

## THE BEBÒT ANTHROPONYM: NAMING STAGES

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### ABSTRACT

This work briefly presents the linguistic statute of onomastic to us. It proves what must be done right from the engagement period between a boy and girl to be united to the naming day. At this stage, the young people are trained in order to protect their home. Once being together, these young people's parents are obliged to prepare them in view to obeying the social golden rules. This obedience will enable them prevent future punishments. It will also enable the young new couple, and even the old ones, have a baby to be individualized one day. However, before naming this baby, we need two name givers. The first name giver attributes a name, and the second one puts the first drinking water drop into the newborn baby's mouth. At first sight, these rites are the signs of unhappiness and happiness. For this reason, not anybody is allowed to do it.

**Keywords:** Name, pregnancy, naming day, choice, childe, respect of the forbidden.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Surname is a particular name and capital system in the society. This name first testifies of a living thing or object. Its presence motivates parents and family members to make arrangements before birthday. These arrangements consist in watching the couple right from their home to theirs. Parents and family members shall make sure that traditional laws do not destabilize young couple's home and affect fetus's life. After this conventional work, parents, always agreeing with other family members, focus on the name to be given to the future newborn, especially when it is a matter of first pregnancy. They are obliged to think over a suitable name, because neglecting name choice will make people despise the child and his/her whole family. This concept, which is not by chance, will alternately be analyzed during our study.

Concerning phonetic transcription, all the sounds appear, but average sounds are cancelled, comparing with their higher circumstances (cases).

### 1.1 The stages before naming

Name is given by a person. However, for baby to be named, the latter shall, in any circumstance, be present first. In other terms, that baby shall be born before he/she is named, and his/her birth is a logical result of pregnancy from the union between the couple members. Before this pregnancy, there are some positive and negative criteria during the engagement,

marriage and pregnancy period. Neglecting these obligatory conditions often leads to tragedy for the mother and her baby. That is the reason why parents and other family members shall watch the newborn's future parents. This watch is jointly operated as follows:

## 1.2 The period before pregnancy

The period leading to pregnancy consists in only preparing willing marriage. In fact, marriage is a legitimate union between man and woman in order to get children. Generally speaking, this concerns the couple's parents in the 'Bebòt community. These parents are in charge of choosing members of the future couple. They train them, to this effect, in tradition schools<sup>1</sup> and others to protect their home. This training varies from one clan to the other. When mature, members of the future couple shall cohabit. Their marriage shall be guaranteed through dowry payment.

Since man and woman are united, their union shall be governed by one of the laws which is dowry payment. However, before this little action (dowry payment), '*marriage proposal*', locally called *né kùwə dò*, shall be made first. As from now on, this agreeing sign honours the young married man. Dowry, which is a complex action, is paid before or after pregnancy, and not during pregnancy. If dowry is paid during pregnancy, that will make the fetus die or cause abortion. To avoid this bad situation, wife's parents shall give, in their turn, a *throwing knife* to husband's parents before they collect dowry. The *throwing knife* will be collected back after delivery in the normal time of the dowry payment. This practice is becoming obsolete in the 'Bebòt community, because the high cost of dowry forces young people to marry young girls on credit. That makes most young people live as men and women.

A young married girls shall traditionally return to her parents' house a few days after her wedding day, even though dowry is not paid. When her parents approve the marriage, the young married man shall give a chicken and a coin to his wife. That currency, formerly called *là ndùl*, is nowadays a CFA Franc and its value shall not be more than CFA F100.

When reaching her parents' or other family members' house, the young married girl secretly drops that chicken or coin on their doorstep very early in the morning for her not to be surprised. If she is seen when dropping that, the wedding shall be cancelled. This ritual practice, called *là kòw* (chicken or coin offered by the wife to her parents to augur her victorious return to them), protects the young girl's parents from tragedy. Violating the practice in the 'Bebòt community causes repeated child death or wife's sterility, because when tradition is not respected, parents do not hesitate to curse their daughters.

