

## EMPAAKO “PRAISE NAMES”: AN HISTORICAL, SOCIOLINGUISTIC, AND PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

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**ABSTRACT** This paper traces the origin of *empaako* “praise names” and explicates their sociolinguistic and pragmatic significance. The 14th (or 15th) century was marked by both political change in the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom of Uganda and the genesis of an important sociolinguistic phenomenon: the introduction of *empaako*, an idiosyncratic type of personal name in Runyoro-Rutooro (a language spoken in Uganda) used to show intimacy, endearment, and respect. The use of *empaako* emerged following the Biito (an aristocratic Luo clan) conquest of the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom. As most typical African personal names have explicit semantic content, the lexical meaninglessness of *empaako* in Runyoro-Rutooro indicates that they are borrowed from Luo (a Nilotic language), in which similar name forms with explicit semantic content exist. Although *empaako* are ubiquitous in everyday discourse and carry robust social import, they are only 12 and this raises the issue of their referential indeterminacy. In this paper, I examine this issue within the givenness hierarchy framework of Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski (1993).

**Key Words:** Runyoro-Rutooro; *Empaako*; Sociolinguistic import; Referential indeterminacy; Luo influence.

### INTRODUCTION

*Empaako* belong to a special category of personal name used primarily in the Runyoro and Rutooro speech communities.<sup>(1)</sup> They were introduced in the early modern period, around the 14th century (Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom). No proper equivalent of *empaako* exists in English. The British hastily equated them to “pet names,” but this term is clearly a misnomer based on the functions of *empaako*, one of which is to show respect, as pet names are associated only with intimacy, endearment, and familiarity (Byakutaaga, 1990). Kihumuro (1994: 30) argued that the term *empaako* should instead be rendered as “praise names.” The use of *empaako* is the most idiosyncratic linguistic feature distinguishing Runyoro and Rutooro speech communities from speakers of other Bantu languages (Byakutaaga, 2010). Although *empaako* pervade everyday discourse among Runyoro and Rutooro speakers, only 12 names are used: *Abbooki*, *Abwoli*, *Acaali*, *Adyeri*, *Akiiki*, *Amooti*, *Apuuli*, *Araali*, *Ateenyi*, *Atwoki*, *Bbala*, and *Okaali*. *Okaali* is reserved exclusively for the king, leaving 11 *empaako* to be shared among almost 2,000,000 people, as every person in the two speech communities ideally has such a name (Byakutaaga, 2010).<sup>(2)</sup> This intensive use of a small set of names raises the question of whether *empaako* are referentially optimal name expressions. These terms are not typical Runyoro or Rutooro names; they were borrowed from Luo (a Nilotic language) following the Biito (an aristocratic Luo clan) conquest of the Bunyoro-

Kitara Kingdom around the 14th century.<sup>(3)</sup>

Runyoro and Rutooro, spoken in western Uganda,<sup>(4)</sup> belong to the Niger–Congo phylum, which comprises the Atlantic–Congo, Kordofanian, and Mande sub-phyla (Lewis, 2009). They are part of a large subgroup of Bantu languages belonging to the Benue–Congo clade of the Volta–Congo family within the Atlantic–Congo subphylum (Lewis, 2009). Runyoro and Rutooro are not linguistically distinct, as they are mutually intelligible and exhibit remarkable grammatical affinity and 93% lexical similarity (Ladefoged et al., 1972). They should thus be regarded as dialects of the same language, but they are considered different languages for political reasons. Originally, Runyoro was the sole language of the expansive Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom. In the 1880s, Prince Kaboyo rebelled against his father Omukama (“King”) Kyebambe and established the separate Tooro Kingdom. The Runyoro spoken in Tooro Kingdom came to be known officially as Rutooro. Attempts to use a single collective label (i.e., Runyoro or Rutooro) for the two dialects were not successful, but a compromise was eventually reached and the compound label “Runyoro-Rutooro” was adopted (Ndoleriire & Oriikiriza, 1996). Thus, the term “Runyoro-Rutooro” is used in this paper, and the two dialects are treated as a single language. The speakers of this language, however, are distinguished as the Banyoro (Munyoro) and Batooro (Mutooro).

