

# “Doing Gender” in the First-Names of Persons in Nyamwezi and Sukuma

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*We address how nominal prefixes in personal names reveal gender status of name bearers in Nyamwezi and Sukuma society in Tanzania. The analysis is coached in the African feminism in which women are assigned, albeit stereotypically, to inferior position in the society. The motivation for this approach emanates from the previous studies on personal names in Nyamwezi and Sukuma which are deemed incomplete without special attention to the interaction of the people with plants. Another lacuna concerns lack of a specific study that offers an analysis of the contribution of linguistic morphology to the indication of the male and female name bearers in Nyamwezi and Sukuma. We demonstrated that the nominal prefix Ma- (e.g. Mabelele ‘large maize stalk’) is preferred for names of male babies, while the prefix Ka- (e.g. Kabelele ‘small maize stalk’) is favoured for names of female babies. We argue that this linguistic choice of morphology of names perpetuates the social construe that “smallness” is the preferred character of women in the African society.*

**Keywords:** *Gender, Naming, Nominal prefixes, Nyamwezi, Sukuma, Tanzania*

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The main intent of this paper is to offer an analysis of the way gender is framed in names of persons in the Nyamwezi and Sukuma society<sup>2</sup> of Tanzania. Firstly, the motivation to carry out this study arises from the bottleneck in the previous studies about personal names in this society (Batibo 2015; Manyasa 2008; Schönenberger 1995; Shigini 2020). The shortfall emanates from unanalysed morphological structures of names for male persons against names for female persons, for example, *Kiziku* (Female) vs. *Maziku* (Male) ‘born at night’ (Schönenberger 1995) and *Kajige* (Female) vs. *Majige* (Male) ‘locusts’ (Manyasa 2008). Thus, while the Nyamwezi and Sukuma

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<sup>2</sup> Nyamwezi and Sukuma speak dialects of the same language hence form an ethnic group with the largest population size in Tanzania (Joilet 2015; LoT 2009; Masele 2001; Roth 2013). Similarly, we treat Nyamwezi and Sukuma as one ethnic group speaking the dialect Nyamwezi in the south and dialect Sukuma in the north. Internal dialects of Nyamwezi and Sukuma have been described in studies by Masele (2001) and Roth (2013).

society is regarded as first-class patriarchal society (Batibo 2015; Gunderson 2010; Little 1991; Masele 2019), none of the previous analyses of names of persons offer a detailed linguistic account of the gendered naming system in the society. This lacuna requires filling.

Secondly, the motivation to carry out this research emanates from the literature that covered the way names of people exhibit gender (Johns & Dye 2019; Pilcher 2017; Rapoo 2002). One specific point is of interest in this review. Pilcher (2017) pointed out that giving newborn babies specific names is associated with sex categorization of their physical body as males or females. However, issues of male–female gender distinction are construed in the socio-economic attestations in a specific society (West & Zimmerman 1987). Usually, such sociology of names reveals bias which reveals skewed preferences of a gender in the attribution of specific male and female names. Johns and Dye (2019) pointed out that naming biases tend to favour males over females. These biases are implicitly imbedded in the meaning conveyed by the given names. This claim is also supported by Rapoo (2002) whose study focused on the naming system in Setswana speaking community. The study found that girls are commonly given names that express an aesthetic reference, while boys’ names depict power and intellect. A girl, for instance, can be named *Sethunya* ‘a flower’, making an appearance allusion. In contrast, a boy can be named *Mogale* ‘valorous and witty one’, reflecting physical and mental strength. The current article analyses the linguistic morphology of names that designate females and males in the Nyamwezi and Sukuma society in order to unearth the gender prejudices and its manifestation in the naming practices.

Furthermore, the motivation emanates from research on names of persons in Tanzanian societies (Asheli 2017; Chipalo 2019; Muzale 1998; Lusekelo 2018; Resani 2016; Sebonde 2020; Swilla 2000a). These scholars establish that the elaborate nature of the personal names is revealed in their linguistic structures which contain information about the society in question. In most cases, names of persons bear meanings which are extended from the circumstances that surrounded the birth of the bearer. However, compared to research conducted elsewhere (see Johns & Dye 2019; Mandende 2009; Pilcher 2017; Rapoo 2002), not much research conducted in Tanzanian societies has shown the construction of gendered identity that emanates from the choice of personal names bestowed to newborn babies (except Mwangeka 2013; Swilla 2000b). This lacuna motivated the current study. Put in other words, the motivation for the current research arises from lack of analyses of gendered naming system based on the linguistic morphology of names in Bantu languages.

