

## Socio-Cultural Meanings of Special Children Names in The Luba Culture of Kasai

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### Abstract

This article approaches the correlations between the names of special children and their birth circumstances. We have used the lexical-pragmatic theory to show how context and circumstance of births contribute to the names' meanings. This chapter considers recent work on lexical meaning developed within relevance theory which has been described using the term lexical pragmatics. This work focuses on how words are understood in context. It examines the socio-cultural significances of special children names in Tshiluba of Kasai (L31), the cultural language of Luba people of Kasai and one of the four national languages in Democratic Republic of Congo. Traditionally in the Luba culture of Kasai, the naming custom of special children depends on the contexts and circumstances surrounding their births.

Keywords: special children, names, luba-kasai culture

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### Introduction

Research in this area of investigation is rare. Most of it was in manuscript, some in newspapers and magazines, and most of it had never been published. But for us, we have been encouraged to approach this topic of our culture by this Marcus Garvey's quotation: "A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots". James Ngugi who is quoted by Donat Nkuna asserts that "Africans are quite good when they are dealing with the past". In this context, we are going to explain from the LUBA-KASAI culture some traditional names of special children and discuss them briefly not only as an onomastician, but also as lubas. In this research, we intend to discuss the traditional luba naming custom of special children by giving an anthroponymic explanation of their names.

With approximately 10 percent of the world's population having a disability of some sort, it is crucial to identify whether their needs are being fully served by society (Vornholt et al., 2018); (Bonaccio et al., 2020). International treaties and legislation dealing with human rights guarantee the rights of all persons, including those with disabilities, to certain provisions including the right to employment and the right to education (Pozón, 2016); (Broderick, 2020); (Stein & Bantekas, 2021). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights further emphasizes the value of education under the provision to provide technical and professional education and enable equal access to higher education based on accomplishment, while giving parents the right to decide how their children are educated. Despite the existing legal frameworks that deal with fundamental human rights for disabled populations, however, there are social, cultural, and economic barriers to their implementation (Lawson & Beckett, 2021); (Degener, 2016); (Wånggren et al., 2023). In an overview of international legal frameworks for disability legislation, the United Nations pinpoints the challenges of ensuring the full participation of disabled people in society due to social and cultural norms (Broderick, 2015).

Moreover, our article is divided into three parts. The first part will deal with the socio-linguistic context of the Tshiluba language. Here, we are going to speak of Tshiluba language and where it is spoken. The second part which is entitled names in the Luba culture of Kasai will include two parts which will cover category of names in the Luba culture and attribution of these names. In the third part, we shall be concerned with special children and their names. Here, we would like in particular to restrict ourselves in categorizing these special children according to the circumstances of their conception, childbirth or multiple birth. After this last part, we will draw a conclusion which will be followed by a bibliographic books references.

## Methodology

We have used the lexical-pragmatic theory to show how context and circumstance of births contribute to the names' meanings. This chapter considers recent work on lexical meaning developed within relevance theory which has been described using the term lexical pragmatics. This work focuses on how words are understood in context. The central idea here is that the contribution of words with conceptual meanings involves more than simply accessing the concepts encoded by the words and slotting them into semantic representations. Comprehension also routinely involves adjusting the encoded concepts to reflect specific meanings intended by communicators. Work in this area has been carried out not only by relevance theorists but also by a number of linguists, philosophers and cognitive scientists. A starting assumption for many theories is that regular content words contribute to utterance meanings by encoding concepts. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of this and an illustration that understanding some words involves making inferences about exactly how they are being used on a specific occasion.

## Results and Discussion

### *The Socio-linguistic context of the Tshiluba language*

Tshiluba (also known as Ciluba, Luba-Kasai, and Western Luba, among others) is a Bantu language of Central Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo) and cultural language of Kasai. This name "Kasai" derives from the Kasai River, the second-longest river in Democratic Republic of Congo. In (J. Kerr et al., 2023), classification of Bantu languages, Tshiluba falls into the central L region and is given the number 31 (L31). According to Annuaire statistique 2021 de la République Démocratique du Congo (Ministère du Plan), this region over an area of 324,433 square kilometers and has an estimated population of 17,000,000 people. As a result of the new administrative division of Democratic Republic of Congo in 2015, Kasai region was divided into five provinces: Kasai, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Lomami and Sankuru. All these provinces are predominately lubaphones. For illustrative purposes, below, we have a linguistic map of luba-Kasai language:

