The Sociolinguistic of Akan Personal Names
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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses personal names among the Akan of Ghana and considers naming as an important aspect of the Akan society. The paper looks at Akan names within the purview of linguistics anthropology. It considers names as not being arbitrary labels but sociocultural tags that have sociocultural functions and meanings. The paper discusses the typology of Akan names. These include (1) day names, (2) family names, (3) circumstantial names, (4) theophorous names, (5) flora and fauna names, (6) weird and reincarnate names, (7) achievement names, stool names, religious, occupational, etc. (8) insinuating and proverbial names, (9) bodily structure and (10) kinship etc.

Keywords: personal names, social functions, and name connotation

1.1 THE AKAN PEOPLE

Akan is the language of the people called Akans. The Akans are the largest ethnic group in Ghana. According to the 2000, national population census, 49.1% of the Ghanaian population is Akans and about 44% of the population speak Akan as non-native speakers.

The Akans occupy the greater part of the southern sector of Ghana. Akan is spoken as a native language (L1-first language) in six of the ten regions in Ghana namely, Ashanti, Eastern, Western, Central, and Brong Ahafo Regions. They are sandwiched by the Ewes in Volta Region of Ghana (see Appendix 1 showing the map of Ghana and the Akan areas). The Akans are made up of various dialects that are mutually intelligible. These are Asante, Akuapem, Akwamu, Fante, Akyem, Agona, Assin, Denkyira, Twifo, Wassaw, Kwawu, Bron and Buem.[1] Some Bron speakers are found in Cote d' Ivoire. Akan is studied from primary school up to the university level. [2]

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[1] Dialects like the Assin, Denkyira, Twifo, Wassaw, not indicated in the map, speak the Asante forms, the Agona is closer to Fante while Buem is closer to Akuapem. The Buems are sandwiched by Ewes the Volta Region.

[2] Akan uses Arabic script and the phonemic method in its orthography. The Akan expressions in this paper are rendered in this orthography. Akan has two unfamiliar letters in the orthography and these are [ɛ,] and [ɔ]. The Akan language is currently written in three different dialects namely: Asante, Akuapem and Fante. There has been a successful attempt to have a unified Standard Akan orthography.

1.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper was collected from both primary and secondary data. I started collecting the names as far back as 1994. Some of them were collected from the Asante King and Queen's court in 1994 while I was collecting some data on arbitration and verbal taboos. As a native speaker of Akan, I was able to identify these names when people were called to narrate their versions of cases. Most of the names used in this paper are names of people from my hometown and people I have met from my school days up to now.

I also collected some of the names from school registers and pay rolls of teachers at the various district education offices. A greater part of the names were selected form our departmental class list of graduate and undergraduate students from 1994 up to date.

I also consulted books on personal names written by scholars of Africa. These include Obeng (2001), Asante (1995); Crane (1982) Chuks-orji (1972) Zawawi (1993: 6) Suzman (1994) among others.

1.3 INTRODUCTION

The study of personal names is referred to as **anthroponomy**. Anthroponomy is related to genealogy, sociology and anthropology. Anthroponomy falls under the umbrella of onomastics that deals with the study of proper names including their forms and use (see Algeo 1992: 727). In our cultural contexts we name in order to differentiate, to recognize and finally to know.

The topic of names is a multidisciplinary field that has occupied the attention of philosophers of language, anthropologists, linguists and ordinary people. Personal names can best be analysed by a combination of both philosophical and anthropological notions. The Akans attach much importance to names and naming practices. The knowledge about Akan names gives insight into Akan culture, philosophy, thought, environment, religion, language and culture. The symbolic nature of Akan names and their interpretation depicts Akan religious beliefs, and their interaction with foreign cultures (see section 1.4 on issues about linguistic anthropology).

In logical and philosophical sense, a name refers to a different element of human experience i.e. to an individual or a collective entity, which it designates or denotes. Names are therefore purely referential (see Rey 1995: 26). Some philosophers and linguists have attempted to characterise names logically in the absence of social contexts. Names are only considered as arbitrary labels that refer to certain signified entries, therefore the signifier and the signified may not share certain intrinsic qualities.

This notion is true when we consider situations where people who bear the same name behave differently. Proper names refer very specifically (but without

describing) to the person who has that name. The characterisation of names is constant with Saussure's characterisation of linguistic signs as arbitrarily connected to their referent. If this assertion were true then names would have no functional correlation with culture (see Rymes 1996). However, this is not wholly true and is the converse that is the focus of this paper. We now tend to cultural significance of Akan names.

The paper assets that Akan names are not arbitrary but they are based on socio-cultural and ethno-pragmatic contexts. The current paper is a contribution to linguistic anthropology and to the study of Akan and African anthroponomy and the general theory of onomasiology by scholars like Obeng (2001), Asante (1995), Crane (1982), Chuks-orji (1972), Suzman (1994), among others. The paper argues that most African societies have similar naming practices that correspond to that of Akan. For example, Madubuike (1976) has what he calls "positional names" which correspond to Akan numeral names discussed under (section 2.3c).

According to the literature on anthroponomy, African and Ghanaian names are quite different from the western societies where people take their fathers' last names. While western names are predictable, African names are generally not predictable, for until the child is born and under what circumstances it is born, the name cannot be determined with accuracy.

In every culture, names have cultural and social contexts that identify the bearer. The Akans therefore have the maxim that *nsɛmmɔne nti na yɛkyeɛ din* 'it is because of criminal acts that names were shared'. This is to say that every person in this world has a name that solely identifies and marks him/her from all other peoples in the world. Algeo (1992: 728) aptly points out that "People are almost invariably named, indeed, a human being without a name would be socially and psychologically less than a fully man." In Saussure's notion, the name is the sign and the denotatum is the signified. Simply put, the name is a label that refers to a person.

Sign -------------------- signified

[-animate]   [+ human,]

Among the Akan, by default people who bear the same family name are supposed to be related genetically and so behave alike. This would thus dispute the arbitrariness of names. There is an Akan maxim *ne din ne ne honam sɛ* 'his/her name befits his/her body'. This depicts that there is an inherent element in the name that corresponds with the bearer's mental and social behaviour. According to Zawawi (1993: 6) "a name constructs a person because the name one bears may create an attitude in those who hear it before they meet the name bearer."

Frege (1949) and other scholars also consider names to have attributes and therefore consider names to be attached to referents. This is exactly what pertains in the Akan culture where the social and cultural context analyses of

personal names strongly reveal the power of names to emphasise social relationships. Personal names are iconic representations of composite social variables that indexicalise and relate to the name and the person. They include sex, hierarchy in birth, circumstances surrounding the birth, the person's structure, power, status, etc (see section 2.3 - 2.5).

The events involved in the naming ceremony and the choice of names given to children have traceable links to the referent. Lyons (1977: 222) therefore claims that proper names are both "synchronically and diachronically motivated". Rymes (1996: 231) confirms this in saying that "the name an individual is given has one synchronic meaning in the baptismal ceremony but as the individual uses that name, it acquires new and varied meanings diachronically. We will see that with time people may add names to their original names and drop some of the original, this is a system of elimination by substitution. In Akan, people with circumstantial names normally change them when they grow up, however, some maintain theirs to make the names unique.

The circumstances and social contexts during the birth of a child may prompt the parents to give a name X but not Y. The circumstantial context will be first and foremost gender, then the social and economic situation of the parents and the time of birth and their social links with other people, among other factors. These are all aspects of the synchronymy. The individual then carries this name and since names have social meanings, people expect the bearer to live by it or make positive amends to that name. The varied meanings will represent the diachronic aspects of the name. In this respect, it is gainsaying that the meaning of one's proper name evolves through a life history imbued with a lot of transformations and may be intimately linked with the "identity concerns" of an individual or society (Goodenough 1965: 265, Rymes 1996: 238).