## **2 The Nyamwezi and Sukuma people**

The Nyamwezi and Sukuma is a large Bantu speaking society in Tanzania. Their history trails back to 1840s during the long-distance slave and ivory trade mainly after the establishment of the Arab trade centre at Tabora. Tabora became a famous trade centre for items from Ujiji in Kigoma, near Lake Tanganyika, and Mwanza, near Lake Victoria (Abrahams 1967; Pallaver 2006; Rockel 2000). During long-distance trade, the traders and porters from the western territory (mainly

Tabora) identified themselves as Nyamwezi, while traders and porters from the northern lands (mainly Shinyanga and Mwanza) identified themselves as Sukuma. Their dialects, however, are highly mutually intelligible (Joilet 2015; Masele 2001; Roth 2013). Today, the Nyamwezi society is located in Tabora region, while Sukuma society inhabits primarily Geita, Mwanza, Shinyanga, and Simiyu regions (LoT 2009). Even today, the mutual intelligibility of the dialects and social structure qualify to group them into one society.

The two economic activities of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma people contribute to the naming system in the society. Traditionally, they are full-time agriculturalists cultivating *busiga* ‘grain sorghum’, *bulegi* ‘bulrush millet’ and *ndolo* ‘root crop of potatoes’ (Brooke 1967; Little 1991; Schoenbrun 1993). The New World cereals and tubers, namely *mandege* ‘maize, corn’, *mahalage* ‘beans’, *nhombo* ‘Irish potatoes’, *nharanga* ‘groundnuts’ and *maliwa* ‘cassava’ were introduced later in the society (Little 1991; Lusekelo 2016). During the colonial administration, the Nyamwezi and Sukuma adopted commercial farming of *buluba* ‘cotton’ and *ntumbate* ‘tobacco’ (Illife 1969; Little 1991; Madulu 1998). Their mastery of the local biodiversity allowed them to execute slash-and-burn farming system for both local food crops and commercial farming (Brooke 1967; Madulu 1998). Both food and cash crops contribute names of persons in the society (Manyasa 2008; Schönerberger 1995).

Animal keeping is another central economic activity in their hinterland. Their interaction with the Datooga people allowed them to adopt livestock keeping (Batibo & Rottland 2001). Today, the Nyamwezi and Sukuma are characterized as successful agro-pastoral communities who manage their local biodiversity (Selemani 2020). Cattle depend on local biodiversity as a source of fodder in Sukuma land. The Sukuma managed resources for agriculture and animal husbandry through *ngitili* (pasture reserving) system that involves “reserving pasture as standing hay during rainy season and allowed for grazing at the peak of the dry season when forage resources are scarce” (Selemani 2020: 3867). Names of persons which relate with animals are common in the society (Manyasa 2008; Schönerberger 1995).

### **3 Naming among the Nyamwezi and Sukuma people**

#### *3.1 Vegetation and naming*

Studies show that circumstances-at-birth induce name givers the choice of names for the new born babies in Nyamwezi (Schönerberger 1995) and Sukuma (Manyasa 2008; Shigini 2020). Some circumstances at birth influence the name giver to select names from the vegetation. For instance, infertility or barrenness, commonly known as *nengo*, is not entertained in this community. If such a birth problem is found, local specialists are consulted and medicaments to remedy *nengo* ‘infertility’ can be used. Hinkkanen (2009: 77) pointed out that infertility “can be easily fixed with a hand by a specialist and additional medication with *nengo* may also be needed.” Names such as *Bugaanga* ‘traditional healing’, *Kasanda* ‘tree species’, *Maganga* ‘local healer’, *Nyamiti* ‘out of herbs’ and *Shigula* ‘open womb’ emerge as a result of complications before or at birth. Local

knowledge of prenatal development and the complications of birth are another circumstance that induce choice of names among the Nyamwezi and Sukuma (Schönenberger 1995). Names such as *Nkoola* ‘lucky bean tree’, *Nkundi* ‘edible mushrooms’ and *Sokolo* ‘slim and sticky grass seeds’ are commonly derived from plant species. The first two names have to do with the place of birth, while the third one has to do with the bodily size of the newborn baby.

Vegetation contributes to the healing knowledge of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma people. As a result, names of persons derive from vegetation for healing. Manyasa (2008) points out that some plant names are given to children after health complications that a mother undergoes during her pregnancy. Manyasa (2008) gives examples of names such as *Bugaanga* ‘herbs/drugs’. This name means that the mother gave birth after a long time, backed by persistent taking of herbs/drugs. This name is given to a baby who is born after customary procedures of healing are performed.

The place of birth is central in the naming system of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma. Parents recount the places where births occurred for the children. The places would be covered with some kind of vegetation, which in turn become a source of personal names. Both Manyasa (2008) and Schönenberger (1995) describe names of persons that were derived from place of birth in Nyamwezi and Sukuma society. Common names associated with plants include *Kidutu* ‘born in shadows of leaves of trees’, *Malale* ‘born in millet fields or farms’, *Kisenha* ‘pangs began when cutting and carrying firewood’ and *Makala* ‘charcoal’. This refers to a child who was born when people depended on charcoal for their day to day household cooking activities or commercial purposes.

