Changing Names
in the "New" South Africa:
A Diachronic Survey

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A study of name changes in South Africa in 1997 (de Klerk 2000b) found that socio-cultural factors were foremost among the reasons why people had changed their names, and there was also a trend in favor of English names generally and most particularly among speakers of African languages. This article reports on a comparative survey of first name changes in South Africa over two 3-month periods, the first in 1997 and the second in 2000. It is once again notable (and surprising) that there is a marked increase in the number of African-language speakers who have favored English in changing their names, by adding an English name, by deleting an African name, or by reversing the order of their names so that an English name comes first. This is remarkable in light of concerted national efforts to encourage the African Renaissance as an overt symbolic resistance to former white cultural oppression.

Introduction

Personal names provide particularly informative insights into socio-cultural practices and values and this is particularly the case in Africa, where names are meaning-bearing as well as referential. This point has been made repeatedly over the years in reports on the many ways in which names reflect values, traditions, hopes, fears, and events in people's lives, e.g., Koopman (1987); Sumbwa (1997); Herbert and Bogatsu (1990); Suzman (1994), de Klerk and Bosch (1995; 1996); Moyo (1996); Thipa (1986). With few qualifications, it can generally be claimed that for Africans a traditional African name carries religious or personal significance.

While most South Africans of English background see personal names as primarily a system of reference, with names having no logical

links to the people to whom they refer (de Klerk and Bosch 1995), African cultures assign names in a less arbitrary fashion, retaining a strong emphasis on the meanings of the names (Herbert 1990, 3; Nsimbi 1950; Beattie 1957; Alford 1987; Herbert 1993; 1996). Thus, African names provide information, albeit sometimes obtusely, about their bearers and sometimes their givers, or the socio-political circumstances at the time of naming. Meanings relate variously to linguistic, cultural, and religious conventions. As Sumbwa puts it in his study of naming among the Barotse, "names are not only meaningful but purposeful. The purpose of a name dictates its choice for a particular individual" (1997, 51).

The Rise of National Consciousness: the African Renaissance

The pattern of an African first name, an English middle name, and a surname has long been noted in southern Africa and has been fairly persistent in surveys of African naming practices (Herbert n.d; 1996). This is a direct consequence of the influence and domination of English colonizers with whom Africans came into contact. In some instances early white "masters" gave their slaves or servants English names as a matter of phonological convenience (and sometimes arbitrarily changed them) (Jenkins 1994, 38). In other cases the use of English names was undoubtedly a simple matter of convenience or habit.

Another significant source of English names for Africans was conversion to Christianity, when many newly "colonized" inhabitants took English names as a symbol of Christian conversion. Others have reported that they assumed English names in order to enhance employment opportunities and to symbolize educational achievement and a western outlook. There is also an indication that such names were sometimes chosen for their reconciliatory effect (Neethling 1988).

However, according to Thipa (1986, 287) and Herbert (1996), the rise of a Black consciousness movement and African nationalism in South Africa resulted in a reversal of this trend, with renewed emphasis on and pride in African names, often marked by a rise in political naming after great African leaders and heroes. Given the long and tortured history of resistance of black South Africans to cultural domination by white South Africans, it is hardly surprising that names have come to carry a great deal of symbolic value. Research in the

1980s reported a trend toward outright rejection of English names owing to increasing socio-cultural awareness (Dickens 1985; Thipa 1986, 287; Neethling 1988, 235) and the urge to shake off signs of political domination. One would expect an increase in this trend after 1994, which marked the end of apartheid and saw the election of Nelson Mandela as president of South Africa. Another factor leading to the expectation of a trend to take on African names is the strong national effort, led by President Thabo Mbeki and the African National Congress (ANC), to renew pride and rally support for the concept of the African Renaissance, implying a rebirth and reaffirmation of the value of all things African.

While studies by Neethling (1988) and de Klerk and Bosch (1995) do not unequivocally confirm this expectation, it was nevertheless likely that in subsequent years this trend would increase. In their survey of naming in the Eastern Cape, de Klerk and Bosch (1996) found evidence of such a trend in naming patterns in urban areas, where the majority (57.5%) had no English name, while rural areas lagged far behind (72.4% of all rural informants had given English names to their children). It would therefore seem that increasing political awareness in urban areas was having a direct effect on the use of English in the naming of children.

