Empaako, the Magic Word: A Special Form of Address Used in Western Uganda

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Abstract

This paper investigates Empaako, a special form of address and communicative process used in western Uganda. Through a historical and ethnographic background, the next section explores the linguistics of the magical word. Next, the paper traces naming and traditional names and examines examples of such naming for the Banyoro and Bantoro peoples. In particular, it discusses the etymologies for six semantic categories of secret names and how they have been reduced in these modern times to four groups. Meanwhile, more and more Batooro and Banyoro families are replacing traditional naming with a more European style of naming in which the clan's name becomes the surname and a given name is derived from either Islam or Christianity. Finally, what remains is the requirement to employ Empaako communicatively to show respect and intimacy, and to avoid taboo violation.

Key Words: Empaako, hypocorism, greetings, Lwoo, secret language

INTRODUCTION

It was an article in a Ugandan newspaper (Kakembo 2001) and my interest in the Southern Lwoo languages, which inspired me to do my own little research on special forms of addresses used by the Banyoro and Batooro people in Western Uganda. Besides the newspaper article, the following publications had previously dealt with Empaako: Byakutaaga (1991) with considerable linguistic depth, and Dunbar (1965) who briefly touched Empaako from a historic perspective solely.

The Banyoro and Batooro have a cultural and linguistic characteristic that is – to my knowledge – so far attested for no other African people. They use special names in greetings and in other situations of communication. Involved are a total of 12 fixed names. In the language of the Banyoro and Batooro these special names are referred to as Empaako. Empaako can express both intimacy and respect between two people. When used correctly, an Empaako can have a quasi-magical effect. Thus, for example, the addressee of a request

presented with an Empaako feels more obliged to comply with it than with a request which was presented without an Empaako (Kakembo 2001: 21).

I adopted the original notion Empaako since an adequate translation of the word is not possible. Frequently encountered but wrong translations are nickname or pet name. The latter translation is found in the above-mentioned newspaper article.

Within onomastics, the science of names, nicknames and pet names are subsumed under the generic term hypocorism. Hypocorisms are shorter or diminutive forms of given names such as Sam or Sammy for the given name Samuel. But since Empaako represent fixed and independent forms, they are no hypocorisms. However, they take over some of the functions of a pet name by creating some degree of intimacy between two people.

Another but again not exactly accurate translation of Empaako would be the term praise name. This translation would come close to the actual meaning of the word Empaako. For the etymological root of the word, as we shall see later (and as already stated by Byakutaaga 1991: 129), is a verb with the meaning "praise". On the other hand, this translation does not necessarily include an idea of intimacy that can be triggered by an Empaako.

In the following sections, I will introduce the source, the forms, etymologies and the utilization of Empaako by the Banyoro and Batooro.

BANYORO AND BATOORO

Linguistic Background

The Banyoro and Batooro are Bantu-speaking peoples. Like all Bantu languages, the language of the Banyoro and Batooro is characterised by a so-called noun class system. In a noun class system, nouns are not categorized into grammatical genders but divided into up to 23 different noun classes. The individual nominal classes usually are characterized morphologically by different prefixes. Originally, each noun class represented a semantic field. There were nominal classes for human beings, for trees, for objects, etc. As a result of historical developments, however, the semantic background of a noun class is not always exactly recognizable in the Bantu languages spoken today. Table 1 below lists some indigenous terms that are used in this paper and at the same time the table gives us an insight how a noun class system works.

Starting from the root words Nyoro and Tooro, the forms Banyoro and Batooro are marked for the plural class of persons with the help of the prefix **/ba-/**. To refer to one individual only, the word roots have to be transferred into another noun class, which is marked by the prefix **/mu-/**. To denote the dialectal variations of the Banyoro and Batooro, the root words must in turn be transferred to another noun class, which is marked with the prefix **/ru-/**. Runyoro and Rutooro are mutually intelligible dialectal variations of the same language. This

Table 1: Glossary of some indigenous terms

Root word	Person Plural	Singular	Dialectal variation	Language	Nation
Nyoro	Ba-nyoro	Mu-nyoro	Ru-nyoro	Runyoro-Rutooro	Bu-nyoro
Tooro	Ba-tooro	Mu-tooro	Ru-tooro		Tooro

underlying language was given the man-made name Runyoro-Rutooro. In order to identify the habitat, the root word is labeled with the prefix **/bu-/** in Runyoro. In contrast, the bare root word is used in Rutooro. In addition to the nominal classes in Runyoro and Rutooro which I just presented, there are 11 additional noun classes.

