



## Year Naming Practice among the Haya and Nyambo Communities of Kagera Region Tanzania

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**Abstract:** This paper explored the distinctive cultural practice of year naming among the Haya and Nyambo communities, a tradition that plays a vital role in their social and cultural activities. The study focuses on the names assigned to years from 1959 to 2022, investigating the linguistic features, the implications and socio-cultural impacts of these names. The year naming practice serves as a lens through which the communities articulate their historical narratives and collective memory. By documenting this tradition, the study aims to uncover how these names reflect broader cultural themes and issues related to identity within the Haya and Nyambo societies. The paper employs Descriptivist Theory. The descriptive approach was employed, utilising qualitative data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions involving 20 respondents from Karagwe, Misenyi, Kyerwa, and Muleba districts of Kagera region. The year names were systematically coded into lexical, phrasal and sentential structures which were analysed using tabulations. The study revealed that the year names among the Haya and Nyambo display both lexical and post-lexical structural features including lexical items, sentences, metaphorical and metonymic expressions, and elliptical forms with declarative sentences (49 year names) and metaohorical expressions (9 year names) leading. These structural elements reflect meaningful sociocultural functions tied to specific communal experiences. The naming conventions convey key societal themes such as encouraging resilience and hard work, prompting self-reflection and self-examination, acknowledging shared struggles and empathy, offering spiritual and moral guidance, and celebrating achievements. Ultimately, the research highlights a unique cultural practice that contributes to broader discussions about how language-based traditions influence collective identity and social cohesion. By examining these naming patterns, the study sheds light on the deep interrelationship between language, culture, and community life in these linguistically rich societies.

**Keywords:** Year Naming Practice, Culture, Language, Haya, Nyambo.

### 1. Introduction

Naming practices serve as linguistic repositories that encode collective memory, ethical frameworks, and communal aspirations in the Haya (Bahaya) and Nyambo (Banyambo) communities of northwestern Tanzania. The tradition of assigning names to individual years is a deeply embedded and distinctive cultural practice among the two communities. They both share the names once they are given. These year names are not arbitrary but symbolic phrases generated through participatory discourse, often during harvest festivals or royal gatherings, and are infused with moral, historical, and social meaning (Katoke, 1975; Finnegan, 1970).

Each year name reflects defining events, communal aspirations, or societal challenges. For example, a year marked by drought might be named to inspire resilience, while a period of political turmoil might yield a name that calls for unity or wisdom. These names, crafted and proposed by community elders in royal assemblies, function as both a moral compass and a historical chronicle, translating complex societal dynamics into concise, culturally resonant linguistic forms (Obeng, 1997; Mphande, 2006). In most African cultures, names are given to reflect events, culture and circumstances at different occasions. Mpobela (2025) evidences this in personal names with negative meanings in Runyambo which are said to reflect cultural beliefs and are believed to have social impact. To



complement this, Madima (2025) discussed names with negative meanings in Sepedi including *Matlakala* 'rubbish' given to a death survivor among high mortality rates. Mpobela (2025) and Madima (2024) argue that some negative personal names are given as a blame to those who are believed to have caused the disasters. This paper analyses year names with both positive and negative meanings to see the implications behind them. Thus, the socio-cultural rationale of the names in African context is important to understand the connection between language, history and culture.

Formally documented since 1959, year naming practice is characterised by observable structural patterns. Year names often feature imperative expressions, verb-noun compounding, tonal emphasis, and metaphorical language. Such structural features are not unique to year names as are reflected in other names including personal (Asiimwe, 2022; Taji, 2024) and place names (Mpobela, 2024). Semantically, year names engage with themes such as agriculture, governance, kinship, and spirituality, domains central to communal life. For example, *Nywamwiza* 'Harvest of Unity' uses compound noun construction to reflect communal action, while *Kweka* 'Persevere' functions as a moral imperative embedded in social discourse.

In recent decades, the practice has transitioned from oral to written documentation, reflecting both adaptability and cultural resilience. This shift also underscores the evolving role of language in preserving identity in the era of globalisation, urbanisation, and youth disengagement. In contrast to the individualistic focus common in Western naming systems, Haya-Nyambo year names prioritise collective identity and social accountability, reinforcing the community's ethical and historical continuity (Haviland and Gordon, 2017). This paper sets out to analyse year naming practices employed by the two linguistic communities. By documenting this tradition, the study aims to uncover how these names reflect broader cultural themes and issues related to identity within the Haya and Nyambo societies. This contributes to a grater interdisciplinary relationship that exist between language, culture and history reflecting the social and cultural practices reflected through year naming. It contributes to the documentation of the Historical and linguistic connectivity between the two communities of Haya and Nyambo who live in close proximity and share linguistic intelligibility and some aspects of culture as reflected in the year names.

