

The ethnopragmatics of naming children in the Mafa culture in Cameroon

Faissam Warda
The University of Garoua

Abstract

This paper discusses the major themes and implied meanings behind the names given to children in the culture of the Mafa, a community that lives in the Far-North Region of Cameroon. While naming their children, the Mafa people create a way to speak to the world. Naming is not a haphazard process, nor is it done for the pleasure of having this or that name. Giving a name to a child is a fervent commitment to bringing about a certain change in the way the world is. The present study aims to show that naming or bearing a name in the Mafa culture is performing an act. It is a form of oral literature revolving around themes such as death, suffering or illness, jealousy, joy, consolation, pride, and prayers addressed to God on specific issues. The data for the present study were collected through document analysis (exploitation of an existing checklist of names), observations, and interviews.

Keywords: Naming, Mafa culture, oral literature, anthroponyms, ethnopragmatics

1. Introduction

From the point of view of ethnopragmatics, as propounded by Goddard (2006), names are generally a reflection of the cultural identity of the community to which the name bearer belongs. Actually, ethnologically, the Mafa people in the Far-North Region of Cameroon are believed to give value to humility, honesty and hard work. Even though this may not stand without exception among them, a semantic and ethnopragmatic analysis of most of their names reveals their worldview. From the name of the ethnic group, Mafa /məfa'a/¹, a contraction of

¹ The justification for repeating the sound (like the /a/ in this case) in transcribing Mafa names is that these generally correspond to multi-word utterances. For instance, the name *Wandala* corresponds to a three-word utterance, namely *Wa-ndala-a*, to be translated, word for word, as 'you shut it', to mean 'shut up!'. Thus, to reflect this semantic compositionality, the phonetic transcription of the name should be /wandala'a/, with the first /a/ (before the diacritic ') representing the final <a> letter of *ndala*, and the second /a/ representing the final <a> in the name. This practice will be used throughout this paper for other names as well. Thus, the name *Awayè*, corresponding to the sequence *a-*

the sentence *ma n'fa'a*, which literally means 'the word is given' (for 'I respect my words' or 'I keep my promise' or 'I promise'), one can grasp the commonly shared philosophy of the people. It is a commissive act. If one happens to have a negotiation on anything with a Mafa person, one of the most commonly used phrases to assure you that they will keep their word is *ma n'fa'a* ('the word is given'), especially when Mafa is the language of communication. This commissive act has become an oath to take the word itself as witness. In the past, it was considered that the first witness of a Mafa was their word, the essential tool of connection to God, and the second was God (as they almost always say *sey Zhiklè* to mean 'God takes control'), embodied in the word. By mere coincidence, the Mafa ideology concerning nature and God is not far from what is depicted in the Holy Bible "[...] the Word was God" (John 1: 1). From observation, not in the biblical sense, the word is like a god who deserves all respect in the Mafa mindset. Before being a proper name to a person, however, an anthroponym is a (lexical) word (or even a phrase or a sentence). A (lexical) word is any unit of language with specific meaning. All (lexical) words have meaning. A name is a (lexical) word and thus has meaning. This syllogistical claim goes against the idea of some scholars including Mill (1875) who propose that proper names are void of meaning. The Mafa culture in general is a contradiction to this stance because, except when a child is named after another person (names given for specific purposes such as paying tribute to a friend or a grandparent), names almost always carry a message (implicated in the utterance that constitutes the name). This goes in the same line with Olatunji et al.'s (2015) claim that "in Africa, personal names play a significant role in virtually all aspects of human life. Among African people, it is conceived that the name an individual bears can exert enormous influence on their general lifestyle and life prospects" (p. 72).

Names are a part of what makes people unique (Norris 2017). This uniqueness is not always limited to individuals. It can be extended to families, societies, clans, tribes and ethnic groups. As the first element of identification, people can

way-yè ('he loves me'), will be transcribed with a double /j/, like this: /awajjɛ/. As for the diacritic (') in /wandala'a/, it will be used to indicate stress in names. But this should be construed as sentence stress, not word stress, since the latter does not exist in the Mafa language.

generally be recognised as from this or that origin in Africa through their names. The latter are units that showcase more of an identity trait than linguistic meaning and have specific meanings according to their origins. They give information about many aspects of the baby's family. In some communities, such as the Mafa of Cameroon, names give information about the bearer of the name or about their family. However, in the Gizey community living in Northern Cameroon, they exclusively give variable information on the giver(s), not on the bearer (Ajello 2011).

