

DOI Link: <https://doi.org/10.61586/0cWMPIU>

Vol.32, Issue.8, Part.1, August 2025, PP.13-19

## **CHILD NAMING AMONG AMANGUNI AS ILLSTRATED IN MEDIA**

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Received Feb 2025   Accepted July 2025   Published August 2025

### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines naming among amaNguni, as illustrated in media. The media considered in it include television, radio and social media. The discourse discusses traditional naming, the significance of culture in naming a child, the meaning of names in relation to the surroundings of one's life, given and inherited names, naming in the post-apartheid era, and reasons associated with names given to children. The significance of naming children is included in the introductory section of this paper. The subheadings of the article are introduction, discussion and conclusion. It should be noted that the authors of this paper are aware that the word amaNguni is abeNguni in other isiNguni languages, such as isiXhosa. In the discourse, 'amaNguni' is preferred as the discussion leans towards isiZulu, which uses it.

## INTRODUCTION

While media illustrates the naming of children in isiNguni languages and cultures, hitherto, no study has been conducted focusing on this aspect of the media. So far, Zwane (2024), on whose doctoral study this article is based, is probably the only one who has done so. Naming a child is one of the important but difficult processes parents go through. Ngubane and Thabethe (2013: 1) state that choosing personal names in African societies is a conscious decision, rather than a random process. This is the case in all African societies, including the amaNguni tribes. This is because it is believed that one follows life according to the meaning of one's name. A name alone can say a lot about an individual, mostly in African cultures. According to Mkhize and Muthuki (2019: 87), a name signifies to outsiders the individual's identity, clan origins, family dynamics as well as their destiny. It highlights one's social and historical background as well as the circumstances surrounding their birth (*Ibid*).

## DISCUSSION

Traditionally, personal names are unique and meaningful, emerging from circumstances at the time of the child's birth. Fathers and grandfathers are the name givers. The giving of a name to a child has significance within the larger family.

The above explanation highlights that one's name may contain a deeper meaning than one may imagine. In other words, naming a child can be a way of storytelling because, from the name alone, one can get the story behind it. It is for this reason that one can find a child named Nkululeko to signal that they were born during a time where the country gained its freedom. A child named Ntombizodwa to inform that all her siblings are girls; and a child named Cijimpi to signal that the child was born during times of war or that there were conflicts in the family. Mphande (2006: 104) agrees in line with the above statement when he says:

Shakespeare once asked, "What is in a name?" The answer to this age-old question depends on the particular culture from which it is framed: among many African cultures a name tells a lot about the individual that it signifies, the languages from which it is drawn, and the society that one ascribes to. A name may indicate the linguistic structure and phonological processes found in the language, the position of the name's bearer in society, and the collective history and life experiences of the people surrounding the individual.

The above statement says a lot about what goes into naming an individual. This also means that, one's name is not just a combination of letters and sounds but is a linguistic and cultural creation of a meaning surrounding one's life. Lubisi, quoted by Ngubane and Thabethe (2013: 2), categorises child naming into given and inherited one, where a given name is the one bestowed at birth whereas the inherited name is the one conferred at a later stage. Remembering during the colonization era, a child had a name given by their parents at birth and the one they got from either church or school at a later stage. The inherited name was usually a European or English name that a child was given to make it easy for the colonisers to

pronounce. This was also one of the ways to Europeanise or Anglicise Africans (Mtumane, 2000: 12). For instance, the first black president of South Africa had a given name and an inherited name. The given name being Rholihlahla, a name that was given to him at birth by his family. Nelson was his inherited name (Mandela, 1995: 1). This type of naming changed as South Africans changed from the colonial and apartheid eras and adopted the notion of decolonisation. Some parents still grant children more than one name, an English name and the one from the child's native language. As much as the child's name still has meaning, both or all the names that are given to children at birth hold meaningful explanations for their parents or families.

Post-apartheid child naming has become based on contemporary trends. One of the phenomena that was taboo during the colonial era was women naming children. Suzman (*Op cit.*) highlights that child naming was the father or grandfather's responsibility. In the current trend of human rights and women empowerment discourse, women are now allowed that responsibility of naming their children. This does not exclude the father, if he wants to name the child; hence one may find a child with two or more names that contain different meanings. For instance, a mother may give the first name, and the father give the second name or vice-versa.

Letsoela (2015: 1) argues as follows:

Naming is not just a linguistic labelling by which speakers of a language identify the entities they are referring to in the real or imaginary world. A name is not chosen arbitrarily but it is chosen based on a combination of socio-cultural factors. This is because language cannot be divorced from culture, for it is through language that speakers reflect their cultural sociolinguistic etiquette.

