

## **Creative Ways of Using Esl To Name Children**

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**Abstract:** *The study examines English names which second language speakers give their children. The names may be English but have a distinct African flavour such as No Please and Talknomore hence the term Afro English. The study interrogates the background of over sixty names collected over a period of ten years. The researchers conclude that ESL speakers of all linguistic groups exercise creativity when they choose English names. Furthermore the study reveals that the less educated the parents are, the more creative they get to be in name choice.*

**Key words:** *Afro English, onomastics, ESL, SFL, indigenous and circumstances.*

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### **I. Introduction**

#### **Background**

The birth of a child is universally marked by congratulatory messages. Among the Ndebele and the Shona the occasion is marked by expressions of joy and goodwill; ‘Amhlophe’, and “Makorokoto” respectively. (The expression is loosely translated ‘congratulations.’) The naming of the newest member of the clan is not to be taken lightly and it is everybody’s business. When the extended family was still in evidence the grandparents, the parents and other relatives, played a leading role in the naming of the child. The presentation of a present could be accompanied by a name which best depicted ones conception of the event.

The name of the child could be drawn or be inspired by different factors. For example the child could be named in response to whatever the family would be going through at that point in time. This explains the prevalence of the name Freedom for children born when Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980 and the names Strife and Chaos for children born during times of war. Some names were inspired by topical events at the time of birth, while some were inspired by the aspirations and hopes that the parents. In Zimbabwe today, names are influenced by the mix of local languages as well as English. The present paper is grounded in onomastics, focusing on the influence of the English language in the naming practices of Second language speakers. The study focuses on Afro English names.

### **II. Review of related literature**

The study of names is a broad area which has attracted local research focused from different perspectives. However, while a number of studies have been done on the naming practices of the Shona, Pongweni (1983), Mapara et al (2005 cited in Mutema and Njanji 2013) and Pfukwa (2003, 2007, 2008). These scholars focused on different aspects of the naming process and provided new insights into a phenomenon otherwise taken for granted, thus pointing out to other avenues that still need to be investigated.

Pfukwa (ibid) interrogated liberation (Chimurenga) war names, their origins and the purposes they served in conveniently concealing old identities and carving new ones expedient for the execution of the guerilla war. Mutema and Njanji (2013) on the other hand focused on names in everyday life; exploring how some novel names come to being and interrogating their purposes. Their study is however not conclusive since no study could conceivably cover all aspects of the naming process; hence the conception of the present study.

In this study situations in which names were derived from are examined. For example the circumstance of birth determined the bestowal of the name ‘Unseen’ shortened to ‘Seen’. The owner of the name states that her mother went back to her family to deliver her first child, a tradition common among both the Shona and the Ndebele. A few days before the baby was born the paternal grandmother passed away. The aunt who had little education then called the newly born ‘Unseen’ (by her grandmother of course). The owner of the name is a grandmother and none of her grandchildren have Afro-English names. The name ‘Unseen’ was given from a position of knowledge and understanding of the term. In another case, the name ‘Do it’, shortened ‘Do,’ could have been bestowed by a husband who considered his wife’s fertility, tardy in producing the heir.

Very little has been written on such names which are, in essence, African but are rendered in English. These have been referred to as ‘Afro-English’ names as used by Second Language speakers of English in Zimbabwe. This paper seeks to explore the phenomenon of Afro-English names that have been coined in different Zimbabwean communities at different times in post independent Zimbabwe. The ingenious use of

English verbs, nouns, adjectives, adjectival clauses and other ‘original’ contraptions as names is a phenomenon which cuts across different linguistic communities in Zimbabwe. These Afro-English names present interesting linguistic perspectives for study.

The major limitation is that not all the names collected could be incorporated into the study. However, the researchers attempted to extract names from which a comprehensive analysis and conclusions could be drawn and generalised.

### Research question

The question that guided the research was:

- How are Zimbabwean Afro- English names constructed?

To answer this question the sub-questions below were interrogated:

- i. What are the factors that inspire the naming process?
- ii. What SFL perspectives can be drawn from the naming process?

### III. Methodology

The research relied mostly on document analysis and observation stretching over twenty years. The researchers collected names from the students’ registers that they encountered over the years as classroom teachers. The three major sources of data used were:

- the researchers’ class lists collected over a period of almost twenty years in classrooms across western Zimbabwe and the Midlands,
- the lists from the 2014 award ceremony from Hillside Teachers’ College and
- admission lists from Midlands State University (2008 to 2015)

### Theory

Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics theory states that Systemic Functional Linguistics operates from the premise that language structure is related to social function and context. Halliday argues that language is arranged the way it is within a culture because that particular arrangement serves a social purpose within that culture. The main function of language, he asserts, is to make meanings which are influenced by social and cultural context. Halliday(1985) posits that whenever people use language they make choices from an array of linguistic resources at their disposal. When indigenous people use English to name their children they would be choosing from an array of the linguistic resources referred to by Halliday. The names thus chosen seem to be influenced by the social purposes of the speakers’ L1 rather than L2. This paper seeks to show how the L2 speakers use ESL to serve an L1 purpose.

