

Naming and Humour: Decrying Extensions to Time-Celebrated Residences

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ABSTRACT This paper was inspired by the humorous place naming of newly developed extensions of villages which is not restricted to any particular individual. The main aim of this research is to provide a comprehensive and critical evaluation of the meaning behind the names of some places among the Vatsonga communities. Emerging villages in the form of extensions of the existing villages are receiving a considerable amount of attention with regard to patterns of their naming. The presence of these villages is important for the study of toponymy. The study is qualitative in nature and data was collected using the interview technique. A focus group of five participants in each of the ten villages was used. Therefore, the study reports the results of the investigations into these place names among Vatsonga communities. The analysis shows that behind every place name, there is a meaning which is humorous and symbolic in nature. The study was conducted in order to make recommendations on guidelines for naming process of the newly developed extensions of villages.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of giving a place a name cannot be over-emphasized. The naming of places differs in the circumstances they are given. Some place names are bestowed after heroes or heroines, politicians, people who have contributed something in the lives of their people (Mbenzi 2009). The focus of this study is on the humorous naming of the newly developed extensions of some of the rural villages among the Vatsonga communities. Rural areas are given names which are registered with the South Africa Geographical Names Council (SAGNC). However, the focus of this research is on the naming of the newly developed extensions of these villages which of course are not registered with the Council. These place names have interesting stories behind them. The names discussed in this paper are usually nicknames as there are official names for these places. Crystal (1994: 152) says a nickname "...is an extra or additional name used to express such attitude as familiarity, affection and ridicule". An important point is that these nicknames are more popular among members of these communities than the official names.

The naming of these newly developed extensions of villages is very humorous and symbolic. From time immemorial, the power of bestowing names to either a person or place was

given to Adam by God. According to the scriptures, after creating everything, God assigned the naming to Adam. Fromkin and Rodman (1988: 413) concur by saying "*and out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them and Adam named every creature.*" However, this Adamic license is no longer rigid for special people but open to everybody especially in the naming of the newly developed extensions of villages among Vatsonga communities. The coining process of the place names discussed in this research was not controlled and coordinated by the Council. However, their symbolic meanings could be easily traced. On this note, Golele (1993: 30) said that "*...it is traceable to the circumstances which gave rise to them, as they are situation-bond.*". Although these types of place names are traceable, it is however sometimes difficult to trace the name-giver(s). This is due to the fact that when these names are given, there are no community structures, committees and meetings to facilitate the naming process.

Literature Review

Studies on place names have been conducted by various researchers and have contributed enormously in the discipline of toponymy, which is the study of place names. However, not much

has been dedicated on the humorous meanings behind the naming of the newly developed extensions of villages especially among Vatsonga communities. Although this type of nicknaming have been in existence for a long time, there is a lack of adequate material regarding the history of the humorous nicknaming practices of the extensions of villages about the way these names are coined. Perhaps the reason for the scarcity of such researches is that the names of these places are nicknames and not official. It is worth mentioning that earlier literature conducted on place names has important contributions to make on the debate around the naming patterns of the newly developed extensions of villages.

Mbenzi (2009) wrote an article titled *“The Management of Place Names in the Post-Colonial Period in Namibia”*. In this research, Mbenzi found that there are towns which have official names in European languages but people use the indigenous names for these towns in informal situations. Accordingly, naming and renaming of place names were to be done soon after the country’s independence from colonial rule. Some of the place names which bore colonial names such as Kaiser Street was renamed Independence Avenue while the international airport which was named J.G. Strydom was renamed Hosea Kutako International Airport. The researcher concluded that the use of indigenous names in naming places was desirable since it was the right direction for the African renaissance.

Khuboni (2003) conducted a study on Zulu nicknames with special reference to industrial workplace whereby nicknames are mostly used instead of personal names. The main focus of her study was on Zulu nicknames given to employees by other co-workers of equal rank. According to Khuboni (2003: 3) these names are “bestowed as a results of behavior, attitudes, personality traits or physical features”. The study found that some of these nicknames are full of humour and at times derogatory. The study further revealed that these nicknames are informally acquired and may not be permanent to the name-bearer. However, sometimes they may continue to be used forever depending on the circumstances and the nature of the nickname. Although Khuboni’s focus was on nicknames of people, the study is related to the present paper because the nicknames of the villages discussed

are also humorous and are given outside of naming conventional practices.