Climatic conditions determine the kind of vegetation to grow in a given environment. The vegetation is influenced by climatic conditions. Thus, names associated with seasons of the year and circumstances surrounding some events are common among the Nyamwezi and Sukuma. *Msoma* ‘bitter food cooked from greens alone’ and *Malisha* ‘government meal aid’ are commonly associated with famine. Another name is *Wande* ‘weeds’ which is associated with women giving birth in a deserted homestead that has already been covered with grasses. While the first two names derive from crops, the third one derives from wild plant biodiversity. Moreover, weather conditions determine the choice of names. Schönenberger (1995) found names associated with precipitation, e.g. *Selema* ‘run off water’ and wind, e.g. *Kabelele* ‘little stalk of maize or millet which bends under the wind’.

### 3.2 *The research gap*

In this paper, we continue contributing to the literature on the naming culture in Nyamwezi and Sukuma after Manyasa (2008), Schönenberger (1995) and Shigini (2020). The gap that still remains is the way this society interacts with plants to account for naming newborn babies and their reflection of gender bias. Specifically, the gap that the current paper fills is about gender representation in the personal names. This objective is consonant with Mkhize and Muthuki (2019) who correctly pointed out that an individual’s name has implications on how the society construes the gendered identity of the name bearer in Africa. Thus, we offer an outline in the way the name bearers are construed by the members of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma.

Another research gap that is covered in this paper concerns the linguistic morphology of names of persons which reveals a boundary between female and male name bearers in Bantu languages (Doke 1948; Lusekelo 2018; Mandende 2009; Okal 2018). Okal (2018) found that among the Kamba society of Kenya, suffixes differentiate male and female name bearers. For example, “the case of *Mbithi* (male child who could not be noticed in the mother’s womb) and also *Mbithe* (female child who could not be noticed in the mother’s womb)” (Okal 2018: 13). Mandende (2009: 180) pointed out that “Tshivenda personal names that start with the prefixes *Nya-* and *Ñwa-* denote female gender, while those that start with the prefixes *Ne-* and *Ra-* denote the male gender.” Remnants of gender marking prefixes unfold in names of persons in Nyakyusa society in which *Sa-* has reference to female descent, while *Mwa-* refers to male descent (Lusekelo 2018). The remaining gap surrounds the evaluation of the meanings of the prefixes in relation to the individual name bearers. The motivation to fill this gap emanates from the absence of this evaluative analysis in the previous studies of names of persons in Bantu speaking societies of Tanzania (see Asheli 2017; Chipalo 2019; Lusekelo & Mtenga 2020; Muzale 1998; Swilla 2000a).

#### **4 Gender issues in theoretical perspective**

The framework that we adopt in the analysis of a gendered naming system assumes social construction of differences between women and men in the society. Members of a particular society construe and reinforce the differences between men and women in the social institutions such as schools, sports, and families (Bergstrom-Lynch 2020; West & Zimmerman 1987, 2009). Also, the reinforcement of gendering is executed through a hidden curriculum of both overt and subtle gender expectations and interactions within a family (Bergstrom-Lynch 2020; West & Zimmerman 1987, 2009). Within the family, name givers choose different names for male babies as opposed to female babies. Eventually, gendered naming system assigns females names to babies which differ in characteristics to those bestowed to male babies (Shartiely 2005; Swilla 2000b). The meaning that derives from the name of a person has significant link to the life of the name bearer. According to Kramarae and Treicher (1985), gender is the allocation of duties in society along gender lines. This delineation in relation to whether one is male or female is regarded as the major source of male dominance over females. Such differences can greatly perpetuate gender inequality in the society. We argue that the naming system in Nyamwezi and Sukuma enhances gender stereotyping.

Specifically, in the current contribution to personal names in Nyamwezi and Sukuma, attention is paid to the manifestation of gender within the framework of African feminism. Lewis (2001: 5) once pointed out that “much of the work dealing generally with women and gender in Africa needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny by feminists.” Also, understanding African societies requires “equating social roles and ascribed identities with alternative feminisms” (Lewis 2001: 6). This research is informed by the importance of agriculture, pastoralism and hunting to the social construction of gender identities in Tanzania. For instance, in articulating gender

relations in the agricultural sector, Mbilinyi (2016: 118) pointed out that “men were increasingly forced to withdraw their labour from subsistence production systems to engage in market-oriented production. Women had to take up the slack and became the major producers of food for local consumption in many societies.” We bring to the forefront the naming system based on crops and plants because previous works (Manyasa 2008; Schönerberger 1995; Shigini 2020) ignored the construal of gender differences associated with personal names. Such an oversight is moulded within the framework as Arndt (2002: 33) argues that “patriarchal-moulded attitudes, norms and conventions, both century-old and modern, which discriminate against women and hinder their self-realization, are censured.”

According to West and Zimmerman (1987: 126), “doing gender involves a complexity of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “natures”. This is eminent in the way members of the African society choose names for girl-children as opposed to boy-children. In Bantu speaking communities in which gender marking is more or less absent except in derivational genders attested in some nominal prefixes (Carstens 1993; Contin-Morava 2002), remnants of gendered linguistic materials manifest in the structure of names which distinguish male children from female ones (Lusekelo 2018; Mandende 2009). Our data-sets in section 6 confirm this claim in Nyamwezi and Sukuma.