However, traditions are no longer respected nowadays. Young people do not wait for their parents to make decisions any more. They consider marriage to be a simple agreement which can be terminated at any time. This reason makes them not consult their parents. Young people, therefore, violate their parents' conditions by freely choosing one another for marriage. They consider those traditional laws to be bad in their community.

<sup>1</sup> *Ndò jò* and *màgi* for boys and girls at that time, and *ndò* and *bàl* for those of nowadays.

When a woman is pregnant for the first time, she shall go through difficult times.

### 1.3 The pregnancy period

During pregnancy, the young girl shall serve her parents-in-law. She is quickly tested by her parents-in-law. Her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law entrust her many works to do, despite health problems cause by her pregnancy, particularly her first pregnancy. She lives in such conditions till she delivers. Parents-in-law make her work hard to facilitate delivery, if she willingly does the works. Paul Edwin Malekou (2007) supports this point by saying: *“Physical exercises lead to easy labour and delivery.”* Apart from hard works, there are other obligations.

The woman being pregnant for the first time is exposed to danger. To prevent that danger, she ought to respect some laws before naming, as we have observed as follows:

The stages before and after naming are mainly some procedures, prenatal treatments, and especially rites to support successful pregnancy. Prenatal treatments are particularly important to guarantee the health of the pregnant woman and her baby. (Ibid).

For her pregnancy to be successful, the woman shall, for a period of time, strictly obey the laws concerning her. Those laws are related to food and morality.

Consequently, the *Bebòt* tradition has social obligations, among which are those concerning pregnancy. So, pregnant women in general, and women being pregnant for the time in particular, ought to obey those golden laws. In the daily activities of the *Bebòt*, pregnant woman *“ought to respect some laws concerning food. In fact, what pregnant woman eats also feeds her fetus [ad.]. She shall, therefore, adopt a stable food diet and choose healthy foods.”* (Ibid).

Any pregnant woman shall not consume the following foods:

- “sugar cane:” *kádi*, because the newborn will have cracks on his/her body a few days before his/her birth and contract a disease called *mõn sukar*: “diabetis”;
- vegetable called *mündürú*: “terokarpus” and non-fermented alcohol called *súwə jìw* which can cause abortion;
- *bəti* meat: “monkey” and snake meat called *mqm*: “boa”, or meat of *bàtangì*: “flying squirrel”, because the child will have a small head or the bodies of those animals. Concerning boa, the newborn will have a normal body but will die three years later. The child will not crawl, nor walk all his/her life;
- *dùl* meat: “gazelle”, because the newborn will have thin legs;
- *kinje kə* meat: “partridge” and *tum* meat: “fish” will make woman contract piles after delivering.

Talking about female animal meat, Paul Edwin Malekou (2007) wrote about it:

Forbidding consumption of female animal meat is also cultural. On the one hand, if an animal (killed through a trap, gun or dogs) has died with some children who are yet to be born and a pregnant woman eats its meat, that woman may have the same problem. She may die early and leave a newborn without his/her biological mother to take care of him/her. On the other hand, the animal may be pregnant when it was killed. Eating the meat of such an animal, the pregnant woman may deliver a dead newborn (like the animal's children found dead in that animal's belly during its cutting-up).

A *Bebòt* pregnant woman also obeys traditional laws. She shall not walk or stay outside room late in the night. According to some laws, when a pregnant woman stays outside room late in the night, she holds in her hand a cereal stem or she hangs a needle on her hair to protect herself. A woman that does not obey the laws, her child is vulnerable and often haunted by a snake called *məm rə*: "winged boa" and other bad spirits. The child will become a mental or physical disabled person like those bad spirits.

It is important to know that disobeying this practice cannot be solved at all in the *Bebòt* community. Victim children will be natural disabled people. They are called *ngo: məm*: "a child whose head resembles that of boa", *ngo: ləngi*: "puny child", *dóbój*: "big head", *məm tóka*: "stupid (very serious mental problem)," etc.