## 2. Literature Review

Language has long been understood as more than a medium for communication. It is a cultural tool that shapes and reflects the worldview of its speakers. Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf were among the first to systematically argue that the structure of a language influences the cognitive patterns of its users, a concept encapsulated in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956). Even though the deterministic interpretation of this hypothesis has faced criticism, the broader view that language and culture are interdependent remains central in linguistic anthropology. This paper investigates year naming systems among the two communities of Haya and Nyambo which reveal language as a cultural tool reflecting the everyday life of its speakers.

Noam Chomsky's Descriptivist Theory provides a valuable framework for studying language as it is naturally used within communities. Chomsky (1965) distinguishes between linguistic competence (the abstract knowledge of language) and performance (actual language use), advocating for a focus on observable linguistic behaviour. This approach aligns well with the analysis of Haya and Nyambo year naming, as it emphasises the community-driven evolution of language forms over rigid grammatical correctness. Descriptive theory offers a framework that allows for an investigation of linguistic forms without imposing external arguments focusing on how language is used in social contexts. It helped the researchers to uncover patterns in naming practices including morphology, syntax and semantics within year names and how they relate to broader social cultural phenomena. The structural properties of names represent both identity and carry implications about community values, traditions, histories and social dynamics.

The structural properties of names have also been discussed by different scholars including, Masanja (2025) and Mpobela (2024) on place names in Kiswahili and Runyambo respectively, and Siame, Muleya and Chisenga (2025) on shop names in Zambia. Thus, the structural properties of names are worth a study. Despite being a unique category of names, year names have linguistic properties which are worth a discussion. This paper presents the linguistic properties of year names among the Haya and Nyambo communities of Kagera region.

Within African contexts, naming has long been recognised as a culturally significant practice that conveys identity, values, and historical context. Finnegan (1970) outlines how oral traditions, proverbs, praise poems,



storytelling, and naming are vital for preserving social knowledge and moral instruction. Among Bantu-speaking groups, names function not just as identifiers but as encapsulations of events, moral commentaries, or symbols of resistance and triumph (Mpobela 2025; Msuya, 2021; Obeng, 1997). Mpobela (2025) discusses the negative meaning names and how they reflect the events and situations in the society. They may be given to warn, advise or address. Msuya (2021) agree that Chasu speech community has rich and diverse criteria for giving names such as memorable life experience, mannerisms, birth circumstances, seasons, physical appearance, and religious/cultural events. Just like personal names reflect different situations and predictions for the future, year names are discussed in this paper to show how they are given and which are the reasons behind their bestowal.

While considerable scholarship exists on African personal and ritual naming, systematic year naming remains under explored. Most studies have focused on birth names, clan identifiers, and initiation titles (Mphande, 2006; Herbert, 1995). However, similar symbolic naming traditions exist across the continent; in Akan seasonal names, Yoruba spiritual titles, and Baganda ceremonial labels, although they rarely assume the regular, annual structure observed among the Haya and Nyambo (Katoke, 1975). This paper investigates year names among the Haya and Nyambo communities which have not been linguistically discussed. Many of the reviewed studies present about place names, personal names, etc.

The cultural function of these names reflects what Mufwene (2001) describes as the "ecology of language," whereby linguistic forms emerge from the interplay between social function and environmental context. To support this, Sebonde (2020) reports that personal names in Chasu are linked with the circumstances surrounding the birth such as time and place of birth. In this light, Haya and Nyambo year naming operates as a form of social navigation, reinforcing communal values, articulating shared histories, and guiding future action.

Thus, this study addresses a significant gap in both onomastic and linguistics literature by documenting and analysing the forms and sociolinguistic logic of year naming in East Africa. Year naming presents a new naming category which does not seem to exist in other languages discussed in this review. The uniqueness of the category of naming results into the uniqueness of the structural properties and sociocultural properties of year names among the Haya and Nyambo. It contributes to a deeper understanding of how indigenous linguistic systems operate as both cultural archives and mechanisms for social cohesion.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, employing data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions conducted in Buchurago and Bugolola within Misenyi district, regions noted for their elder populations who serve as custodians of the year-naming tradition. To broaden the scope of the inquiry, additional insights were gathered from speakers across Nyambo and Kihaya speaking areas, with 20 respondents from Karagwe, Misenyi, Kyerwa, and Muleba participating in interviews and focus group discussions. 4 informants were selected through snowball sampling from each district. The other four elders were purposefully selected from Buchurago and Bugolola villages in Misenyi district due to their direct involvement in the year naming process. The informants provided the meanings and sociocultural underpinnings behind the bestowal of such names.

The importance of year names emerged strongly, as community members view them not only as linguistic markers but also as guiding motto encapsulating the spirit of each year. The study also analysed a documented data set of year names spanning 1959 to 2022, sourced from local community records. Each name was examined for its grammatical structure (such as imperatives, declaratives, or noun phrases), lexical and rhetorical features (including metaphors, metonymy, and ellipsis), and the underlying sociocultural messages. The analysis was framed by the principles of descriptive linguistics in line with Noam Chomsky Descriptivist Theory, focusing on how language use naturally emerges within cultural contexts.