This is true even in the media, where child naming is shown as also having cultural meaning. For instance, in the television drama *House of Zwide*, broadcast on channel 194 of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), a character by the name Isaac renames a child who has originally been named Zobuhle, to Onalerona, try and change the identity of the child and, also, because the child is now leaving with him and has to adopt the Sesotho cultures as he belongs to the baSotho nation. For instance, in the television drama *House of Zwide*, broadcast on channel 194 of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), a character by the name Isaac renames a child who has originally been named Zobuhle, to Onalerona, try and change the identity of the child and, also, because the child is now leaving with him and has to adopt the Sesotho cultures as he belongs to the Basotho nation. Zobuhle is biologically umZulu, whose parents are Funani and Busisiwe Zwide. Isaac then steals the child after he (Isaac) has burnt the house with Busisiwe inside and later realises that Zobuhle (the child) is inside. He does not only save Zobuhle but changes her identity. This shows that a name is closely associated with one's culture and language, which then contributes to one's identity.

There are many reasons associated with names given to children. One of them is commemorative (de Klerk & Bosch, 1996: 172). This is when a child is given a name after a family member who has departed in remembrance of that member. According to Mabuza (2008: 141):

*Bekuba nomkhutshana olandelekayo njalo nje ezizweni zamaZulu uma kuqanjwa igama. Akuyona yonke imindeni ebeyenza lokhu. Kodwa bekujwayelekile ukuthi uma umntwana wokuqala kungumfana aqanjwe igama likamkhulu. Uma kuyintombazane iqanjwe elikagogo. Lokhu bekwenzelwa ukugcina isikhumbuzo sawokhokho. Uma kwenzeka ukuthi kuba nentombazane enye futhi bese iqanjwa ngegama likagogo ngasohlangothini lukamama wengane, bese kuthi uma kulandela omunye umfana bese naye aqanjwe ngegama likamkhulu kulo belu uhlangothi lukamama. Kodwa bekungesona isimbelambela.*

There was a common habit/practice among amaZulu when a child was given a name. However, not all families did this. Nevertheless, it was common that if the first child was a boy, he was named after the paternal grandfather. If it was a girl, she would be named after the grandmother. This was done to preserve the memory of the ancestors. If it happens that there is another girl, then she would be named after the maternal grandmother of the child, and if another boy follows, she would also be named after the grandfather on the mother's side. Nevertheless, this was not a necessity.)

It is important to note that the grandmother or grandfather being referred to in the above explanation is not the immediate one of the children being born, but that of a family's patriarchy. However, nowadays names of the immediate grandparents are found used in some cases. Looking at *House of Zwide*, when a character named Nkosikhona Zwide has a child with Mampho, they decide to name her after the child's grandmother Busisiwe, who is the mother of Nkosikhona Zwide. The child is born at a time when Nkosikhona is constantly having dreams about the fire that killed her mother, which makes him think about her more. Again, characters named Shaka Khoza and Mmabatho in the telenovela *The Queen* on channel 161 of Digital Satellite Television (DStv.) name their child after Shaka's father who was killed. The child is named Mziwoxolo. This shows that in television productions they also show that children can be named in remembrance of departed family members.

As much as naming a child after a departed family member is allowed in the isiZulu culture, it is important to remember that not all names can be used. For instance, there are names that a daughter-in-law (*umakoti*) is not permitted to call out, one of them being the father-in-law's name. Again, if the groom's father is Ndoda, the daughter-in-law is not allowed to call the name Ndoda, or any names or words related to it. Rather, she should substitute it with a synonym, in this case the synonym being Njeza. In the case of *The Queen*, a character named Mmabatho is not supposed to call the name Mziwoxolo as it is her father-in-law's name. This therefore means that she should not have her child as Mziwoxolo because that would mean she is disrespecting the ancestors by calling her father-in-law by his

name, but she does. This proves that the cultural rules and norms are not followed when naming the child after the child's grandfather in this telenovela.

