiles and so on and so forth. In the same vein, a proper noun distinguishes one entity from its equals, in respect of animals, human beings and objects: for instance, Muhammed as a name among other men, Hadiza as distinguished from other women, Wuule from other cows, and so on and so forth.

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (06/2007) also defines name as a word or term used for identification. Names can identify a class or category of things, or a single thing, either uniquely, or within a given context. "Within a given context" implies that attribution and meaning of names are, in most cases, contextual and circumstantial.

When we consider the term tradition, the same *Encarta* defines it as

-Custom or belief: A long established action or pattern of behavior in a community or group of people, often one that has

been handed down from generation to generation, - Body of customs: a body of long established customs and beliefs viewed as a set of precedents, Handing down of customs: the handing down of patterns of behavior, practices, and beliefs that are valued by culture.

The idea expressed by Encarta 2008 concerning *handing down of customs down from... generation to generation* correspond to that of Fulfulde customs. The Ful e refer to tradition as *Tawaangal*, meaning *what was found*. Riesman (xi) in his study on Ful e Anthropology titled *Freedom in Fulani Social Life*, expatiated this in these words:

« Tawaangal of Jelgo e », which describes Fulani social organization, authority structures, conceptual categories, religion and cultural themes; and « life as lived », the introspective part of the book which explores attitudes, social relations, conflict, and the Fulani pastoral sense of freedom.

It could be believed that people dignify culture, for the fact that culture is made of what they found their parents and great grandparents doing, and doing with religious respect.

With regard to traditional name, consultation was further made of Encarta where it defines it as *Relating to tradition or based on tradition*. This is to say that the word 'traditional' is an adjective derived from 'tradition'. Apparently, therefore, all the names that are going to be analyzed derive from the culture and beliefs of the people that use them. This assertion is exhibited in the European culture of naming as we can see in this quotation:

A feudal naming habit is used sometimes by other languages; the French sometimes refer to Aristotle as "le Stagrite" from one spelling of his place of birth, and English speakers often refer to "Shakespeare" as the "Bard" recognizing him as a "Paragon" writer of the language, (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia 06/2007).

Languages will now be investigated one after the other starting with English and then Fulfulde, in order to ascertain the statuses or origins of names in the languages. However, we are not going to compare the names based on their meaning since our main concern is to ascertain whether every language considered has a set of traditional names, and that their attributions are based on a variety of cultural criteria.

English culture for example is difficult to compare to Fulfulde culture being that the present modernism is brought to us by the English. Therefore trying to go back into their Dark Age will be a herculean task, and may be unfruitful one. However, naming is a world practice cutting across ages, centuries and cultures. In fact naming was the first assignment the Creator gave to the first created man, as recorded in the holy books as follows:

v19 So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. **v20** The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him (The Holy Bible: Gen. 2:19-20 RSV);

v31 And He taught Adam all the names (of everything), then He showed them to the Angels and said, "Tell Me the names of these if you are truthful." **v32** They (Angels) said: "Glorified are You, we have no knowledge except what you

have taught us. Verily, it is You the All-Knower, the All-Wise." **v33** He said: "O Adam! Inform them of their names," and when he informed them of their names, He said: "Did I not tell you that I know the ghaib (unseen) in the heavens and earth, and I know what you reveal and what you have been concealing?" (The Glorious Quran (Suratul Baqarah 2:31-33).

The above quotations imply that the importance of name transcends human creation, hence its historical and social significance across ages, communities and cultures. In fact to talk of traditional English names implies going back in human history since Europe has been the meeting point of different traditions and cultures that finally gave birth to the present European civilization (Césaire 9). And for this reason, some of the names we selected as English traditional names, even though they were recorded as such by Encarta 2008, are actually of foreign origin. This constitutes the limitations of this paper. Nevertheless, we have selected some names to reflect both professional and other categories of names in the English culture.