To adhere to research ethics, the researchers acquired a research permit (SRN:8/2024) from the Directorate of Research, Innovation, and Community Engagement (DRICE) of the Saint Augustine University of Tanzania. Also, the informants were asked verbally to give informed consent before they were involved in the process. Each informant was informed verbally of the objectives of the study and asked to freely participate in the process of data collection that they both accepted. Verbal consent was preferred because some informants could not read and write.



## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Structural Diversity of Year Names

The structural diversity of year names among the *Haya* and *Nyambo* communities is both linguistically rich and culturally meaningful. These names, selected annually through communal processes, reflect a sophisticated use of grammatical and rhetorical forms that align with the communicative and ethical goals of the society. Through a detailed linguistic analysis of year naming documented from 1959 to 2022, several structural patterns emerge, each contributing uniquely to the semantic depth and pragmatic function of the names. The names in Table 1 reflect the examples of Year Names that reflect the structural diversity of year naming practice:

**Table 1.** Structural Diversity of the Year Names

| Structure                         | Year | Name                                 | Gloss                                                   |
|-----------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Imperatives                       | 1972 | <i>Shaya</i>                         | Put in more effort                                      |
|                                   | 1995 | <i>Guma</i>                          | Be strong                                               |
|                                   | 1960 | <i>Ija webonele</i>                  | Come and witness                                        |
|                                   | 1961 | <i>Bilye oyekomile</i>               | Dine on a dime                                          |
| Declaratives                      | 1981 | <i>Galaziw'enzih</i>                 | Only the best swimmer will swim best                    |
|                                   | 1966 | <i>Ndarweboineo</i>                  | I have ever encountered it (misfortune)                 |
|                                   | 2019 | <i>Birug'omumpita</i>                | (Success is) earned through a sweat                     |
|                                   | 1979 | <i>Tikiliwa Igamba</i>               | Unforgettable / Memorable                               |
| Metaphoric and Metonymic Phrasing | 2019 | <i>Birugomumpita</i>                 | It (success) is earned through sweat                    |
|                                   | 2022 | <i>Otagwisa Mukono</i>               | Don't relax your hand                                   |
|                                   | 1963 | <i>Gumisa Omwoyo</i>                 | Have a mighty heart                                     |
| Nouns and Nominalized verbs       | 1986 | <i>Shuubi</i>                        | Hope                                                    |
|                                   | 1982 | <i>Goshoko</i>                       | Usefulness                                              |
|                                   | 1965 | <i>Karamanshanyio</i>                | Hustler                                                 |
| Elliptical forms                  | 1964 | <i>Otula Obungya (Mbwenu waguza)</i> | You 've always been dealing (Now you own the game)      |
|                                   | 1975 | <i>Kakiweyo (akakoza omukila)</i>    | Long wait of the hunter ( made his spear find the tail) |
| Verbs                             | 1997 | <i>Chwaziika</i>                     | Work hard                                               |
|                                   | 2000 | <i>Shanduka</i>                      | Jubilate                                                |
|                                   | 1996 | <i>Yechuze</i>                       | Repent                                                  |

#### 4.1.1 Imperatives

The most prevalent structure within the corpus of year names is the imperative form. These names function as directives aimed at influencing collective behaviour or inspiring specific moral actions. From Table 1, examples include 1995 *Guma* 'Be strong' and 1972 *Shaya* 'Put in more effort'. Both year names structurally begin in imperative verbs, 'be' and 'put', with direct address motivational weight, often urging resilience, industriousness, or solidarity in response to the socio-economic challenges of a particular year. This relates to the general feature of names in most African languages in which they reflect the circumstances and histories of the entity being named or those surrounding it as argued by Mpobela (2024, 2025). Thus, the structural properties of names reflect the community's beliefs and traditions which later tells about the social dynamics of the Haya and Nyambo communities.

On the other hand, the name for 1960 *Ija Webonele* 'come and see for yourself' show the need of every member of the society to witness the events without having to hear from other people. Such may be joyful events. *Bilye Oyekomile* 'dine on a dime' (Lit. Eat it with a fasten belt) for 1961 insists on the need to not be satisfied by the past success. It urges people to be prepared for the next struggles while they enjoy the fruits of the past. The inclusion of the past memories is the names in revealed in personal names among the Chagga Rombo language



(Lusekelo and Mtenga, 2020) in which naming is a sociocultural event which reflects history within the family and beyond. Thus the history reflected within the names may help in predicting the future and working hard to refute the undesirable history.

The two years (1960 and 1961) show the progression of events and predictions, the first insisting people to witness the success and the next encouraging them to enjoy while prepared for the future. The frequent use of imperatives illustrates the performative role of language within the community. Words are not just descriptive but prescriptive, setting a communal tone for the year, serving as the direct address of the message to the members of the community. The year names in this group highlights the directive nature in which the imperative names function to instigate the community to act in a certain way. Thus, year names performs the speech acts and the names redirect the actions, activities, etc within the named year and beyond. The name Shaya 'put in more effort of 1972 for instance was reported to have made people to work harder.

