Morphology and semantics of proper names in Northern Sotho

Mampaka L. Mojapelo

Department of African Languages, University of South Africa
P.O. Box 392, UNISA 0003, Pretoria, Republic of South Africa
mojapml@unisa.ac.za

The objective of this article is to present the identifying features of the Northern Sotho proper name as a subcategory of the broader word category N (noun). The article analyses the identifying morphological features and semantic interpretations of two types of the proper name, namely, personal and place names in comparison to the common noun. Some proper names in Northern Sotho have the same phonetic form as the common noun, but can be distinguished by morpho-syntactic means. Common nouns may serve as modifying agents and compound with personal proper names for specific semantic effects. Four morphological forms reveal that both common and proper names are used to form place names, with specific morphological elements selecting either common or proper names. As languages advance, it becomes necessary that linguistic elements such as these be afforded further linguistic exploration for valid automatic identification so that they can be extracted from texts for various applications.

Introduction

‘Proper names are the Rodney Dangerfield of linguistics. They don’t get no respect’ (McDonald, in Boguraev & Pustejovsky, 1996:21). At least comedian Rodney Dangerfield could make ‘his feelings’ known with his catchphrase: ‘I can’t get no respect’. The general tendency observed in the literature is that proper names have traditionally not enjoyed attention in theoretical linguistics. However a closer look at the subcategory uncovers interesting grammatical features that may be helpful for recent and upcoming applications.

Proper names are generally names of persons, animals, products, places and personified characters in fictitious contexts. They are also known as proper nouns. There are opposing views with regard to whether or not proper names have any semantic content (Valentine, Brennen & Brédart, 1996; Lyons, 1999; Cruse, 2000). One view is that they do not, since they only denote an individual, nothing more. Another view is that they do have sense and they denote one-member sets. Both views, however, state or imply that proper names constitute unique references.

The proper name is used in communication to enable identification, that is, it makes unique reference to a particular identifiable entity. When the speaker thus uses a proper name he is making reference to one, and only one individual or entity. The common noun, on the other hand, may refer to any member of a class of entities. One distinction in this regard, adapted from Ziff (as cited in Zabeeh, 1968) is that: if there are two identical animals, for instance, and animal A is a *mpša* ‘dog’, it stands to reason that animal B is also a dog. But if animal A is called **Tilo**, it does not make animal B **Tilo**. Similarly, if animal B is called **Sparky**, that does not make animal A **Sparky**. It is a matter of **rose** vs **Rose** or *palesa* ‘flower’ vs *Palesa*.

The proper name serves the same basic function cross-linguistically. The naming traditions and patterns mainly reflect a people’s culture and, as such, there are bound to be characteristic features peculiar to a particular language. For this reason, as a subcategory of the broader word category N (noun), a Northern Sotho proper name forms an important part of the language.

The proper name has several types. To use but one typology, Grass, Mayrel and Piton (in Ranchhod & Mamede, 2002) distinguish proper names as anthronyms (personal), toponyms (locational), egronyms (product) and pragonyms (event and phenomena). This article will confine itself to examples from two types only, namely anthro-

nyms and toponyms. First names and family names are sub-types of anthronyms; and village or town names are a sub-type of toponyms. The two types seem to be the most frequently used, and they display most of the features observed and under discussion in this article.

While it may be necessary to try and look systematically at the grammar of proper names mainly as lexical units, it is also important to look beyond the unit, given the role of agreement morphology in the syntax of the language. An obvious way of recognizing a proper name as a unit in a text is delimitation, that is, it will always start with a capital letter and end just before a space or punctuation (except a hyphen).

In Northern Sotho, some first names have been recategorized from common nouns, that is, common nouns have acquired a function of uniquely individuating a person; and the two co-exist in the language, for example: *Mpho* x *mpho* 'gift', *Mogau* x *mogau* 'mercy' and *Sello* x *sello* 'lament'. As such, the above-mentioned identifying strategy will not hold by itself if a common noun appears at the beginning of a sentence. One way of resolving such ambiguities is to take the analysis beyond the bounds of the NP (noun phrase). Some elements in the VP (verbal phrase), such as agreement morphology and the semantics of the verb, would be considered. As far as agreement is concerned, agreement morphology of Classes 1 and 2 will serve as a cue. The semantic feature [$\pm$ human] will be taken into account for the subcategorization of NPs in the VP structure; that is, the verb should belong to a class that can only subcategorize for NPs with the feature [+human]. For a place name, agreement morphology will resemble locative classes. A place name will mainly assume an adverbial position and the semantics of the verb will exhibit subcategorization of NPs with the feature [+loc].