In effect, what happens is that people expect the inherent power of words in names to reflect the lives of people either positively or negatively. Therefore the individual's name is of concern to the society as a whole. For example, the Akans expect a child named after a dignitary or a chief to behave himself properly so that nobody makes derogatory remarks about the name in attempt to denigrate it. It is for these same reasons that children named after grandparents, parents and chiefs are addressed accordingly, such as *Nana Opoku, Nana Agyeman*, *Papa Agyekum*, *Maame Boakyewaa* and so on. Such children are also advised to behave well so as to avoid tarnishing their names. The names are meant to shape the children's upbringing, behaviour and socialisation (see section 4.5).

Names in Akan frequently describe the characteristics of the named individual. This is why people are able to acquire new names, appellations and by-names based on their personal achievements. We will consider these when we look at honorifics and appellations as part of the Akan name system in section 2.6. Names can thus be clearly understood when placed in socio-cultural context. Analysis of proper names should therefore concentrate more on the functional theory bearing the society and culture in mind, for names are not arbitrary as perceived. Names are important indicators of people's behaviour

and ways of life. Since Akan names can be best understood and interpreted under context, people who know the language and culture of the people are able to interpret such names accordingly.

Obeng (2001: 6) argues that there is indirection and ambiguity in African naming traditions and name givers could use indirection as a defensive mechanism. This assertion is not generally true. The use of indirection applies with proverbial and death prevention names (Obeng 1998). All other categories of names have socio-cultural and ethno-pragmatic referents and interpretation.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is an aspect of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. It is based on the theory that there is a strong interface between a people's language and their cultural practices. It mirrors on (a) how language is used as cultural resources and practices, and (b) how language is viewed as a powerful tool used to view and understand the worldview and philosophy of a particular society. One can therefore use language as a microscopic lens to view and understand the social practices and day-to-day activities of a society. As a microscope, the language travels beyond what is expressed and settles on what is practised in the real sociocultural world. Foley (1997: 3) aptly states the role of linguistic anthropology and its instrumental function as follows:

> Anthropological linguistics is that sub-field of linguistics which is concerned with the place of language in its wider social and cultural context, its role in forging and sustaining cultural practices and social structures. It views language through the prism of the core anthropological concept, culture, and as such seeks to uncover the meaning behind the use, misuse or non-use of language, its different forms, registers and styles. It is an interpretive discipline peeling away at language to find cultural understandings.

According to (Duranti 1997: 2) "Linguistic anthropology is the study of language as a cultural resource and speaking as a cultural practice." The language of the people is inextricably interwoven with their culture and thought. In linguistic anthropology, language is considered as a social tool. Language has the power to evoke realities beyond the literal linguistic content of what is been talked about. It is a set of symbolic resources that enter the constitution of social fabric and the individual representation of actual or possible worlds (see Duranti 1997: 1-3). It is a cultural practice and verbal activities that link and fit verbal activities to the real world. This is also true of Akan personal names.

A society's world is fitted to words and words may also be fitted to the world. There is a strong relationship between the **world,** which is **reality,** and the **word**, which is **language**. Linguistic signs are therefore representations of the word and to a greater extent the world (see Duranti 1997: 337). In our

current study the Akan names are the linguistic signs, and the sociocultural interpretations of the names represent the real world. Since the world and cultural practices are dynamic, the naming system of the Akan people is also affected by this dynamism. We will consider this in section 4 of this paper.

According to Mey (1993:132), "through the use of words I make the word fit my language and change the world in accordance with my directions as given through the use of language." The language of the people is therefore the exit valve through which their beliefs and thoughts cognition and experiences are articulated. The limit of one's language is therefore the limit of his world, and man is at the mercy of his language (see Farb 1993: 168).

The language is a manifestation and description of the complexity and diversity of the peoples' way of life and practices. The language of the people is manifested in their naming systems and practices (the centre of this paper), marriage, family, kinship, political, economic, occupational, health systems, religious beliefs and practices, law, funeral activities, etc. The language of the people also depicts the social stratification of the society.[3]

The data on this paper looks both at the emic and etic point of view on how the Akan naming systems depict the Akan philosophy and culture. The *emic* perspective is the point of view of a cultural practice of the members of the group based on their conceptualisation, meanings and interpretations of their belief systems and the things around them. The *etic* is the point of view of the observer and ethnographer. The approach here is to describe the Akan naming systems in *emic* terms. In using this, it is apparent therefore that the paper is a contribution to language and culture and how people use their language to perform and participate in particular cultural activities such as naming. Language is a resource for reproducing social reality.

Linguistic anthropology uses general theoretical frames in specific sociocultural contexts. It focuses on how language allows for and creates differentiations between groups, individuals and identities (see Duranti 1997: 7). Naming can be considered as a universal cultural practice. Every society in the world give names as tags to its people, but how the names are given, the practices and rituals involved and the interpretations attached to the names differ from society to society and from one culture to another.

The Akan naming system is very unique from any of the western societies, but it may share some similarities with the naming systems of the Ewes Ghana and other African ethnic groups. This phenomenon tallies with Giddens's (1984) concept of *regionalisation* that is defined as the "zoning of time and-space in relation to routinized social practices. Within the Akan society in particular, *regionalisation* is also applicable in space where certain names are very particular to certain dialects of Akan and certain geographical areas (see section

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[3] In linguistic anthropology one is confronted with issues about language and power, language and status, language and gender, language policy, language contact, language and persuasion, etc.

2.2). In terms of time, naming system has been affected with the spate of time (see section 4 of this paper). [4]

In discussing the theoretical concerns of contemporary linguistic anthropology, Duranti (1997: 14-21) discussed three interconnected analytical notions that help to understand the function of language in culture. These are (i) *performance*, (ii) *indexicality* and (iii) *participation*. Of these three the most important one to the discussion of Akan naming system is *indexicality*.

Indexes are signs that have some kind of existential relation with what they refer to either spatial, temporal, social or personal (see Silverstein 1976: 27). In indexicality, language is used as a tool through which our socio-cultural world is constantly described, evaluated and reproduced. If we say that words are indexically related to some objects and reality of the world it implies that words carry with them a power that transcends beyond mere identification and tagging of people, objects and properties (see Duranti 1997: 19). Akan naming system is an aspect of cultural indexicality. In this theory, linguistic expressions or tags such as Akan personal names are connected to some aspects of the sociocultural context of the Akan. Indexicality is applicable in Akan names since they have sociocultural interpretation. Some Akan names refer to *personal, temporal, spatial* and *social deixis*.

We will see in this paper that Akan names have *personal deixis* because there is always a person whom a child is named after. The Akan refer to such a person as grandfather or mother, which may either be biological or distant. One can always point to an elderly person in the society whether dead or alive whose name a younger child bears. With regard to *temporal deixis*, Akan names are very unique, because each person has an automatic birthday first name that points to the day of the week that s/he was born. For example, my fist name *Kofi* indexicalises the day Friday on which I was born (see section 2.1 and 2.3b). There are also *spatial names* referring to localities within the Akan society where people were born. This is what I have referred to as anthroponyms in section 2.3a.

Social deixis refers to the social centre (SC) that is the social status, power and rank, of the addressee or referent. Some names in Akan clearly depict that the bearer comes from the royal family or has some affiliation with the royal family. These may include names like *Prempe* and *Osei Tutu* that are specifically from the Asante palace. The social *deixis* may also cover all deference vocabularies such as honorific and address forms that show the status, rank and power of the bearer of the name. Indexical modes like personal names therefore link language and speech to the wider system of sociocultural life of the people.