In addition, political leaders from all parts of the country served as examples and replaced their English names with African names. Archbishop Winston Ndungane is now known as Njongonkulu; Sam Shilowa of COSATU, the Council of South African Trade Unions, is now Mbhazima Shilowa; Marks Maponyana, a famous soccer player, has become Mafa Maponyana. The Minister of Defense has changed from Patrick Lekota to Mosioua Lekota. But other national leaders have not followed suit; most notably, Nelson Mandela remains Nelson and Desmond Tutu remains Desmond.

Against this background, and despite the trend toward Africanization of names, it was still somewhat surprising that name changes in 1997 (de Klerk 2000b) revealed a shift in favor of English, evident in all groups but most prevalent in the African language group where just under 32% demonstrated an explicit preference for English, either by placing an English name first, by adding an English name, or by replacing an African name with an English name. By comparison, 24%

of all African language speakers who changed their names over that period favored African languages in their name changes. The present study aimed to ascertain whether this trend continued in 2000.

The Role of English in South Africa

More than five years have passed since the declaration of South Africa's 11-language policy in 1995, and despite strongly worded legislation, and the establishment of several authoritative bodies charged with monitoring the implementation of the policy, there seems to be little evidence of any significant changes in actual language use in most public domains, where English still seems to be the predominant language (de Klerk and Barkhuizen 2002). In reality state language policies actually run counter to the South African people's strong positive attitudes towards, and preference for English (Kamwangamalu 1998; Bowerman 2000; Dyers 2000) and their lukewarm support for indigenous South African languages (Mawasha 1996).

Despite *de jure* linguistic parity, *de facto* parity has not been attained and there is increasing evidence, ironically, that English is growing in its tendency to monopolize many areas of public administration in South Africa, and in many other multilingual contexts such as business, schools, university campuses, military camps, and prisons (de Klerk 2000a; de Klerk and Barkhuizen 1998; 2001). Thus "little has changed in five years since the end of the apartheid era" (Bowerman 2000, 30), with English usage actually increasing in parliamentary debates (where speakers of indigenous languages outnumber mother tongue speakers of English [Pandor 1995, 75]), in government publications, and on all educational levels as well as in the media. In contrast, despite the explicit intention to implement functional re-allocation to substantive domains for previously marginalized languages, and despite legislation and strenuous efforts by PANSALB, the Pan South African Language Board, which has established lexicographical units and language bodies for each official language, there is persistent functional deficiency and low levels of development for indigenous languages in terms of corpus, status, and prestige in education, commerce, science, and technology (Bowerman 2000). With minimal changes in the public profile of indigenous languages, except for minor increases in parliamentary speeches, government publications and signage, and on TV

(Bowerman 2000, 63; cf. Kamwangamalu 1998, 284), speakers increasingly demand access to English.

Although English is the first language of only 8.6% of South Africans (Population Census 1996, 11), it is entrenched in a dominant position because of its highly favorable economic, social, and historical status. Given this linguistic context in South Africa, it is reasonable to expect the favorable status of English to have an effect on the first name choices of its people.

Administrative Requirements for Changing Names

Upon reaching the age of 16 South Africans are legally entitled to change their given name. Because there are a number of administrative steps which must be taken, name changes are unlikely to take place on the basis of a mere whim. In order to change a name, a person must first pay a fee of R30 (although only about $2.80 US, this is a hardship for many; a large number of South Africans are either unemployed or earn less than R600 per month), and to submit a form in duplicate to the Home Affairs office. Name changes are generally *pro forma* and petitions are denied only in highly unusual circumstances. The name change becomes official when it is published in the monthly South African Government Gazette, which lists all forename alternations registered by the Department of Home Affairs. Such name changes are made in terms of Section 24 of the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1992 (Act No. 51 of 1992), where for each petition it is stated that "the Director General has, in respect of the following persons, approved the alteration of their forenames."

The Gazette entry provides the full name (including surname) of the name changers, as well as their identity numbers and addresses. It also stipulates their new name(s). It does not provide information regarding the gender or linguistic background of those who have changed their names, although this is generally evident from the surnames and forenames.

In addition to having the name change published, one would then have to apply for a new identity document, which has further cost implications, and would involve further delays. Last, but not least, there are social consequences to changing one's name, since one has to devote considerable time and energy to ensuring that one's family, friends and

acquaintances are informed of the change, and become accustomed to suppressing old habits and using one's new name. But despite the money, time, and effort involved, a large number of people (about 400 per month in the 1997 sample and about 700 per month in the 2000 sample) do change their given names, which suggests that they are sufficiently strongly motivated to take up the administrative and social challenges involved.