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, I present an historical account of *empaako* by tracing their origin from the Biito (Luo) conquest of the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom in the 14th or 15th century. I consider the social significance of *empaako* in section 3, describing their social functions and the discourse situations in which their use is required. In section 4, I examine the pragmatics of *empaako* within the givenness hierarchy framework (Gundel et al., 1993). Concluding remarks are presented in section 5.

## ORIGIN OF *EMPAAKO*

*Empaako* are not indigenous Runyoro-Rutooro words; they were borrowed from Luo<sup>(5)</sup> following the Biito (a Luo clan) conquest of the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom around the 14th or 15th century (Page, 2005; Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom). Despite the phonological assimilation of the 12 *empaako* to fit Runyoro-Rutooro phonotactics, these names remain peculiar in that they (together with borrowed Western/Asian religious names) are the only personal names in Runyoro-Rutooro with vacuous lexical semantics. Name forms similar to *empaako* are used in Luo as ordinary personal names with clear lexical semantic content (Byakutaaga, 1990; Ndoleriire & Oriikiriza, 1996).

Some linguists and philosophers of language (e.g., Van Langendonck, 2007) hold the view that proper names have no explicit semantic content. To support this view, Van Langendonck (2007: 84) quoted Ullmann (1969: 33): “One cannot possibly say that one understands a proper name; one can only say that one knows whom it refers to, whose name it is.” However, most typical (sub-Saharan) African personal names have explicit semantic content, and Africans commonly ask those from different speech communities what their names mean. Although

Ullmann (1969: 33) discussed proper names, which are not necessarily personal names, the latter is a subset of the former. Additionally, other types of proper names, such as those for mountains, rivers, and places, have explicit semantic content in Runyoro-Rutooro. Whereas the communicative role of personal names comprises their ability to serve as pointers to the intended referent, most African personal names have clear descriptive meanings. However, these meanings are not descriptive conceptual meanings that contribute to the propositions expressed, as is typical of the conceptual meanings of common noun phrases. In other words, the lexical meanings of personal names provide no truth condition that affects the propositions expressed by the utterances in which they are used. Rather, the lexical meanings of African personal names contain three main elements that can be regarded as lexical semantic classes. The first class reflects the general circumstances under which a child is born. For example, a Munyoro and Mutooro child born during war or to a family characterized by fighting or bickering is typically named *Bulemu* “war”. According to Suzman (1994: 264), the Zulu (South Africa) typically give the name *Unyoka* “little snake” to a boy born under circumstances in which a snake is spotted. The second class of personal names, also discussed by Suzman (1994), reflects people’s (parents’) communication of their feelings. Such names are used to express happiness or chagrin and disenchantment. Runyoro-Rutooro names such as *Katusemiize* “we are pleased with the little girl”, *Kemigisa* “she has/brings luck”, and *Tusiime* “let us thank [God]” are used by parents to express happiness, whereas names such as *Bazarrabusa* “they produce [children] for nothing”, *Beebwa* “they can forget”, and *Kabagambe* “let them talk” convey chagrin and disenchantment.<sup>(6)</sup> Parents sometimes use children’s names to implicitly vent anger toward neighbors or relatives. The third class of personal names refers to the child’s appearance; examples are *Basemera* “he/she is good looking”, *Manyindo* “he has a big nose”, and *Matama* “she has big cheeks”.

