

MORPHOSYNTACTIC AND SEMANTIC CURIOSITIES IN THE NAMING PRACTICES OF THE NSÓ? PEOPLE

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Abstract

This paper sets out to investigate the morphosyntactic and semantic curiosities of Lámnsó? names. Its objective is to show the norms and values as expressed in the naming patterns of the Nsó? people. Two questions guided our analysis: What are the linguistic structures of Lámnsó? names? Are names given at random or are they related to the events surrounding the birth of a child? Two hundred names were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews from Nsó? natives of two meeting houses in Kumbo: NASU (Bambili branch) and Bongnavti (Tobin branch) meeting houses. These data were analyzed in the frameworks of Onomastics (Crystal, 1985) and Ethnolinguistics (Sapir, 1921). Findings disclose that Lámnsó? names are noun phrases, verb phrases and sentences. They also show that Lámnsó? names express the cultural beliefs of the Nsó? people and are closely related to the events surrounding the birth of the name bearer and the way name givers reacted to them.

Key words: *Lámnsó?, ethnolinguistics, onomastics, naming practices, Semantic curiosity*

1. Introduction

One of the most pronounced impacts of modernism in Africa is the fact that cultural values and practices are neglected because traditions are no more preserved and promoted. African cultural values and languages are undergoing serious pressure from western culture, through globalization, which is spreading worldwide, weakening local customs and values on the continent. Naming is one of the practices that is deeply rooted in the life of people and, in African cultures, it is not only an important moment for the family of the child, but most often a crucial moment for the community. It is closely related to African spirituality and, as Bernhardt (2001) observes, *“when one bestows a name upon a child that person is not simply naming the flesh of the child, but rather the name is for the person’s soul.”* Generally, naming practices in Africa are an important activity that is usually accompanied with a ceremony (naming ceremony). On observing naming practices in the Lámnsó? linguistic area, one is captivated by the way these people have remained deeply rooted in their culture and traditions. The Nsó? naming system has been conserved and orally passed on from one generation to another for centuries. Family names (Lámnsó? names) are guarded and very much cherished among the Nsó? people because they are considered a reference to someone’s reputation in the society. Therefore, the semantic values of Nsó? names triggers curiosity and become a productive area of research interest since the Nsó? people express their perception of the world and life through the names they bestow on their children. Nsó? names generate curiosity amongst people because most of them are messages of the name givers to their community and their meaning can only be understood by paying attention to the events surrounding the life of the name bearers. In the Nsó? land, the process of naming a child is very complex and it is important to consider the reason why the name in question is being bestowed on the child by examining naming practices. What are the linguistic structures of Lámnsó? names? Are names given at random or are they related to the events surrounding the birth of a child? This paper will help to better understand the linguistic processes under which names are derived in Lámnsó?. By establishing the different lexical units employed in Lámnsó? naming practices, it will reveal the organization of Lámnsó? grammar and present the language habits of the native speakers as well. It will then classify Nsó? names in various semantic categories in order to depict the diversity of the situations that lead to the choice of a name.

2. The Nsɔʔ people and the Lámnsɔʔ language

The Nsɔʔ originated from Tikari, a plain that lies in the region of the upper Mbam River and extends to the Magba area in the western region, into the plains around Sabongari and Mbonso in the North West region of Cameroon. The MboNso plain is also known as the Tikar plain. The name, Nsɔʔ, originated from the name of its founder, Ngonso, a princess from Rifum, in Tikari, and sister to two brothers named Nchare Yen and Mfombam.

The Nsɔʔ language is Lámnsɔʔ, literally translated, 'language of Nsɔʔ'. Lámnsɔʔ is spoken in three of the five subdivisions of Bui Division in the Northwest region of Cameroon: Kumbo, Jakiri and Mbven. It is spoken by a total number of about 240,000 people and classified as a Benue-Congo language belonging to the Bantoid group. Lámnsɔʔ is from the Ring sub-group of the Grassfields branch of the southern Bantoid languages. Grebe (1984), states that Lámnsɔʔ does not have any significant dialectal variation. The Nsɔʔ have borrowed words from several languages but only to the extent of naming some objects newly introduced to the Nsɔʔ culture, while others have original Nsɔʔ names.

3. Theoretical frameworks

Ethnolinguistics and onomastics serve as main theoretical frameworks for this research. Ethnolinguistics (Sapir, 1921) is a field of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and culture and the way different ethnic groups perceive the world. It studies the way perception and conceptualization influence language. The relationship between language and social behaviour cannot be overemphasized. Ethnolinguistics is used in this study because it is a theory that deals with language and culture and the study of names is both a linguistic and a cultural activity. Onomastics (Crystal, 1985) is a branch of semantics which studies the etymology of institutionalised ('proper') names, such as the names of people (anthroponymy) and places (toponymy). It can be considered as the study of societies and circumstances prevailing in them, as reflected through names. Names as words are linguistic entities that are shaped by the languages spoken in the societies where they are found. This theory is important to this work because it prescribes stages involved in the study and analyses of names in general.

4. Population of the study

The population of this study is made up of Lámnsɔʔ native speakers. Two groups were targeted: the Bongnavti meeting house (middle aged people) and the Nsɔʔ Association Students' Union (NASU) Bambili branch which is made up of young people. These two groups are members of 'meeting houses'. These meeting houses were chosen because they are cultural groups (their objective is the teaching of the Nso beliefs, customs and values) and as earlier mentioned, naming practices which is the main idea in this study is a cultural activity. NASU is also an academically oriented group, in the sense that old members always give vital directives about the school milieu to the Nsɔʔ newly admitted students who are members of the meeting. Bongnavti, on the other hand, promotes solidarity among its members, constantly reminding them of the benefits of keeping and being attached to one's cultural values.