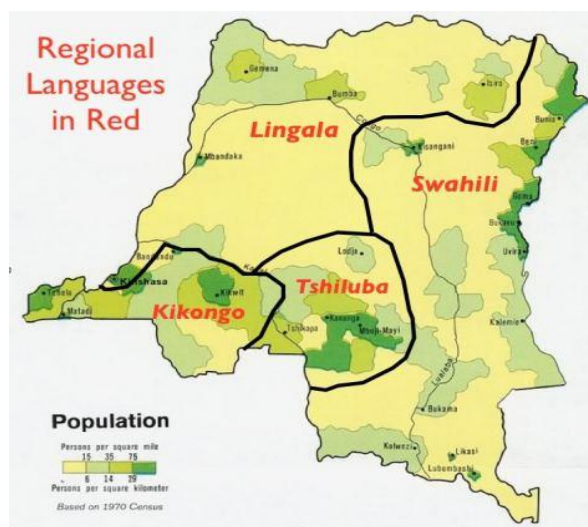


Figure 1. Map of luba-Kasaï language

### *Names in the Luba-Kasaï culture*

Concisely speaking, in this part of our article, we do not intend to talk about all the names of the Luba culture in general, but we would like in particular to speak about the individual names. But before moving into details, we would like to say a word about what we mean by individual name. The term “individual name” as such may be defined in several ways. Referring to (Dlodlo & Moyo, 2022), individual name is a “personal name identifying that individual person”, and today, it usually comprises a given name bestowed at birth or at a young age. But if we consider Oxford Wordpower Dictionary, the term is defined as a “word or words by which somebody is known, designated, or called. An individual name, or identity, is a powerful thing. It is a descriptor that allows people to make quick judgments and assumptions about us (Amit & Dolberg, 2023). According to (Quaglia et al., 2016); (Pilcher et al., 2024), our names are an incredibly important part of our identity. They carry deep personal, cultural, familial, and historical connections. They also give us a sense of who we are, the communities in which we belong, and our place in the world (Franklin & Tranter, 2021); (Reddy & Van Dam, 2020).

In African societies, great importance is attached to names, because in general, the belief system of African people is often anchored in a name given to an individual which determines his or her personhood and character (Primecz, 2024); (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). As far as the Luba-Kasaï culture names are concerned in this study, they are very attached to customs and families and they are often determined by the circumstances of the children births or linked to events experienced by the parents (Karatasas et al., 2024), in her *Lexique des noms Lubà (République Démocratique du Congo*, points out that « The Luba-Kasaï people have a consideration of their culture and the name is viewed as a new birth or as a confirmation of the cultural belonging of the child ».

### *Category of names in Luba-Kasaï culture*

In Luba-Kasaï culture, personal or individual names are classified according to the below categories:

- Mena a tshilelelu: names given to children at the birth.
- Mena a bupanga: names given to children depending to the circumstances of their births or also names of special children.
- Mena a bukole, bukallenge or bulungu: these names are taken towards adolescence, to the transition to adulthood, linked to an event that occurred later in the life of these persons or to personal achievements may change several time during the life of these individuals.

The second category of names that of special children, with their sub-categories of extraordinary births, will make the concern of our study in the third part of our article.

### *Attribution of names in Luba-Kasaï culture*

Naming a child represents an important cultural decision and reflects the identity that the parents or other of the family expect for the newborn (Hancock, 2023). In the Luba-Kasaï culture, at the birth of each child, the parents are given him or her a name. And the criteria of choice depend from one family to another but in most of the cases the newborn bears the name of a member of the family, a friend or a personality who marked a period of the life.

### *Special children and their names*

In this third part which is the heart of the present article, we will define special children, explain their names and classify them according to their births.

### *Special children*

Special children (also known as children with titles or in Tshiluba-Kasaï as “bana ba mapanga”) are extra-ordinary born-children. In the same line of thought, Francois Kabasele Lumbala (2004) says that: “Special children are those born in exceptional circumstances”.

