



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION IN THE NAMING OF PEOPLE AMONG THE DAGARA OF
NORTHWESTERN GHANA

Martin Kyiileyang

Department of English Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

ARTICLE INFO

Received 10th December, 2016
Received in revised form 8th January, 2017
Accepted 5th February, 2017
Published online 28th March, 2017

Keywords:

Dagara, Nomenclature, Theophoric,
Customary, Figures of speech

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the nomenclature of the Dagara people in northwestern Ghana. There are two main categories of Dagara nomenclature. The study is narrowed down to human beings with the main focus on traditional Dagara societies of Nandom. The spelling of words is derived from Dagara, the variety of Dagaare spoken in Nandom. I have clarified the identity of the Dagara as part of the MABIA speakers. Next, the study elaborates the two categories of nomenclature: stereotyped names and freely chosen names. Stereotyped names are customary names and fall into five categories. Freely chosen names give a wide scope of naming among the Dagara people. In this category, there are theophoric names. Most of the names depict certain literary features such as metaphor, paradox, hyperbole, various images and symbols. Certain thematic values are associated with some of the names linked to peculiar events. The methodology employed in the study was a sampling of a variety of names from the five categories of stereotyped or customary names from collection of names done by previous Dagara scholars who undertook studies on Dagara traditional practices. In fact, the study reveals how the Dagara society is closely bound with its language, tradition and culture.

Copyright © 2017 Martin Kyiileyang., This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

INTRODUCTION

Anthroponomy is the study of personal names. In the Ghanaian and African cultural contexts, names are given to people in order to differentiate, to recognize and to know them properly. Anthroponomy has captivated the attention of philosophers of language, anthropologists, linguists and ordinary people. In Ghana, the Akan and most other ethnic groups attach much importance to names and naming practices. Relevant knowledge about one's traditional names this gives insight into one's culture, philosophy, environment, religion, language and culture. There is no doubt that symbolism and imagery play an important role in most African and for that matter Ghanaian names apart from their socio-linguistic significance. The true interpretation of names depicts basic African religious beliefs, and their assimilation of foreign cultures. (Algeo 1992: 727 cited in Agyekum, 2006).

African and Ghanaian names are quite different from the western societies where people take their fathers' surnames. Western names are predictable but African names are generally regarded as unpredictable, for until the child is born and one knows the circumstances under which the birth took place, the name cannot be determined with absolute certainty. This is

equally true with the Dagara of Nandom traditional area. In every culture, names have cultural and social contexts that identify the bearer. Everybody is unique in this world and bears a name that solely identifies him from all others in the world. According to Algeo (1992: 728, cited in Agyekum, 2006) "people are almost invariably named; indeed, a human being without a name would be socially and psychologically less than" a complete being.

African names portray a strong sense of cultural values. In Ghana as in most parts of Africa, names of people do not only give them a personal identity but also a socio-cultural identity. Your name links you with your past, your ancestors. In fact, it is a part of your spirituality. Traditional Ghanaian names do not only augment the family lists but most importantly, they give people a new perspective and understanding of their own rich heritage and traditions. In Africa as in the rest of the world, the birth of a child is an event of great joy and significance. Much importance is attached to the naming of the child. The hopes of the parents, current events of importance and celestial events are very symbolic and are all given consideration in naming the child. It is believed that the name chosen will exert an influence for better or for worse on the life of the child and on the family as well.

*✉ Corresponding author: Martin Kyiileyang

Department of English Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

Dagara nomenclature is a vast cultural and literary area which exposes much about their traditions and certain moral values in general. However, many of the youth in Dagara society are ignorant about their system of naming people in their cultural circles. Most of them are equally ignorant about the literary significance of such names. This paper has examined the nature of Dagara nomenclature and has indicated striking sociolinguistic as well as literary features in the system of naming among the Dagara. The study aims at exposing the intricacies involved in Dagara nomenclature with a strong desire of teaching those who are not Dagara the opportunity of learning more about cultural similarities and differences in traditional Ghanaian societies. This study helps both Dagara and others to reckon with the need to sustain useful aspects of Ghanaian and Dagara traditions. It is an undeniable fact that the current system of naming people in our society is adulterated with western culture. This explains why many African intellectuals have changed their names to reflect their true identity. Africans need to go back to their roots and retrieve all the valuable aspects of their traditions.

Personal names and expressions of greeting have existed since the earliest stages of human society. They are found in all societies in the world today, literate or illiterate. Smith's (1952) bibliography lists some 3,400 items of research on personal names. Also in his bibliography Lawson (1987) reports at least 1,200 sources in English alone. Most of these studies focus on the listing of personal names in a particular region and time, their classification, semantics, social functions, or etymologies. In fact, they do not necessarily deal with the relationship between naming and the history of human civilization. A personal name distinguishes one individual person from others. Thus, a person comes into existence for the first time when he is given a personal name. In some societies, if a person dies before receiving a name, he or she is considered to have never lived and no funeral is held. Slaves by definition, possess no place in society. In earlier European societies, they were simply called "foreigner" or carried the name of the land from which they had come (Benveniste 1969, pp. 355-361). In the Khassonke society of West Africa, slaves went unnamed to justify treating them as things rather than human beings (Monteil 1915, pp. 344-345). No name is given to a person whose existence is unacknowledged. For people in ancient times, there were important relationships between a name and the person who bore it. The opening poem in 'Man'yoshu' describes a scene in which a man proposes marriage to a girl by saying, "Tell me where you live. Tell me your name." Revealing her name would be an acceptance of his proposal. In such cases, giving one's name was the same as handing over one's soul. Revealing one's name casually was thought to weaken one's vital energy. If a curse were laid on a name, its bearer would fear injury.

