Naming in Sesotho*:
Its Sociocultural and Linguistic Basis

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Sesotho is a Bantu language of southern Africa, spoken by more than two million people. The majority of the speakers of this language are found mainly in Lesotho, in most of the Orange Free State province, in the southern parts of the Transvaal and in the north-eastern parts of the Cape colony, particularly in the vicinity of Matatiele. Naming in Sesotho is both a cultural and linguistic phenomenon inasmuch as culture and language are interdependent systems. Among the Basotho there seems to be even more abundant evidence of this. Traditionally the Basotho were, and still are (in certain parts of southern Africa), practising agriculture and animal husbandry as their main sources of livelihood. Cattle play a very important role in this society – both economically and socially. Obviously, in a society where technological development is rather low, dependence on nature is bound to be great. That is to say, people are for most of the time at the mercy of the vicissitudes of nature. The result is that their fears and hopes are, more often than not, reflected in their social forms as well as in their language. The naming system of the Basotho reflects this phenomenon quite vividly.

The Basotho attach great significance to the meaning of names. In various ways, as will be seen later, the names refer to events, experiences and emotions. Some names are believed even to have some influence on the character of their bearers. There is a proverb which refers to the influence of names on character, *Bitso lebe ke seromo*, (lit. "a bad name is ominous"). In a wider sense this means that a person usually behaves in accordance with the meaning of his name. For instance, if a person by the name of *Motsamai* (lit. "the traveller," or "the-one-who-travels") happens to be fond of travelling or visiting, it is believed he is such because of the influence of his name.

The following are some of the major procedures of giving names in Sesotho:

(a) *Naming a child after its kinsmen:* To name a child after its kinsmen, especially after its grandparents or senior relatives, is very important

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* Sesotho: language of the tribe of Basotho, or anything pertaining to the Basotho.
  Mosotho: a member of the tribe of the Basotho.
  Basotho: plural of Mosotho.
  Lesotho: country of the Basotho.

Anglo-Boer war), and many more. It is worth noting that these names of prominent people are also helpful in estimating the ages of their bearers who, in the majority of cases, may be illiterate and thus without birth-date records.

The reasons behind the naming of children after people who are believed to have desirable characteristics are obvious. It is assumed that the child will take on the good qualities of that person and that he will behave like him. As a matter of fact, when the person after whom the child is named is living in the same neighborhood as the child, an intimate relationship develops between the two. The child usually receives gifts from its adult namesake, and indeed, they treat each other as equals. The reciprocal term of address is *bitso* ("namesake") from the noun *lebitso* ("name").

(c) *Naming children after events:* This is the most important source of Sesotho names. Many Sesotho names refer to, or are derived from, events that coincide with the birth of children. Since the Basotho were a non-literate people without a recording system, it is obvious that event-names served as a kind of a "recording" system. In fact, it is common among these people to refer to an event whenever one asks for their dates of birth. Event-names are thus very much like "birth certificates."

One other function of event-names seems to be to take care of what may be called the psychological needs of the people. In a society where technological development is backward, and where the lives of the people are directly affected by changes in nature, particular significance is at-tached to events. Thus, names based on events reflect, as it were, these psychological and emotional states. When the birth of a boy coincides with the occurrence of an accident which affects the family in one way or another, he is almost invariably christened *Kotsi* ("danger" or "acci-dent") or *Tsietsi* ("accident"). A girl born on a rainy day may be named *Pulane*, diminutive form of *pula* ("rain"), or *Puleng* (lit. "in rain," i.e., "born in rain").

Following are instances in which event-names are commonly chosen: *Names referring to pleasant happenings:* As mentioned earlier, the tradi-tional Basotho are dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood, and rain is, accordingly, one of the most pleasant events. Thus, children born on a rainy day are often named after rain (*pula*). It is important to note the linguistic or grammatical device which is used in the formation of names in this category. Most of the personal names derived from inanimate or non-human objects undergo slight phonological and morphological changes. For instance in the case of *pula* (rain) the final -*a* is replaced by an -*e* to form personal names for males. However, in the case of a girl's name there are two ways of doing it, first, by re-placing the final -*a* of the diminutive form of the word *pula*, i.e., *pulana*

with an -*e*, e.g., *Pulane* ("little rain"), and second, by adding a locative suffix to the word. Note the following:

pula ("rain")   > *Pule* (boy's name) or *Puleng* (girl's name)
pulana ("little rain") > *Pulane* (girl's name).

