Antonomasia and Personal Naming among the Ndebele of Lupane

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Abstract

Antonomasia refers to the semantic mechanism of replacing a proper name with an allusion or ascription that denotes a perceived set of traits. This paper aims to examine how antonomasia as a phenomenon is used in personal naming, as driven by cognitive metonymic and metaphoric mechanisms. It seeks to explore how the Ndebele conceptualise different members of society and consequently name them. From a Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) perspective, the study employs autoethnography and focus group discussion to study a group of adults in a rural community, exploring how antonomasia has been used in their adult-acquired names. Convenience sampling techniques were used to identify twelve participants who were put into three groups based on their social and physical proximity. Sources of antonomasia in personal naming include perceived physical or behavioural qualities, one's life history and experiences, as well as one's speech habits. In other instances, antonomasia is based on metaphorisation that is founded on association and transfer of semantic conceptual structure. The study concludes that antonomasia is a primary naming strategy among the Ndebele, especially about names acquired at adulthood, where one dimension of a person's character becomes a typical representation of who they are.

Keywords: antonomasia, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metonymy, epithet, metaphoric metonymy

1. Introduction

The Ndebele are a Nguni group that came to present-day Zimbabwe from Zululand in the early 1800s (Hadebe, 2002; Ndlovu, 2017). They are a Bantu people found mainly in the western parts of Zimbabwe, and their language belongs to the Nguni sub-group of the Bantu language family (Hadebe, 2002). The Ndebele language and culture are closely related to those of other Nguni groups such as the Zulu of South Africa, the Xhosa, and the Ngoni of Central and East Africa. Outside Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe, the Ndebele people are also found in Buhera in Manicaland, Mwenezi and Chivi districts in Masvingo, as well as Zvimba and Hurungwe districts in Mashonaland West (Hachipola, 1998). The Ndebele language is related to other Nguni languages like Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, and Ndebele of Transvaal. The Ndebele are the second-largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe.

According to Arnaud (2022), antonomasia is a literary term in which an expressive term substitutes an individual's name. It can range from light-hearted nicknames to epic

names. It is used to call attention to certain characteristics of the individual, whether visible, known, or discernible; hence, antonomasia is bestowing nicknames that reveal something about a person. While both antonomasia and nicknaming generally relate to the substitution of an already existing name, the former always calls attention to characteristic qualities, while the latter may be ingenious and obscure, often lacking a satisfactory explanation (Arnaud, 2022). With antonomasia, the link between the name and its referent is visible or has a known history, while it is commonplace for nicknames to be ironic, include some antiphrasis, and lack correspondence between the name and the referent. Starks and Taylor-Leech (2011, p. 87) posit that, "[T] he sociological studies of nicknaming practices have shown that naming practices are often associated with domains of language use." This is an important characteristic of nicknames that distinguishes them from antonomasia in that while the former appears to be domain-specific, the latter is more general, transcending various domains. Nicknaming practices are common in gangs (Rymes, 1996; Zaitozow, 1998), sports teams (Kennedy and Zamuner, 2006), and family, while antonomasia tends to be general and more accessible and used by people across the various spheres of life.

2. Statement of the problem

The distinction between antonomasia and nicknaming is very blurry; while the former is figurative and descriptive, the latter implies the act of bestowing on someone an informal name that is often social. However, both concepts are commonly used in personal naming, and sometimes with overlaps. Nicknames can be based on shorter names, characteristics, new names, specific names, resemblances, and professions (Dianitami, Widyastuti & Setiawan, 2023). On the other hand, antonomasia is the name applied to that form of expression when the title, office, dignity, profession, science, trade, or any other characteristic is put instead of the true name of the person (Popescu, 2019). Thus, with antonomasia, there is always a transfer of characteristics, something that is not requisite with nicknames. This article examines the concept of antonomasia in personal naming among the Ndebele of Zimbabwe. It seeks to establish how antonomasia, as driven by a cognitive metonymic and metaphoric mechanism, can reveal how different members of a society are conceptualised and consequently talked about. The type of antonomasia where there is emotional substitution of a person's name based on the transfer of characteristics (from other domains) is a common phenomenon among the Ndebele, yet it is often labelled as nicknaming.