The present paper aims to investigate the major themes that are addressed in Mafa names and their pragmatic or implicated meanings. Thus, it attempts to answer the following questions: (1) What are the major themes that feature in Mafa names? (2) Under which circumstances are names (related to this or that theme) given to a child in the Mafa culture? (3) What are the social and interactional implications or implicatures of each of the themes addressed in Mafa names? As such, the speech act theory developed by Austin (1962), further deepened by Searle (1969), is applicable as a pragmatic basis to the analysis. This pragmatic theory is relevant because, in the Mafa culture, a name is a word, phrase or sentence (locutionary act) which conveys a message (illocutionary act) that influences the external world, including the name bearer and/or the name giver and/or the society in which the child is born (perlocutionary act).

Naming and investigating names are as old as mankind. The first manifestations of onomastics can be found in myths, legends of ethnogenesis and works of literature as old as the creation of the world. With reference to the Old Testament (the Judeo-Christian script), God himself is the father of name giving; when He creates, He names: "And God called the firmament Heaven (Genesis 1:8); "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all the living (Genesis 3: 2)". From that period on, names have meanings and specific origins. For instance, *Eve* means 'the mother of all the living'. This justifies the existence of the etymology of names, one of the oldest branches of onomastics in scholarly studies.

Studies started flourishing a decade ago or so in Africa, a continent where names are very meaningful. Besides, names are given according to birth circumstances and following varied types of rites. In some societies in Africa,

among the Akan of Ghana, for instance, children are named after the days on which they are born. This is to honour the divinity of the day of birth, since each day of the week has its own divinity, and the future and the life of the child depend on whether the deity is well honoured or not (Olatunji et al. 2015). In naming a child, divinity is called upon in different ways in African cultures. While the Zulu people from South Africa name infants before their birth and organise some sacrifice to thank their gods for the pregnancy, among the Edo of Nigeria, ancestral spirits are invoked for blessings during the naming ceremony after the child's birth (Olatunji et al. 2015). The current study is based on the view that

proper names are not only linguistic signs - they are also social constructs, often strongly ideologized, entering into numerous text and discourse relations, forming both formal and semantic-connotational, or metaphorical-metonymic series, playing in many cases a key role in (re)constructing social reality (Rutkowski & Skowronek 2019: 49).

In other words, naming is at the same time a social, rhetorical, cultural, ideological and philosophical act that the name giver operates (Minkailou & Abdoulaye 2020). This is not far from what other scholars (Haviland et al. 2013) claim, that naming is marking the point of social transition of the child from the state of nature to the state of culture (Mensah & Rowan 2019), because names as identity markers are the first traits of culture a child bears. In addition to all this, Włoskiewicz (2018) claims that by giving a name to a baby, one may express emotions towards the named person, manifest claims or opinions, or try to convince somebody to take a specific action. Thus, "proper names do have their pragmatics as well" (Włoskiewicz 2018: 1).

With regard to Mafa names, according to Faissam Warda (unpublished manuscript, p. 12), names in Mafa are morphologically indicated for gender and thus depict the ideology and the philosophy of the people. In this respect, through names, the place of a woman in the Mafa society is portrayed and (ethno)pragmatically spelt out. Besides, in the introduction to the "Dictionary of Mafa Names", Yaoudam (unpublished manuscript, p. 6) states that Mafa names are full of hidden meanings (implicatures) that need ethnopragmatic knowledge in order to be decoded. To the best of the present author's knowledge, no

publications exist yet on Mafa names, which differ from other ethnic groups' names in many aspects, including the naming circumstances and the meanings of names and themes addressed in names. However, two unpublished manuscripts already exist about the topic: Yaoudam's and Faissam Warda's.

2. Methodology

Data for the current research are common family names of the Mafa people. Some of the data for the current investigation were collected through a checklist of names elicited in Mokolo, a native area of the Mafa people in the Far-North Region of Cameroon. The list of names collected in that area was backed up with documentation (the repertoire of Mafa names taken from Yaoudam's unpublished manuscript, interviews and observation. The Mafa people are found in almost all the regions of Cameroon (except in the West, the South-West, North-West and the South regions, where they are very few in number). They are also found in Borno and Adamawa states in Nigeria. However, data for the current study were obtained only from the Mokolo area (Cameroon) because most of the villages in Mokolo (among which Gouzda, Koza, Soulede, Modoko, and Ziver) are monolingual (speaking only the Mafa language, except in schools or some other public institutions where literate people may use French).