Calling pregnant woman at night also causes a problem in the *Bebòt* community. A bad spirit can also use the mother's name to reach her fetus. Consequently, pregnant woman "*shall not be called at night (nocturnal calls wake up devils), in order not to be attacked by nocturnal spirits and also affect normal development of the fetus.*" (Paul Edwin Malekou, 2007).

Considered to be a tragedy for the population, a woman being pregnant for the first time shall not come out of her hut early in the morning. For instance, a hunter can easily bewitch her, if he has not caught an animal. The unhappy hunter can cause an unwilling abortion to the woman.

Anyway, those laws excellently protect fetus' life, if a woman, being pregnant for the first time or not, respects tradition. In other words, she allows herself to be governed by traditional laws to save her child's life.

By the way, a naming person is needed to individualize the future newborn. Choosing that naming person is certain and has many meanings in the *Bebòt* community. A direct or close family member, a father or mother, is in a better position to name his/her biological baby. Despite that, tradition does allow biological parents to name their own children. They are not allowed to name their first two children, even their third ones. This disagreeable phenomenon can be stopped when a young man is married.

There is another tough traditional law in the *Bebòt* community. A man that does not pay dowry shall not name his newborn. His parents-in-law are allowed by tradition to name his children. Names given by those parents-in-law are *mádingən*, *nənàdi*, *nən máji*, *nənòtìm*, etc.

These names respectively mean ‘*I have given him to his uncles*’, ‘*the nephew has been given to me*’, ‘*the nephew is good*’, ‘*the uncle is hosting me.*’

For a child to be useful for his/her society in general, or for his/her family in particular, a sociable and humanist person is chosen to put a first water drip into his/her mouth. That means choosing a person to put the first water drip is more difficult than choosing a naming one. Being a special aspect, this choice mobilizes the whole family. Only a family member having good morals shall be chosen to put the first water drip for the child not to run serious risks. That is why the *Bebòt* always make sure children are prevented from the worst things.

Generally talking about delivery, pregnant women go through difficult periods. However, a woman being pregnant for the first time suffers the most of all. This difficulty can be observed in advance when she is about to give birth for her first time. She is surrounded, in her hut or elsewhere, by experienced and matron women to help her in her prenatal pains. Those women are only husband’s paternal aunts, wife’s mother or elder sisters. Men, other women and children, waiting to hear about the newborn, shall stay far away from the delivering place. If the delivery is delayed, the experienced women wander and ask the woman in labour to review her youth period before the next steps. She sweeps or gives sand, since she may forget some of her former boyfriends. Mentioning her former boyfriends’ names, sweeping or giving sand is a *Bebòt* term that means: *kìdà kòw*: ‘‘mentioning her failed boyfriends.’’ This rite is a saving practice for her, because forgetting one of her former male partners may kill her baby. A baby boy is too jealous and will die on the third or fourth day, but a baby girl can last one week.<sup>2</sup> In case the woman is ashamed, she may not get a child in her life. This is often heard about in the *Bebòt* community: *kòw tól gún*: ‘‘refusing or forgetting to mention failed partners has killed the child.’’ The experienced and saving women seriously keep the secret of a woman being pregnant for the first time. This secret is kept forever in order to prevent tragedy.

When a baby cries, the people waiting outside are happy and ask questions: *kó: à sé bàw ba o?* ‘‘male or female?’’ Just after being answered, they individually celebrate their joy again.

The baby is delivered and will be part of other people. He/she needs to be named at a right time. A naming system is needed to give a good name to the baby.

## 2.0 THE PROCEDURE TO CHOOSE A NAME

The procedure to choose children’s names is a common phenomenon in all the ethno-linguistic groups in the world. Choosing a name is naturally based on parents’ particular intentions. Benaouda Souhila (2016: 18) supports this point and declares: ‘‘(...) *the choice of a child name [ad.] is legally and seriously made. That child starts living when he/she was born. In other words, giving him/her a name is never by chance, since naming is very important in community.*’’ This methodical work has so many criteria as Paul Edwin Malekou (2007) mentions:

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<sup>2</sup> The girl is obliged to pity her mother, because she will be in the same situation one day.