According to Frazer, "uncivilized people thought a name to be a vital part of themselves. Therefore, they were very careful about how names were to be treated" (Frazer, 1966, p. 190). In the Ilongot society of northern Luzon, it was believed that if a person mentioned the name of someone who had died, the deceased would make him sick or do him some other kind of harm. Instead of directly referring to the dead by name, people used some kinship term (e.g. "cousin of so-and-so") or the name of the place where the deceased was buried. Furthermore,

those who happen to hold the same name as the deceased changed it so that the dead person's name would not be invoked (Rosaldo, 1984). Thus, nicknames originate from this avoidance of real names. Many surnames arise from nicknames. There are some basic names with some specific functions. A child's name commonly indicates hope for its uninterrupted growth. In the Fulbe society of West Africa, names like 'Booydo' 'one who lives long' or 'Wuuri' 'is living' (a verb) express the parents' fervent wish for the child's survival. In an environment with high infant mortality, this is only to be expected. Other examples are 'Hino Doon' 'is here' (a-whole sentence), Malaado, 'the blessed one', 'Woppetaake' 'will not be deserted' or 'Nayeejo' an oldman/woman'.

However, the same parental wish is often expressed in a reverse manner: 'Gan Naado' 'one who is hated', 'Geddaado' 'one who is rejected', or 'Alaa innde' 'one without name'. Parents intentionally select such names in order to keep evil spirits away from the child and prevent other parents from becoming envious. While superficially the opposite of propitious names, they too express parental wishes for the safety of the child. An extreme case is a name meaning 'one who does not have a name', which pretends to society and evil spirits alike that the child does not exist! A third kind of name quite common in African societies is one that reveals a parent's honest feelings towards his or her family, relatives, or society in general. A husband names his child 'pot to give' (from the verb of the same meaning) to complain that his wife does not give him enough food (Middleton 1961).

African names hold special meaning and the giving of names is of utmost importance. A name may tell about special characteristics of a person. It may show royal or sacred lineage, as in the Igbo (Nigeria) name Nze (male)- "sacred leader" or the name Adanze (female) "daughter of Nze" (Brown). It may give an historical account of social or political happenings at the time of birth. A person may also have names that divulge personal attributes or circumstances. Many Africans believe that the name a person bears is sometimes a key to the understanding of his character and behaviour. This is especially true with nicknames and praise names. Among the Igbos, for example, a nick name like Nwaagankwo, calls to mind a particular skill in wrestling whereas among the Swazis of Southern Africa, a man called Mona (unmona-jealousy) displayed jealousy traits in his conduct (Madubuike, 1976 cited in Chambers, 2002, pp. 16-18).

Traditional African names have been in use for thousands of years. Due to the influence of Christianity, Islam, and other religious practices during the medieval period, people began to integrate new names into their traditional naming systems. Names like David, Jamaal or Krishna are commonly found in Africa as in Europe, America and Australia. Yet these names in Africa do not necessarily supersede traditional ones. In the Yoruba language, words may be combined to change or emphasize meaning. For example, the word Ayo- "Joy" is used in the names Ayodele and Ayoluwa to express two different implications. Similarly, the use of the ending -"tunde" in Yoruba names connotes a previous loss to the family, perhaps a death. For instance, if a father dies, the child could be named "Babatunde" or "father has come again" as a way of evoking the memory of the child's father. Sometimes children are given

more universal names in addition to special traditional names. The *Akan* and *Ewes* of Ghana believe children born on the same day of the week have the same type of soul. Thus, seven common names are given to *Akan* children. A different set of seven names is used by the *Ewes*. Naming ceremonies are a tradition in many African societies. These cultural events are of great importance and are often passed on from generation to generation. Members of the ceremony dress up in traditional garments. One Ghanaian states that “to name an African child “Mary”, “James”, “Robert”, “Mao”, “Ronald”, “Arthur”, “Carol”, “Donald”, “Betty” or “Sarah” is to introduce a particular cultural message into the family” (Asante, 1991).

Apart from religious influence in the giving of names, colonialism and the slave trade also led to the adoption of various continental names. The European system of naming allows for only a first, middle and last name whereas traditional African names are not arranged in that way. During the slave trade, many Africans were stripped of their indigenous names and given Anglo identities instead. Slave traders dehumanized the captured slaves by stripping them of everything representative of Africa (Ajani, 2001). In his research on Haya names, Brad Weiss (1999) stated categorically that “certain Haya names evoke past experiences and circumstances that surround the birth of a child, as well as the social reputation of the child’s parents, ... this act of recollection embedded in such names can best be understood as an effort to displace past reputations, and overcome the disparaging views of one’s consociates. From this perspective, Haya names can be understood as modes of remembering designed to both recall and undermine past memories; as well as forms of social agency through which people actively attempt to engage in and transform their social conditions” (p. 397).