Research has shown that women are regarded as less important in African societies and as a result, they obtain names which are derogatory (Swilla 2000b). Specifically, this is in line with Masele (2019) who pointed out that the role of women in Sukuma society is manifested in the way they establish important roles in the community, e.g. participation in work for economic gains. Nonetheless, stereotypically, women are regarded as inferior in society (Masele 2019). Among the Nyamwezi, women also obtain low status as they would not be entertained in protection of the villages (Abrahams 1989). It is our assumption that diminutive nouns represent artefacts which are valueless. Similarly, assigning a diminutive name to a person has implications to the stereotypical setting of the destiny of that person. It is in this line that names of men and women are compared in order to unearth stereotypical choice of names for children in Nyamwezi and Sukuma society.

## **5 Methods and materials**

Three methodological procedures were involved in arriving at names of persons in Nyamwezi and Sukuma society. Firstly, an inventory of the meanings of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma names appearing in previous works (Manyasa 2008; Schönerberger 1995; Shigini 2020) was established in order to grasp the naming system of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma people. An appendix in Manyasa (2008) accounts for more than 90 names of persons, while Schönerberger (1995) has more than 350 names. It is fascinating to note that names with the nominal prefixes *Ka-*, *Ki-*, *Lu-*, *Ma-* and *Mi-* surpass the remaining names. Based on noun classification in Bantu languages, these nominal prefixes are involved in the semantic assignments related to evaluative morphology (van

de Velde 2019). It is the intent of the current research to unearth the meaning associated with assigning these noun classes to names of persons in Nyamwezi and Sukuma speakers.

Secondly, in order to arrive at the utility of the names in rural areas in Tanzania, another sample of 861 personal names had been gathered in four villages inhabited primarily by the Nyamwezi and Sukuma (LoT 2009). The linguistic morphologies of these names have been analyzed to decipher the realization of feminine and masculine gender roles that unfold in African societies. Names of school pupils had been gathered from Magu, Meatu, Sikonge and Ushetu districts in Tanzania. Villages where school pupils come from included Kahangara village (230 names), Mwangudo village (172 names), Ipole village (198 names), and Chambo village (261 names), respectively. According to LoT (2009), these villages constitute the majority of the inhabitants as mother tongue speakers of Nyamwezi and Sukuma. The registry of school pupils in Tanzania contains three names. As illustrated below, the first (personal) name belongs to the school child, followed by the first name of the father, and then the family (clan) name. In this paper, attention is paid to first names of school pupils which are Nyamwezi and Sukuma.<sup>3</sup> It can be noticed that there is variation in the linguistic morphology of names of male pupils in Table 1 from female pupils in Table 2.

In reading names in Table 1 and 2, some guidelines are worth mentioning. Some names are borrowed either from English or Swahili. A couple of names are also borrowed from neighbouring communities such as the Datooga (Batibo & Rottland 2001). Such names are ignored in the analysis. Therefore, attention is paid to indigenous names in Nyamwezi and Sukuma. Much attention is paid to the first-names of school children from Nyamwezi and Sukuma villages of Tanzania.

Table 1: Names of male school pupils in Nyamwezi and Sukuma society

<b>First-name of pupils</b>	<b>First-name of male parents</b>	<b>Family/clan name</b>
<i>Bankolwa</i> ‘the hated one’	<i>Masesa</i> ‘farm yard’	<i>Sali</i> (Borrowed name)
<i>Bundala</i> ‘up-side down’	<i>Mayunga</i> ‘wanderer’	<i>Mgesa</i> ‘harvesting’
<i>Chalya</i> ‘bizzar’	<i>Sali</i> (Borrowed name)	<i>Nyoni</i> ‘bird’
<i>Daniel</i> (Foreign name)	<i>Shigela</i> ‘chief’	<i>Minzi</i> ‘water’
<i>Godfrey</i> (Foreign name)	<i>Joseph</i> (Foreign name)	<i>Maganga</i> ‘medicine man’
<i>Mabula</i> ‘heavy rain’	<i>Zaholo</i> (Swahili name)	<i>Masele</i> ‘local brew’
<i>Makungu</i> ‘forest’	<i>Manyanda</i> ‘youth’	<i>Medadi</i> (Swahili name)
<i>Malima</i> ‘farm work’	<i>Magesa</i> ‘harvesting’	<i>Robert</i> (Foreign name)
<i>Mandago</i> ‘grass sp.’	<i>Samweli</i> (Foreign name)	<i>Abeli</i> (Foreign name)
<i>Mashishanga</i> ‘butter’	<i>Mindi</i> ‘evening time’	<i>Dima</i> ‘animal herding’
<i>Mayombi</i> ‘outspoken person’	<i>Eliasi</i> (Foreign name)	<i>Ndebile</i> ‘premature baby’
<i>Mwandu</i> ‘baobab tree’	<i>Masunga</i> ‘milk’	<i>Makena</i> (Borrowed name)

<sup>3</sup> Penetration of foreign (Arabic and English) and Swahili names appear in other publications about Bantu languages of Tanzania (see Chipalo 2019; Lusekelo 2018; Muzale 1998; Swilla 2000a, among others).