Other pleasant events in Sesotho society, and surely in all human societies, are the prevalence of peace, and good social relations with kinsmen, neighbors or villagers. Thus *kgotso* (lit. "peace") is a very common name for boys, and what is more, the word is also used as a form of greeting. Names falling under this category are formed in various ways:

Names expressing social harmony: Most of these names are nouns derived from verb stems, e.g.,

ho rata ("to love")   *Lerato* ("love"), girl's name
ho nona ("to become fat or prosperous") *Monono* ("prosperity"), girl's name
to tuma ("to become famous")   *Tumo* ("fame"), boy's name
ho nyakalla ("to make merry")   *Nyakallo* ("merriment"), boy or girl's name

Names expressing gratitude, especially for the birth of a child:

ho thaba ("to rejoice")   *Thabo* ("joy"), boy's name
                                Thabang ("rejoice!" imperative pl.), girl's name
ho leboha ("to thank")   *Teboho* ("gratitude"), boy's name
ho fumana ("to get, find")   *Fumane* ("the found one"), girl's name

Recompensatory names: These are names given to children who are born following the death of a preceding child. Such children are regarded as repayment or compensation for the dead ones. Note the following:

ho lefa ("to pay")   *Tefo* ("payment"), boy's name
ho tshedisa ("to console")   *Tshediso* ("consolation"), boy's name
                                        Matshediso ("consolations"), girl's name
ho buseletsa ("to recompense")   *Puseletso* ("recompense"), girl's name
ho hauhela ("to have mercy on someone") *Kgauhelo* ("mercy"), girl's name

Names expressing a wish, hope, or request: In this type of event-name, we are dealing with what may be called "invocative" names. These names express both harmony and disharmony in society, for example joy or gossip:

ho thusa ("to help")   > *Nthuseng* ("help me!," pl.), girl's name
ho amohela ("to accept")   > *Nkamoheleng* ("accept or welcome me!," pl.), girl's name
                                  Kamohelo ("acceptance"), boy's name
ho tshepa ("to hope, trust") > *Tshepo* ("hope"), boy's name
ho tshepisa ("to promise")   > *Tshepiso* ("promise"), girl's name
ho tshedisa ("to console")   > *Ntshediseng* ("console me!"), girl's name

Note that girl's names are formed by a phrase or a sentence which is always in the plural form, e.g., *Nthuseng* means "(you, pl.), help me!"

Naming children after natural calamities: Natural catastrophes such as hail, snow, thunderstorm, lightning, famine, and so on are usually reflected in the naming system of the Basotho. Note the following:

> *Dikeledi* ("tears"), girl's name
> *Sefako* ("hail"), boy's name
> *Serame* ("cold"), boy's name
> *Sehloho* ("disaster"), boy's name
> *Kganyapa* ("thunderstorm"), boy's name
> *Tladi* ("lightning"), boy's name
> *Tsie* ("locust"), boy's name
> *Lefu* ("death"), boy's name
> *Mookgo* ("tear," sing.), girl's name

It is important to note that the above are ordinary common nouns, the only modification being the capital letter at the beginning of each one. Another point of interest is the fact that girls' names are formed by pre-fixing *mma-* ("mother of") to the above names. This will be dealt with in detail at a later stage.

