

# The Syntax and Semantics of Naming Strings in Kiswahili Classes\*

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Amidu, Assibi A. 2006. The Syntax and Semantics of Naming Strings in Kiswahili Classes. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 14(1), 295-312. This study, firstly, demonstrates how the pronoun *nani* 'who?' rather than *nini* 'what?' is used in Kiswahili naming strings. We illustrate in the process that a peculiarity of naming strings in Kiswahili is that WH *nani* appears to refer not to the name of a person or even the nouns *jina/majina* 'name/s' but rather to the person who bears a name. Secondly, the study reveals that *nani* 'what?' is polysemic, i.e. it is a [±animate] denoting word that can also express the meaning of *nini* 'what?' in Kiswahili. The evidence illustrates how a common and allegedly animate denoting WH pronoun has the primary sense of the inanimate denoting WH pronoun *nini* while it is still a member of the so-called animate classes 1/2. Thirdly, we illustrate how predicate verbs connected with naming or mentioning or writing names take concords of classes 1/2 or 5/6 or both. We conclude that the key to the behaviour of *nani* lies in its polysemy. This underscores the limitations of semantic assignment rules in Bantu.

**Key words:** pronoun, WH question word, personal name, gender, animacy

## 1. Introduction

In this study, we shall look at the function of WH *nani* 'who?', 'whom?', the nouns *jina/majina* 'name/s' and other constructions that are used to ask or speak about names in Kiswahili. We shall illustrate how the forms of *nani* 'who? whom?' in Kiswahili have scope over WH *nini* 'what?' and inanimate denoting NPs. We will argue that the

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\* The data in this study were verified by Sh. Abdulaziz Yusuf Lodhi of Uppsala University in Sweden. Sh. Lodhi is a native speaker from Zanzibar in addition to being a scholar in his own right. I thank him sincerely for his assistance and invaluable comments. All shortcomings are, however, mine.

reason why naming strings appear to refer to persons and objects rather than the name terms *jina/majina* or the proper name terms borne by people or objects derives from the polysemy of the WH *nani* 'who?'. We will also demonstrate that predicate verbs of calling, mentioning and writing names are subject to specific verbal agreement choices and constraints in naming strings in Kiswahili. We stress also that WH is distinct from relative pronoun in Kiswahili and that semantic assignment rules of Bantu lack explanatory relevance in the l.u.d.

## 2. WH *nani* 'who?', 'whom?' in Predication-sentences

The pronoun *nani* 'who?, whom?, what person/s?' has generally been assumed to be an animate referring pronoun in Kiswahili Bantu. For example, Sacleux (1939, pp. 664-665) writes of *nani* that "Ne peut désigner que des personnes" 'cannot designate anything but persons'. According to Sacleux (1939, p. 664), the dialects Kiamu and Kigunya (commonly called Kibajuni today) have variant forms that inflect for number. Kiamu and Kigunya use *nyani*, for singular, while Kiamu uses *wani* for plural and Kigunya uses *mbani* for plural. Indeed, we find the use of the variant *nyani* in Harries (1967, p. 15, verses 45-46).<sup>1</sup> Consider (1)-(2) below.

- (1) *Nani a-li-ni-u-li-a m-toto w-a-ngu?*  
 Cl. 1-who Cl. 1 SM-PAST-ProCl. 1/1 OM-kill-APPL-MOD Cl. 1-child Cl.  
 1 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/1 OM my  
 'Who killed my child? Lit. who (sg.) killed my child for me?'  
 (2) *Nani wa-li-ni-ul-i-a m-toto w-a-ngu?*

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1) The verses in question are the following:

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|------|---|--|
| "45. | Shekuwe asikubali<br>chenda Amu tashili<br>hafisini kiwasili<br>huyo balozi hungiya.            | Shekuwe would not agree<br>and went post-haste to Lamu<br>and arrived at the office<br>as the commissioner was getting into it.                                |
| 46.  | Akamwegema Shekuwe<br>kanena naye kwa yowe.<br>Kamuzu: Nyani wewe?<br><br>Ina laki kamwambiya." | And Shekuwe pressed him hard<br>and spoke to him angrily.<br>And he (the commissioner) asked him, 'Who are<br>you?'<br><br>And he (Shekuwe) told him his name. |

The translations are my work. The translations of Harries (1967) are on page 48 of his book. I have made changes in the punctuation of verse 46 to bring out the intended reading which Harries missed.

Cl. 2-who Cl. 2 SM-PAST-ProCl. 1/1 OM-kill-APPL-MOD Cl. 1-child Cl.  
 1 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/1 OM my<sup>2</sup>  
 'Who killed my child? Lit. who (pl.) killed my child for me?'