Methodology

The South African Government Gazettes for the period January through March 1997 provided 1177 records, which included prior and changed names, and ID numbers (which provided dates of birth). A further 2064 records were obtained for the period January through March 2000. Each set of records reflected all of the official name changes made during the specified 3-month periods. In most cases a broad classification of linguistic background was evident from the names, and four main categories of language background were selected for analysis: English/Afrikaans (these two languages were grouped together in view of the highly ambiguous status of many names, which are shared by speakers of both languages), African languages, Arabic and Indian languages, and "Other," a portmanteau category for all other languages, including names largely of Greek, Portuguese and Chinese origin.

Although no information about gender is explicitly given in the Government Gazette, gender was usually readily apparent for nearly all of the names; in the cases of some more opaque African names a mother-tongue speaker assisted in identifying gender, and names where it was impossible to determine gender were omitted in gender consideration. The names were then analyzed in terms of the apparent reason for which the change was requested, and grouped into the main categories shown below.[1]

Socio-Cultural Reasons

This category includes those name choices which clearly reflect an intention to affiliate with or reject a cultural or linguistic group. This is achieved by adding or deleting a name which is recognizable as being from a particular linguistic or ethnic group. This category also includes cases where existing names were from two different linguistic groups

and they were reordered in order to emphasize the desired group, when, for instance, Charles Thembi changed his name to Thembi Charles. Subcategories for each language group were created as follows:

English First

From:	To:	From:	To:
Basani Snowy	Snowy Basani	Bulelwa Agnes	Agnes Nozuko
Buti Mufana David	David Butimfana	Celiwe Beauty	Beauty Aliah Celiwe
Sipho Cresswell	Cresswell Sipho	Diapo Isaac	Isaac Diapo
Duduzile Cynthia	Cynthia Duduzile	Jaheni Eunice	Eunice Jaheni

Add English

From:	To:	From:	To:
Allimuthu	Allimuthu Colin	Andile	Andile Stanford
Annastasia	Annastasia Muriel	Bashingile	Bashingile Eunice
Betrina	Betrina Yolanda	Bidiyane	Bidiyane Jackson
Bonginkosi	Bonginkosi Richard	Bukeka	Pearlrose Bukeka

Replace With English

From:	To:	From:	To:
Abieda	Alison	Abubaker Sedick	Austin
Aganathan	Shaun	Amunavathie	Evelyn
Asor	Arthur	Balityiwe Ayford	Freddy Ayford
Betjie	Bettie	Dawid Johannes	David John

African Language First

From:	To:	From:	To:
Christina Nompiliso	Nompiliso Christina	Emelda Zanele	Zanele Emelda
Daisy Hlanganani	Hlanganani Daisy	Emmah Dithotseng	Dithotseng Emmah
Cliff Toero	Tuelo Clive	Gabriel Losias	Motsumi Gabriel
Cynthia Phumuzile	Phumzile Cynthia	Hendrick Khulu	Khulu Hendrick
Christopher	Mziwoxolo Christopher		

Add African Language

From:	To:	From:	To:
David	Muharhi David	Desmond	Mohula Desmond
Elizabeth	Pulane Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Ntsoaki Elizabeth
Elizabeth	Motlatsi Elizabeth	Ella	Lesego Ella
Ellen	Solekile Ellen	Ernest	Ramphelane Ernest

Replace With African Name

From:	To:	From:	To:
Barry	Mmakou	David Sefako	Leso Modise
Dennis Cyprian	Mtembu	Emily Sussie	Emily Mmapoloko
Erick Ezeiel	Nhlanhla	Fatima Canada	Fatima Pombo
Hope Veronica	Kolofelo Veronica	Isaac Hopy	Selatiele Ngidi

Other Language[2] First: No Instances

Add Other Language

From:	To:	From:	To:
Thembinkosi Moses	Johannes Moses	Lisa	Lisa Bouverie

Replace With Other Language

From:	To:	From:	To:
Ben Letladi	Ben Skitter	Catherine Maria	Zubeda Catherine
Christopher	Christoffel	Desiree Elizabeth	Imane
Gerthina Johanna	Yasmin	Ivan	Ebrahiem
Johannes Jacobus	Jean-Maurice	Lizette Louise	Mishkah