#### 4.1.2 Declaratives

A smaller, yet significant, number of year names take the form of declarative sentences, such as *Ndarweboineo* 'I ever witnessed misfortune struck me' for 1966 and *Galaziwenzih* 'Only the best swimmer will swim best' for 1981. These names reflect a more narrative or reflective tone, acknowledging shared experiences or hardships. The name, *Ndarweboineo* show that the community predicts the future misfortunes which help them to plan how to tackle them before they face them. They serve as linguistic mechanisms for communal purification, empathy, and the reinforcement of collective identity through the expression of vulnerability or shared suffering.

Using declarative sentences, communities tell stories about difficult times and teach important lessons, drawing on the wisdom of their elders, remembered events, and shared cultural history. Sentential names are also reported in Runyambo by Mpobela (2024) who presents place names. The names of this nature presents the relationship between linguistics and history by showing how historical crises shape linguistic expression. While history may shape the naming, the naming reflects the history. Thus, the two cannot be separated.

#### 4.1.3. Metaphoric and Metonymic Phrases

Many years' names utilise metaphorical and metonymic constructions to encapsulate complex ideas or sentiments in condensed linguistic form. For example, 2019 *Birug'omumpiita* 'Success is earned through sweat' and 2022 *Otagwisa Mukono* 'Don't relax your hand' convey the value of hard work and perseverance through imagery rather than explicit description. The words '*mpiita*' and '*mukono*' are metonymically and metaphorically used to represent the need for hard-working. These figurative forms deepen interpretative engagement and connect year names to broader cultural narratives, idioms, and oral traditions. They also reflect the community's reliance on symbolism and poetic language to encode lessons, warnings, or celebrations. This feature is not unique to year names as it is also reported in Ekegusii personal names by Onchoke (2018). The year names like *Birug'omumbita* evoke emotions instigating people to work harder than they are used to. The name also reflect the hopes that come as a result of struggle. It invokes the belief that 'no gain without sweat'. The Haya and Nyambo community build narratives which provide them with moral guidance and shape their shared experiences.

#### 4.1.4 Nouns and Nominalized verbs

Some year names are formed by simple lexical items like *Shuubi* 'hope' (a noun) for 1986 while others are formed through various word-formation processes, including affixation. For instance, the names *Goshooko* for 1982 'usefulness' and *Kalamanshanyio* for 1965 'hustling' are derived from verbs *Goshoka* 'be useful' and *lamanshanya* 'hustle'. These forms emerge through the addition of the nominalising suffix *-o* to the respective verb stems and a name forming noun class 12 prefix *ka-* to form the name *Kalamanshanyio*.

In Runyambo and Ruhaya, both suffixes typically attach to verb roots either to create nouns (*goshok-* 'be useful' becomes *goshooko* 'usefulness'). These morphological constructions condense complex social moods or aspirations into single lexical items. Such names are commonly used in years marked by transition, uncertainty, or anticipated renewal. By assigning a year an abstract, value-laden label, the community expresses a collective orientation toward reflection or progress, implying that the moral or emotional tone of the year is as significant as



its actual events. Nominalization of verbs is used in forming names of different kinds in different languages including Runyambo (Mpobela, 2024) and Kisukuma (Shighini, 2023).

#### 4.1.5. Elliptical Expressions

Another significant structural feature observed in several year names is the use of ellipsis or clipped forms, shortened expressions that rely heavily on cultural context and oral tradition for their full meaning. For instance, the year names *Kakiweyo* 'let it finish/complete' for 1975 and *Otula Obungya* 'you always deal...' for 1964, as shown in Table 1, are abbreviated versions of longer proverbs. *Kakiweyo* is derived from the full saying *Kakiweyo akakoza omukila* 'A long wait of the hunter made his spear find the tail', while *Otula Obungya* comes from *Otula Obungya, Mbweni Waguza* 'You have always been dealing, now, you own the game'. These shortened forms carry layered meanings that are easily recognised and interpreted by community members. They draw from traditional wisdom and serve to pass down values and knowledge across generations. The use of ellipsis reflects the oral culture's ability to express complex ideas concisely, preserving depth of meaning while favouring brevity, a hallmark of expressive efficiency in oral societies.

#### 4.1.6 Verbal Names

Some year names are made up of verbs including 1997 *Chwaziika* 'work hard', 2000 *Shanduka* 'jubilate', and 1996 *Yechuze* 'repent'. Such names include all obligatory elements of a verb including the verb roots and final vowels. A final vowel represents mood and may change depending on the mood. The canonical FV is *-a* but may become *-e* (imperative).

Generally, the structures of year names are not just by chance, they are given as directions or advice hence their structure reflect their socio-cultural functions within the two communities. Declarative explains what is or have happened while imperatives directs people how to live and behave and elliptical expressions present sayings which are used as warnings, regrets, blessings, etc. Thus, the structures are deliberately employed to reflect the message within the year names. The reflection of socio-cultural underpinnings behind year names are reflected in the discussion in 4.2.