Historical and Ethnographic Background[1]

In the area of the Great Lakes Region between Lake Victoria in the east and the lakes of the Central-African rift in the west, some hierarchically structured, quasi-feudalistic social and political systems had been formed in pre-colonial centuries. It is believed that starting in the 15th century, Nilotic pastoral people on their north-south migration superimposed the Bantu farmer population already living in the Great Lakes Region. In the territories of the present states of Burundi and Rwanda, the Nilotic pastoral people, called Tutsi, subjected the Bantu farmers, called Hutu, and made them pay tribute. This separation between the two populations remained until the modern times and culminated in the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

In the area of present-day Uganda, different groups of Nilotic immigrants were absorbed by Bantu peasant populations whom they encountered. On the one hand, the Nilotes established themselves as political elite, on the other hand, they gave up their linguistic identity and took over the language of the Bantu. The assimilated Nilotes underwent a complete language change. The only trace their languages left in Runyoro-Rutooro are the Empaako, as we shall see later.

Around 1,000 A.D., the Nilotes appeared as a distinct group in the southern part of Sudan. These early Nilotes were mainly pastoral and nomadic. In several waves of migration that began in the 12th century, the Lwoo as a Nilotic subgroup migrated southwards and entered present-day Uganda.

There they reached – at the beginning of the 15th century – the Kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara, which was ruled by the Bacwezi dynasty. The second table outlines the further evolution of the Kingdom.

According to oral tradition, the Bacwezi were demigods. The Lwoo took overpower in Bunyoro-Kitara and the Bacwezi dynasty was replaced by the Nilotic Babiito dynasty. Towards the end of the 15th century, the Kingdom of Bunyoro presented itself as a pastoral state in its largest geographic coverage ever. In the following centuries, the Kingdom steadily lost power and size. In 1967, five years after the independence of Uganda, all Kingdoms including Bunyoro were dissolved by the Ugandan government. In 1993, the Kingdom of Bunyoro was restored and Solomon Gafabusa Iguru I. was enthroned as the 27th king. Unlike his predecessors, King Solomon is a cultural leader and has no political power.

Table 2: Development of the Kingdoms of Bunyoro and Tooro

Time (A.D.)	Kingdom(s)		Dynasty
before 1400	Bunyoro-Kitara		Bacwezi (Bantu)
after 1400	Bunyoro		Babiito (Nilotic Lwoo)
since 1822	Bunyoro	Tooro	Babiito

The Kingdom of Tooro was founded in 1822, when Prince Kaboyo started a rebellion against his father Kyebambe III. and established his own kingdom called Tooro in the southern provinces of the Kingdom of Bunyoro.

In 1967, the Kingdom of Tooro suffered the same fate as Bunyoro: it was dissolved. With its reintroduction as a cultural institution in 1993, Patrick Olimi Kaboyo III. was enthroned again as king. After his death in 1995, his then three-year-old son Oyo Nyimba Kabamba Iguru Rukidi IV. (which is his full name) mounted the throne as the sixth King of Tooro.

It remains to be mentioned that not all Western Nilotic Lwoo groups were assimilated by the Bantu population. The Alur, Acholi and Adhola settled north and east of the Banyoro and in turn linguistically assimilated Eastern Nilotic peoples such as the Langi and Kumam.

NAMES AND NAMING WITH THE BANYORO AND BATOORO

This third section focuses on names and naming with the Banyoro and Batooro.