Seventy people (45 male and 25 female respondents) were interviewed on the meaning of their own names and those they have given to their children or relatives. Unstructured interviews were used. They were used to validate the meanings of names we gathered through observation. The collected data are both qualitative (data elicited mainly from interviews and observation) and quantitative (data elicited from a pre-existing list of Mafa names).

Yaoudam's checklist of Mafa proper names serves as an instrument to broaden the list we have made. Yaoudam's work provides a list of 400 root names and their derived² names with their meanings. This helped us access some rare names and their meanings to make our data more reliable. A total of 240 Mafa names were specifically selected and classified according to the lexical field in which

² Some Mafa names are derived from other existing names. For instance, the names *Nguiziye*, *Nguizaye*, *Nguezana* and *Nguizbay*, are derived from the name *Ngəzyè*.

they fall. Names like *Mtsai* (death), *Dzavi* (grave), *Moutsina* (died), for instance, are classified under the lexical field of death. Lexical fields correspond to the themes under which the meanings of the different names are discussed in the next section.

3. The themes and related implicatures underlying the Mafa names

The major themes addressed in Mafa names observed in this study are death, pain, joy, rejection, prayer, love, doubt, pride and hope. They are summarised in Table 1 below. The meanings and implicatures of the names related to each theme are discussed after the table.

Table 1. Relative weight of the recurrent themes in the Mafa names

		Frequency of occurrence	
	Theme		%
1.	Pain	35	14.6
2.	Prayer	31	12.9
3.	Rejection	30	12.5
4.	Pride	30	12.5
5.	Death	22	9.2
6.	Doubt	20	8.3
7.	Joy	18	7.5
8.	Love	16	6.7
9.	Hope	12	5
10.	Others	26	10.8
Total		240	100

3.1 Pain-related names and the motivation behind them

As the Mafa people say, pain that is verbalised is half cured. The Mafa people start healing an incurable disease by calling the illness by its name. Pain, in the context of the current study, involves suffering and illnesses (diseases). The most frequent names addressing pain in Mafa appear in Table 2.

Table 2. The most frequent pain-related names in Mafa culture

Name	Phonetic transcription	Meaning
Matakon	/mætækwæn/	Disease/suffering
Bènè	/bɛnɛ/	Suffering
Doukona	/dʊkwana/	Make him suffer
Diamai	/dɛjɛmaj/	Cause starvation
Bava	/bavæ/	Difficulty
Gayè	/gajɛ/	I suffered
Belè	/bɛlɛ/	Slave/slavery

Pain-related names (names that denote suffering, illnesses or hard times/famine) are generally given circumstantially. These names indicate that during the pregnancy period, the family in general or the mother/father of the child in particular was going through difficulties. The birth of the child thus marks the end of the pain, or at least, the parents proclaim the end of the pain in their lives by giving the child the name of that pain. In this vein, *Matakon* /mætækwæn/, for instance, meaning ‘disease’, implies that the family has suffered a lot from a disease and is declaring its end. A general observation shows that those named *Matakon* hardly fall sick, illustrating the power of words in a name. Therefore, the main intention behind pain-related names is to discard any pain in the family. However, the name ‘*Matakon*’ (or any other pain-related name) can be given to people just as a name of kinship to pay tribute to a friend or a grandparent. In this case, *Matakon* cannot be expected not to fall sick because it does not actually mark a painful period, but is a tribute paid to the person after whom the child is named.

It is believed in some African cultures that names are more spiritual than mere labelling. “There is [a] strong connection between a name and the significant values and virtues associated with it” (Oladipupo 2014: 71). That’s why the Mafa people give names to children with an expectation of some supernatural effects, like healing or not falling sick throughout the lifespan. Names, which are locutionary acts that embed illocutionary acts, are expected to result in observable perlocutionary effects on the name bearer or the family of the name bearer or even the whole society in Mafa communities.