Circumstantial English Names

The category reflects those names that depicting the wishes of parents for their child, since it is natural for every parent to earnestly wish his child well. These types of names are mostly taken from the beliefs or religions of a people. Below are a few examples:

1. **John:** As stated earlier, most English names are of foreign origin. Thus, John is derived from the Hebrew name Yohannan. It is therefore a foreign name, but accepted now as part of English culture. This name has a variety of forms in many cultures of the world, based on religions, regions and languages of people. In its etymology, Yohannan or John means child of grace or blessings. Therefore, this name is given to a child with a strong prayerful mind, that the child be blessed, have favors and succeed in life.
2. **Agnes:** This name is originally inherited from Latin and now used in both Latin and English cultures. Agnes means the one that is chaste. Therefore, when parents name their girl-child Agnes, they desire to see that the daughter be descent, of good morals and excellent behavior.
3. **Ambrose:** From the Latin and Greek to English. This name is a sort of prayer for long life since it means immortal, that is, the *one that will not die*. This is a common prayer offered across cultures by the well-wishers for any new born child. Thus it is in this circumstance that English parents name their child Ambrose so that death would not cut off their joy of having a child.
4. **Ainsley:** This name is originally a place name. It has been indicated earlier, in this work, that traditional names can be given based on a geographical location. Here one could hypothesize two reasons for this naming. It may be that a child was born in a place named *Ainsley* and the parent decided to name the child after this admirable environment. It could also be that the parents lived in and cherished the place, and the name sound well in their ears, so they name their child after it. The fact is that the beauty and the sweet sound of a place

could attract and influence a parent's decision to name a child after such a place. As a point of comparison, a Fulani couple from Nigeria visited the wife's family that migrated to Cameroon. In the course of this visit, the wife gave birth to a child in Yaounde, the capital city of the country and the child is named Yaounde.

5. **Arnold:** This name has its origins from German, as a derivation from *arn* (eagle) and *wald* (power). The synthetic name Arnold therefore means Eagle Power. The objective of this name may be a prayer for the child to be as agile as eagle, because nobody would like their child to be a lazy one or weak in body or mind.
6. **Alfred:** This name owes its origin from the old English name Aelfraed. It was a composition of two elements, *aelf* and *raed*. *Aelf* (elf) is a supernatural imaginary being in the folklore of the Anglo-Saxon that always comes out victorious in any encounter. The second element, *raed* means counsel. The combination of the two words and ideas gives the name Alfred a connotation of intelligence and success, and that is what every parent would wish for their child. No wonder, perhaps, Alfred the Great (849- 899) succeeded in reconquering England.
7. **Barnaby:** As many other English names have foreign origins, Barnaby has a Jewish origin. Barnaby is therefore a derivation of the Medieval English form Barnabas. He was named Barnabas, which means (son of encouragement, Acts 4:36) due to his courageous act in receiving Paul at his conversion to Christianity and his devoted activities in Christian Evangelism. Courage and encouragement are qualities everybody desires to possess or see his children possess.
8. **Walter:** Culture does not reflect only happiness and beauty, it also describes sorrow and curse. As a result, there are some names that describe failure, laziness, and all sorts of unpleasant situations. Walter is one such name as it signifies a *daydreamer*. A daydreamer is a person without focus. That person may have good plans, but she may never realize any of it, because she would always abandon the project half way, or even before the commencement of the project. A Hausa adage says: "*rago ba ya cin abin gina, sai ya kai ga bundi ya gaza*", which means "*a lazy man will not eat an animal he has to labour for, for he will get close to succeed, but abandon the work*".

One would wonder why a parent would give his child such a name as Walter. The etymology of many words disappears with years in the diachronic evolution of language, and people may no longer pay attention to the meaning of a name but will only be attracted by the rhythm or sounds in such a name. It could also be that one *Walter* in history became successful and thus parents would wish that their children be as successful as such proverbial *Walter*.

Professional English Names

This section will deal with names that describe profession or are related to some professions. For instance in our local languages such as Fulfulde, children are named to reflect either the profession or activity practiced when they were born or the profession their parents desired them to practice or

excel in. Few names have been selected from English culture to represent this category of naming:

1. **Taylor:** Even though the spelling differs from that of a person that sews cloth, the origin is one. This name has its origin from a family whose job was to make tread and/or cloth with hand before the advent of the machine.
2. **Smith:** For many years the writer admired this name until he learnt its etymology. It happens that in Ful e society "Bahillo" meaning smith in Fulfulde, is of the lower rank of the social ladder. However, that does not reduce the professional importance of both the profession and the professional, either in the United Kingdom or in Ful e community. The local technology has been manned and promoted by the smith, both for the manufacturing of tools and jewelry.
3. **Fishman:** This name is made up of the words fish and man in order to reflect the fishing profession. This could refer to either fishing or selling fish, both of which relate to fish and fishing as a profession.
4. **Carter:** The cart has for long been an effective means of transport and farm work. The cart is normally pulled by horses, donkeys or cows, depending on the region and culture. The person who works with the cart is called Carter. Thus, if a child is named Carter, it may be that the parents belonged to that profession, they owned the business, or were manufacturers of carts. In this case, the parents would desire their child to be named Carter in order to promote the business.