He concludes that naming in Haya social interaction is intended to establish a position of privilege. In citing Putnam, Brad Weiss (1999) points out that this privilege derives not only from exercising control over what is known as the “baptismal event” that is, the original act of naming that may define, or shape another’s identity. This privilege further extends to some control over the community that uses the name. This community may recognize the source of the name in their own activities, and when using a given name might be compelled to acknowledge supreme control over collective life to which naming aspires. A name, then, is a claim to a particular kind of authority, and recognition that such claims might be contested. Furthermore, Brad Weiss (1999) contends that “one of my central arguments is that Haya names, as both expressions of and claims to power, can be understood as sociocultural forms of agency. In naming, Haya subjects do more than *express* the hierarchies present in a given set of relationships, they organize and *act on* a specific social field” (p. 398).

The naming ceremony in many African societies is considered a sacred rite that occurs outdoors. Among the Yoruba, ritual foods and sacred objects are used on the occasion. These include water, salt, palm oil and honey. Water signifies the importance of the community. Salt means the person will be ‘palatable’ to the community bringing happiness. Palm oil refers to positive contribution in society and finally the child

will be as sweet as honey. In Ghana, water and alcohol are used particularly among the Akan. Water signifies purity whilst alcohol signifies truth at all times. The child is encouraged as he/she grows up, to say yes when it is yes and no when it is no without hesitation. Special attention is often given to twins in many African societies. Among the Yoruba, mothers of twins or praise singers parade the streets and sing the praises of these twins. In the process, they collect gifts and money from the community. The first twin regardless of sex is called “Taiwo” meaning he who prepares the way and second twin is known as “Kehinde”. Interestingly, children born after twins will be affected by the naming pattern in the family. The child born after twins will be called Idowu and the next child will be Alaba. Such children will also bear chosen names in addition to the stereotyped ones given them according to tradition. This will make them have a unique identity (Madubuike, 1976). Among the Dagara of Nandom, the first twin born is called “Ziem” irrespective of sex and is normally considered junior. Tradition has that the second twin sits down like a chief and sends the junior one to survey the world before he/she also appears. Thus, the name “Naab”, meaning chief, is given to the second twin (irrespective of sex) unlike in Guinea. The Dagara equally give personal names to the twins apart from the stereotyped names. In Guinea, twins are given a special name as Bo. Both share the name in addition to individual names given them. However, the first twin is considered senior and is considered first in matters of sharing property as depicted by Laye (1954) in his novel *The African Child*. It is only when the junior twin has a greater strength of character that he can usurp the rights of his elder twin. Unlike Yoruba tradition, where children are named differently yet treated equal, Guinean tradition rather favours one twin over the other. Dagara tradition treats twins equally otherwise one breaks tradition and breeds animosity between the inseparable pair if one applies favouritism. The scope of the address system among the Dagaaba in general and the Dagara in particular is wide. However, this paper has examined the nature of Dagara nomenclature (in relation to personal names) and has indicated striking sociolinguistic and symbolic features in the system of naming among the Dagara.

Identity of the Dagara

The origins of the Dagaaba are based on oral tradition. Their origins can be traced and linked up with other large ethnic groups which have known to have inhabited the vast expanse of land lying between the forest belt and the Upper Niger bend in West Africa. From oral traditions, the Voltaic basin is known to be the home of vast number of ethnic groups including the Birifor, Senufo, Gurma, Busansi, Gurunsi, Sissala, Vagala, Lobi, Bobo, Bimoba, Konkomba, Tampulma, Dogon, Gonja, Fulani, Ninisi and the Mole-Dagbani peoples. The Dagaaba also find their place among the Gur (‘Mabia’) speakers. The term “Mole-Dagbani” is used ethnologically to identify a large portion of the voltaic people. Their parent language is derived from the Gur group of speakers located earlier in history around the Niger-Congo region. These groups of people are the Dagomba, the Mamprusi, the Mossi, the Nanumba, the Guruni (Frafra and Nankeni), the Bulsa, the Kusasi and the Dagaaba. One hypothesis of the origins of the Dagaaba by the ethnologist Tauxier, traces their immediate origins to Zanga, a Mossi country in present-day Burkina Faso. Another hypothesis by

Hebert and Delafosse traces the Dagaaba origin to Dagbon in the present day Northern Region of Ghana. Hebert's conclusions drawn were based on an ethnographic survey conducted among the Dagaaba both in Ghana and Burkina Faso. He points out that the Dagaaba elders give categorical answers about their origins. A Dagara historian also gives an elaborate presentation of the Dagomba-origin hypothesis (Tuurey, 1982, p. 26-30).

Originally, the Mole-Dagbani existed as a loosely organised people without a centralised system of government. Towards the beginning of the fifteenth century, descendants of Tohajie (Red Hunter) imposed themselves on them in an attempt to establish the Dagbon State. The grandson of Tohajie, Na Gbewa who had led the strangers from Zamfara of present day northern Nigeria first settled in Gurma in Burkina Faso before moving to Pusiga in the current Upper East Region of northern Ghana. The invaders absorbed the indigenous settlers as their subjects but in other instances they persecuted and compelled them to emigrate eastwards and northwards. Such a persecution occurred under one of these Dagomba rulers identified as Na Nyagse (1476-1492). Under him, a conflict over land ownership occurred between the local inhabitants and the invaders. The indigenous people claimed that the land belonged to them by right of first occupation. However, the invaders insisted that the land belonged to them by right of conquest. As a result, a bloody massacre ensued leading to migrations.