Ndletyana (2012) on the title *“Changing Place Names in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Accounting for the Unevenness”* conducted a research in which the main focus was to examine the renaming of South Africa’s public places since the dawn of democracy. This research discussed the renaming of major cities, prominent streets and popular public spaces which bore colonial names and were to be replaced by indigenous place names. Names such as Transvaal and Eastern Transvaal were changed to Gauteng and Mpumalanga respectively. Ndletyana concluded by indicating that there is unevenness of the renaming of place names in South Africa since 1994.

Among those who have made studies of naming practices among Vatsonga are Mushwana and Chauke (2015). Their article *“Naming Practices among Vatsonga: The Case of Naming of ‘Characters’ in Some of Thomas Hasani Chauke’s Songs”* looks at both the semantic and semiotic meanings attached to a given character. Some of the names discussed include Tlevulani (She who never stays in one place), Roza (Rose, a flower) and Matendla (She who caused mischiefs by herself). The study revealed that the names bestowed to the characters in Chauke’s songs are relevant to the message of the songs because they influence the lifestyle and behavior of the given character.

Chauke (2015) is one of the most prominent scholars that has done a study on Vatsonga naming practices. In his article titled *“Personal Names and Naming Practices among the Vatsonga”* he brings forth some of the types of naming practices such as politically inspired names, commemorative names, ancestral names, Christian names, family/birth circumstances names and protective names. In his study, Chauke deals with the meanings behind the personal names given to a newly born baby by the parents. His findings revealed that a name is not just given but there are circumstances that led to the names given to the name bearers.

The related research conducted on place names among Vatsonga was done by Golele (1993) titled *“Names and Society: The Rise of Some South African Place Names”*. The place names discussed in her paper were as a result of political, economic, social and other factors affecting the people’s lives. The focus of her re-

search was not only among Vatsonga communities, but also included indigenous place names of other languages such as Northern Sotho and Tshivenda. In her research, some of the place names related to the present study include *Hlantswa-vuhlalu* (wash the beads), *Xilovani* (place of death), *Hunguta-ximbitana* (reduce the little pot), *Pekulani* (lift the dress), *Nyagelani* (look for him) and many more. It is important to mention that the naming of these places is humorous and they are for the newly developed extensions of the villages. The present paper is an attempt to fill the gap which was not covered by the scholars discussed above.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative in nature and has used the focus group interviews as a primary method to gain an in-depth knowledge on the meaning behind the naming of the newly developed villages discussed in this paper. Seidman (1998: 1) explains that the reason why the researcher conducts an interview is that she/he is *interested in other people's stories* which are *a way of knowing* or contributing to new knowledge. The qualitative approach in this research is based on the fact the data was collected in the natural settings of all the participants. The study was carried out in the selected villages among the Vatsonga communities. The researcher collected the data for this research between January and June 2015 from ten newly developed extensions of rural villages. A focus group interview session was used with fifty participants in Xitsonga.

Research Instruments

The study made use of the focus group interviews instrument to collect the data from all the selected participants. This technique allows for an in-depth coverage of the information from the participants. Through this type of interviews, the researcher was able to obtain a greater depth of data because interviews allow in-depth coverage of a phenomenon from the participant's point of view (Fontana and Frey 1994).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study was collected by using the qualitative approach. The technique

used was the focus group interviews. One structured focus group was conducted with five participants in each of the ten new developed extensions of villages for not more than an hour per group. In total, the data for this research was collected from fifty participants. In order to capture the provided data accurately, a permission to use the tape recorder was requested from all the participants (De Vos et al. 2006). The researcher also wrote notes to augment the information recorded in the tape recorder. All the interviews were conducted in Xitsonga in order to allow all participants to actively participate during the interviews. The recorded data was later transcribed and translated into English by a professional translator. The central question was: "What is the meaning behind the naming of the newly developed area?"

The data was read and re-read several times in order to get the whole sense of it. The collected field notes taken during the interviews were also coded (Creswell 1990). During the analysis, the recorded information was compared with the transcribed data in order to avoid omissions of some important information.

Participants

The researcher made use of purposive sampling technique (also known as judgmental sampling), to select the participants for this study. This sampling technique is based on the judgment of the researchers about the individuals to be sampled for the purpose of a particular research (De Vos et al. 2006). In this study, the sample of fifty participants was purposively selected to take part. In each of the ten newly developed extensions, five participants were selected. The participants included both men and women between the ages of 27 and 50 years. In this research, the sampling of these participants was important because not all the residents in these extensions are knowledgeable about the meanings behind the names of these areas. It, therefore, became very important to decide on how to reduce the number of participants to be selected. In order to understand the phenomenon, a small sample was then purposively selected.