5. Methodology

A total of 220 Lámnsɔʔ names were collected and interpreted through document analysis and interviews. The names were collected from the list of members of these meeting houses. The interview was semi-structured; in the first phase, members were asked to complete the list by enumerating names of their relatives and acquaintances. In the second phase, the focus was on the understanding

of the origin, meaning and circumstances that surrounded the choice of the various names. The data of this work shall be presented in a four-tier grid.

(1) a. **Ghannyuy**
 yàn j̀d̀ì
 time God
 ‘God’s time’

b. **Yenmo**
 j̀èn m̀ó
 see me
 ‘See me’

This presentation is of paramount importance because it gives a clear picture of the various morphemes that constitute each Lámnsó? name. The first tier represents the way names are written in birth certificates; here, the English alphabet is used. The second tier, written using the IPA¹, will segment the names into their various constituents. Therefore, we ascertain that the name **Ghannyuy** (1a) is made up of the nouns **yàn** and **j̀d̀ì** which respectively mean ‘time’ and ‘God’. In (1b) the verb **j̀èn** and the pronoun **m̀ó** make up the name **Yenmo**. The third tier will consist of the gloss and the last tier is the contextual translation that the Nsó? people give to the name.

6. The morphosyntactic structure of Lámnsó? names

Lámnsó? names generally result from the association of words that generates either in noun phrases, verb phrases or full sentences.

6.1 Verb phrase names

Verb phrase names have the structure of verb phrases in the language. They are built around the verb which is always the first element of the phrase. They are often questions which we will term interrogative verb phrase names in contrast to simple verb phrase names.

6.1.1 Simple verb phrase names

Simple verb phrase names are names that start with a verb. The verb is always at the initial position of the phrase and it can be followed by a noun, a verb, or an adverb.

6.1.1.1 Verb + Noun / Pronoun

This is the most common type of simple verb phrase names in the Lámnsó? linguistic area.

(2) a. **Yennyuy**
 j̀én j̀d̀ì
 see God
 ‘God sees.’

b. **Kiven**
 k̀ì v̀én
 know you
 ‘You are aware.’

c. **Kongnso**
 ŋk̀òŋ ns̀ó?
 love Nso
 ‘Love Nsò?’

d. **Fonyuy**
 f̀ɔ́ j̀d̀ì
 give God
 ‘God gives.’

e. **Yuven**
 j̀ú v̀én
 listen you
 ‘You are listening.’

f. **Kinyuy**
 k̀í j̀d̀ì
 know God
 ‘God knows.’

From the foregoing examples, the structure Verb + Noun is attested in many names. In (2e) the verb **j̀ú** ‘listen’ is the head of the phrase and has as complement the pronoun **v̀én** ‘you’ to produce a name that literally means ‘you are listening’. In 2c, **ns̀ó?** ‘Nso’ is the complement of the verb **ŋk̀òŋ** ‘love’ and the phrase literally means ‘love Nsò?’. A good number of Lámnsó? verb phrase names take **Nyuy** ‘God’ as

¹ International Phonetic Alphabet

complement or object. For instance, **nyuy** is the complement of the verb **yen** ‘see’ (1a), **fo** ‘give’ (2d) and **ki** ‘know’ (2f) to respectively mean ‘God sees’ (**Yennyuy**), ‘God gives’ (**Fonyuy**) and ‘God knows’ (**Kinyuy**). Other Lámnśó? names that fall in this category are:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>(3) a. Leinyuy
 lê n̄̀
 watch God
 ‘God watches.’</p> | <p>b. Mailam
 mà? ləm
 finish language
 ‘The language is finished.’</p> | <p>c. Kongnyuy
 kòŋ n̄̀
 love God
 ‘God loves.’</p> |
| <p>d. Lotum
 lǒ tùm
 leave errand
 ‘Leave on an errand.’</p> | <p>e. Sunjo
 sù ndzó
 clean guilt
 ‘Clean the guilt.’</p> | <p>f. Tatinyuy
 tátí n̄̀
 bring together God
 ‘God brings together.’</p> |
| <p>g. Shiyghan
 ŋí yún
 wait time
 ‘Wait for the time.’</p> | <p>h. Yiinyuy
 ŋí n̄̀
 do God
 God’s doing.</p> | <p>i. Sahnyuy
 sáŋ n̄̀
 judge God
 God is the judge.</p> |

6.1.1.2 Verb+Verb

This type of name is made up of two verbs. The first verb is the head verb. It expresses the initial action and indicates the starting point or the beginning of an event. The second verb corresponds to the termination phase of the same event. In a Verb +Verb structured Lámnśó? name, the two verbs are related and are understood as two separate phases of an action or event.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>(4) a. Lemloh
 lēm lǒ
 keep leave
 ‘Keep it and leave.’</p> | <p>b. Yariyen
 járí jén
 allow watch
 ‘Allow it and be watching.’</p> |
| <p>c. Suili
 sú lí
 say take
 ‘Say and take.’</p> | <p>d. Yuwang
 jú wán
 hear ignore
 ‘Hear and ignore.’</p> |

In (4a) above the head verb **lem** ‘keep’ associates with the verb **loh** ‘leave’ and the result is **Lemloh** ‘Keep it and leave’. Likewise, **Yuwang** (4d) is a name which expresses two actions. The first verb **yu** means ‘to hear’, the second one **wang** signifies ‘ignore’, and ‘Yuwang’, as confirmed by the consultants, is a piece of advice to ignore everything we hear.

