An Onomastic Study of the Structure of Basà Personal Names

By

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Abstract

This paper investigates Basà personal names from their structural perspectives. Regardless of cross-cultural variations among human societies, personal naming practice is a universal tradition, although, it is remarkably idiosyncratic in style and custom across human societies. In the Basà community, as well as Africa, personal names are very significant, virtually, in all aspects of human life. For instance, it is believed that personal names are very influential on the general lifestyle and prospects of the bearer. This paper is within the purview of linguistic onomastics and examines the complex lexical, morphological and syntactic properties and processes which provide a window to the grammatical processes of Basà language using the Leipzig Glossing Rules. The paper attempts to answer the question “What are the lexical and grammatical structures of Basà personal names? Though, quite much has been done on onomastics, especially, as it concerns personal names, there is no known work on Basà personal names. Data for this investigation are obtained through interview, students registers in various Basà extractions and personal observations. Findings from this study show that names have different structures such as simple words, complex words, idiophones, idioms, riddles, clipping, compounds and proverbs, each undergoing various derivational processes. These findings can be replicated in other languages or compared to other naming practices in Africa or the world to enrich the frontiers of onomastic literature or, to a larger extent, scholarship, in general.

Keywords: Basà, morphological property, personal names, lexical, grammatical structure, and syntactic properties.
Introduction

Basà language belongs to Kainji of Western-Kainji family (Croizer & Blench, 1992). It is spoken in North Central Nigeria, that is, all the Federal Capital councils, Niger, Nasarawa, Benue, and Kogi states in Nigeria. Basà language is spoken in different locations in North Central Nigeria such as, the six area councils of the Federal Capital Territory; Kokona, Nasarawa, Toto and Doma Local Government Councils of Nasarawa State; Bassa, Dekina, Ankpa and Kotonkarfe Local Government Areas of Kogi State; Kontagora Local Government of Niger State, Agatu and Markurdi Local Government Areas of Benue State. Some of these locations are characterized by different dialectal variants, each is identified by name, but all varieties are mutually intelligible.

A name is what somebody or something is called or identified by. It is a term by which an individual or a thing is known and distinguished from other people or things (Olatunji, Issah, Noah, Muhammed & Suleiman, 2015). Conventionally, the term name as a word or words by which an individual person, place or thing is identified; it is the nomenclature used in making reference to all the tangible or intangible, living or non-living, concrete or abstract, liquid or solid. Agyekum (2006) argues that:

Naming can be considered as universal cultural practices, every human society in the world gives name to its new born as tags, majorly as a means of identification, but how the names are given, the practices and rituals involved and the interpretations attached to the names differ from society and culture to culture (21).

Chucks-Orji (1972) and Suzman (1994) assert that, in African societies, great importance is attached to names because in general, the belief system of Africans is often anchored on the name given to a person which determines his or her personhood and character.

Each culture has an idiosyncratic perception of the experience of life, and language is the vehicle used to convey such cultural nexus. Personal name in Basà culture is a veritable linguistic medium for transmitting traditional heritage, because naming practice is best understood in the context of the people’s culture and traditions. Personal names or practice in general relate with the core part of peoples’ culture to show solidarity, identity, social cohesion, history and many others. This agrees with Kuschels (1988) argument as saying that there is nexus between names and the socio-cultural life of the people, because of the prevalent belief that institutions do not exist or develop in cognitive vacuum. Mensah and Offong (2013) hold that, “In Nigeria, it is easy to distinguish a Yoruba person from Hausa or Effik through his/her name, because names can define the concept of identity, whether individual or group identity”. Thus, “names are important indices for reconfiguration of identity and ethnicity.” Names in Basà, as well as other ethnic groups, especially, in Africa give insight into various cultures. This investigation examines the structure of personal names in Basà thereby providing an answer to the question “What are the lexical, morphological and syntactic structures of Basà personal names?

As earlier mentioned, different cultures perceive and conceptualize the experience of life in different ways, and language is a primary medium of this cultural nexus (Mensah & Offong, 2013). Thus, the earliest studies on personal names in Nigeria, such
as Oduyoye (1982), Ubahakwe (1981) Essien (1986), and so on, are focused mainly on the meaning of etymology, typology and the circumstances surrounding personal naming practices in Yoruba, Igbo and Ibibio, respectively.

Mensah (2009) argues that linguistically, it is observable that naming practices in these languages (Yoruba, Igbo and Ibibio) reflect their grammatical structure. The naming practices in these languages serve as window to the understanding of their grammatical structures; such that, it could be a word, a phrase, a clause or sentences of various types and functions. He exemplifies some sentential names in some of these languages; in Igbo and Yoruba thus: Igbo *Ijebusomma* ‘The journey is good/sweet’, *Onwuamaegbu* ‘Death has come to the wrong person’; Yoruba: *Bankole* ‘(You) help build this house’, *Olubunmi* ‘God has given me’, *Demeji* ‘My honour has been doubled’ (2).