WH *nani* functions as the subject NP of each of the Pn-Ss (1)-(2).<sup>3</sup> It does not inflect for class marker but generates class 1 MU1 SM {a} in (1) and class 2 WA SM {wa} in (2). Morphologically, the classes 1/2 affixes underlie the lexical word in U-structure, but they are realized as zero at S-structure. According to Sh. Abdulaziz Yusuf Lodhi of Uppsala University, some native speakers prefer (3)-(4) to (1)-(2) because they are more 'idiomatic'.

- (3) a. *Ni nani a-li-ye-ni-u-li-a m-toto w-a-ngu?*  
 Cl. 1 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 1-who Cl. 1 SM-PAST-Cl. 1 SRM-ProCl. 1/1  
 OM-kill-APPL-MOD Cl. 1-child Cl. 1 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/1 OM  
 my  
 'Who is it that killed my child? Lit. he/she/it is who who killed my child  
 for me?'
- b. *A-li-ye-ni-u-li-a m-toto w-a-ngu ni nani?*  
 Cl. 1 SM-PAST-Cl. 1 SRM-ProCl. 1/1 OM-kill-APPL-MOD Cl. 1-child  
 Cl. 1 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/1 OM my Cl. 1 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 1-  
 who  
 'Who is it that killed my child? Lit. he/she/it who killed my child for me  
 is who?'
- (4) a. *Ni nani wa-li-o-ni-u-li-a m-toto w-a-ngu?*  
 Cl. 2 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 2-who Cl. 2 SM-PAST-Cl. 2 SRM-ProCl. 1/1  
 OM-kill-APPL-MOD Cl. 1-child Cl. 1 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/1  
 OM my  
 'Who are they that killed my child? Lit. they are who who killed my  
 child for me?'
- b. *Wa-li-o-ni-u-li-a m-toto w-a-ngu ni nani?*

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2) COP 'A' is like English 'of'. It as a nominal copula on analogy with verbal copulas. Sometimes, I describe it as a P-n, i.e. 'nominal predicate'. Nominal COP and P-n are synonymous terms in my works.

3) Within the Bantu class system, this suggests that there are, at least, two lexical words, namely *nani1* of class 1 MU1 and *nani2* of class 2 WA, which share a single phonological wordform. In contrast, the phonological form *nini* 'what?' has up to 12 lexical realizations in the class system. In an underlying description, each lexical realization will bear the marker of its class matrix and generate the concords in its matrix. For simplicity of description, we shall refer to the phonological words in this study.

Cl. 2 SM-PAST-Cl. 2 SRM-ProCl. 1/1 OM-kill-APPL-MOD Cl. 1-child  
 Cl. 1 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/1 OM my Cl. 2 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 2-who  
 'Who are they that killed my child? Lit. they who killed my child for me  
 are who?'

Indeed, without Sh. Lodhi's knowledge, his preferences matched data in Zaidi, Kamal Khan, Saidi and Chiraghdin (1972, p. 49) from which the test data (1)-(2) are based (Wilson, 1985, pp. 166-167). Observe that the forms of *nani* in (3)-(4) function as the object NPs of their question Pn-Ss. In each case, the WH form is the object NP of the copula NI 'be' predicate. The subject NP in (3) is the relative clause *aliyeniulia mtoto wangu* 'he/she/it who killed (for me) my child'. The subject NP in (4) is also the relative clause *walioniuilia mtoto wangu* 'they who killed (for me) my child'. (3a) and (4a) have the non-neutral word order VOS in which the subject NP is demoted to postverbal position for emphasis and the VP *ni nani* 'it is who' or 'they are who' is syntactically the topic of the discourse. (3b) and (4b) have a neutral word order SVO. Observe further that the subject NPs of the relative clause arguments are not overt but the SMs {a} and {wa} and their allomorphic SRMs {ye} and {o} in the PCs suggest that the omitted NP heads belong to classes 1/2, MU1 and WA, respectively.<sup>4</sup> For example, generically, we could assume that the NP heads of the concords {a} and {wa} are *mtu* 'person' and *watu* 'persons' respectively. A comparison of (1)-(2) with (3)-(4) reveals that a relative clause argument is used with WH *nani* constructions only when *nani* is the subject or object NP of a copular predicate, such as NI 'be', but not when it is the subject or object NP of a tensed predicate verb. This suggests that native speakers have choices of usage in the grammar and (5)-(6) taken from Wilson (1985, p. 167) illustrate the choice.