The grammar of the Northern Sotho proper name is discussed below, with special attention to its morphology and semantics.

Personal names

Morphology

As a subcategory of the word category N, the proper name also has a nominal classification, namely class 1a in the singular and class 2b¹ in the plural. The morphology of proper names in prominent Northern Sotho grammars has gone as far as the nominal class level, also indicating dual semantic interpretation of the plural prefix. Proper names have mainly been clustered with kinship terms (Ziervogel, Lombard & Mokgokong, 1969; Lombard, 1985; Nokaneng & Louwrens, 1990; Poulos & Louwrens, 1994).

Class 1a has a zero prefix and the plural prefix is **bo-** class 2b. For example:

- (1) *Lesiba: BoLesiba*
'Lesiba: Lesiba & company/more than one person bearing the name Lesiba'

There seems not to have been much interest in the proper name, probably because there was little that could be done about it, and this issue is not limited to Northern Sotho. However, it may now be necessary to explore the subcategory further because of the following reasons:

- It has to be acknowledged that the nature of the Northern Sotho proper name is unique.
- The growing need for technological linguistic applications may require that the proper name be explored further to be properly identifiable and classified, and therefore interpreted as such.

According to Dalli (in Gelbukh, 2004), the proper name extractions and verification processes are not without challenges. It is for this reason that the subcategory should be explored.

The following table illustrates a comparison of recategorized proper names with corresponding common nouns or verbs of origin:

Table 1: Basic morphology

Name	Morphological analysis			
	Proper		Common	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nouns				
(1) Lesedi	Lesedi	Bo-Lesedi	le-sedi 'light'	ma-sedi
(2) Mahlatse	Mahlatse	Bo-Mahlatse	-----	ma-hlatse 'luck'
(3a) Mpho	Mpho	Bo-Mpho	m-ph-o 'gift'	dim-ph-o
(3b) Dimphe	Dimphe	Bo-Dimphe	-----	dim-ph-o
(4) Katlego	Katlego	Bo-Katlego	k ² -atl-eg-o 'success'	di-k-atl-eg-o
(5) Sello	Sello	Bo-Sello	se-ll-o 'lament'	di-ll-o
(6) Lerato	Lerato	Bo-Lerato	le-rat-o 'love'	ma-rat-o
Verbs				
(7a) Kefilwe/	Kefilwe/	Bo-Kefilwe/	ke-f-il-w-e	re-f-il-w-e
(7b) Refilwe	Refilwe	Bo-Refilwe	'I've been given'	'we've been given'
(8) Thabang	Thabang	Bo-Thabang	thab-a 'rejoice'	thab-a-ng

As illustrated in Table 1 above, being recategorized from common nouns and verbs, any one of the proper names is an orthographic unit, which will also exhibit morphological differences from the corresponding common noun or verb. The original singular or plural prefix, as in the case of a common noun for instance, can no longer serve or be viewed as a prefix in the proper name; the prefix of the common noun and the stem together constitute a unit, namely a proper name. The proper name has Ø prefix in the singular and the plural is marked by the prefix **bo-**.

Semantics

Contrary to popular belief, not every personal name in Northern Sotho has a clear meaning. There is a growing tendency to try and reconstruct every personal name in order to make a synchronic recovery of their semantic content because of the fashionable view that 'all African names mean something'. Efforts at forcing meaning (formally and informally) out of some traditional proper names are often either or both inaccurate and downright ridiculous, and therefore seem fruitless. Some traditional names that are carried over from generation to generation do not have clear derivational origins, and therefore seem to fit the general view that proper names are expressions with no sense. Another possibility is that their origins may be so archaic that the senses have been lost over generations.