There are other works in the rich body of the literature of onomastics, especially, on the personal naming practices in Africa, such as Mensah (2009), who studies the structure and meaning of Nigerian names, Obeng (1998) and Agyekum (2006) who investigate the pragmatics and sociolinguistics of Akan names; Ngade (2011) focuses on Bakossi (Camaroon) names in relation to its naming tradition and identity. Gebre (2010) studies the effect of contact on the naming practice of the Aare ethnic group in Ethiopia. Suzman (1994) and Koopman (2000) extensively analyze Zulu personal names in South Africa. De Klerk and Bosch (1995) and Neethling (1996) study on Xhosa personal names, nicknames, place names and onomastic theories. Personal names from the semantic point of view were studied by Olenyo (2011) and Dromantaite and Baltramaitiene (2002). They argue that personal naming practice in Africa is contrary to the practice in the western cultures, where names serve as mere labels, rather, in African cultures, names, both with denotational and connotational meanings, stemming from existing phenomena have underlying interesting information.

Mensah & Offong (2013) report Moyo (2012) on the effect that colonialism and slavery have on African personal names as saying, “such effects changed the ideological conceptions that were embedded in these names, in other cases, African names survived the onslaught of slavery and European domination”; and that “African names, especially, in the Diaspora, became elements of cultural retention, forms of resistance and means of identity construction.” Essien (1986 & 2000) investigate the structure and meaning of Ibibio personal names and provide linguistic, as well as cultural explications. Maduagwu (2010) studies the Igbo naming practice from the morphology and semantic points of view, and analyses the morphology and semantics of Igbo language which is linked to the Igbo culture and social milieu. Mensah & Offong (2013) posit that naming practices have enormous socio-cultural, spiritual and psychological significance in Africa and beyond, because they are believed to have inherent power used to indexicalise the lives and behaviours of the people, both positively and negatively. This conforms with what Agyekum (2006) believes that names are pointers to people’s ways of life and socio-cultural experience that give deep insight into the cultural patterns, belief, ideology and the religion of the people concerned. He also believes that names also reflect how people relate with their social and physical environment, especially in their relationship with cosmic powers. This relation,
precisely, describes the Basà naming practice given that the practice is a product of social, as well as spiritual factors. Spiritually, it is believed in the Basà ethnic group that life is cyclical.

This investigation sets out to study the structure of Basà personal names. The study will analyze the various structures of personal names in Basà language, namely, words (simple, complex, and compounds) phrases, sentences, idiophones, proverbs, idioms and riddles with the aim to investigate the grammatical information conveyed by these names as a window to understanding the grammar of Basà.

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

Mensah and Offong (2013) further point out that, in Effik community, children are given names following days of the week, time of birth or circumstances surrounding the birth of a child can also determine the choice of a child’s name. These phenomena are also true of the socio-cultural naming tradition of the Basà people.

Children that die shortly after birth are believed to be spirit beings that relate with mortal beings. This is similar with the Igbo belief (in Eastern Nigeria) called Ogbanje, in Yoruba (Western Nigeria) called Abiku, in Effik (South Nigeria) called Eka Abasi.

In a situation as such, the earthly parents create measures to stop further infant mortality by inflicting a cut on the deceased before he/she is buried. This belief is to ensure reincarnation of the deceased child and subsequent survival of other children. Otherwise, a survival name is given to a child to ensure his/her survival. Others are sourced from traditional royalty which are exclusively for members of royal families; notable among them are royalty names and royalty titles which double as names. These names can be studied or analyzed from the lexical level (simple and complex) to complex sentences which are larger grammatical units. They provide a window to Basà grammatical structures.

The concept onomastics is traceable to ancient Egypt of 5 to 6 thousand years ago. Through their inscriptions, had first made a distinction between proper names and common nouns by inserting their gods’ and Pharaohs’ names in frames or “name rings” (cartouche) and, later, writing them in red paint on papyrus. Although this may have originated with respect to gods and kings, and not for the names themselves, it is indicative of the recognition of proper names as such.

In Akkadian and Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions, as well as in Chinese and, later in Greek and Latin writings, various determining signs, mainly horizontal or vertical lines, were used to call attention to proper names (Keszler, 1993). In the most ancient layer of the Bible (the first book of Moses or Genesis, 11, 19-20) there is reference to people’s name giving habits: “Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he called each living creature, that was its name” (The Holy Bible, New International Version, 1984).
Partridge (1949) applied a formal approach, saying that proper nouns consisting of more than one word cannot be considered a subbranch of proper nouns. In Hungarian linguistics, it was Barabás et al., who first discussed this question, argued: “structures consisting of more than one words cannot be considered to be parts of speech, consequently, nouns” (1977). Although it has been pointed out above that titles of books, periodicals, poems, etc. have been regarded as proper nouns in Hungarian linguistics since the end of the 19th century, this proper noun can, however, by no means be a noun.