Traditional Names and Naming

Traditionally, each Munyoro and Mutooro has two names: an individual name (called Ibara in Runyoro-Rutooro), such as Bagamba and an Empaako such as Apuuli. Individual name and Empaako are given to a girl three months after her birth and to a boy four months after his birth in a ceremony. Names are given by the clan elders. Cf. the third table:

Table 3: Traditional names

Individual name (= Ibara)	Empaako
Bagamba	Apuuli

Table 4: Semantic categories of individual names

Semantic category	Example
1. Names which refer to demigods of clans (called Bacwezi)	Wamara
	Wamara, the 2nd Mucwezi King of Bunyoro-Kitara
2. Names which indicate the affiliation with a clan. These are rare and are almost exclusively given to royal dignitaries.	Ba-biito
	plural (person)-biito
	Member of the Biito-Clan
3. Names which refer to the place or the circumstances of one´s birth	Rwo-mu-bi-tooke
	genitive-singular (person)-plural-banana
	the one/the person of the bananas (i.e., the child was born in a banana plantation)
	Ka-toroogo
	genitive-born prematurely
	Born prematurely
4. Names which express the relation of the parents towards the neighbours	Ba-gamba
	they-talk
	They talk
	Connected to the proverb **Abantu bagamba bingi** *the people are talking a lot,* i.e., most things which people are talking, e.g. about the parents of a newborn baby, is not true and should better be ignored.

5. Names which refer to poverty, bad luck or death within the family or the clan. Such names shall trigger a positive change of fate, i.e. the negative aspect implied in the name shall be reversed into its positive opposite.	Ka-ba-naku genitive-plural (person)-poverty Of poor people Nyama-yarwo meat/flesh-death *Meat/flesh for the death*
6. Names which refer to physical features of the newborn baby	Ma-nyindo plural-nostril Nostrils The nostrils of the newborn show a peculiarity, e.g. they are larger than usual.

Individual names must have a meaning. They are based on words or phrases in the Runyoro-Rutooro language. On the one hand, there are a number of established names which can be used. On the other hand, however, new names can be created and assigned. Individual names can be divided into at least six semantic categories summarizes in the fourth table (cf. Beattie 1957 for a more comprehensive list of individual names):

In addition to the individual name of the newborn, one of twelve Empaako is given to it. The Empaako was originally identified with protective deities and this property was used in earlier times as a selection criterion. The common people have eleven Empaako to choose from. There is, however, a twelfth Empaako, namely Okaali, in existence which is reserved for the king only (see table five).

Table 5: The twelve Empaako[2]

Empaako	Gender
Abwoli	♂ or ♀
Atwoki	♂ or ♀
Akiiki	♂ or ♀
Adyeri	♂ or ♀
Amooti	♂ or ♀
Atenyi	♂ or ♀
Abboki	♂ or ♀
Acaali	♂
Abbala	♂
Apuuli	♂
Araali	♂
Okaali	♂ reserved for the king

In communicative settings in which a person does not know the Empaako of his counterpart, and where it would be improper to ask for the Empaako, although the use of a Empaako is necessary or appropriate, two of the twelve Empaako can be used in a more general sense. For boys or young men, the Empaako Apuuli is used in such cases, while for girls and young women the Empaako Abwoli is used.

A situation of this kind is for example given when an old man does not know the Empaako of a boy. Since the old man should not ask for the Empaako of the boy, he can resort to the Empaako Apuuli.

With regard to twins, there are standardized individual names. The first-born twin is called Isingoma (boy) or Nyangoma (girl). The second-born twin is given the name Kato (boy) or Nyakato (girl). The Empaako for twins are also stipulated. The first-born twin in Rutooro gets the Empaako Amooti, and in Runyoro the Empaako Adyeri. The second-born twin is given the Empaako Abboki in both dialects. Cf. the sixth table:

Table 6: Individual name and Empaako with twins

	Individual name		Empaako
	♂	♀	
First-born	Isingoma	Nyangoma	Amooti (Rutooro)
			Adyeri (Runyoro)
Second-born	Kato	Nyakato	Abboki