<i>Ndulu</i> ‘grudges’	<i>Jakobo</i> (Foreign name)	<i>John</i> (Foreign name)
<i>Nyanda</i> ‘youth’	<i>Majaliwa</i> (Swahili name)	<i>Bahege</i> (Borrowed name)

Table 2: Names of female school pupils in Nyamwezi and Sukuma society

<b>First-name of pupils</b>	<b>First-name of male parents</b>	<b>Family/clan name</b>
<i>Kabula</i> ‘little rain’	<i>Mipawa</i> ‘strength’	<i>Ngusa</i> ‘wealth, prosperity’
<i>Kahabi</i> ‘poor person’	<i>Samsoni</i> (Foreign name)	<i>Yohana</i> (Swahili name)
<i>Kalunde</i> ‘little cloud’	<i>Huseni</i> (Foreign name)	<i>Amiri</i> (Swahili name)
<i>Kapemba</i> ‘ignite’	<i>Kapaga</i> (Borrowed name)	<i>Erasto</i> (Foreign name)
<i>Minza</i> ‘royal wife’	<i>Basanda</i> ‘youth’	<i>Bugakamba</i> ‘threatening’
<i>Minza</i> ‘royal wife’	<i>Mwendapole</i> (Swahili name)	<i>Jenga</i> (Swahili name)
<i>Mwandu</i> ‘baobab tree’	<i>Masunga</i> ‘milk’	<i>Makena</i> ‘sieve’
<i>Njile</i> ‘wanderer’	<i>Malekemo</i> ‘withdrawal’	<i>Musa</i> (Swahili name)
<i>Nyanzala</i> ‘hunger’	<i>Sapu</i> ‘blossom; first harvest’	<i>Dubali</i> (Borrowed name)
<i>Sundi</i> ‘royal wife’	<i>Stefano</i> (Foreign name)	<i>Masolwa</i> ‘the helped one’
<i>Pili</i> (Swahili name)	<i>Luchagula</i> ‘selection, choice’	<i>Masanja</i> ‘gathering’
<i>Teresia</i> (Foreign name)	<i>John</i> (Foreign name)	<i>Malamba</i> (Swahili name)
<i>Wande</i> ‘bird’	<i>Jilala</i> ‘the slack one’	<i>Gagunda</i> ‘farm yard’
<i>Wile</i> ‘born at dusk’	<i>Limbu</i> (Borrowed name)	<i>Masanja</i> ‘gathering’

Looking at the names of pupils, one notices names for boys begin in the prefix *Ma-*, as exemplified by *Mandago* ‘grass sp.’ and *Mwandu* ‘baobab tree’ (Table 1). Names of girls begin with the prefix *Ka-* as illustrated by *Kapemba* ‘little corn’ (Table 2). This kind of differentiation is linked to the gendered assignment of personal names to babies among the Nyamwezi and Sukuma people. A detailed analysis of the names is thus required.

Lastly, in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the male–female distinction of names in this society, an inventory of meanings of fifty first-hand sample of names of persons was elicited from two informants. The second author who is also a mother tongue speaker of Sukuma elicited specific names emanating from plants. In addition, meanings of the names were confirmed by three other speakers of Nyamwezi and Sukuma dialects in Tanzania<sup>4</sup>. Table 3 shows the list of male personal and female personal names.

<sup>4</sup> We are grateful to our informants, namely Dina Jeremiah (Sengerema district), Lameck Makoye (Shinyanga) and Damas Ngelela (Mwanza region). We are also thankful to mother tongue speakers of Nyamwezi and Sukuma who are linguists involved in this research: Shingwa Magashi (University of Dodoma) and Zephaniah Kaswahili (University of Dar es Salaam).