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3. Literature Review

According to Achilova (2021), the concept of antonomasia is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been traditionally viewed as a metaphor for object identification with the real meaning of the name. Antonomasia is a Greek word that is traceable back to antiquity (Schwab et al., 2019). It means to name differently and refers to the phenomenon of substituting an official or real name with a nickname. As opposed to an epithet, which is an added tag, antonomasia is the total replacement of a proper noun by an appellative. Achilova (2021, p. 55) postulates that "antonomasia is a type of metonymy that refers to words or phrases that indicate the place of a real name or noun". It highlights an important feature of an object or its relatedness to something else. Thus, metaphorically, antonomasia is a comparison with paragons from other spheres (Holmqvist and Pluciennik, 2010).

Although it is commonplace to have both phenomena used simultaneously, this study explores the use of epithets as a form of antonomasia in personal naming among the Ndebele. Antonomasia can provide someone with a strong epithet that celebrates and venerates their great deeds, or give negative names to weak or nasty people. Antonomasia provides people with exciting names and nicknames that reflect certain characteristics, feats they possess, or even their professions.

Bergien (2013) avers that, in antonomasia, a source serves as a paragon to elevate the target (sometimes by applying a modifier that provides a corresponding context). Thus, it relates to token or telling names as the person's name serves to describe their visible, known or discernible characteristics (Widdowson, 1992). Token or telling names give information to the hearer (reader) about the bearer of the name. In this way, antonomasia is based on the interface of logical and nominal meanings, and these meanings must be realised concurrently. This study seeks to demonstrate how antonomasia is applied in personal naming, with specific reference to nicknames acquired at adulthood.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Cognitive Linguistics Theory, which focuses on "the study of language in its cognitive function, where cognitive refers to the crucial role of intermediate informational structures in our encounters with the world" (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2012, p. 5). Language offers us a window into the cognitive functions of the human mind, providing insights into the nature, structure and organization of thoughts and ideas (Evans & Green, 2006). Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2012) and Nordquist (2021) observe that our interaction with the world is mediated through informational structures in the mind by

focusing on natural language as a means for organising, processing, and conveying that information. Language, then, is seen as a repository of world knowledge, a structured collection of meaningful categories that help us deal with new experiences and store information about old ones. In this regard, antonomasia is a cognitive and linguistic process and phenomenon where the perceived characteristic attributes of an individual are then conveyed through an attributive appellative. This brings to the fore the primacy of semantics in linguistic analysis, the encyclopedic nature of linguistic meaning, and the perspectival nature of linguistic meaning regarding personal names.

Cognitive linguists are more concerned with determining how language reflects people's perceptions of the world around them by focusing on the process of interpreting meaning and the mental concepts the mind forms and expresses about the world through language. Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) observe that meaning does not exist independently from people who create and use it (Lakoff & Johnson, 1993, 1999, 2003; Grady, 1999). The study uses the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) propounded by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), which states that metaphors are a property of language, thought, and linguistic phenomena, and involve perceiving one experience in terms of another. Fundamentally, in human cognition, metaphors are at the centre of speech production, communication, and processing of meaning, which depends on the perceived resemblance between domains. Grady (2005) proposes the use of metaphors as a universal and basic principle of generating names and creating novel meanings. Thus, in this study, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory is used to explore and discuss the resemblance metaphor applied as antonomasia in the Ndebele language from a cognitive linguistic point of view.

5. Methodology

This study was carried out in Lupane, which is located in the south-western part of Zimbabwe. Lupane is situated in Matabeleland North province, which is 170 kilometres from Bulawayo, along Victoria Falls Road. Dandanda village is 70 kilometres north of Lupane town. It is a predominantly Ndebele-speaking community that shares borders with Gokwe to the east and Binga to the north. The study follows a qualitative approach to get an in-depth understanding of the respondents' perceptions of how antonomasia is deployed in personal naming among members of the Ndebele society. The data is in the form of views of the respondents, which helps the researcher make an exploration of the respondents' predispositions (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005). The study combines autoethnography with data collection and focus group discussions to understand the sources of antonomasia. Autoethnography is when a researcher uses personal

experience, acknowledging and valuing their relationships with others, to interrogate the social phenomena (Poulos, 2021).

Using the chain referral technique, a form of snow-ball sampling that begins with a convenience sample of initial subjects that could not be accessed through non-convenient methods (Heckathorn, 2012), the researcher identified two initial participants based on social proximity, who then referred him to others. The total sample size was twelve participants who resided in the Dandanda area. Of these, eight were males and four were females, aged between 48 and 78 years. Three sessions were held with three separate groups according to their physical and social proximity to each other.