**Social media**, as one of the media platforms, plays a big role in influencing the naming of a child. Davis (2015: 01) explains that social media can be defined as the set of interactive internet applications that facilitate collaborative or individual creation, curation and sharing of user-generated content. In other words, these are applications that people use to share and create content. The content can be of any kind and genre; it is not limited. These applications include Facebook, YouTube, Myspace and Live Journal (Davis, *Op cit.*). Social media influences people on many things as it has the power to reach millions of people, including names people give to their children. It does not only influence the names parents give to their children but also stigmatises certain names by associating them with certain behaviours and meanings that were not intended by the parents when the child was named. For instance, there have been many trends on social media, mostly Facebook, that associated the names Mbali and S'ne with drunkenness, immorality, and partying uncontrollably. When looking at what the name Mbali means it is totally different from what the media associates it with. Mbali is an isiZulu word that refers to a flower. This means that when Mbali was born, her parents saw a beautiful flower that they had been blessed with. Again, S'ne is a shortened form of different names like S'nenhlanhla, meaning we are lucky or, and S'nethemba, meaning we have hope. These names hold meaning of beautiful phenomena, but media stigmatises them into meanings that may bring shame to the name bearer. This then negatively influences the identity and perception a child will have towards their name as they grow up.

As mentioned earlier, child-naming changes with eras. There are names that do not have any cultural meaning or meaning at all. De Klerk and Bosch (1995: 79) outline that their observation revealed a growing tendency for parents to bestow names on their children because they liked the name or its sound. This suggests that there are children who have names that have no personal meaning to them or their parents, other than that the parent liked the sound of that name. In some instances, one would find that parents also do not know what the name means. A practical example is the name Amanda which is a Latin feminine gerundive name meaning worthy of love, literally meaning, "She who must be loved". There are many girls who are named Amanda by parents who do not know Latin and have no background meaning of the name, other than liking its sound. Some names are given purely at the discretion of the name-giver without reference to meaning or association and in compliance with modern tastes (Ngubane & Thabethe, 2013: 6). According to Ngubane and Thabethe (*Op cit.*), this is associated with names that have a pleasant, melodious sound.

Ngubane and Thabethe (*Op cit.*) argue that names that start with vowels have become fashionable trends since 1994, and they continue to gain momentum. Some of these names are *Aphiwe* (They have been given), *Asiphe* which in full would be *Asiphe uThixo ubomi obude* (May God grant us long life), *Abongwe* (Be thanked), *Esihle* (A beautiful (gift)), *Olwethu* (Ours), *Oluhl'uthando* (The beautiful love) and

others. Even so, social media still stigmatizes some of those names and portrays them negatively. For instance, *Enzokuhle*, meaning 'Do great things', is a name that became common as the trend of giving children names that start with vowels continued, in the era of the millenniums (2000s). As much as this name holds a beautiful meaning, on Facebook, it has become associated with children who are unruly from a very young age. This can be viewed from the cultivation theory perspective which holds the belief that prolonged exposure to certain narratives in media and societal discourse can shape people's perceptions of reality. The association of children's names like *Enzokuhle*, which gained popularity in the 2000s, with unruly behaviour likely stems from repeated narratives on platforms like Facebook or other media. Over time, such portrayals cultivate a perception that these stereotypes represent reality. As people encounter these narratives repeatedly, they begin to generalize them, believing that all children named 'Enzokuhle' are unruly.

Moreover, the name *Enzokuhle* is often used to negatively refer to all mothers who are child social grant recipients. For instance, around the dates of receiving the social grant, any woman who is seen in the mall or town wearing torn clothes or dressing in an 'unsociably appropriate' way, would be referred to as *umama ka-Enzo* (Enzo's mother). As much as this kind of dressing is not associated with social grants, it has been made to appear as if it is associated. Maybe because of the view that people receiving social grants cannot afford to dress in expensive clothes or certain fashions. This then brings shame to all ladies who have named their children *Enzo* and might later affect children's self-esteem and confidence because of their name.

As much as the name *Enzokuhle* symbolises positivity and aspiration, societal narratives have it into a symbol of unruly behaviour and poverty. The label "*umama ka-Enzo*" has become a symbolic shorthand for social grant recipients, encapsulating stereotypes about poverty and unsociable behaviour. This symbolic association not only affects how individuals named *Enzokuhle* are viewed by society but also impacts their self-identity and self-esteem, demonstrating how symbolism can shape societal dynamics.

## CONCLUSION

This article has examined the naming of children among amaNguni, as illustrated in media. The media considered in it include television and social media. Discussed are traditional naming, the significance of culture in naming a child, the meaning of names in relation to the surroundings of one's life, given and inherited names, naming in the post-apartheid era, and reasons associated with names given to children. The significance of naming children is included in the introductory section of this paper.

The findings of the paper are that naming among amaNguni is not an arbitrary practice. There are aspects of life that are considered when a name is to be bestowed to a child. Some of these aspects are the ones discussed above. Scholars of African

literature are then challenged to write studies that consider more aspects of the naming practice among amaNguni or African societies in general.

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