

Wasu to Samaz : Collective Identity in Manyika Nicknames

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Abstract

This paper explores linguistic innovation and onomastic aspects around the nicknames 'Samaz' and 'Wasu'. It goes on to examine place names like Samanyika and its derivatives in popular discourse. Nicknames are statements of identity and the identity can be collective or individual. Among these are issues of standardization, orality and phonological innovation of the nickname. Besides being derogatory and satirical, nicknames carry connotations and inherently own informal qualities of linguistic structure coupled with the phonetic sound. It is on the basis of a nickname that many positive and negative onomastic assumptions about the bearer can be inferred, as will be shown in the paper.

Introduction

A name is a full social statement that ascribes to the bearer certain attributes and values. It is a text that carries with it a set of denotations and connotations. Besides being sociolinguistically creative and ambiguous, nicknames are rich in meaning as will be shown in this paper. Names can be formal or informal and with a positive communicative intent or a negative one. This paper first gives a geographical and historical background of the area under discussion. It then gives a brief survey of some theoretical constructs such as theoretical linguistics and identity studies and how they have influenced the naming process. This becomes the platform for onomastic analysis of selected Manyika names that are presented in this discussion: the place-name *Manyika* and the nicknames *Wasu* and *Samaz*. The paper closes with some pertinent questions about orthography and standardization of nicknames in Zimbabwean languages.

Historical Background

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country bounded to the south by South Africa, Mozambique to the east, Zambia to the north and Botswana to the west. There has been political and cultural contact between Zimbabwe and Mozambique over the centuries. The two countries share a long history that often renders the political boundary artificial. The border divides various ethnic groups that lie on either side of the border, stretching from the Chikunda in the Zambezi valley, Budja and Korekore in the north east of the country, the Manyika and Ndau in the Eastern Highlands in the central part and the Shangaan and Venda in the Southeastern lowveld (Hachipola, 1998). Contact and interaction has been recorded in the Bantu migrations in the Middle Ages, the rise of the Monomotapa and Rozwi dynasties, the first Portuguese traders and missionaries, the Nguni incursions of the early 19th century and European imperialism in the late 19th century as well as the Liberation wars in the middle of the 20th century (Beach, 1980, Ellert, 1993, Pikirayi, 2001). Each of these contacts has spawned sets of Zimbabwean place names, personal names and more recently war