*Empaako* do not fall under any of the three lexical semantic classes of personal names in Runyoro-Rutooro as they are lexically meaningless,<sup>(7)</sup> but non-trivial evidence supports the existence of similar personal name forms in Luo with clear lexical meanings that fit these classes. Phonological evidence also supports the Luo origin of *empaako*; most Luo names begin with *a* or *o*, representing the sound /a/ or /o/ (e.g., *Atim*, *Akello*, *Awacorach*, *Obama*, *Ogwang* and *Oculi*), whereas Runyoro-Rutooro names begin with a variety of sounds (e.g., *Isingoma* /i/, *Nuwategeka* /n/, *Mugisa* /m/, *Asiimwe* /a/, *Baguma* /b/, and *Kabahuma* /k/) (Ndoleriire & Oriikiriza, 1996). Byakutaaga (1990: 53) showed that the personal names listed in Table 1 were originally Luo and were borrowed and nativized in Runyoro-Rutooro as *empaako*. She also provided the lexical meanings of the Luo forms. Thus, there is sufficient lexical semantic evidence that *empaako* are not Runyoro-Rutooro names, but were borrowed from Luo. Lexical semantic content is crucial in typical African names, as pointed out by Suzman (1994).

**Table 1.** Luo name forms, meanings, and corresponding *empaako* (adapted from Byakutaaga, 1990: 53)

Luo name	Etymology (based on Acholi)	English translation	Corresponding <i>empaako</i>
<i>Abwol</i>	A-bwolo 1sg-PRES.deceive I deceive	I deceive you.*	<i>Abwoli</i>
<i>Amot</i>	A-moto 1sg-PRES.greet I greet	I greet you.	<i>Amooti</i>
<i>Abok</i>	A-boko 1sg-PERF.narrate I have narrated	I have narrated to you.	<i>Abbooki</i>
<i>Acal</i>	A-calo 1sg-PRES.resemble I resemble	I resemble you.	<i>Acaali</i>
<i>Adyero</i>	A-dyero 1sg-PERF. sacrifice I have sacrificed	I have sacrificed it.	<i>Adyeri</i>
<i>Atenyo</i>	A-tenyo 1sg-PERF.leave I have left	I have left it.	<i>Ateenyi</i>
<i>Abalo</i>	A-balo 1sg-PERF.spoil I have spoiled	I have spoiled it.	<i>Bbala</i>
<i>Okal</i>	O-kalo 3sg-PERF.jump over He/she has jumped	He/she has jumped over you.	<i>Okaali</i>

\* The objective pronouns in the English translation are implicit in the Luo clauses.

As this paper focuses on Runyoro-Rutooro *empaako*, I have not included tonal descriptions for the Luo words, although tone is crucial in marking tense and aspect in that language (cf. Odonga, 2012: xvi). Usually, Luo personal names beginning with *a* are female names, and those beginning with *o* are male names. However, some male Luo names begin with *a* (e.g., *Akena*, *Amone*, *Abok*, *Acire*, *Ayella*, *Acika* and *Acaye*) (cf. Odonga, 2012) and, less commonly, some female names begin with *o* (e.g., *Oyella*). Although the predominant use in Luo of the first person singular (i.e., beginning with *a*) for female names and the third person singular (i.e., beginning with *o*) for male names is interesting, a complete examination of this pattern is beyond the scope of this study. Most names in Table 1 begin with <a> and thus are predominantly female, with the exception of the male name *Abok* (similar to, e.g., *Acaye*, *Amone* and *Akena*). According to my Acholi-speaking (a Luo dialect) informants, all the female names in Table 1 have corresponding male names (e.g., *Obwolo* (see also Odonga, 2012: 372) for *Abwol*, *Obala* (see also Odonga, 2012: 368) for *Abalo*, *Omot* for *Amot*, *Ocal* for *Acal*, and *Otenya* for *Atenyo*). The differences in the endings of the names (e.g., *Atenyo* vs. *Otenya*) are orthogonal for the current purpose.

Only eight of the 12 *empaako* (the exceptions are *Apuuli*, *Araali*, *Akiiki*, and *Atwoki*) have similar forms in Luo, which was not mentioned in the three systematic analyses of *empaako* (Byakutaaga, 1990, 2010; Ndoleriire & Oriikiriza, 1996). My own search for possible Luo forms corresponding to these four *empaako* yielded almost no positive results. The noun *apoli* (a type of antelope) may be associated with *Apuuli*. The name *Achichi* appears in the Luo dialect Acholi as a hypocoristic equivalent of *Akello*, which is given to a girl whose birth follows that of twins and may be associated with the *empaako Akiiki*.<sup>(8)</sup> However, these two nouns may not be associated with the two *empaako*. Although no analyst has used this apparent counterevidence to challenge the proposal that *empaako* come from Luo, this issue must be resolved. Luo name forms corresponding to the four *empaako* may have disappeared from the language’s nominal lexicon. Alternatively, the Banyoro and Batooro may have borrowed eight *empaako* from Luo and coined the remaining four based on the pattern and usage of the borrowed names.