Fifty participants were selected to take part in this study. The sampled size of this research was determined by data saturation. All the participants in this study were conversant with the

reasons why the newly developed extensions of villages were bestowed these names. These participants were mainly the first people to occupy these areas and some of them claim to be the name-givers of these areas. However, in some instances, others who were not the first occupants were also involved because it was established that they too are knowledgeable with place naming.

The participants were well informed about their rights before embarking on the research. They were all aware of the ethical considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity and withdrawing from the study when they felt they could not continue. All the participants were Xitsonga speakers.

DISCUSSION

The paper discusses the findings of ten newly developed extensions of villages among Vatsonga communities. The findings of this research demonstrated that there are differences in the meaning behind the naming of the newly developed extensions and its mother villages. All the names bestowed on these extensions are humorous and symbolic in nature. The naming of these places was mainly attributed to political, social and economic reasons.

The events that necessitated the establishment of the extension of the village named *Matshama-hi-nkani* (Stay defiantly) were the reasons behind the naming of this place name. *Matshama-hi-nkani* is a name of the extension of the villages under the Xikundu Tribal Authority and Wervierdien under the Mnisi Tribal Authority. This name is formed by *Matshama* which is a verb, *-hi-* is a subject concord and *nkani* which is a verb. The name refers to stay in a place defiantly. In other words, the residents were not given permission by their respective tribal authorities or the municipality to stay in these areas. No proper procedures are followed when the areas are invaded, hence, the name *Matshama-hi-nkani*.

The analysis of this place name indicates that some of the ploughing fields of the community members were forcefully invaded by members of the communities without the permission of the headman or owners' consent. The researcher observed that the residences of *Matshama-hi-nkani* are either those who are not interested in moving to towns or suburbs or those who are

financially challenged to move from villages. Participant 2 avers that "*the more efforts are made to prevent community members to stay in the un-demarcated areas, the more influx to the area*". The important point to note is that people are discouraged to stay in the area where the municipality did not demarcate because municipal service delivery will not be rendered. These are municipal services which are provided to satisfy the basic needs of the people which include water supply, sewage collection and disposal, electricity supply, refuse removal, municipal roads and storm water drainage, street lighting and parks and recreation. All these services are difficult to provide for since the residents have defiantly occupied these areas.

Unlike in the past, nowadays extended families do not prefer to stay in one household because there could be more quarrels among family members. The situation forces young couples to move to the newly developed extension named *Hunguta-poto* (Reduce the pot).

The place name *Hunguta-poto* literally means reduce the pot. It was envisaged that the literal meaning of this name should be applied and serve as one of the principles for residents to become permanent inhabitants. *Hunguta-poto* is the name of the extension of the Magona village under the Gijana Tribal Authority. This is a compounded place name formed by *Hunguta* and *Poto* which are verb and noun respectively. The name *Hunguta-poto* is given to a place whereby the majority of the residents were initially staying with their extended families where a huge pot of say size six and above was used to cook. In such cases the daughters-in-law become tired of cooking with a big pot and decide to move with their newly established small families to a new developed area.

Obviously, because they are staying in the nuclear families the pot used for cooking is reduced. Hence, the place name *Hunguta-poto*. Some of the participants say that, the name *Hunguta-poto* is derived from the fact that daughters-in-law while still staying with their in-laws used to cook their own food and hide in their respective bedrooms to eat with their husbands and their children while sidelining other family members. This situation persisted and caused many quarrels in various extended families up to a point where they had to move to a new extension and name this place *Hunguta-poto*. The same sentiment was shared by participant 8 who asserts that:

According to the Vatsonga customs and traditions, the last born son in the family is the one who stays with the parents. My husband is a last born and I was expected to cook with size ten pot. We decided to move to Hunguta-poto as the name indicates we have reduced the pot from size ten to size three.

Looking at the quotation above one gets the reason why this place was given the name *Hunguta-poto*. Clearly, the meaning of the name so derived shows how the residents are free in this place without elderly people to control them because they sometimes cook only when they feel like. Golele (1993: 89) noted that there are related names to *Hunguta-poto* such as *Hungata-ximbitana* (reduce the little pot) and *Wisapoto* (fell the pot) whose naming bears the same meaning.

This research found that when young couples move to their new houses, they normally leave their mothers-in-law behind and the place name *Xisiyan'wingi* (Leave the mother-in-law behind) is bestowed to the extension comprising mainly of these couples. *Xisiyan'wingi* is an extension of the Dzingidzingi village under the Hlaneki Tribal Authority. Related to this name is *Sorry xikoxa* which is an extension of the Mninginisi Block 3 village under the Thomo Tribal Authority and the name literally means sorry old lady. The name *Xisiyan'wingi* is literally translated to mean leave the mother-in-law behind. The name was given to a place where the majority of the residents are young people. According to the participants, this name was given by women because they are the ones who influence their husbands to leave their parents' and grandparents' homes to start their own homesteads.