In linguist anthropology, *performance* refers to a domain of human action where special attention is paid to ways in which communicative events are

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[4] Linguistic anthropology also employs the works of contemporary social theorists who pay greater attention to the constitution of society and culture in everyday. Such scholars include Bourdieu (1977, 1990) *practice theory*, and Giddens (1979, 1984) *structuration theory*.

carried out.[5] Silverstein (1976: 44) argues therefore "Speech acts are the elementary indexical formulae for specifying the pragmatic meaning or *function* of speech signs. They operate within the framework of *purposive function* of socially constituted behaviour." Utterances therefore perform certain sociocultural functional actions. In naming, the official performs the act of naming by saying, "I now give you the name XYZ", and that becomes the official name of the newly born baby.

Participation sees communicative events as belonging to a bigger class of social activities that go beyond the linguistic expressions and utterances to the sociocultural domains. Naming conforms to both performance and participation for the labels may dictate how the person behaves and how s/he participates in social activities. We now turn to the typology of Akan personal names.

2. TYPOLOGY OF AKAN NAMES

This section deals with the typology of Akan personal names. It is an empirical and sociocultural descriptive study of names that exist in the community. It considers both purely traditional and contemporary names. We will give the translations and the ethnography background of the names.

2.1 BIRTHDAY NAMES

This is the first automatic name every Akan child gets based on the day s/he was born even before s/he is officially named. Except in few cases, this first name is not tampered with.[6] The Akans call it *kradin* (lit.) 'souls name' and they believe that this is a name that a person's soul offers him/her. It is the soul of the person that decides when to allow the unborn child to enter this world. It is believed that this particular day may affect his/her behaviour, fate and future. The names of the days were derived from names of deities and their particular days of worshipping. Akan names of the days of the week show a regular pattern: name of a deity + *-(a)da* 'day' e.g. *Kwasi-ada, Dwo-ada, Memene-da...* We find the same patterns in English (*Mon-day, Tues-day, Wednes-day...),* in Italian (*Lune-*

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[5] This is what Jakobson (1960) refers to as the "poetic function" of speech (see Duranti 1997:15). Performance includes the speech act theory and how it operates in sociocultural contexts as proposed by Austin.

[6] The birth day name may only be altered for another in a situation where the person the child is being named after bears a different birthday and the parents think that if they maintain the automatic day name of the child it may appear that the child is named after a different person For example, I wanted to name my son after my father called Kwasi Agyekum (Sunday born), however, he was born on Friday. Naming him Kofi Agyekum would not be proper here, in the sense that it will mean that I have named him after myself. I therefore changed my son's birthday name from Friday to Sunday and called him Kwasi Agyekum.

dì, Marte-dì, Mercole-dì) and in many other Indo-European languages: French (*Lun-di, Mar-di, Mercre-di*), German *(Mon-tag, Diens-tag, Donners-tag*), Norway (*Man-dag, Tirs –day, Ons-dag*), and so on. This pattern (name of a deity + word for 'day') is a feature shared by almost all the languages belonging to the Indo-European family, and it is believed to have been a trait of the Proto-Indo-European language as well. [7]

There is a system of seven-day names that correspond to the days of the week. There are two forms; one for females and another for males. I present here a table of these in both the Twi and Fante forms. Twi and Fante are two major dialects of Akan. In some of the names in the table below, the Twi forms overlap with the Fante. In others there are two different forms. There are cases where Fante alone has two different forms.

Table 1. Akan Days and Birthday Names male and Female.

DAY NAME		MALE NAMES		FEMALE NAMES	
English	AKAN	**Twi**	**Fante**	**Twi**	**Fante**
Sunday	Kwasiada	Kwasi	Kwesi	Akosua	Akosua/Esi
Monday	ɛdwoada	Kwadwo	Kojo/Jojo	Adwoa	Adwoa
Tuesday	ɛbenada	Kwabena	Kobina/Ebo/ Kwamena	Abenaa	Abenaa/Araba
Wednesday	Wukuada	Kwaku	Kweku/Kuuku	Akua	Ekua/Kuukua
Thursday	Yawoada	Yao	Ekow	Yaa	Aba
Friday	Efiada	Kofi	Kofi/ Fiifi/Fi	Afua	Efua/Efe
Saturday	Memeneda	Kwame	Kwame/Kwamina/Ato	Ama	Ama

Among the Twi speaking people, each of the birthday names has its own appellation that hints on the behaviour of the people born on such days. The table below depicts that (cf. Opoku 1973: 26-27, Yeboa-Dankwa 1990: 155, Obeng 1997: 41). The English glosses of the appellations are given.

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[7] The bigger question is, is it just a sheer coincidence that Akan names of the days of the week show a pattern which is *exactly the same pattern* observed within the Indo-European family? Or is it a case that the Akan names of the days of the week must have been coined *after* the arrival (and settlement) of the British colonials in Ghana, in order to imitate a pattern which is actually typical of the Western (Indo-European) culture? The answer to this question is that it is sheer coincidence because the Akans have these day names and birthday names long before the advent of the early Europeans. For when the Portuguese arrived in Elmina they met the chief Nana Kwamena Ansa. The name Kwamena is a Saturday born.

Table 2. Akan Birthday Names and their Appellations.

Male		Female		Response
Day Name	**Appellation**	**Day Name**	**Appellation**	**Both Male and Female**
Kwasi	Bodua/ Obueakwan 'agility'	Akosua	Dampo 'agility'	Awusi 'agility'
Kwadwo	Okoto/Asera 'peace'	Adwoa	Badwo/Akoto 'peace'	Adwo 'peace'
Kwabena	Ogyam/Ebo 'friendliness'	Abenaa	Kosia, Nimo 'friendliness'	Abra 'friendliness'
Kwaku	Atobi/Daaku/Bonsam 'evil'	Akua	Obirisuo/Obisi/ɔdaakuo 'evil'	Aku 'evil'
Yaw	Preko/ɔpereba 'brave'	Yaa	Busuo/Seandze 'brave'	Awo 'bravery
Kofi	Kyini/Otuo/Babɔne/Ntiful 'wanderer/traveller/'	Afua	Baafi/Nkɔso 'wanderer/ traveller/'	Afi 'wanderer/ traveller'
Kwame	Atoapoma, ɔteanankannuro 'combat ready', snakebite herbalist.	Amma	Nyamewa/Adoma 'creation/grace'	Amen 'creation'

The appellations for both male and female and their responses have the same interpretation. People born on particular days are supposed to exhibit the characteristics or attributes and philosophy, associated with the days. For example, a Monday-born is supposed to be peaceful and calm, while a Friday born is a wanderer and adventurer, and a Saturday born is creative (see Obeng 2001: 16). The last column represents response addressive associated with the day names of the Akan. Both female and male have the same forms because they are all derived from the same source, i. e. the deity of the particular day. The elderly people still use these responses when one greets them and they know the person's birthday name. This phenomenon confirms our hypothesis that names are not arbitrary labels among the Akan of Ghana but have indexes to sociocultural contexts.