Thus, proper nouns are embedded in the communication as nouns, but unlike common nouns, they do not convey thoughts, their function is for identification. So they are independent of the other parts of speech and constitute a special system. As one-word, proper nouns, too, are elements of the identification system, despite undeniable mutual influences; they should be separated from common nouns, since the way they emerge, change and disappear has regularities that differ from those of other linguistic elements.

At the word level, names are mostly nouns; there are few adjectives and idiophones. The complex words are characterized by a number of morphological processes common in the derivational processes of Basà word formation; most productive in this category of derivation, is nominalization of adjectives and verbs.

Methods
Data for this investigation are obtained through interview, students’ register in various Basà extractions, personal observation and the researcher’s native intuition. The data analysis is done following the Leipzig Glossing Rule that is morpheme-by-morpheme glossing system followed by literal interpretation, the underlying and discussions emanating from salient discoveries from the data. The researcher chose the Leipzig Glossing Rule system and Basà because it gives room for multiple interpretations of data and there is no known work on any aspect of Basà onomastics.

Data Presentation and Analysis
This section presents and analyses Basà names. Each category is presented in a subsection according to its structure, namely, nouns, deadjectivals, compounds, idiophones, phrases, sentences, idioms, proverbs, royal royalty and riddles.

Names as Nouns
Nouns are dominant at the lexical level in Basà naming system, adjectives, idiophones, and riddles are fewer, whereas verbs are fewest.

1. Abstract Nouns
   a. Erèce → Rècé ‘blessing’
   b. Ùrányẹ → Rányẹ ‘life’
   c. Ågwatana→ Gwatana ‘God’
   d. Ùjasà → jasà ‘war’

   Each noun in (1 & 2) is a simple lexeme. They represent supernatural concepts, geographical features, chieftaincy and folklores, which epitomize the Basà natural environment, religion or belief system and worldview generally. Examples (1 & 2) are derived through the process of backformation.

2. Common Nouns
   a. ùníbì → Níbì ‘medicine’
   b. ùnwana → Nwana ‘sun’
   c. Cè̩nje → Cè̩nje ‘ground’
   d. úzhizhi→ Zhızhi ‘shadow/ masquerade’
   e. údukwo→ Dukwo ‘market’
In this language, vowels do not begin personal names, hence the deletion of the initial vowel in each case in (1 and 2). In (2c) the word’s root inherently begins with a consonant, hence, the initial sound is not elided. Next to nominal names are adjectives. They are both predicative and attributive. They can be shown in (3) below:

3. **Adjectives**
   a. Huleji ‘plenty/abundance’
   b. Sheneni ‘scanty/small’
   c. Legeji ‘oversize’
   d. Räháñ ‘free’
   e. Fwéshi ‘rotten’

(3) are predicative adjectives because, in the sentence, they serve as subject complements or occur after the verb in the predicate, they form personal names without the nouns they modify undergoing any overt phonological or morphological modification, except in *fwéshi* where there is a tonal modification from MM to HH.

This can be illustrated in the following sentences:

4. a. Ōshilohuleji
   rain plenty/abundant ‘rain is plenty’

   b. Ėyimẹyẹ fwéshi
   food rotten ‘the food is rotten’

In Basà, verbs constitute personal names, though this occurs with uttermost rarity compared to other categories, for instance, consider example (5)

5. a. Gushiji ‘found’
   b. Fwósò ‘rotten (as a command)
   c. Gûreg ‘returned’
   d. Lasọ́ ‘won’

Verbal personal names in Basà occur in the past forms for instance, (a, c & d) or in the imperative. The forms in (5) do not undergo any derivational process because each begins with an initial consonant sound. Examples (6) below show a different process where noun names are derived from verbs through some morphological derivation processes, namely: prefixation and suffixation. The results of these derivational processes have meanings that are related to the verb stems from which they derive. Generally, the affixes attached to the verbal stems for these derivational processes give extra morphological information to the base word. The process can be illustrated in (5) below:

6. **Nominalization**
   
   a. Comedy (V) + ngà → Dúmàngà (N)
   speak N-SUF speech

   b. nyíngátángà (V) + a→ ànyíngàtò (N)
   console N-PRE consolation

   c. ógbájẹ (N)  Gbájẹ (N)
   heap (V)  heap (grave) (N)

   d. jíshíjẹ́ (V) + à→ Àjìshìgwà (N)
   answer (V) N-PRE answer (N)

   e. Iásọ́ (V)  + to → Tọ̀lasọ (N)
   win N-PRE victory

In (6) above, the derivational processes are affixal in nature, involving two types of affixes, namely, the prefix and the suffix. The affixal processes of (a) is a suffix where the suffix-ŋà is attached to the verb stem dúmà. ‘Speak’ is used to derive the noun dúmàngà ‘speech’ whereas in (e), the prefix té- is attached to the verb stem lasọ́ to derive the noun Tólásọ́ ‘victory’. In (a) the tones of the verb stem subsist, but in (e) the tones of the derived noun changes from
High Low to Mid-Mid. Example (c) does not involve any overt affixation, rather, a process of deletion elides the initial vowel sound of the root word. Examples (b) and (d) both employ prefixation, i.e. the prefix a- is attached to both stems but differ in the sense that in (b), the last syllable of the base is clipped off and the tones of the stem are changed from HHHL to LLLL whereas, in (d), there is an evidence of internal modification where the final syllable je is replaced with gwà bearing a low tone but the initial and medial syllable tones of the stem which are HH are replaced with LL, as well as the tone of the attached derivational morpheme.