Delete English

From:	To:	From:	To:
Athole Landile	Landile	Joseph Mokganya	Mokganya
Lindeka Patience	Lindeka	Mabelandile Primrose	Mabelandile
Motlogelwa Isaac	Motlogelwa	Msinyane Thomas	Mabaso
Nkhanedzeni Elvis	Nkhanedieni	Nomphikelelo Miriam	Nompikelelo

Delete African Language

From:	To:	From:	To:
Lindiwe Margaret	Margaret	Mafeka Francis	Francis
Mpandlane Matthews	Matthews	Thomani David	David

Delete Other Language

From:	To:	From:	To:
Helena Wilhelmina	Helena	Lesiba Klaas	Mafalo
Modise Hendrick	Makou	Naledi Johannes	Naledi
Pieter Jacobus	Peter	Pieter Johannes Louw	Peter
Shurone Saartjie	Shurone	Vuyani Petrus	Vuyani

Reasons of Personal Taste

This category included all name changes made within a particular language category, where changes involved shortening names, deleting names, choosing completely different names from within the same category, changing the spelling of names, and reordering names for personal preference.

Add or Replace Names

From:	To:	From:	To:
Adoons	Isak	Alice	Alice Julie
Alastair Brian	Alastair Hamilton	Alice	Selinah
Anna	Joanne	Ayanda	Luntu

Delete Names

From:	To:	From:	To:
Brandon Tariq	Tariq	Carlos Domingos	Carlos
Claude Waleed	Waleed	Claudette Rubia	Claudette
David Louis	David	Dineo Marang Dawn	Dineo Dawn
Dusrath Surianarayana	Dusrath	Erika Johanna Fransina	Erika
		Faziela Abdul Kalik	Faziela

Reorder Names

From:	To:	From:	To:
Bertha Jeanette	Jeanette Bertha	Jacques Julius	Julian Jacques
Jakob Johannes	Johannes Jakob	Kagisho Urashion	Eurashion Kagisho
Nina Beatrice	Beatrice Nina	Pamela Daphne	Daphney Pamela
Pauline Deidre	Deidre Pauline	Salim Thembile	Thembile Salim

Shorten Name

From:	To:	From:	To:
Alawi	Ally	Albert Gundane	Albert Gu
Deenadayalan	Deen	Hendrik Stephanus	Hennie
Hermanus	Manie	Jennifer Ann	JenniAnn
Katrina	Katie	Lisette-Liza	Liza
Masoorakunum	Masoora	Petrus Jacobus	Jaco
Ravindranath	Rafi	Thandolomzi	Thando

Administrative Reasons

Changes apparently to correct errors, especially obviously incorrect spellings.

From:	To:	From:	To:
Aldona Natasza	Aldona Natasha	Allias Xolani	Elias Xolani
Amargret	Margret	Imoran	Imran
Barenice Elidia	Berenice Elidia	Jabulile Octawa	Jabulile Octavia
Brain Velapi	Brian Velapi		

Religious Reasons

Name changes often follow religious conversion, and in both sets of data such changes seem to have been linked to conversion to Islam, where new converts are encouraged to take on a Muslim name, usually a name from the scriptures, as a role model and as a sign of their new faith.

From:	To:	From:	To:
Anthony Martin	Ameer	Anthony Paul	Ebrahiem
Antony	Ashraf	Athena	Acheeka
Audrey	Faeeza	Barney Aubrey	Adiel
Basil John	Abdul Gassier	Beatrice Vivienne	Badia

There were a number of instances in which more than one category was relevant; in such cases multiple classifications were made; these included

Amos Eric, changed to Erick Nkosinathi Amos: personal choice (different spelling) and socio-cultural (add African name, reorder);

Bhekiseni Wilson, changed to Mbekhiseni Wilson Johnny: personal choice (spelling) and socio-cultural (add English);

Benedict Mlindi S'fiso, changed to Mlindi Martin: socio-cultural (African first) and personal choice (drop African);

Bonkosi Maxwell, changed to Zondi: socio-cultural (drop English) and personal choice (shorten; choose different African name);

Barend Jacobus, changed to Barry: socio-cultural (replace with English) and personal choice (shorten);

Bregette, changed to Bridgette Nthabiseng: administrative (to correct spelling) and socio-cultural (add African language and place English first);

Dalinjebo, changed to Witness Bongani Dalinjebo: socio-cultural (add English, place English first) and personal choice (add African name).