6.1.1.3 Verb+Adverb

Lámnśó? names can also be derived from a combination of a verb and an adverb where the adverb specifies the circumstances of the action expressed by the verb. In Lámnśó?, it is generally the place (adverb of place) where the action takes place or the manner (adverb of manner) in which the action of the verb is carried out. From the collected data, we recorded few Lámnśó? names that exhibit the structure Verb+Adverb.

(5) a. **Suireng**

swí rɛŋ
tell well
'Tell it well.'

b. **Wiybam**

wî bàm
come behind/last
'Come last.'

c. **Kwajei**

kwà? dʒɛɪ
think different
'Think differently.'

d. **Jumbam**

dʒùm bám
follow behind
'Follow last/behind.'

In (5a), the adverb is attached to the verb **sui** resulting in **Suireng**, 'Tell well' where the adverb **reng** 'well' indicates the manner in which the action verb, **sui** 'tell', is carried out. As for (5b), **wiy** 'come' is joined to **bam** 'behind' to form **Wiybam** 'come last', where the adverb of place, **bam**, indicates where the action has taken place.

6.1.2 Interrogative verb phrase names

Lámnsó? interrogative verb phrase names ask questions that start with verbs. They are generally wh-questions. This category of names is made up of a verb and an interrogative marker.

(6) a. **Suiye**

sû jé
tell do what
'Tell and do what after?'

b. **Sahla**

sà? lá
judge who
'Who judges?'

c. **Kwaka**

kwà? ká
think what
'Think about what?'

d. **Binla**

bín lá
interfere who
'Who interferes?'

e. **Litika**

lítí ká
hide what
'What is hiding?'

f. **Yenfe**

jén fé
see where
'See where?'

In (6b) above, the verb **sah** 'judge' is associated with the interrogative marker **la** 'who' to form the question 'who judges?' In (6f) the interrogative marker **fe** 'where' is associated with the verb **yen** 'see', and result in the rhetorical question 'see where?' Other interrogative verb phrases in the language include:

(7) a. **Kumla**

kúm lá
touch who
'Who is touching?'

b. **Banye**

bàn jé
hate do what
'Hate and do what?'

c. **Yongka**

jòn ká
say what
'Say what?'

d. **Leila**

léí lá
watch who
'Who is watching?'

e. **Kongla**

kòn lá
love who
'Who is loving?'

f. **Kila**

kì lá
know who
'Who knows?'

To conclude this section on verb phrase names in Lámnsó?, it is clear that a verb can be combined with four main parts of speech to form a name, namely a noun, a pronoun, another verb, an adverb, or an interrogative marker. The same verb can therefore yield different names depending on the other word it associates with. Let us consider the verbs **ki** 'know' and **lei** 'watch'.

ki- know	-nyuy God	Kinyuy God knows	lei- Observe	nyuy God	Leinyuy God observes
	-reng Well	Kireng Know it well		jei differently	Leije Observe differently
	-wang Ignore	Kiwang Know and ignore		loh leave	Leiloh Observe and leave
	-ven You	Kiven You are aware		mo me	Leimo Observe me
	-la Who	Kila Who knows ?		ka what	Leika Observe what ?

6.2 Noun phrase names

Some Lámnsó? names can be syntactically described as noun phrases because their head are nouns. Such names are very common in the Nsó? area and can be divided into three categories: single words, simple noun phrase and interrogative noun phrase names.

6.2.1 Single word names

Single word names are names that are made up one noun. These names can refer to various realities, depending on what the parents want to express. Though scarce nowadays, they are still present.

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------|---------------|
| (8) | a. Viban | Hatred |
| | b. Shang | Prison |
| | c. Kisherii | Joy/Happiness |
| | d. Nsah | Dispute |
| | e. Ngeh | Suffering |
| | f. Nsai | Earth |

Looking at the above presentation, some Lámnsó? single word names cannot be further broken down while others can. For instance; examples (8b), (8d) (8e) and (8f) cannot be separated, while examples (8a) and (8c), **Viban** ‘hatred’ and **Kisherii** ‘Happiness’ are derived from verbs through affixation. The affixes **vi** and **ki** are prefixed to the verbs **ban** ‘to hate’ and **sheri** ‘to be happy’. In Lámnsó?, **vi** is a plural prefix and **ki** is a singular prefix.

6.2.2 Simple noun phrase names

In simple noun phrase names, the noun can combine with a noun, a verb, or an interrogative.

6.2.2.1 Noun+Noun

This type of names results from the association of two nouns. The first noun is the head and it captures the essential meaning of the entire phrase. The second noun gives a particular quality to the first noun; it can be referred to as a qualifying noun. It specifies the first noun by giving information on its origin or its nature.