- (5) *U-na-tak-a ku-mw-on-a nani?*  
 ProCl. 2/2 SM-PRESENT-want-MOD (PRO+T)-Cl. 1 OM-see-MOD Cl. 1-who  
 'Whom do you want to see? Lit. you want to see who?'
- (6) *U-na-ye-taka ku-mw-on-a ni nani?*  
 ProCl. 2/2 SM-PRESENT-Cl. 1 ORM-want-MOD (PRO+T)-Cl. 1 OM-see-  
 MOD Cl. 0  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 1-who  
 'The one whom you want to see is who? Lit. who you want to see is who?'

Note that (1)-(2) do not contain WH *nani* as an object NP but (5) provides an example of this and the PC is a tensed marked serial predicate *unataka kumwona* 'you

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4) SRM = subject relative marker, and ORM = object relative marker. In Kiswahili, they are strictly agreement markers of argument constituents only (Amidu, 2001b).

want to see him'. Recall that (6) is preferred over (5) even though both are grammatical strings. More importantly, observe that, in Kiswahili, WH words are significantly different from so-called relative pronouns. In fact, the Kiswahili relative is not, in any way, a WH element but a class agreement marker of argument NPs. This typological peculiarity is generally missed by linguists when they base their descriptions not on the Bantu grammatical model but on Indo-European grammatical models in the name of Universal Grammar.

The antonym for *nani* is usually *nini* 'what?, which?, what thing/s?' in Kiswahili. Other question words in Kiswahili are the temporal *lini* 'when?, what period/s?' and the spatial *wapi* 'where?, what place?'. Kiswahili also has the manner and reason question word *vipi* 'how?, what manner?'. *Vipi* 'how?' is really a dependent modifier of nouns of class 8 VI, but it is also used as a self-standing question word in the grammar.

### 3. How They Say 'What is Your Name?'

Asking people about their names is a common everyday activity of human beings all over the world. In English, the inanimate denoting question pronoun 'what' is used to ask about a person's name. The animate denoting question word 'who' is not used. In Buli, a Gur language spoken in Northern Ghana in West Africa, the question pronoun is *boa* 'what?' (Kröger, 1992, p. 63). It is an inanimate denoting question word. The animate denoting question word *wana* 'who?', singular and *bana* 'who?' plural are not used to ask about a person's name in Buli (Kröger, 1992, p. 47, p. 378). (7) and (9) illustrate the English and Buli question types that are used when one is asking about the names of people.

- (7) What is your name?
- (8) My name is Johanna.
- (9) *Fi yue le boa?*  
your name COP-be what  
'What is your name?'
- (10) *Mi yue le Adung.*  
My name COP-be Adung  
'My name is Adung.'

In both English (7) and Buli (9), the question words *what* and *boa* have the inanimate denoting nouns *name* and *yue* 'name' as their domains of reference. Consequently, *what* and *boa* are inanimate denoting question words that refer almost

exclusively to the name that a person or something possesses. They do not refer to the possessor of the name directly. The answer to (7) is (8) and the answer to (9) is (10). Let us now look at examples from Kiswahili.

(11) *J-ina l-a-ko (ni) nani?*

Cl. 5-name Cl. 5 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/2 OM your (Cl. 5 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be) Cl. 1-who

'What is your name? Lit. your name is who, or who is your name?'

(12) *J-ina l-a-ngu (ni) Juma, Fatuma, Kibao, Majaaliwa, Kombo, Sikujua, Mtakuja*

Cl. 5-name Cl. 5 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/1 OM my (Cl. 5 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be) Cl. 1-Juma, Cl. 1-Fatuma, Cl. 1-Kibao, Cl. 1-Majaaliwa, Cl. 1-Kombo, Cl. 1-Sikujua, Cl. 1-Mtakuja

'My name is Juma, Fatuma, Kibao, Majaaliwa, Kombo, Sikujua, Mtakuja...'