However, in such traditional names there is generally a clear guidance with regard to the masculinity and femininity of the referent. The names have an inherent semantic feature [$\pm$ male], subject to the naming patterns of a particular clan. Just as it may not be appropriate to name a girl John and a boy Elizabeth, in Northern Sotho it would be odd to name a girl *Malose* or *Mašilo* and a boy *Mokgadi* or *Mosima*. The name has, therefore, inherent information about the gender of its bearer. The name-giving patterns of a specific clan or dialectal group, coupled with cross-marriages, may see these conventions violated to a minimal extent. However this would not be the norm but rather a generally understood deviation from semantic regularity.

As illustrated in Table 1, other proper names exhibit overlaps with common nouns and other word categories because of recategorization, and the semantic content of the original lexical item is carried over to the proper name.

Even common animal names are often recategorized as proper names and personified in the context of folktales. Proper names in general have unique reference. Their role of unique identification, as proper names, surpasses sense.

As illustrated in example (1) above, unlike common nouns, singular proper names of persons have no overt class prefix. The difference in semantics is that while in the case of common nouns the plural prefix indicates ‘two or more of the same’, the proper name prefix **bo-**, as in the case of *BoLesiba* for instance, also refers to ‘a person called Lesiba & associates’, irrespective of what their names are.

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, some of the Northern Sotho personal proper names have been recategorized from common nouns (cf. also Table 1). They are mainly given to babies as a result of certain events or emotions associated with their coming into existence and as such their semantic contents are clear, as being transferred from the original common noun. An important point to note is that a baby may not necessarily be named *Mapula* simply because it was drizzling when she was born; it normally has to have been a memorable incident or occasion. In other cases the original intent is corrupted by the name-giving processes, whereby a child may inherit such a name without a similar cause.

Other examples of such names and likely triggers are:

- (2a) *Khomotšo* ‘consolation’: may have been conceived or born following a sad experience.
- (2b) *Lethabo* ‘joy’: expression of joy for the family or birth coinciding with some celebration.
- (2c) *Modiegi* ‘the slow/delayed one’: a remarkable gap between conception and the preceding sibling or an unusually long labour.

In the majority of these names, the semantic feature [$\pm$ male] is not strictly adhered to. However, a particular morphological feature in some of them may exclude one gender. For instance, while the name *Puleng* may be acceptable for both genders, *Mapula* is restricted to females because of **ma-**, shortened *mma*, basically ‘mother’:

- (3) *Ma* ‘gender marker [-male]’ + *pula* ‘rain’ > *Mapula*

The same applies to *Sello* vs *Masello*. A name such as *Dikeledi* ‘tears’, tends to be gender specific [-male], without any morphological or semantic support. *Morongwa* ‘angel/the one which is sent’, on the other hand, draws its gender bias from traditional practices, whereby the name would be given to the first baby girl that follows a number of male siblings. The male version is *Mašilo*, the first baby boy who follows a number of female siblings.

Other common nouns with ‘ugly’ or undesirable meanings are subcategorized and often given to babies whose parents have lost a relatively high number of babies before. Traditionally, this kind of naming worked as a believed defence mechanism against severe infant mortality, and the belief was that this supposedly ‘don’t care’ attitude would lead to the baby’s survival. That was the belief and the role of such names; and they were neither known to rub off their meaning onto nor to determine the fate of the bearers – that would still be blamed on genealogy and other environmental circumstances. Examples of such names are: *Ntatauwane* ‘monster’, *Kgokgo* ‘monster’, *Roto* ‘male baboon’ and *Matlakala* ‘leaves/peels/rubbish’.

A few personal names have been recategorized from days of the week. While their origin may also be in proper names, their reference is different. The reason behind the naming mainly relates to the link between the birth and the specific day of the week. The following are well-known examples, with translations of their original counterparts, namely, days of the week:

- (4a) *Mošupologo* 'Monday'
 (4b) *Mokibelo* 'Saturday'
 (4c) *Sontaga* 'Sunday' (loan)

Specific morphological tendencies and their semantics

Compounds

Two nouns often compound to form one proper name. One part of the compound, a common noun, would serve as a modifying agent while the part that was originally a proper name is the base, and the two would form a unit.