Deadjectivization is also attested in the language, where nouns are derived from adjectives. This process is not as productive as the previous processes. Example (6) provides instances of this process.

7. Deadjectivization
   a. nwọmẹ (adj) + tô → T̀nẁmà (N)
      to be guilty/failN-PRE guilt/ill luck
   b. gbî (adj) + e → Ègbî
      vain N-PRE vain

In examples (6a), the adjective nwọmẹ‘guilty’ or ‘fail’ derives the noun t̀nẁmà ‘guilt’ or ‘ill luck’ when the prefix tô- is attached to it and the final vowel is modified or replaced. The tones of the base which are inherently HM modify to LLL in the derived nominal. In (b), the derived word is prefixed with è-while the inherent tone of the stem subsists.

Another production category of Basà personal names are those formed through compounding, a situation where a linguistic unit is composed of elements which function independently in other circumstances which are usually two or more words or free morphemes (Crystal, 2007). In Basà, as shown in (8) below, these compounds are composed of two or more independent units. The compounds sourced for this investigation are mainly endocentric in nature, being that syntactically, the words are related in such a way that one is functionally equivalent to the group as a whole i.e. as the head of the group. Although there is an evidence of exocentric compounds which are very rare, that is, there is no definable centre or head inside the group. Examples in (8) below illustrate this phenomenon.

8. Compounding
   a. ùnyizọ # ùfwo → Nyizọfwo
      world new ‘new world’
   b. ùwè # i # biye → Wèbiye
      thing of AGR good ‘Blessing’
   c. lánẹ́ # nù # ùwè→ Lánùwè
      worthy of something
   d. ùjẹrọma # wà # Àgwatarà → Jẹrọma
      (Gwatana)
      Glory of God ‘God’s glory’

In Basà, syntactically, endocentric compounds are headed by the left-most members of the group, thus, in examples (8a,b & d) respectivelyùnyizọ ‘world’ ùwè ‘thing’ and ùjẹrọma ‘glory’ are the syntactic heads. The derivational processes are characterized by the following processes: each example is characterized by the process of aphaerisis, where the initial vowel sound in each content word is elided i.e. ù and ù in (a),ù and i in (b), ù of the right-most element but not the left-most, being that it begins with a consonant. In (d), ù, the left-most constituent and â, the right-most constituent, example (c) contrasts with others being that it is not endocentric in nature, rather exocentric, thus, no member heads the group.
Names as Idiophones
Basà language uses vivid idiophonic representation of an idea, features, etc. in sounds as used in onomatopoeia or sound symbolism accompanied by extra linguistic or mimic effects (Crystal, 2007). These words function like adjectives but lack features of full-fledged conventional words, but generally, they are descriptive of things, places, texture, and manner by symbolizing their nature of mimicking them. They can be exemplified in (9) below:

9. a. Gbọ́ ngbọ́
   b. Gbèm
   c. Gwọ́sọ́
   d. Kó ró
   e. Gbokùngù

Each of the examples in (9) above is an expression that describes a situation surrounding the birth of a child etc. Gbọ́ngbọ́ is an exclamatory expression used as a name given to a child born immediately after something very great, tragic or very dreadful happens in a family or community, such as the death of a great leader, rich man, war outbreak or challenges such as famine etc. These words are used as an emotional expression to express surprise, shock, fear etc. Thus, these idiophones are used to name children in order to preserve history and serve as indices of important happenings during their birth. The same meaning underlies other names in (9) namely, Gbèm and Gwọ́sọ́ (9 b & c). Kó ró, on the other hand, is used to express God’s sovereignty and supremacy over matters of life involving an indigent person and an influential person where justice can only be decided by divinity. It is believed that truth will always prevail over injustice. When God vindicates the indigent and judges the delinquent influential person, Kó ró ‘truth’ is used to express such scenario, and it is used to name a child in order to also preserve history and teach that God is the ultimate judge and sovereign, regardless of the status or position of men. It is also an indirect way of teaching a moral lesson.