3.2 Death-related names and relevant implicatures

Death is one of the most addressed issues in naming in the Mafa culture. Naming after death aims at making the child not die at an early age, like the other children who preceded him/her and who died prematurely. Some common death-related names are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. A sample of death-related names in Mafa culture

Name	Phonetic transcription	Meaning
Ridassa	/rəda'asa/	Bury it there
Guidzavi	/gijdzavi/	Grave
Kaladzavi	/kalæadzavi/	Passed away
Vishè	/vəʃɛ'ɛ/	Fill the grave in
Mamtsai	/mæmtsaj/	Death
Baldena	/bazlna/	All of them died
Guidaidi	/gədajədiy/	Show me first

In some African societies, one way of expressing gratitude to a friend or of establishing friendship is to name a child in the family after that person. In the same vein, the Tupuri³ people say that “a devil never kills another devil”. To “keep death at bay”, similarly to what obtains in many other African cultures, like in the Shona community (Makondo 2007), the Mafa people give death-related names to their children. Naming a child *Mamtsai* (death), for instance, symbolises putting an end to the actions of ‘death’⁴ in the family in general and in the life of the child in particular. As implicature, one cannot expect *Mamtsai* to die young because he is death itself. The expectation is that if the real death were to come for *Mamtsai*, it would realise that he was its namesake and, thus, would refrain from taking him. In naming through death and pain, Mafa people are figurative in their language. Antiphrasis (*death* to mean *long life* for example) is the most used figure of speech in this family of names.

³ An ethnic group dominantly living in Yagoua in the Far-North Region of Cameroon.

⁴ This is the spirit that takes people from the world of life to the world of death, according to the philosophy of the Mafa people. Death, in that culture, is a polysemic word which means: the act of dying, the state of being dead, the spirit that takes people from life to death.

3.3 Joy-related names and attached meanings

Joy is the most important thing to share (once one has the possibility) in both peaceful and warring societies. While it is just a ritualistic common sharing in peaceful societies, joy (once it is found) is a golden treasure to share in warring societies. As names are considered as means of acting upon the world, communicating joy onto the world, for such a peace-making people as the Mafa, is one of the aims to be attained.

Table 4. A sample of joy-expressing names in Mafa

Name	Phonetic transcription	Meaning
Nwufdiyè	/ɲwufdjɛ/	I enjoy it
Nwuffè	/ɲwufɛ/	Joy
Biwalai	/biwalaj/	Joker
Gatsediyè	/gætsədjɛ/	Make me dance
Demlalao	/dəmlalaw/	Daughter of shout (of joy)

As the meanings of the names in the table above indicate, giving joy-related names consists in either proclaiming joy (*Nwuffè*) upon the world (the neighbours), expressing one's personal, or family's joy (*Nwufdiyè* or *Gatsediyè*), or proclaiming (as a blessing) that this child shall be a joy carrier to the world (*Demlalao* or *Biwalai*). This category of names is related, in one way, to the prayer names in the sense that it expresses the wishes of joy that can only be fulfilled through divine intervention. These types of names are utterances that reveal the name-givers' attitude, emotions and feelings: they are expressive speech acts that convey the giving out of joy.

3.4 Pride-expressing names and embedded messages

In many societies, some people wish to impose a certain way of doing or change social behaviour, but they cannot do so because they do not have the required power. This may be because of a lack of social, political and/or physical power. The Mafa people have a long-lasting remedy to such situations: speaking with power through names to show off. This is an indirect manifestation of pride: implicated pride.

Table 5. A sample of pride-expressing names in Mafa culture

Name	Phonetic transcription	Meaning
Wandala	/wandala'a/	Stop! I'm the one
Golimè	/gwalimè /	Can you dare me?/Try!
Gaywi	/gajəwi/	Brag on!
Biywi	/biwi/	Boaster
Dangalva	/dangalva/	Show off!

A child is wealth. Having a child is a sign of being blessed by God in Africa in general and in the Mafa community in particular. A couple that has not had a child after five years of marriage or more is considered an outcast and a cursed one, and thus suffers belittlements in society. Pride names are mostly revenge names after some threats, discriminations, slanders, despise, etc. that a family might have suffered due to childlessness. In this respect, most of the pride-related names act as silencers (*Wandala*) which order the slanderers to shut up, and as authority displayers (*Golimè*, *Gaywi*) which enable the family to impose on others without indexing them directly. The names that fall under this category are generally directive acts (requests, orders, commands, etc.).

