



MINNA SAARELMA-MAUNUMAA

Edhina Ekogidho – Names as Links

*The Encounter between African and European
Anthroponymic Systems among the Ambo People in Namibia*

Studia Fennica
Linguistica

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Acknowledgements

“Edhina ekogidho”, the title of this book, is a common saying among the Ambos in Namibia. The noun *edhina* means ‘name’ and *ekogidho* ‘joining, connecting permanently together’. Hence, this expression means that personal names serve as links between people; they connect people together.

This book on Ambo personal names, which is based on my Ph.D. thesis, also connects many people together. First of all, I would like to thank the supervisor of my thesis, Professor Emeritus Eero Kiviniemi, whose inspiring lectures on Finnish onomastics made me choose anthroponymy as my field of research. It was his encouragement that made me an onomastician. My special thanks also go to my other fellow-onomasticians in Finland – Dr. Terhi Ainiala, Professor Ritva Liisa Pitkänen, and many others – for their warm support during the various stages of my studies.

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Vantaa, 14 September, 2003

Minna Saarelma-Maunumaa

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Introduction

The Aims of the Study

The general aim of this study is to analyse the changes in the personal naming system of the Ambo people in Namibia (formerly South West Africa), caused by the Christianisation and Europeanisation of the traditional Ambo culture. The process started in 1870, when the first Europeans, a group of Lutheran missionaries from Finland, settled in the Ambo area. For decades, the Finnish missionaries were practically the only Europeans living and working in this remote area. As their activities covered most of the Ambo area, their role in this process was crucial. Later, German missionaries, both Lutheran and Catholic, as well as British missionaries sent by the Anglican church, also worked in some Ambo communities and thus introduced new elements to the Ambo culture.

Another important factor in this process was colonisation. In 1884, South West Africa became a German colony. In the beginning, the Germans showed little interest in the Ambo area, which was situated on the periphery of the vast colony. However, the situation changed rapidly after the Herero and Nama wars of 1904–1907, when the Germans faced a severe lack of labour in the southern parts of the country. It was above all the migrant labour system that spread the European mode of life to the Ambo communities, and this continued under the South African regime (1915–1990). Hence, the influence of the settlers of German, British and Afrikaner origin who had Ambo employees working in their households, farms, mines, etc., was also significant in the personal naming of the Ambo people.

The adoption of Christianity, together with the spread of European cultural patterns, has led to radical changes in the Ambo naming system. In this process, many traditional naming customs have been replaced by new European and Christian ones. However, this study will show that the result of this process was not a Europeanised naming system as such, but an entirely new and dynamic system which includes elements of both African and European origin.

As is the case with most anthroponymic research, this study is interdisciplinary in nature. The main approach will be sociolinguistic, more

precisely: socio-onomastic. Primarily, this study represents “general onomastics”, as it deals with an encounter between two naming systems and changes within a naming system on a structural level. Thus, from a general onomastic viewpoint, the purpose of this study is to analyse the impact of intercultural contact on personal names. The main questions are: What happens to one naming system when it encounters another? Which elements of the new system are adopted, and which elements of the old system survive in the process? How do these elements affect each other, i.e. what happens to the European elements when they become part of an African naming system, and how are the African elements influenced by the European ones? Moreover, what are the underlying sociocultural and linguistic reasons for these changes, and what stages can be differentiated in the process? Finally, how does the new, dynamic naming system function in the society, and what changes can it be expected to undergo in the future?

Because of its general onomastic approach, this study should not be understood to represent primarily either Ambo linguistics or Finnish linguistics. Nevertheless, it also presents a linguistic analysis of a large number of individual names from the etymological as well as morphological and semantic point of view. As the writer of this study has a background in European (Finnish) onomastics, the main emphasis will be on the analysis of names adopted from European naming systems into the Ambo system. While the analysis of Ambo names will be more general in nature, it strives to be thorough enough for the purposes of this study.