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| (9) a. Wirba | b. Wirnkar |
| wìr bà | wìr ḡkár |
| person Baba | person Nkar |
| ‘A person from Baba’ | ‘A person from Nkar’ |

c. **Fonlon**

fɔ̃n **lɔ̃n**
king illluck
'King of ill luck'

d. **Wirkom**

wìr **kòm**
person Kom"
'A person from Kom'

In (9a), the noun **wìr** 'person' is associated with another noun **ba** 'Baba' and the result is a complete phrase meaning 'a person from Baba'. Here the second noun indicates the origin of the person. If we consider **Fonlon** in (9c), the second noun **lon** 'illluck' qualifies the first noun **fon** 'king' by specifying its characteristics. The name **Fonlon** means 'king of badluck': a king whose first characteristic is to bring badluck. Most of these names indicate where the person is coming from. Other names that belong to this category include:

(10) a. **Wirntem**

wìr **ntèm**
person Ntem
'A person from Ntem'

b. **Fomonyuy**

fómò **ɲdì**
gift God
'God's gift'

c. **Wirngo**

wìr **ngò**
person Babungo
'A person from Babungo'

d. **Wirdzerem**

wìr **dzèrèm**
person Dzerem
'A person from Dzerem'

e. **Wirsungnin**

wìr **sùŋìŋ**
person Nkambe
'A person from Nkambe'

f. **Wirsiy**

wìr **sí**
person Babessi
'A person from Babessi'

6.2.2 Interrogative noun phrase names

Interrogative noun phrase names are made up of a noun and a constituent question word.

(11) a. **Jaila**

jàì **lá**
fault who
'Who is at fault?'

b. **Njobe**

ndzò **bě**
guilt where
'Where is the guilt'

c. **Njoka**

ndzò **ká**
guilt what
'What guilt?'

d. **Njola**

ndzò **lá**
guilt who
'Who is guilty?'

e. **Jaibe**

jàì **bě**
fault where
'Where is the fault'

f. **Jaika**

jàì **ká**
fault what
'What is the fault?'

In the above names, the constituent question words, **lá** 'who', **bě** 'where' and **ká** 'what', appear at the phrase final position and the result is a rhetorical question that is geared at drawing people's attention to social issues. These three constituent question words are the most recurrent ones that can be attached to a noun in an interrogative noun phrase name as illustrated with **dze** and **din** below.

dze- way	- lú who	Dzela Who is the way?
	- kú what	Dzeka What is the way?
	- bě where	Dzebe Where is the way?

	- lú Who	Dinla Who is the proof ?
din – proof	- ká what	Dinka What is the proof?
	- bě where	Dinbe Where is the proof?

Some names in the Lámmsó? linguistic area fulfill all the conditions to be treated as full sentences. Such names can be considered as “unit(s) of speech constructed according to language-dependent rules, which are relatively complete and independent in respect to content, grammatical structure, and intonation” (Bussman, 2006). Sentence names can be divided into two groups: declarative sentence names and interrogative sentence names.

Lámnsó? declarative sentence names are assertive. They make a pronouncement about a wish, state, or observation, just to name the few.

- m̀ búrí j̀dì
I praise God
'I praise God'

- fōn dzə ɲə̀i
king Cop heaven
'The king is in heaven'

- nòì kón véér
God loves us
'God loves us'

- jǐnà kǐ yán
God know time
'God's time is the best'

(13) a. Njodzeven

- ndzè dzè vón**
guilt Cop you(plural)
'The guilt is yours'

- vèr dzà kòn
we Cop forest
'We are in the forest'

- mbì dzè jhè**
first Cop God
'God is first'

- fɔn dzə ɲə̀̀
king Cop God
'God is the king'

- | | | |
|---------------------|-----|-----|
| tàr | dzè | ɲòì |
| father | Cop | God |
| 'God is our father' | | |

- nsáí dzè dzǎ
earth Cop route
'The earth is the route'

6.3.2 Interrogative sentence names

Just as it is the case with Lámnsó? interrogative phrase names, the interrogative sentence names are rhetorical questions. The structure of Lámnsó? question names is peculiar; this is because the questioning lexical item generally takes the final position.

(14)a. Njodzeka

ndʒò dzò ká
guilt Cop what
'What is guilt?'

b. Fondzefe

fòn dzò fé
king Cop where
'Where is the king?'

c. Kpudzeka

kpú dzò ká
death Cop what
'What is death?'

d. Mberinyuylee

m bóri jù lé
I thank God how
'How do I thank God?'

As the above examples illustrate, most of the questions end with interrogative markers such as: **ká**, **lé** and **fé** that respectively stand for 'what', 'how' and 'where'. The position of the interrogative marker hardly varies as it appears generally at the end of the sentence. Interrogative sentence names in Lámnsó? are mostly built with the interrogative marker 'ká'.

(15)a. Kindzeka

kí ndzò ká
again Cop what
'What is it again?'

b. Nsoyuka

nsó? jú ká
nso listen what
'What are the Nsó? listening to?'

c. Tanlaka

tún lú ká
lack who what
'Who lacks what?'

d. Nsoseka

nsó? só ká
nso collect what
'What are the Nsó? collecting?'

After presenting the structure of Lámnsó? names, it will also be interesting to analyze their meaning and their contextual value.

7. Meaning and contextual value of Lámnsó? names

In the Lámnsó? linguistic area, as it is the case in Africa, names are generally given with reference to the events surrounding the birth of the child. Machaba (2004) gives a clear picture of such naming habits as he observes that "*the names of African children are not randomly chosen for the purpose of identifying them. [...] It is often the case that circumstances prevailing in the family and or in the community influence the choice of a name given to a newborn child*". Earlier, Wieschhoff (1941, 212) in discussing African names had already argued that "*names are not merely considered as tags by means of which individuals may be distinguished, but are intimately associated with various events in life of the individual as well as those of the family and the larger social groups*". Consequently, a name in Nsó? land clearly depicts the conditions under which the child was born. If the said conditions are highlighted and immortalized through the name, it is also the interactions and the attitudes of the name givers towards societal issues that are depicted in the name bestowed on a child. The name given to a child therefore shows the way the Nsó? people interpret and interact with the world around them.