### 4.2 Sociocultural Rationales

Year naming is not just a mere practice; it is culturally rooted, presenting the beliefs and practices of the communities in question. It is connected to how people live and behave. Most of the people, especially the elderly generation, respect the themes carried within the names. When a name inspires them to work hard, they do so seriously. The sociocultural significance of year names is presented in Table 2.

The names in Table 2 are reflective of major community values and experiences, indicating how the community lives and encourages each other on good conduct and work hard. The issues related to hard work, resilience, and warship are also reflected in the year names in Table 2 and other collected names which are not in the table.

**Table 2.** Sociocultural Rationales of Year Naming in Ruhaya and Runyambo

| Year | Name                  | Gloss                                                            | Socio-cultural Rationales                                               |
|------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1997 | <i>Chwaziika</i>      | Work hard                                                        | Encouraging diligence and effort towards goal achievement               |
| 2000 | <i>Birug'omumpita</i> | It (success) is earned through sweat                             | Encouraging the value of hard work and dedication in achieving success. |
| 1974 | <i>Wekebuke</i>       | Examine yourself                                                 | Calling for self-reflection and self-awareness                          |
| 1966 | <i>Ndarweboineo</i>   | I have ever been through it before (misfortune/ adversity /loss) | Acknowledging past self-hardships and reflecting a humble attitude      |
| 2012 | <i>Webange</i>        | Prepare / plan                                                   | Encouraging foresight and planning for the future life                  |



|      |                     |                                                                                 |                                                                                           |
|------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1987 | <i>Wemoge</i>       | Regret (the mistakes)                                                           | Acknowledging and learning from mistakes, emphasizing self-improvement.                   |
| 2000 | <i>Shanduka</i>     | <i>Jubilate</i>                                                                 | Encouraging celebration and joyous expression of a certain achievement                    |
| 1960 | <i>Ija Webonere</i> | Come and eye-witness (the achievement)                                          | Uplifting the joy of a hard-earned success by inviting others to share in the celebration |
| 1996 | <i>Yechuze</i>      | Repent                                                                          | Encouraging self-examination and correction of wrongs                                     |
| 1994 | <i>humbya</i>       | Hold on to charms for the success of some affair, pray for success of something | Encouraging the need to pray against evil which may result into trouble in the community  |
| 2017 | <i>Yegashanize</i>  | Worship                                                                         | Reflecting on religious and spiritual practices in life, guiding decisions, and hope      |

#### 4.2.1 Hard work

Most of the names of years in the two communities reflect a need for hard work and diligence, this is because the communities depends on agriculture and small business for survival. The names like *Shaya* 'put in more efforts' 1972, *Genderera* 'continue' 1973, *Galaziwenzih* 'only the best swimmer will swim best' 1982, *Yombeka* 'build' 1992, *Chwaziika* 'work hard/get busy' 1997, *Jwahuka* 'be active/lively' 2008, *Bilug'omumpita* 'success is earned through sweat' 2019, *Kanyis'emisiri* 'expand farms' 2020, *Bagara* 'clean the farm' 2021, and *Otagwisa Mukono* 'don't loosen your hand' 2022 encourage hard work among the community members. The community members take year names as the motto which lead their actions for the named year. Thus, working hard and being productive is very important for survival among the Haya and Nyambo.

While many years reflect hard work, only one was given to reflect lack of drinks which among the two communities may insinuate hunger. This is because they quench thirsty by local beer made from sour banana. The name is *Nyin'eiriwo* 'I am thirsty' which was given to the year 1992.

#### 4.2.2 Encouraging Resilience and Industry

In the Ruhaya and Runyambo communities, year names like *chwaziika* 'work hard' for 1997 and *Birug'omumpita* 'success is earned through sweat' for 2000 were given during times when life was especially tough, when people faced economic hardship, food shortages, or had to put in extra effort just to get by. These names aren't picked at random. They reflect the real struggles people expected to face that year. Elders often relate them to farming seasons, when resilience and determination were essential to survival. From a language and culture perspective, these names serve as living memories, reminding people of past challenges while passing on values like hard work and perseverance.

The way years are named also shows a kind of progression, where each name responds to the events or mood of the time. Looking at the three years leading up to 1997, we see a clear story unfold. In 1994, the year was named *Humbya*, which loosely means "cling to charms or pray for success," suggesting it was expected to be a particularly hard year. It was reported by one of the informants that the prediction of the name came to pass as the community faced challenges brought by the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. The community had to accommodate refugees which disturbed the normal life they used to have. During focus group discussion, it was said that year names reflect the predicted fact which is insinuated by the happenings of the past year and the prophecies for the future by the traditional leaders. The name *Humbya* for instance, was given to encourage people to turn to prayer. The year 1995 was given the name *Guma* 'be strong' urging the community to remain strong through ongoing hardships which resulted from the previous year. In 1996, the name *Yechuze* 'repent' suggested that the difficulties might have been linked to spiritual or moral failures, encouraging reflection and repentance to avoid further misfortune.