Results

Language Groups

The names in the Gazettes were classified in terms of the broad language groups shown in table 1, except in those few cases where it was impossible to ascertain linguistic affiliation. Patterns over the two samples are not strikingly different, and overall figures seem broadly representative of the country's general demographic distribution.

Table 1. Linguistic Affiliation of Name-changers.

	1997		2000	
Language	N	%	N	%
English/Afrikaans	246	21	672	36
African Languages	61	61	1153	59
Arabic/Indian	14	14	181	9
Other	4	4	42	2

Age

Since identity documents in South Africa include dates of birth, these were available from the listing in the Gazettes and they provided the typical ages at which people choose to change their names. Table 2 reflects the results of the analyses of the two samples. The trends are very similar over the two sets of data, and accord with what one might have expected: the fact that 70-75% of all name changes were made before the age of 40 suggests that this is the time of life when a concern with identity and sense of self is at its peak. It also probably reflects the stage of life at which bureaucratic demands are at their highest. More surprising are those who have waited as long as 60 years before making the change.

Table 2. Age at Which Names were Changed.

	1997		2000	
Age	N	%	N	%
75+	12	1.0	24	1.1
60-70	40	3.4	90	4.4
50-59	77	6.5	160	7.8
40-49	153	13.0	352	17.0
30-39	284	24.1	587	28.5
20-29	604	51.3	840	40.8
16-19	7	.6	2	.1

Gender

Table 3 shows the results of an analysis of name-changers in terms of gender: percentages reflect the proportion of the total number whose gender was transparent from their names. Interestingly, the proportions of males and females who have changed their names is almost identical across the two time periods, with only slightly more women than men who took the initiative to change their names in both samples (the difference is too small to draw any firm conclusion). A further interesting phenomenon emerged during the analysis of the 2000 data, which suggested that some people were changing their names because they had undergone a sex change operation. There were only 9 such cases (7 English/Afrikaans; 2 African), and they do not warrant a full category on their own.[3]

Table 3. Gender of Name-changers.

	Females				Males			
	1997		2000		1997		2000	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
English/Afrikaans	150	14	386	20	94	9	267	14
African	312	29	559	30	360	33	568	30
Indian/Arabic	81	6	10	1	38	4	59	3
Other	21	2	14	1	16	1	19	1

Reasons for Name Changes

Table 4 shows overall trends in terms of the four main categories used to classify the reasons for the name changes. Table 5 provides a more detailed analysis of reasons in terms of the language group of the name changers. Not reflected in this table is the fact that in the 1997 data 164 African language speakers (82 women and 78 men) retained their original English name despite going to the trouble of making changes to their names. In 2000, 473 African language speakers (265 women and 208 men) did the same.

In broad terms, it is evident that there has been a significant change between 1997 and 2000, with a swing away from administrative reasons in favor of socio-cultural reasons for name changes. One can speculate as to the reasons for this, but the obvious suggestion that fewer mistakes are being made in the administrative area is unlikely.

Table 4. Reasons for Name Changes.

	1997		2000	
Reason	N	%	N	%
Socio-Cultural	699	48	3011	65
Personal Taste	431	30	1201	26
Administrative	224	15	156	3
Religious	100	7	272	6

Table 5. Reasons for Name Changes by Language Group.

	English/ Afrikaans	African	Arabic/ Indian	Other	1997	2000
Socio-cultural Reasons						
Preference for English						
Place English First	12	143	5	2	95	162
Add English	23	193	9	3	179	228
Replace With English	359	715	89	23	97	1186
%	29	37	29	32	26	34
Preference for African Language						
Place African Name First	80	123	20	11	69	234
Add African Name	8	99	1	0	111	108
Replace With African	17	41	10	2	22	70
%	8	9	9	15	14	9
Preference for Other Language						
Place Other Language First	30	113	10	5	0	158
Add Other Language	211	11	53	1	8	276
Replace With Other Language	11	469	4	3	60	487
%	18	21	19	10	5	20
Delete Name in Specific Language						
Delete English	1	63	0	0	31	64
Delete African	0	15	0	0	20	15
Delete Other	13	10	0	0	7	23
%	1	3	0	0	4	2
Socio-Cultural Total %	56	70	57	57	48	65
Personal Choice						
Shorten Name	16	7	10	2	67	35
Delete Name	79	49	20	11	115	159
New Name/Spelling	278	620	63	18	221	979
Re-order Names	6	21	1	0	28	29
%	27	25	26	36	29	26
Administrative Reasons	30	111	10	5	224	156
%	2	4	3	6	16	3
Religious Reasons	210	9	52	1	100	272
%	15	0	15	1	7	6
Grand Total	1384	2812	357	87	1446	4640