Other girls' names are formed by adding suffixes to a common noun, or by replacing the final *-a* by an *-e* as was pointed out earlier. For example,

> *tlala* ("famine, hunger")   > *Tlale*, boy's name
> *tlalana* ("small famine")   > *Tlalane*, girl's name
> *tlaleng* ("in famine")   > *Tlaleng*, girl's name

However, a great number of names falling under this category are derived from verb stems. Some nouns are slightly modified by affixation, or replacement, while others remain unmodified:

> *ho lla* ("to cry")   > *Sello* ("act of crying"), boy's name
> *Sellwane* ("small crying"), girl's name
> *ho siuwa* ("to be
>   left behind, forsaken")   > *Ntshiuwa* ("forsaken one"), girl's name
> *Mosiuwa* ("forsaken one"), boy's name
> *makatsa* ("cause to wonder") > *Dimakatso* ("wonders"), girl's name
> *makala* ("to wonder")   > *Makalo* ("wondering"), boy's name
> *hlomola* ("to grieve")   > *Mahlomola* ("grief"), boy's name

Names denoting repeated death in the same family: A name of this type is given to a child which is born after the still-birth or death of an immediately preceding sibling or siblings. The interesting thing about a child born under these circumstances is the concern or anxiety of the parents regarding the survival chances of the infant. There is always the fear that it too, may not survive. Extraordinary rituals are performed with meticulous care to ensure the survival chances of the baby, and as may be expected, special taboos are observed. Apart from the rituals and taboos, a special name is given to the child, and this is usually a derogatory or

non-human name. The intended implication of these names is to produce the opposite effect of their literal meaning: most of them are derived from the word *ntja* ("dog"). Among the Basotho a dog is one of the lowliest animals. This attitude is borne out by the fact that anyone who is poor, a beggar, a glutton, or over-indulgent in sex, is contemptuously referred to as a dog.

A morphological feature of these names is that many of them are compounds:

mosela ("tail")	> *Mosele*, girl's name
mosela ntja ("dog")	> *Moselantja* ("dog's tail"), girl's name
ntja-ntja	> *Ntjantja* ("dog-dog"), girl's name
polomahwashe ("alligator")	> *Polo*, boy's name
nakedi ("skunk")	> *Nakedi*, boy's name
ntho ("thing") +	
feela ("just, simply")	> *Nthofeela* ("just-a-thing"), boy's name

Names denoting an unusual birth place: Traditionally, the proper place for a Mosotho woman to deliver her baby is at her own house or parental home; however, the use of modern facilities has undermined this custom seriously. Nowadays, especially where medical facilities are easily accessible, the common practice is to send the expectant mothers to maternity houses. Nonetheless, it does happen that a woman delivers a baby at an unexpected time and place, e.g., along the road, at a stranger's home, or while on a journey. Usually children born under these circumstances bear names to that effect:

tsela ("road, path")	> *Tseleng* ("in or at the road"), girl's name
tselana ("small road")	> *Tselane*, girl's name
thota ("plain")	> *Thota*, boy's name
leeto ("journey")	> *Leeto*, boy's name
lefella ("wilderness")	> *'Felleng* ("in or at the wilderness"), girl's name
tsamaya ("to walk, travel")	> *Motsamai* ("traveller, walker"), boy's name

Sometimes these names are also given to children who are born while the father or a close relative is away on a journey. As in other cases, the *mma-* ("mother of") prefix is also commonly used to form girls' names from the above names.

Names denoting patience, endurance, or perseverance: Usually these names refer to a very trying time through which one or both parents lived, implying perhaps that success comes after numerous failures or long waiting; they can also be given to a firstborn child whose father struggled hard to win over the love of the mother:

ho mamella ("to persevere")	> *Mamello* ("perseverence"), boy's or girl's name
ho tiisetsa ("to endure")	> *Tiisetso* ("endurance"), boy's name
ho phehella ("to persist")	> *Phehello* ("persistence"), boy's name
ho latella ("to insist")	> *Tatello* ("insistence"), boy's name
ho dumela ("to believe")	> *Tumelo* ("belief"), boy's name

Again, the *mma*-prefix can be used with all of the above to produce girls' names.

