

AN ETHNOBIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION INTO NORTHERN SOTHO PLANT NAMES

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INTRODUCTION

In this contribution the linguistic structure and hierarchical ordering of Northern Sotho plant names are investigated within the realm of ethnobiological theory. Ethnobiological research conducted within the domain of cognitive anthropology is primarily concerned with "prescientific man's classification of his biological universe" (Berlin et al. 1973:214). One of the main objectives of investigations into folk taxonomies is to determine "the relationship of the formal linguistic structure of plant and animal names and the cognitive status of the taxa to which such names apply" because "while no isomorphic correspondence is claimed to exist between nomenclature ... and classification ... the overwhelming body of evidence now in hand suggests that nomenclature is often a near perfect guide to folk taxonomic structure" (Berlin et al. 1973: 216). A major methodological principle which underlies this approach is that members of every speech community organize the biological diversity which exists in the natural world surrounding them by classifying plants into hierarchically ordered categories called "taxa" and, furthermore, that the status of each taxon within this hierarchy is reflected in the linguistic structure of the nomenclatural element which names that taxon. Hunn (1976:69) puts it thus:

This taxonomic and linguistic evidence suggests that all folk biological hierarchies are comprised of a series of categories organized in a series of levels or ranks related by inclusion and designated by specifiable kinds of linguistic labels depending upon their taxonomic rank.

According to Berlin et al. (1973:240) there consequently "seems to be strong

evidence that the linguistic structure of a plant or animal name is usually a good mirror of the taxonomic status of the category which it represents" (Cf. also Swanepoel, 1994a & 1994b; Atran, 1985 & 1987; Brown et al. 1976; and Berlin, 1976).

Ethnobiological research is therefore primarily concerned with "important aspects of man's conceptual organization of the natural world" (Berlin et al. 1973:214) and, as is pointed out by Atran, striking cross-cultural uniformities are observed in the structure of folkbiological classification because

Knowledge of species *qua* biological species, and knowledge that organic individuals naturally fall into groups within groups, is a knowledge humankind shares, whether bushman, layman or scientist. Such knowledge determines the way we see the world and regulates our inductions about what we do not see (Atran, 1987:48).

The classification of plant names in Northern Sotho will be investigated against this background in order to ascertain whether the "strikingly regular structural principles of folk biological classification which are quite general" alluded to by, *inter alia*, Berlin et al. (1973:214), are also attested by data from this language.

In the first half of the article attention will be paid to particularly four aspects, namely (a) the general principles underlying ethnobiological taxonomies, (b) the way in which the linguistic labelling of ethnobiological categories reveals their hierarchical status within an ethnobiological taxonomy, (c) possible exceptions to general nomenclature principles; and (d) ontological and cognitive considerations which have a direct influence on a person's classificatory activities. In an attempt to ensure maximum clarity and understanding, examples cited in this section will be taken from English only. In the second half of the contribution Northern Sotho data on plant names which have been collected during fieldwork will be analysed following the research paradigm which is generally accepted for the purposes of ethnobiological inquiry. The Northern Sotho material will be shown to confirm observations made by ethnobiologists for languages around the world namely that folk biological classifications are largely governed by universal principles.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF FOLK TAXONOMY

Most of the principles that were set out by Berlin, Breedlove and Raven in their 1973 article entitled *General principles of classification and nomenclature in folk biology* today still form the basis for folk taxonomic investigations. Their

distinction between primary and secondary lexemes, a matter that will be addressed in more detail below, plays a particularly crucial role in this regard (Swanepoel, 1994a:36). The following is a slightly adapted version (particularly as far as examples are concerned) of the most important of these principles as summarized by Berlin et al. (1973:214–215):

- (a) In all languages it is possible to isolate linguistically recognized groupings of organisms of varying degrees of inclusiveness. These classes are referred to as *taxa* ...
- (b) Taxa are further grouped into a small number of classes known as taxonomic ethnobiological categories. These ethnobiological categories, definable in terms of linguistic and taxonomic criteria, probably number no more than five. They may be named as follows: *unique beginner* e.g. plant, *life form* e.g. tree, *generic* e.g. bushwillow, *specific* e.g. velvet bushwillow, weeping bushwillow, etc., and *varietal* of which examples are rarely encountered (also see Brown, et al. 1976:75). A sixth category, called intermediate, may be required as further research is carried out (Atran, 1985:309 and Berlin, 1976:387). This point will shortly receive special attention under the heading *Intermediate categories*.
- (c) The five universal ethnobiological categories are arranged hierarchically and taxa assigned to each rank are mutually exclusive, except for the unique beginner of which there is only one member.
- (d) Taxa of the same ethnobiological category characteristically, though not invariably, occur at the same taxonomic level within any particular taxonomic structure, e.g.:

Level	Taxon	Example
Zero	unique beginner	“plant”
1	life form	“tree”
2	generic	“bushwillow”
3	specific	“velvet bushwillow”, etc.
4	varietal	?

- (e) Taxa assigned to each of the fundamental ethnobiological categories characteristically exhibit linguistic and/or taxonomic features which allow for their recognition.

According to Atran (1987:40) the hierarchy outlined above is governed cross-culturally by principles such as the following:

- Every natural object is either a living kind or not.
- Every living kind is either a plant or an animal.

- Each plant or animal belongs to one and only one basic taxon.
- No two basic taxa share all of their characteristic phenomenal properties. This implies that where two taxa are encountered, one will lack at least one feature which is characteristic of the other.
- Every basic taxon belongs to only one life form taxon *LF*.
- For every LF_i there is at least one phenomenal property D_i which is characteristic and diagnostic in the sense that to all LF_j , D_i is not characteristic. Atran explains this by observing that if, for example, "quadruped" is characteristic for the life form mammal, it is *not* characteristic for life forms such as TREE, GRASS, HERB, etc.

Berlin et al. (1973:215–216) proceed by identifying the following general tendencies regarding the nature of the basic taxa mentioned above.

Unique beginners

It is very often found in languages around the world that a taxon which is a member of the category *unique beginner* such as plant and animal is not labelled linguistically (also see Berlin, 1976:394). The unique beginner is the most inclusive taxon and is therefore polytypic in the sense that it always includes several subordinate members.

Life forms

Life form taxa such as tree, grass, herb, mammal, bird, fish, etc., are generally few in number ranging from five to ten (Berlin et al. 1973:214; Brown et al. 1976:75), and are "the most inclusive, wide-ranging categories in folk biological taxonomies (apart from the unique beginner)" (Berlin, 1976:384). Every taxon belongs to only one life form, and each life form has at least one diagnostic characteristic which distinguishes it from all other life forms (Atran, 1987:40).

Generics

Taxa which are members of the category *generic* are much more numerous than life form taxa, and due to their high degree of saliency, many investigators regard generics as the core of any folk biological taxonomy. Berlin et al. (1973:216) therefore characterize generic taxa as "the basic building blocks of all folk taxonomies". (See, however, Dougherty, 1978 for a refinement of this viewpoint.) Typical generics like *baobab*, *marula*, *tamboti*, *leadwood* and *mopane* are characterized by two features in particular, namely: they are

terminal and include no further named subdivisions; and therefore they are monotypic since they always refer to a single species.

Specifics and varietales

According to Berlin et al. (1973:216):

Taxa which are members of the ethnobiological categories "specific" and "varietal" are, in general, less numerous than taxa found as members of the generic category."

Subgeneric taxa of specific and varietal rank occur in contrast sets of mostly two to three members, whereas sets comprising six or more members are rarely found. Compare a contrast set comprising two members, e.g. {seringa: white seringa; mountain seringa}, with one containing six or more members, e.g. {shepherd's tree: rough-leaved shepherd's tree; stink shepherd's tree; broad-leaved shepherd's tree; kaoko shepherd's tree; hairy shepherd's tree; etc.}. (Van Wyk, 1994; Coates Palgrave, 1981). Specifics like rough-leaved shepherd's tree are generally terminal in the sense that they do not form category superordinates for other terms of a lower rank, i.e. of a varietal nature. It is for this reason that varietales are said to be seldom found (Swanepoel, 1994a:40; Brown et al. 1976:75).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHNOBIOLOGICAL CATEGORIES AND THEIR LINGUISTIC LABELS

Berlin (1976:394) observes that:

With the exception of the unique beginner, which is commonly not named, taxa of the ranks of life form, generic, specific and varietal are all given linguistic recognition.

All investigators dealing with ethnobiology whose aim it is "to discover the conceptual foundations of ethnoscience as practised by preliterate peoples" by focusing on "the cognitive organization of the world of plants and animals" (Berlin et al. 1973:227) recognize a strong correlation between the linguistic form of a plant name and the taxonomic category which it labels (Berlin et al. 1973:226). Dougherty (1978:68) makes a similar observation when he states that

A strong correlation has been observed in botanical classification between the taxonomic rank of a particular category and the linguistic nature of its name.

The nature of this correlation amounts to the following: the higher up on the hierarchical scale [unique beginner ← life form ← generic ← specific ← varietal] a taxon is, the more basic (i.e. "primary") the lexical item becomes with which it is labelled. The lower down a taxon appears in the hierarchy, the less basic (i.e. "secondary") the linguistic label of the taxon appears to be. (Predictable exceptions to this rule are addressed below.) Swanepoel (1994a:42) therefore states the primary interest linguists have in ethnobiological taxonomies as follows:

Die aanname van die isomorfie tussen linguistiese struktuur (etnobiologiese nomenklatuur) en konseptuele ordening bring mee dat die taalkundige deur 'n ontleding van die semanties-konseptuele relasies van die etnobiologiese nomenklatuur van 'n taal ... 'n passing van die etnobiologiese nomenklatuur na die onderliggend taksonomiese strukturering daarvan in etnobiologiese konseptuele kategorieë kan aanpak.