The term *empaako* is said to have been borrowed from the Luo word *pako*, which means not only “to praise” (Byakutaaga, 1990: 51; Ndoleriire & Oriikiriza, 1996: 169) but also “to give honorary titles to cattle.” However, the Luo names listed in Table 1 are used not as *empaako* “praise names”, but as “real proper personal names” (Ndoleriire & Oriikiriza, 1996: 169) in the Luo speech community. The meaning of these Luo names has nothing to do with “praise,” and some, such as *Abalo* “for wastage” or “I have spoiled it” (Table 1), actually have negative semantic content. Luo speakers use praise names referred to as *pak* (a nominal associated with the verb *pako* “to praise”), which are shortened forms of personal names (e.g., *Awaco* from *Awacorach*). Unlike the Runyoro-Rutooro *empaako*, the Luo *pak* are not obligatory and normally emerge casually, like pet names, hypocoristic names, or terms of endearment. Thus, the Luo language may contain as many *pak* as personal names, whereas Runyoro-Rutooro contains only 12 *empaako*. Additionally, *empaako* are used in formal and informal situations, whereas *pak* are used only in the latter. *Pak* and *empaako* also differ with respect to directionality of usage, as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Direction of usage for *pak* and *empaako*

Direction	<i>Pak</i>	<i>Empaako</i>
Horizontal (between peers)	√	√
Top down (e.g., parent to child)	√	√
Bottom up (e.g., child to parent)	—	√

Thus, despite the “praise” root of the term, Luo *pak* are used mainly to express intimacy and endearment, whereas Runyoro-Rutooro *empaako* are best rendered as “praise names” (cf. Kihumuro, 1994). Unlike that of *pak*, the usage of *empaako* is broad, including formal situations and bottom-up directionality.

The evidence provided above supports the claim that *empaako* were borrowed from Luo. Factors that underlie borrowing from another language include the pres-

ence of a “lexical gap” in the recipient language and the desire for prestige (Langacker, 1973: 181; Jingjing, 2004: 13), both of which arise in the context of language contact. *Empaako* were borrowed not because of a “lexical gap,” but for reasons related to prestige. Langacker (1973) pointed out that English speakers borrowed French words following the 11th century Norman Conquest because the French, as rulers of England, constituted the upper class. Similarly, the Biito, an aristocratic Luo clan, conquered the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom and established themselves as rulers in the 14th or 15th century (Page, 2005; Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom). Since that time, Bunyoro and Tooro kings have been Biito (Luo) and have usually had Luo personal names (typically beginning with *o*); for example, the current king of Tooro is named *Oyo*, and his father (his predecessor) was named *Olimi*. Like *empaako*, these kings’ names have no lexical meaning in Runyoro-Rutooro.<sup>(9)</sup> Normally, ordinary Banyoro or Batooro individuals cannot have such names. The need for ordinary people in Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom to identify with the Luo royalty seems to have been the reason underlying their adoption of some Luo names as *empaako*. However, unlike the Normans who continued to speak French in England and the “English speakers who desired social advancement [and] were naturally led to learn French” (Langacker, 1973: 182), the Biito kings dropped Luo and adopted Runyoro-Rutooro. *Empaako* are the most remarkable linguistic legacy of their conquest.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF *EMPAAKO*