In an informal setting, and beginning with the names of the participants, the nicknames were discussed, paying attention to their origins, the shifts and continuities in these names. Participants were initially asked how they acquired their names and hen the questions:

1. Who bestowed these names on them?
2. How do they feel about these names?
3. How have their attitudes changed towards these names?

Clarifications were sought on the link between the names and characteristics of the bearers.

Discussions were not limited to the names of the participants alone; names of other people who have passed on or have relocated to other places were also discussed. These focus group discussions were held between December 2021 and April 2022, when the researcher visited the village on weekends and vacations. A set of semi-structured interviews was used to guide the discussions, focusing on the origins of the names under discussion. Informal appointments were made with some informants and discussants, while some of the names and their origins were discussed during everyday activities in the homesteads. The study targeted older members of the community who have acquired names through antonomasia. These older members were targeted based on the premise that such names could be offensive to others, while the younger members of the population may not have acquired some of these names. The different types of antonomasia are discussed in terms of how these members of the community have acquired them.

6. Findings

The following names were collected from the population. The source or origin of each name was discussed. These names are discussed under the categories of pejorative names, speech patterns and idiosyncrasies, names celebrating positive attributes, as well as those used for self-referencing. Although during the discussions some names were suggested by the participants, only the twelve names listed on Table 1 were discussed in detail.

Table 1 below presents the names that were discussed with participants. The table presents the name, its meaning or attribution, source, and the source domain. The source for the names presented in Table 1 ranges from mechanical, topography, animal and linguistic domains. Others are sourced from the human domains of speech, occupation, race and maturation.

Table 1. Personal names, their meanings and source domains.

Name (target)	Meaning/attribution	Source	[DOMAIN]
Bhawuza	Big bodied	common noun	[MECHANICAL]
Titsha	Assertive; knowledgeable	common noun	[HUMAN occupation]
Lele	Witty	common noun	[ANIMAL]
Magagasa	The stutterer	adverb	[HUMAN speech]
Zidulini	One who likes anthills	adjective	[TOPOGRAPHY]
Maravaza	The brutal one	adverb	[LINGUISTIC]
Sidzweyatstweya	Crookedness	adjective	[LINGUISTIC]
Mfanongakatsheni	Toothless baby	adjective	[HUMAN maturation]
Zakabatana	They are bundled up	adjective	[LINGUISTIC]
Maheleza	One with a hoarse voice	adverb	[HUMAN speech]
Makharathi	Mother of coloureds	adjective	[HUMAN racial]
Mawawama	The loud talker	adverb	[HUMAN speech]

In antonomasia, although in most cases both the source and target are persons, one or both could be almost anything as long as the target is a proper name (Schwab et al., 2013). The source domains of the names in Table 1 range from mechanical, human, topography, animal, and linguistic. What is outstanding is the attribution of certain properties to people.

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6.1 Pejorative names

These names were initially created and maintained by close friends and peers because they were considered offensive and disparaging. Over time, they would then migrate and become popular with other groups within the community. Names such as *Bhawuza* (the big woman/bowser) and *Magagasa* (the stutterer) were initially used by peers but eventually extended beyond the boundaries of peer groups. Although pejorative in their nature, the bearers indicated that they were left with very little choice but to embrace these names because they were most often used by those close to them, such that they understood it as an endearment rather than anything negative. One respondent, Magagasa, stated:

> *Mina angilandaba lakho ukuthi abantu bathi nginguMagagasa ngoba vele ngiyakwazi ukuthi kuliqiniso. Abanye phela abalandaba, bayakubiza ngebizo asebekuphe lona. Ngiyazwisisa ngoba thina phela besesibanengi oMaDube so besokumele basehlukanise.*

> (I don't mind that people call me a stutterer because I am indeed a stutterer. Some people don't really care; they begin addressing you using a name they would have bestowed on you. I do understand because there were so many of the Dube women, and so there had to be a way of distinguishing one from the others).

Maheleza is an old man in his mid-70s, he has a distinctive and hoarse voice that makes him stand out to those who know him. In the excerpt below, he recounts how he got his name:

> *Mina ngezwa sokuthiwa ngingu Maheleza. Kodwa akungikhubanga ngoba lakhathesi lami ngiyalizwa ilizwi lami ukuthi lembala liyaheleza.*

> (At some point, I just got to know that people call me Maheleza (one with a hoarse voice). I never took offence though because even right now I can tell that, indeed, I have a distinctive hoarse voice).