(Also see Berlin et al. 1973; Berlin, 1976; Atran, 1985 and 1987; Hunn, 1976; Dougherty, 1987 and Brown et al. 1976). The correlation which has been observed between what are called *primary lexemes* and high ranking taxa and *secondary lexemes* and low ranking taxa calls for a detailed discussion of the crucial role played by the distinction *primary* versus *secondary* with regard to nomenclatural labels.

Primary lexemes and the role of contrast sets

Brown et al. 1976:74 state that

Primary and secondary lexemes are distinguished from one another in terms of the manner in which they are linguistically analysed and whether or not the taxa they label occur in "contrast sets" in taxonomies.

Primary lexemes can either be *unanalysable* or *analysable*. A characteristic feature of *unanalysable* primary lexemes is that they are single-word expressions. Life forms like tree, bush, grass, herb, shrub and weed are labelled by primary lexemes, and so are many generics such as marula, mopane, tamboti and baobab. Consequently, sets like {life form: tree, bush, grass, herb, ...} and {tree: marula, mopane, tamboti, baobab, ...} are characterized as *primary contrast sets*. Generics are, however, very often also denoted by *analysable* primary lexemes. These are compounds which consist of more than one lexical component and are divided into *productive analysable primaries* and *unproductive analysable primaries*. This distinction is based on whether one of

the components of the name denotes the relevant *life form* or not. If one of the components in the name denotes the *life form* in question like *tree* and *bush* in the following examples, the lexemes are regarded as *primary* and *productive*, e.g. {*tree*: fever *tree*, bell-bean *tree*, carrot *tree*, common cabbage *tree*, currant resin *tree*, etc.}; and {*bush*: caterpillar *bush*, common bride's *bush*, common poison *bush*, cucumber *bush*, etc.}. Such lexemes are regarded as *primary* since they can occur in contrast sets with the same superordinate term together with single word items, e.g. {*tree*: marula, mopane, bell bean tree, carrot tree}. This set denotes the fact that a mopane is a tree in the same way as a bell-bean tree is a tree. Furthermore, such lexemes are *productive* because a whole range of names containing the component *tree* can be derived in a productive way, e.g. dead-man's *tree*, snuff-box *tree*, fever *tree*, gland-leaf *tree*, horn-pod *tree*, shepherd's *tree*, etc. (Van Wyk, 1994). In the second half of the article it will be shown that, for explainable language specific reasons, productive primary lexemes of this kind do not occur in Northern Sotho.

Unproductive primary lexemes, on the other hand, are characterized by the fact that "no constituent marks a category superordinate to the [life] forms in question" (Brown et al. 1976:74). Compare the following examples from Watt and Breyer-Brandwijk (1962): Aaron's rod (*Verbascum virgatum*), Abraham's book (*Mansonia bowkeri*), bachelor's buttons (*Centaurea cyanus*), common blackjack (*Bidens bipinnata*), dog's tooth (*Cynodon dactylon*), etc. These examples all represent instances of metaphoric compounding since Aaron's rod is not a kind of rod, whereas bachelor's buttons has very little to do with either bachelors or buttons. The *unproductive* nature of such compounds therefore arises from the fact that none of the other members of, for example, the genus *Centaurea*, e.g. *Centaurea calcitrapa* (starbur), *Centaurea melitensis* (cockspur), *Centaurea picris* (hardheads), etc. are named in terms of either bachelors or buttons. (Consider a fictitious contrast set like {*Centaurea*: bachelor's *button*; ladies *button*; gentleman's *button*; ... etc.}). In this regard, unproductive primaries stand in vivid contrast with productive primaries occurring in sets like {fever *tree*, shepherd's *tree*, jumping bean *tree*, nyala *tree*, ..., etc.}. Examples of larger trees which are labelled by unproductive primary lexemes are weeping boer-bean, sjambok pod, jackal berry, monkey orange, etc. Although a tree named jackal *berry* is recognised, no other trees are productively related to the jackal *berry* by conceivable names like, for instance, wolf *berry*, lion *berry*, leopard *berry*, etc. An important feature of such *unproductive primary lexemes* is that despite the absence of a constituent denoting the life form (i.e. *tree*) in their composition, they can nonetheless enter into the same contrast set with *primary simplex* (i.e. "tamboti") and *productive primary complex* lexemes (i.e. "fever *tree*"), e.g. {*tree*: tamboti, fever *tree*, sjambok pod"}. It will be shown later that whereas *productive* primaries do not occur in Northern Sotho, *unproductive* primaries abound.

Secondary lexemes and the role of contrast sets

Like compound primary lexemes, secondary lexemes also consist of more than one constituent. They differ from compound primary lexemes in that they always occur in contrast sets of which *all members* contain a component which denotes the immediate superordinate taxon like *thorn*, *bushwillow*, *fig*, etc., in {*thorn*: bitter false-*thorn*, black monkey *thorn*, common spike *thorn*, paperbark false-*thorn*, broad-pod false-*thorn*, etc.}; {*bushwillow*: red *bushwillow*, river *bushwillow*, velvet *bushwillow*, russet *bushwillow*, false forest *bushwillow*, weeping *bushwillow*, etc.}; {*fig*: Natal *fig*, Wonderboom *fig*, red-leaved rock *fig*, small-leaved rock *fig*, mountain *fig*, lowveld *fig*, etc.}. It is clear from these examples that *secondary lexemes* denote either *specifics* which are dominated by the same superordinate taxon (e.g. *fig*) as in Natal *fig*, Wonderboom *fig*, sycamore *fig*, rock *fig*, etc., or they denote varieties of a specific (such as, for example, *rock fig*) as in red-leaved *rock fig*, small-leaved *rock fig* and large-leaved *rock fig*. A limited number of contrast sets of this kind which will be discussed later have been recorded for Northern Sotho.

The main differences between *primary* and *secondary* lexemes can be summarised as follows:

- (a) Primary lexemes may be monolexemic whereas secondary lexemes are always compound.
- (b) Compound primary lexemes, in their turn, differ from secondary lexemes in as far as one constituent of the compound in the case of primaries denote the *life form* which is involved (e.g. *tree*), whereas one constituent of the compound in the case of secondary lexemes denote an immediate superordinate category which is a *generic* and not a *life form* (e.g. *bushwillow*, *fig*, etc.).
- (c) Primary lexemes, whether they are monolexemic (mopane, tamboti, etc.) or compound (fever tree, sjambok pod) may enter into the same contrast set, e.g. {*tree*: mopane, tamboti, fever tree, sjambok pod}. Secondary lexemes, on the contrary, enter into contrast sets of which *all members* contain a component denoting the same superordinate term (e.g. *bushwillow*) as in {*bushwillow*: red *bushwillow*, river *bushwillow*, velvet *bushwillow*, russet *bushwillow*, Rhodesian *bushwillow*, etc.}.

Summary: the nomenclature principle

From this it is clear that *primary lexemes*, be they monolexemic or complex, denote taxa such as *life form* (*tree*) and *generic* (*tamboti*, *fever tree*, *sjambok pod*) which occupy high positions in the taxonomic hierarchy. Secondary

lexemes, on the other hand, label taxa such as specifics (Wonderboom fig, sycamore fig, rock fig), or, where they occur, varieties (red-leaved rock fig, small-leaved rock fig) which are low on the taxonomic hierarchy. Following Brown et al's (1976:74–75) characterization of what they call “the nomenclature principle”, the generalizations which emanate from what has been observed thus far can be summarised as follows:

- (a) Some taxa marked by primary lexemes are terminal, i.e. they include no other labelled taxa (e.g. tamboti, marula, sausage tree) or immediately include taxa designated by secondary lexemes (e.g. fig which includes Wonderboom fig, Natal fig, etc.). Taxa satisfying these conditions are *generic*: their labels are generic names.
- (b) Some taxa other than the taxon which is the unique beginner marked by primary lexemes are not terminal and immediately include taxa designated by primary lexemes (e.g. tree which dominates tamboti, marula, sausage tree, etc.). Taxa which satisfy these conditions refer to *life form* categories: their labels are life form names.
- (c) Some taxa marked by secondary lexemes are terminal and are immediately included in taxa designated by primary lexemes (e.g. Wonderboom fig, sycamore fig, lowveld fig, rock fig which are dominated by fig). Taxa satisfying these conditions are *specific*: their labels are specific names.
- (d) Some taxa marked by secondary lexemes are terminal and are immediately included in taxa which are designated as well by secondary lexemes (e.g. small-leaved rock fig, large-leaved rock fig, red-leaved rock fig which are included under rock fig). Taxa satisfying these conditions are *varietal*: their labels are varietal names.

In the second half of this presentation it will be shown that, apart from predictable exceptions, these generalizations are equally valid for Northern Sotho botanical nomenclature.

Intermediate categories: possible exceptions to the nomenclature principle

Unaffiliated generics

Following the nomenclature principle, it is possible to identify plant names such as tamboti (*Spirostachys africana*), river bean (*Sesbania sesban*), wild tea (*Lippia javanica*), common blackjack (*Bidens pilosa*), sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), etc. with specific life forms:

<i>Plant</i>	<i>Life form</i>
tamboti	tree
river bean	shrub
wild tea	herb
common blackjack	weed
sweet potato	vegetable

Stated differently: each one of the plant names in the list can be said to be dominated by a superordinate term which denotes the life form to which it belongs. However, when an attempt is made to relate the names of cultivated plants such as maize, grain sorghum, finger millet, groundnut, etc. to specific life forms, it seems to become impossible. Generics like these are apparently not dominated by a superordinate term denoting the *life form* to which they belong. They are, in fact, directly dominated by the *unique beginner* "plant", causing them, as it were, to constitute *life forms* on their own. Berlin (1976:387) refers to such examples as *unaffiliated generics* and defines them as follows:

An *unaffiliated generic* encompasses organisms which, in all contexts of actual plant identification, are consistently said not to be included in one of the major life forms.