In addition to being a study in linguistics, this study deals mainly with cultural history, church history and anthropology. The general perspective will be historical, as the main aim is to analyse historical developments in a naming system, together with the various sociocultural reasons behind these developments. As this thesis specifically deals with changes in an anthroponymic system, it can be said to represent historical onomastics, or even *dynamic onomastics*, a term suggested by Herbert (1997, p. 4).¹ It is interesting to note that this has not been a common approach within African onomastics. According to Herbert (1996, p. 1223),

One of the less studied aspects of anthroponymy in sub-Saharan Africa concerns changes in naming practices. Almost all mentions of names and/or naming treat the repertoire and the process as static and fail to note the very close relationship between changes in sociocultural organization, most particularly as a result of culture contact, and changes in name types.

Anthropology is linked to this study by an analysis of the Ambo personal naming system as part of the Ambo culture. Beside examining names as linguistic elements, this study investigates the naming ceremonies of the Ambo people, their religious beliefs associated with personal naming, the use of names in the everyday lives of the people, etc. Changes in these customs will be described and analysed in their sociocultural

context up to the present day. In this respect, this study also represents anthropological linguistics.²

Another important aspect of this study is that it examines the influence of Christianity on name-giving. Many creditable theses and publications have been written on this topic in various European countries. Many of them deal either with medieval name-giving or the influence of the Reformation on personal names in different parts of Europe.³ However, the influence of Christian missionary activities – together with colonialism – on name-giving outside Europe has been a neglected field of research. It is clear that such research would offer valuable material for a comparative study of changes in naming systems caused by the adoption of Christianity, both in different parts of the world and at different times. Compared with the corresponding changes in many European naming systems, the process in the Ambo system – as well as in many other African naming systems – has been exceptionally rapid. It is also of great significance that there is precise written documentation of this change in the church records of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), starting from the early years of Christian influence in the Ambo communities. As is well known, this is not the case in European countries.⁴

Relation to Other Research Projects

Thematically, even if not officially, this study can be seen as a continuation of a research project entitled “Cultural change of the Ovambos in Northern Namibia during the years 1870–1915” which was started in 1982 and was funded by the Academy of Finland (Eirola *et al.* 1983, p. 6).⁵ This project produced three doctoral theses in Finland within the years 1990–1992: Martti Eirola’s “The Ovambogefahr: The Ovamboland Reservation in the Making (Eirola 1992), Harri Siiskonen’s “Trade and Socioeconomic Change in Ovamboland, 1850–1906” (Siiskonen 1990), and Frieda-Nela Williams’s “Precolonial Communities of Southwestern Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms 1600–1920” (Williams 1994). Some Finnish anthropologists have also worked on topics concerning the traditional Ambo culture (e.g. Hiltunen 1986, 1993; Salokoski 1992; Tuupainen 1970). Hence, this study is closely linked to previous historical and anthropological research on the Ambo people in Finland, even if it represents linguistics (onomastics).

On the whole, onomastics has been a neglected branch of linguistic studies of most African countries. The main emphasis of African onomastics has also been on the study of place names, not of personal names. Nevertheless, many anthropologists have been interested in name-giving. In their studies, they often describe name-giving ceremonies and analyse the use of personal names in the society, etc. However, their point of view is anthropological, not onomastic, which means that they do not analyse naming systems as linguistic systems or names as lin-

guistic elements.⁶ It is clear, though, that the research done by anthropologists is of great importance to African onomastics, as it offers valuable material for onomastic studies.

Not surprisingly, onomastic studies concerning Namibia – and especially anthroponymic studies – have been limited in number. Aside from my own theses and articles (Saarelma-Maunumaa 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 1997b, 1999a, 1999b, 2001), there are only a few academic publications on personal names in Namibia. Moreover, many of them are not written by linguists but by anthropologists. For example, Brenzinger (1999) has handled personal names of the Kxoe, Budack (1979, 1988) nicknames of the “Rehoboth Bastards” and inter-ethnic names for white men in Namibia, Fisch (1979) the name-giving of the Kavango people, and Otto (1985) Herero name-giving. In 2001, the writer of this study was the only one to have written theses on personal names in Namibia or published articles on Ambo name-giving.