Regarding the etymology of the name *Mawawama*, the son of an elderly woman, in her early 80s, had this to say about his mother's name:

> *Umama kwakuthiwa ngumawawama ngenxa yokukhulumela phezulu. Thina sasikwazi ukuthi vele ukukhulumela phezulu kodwa ukuthi ngubani owametha lelobizo lathi ngeke sitsho.*

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(My mother was referred to as *Mawawama* (the talkative or the loudmouth). We were conscious that she was a loud talker, but we cannot tell who in particular gave her that name).

The above excerpt demonstrates how salient character traits can become conduits for the acquisition of new names, even at adulthood, a classic example of how an official name can be replaced by an attributive one – antonomasia. In this regard, stuttering, a hoarse voice or being a loud talker served as a "unique attribute" through which the individuals are differentiated from other persons of the shared identity (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980).

Some of these names may appear abusive and derogatory, but that is what makes them common and sticky (Morgan et al., 1979). *Bhawuza* is a metaphorization as the woman in question is being likened to an inanimate object, the water bowser, based on her body stature. Further interrogation regarding the time at which the name could have been first mooted revealed that, during the early 1990s, when there were massive road works in the Dandanda area, one of the distinct and noticeable items of equipment was a water bowser. One of her very close friends had this to say:

> *UBhawuza samnika lelo bizo ngenxa yokuthi wayeqatha, elomzimba omkhulu. Sasuke samfanisa lebhawuza le eyayithwala amanzi. Saqala nje silibiza nxa sisodwa emaklabhu abomama kodwa sasesibona ukuthi laye uyalithakazelela, kwaba yikho ukukhula kwebizo lelo.*
>
> (We named her Bhawuza (bowser), having compared her with a water bowser because of her big body. Initially, we used the name among ourselves as women whenever we would meet at our gatherings, but realising that she loved the name, it was popularized).

Although some may take offence and view it as body shaming, *Bhawuza* was an emotionally strong character who cherished her gigantic stature. Puoane, Tsolekile and Styen (2010) argue that, among Africans, happiness and wealth are regarded as important factors related to a big body. In the same vein, within the Ndebele culture, a big body is a symbol of nourishment and attracts respect; thus, by naming her *Bhawuza*, her contemporaries were acknowledging that she is a distinct, well-nourished woman of ample proportions. In their interaction with the world, mediated through informational structures in the mind, the bowser became a reminder of the distinct woman, and to capture the experience of having encountered a water bowser, metaphorisation was the best strategy for organising, processing, and conveying that information. Metaphorisation

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is founded on association, and it constructs systems-based prototypical notions and meanings which are used to classify the world (Grkoviae-Mejdor, 2008, p. 54). It is based on the transfer of semantic and conceptual structure (size) from the source conceptual domain (MECHANICAL: bowser) to the target conceptual domain (PERSON: *Bhawuza*). In the class of the big things, the woman in question belonged to the same category as the water bowser, hence the rephonologised name *Bhawuza*.

As Morgan et al. (1979) note, a nickname often highlights characteristics or stigmas, physical or social, to which a recipient is reluctant to call attention. They are often based on characteristics they would prefer to forget. *Mfanongakatsheni* is a graphic attribute of an elderly man who has lost all his front teeth. Narrating how he got his name, his nephew narrated:

> *Umalume sasimbiza Mfanongakatsheni ngoba wayengasela mazinyo njengosane oluncinyane olungakabi lamazinyo. Yena umnikazi walithanda ibizo lakhe kazange kumkhathaze ukuthi simbiza ngalo.*

> (We would refer to my uncle as *Mfanongakatsheni* because he had lost the whole frontline of his teeth, such that he resembled a yet-to-teethe baby. He had no qualms with being referenced as such).

The art of naming among the Ndebele is sometimes based on similarities and mockery (Dlodlo & Moyo, 2022). Certain names are bestowed on people based on whom they are likened to. Regarding the name *Makharathi*, a group participant noted that:

> *UMakharathi yena kutshiwo ngoba bonke labantwabakhe bamhlophe yingakho-ke yikho sabafanisa lamakharathi.*

> (We called her *Makharathi*, "mother of coloureds" because her children are light in complexion, hence likening them to coloureds).