(11) implies, in literal translation, the following equative predication: *your name is equal to or defines or describes who?* Alternatively, one can say that the equative string implies, *Who does your name equal to or define or describe?* The answer given in (12) correctly answers the question in (11). (11)-(12) suggest that the noun *jina* 'name', an inanimate denoting object, is used in the naming process of an entity that is an animate denoting item but the WH does not refer to it. *Jina* 'name' could be used for a non-animate denoting item too.<sup>5</sup> In Kiswahili, when *jina* 'name' is used in the process of asking about the name of a person, the question pronoun that is used with it is *nani* 'who?'. *Nini* 'what?' cannot be used to ask a question about the name of a person. This paradox has puzzled Bantuists for years. Note, however, that when dealing with personal proper names, the senses of *nani* 'who?' include an extended interpretation that allows it to apply also to *decessus*, i.e. the dead (see footnote 5 above). *Nani*, therefore, refers to [ $\pm$ live] animate denoting objects in Kiswahili. The use of *nani* to ask questions about the names of persons seems to suggest that the Waswahili see naming as something that applies directly to the person that bears the name term and the name term is equal to or defines or describes the person so named. A name is, therefore, not just a convenient term of reference in Kiswahili, but a shorthand representation of a person. How motivated is this interpretation of the use of *nani* in Kiswahili?

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5) For example, a dead person is strictly speaking a non-animate object.

If we look at (12), we see that inanimate terms become animate name terms when they are used to answer the question (11). (12) reveals that in Bantu, proper names are either inherently inanimate or animate denoting terms in their semantic origins. For example, *kibao* in (12) literally means 'a small piece of plank, board, slate'. It is a noun of class 7 KI. As a proper name term in (12), it gets promoted to class 1 MUI, the so-called animate class, and it is thereby personified as a person bearing the name term *kibao*. It follows that any term or expression in Bantu can be a proper name of a person or object. If the name term of a person is an inanimate denoting string in its basic meaning, it may acquire personification from a) its context of use and b) the agreement markers it generates in PS. We see in the elevation of *kibao* from class 7 to class 1 that *nani* refers or appears to refer directly to the person rather than his or her name term in class 7, a so-called inanimate class. This process of grammatical elevation is known as 'reification'. It involves conversion without change of form and finally lexical movement into another class (Amidu, 1980, 1997b, 2004a).

#### 4. On Using Tense Taking Predicate Verbs to Ask about a Name

One could also ask about the names of persons in Kiswahili by using tense taking finite predicate verbs. Consider (13)-(16) below:

- (13) *J-ina l-a-ko u-na-it-w-a nani?*  
 Cl. 5-name Cl. 5 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/2 OM your ProCl. 1/2 SM-PRESENT-call-PASS-MOD Cl. 1-who  
 'What is your name? Lit. your name, you are called who?'
- \*(14) *J-ina l-a-ko li-na-it-w-a nini?*  
 Cl. 5-name Cl. 5 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/2 OM your ProCl. 1/2 SM-PRESENT-call PASS-MOD Cl. 9-what  
 'What is your name? Lit. your name, it is called what?'
- (15) *J-ina l-a-ngu ni-na-it-w-a Juma, Fatuma, Kibao, Majaaliwa, Kombo, Sikujua, Mtakuja, etc.*  
 Cl. 5-name Cl. 5 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/1 OM my ProCl. 1/1 SM-PRESENT-call-PASS-MOD Cl. 1-Juma, Cl. 1-Fatuma, Cl. 1-Kibao, Cl. 1-Majaaliwa, Cl. 1-Kombo, Cl. 1-Sikujua, Cl. 1-Mtakuja, etc.  
 'My name is Juma, Fatuma, Kibao, Majaaliwa, Kombo, Sikujua, Mtakuja, etc. Lit. my name, I am called Juma, Fatuma, Kibao, Majaaliwa, Kombo, Sikujua, Mtakuja, etc.'
- \*(16) *J-ina l-a-ngu li-na-it-w-a Juma, Fatuma, Kibao, Majaaliwa, Kombo, Sikujua, Mtakuja, etc.*

Cl. 5-name Cl. 5 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/1 OM my Cl. 5 SM-PRESENT-call-PASS-MOD Cl. 1-Juma, Cl. 1-Fatuma, Cl. 1-Kibao, Cl. 1-Majaaliwa, Cl. 1-Kombo, Cl. 1-Sikujua, Cl. 1-Mtakuja, etc.

'My name is Juma, Fatuma, Kibao, Majaaliwa, Kombo, Sikujua, Mtakuja, etc. Lit. my name is called Juma, Fatuma, Kibao, Majaaliwa, Kombo, Sikujua, Mtakuja, etc.'