You may wonder how the Banyoro and Batooro knew their relationships with such a name system. The answer is simple: by using the respective clan name. These were indeed very rarely awarded as individual names, but every Munyoro and Mutooro knew his clan name. The clan name disclosed lineage and consanguinity, and served to avoid inbreeding. For a Munyoro and Mutooro it is a taboo to marry someone from the own clan or the mother´s clan. This taboo also includes distant cousins. Excluded from this taboo are only the royal families. This should enable them to maintain their "blue" blood lines. Each Munyoro and Mutooro child can be classified genealogically using the name of the father's clan. During courtship, the respective clan relationships must be disclosed at the outset to avoid a possible violation of the taboo.

Modern Names and Naming

Today, however, many Banyoro and Batooro families have broken with traditional naming and have gone after the European model to use the clan name as an identical surname for all family members. With the spread of Islam and Christianity in the late 19th century, a tradition was established, to add a Christian or Muslim name to the individual name and the Empaako. Overall, today there are four categories of names: Individual name, Empaako, clan name and religious name. Cf. the seventh table.

As regards the order in which the different names are used, there is no specification or regulation. A Munyoro or Motooro with each a personal name, a family name and a religious name can choose out of a total of six linear sequences. Some Banyoro and Batooro keep a once chosen name sequence up to the end of their life, for others the name sequence is indifferent, and they change the sequence depending on the situation.

Officially, clan elders are still responsible for the selection of individual names and the Empaako. However, parents have today a big word to say – if not the last word in actual fact.

The link of the Empaako with protective deities was eliminated by the Christian mission. Today, every family has their own criteria by which it selects the Empaako for their children. Some families choose Empaako of great heroes, close friends, or popular family members for their children.

Even immigrants, no matter where they come from, are given Empaako. In most cases, it is the general Empaako Apuuli and Abwooli, depending on the gender of the person.

EMPAAKO ETYMOLOGIES

The fourth section deals with the etymologies of individual Empaako. In a linguistic perspective, Empaako have no Bantu origin but are obvious borrowings from the Western Nilotic Lwoo languages. Empaako display three typical features of loanwords:

1. They cannot be morphologically analysed in Runyoro-Rutooro (i.e., they cannot be segmented into smaller meaningful units).
2. They have either no or only a tagged meaning assigned to them later in Runyoro-Rutooro.
3. Some of them display formal resemblances with individual names, which are found in the Nilotic Lwoo languages of Northern Uganda.

And even the word Empaako as a generic term for a group of names is clearly of

Table 7: Modern names

Individual name	Empaako	Clan name	Religious name
Bagamba	Apuuli	Ndoleliire	Paulo

Nilotic origin. It is related to the verb **paako** *to praise* as it is found today, for example, in Acholi, a Lwoo language that is spoken in Northern Uganda. It has been brought into line with the Bantu system by being integrated into the noun class that is marked with a prefix /**en-**/. This class is known by the fact that it hosts loanwords from other languages. By regressive assimilation to the labial plosive /**p**/, the alveolar nasal /**n**/ of the prefix became a labial nasal /**m**/. For completeness, it should be said that words belonging to the noun class with the prefix /**en-**/ do not formally distinguish number. Accordingly, we can use the word Empaako both in singular and plural.

The individual Empaako have no meaning for the Banyoro and Batooro, which could be unlocked by using morphological analysis. Empaako appear to have been re-interpreted semantically or given a new meaning. The labelled meanings go back to names for various gods. Probably all Empaako had earlier labelled such a meaning. Today, only four of these meanings are known. The other Empaako are provided today with no meaning for the Banyoro and Batooro. The four Empaako with labeled meanings are as follows in table eight.

Nine of the twelve Empaako of Runyoro-Rutooro have ample formal resemblances with individual names, which exist in the Nilotic Lwoo languages of Northern Uganda, such as Acholi. These Lwoo individual names have morphologically analyzable meanings in the Lwoo languages. I am now going to present the eight Empaako and their equivalents in Acholi, from which they presumably emerged.