From the above excerpt, the name *Makharathi*, although bestowed upon the mother, becomes a banner that she carries on behalf of the family, and it typifies the average member of the family (Dlodlo & Moyo, 2022). It is important to note that although some of these names may have originated from a disablist context, and are pejorative in their etymologies as they reference distinct and often visible differences by those outside the difference, the bearers have accepted them as an endearment by those close to them. A key feature of nicknames is that they are mostly assigned to individuals against their will and usually maintained by their peers.

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6.2 Speech patterns and idiosyncrasies

In this instance, *Maravaza* earned himself this name through the repeated use of the phrase *ravaza* (to tear up). He would (and still does) use the phrase even in instances where it would not be proper.

> *Umdala kuze kuthiwe nguMaravaza wayethanda ukuthi ngizakuravaza nxa ekuthembisa ukukutshaya. Kodwa nje yena kuye yonke into eyenzakalayo yikuravaza kuphela ngoba lanxa elima uthi ezakhe ziyaravaza. Lelanga uthi liyaravaza, lezinja zakhe kazilumi ziyarazava. Kutsho ukuthi yena nguye uMaravaza.*

> (The old man here is called Maravaza because he would use that phrase when threatening to beat you. But to him, any act or anything done well is referred to as tearing up. He can use the word to refer to anything from the hot sun, vicious dogs, or even tilling the fields).

Just like *Maravaza*, *Sidzweyatsweya* earned his name by consistently using the term *isidzweyatsweya*, a word borrowed from the Shona language, *kutsveyama* meaning crookedness. He would refer to any kind of behaviour and conduct that he was not satisfied with as *isidzweyatsweya,* meaning dodgy and unscrupulous.

> *Umdala vele lakhathesi uyakuthanda ukuthi kafuni sidzweyatsweya. Yonke into angayizwisisiyo uthi yisidzweyatsweya. Ukuqila, ukungathembeki, ukungacaci konke yisidzweyatsweya.*

> (Even to date, the old man is fond of saying I don't want *isidzweyatsweya* - dodgy conduct. To him, anything that he cannot comprehend is referred to as such. It includes cheating, insincerity, or anything that does not make perfect sense to him, which is referred to as such).

Just like *Maravaza* and *Sidzweyatsweya*, *Zakabatana* earned his name by consistently using the phrase *"Zakabatana,"* another word borrowed from the Shona language, which means wholeness. Every time his clients asked for change, he would tell them that *Zakabatana* (*zvakabatana mari dzacho*), he does not have loose notes or coins, but big bills only.

> *Undoda lo wayehlala engothengisayo. Pho-ke wayethi nxa esebuzwa intshintshi athi zakabatana. Zibambene mama. Esitsho izimali. Yikho ukukhula kwebizo lelo.*

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(This man has always been buying and selling different commodities. So, whenever he would remain with your change, upon being asked, his common response was '*zakabatana'*, meaning that all the money is a single note).

In this regard, antonomasia is primarily created by attributive, idiosyncratic combinations or phrases that are characteristic of the bearer, highlighting the salience of names in ordinary self-concept relative to other personal traits and characteristics. Contrary to the views by Alford (1988), that recipients rarely generate their names, when a person gets a name such as *Maravaza*, *Sidzweyatsweya* or *Zakabatana* originating from their idiosyncratic tendencies, it is as good as if they have generated these names themselves. It does not take long before the recipient begins self-referencing by these new names. It is a common phenomenon among the Ndebele for one to acquire an additional name from their most distinct phrases.

Names such as *Zidulini* and *Maravaza* are examples of antonomasia as they have seemingly overridden the official names in social settings. This is attested to by the decision that *Zidulini* has made to inscribe the name on his bus stop signpost. It is the only one of his names inscribed there. Some (fairly new) members of the community may not know his official name and surname because he is always referred to as *Zidulini*. Within a cognitive linguistic perspective, such names as *Maravaza* and *Zidulini* speak to the characteristic attributes of those individuals, conveying meaning covertly or overtly. The appellatives draw attention to the primacy of semantics in linguistic analysis of these names, and the encyclopedic nature of their linguistic meaning as personal names become prominent.