By 1997, with the name *Chwaziika*, 'work hard', there was a shift; people were being encouraged to move forward, now that the worst seemed to be behind them. According to community members, those years were marked by real suffering, hunger in 1993 and 1994, and the traumatic impact of the Rwandan genocide nearby, which



affected both communities deeply. Then came 1998, named *Tekereza* 'think' or 'meditate', calling for people to reflect on what they had been through. In 1999, the name *Fukama* 'be humble' captured a sense that hardship had taught humility, and that reflection had led to a renewed sense of perspective. These names are more than just labels; they are part of how the community uses language to teach and guide, especially the younger generation.

In line with Chomsky's Descriptivist Theory which emphasizes how language is actually used in real-life contexts, these names are a natural way for people to express what truly matters to them. Through this shared tradition, the community teaches that success comes through effort, and each year's name becomes part of the story they tell about resilience, faith, and identity. The year names function as a tool to preserve cultural norms of the society guiding people on how they should live and behave. While mere words may vanish, the words in the year names live from generation to generation.

#### 4.2.3 Calling for Reflection and Self-Examination

Names such as 1974, *Wekebuke*, 'examine yourself,' 2012, *Webange* 'prepare', and 2003, *Webaze* 'ask yourself' were given in years following major events like leadership changes, disputes, or failed harvests. These names were used to encourage people to think carefully about their actions and prepare for the future. Such names are more than just labels; they are tools that help guide people's thoughts and actions. They often use forms of speech that give imperatives or encourage self-reflection, which shows that the language itself is used to teach moral lessons. From a sociolinguistic angle, these names serve both to mark historical moments and to push the community towards self-awareness. Chomsky's Theory supports this by showing how language naturally grows out of people's mental grammar and social experiences. This way, naming a year becomes part of how a society learns and grows from its past. Year names among the two communities are used to transmit norms, customs and ways of life encouraging people to live accordingly which is transmitted from generation to generation.

#### 4.2.4 Highlighting Shared Struggles and Empathy

Names like *Ndarweboineo* (1965) 'I've been through it' and the 1987, *Wemoge* 'regret' were given to years when the community endured collective hardships, whether from loss, natural disasters, or social and political turmoil. Some of these names are tied to moments during the struggle for independence like *Bhilemorengire* (1959) 'you fail while trying' which encouraged people to continue fighting for independence even when they thought they would not achieve it. It made them to understand that the person who fails shall fail while trying as they should not give up. The name *Ija Webonere* (1960) 'come and witness' was given to reflect the prediction that the country could gain independence. It was argued by one of the informants that, from the struggles for independence and the encouragement to keep trying, it was predicted that 1960 could be the year of independence from the colonial powers. 1961, *Bilye Oyekomire* 'eat while your belt is fastened' was given to encourage people to get prepared for the fight, that they should eat while ready for the fight. This was the year when Tanzania gained independence though other life difficulties raised due to the change of regime leading into the names of 1962 *Gumisa Omwoyo* 'be patient/take heart. The year name *Kakiweyo* for 1975 encouraged the community members not to rush things, to work on one to the end before moving to the next. It also encouraged people to work on things early enough for better success.

The other names reflect fear such as *Teekana* 'be still' for 1968, and 1994 *Humbya* 'hold on to charms for the success of some affair, pray for success of something, One of the informants claimed that the names were given to predict the difficulties which could face the community and raise a need to take heart, pray and be patient. The other names reflect displacement or oppression.

The year naming among the Haya and Nyambo communities reflect progression of events which is also a feature of personal naming as reflected in Mpobela (2025) who argues that negative names are given to reflect the situations in the community. The names are given in relation to the experiences encountered and the hopes that the community have for the next year. Year names therefore are given to establish continuity or contrast between the community and their past which reveals cultural dynamics in the society.

These emotionally charged names are often remembered during funerals or retold in stories about hard times, keeping the memory of those struggles alive. Such expressions show how language becomes a way to acknowledge pain, foster compassion, and strengthen bonds among community members. Naming a year after a



shared hardship allows people not only to recognize suffering but also to process it together and begin healing. In this way, language serves as a tool for empathy and solidarity. Chomsky's view that language naturally reflects human thought and experience helps explain how these expressions arise, not merely to describe events, but to support one another emotionally and affirm a shared sense of identity and endurance.

Year names among the Haya and Nyambo communities carry meanings which encapsulate the experiences of the community, especially in the context of historical hardship and trauma. For instance, the name *Birye Oyekomire* encourages people to eat while prepared for whatever that may happen. This was the year of independence as discussed above showing that names do not only serve as identifiers but as forms of collective memories reflecting what people individually and the community as a whole go through.