As Namibia was under South African rule until it gained its independence in 1990, onomastic research on Namibia was for a long time closely connected with South African onomastics. Of all African countries, onomastic research has undoubtedly been most active in South Africa, even though the main thrust there has been toponymic research. In 1970, the South African Centre of Onomastic Sciences (later the Onomastic Research Centre) of the Human Sciences Research Council was established in Pretoria to “stimulate, co-ordinate and undertake names research”. Several research projects have been carried out in this centre, including one on German place names in South West Africa (Namibia).⁷ The Names Society of Southern Africa (NSA) was founded in 1981 to promote onomastic research in southern Africa by organising congresses and symposia and by publishing the journal *Nomina Africana*. The third congress of this society was held in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia, in 1985. (Raper 1995, p. 258.) In 2000, an Onomastic Studies Unit was established at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, to further encourage onomastic activities in South Africa.

Raper (1995) presents an overview of the history and recent trends of onomastic studies in South Africa (and Namibia) in “Namenforschung – Name Studies – Les noms propres”, the international handbook of onomastics (Eichler *et al.* 1995). It might be useful to mention some examples here of the studies on the personal naming of the different ethnic groups in South Africa. The personal naming of the Zulus has been researched by Dickens (1985), Koopman (1979a, 1979b, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1989), Ndimande (1998), Suzman (1994), Turner (1992, 1997) and Von Staden (1987); Xhosa personal naming by Neethling (1988, 1990, 1994, 1995, 1996), De Klerk and Bosch (1995, 1996), Coetser (1996) and Finlayson (1984); Tsonga naming by Golele (1991); Sotho and Tswana personal names by Herbert and Bogatsu (Herbert & Bogatsu 1990, Herbert 1995); and Sotho and Xhosa naming by Thipa (1986). Comparative articles with a more general viewpoint have been published especially by Herbert (1996, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b). Some of the above-mentioned articles and theses deal with the influence of

culture contact on personal naming as well. However, as the “New South Africa”, i.e. the post-apartheid South Africa, is a multicultural society with a wide variety of ethnic groups communicating with each other more actively than before, this viewpoint will no doubt be increasingly relevant in South African anthroponymy in the future.

As this study also deals with names in the Ambo languages, it is related to the linguistic research done in this field both inside and outside Namibia. All in all, this research has not been very active, despite the fact that roughly half of the population of Namibia are Ambo speakers and the role of the Ambo languages is fairly strong in the society. Today, there are two written languages based on the different linguistic varieties of Ambo: Ndonga and Kwanyama. These varieties were developed as written languages originally by the Finnish and German missionaries who were active in linguistic work. The missionaries published grammars, dictionaries and textbooks, and some of them also wrote articles in linguistic journals.⁸ Later, Ndonga and Kwanyama were developed and standardised under the control of the South African government. (Fourie 1992, p. 15–24.)

Before the independence of Namibia, there were altogether four M.A. or Ph.D. theses dealing with Ambo linguistics. The first M.A. thesis was written by Janse van Vuuren (1966), and the first Ph.D. thesis by Viljoen (1979).⁹ Since 1990, a few more have been written, both in Namibia and outside the country.¹⁰ Ndonga has also relatively modern grammatical descriptions (Fivaz 1986; Tirronen 1960), which is not the case with Kwanyama. A number of academic articles have also been published on various issues dealing with Ambo linguistics (Maho 1998, p. 31–32). As there is still a lot of basic research waiting to be done in this field, it is not surprising that onomastic research has not been active either.

Clearly, this study also touches on Finnish onomastics, as many of the European personal names adopted by the Ambo people are of Finnish origin. In fact, the Ambo area seems to be the only place in the world outside Finland where one can find significant Finnish influence on the personal nomenclature of the local people. Such being the case, this study hopes to be a valuable addition to Finnish anthroponymy as well.

Sources

Archive Sources and Name Data

For the most part, this study is based on old written material of the Ambo area, both archival sources and literature. The most important archives utilised for this study are the missionary archives in Finland (the Archives of the Finnish Missionary Society in the National Archives of Finland, Helsinki)¹¹ and in Germany (the United Evangelical Mission Archives, Wuppertal-Barmen), as well as the German colonial archives (in the Federal Archives, Berlin). The ethnographic collection of Emil Liljebblad (ELC) in the Helsinki University Library is also of special importance to this research, and the name data for this study were col-

lected from the parish records of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN).