Table 3: Gendered names of persons in Nyamwezi and Sukuma society

Names of persons		Source plants or crops
Males	Females	
<i>Boyo</i>	---	neem tree ( <i>Azadirachta indica</i> )
<i>Bukula</i>	---	sorghum with red seeds ( <i>Sorghum bicolor</i> )
<i>Buluba</i>	---	cotton crop ( <i>Gossypium sp.</i> )
<i>Bumela</i>	---	soaked sorghum produce ( <i>Sorghum bicolor</i> )
<i>Bupilipili</i>	---	pepper crop ( <i>Capsicum sp.</i> )
<i>Busiga</i>	---	sorghum crop ( <i>Sorghum bicolor</i> )
<i>Kidutu</i>	---	shadows of leaves of trees
<i>Limbe</i>	<i>Nyalimbe</i>	cucumber crop ( <i>Cucumis sativus</i> )
<i>Mabelele</i>	<i>Kabelele</i>	stalk of maize ( <i>Zea mayas</i> ) or millet ( <i>Eleusine coracana</i> )
<i>Magaka</i>	<i>Kagaka</i>	aloevera ( <i>Aloe vera</i> )
<i>Mahushi</i>	<i>Kahushi</i>	wild plant species
<i>Makalanga</i>	<i>Kakalanga</i>	groundnuts crop ( <i>Arachis hypogaea</i> )
<i>Malando</i>	<i>Kalando</i>	leaves of sweet potatoes ( <i>Ipomea batatas</i> )
<i>Malendi</i>	<i>Kalendi</i>	wild vegetable ( <i>Corchorus olitorius</i> )
<i>Maliwa</i>	<i>Kaliwa</i>	cassava crop ( <i>Mandioc sp.</i> )
---	<i>Kasanda</i>	tree species
<i>Mashili</i>	<i>Kashili</i>	legumes crop ( <i>Vicia sp.</i> )
<i>Matobolwa</i>	<i>Katobolwa</i>	peeled sweet potatoes ( <i>Ipomea batatas</i> )
<i>Matolo</i>	<i>Katolo</i>	gourds plant ( <i>Cucurbita sp.</i> )
<i>Mchele</i>	---	rice ( <i>Oryza sp.</i> )
<i>Mhande</i>	---	peanuts ( <i>Arachis hypogaea</i> )
<i>Michembe</i>	<i>Kachembe</i>	peeled and dried sweet potatoes ( <i>Ipomea batatas</i> )
<i>Msoma</i>	---	bitter greens (vegetable/food)
<i>Mwandu</i>	---	baobab ( <i>Adansonia digitata</i> )
<i>Ndulu</i>	---	green grams ( <i>Vigna sp.</i> )
<i>Nkoola</i>	<i>Kakoola</i>	lucky bean tree ( <i>Vigna sp.</i> )
<i>Nkundi</i>	---	edible mushrooms ( <i>Agaricus sp.</i> )
<i>Ng'wandu</i>	---	baobab ( <i>Adansonia digitata</i> )
<i>Nyembe</i>	---	mango ( <i>Mangifera indica</i> )
<i>Salyungu</i>	---	pumpkin ( <i>Cucurbita sp.</i> )
<i>Shaageembe</i>	---	grinder of the ebony tree
<i>Shitungulu</i>	---	onion ( <i>Allium sp.</i> )
<i>Sokolo</i>	---	slim and sticky grass seeds
<i>Twege</i>	---	wild vegetable ( <i>Corchorus olitorius</i> )
---	<i>Nyamiji</i>	herbs
---	<i>Shing'odi</i>	'cotton plant seed coat'

## 6 Gender in personal names in Nyamwezi and Sukuma society

Plants in the hinterland of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma are either cultivated crops or wild plants. Though both crops and wild plants contribute to names of persons, their differences are worth presenting them in separate sections.

### 6.1 Names of persons that derive from crops

Gender specifications unfold in names of persons that derive from crops. Thus, the intent of this section is to explore the relationship between crops and the contents of personal names in Nyamwezi and Sukuma society. Based on the data analyzed in this paper, we argue that naming women among the Nyamwezi and Sukuma is highly entrenched in the patriarchal culture that assigns a lower status to women. As far as labour force was concerned in the Nyamwezi and Sukuma society, Little (1991: 378) found that “certain crops were the domain of women, others of men.” Consequently, names of persons help to distinguish those that derive from men’s crops as opposed to those that stem from women’s crops.

Men’s food crops were millet, cassava, cotton, rice and sorghum. From Table 3, a number of personal names derive from an indigenous men’s crop of sorghum: *Busiga* ‘sorghum’, *Bukula* ‘sorghum with red seeds’ and *Bumela* ‘soaked sorghum for local brew’. Several names of persons that derive from New World cereals and tubers appear to signal masculine gender in Nyamwezi and Sukuma: *Buluba* ‘cotton’, *Shitungulu* ‘onions’, *Makalanga* ‘peanuts’ and *Mchele* ‘rice’. This is typical of cash crops of cotton, rice and onions which had been adopted as crops for men, but strange for the food crop of groundnuts, allocated as women’s crop (Little 1991).

Women’s food crops are Bambara nuts, beans, cowpeas, green grams, maize, peanuts, sesame, and sweet potatoes (Little 1991). Likewise, names of female persons tend to be parallel with these crops, e.g. *Nyalimbe* ‘wild cucumber’. As discussed in the subsequent section, the same crop could also be a male name when the prefix is not assigned to it, e.g. *Limbe* ‘wild cucumber’. In addition, the names of parts of crops could also be bestowed to women. This is the case of the parts of cotton that derives feminine names, e.g. *Shing’ondi* ‘cotton plant seed coat’. Through personal names, the Nyamwezi and Sukuma assign parts of men’s crops to feminine names. Looking at evaluative morphology, one notices that the male–female distinction is made possible through the use of the nominal prefixes *Ka-* for females and *Ma-* for males (see Table 4). The names that derive in such manner tend to express “smallness” for the women and “bigness” for the men. We argue that this is a typical gendered naming strategy among the Nyamwezi and Sukuma of Tanzania.