Many investigators like Berlin et al. (1973); Berlin (1976), Atran (1985 and 1987); Hunn (1976), and others have observed this deviant tendency with regard to plants which are of particular cultural and economic importance. Atran (1987:56) explains the exceptional behaviour of such names within the nomenclature hierarchy as follows:

Rather, it is because constant and direct intervention by man actually creates an isolated role for them in the local environment, which makes them phenomenally salient.

When investigating the Northern Sotho data, particular attention will therefore be paid not only to cultivated plants, but also to a variety of fruit bearing wild plants such as members of genera such as *Grewia* (wild raisin), *Ximenia* (sour plum) and *Maytenus* (spike thorn), as well as other wild species such as members of the genus *Commiphora* which are, for a variety of reasons, of major cultural importance. Many of the names of such plants behave exceptionally due to, as Atran stated above, "constant and direct intervention by man".

Ambiguously affiliated generics

According to Berlin et al. (1973:219); Berlin (1976:387, 391) ambiguously affiliated generics are names referring to plants which exhibit some or other morphological peculiarity particularly with regard to stem habit. In this regard, Berlin (1976:387) observes:

It is informative to examine some examples of the unaffiliated or ambiguously affiliated generic taxa, for it can be shown that, as is the case with Tzeltal Mayan ethnobiological materials, such plant classes are "almost without exception cultivated and/or morphologically peculiar in some fashion" (Berlin, Breedlove & Raven 1973:219).

When discussing the Northern Sotho data, specific reference will be made to this aspect regarding species like *Aloe marlothii*, the Transvaal sesame-bush (*Sesamothamnus lugardii*) and the baobab (*Adansonia digitata*).

"MAN, THE CLASSIFYING ANIMAL" (Berlin et al. 1973:214)

Ethnobiologists point out that people are constantly in a process of "bring[ing] order to the diversity of the domain of plants by classifying groups of similar organisms into a number of taxa of greater and lesser inclusiveness" (Berlin 1976:384). As Atran (1985:311) puts it:

In short, folk-botanical life forms partition the everyday world of human experience with local flora in ways that are "natural" to the human mind as it partakes of the activities of ordinary life.

It should, however, be kept in mind that the act of categorization in folk taxonomies is not carried out by an ideal mother-tongue speaker who possesses a complete and perfect scientific knowledge of the botanical world which surrounds him or her. Categorization is done by individuals with an imperfect knowledge of the botanical world and who rely heavily on their own subjective perceptions, experiences and deductions. This implies that species which are being regarded as belonging to the same taxon by one language user might be categorized differently by another member of the same speech community. Swanepoel (1994b:59) quotes Taylor (1989) in this regard:

Similarity, like beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. Once we invoke similarity as a basis for categorization, we inevitably bring language users, with their beliefs, interests, and past experience into the picture. *Things are similar to the extent that a human being, in some context and for some purpose, chooses to regard them as similar.* (My emphasis.)

These observations explain why field notes often reveal that different names are given to the same species, why different species are sometimes named with the same nomenclatural label, or why the members of certain taxa encountered in one speech community may differ completely from corresponding taxa in other speech communities. They also explain why folk taxonomies often deviate from the purely scientific ones adhered to by biologists, although striking similarities between pre-scientific and scientific taxonomies are often observed with more than chance frequency. About these similarities, Hunn (1976:508) writes:

However, recent advances in the anthropological understanding of folk biological classification stem in large from a growing recognition of the striking similarities between folk systems and the biologist's system of classification. It is now clear that these similarities are neither fortuitous nor to be taken for granted. We are now directing our attention at discovering the constraints in nature and in the human mind which may account for the pan-cultural regularities.

The field worker must, therefore, be constantly aware of the fact that the capacity of individuals to differentiate one concept from other similar concepts, that is to identify the members of the same *prototype category*, may vary, since "the individual may draw the lines of demarcation differently from the social group, either out of misconstrual or out of thoughtful considerations" (Kittay, 1992:237). Furthermore, the ethnobiologist must realize that the boundaries between adjacent categories or ranks are *arbitrary* "due to the continuous variation of taxonomic heterogeneity" (Berlin, 1976:383 quoting Hunn). This heterogeneity is interpreted by Chaffin (1992:255) in terms of what he calls the "typicality gradient" which is explained as follows:

Exemplars of a category vary in the degree to which they are typical of the concept (Rosch 1978). For example, a robin is a very typical bird, a crow is less typical, and an ostrich is not very bird-like at all. The gradient continues for nonmembers of the category; a *bat* is rather like a *bird* but it is not a bird, whereas a *rock* is nothing like a *bird*.

These are all very important considerations which will constantly have to be kept in mind when the Northern Sotho data are analysed below.

NORTHERN SOTHO PLANT NAMES

The data corpus

Plant names considered for the purposes of this investigation were collected as follows:

Fieldwork

Names of plants were collected particularly in two areas in the Northern Province, i.e. (a) in the Alldays district including Blouberg and the farms Middelsigt and Claudiushoop of Mr J.N. Joubert.¹ Middelsigt lies to the north of the Soutpansberg, whereas Claudiushoop lies to the south of it; and (b) in the Steelpoort-Lydenburg district on the farm Spitskop which is also owned by Mr J.N. Joubert. Where necessary, the two areas will be distinguished from one another by referring to the former as Soutpansberg, and to the latter as Steelpoort.

Northern Sotho biological taxonomy

The Northern Sotho data² support the hypothesis regarding folk biological classification to an amazing extent. As will become evident from the exposition below, the hierarchical ordering of names on the scale [unique beginner ← life form ← generic ← specific ← varietal] is not only clearly identifiable in Northern Sotho, but the different biological categories occurring on this scale are all given recognition through linguistic labelling. Furthermore, as is predicted by the folk taxonomic hypothesis, groupings occurring higher up in the hierarchy are labelled by names which are linguistically more basic or primary than the names of groups which occur lower down in the hierarchy.

Unique beginners

Although the unique beginner is often not labelled in other languages of the world, the following two unique beginners are constantly named in Northern Sotho, i.e. *phôôfôlô* (animal) and *semela* (plant). Note that unique beginners are labelled by unanalysable (i.e. monolexemic) *primary* lexemes.

Life forms

Life forms such as the following which are dominated by the unique beginner

semela (plant) are given linguistic recognition in Northern Sotho: *mohlare* (tree), *mohlašana* (shrub), *mošunkwane* (herb), *bjang* (grass), *morôgô* (vegetable), *morara* (vine), *ngwang* (weed), etc. Again, life forms are named by monolexemic primaries.

Generics

As is predicted by the theoretical paradigm developed in the first half of this presentation, generics are dominated by life forms within the hierarchy and are much more numerous than either of the two categories mentioned above. In Northern Sotho, genera are named either by (a) unanalysable (i.e. simplex) primaries, or (b) by analysable (i.e. compound) primaries. Here the first signs are observed of the linguistic recognition which is given to the hierarchical difference which exists between unique beginners and life forms and generics: being higher up on the hierarchical scale, unique beginners and life forms are named by *simplex* primaries only. Generics, on the contrary, are named by *either* simplex primaries *or* compound primaries:

Genera named by simplex primaries

The following examples illustrate this nomenclatural trend and, as was indicated earlier, genera of this nature are generally *monotypic* and therefore *terminative*:

morula (marula, *Sclerocarya birrea*), *modumêla* (wild seringa, *Burkea africana*), *motswiri* (leadwood, *Combretum imberbe*), *morala* (Transvaal gardenia, *Gardenia volkensii*), *monoko* (common resin tree, *Ozoroa paniculosa*), *mokgwa* (knob thorn, *Acacia nigrescens*), *monêi* (red ivory, *Berchemia zeyheri*), *mohlafuhla* (worm-bark false-thorn, *Albizia anthelmintica*), *morekhure* (tamboti, *Spirostachys africana*), and many more.

Genera named by complex primaries

It will be recalled that two subdivisions of complex primaries were discussed earlier, namely (a) *productive* complex primaries being compounds of which one of the components designates the *life form*, e.g. tree; and (b) *unproductive* complex primaries, being compounds of which none of the constituents refer to the category superordinate (Abraham's book, sjambok pod). As far as Northern Sotho is concerned, (a) in particular presents a very interesting case, and hence these two sub-categories will be discussed separately.

● *Productive complex primaries*

English examples like coral *tree*, shepherd's *tree*, resin *tree*, fever *tree* and lavender *tree* illustrate what is meant by *productive* complex primaries, since one component of the name, i.e. tree, denotes the *life form* in question. See also Afrikaans examples such as paddaboom, peperbasboom, rondeblaargifboom, rooihartboom and helikopterboom. Strikingly enough, this category of names does not occur in Northern Sotho. Although this observation initially seemed to present an exception to the nomenclatural principles outlined thus far, it later became clear that there are clearly explainable language specific reasons for this. It should be kept in mind that, like in all other Bantu languages, nouns are grouped into different noun classes in Northern Sotho. With the exception of class 1/2, these classes today have a heterogenic nature, i.e. a single class, e.g. class 5, may accommodate nouns referring to a variety of semantically diverse objects such as humans, plants, animals, artifacts, etc., e.g. (class 5), *lesôgana* (young man), *legapu* (water melon), *lehlalerwa* (wild dog), *lehô* (ladle), etc. Note also the heterogenic nature of nouns of class 3/4 which may denote plants (*motswiri* leadwood), animals (*moswe* meerkat), natural phenomena (*molapô* valley), etc. Givón (1971), however, argues convincingly that, although nouns "appear to be distributed all over the noun-class system in inexplicable chaos" today, this system, at an earlier stage in the development of the Bantu languages, had a purely semantic basis. He observes (op. cit.:34):

Evidence exists to suggest that what is now largely a system of "grammatical" genders was once a system of semantic classification of the noun universe.