The manner in which they leave their parents' homesteads is too unceremonious because these aged parents had to fend for themselves. These women left their mothers-in-law or grannies behind and hence *Xisiyan'wingi* and *Sorry xikoxa* respectively. The participants concurred that they do not want their mothers-in-law because they had so many differences with them during the time they were still staying together. Participant 5 points out that *"I want to be free in my own house with my own family and not with the extended family. I want to be independent and only visit my mother-in-law and the rest of the family members when I feel like"*.

Some of the newly developed extensions are due to the fact that people who have a strong

bond with their villages do not want to move to urban areas. Because they are financially viable, they build their houses in the newly developed extension and others bestow the area *Ketleketle* (Sounds of tea pots).

Ketleketle is the name of the extension of the Mphambo village which is about five kilometres from Malamulele town. The name literally means sounds of tea pots. This place earned this name from the fact that people who live there are believed to be young and rich and are able to buy themselves tea. The name of this newly developed area was given by those who are staying in the main village. Concisely, they scorn those in the new extension by indicating that every time one passes by, one hears the sounds of teapots because the residents are making and drinking tea. According to the participants, sounds of teapots is an indication of well-being.

This research established that sometimes there is a tendency of unmarried women, single mothers and divorcees to have relationships with married men. Generally, these women stay in their own houses with their children. There is place where some of these women stay which is named *Mbuti-a-yi-tlheli* (The goat does not go back). *Mbuti-a-yi-tlheli* is an extension of Jerone village and is situated about five kilometres from Malamulele town and falls under the Mavambe Tribal Authority. *Mbuti-a-yi-tlheli* literally means the goat does not go back. The residents of this area are mainly females who are unmarried, divorcees, widows, single mothers and frustrated women. The researcher observed that most of these females are government employees in their early thirties and forties. According to Participant 2, the name was given to alert the females in the neighboring villages that once their husbands come to this newly established area, they will not go back to their homes. In fact, the noun *Mbuti* symbolizes a male person.

The place is well developed since the men who live with these women shoulder the responsibility of looking after them. This newly demarcated area is perceived by others as "Small Heaven" because of the mansions and relatively higher life style. Participant 8 concurs by indicating that *"at Mbuti-a-yi-tlheli we are living as if we are in "small heaven" because we have almost everything we need. Men who come and reside with us as our concubines do not go back to their respective homes because we take good care of them."* The quotation shows that resi-

dents of *Mbuti-a-yi-tlheli* regard this place as “small heaven” in that they have found peace of mind after having suffered numerous frustrations in the past.

The naming of some of the place names such as *Nhloko-ya-njiya* (Head of the locust) are done with the aim of promoting oneness among individuals of those areas. This research found that some place names have a specific meaning to the giver(s) since they sometimes convey hidden information. In African societies, sharing of things such as foods and clothes by members of the family is very important because it shows and promotes oneness. The place name *Nhloko-ya-njiya* is derived from the Xitsonga idiomatic expression, *Nhloko ya njiya vana va munhu vo tsemelana*. Literally, this idiomatic expression means siblings share the head of the locust and encourages that the little that one has one should share with others. According to the participants the name *Nhloko ya njiya* was given to this area because most of the people who stay there are unemployed and therefore depend mainly on child support and old age grants. It should be borne in mind that the residents of *Nhloko-ya-njiya* live from hand-to-mouth; hence they encourage one another to share whatever they have. It was observed that this name has a beneficial influence on the life of the residents of this area. On this note, Golele (1993: 85) averred that “*although at times the meaning of such names may be forgotten, it is traceable to the circumstances which gave rise to them, as they are situation-bound*”. Although the majority of the residents of *Nhloko-ya-njiya* are having it tough to survive, the researcher observed that they are content. Participant 1 strongly supports this view when she says “*I am not employed, however, I am happy because others such as friends and neighbours are shouldering the responsibility of my survival. These people are doing this maybe because the name bestowed to this area says we have to share*”. One may thus conclude that the name given to this area serves as a symbol of how the residents live.