Names denoting a delayed birth: Usually when the pregnancy period is unduly long and the birth date long overdue, the Basotho, as may be expected, become anxious. In the traditional setting rituals are usually performed to precipitate birth, and usually the name of the child resulting from such a birth reflects the circumstances. Note the following:

ho dieha ("to delay")	> *Tieho* ("delay"), boy's name
	> *Modiehi* ("delayer or delayed one"), girl's name
ho lebella ("to expect")	> *Tebello* ("expectation"), boy's or girl's name

There are also names which refer to premature births, for example,

ho potlaka ("to hurry")	> *Mopotlaki* ("one who hurries")
	> *Potlako* ("a hurry"), both are boy's names

Names referring to social disharmony: Sesotho naming is also marked by proliferation of names denoting social discord. These are names which, among other things, reflect the people's concern about gossip, hatred, petty jealousies, quarrels, poverty, or lack of cooperation. Note the following examples:

lekgotla ("court of law")	> *Lekgotla*, boy's name
lefufa ("jealousy")	> *Lefufa*, boy's name
lefuma ("poverty")	> *Lefuma*, boy's name
ho seba ("to gossip")	> *Disebo*, ("gossips") girl's name
ho leka ("to tempt")	> *Teko* ("temptation"), boy's name
ho hloya ("to hate")	> *Mohlouwa* ("hated one"), boy's name
ho hloka ("to need")	> *Mohloki* ("one who needs"), boy's name
ho tshehwa ("to be ridiculed")	> *Motshehwa* ("ridiculed one"), girl's name
ho nyatsa ("to scorn, despise")	> *Monyatsi* ("despiser"), boy's name
ho tseka ("to dispute, quarrel")	> *Tseko* ("a dispute"), boy's name
	> *Motseki* ("one who disputes"), boy's name
ho lahlwa ("to be forsaken")	> *Dilahlwane* ("forsaken one"), girl's name
ho lahleha ("to become forsaken")	> *Tahleho* ("state of being neglected"), boy's name

Names of illegitimate children and those of uncertain paternity: Children born out of wedlock or born of infidel mothers (wives) usually bear names implying these circumstances, for example,

ho hanuwa ("to be rejected, disclaimed")	> *Mohanuwa* ("disclaimed one"), girl's name
	> *Mohanwe* ("disclaimed one"), boy's name
ho kgokolotsa ("to collect, gather")	> *Makgokolotso* ("collected things") girl's name
matlakala ("garbage, litter")	> *Matlakala*, girl's name

Names related to marriage or bride-wealth: Sometimes it happens that there is dissatisfaction with the number of cattle given to the bride's family as brideprice. Children who neglect to seek their parents' advice and approval

in their marriage plans usually cause their parents great displeasure, and this is usually reflected in the name of the first-born child of such a couple:

ho busa ("to return, refund")   > *Dibuseng* (pl. "return them!"
                                           i.e., cattle), girl's name
ho fela ("to become finished")   > *Difelile* ("they are finished"
                                           i.e., cattle), girl's name
ho ithera ("to plan one's own marriage") > *Moitheri* ("one who planned his own
                                           marriage"), girl's name
ho leleka ("to expel")   > *Molelekeng* (pl. "expel her!"
                                           i.e., bride), girl's name
ho iketsa
   ("to perform an act on oneself," refl.) > *Moiketsi* ("one who lets himself
                                           down"), boy's name

Names referring to personal qualities: An interesting feature of the Sesotho naming system is its lack of many names that refer to a person's features or qualities. Perhaps this stems from the difficulty in trying to predict a baby's attributes. Personal attributes of an adult are traditionally expressed in the form of personal praise poems or nicknames. Here are some of the names denoting personal qualities, usually given to children:

Palesa ("flower"), girl's name
Seponono ("the pretty one"), girl's name
Mohlalefi ("the wise one"), boy's name
Bohlale ("wisdom"), boy's name
Tsebo ("knowledge"), girl's name

The naming of twins: In contemporary Sesotho society the birth of twins always is a cause of joy and anxiety. We do not have information about the attitude of the Basotho toward twins in the past, and we can therefore venture no speculation in this regard. However, what is true is that a great deal of excitement as well as concern surrounds the birth of twins, moreso if they happen to be identical twins. They are regarded as a special gift from the ancestors. The birth of twins is said to indicate that the ancestral spirits are happy and proud about such parents. The cause for concern always stems from the belief that twins are delicate and thus frail. There exists a strong belief among the Basotho that twins rarely grow to be adults without one dying.