This entails that in the early phases of the development of the Bantu language family, membership of a particular noun class was determined by the presence of a common semantic denominator in the meaning of nouns belonging to the same class. Givón (1971:33) hypothesizes that such an older semantically based system could have had the following form:

class 1/2	humans	class 12/13	small objects
class 3/4	plants	class 14	masses
class 5/6	fruits	class 6	liquids
class 7/8	inanimates	class 15/16	paired body parts
class 9/10	animals	class 15	infinitive nominalizations
class 11/10	elongated objects		

It is important to note that *plants* probably all occurred in the same class, i.e. class 3/4 which, in present-day Northern Sotho, is marked by the singular prefix *mo-* (in the case of class 3), and the corresponding plural prefix *me-* (in

the case of class 4). It is very significant that, apart from predictable exceptions which will be returned to shortly, *all* trees are accommodated in class 3/4 in modern Northern Sotho. (Note, for example, the recurring class prefix *mo-* of class 3 in the Northern Sotho names of trees cited thus far.) Regarding the situation in modern Bantu languages Hendrikse and Poulos (1992:202) point out that “despite the heterogeneity of the contents of certain classes ... certain sets of classes appear to have a common underlying denominator which could be abstracted from the semantic details in each case ...”. In the case of class 3 the most salient common denominator today still appears to be “plant” (and by implication “tree”) as has been proposed by Givón above – a notion which is contained in the *class prefix mo-*. Class prefixes are, therefore, not mere semantically empty markers of the categories “singular” and “plural”, since they contribute significantly to the overall meaning of nouns. This implies that in names such as *moduba* (large-fruited bushwillow, *Combretum zeyheri*), *moôbaôba* (yellowwood, *Podocarpus latifolius*), *mogônôno* (Transvaal silverleaf, *Terminalia sericea*), *mokgalô* (buffalo-thorn, *Ziziphus mucronata*), *mohlôpi* (shepherd’s tree, *Boscia albitrunca*), *mohlware* (wild olive, *Olea europaea*) and *mogaba* (mountain seringa, *Kirkia wilmsii*) the notion of the life form “tree” is already contained in the class prefix which makes the utilization of an additional lexical component to designate the life form redundant. This appears to be the most plausible explanation which presents itself for the absence of productive complex primary lexemes in Northern Sotho – an explanation which will probably be equally valid for all other Bantu languages since all are characterized by the division of nouns into different noun classes.

● *Unproductive complex primaries*

Unproductive primary lexemes are characterized by the fact that no constituent in the compound denotes a category superordinate term or the life form in question. Recall examples such as dog’s tooth, sjambok pod, bachelor’s buttons and Abraham’s book. Names which fall within this category abound in Northern Sotho, e.g. *mmutšwaosepela* (common turkey-berry) – *butšwa* (ripen) + *o sepela* (while you travel); *molalagaka* (red thorn) – *lala* (sleep) + *kgaka* (guinea fowl); *modulakgogo* (lowveld cluster-leaf) – *dula* (sit, perch) + *kgogo* (fowl); *moilagaê* (bead-bean tree) – *ila* (avoid) + *gaê* (home); *mohlabaphala* (live-long) – *hlaba* (stab) + *phala* (impala); *masepa’magôkubja* (bird’s brandy) – *masepa* (excreta) + *magôkubja* (ravens); *mpharatsšwêne* (climbing raisin) – *fara* (be interwoven) + *tšwêne* (baboon).

The naming of specifics and varieties

Being lower down on the taxonomic hierarchy, specifics and varieties are commonly named by secondary lexemes. This category of names is characterized by the fact that (a) they always appear in contrast sets; and that (b) each member of the set denotes the immediate superordinate category. The following English examples illustrate this naming strategy: {bushwillow: red *bushwillow*; river *bushwillow*; velvet *bushwillow*; russet *bushwillow*}. Such contrast sets do occur in Northern Sotho, but appear to be rare. It is important to observe that secondary lexemes are used to name specifics and varieties of a genus. As has been pointed out by several investigators, preliterate peoples only tend to distinguish varieties when these are culturally important. As Berlin (1976:394) puts it:

In rather unprecise terms, the native folk biologist recognizes generic taxa "because they are there"; he recognizes specific (and varietal) taxa "because it is culturally important to do so."

Furthermore, the moment varieties become culturally important (see discussion below), they tend to be named by primary rather than by secondary lexemes, which explains the restricted occurrence of secondary lexemes in the language. The following contrast set that was documented in the Soutpansberg region presents an interesting case: {*motšhidi* (sourplum – *Ximenia caffra*): *motšhidikgwanathê* (common spike-thorn – *Maytenus heterophylla*); *motšhidikgômo* (false spike-thorn – *Putterlickia pyracantha*); *motšhidiphiswane* (red spike-thorn – *Maytenus senegalensis*)}. In this contrast set, each of the names contains a component denoting the immediate superordinate category, i.e. *motšhidi*. What is striking, however, is that three biologically differentiated genera i.e. *Ximenia*, *Maytenus* and *Putterlickia* are presented as members of the same contrast set in folk taxonomy. The fact that such a contrast set exists points first and foremost, to the cultural importance of the plants involved. In this regard, Coates Palgrave (1981), Watt and Breyer-Brandwijk (1962) and Fox and Norwood Young (1982) can be consulted for lengthy discussions regarding the utilization of these plants by indigenous peoples which range from the manufacturing of utensils to the preparation of food and other decoctions for medicinal purposes. But apart from their cultural importance, these plants also show striking resemblances as far as overall *gestalt* (i.e. gross morphology), leaf form, and the presence of spiky thorns are concerned. The reason that biologically unrelated genera and varieties are included in the same folk biological taxon should be looked for in the language user's perception of similarities and resemblances between species. All classifications of this nature revolve around the notion of *prototype*, i.e. "an item that would be a 'good example' of the category" according to Grandy (1992:112). Once such a

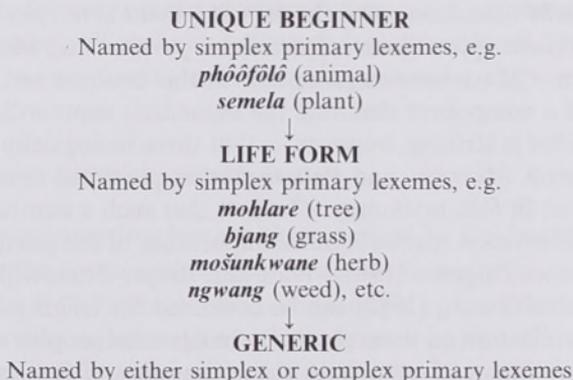
prototype has been established in the mind of the language user (cf. *motšhidi* sour plum), it becomes possible to expand the category through the inclusion of other species and varieties which, *according to the language user's perception*, are reminiscent of the prototype. (Also see Hendrikse and Poulos, 1992:205–206.) This expansion normally takes on the form of an attributive being added to the prototypic name, irrespective of whether the inclusion of biologically different species and varieties in the contrast set is scientifically justifiable or not. As Swanepoel (1994b:56) points out:

... integrasie en benoeming by 'n prototipe geskied op basis van 'n ooreenkoms (hoe groot of hoe gering dan ook al) met *wat binne 'n bepaalde kultuur* as die prototipe van die kategorie geld ... (My emphasis.)

Although the examples which have been discussed here illustrate the application of *secondary* lexemes in the naming of culturally important plants, it will become evident below that a much more productive strategy exists in Northern Sotho whereby monolexemic *primaries* are used for this purpose.

Northern Sotho folk taxonomy: summary

The following schematic representation summarizes the material discussed thus far:



Simplex primary lexemes

moôbaôba (yellowwood)
mohlware (wild olive)
mogaba (mountain seringa)
mokgalô (buffalo-thorn) etc.

Complex primary lexemes

Productive

(Not present due to semantic character of the class prefix.)

Unproductive

molalagaka (red thorn)
mohlabaphala (live-long)
moilagaê (bead-bean tree)
modulakgogo (lowveld cluster-leaf) etc.

↓

SPECIFICS AND VARIETALS

(Named by secondary lexemes. One component of the compound designates the superordinate.)

- motšhidi* (sourplum) – superordinate
motšhidikwanathê (common spike-thorn)
motšhidikômo (false spike-thorn)
motšhidiphiswane (red spike-thorn)

INTERMEDIATE CATEGORIES

Intermediate categories are categories of plants the naming of which deviates from the hierarchically structured pattern outlined above. The three categories of plants for which these deviations have been observed are (a) cultivated plants; (b) wild plants of cultural importance; and (c) wild plants with exceptional or conspicuous morphological (i.e. *gestalt*) features.

Cultivated plants

Cultivated plants like *tloo* (groundnut), *mphôgô* (finger millet), *lebêlê* (giant millet), *lefela* (maize), etc. present exceptions to the hierarchically ordered naming principles outlined thus far in that they cannot be associated with a particular life form. This implies that mother-tongue speakers regard cultivated plants neither as belonging to the life form tree, nor as belonging to other life forms like shrub, herb, grass, vegetable, etc. Examples such as those listed above are in the strict sense of the word *generic* names, but since they are not conceptually included into a particular life form, they, as it were, constitute highly specific life forms on their own. A further exceptional characteristic of such plant names in Northern Sotho is that the majority of them do not occur in class 3/4 despite the fact that they refer to plants. It is for reasons such as these that Atran (1985:310) aligns himself with Rogers who observes:

... among plants at the species [i.e., folkgeneric] and subspecies levels there are apparent and wide differences between natural and cultivated plants. These discrepancies indicate that modern systematics and nomenclature, aimed primarily at natural phenomena populations, cannot be appropriately applied to cultigens.

Also see Atran (1987); Berlin et al. (1973) and Berlin (1976).