Every person in the Runyoro-Rutooro speech community should have an *empaako*. Of the 12 *empaako*, *Okaali* is strictly reserved for the king, and *Bbala* was formerly reserved for those close to the king. These two names are the only *empaako* that do not begin with *a*, although I have occasionally heard *Abbala* (see also Byakutaaga, 1990: 50). *Araali*, *Apuuli*, *Acaali*, and *Bbala* are used for men, and the remaining *empaako* (i.e., *Abwoli*, *Ateenyi*, *Akiiki*, *Amooti*, *Abbooki*, *Adyeri*, and *Atwoki*) are used for men and women (Rubongoya, 2002); no *empaako* is reserved exclusively for women. Twins are obligatorily given the names *Amooti* (for the elder twin) and *Abbooki* (for the younger twin) (Isingoma, 2003; Ndoleriire et al., 2009).<sup>(10)</sup> According to Byakutaaga (1990: 50), only the Batooro use the name *Amooti* for the elder twin; the Banyoro use *Adyeri*.

*Empaako* must be used when addressing or referring to somebody. In particular, they play a very important role in greetings; under normal circumstances, greeting someone without mentioning their *empaako* is regarded as bad manners. *Empaako* are used in greetings in two main ways, as illustrated in examples (1) and (2). In (1), neither interlocutor knows the other’s *empaako*; in (2), both interlocutors know the other’s *empaako*. When speaker A knows speaker B’s *empaako*, he/she will use it as in (2); when speaker B does not know speaker A’s *empaako*, he/she first asks what it is, as in (1).<sup>(11)</sup>

- (1) A: *Empaako yaawe?*  
 “(What is) your *empaako*?”  
 B: *Amooti. Kandi eyaawe?*  
 “*Amooti*. And yours?”  
 A: *Eyange Akiiki. Oli ota Amooti?*  
 “Mine is *Akiiki*. How do you do, *Amooti*?”  
 B: *Oli ota Akiiki?*  
 “How do you do, *Akiiki*?”
- (2) A: *Oli ota Amooti?*  
 “How do you do, *Amooti*?”  
 B: *Oli ota Akiiki?*  
 “How do you do, *Akiiki*?”

As summarized by Ndoleriire and Oriikiriza (1996: 140) in Table 3, *empaako* use has significant social implications.

**Table 3.** *Empaako* users’ age groups and social implications (from Ndoleriire & Oriikiriza, 1996: 140)

Addresser	Addressee	Reciprocity implication
Youth	Adult	Respect
Youth	Youth	Intimacy
Adult	Youth	Endearment
Adult	Adult	Intimacy

However, Ndoleriire and Oriikiriza’s (1996: 140) construct is not very clear as *empaako* use does not always involve an addresser and addressee alone. In many cases, a referent other than the addressee is also involved. Thus, the term “referent” (the addressee or person being talked about) should be used instead of “addressee.” Additionally, Ndoleriire and Oriikiriza’s (1996: 140) claim that *empaako* use between adults or between youths has the social implication of intimacy is incomplete as respect is also involved in these situations and may take precedence over intimacy. Table 4 addresses these gaps.

**Table 4.** *Empaako* users’ age groups and social implications revisited

Addresser	Referent	Social implication
Youth	Adult	Respect
Youth	Youth	Intimacy and/or respect
Adult	Youth	Endearment
Adult	Adult	Intimacy and/or respect

Children (whether young or mature) must use *empaako* when addressing their parents. When talking about their parents, children can use *empaako* (when familiar to the interlocutor) or appellatives such as *baaba* “daddy, father” and *maama* “mummy, mother.” In contrast to common practice in some European countries, under no circumstances are children allowed to refer to their parents by their first (or second) names. I was culturally shocked when I visited a Norwegian family, and a young woman addressed her father by his first name. I was even more shocked when the woman’s fiancé also did so. Among the Banyoro and Batooro, and in many other Ugandan speech communities, this practice is forbidden. A young woman’s use of her father’s first name would be treated as a joke as long as it did not recur, but her fiancé’s use of this name would be considered a sign of disrespect or an insult.