Names are generally given to indicate a range of people and circumstances that were relevant at the time of their birth (Suzman, 1994) and it is therefore necessary, to understand them, to resort to their referential meaning, that is the meaning realized in connection with a given cultural background. However, it is important to point out

that the classification of Lámnsó? names which will be given below is not always consistent, for there are exceptional cases where a child can bear some of these names without necessarily being born under the stated circumstance in which the name belongs: they may be named after a relative or a family acquaintance. In this first section, our first interest is to identify all the semantic categories of names in Nsó? land. Then, we will resort to name givers and name bearer to identify the situation that surrounded the choice of a specific name.

7.1 The Acknowledgement of the Presence and Existence of God.

The Nsó? people, like most African communities, practise the African religion and are conscious of the presence and existence of an almighty God. Lámnsó? names that are given to acknowledge the wonders of God are generally chosen when the family has experienced a difficult situation for a long time, which almost made the name giver hopeless. These names are built around the word **ŋòì** 'God'.

Table 1: Names that acknowledge the existence of God

Lámnsó? names	Literal meaning
Nyuykighan	God knows the time.
Nyuykongver	God loves us.
Fonyuy	God gives.
Sanyuy	God writes.
Dzelamonyuy	Who is like God?

As mentioned earlier, these names come into play when the name giver has deemed it necessary to appreciate God for taking them out of a hopeless situation. This is done by admitting the fact that God exists. For example; **Nyuykighan** 'God knows the time/God's time is the best' explained that her father stayed for so long without a wife and when he finally got married and had his first child he decided, through her name, to tell the people around him that 'God's time is the best'. In other words, it does not matter how long one waits to have something but what matters is to have it at God's own appointed time. **Fonyuy** 'God gives' during the interview told us that his mother was barren for long and kept trusting God for a child but the expected results were not forthcoming. When God finally answered her prayers she delivered a baby boy and named him 'God gives/God has given' (**Fonyuy**) to acknowledge the source of her gift (her child). The father of **Nyuykongver** 'God loves us' was cured of a deadly disease at the moment his son was born. He bestowed the name on him to thank God for making him healthy after a long time. With these illustrations it is clear that a name is worthless without a backing of descriptions which can be produced on request to explain its application. This descriptive backing amounts to the content of all conventional beliefs and meaning or connotations attached to a name. Other names that fall in this category include:

(16) Lámnsó? names	Literal translation
Biydzenyuy	God is first.
Mburinyuy	I praise God.
Tardzenyuy	God is the father.
Ghahkanyuy	What is difficult for God?
Kongnyuy	God loves.
Javnyuy	God shares.
Sangyuy	God writes.

7.2 A Call for God's Intervention.

After the introduction of Christianity in the Nsók land around the 1920s, the Nsók people became aware of another god who was presented to them by missionaries as an Almighty God they could resort to in difficult times. Consequently, when a child is born in moments of hardships, Christian families prefer to call on God for protection and deliverance via the child's name. It is important to specify that before the introduction of Christianity, the existence of names that express a call for God's intervention were not as rampant as today. Let us consider the following names in the table below where those who gave the name sought for God's intervention.

Table 2: Names that express a call for God's intervention

Lámnsók names	Literal meaning
Wiykiynyuy	God will ever know.
Leinyuy	God sees.
Kinyuy	God knows.
Yennyuy	God watches.
Shiynyuy	Waiting on God.

The way parents name a child reflects their thoughts and lifestyle and also how their psychology and subconscious mind function. Therefore, in the mind of a good number of Nsók people, the intervention of God in a difficult situation is indispensable. Our consultant, **Wiykiynyuy** explained that his name is a call for God's intervention because his family was falsely accused of an issue at the moment he was about to be born. They used the name to surrender and call on God who knows everything to vindicate them in their predicament; **Leinyuy** was born at a time when her father was facing difficult financial moments and did not know how his baby girl was going to survive without basic needs. So he called her 'God sees' to invite God to come and watch over the gift (child) he had given him. In Nsók land, the names **Leinyuy** and **Fonyuy** are often given to twins to signify that since it is God who has given them (**Fonyuy**) it is still Him who will take care of them (**Leinyuy**). Hence, Lámnsók names have a strong historical and socio-cultural bearing that go beyond mere identity. **Tatinyuy** 'God brings together' and **Koitynyuy** 'Embrace God' belong to this set of names.

7.3 A Source of Encouragement and Consolation.

Names that appear in this category result from a devastating condition that befalls a family. A name with a semantic value that is linked to encouragement and consolation is therefore given to the child as a means to comfort the family or the name giver and that is why it is clear that Lámnsók names have a semantic load with communicative functions. Circumstances surrounding a child's birth dictate the name to be given the child, thus social context plays a vital role in understanding Lámnsók names. Let us consider the following names that are given to children as source of encouragement and consolation.

Table 3: Names that are source of encouragement and consolation

Lámnsók names	Literal meaning
Sikehkem	It is mine that is starting.
Kpudzeka	What is death?
Nsaidzedzee	The earth is the route.
Sighanlen	Now is the time.
Lendzemo	Now is my turn.