6.3 Names celebrating positive attributes

In antonomasia, the language unit used as a new name is written with a capital letter, and as a proper noun, it stands for a quality which becomes inseparable from the naked character (Poghosyan & Ghumashyan, 2021). In this regard, antonomasia is a veneration of a person's exceptional deeds and carries with it an ameliorative meaning. It is relatively easier for a positive name to replace an official one, and it will stick. However, with time, while the names are popularised and adopted, the originators of these names fade away into opacity, as seen in the following excerpt:

UMpofu omdala kuthiwa nguLele ngenxa yokuhlakanipha kwakhe. Ukuthi singatsho ukuthi ngubani owamnika ibizo, ngeke sisakhubula kodwa esikwazi kamhlophe yikuthi kwathiwa nguMvundla kwacina sokuthiwa nguLele ngoba phela ukuthi lele lokuthi mvundla yintonye.

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> (The older of the Mpofu brothers is now referred to as Lele. It is difficult to say when that name came about, but one thing is certain, it is due to his witty character that he was first referred to as Mvundla, then later Lele, because the two are synonymous).

According to Brozoviæ-Ronèeviæ and Zic-Fuchs (2003), names carry meaning in their original form from their point of creation, and meaning lies behind the motivation for their usage as personal names. *Tistha* is a rephonologisation of the English word 'teacher' with a transfer of the semantic meaning to suggest that the bearer has the wits of a teacher. Commenting on the origins of the name Lele, one participant had this to say:

> *UMpofu omncane yena sambiza Titsha ngexa yokuthi wayetshengisa ukukhalipha njalo ehlala engumuntu ogqoke kuhle njengababalisi bakudala. Ungumuntu olomqondo okhaliphileyo lezeluleko ezinhle kwabanye. Ucabanga njengombalisi sibili.*

> (The younger of the Mpofu brothers is called *Titsha* because people admired his deportment and general wise counsel. He thinks like a teacher even though he is a layman).

The names *Titsha* and *Lele* are designations that celebrate or venerate their recipients. They celebrate the positive attributes of the recipient. *Lele* is synonymous with the common Ndebele word *umvundla* (the hare), a very witty character in Ndebele folktales. While the former venerates its recipient as a smart guy who is 'well-educated' (because his reasoning resembles that of a teacher), the latter celebrates the craftiness and shrewdness of the bearer. Once more, there is a transfer of semantic meaning from one domain (ANIMAL: hare) to another (HUMAN: *Lele*).

Metaphorisation is considered one of the most basic notions of language and human cognition, and linguistically, it is an important source of names. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), this is a basic metaphor where an animal is perceived as a person with such qualities as the size of the animal and their perceived behaviours as understood from folktales (Onchoke, 2018). This is also noted by Alford (1988), who notes that antonomasia provides a strong epithet that further celebrates or venerates their great deeds or character traits.

6.4 Self-referencing

As the popularity of the names grows beyond certain boundaries, the recipient then begins self-referring, ushering in a new phase as the name overrides their official one in

some settings. In self-referring, the bearer attempts an amelioration of the name, further distinguishing themselves as a unique and special being. An informant had this to say:

> *Mina ubaba nguye owayethi nginguZidulini ngoba umuzi wami wakuqala ngangiwakhele phezu kwesiduli eceleni kwensimu yakhe. Omasalu yibo abalikhulisayo lelibizo ngoba vele lanamuhla kabakaze bangibize ngebizo lami lokuzalwa. Ngabona ukuthi kungcono-ke ukuthi ngilithathe lelibizo ngoba angikaze ngilizwe komunye umuntu loba ngaphi. Manje sengibonile ukuthi okulibizo lokhu kushapu.*

> (My father is the one who would call me *Zidulini* because I built my first home on the anthill next to his field. The older women are the ones who popularised this name because, since then, they have not used my official name. I then realised that I had never heard of this name anywhere. I decided to embrace the name, and now I have realised that it is a beautiful name).

Snyder and Howard-Fromkin (1980) emphasise that names, along with commodities as well as attitudes and beliefs, are unique attributes through which individuals may differentiate themselves from other persons. Thus, in self-referencing, attributive names serve as a distinctive identity marker championed by the bearer.

7. Discussion

From the findings of this study, there is a noticeable pattern in the migration of the names from nicknames to pure antonomasia. There is a thin line between an epithet and an antonomasia; however, the major difference is that an epithet is often used in conjunction with an official name, as an extension to it, while antonomasia entails the replacement of an official name with an acquired and unofficial name. In the case of antonomasia, it does not matter whether people know or remember one's official name; they use the acquired name on its own, as seen in this study. The bearer of this name also uses this name as if it were their official one.