The procedure to choose a child's name in the society (...) is based on some criteria. . This criteria generally refers to the physical or morphological marks of a newborn, events happening before and after the birthday, child's relation with his/her own family, or naming related to the function of brilliant forces. Choosing individual names includes those who are compulsory (for instance, a newborn can be given a parent's name (father or mother) that has died just after his/her birth) and those related to child's morphology, birth circumstances, etc.

The 'Bebòt naming also acts for the same reason. Before naming a child, the naming person can rely on his/her experiences. The name of each newborn results from his/her observation and that of other family members for the child to be given a suitable name that augurs his/her future. Their deep aim is that their child enjoys a better life. According to family members, neglecting the choice of their children's names will harm them, because those names will describe the children and reflect their image. So, they do not want their children's names to deceive their families and them. That will seriously be shameful for the children when their know that *"their names have bad meanings (...)"* (Rebhi Massissa and Tekrbous Nassima, 2016: 45).

In the 'Bebòt community, names are given according to observed facts like in other communities. The naming person considers name choice to be important for the relation between the society and nature. In this case, choosing a name shows the close relation between the community and natural and artificial facts. This world vision was also seen as choosing criteria included temporal, locative or situation coincidence. Those names symbolize the reality of the facts in the community. Names are first identified according to some child physical characteristics.

This practice is conditioned by the choice of a name according to circumstances experienced by parents and other family members. In fact, *"before making a decision, parents shall think over the meaning of a name to be given to their child."* (Rebhi Massissa and Tekrbous Nassima, 2016: 45) ». Since name is a priority, its choice is first guided by parents' particular intentions. In the 'Bebòt community, a surname is a strict symbol that shall be legislated. Benaouda Souahila (2016: 21) considers it to be:

(...) a designation whose meaning never changes. It always symbolizes the same object and refers to a reality, whatever an eventual community may. In other words, strict surnames correspond to a real community's primacy: even though we talk about another eventual community, a surname means an object that refers to real community.

Nowadays, it is a matter of trying to know how names are chosen to distinguish children.

A newborn shall certainly have a circumstantial name, comparing with child's morphology. Malformation of body organs is a direct cause of it. In this case, a suitable name will be

chosen by any person that is present at the delivery, without resorting to the naming person. Moreover, that name is just an insult in the 'Bebòt community, and family members do not like it too much. We will, therefore, have names such as: **Dóboj**: "big head", **Kùlò**: "cord": "slim and thin newborn", **Màm**: "boa": small head with big eyes", **Gàngi**: "thin legs", etc.

The 'Bebòt can also be delighted at their children's names. Those names represent child's beauty or father's pride. The concerned names will be **Nàsi**: "antelope": very beautiful that some hunters sometimes refuse to kill", **Wàdi**: "winged termite": this consumable insect with oily body is very beautiful", etc.

In the 'Bebòt community, names are chosen according to bad or good times during pregnancy. Names describing bad times will be **Dámèṃ**: "I'm overcoming the problem", **Kòṅgòṃ**: "I'm suffering", **Toròṃ**: "I'm tired of it", etc.

If pregnancy period is full of joy, names will be **Míngòṃàjì**: "I've received happiness", **Remàjì**: "welcome", etc.

Chosen names are sometimes identified to referents and represent all circumstances. They are very directly related to the society development. They "*form a category of specific signs, interesting through semantic, pragmatic and cognitive particularities.* (Parpală repeated by Adelina Iliescu, 2007). Names are given according to child birth circumstances. Here are those testifying that children were born on roads (going or returning) in the 'Bebòt community: **Mbájmū**: "bush head", **Rəwmba**: "journey road", **Rəwndò**: "farming road", **Rəwbura**: "fishing road", etc.