### IV. Findings and Discussion

The researchers were able to get the background for some of the names discussed in this paper. However, these names represent a small percentage of the total names collected for the study. It was not possible to get the background to any of the sixty eight names obtained from the awards ceremony for obvious reasons. However, some of the names in the awards list appear in the original list obtained in class registers over the years.

Table 1 below shows an analysis of the names against the parents’ educational social status.

**Table 1 Analysis of the relationship between the naming patterns, educational and linguistic background parents**

Name	Parents L1	Level of Education	Occupation
Agree/Agreement	Shona	Primary	Farm hand
Argument	Shona	Primary	Farm hand
Against	Shona	Primary	Mine worker
Admire	Shona	JC	Teacher
Beautiful	Shona	Primary	Farmer
Beauty	Shona	Primary	Domestic
Blissful	Shona	Post grad	College lecturer
Benevolence	Shona	2yrs sec	Teacher
Only	Ndebele	7 yrs primary	Primary Teacher
Onward	Shona	Primary	Security
Idea	Shona	Primary	Factory worker
Victim	Shona	Primary	Mine worker
Silence	Ndebele	Standard ^6	Migrant
Talkmore	Shona	7yrs	Farmer
NoPlease	Ndebele	Standard 6	Migrant worker
Unseen	Ndebele	Primary	Farmer

Speak no more	Shona	Primary	Farmer
Unity	Ndebele	O level	Primary teacher
Referendum	Ndebele	Primary	Farmer
Liberty	Ndebele	O level	Teacher
Freedom	Ndebele	JC	Primary teacher
Vote	Ndebele	O level	Farmer
Summer	Ndebele	Olevel	Receptionist

## V. Discussion

### Indigenous language patterns

The names drawn from class registers seem to show major differences between the naming practices of the two main indigenous languages, Shona and Ndebele. Parents whose first language is Shona seem to display greater creativity in their use of English words, displaying the sentential nature of Shona names as mentioned by Pongweni (1983). An example is 'Talk more' and 'Speak no more.' Both names were given by Shona speaking parents who did not go beyond primary school and were originally employed as farm hands. The parents' knowledge of English linguistic construction could be considered minimal. The tendency for Shona speakers to construct lengthy names could not be readily explained since in both Shona and Ndebele name- constructions lengthy and sentential constructions are common.

### Educational levels and the creativity patterns

The research also established patterns related to the educational levels of parents. Surprisingly, the less educated the parent, the greater the creativity exhibited in the use of ESL terms in the naming of their children. Firstly it was noted that the less educated parents tended to come up with novel contraptions of names in the form of constructions, uninhibited by the restrictions of word division and nominal constructions. For example the verb phrase 'talk no more' presented as a single word 'talknomore' or joined is rendered as a proper name. Such constructions are apparently common as Afro-English names (Talkmore, Lovemore, Givemore and many more)

In names like *Agreement* and even *Argument* parents seem to have chosen both names for being 'sweet sounding' (Ibid) and also because of the circumstances which the parents of the newly born found themselves in. If the act of naming is done to denote peculiarity and identity (Mutema and Njanji 2013) the question which this current study does not answer is how a new-born baby can be indicative of Argument or Agreement? The parents who could be considered to be 'educated' such as teachers tend to display less creativity with names such as 'Unity' for a child born soon after the 1987 unity accord between Zimbabwe's former liberation groups; Zanu and Zapu. The names 'Vote' and 'Referendum' also seem to be based on historical happenings. Table 2 below presents an analysis of names extracted from an awards list from a teacher training college for which it was not possible to obtain information on both the parents' ethnic background as well as their level of education. Instead the names are arranged according to the experiences which the parents might have been going through at the time of birth or other defining factors. Four broad categories were defined as follows:

- Names that define the positive and negative emotions
- Names based on the defining circumstances
- Names based on the anticipated or desired character
- Names based on Historical events or topical characters

**Table 2 Classification of names**

a. Emotions/Imizwa	b. Circumstances/Umumo	c. Character/Isimo	Historical/Imbali
Everjoy, Joice	Dangerboy	Prudence	Victoria
Progress	Performance –Audience	Pretty	Huggins
Persist	Honesty		Adolph
Pride, Proud	Nevertheless	Superior	Rooserveld
	Faith		
Happy	Causemore	Perseverance	Churchill
Happier	Knowledge	Gracious	Lloyd
Rejoice	Privilege	Preacheria	Soams
Gladmen	Agreement	Preciate	Ceaser
	Idea	Patience	
	Truth	Charity	
	Livemore	Prettygirl	
	Conscience	Obey	
	Chaos	Courage	

## VI. Discussion of Individual name categories

### Names that denote emotions

The names which denote emotions tended to display minimal linguistic creativity. A name such as 'Happy' might not be as melodious as say 'Happier'. If the parent went through primary school it is likely that they are aware that happier is higher on scales of intensity than happy. Names such as Everjoy and Rejoice would be indicative of good fortune or good times, what Mutema and Njanji (2013) refer to as 'sitting pretty'. Though the Mutema and Njanji study was referring to Shona first names, the idea that children are used to reveal the parents' emotional and situational state is affirmed in their study.