To insure the survival of twins, great precautionary and protective measures are taken. For instance, the mother receives special care by being given plenty of food so as to maximize her lactic capability. Rituals and taboos are elaborate. The joy of the parents is shown by organizing lavish food and beer parties to celebrate the occasion. Two sheep or goats are slaughtered to welcome the twins. Custom dictates that everything must be done twofold, for it is believed that if this is not done, one of the twins may die.

Another feature of twin-names is that, for identical twins, the name of the twin delivered last is always in the diminutive form, while for unidentical ones, the names usually assume variant forms which, rather than indicating the order of birth, reflect the sex of the twins. Following are some of the popular twin-names in Sesotho society:

For identical boy twins:

Masilo	> Masilo*nyane* (legendary, meaning obscure)
Ntai	> Ntai*nyane* (legendary, meaning obscure)
Molefi ("payer")	> Molefi*nyane* ("payer," dim.)

Irregular names:

Thabo ("joy")	> *Teboho* ("gratitude")
Tefo ("payment")	> Tefelo ("payment on behalf of someone")

For identical girl twins:

Mosemodi	> Mosemo*tsane* (legendary, meaning obscure)
Mesi ("smokes")	> Mesi*nyane* ("smokes," dim.)
Masimong ("at the fields")	> Masi*ngwaneng* ("at small fields")
Dipuo ("talks, rumors")	> Dipuo*nyane* ("small talks, rumors")

Boy and girl or vice versa:

Thabo ("joy"), a boy	> Thabang ("Be happy!"), a girl
Thabiso ("that which gratifies") a boy	> Nthabiseng ("Make me happy!"), a girl
Ntshiuwa ("forsaken one"), a girl	> Mosiuwa ("forsaken one"), a boy
Mpho ("gift"), a girl	> Neo ("present"), a boy
Moromodi (legendary), a boy	> Moromo*tsane* (legendary),** a girl
Tshepo ("trust, hope"), boy	> Tshepiso ("promise"), girl

Stereotype names: Certain names tend to be stereotyped in Sesotho society. These are names given to children who are born under what may also be called "stereotyped" circumstances, that is, when a child is born into a family which, until the birth of the child in question, had only children of one sex. This state of affairs causes a great deal of concern among the

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** The suffix *-tsane* in *Moromotsane* should not be confused with the one in *Mosemotsane*. The former is a feminine suffix, while the latter is a diminutive one. Note the following:

mosuwe ("male teacher")	> mosuwe*tsane* ("female teacher")
kgosana ("minor chief")	> kgosa*tsana* ("minor chieftainess")

The unmodified forms of these suffixes are *-ana* and *-nyana* for the diminutive form, while *-tsana* is used to form the feminine gender. However, as pointed out earlier, the practice is to replace the final *-a* by an *-e* in most personal names. There are, of course, many exceptions to this rule. However, the following examples illustrate this rule quite graphically:

pul*a* ("rain")	> Pule, boy's name
tselan*a* ("small road, path")	> Tselane, girl's name
mohom*a* ("hoe, plow")	> Mohome, boy's or family name
mosel*a* ("tail")	> Mosele, girl's name

Basotho, more especially when such children are girls, about inheritance and perpetuation of the father's descent line or family name, for in a patrilineal society such as the Sesotho, inheritance and descent are based on the male line. Daughters are also wanted, though in regard to wealth, usually in the form of cattle or money, that will accrue from their marriages, and this, in turn, can be used in procuring wives for the sons. Thus an ideal family in Sesotho society is the one in which the ratio of boys to girls is equal.

Names of this type are not many, but they are common because families with one boy and several girls, or vice versa are also common. As may be expected the meanings of these names are related to the circumstances:

ho tswaka ("to mix")	> *Ntswaki* ("the mixer"), girl's name
ho ja ("to eat") *lefa* ("inheritance")	> *Mojalefa* ("inheritor"), boy's name
ho disa ("to herd animals")	> *Modise* ("herdsman"), boy's name

Theoretically these names are not suitable for a first or second-born child for they will then be inappropriate except for *Mojalefa* which is appropriate for the eldest son irrespective of whether he is a first born or not. This is so because in this society inheritance is based on the principle of primogeniture.