The idea in these explanations given above is to demonstrate that their births depending on their conception, childbirth or to the multiple birth.

### *Special children names and meanings.*

In the Luba-Kasaï culture, names of special children are not given at random. They have special meanings which depend on the contexts of their births. To have an idea about their names, these children can be classified in nine categories:

#### *According to the multiple birth (Number of children born once at the birth).*

- Mapasa (twins, triplet ...): we have Mbuyi, also called Tshibuabua (the first born of twins) and Kanku or Kabanga (the second born or the youngest twin). In the case of triplet, we have Mbuyi, Kanku and Katuma (the last born of triplet). Nsanza is the last born of quatriplet and Nsanga is a twin pregnancy survivor. The parents become Muambuyi (Mother of twins) and Shambuyi (Father of twins).

#### *According to the conception*

- Ntumba is a child who conception is special, that is to say, the mother does not realize it, because since the previous delivery the mother has not yet had her period and this child is born at the following amenorrhea. In short, he/she is conceived without the mother's control of her menstrual.

- Nkongolo or Tshiowa is a child conceived during his/her mother's menstruation. He/she is a child whose mother continued menstruating during his/her pregnancy.

#### *According to the childbirth (Succession of children).*

- Ngalamulume: a boy born after at least three girls.

- Ngala Mukaji (also Ngallula, Tshianda or Tshiandanda); a girl born after at least three boys.

- Mputa Milongo or Tshituala: a child born before the multiple birth.

- Mputu: a child following the multiple birth.

- Nolela or Kankolongo is a child who follows Mputu.

- Kapinga is a child who follows Ngolela or Mputu.

- Muswamba is a child born after Ngolela.

#### *According to the polyhydramnios.*

- Lulua is a child born when there is a loss of amniotic fluid.

*According to the birth after several children deaths.*

- We have Mbombo and Tshibola. These children are born after their parents' contact with the healers to save their lives.

*According to the pregnancy duration.*

- Tshituka or Kabishi is a premature or a low birth weight child.

*According to the cord circulars.*

- Mujinga or Mpamba: a child born with the umbilical cord around the neck.
- Tshikute: a born child who is still wrapped in his/her foetal membrane.
- Kadikele is a child born without an umbilical cord or already circumcised.

*According to the procession.*

- Tshiela: a child presenting first the feet or the buttocks at birth. The full name is Tshiela Makasa and literally means "presenting feet".
- Tshikudu is a child born with the face to the ground.
- Ndomba: a child born with the prolapse of the hand. He/she comes first out with the arm.

*According to the children attitude.*

- Kabungama is said of a child who is born with his hand on his cheek as a sign of sadness or melancholy; depending on the culture, this child expresses his sorrow at being born into a family where disagreements and conflicts exists. It can also be about problems that the mother is hiding – either the mother did not want this pregnancy and tried to abort without success, or the mother and father do not get along and the child comes into the world where he knows in advance that he will not be welcomed. This negative energy can accompany the child even in his development.

In their Bana ba Mapanga, with Muamba Tshishi and Lambert Museka, Thérèse Tshiadua (1994) proposes her own classification in term of extra-ordinary births, secondary extra-ordinary births and tertiary extra-ordinary births:

*Extra-ordinary births.*

- Ntumba
- Mapasa
- Ngalamuluma
- Ngalula

*Secondary extra-ordinary births*

- Mbombo
- Tshibola

*Tertiary extra-ordinary births*

- Mputu
- Ngolela
- Mujinga
- Tshituka
- Tshiela
- Tshikundu
- Ndomba
- Kadikela
- Kabungama
- Tshikute

- Lulua

## Conclusion

To sum up, we have been dealing with Socio-cultural meanings of Special children names in the Luba-Kasaï culture. The Luba people of Kasaï are one of the largest ethnic group in Democratic Republic of Congo. In their traditional naming custom, special children names depend on the contexts of these childrens births and they are significant. As for the subdivision of our article, we have restricted it to three various parts after having concentrated on the introduction. The first part dealt with the socio-linguistic context of luba language. In the second part, we have discussed names in the Luba-Kasaï culture and this part opens on the third one where we have defined special children, explained their names and classified them in categories.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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