Children born under the rain will be given names such as **Ndindàngjè**: "the rain has hit us: we have been hit by a thunderclap," **Ndindóm**: "I have been hit by the rain..."

Those that were born after parents' promotion will be named **Bekàdi**: "entrusted power", **Dádimngar**: "I have been entrusted power", **Tòṃte**: "my name has come out: I have won," etc.

When a woman is in labour, and baby delays to be born, that woman is in a very critical situation and her baby's name will be **Tà gòtó**: "there is no problem", **Sàngitàm**: "he has accused me," etc.

In the 'Bebòt community, there are also short and slim children. The naming person will make choices such as **Pòròṃja**: "fire has burnt your food," **Gòti**: "short male chicken", **Mòsi**: "short horse", etc.

There are also, in the 'Bebòt community, surnames that symbolize real or unreal facts. Members of this community resort to their environment to name their children. Those names, related to analogy, are so many in the community. They will be detailed in the next points.

The 'Bebòt choose some names to defend their innocence. Those chosen names can be **Ròtá**: "that is the truth (I haven't touched it)," **Nàjitesòm**: "innocence has saved me," **Nàjirané**: "innocence has acted, innocence is victorious," **Nàjiresòm**: "innocence has brought me back," etc.

In 'Bebòt language, names relate a person's bad acts against his/her parents or family members, even real negative facts. So, chosen names will be: **Beosi**: "the village has fallen, the village is finished," **Ngarbujim**: "the head of village has killed me," **Beduu**: "lost village," **Besana**: "scattered village," etc.

Arrogant, man is proud. Chosen names can be **Másíná**: "Who am I able as?" by analogy to father's pride," **Másírané**: "I'm able to do something,"

In the 'Bebòt community, names are related to parents' or family members' activities. Referential names are given to some children based on the nature of their parents' activities. Those names are **Mbájda**: "animal heads," **Mbájndo**: "farming head," **Mbájro**: "warrior," etc.

There is also a category of surnames that are given to fictive people. When we want to keep something or talk about somebody based on his/her appearance, we use imaginary names according to the nature of the named person. Such names are not exhaustive in the spoken 'Bebòt. Chosen names will be **Górejím**: "unexpected visitor or foreigner," **Bàl**: "excessive male love maker," **Rójtá**: "unsatisfied beggar..." He is an ambling man who uses the system of: *mo à miri*, meaning: "when I see, I will finish it," etc.

In Africa, when an ancestor disappears, another one takes over from him/her. The 'Bebòt, like members of other communities, give their ancestors' names to their children in order to guarantee the lineage continuation and reincarnate those ancestors. However, this practice consists in entrusting children to their chosen ancestors for protection or wishing that they resemble the ancestors. Observing social facts is also dominant in Africa: "*(...) ancestors communicate with their descendants and positively or negatively influence on their daily life.*" (Jean Paul Tadoum, 2012: 17). We can say that choosing those honorific or commemorative names will allow the Bòt to discover their common ancestors. To illustrate this, we have **Dòwàle**, the name of a formidable warrior in Béboto. **Néálmbáj** and **Mbánjijədòtí** are names given to their descendants, **Mòsindà**, the name of the first of head of village in Doungandi, whose descendants bear the same name, etc.

The 'Bebòt also give people's important names to their children. Those names allow them to commemorate their ancestors. In some families, such names are used from generation to generation and sometimes prepared in advance: **Ngòrijò** and **Dárá**: "traditional musicians from 'Bebùngəj," **Káj Ndòkìrò**: "traditional musician from Dobiti," **Bájbur**: "Generous man ..."

The children who were born during colonization or an event in the 'Bebòt community will be cordially given important and unforgettable names. Those names are **Jirò**: "fighting hand: the useful hand for defence during the colonization," **Bàngide**: "their track," etc.