It was under these circumstances that the Dagaaba emerged as a breakaway body. Therefore, the name Dagaaba (singular "Dagao" or "Dagara" as those from Nandom and Burkina Faso are called) etymologically describes the rebellious nature of the breaking away from Dagbon. In fact, "Dao" or "Dɛb" (even "Dɔɔ") is the Dagaare/Dagara word for 'man' and "gaara" means 'rebellious'. Therefore, "dao-gaara", "Dɛb-gaara" or "dɔɔ-gaara" means 'man-rebel' which can easily be rendered as 'rebellious man'. The plural "Dagara" simply means 'rebellious men'. Dagaaba oral tradition is quite unanimous on the Dagomba origin and also quite vocal on the settlement along the coast in regions such as Accra and Cape Coast. From there, they went up north in stages from 'Gɔi' (corrupted form of Oguaa). Upon arrival, the Dagaaba settled first on the western side of the river. The slave raids of Samouri Touré and Babatu compelled further migrations across the river (McCoy, 1988, p. 311).

Tuurey (1982, p. 14) claims that all those who are native speakers of "N ye yaa" or "Eeyaa" (meaning "I say") actually belong to the Mole-speaking community no matter whether they are Wala, Manlarla, Sonuona, Mantare, Namane, Guombo, Monyarla, Dorimbo, Wechage, Bulenge, Mankure, Samune, Lossala, Gbare, Jirbala, Tizzala, Dogmine, Tuopare and Zimuopare. Their being Mole-Dagbani makes them ethnically Dagaaba. Therefore, the expression "Dagaaba" employed here is to be understood in its strictly ethnical sense comprising the descendants of those who originally broke away from Dagbon as well as those other groups who integrated culturally among them. They speak dialects of one language and have slight variations with other ethnic groups such as the Lobi. The main dialects spoken among them are Lobri, Manlaale, Wiilu, Birifor and Dagaare. Their language is

Dagaare or Dagara as the Nandom people and their relatives in neighbouring Burkina Faso call it.

There are several theories connected with the origins and the identity of the Dagara. Bekye (1991) has given a brilliant and elaborate account of the location and the identity of the Dagaaba and the Dagara in particular. He points out that the Dagaaba like many other African peoples, have suffered various situations of arbitrary divisions imposed on them by Europeans in their scramble for Africa in the latter part of the nineteenth century. They used the Black Volta as their line of demarcation. The French claimed the western side of the river now part of present-day Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta). However, the British controlled the eastern side which is now part of the modern Republic of Ghana. Majority of them live in the north-western corner of Ghana and form the largest ethnic group in the Upper West Region.

In the literature several terms are used as referent appellation to the Dagaaba with reference to the existing literature of the Dagaaba. In fact, besides the term "Dagaaba" there are terms like "Dagara", "Dagarti", "Dagaba", "Dagaabas", "Daga-Wiili", "LoDagaa", "LoDagaaba" and sometimes "Dagare". The confusion created can be traced to two factors. First, there are dialectal differences in the "lingua franca" (Dagaare) which the people speak. Secondly, early Europeans colonial administrators and ethnologists misrepresented the Dagaaba in their efforts to identify and describe the people they just came into contact with. There are two principal dialects of the Dagaaba in the Upper West Region among a variety of dialects. The "lobri" dialect group lives in the extreme north-western corner of Ghana and across the Black Volta in Burkina Faso. At present, they call both themselves and the language they speak "Dagara". Thus, one is a Dagara and speaks Dagara. However, those who speak "Dagaare" or "Dagaari" live exclusively in the south-western part of the lobri dialect group. They call themselves "Dagaaba" and the language "Dagaare" or "Dagaari". Despite these dialectal differences, the two groups of people—the Dagara and the Dagaaba—know well that they are one people and speak the same language with different accents. Kpiebaya (1973, p. 11, Wardhaugh, 1986, p. 25) states categorically as a matter of fact, one of the main reasons why groups refer to others as "loor" or "Dagaar" is the fact that they hear these groups speaking their language with a completely different accent. They know that they are all Dagaaba but dialects differ. These dialectal differences were adopted by Europeans colonial administrators and ethnologists and used to show differences between "Lobi" and "Dagarti". Both appellations were wrong. It is important to point out that they separated the Lobi dialect speakers from their brothers, the Dagaare dialect speakers whom they wrongly call "Dagarti". Language and custom wise, the Lobi are quite distinct from the Dagaaba. Therefore, the British equation between the Lobi dialect speakers and those of the Dagaare dialect speakers is not justified. The British are also responsible for the wrong term "Dagarti". "Dagarti" is a corrupted form of another term "Dagatere" which is a variant of Dagaare, meaning language. In fact, the term "Dagarti" has become so widely diffused (especially in Ghana) that most Ghanaians know and prefer to use it to describe the Dagaaba. (Bekye, 1991, p. 95 cf. Hudson, 1980, p. 36).