Culturally important wild plants

The research undertaken for the purposes of this contribution revealed that wild plants which are highly valued by speech communities behave exceptionally as far as nomenclature is concerned. It became clear that, contrary to predictions made by the nomenclature hierarchy, certain varieties and specifics are named by primary and very often by simplex primary lexemes, instead of secondary lexemes. Berlin (1976:391) remarks as follows in this regard:

Although binomial nomenclature is the general rule for taxa of specific rank, a number of taxa which are taxonomically included in generic classes are labelled by primary lexemes and, as a consequence, constitute an exception to the binominality principle.

The first contrast set that can be cited was documented in the Soutpansberg region and includes members of the highly valued *Grewia* (wild raisin) genus about which *inter alia* Fox and Norwood Young (1982:354) remark as follows:

Gerstner (MS) states that nearly all species of *Grewia* (about 20) are very tasty, especially so are *Grewia caffra*, *G. flava* and *G. monticola*; some like *G. hexamita* (*G. messinica*) are more or less woody, but all are sweet ... According to Maguire (MS) at least ten species of *Grewia*, eaten by Bushmen, are difficult to distinguish as the species seem to merge into one another because of hybridisation, and there is also a variability in growth habit induced by local conditions. (My emphasis.)

Similar difficulties in the identification of *Grewia* varieties were encountered during the field work undertaken for the purposes of this contribution, and although the varieties of which the Northern Sotho names are given below have been identified with a fair amount of certainty, doubt still exists regarding the exact scientific name which corresponds with a particular Sotho name. For this reason, only the Northern Sotho names are given, except in the case of *Grewia flava* (*morêtlwa*) the scientific name of which could be established beyond doubt. Being the most common and particularly highly valued, *Grewia flava* has been elevated to the status of a generic in Northern Sotho since the name *morêtlwa* is currently used as a common denominator of all *Grewia* varieties. The generalization of a specific name is a fairly common naming strategy which has been observed in several other languages across the world. In this regard Berlin et al. (1973:224) observe:

... one of the members of the set is considered as the focal or most dominant member. Generally, the type specific taxon refers to members

of the generic class which have the widest geographical distribution, are larger in size, or are the best known ... In many natural contexts, it is often the case that one can refer to the type specific by the generic name alone (i.e. by the polysemous use of the generic name) with total confidence of being understood.

Consider the following contrast set: {*morêtlwa* (wild raisin): *morêtlwa* (*Grewia flava*); *sokê*; *phalane*; *kokorutô*; *sebonosamaphokwê*; *mpharatšhwêne*}. Authors like Berlin et al. (1973:216) and Swanepoel (1994a:40) point out that the greater the number of the varieties which are specified in a contrast set, the more important the genus is within a particular cultural context. Similarly, the less important a plant is within a speech community, the fewer the number of varieties which are distinguished become, to the extent that for culturally unimportant plants no varieties are recognised at all. Berlin et al. (op cit.) write:

Specific and varietal taxa characteristically occur in contrast sets of few members, the most frequent being a set of two classes. Contrast sets of more than two members tend to refer to organisms of major cultural importance.

For culturally unimportant plants or plants with limited usages like, for example, *Acacias*, no varieties are distinguished in Northern Sotho. This means that the different *acacias* are regarded as belonging to different monotypic *genera* which are terminal in that they do not include any other named categories. Consequently, they are labelled by generic names such as the following which have been recorded in the Soutpansberg region: *mooka* (sweet thorn – *Acacia karroo*), *mošu* (umbrella thorn – *Acacia tortilis*), *molalagkaka* (red thorn – *Acacia gerrardii*), *mofatanare* (scented thorn – *Acacia nilotica*), etc. With regard to *acacias*, the English nomenclature differs markedly from the situation in Northern Sotho. In English, the name *acacia* is used as a common denominator for all the different *acacia* species whereby all *acacias* are grouped together under the same superordinate term. (Note the recurring constituent *thorn* in the English names above.) In Northern Sotho, on the other hand, there exists no equivalent for the superordinate *acacia*, i.e. there is no single term which denotes *acacias* in general.

The second contrast set also documented in the Soutpansberg region involves members of the genus *Commiphora* (corkwood). The cultural importance of this genus is mentioned, *inter alia*, by De Winter et al. (1966:91) who observe that “several north African and Asiatic species are blended to obtain the fragrant and resinous myrrh”, and according to the informants the resin of these trees has traditionally been used in the preparation of soap. *Commiphora*

glandulosa (tall common corkwood) is regarded as the type specific and is called *mogôrôgôrô*. Due to the generic status acquired by this species, informants prefer to call *Commiphora glandulosa* *mokôulô*, while reserving the term *mogôrôgôrô* as a common denominator for all *Commiphora* varieties which occur in the region. However, whenever the name *mogôrôgôrô* is heard, it is first and foremost interpreted as referring to *Commiphora glandulosa*. The contrast set hence takes on the form {*mogôrôgôrô* (corkwood): *mogôrôgôrô*/*mokôulô* (tall common corkwood); *moôkgôthu* (green-stem corkwood); *serêkwé* (glossy-leaved corkwood)}.

The third contrast set which was documented in the Steelpoort region includes two varieties of the genus *Ximenia* (sourplum trees), i.e. *Ximenia caffra* (sourplum) and *Ximenia americana* (blue sourplum). *Ximenia caffra* is much valued as a food source and is known as *motšhidi*, and due to its focality in community life *motšhidi* has gained generic status. Although both species of *Ximenia* are referred to as *motšhidi*, *Ximenia caffra* is distinguished from *Ximenia americana* by preferably using the name *mohwele* for the former, and *morotologane* for the latter. The contrast set involved therefore takes on the form {*motšhidi* (sourplum – generic): *motšhidi*/*mohwele* (sourplum); *morotologane* (blue sourplum)}. Contrary to the situation in the Soutpansberg area, different varieties of the spike-thorn are not included in the contrast set for *motšhidi* in the Steelpoort region. (Compare the contrast set for *motšhidi* listed higher up under the heading *The naming of specifics and varieties*.) This clearly reveals the differences which exist between different speech communities regarding perceptions as to what ought to be grouped together as a taxonomic category under the same prototype.

Although the nomenclature principle predicts that varieties are named by secondary lexemes which are, per definition, complex, the three contrast sets discussed above reveal that varieties are quite commonly named by simplex primary lexemes in Northern Sotho. This anomaly in respect of the nomenclatural hierarchy is explained by ethnobiologists in terms of the cultural importance (i.e. focality) of these plants. This results in them obtaining a distinct and isolated status within a given community which makes them phenomenally salient (Atran, 1985:310; 1987:56). Consequently they are not only named by *primary* lexemes, but more so by *simplex* primary lexemes (Hunn, 1976:78; Berlin et al. 1973:224).

Plants with conspicuous morphological ("gestalt") features

The plant names which will be considered in this section do not present exceptions to the nomenclature principle as such. They refer to genera which

are monotypic and terminal, and as predicted by the nomenclature principle, their names are (either complex or simplex) primary lexemes, e.g. *seêmakamotho* (*Aloe marlothii*: Soutpansberg), *sebôï* (baobab: Steelpoort), *seokgolwê* (Transvaal sesame-bush: Soutpansberg), etc. They should, however, for language specific reasons be regarded as exceptional because they exhibit a prefix other than that of class 4 (*mo-*) which normally occurs in the names of plants; particularly trees. What such plants have in common is some kind of conspicuousness or morphological peculiarity in their overall appearance or *gestalt*. Compare, for example, the well known baobab which needs very little or no introduction in this regard. De Winter et al. (1966:110) write as follows regarding this tree:

A huge, deciduous tree, with a large swollen trunk Trees rarely over 45 ft, but with a stem-girth frequently about 75 ft, and known to be over 120 ft.

Similarly, when observing the Transvaal sesame-bush for the first time, one is immediately struck by the highly exceptional overall *gestalt* of this tree. Van Wyk (1994:214) refers, *inter alia*, to its short but exceptionally thick and “fleshy” trunk which spreads into branches very low above the ground. Particularly as far as stem habit is concerned, the morphological conspicuousness of these plants makes it very difficult for language users to reconcile them with the generally held view of what a prototypic tree should look like (compare also the *Aloe marlothii*). Consequently, linguistic recognition is given to their exceptional appearance by assigning their names to a noun class other than class 4 which usually denotes trees. The important role played in naming by exceptional *gestalt*-features has been recognised by a number of ethnobiologists such as Berlin et al. (1973:216, 219); Berlin (1976:388, 391); Atran (1985:309) and others. Stated in rather unscientific terms, the replacement of the class prefix of class 3 with another class prefix in the names of these plants entails that the language user regards them as something other than a prototypical tree. By doing so, the language user in fact conveys the message that such plants are not being regarded as members of the life form tree. As Berlin et al. (1973:216) put it:

It is not uncommon to find, however, a number of classes of generic rank which are aberrant (in terms of the defining features of the life form taxa) and, as such, are conceptually seen as unaffiliated (i.e. are not included in one of the life forms). Aberrancy may be due to a number of factors but *morphological conspicuousness* and/or economic importance appear to be the primary reasons involved. (My emphasis.)

Atran (1985:309) refers to such generic names as “unaffiliated” since they are

“apparently included under no life form”. As far as Northern Sotho in particular is concerned, these observations show convincingly that class prefixes are not merely semantically empty markers of what are generally regarded as grammatical “genders”, but that they contribute significantly to the overall meaning of nouns.