2.2 FAMILY NAMES

Family names are clan names given to children by their fathers. The cultural norms demand that the father discusses the name together with his parents. It is, however, possible for the husband also to discuss this with his wife. The family names are based on the twelve patrilineal clans of the Akan. These are *Bosommuru, Bosompra, Bosomtwe, Bosomnketia, Bosompo, Bosomdwerɛbe, Bosomkrɛte, Bosomafi, Bosomayesu, Bosomakɔm, Bosomakonsi, Bosomafram, and Bosomsika.* These names were derived from certain deities the ancestors of Akan worshipped in the olden days. The first morpheme *bosom* in all the names means 'a deity'. Each of these clans has their peculiar names, although some names may overlap. People whose fathers are from the same patrilineal clans are

therefore suspected to bear the same family names. Some of the names are *Apau, Yeboa, Agyekum, Yankah, Ofori, and Agyeiwaa.*

Within the family names, it is possible to have a male name with a corresponding female name just by attaching a feminine suffix-*waa*, - *maa,* or *bea/ba* (female). However, certain names have the same morphological form for both male and female. Examples are, *Agyeman,* -→*Adwoa Agyeman,* or *Kofi Agyeman,* and *Kofi or Ama Konadu. Kwadwo* or *Adwoa Pinaman,* and *Adu.*

Table 3. Akan Male Names and their Female Counterparts.

Male	Female		
	Asante	**Akuapem**	**Fante**
Ofori	Oforiwaa	Oforiwaa	----------------
Ado	Adowaa/Adoma	Adobea	Adoma
Agyekum	Agyekumwaa	--------------	----------------
Frempɔn	Frempɔmaa	Frempɔmaa	Frempɔmaa
Akyampɔn	Akyampɔnmaa	-------------------	----------------
Agyei	Agyeiwaa	Agyeibea	----------------
Opoku	Opokuwaa	Opokuwaa	----------------
Asare	Asare	Asabea	Esarewa
Kumi	Kumwaa/Kumi	Kummea	----------------
Fosu	Fosuwaa	Fosuwaa	----------------
Ɔkyere	Kyerewaa	Kyerebea	Kyerewaa

The three columns representing female names depict that some of the male names have three realisations in the three main dialects of Akan: - Asante, Akuapem and Fante. A hollow in the pattern means that the particular dialect does not have such a female name.

Let us consider an excerpt from a naming ceremony of my daughter that was held on the 1st of June 1985 in Kumasi. The child is named after my mother a female born on Friday. The child's full name is Afua Ataa Boakyewaa Agyekum. This is what the elderly person who was performing the name ritual said.

Abɔfra woaba tena ase, mmɛyɛ ɔyɛkyerɛ nkɔ. Wo maamenom ne wo papanom na ahyia ha nnɛ yi. Yɛrema wo din nnɛ. Edin a yɛde rema wo ne Afua Ataa Boakyewaa Agyekum. Yɛbɛfrɛ wo Afua ɛfiri sɛ yɛwoo wo Efiada. Saa da yi na wo kraa pene so sɛ bra asaase yi so. Yɛde wo reto wo nana Afua Ataa. Wo nana Ataa no deɛ yɛwoo no nta nti na yɛfrɛ no saa. Ne din pa ara ne Boakyewaa, ne mmarima din de Boakye. Woaba a, hunu sɛ wo nana yɛ Ataa, Ataa biara nso yɛ bosom a ɔkyiri fi. Yei nti bɛbu subanpa, mmɛyɛ biribi a ɛbɛma nkurɔfoɔ anya kwan adidi wo atɛm

ama ebi aka wo nana. Bio yɛde wo papa din Agyekum reka wo din ho sɛdeɛ wobɛfa wo papa su na woatiatia n'anammɔn mu ayere wo ho asua adeɛ te sɛ wo papa. Yɛka sɛ **nsuo** a, ka sɛ **nsuo**, yɛka sɛ **nsa** a, ka sɛ **nsa**.

'Baby, you are welcome to this world. Have a longer stay, just do not come and exhibit yourself and return. Your mothers and fathers have assembled here today to give you a name. The name we are giving to you is **Afua Ataa Boakyewaa Agyekum**. You are named Afua because that is the day your soul decided to enter into this world. We are naming you after your grandmother Afua Ataa. Your grandparent is Ataa because she was born a twin. Her real name is Boakyewaa the feminine form of Boakye. Remember that your grandmother is a twin and therefore a deity and sacred figure that must be kept hallowed. In view of this, come and put up a good moral behaviour. Again we are attaching your father's name Agyekum to your name. Follow the footsteps of your father and come and study hard. When we say water, let it be water, when we say drink let it be drink.'

In this except, we see that the child's name indexicalises, the day of birth that is Friday, the name Ataa indexicalises the grandmother who was a twin, the name Boakyewaa first and foremost indicates the female gender because of its suffix -*waa*. The final family name Agyekum indexicalises the father. In future, if the girl mentions her name anywhere and the people she meets know me, she would be questioned if she is related to me. All these go to prove that, the name is not just a tag but strongly related to temporal, personal and social indexes.

2.2.1 Family Names as Markers of Personal or Group Identity

One of the social contexts of names among the Akan is that they are used as social tags to indicate personal and group identity. This is so with family names derived from the patrilineal clans of the fathers that are given to children. Each of the twelve patrilineal clans has its peculiar family names. It is thus possible to use one's name to trace his/her patrilineal clan. Children who trace their genealogy to one patrilineal father may therefore share similar family names (see Opoku 1973: 21-34). There are examples of some patrilineal clans and their associated names in Table 4.

Among the Akans, names are so synonymously equated with their bearers that in some cases the two may alternate. There are expressions like *wasɛe ne din* 's/he has soiled his name', *yɛama ne din so*, 'his name has been elevated'. The latter is the situation where the person has been promoted and his/her name stands metonymically for him/her.

Table 4. Patrilineal Clans and Associated Names.

	Patrilineal Family	Examples of Family Names
1	*Bosomafram*	Afram, Peasa, Dame, Amponsa, Awua, Afrane, Anokye
2	*Bosom-Akɔm*	Asuman, Adu, Akɔmaa, Oben, Anim, Ado, Ankomahene
3	*Bosom-Dwerɛbe*	Akuamoa, Sɛkyere, Otieku, Sakyi, Amponsa, Aboagye
4	*Bosomnketia/Bosompo*	Ayim, Dakwa, Boadu, Antwi, Poakwa, Bonsu, Osei, Otutu, Apea, Kusi
5	*Bosompra*	Agyeman, Amoako, Asare, Boaten, Kwakye, Ofori, Owusu, Oti
6	*Bosomtwe*	Ofosu, Boafo, Gyadu, Kwatia, Boate, Atakora Osafo

Names can also carry some aspects of telepathy among the Akan such that in most cases a mention of the name of a person marks the appearance of that individual. The Akans would therefore say that *akoa yi de ne din nam,* 'this man walks with his name', or *wo din bɛn wo,* 'your name is closer to you'. It is by this concept of equation between name and personality that make people use names in certain religious divination and sorcery. In water gazing in certain cultures in Africa, it is possible to mention the name of a person and to see his/her image in the water. It is for this same reason that people can curse others during their absence and cast spells on them.

In fact, family names may tell us which of the Akan dialects a person belongs to (see section 1.1). Some names are very peculiar to certain particular dialectal groups of the Akans. The list below expatiates that.

> **Akuapem:** -- Adobea, Aye, Akufo, ɔfɛe
> **Bono:** -- Ansu, Kyereme, Efa, Henne, Kodom,
> **Kwawu:** -- Kissi, Mireku, Darfour, Ansong, Sampong, Twerefoɔ
> **Asante:** -- Prɛmpɛ, Konadu, Akyaa
> **Denkyira:** -- Boa Amponsem, Korang, Ntim Gyakari
> **Fante:** -- Yankah, Osam, Aidoo
> **Akyem:** -- Dokua, Kena, Amoatia,

Within a particular group of Akans, it is also possible to indicate one's place of domicile by his name. For example, most Asantes called *Basoa* hail from Kumawu. The *Atafua's* are from Akyem Oda. Notwithstanding, there are certain floating names that cut across the whole terrace of the Akan community and such names include, *Agyemang, Yɛboa, Opoku, Adu*, *ɔsɛe*, etc.