Teknonymous names: Elsewhere in this presentation we alluded to the fact that the prefix *mma-* ("mother of") is commonly used in forming girl's names in Sesotho. It is now proper to take a closer look at this sociolinguistic device. To begin with there are two of them, *mma-* ("mother of") and *ra-* ("father of"). They serve two functions when used with or prefixed to names: to address or to refer to a person by using the name of his or her child, for example, father or mother of "so-and-so," and to form names. The former is prevalent in many societies, especially where in-law avoidance rules are customary. In fact this is one of its uses in Sesotho society. A woman is not supposed to address or refer to her son-in-law by his name, and vice versa. Before a man begets a child, his mother-in-law addresses him or refers to him by the kin term *mokgwenyana* ("son-in-law"), while she is addressed and referred to as *mme* ("mother") by him. By the time he has a child, she will address him or refer to him by the teknonymy "father of so-and-so," for example, "father of *Pule*." A daughter-in-law also does not address or refer to her father or mother-in-law by name, but calls them "father" and "mother" respectively. The kin terms *matsale wa monna* ("father-in-law") and *matsale wa mosadi* ("mother-in-law") are also commonly used by daughters-in-law to refer to their in-laws. Sons-in-law too, address their in-laws as "father" and "mother" respectively, and refer to them by using the kin terms *mohwe* ("father-in-law") and *mohwehadi* ("mother-in-law"). According to custom, a man is supposed to address or refer to his son-in-law by the

kin term *mokgwenyana* ("son-in-law"), or by teknonymy "father of so-and-so" and not by his name; likewise, he addresses or refers to his daughter-in-law as *ngwetsi* ("daughter-in-law"), or "mother of so-and-so." Incidentally, it is worth noting that a new bride is usually given a tek-nonymous name as soon as she arrives at her husband's home. This custom, which is still adhered to by many Basotho, makes it easy for the in-laws of a woman to avoid to address her, or refer to her by her maiden name. Sometimes the name becomes permanent as a result of giving her first-born a name that will match with her teknonymous name; for example, if she is named *Mmatshepo*, her child, if he is a boy, may be named *Tshepo* ("trust"). However, if the child is a girl, the name is dropped in favor of one which matches with that of the baby daughter. For instance, if she is named *Tshepiso* ("promise"), her mother's teknonymous name will be *Mmatshepiso*. The reverse procedure is followed if her teknonymous name was based on a girl's name. However, an interesting feature of this custom is that the majority of teknonymous names given to new brides, are based on boy's names. It is not difficult to understand why this is so, for in a patrilineal society boys are preferred to girls in order to perpetuate the male descent line.

To recapitulate, it has been stated above that one of the uses of the prefixes *ra-* ("father of") and *mma-* ("mother of") is to address or refer to a person by using the name of his or her child. In Sesotho language two structural or syntactical forms are used. One is the equivalent of the English possessive construction "father of" or "mother of," for example, *ntate wa Pule* or *mme wa Pule*, in English, literally "father of *Pule*" and "mother of *Pule*." The other construction in which the prefixes *ra-* and *mma-* are affixed to the names of the child, for example, *Rapule* or *Mmapule*, has no equivalent in English, except, perhaps, for the similarity in the structural features of Irish names such as *McCarthy*, *McKinne* and many more. The reader must have raised his eyebrows when he came across the forms *mme* and *ntate* instead of *mma* and *ra* respectively.

It is therefore essential that, before closing this section, a brief description of the etymological and syntactical derivation of these words be given. To begin with, the prefix *ra-* is from the archaic and now defunct form, except in poetry, *rare* or *rara*, meaning "father." In Setswana the word is contracted to *rra* for addressing a person, and *rre* for referring to a person, while *rara* is mostly used in poetic and religious language. The Sesotho modern form *ntate* ("father") is probably a loan word from other Bantu languages which have similar roots; for example, the Xhosa word for "father" is *tata*. So only the first syllable *ra* is retained in Sesotho, hence *Rapule* ("father of *Pule*"). As to the prefix *mma-*, an altogether different process is at work. It is a contracted form of *mme* ("mother") *wa* ("of"), i.e., the *e* and *w* drop out to leave the resultant form of *mma*.