A further confusion was introduced by the British anthropologist Jack Goody. Goody endeavoured to correct the British mistake of dividing the Dagaaba into “Lobi” and “Dagarti”. In the process, he ended up by making his own arbitrary divisions of the Dagaaba and referred to them variously as “LoBirfor”, “LoDagaba”, “Lowiili”, “Daga-wili” and “Dagaba”. These were all dialect names which had nothing to do with ethnic differentiations (Kuukure, 1985, pp. 24-25 and Kpiebaya, 1973, pp. 9-11).

Rationale of the Study

Dagara nomenclature is a vast cultural and literary area which exposes much about their traditions and certain moral values in general. However, many of the youth in Dagara society are ignorant about their system of naming people in their cultural circles. Most of them are equally ignorant about the literary significance of such names. It is significant to delineate the distinction between Dagara nomenclature and that of other ethnic groups. This study aims at exposing the intricacies involved in Dagara nomenclature with a strong desire of teaching the youth the nature of valuable Dagara traditions which are cherished legacies of their forebears. It also gives those who are not Dagara the opportunity of learning more about cultural similarities and differences in traditional Ghanaian societies. This study helps both Dagara and others to reckon with the need to sustain useful aspects of Ghanaian and Dagara traditions. It is an undeniable fact that the current system of naming people in our society is adulterated with western culture. This explains why many African intellectuals have changed their names to reflect their true identity. Africans need to go back to their roots and retrieve all the valuable aspects of their traditions.

Application of Methodology

There are many Dagara names in various categories. Due to the vast nature and the wide scope of naming among the Dagara, it is not possible to consider all the names so the selection in this study is a representation intended to give an insight into the nature of Dagara nomenclature. There are two main categories in Dagara nomenclature. These are customary names and names freely chosen by parents and relatives to identify their children from others in the family, household and society at large. The study has examined all the five categories of stereotyped or customary names. The second category deals with theophoric names. These can be put into three main categories to facilitate the analysis. However, there are certain peculiar names which basically deal with the subject matter of death. These are necrophoric names. Such names expose the Dagara philosophy about life and death. People are sometimes named “Kuu-be-bale” which literally means “death is never tired”. In a deeper sense, the name means death is like a roaring lion, ferocious in nature which cannot be tamed.

Analysis of Data

The Name of God

The name of God is “Naamwin”. It is important to point out that the word Naamwin is a compound expression. Two Dagaare words make up the word and these are “Naa” and “mwin”. The Naa has several meanings. Denotatively, it means

“Chief” or “King” in the secular and the political sense. The Dagaaba call chief “Naa” so all their village chiefs as well as their paramount chiefs are addressed by the same title- “Naa” as a sign of honour. Therefore we have Nandom Naa, Lawra Naa, Jirapa Naa, Nadowli (Nadol for short) Naa, Kaleo Naa or Wa Naa. However, the word is also associated with other meanings. The term can be used to designate a rich or wealthy person— somebody of substance and economic power. There are various ways of describing a wealthy person. “O kpen naalu puo”- He is wallowing in wealth/ he has become wealthy. “O i-n naa”- He is rich/wealthy. “Me naa taa nu”- Well, is he not that wealthy. The third expression is often used cynically to indicate the ostentatious display of opulence by a rich person among the Dagaaba. The noun form of riches is “Naalu” (“Naalong” in other varieties if Dagaare). However, the term “Na-mine” means rich people or several chiefs. From these examples, one can see the distinction between these people and God whom the Dagaaba call Naamwin (Bekye, 1991, pp. 133-134).

The second part of the word- “mwin”- is the Dagaare expression of deity, god, spirit, divinity or spiritual agency. Generically, “mwin” means a being of a divine or spiritual nature which is not a human spirit. However, departed ancestors are not “mwimme” (plural for “mwin”) but rather “kpime” (plural form of “kpiin”) Therefore, the cosmos is made up of various deities such as the earth (“teng”), the rain (“saa”), the river (“man” or “baa”), a fountain (water source- “kulbog” or “kulah”) the hills (“tan”) and open arable fields (“wæru”) All these assume supernatural significance as abodes of benevolent spirits and have cults dedicated to them. These natural deities in their spiritual designation are regarded as “mwimme” (gods). God is classified as ngmen in relation to his spiritual, immaterial and non-physical nature. However, he is clearly distinguished from nature spirits, generally referred to as “tibe” in Dagaare and human spirits known in “Dagaare” as “kpime”. In sacrifices, God is referred to as “Saazu-mwin” (God of firmament), “Nabile-mwin” or “Nisaalbile-mwin”(God of gods or God of small human beings or lower beings). It is a descriptive term to show that God is a universal God, an effective God of mankind.

Names Connected With Birth

Twins are automatically called “Ziem” and “Naab” (or “Zieme” and “Naa” in other Dagaare dialects). This is irrespective of whether they are boys or girls. According to oral tradition, it is Naab, the elder who normally sends Ziem ahead of him to survey the place (the world) before he too comes. Even though Ziem is normally born first, Naab is considered the older one. In the case of triplets, the third is either called “Kog” or “mwingyine”. Kog in Dagara means immature indicating that the little one was too anxious to wait for his turn of birth and made his appearance prematurely or unexpectedly. Literally, “mwingyine” means God tests. This seems to express the idea that God wants to test the parents of the twins or triplets as the case may be. In Dagara tradition, it is extraordinary to give birth to twins and to give birth to triplets is a situation of God putting parents to a test. In some Dagara communities if a woman gives birth to three boys or girls in succession, the fourth is often called “Suglo” if he or she is of the same sex as the first three. That is regarded as coming to add to the rest of the family- “U sugli na”.