The Archives of the Finnish Missionary Society (FMSA), which today form part of the National Archives of Finland in Helsinki, contain a great deal of information about the traditional naming practices of the Ambo groups, the first baptisms in the Ambo area, the adoption of European and biblical names by the converts, discussions on African baptismal names, and so on. It is of great importance that this material also reveals the attitudes of both the Finnish missionaries and the local people to name-giving. The archives of the United Evangelical Mission at Wuppertal also contain such material, although not as much, as the Ambo area was never one of the main areas in which the Rhenish missionaries worked. The colonial archives in Berlin (in the Federal Archives) include useful material on name-giving practices in German South West Africa, as well as on the Ambo communities under German rule.

When utilising these missionary and colonial archives, one should remember that the point of view in this material is clearly European. The traditional Ambo culture, as well as the Christianisation process of the Ambo communities, is described in these documents in the way the Europeans saw these matters, not as the Ambo people experienced them. Of course, this is a problem which any researcher faces when dealing with the history of Africa.

The most important source dealing with the traditional naming practices of the Ambo people is the ethnographic collection of Emil Liljeblad (ELC) in the Helsinki University Library in Finland. This material, collected during a fieldwork period in 1930–32 from different parts of the Ambo area, contains 125 exercise books with 4,800 pages in different linguistic varieties of Ambo, and 2,016 folio sized pages of translations into Finnish.¹² The material includes examples of different aspects of traditional Ambo culture, such as wedding customs, witchcraft and sorcery, reflections on God and the creation of the world, death magic and burial rites, as well as oral tradition in the form of proverbs and riddles, songs and tales. In addition, the collection contains descriptions of name-giving practices among the different Ambo groups.

Altogether, Liljeblad had 195 informants representing different Ambo subgroups (Salokoski 1992, p. 10). A question which needs to be raised here is the reliability of these informants, many of whom were teachers and pastors of the Lutheran church and former students of Liljeblad.¹³ Hiltunen (1993, p. 16) points out that many of these informants were former diviners and their children, and as they had abandoned the traditional religion, the taboo not to reveal tribal secrets no longer applied to them.¹⁴ Salokoski (1992, p. 11) also states that “at the time the material was collected, only those who had abandoned traditional beliefs were likely to give away the more esoteric parts of local tradition”. Aune Liljeblad, daughter of the collector, remarks that it was crucial for the results of the field work that Emil Liljeblad could interview people with whom he had a close and confidential relationship (Kokoelman selitykset, ELC).

All in all, Hiltunen (1993, p. 17) regards the material collected by Liljeblad as reliable and not biased in one way or another. On the other hand, Salokoski (1992, p. 11) points out that as many of the informants were from important families in the traditional society and had become powerful persons in the church, it is often “the voice of a power-holding stratum” that can be heard in the material. She also states that the influence of Christian thought sometimes merges into the description of pre-Christian tradition, and that the fact that the informants were predominantly male gives a clear bias to both topics and perspective (Salokoski 1992, p. 11–12). As far as name-giving is concerned, Salokoski’s last point cannot be seen as a serious drawback, since in the traditional Ambo culture giving names to children was primarily the responsibility of men. The descriptions of name-giving practices do not reflect the influence of Christian thought, either.

The name material presented and analysed in this study is based on a corpus containing the baptismal names of a total of 10,920 members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). The names were taken from registers of baptisms of three congregations, Elim, Okahao and Oshigambo, representing three Ambo subgroups, from the period 1913–1993. As the parish records of the seven oldest congregations in the Ambo area were microfilmed in Namibia in 1993–94, they are available for researchers in Finland in the University of Joensuu (Siiskonen 1994, p. 25–26).¹⁵

A linguistic analysis of these baptismal names forms an important part of this study. With the use of this corpus, it is possible to present a careful analysis of the variety of names given to Lutheran Ambo Christians, as well as of the main trends in their name-giving, starting almost from the first Ambo converts. The analysis of these names was made with the assistance of various name books (concerning mainly European first names and surnames), dictionaries, translations of the Bible, and so on. As roughly 70 per cent of the people in the Ambo area are today members of the Evangelical Lutheran church (Notkola & Siiskonen 2000, p. 40), this material reflects well the general name-giving trends of the majority of the population. The developments in the name-giving of the Anglican and Catholic Ambos, as well as of the non-Christian minority, will be discussed as well. However, this analysis is not based on statistical material but on literary sources and interviews. This is also the case when discussing other types of names of the Ambo people: surnames, nicknames, etc.