Some of the naming of the newly developed extensions came about because the residents are scorned by those who remained in the mother village. The humorous and symbolic naming of the place *Gongondza-hi-nenge* (Knock with your leg) serves as an example. The name was formed by a verb *Gongondza* and the subject

concord *-hi-* and a noun *Nenge*. The name of this extension was bestowed because those who live there are assumed to be rich. It is believed that everyday when they come back from work, they will be holding plastic bags full of groceries. Due to the weight of the plastic bags, they use their legs to knock on the door, hence *Gongondza-hi-nenge*.

The issue of service delivery by some municipalities is a serious challenge, especially in rural areas. Some of the place names given reflect poor or insufficient delivery of services such as electricity. The place name *Mbamba-Muchisi* (search for a box of matches) is an example of such names. *Mbamba - Muchisi* is the name of the extension of the village in Saselamani under Chief Xikundu which literally means search for matches. The name is formed from the verb *Mbamba* because it denotes to us what the person is doing or the action that is being performed and from the noun *Muchisi*. This name emanates from the fact that it only took a long time after the place was occupied was electricity installed. The residents gave this name because they had to search for a box of matches in order to light their houses/huts (Chauke 2005: 119). Chief Xikundu advocated that his subjects were treated unfairly by the electricity suppliers.

This research further found that there are other different but related views from the preceding discussions which are worthy of note. In fact, other participants say the name *Mbamba-Muchisi* was given because the majority of the residents are not educated. Participant 9 avers that “*the name Mbamba-Muchisi was given to this area because residents do not want to go to school. We are still living in darkness even though education is free here in South Africa*”. From the extract above, one can say that the verb *Mbambu* is used to mean pull up your socks, while the noun *Muchisi* stands for education. The petty headman in charge of this extension keeps on telling his subjects, especially the youth, that they have to search for matches in order to light and study their books so that there should be light in this area. As is reflected in the preceding deliberations, different people are of different interpretations about the naming of the place *Mbambu-Muchisi*. It is, therefore, relevant to conclude that all the meanings of this name are important for the residents to consider.

This research found that some place names are as a result of the situations of the people

who live in that area. The humorous and symbolic name Tana-ni-Xixevo (Come with relish) was given because the majority of the residents live from hand-to-mouth. *Tana-ni-xixevo* is a name of a place occupied predominantly by single women who are either divorcees, unmarried and frustrated. The literal meaning of this place name is come with relish. The name was given to this place because many of the residents are unemployed and they depend mainly on government grants for their survival. The name calls upon men who come and make advances should bring along the relish. The observation made during this research found that men of different ages and status frequent this newly developed place and they will be holding plastic bags full with groceries in response to the name of the place. It is interesting to note that bachelors and men without spouse find this place more comfortable because once they bring along relish they are welcomed to stay there as long as they wish. Related to this place name is *Xavakota* which literally means “buy quarter of bread” and is also given to other newly developed areas among Vatsonga communities.

Another place which is humorously named is *Tana-hi-wexe* (Come by yourself). *Tana-hi-wexe* is a name of an informal settlement which was later developed into a fully-fledged residential village. This is a compounded name which is formed by a verb-*tana* and a subject concord-*hi* and a pronoun-*wexe*. The place named *Tana-hi-wexe* started as an informal settlement by contract workers (only males) who erected their tents while they were busy with the construction of a local dam (Chauke 2005: 110). The name of this informal settlement literally means “come by yourself”. Since these men did not bring their wives along, they swept, cooked, washed and ironed by themselves. Females from the neighbouring villages such as Thulamahashe, Xiphafulanini, Mambhumbhu, Kumani and M.P. Streams were attracted to this place mainly by biltongs hanged on the washing line as well as dancing to loud music played during the weekends (Nxumalo 2000). Women came to the place uninvited and falling in love with these contractors and later stay there permanently. The participants say that after the completion of the dam project, the settlement was well established and many people decided to stay permanently.

CONCLUSION

The study provided some insight into the meaning behind the place names of the newly developed areas in the villages among Vatsonga communities. The study concluded that a strategy should be developed by the South African Geographic Names' Committee for the participating name-givers to these new areas to have full understanding of the naming process of place names.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings of this research, it is recommended that further research focusing on the naming of the newly developed extensions of the villages be conducted. This research also recommends that these place names be officially recognized and submitted to South Africa Geographical Names Council. The research recommends that the Council should constantly control and coordinate the coining of the place names whenever newly developed extensions are established. The participation of all the residents in the naming process is very crucial.

LIMITATIONS

The study purposively selected five participants from each newly developed village to participate in the study. This study was conducted in ten newly developed villages among Vatsonga communities. The results of this paper cannot be generalized to all the villages bearing the same names discussed in this paper. Future studies of this nature should be conducted to provide clear picture of the naming patterns of these place names.

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