The finite verb *-ita* 'call' and its passive *-itwa* 'be called' commonly feature in name asking contexts. Observe in (13)-(16) that when the passive verb *-itwa* 'be called' of active *-ita* 'call' is used in the PC, only classes 1/2 SM concords, or their pronoun subtypes, are licenced as grammatical in the finite PC. In (13) the SM is {u} of proclass 1/2, i.e. second person (I) or singular. In (15), the SM is {ni} of proclass 1/1, i.e. first person (I) or singular.<sup>6</sup> Since pronoun subclasses are traditionally assumed to be part of the genetic classes 1/2, the strings (13) and (15) are grammatical and acceptable to the native speaker (Ashton, 1947, pp. 42-44). The same rules apply when the active *-ita* 'call' is used in naming strings. An example is as follows:

(17) *J-ina l-a-ke m-toto hu-yu wa-tu wa-na-mw-it-a nani?*

Cl. 5-name Cl. 5 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/3 OM his/her/its Cl. 1-child this-Cl. 1 Cl. 2-person Cl. 2 SM-PRESENT-Cl. 1 OM-call-MOD Cl. 1-who  
What name do people call this child? Lit. this child, his name, people call him who?

*Watu* 'people' is the subject NP in (17). It generates SM {wa} in the PC *wanamwita* 'they call him'. The DO1 is WH *nani* 'who?' and the DO2 is *jina lake mtoto huyu* 'this child's name'. *Nani* 'who?' rather than *nini* 'what' is used in (17) to ask about the child's name, i.e. *jina*. DO1 generates OM {mw} in PC, but DO2 is located in preverbal position as the topic of the discourse and has no OM in PC. In contrast, observe that (14) and (16) are ungrammatical. The SM {li} in *linaitwa* 'it is called' of the PCs in (14) and (16) is governed by the inanimate denoting NP *jina* 'name'. The Kiswahili naming process, however, seems to require classes 1/2 concords. (14)-(16) violate the animacy constraint on agreement marking in the PC. As a result, they are ungrammatical strings in the language.

6) Proclass or the gloss ProCl. is a shorthand for pronoun class. ProCl. 1/1 means genetic class 1 pronoun class 1, Proclass 2/1 means genetic class 2, pronoun class 1, etc. (Amidu, 2004b, p. 7, for details). (I) = one individual object or possible object and (F) = family of individual objects or possible objects (Amidu, 1997b).



#### 4.1. Predicate verbs **-ANDIKA** 'write' and **-TAJA** 'mention' in naming operations

There are finite predicate verbs that can take either [+animate] or [-animate] agreement concords in PC. Compare (13)-(17) above with (18)-(19) and (20)-(21) below

- (18) *J-ina l-a-ko wewe u-na-andik-w-a ha-pa.*  
 Cl. 5-name Cl. 5 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/2 OM your ProCl. 1/2 you ProCl. 1/2 SM-PRESENT-write-PASS-MOD this-Cl. 17a/26a  
 'Your name is mentioned here, lit. your name, you are written at this place.'
- (19) *J-ina l-a-ko wewe u-me-andik-w-a ha-pa.*  
 Cl. 5-name Cl. 5-SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/2 OM your ProCl. 1/2 you ProCl. 1/2 SM-RECENT PAST-write-PASS-MOD this-Cl. 17a/26a  
 'Your name has been mentioned here, lit. your name, you have been written at this place.'
- (20) *J-ina l-a-ko wewe li-na-andik-w-a ha-pa.*  
 Cl. 5-name Cl. 5 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/2 OM your ProCl. 1/2 you Cl. 5 SM-PRESENT-write-PASS-MOD this-Cl. 17a/26a  
 'Your name is written here.'
- (21) *J-ina l-a-ko wewe li-me-andik-w-a ha-pa.*  
 Cl. 5-name Cl. 5-SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/2 OM your ProCl. 1/2 you Cl. 5 SM-RECENT PAST-write-PASS-MOD this-Cl. 17a/26a  
 'Your name has been written here.'

All the constructions (18)-(21) are grammatical.<sup>7</sup> The meanings of (18)-(19) differ from those of (20)-(21). Observe that the subject NP of all the Pn-Ss (18)-(21) is the same string *jina lako wewe* 'your name, lit. name of-yours you'. Note, however, that the SMs in the PCs are different. In (18)-(19), the SM in the PC is {u} of proclass 1/2, i.e. second person (I) or singular, but in (20)-(21), the SM in the PC is {li} of genetic class 5, and it is a third person (I) or singular. This type of NP has been termed a cohesive ÑP (Amidu, 1997a, 1998) or a polyandrous NP (Amidu, 1997b, ch. 8). It

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7) The predicate verbs in (13)-(16) and (18)-(21) are all passive verbs. The reader can derive the active Pn-Ss for himself or herself. The choice of the passive is based on the fact that it is preferred in everyday usage. It does not mean that active verbs are not used in the language (see (17) above).

operates also what has been called PIT and DPG (Amidu, 1997b, pp. 307-308).<sup>8</sup> In terms of argument structure function, the type of NP in (18)-(21) is called a double subject construction (SS) in Amidu (1997b, 2001b). This means that each constituent *jina* and *wewe* in the subject NP matrix generates SM and changes the meaning of the Pn-S. Meaning changing argument operations within a single NP are not covered by the term 'trigger-happy' agreement marking (Comrie, 2003). Indeed, the double subject (SS) type has not been identified in any other grammatical or linguistic description, as far as I know, apart from Amidu (1997b, 2001b, 2004b).