At the larger grammatical level in Basà naming practices, it was discovered that some Basà names are made of larger grammatical units such as phrases and sentences of various types. This section therefore examines the structure of Basà personal names at the larger grammatical level, beginning from the phrases. Nouns and verb phrases form a very productive source of personal names in Basà, for instance:

10. Negative Nouns
    a. zá #ùwè # biye → Zébiye
        have.NEG thinggood
        ‘lack of blessing/fortune’
    b. zá # uhugwà → Záhugwà
        have.NEGpower/strength
        ‘lack of strength’
    c. zá # ohugwo → Zôgwo
        have.NEG place ‘no destination’

Examples (10) are phrases, (a-c) are proceeded by a negative verb stem which negates the whole proposition. They are originally clauses or sentences but are clipped. They are never used in their full clausal or sentential status like those that undergo the process of desententialization. In (a), ùwèbiye means blessing but zá is a negative verb stem which negates the whole clause deriving ‘lack of blessing’. It is a name given to a child birthed when misfortune is experienced in the family, community etc. The same process applies to (b) and (c). In (d), húlobu ‘pass him/her’ is a verb phrase. Húlo ‘pass’ is a transitive verb that requires a direct object thus, bu is
a third person singular pronoun that serves as the direct object of the head hùlo. There are other noun phrases modified by adjectives used as personal names, see (11) below:

11. Noun Phrases
ùwè#biye → Wèbiye
thing good  ‘Blessing’

In (11), ùwè ‘thing’ is modified by the adjective biye ‘good’ to derive ‘good thing’ which means blessing.

12. àhaànsà# àba → Hàsàba
thought POSS ‘heir though’

(12) is a noun phrase, made up of àhaànsà ‘thought’, (the possessed) and àba ‘3PL(them)’ (the possessor). The possessed element undergoes the process of aphaeresis (elision of the initial syllable) and shortening of the second syllable to derive the surface form. In what follows, larger units than the phase shall be examined, beginning from simple sentences.

In Basà naming system, names display or constitute a wide range of structural types which make up complete sentences of both simple and complex clauses, such as imperative, declarative, negative, declarative and interrogative sentences. The basic word order of Basà sentence structure is subject-verb-object (SVO). Sentences in this language, basically are characterized by indicative mood (declarative), interrogative mood and imperative mood which semantically function as statement, question and request. What follows examines each of these structural categories in relation to their semantic and syntactic classification.

Names as Statement (Declaration)

This category of names is structurally sentences with subject, verb and object or complement. They can be shown in (13) below:

13.
   a. Ñ tâshelanẹ → Tâshilanẹ
      1SG PROG hope (V)
      ‘I am hopeful / hoping’
   b. ùwè i zhé → Wèzhé
      word/something AGR go.PST
      ‘answered prayer’
   c. Ñ ta hànsà → Tâsà
      1SG PROG think
      ‘I am thinking’
   d. ùwananjẹ→ Wânįnjẹ
      Sun do-PST
      ‘The Sun (God) did it.
   e. Ì ñshinji → Shinji
      3SG 1SG feed up
      ‘I am fed up’
   f. ùwè tê zhé → Wètêzhé
      matter PROG continue
      ‘The matter still continues’

The sentence type exemplified in (13) is characterized by the structure SV (i.e. subject + verb) where the verb that fills the predicate is intransitive and does not require an object. In (a), the derived name Tâshilanẹ, ‘I am hopeful,’ is derived by clipping the subject of the sentence Ñ which is first person singular. In (b), Wèzhé is derived by eliding the initial sound of the subject noun phrase ù, which means ‘answered prayer’. (c) is characterized by clipping the subject and object completely. The progressive maker ta, which is characterized by a mid-tone (unmarked) takes a rising tone in the derived word because the first syllable of the verb stem elides, but leaves its tone, hence, the gliding
tone on the first syllable of the derived name. As earlier mentioned, the word order of Basà is SVO, but in (13c), the sentence is ordered SOV. This is because there are categories of verbs that are both verbs and adjectives which allow SOV ordering, contrary to the basic word order. Finally, the nasal sound at the medial position of the verb stem is elided in the derived name. In (d), Wànánjẹ is derived where the phonological aphasis (aphaeresis) deletes the initial sound of the subject noun phrase. In (e), Shinji is derived by clipping the subject noun phrases completely.

Some Basà names are characterized by SVO i.e. Subject + Verb + Object. In such structures, the verb in the predicate is transitive and thus, requires a direct object. This category can be illustrated in (14) below:

14. Transitive Verbs
a. Úrányẹ́shẹ́ ùwẹ́ → Rányẹ́shíwè
   life be something
   ‘Life is the ultimate’

b. Ùwẹ́ dàma → Wàndáma
   matter ISG surprise
   ‘I am surprised’

c. Ñnjẹ ùwẹ́ ùfwo → Njọfwo
   ISG do.PST something new
   ‘I did something new’

d. Èhíkéní-shiàmẹ → Híkéníshàmẹ
   3PL see-NEG stomach
   ‘It is not possible to see ones thought’

In (14a), Rányẹ́shíwè is characterized by úrányẹ́ (subject), shẹ́ (verb), and ùwẹ́ (object) or complement. In the derivational process, two aphasis processes occur eliding the initial sounds of the subject, and complement. In (b), the initial and final sounds of the subject noun phrase delete to derive Wàndáma. In (c), Njọfwo is derived through the process of coalescence, where the final vowel of the verb stem nje and the initial vowel of the adjective ùfwo both elide, compromise and produce another vowel sound, but both tones of the elided vowels subsist. The subject and the object noun phrases clip, leaving the verb nje and the adjective fwo. The initial syllable glides because the elided syllable leaves its tone on the initial syllable of the derived word. The process of modification replaces the front open-mid vowel /ɛ/ of the verb with a back close-mid sound (/o/). In (d), Híkéníshàmẹ, the subject noun is clipped and the final sound of the negative operator shi elides.