CONCLUSION

In this contribution Northern Sotho plant names have been investigated within the paradigm developed by ethnobiologists following nomenclatural trends in many languages of the world. The main objective was to ascertain whether the universal trends which have been observed by other investigators are also attested by the Northern Sotho data. It has become apparent that naming practices in Northern Sotho adhere, almost to a surprising extent, to what has been called the “nomenclature principle” and data from this language thus give further support to the idea that this principle has cross-cultural and hence universal underpinnings. The universal features of the nomenclature principle, however, cannot be fully appreciated if special attention is not given to what has been referred to as intermediate categories. Although such categories initially seem to present exceptions to the nomenclature principle, close scrutiny of the data reveals clearly explainable reasons for their exceptional behaviour. Furthermore, it should always be borne in mind that folk biological categories do not present themselves as discrete, watertight compartments. Here the important role played by the concept *prototype* in the consciousness of speech communities as well as in the minds of individual speakers should never be underestimated. Discrepancies between data obtained from different individuals from the same speech community, and from speech communities from different geographical regions are almost always explainable in terms of people’s intuitive personal perceptions and deductions regarding the biological diversity which surrounds them.

ENDNOTES

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2 Printed sources

The following printed sources were also consulted: Coates Palgrave (1981); De Winter, et al. (1966); Fox and Norwood Young (1982); Vahrmeijer (1987); Van Wyk (1993 & 1994) and Watt and Breyer-Brandwijk (1962). Two sources which were brought to my attention by Prof J.A. Louw due to his keen interest in the topic i.e. Fox and Norwood Young (1982) (of which Prof Louw kindly made his personal copy available) and Watt and Breyer-Brandwijk (1962) were particularly useful since the authors not only provide extensive lists of vernacular plant names, but also discuss the cultural importance of plants to indigenous peoples at length. These sources were first used to cross-check the data obtained from informants in the veld, and, secondly, they were consulted for additional information on species which do not occur in the research areas mentioned above.

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BUS NAMING AS A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY – A SWAZILAND EXPERIENCE

D.B. Ntuli

INTRODUCTION

In the preface to the book *Lithemba alibulali – hope does not kill* Shongwe and Nhlapo (1990:iii) say:

In Swaziland it is very common to see a person reading an inscription or a name of a bus and chuckling to himself with an expression of puzzlement, a smile or even breaking in laughter.

The puzzlement emanates from the peculiarity of most of the names which are emblazoned on the flanks of the buses. In most cases when one reads the name one feels there is some story or explanation hiding behind the name. This hidden meaning can only be disclosed through patient investigation.¹

In this discussion I shall look at systems discernible in the origin of some of these names² and point out onomastic peculiarities which place the naming of buses in a category of its own. Some of the names possess or produce literary and linguistic features which warrant special attention.

Only about 6% of the bus names are written in English in Shongwe and Nhlapo's book. The rest are in siSwati (abbreviated as "S") or isiZulu (Z) or a combination of these languages (S&Z) in one name. Of course there are words which are common in all respects in these two languages (S/Z). After the name, words such as "Bus Service" or "Express" or "Transport" are appended.



Most of the buses originally belonged to private individuals. Each owner coined a particular name with the intention of conveying a special message or information to the people who would see his or her bus.

Origin of the names

There are very few names which merely indicate the place of origin of the bus or the route it takes or the destination to which it travels. The bus, **Inkomati Bus Service**, for example crosses the Nkomati river.

There is little need for elaboration on the bus name which is taken from the first name or the clan name of its owner. The owner of **Mthunzi**, for example, is Mthunzi Matsenjwa. But even with what may seem to be a straightforward correspondence between the name of the bus and that of its owner, one may get the full picture only after making some enquiry. The significance of the bus name **Sanele**, for example, is understood more fully – after we have been told that Irvin Mabuza named his bus after his sister with the same name. The bus, **Qobonga**, was named after Qobonga, one of the forefathers of the owner of the bus, Elizabeth Masina whose name was Qobonga. **Lembelele Bus Service** was named after Lembelele Dlamini, the forefather of the bus owner Macebo Dlamini. A bus owner may wish to perpetuate the memory of his or her beloved relatives by painting their names on the sides of the bus.

Such honouring is not limited to the members of the immediate family. The bus owner may decide to exalt the whole clan to which he or she belongs.

EmaKhonkosi Express belongs to Reuben Mndzebele. The clan praise for the Mndzebeles is Mkhonkosi. This implies that all the people who share this praise are made to feel that **EmaKhonkosi Express** is their bus. The same applies to **Mahle EmaPhotholoz** (S) (The Photholozis are beautiful) owned by Francis Fakudze. Even those Fakudzes that Francis is not acquainted with are known as emaPhotholoz. They all share the compliments of being regarded as "beautiful" as *their* bus spreads this perception to whoever sees it.

Many bus names have an interesting history behind them. The most common story is that of a person who toils hard to get money to buy a bus. Having toiled hard he or she also struggles against odds to get a permit to operate, especially because of fierce opposition from objecting bus companies. When Johnson Tsela eventually got his permit, he justifiably exclaimed: **Awu Ngaphumelela** (S/Z) (at last I have succeeded). But in most cases the names are utterances or comments directed at members of the public. Jabulani Masuku's **Yekelani Transport** (S) got this name because he felt that his opponents were jealous. When he did well, he told them "*Yekelani umona*" (Down with jealousy!). Duma Msibi named his bus **Yivume Wethu** (Z) (Admit that I have beaten you), an expression made by a victorious fighter after striking an opponent with a stick. He was obviously telling those who had been trying to block his way that he had defeated them.

It is noteworthy that the name givers sometimes use the shortened forms of an expression. In order to appreciate the full meaning of that expression you must know the full text that has been abbreviated. According to my informant, Nhlanhla Khumalo, when Prince Mfanisibili Dlamini bought a fleet of buses, the people were curious about his source of income. He retorted: **Teka Takho** (S) (Mind your own business). The full proverb is "*Teka takho (tinzaba) ngobe tebantfu tiyafomisana*" (Mind your own business because other people's affairs will put you into trouble). Another bus owner wanted to complete the sentence started by Prince Mfanisibili; so he used the second portion: **Tebantfu Tiyafomisana** (S) to name his bus.

The use of a proverb as a bus name is common. The bus owner seems to wish to spread the wisdom contained in the aphorism to wherever his or her bus will travel. We find names such as **Kwandza Kwaliwa Batsakatsi** (S) (Wizards detest prosperity, i.e. thank you very much); **Lithemba Alibulali** (S&Z) (If you are hopeful you will eventually succeed); **Umbango Awakhi** (S/Z) (Disputes do not help to build); **Budze Abuphangwa** (S) (Don't do things you are not yet ripe enough for).

Other names are aimed at telling the people, especially the Swazis, to strive for

high ideals. They must unite and co-operate with one another. We thus find names such as: **Sizanani MaSwati** (Z) (Help one another, Swazi people), **Phambili MaSwati** (Z) (Go forward, Swazi people) and **Sukumani MaSwati Nitimele** (S) (Stand up, Swazi people, and be independent).

We have a substantial number of names which reflect the role Christianity plays in the lives of some bus owners. Mr Msibi was not ashamed to tell the world that he was grateful to God who enabled him to buy a bus. He named it **Bonginkosi** (S/Z)(Thank the Lord). What is obviously a prayer is found on Charles Matsenjwa's bus, **Hamba Nathi Nkosi** (Z)(Go with us, Lord). Shongwe and Nhlapo (1990:6) explain:

Since nowadays there are too many car accidents, he (Matsenjwa) wished that nothing should happen to the passengers while being transported. The name "Hamba Nathi Nkosi" is his prayer for the safety of the bus and the passengers.

David Zeeman's religious father liked to sing the hymn: "*Zulu khaya lami, ngiyophaphela kuwe ...*" In memory of his father, David used a phrase from this popular hymn and named his bus **Zulu Kaya Lami** (S/Z) (Heaven, my home).

Apart from these "dialogues", "speeches" and "prayers" we also find names used to advertise the service in a number of interesting ways. In some of these advertisements the bus owner uses gentle tactics to encourage people to board the bus. We find names such as **Masihambisane** (S/Z)(Let us go together), and **Wota Sambe** (S) (Come, let us go). It sounds as if the bus is coaxing the passenger to do it a favour by accompanying it on its journey. Such a gentle plea would be difficult to turn down. Malsov (Morgan & Welton 1986:104) considers the need for companionship as one of the five levels of human needs. In a subtle way the owner of the bus is aiming at satisfying this need.

In certain cases you are given a guarantee about your journey. When you see a bus with a name such as **Hamb' ubuye** (S/Z) (Go and return), you are assured that the bus will take you to your destination and back. You can depend on **Inyonimaphiko** (S/Z) (a bird with wings) because it will take you swiftly to where you want to go.

The bird metaphor is fairly common in the names, hence **Impangele** (S/Z) (guinea fowl), **Lijuba** (S&Z) (dove), **Ligwababa** (S)(crow). Of course if you want to go deeper than the surface meaning and symbolism of these metaphors you may discover interesting stories behind the name. With regard to **Ligwababa** for example, Shongwe and Nhlapo (1990:19) say that the owner, Mr Gule:

... named his other bus “Ligwababa” because of his past experiences. This is an extract from the Zulu saying, “Ngiyoxoxel” amagwababa echobana” – I’ll tell it to the crows whilst they are picking fleas from each other. This means that his experiences are so bad he will not forget easily.

Other animals which feature in these names are, for example, **Imbabala** (S/Z) (bushbuck), **Impala** (S/Z)(antelope), and **Inyatsi** (S) (buffalo). If you take **Imbabala** or **Impala** you will get to your destination in no time. These metaphors are well selected in order to present a positive image of the bus company. If you board **Inyatsi**, you will not be delayed by a breakdown on the way. Here again, if you ask the owner the exact reason for the choice of a particular animal you are likely to get an exciting story. Elvis Dlamini, the owner of **Inyatsi Bus Service**, had to confront people who discouraged him from embarking on this business. Because he was as strong as a buffalo he forged ahead. He hoped that his bus would also be strong and survive the rugged roads.