The following compounds illustrate:

*Compounds with **Mma** (**Ma**)*

For females, the names as discussed above may be compounded with *Mma* 'mother', which is mostly presented as *Ma* in written form but still pronounced *Mma*. In the context of personal proper names, specifically first names, *Mma* (*Ma*) is a marker of femininity and does not necessarily mean mother. It marks the name as [-male]. Examples of such names are: *Mapula*, *Malehu*, *Masello* and *Mampho*.

A compounded name with *Mma* may also be given to a new bride based on the name of her anticipated first child. Naming is one of the activities on welcoming a new bride to a family. The name would identify her as part of that family or clan because specific main names are known to be associated with specific clans. Traditionally, a baby's name would be known before it is born due to specific name-giving patterns of the clan. However, the name would be given to the baby formally after birth, at a specific time and by the suitable person. Even if the new bride never has a biological child, she would still be 'that child's mother' by virtue of her status and position in her married family and clan. For example: *M(m)akgabo* or *M(m)anare* would be given to brides whose first babies are going to be *Kgabo* or *Nare*, respectively.

Mma may also be compounded with a family name; in which case it will never be contracted to *Ma*, and has a different meaning. *MmaMatlala* means Mrs Matlala.

*Compounds with **Ngwana***

The compounding for equivalents of Mrs, as demonstrated above, is not the only way of addressing or referring to a woman and is rarely used traditionally for the following reasons:

- In traditional African settings, the use of a surname would not suffice for the purpose of unique identification, since a particular surname would often dominate a village.
- As a result of particular traditional name-giving patterns, it was also common for people of the same surname to share a first name.

A common traditional identification strategy was to use a woman's genealogical descent. For this purpose, her family name would compound with *ngwana* 'child'. *NgwanaDikgale* means née Dikgale. Traditionally, when a woman is married she is not 'lost' forever. She remains part of her family, and the manner in which she is addressed or referred to by her in-laws and the people of their village would reflect recognition of who she really is. They would, in most cases, neither use her first name nor an equivalent of Mrs X, but call or refer to her by 'whose daughter' she is. Traditionally, it is therefore common practice for people to be identified as children or grandchildren of *NgwanaDikgale*, *NgwanaMogodi*, *NgwanaMolepo*, *NgwanaMogonong*, *NgwanaTladi* or *NgwanaMothiba*, depending on the origin of a particular woman married into the clan or village.

Compounds with **Rra (Ra)**

In most traditional Northern Sotho clans, a person would have a number of first names, with varying roles. The baby would take over the set of names of the person it is named after. Among the set of names, is what is called *leina la go wela* ‘the name of coming of age’. This name is a known member of the set but it was traditionally proper that it be used only after a person had been initiated – the name that was used before would be avoided, as a sign of respect. Most of such names have male/female counterparts.

In common names *ra-*, as a contracted form of *rra* ‘father’, carries the semantic feature [+male], while *mma* is [-male]. *Ralebenkele* ‘shopkeeper, male’ and *mmalelengwana* ‘gossip, female’ are examples of such compound nouns. However, it is not clear how *ra-* (or is it *Ra-*?) came to mark femininity in the sub-set of personal proper names mentioned in the previous paragraph. The observation is that of first names, *Ra-* carries the semantic feature [-male] in this class only.

The following table illustrates pairs of names (with the name in the left column being a woman’s name and a corresponding male name, without *Ra-*, appearing on the right):

Table 2: [-male] Ra-

[-male]	[+male]
Ramatsemela	Matsemela
Ramatsobane	Matsobane
Ramaesela	Malesela
Raesibe	Lesiba
Ramaredi	Maredi
Raesetja (Raesetša)	Lesetja (Lesetša)
Ramadimetja (Ramadimetša)	Madimetja/Madumetja (Madimetša/ Madumetša)

Direto

One of the members in a set of first names is *direto*; singular: *sereto* ‘praise, but mainly [a] greeting name’. Unlike clan names and/or totems that are also used for greetings, but have collective reference, the *direto* under discussion here are individual greeting names. People of the north-western dialect cluster of Northern Sotho do not have these individual *direto*, and often a bride from that area would be named upon arrival at her in-laws. These also have male/female versions, although some cases overlap. The [+male] version would either be compounded with *mosadi* ‘woman’, or shortened **-adi** to give rise to the [-male] counterpart. Table 3 below illustrates this point:

Table 3: Direto

[+male]	[-male]
Mphela	Pheladi
Nape	Napjadi (Napšadi)/ Napogadi
Phaahla	Phaahlamosadi
Ngwato	Ngwatomosadi
-----	Mologadi
-----	Mogotladi
-----	Shatadi (Šatadi)
Mosebo	Mosebjadi

Diminutive

Diminutive forms of first names occur either independently or alongside their non-diminutive counterparts, marked by suffixes **-nyana** and **-ana** (or variant **-ane**):

(5a) *Mphonyana*

(5b) *Sekhongwana*

(5c) *Pulane*

In folktales, they mainly occur alongside each other as illustrated below:

(6a) *Mokgadi – Mokgatšana*

(6b) *Mašilo – Mašilwane*

It is however possible for a girl to be called *Mokgatšana*, for instance, if there is an older person of the same name in the same neighbourhood, even if her name is *Mokgadi*. Such forms rarely become formalized, but are very practical for unique identification.

Family names follow the same morphological patterns with regard to analysis and the semantics of the plural prefix. The same cannot be said of the semantics of **M(m)a** and **Ra-** appearing in a family name.

Place names

In the South African context, the original, unregistered place names, commonly used by the indigenous people, and the registered names that were later given to the same places, have always existed side by side. Examples are: Modimolle, Polokwane, Tshwane, Mokopane, Mashishing and Mangaung alongside Nylstroom, Pietersburg, Pretoria, Potgietersrus, Lydenburg and Bloemfontein, respectively. From these pairs the discussion will be limited to non-foreign place names.

Morphology

Place names in Northern Sotho can morphologically be subcategorized into four groups. There are those without a grammatical locative marker, those marked by the prefix **ga-**, those with suffix **-ng** (**-ing**) while some exhibit the prefixation of **bo-**. To form place names, the prefix **ga-** is used with proper names while **-ng** is suffixed to common nouns. **Bo-** is prefixed to a proper name root that would often be of an ethnic group, sub-ethnic group or clan. For example: *Gauteng* < *gauta* ‘gold’ + **-ng** (locative suffix); *GaMolepo* < **ga-** (locative prefix) + *Molepo* (proper name; surname); *Bořokwa* < **bo-** (locative prefix) + *-řokwa* (proper name root; ethnic/dialectal group). Others such as *Tshwane* have no affixes; some of them are deverbatives, some exhibit reduplication or compounding. Examples: *Tlhakano* > **-hlakana** ‘meet/ come together’ (deverbative), *Bela-bela* > reduplication of verb stem *-bela* and *Phalaborwa* compounding *-phala* + *-borwa* (cf. the semantics below). Table 4 below illustrates the four types, with affixes in bold:

Table 4: Morphology of place names

Ø	Ga-	-ng	Bo-
Moletlane	Ga Mamabolo	Gaut eng	Bok galaka
Tshwane	Ga Nchabeleng	Mahweler eng	Bop edi
Modimolle	Ga Thaba	Dithaban eng	Bok gaga
Phalaborwa	Ga Masemola	Ditlhopan eng	Bok gatla
Moletji	Ga Mothapo	Seroban eng	Bol obedu
(Moletši)	Ga Dikgale	Hweleřan eng	Boř okwa

Semantics

The semantics of place names that are grammatically unmarked vary in terms of origin. Some exhibit their origin from common noun recategorization by word extension, reduplication or compounding, such as *Bela-Bela* < *-bela* ‘boil’ and *Phalaborwa* < *-phala* ‘surpass’ + *borwa* ‘south’, while some are known to be the personal names of rulers of the areas, such as *Tshwane*. Some place names’ etymology shows no semantic link with the surface meaning; for example, although *Sepanapudi* is a meaningful Northern Sotho compound noun, as a place name it is known to originate from the Afrikaans surname, Swanepoel. Constituent parts of the compound, as a Northern Sotho word, are: **Se-** (cl. 7) + *-pana* ‘harness’, from Afrikaans ‘(in)span’ + *pudi* ‘goat’.

The semantics of affixes used to form place names, as indicated above, is the same as used in common nouns. All three have the semantic feature [+loc]. Therefore, the point of departure at explaining the semantics of these affixes will be based on common nouns.