We find confirmation for the polysemy of -ANDIKA 'write' in Mzirai (1971, pp. 21-22). When he uses the predicate verb *-andika* 'write' with OMs of classes 1/2, it always means 'to mention a person's name in writing'. The following passages illustrate our claim.

- (22) *Kwa desturi, jina la dini la mpenzi ama mpendwa huyu ndilo hutajwa na mwandikaji huyo mwishoni mwa salamu hiyo. Walakini, mila na adabu njema haiwaruhusu watoto wawataje wazazi wao hivyo, bali yawaruhusu wawaandike hivi tu: "Baba (ama Mama) Mpenzi (ama Mpendwa)," basi, halafu waanze barua zao na kuzifikiliza kama ilivyoelezwa kwingine humu.* (Mzirai, p. 21).

'Normally, the first/Christian/Muslim name of this dear one or beloved one is the one mentioned by the writer at the end of his greetings/salutations. On the other hand, custom and good upbringing does not permit children to mention their parents in this way, rather it allows them to refer to them in writing only in this manner: "Dear (Beloved) Father (or Mother)", and no more, then they may begin their letters and proceed in the manner described elsewhere in this work.'

- (23) *Ingawa hivyo, kwa mintarafu ya anwani za wazazi hao juu ya bahasha, mila na adabu njema hapo haiwakatazi watoto kuwataja waziwazi wazazi wao hao bali yawaruhusu wawaandike sawasawa kabisa na watu wengine.* (Mzirai, p. 22).

'Although this is so, with regard to the address of the parents on the envelop, custom and good upbringing does not forbid children from naming their parents in writing clearly, on the contrary, they permit them to name them in the same manner as they do for other people.'

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8) PIT = principle of independent targeting and DPG = diarchy principle of government.

*Wawaandike* in (22)-(23) does not mean "they may write to them". To express such a meaning, the applicative form *wawaandikie* is used. *Wawaandike* 'lit. they may write them' means "they may name them". (22)-(23) confirm that the verb *-andika* is polysemic. It means 'to write something' or 'to name someone in writing'. To express this meaning, the PC must take obligatorily the OM of classes 1/2, MU1/WA.

In (22)-(23), *wawataje* 'they may mention them' means "they may mention them by their names". The predicate verb *-taja* 'mention, name' may, therefore, be used to mention a person or persons directly, as signalled by the class 2 OM {wa} of *wa-wataje* above. The predicate may also be used to mention the name term *jina* 'name' as follows: *walitaje jina lake* 'they may mention his/her/its name'. The PC *walitaje* 'they may mention it' has a class 5 JI OM {li} in it and it refers to the object NP *jina lake* 'his/her/its name'. We see that the NP *jina lake* only refers to the name term that a person bears and not the person himself or herself.

## 5. What Happens when Inanimate Objects are Named?

How does one name an inanimate object after an animate or inanimate object, e.g. Kwame Nkrumah Teachers Training College in Zanzibar, Mnazi Mmoja Avenue, etc.? To answer the question, I presented Sh. Lodhi with the data below.

(24) *Ji-na l-a barabara hi-i ni nani?*

Cl. 5-name Cl. 5-of Cl. 9-street this-Cl. 9 Cl. 5 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 1-who  
'What is the name of this street? Lit. the name of this street is who?'

(25) *Ji-na l-a barabara hi-i ni Kwame Nkrumah, Nyerere, Baraste, Mnazi Mmoja.*

Cl. 5-name Cl. 5-of Cl. 9-street this-Cl. 9 Cl. 5 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 1-Kwame Nkrumah, Cl. 1-Nyerere, Cl. 9-Baraste, Cl. 3-Mnazi Mmoja  
'The name of this street is Kwame Nkrumah, Nyerere, Baraste, Mnazi Mmoja.'

\*(26) *Ji-na l-a barabara hi-i ni nini?*

Cl. 5-name Cl. 5-of Cl. 9-street this-Cl. 9 Cl. 5 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 5-what  
'What is the name of this street? Lit. the name of this street is what?'