Literature

As is the case with many other African countries, most of the written information on Namibia and the Ambo area has been published outside the country, mainly in Finland and Germany.¹⁶ The literature used for this study can be divided into three groups:

1. Missionary and colonial literature concerning the Ambo people
2. Research literature on the traditional Ambo culture and the history of the Ambo communities and Namibia
3. Research literature on personal naming in other cultures, especially in African societies, and on the influence of Christianisation and Europeanisation on indigenous African cultures

The first two can be regarded as primary literature sources, whereas the third serves to offer comparative material from other cultures. Most of the literature utilised for this study is published either in English, German or Finnish. Some books and articles are also in Afrikaans, Ndonga, Swedish and Danish.

As the Ambo area was the first, and for a long time the main, mission field of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (formerly the Finnish Missionary Society), publications on the Ambo area have been numerous in Finland. The Finns have published books in which various aspects of traditional Ambo culture are presented – and often commented on from a Christian perspective (e.g. Haahti 1913; Hopeasalmi 1946; Mustakallio 1903; Närhi 1929; Savola 1924). Many books also deal with the history of missionary work in the Ambo area, without representing academic historical research (e.g. Hänninen 1924; Pentti 1959; Perheentupa 1923; Suomalaista raivaustyötä Afrikan erämaassa 1945; Tarkkanen 1927). Some describe the life of individual missionaries or Ambo Christians (e.g. Aho 1933, 1941; Auala 1975; Hamutumua 1955; Helenius 1930; Holopainen 1993; Ihamäki 1985; Kivelä 1991; Levänen 1935, 1963, 1964; Perheentupa 1935; Ranttila 1935; Saari 1952; Weikkolin 1888). The Finnish missionary literature deals mainly with the southern parts of the Ambo area, in particular the Ndonga subgroup.

The main emphasis of the German missionary literature is on the northern parts of the Ambo area, i.e. Oukwanyama. These books also deal with traditional Ambo culture (e.g. Brincker 1900; Tönjes 1996), the history of Rhenish missionary work among the Ambo people (e.g. Aus den Anfangstagen der Ovambomission 1904; Himmelreich 1900) and the work and life of individual German missionaries and Ambo Christians (e.g. Erstlinge von den Arbeitsgebieten der rheinischen Mission 1899; Welsch 1923, 1925; Wulfhorst 1912). The German colonial literature on the Ambo area (e.g. Haussleiter 1906) turned out to be of minor importance for this study, as not much of it deals with cultural issues. Altogether, none of these Finnish or German books presents a profound analysis of the personal naming of the Ambo people, but several aspects of name-giving, both traditional and Christian, are taken up here and there.

How reliable is this literature then as a source for academic research? It is apparent that when the European missionaries made observations on Ambo culture, they did this from a narrow European and Christian viewpoint. Hence, even if these books do contain unique information that cannot be found elsewhere,¹⁷ they do not meet the requirements of academic research. It is quite obvious that one of the main purposes for

What are the most popular names of the Ambo people in Namibia? Why do so many Ambos have Finnish first names? What do the African names of these people mean? Why is the namesake so important in Ambo culture? How did the nation's long struggle for independence affect personal naming, and what are the latest name-giving trends in Namibia?

This study analyses the changes in the personal naming system of the Ambo people in Namibia over the past 120 years, starting with 1883, when the first Ambos received biblical and European names on baptism. The central factors in this process were the German and South African colonisation and European missionary work on the one hand, and the rise of African nationalism on the other. Eventually, this clash between African and European naming practices led to a new, dynamic naming system which includes elements of both African and European origin.

"Within the field of onomastics, i.e. the scientific study of names, this study is a remarkable and extremely important one. ... I suspect that it will become a major and standard reference work in the future, not only regarding Ambo anthroponymy, but anthroponymy in general, particularly where cultures interact."

Professor S. J. Neethling,
University of the Western Cape, South Africa



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