3.5 Rejection-expressing names

Rejection expressed in names in the Mafa community is another form of pride. Rejection names are used as an antiphrasis to show timid acceptance of the child. A literal interpretation of rejection names in Mafa sounds like saying the following to God: “since you did not want to give us a child [early enough], but finally have decided to give it to us now [so late], you had better take him/her back, or we reject it”. Through these names, parents are figuratively expressing a great joy after the divine gift that is second to none in their lives. In addition, one of the most recurrent ways of boasting about a precious thing in the Mafa traditional community is to shout out to the world: “If someone wants this thing, let them come and collect, or else I will throw it away”. It is worth noting that, in yesteryears, boasting was not considered a flaw in the Mafa community. If you have something precious to the sight of the community, you show it off, and no one could blame you. It was rather a technique to make people have a finger in

the pie to endeavour to get the same thing or more of it; in other words, that was a call for competition. This is, however, expressed figuratively in most cases so that the addressor may not sound impolite in conveying the message. Some illustrative rejection names are given in Table 6.

Table 6. A sample of rejection-expressing names in Mafa culture

Name	Phonetic transcription	Meaning
Kaldaoussa	/kazla'ausa/	Throw him away
Ngaibai	/'ŋajəbaɪ/	I do not like him
Nganawa	/'ŋanawa/	Who likes her? (I'll offer)
Kaldana	/kazlana/	Leave him
Vambala	/vambala'a/	Chase her

It is said, in the Mafa community, that it is not worth screaming a “welcome!” to someone you are happy to see. The ordinary sayings in such instances are “what brought you here?” (to someone very familiar: indirect positive politeness welcoming strategy) and “haven’t you missed your destination?” (to a non-familiar person: an indirect negative politeness welcoming strategy). These expressive speech acts are heartfelt welcoming strategies in the Mafa culture. In fact, according to the Mafa people, we do not have to say what is obvious. Nature itself will communicate the message to the person. In the same vein, newborn babies should not be greeted with shouts of “you are welcome!” They may sulk and go back (die). Therefore, to make someone stay, it is often more effective to tell them to go. The Mafa people thus believe that it is better to give children rejection names to make them dwell and feel warmly welcomed in the family.

3.6 Prayer-expressing names

Praying is a way of communicating with God. There are two main directions of prayer: the perfective direction and the non-perfective or futuristic direction. Prayers of the perfective direction are prayers addressed to God on what He has already accomplished in the life of the person who prays. They are generally prayers of thanksgiving. As far as prayers of futuristic direction are concerned, they are addressed to God to make Him make something happen or change the

course of a certain event in the future. Both directions of prayers are captured in Mafa names, though the prayers related to the futuristic direction are more recurrent.

Table 7. A sample of prayer-related names in Mafa culture

Name	Phonetic transcription	Meaning
Vaidam	/vajədam/	I plead for a female baby
Gayando	/gajəndo/	Let my child be a man
Yawa	/jawæ/	Thanks
Dehenma	/de'enma/	Give me a child of the other sex
Chèneguèd	/ʃenəɡəd/	He be the last
Takahayè	/takahæjɛ/	I plead for your help

Prayer, as a communication with God, is an activity that has to be carried out on a daily basis: “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is true that this belongs to Christianity, not to the Mafa tradition, but their practices are similar to the biblical recommendations. As from the culture per se, before the advent of Christianity, prayer was not said on a daily basis in any manifest way. However, mindful of the fact that if there is a topic to address to God, it is better done incessantly, the Mafa people have decided to frame their prayer topics in names. As such, they call this prayer-embedded name at least three times a day, thereby speaking (praying) to their God continually.

3.7 Love-related names

Love is a symbol of interaction between two or three parties (people). In name-giving instances in the Mafa community, communication of love may be horizontal (between the mother and the father of the child or between the child and the parents) and/or vertical (between God and the parents). The vertical communication of love can be a form of perfective direction prayer (an indirect way of thanking God for his love) or a simple expression or description of godly love. Some love-embedding names are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. A sample of love-related names in Mafa culture

Name	Phonetic transcription	Meaning
Awaya	/awaja'a/	He/she loves him/her
Awaye	/awajjɛ/	He loves me
Awayinga	/awajɛŋga/	He loves us
Daïvagäi	/dajɛvagaj/	Let us get inside (for love-making)
Djinahaye	/dzinnahajɛ/	I find it tasty
Waye	/wajjɛ/	Love me

Names related to love do not generally have any implied meanings other than love in all its senses. It is the mere expression of romance between husband and wife or divine love as explained above. However, in some rare circumstances, love names may be given to a child as an indirect way of rebuking the society members who have been murmuring and considering the parents as rejected by God. The implicature in such names generally conveys the following message: “You, society, may think that God has abandoned me. But you are mistaken: Awaye (‘He loves me’)”.