\*(27) *Ji-na l-a barabara hi-i ni Kwame Nkrumah, Nyerere, Baraste, Mnazi Mmoja.*

Cl. 5-name Cl. 5-of Cl. 9-street this-Cl. 9 Cl. 5 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 1-Kwame Nkrumah, Cl. 1-Nyerere, Cl. 9-Baraste, Cl. 3-Mnazi Mmoja  
'The name of this street is Kwame Nkrumah, Nyerere, Baraste, Mnazi Mmoja.'

Firstly, (27) is ungrammatical only because it is a response to the ungrammatical (26). On its own, it is grammatical. *Mnazi mmoja* literally means 'one coconut tree'. Secondly, in his email response, dated 20th October, 2004, Sh. Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi writes,

- (28) *'Jina la barabara hii ni nani?' ni Kiswahili halisi lakini si wengi sikuhizi watatamka hivyo. Angalia, waweza kuuliza hivi – 'Barabara hii, jina lake nani?' Na swali hilo laeleza kuwa muundo huo ni sahihi! Na jawabu lake laweza kuwa mathalani 'Ni Barabara ya Nyerere.' au 'Jina lake ni Barabara ya Nyerere.'* *'Jina la barabara hii ni nini?' Si Kiswahili fasaha, ni athari ya Kiingereza na matumizi ya wasio Waswahili wazawa.*  
 'The question, *Jina la barabara hii ni nani?* 'What is the name of this street? Lit. the name of this street is who?' is good Kiswahili but many people will not articulate it in this way today. Note that you can ask the following – *Barabara hii, jina lake nani?* 'This street, what is its name? Lit. this street, its name is who?' And the question demonstrates that the syntax is correct! And the answer to it could be, for example, *Ni Barabara ya Nyerere*, namely 'It is Nyerere Street.' or *Jina lake ni Barabara ya Nyerere*, namely 'Its name is Nyerere Street.' *Jina la barabara hii ni nini?* 'What is the name of this street? Lit. the name of this street is what?' This is not elegant Kiswahili. It is the result English influence and the usage of those who are not indigenous Waswahili.'

From the response of Sh. Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi, we learn that (24)-(25) are grammatical but are more idiomatic when rephrased as (29)-(30). On the other hand, (26)-(27) are not grammatical, and even when rephrased as (31)-(32) below, they remain ungrammatical.

- (29) *Barabara hi-i, ji-na l-a-ke ni nani?*  
 Cl. 9-street this-Cl. 9 Cl. 5-name Cl. 5-SM-P-n-PossProCl. 1/3 OM its Cl. 5 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 1-who  
 'This street, what is its name? Lit. this street, its name is who?'  
 (30) *Ni Barabara ya Kwame Nkrumah, Nyerere, Baraste, Mnazi Mmoja.*  
 Cl. 5 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. Cl. 9-street Cl. 9-of Cl. 1-Kwame Nkrumah, Cl. 1-Nyerere, Cl. 9-Baraste, Cl. 3-Mnazi Mmoja  
 'It is Kwame Nkrumah, Nyerere, Baraste, Mnazi Mmoja street.'

\*(31) *Barabara hi-i, ji-na l-a-ke ni nini?*

Cl. 9-street this-Cl. 9 Cl. 5-name Cl. 5-SM-P-n-PossProCl. 1/3 OM its Cl. 5 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 1-what

'This street, what is its name? Lit. this street, its name is what?'

\*(32) *Ni Barabara ya Kwame Nkrumah, Nyerere, Baraste, Mnazi Mmoja.*

Cl. 5 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. Cl. 9-street Cl. 9-of Cl.1-Kwame Nkrumah, Cl. 1-Nyerere, Cl. 9-Baraste, Cl. 3-Mnazi Mmoja

'It is Kwame Nkrumah, Nyerere, Baraste, Mnazi Mmoja street.'

The data reveal that even when a street is named after an inanimate object, e.g. *Mnazi Mmoja*, the formulation of the question about the name requires WH *nani* rather than WH *nini*. On the basis of (29)-(32), we realize that naming, particularly proper naming, is one area in which traditional semantic assignment rules and descriptions of *nani* in Bantu classes fail. In the light of polysemy, the function of naming terms like *nani*, *jina*, *kibao*, etc. in (11)-(23) can now be reassessed. The subsenses of WH *nani* are now 'who?', 'whom?' as well as 'what?', 'which?'. This explains at last how *nani* is used in place of *nini* to ask about the names of animate and inanimate objects or locations in Kiswahili and how verbs associated with it often take classes 1/2 concords even when the referents of *nani* are inanimates. Our study reveals, for the first time, that, contrary to traditional studies, e.g. Sacleux (1939, pp. 664-665), WH *nani* has domain over both [ $\pm$ animate] denoting name terms without changing its class matrix (Johnson, 1939, pp. 339, Amidu, 1997b, 2003).