Names fulfil many other functions that are not explicitly manifested but which are indexes of cultural situations that are remote from the situation at hand. One's individual name is felt in the context of his personality as a member of a group. Levi-Strauss (1966: 176) therefore posits that "naming claims unity at the heart of diversity". This is to say that names distinguish one member of the community from all others. It is also possible to assemble a group of people and catalogue them as belonging to one bigger group. The ongoing, therefore depicts that names serve to describe individual traits, and they index familiarity, kinship and group membership. They pick out entire world of cultural

significance. By this mechanism, naming surely indexes an entire world of socio-cultural association (see section 1.4 on linguistic anthropology).

2.3 CIRCUMSTANTIAL NAMES

There are certain names based on the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child. These may relate to the places of birth, period or time, festivals or sacred days, manner of birth, etc. According to Blum (1997: 364) these names are viewed as governing the child's fate in some ways, they should harmonise with the time and often place of the child's birth...'. I have grouped these names into (*a) anthro-toponyms, (b) temporonyms, (c) manner of birth,* and *(d) death prevention and survival names.*

(a) Anthro-Toponyms: These are personal names that pertain to the place of birth of the child. Examples are Kwaku <u>Bekwae,</u> Afua <u>Kumase</u>, Kwabena <u>Kokofu</u>, Abena <u>Dwansa</u>, Ama <u>Agogo</u>, and Kwaku <u>Mampɔn</u>. The names Bekwae, Kumase, Kokofu, Dwansa, Agogo, and Mampɔn are traditional towns in the Asante Region of Ghana. Kumase is the capital of the Asante Region, while Mampɔn, Bekwae and Agogo are district capitals.

The place may even refer to the farm or inside the car when the woman was travelling to another place. It is also possible to use the names of rivers, lakes and other geographical areas as names for children. Such names include *Kwasi Bosumtwe* (name of the only natural lake in Ghana, located in the Ashanti region, *Densu,* (a river in the Eastern Region), *Afram, Pra*, (rivers in the Ashanti Region) *Tano* (a river in the Brong Ahafo Region). Obeng (2001: 32) refers to this as hydronymic-anthroponyms.

(b) Temporonym: I am using the term temporonym for names that relate to the period of birth. Under these, various categories can be identified. The period may relate to sacred days in the Akan calendar like Fofie (sacred Friday), Adae (sacred Sunday), Dapaa (sacred Tuesday, Saturday). This category of names includes Afua Fofie, Kofi Fofie, Kwaku Adae, Kwasi Adae, Ama Dapaa, and Kwabena Dapaa. Since these sacred days, called nnapɔnna or nnabɔne occur on the same particular days, they carry with them their automatic day names. These sacred days occur once every forty days on the Akan traditional calendar. They are days set aside for the worship of the deities, and the cleansing of the misdeeds in families and in villages and towns. People do not go to farm on these days they rather do general cleaning and sanitary activities.

The period of birth may also relate to important festivals of the Akan such as *Odwira, Akwambɔ, Ohum, Aboakyere, and Bakatue.* Akans have names like *Kwadwo Munufie, Akosua Apoɔ, Kwame Dwira,* etc. Christian festivals like

Buronya 'Christmas', *Yesu Amanehunu,* 'Easter' have also brought names like *Abenaa Buronya, Kwaku Buronya, Akosua Yesu,* etc.

Odwira is one of the major festivals of the Akans. The name is derived from the verb *dwira* 'to cleanse'. It is a cleansing festival that takes stock of the misdeeds of the past year and makes amend for a virtuous incoming year. During the festival, we pacify the gods and the supernatural beings and ask for forgiveness, good health and prosperity.

There is also an *Akwambɔ* festival celebrated among the Fantes of Ghana. The word *Akwambɔ* is made up of the morphemes *a-*(nominal prefix), *kwan,* 'path', and *bɔ,* 'to weed or clear'. The compound thus means weeding or clearing of a path. It is an environmental sanitary festival during which all paths that lead to farms, streams and shrines are cleared to make them safe.

Let us finally look at *Aboakyere* since the description of all the festivals is beyond the purview of this paper. The people of Winneba in the Central Region of Ghana celebrate the Aboakyere festival. The name is made up of the morphemes *aboa,* 'animal' and *kyere,* 'to catch'. It is a deer hunting festival where two groups go to hunt for a life deer. The group that catches first, runs home to show the deer to the chief and thus wins the game for the year. The chief steps on the deer three times (see Opoku 1970 for details on Ghanaian Festivals).

Another typology of periodic names relate to periodic social, economic or political atmosphere of the time, particularly those that relate to the status of the parents and/or the family. A child born during the period of an economic boom or prosperity among the people would be called *Afriyie,* (lit) 'has appeared well' (has come at the right time), *Abayie,* 'has come well', or *Sika* 'wealth'. A child born during good economic times will get the name *Antobrɛ,* 'did not come to experience hardships'. On the contrary, a child born during the time of mysteries, hardships, poverty and periods of death may have one of the following names: *Abɛbrɛsɛ,* 'hardships', *Adiyia,* 'has encountered sorrow', and *Antobam,* 'did not come to meet good days'. In fact, a child who was born at a time when the father is dead is called *Anto* made up of *a-n- to*. The verb *to* in this context means 'to meet'; *Anto* thus mean 'did not come to meet'.

(c) Manner of birth: This may relate to the sequence by which the mother has given birth. More importantly there are names that refer to the order in which the children come. Ordinal names include *Piesie,* 'first born', made up of *pie,* 'erupt from a place', and *sie* 'anthill'. Here, the pregnant woman's stomach is compared to an anthill and the first-born is conceptualised as the one who has erupted from the anthill thus making an exit. The children who come after the *piesie* have names that morphologically correspond with the Akan numerals, 2nd-*Manu,* 3rd- *Mɛnsa* and *Mansa (female),* 4th-*Anane/Annan,* 5th-*Num/Anum,* 6th-*Nsia,* 7th-*Nson/Esuon,* 8th-*Nwɔtwe/Awotwe,* 9th -*Nkroma/Akron,* 10th-*Badu/Beduwaa,* 11th-*Duku,* 12th-*Adunu,* 13th-*Adusa*. There are therefore names like *Kwaku Nsia, Ama Anane,* and *Kofi Anan*. The names above that have two

forms refer to Twi and Fante forms. The first slots are the Twi forms and the second are the Fante forms. It can be seen that Akan like other African societies has names that correspond to the position children occur in the sequence of birth.

Another aspect of the manner of birth is the situation when twins come into the scene. Children who are born twins and those who follow them get some cultural automatic names in addition to their family names. The twins are called *Ata* (male) and *Ataa* (female). The child that comes directly after the twins is called *Tawia*, then comes *Nyankomago*, *Atuakɔsɛn, Abobakorowa* and *Damusaa* in that order. The names that come after the twins are all positional names.

A child who is born through a pregnancy that lasted for more than ten months may get a name like '*akyiremu* 'has kept too long'. Dzameshie (1998: 5) records that among the Ewes such a child may get the name *Feyi,* 'a year has passed', *Fenu* 'year thing', and *Fenuku* 'year seed'. All these names have a component of year and means that instead of the nine months pregnancy, the mothers went beyond a year or more. (The Ewes are located in the Volta Region, is one of the major ethnic groups of Ghana).

(d) Death Prevention and Survival Names: The Akans, like other cultures in West Africa, believe that if a mother suffers constant child mortality, then the reason is that it is the child's mother in the underworld that does not want the child to stay in the living world. To combat such an unfortunate situation, the parents give the child a weird name. They believe that if the name is unattractive the other mother in the underworld will not like to accept the child over there and this would make the child stay. Such a name is called *bagyina* [8], *apɛntɛdin* among the Akan and may be derived from any object the parents can think of. They may be nasty names of migrant labourers, dangerous animals, nasty objects, filthy places and expressions of emotions (see Obeng 2001: 90-103, Obeng 1998, Opoku 1973: 26-30).