Based on the discussions held with informants during the interviews, the following explanations were obtained. **Kpudzeka** narrated that she was born at a time when her grandfather died or experienced death for some hours and came back to life.

After his experience, he did not see why people should be scared to die because death was not a harmful and hence he named his granddaughter ‘What is death?’ The purpose of the name was to always console his family about the idea of death, since it frightens many people. On the other hand, **Sighanlen** is a sentence that expresses the beginning of a new experience in the life of the name giver (the mother of the name bearer). Before our informant was born, her mother was ignored and taken for granted by her in-laws. When she had her child, she decided to be strong and courageous. The name **Sighanlen** therefore served as some sort of encouragement pronounced by the name giver to herself. The birth of her child was the time for change and a beginning of new experience (being strong no matter the actions of her in-laws). The following names are equally part of this group of Lámnsó? names.

(17)

Lámnsó? names	Literal meaning
Litika	What is hiding?
Kila	Who knows?
Tanlaka	Who lacks what?
Bunila	Who is sleeping?
Ghansiwiyi	The time is coming.
Lifoter	Take it easy.

7.4 Negative Circumstantial Names

Lámnsó? assigns names as ‘signifiers’ to the ‘signified’ (people). The names thus act as identifiers and sources of the recorded happenings. These happenings, which in this case are negative, reveal the fact that in the Nsó? culture, it is important to remember not only positive but also uncomfortable life situations. This is because knowledge of the unfortunate situation helps an individual to better shape his future and devise means to avoid another uncomfortable experience. The presentation of some names that fall in this category is done in the table below:

Table 4: Negative circumstantial names

Lámnsó? names	Literal meaning
Dzerlamo	Who is asking after me?
Ngeh	Suffering
Shang	Prison
Dzelambong	Who is perfect?
Wiydorla	Who will ever get tired?

This table reveals that it is not a taboo in Nsó? land to name a child **Dzerlamo** ‘Who is asking after/Who cares about me?’, **Ngeh** ‘suffering’ and **Shang** ‘prison’ just to name the few. From **Dzerlamo**’s story, we found out that her father was a polygamist who had three wives, her mother being the second wife was the least loved and most neglected, so when she was born the name was bestowed on her by her mother. This shows that her mother did not want to forget the treatment she received from her husband despite the fact that it was an uncomfortable situation. As for **Ngeh** ‘suffering’ he was born at a time when their family business was experiencing a fall in its general turnover. **Dzelambong** ‘who is perfect?’ was born at a period when her step mother was always complaining about everything in the house. Her mother was uncomfortable with that and kept telling her to learn to accept people the way they are because no one is perfect. Therefore the name served as a reminder to her step mother to this present day. **Wiydorla** ‘who will ever get tired?’ was born at a time when her mother found out that her father had been cheating on her since they got married. The name she gave to her daughter therefore signifies that, no matter how he cheats on her, he will one day get tired of it, while she will never get tired of her matrimonial

home. From these names, it is clear that name givers choose names that emanate from the social fabric of their lives (Suzman, 1994). In this view, the social context within which naming is included becomes part of the name itself. Most single word names fall under this category of Negative Circumstantial Names.

	Lámnsó? names	Literal meaning
(18)	Viban	Hatred
	Suilika	Say and take what?
	Wiybam	Come last/behind.
	Lon	Badluck
	Yarayen	Allow and be watching.
	Yula	Who is listening?
	Nsahdzetsen	There is dispute below.

7.5 Expected Future Manifestations

The Nsó? people sometimes bestow names with positive connotations with the aim of seeing them manifest in the life of the child or the family as they grow up. This means that the Nsó? people do not only depend on circumstances surrounding the birth of the child, they also get inspiration from what they want the child to become in the future and how they want it to happen. Let us therefore consider the following names.

Table 5: Names with expected future manifestations

Lámnsó? names	Literal meaning
Sulii	Clean the insult.
Kiven	You people know/It is your business.
Yuwang	Hear and ignore/do not bear grudges.
Konglim	Love work.
Bamenjo	Avoid guilt.

Sulii ‘clean the insult’ explained that her father gave her that name because he wanted her to be humble enough and to be able to ask for forgiveness or forgive others when they hurt her feelings. As for **Kiven** ‘you people know’, his uncle bestowed the name on him because he wanted his nephew to grow up being passive in issues that do not concern him directly, that is to say, he should not be interested in the affairs of others. It is important to mention that these names could as well be given based on a circumstance surrounding the birth of a child. Therefore, apart from being names with expected future manifestations, they could also be circumstantial names. Other names that belong to this set of Lámnsó? names include:

(19)	Lámnsó names	Literal meaning
	Suireng	Say it well.
	Kwajei	Think differently.
	Barah	Modernity
	Bamenjo	Avoid guilt.
	Kisheri	Happiness/Joy

7.6 Nsó? Religious beliefs

Despite the fact that in Nsó? land, the Christian God is acknowledged and cried to in times of trouble, the practice of traditional religion is not totally left out. As is the case with Christianity, the Nsó? traditional religion also practises ‘baptism’. During this ‘baptism’, an identity is given to the child by bestowing a particular name on them. These names are divided into two sub groups; the automatic names, or

names given based on the gender and birth position of the child in the family, and the calculated names, which are bestowed based on the answer to the question of the child's origin (where the child is coming from). The automatic name is given before the calculated name and the exercise is carried out in a shrine by a chief priest who performs traditional rites and some incantations to perfect the naming exercise. When giving calculated names, the chief priest has prepared locations that he mentions to search where the child comes from. The locations that are mentioned during this exercise include, amongst others, Babessi, Babungo, Ntem, Baba, Kom, Nkar, Donga mantung and Dzerem. It is worthwhile to state that these locations or areas are neighbouring tribes that have a diplomatic relationship with Nsók (this relationship is seen in the fact that when the chiefs of these tribes die Nsók people always have a role to play in the funerals and if the Nsók fon dies these tribes too have obligations to fulfil. When the child's origin is finally gotten, **Wir** 'person' is then attached to the location to identify the child. The tables below present names linked to idol worship that were recorded during the interview.