Discussion

As mentioned in the introduction, naming practices interact in significant and complex ways with various patterns of social and cultural organization and can therefore provide useful insights into broader cultural changes. With changing times come changing conventions, and as South Africans find themselves increasingly part of the new global village, citizens of the world, able to move around more freely than they could before and to mix with a range of different people, they are very likely to encounter new pressures and expectations. One of these pressures is in the direction of African nationalism; another is the appeal of the status of English. The name changing patterns which have emerged from these analyses offer themselves as a very useful measure of how South Africans are responding to these pressures.

While gender does not emerge as a relevant variable, age and language background seem to be significant forces in the decision to change one's name. In particular, the name choices of members of certain language groups suggest fairly strong preferences and reflect a shifting allegiance and a desire to be associated with a particular linguistic group.

Socio-cultural Factors

In 1997 socio-cultural factors accounted for 59% of all African name changes, in contrast to 20% in the English/Afrikaans group, 30% in the Arabic/Indian group, and 37% in the "other" group. By 2000 these figures had shifted to 70% of all African name changes, in contrast to 56% in the English/Afrikaans group, 57% in the Arabic/Indian group, and 57% among the "Others." The strongest trend in both time periods is a clear shift in favor of English, evident in all groups but most prevalent in the African language group, as shown in table 5.

With English playing an increasingly prominent role in all areas of South African life, the increase in the number of people who have favored English in some way in their new names is unsurprising. It would seem that, for the most part, such names can be interpreted as tokens of group membership and signs of westernization or increased education. Of particular interest is the number of African-language name changers who favored English. There are several ways in which the

appeal of English manifests itself in these name changes, especially choosing an English name to replace an African name, reordering names so that the English name comes first, adding an English name, deleting an African name, or retaining an English name while going to the trouble and expense of changing an African name.

The relative frequencies of these particular name changes are shown in table 6. (Because retaining an English name is a passive rather than an active reflection of favoring English, this category has not been included in the table. However, in 1997 there were 164 people, or 17%, who retained an English name while changing an African name, and in 2000 the number was 470, or 14%.)

Table 6. African Name-changers Favoring English.

	1997		2000	
Process	N	%	N	%
Replace	44	5	715	25
Reorder	92	10	143	5
Add	165	17	193	7
Delete	20	2	15	1
Total	321	34	1066	38

The same trend favoring English names is evident among other groups but is not as strongly pronounced. In 1997, 27% of Arabic/Indian and 17% of the "other"language speakers showed overt preference for English. In 2000, this has changed to 29% and 32%, respectively. Overall, across all groups, the figures also show a substantial increase favoring English, rising from 26% in 1997 to 34% in 2000. Numbers in these groups which showed a preference for a language other than English are negligible: 8% and 6% in 1997 and 19% and 10% in 2000 (table 5). Name changes which favored African languages are shown in table 7. It is noteworthy that over the 3 year period, the number of name changes in favor of English rose slightly, from 34% in 1997 to 38% in 2000 (table 6) but the number of changes favoring African languages dropped by 11%, which amounts to an overall strengthening of the position of English.

Table 7. African Name-changers Favoring African Languages.

	1997		2000	
Process	N	%	N	%
Replace	22	2	41	1
Reorder	69	7	123	5
Add	109	11	99	4
Delete English	28	3	63	2
Total	228	23	326	12

Ironically, there is some evidence of growing support for or alignment with African languages from other language groups, with increases from 0% to 8% among the English/Afrikaans group, from 0% to 9% among Arabic/Indian-language name-changers, and from 2% to 15% among the "other" group. Real numbers in these categories are small; nevertheless, this could be interpreted as evidence of growing rapprochement across cultural groups, and of softening of boundaries, with people deliberately going counter to cultural expectations in their name choice, for ideological or pragmatic reasons.