My own morphological and etymological analyses are summarized in the ninth table but cf. also Byakutaara (1991: 131) on this.

THE USE OF EMPAAKO

Following Byakutaara (1991: 134f.) and Kakembo (2001: 22) the use of Empaako depends in principle on the social status of the individuals involved. The social status is mainly determined by age and social position of a person.

Between people of low and high social status, an Empaako is normally used in an asymmetric way. A person of low social status must address a person of high social status with an Empaako. Conversely, a person of high social status must not address a person of low social status with an Empaako, but with the personal name, the clan name or the religious name. Used in this asymmetric way, the Empaako fulfils the function of a praise name.

Table 8: Labelled meanings of four Empaako

Empaako	Labelled Meaning in Runyoro-Rutooro
Atwoki	Cat *(God in cat form)*
Akiiki	Savior of the Nations *(God of the Nations)*
Atenyi	Big Snake of the Muziizi-River *(God in snake form)*
Araali	God of Thunder

If the Empaako is used reciprocally between unequals, then this must be initiated by the person of high social status. This can occur, for example between mother and son. In this case, the Empaako is a pet name. If the Empaako used reciprocally between equals (e.g., between peers), it also indicates intimacy and the Empaako fulfils the function of a pet name.

Empaako can also be used to overcome a social distance or a communicative blockade by asking for them (if this is allowed in a given situation). Two people who know their Empaako feel connected to each other and can talk to each other more freely.

The Empaako can also be regarded as an identification mark. For this reason, the Empaako is not always revealed freely. This phenomenon is e.g., observed when a man woos a woman. If the woman is not interested in the man, she will give him a false Empaako. In this way, the woman does not have the negative feeling that she exposed her identity. At the same time, this is of course an elegant way to give the man a rebuff.

The use of Empaako follows certain basic rules that can be modified depending on the situation though. Byakutaara (1991: 135-139) explains the use of Empaako in the following selected situations.

Greeting

A: *Oraire ota Akiiki?*   How did you sleep, Akiiki?
B: *Ndaire kurungi Adyeri.*   I slept well, Adyeri.
   I*we oraire ota?*   And how did you sleep?
A: *Nanyowe ndaire kurungi.*   I slept well, too.

In Rutooro, Empaako are used in greetings, e.g., in the morning. People who know each other (family members but also village neighbours) have to use the Empaako reciprocally.

In contrast to the Batooro, the Banyoro use the Empaako only very rarely in greetings. They find it more difficult than the Batooro to reveal their identity and they reserve the Empaako for people who are already very familiar to them.

Status differences are also reflected in greetings. During the exchange of greetings, an adult is not allowed to ask for the Empaako of a child. While the child must use the correct Empaako of the adult, the adult uses the general Empaako Abwooli for girls or Apuuli for boys.

Request

A: *Abwoli ninkusaba kuntiizaaho ekitabu kyawe.*
   <u>Abwoli,</u> I kindly ask you to lend me your book.

Even with requests, Empaako play an important role. Through the use of an Empaako, a request becomes more polite, and the recipient feels more obliged to comply. If a request is not complied with, despite the use of an Empaako, it is perceived by the petitioners to be extremely unpleasant. This function of the Empaako is already perceived in childhood. So, one can often hear children say sentences like the following: "Even if you reveal your Empaako, I will not give you my toy."

Acknowledgement

A: <u>*Abwoli webale kwija.*</u> <u>Abwoli,</u> thank you that you have come.

Acknowledgements are highly valued in Runyoro-Rutooro. Whenever a person has been given something, he