Names Connected With Infant Mortality

The Dagaaba also have a strong traditional belief in re-incarnation. Children who are born can stay and form part of the world of adults. They can decide to return to the world they came from and then reappear in the world of the living. In such situations, the child could come twice, three times or even four or more times at will and go back at will. Thus a boy who is born immediately after the death (at a tender age of a brother before him) is given the name "Der". It is claimed that such a child is elusive and evasive as well. Therefore the Dagara often say: "U dere ni a saa ni a u ma; mi wa nyili be nyog gu u leb kyen" (he is elusive and evasive to his parents for he makes a brief appearance, escapes and returns.) Thus, Der is actually a slippery child who seems to be dilly-dallying with his parents and the world at large. A girl who is also born in similar circumstances after the death of a sister immediately before her is called either "Yuora" (traveller, wayfarer) or "Der-pog" (femine Der). When other "Ders" and "Yuoras" are born in the same circumstances within a family or household, there is a distinction between them and the first Ders and Yuoras. Therefore, a later Der is called "Delle" which actually means junior Der. In the case of a girl, she is known as "Yuole" that is junior Yuora.

Other names are also connected with the idea of Der. For instance, a boy born after the successive deaths of some two boys before him is known as "Der-bie". When there are three successive dead brothers before him that child is named "Der-kpaakpile". In the case of four successive dead brothers before him that child is known as "Der-kpul". However, a child born after five successive dead brothers before him is normally called "Lee-baa". In the case of girls, a child born after the successive deaths of two earlier girls is called "So-kyara" (cross-roads). This name obviously shows that the little girl was standing at the cross-road of life and death and could easily return to where she came from when she was not able to resolve her dilemma. However, there are no corresponding feminine names for the other masculine names as stated above. It therefore means that according to Dagaare tradition there are no feminine forms of "Der-kpaakpile", "Der-kpul" and "Leebaa". This may be so because nobody ever bothered about the evasive female child or earlier Dagara elders were more particular about the male child's birth cycle than the female child. One could also say that earlier Dagara elder-observers of Dagara traditions might have noticed that the phenomenon seemed to be more peculiar with boys than girls. It could also have been a situation of discrimination as the Dagara society is a typically patriarchal one.

Stereotype Names Connected With Death in General

Other names are connected with death in general and some of the outstanding names include "Debuo" (also "Dabuo"). This means that the child was conceived before and born after the death of a father. Consequently, such a child is said to be born into a ruined house because the breadwinner is no more. Children who are born during funeral performances are known as "Beyuo" for the boy and "Ayuo" for the girl. However, these two names are explained in a different way by Nakuma (2001). He said that "Ayuo and "Bayuo" ("Beyuo" as the Dagara name such a child) are rather associated with the fetching of water. He claims that the difference is based on

dialectal variations in the Upper West Region. One strongly believes that this is far-fetched and departs radically from the trend that pertains among the Dagaaba. This is obviously an erroneous interpretation which has to be acknowledged and corrected. The spelling of the words is similar to other dialects such as the variety of Dagaare spoken in Nandom but the meaning is totally different. The Dagaaba are related not only by family ties but also by language. Thus, his interpretation of these two notable words is suspect.

Names Connected With Initiation

A child who is born during the preparation for any "Bagre" socio-religious initiation is called "Bagrviel" (Bagr is good). However, a child born on the last day of the Bagr initiation is called "Baawuo". This means removal of the animal skin bag that is a symbolic feature which the neophytes wear during the period of abstinence. This is to stress that skin-bags were often worn in the olden days during the socio-religious ceremony as is prevalent these days. So a child born on the day that the skin-bags were removed and replaced with normal clothes is obviously called "Baawuo". In Dagara tradition, the guardian spirit ("sigra") is also very significant. Therefore, one could be named after a particular spirit; such a name becomes a spirit-imposed name e.g. "Zuur" (tail) where the tail of wild animal is being referred to. Another name is "Kula" (spring, fountain) associated with a particular river/water spirit. A case in point is "Kaa-baa", the name of a river located between Nandom and Lawra of north western Ghana; where 'Kaa' is the name of the water spirit and 'baa' is river.

Names Connected with Place of Birth

A child who is born in the bush or in the farm is known as "Wienaa" or "Muonaa" (chief of the bush). However, if a child is born in another village other than his own native village, he is called by the name of that village where he was unexpectedly or consciously born. Therefore a couple of people are known by names such as "Nandom", "Jirapa", "Kyetu", "Puffiong" and "Koro". Apart from Jirapa, all these are names of villages in Nandom in the north-western part of Ghana.

