What’s in a name sign?
Name signs in NGT

Joke Schuit, MSc
Universiteit van Amsterdam

Outline
- Introduction
- Sign language myths
- Names: what are they?
- Names in Dutch and in Xhosa
- Name signs in general
- Methodology
- Name signs in NGT

Sign Language myths
- Sign Language is universal
- Sign Languages are derived from spoken language
- The lexicon and grammar of Sign Languages is less complex than those of spoken languages
- Sign Languages are slower than spoken languages
- Sign Languages only exist since the 1960s

What are names?
- Proper names are special part of lexicon
  - Morphological restrictions
  - Often formed by specific syntactic rules
- Cultural universals
- Earlier thoughts on names
- Today?

Names in Dutch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Named after family member</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name sounds nice</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful name</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unusual/special name</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Foreign name</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Named after an idol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Found in book on first names</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goes with name of other child(ren)</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch name</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Names in Xhosa
- Names have meaning → language is source for names: from V or N.
- Female markers: No-, -wa, -iwe, -eka
- Male markers: -ile, -ni
- Also negative names:
  - Nyamkambi from unyaka ‘year’ and mbi ‘is ugly/bad’: ‘bad year’
  - Phumephi from –phuma ‘come from’ and phi ‘where’: ‘where do you come from?’ (from Nguni language)
Motivations for names in Xhosa

• expectation of the parents: Nomathamsanqa from ithamsanqa ‘good luck’

• gratitude of the parents to God or the ancestors: Nkosinathi of inkosi ‘Lord’ and na– ‘with’ and thi(na) ‘we/us’, meaning ‘the Lord is with us’.

• representing the family: Siyanda of si– ‘we’ and ya (temporal morpheme) and –anda ‘increase’, meaning ‘we are increasing’; Mzwamadoda of umzi ‘home’ and wamadoda ‘of men’, meaning ‘home (full) of men’.

Motivations (cont.)

• circumstances around the birth: Nontsikizi of intsikizi ‘black bird’, meaning ‘a female baby with a dark skin’; Nontsasa of intsasa ‘early in the morning’, meaning ‘a girl born early in the morning’.

• famous African people: Tambo, of Oliver Tambo, the former president of the ANC.

• name of the tribe it belongs to: NomaTshawe of the Tshawe tribe.

• reminders of a special occasion: Nomnyama of –mnyama ‘black’, a female name to remember the eclipse of the sun in 1940.

Name signs in Deaf cultures

Name signs only in Deaf cultures. Deaf living in hearing society have no name sign.

Hearing people in contact with Deaf community also name sign. Some famous also.


Descriptive name signs

• Physical feature
• Character trait/habit
• Resemblance of [either above]
• Related characteristic
  • Status, profession, place of origin, school number
• Initialisation is possible
• Negative name signs possible

Loan translations

• Name is gloss: one to one correspondence
• Approximate translation: e.g. Jerry → CHERRY, Clive → c-LIVE
• LSQ:
  • ‘Folk etymology’: Bellefeuille: BELLE + FEUILLE
  • Pragmatic association: Pilote → AVION (plane)
• SSL:
  • Lexicalised name signs
  • Based on meaning of name
  • Based on part of the name
Arbitrary name signs
- Part of loan translations?
- Traditional system in American SL
- Also found in SSL
- In BSL: not found as two handed alphabet, but has combination of first letters of first and last name.

Methodology
- 139 people interviewed (40 Deaf, 99 hearing); 20 famous people’s name signs
- 5 students without name sign: 1st year
- 199 name signs: some people had different name signs throughout life, some mentioned a friend’s name sign

Group 1: Descriptive name signs
a. Physical feature: CURLY-HAIR, EARRING, signs that denote length
b. Habit/character trait: SMILE, COMB
c. Related characteristic:
   1. Hobby: DRUMS, FLUTE, VOLLEYBAL
   2. School number: 4, 6, 11
   3. Profession: PSYCHOLOGIST, FARMER
   4. Place of origin: PORTUGAL

Based on physical feature
Arnold has a mole on his cheek; Sign is signed with A-handshape. This is not an existing sign!

Based on habit or character trait
Queen Wilhelmina’s name sign depicts her typical way of waving
BLUSH: the sign is signed with T-handshape, as the person is called ‘Tina’. This is called initialisation

Group 2: Loan translations
a) Name is gloss:
   1. First name: MARGRIET (moondaisy), MEREL (blackbird),
   2. Last name: KERK (church), VEER (feather)
   3. Nick name/abbreviated name: MOUSE, ROSE, LITTLE-ONE
Group 2 (cont.)

b) Approximated gloss:
1. Resembles gloss: Hund → Hond (dog)
2. Translated gloss: Neiboer → Frisian for ‘new’, name sign is NEW,
3. Meaning of name: PEACE for someone named Irene
4. Morphological compound: Marijke → MA+RIJK (mum+rich)

Based on loan translation

Groups 3 and 4

3. Mixed group: based on two features.
   1. LION: star sign ‘Leo’ and person’s last name
   2. BEER: father owned bar and likes beer

4. Arbitrary group: only the first letter of the written name, or a self invented sign

Comparison NGT vs..

- Dutch → no overlap
- Xhosa → names carry meaning + language is origin for names
- ASL → only the descriptive system
- LSQ → much overlap; in NGT only 1 name sign with lost origin, in LSQ 11%
- SSL → much overlap; SSL has lexicalised signs for certain names

References


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