There are orthographical issues regarding place names with **ga-**, which will not be entertained here because of the scope of this article. (This is merely mentioned because of the link with the semantics of **ga-**.)

In explaining the semantics of **ga-** with common nouns Poulos and Louwrens (1994) indicate that the locality involved would be 'conceived as being the property or the territory owned by the individual or individuals'. Proceeding to place names, which are proper names, they present the case as follows:

ga- is written together with the name as one word, and both **ga-** and the name are written in capital letters, e.g. GaModjadji (Poulos & Louwrens, 1994:335).

In the process of dealing with orthographical issues regarding conjunctive versus disjunctive writing, as well as the use and non-use of the capital letter in place names with **ga-** *Northern Sotho terminology and orthography no. 4* (1988:20), puts the following forward:

Whenever a place name is formed with **ga-** this place name is written as one word, e.g.: GaNchabeleng.

Note: GaModjadji is not an official place name as is the case with GaNchabeleng, that is why the **ga-** in the middle of the sentence is not written with a capital letter.

Compare:

Ba ya GaNchabeleng (They go to GaNchabeleng).

Ba ya gaModjadji (They go to the place where Modjadji reigns/ rules).

Ba ya ga Modjadji (They are going to Modjadji's house i.e. place where Modjadji is to be found).

The extract above seems to differentiate a place name from an official place name. The notion 'official' in this case is not explained. What makes a name official, and at what stage is it considered official? Is the official or non-official status of a place name something permanent? If one assumes that 'official name' means 'registered name', one would struggle to see how the status impacts on the noun's categorization as a common or proper noun. If the assumption that 'official' means 'registered' is correct, it will also imply that we cannot guarantee the status of a name as official or non-official to be permanent at any given time. One would have thought that place names are proper names and they would therefore have a standard way of writing, official or not.

The part that links directly to the semantics of **ga-** from this source is the implication that a person will always be found at his house. This looks like a mix-up between the two locative prefixal morphemes **go-** and **ga-**. For the purpose of disambiguation, the semantic use of these two morphemes will be clarified. **Go-** is the one with a semantic content implicating the presence of the referent at the place. **Ga-**, on the other hand, has a semantic content of ownership of the place by the referent. Two dialect clusters, namely the Central and East-Central, use **ga-** both for its meaning and for the meaning of **go-** with regard to the presence of the referent at the place; which would obviously not make 'presence' or 'absence' a distinguishing feature. In the following examples **go-** and **ga-** are used with common nouns to illustrate the semantic difference between these two morphemes, as well as to reflect on the *Northern Sotho terminology and orthography no. 4* explanation:

(7a) *Malesela o iša ngwana [go [malome]].*

'Malesela takes a/the child to (my) uncle.'

(7b) *Malesela o iša ngwana [ga [malome]].*

'Malesela takes a/the child to (my) uncle's home.'

- (8a) *Ngwato o dutše [go [malome]].*
 ‘Ngwato is sitting on (my) uncle (’s lap).’
 or
 ‘Ngwato had stayed where (my) uncle stayed.’
- (8b) *Ngwato o dutše [ga [malome] – ge a sa gola; ga o bone a kgona go apea bjalo.*
 ‘Ngwato stayed at (my) uncle’s home – when growing up; that’s why he cooks so well.’
- (9a) *Išago ke tla dula [go [malome] – gore ke be kgauswi le yunibesithi.*
 ‘Next year I will stay where (my) uncle stays – so that I am close to the university.’
- (9b) *Išago ke tla dula [ga [malome] – gore ke thuše mosadi wa gagwe ka gore e sa le mohwana.*
 ‘Next year I will stay at (my) uncle’s home – so that I help his newly widowed wife.’

In examples (7) – (9) above, the (a) sentences exhibit a strong implication of the presence of *malome* at the place in question. If *malome* is not at the place at the time **go-** cannot be used. The (b) sentences, on the other hand, do not suggest the presence of *malome* at the place; but rather *malome*’s ownership of the place/property. Sentences (8b) – (9b) have been extended for the purpose of contextualization. As is evident from the extension in (9b), *malome* would be incapable of being at his home at the time that the speaker will be staying there.