Table 9: Morphology and etymology of eight Empaako

RUNYORO-RUTOORO	LWOO-ACHOLI		
Empaako	Individual name	Morphological analysis and literal translation of the individual name	Figurative meaning of the personal name
Abwoli	Abwol	a-bwol i-cheat/deceive *I cheat/deceive*	Death can overtake the baby at any time, since it is in a weak physical condition.
Atwoki	Adok	a-dok i-go back *I go back*	The mother of the newborn is threatened to be expelled and sent back to her father's house. The reasons for this can vary (e.g., poor health of the newborn or the actual or alleged extramarital natural paternity of the newborn).
Adyeri	Adyero	a-dyer-o i-leave over -[transitive] *I leave it over*	Death shall spare the newborn. The name is mainly given when a sibling has already died.
Amooti	Amot	a-mot i-greet *I greet*	The newborn greets his parents and the world. The name reflects a great joy of the parents on the birth of the child. In the case of the Anywa (another Nilotic Lwoo people living in South Sudan and the Gambela Region of Ethiopia), the name Amoot is always assigned to the first-born.
Atenyi	Atenyo	a-teny-o i-leave-[transitive] *I leave it*	Death shall spare the newborn. The name is mainly given when a sibling has already died. The name has a similar meaning like above Adyero but is derived from another verbal root.
Abboki	Abok	a-bok i-say *I say*	The mother of the newborn predicted its gender correctly.
Abbala	Abalo	a-bal-o i-waste-[transitive] *I waste it*	It is the mother of the child´s father giving the name. She wants to express that the bride price paid by her son was wasted because his wife, for example, is lazy.
Acaali	Acal	a-cal i-image *I am an image*	The newborn is the image of another person (e.g., the mother).
Okaali	Okal	o-kal NAME PREFIX-JUMP OVER *The one (who) jumped over*	A person being taken to be above the others.

or she must thank the donor and use the Empaako. Without an Empaako, an acknowledgement is considered rude and as an expression of bad upbringing. Children can be taken away a gift if they do not use the Empaako while saying thank you. With acknowledgements and thanksgivings, the use of the Empaako is usually reciprocal, although an adult can also opt not to use the Empaako of a younger person.

Reception

A: *Webaaleyo Araali*. Welcome back, Araali.
B: *Ego Adyeri*. Yes, Adyeri.

Another situation in which the Empaako is used, is the reception of a person, who has been away for an extended period of time (i.e., at least a few days). However, beneficiaries of this very warm welcome are family members or already well-known people only.

Say Good-bye

A: *Ogorobe Atenyi*. Good bye, Atenyi.
B: *Ogorobe Akiiki*. Good bye, Akiiki.

With good-byes, Empaako must be used and always reciprocally. Differences in social status are ignored in this situation.

Apology

A: *Akiiki ninkusaba onganyire.* Akiiki, I beg your pardon.

Finally, apologies and excuses can be categorized as requests in Runyoro-Rutooro because they are formulated in a similar manner. The only difference is that they always deal with a specific issue, namely the request for forgiveness. Forgiveness is granted only if the recipient uses the Empaako of the addressee.

CONCLUSION

This paper shows the special forms of address employed by the Banyoro and Batooro peoples of Western Uganda. To express intimacy and respect, special names called Empaako are uttered, conjuring a quasi-magical effect when correctly applied. The exploration looks at the etymologies, forms, and sources of these Empaako usages. The study indicates that the use of special names depends on the social status of the interlocutors. Only a speaker of low status must use the Empaako to address a person of higher status. If social status is not asymmetrical and the Empaako employed is reciprocated, the consequence achieves an increased level of intimacy and connection, thus allowing a freer interaction. Moreover, in a strategic manner, a name may not be revealed easily, or a false name may permit the pursued in a potential courtship to magically reject an undesirable wooer without the negative feeling of having to reveal true identity. In addition, this work provides support for the notion that linguistic behaviours, frequently subject to dismissal as ritual or routine, create and maintain a ground on which speakers may safely position and perceive. Design size presents the main limitation of this study. The confidence of the results could be strengthened by a larger sample that would allow a more powerful analysis. This acknowledged shortcoming could inspire future researchers to capture and measure more usages of the magic of Empaako.

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ENDNOTES

1   In addition to my own knowledge, the following sources have been consulted for this section: Crazzolara (1950, 1951), Dunbar (1965) and Hecklau (1989).

2   Also given – albeit in slightly different forms – in Byakutaaga (1991: 128), Dunbar (1965: 33) and Kakembo (2001: 22).