Although *empaako* use is ubiquitous and of remarkable social import, some resistance to this practice has emerged. Ndoleriire and Oriikiriza (1996) attributed this social dissent to religious beliefs and so-called modernization. Some religious groups, such as the Abaikiriza and Abasisimukire, and some “born-again” churches allege that *empaako* use is satanic (Byakutaaga, 2010: 5). Byakutaaga (2010) stated that this rejection of *empaako* is related to the previous use of these names for deities, but it appears to have another underlying reason. When I asked adherents of one of these sects why they forbade the use of *empaako*, they challenged me to give them the meaning of just one *empaako*, as can be done for other Runyoro-Rutooro names.<sup>(12)</sup> Thus, the lack of lexical meaning for *empaako* in Runyoro-Rutooro has led them to be regarded as “mysterious” expressions of the “abracadabra” sort. Additionally, modernization has led to the emergence of urban centers and boarding schools at which many Banyoro and Batooro people intermingle with members of societies that lack *empaako*. This situation has been compounded by the modern mentality that “time is money;” the young generation considers *empaako* use to be a waste of time (Ndoleriire & Oriikiriza, 1996). Although Ndoleriire and Oriikiriza’s (1996) statement about the younger generation’s attitude toward *empaako* is a generalization, this presumed rejection is restricted to greeting episodes, as illustrated in (1), which are admittedly time consuming. Members of the younger generation continue to use *empaako* in other discourse situations, such as when speaking or referring to a superior. Thus, although Ndoleriire and Oriikiriza (1996) predicted the total disappearance of *empaako* due to the influence of the church and modernization, I doubt that total disuse will occur. I envision no scenario in which the entire Runyoro-Rutooro speech community would join the religious sects in prohibiting *empaako* use. Rather, I hypothesize that these “radical” religious groups will continue to live side by side with the current majority of Banyoro and Batooro people who continue to cherish (or at least tolerate) the use of *empaako*. The younger generation’s attitude is also unlikely to lead to the complete disuse of *empaako*, as their avoidance of these terms does not extend beyond discourse situations involving greetings. Hence, I do not see a force capable of obliterating this practice. However, I do concur with Ndoleriire and Oriikiriza’s (1996) argument that modernization, including the emergence of urban centers and boarding schools, has negatively impacted *empaako* use. Banyoro and Batooro individuals who grow up in these modern contexts are likely to form multicultural





- (5) A: It's Ndoleriire again on the cover!  
 B: That man is a professor.

## II. *Empaako* and the givenness hierarchy

Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski (1993) did not include Runyoro-Rutooro in their account of the implications of the givenness hierarchy for specific natural languages, but they stated that their framework is universal. Although the givenness hierarchy was not designed for the analysis of names, some studies have attempted to include names in this framework. For example, Mulkern (1996) incorporated proper names in the givenness hierarchy, dichotomizing them as full names (defined as “names which constitute the longest name form conventionally used by a society;” e.g., Napoleon Bonaparte) and single names (defined as “a shorter version of a proper name used in a society”) (Mulkern, 1996: 236–238). Single names comprise family names, given names, and nicknames (e.g., Napoleon, Bonaparte, Bebwa, and Christopher). Although Mulkern (1996) did not explicitly mention *empaako*, she stated that these types of single name are well known, suggesting the existence of a less common category of single names that I consider to encompass *empaako*.

According to Mulkern (1996: 241), the appropriate use of single names as referring expressions requires that referents are at least “familiar.” This stipulation is true of *empaako*. For example, my wife, children, and dependents must refer to me as *Amooti* (my *empaako*). Likewise, I and the other individuals mentioned must use *empaako* to refer to my wife or any other person who deserves such treatment. Hence, when *Amooti* is uttered in my home, everyone generally knows that I am being talked to or about. When *Amooti* is used to refer to another person, the exact referent can be identified not only on the basis of the linguistic concept encoded in the name (i.e., human, Munyoro or Mutooro, possibly a twin) but also on the basis of optimally utilized contextual assumptions. This usage clearly concurs with Mulkern’s (1996: 241) assertion that “...familiarity with the referent can come from the current linguistic or extra linguistic content.”