Ikhwezi (Z) (morning star) is a symbol of hope. Vondo Shongwe started his bus service just after Swaziland had gained its independence. He felt that there was new hope for prosperity in his country.

We do find names which have historical allusions. In explaining the origin of the name **Ingabisa** (S) (a show-piece), my informant, Celiwe Nxumalo, wrote that Duma Msibi, the owner:

... named it after king Sobhuza had named the first girls’ regiment as Ingabisa In his (Msibi’s) family this business was the first of its kind.

Slogans

Apart from having names by which they are registered, the buses also display various types of slogans on the forehead of the bus or at the rear or on the sides, above the doors. This is in agreement with what Vos (1992:33) observes regarding Durban buses that “... a bus may have a name, a nickname, a motto and message”. These occur in various combinations. Where an expression is shortened as the name on the side of the bus, that expression may be completed at the back as a kind of a slogan. For the expression “Inqabakayitshelwana” (an uncommon phenomenon), only **Inqaba Bus Service** (Z) appears on the sides and “*Kayitshelwana*” appears at the back of the bus.



The bus known as **Isiphiwo** (a gift) has “*Luvivane*” (S) (butterfly) written above the door.

On the rear is written: “*Olukaphunga Olukamageba*”, and further below that: “*ngathi ngiyaluthinta lwahaqabala*”.

The bus owner obviously borrowed “lines” from the praises of King Dingane of the Zulus:

*UVemvane lukaPhunga noMageba ...
Ngibe ngiyaluthinta lwahwaqabala ...*

(The butterfly of Phunga and Mageba ...
When I touched it, it frowned ...)



One is struck by the religious tinge in many of the slogans. Again Vos (1992:330, comments on how some buses

... carry inscriptions which identify the cultural and religious values of their owners, their operators and many of their passengers.

Timele Ngwane (S) (Be independent, Ngwane) has "*Jehova ungumalusi wami*" (The Lord is my Shepherd). **Sibhuluja** (S) (a mealie-cob) has "*Yizwa imithandazo yethu*" (Hear our prayers). One **Thuthuka Kusile** (Z) (Develop, it is dawn) bus has "*Nkosi Bathethelele*" (Lord forgive them). The other **Thuthuka Kusile** bus has "*Ukhona uMalusi*" (There is a shepherd). The different slogans for the buses belonging to this fleet are probably used to identify one **Thuthuka Kusile** from the others.

In some cases people are told in English that "Jesus is Lord".

Sibane (S) (the lamp) has "The Lord is my Shepherd". **Inawe Ngwane** (S/Z) (He is with you, Ngwane) has two slogans: "God be with us" and "Thank God". I asked one of the drivers about the kind of person the owner of one of these buses was, and he confirmed that he was a very religious person. The slogans are meant to spread the gospel, as it were. Of course this need not always be true since ownership of the buses may change hands.



Popular slogans such as "The Lord is my Shepherd" are used freely on buses belonging to different owners.

The attitude of the owner to women is clear to whoever reads "Women's Rights" written on the face of one of the buses.

Some of the inscriptions are meant to entertain or amuse those who read them. **Qobonga Brothers**, for example, has "*Unganginaki, okey*" (Don't worry about me. O.K.?) **Khuphuka Ngwane** (S/Z) (Come up Ngwane) has an interesting combination of slogans. We find "*Hhusha moya*" (Blow, wind); on the bumper is written: "*Uvele ngemadlebe entabeni*" (You appear with the ears on the mountain); behind the rear wheels, on the left-hand mud flap is written: "*Phakamisa Ndvodza*"; and the sentence is completed on the right-hand flap: "*Kuyesindza*" (Lift up, man, it is heavy).



One of the conductors explained that he sometimes drew the attention of the prospective passengers to his bus by using the slogan of the bus. This means that some of the slogans are, in fact, used as nicknames for the buses.

Praise poems (*tibongo*)

Buses are so much part of the community that they seem to be perceived as "human beings" who should be praised in the same traditional way as prominent heroes are praised. Leonard Dlamini called his buses by the name: **Sishingshane** (S) (a whirlwind i.e. an active, hard-working person). When any of his buses goes past, people praise it:

Shikisha Mntfwanenkhosi,
Shikisha Leonard.
Kwefika Asikhutulisane,
Bamshaya phansi batsakatsi.
Kwavela Sibhatu sababhatula;
Satala Sibhuluja,
Sahlanyela kwamila luchule,
Kwaba luhlata siganga.
Hha! Shikisha Leonard,
Shikisha Mntfwanenkhosi.

(Move fast, Prince.
Move fast, Leonard.
Asikhutulisane arrived,
The wizards killed him.
Sibhatu appeared and broke them off,
He gave birth to *Sibhuluja*,
He sowed seeds and
The veld turned green.
Move fast, Leonard,
Move fast, Prince.)

In these praises we learn how Leonard bought buses on which he used different inscriptions. On the first bus he used **Asikhutulisane** (S)(Let us help one another), on the next one he used **Sibhatu**, (S) (shoe) and on the third one he used **Sibhuluja** (S) (mealie-cob). Eventually he bought a fleet of green buses that people were very satisfied with. Although all of Dlamini's buses had the name **Isishingishane** on both sides, the additional inscriptions helped people to identify one **Isishingishane** from the others. In the *tibongo* we are given the history or the "genealogy" of the bus family.

While the bard is praising the bus, he simultaneously expresses admiration for the owner's fortitude during times of adversity. In the poem, we find typical *tibongo* formal features such as linking (lines 1, 2) and parallelism (lines 3, 5). Personification is a dominant feature in the poem.

In order to appreciate all the allusions found in *tibongo*, one needs to be supplied with adequate background information. The bus known as **Vulindlela** (S/Z) (Open the way) used to take people to Mlembe mines. Sometimes people wondered why the fruit they had put on the carriage on top of the bus disappeared. The conductor by the name of King used to explain that the fruit had obviously been eaten by rats. One day a mischievous passenger smeared

some poison on the fruit. King himself landed up in hospital. All this is summarised in the *tibongo*:

*Vulindlela, Mkholo lonsundvu netinyawo takhe,
Lohlala aphuphuma abheke kanyama kayipheli
Kuphel' ematinyw' endvodza.
BoKing bavuke etibhedlela
Ngekujik' emagundvwane bangesiwo.
Vulindlela yemaSwati*

(Vulindlela, Mkholo who is brown, down to his feet
Who is always full as he goes to
The big town (Mlembe).
King woke up in hospital
Because he had turned into a rat.
Vulindlela of the Swazi people.)

This poet incorporates praises borrowed from other sources. "*Mkholo lonsundvu netinyawo takhe*" has been borrowed from the clan praises of the Mavimbela. "*Kanyama kayipheli kuphel' ematinyw' endvodza*" is part of the praises for Johannesburg which are freely used to praise any big town or city. In a satirical manner the bard criticises King's behaviour.

Songs

Bus names have also stimulated the composition of traditional songs through which people, especially women, voice their protest. The bus, **Sondundu**, is named after its owner, Sondundu Dlamini. A person who was left behind by this bus composed the song:

Leader: *Sondundu, ngitowucela lokuhle kuwe.*
Chorus: *Wangishiya Sondundu, ubongiphatsela lokuhle.*
Leader: *Sondundu, ngiphatsela lokuhle mine.*
Chorus: *Wangishiya, Sondundu, ubongiphatsela lokuhle.*
Leader: *Mine ngitawugibela yiphi ibhasi?*
Chorus: *Wangishiya Sondundu, mine ngitawugibela bani?*
Leader: *Sondundu, ubongibonela Joana Masuku.*
Chorus: *Wangishiya, Sondundu, ubongiphatsela lokuhle ...*

(Leader: Sondundu, I am asking for something nice from you.
Chorus: You are leaving me, Sondundu, bring me something nice.
Leader: Sondundu bring me something nice.
Chorus: You are leaving me, Sondundu, bring me something nice.)

- Leader: Sondundu, which bus will I take?
 Chorus: You are leaving me Sondundu, which bus will I take?
 Leader: Sondundu please greet Joana Masuku.
 Chorus: You are leaving me, Sondundu, bring me something nice.)

Superficially the song is addressed to the bus, but it is clear that the singer is speaking to the owner, Sondundu himself. The singer has been inconvenienced by the early departure of the only bus that would take her to town. All she can do is to ask it to pass her regards to a popular woman announcer, Joana Masuku. The singer chooses the female announcer, probably because, as a woman, Joana will be in a better position to understand her (singer's) plight. The singer may be hoping that Joana will announce to the nation what the bus has done.

We have referred briefly to the bus known by the name of **Inqaba**. It operates between Nhlanguyavuka and Pigg's Peak. When it did not appear according to schedule, people complained, but they did this in a song of protest:

- Leader: *Inqaba.*
 Chorus: *Siyayikhale' Inqaba, siyayifuna.*
 Leader: *Inqaba ishonephi?*
 Chorus: *Siyayikhale' Inqaba, siyayifuna.*
 Leader: *Sibuta kuwe Jabulani.*
 Chorus: *Siyayikhale' Inqaba, siyayifuna.*
 Leader: *Tsine bakuNhlanguyavuka.*
 Chorus: *Siyayikhale' Inqaba, siyayifuna.*
 Leader: *Ngobe sisehlatsini.*
 Chorus: *Siyayikhale' Inqaba, siyayifuna.*
 Leader: *Sitjelele Nkotheni.*
 Chorus: *Siyayikhale' Inqaba, siyayifuna.*
 Leader: *Sibuta kutsi ibhekephi.*
 Chorus: *Siyayikhale' Inqaba, siyayifuna.*
 Leader: *Sibuta kini baholeli.*
 Chorus: *Siyayikhale' Inqaba, siyayifuna.*
 Leader: *Sitsi Inqaba ibhekephi.*
 Chorus: *Siyayikhale' Inqaba, siyayifuna.*
 (Leader: Inqaba
 Chorus: We are crying for Inqaba, we want it.
 Leader: Where did it go?
 Chorus: We are crying for Inqaba, we want it.
 Leader: We are asking you, Jabulani.
 Chorus: We are crying for Inqaba, we want it.
 Leader: We the people of Nhlanguyavuka.)