Table 4: Names of male and female persons that derive from crops

<b>Crops</b>	<b>Male names</b>	<b>Female names</b>
<i>ilando</i> ‘potato vegetable’	<i>Malando</i> ‘big potato vegetable’	<i>Kalando</i> ‘little potato vegetable’
<i>itobolwa</i> ‘sweet potatoes’	<i>Matobolwa</i> ‘big sweet potatoes’	<i>Katobolwa</i> ‘little sweet potatoes’
<i>shili</i> ‘Vicia sp.’	<i>Mashili</i> ‘large Vicia sp.’	<i>Kashili</i> ‘small Vicia sp.’

## 6.2 Names of persons that derive from wild plants

We deal with gender marking in names of persons that derive from wild plants. The choice of this topic is motivated by the point that local communities reveal close relationships with their local biodiversity (Berlin 1992). The interaction between native people with the plants can also be shown in naming system. In this paper, we focus on gendered names persons which come from plants in the Nyamwezi and Sukuma society in Tanzania.

A parallel structure of nouns reveals gender differentiation in Nyamwezi and Sukuma. On the one hand, names given to males manifest with the structure *Ma-*, which is designated for the nominal class 6 that constitutes names of fruits, grasses and plants (Maganga & Schadeberg 1992; Matondo 2003). In other contexts, *Ma-* can also mark plural forms as in *Mawe* ‘stones’ as opposed to *Iwe* (a ‘stone’). On the other hand, the nominal prefix *Ka-* manifests in numerous female names which derive from plants. Generally, this prefix is used for the diminutive nouns in Nyamwezi and Sukuma (Maganga & Schadeberg 1992; Matondo 2003). Therefore, names of women are designated within the framework of diminutives. Examples in Table 5 illustrate common names of persons that derive from wild plants.

Table 5: Names of male and female persons that derive from wild plants

<b>Crops</b>	<b>Male names</b>	<b>Female names</b>
<i>igaka</i> ‘aloevera’	<i>Magaka</i> ‘large aloevera’	<i>Kagaka</i> ‘small aloevera’
<i>ihushi</i> ‘Asparagus sp.’	<i>Mahushi</i> ‘big Asparagus sp.’	<i>Kahushi</i> ‘small Asparagus sp.’
<i>ilendi</i> ‘Indian jutes’	<i>Malendi</i> ‘large Indian jutes’	<i>Kalendi</i> ‘little Indian jutes’
<i>ndulu</i> ‘wild green grams’	<i>Madulu</i> ‘big wild green grams’	<i>Kadulu</i> ‘small wild green grams’
<i>nhalanga</i> ‘groundnuts’	<i>Makalanga</i> ‘large groundnuts’	<i>Kakalanga</i> ‘small groundnuts’
<i>ntolo</i> ‘wild cucumbers’	<i>Matolo</i> ‘big wild cucumbers’	<i>Katolo</i> ‘big wild cucumbers’

Another parallel structure concerns the regular nominal class prefix *M(u)-* and *Mi-* which is attested in the data of names of men. On the other hand, names of women appear without the nominal prefix. It is plausible to argue that plants belong to men because nominal classes 3/4 constitute mainly plants in Nyamwezi and Sukuma (Maganga & Schadeberg 1992; Matondo 2003). Clear cases of this naming pattern are provided in (1). Notice that none of these names refer to women in the society.

(1) <b>Plant species</b>	<b>Male names</b>
<i>twege</i> ‘Corchorus sp.’	<i>Twege</i>
<i>michembe</i> ‘peeled and dried potatoes’	<i>Michembe</i>
<i>minyembe</i> ‘mangoes’	<i>Nyembe</i>
<i>mhande</i> ‘peanuts’	<i>Mhande</i>
<i>ng’wandu</i> ‘baobab tree’	<i>Ng’wandu</i>

We summarize about the feminine and masculine distinctions in the morphology of names. Firstly, we argue that although previous studies reveal patriarchal relations in the agricultural section among the Nyamwezi and Sukuma (see Little 1991; Mbilinyi 2016), we have revealed that the patriarchal system is embodied even in the names of persons. The masculine names bear the prefix *Ma-* (or *M-*) as manifested in numerous names of persons. The feminine names unfold with the prefix *Ka-* or zero. The data sets point towards the separation of male–female names on the basis of nominal prefixes.

Secondly, Swilla (2000b) argues that linguistic structure and inherent semantics of some words in the Bantu language Swahili are intrinsically gender wired. As a result, women appear to be portrayed as passive participants in many socio-economic activities. In many cases that involved women, derogatory names are used. She argues that “the preponderance of sexually-connotative names is a powerful manner of “doing gender” (Swilla 2000b: 165). Likewise, the linguistic morphology of names in Nyamwezi and Sukuma assign a lower status to women, which is another strategy stereotypically employed to depict women in society.

Thirdly, the choice of the meaning of names associated with “smallness” is related to stereotypical gendered naming system. We point out that this is typically a sort of gender stereotyping since women are considered to be weak. Our argument is in line with Mwangeka (2013), who contends that the society fosters gender stereotyping through naming system by using Kindali names whose meanings praise males and demean females. In Nyamwezi and Sukuma, gender stereotyping is linguistically imbedded in the way names are formed. Thus, morphological forms such as *Ma-* and *Ka-* are stereotypically used to differentiate female and male names in some circumstances.