The list on the English names which originated from professions and jobs is not exhaustive due to the present writer's inability to dig deep into the English language tradition as indicated in the introduction of this paper. However, the issue of concern here, is to find if both communities of English and Ful e practice naming as part of their cultures.

In Fulfulde, as in many other African languages, there are a good number of circumstantial names. These names reflect both the circumstances around the birth of the child, the geographical location of the birth, profession and also the prayer for a prosperous future for the new born. The Fulfulde traditional names will be categorized into circumstantial and professional. The two categories of names will comprise geographical, descriptive and those names that express wish or prayer.

Circumstantial Ful e Names

The following are the set of Ful e names that reflect the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child. They include names like: *Ja i*, *Ho i*, *Munyi*, *Wanto*, *Kuuji*, *Audi* etc. The list is not exhaustive and every name considered below has a meaning relating to the circumstance of the birth of a child.

1. **Ja i:** (*Ja o* for the female) is given to a child born at the time when one of the family's relations coming from a far distance visited them. This name is a derivation from the Fulfulde verb *ja aago* (to welcome). It is given as to say that the child came to welcome the visitor.

2. **Ho i:** (unisex) is a name given to a baby born at the end of a group displacement, a usual journey for the purpose of a better pasture, as the nomad Ful e use to move from place to place for the sake of their animals. It is a derivation from Fulfulde verb *ho ugo* which means to land (in the case of a bird) and to end a journey in the case of people migrating from one place to another.
3. **Munyi:** (unisex) is a name given to a child born after a long period of suffering by the mother, whose husband neglected. It could also be a conflict resulting from the wife being barren. It is the equivalent of Patience and Hankuri in English and Hausa respectively. This name is derived from the Fulfulde verb *munyugo* meaning (to endure or to have patience). It is a sort of consolation connoting that “I am not regretting my endurance.”
4. **Mawnde:** This name is given to a child born on a Friday. Literally it means big day signifying the importance of Friday in the Ful e culture. This cultural importance is not necessarily related to Islam, but is purely rooted in Ful e philosophy and belief.
5. **Banndaa o/Bannde:** This name reflects the kinship ties between a husband and his wife. This type of kinship marriage is very popular among the Ful e. The name indicates that the child is blessed with many relatives from both sides of the parents. The feminine form of Banndaa o is Tummba, *Tummba lenyol*.
6. **Wanto:** This name is given to a male child born after series of births in which a mother has only girls. The male child is seen therefore as to have come to relieve the father from rearing the animals and replace him as head of the family. Yugge is the female equivalent of Wanto. It equally means someone who has come to relieve the mother of her kitchen chores and keep her company in the house.
7. **Koyne:** Parturition has always been a difficult and painful experience, especially for the mother. However, this stands as the general rule for this natural ejection of the baby. As there is never a general rule without an exception, it happens in some rare cases that the mothers gets it smooth and safe. It is in this case that the child is named Koyne. The name derives from the verb *Hoynugo* (to heal), and it means a healer. This type of name is mostly used for a female child.
8. **Kuuji:** (female equivalent of Riskuwa) This name is given to a child whose birth nearly caused the mother’s death. It is also a name given to a child, born when the prosperity comes to the family or even to the community at large. Kuuji is the short form of Riskuuji, and both names derive from the verb *riskugo* (to be rich, to get fortune or to escape sorrow or death).
9. **Audi:** (unisex). Just as all the names cited above reflect happy moments and events, the name Audi reminds one of sorrow by way of consolation. This is to say that the child comes as to comfort the family for the loss of the father that died while that child was in the womb. The name is derived from *awdiri* which means a seed to plant or already planted. The whole idea in the name is derived from the verb *aawugo* (to plant). By implication, Audi is the seed that has germinated to replace the dead father.
10. **Suumaye:** A male child is named Suumaye if he is born during the fasting period of the month of Ramadan. The female equivalent of this name is Suume. Cousins and Grandparents can nickname a child Suumaye or Suume if the child is born tiny or has been rendered so, as a result of sickness.
11. **arti:** This is a popular name given to a child who is born when a Ful e group is about to migrate to another place, for the purpose of seeking better grazing conditions. Similarly, a child born in the course of the migration to a new location is called arti. The name is derived from the verb *artugo*, which means to migrate. Another name with the same meaning is Bammowo, which is derived from the verb *Wammugo*, which equally means to migrate. The female equivalent is arto.
12. **Ba-wuro:** This name is the short form of Baba wuro, meaning the father of the house. It is given to child named after the name of his father or grandfather. The female form of it is Inna- wuro, which means the mother of the house.
13. **Ndaneeri/Cayeeri:** This name is given to a light skinned child as the word ‘danejum’ refers to white color. The female equivalent of this duo name is Daneejo or Jaanayel.
14. **Gaaji:** This name is given to the youngest child in the family or simply the last born. It is the same as Ko aajo which is a derivation from verb *ho ugo* (to wean).