As it is seen in this study, antonomasia among the Ndebele provides society with a strong epithet for celebrating and venerating people's good deeds and distinct characters. Although sometimes these names seem derogatory, abusive, and pejorative, antonomasia represents the complementarity of elements in the African worldview, which allows people to live with contradictions in their lives (Ntuli, 1999). When one's peers and close family bestow them with a seemingly abusive name, this represents the complementarity of the contradictions that people experience daily. The phenomenon

serves to remind us that acquired names remain a common phenomenon in many African societies, and an individual accumulates such names as they progress from birth to death (Lienhardt, 1988).

At a personal or family level, names are part of a communicative repertoire that decorate the personal stories and histories of the bearer, as is seen with the names *Zidulini* and *Mfanongakatsheni*. Hence, the role of the name in existential, identity, and opaque contexts makes every name a description of the bearer or their existential conditions. Lienhardt (1988) reminds us that, in many African cultures, names tell a story, and there is a host of personal names that are formed by compounding ideas, idiomatic or proverbial expressions or even sermons. Hence, for every proper name, there is a collection of descriptions associated with that name that constitute the meaning of the name (Gottlob and Russell, cited in Hlengwa, 2019).

A name such as *Zidulini* (one who builds his home on an anthill) and *Bhawuza* (a giant woman of ample proportion) personifies the bearer. Upon hearing such names, the hearer is likely to enquire as to what could have led to a person earning such a name, hence soliciting that the full story be told. Ubahakwe (1981) posits that an indigenous African name, on the whole, personifies the individual and tells some story. Hence, in the study of names acquired at adulthood, from a Cognitive Linguistic Theoretical perspective, antonomasia is a central concept as it relates to studying societies' mental and emotional processes and behavioural patterns (Neethling, 1998, p. 59). Because a people's language is the main conduit that transports cultural expression and marks one's identity, their lived experiences become the best source of names as their existential conditions directly determine their naming practices.

This study explored the phenomenon of antonomasia in the Ndebele language and concluded that it is mainly stylistic as it is represented by the use of a general term (an epithet) to stand for a referent having a proper name. In this regard, a new metaphoric name is used as a proper noun, replacing the individual's official name. Antonomasia in the Ndebele language is an attributive stylistic device often used as a token or telling name. The major distinction between nicknames and antonomasia is in their usage, where the former is often used widely across domains while the latter is common in groups such as sports teams, circles of friends, and family. The sources of antonomasia in the Ndebele language range from perceived physical or behavioural qualities to one's life history and experiences, as well as their speech patterns. Sometimes antonomasia is based on metaphorisation and is founded on association and transfer of semantic conceptual structure. Sources of antonomasia in the Ndebele language include metaphorisation and behavioural names. In the former, names of objects become

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personal names, while in the latter, one's habits, such as speech, can become a source of their name. In addition, loan words and rephonologization are popular among the Ndebele, as seen in names like *Sidzweyatsweya*, *Bhawuza,* and *Maravaza*, which all have a non-Ndebele origin. We can also discern that the metaphoric nature of some Ndebele names appeals directly to the senses of listeners, soliciting their imagination to understand what is being communicated; therefore, the cultural nuances in antonomasia should be appreciated. Thus, antonomasia can be regarded as a sub-branch of socio-onomastics, the study of names, naming systems, and naming patterns as they pertain to particular societies (Neethling, 1998:59), where there is always a transfer of characteristics between entities or domains.

8. Conclusion

This study concludes that antonomasia is an active strategy for personal naming among the Ndebele of Lupane, especially with names acquired at adulthood. While, just like in ordinary nicknaming, people acquire new names, with antonomasia, these names are not mere pet names but analogical as they highlight the similarity of features between two entities (Sharagih & Marpaung, 2021). Antonomasia is a conscious cognitive process rather than the simple throwing of names at people. There is a metaphoric transfer and emphasis of shared characteristics between entities, making it a popular naming strategy for names acquired even in adulthood. While antonomasia involves replacing a common noun with a proper noun and vice versa (Grgić & Nikolić, 2011), this study focused on the type of antonomasia that involves the use of a regular/common noun to replace a proper noun (Athanasiadou, 2023). This is demonstrated by the use of names such as *Magagasa* (the stutterer) instead of one's official name. In this regard, antonomasia becomes metonymic (Holmqvist & Pluciennik, 2013) as a personal naming strategy, as one dimension of a person's character becomes a typical representation of who they are. The study recommends future research to explore other types of antonomasia within Ndebele onomastics and other fields.

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9. References

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