Anatomical, Colour and Character Description Names

Anatomical names are directly connected with the physical structure of the child whilst colour names refer directly to the colour of the child's skin at birth. Character names try to expose the peculiar behaviour that a child exhibits to attract special attention. There are several examples of such names: "Debnyuo" (man with umbilical hernia), "Pognyuo" (woman with umbilical hernia), "Deb-zu" (big-headed man), "Pog-mwaa" (short woman). On the other hand, the following names are all connected with colour (complexion): "Deb-zie" (fair-coloured man), "Pog-zie" (faired-coloured woman), "Depla" (white-like man), "Pogpla" (white-like woman). The last two names are not used in the sense of being European but the person is indeed very fair in complexion. An albino (man) is often referred to "Doo-kpere" whilst the woman is known as "Pogkperere". "Doo-tobe" ("Doo-tobo") identifies a male who has large ears whilst "Pog-tobe" ("Pog-tobo") refers a woman with large ears. Sometimes the name given is based on a particular defect: physical or otherwise. Therefore, "Doo-gala" (for a man) and "Pog-gala" (for a woman) are common names used to describe a

man's and a woman's hearing defect respectively. "Dɔɔ-siɛ" (wizard-like boy) and "Pɔg-siɛ (witch-like girl) are also used to describe children who exhibit mysterious aspects of their character with inclination towards sorcery. Smallish-looking boys and girls especially at their tender ages are sometimes described as "Dɛb-lilɛ" and "Pɔg-lilɛ" respectively. Such children are compared with tiny-looking birds. "Kpabuɔl" is also a common term used to describe a man with a long occiput whilst "Kontii" is used to describe a worthless man - a man of no substance at all which is similar to "Efulɛfu" as some Nigerians term such people. Such a man is always a laughing stock to people in his society. All the above names indicate how our ancestors used oral tradition in describing and naming their children accordingly. The names tell the circumstances, the type of birth and the variety of names used to expose them. These are basically pre-determined names. However, apart from these names, a person could still be given other names (Bekye, 1991:146 and Nakuma :6-11). It is equally significant to point out that most names of people depict certain literary features especially in terms of metaphor, paradox, hyperbole, imagery and sound quality.

Names Freely Chosen

Majority of Dagaaba proper names fall under the category of freely chosen names ("putieru yoeɛ"). They are usually in the form of maxims or compound expressions that are an expression of the philosophy of life and equally of the religious attitude of parents. These names express the sentiments or the ideas that relate to the social situation of the parents. Kpiebaya (1973) describes such names as the "mottos" of the parents expressed in their children (p. 13). It is in this category that such theophoric names are found. Such names are usually compounded with the name "Naa-ngmen" (God) but in most cases it is abbreviated as "Ngmen". A couple of examples can be illustrated below here to indicate the Dagaaba thinking and experience of "Naagnmen" from the system of naming their children.

Names based God's Existence

- A. "Naagmen-be"- God exists; he exists forever.
- B. "Ngmen-vuure" - God lives.

Names Indicating God is above Everything

- A. "Ngmen-bɛ-tɛr-zie" - God has no place (habitation).
- B. "Ngmen-zaa" - God is far away.
- C. "Ang-so-Ngmen" - Who owns God?

Names which portray God as Nearby

- A. "Ngmen-pilɛ" - Underneath God
- B. "Tuɔr-ngmen" - Touching or in Close contact with God
- C. "Ngmen-tarɛ-mɛ" - God draws closer to me.

Names which depict God as Omniscient

- A. "Ngmen-bangfu" - The wisdom of God
- B. "Ngmen-bangmɛ"- God knows me.
- C. "Ngmen-bɛ-tule" - God does not make any mistake.
- D. "Ngmen-nia- bangmɛ"- God alone knows.

Names which portray God as Omnipotent

- A. "Ngmen-fang" - The strength or power of God
- B. "Ngmen-ni-so" - Because of God; God is responsible.
- C. "Ngmen-bɛ-ti-nua" - Had not been for God

Miscellaneous Nomenclature Connected With God

This category is a mixed bag as the names depict various aspects of God in relation to man. Man stands in awe of God Almighty in various ways. The names here cover God as the only one Man has to look up to for salvation and all kinds of assistance. The Dagara also realise the importance of God's will in all things. The general goodness of God is equally acknowledged. Generally, God is regarded as a pleasant being. In conformity with what the Good Book says, God is also a jealous being and the Dagara system of naming people corroborates this. God is a watchful being over all his creatures.

There many ways that God put his creatures to test by what difficulties they experience in life. Man is obliged to revere his creature hence the significance of names connected with beholding God in awe. If human beings were God, then many things would have changed in society to the disadvantaged of the weak and the less privileged. When some people suffer persistent persecution in the world to the point of intolerance, they curse their persecutors by certain names that they give to their children. In fact, one who is assailed by insults from his enemies can retort that the insults hurled at him/her are rather directed against God who is full of justice. The following names illustrate the ideas that have been outlined above.

- A. "Ngmen-yo" - God alone, only God
- B. "Ngmen-puɔ" - God's stomach (intention or design)
- C. "Ngmen-nuɔr" - God's mouth (law, word or commandment)
- D. "Ngmen-yelle" - God's affair or doing
- E. "Ngmen-viela" - God is good (beautiful).
- F. "Ngmen-in-song" - God is good/ favourable.
- G. "Ngmen-nng-mɛ" - God loves me.
- H. "Ngmen-kyile" - God's excitement/ecstasy
- I. "Ngmen-nyuur" - The jealousy of God
- J. "Ngmen-ir-mɛ" - God created me
- K. "Ngmen-kaare" - God watches over me
- L. "Ngmen-gyine" - God puts to test
- M. "Zɔrɛ Ngmen" - Fear/ Revere God
- N. "Naa-I-Ngmen" - If I were God
- O. "Vhɛ -ku-Ngmen" - Leave it to God
- P. Ngmen-zumɛ - Insults directed against God