Lastly, two issues emanate from male persons bearing *Ka*-names. On the one hand, they are born when circumstances surrounding their births were not expected in the society. On the other hand, male persons who bear *Ka*-names uphold a less significance position in this society. This means that the status and social contribution to the society of male persons bearing *Ka*-names is deemed insignificant. Consequently, such persons obtain names associated with “smallness”, a typical feature of female names.

## 7 Discussion

Names given to male participants tend to perpetuate positive contribution to building the society than their female counterparts. Swilla (2000b: 161) found that “two thirds of stories (67.8%)

employed derogatory language with sexual connotations in referring to women.” Similarly, Shartiely (2005) found that female participants are bestowed with endearing and attractive names as opposed to courageous and boldness names assigned to male participants. This kind of naming assumes “small” contribution of women in building the society. The observations made for the Swahili society tends to transcend down to the small societies like the Nyamwezi and Sukuma. Data points described in this paper show that women are accorded lower status as compared to men. This happens even in the names bestowed to the new born children.

Among the Nyamwezi and Sukuma people, women are perceived as a property of men as entrenched in bride-price payment by the husband and his family. Consequently, women cannot even own land property in Sukuma society (Shayo, 2016). Since the culture of the Sukuma society treats women as being owned by men, eventually the language also embraces the socio-cultural system in that even personal names tend to portray “smallness” of women and “bigness” of men. This kind of comparison allows women to remain in the low status position in the society irrespective of the movements towards gender balance and equity.

Among the Nyamwezi and Sukuma, men and women relations undergo acculturation towards men owning women. Masele and Lakshmanan (2021: 388) pointed out that “a man who has no wife is considered socially a failure in his life. The same applies to a woman who is not married. The Sukuma call such a woman *nshimbe*, ‘a woman belonging to nobody’. The key term *nshimbe* reduces women to being a property of men. It is unfortunate that this custom entails that women are accorded “smallness” similar to property, which could be owned at one point and dispensed at another time.

Decision making is skewed towards men in Nyamwezi and Sukuma making decisive actions at the expense of men. This happens even in income-earning by women. Badstue et al. (2021: 320) found that “across the four communities, middle-income women agreed that most decisions are taken by men.” It happens that even in name-giving, men make decision on the choices of names for new born children. Since names are bestowed by men, it follows that gendered choice of names still assign “smallness” to baby girls.

The low status of women is sometimes brought by circumstances involving husband-wife relations even in the presence of a good legal system, as is the case of Tanzania. Otsyina and Rosenberg (1999: 53) pointed out that “most women seem not to be aware of their rights in society – as wives, mothers, and, more generally, as citizens who are equal to their male counterparts.” The right to claim equality even in the eyes of cultural traits should be born first by women so as to allow men to see the difference. Perhaps this could begin with naming system that places women in the “smallness” category.

The passive participation among women in Tanzania is attested in the utility of lexical entries such as *oa* ‘to marry’ and *olewa* ‘to be married’ in Swahili society. Swilla (2000b) argues that the former is associated with active male participants, while the latter is engraved in the world of passive female participants. The internal structure of Nyamwezi and Sukuma language allows the speakers to resume low status to women as opposed to men in a marriage. The low status of women is perpetuated further into the naming system discussed in this paper.

## 8 Conclusion

We wanted to elaborate the point that in some African societies doing gender is entrenched even in cultural activities which are highly cherished. Naming in African societies is cherished and involves elaborate celebrations. In this paper, we have attempted to show that the feminine designation of *Ka-* as opposed to the masculine designation of *Ma-* on the Sukuma and Nyamwezi personal names assume. The findings have revealed that these designations help to decipher how this community assigns women's status in relation to men. It shows their relationship to nature. In the Nyamwezi and Sukuma communities, the determinate feature "smallness" in the femininity traits of names forms a structural system of labeling women, depicting their lower socio-cultural status. Similarly, we do not see the "smallness" on the masculine names in Sukuma and Nyamwezi, rather we see "largeness" in the masculine names of persons. This fact is patriarchal since it demonstrates the way in which women's gender is handled by the patriarchal system. In this study, we argued that plants and local weather conditions are part and parcel of the naming process in Sukuma and Nyamwezi speech communities. So, we indicated that gender differences between men and women are based on the ground of their stature, as suggested by the gender theory. Our analysis was based on the language elements that are used to name plant genera and weather conditions, whereas language is a consequence of shared cultural and linguistic factors. Therefore, in this study, we pointed out that some aspects of the naming system in Nyamwezi and Sukuma are stereotypically backed by gender lines. While male names seem to be linguistically favored, in the sense that their connotations are positive, through the use of *Ma-*, female names bear a prefix *Ka-* that tends to demean women, subjecting them to gender stereotyping. This study made us realize that language forms can be used to perpetuate gender inequalities through the naming system.

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