Table 6: Names Based on the Nsók Religious Belief that express birth position (automatic names).

Position in the family	Male	Female
First	Lukong	Biy
Second	Tata	Shee
Third	Ngong	Ntang
Fourth	Tukov	Kfekfe

The table above reveals that there are only four names in this subcategory. If a parent happens to have more than four children, he will start naming from the first name. Their semantic values are not stated because they are characterized by what Katamba (1993) calls "semantic opaqueness". In other words, they do not have a clear semantic value or meaning. In the Nsók community, these are the only names that are gender marked. Like mentioned earlier, it is possible to find people in the Nsók land who were not taken to a shrine but bearing these names. In this case, the person can be the namesake of a family member or acquaintance in the one hand, or the name can simply be a family name that a father will attribute automatically to his offspring. Another sub category of names based on the Nsók religious belief which is the calculated names is presented below.

Table 7: Calculated names

Lúmnsók names	Literal meaning
Wirba	Person from Baba
Wirsiy	Person from Babessi
Wirkom	Person from Kom
Wirntem	Person from Ntem
Wirngo	Person from Babungo
Wirsungnin	Person from Donga mantung
Wirnkar	Person from Nkar
Wirdzerem	Person from Dzerem

As explained earlier, these names are normally given after the chief priest has consulted the Gods of the land to know about the origin of the child. Like automatic names, some people have these names nowadays without ever having been to a shrine, for the same reasons evoked earlier.

7.7 Names that reflect the pride of the Nsók people

History clearly shows that Nsók kingdom was founded in the 14th century by a woman, Ngonso. Like a good number of African tribes, the Nsók went to war with other groups, such as the Bamum, the Njotin and the Nkar. Nsók pride therefore originated from these wars since, before the arrival of the Germans, the warriors of Nsók had the tradition of keeping the skulls of their defeated war enemies as trophies. It is said that each time they went to war they returned with a good number of skulls in order to exhibit their prowesses. It is therefore important to state that the defeated Njotin and Nkar are kingdoms that are answerable to the paramount chief of Nsók. These names are built around the word **Nsók**.

Table 8: Examples of names that reflect the pride of the Nsók people

Lámnsók names	Literal meaning
Fannso	Fear the Nsók people
Lanso	If not of the Nsók people
Kongnso	Lover of Nsók
Veranso	We and the Nsók
Nsochavi	The Nsók are selective.

Names reflect the thoughts of the name giver and his perception of the world around him. The Nsók people in their names express a sense of being worthy of honour. That is why in the Nsók land, there are names like **Fannso** ‘fear the Nsók’, **Lanso** ‘if not of the Nsók’ and **Kongnso** ‘lover of Nsók’, which expose a feeling of superiority and quest for reverence. The Nsók people are so attached to their culture that they do not shy away or feel ashamed of their roots like some Africans in the 21st century. Their pride is also seen in their attitude towards the culture. A Nsók man always wants to find and mingle with his own people and names like **Veranso** ‘we and the Nsók’ clearly illustrates it. A name like **Nsochavi** ‘the Nsók are selective’ is another expression of the Nsók pride, for to be selective implies the feeling of being superior to other people.

When an Nsók is disappointed by his community, the names he coins using the affix Nsók express the poor opinion he has of his people at the moment he has a child. This gives rise to names such as **Nsoboti** ‘the Nsók are telling lies’ and **Nsokika** ‘what does the Nsók know?’ Other names that belong to this category of names include.

(20)	Lámnsók names	Literal meaning
	Shunso	The Nsók have guessed.
	Nsobe	Where are the Nsók people?
	Nsoyuni	The Nsók people have heard.
	Nsogiri	The Nsók are in haste.

To summarize this sub-section, the naming practices of the Lámnsók people profoundly reflect their attitudes towards the events that surround the birth of a child. They serve as living memories of what the name givers experienced, both positively and negatively, and are clear indicators of a people deeply rooted in their traditions. As a point of analysis, what matters is not the negative or positive connotation of the names, but the will of a people to immortalize moments of their day to day life in a form that put forward the beauty of their customs.

8. Conclusion

In the Nsɔʔ land, names are not given at random. They are not merely words that are used to identify people in the community. They are very powerful instruments in understanding the way the people interact with each other and with their environment. Through the names they give to their children, Nsɔʔ people immortalize the major events they go through. The child (name bearer) becomes a living testimony of an unforgettable joy or an unbearable pain. Morphologically, the linguistic structure of names includes compound words made up of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Those compounds can be further classified into noun phrase, verb phrase and sentence names. The naming habits in the Lámnsɔʔ linguistic area are a clear indication that the Nsɔʔ people are deeply attached to their traditions and culture. A name is far from being a simple word used to designate a person, it depicts the state of mind of the name givers at a specific time and relates to the events that were current at the birth of the name bearers and the way they influence them.