The basic reason is that the name must be unpleasant even in the ears of the living. Such names include, *Sumina* 'garbage, *Dɔnkɔ,* 'slave', *Kaya,* 'carrier of loads', and *Adwengo,* 'palm kernel oil'. Others are *Sereba,* 'silver', *Agyegyesɛm,* 'harassment/trouble making', *Saarabi,* 'just like that', *Abirekyie,* 'goat', *Sraha,* 'Islamic gift', *Asaaseasa,* 'the land is finished', etc. The name *Asaaseasa* is very interesting. The concept of lack of land is to imply that if this child now chooses to die, there would be no land for its burial and it would therefore be left to the prey of cannibals. There is another name *Dinkyene* made up of two morphemes *di* 'eat' and *nkyene* 'salt'. The act of eating salt implies being alive. The word is in the imperative mood to imply that the newborn child should survive and eat salt than to go back to the ancestral world.

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[8] *bagyina* is made up of *ba* 'child' and *gyinaa,* 'stop' which is metaphorically extended to mean 'be stable'. The concept of *bagyina* therefore refers to a system of birth where the child born should come to stay but not to return to the other world.

It is believed that if a woman suffers constant child mortality, then it is the same child who comes and goes back several times. The Akans also believe that if the name is funny, the child will be ashamed to go back to the underworld. Again, if the members of the underworld recognise the child with such a funny name, they will be so annoyed and refuse to call it to the spirit world.

2.4. Flora and Fauna and Physical Structure names

Certain personal names are derived from flora and fauna. It is their physical structures that are compared. The flora includes *Odum, Dwuma, Onyina, Bɔdɔm, Sã, Esie* 'anthill'. Faunym include names like *Kwaku Sono,* 'elephant', *Yamoa Pɔnkɔ,* 'horse', *Kofi Nantwi,* 'bull/cow', *Abenaa Koɔ* 'buffalo', and *Adwoa Kɔre* 'the eagle'. The physical structure and complexion of a person can also be the basis of names such as *Akua Kɔkɔɔ,* 'the red', *Owusu Kɔkɔ,* 'Owusu the Red', *Buroni,* 'the white person', *Tuntum,* 'the Black', *Opoku Tenten,* 'Opoku the Taller', *Opoku Ware,* 'Opoku the Taller', *Akua Tia* ' Akua the Short one', *Kofi Teawa* 'Kofi the Slim One', *Kwaku Dua* 'Kwaku the Tree', etc.

2.5 Theophoric Names

There are certain names that depict the Akans' belief in the supernatural beings and their power to give children. These names are normally given when parents have struggled for children for a number of years and all hopes are lost. A child whose parents give birth out of a broom would be called *Nyamekyɛ,* 'God's gift', *Nyameama,* 'God has given' and *Nso Nyame yɛ* 'it is not impossible for God to act.'

Children who have been sought from other deities apart from God are also named after the deities who have helped the parents in cases where there has been child mortality. These names are referred to as *abosomdin,* 'deity's name' or *abagyina,* 'child stability'. Some of such names are *Akua Abagyina, Osei Tutu, Kwadwo Mframa, Kwaku, Firi, Yaa Gare, and Afua Ntoa, Kofi Dwomo, Yaw Dumgya,* 'Yaw the Fire Extinguisher'. All the names attached to the day names above are names of Akan deities.

2.6 Honorifics and Title Names

Some other names are achieved outside people's given names. Such names may be achieved from occupations, wars, zeal, and stool names when a person is enthroned. Such names are normally appellations and titles. They include *ɔkogyeasuo,* 'the fighter who seizes a river', *ɔkoforoboɔ,* 'the fighter who

climbs rocks', *ɔdeneho,* 'the independent one'. Some of these names may also be religious. Traditional priests, Christians and Moslems acquire them when they are ordained into office. These include *ɔsɔfo,* 'pastor', *kɔmfoɔ,* 'traditional priest', and *Imam,* 'Islamic leader'.

Some titles were previously based on excellence in wars and such names are now established as personal names. They include *Bekoe,* 'came to fight', *ɔkofo* 'the warrior', *Katakyie,* 'the strong man', *ɔsafohene* 'the commander', *Ankoanna,* 'does not sleep without fighting', *Bediako,* 'came to engage in wars', *Agyeman,* 'saviour of the nation', etc.

There is an Akan maxim which states that *Bɛkoe din fata no a ɛfata no wɔ akono na ɛnyɛ gyedua ase.* 'If Bɛkoe's name befits him, it befits him at the war front not under the shady tree'. This maxim depicts the situated functionality of Akan names. The word *Bɛkoe* is made up of the motional prefix *bɛ-* which indicates a coming, the verb *ko,* 'fight', and the past tense suffix marker *–e.* The word means 'came to fight', and it implies that the bearer should be a fighter. We see that the name is not arbitrary and there is a correspondence between the name and the bearer.

2.7 INSINUATING, PROVERBIAL, INSULTING AND NICKNAMES

There are other names couched in the form of innuendoes to depict the situation on the ground during the pregnancy and childbirth. Some of such innuendoes and proverbial names are called *abebudin*. They depict the sour and bitter relationship that exists between the parents and other neighbours. These names thus portray that the enemies are ashamed because their expectations have misfired (see also Dzameshie 1998: 5). All these names are meant to portray some of the aspects of life and the conflicts that ensue in human relations. Such names are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Insinuating, Proverbial, Insulting and Nicknames.

	Akan Name	**English Gloss**
1	*Agyegyesɛm*	the troublemaker
2	*Ammamanyɛ*	they did not allow me to perform it
3	*Ammɛyɛhuu*	did not come to perform anything
4	*Asɛmyɛyaa*	issues are painful
5	*Atenka*	the experiencer
6	*Disaaka*	you deserve saying it
7	*Disaayɛ*	you deserve doing it
8	*Fasaayɛme*	treat me like that
9	*Kaedabi*	remember the past

10	*Kwandahɔ*	the road is there
11	*Mafamadi*	I have taken it for free
12	*Maniyɛwo*	the kinsman is harming you
13	*Matemasie*	I have heard and concealed the fact
14	*Mmaɛnyɛwodɛ*	do not rejoice over it
15	*Mpɛasɛm*	does not like any trouble
16	*Nkaeguo*	saying it for nothing
17	*Nkasɛmbi*	do not say anything
18	*Nnipa nka*	human beings do not love each other
19	*Ntoaduro*	where slander has reached
20	*Nyaasɛmhwɛ*	be in trouble and see
21	*Obideɛaba*	someone's has come
22	*ɔdɔyɛfɛ*	love is beautiful
23	*Sunkwa*	cry for life
24	*Suronipa*	be afraid of human beings
25	*Susuka*	say it moderately
26	*Tenabaabi*	just stay at a place
27	*Yɛkekanokwa*	they are saying it in vain
28	*Yɛkwa*	harming in vain

There are also rivalry and insinuating names that indicate the rift between the speaker and the addressee. These names are not the real names of the children but used as verbal duelling terms by their parents and normally occur among rivals. These names are made so impersonal and indirect that speakers can easily run away from commitment and face threatening acts. Such names include; *Agya Ntɛtea Kɔkɔɔ* 'father the red ant'. The red ant is considered as man's enemy since it can destroy a lot of domestic things in the house. Other impersonal names are *Asomasi, ɔbɛnten* and *Okooto* and they do not belong to any category of the Akan name system except being used as insinuating.