However, in Setswana the form *mma* is used both as for address and reference. Perhaps with an extra stretch of the imagination, it could be speculated, rightly or wrongly, that the forms *mma* and *mme* are contractions of the form *mama* ("mother") which is used in Xhosa, but only further research may provide the answer.

Now back to the form *mma*. Apparently the contraction form *mma* from *mme wa* ("mother of") is a result of rapid speech and the tendency of contiguous phones to coalesce when articulated at the same point, for example, *m* and *w* which are both bilabial. A similar process with the same word is evident in the contraction *mmae*, from *mme wa hae* (lit. "mother of his or hers") in which *e*, *w*, *a* and *h* drop out. Also note, *ntate wa hae* ("father of his or hers") becomes *ntatae*. Orthographically, they are sometimes written with an apostrophe to indicate that they are contracted forms, for example, *mm'ae* and *ntat'ae*. However, both the long and contracted forms are commonly used in Sesotho.

An interesting sociolinguistic phenomenon about these forms is that, when used to form teknonymous labels, the long forms are used by children and the short ones by adults. This may sound a little strange to a non-Sesotho speaker. But a Mosotho child, when referring to or talking about the parent of another child will use the form *ntate wa Pule* ("father of *Pule*"), or *mme wa Pule* ("mother of *Pule*") instead of *ntat'a Pule* or *mm'a Pule*. Adults use both contracted forms and teknonymous names, for example, *ntat'a Pule* or *Rapule*, and *mm'a Pule* or *Mmapule*. Children may use teknonymous names, for example, *Rapule* or *Mmapule*, only by further adding classificatory kin terms to them. A classificatory kin terminology is one by which a child or minor addresses or refers to all adults as "fathers" and "mothers." A Mosotho child will therefore address or refer to *Rapule* as *ntate Rapule* ("father *Rapule*," or literally, "father father of *Pule*"), and to say simply *Rapule* is regarded as disrespect in this society where respect for age is very important.

This brings us to the end of our description of the use of the prefixes *ra-* and *mma-* in forming teknonymous names. We observed that these names are based entirely on those of the children; they can therefore be conveniently called teknonymous names. The function here can be said to be identificative.

Let us now turn to a consideration of the second use of *ra-* and *mma-* which we said was to form names, especially those of children. Obviously, the use of these prefixes in this case, cannot, and indeed does not, serve the same function as in the case of parents. In the case of infants the *ra-* and *mma-* adopt a different connotation, i.e., they are qualificative. In other words, they convey the meaning of "one who has such-and-such qualities or attributes." An illustration is in order. Let us suppose that a boy is named *Rantsho*, the stem *-ntsho* meaning "black," and that he is

not named after any person; the name would translate as "the black-one" or "the-one-that-is-black," and certainly not as "the father of black." The same is true with *Mmantsho*. What is important here is the qualificative, rather than the identificative function of *ra-* and *mma-*. In the former the child's name is given a qualifying meaning, while in the latter a person is addressed or referred to by identifying him by his child's name. It may be objected that the example given above is not satisfactory in that the root of the name is already a qualifying word. But this holds true even with words that are non-qualifying. For example, in *Rantwa* or *Mmantwa*, where *-ntwa* means "war or battle," the name would translate as "the-one-of-war" rather than "the father or mother of war."

This function of the teknonymous prefixes may be further exemplified by reference to their use in prayers or in addressing the Almighty. In their prayers the Basotho make frequent reference to *Ramohau* (*mohau* "mercy") or *Ramosa* (*mosa* "friendliness, good-heartedness") which translates as "the-One-who-is-merciful" or "the-One-who-is-friendly" respectively. It would be absurd to translate this as "Father of mercy" or "Father of friendliness," thus implying that the name of God's child is "mercy" or "friendliness." Of course this is not what the Bible tells us! Similarly, the devil is referred to as *Radihele* (*dihele* "hells") which translates as "the-one-of-hells," and not as "the father of hells."