A name such as Gladmen would suggest that the family was gladdened by the birth of that particular child. In this study the individual so named was an illegitimate mixed race child. The mother was a maid who came back home pregnant. She gave birth to a coloured child whom the grandfather accepted unconditionally in the face of his scandalised neighbours insisting he was a 'glad man'. Like many Afro-English names it is often difficult to separate circumstances from emotions as names indicative of joy for instance can easily fall under both emotions and circumstance.

### Names that denote the circumstances

Names that denote circumstance preserve a part of history that the name givers want to remember. Circumstances could loosely be referred to as 'the state of being' of the parent or the family at the time of birth of the child. Names such as Forget, Believe, and Idea are examples of names conceived in response to the particular circumstance which the parent or family may have been going through. In the same category some names express the desires and aspirations that define the occasion hence the conception of names like, Courage and Knowledge, common English nouns only turned proper nouns by assigned functions. But then there are also other un-English contraptions like Dangerboy and Causemore. Such names are suggestive of difficult circumstances in the life of the parent, best captured by such ingenious contraptions that defy the basic rules of word division.

The name Faith, proved to be popular in this category. It appeared five times in the awards list followed by Privilege which appeared three times. Only one individual was called Conscience. One may only speculate that the parent must have had cause for some soul searching at the time of birth of the particular child. The name Performance-Audience was difficult to place. Both the infant teacher and the infant must have gone through a lot of effort to ensure that the name was spelt properly! The name suggests that the parent was aware of the relationship between a performance and an audience.

### Character anticipated or desired

Names like Charity, Perseverance and Prudence fit into this category. The names could refer to the child or others in the extended family. In either case, the names capture a point in time with regards to namers' aspirations, beliefs or values. It is worth noting though that unusual constructions are often contrived in the process. Names like Preciate and Preacheria stand out as ingenious locally coined constructions that reflect on the parents' but never-the-less capture meaning intended in a way that makes sense to the non-native speaker.

### Historical events/ topical characters

In oral tradition history was kept alive through names. This was done through naming children after topical events or characters. The tradition thrives even in contemporary societies and is evidenced by the names in category d in table. A person bearing the name Soames for example was born just before independence when Lord Soames was tasked to preside over the demise of Zimbabwe Rhodesia. When a parent names a child Adolf or Hitler or Stalin it becomes difficult to understand what their intended message was. Infamous historical characters are celebrated by second language speakers of English hence one would come across names like Hitler, Adolf, and Stalin. Parents with very little understanding of History would choose a name because they heard something about a leader somewhere.

### Other names

Names such as 'Everjoy,' 'Blissful' and all the variations of the word 'Happy' are indicative of positive/joyful occasions. Consequently names like *Delight* or *Delightful* and many more to express feeling and emotions; perhaps the ecstatic father's reaction after getting a long-awaited male off spring. The line between the emotions and circumstance is fine therefore the above categorisation is not absolute.

## VII. Conclusion

The names discussed in this study may be English constructions but they are distinctly African. They are an indication of the lengths to which people go to in order to express their ideational experiences with others. Second language speakers of English never attain native like competency (Ellis,1997 and Krashen,1985 )

but that does not hinder them from utilising the second language to express their innermost feelings and capture their experiences in a way rooted in their indigenous perceptions. The limited competency of ESL speakers in Zimbabwe is not a handicap as it is celebrated in highly novel and creative ways grounded in the interlanguage theory where communication and not grammar matters. In the process parents endow their children with unusual Afro-English names that defy the grammatical conventions of English constructions but never-the-less aptly capture the experience and the feelings enshrined in the event of the new coming of a member of the clan.

This research indicates that names are informed from a position of knowledge and are not neutral. Contrary to the conclusions drawn by Pongweni (1983) that individuals who use Afro-English names are the newly educated, this study proves that even highly educated ESL speakers use the same tactic as their less educated counterparts to name their children. For instance 'Blissful' and 'Admire' cut across all educational levels. While Pongweni (ibid) also argues that some names are chosen because they are sweet sounding, this study seems to indicate that names are given from a point of knowledge as most people/parents strive to express unique individual experiences. In the process legitimate, original and genuine feelings are expressed in highly creative ways using ESL to capture an event.

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