Personal Choice

Name changes which reflect personal choice, an aesthetic preference often relating to fashion, originality, or creativity, were also in evidence in the data. While 48% of all 1997 name changes were linked to socio-cultural factors, and 30% to aesthetic factors, in 2000, 3 years later, proportions had shifted substantially—to 65% and 26%, respectively. Nevertheless, aesthetic factors still rank as the second most important reason for a name change in both time periods. Proportions within language groups fluctuate across the two data sets, with the high levels among English/Afrikaans speakers in 1997 (40.6%) dropping to 27% in 2000, from 37% to 26% among the Arabic/Indian group, and from 49% to 36% among the "others." In contrast, levels among speakers of African languages increased slightly, from 23.6% in 1997 to 26% in 2000.

This sensitivity to personal taste and the sound of a name was also observed by de Klerk and Bosch (1996), who reported that English and Afrikaans informants revealed greater freedom in name choice and

frequently claimed to have chosen a name for no other reason than personal whim or taste (English 34.8%, white Afrikaans 23.7%, colored Afrikaans 32.2%, Xhosa 16%). Such linguistic experimentation with names among English and Afrikaans informants in that study and in the current study suggests increasing levels of linguistic sophistication and awareness among all speakers.

Administrative Reasons

In the 1997 survey, administrative factors (most often spelling errors) played a more prevalent role in the name changes of all groups other than the English/Afrikaans group, and this was interpreted as a direct reflection of the higher literacy levels of English/Afrikaans speakers at the time of registration of a baby's birth. The 2000 analysis reveals a drop in this category from 16% to 4% overall, with no particular group evincing special problems in this regard. Reasons for this are difficult to surmise.

Religious Factors

In 1997, 7% of all name changes were made for religious reasons, and most of these were by English/Afrikaans speakers (29.3%), in most cases reflecting a conversion to Islam. In contrast, religion played a negligible role in the name changes of speakers of African languages and other groups. The 2000 results reflect an overall drop of 1%; once again the English/Afrikaans speakers made most of these changes, followed by the Arabic/Indian group.

Conclusion

Evidence of the importance of names in people's lives comes from the statistics reflecting the number of people who go to considerable lengths to change their given names. According to a spokesperson for the Department of Home Affairs, more than 88,000 people applied to have their first names or surnames changed in 1998, and a similar number did so in the previous year as well (Natal Witness 2000, 9). At face value, one would expect that the vast majority of these would be Africans, and that they would be discarding their Western names in favor of more traditional African names, in a quest for their roots, but this assumption is not borne out by a closer analysis of the name change data. In fact, the very opposite trend is under way, paradoxically running counter to expectations.

This study has provided a glimpse at two cross sections of the name-changing population of South Africa. While it must be remembered that two 3-month windows on name changes provide a far from sufficient basis from which to draw any firm conclusions, such a diachronic analysis of changing patterns of name choices has considerable value in offering insights with regard to social and cultural trends in post-apartheid South Africa. The growing positive attitude towards English names across the board, and particularly from speakers of African languages is surprising in view of recent political changes in the country, and high-profile political leaders who, in recent years, have publicly abandoned their English names in favor of African names. There are many possible underlying reasons for this trend, including administrative factors, but the fact remains that, despite a change in language policy and despite a political turnaround in the country accompanied by enthusiasm for the African Renaissance, the appeal of English seems to be growing. Instead of concluding that the decline in use of African names means a move away from the rich symbolism and meaning of these personal names, one could interpret taking on an English name as a symbol in its own right, a name which bears meaning of a different sort—upward mobility, education, and multiculturalism.

Whatever the reasons for name changes, it is likely that rapid urbanization and steadily increasing levels of contact across social, cultural, and linguistic boundaries in South Africa will give further impetus to such changes. Future Government Gazettes promise to provide an ongoing rich resource for tracking the name preferences of people in the "new" South Africa.

Notes

1. The 1997 study (de Klerk 2000b) was supplemented by a postal survey of reasons supplied by a sample of these name changers, in order to validate the classification. This technique was not pursued in 2000 in light of the very low response rate experienced in the previous survey (27.8%) and the strong correlation between the sample and the writer's classification at that time.

2. "Other"includes all languages other than English, Afrikaans, and African languages, since numbers were very low for all other individual languages.

3. These include Anna Christina to Anton Christo, Wayne William to Collen Claire, Gerrie to Serina, Catharina Maria to Tertius, Joszeme Johanna to Eugene Johan, and Renier Christiaan to Rene Christine.

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