#### 4.2.5 Encouraging a New Beginning after Struggle

Some of the year name were given to encourage a new beginning after facing problems like hunger, misfortunes, etc. For instance, the name *Tabaro* for 1969 encouraging reign/advocate after reflection. Thus, one should not just sit by and see enemies take over, they need to advocate and make sure the disputes are rightly settled. *Nyikira* 'stretch your limits to bear the load' was given to 1970 encouraging people to push beyond their comfort zones and embrace the challenges. 1971 was named *Tweyambe* 'let us have each other's backs' encouraging the community to work hard and together to free from hardships. This name encouraged togetherness and helping one another to reach greater achievements. These years therefore suggest the new beginning despite the previous difficulties. It encourages people to forget the past and let them as a lesson to start a new life.

The year 1991 was given the name *Humura* 'take a break' advising the people to relax after they had been through difficulties while *Shabuka* 2004 'cross' was given to encourage people to move away from the issues that made them to suffer in the previous year. It connects to the name *Webaze* 'ask yourself/reflect/meditate which was encouraging people to think of what they had been through. The progression is reflected in these names as after one had reflected on his/her past in 2003, he was being advised to do away with what held him down.

The year 2006 was given a name *Gir'emilembe* 'have blessings/peace, showing that the year could be full of peace, blessings and new good beginning. *Webange* 'plan' was given to 2012 advising people to plan for the future while 1984 was named *Ikingura* 'the opening of opportunity' indicating a new beginning. *Shamula*, 'throw' was given to 2001 as an advice to let go of unnecessary things or to cast the burden while 2002 was named *Rundaana* 'collect/gather' to encourage people to gather the good things for a better and successful progress. Year names presents ways of life in almost all the spheres of life. They direct the lives of people encouraging resilience, hard work, unity, new beginnings which live to be taken as wise words of encouragements during and after the years. The words live to warn, direct, encourage etc. the community members during the time of need.

#### 4.2.6 Encouraging Seeking for Justice

Some year names among the Haya and Nyambo communities encourage the community to seek for justice. 1977 was given a name *Henjuuza* 'search/investigate as an encouragement to the community to keep investigating the cause of problems. This name wanted the community not to take things for granted but to investigate. *Galaziw'enzihi* 'only the best swimmer will swim best' was given to 1981 to show that survival is achieved by the strong, i.e. survival for the fittest. One of the informants argued that such names encouraged people to work hard and make sure they achieve from their hard work. *Tongana* 'advocate' was given to 2010 to show the need to advocate for what is ones right. *Rashana* 'strive/ fight' for 2007 also encouraged the fight for ones right. 1969 was given the name *Tabaro* 'reign' to symbolize leadership and control, asserting authority in ones domain. The names in this group encourages people to take control of their situations and fight for their right and take over. This is also reflected in personal names in Zulu (Turner, 2000) which are given to make the family to reflect on the past before taking any action. Thus year names in the two communities directs how they ought to live and act during the times of difficulties. These names do not die after the year ends, they live in the memories of the community members and function to direct how they behave towards life, towards each other and towards other communities.



#### 4.2.7 Spiritual and Moral Instruction

In years when the community felt spiritually challenged or morally lost, names like the year 2017, *Yegashanize* 'worship', 1987 *Wemoge* 'regret', 1988 *Kakuntantalikwa* 'don't lose your composure' and 1996, *Yechuze* 'repent' were given to urge the community to stop doing evil. The years 1987 to late 1990's were filled with deaths from HIV/AIDs which was known to be caused by adultery and fornication. One of the informants reported that, by then, the sick were segregated and the deaths from the disease were so painful. These names give a strong moral message, often using command forms to urge people toward better behavior. This shows how language can be used to guide the society spiritually. The year names among these two communities encapsulate social values and serve as vehicles of cultural transmission from generation to generation. The names like *Kakutantarikwa*, *Wemoge* and others live as sayings, warnings and directions of life through out the lives of the Nyambo and Haya. No new words are created for year names, instead, the already existing words are put into use depending on what the community is anticipated to do and how they are suppose to live.

The other year names encouraging morals include 1988 *Kwatiraho* 'hold a grip', which was given to encourage people to hold on the good morals they have started showing, and 1990 *Hanurirwa* 'be open to criticism' encouraging people to accept advice and warnings. The year names *Chulela* 'be orderly/calm' 2009, and *Yeetohye* 'devote' 2013 were given to encourage the community members to be calm, slow to anger and devoted to whatever they do. Due to the significance given to the year names by the community, they always await for the year name which is believed to lead their actions during the year long.

It was found that some of the year names encouraged them to forgive others as 2018 *Ganyira* 'forgive' while others encouraged them to acknowledge/appreciate the goodness of others as in *Ijuka* 'remember' for 2013, and to be thankful in the name for 2005 *Siima* 'thank/acknowledge'. The other names encouraged the need to visit and check on as reflected in *Shuliza* 'visit' (1978). The names *Fukama* 'be humble' (1999), *Babindangiire* 'they guided me (to success)' (1967), *Kankwehanuzeo* 'let me ask for advice from you' (1985) were given to encourage people to value and respect others and be ready to receive advice and be guided by others.