There are derogatory names used as invectives, and they normally bring conflict among Akans so they are considered in some respects as verbal taboos and should therefore not be used. These names include *mmrane* 'nicknames'. People use the physical structure, including one's complexion, height or size, or a person's behaviour to give him/her a name. Such names include *pobire* 'black snail' to refer to a person who is very dark. We also have metonymic names where a person's body-part that is contrary to the norm is used to tease him/her. Such names include *apantan* 'jaw', *abɔdweɛ* 'chin', *nkonto* 'bow legged', *aso* 'ears', *kɔntape* 'short necked', etc.

3. GANG, PLAY AND OCCUPATIONAL NAMES

Among the Akan, gang names are referred to as *ɛfe* or *mmrane*. They are normally coined slogans that are used by gang members. One funny and striking thing about the gang names is that members of the same gangs use the same name to refer to each other. The gang names can therefore be referred to as "reciprocanyms". Examples are *ɔpanin,* 'the elder' *w'agya,* 'your father', *wo nua,* your cousin', *wo gyafo,* 'your colleague', *wo nana,* 'your grandparent', *ɔhene* 'chief', *ɔhemmaa* 'queen', *akora* 'old man', etc. It is possible to have different gang nicknames whereby A refers to B with a nickname and B refers to A with another nickname.

1. A*: Agya* 'Father'
    B: *Wo Nana* 'Your Grandparent'
2. A *Osikani* 'Rich man'
    B: *ɔmamma/Okonkoni* 'Wealthy man'

In 1, the speaker A and the addressee B use kinship terms. In 2, however, they use status terms especially wealth. Nicknames may also be referential to the behaviour of the people who bear such names. Most of such names are derogative and meant to tease the bearers to change their ways of life. Below are examples of such names:

ɔweee (lit) 'the chewer' ------------> 'drunkard, alcoholic'
ɔnomfo 'the drinker' ------------> 'drunkard, alcoholic'
ɔkaka (a ɔfa nkwan mu) 'the bad aroma that spoils the broth -------> 'destroyer'
ohui (lit.) 'the blower' ---------------> 'the liar'

Most gang and nicknames in Akan are descriptive and normally have allusions or etymological information about them that are best known to their users and in-group members. This confirms the indexical sociocultural importance of names that is the focus of this paper.

4. INNOVATIONS IN AKAN NAMES

This section looks at the innovations in the Akan name system as a result of westernisation, education and foreign religion. It first considers the use of multiple names.

Religion, education, westernisation and urbanisation have brought about innovations in the structure and system of Akan names. Some members of the

elite are gradually shifting away from the traditions (see Oyetade 1995: 531-32). These days, apart from birthday names and surnames, some people get additional Christian or Islamic name(s) during baptism or when they first enter into formal school. Some nationalistic members would maintain their traditional names without taking any Christian or Islamic names during baptism or at school.

At school, most people would now use their fathers' or sponsors' name, or combine names of these people with their own names. People whose schooling have been sponsored by some people other than their biological parents take the names of their sponsors and may thus have two varied names. The above phenomenon is a real shift from the tradition where fathers and their children do not bear the same name (see cultural dynamism in section 1.3).

Assuming a person is called *Ofori,* and the father is called *Agyemang,* the following combinations can be expected: *James Ofori, James Agyemang, Kofi Ofori Agyemang, James Ofori Agyemang, James Kofi Ofori Agyemang,* etc.. The same structure may prevail for both males and females. Quite apart from these, some people would add appellations to their given names as in *Kofi Ofori Amanfo, James Ofori Amanfo, Agyemang Pamboɔ Prɛmpɛ.*

The foregone issues therefore bring about two categories of names, official and unofficial names. The official is normally religious (Christian or Islamic) plus one's Akan name used at school or job site. This is the name that appears on his/her personal records such as passport, certificates, and all other personal documents. If somebody is enthroned as a chief, king, or queen then an additional official stool name is given to him/her in the chieftaincy sector. Among the Akans, the symbol of office of a chief, king or queen is a stool. The name may be that of one of his/her predecessors. An unofficial name refers to the name the person gets at out-dooring that his/her parents, kinsmen and closer mates call him/her by it.

4.1 CHANGING USE OF MULTIPLE NAMES REGARDING SOCIAL CONTEXT

In Akan, as in many cultures, there is a current phenomenon where a person can receive multiple names that change according to social context and situation; the person may be accordingly addressed differently.[9] In contemporary Akan, it is possible for a person who has undergone various baptism to combine the various names into a serial monomymy.

With education, it is also possible for certain Akan Chiefs to maintain separate baptism name. One may have a "scholarly name" that appears on his

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[9] The Arizona Tewa for example receive several different names through several different naming ceremonies during their lives. According to Dozier (1954: 325-31) the Arizona Tewa ceremonies include tribal initiation, clan initiation, girls' puberty rites and society inductions. The various baptismal names have their sources and origin from the sociocultural contexts.

certificate which is very official. He may be called at the work site by this name and also by his colleagues. Outside these scenarios, he may be referred to by his stool name. It may even be possible that he had his own *efie din* 'domestic name' which he shelved and took that of his parents. This means that in reality he has three category of names. It could even be more depending on the type of colleagues he has. For example, a chief can combine his birthday name with his stool name as *Nana ɔdeneho Kwame Ababio Agyeman.*

Newly acquired names are given in addition to people's initially given names. The given names, although rarely used, may be needed later in life as hypocoristic terms of endearment and affection. In fact, among the Akan, one of the names that serves as an affectionate term is first, the birthday name- Kofi, Ama, Abenaa, etc. (see Whiteley 1992). The given first names are shortened into the hypocoristic terms as in *Kofi* becoming *Koo* or *Kee,* and *Abenaa* becoming *Abii*.

As the names accumulate so do one's prestige and social standing within the community. This is to say that multiplicity of names is proportional with social elevation. In fact, this hypothesis is true when and only when the added names are acquired through good deeds.

Conversely the accumulation of negative names is inversely related to one's prestige and social standing within the society.

A. multiple names ------- via good deeds --------------> social upliftment and prestige
B. multiple names ------- via vicious deeds -----------------> social debasement

There is a social practice that compels individuals to use names they would rather not use. Those who acquire the multiple names via good deeds feel honoured and even use the names themselves to assert their status. On the contrary, multiple names got through vicious means are derogatory and humiliating. Sometimes people use them hoping that the bearers may change their behaviour. The vicious names are given by certain individuals and accepted by the entire society and are based on the behaviours of the referents whose behaviour go contrary to the Akan sociocultural norms. (See also Barnes 1980 on multiple names and use among the Hidatsa).

4.2 USE OF CHRISTIAN OR WESTERN NAMES

Among the present generations, some elites, Christians and Muslims are best known by their religious names. Those who have gone to school use such names as their first names in addition to their Akan family names. Some people even drop their Akan birthday names such as *Kofi, Ama*, and choose *John* and *Mary* respectively. It is not uncommon to come across people with names like *John, James, Martin, Ali, Ahmed, Issa*, etc. Apart from the Christian and Islamic names, many Ghanaians pick western names such as *Charles, George, Andrew, Jackson, Faustina, Florence, Margaret,* etc.

This phenomenon is so predominant among females than among males. Females may prefer to be addressed as *Ajila, Asetu, Fatima, Mary, Susana, Theresa, Martha, Sophia, Grace, Jennifer, Priscilla,* etc. rather than their indigenous names. In fact, some ladies even become offended when they are addressed with their indigenous names referred to as *efie din* (lit.) 'home name', especially when such a lady bears any of the weird or circumstantial names (see sections 2.3, 2.4, and 2.7 above). My wife's senior mother is called *Saarabi* but she has since changed it to *Theresa.* There are evidences that prove that people equate the Christian, Islamic and western names with prestige, education and higher status in the society.