At this point, I can confidently posit that *empaako* encode references that are “familiar” and thus also have the properties of lower statuses in the givenness hierarchy (e.g., “uniquely identifiable” and “type identifiable”). This hierarchy is especially pertinent when considering the “type identifiable” status of *empaako*. For example, the use of *Amooti* is an a priori signal to the addressee (who is “familiar”) that the referent belongs to or has some connection with the Runyoro-Rutooro speech community, which is the context of *empaako* use.

However, the postulate that speech acts in which an *empaako* is used to refer to a person encode information about a referent that is “familiar” within the givenness hierarchy may not hold in all situations. Practically speaking, reliance on *empaako* alone is a barrier to communication; however, the use of these names is sacrosanct and cannot be flouted, even if such use is detrimental to clarity. As only 12 *empaako* are used by more than 2,000,000 people, a situation in which three or more people with the same *empaako* live together is common. Thus, an utterance such as that in example (6) may lead to referential indeterminacy.

- (6) *Amooti naakweta ha simu.*  
 “Amooti is calling you on the phone.”

This utterance is commonly ambiguous, as the addressee must often determine which of the several people named Amooti is the referent. In such a situation, the referent should ideally be “activated” in the addressee’s short-term memory to enable him/her to identify a unique individual. Contextual assumptions can be used to identify the actual referent, but in a broad context the addressee may need to seek clarification by asking “which *Amooti*?” after failing to mentally identify the most relevant referent. Under normal circumstances, I regard this as a gratuitous effort. First names (e.g., Jane) or names for twins in Runyoro-Rutooro and Luo (e.g., *Isingoma* and *Opio*, respectively) may present similar situations of indeterminacy, but the case of *empaako* is more serious given the number of people sharing each of the 12 names. Few names are used for twins, but it is rare to find two or more sets of twins living in the same homestead; when this situation does occur among the Banyoro and Batooro, appellatives such as *Omukuru* (elder) and *Omuto* (younger) are added to the names, which is similar to the use of “Senior” and “Junior” in English (OED, 2009). Of course, as occurs with other personal names, twins sharing the same name may be brought together in schools or places of work. Quintessentially, personal names are uniquely identifiable in shared contexts, and speakers are expected to use them when they are referentially optimal. However, the use of 12 *empaako* by more than 2,000,000 people minimizes the occurrence of such clear contextual situations, leading to acute referential indeterminacy.

In (6), the speaker’s addition of a suitable description or acceptable appellative in apposition to *empaako* before the addressee is required to request it (e.g., *Amooti, Baaba Baguma* “Amooti, Baguma’s dad”) would have been convenient. Practically speaking, however, such information is not usually provided. One would be justified in wondering why. Apparently, the speaker assumes that the addressee will be able to uniquely identify the referent; hence, it would be uncalled for to add “unnecessary” descriptive information. Metalinguistically, the provision of descriptive information about a referent whose *empaako* has been used may be tolerated, but it is rare, and the common practice of using *empaako* with no further information impedes effective communication. The speaker cannot be blamed for indeterminacy because he/she is following the cultural convention, which does not require an appended appellative or other referring expression. Such reliance on *empaako* in the name of cultural preservation clearly violates Grice’s (1975: 45) maxim of quantity: “make your contribution as informative as required for the current purposes of the exchange.”

The foregoing discussion shows the importance of reconsidering the implicational dimension of the cognitive statuses of the givenness hierarchy. *Empaako* do not conform to Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski’s (1993) assertion that a “familiar” cognitive status is also “uniquely identifiable,” and so on, as shown in (6); I posit that Amooti is at least “familiar” in keeping with the givenness hierarchy, but the referent is not “uniquely identifiable” (i.e., can be singled out among many alternatives with little cognitive effort) from the addressee’s perspective. In this

example, the addressee cannot identify a unique *Amooti* without recourse to descriptive information or other types of referring expression. Hence, I argue for the existence of instances in which the addressee can fail to resolve the intended reference and in which greater precision on the part of the speaker (i.e., use of other referring expressions in the initial utterance) would save considerable effort. Within the givenness hierarchy framework, a referent who is not “uniquely identifiable” cannot be “familiar,” and a “familiar” referent is necessarily “uniquely identifiable.” In example (6), the speaker obviously intends to refer to a unique individual by using the name *Amooti*, which is simply an erroneous assumption.