The investigation also uncovers strings of negative statements as personal names in the language. This is done by introducing a negative operator to an affirmation statement. This category of names is exemplified in (15) below:

15. Negative Declarative
a. N láné-še → Láshẹ
   1SG worthy-NEG
   ‘I am not worthy’

b. N Jérí-shi → Jéríshi
   1SG want-NEG
   ‘I don’t want’

c. N záajẹmẹ → Zájẹmẹ
   1SG have.NEG talk
   ‘I have not anything to say’

d. N záiyimẹ̀hiẹ̣ñ → Z̩mẹ̀hẹñ
   1SG have.NEG thing to say
   ‘I haven’t anything to say’

In (a), the sentence is composed of the structure SV (Subject + Verb) i.e., the verb phrase is intransitive. In the derived form, the subject NP is clipped; the second syllable of the verb stem lane elides and
combines with the negative suffix to derive Láshe. In (b), Jéríshi is derived by the following processes: the sentence subject clips, while both the verb stem and the negative operator subsist. In (c), Zájemè is derived thus, the subject clips and the negative verb stem zá ‘have not’ (the antonym of yaje ‘have’), combines with ajemè and the object NP and undergoes an aphesic process where the word initial sound or the initial syllable elides. Zámèhèn is derived when the subject NP clips, the direct object iyì also clips thereby merging the negative operator zá, the to-particle mè and verb stem hień to derive Zámèhèn. (e), he negative operator, mè ‘to-particle’ and the verb hień ‘say’. The examples in (15) are negative declaratives but characterized by two different negative operators namely, -shì which functions as a suffix and zá ‘have not’ which is a negative verb stem ‘have not.’

Personal Names as Command
Syntactically, in Basà personal naming system, there are names that function as command or constitute an order. Typically, this sentence type has no overt subject and the verb is in the imperative mood. Semantically, it is used to instruct someone to do or not to do something (Crystal, 2007). This name category can be shown in (16) below:

16.
   a. Náandáò zhaga →Ndá zhaga
      IMP.2SG do AGR continue
      ‘Continue doing it’
   
   b. Zháganàmbè →Zhánàmbè
go PREP bush
   ‘Go to the bush/woods’
   
   c. Támàhòngá →Tàhòngá
      NEG.IMP 1SG laugh
      ‘Don’t laugh at me’
   
   e. Tàínà →Tà ‘ínà

   NEG.IMP lost
   ‘Don’t get lost/missing’

In (16) (a), Ndázhaga is derived by clipping the second person singular imperative marker náá. The sentence has an implied or idiomatic meaning, i.e., it counsels the delinquent to stop perpetrating evil. The first syllable of the derived name is characterized by a gliding tone because ọ̀ is an agreement marker for first person singular subject which elides but leaves its tone, thus, it combines with the tone of the verb stem ndáto form a glide. (b), Zhànàmbè is derived by eliding the second syllable of the verb zhága and the first sound or syllable of the object NP ambè, when it elides, its tone subsists, which the penultimate syllable bears (ná) in the derived name. This results from the combination of the tone of the preposition (low) and the tone of the initial syllable of the direct object which is modified from mid to high. The derivation of Tàhòngá is characterized by the process where the negative imperative operator tà ‘do not’ and the verb base hòngá ‘laugh’ come together and clip the first person singular marker mà. In (d), the name is derived thus, both the negative and imperative makers and the verb stem merge, though they merge together, they maintain their inherent syllables i.e. tà and ‘í are separate syllables, hence, ‘í is preceded with a glottal mark indicating that the name is composed of three syllables.

“Pragmatically, this sentence pattern can be interpreted as a proposal for an action by the speaker since it contains a proposition in which no response is involved” (Mensah & Offong 2013:41). These sentence types do not have an overt subject at the surface structure, the second person, either singular or plural is the implied subject for such a sentence. For the negative imperative (command), the negator is contrary to our
earlier examples where the negative operator is attached to the verb stems; here, it occurs at the sentence initial position as an independent word. Thus, it can be inferred from these examples that negation is Basà is a complex process that is both syntactic and morphosyntactic.

Names as Question
Essentially, there are two types of questions namely, polar questions or Yes/No questions and wh-questions. Wh-question differs from polar or yes/no questions because they are used to seek for content information relating to persons, things, facts, time, place, manner etc. Information on Basà personal names reveals the existence of content information or wh-question only i.e., the wh-operator occurs sentence initially. Examples (17) reveal this phenomenon in Basà language.