Therefore, *ga* Modjadji may have nothing to do with the whereabouts of Modjadji herself. The same meaning is carried over to place name formation, whereby Modjadji may as well be overseas and the place will still be GaModjadji. Is GaNchabeleng not also a place where Nchabeleng reigns/rules? How is where Nchabeleng reigns/rules different from where Modjadji reigns/rules? It is unclear how being non-official affects being a proper name.

Locative suffix **-ng** turns a non-locative common noun into a locality. Such locativized nouns may then be recategorized into proper names. The basic difference between a common noun and a proper name, as explained in the second paragraph of the introduction, would apply between *Dithabaneng* and *dithabaneng*, for instance:

- (10) **di-** ‘cl.10 prefix, pl.’ + **thaba** ‘mountain’ + **-ana** ‘diminutive suffix’
 + **-ng** ‘locative suffix’.

Dithabaneng, as a place name, would refer to a specific place, in this case a village in GaMphahlele in Limpopo Province, while the common noun *dithabaneng* may be at, on or in the vicinity of any grouping of ‘small mountains’ or hillocks.

Among the semantic interpretations of nominal class 14, prefix **bo-**, is the feature [+loc]. Several nouns of locality have **bo-** as the prefix, such as cardinal points *borwa* ‘south’, *bosobela/ bodikela* ‘west’ and *bohlabela* ‘east’. It emanates from *bohlabela* and *bosobela/bodikela*, which are deverbatives: *-hlaba* ‘rise’ and *-sobela* ‘set; disappear’/ *-dikela* ‘go around and be out of sight’, that **bo-**’s suitability is due to its semantics. Evidence from the indefinite NPs shows that when prefixed to indefinite nominal stems **bo-** brings in the semantic feature [+loc]. Compare the following indefinite NPs with the stem *-kete* ‘unspecified, unnamed, undetermined, unidentified or unknown’, and the class prefix will determine whether the entity referred to is a person (cl. 1 **mo-**), thing (cl. 7 **se-**) or place (cl. 14 **bo-**). The indefinite nominal stem *-kete* occurs in most cases in a reduplicated form. The following NPs illustrate this point:

- (11a) *mokete(kete)* ‘so-and-so’
 (11b) *sekete(kete)* ‘such and such a thing’
 (11c) *bokete(kete)* ‘such and such a place’

In the case of proper names, **bo-** seems to select nominal roots that refer to ethnic or sub-ethnic groups and clans or their totems. The name would then refer to the place, land or area belonging to those people, that is, where they live.

Conclusion

This article brings a traditionally peripheral area of linguistics, namely proper names, to the centre. It detaches the proper name from kinship terms, and explores it individually. Personal and place names are treated separately. They exhibit different, yet unique, morphological and semantic attributes. Personal names are either traditional, without any clear semantic content, or they overlap with common nouns and verbs, with traceable semantic content. Without a clear sense, a proper name may have the inherent semantic feature [$\pm$ male]. Personal names are also formed and modified by compounding with *mma*, *rra* and *ngwana* for specific semantic purposes.

Place names, on the other hand, either originate from personal names or they are recategorized from common words by a variety of morphological processes such as affixation, reduplication and compounding. It further shows that place names are also specifically formed by affixation with **ga-**, **bo-** and **-ng**. While **ga-** is prefixed to proper names, **bo-** is prefixed to proper name stems. The locative **-ng** is suffixed to common nouns, and the locativized nouns are then recategorized as proper names.

The discussion will hopefully facilitate some interest or 'respect' for proper names that will lead to further analyses, so as to minimize challenges that may be encountered during natural language processing activities.

Notes

1. Cf. Poulos and Louwrens (1994:16).
2. Note that *k-* in *k-atl-eg-o* does not represent a class prefix. It is an empty morph which is inserted before vowel commencing stems. The same applies to *-k-* in the plural counterpart of the example *di-k-atl-eg-o* where it is neither part of the prefix nor of the stem. Poulos and Louwrens (1994:34) state that '[t]he sound changes which occur when nouns are derived from verb roots which commence with a vowel, amount to the adding of the consonant *k* at the beginning of the verb stem'.

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