3.8 Doubt-related names

Because of many things that might have happened, a man may lose confidence in his wife or develop scepticism towards God in answering his prayers⁵. Doubt, in this context, may simply express ordinary uncertainty regarding the sex of the baby to be born. In this case, the baby is welcome regardless of whether it is male or female. Some doubt-expressing names in the Mafa culture are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. A sample of doubt-expressing names in Mafa culture

Name	Phonetic transcription	Meaning
Ayime	/ajimɛ/	What is she giving birth to?
Bahanwa	/bahanəwa/	What name should I give him?

⁵ This is a heartfelt wish (not a prayer for communicating with God in words) or a wish expressed through words, followed by sacrifices.

Guedaïme	/gəddajəmə/	What do I see?
Deguime	/dəgimə/	What comes this time around?
Goyaha	/gwajaha/	I doubt (the fatherhood)
Bazama	/bazaama/	How can I get there?

Doubting is part of rational thinking. From all the other themes addressed in this paper, it can be inferred that the thematic analysis of names displays the philosophy (the way of thinking and interacting with the world) of the Mafa people. As Descartes pointed out, the very existence of philosophy presupposes the theme of doubt. Most names that express doubt are (rhetorical) questions. These names are generally given by the father to express his reflection (before birth) about the child's sex (*Ayime*), about the fatherhood or faithfulness of the wife (*Goyaha*), or his wondering about the miraculous conception of the child (*Guedaïme*). The latter expresses two associated illocutions (two embedded expressive speech acts): an implicated thanksgiving to God and a joyful expression of surprise.

3.9 Hope-related names

From the view of the ideology expressed through names, the Mafa people do not give room to despair in their philosophy of life. If life is pulling you down into despair, the arrival of a child in the family is a sign of hope. Let us observe some hope-related names in Table 10.

Table 10. A sample of hope-expressing names in Mafa culture

Name	Phonetic transcription	Meaning
Fiyahad	/fəjeahad/	(he who) takes care of me
Dagalak	/dagalak/	Help me collect vegetables
Godokwam	/gwadakwom/	Rock (strength)
Danayam	/danajam/	(She will) help fetch water
Damandaï	/damandaj/	(She will) help fetch hay
Diana	/dəjeama/	Propel me

Hope-related names indicate that when a mother or a father feels helpless, the birth announces the arrival of a future helper in farm work or house chores (*Dagalak*, *Damandai*). If the family is weak in battle or in defending itself against any attack, the birth of a child can be proclaimed to be a shield and defender (*Godokwam*), thus bringing hope with it. Besides, in situations of setbacks, a new take-off (*Diama*) can be proclaimed. Declaring hope through names is a matter of faith: the Mafa people believe in the power of proclamation to change their lives.

4 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore major themes and implicated meanings in Mafa names and to show that naming in Mafa culture is not carried out just for the sake of giving names. Giving a name, according to the philosophy of the Mafa people, is rather a fervent commitment to bringing about a certain change in their world. The findings show that naming in that culture is a form of oral literature that revolves around themes such as death, suffering (illnesses, famine, social interpersonal problems, etc.), joy, pride and hope. In some other cases, the Mafa address prayers to God on specific issues through their names or through the names of their children. Mafa names are speech acts that have implicatures that should be interpreted according to the circumstances of birth and the history of what the family had been going through before the birth. Thus, death-related names generally imply life, rejection-related names imply acceptance, and pain-related names imply relief, etc.

Additionally, as per the findings of the current research, there is power behind the names that people bear in the Mafa community. It may sound problematic if there is no adequacy between a person's behaviour, morality or appearance and his or her name. If a person called *Faissam* /fajəsam/, meaning 'take care of me', happens to be not caring about his family, or happens to be the person to be taken care of, there is something wrong somewhere. The child might have done something terrible, such as disobedience, causing the blessing of being able to care for others to depart from him. This is similar to the bible-related Christian belief that if a child of God sins, the Holy Spirit will depart from him. In Mafa traditional society, a mismatch between a person's name and their personality is

unlikely to occur. This is so because having a name in the Mafa culture is a result of a painstaking exercise that requires parents to think seriously about how to convey their own contribution to bringing about positive change in the world through names.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Below are the questions put to respondents during the interview.

1. Greetings. I am Faissam Warda. What is your name?
2. What are the names of your children, if you have any?
3. What does your name mean?
4. What do the names of your children mean?
5. Why were you given this name?
6. Why did you choose to give these names to your children?

Author's email address: wardafaissam95@gmail.com