4.3 MATRIMONIAL NAMES

At the holy matrimony, Akan females get another category of names in addition to any of the innovated names they already have. A greater percentage of them take the names of their husbands and drop their maiden names or combine them with their matrimonial names. We therefore have names like *Mrs. Abenaa Akyaa Agyekum*, *Mrs. Serwa Boateng*, *Mrs. Theresa Sarpong*, and *Mrs. Beatrice Opokuaa Agyei.* In all these combination, the last name is the husband's name.

4.4 NATIONALIST NAMES

The last two or three decades have witnessed a positive nationalistic movement in personal names among the Akan. Many people have realised the significance of Akan personal names as markers of cultural identity and have therefore stuck to only the Akan names. They give only these names to their children during baptism and first entry into school, doing away with any foreign names. In fact, there are several cases where people who earlier on had these foreign names have legally changed them and maintained only the indigenous ones. A person who was formerly named as *Timothy Akyampong* may now be officially called *Kwasi Akyampɔn.*

Many Akans, who started as civil servants and registered with Christian and Western names attached to their Akan names have dropped the former. Some friends who completed training college with names like *Stephen Bosie Amponsa*, *Andrews Jackson Dapaa*, and *Daniel Kyei,* have dropped, the *Stephen, Andrews Jackson* and *Daniel* respectively. Almost all my mates at the Training College and at the Diploma College have dropped their Western and Christian names.

On the Legon campus, there is a Legon newsletter and the last pages normally have change of names by students. In most cases, what I observe is that you see a long list of students who have changed their names by dropping the foreign names. Below are two examples that appeared in Vol. 41 No 49 of University of Ghana Reporter No 715 page 92. The heading is Change of Names

1. From: Quarcoo, Agnes Naa Ahima (Miss)

   To: Quarcoo, Naa Ahima (Miss)

2. From: Senya, Praise

   To: Senya, Kafui.

In 1 above, the student who is in her final Year dropped the western name *Agnes* from the chain of names. In 2, however, there is an elimination by substitution. The student dropped the western name *Praise* and replaced it with *Kafui* that is an indigenous Ewe name.[10]

4.5 USE OF KINSHIP TERMS

According to Akan sociocultural norms, adult and kings may not be addressed with their bare names and this is an aspect of the Akan naming taboo system (see Agyekum 1996). Parents who name their children after their own parents, grandparents or chiefs would like to show reverence to their bearers by addressing the children with the right labels and address terms. These kinship labels become part and parcel of the official names of these children throughout life. Examples of such names are *Nana Opoku Ware, Nana Akuffo Addo, Nana Yaw, Papa Owusu Ankoma, Maame Abenaa, Nana Yaa*, etc.

The use of kinship terms is also undergoing innovations among the Akans. Oyetade (1995) records this same phenomenon among the Yorubas that certain kinship terms like *daddy, mummy, uncle, aunty, sister, brother* have been borrowed from English into Yoruba with altered changes. The Akan equivalents are first and foremost used for one's kinsmen but like the Yorubas, they are also used for people with whom one may not have any kinship ties.

It is not uncommon for the present day youth to address any male elder as *Dada, Daddy Daa,* and a female as *Mam, Mum* and *Maa.* The speaker may use these terms as intimate, persuasive and polite markers to lure the addressee to buy from them. They may be used in commerce, arbitration, request, permission, etc. (see Agyekum 2004).

The use of these kinship terms carries with it both implicit and explicit recognition of the superiority of the addressee and his or her status. It is common for market women or hawkers to address their educated, rich, or aged customers as *Daddy, Daa, Mummy, Maa, Auntie*, etc. (see Oyetade 1995: 533).

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[10] The Ewes normally take Names that are English words. These include, Victor, Prosper, Innocent, Patience, Praise, Success, etc.

4.6 ANGLICISED NAMES

There is another dimension of naming innovations among the Akan that deals with Anglicisation of Akan names. Two categories can be drawn here:

4.6.1 English Orthography

Here, Akan names are spelt with the English alphabet and sounds, such names include;

Acheampong instead of *Akyampɔn*

Mensah   instead of *Mɛnsa*

Adjei   instead of *Agyei*

Arthur   instead of *Atta*

Quarcooe instead of *Kweku*

Otchere   instead of *ɔkyere*

Crentsil   instead of *Kwenstir*

Forson   instead of *Fɔ*

This is even less problematic, for people still pronounce the names correctly and people can easily know whom they are referring to. In Akan, there are no consonant clusters like [ch, dj, rth, and tch]. Again [g] and [h] do not end any word in Akan, and there is no [q] in the Akan alphabet.

4.6.2 Anglicisation Through Translation

Some Akan names are translated literally into English and such anglicised names have come to stay as family names. This phenomena is so prevalent with the Fantes; one of the major Akan subgroups. One can argue that the Fantes living on the coast were the first to be in contact with the Europeans. It is therefore possible that the trend is a western influence. Examples of such anglicised transformational name are:

Dua (lit tree/board)   ---------------------> Woode

Kuntu (blanket) son of Kuntu -----------------> Blankson

Kumi ba (child of Kumi) ---------------------> Kumson

Akorɔma (hawk)   ---------------------> Hawkson

Nyameba   ---------------------> Godson

ɔbo (stone)   ---------------------> Rockson

Certain phonological processes take place during anglicisation that we do not intend going into the details here. The anglicised forms are distant from the original both in morphology and phonology. The two forms are opaque. It is therefore difficult for the ordinary Akan speaker to know that the two forms refer to the same name.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper is an aspect of linguistic anthropology and based on the theory that there is a strong interface between a people's language and their cultural practices. It mirrors on (a) how language is used as cultural resources and practices, and (b) how language is viewed as a powerful tool used to view and understand the worldview and philosophy of a particular society. We have argued therefore that language is used as a microscopic lens to view and understand the social practices and day-to-day activities of a society.

Akan personal name system and practice is a marker of the people's belief, ideology, religion, culture, philosophy and thought. The names are best understood and analysed when one has insight into the ethno-pragmatics, socio-cultural norms and the language and culture of Akan. The Akan personal names are therefore an aspect of linguistic relativity. In the philosophical sense, Akan names refer to elements of Akan human experience and ways of life. This paper has claimed that names are not mere arbitrary and meaningless labels but rather have indexical relationship to socio-cultural meanings and functions, places, time, people and events.

Akans believe that there is some inherent power and linkage in names, and expect the names to reflect and indexicalise the lives and behaviour of people either positively or negatively. The individual's name is of concern to the society as a whole, for the individual performs and participates in the society. Akan names may show group identification and reveal some aspects of the cultural patterns and behaviour of the culture concerned.

Akan typological names indicate various contexts. They may be day names, family, circumstantial, manner of birth, theophorous, weird names, insinuating and proverbial names, gang and nicknames, status, occupational, professional, religious, matrimonial, and western names. Every potential Akan has at least two of these names: a birthday name plus a family name. Apart from these, there can be a combination of two or more of these typological names.

It is also possible for a person to accumulate some other names especially baptismal names as s/he grows up in the society. I have argued that if multiple names are achieved through virtuous means then it is proportionate to the achievements of prestige and the social standing of the person within the society. Conversely, if the multiple names are through vicious means, then as they multiply, the person debases his/her prestige and honour in the society.

Akan personal names are a multidisciplinary area of study for scholars in sociology, history, religion, anthropology, linguistics, ethnography and philosophy. It is an important area of the Akan culture that should not be ignored in any sociolinguistic and anthropological studies.

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Appendix 1: A Map of Ghana Showing the Akan dialects.