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Appendix: Selected list of Nsɔʔ names

NAME	GLOSSE
Amosa	And me too.
Asheri	They are happy.
Ayangyangka	Why are they bothered?
Ayenika	What have they seen?
Bamenjo	Abstain from guilt.
Banfogha	What the reason for the hatred?
Baninla	Who is gathering?
Banlanjo	Hate without guilt.
Barah	Modernity.
Bernsah	Dispute is left.
Berka	What is left?
Bihkongnyuy	For the love of God.
Bimela	Who is accepting?
Binla	Who is interfering?
Birnso	It is the public(Nso) that is bad.
Boi	Who is free?
Bongajum	Better to be dismissed.
Bongam	It is a good week.
Bonghan	Times are good.
Bongkem	Mine is better.
Bongker	Ours is better.
Bongmoyong	I am the best object of gossip.
Bongnyang	Peace is good.
Bongsuiru	The truth is better.
Buhven	You are the one worried.

Bunila	Who is sleeping?
Dzeebe	Where is the way?
Dinka	What is the proof?
Dzelagha	Who is what?
Dzelamoonuyuy	Who is like God?
Dzerlamo	Who is asking after me? / Who cares about me?
Fannso	Fear the Nso people.
Fola	Who has given?
Folen	Give now.
Fomonyuy	God's gift.
Fondzefe	Where is the king?
Fondzenyuy	God is king.
Fondzeyuv	The king is in heaven.
Fonyuy	God gives.
Ghahkanyuy	What is difficult for God?
Ghandzeni	Moving with bare hands.
Ghansiwiyi	The time is coming.
Ghanyuy	God's time.
Ghenkem	I am proven right.
Girka	Why hurry?
Gohlafen	Who will remain hear?
Jaibe	Where is the fault?
Jaika	What is the fault?
Jaila	Whose fault is it?
Javnyuy	God is distributing /God is sharing.
Jumbam	Follow behind.
Jumshu	Sent away by quarrels.
Kaiven	You are underlooking.
Keafon	What they have given.
Kehla	Who is the first?
Kemjei	My own is different.
Kenjo	The guilt is eating him up.
Kernyuy	God owns
Kidzeru	It is true.
Kiven	It is you who knows.
Koitinyuy	Embrace God.
Kongla	Who loves?
Konglim	Lover of work.
Kongnso	Lover of Nso.
Kongnyuy	God loves.
Kpudzeka	What is death?
Kumla	Who is touching?
Kwajei	Think differently.
Kwaka	Think what?
Kwatinyuy	God's thought.
Labiv	No sides.
Labuni	No sleep.
Lanjo	Without guilt.
Lankar	With no friend.
Lavmai	The house is finished.
Lavkpu	The house of death.
Lialo	Take and leave.
Lifoter	Take it easy.
Litika	What is hiding?
Lontum	Leave on an errand.
Maika	What is ending?
Mainsah	Ended in a dispute.
Mengla	Who doubts?
Nchadze	Passerby.
Nchemi	Laughing stock.
Ngalim	He who has done the work.
Ngeh	Poverty.
Ngitir	Huzzle
Njodzeka	What is guilt?
Njodzeven	The guilt is yours.
Nsah	Dispute.
Nsahdzetsen	There is dispute below.
Nsai	Earth.

Nsaibirni	The earth is spoiled.
Ntainyuy	God's chosen.
Ntumnyuy	God's message.
Nyuydze	God is.
Nyuydzesi	God is adding
Nyuykighan	God knows the time.
Nyuykongmo	God is loving me.
Nyuyminka	What is God ignorant of?
Nyuysoni	God has won.
Resinyuy	God is babysitting.
Rohka	What has cursed?
Sa'aghen	Let them stop.
Sahla	Who is judging?
Senyuymo	It is God that has helped me.
Shang	Prison
Shiyghan	Wait for the time.
Shiynyuy	Waiting on God.
Shulika	What do you gain from gossips.
Siben	It is like that henceforth.
Simolen	Now is my turn.
Siven	You are left on your own
Tahka	In search of what.
Tanlaka	Who lacks what?
Tardzenyuy	God is the father.
Tatinyuy	God gathers.
Tirla	Who is advising?
Tiydze	Standing on the way.
Tahka	In search of what?
Veejai	They made a mistake.
Veranso	We and the Nso.
Verdzekov	We are in the forest.
Vernyuy	Am with God.
Vershiyi	We are waiting.
Viban	Hatred.
Wankui	The child has grown.
Wanya	Grandmother's child.
Wirba	A person from Baba.
Wirdzerem	A person from Dzerem.
Wirkom	A person from Kom.
Wirngo	A person from Babungo.
Wirnkar	A person from Nkar.
Wiyele	What will I ever do?
Wiykiynyuy	God will ever know.
Wiylahnyuy	God will ever reward.
Wiysanyuy	God will ever write.
Woomela	Who is shy?
Woomeka	Why are you shy?
Yabir	A bad year.
Yarayen	Allow it and be watching.
Yenfe	Where are you seeing?
Yongla	Who has said it?
Yongka	What is saying?
Yuban	Hear and hate.
Yufonyuy	Hear from God.
Yurika	What are you listening to?
Yuven	You are the ones listening.
Yuwang	Hear and ignore.