I am aware that Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski (1993) did not include names in the givenness hierarchy, and that Mulkern’s (1996) breakthrough inclusion of names in this framework did not extend to *empaako*. However, I am convinced that *empaako* can be included in the givenness hierarchy, as I have attempted to demonstrate in this paper, despite the lack of a unique referent, which frequently characterizes their use in discourse.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have examined *empaako* from historical and sociolinguistic perspectives and analyzed the pragmatics of *empaako* use within the givenness hierarchy of Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski (1993). I have shown that the lexical semantic vacuousness of *empaako* in Runyoro-Rutooro indicates that they are not typical Runyoro-Rutooro names, which contain lexical meaning. Sufficient evidence indicates that *empaako* were borrowed from Luo, in which similar forms exist as lexically meaningful personal names. Runyoro-Rutooro speakers’ borrowing of *empaako* from Luo was motivated primarily by prestige, as the Luo established themselves as rulers of the Banyoro and Batooro in the 14th or 15th century. *Empaako* enable Banyoro and Batooro speakers to identify with their rulers. I have also shown that *empaako* are embedded in Banyoro and Batooro sociocultural contexts and that their use is required in everyday discourse. The social implications of their use include their communication of intimacy, endearment, and respect. However, some segments of the Banyoro and Batooro societies now oppose the use of *empaako* due to religious beliefs and the effects of modernization. I have used Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski’s (1993) givenness hierarchy to show that *empaako* encode information about a referent who is at least “familiar.” However, *empaako* are highly indeterminate, necessitating “activation” of the addressee’s status and attention state.

## NOTES

- (1) Runyoro and Rutooro are spoken in Uganda. Whether they are distinct languages or dialects of the same language is discussed below.
- (2) In addition to an *empaako*, every person usually has at least two ordinary names.
- (3) Page (2005) dated the Biito conquest to the 15th century. (Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom)
- (4) People from these speech communities are referred to as Banyoro and Batooro. The sin-

- gular forms are Munyoro and Mutooro.
- (5) Luo belongs to the Nilotic group of the Eastern Sudanic subphylum, the Nilo-Saharan phylum. It consists of several dialects, including Acholi, Lango, Dhoadhola, Alur, and Dholuo (Lewis, 2009).
  - (6) Beebwa is sometimes “misspelled” as *Bebwa*.
  - (7) This situation is similar to that of a Munyoro or Mutooro Christian whose first name is *Yozeefu* (a name borrowed from the biblical “Joseph” [Hebrew *Yosef*]). The Hebrew name means “(God) shall add (another son)” (Hanks et al., 2006), but *Yozeefu* is lexically meaningless in Runyoro-Rutooro. It is, however, socially meaningful or, in Van Langendonck’s (2007: 86) framework, “presuppositionally meaningful.”
  - (8) A reviewer has stated that the verb *kiiko* “to decorate with meanders” exists in Acholi. Although I cannot rule out the existence of this verb in the Acholi lexicon, none of my Acholi informants recognized it, and it is not included in the Luo dictionary (Odonga, 2012). Instead, the informants suggested the verb *gikko* “to end” or “to stop”, which is listed in Odonga (2012: 146).
  - (9) *Oyo* has two meanings in Luo: “rat” (for a tiny child) and “born on the way.” *Olimi* has a similar form in Luo: *Olimo* (“he/she has come”).
  - (10) Note that twins have special personal names as well: *Isingoma* (male) or *Nyangoma* (female) is given to the older twin, and *Kato* (male) or *Nyakato* (female) is given to the younger one.
  - (11) Greetings in Runyoro-Rutooro are normally lengthy, as one must ask about virtually every aspect of life as a way of showing concern. The basic manner of greeting is shown in (1) and (2).
  - (12) In this sect, the use of Christian names (e.g., *Yozeefu* “Joseph” and *Paulo* “Paul”) is also not allowed.
  - (13) N = noun.

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