17
a. Chéábọ́ bánẹẹ́? → Chábánẹ
   where 2SG come.PST
   ‘Where did you come from?’

The derivation process clips àbọ́ ‘2SG’ and merges the wh-question operator chée with the verb stem bánẹé to derive Chábánẹ. The wh-operator changes its inherent falling to a high tone, the tone of the first syllable of the verb stem subsists, but the raising tone of the second syllable of the verb changes to mid tone (unmarked). Han’s (2002) description of this category of names suits the Basà situation as saying, they are generally not directed at any one, but are merely rhetorical with sufficient pragmatic information and strong illocutionary force of an assertion with the opposite polarity from what is apparently asked. Unfortunately, this category of names is not productive.

Idioms as Personal Names

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

18:  
a. Ọhulu shírí nè èseshì
   → Ọhulushírínèşesì
   soullaid PREP junction
   ‘a soul at a junction’

b. Bẹ̀ shẹ́-shẹ́ ọdù mò sùgò ni ìyẹlẹ̀
   → Shôdùmòsùgòniyèlè
   3SG be-NEG yam to pick PREP hand
   ‘He is not the kind of yams picked from the ground’

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

Proverbs as Personal Names
Closely related to this category of idioms Basà names are those presented in short expressions of wit, containing the wisdom of past generations in condensed form, often in rhythmic, easy to remember and pleasing to hear form. These expressions are the remains of the ancient wisdom delivered in a condensed form that can be easily remembered and memorized because of their rhythm (Knappert, 1989). They are considered as “ancient survivals in modern age.” Cartey (1999) proverbial names are multifunctional in nature. They are used to settle arguments, uncover axioms, settle disputes, give advice, make suggestions, observations and to make just judgments according to people’s unwritten traditional or customary laws. The meanings of this category of names are invisible, written or implied. Examples:

19. a. Olubo ò hwônsò
   Blind AGR distribute.PRES PART
   Semantic: A blind person is distributing
   Pragmatic: God is seen as a blind distributor who distributes blessings without favoritism. This means any one can be blessed as long as it is God that is involved. The name is given in a situation where child bearing is considered difficult for a couple.

   b. Mànda mú ùwana húrì ùgbàà nù ùkpakwọ → Mànda
   Divine of heaven pass 5000 CONJ
   Semantic: God is greater than 5,200
   Pragmatic: God is more powerful than the whole world. This is given to a child when a miracle happens during delivery, especially in a situation beyond human solution (note that numeral system is restricted in this language hence, 5,200 connotatively stands for the whole world). This happens to be the name of the author based on the situation surrounding his birth: his mother was to undergo a caesarean section after prolonged labour and after the doctor’s efforts turned abortive. As soon as she was laid on the operation bed, the baby was birthed normally and there was no better way of conceiving it than to attribute it to divine intervention.

   c. Tọgatọ ndapẹlànọ ukwede
   Food AGR stick plate
   Semantic: Food sticks on the plate it is contained.
   Pragmatic: It refers to two inextricable things bound by some factors, especially a couple with a serious marital crisis who sticks together where divorce is an option because of pertinent reason, especially, the children they have together or other factors.

   d. È hikéni-shiàmẹ → Hikénishàmẹ
   3PL check-NEG stomach
   Semantic: you cannot see someone’s thought.
   Pragmatic: You can only see people but cannot determine their thought, whether good or bad.

In (d), Hikénishàmẹ is derived by eliding the third person plural subject è and the vowel of the negative operator i. This idiomatic expression means, individuals are seen but not their thought, i.e. one cannot tell what people’s thought are by mere looking at their faces. It refers to the complex and unpredictable nature of humans.
Riddles as Personal Names
Some Bäsà names are characterized by a special type of questions that describe things or people in extremely difficult and confusing ways, which are answered in clever and amusing manner. They are clever ways of teaching; and they are used as a game. These short and usually humorous puzzles, which are obscure and misleading, are understood only by ingenuity. Usually, they require an answer as the meaning of the riddle, followed by a deeper or pragmatic meaning. They are also used as personal and impersonal names for persons and animals. When such puzzles are given as names, it shows, they have meaning related to those puzzle by virtue of birth, politics, parents situations at the time of birth and so on. This category of names can be exemplified in (19) bellow:

20.

a. Riddle: Àkaàzùga
Answer: Ìwèbiye hùrì-shììhènù
Blessing pass-NEG time
Semantic: A blessing does not delay
Pragmatic: A blessing is never overdue i.e. God releases blessings at the right or appointed time. A child is christened thus if it comes late or after a number of years of waiting.

b. Riddle: Nékézëzé
Answer: Àbánàkíìnè bọ̀tò Àgwatana náa
nàkàìnwé bọ̀ 2SG grind POSS person God
PROG grind POSS 2SG
Semantic: If you grind for someone, God will grind for you too.
Pragmatic: What you make happen for someone, God will make happen for you (be it good or evil).