From a Chomskyan view, this reflects how language forms naturally express cultural needs. People use these names to remind themselves and others of the importance of faith, repentance, and moral living. It's a way of using everyday language to keep the community aligned with spiritual and ethical values. Thus, year names are not just labels but narratives which shape and reflect social identity. Looking at the year names, one may tell about the cultural values of the Haya and Nyambo. This instigates the transmission of such cultural undertakings from one generation to another.

#### 4.2.8 Celebrating Achievements

Names like 1960, *Ija Webonere* "Come and eye-witness the achievements", *Shanduka* (2000) "celebrate/jubilate", and *Otu'obungya* 'you have always been dealing (now you own a game)' were given to reflect success after hard work. The celebrated achievements included good harvest, the building of schools, or other major accomplishments like independence. The other names are for 1979 *Tikiliw'eigamba* 'it will never be forgotten' which reflects the historical achievement which is memorable in the community. This was possibly reflecting the happiness after kicking out Idd Amin Dadda who attacked Tanzania in 1978. Since the war was fought between Tanzania and Uganda, Kagera region was the war ground resulting into fear among the community. Tanzania's winning of the war called for the celebration still remembered today. The name for 1980 *Burur'obone* 'open your eyes and see' is also reflecting the celebration that every one was to open their eyes and see what had happened in the area.

These names are joyful and often appear in songs, stories, and community events. They show how language can be used to celebrate and share good news. By naming a year in a way that invites others to witness and join in the success, the community spreads hope and pride. According to Chomsky's theory, these expressions come naturally from people's shared understanding of language and their environment. Such names build group identity and encourage others to aim for similar success. They help preserve memories and encourage a culture that values achievement and celebration. That names carry memories of the past which delve into the future is also reported by [Temba et al., \(2025\)](#), who argue that each place name in Chagga Uru reflect various aspects of their history, traditions and daily life. They carry stories which reveals insights into the values, beliefs and practices of the community. To



cement of this, Guma (2001) adds that African names and naming system is a sociocultural interpretation of historical events.

Year names as discussed in this section reflect the culture of the Haya and Nyambo and help in preserving the historical and cultural knowledge and practices from one generation to another. For instance, the names reflecting hunger may be remembered from generation to generation by their names. For instance, 1979 *Tikiliw'eigamba* reflects the historical event that is memorable from generation to generation. The histories and culture are transmitted through year names among other ways. The study findings show how year naming conventions reflect cultural values by showing what the Nyambo and Haya value and the giving of year names reflect the social structure of the community and the cultural connectivity between the two communities which reflect their historical relationship. Despite being referred to as two different communities speaking two different languages, using the same names shows the long family connectivity which is also reflected by Katoke (1975). Thus, onomastics contributes to the reflection of anthropological facts and cultural connectivity among the two communities. This is also reflected in the similarities between personal names in the two communities (Buberwa (2012) and Mpobela, 2025).

## 5. Conclusion

Year naming among the Haya and Nyambo were found to possess different structural features ranging from lexical to sentential just as reflected in other kinds of names. Year names are formed through morphological processes like nominalization of verbs, declarative sentences, ellipsis, etc. These reflect the structural linguistic richness in Runyambo and Luhaya. These were found to be not mere linguistic structures but they carry within them the socio-cultural experiences. Each structure was found to be chosen deliberately and to have influence on what it represents. Elliptical terms for instance were found to connect moral discourse to year naming. Oral traditions are not just linguistic expressions but they are used to transform wisdom and culture from one language to another. Oral discourse influence year naming among the Haya and Nyambo. Most of the presented names are influenced by oral discourse including imperative, metonyms and other sayings.

Chomsky's descriptivist theory helps explain how these year names come from real social situations and natural language use. The regular use of commands and metaphors in these names shows how the community uses language to express its values and guide behavior. It also reflects the creative ways in which people form names, sometimes turning verbs into nouns or shortening common sayings, demonstrate how flexible yet rule-based language is.

This paper introduces several categories of sociocultural rationales such as resilience, reflection, justice, celebration etc. which together complement each other in reflecting the cultural values of the Haya and Nyambo communities. They reflect the dynamics of time and events, how people face their struggles, how they account for their mistakes like in the name *Wemoge* 'regret (your mistakes)' for 1987 which was given to encourage people to stop bad behaviour like fornication which lead into HIV. *Wemoge* is connected to 1988 *Kakuntantarike* 'do not lose composure' which argues people to stop wondering around especially committing adultery and fornication. The next year, 1989 was named *Kwatiraho* 'hold a grip' encouraging people to maintain the control and focus meaning that they had composed themselves in 1988 and they should keep doing so in the next. Generally, year names in the two communities are progressive with one influencing the next.

The year naming tradition among the Haya and Nyambo people brings together language, history, and culture. These names are not just records of time; rather, they are tools for teaching, remembering, and uniting the community. Using Chomsky's approach, we see how deeply connected language is to how people live and think. The findings of this study theoretically imply the relationship between linguistic symbolism, cultural memory, and African naming systems. Further study could look at other Bantu communities to explore how naming practices reflect shared cultural knowledge and values across regions.

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