These two distinctive functions of the prefixes *ra-* and *mma-* in the Sesotho naming system are further evident in the use of the form *ntat'a Pule* or *mm'a Pule* (literally, "father or mother of *Pule*"), alongside with the corresponding teknonymous name *Rapule* or *Mmapule*, in the case of parents, and never used in the case of children with the same names.

The use of *ra-* and *mma-* is one of the most productive devices of naming in Sesotho. In fact these prefixes can be affixed to most, if not all, of the names that are listed in the article. The *mma-* prefix is very common in the names of girls.

Initiates' names: Finally, let us now consider the naming of circumcision initiates in Sesotho society. For all practical purposes, initiate names are temporary. Their use and social significance last as long as the initiation period itself, and, furthermore, the names are used mainly by those who are involved in the initiation rites. In the olden days the initiation-names of the sons of chiefs lasted longer because they were also used for naming regiments. The chief's son was automatically the leader of an initiation group as well as the regiment resulting from it. Being initiated at the same time as a chief's son was regarded as great honor, and boys would thus hurry or delay their initiation in order to avail themselves of this opportunity. However, this does not mean that initiation would not be held if there was no chief's son who was ready for initiation. In the ab-

sence of a chief's son, the leadership of an initiation group usually fell on the son of a senior or prominent commoner.

There are two standard procedures of naming initiates among the Basotho, one for boys and the other for girls. Generally speaking most of the boys' initiate names refer to good qualities such as adeptness, strength, speed, skillfulness, agility and so on. These names are formed by the prefix *le-* which forms agent nouns from verbs. The resultant forms imply a quality or an attribute of some kind. Note the following examples:

ho hana ("to refuse")	> *Lehana* ("one-who-refuses")
ho nepa ("to hit on the target")	> *Lenepa* ("one-who-hits-on-the-target")
ho tlama ("to bind")	> *Letlama* ("one-who-binds or unites")
ho betsa ("to strike/hit")	> *Lebetsa* ("one-who-strikes")

Girls' initiation names are formed by means of the prefix *ra-* which is the same as the one discussed earlier. On the face of it, it may appear strange to use a masculine prefix to form names of girl initiates. However, the custom stems from the belief that male names will endow the girls with some of the masculine attributes.

In forming names of girl-initiates, the prefix *ra-* is simply attached to nouns, derivative nouns and verb stems. It must be emphasized again that the resultant forms neither imply nor convey the meaning of "father of" as in the case of teknonymous names of parents. For instance, a girl-initiate by the name of *Ralebelo* (*lebelo* "speed") does not imply that she is the "father of speed," but, instead, "the-one-of-speed."

Another interesting feature of the names of girl-initiates is that the majority of them are formed by adding the prefix *ra-* to the name of the maternal uncle of the initiate. The name of the eldest maternal uncle was normally used by his eldest niece. Reasons for this custom are obscure; however, it may be speculated that this is one way of honoring the mother's brother because he is very important in this society. But any definitive answers must await further research. Following are examples of girls' initiate names.

Ralebelo (*lebelo* "speed")
Ratsebo (*tsebo* "knowledge")
Ramatla (*matla* "strength")
Ramona (*mona* "selfishness")
Ramatjato (*matjato* "agility")

Concluding remarks

In this somewhat sketchy presentation, we tried to indicate the interplay of social and linguistic factors and have noticed how naming in Sesotho is determined and influenced by socio-cultural factors. It is also obvious that in this treatment many other types of names have been

excluded. For instance, surnames or family names and what are commonly referred to as Christian names did not receive our attention. We have also avoided detail grammatical or morphological explanations of the changes that take place in some words when used as personal names. This was regarded as a task far beyond the scope of an introductory treatment such as this. The English translations are simply glosses and should be handled with the utmost care. Perhaps the usefulness of this article lies in the fact that it has pointed out areas that require research, and that it also offers raw data which can be useful to both anthropologists and linguists who are interested in cross-cultural studies.

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