Professional Ful e Names

These are names related to a traditional profession of a people. In Fulfulde traditional naming, there is a good number of names linked to cattle rearing. For the sake of this study, we have randomly sampled seven Ful e nomadic names:

1. **Ooro:** (no female equivalent) is a name given to a child that is born at the time of taking the cows to the grazing land. The original form of this name is *Ooroowo* and it means the one taking the animals to the grazing land, as it is a derivation of the Fulfulde verb *Oorugo*. The hope and prayer attached to this name are that the boy will be a dedicated cattle herder.
2. **Maajo:** (no female equivalent) This name is given to a child born when the herd is grazing for the morning session, before going for a full day’s grazing.
3. **Degi:** (no female equivalent) this name refers to a child born at the end of the rainy season, especially when the herds are moving back to their traditional base or a place where they spend the dry season. This name is a derivation from the Fulfulde verb *Regaago*, which means coming down. In other regions the name is known as Kotte, which is also a derivation from the verb *Hottugo*. *Hottugo* means coming back home after spending a period of time away for grazing purpose.

4. **Gaynaako:** (unisex). This is equally a name reflecting the profession of the community of the person bearing it. Gaynaako literally means the one feeding the animal, particularly in the bush. It is a sort of an equivalent to the popular English cowboy. The difference, however, is that Gaynaako here takes the sense of a proper noun.
5. **Jom-wuule:** (no female equivalent) . Jom-wuule literally means the owner of *Wuule*. It is an adjective that is taken as a proper noun for a specific cow. The special meaning attached to this name is that the cow named *Wuule* is very well attached to its owner. In the nomad Ful e culture, this attachment between the cattle herder and an animal in the flock is a sign of dedication to duty. Thus, the term Jom-Wuule is an epithet of honor among the nomad Ful e. However, the second part of the name (Wuule) can be substituted with many other animals' names to derive other compound names such as: Jom-Mbuneeri, Jom- aleeye etc.
6. **Ngorlowa:** (no female equivalent). This is a name given as a proper noun to a boy who follows the births of a number of girls within the family. It is synonymous to Wanto (IV. 6) discussed earlier. However, in its etymology, Ngorlowa is the one that takes animals to feed in the bush as to relieve somebody who may be sick or in a situation not conducive to take animals out for grazing.
7. **Bussiiru:** (no female equivalent) In its etymology, this name is a common name for anyone who rears sheep, or is a shepherd. When the name is used for a proper noun, it is in a sense of prayer for the boy to be a successful shepherd. Being a successful shepherd implies also being knowledgeable and learned in the art jurisprudence of the Ful e nomadic life.

CONCLUSION

The theory of the Tower of Babel is one of the most plausible stories on earth. It is rooted in the idea that men were all together in one place. It goes to say that men, even when scattered, kept their memory and continued doing similar things though in different languages. This paper attempted to prove the universality of human linguistic behavior despite the differences in locations, languages and cultures. This research has highlighted that Ful e, whose life is dedicated generally to the bush in Africa, share a lot of cultural practices with British. This is a proof that there are similarities in human cultures even though humanity lives in different environments and uses different tools in work and in play.

To this end, therefore, naming may be considered or is, in fact, a linguistic universal among cultures and societies, and across generations.

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