c. Riddle: Kúrúkàm
Answer: Âyé-she ọgúgbàdàgà
3PL eat-NEG inheritance vein
Semantic: Inheritances are not given to those who don’t deserve them.
Pragmatic: There are defined rules or methods for doing things.

d. Riddle: Gúda
Answer: Bò twànàbọtò nùùhwana 3SG meet.PST PREP person PREP road
Semantic: S/he met with someone on the road
Pragmatic: This name is given to a child born after some one’s death, especially, a member of the family; the new born is assumed to be a replacement of the deceased.

e. Riddle: àwànàka Dùwàlé
Answer: Bọtò nwànà bì 3SG AUX do POSS
Semantic: Any one that grows does his/her own things.
Pragmatic: Any generation has its unique characteristics. This happens when elderly people compare their generation with the new age or when new agers do things that are consider abominable by elders.

f. Riddle: Tègèri
Answer: Njweè bù ènìyé-she èlè una N.PRE-found AGR.PREP town
eat-NEG benefit town
Semantic: the founder of a town does not usually enjoy the full benefits thereof.
Pragmatic: What one begins, s/he may not live to enjoy the full benefit to it. This a lesson for posterity.

g. Riddle: Àdagbádanya
Answer: Ògùbòòkoèrì-shìlò ọ’wọ̀wọ̀ ùhantò axeone can-NEG fell wood boat
Semantic: One axe cannot fell a log for making a boat.

Pragmatic: A man should not be despised because of his looks, size etc.

h. Riddle: Kütẹpẹ
Answer: iyì i bìyẹgómẹ ubetọta, ò bútògbe bi zhẹ bǎimàiyèlẹ thing AGR good hard find to find if 2SG find 2SG AUX 2SG hold hand

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

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

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

Nèkèzèzé is a caution to people, a lesson or experience cautioning people not to do wrong things because God rewards people according to their deeds, if one does good to others, God will reward them accordingly. Kùrùkùm, this is also a warning to people who are anxious to get things in a wrong way. Thus, the rule of inheritance is used to remind such people that you can only get an inheritance only and only if you are an heir in the family, i.e., there are laid down rules of doing things for acquiring riches or wealth. Gùda, this means taking turns, that is, as someone dies in the family, another person is believed to be sent by divinity to replace the deceased. It is used to console people who are bereaved that God will always fill a vacuum by sending a replacement.

ÀwànàkaDùwâlélé, this is a noun phrase composed of a processor noun Dùwâlélé and a possessed noun, Àwànàka, i.e. Dùwâlélé’s meal. It is a saying of wisdom implying that every generation is characterized by its own life style, that is, every generation is characterized by new innovations. Tègèrì, this serves as advice to people who lay a foundation to start a certain project, that though they may not enjoy the ultimate benefit accruing from it, still others or generation after will certainly enjoy it, or a child born after the death of a certain achiever in the society may be named thus to serve as an index or reference point.

Àdagbádanya is a wise saying to caution people not to despise others because of size, looks, etc. Someone may be small in size but very strong and vis-vas. Someone may look lonely but may have great people somewhere. Thus, it is a caution to people to have mutual respect for each other.

Kütẹpẹ refers to the value people place on what they labour to get or the position they labour to attain. When a couple waits for a long time to have a child, especially a male child, Kütẹpẹ, most appropriately expresses the yearning of such a couple and when eventually the desired child comes, they protect the child and do everything possible to care it.

Conclusion
The study examines the phenomenon of Basà personal naming system from the structural semantic and pragmatic perspectives. They are formed by specific morphological and syntactic rules/processes which may trigger semantic, pragmatic and phonological information. It reveals that naming in Basà mirrors the entire structure of categories of lexemes, phrases, clauses and sentences, which signals significant grammatical processes such as derivation, inflection, compounding etc. Furthermore, sentences (statement, commands, wh-questions, requests, etc.) undergo certain
processes namely, elision, aphaerisis, substitution, coalescence, assimilation etc. to derive personal names. There are other forms of structures such as riddles, idioms, and idiophones used in Basà personal names.

Naming system in Basà does not only reflect the socio-cultural values, philosophy and worldview, rather, it also reveals a lot of grammatical information. The knowledge of these structures gives information into the knowledge of Basà grammar. The study reveals that the syntax of Basà names, being the expression of people’s traditional cultures and language, are continually transmitted from generation to another to continually preserve and sustain the ethnic heritage.

References


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**Abbreviations**

1SG- first person singular  
2SG- second person singular  
3SG- third person singular  
Adj- adjective  
AGR-agreement  
AUX- auxiliary  
IMP- imperative  
N-noun  
NEG- negation  
N-PRE-noun prefix  
N-SURF- noun suffix  
POSS- possession  
PREP- preposition  
PRES PART- present participle  
PROG- progressive  
PST- past  
V- verb