Chorus: We are crying for Inqaba, we want it.
 Leader: Because we are in a forest.
 Chorus: We are crying for Inqaba, we want it.
 Leader: Tell Nkotheni.
 Chorus: We are crying for Inqaba, we want it.
 Leader: We want to know from you, conductor.
 Chorus: We are crying for Inqaba, we want it.
 Leader: We say where did Inqaba go?
 Chorus: We are crying for Inqaba, we want it.)

In the song they ask Jabulani, the driver, who is also the bus-owner's son, to tell his father, Nkotheni, that the mysterious absence of the bus is frustrating them.

Commenting on these songs, Dlamini (1995:50) says:

... buses have a major function in rural society. Their failure to operate brings misery to the society. Bus owners should take their responsibility seriously and know that they are not engaged in the business for profit but also to give service to society.

Some linguistic features

The main indigenous language in Swaziland is siSwati. IsiZulu was the only African language taught in schools before siSwati was introduced as a school subject after 1967 when Swaziland had attained its independence. One of the features of bus naming in this country is that the name giver feels free to use isiZulu or siSwati or a combination of these in the same name. Although both of these languages belong to the Nguni group, they have a number of phonological, morphological and lexical differences which manifest themselves in the names. One of the differences is the absence of the initial vowel in some noun classes in siSwati.

A name is usually associated with the noun. In African languages we would expect all the names of buses to be easily slotted into one of the noun classes. There is no problem with names which are unquestionably nouns, e.g. **Injabulo** (S/Z) (joy), **Ikhwezi** (Z) (the morning star), **Umthombo Wempilo** (Z) (the fountain of life). When these names are used in a sentence, normal prefixes and concords of their respective classes are employed.³

The names which do not appear as nouns are put into class 1a. For this class isiZulu always uses the prefix *u-*, but this *u-* is latent in siSwati, e.g.

Lekelela Ngwane (S/Z) (help, Ngwane): (*lekelela* –imperative) >
(u)Lekelela Ngwane
Lensha (S) (a new one): (adjective) > **(u)Lensha**
Phambili MaSwazi (Z) (forward, Swazis): (*phambili* – adverb) >
(u)Phambili MaSwazi

Sometimes a speaker has to refer to a number of buses bearing the same name. An owner may feel the incongruity of using a name in its singular form in referring to his or her fleet of buses. Mr Sihlongonyane's first bus was **Intsaki** (S) (a finch). When the number of his buses with this name increased, he changed the name to the plural form, **Tintsaki**. Sibhuluja Thomo used his first name to name his bus **Sibhuluja**. Shongwe and Nhlapo (1990:38) remark:

Since he had a number of these buses he decided to name them
“*Tibhuluja*” which is plural of “*Sibhuluja*” – which means maize cobs.

One informant suggested that in a situation where we have to refer to only one of the buses with the name in the plural form, we may revert to the singular form, e.g. **Intsaki** instead of **Tintsaki**.

When a name is written in the singular form, a speaker may use the normal plural prefix to imply plurality, e.g. **uMasihambisane** > **boMasihambisane** (S). In this example *bo-* denotes “distributive” plurality. Explaining this plurality in the context of kinship terms and human beings, Van Wyk (1987:35) says: “Nouns with a distributive plural meaning refer to sets of semantically identical individuals.”

We may also get “associative plurality” (Van Wyk 1987:35) when we imply that apart from the bus with a specific name, there are also other buses with other names. **(b)Masihambisane** may thus mean that one of the many buses is **Masihambisane**.

The question then arises as to whether the name in the plural form still qualifies to be taken as a proper name. In his discussion of the semantics of common nouns and proper names Leech (1990:160) states:

It does seem ... that all proper names incorporate the feature
COUNTABLE and most of them the feature SINGULAR.

There is much controversy on the validity of the premise that a proper name is singular. A proper name which is grammatically similar to a common noun tends to shift to the level of the latter when the speaker intends to convey the idea of plurality.

The problem is compounded when one intends to convey the idea of plurality in the case of a bus name based on a noun which has no plural form, e.g.

Inkululeko (S/Z) (freedom), **Umusa** (S/Z) (kindness). It is not uncommon to hear speakers using the class 2a prefix and concords, so that we get *oNkululeko abane* (Z) or *boNkululeko labane* (S).

The emergence of an irregular morphological construction in the formation of the plural form of the proper name confirms that, in fact, this name is not meant to be used in a plural context. Raper (1983:268) says:

Possibly the most important function of a name is that of referring uniquely, that is, indicating within context one specific and individual entity out of countless possible entities with the same name.

The difference between what Raper refers to as "countless entities with the same name" and the buses with the same name is that the former may differ remarkably in some respects whilst the latter may be exactly the same. The buses sharing the same name may be of the same model and have the same size, shape and colour. Once we try to use the name in the plural form, its status as a proper name seems to be eroded because the name is shared by many "entities" even though they are similar. We appreciate the view by some scholars cited by Raper (1983:268) when they argue that a proper name shared by many people, (e.g. Paul 1, Paul 2, Paul 3) has elements of a homonym.⁴

Like other names in African languages (cf. Pongweni 1983:3), many bus names are sentential. Nguni languages use the conjunctive way of writing, this is why a one-word name can sometimes be translated into a long sentence. What are independent words in other languages are mere morphemes in a Nguni name, e.g.

Asikhutulisane (S) (Let us share maize from one cob: i.e. let us help one another)

Compound names are fairly common:

Impikanelanga (Z) (compete with the sun): < *phika* (verb) + *na-* (conjunctive) + *ilanga* (noun)

Intamakuphila (S) (try to live): < *tama* (verb) + *kuphila* (infinitive)

We do get very long names which are reminiscent of "verses" of praise poetry. On one bus we find a name with four words: **Mandla Ngampisi Kubaka Mamba** (S) (Obtained by force from the Mamba people). In current orthography this could be written as **Mandlangampisi KubakaMamba**. Moses Dlamini's bus is named: **Ulwa Nebuphuya Msamaliya: Wafa Wavuka** (S) (You, Samaritan, are

fighting poverty: you died and rose again). As we said earlier, some of these names are so long that they are broken halfway and continued elsewhere on the body of the bus. One wonders if the name giver really intended to give his/her bus a "name" in the proper sense of the word or he/she was preoccupied with telling a story or imparting some information to the people.

The breaking up of some of the long names results in abbreviated versions and hypocorisms on the sides of buses. For **Insukanabani Idla Ngamabala** (S) (The service which had doubtful beginnings is now prosperous) only the first part of the expression, **Insukanabani**, appears on the sides of the bus. For **Inyonimaphiko** (a bird with wings) only the second portion, **Maphiko**, is used. The full meaning found in the complete or long name is encapsulated in the shorter "version" of the name. As we said earlier, in order to appreciate the significance of the short form one must know what the full form of the name is.

CONCLUSION

From this discussion it is evident that in some areas, names of buses are not mere tags to identify one bus from the others. They serve many functions, the main one of which is to communicate information and messages to people. The name tells us about the experiences and feelings of the owner. It may further be used by the owner to impart to his or her audience certain lessons and philosophies about life. From some of the names and slogans we are even afforded a glimpse of the personality of the name giver.

In most cases the process of communication agrees with the pattern found in most of the communication models. According to V. O'Donnell and J.S. Garth (Smith 1989:49) we normally have:

- the "sender" (the bus owner in our case),
- the "message" (a lesson or advertisement),
- the "channel" (the body of the bus)
- the "receiver" (the passenger or those who see the bus).

Lasswell (Morgan and Welton 1986:29) adds the element called "effect". The people who see the bus are expected to react by conforming to the norms suggested by the name, or by developing a positive attitude towards the bus.

We finally illustrated how the names of buses inspire the composition of poems and songs in a unique manner. The poems and songs in turn transmit to the community certain ideals which it must embrace to foster harmony and peace.

This discussion confirms the validity of the remark made by Herbert and Bogatsu (1990:3) on the criterion often used to distinguish African and Western names:

It is well known that African names "have meaning" and that speakers readily identify that meaning.

What is significant regarding bus names is that merely looking at the linguistic aspects does not take us to the core of the meaning. Nicolaisen (Botha 1986:28) remarks:

Quite clearly, onomastic field-workers would ... be neglecting a considerable amount of relevant information if they were to ignore ... non-linguistic data ... he (the field worker) will not for instance, neglect to obtain, or spurn as irrelevant, stories which, according to local oral tradition, explain the origin of certain names.

It has been demonstrated in this article how extra-linguistic details add more sense and richness to what might otherwise be a dry label.

ENDNOTES

1. I am indebted to Mr J.V. Bongwe, Secretary of the Road Transportation Board in Swaziland for the assistance he and his staff gave me when I was doing research on this subject.
2. Explanations were supplied by informants and bus conductors and supplemented by Shongwe and Nhlapo (1990).
3. There is often confusion regarding the letter to be capitalized. Should it be the initial vowel in cases of nouns where this vowel is found, or the consonant immediately after the initial vowel? The latter proposition has merit because the consonant is more stable than the initial vowel, e.g.
Ikhwezi: *Kukhona ne-Ikhwezi.* < *Kukhona neKhwezi.* (There is also *Ikhwezi.*)
Angiboni Ikhwezi lapha < *Angiboni Khwezi lapha.* (I don't see any *Ikhwezi* here.)
- 4 A fuller discussion of this aspect is found in Raper 1987, pages 82–83.

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