There are still many more names depicting God's activity in terms of creation, reverence, confidence, submission, imitation, abandonment, love and hatred towards God. Many other examples cannot be cited for lack of space. (Bekye, 1991, pp. 147-152)

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the nature of Dagara nomenclature (personal names) and has indicated striking sociolinguistic and literary features in the system of naming among the Dagara. The study has exposed the intricacies involved in Dagara nomenclature with a strong desire of teaching those who are not Dagara the opportunity of learning more about cultural similarities and differences in traditional Ghanaian societies. The Dagara system of naming is meant to expose personal identification, uniqueness of personality and to sustain their cultural values through variety of names given to people.

This study helps both Dagara and others to reckon with the need to sustain useful aspects of Ghanaian and Dagara traditions. It is an undeniable fact that the current system of naming people in our society is adulterated with western culture. This explains why many African intellectuals have changed their names to reflect their true identity. Africans need to go back to their roots and retrieve all the valuable aspects of their traditions.

From the above elaborate discussion and examination, there is enough evidence to expose the identity of the Dagaaba (Dagara) as one group in the Upper West Region and also as identifiable speakers of a variety of dialects. Most importantly, one realises that the system of naming is quite complex but very interesting as there are distinguishable features characterising the naming system. In comparison, one could say that there are likely to be striking similarities and differences in the system of naming between the Dagara and other people especially those in Ghana. It is therefore important to stress the significance of sociolinguistics in general and symbolic representation in the context of naming people among the Dagara of the Upper West Region.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the support of the following people who assisted me in various ways in the writing of this article: the Authorities of the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) who granted me study leave, the Principal of the College of Languages (Ajumako) who proofread and edited the paper, the Dean, Faculty of Foreign Languages Education and Communication Studies and the HOD, Department of English Education whose recommendations enabled me to get my study leave and its renewal.

References

- Agyekum, K. (2006). "The Sociolinguistics of Akan Personal Names". *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15(1), 206-235.
- Ajani, Tim (2001) *Lecture. Summer Institute.*. Gainesville, Florida
- Asante, Molefi Kete. (1991). *The Book of African names.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.
- Bekye, P. K., (1991), *Divine Revelation and Tradition Religions*, Rome. Leberit Press.
- Benveniste, E. (1969). *Vocabulary of Indo-European Institutions.* tome 1: economie, parente societe. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.
- Brad, Weiss .(1999). "Good-for-nothing haya names: Powers of recollection in northwest Tanzania", *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, 64:3-4, 397-420,
- Chambers, George T. (2002). "Names and Naming Practices in African Communities", *Taking Africa to the Classroom*, Florida, The Center for African Studies: University of Florida.
- Damali, Nia. (1986). *Golden Names for an African People.* Atlanta, GA: Blackwood Press.
- Drewal, Margaret Thompson. (1992). *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Frazer, James George. (1922). *Then Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion.* New York: Macmillan, 1922, New York: Bartleby.Com, 2000.
- Hudson, R. A., (1980), *Sociolinguistics*, Gt, Britain, Cambridge University Press.
- Jensen, Anitra. *Yoruba Naming Ceremony.* Utah State University lesson plan site. <http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/TLresources/longterm/LessonPlans/africaindex.htm>
- Kpiebaya, G.E. (1973). *God in Dagaaba Religion and in the Christian Faith.* Institute Lumen Vitae, Brussels, University of Louvain.
- Kuukure, E.(1985). *The Destiny of Man: Dagaare Beliefs in Dialogue with Christian. Eschatology.* Frankfurt am Man, Peter Lang.
- Lawson, Edwin D. (1987). *Personal Names and Naming: An Annotated Bibliography*, (1st Edition) USA: Greenwood.
- Laye, Camara. (1954). *The African Child.* New York, NY: Farrar, Strass and Giroux
- Madibuikwe, Ihechukwu. (1976). *A Handbook of African Names.* Washington, DC: Three Continents Press.
- McCoy, R.F., (1988), *Great Things Happen*, Canada, Society of Missionaries of Africa.
- Middleton, John. (1961). "The Social Significance of Lugbara Personal Names". *Uganda Journal*, 25:34-42.
- Monteil, C. (1915). *Les Khassonké: Monographie d'une peuplade du Soudan français*, Paris: E. Larose.
- Nakuma, C. K., (2001), "Name Morphology and Significance among the Dagaaba of Ghana", *Journal of Dagaare Studies*, Vol.1 No.1
- Rosaldo, R. (1984). Ilongot Naming : The Play of Associations. In E Tooker (ed.) *Naming Systems. 1980 Proceedings of American Ethnological Society*, The American Ethnological Society.
- Smith, Elsdon C. (1952). *Personal Names: a bibliography*, New York, New York Public Library.
- Tuurey, Gregory.(1982). *An Introduction to the Mole-Speaking Community.* Wa, Wa Catholic Press.
- Wardhaugh, R. (1986), *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, Cambridge: Massachusetts, Blackwell Publications.
- Zawawi, Sharifa. (1993). *What's in a Name? Unaitwaje? A Swahili Book of Names.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.