Man is naturally sociable and sometimes violates the laws that govern his society. So, to be rehabilitated or redeemed himself, he resorts to a propitiatory alliance with his environment to name his child. In such cases, names to be chosen can be **Álambátíná** "God never abandons a person," **Soliməm**: "she has appeased my heart: consolation," **Luwóra**: "may God's will be done," **Nétójdàlál**: "God is capable of everything..."

In the **Bebòt** community, children dying before their fathers' death will be named: **Gangitá**: "he has come to die," **Jòbárim**: "death has called me," **Ndùwáde**: "their former mourning place: their male successor," **Ndúwá**: "their female successor..."

Repeated death in families is thought over. A name related to this bad event is chosen. Such names are **Mokojò**: "I am suffering due to the death," **Jòndəbənəm**: "death exterminates me..."

In fact, in case several children die in a same family, some parents are obliged to choose names related to this bad circumstance to give to a boy or girl that was born after them. Those names are **Madinangi**: "I will give him/her to land," **Néləjò**: he/she is for death," **Néləjò**: "he/she is for termites," **Detál**: "she will undoubtedly join dead people," **Təlwáj**: "he has gone back again..."

### 3.0 THE NAMING PROCEDURE

General speaking, name, which is a natural passport, is used to identify an individual person, family and others. It is also used to classify and define a person for the latter to get a place in his/her society. It was observed that the time to name a child marks a second joyful ceremony in the **Bebòt** community. By the way, Paul Edwin Malekou (2007) says: "*the time to name a child is crucial for the latter not to only enter his/her social group, but also human society.*"

In the **Bebòt** community, before naming a child, a rite called *mùdì ndó*: "prenatal pain meal" shall undoubtedly be prepared first. That is quite an eating party. This friendly and circumstantial meal, for which couscous is prepared based on whole cereal flour and sticky sauce with sesame flour or white cereal bran flour, mixed with the flour powder of a tree named *nére*, or with gazelle excrement called *sólo dül*, is shared among half-brothers and sisters. In some clans, in **Békonbé** for instance, looking for bush yams takes place the day before the meal one. Only the baby's mother is allowed to eat the meal, and not men. On that day, just after the meal, the naming person will make the name, which was kept secret for a long time, known officially and children that were present at the ceremony will celebrate that name. The newborn's name was kept secret because naming or preparing a baby's birth before he/she is delivered is a risk. The mother will be victim of unwilling abortion, because "*making the name of a child known before he/she was born will weaken him/her.*" (Paul Edwin Malekou, 2007). A **Bebòt** adage says: "*ndá: ngo: là ngun à ngun ój:*" preparing the birth of the child has killed the latter."

Generally speaking, a name is given in the week which follows birth, meaning after the remaining part of the umbilical cord has fallen from the baby's navel. However, in case of twins, their names are known before their birth. The person who is present at their delivery gives them names according to the first and second child who comes out. If this birth order is

not respected, they may die. Paul Edwin Malekou (2007) also supports this viewpoint and writes: “*Twins sometimes die because they are not given names that do not suit them.*”

Name is given to a child according to his/her affiliation. Naming varies based on different filial relations. Following other children in the world, legitimate 'Bebò children are first given their fathers' or grandfather's names such as Másińá 'Beòsi (his father's name). Anyway, parents can also decide to give their wives' names to their children, or those of the paternal and maternal parents based on the chosen order.

## CONCLUSION

This study is for the various stages where pregnant women, particularly young women in their first pregnancy, shall follow. Before a child was born, those women ought to strictly obey some laws in order to successfully deliver, without negative impacts on their newborn babies. Apart from that, naming and first water dropping people are needed to stabilize children's life

Before naming, we have, however, studied the criteria related to name choice. This choice is based on child physical or morphological marks, events that precede or follow children's birth. The choice according to comparison and evocation is included. This work shows that individual names are either compulsory, or related to morphology, or other birth circumstances, etc.

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