## 6. The Naming Domains of Grammatical and Semantical Referents

Is there historical evidence for the polysemy of *nani* in Kiswahili language? Consider the example below taken from Hichens (1940, p. 41).

(33) *Nazi na maji si mbata ku-to-a mea i nani?*

Cl. 9-coconut P-n-with Cl. 6-water Cl. 9 SM  $\emptyset$ -NEG COP-be Cl. 9-dried coconut Cl. 15 (PRO+T)-lack-MOD Cl. 15 (PRO+T)-grow-MOD Cl. 9 SM-COP-(be) Cl. 1-who?

'A coconut with milk is not a dried coconut, (and so) which one does not grow? Lit. a coconut with water is not a dried one, (and so) failing to grow is who/which?'

(33) is taken from a poem by Muyaka bin Haji Al-Ghassaniy of Mombasa, c. 1776 to c. 1840. He is referred to as Muyaka, for short. (33) contains two clauses, i.e. (34)-(35).

(34) *Nazi na maji si mbata.*

Cl. 9-coconut P-n-with Cl. 6-water Cl. 9 SM  $\emptyset$ -NEG COP-be Cl. 9-dried coconut

'A coconut with milk is not a dried coconut.'

(35) *Ku-to-a mea i nani?*

Cl. 15 (PRO+T)-lack-MOD Cl. 15 (PRO+T)-grow-MOD Cl. 9 SM-COP-(be) Cl. 1-who?

'Which one does not grow? Lit. failing to grow is who/which?'

(34) has a coordinate subject NP *nazi na maji* 'coconut with milk', a negative copula PC SI 'be not' and an object NP *mbata* 'dried coconut fruit'. (35) has a nominal-verbal subject NP *kutoa mea* 'not growing', a subject marker {i} which doubles up as the copula PC of the Pn-S, and an object NP *nani* 'who?, what?, which?'. Even though the subject and object NPs in (33)-(35) are inanimate denoting entities, Muyaka uses WH *nani* rather than WH *nini* 'what?' to enquire about the entities. Consider (36).

(36) *Nazi na maji si mbata kutoa mea i nini?*

Cl. 9-coconut P-n-with Cl. 6-water Cl. 0  $\emptyset$ -NEG COP-be Cl. 9-dried coconut Cl. 15 (PRO+T)-lack-MOD Cl. 15 (PRO+T)-grow-MOD Cl. 9 SM-COP-(be) Cl. 1-what?

'A coconut with milk is not like a dried coconut, (and so) which one does not grow? Lit. a coconut with water is not a dried one, (and so) failing to grow is what/which?'

(36) is grammatical and good Kiswahili. Observe that Muyaka does not select the natural choice (36) but rather prefers *nani* in (33) and (35).

The subject of Muyaka's criticism and sarcasm in (33) is a lady of Mombasa who wanted to have a child to please her husband. She went to a medicine man for help. In spite of his efforts, she did not have a child. Muyaka uses *nazi na maji* 'coconut with milk' to represent a fertile entity that can reproduce, and uses *mbata* 'dried coconut' to represent an infertile entity that cannot reproduce. The question he poses, namely, 'Which one does not reproduce?', expresses the irony of the woman's situation and that of her husband. Muyaka is commenting on the perception of infertility among the Waswahili (Amidu, 2001a, p. 59)..Sh. Lodhi says (33) is wellformed and idiomatic.

One might argue that WH *nani* in (33) has figurative meaning in Muyaka's verse. This line of argumentation is misleading. It does not take into account the synonymy of (33) and (36). Linguistically, therefore, all the referent NPs in (33) and (36) are inanimate denoting arguments. In (35), for example, the subject NP *kutoa mea* 'failing to grow' belongs to class 15 KU and it has a class marker {ku}. In spite of this the NP generates SM {i} of class 9 as its PC. This agreement pattern has been termed 'allonominal concord marking' in Amidu (1997b). SM {i} is also found in (33) and (36). Note further that classes 9/10, NI1/NI2, are traditionally described as non-animate classes. In addition, the verb *-mea* 'grow, geminate, sprout' refers, strictly speaking, to the growth of inanimate objects such as plants, hairs, feathers, wings, teeth, etc. (Issak, 1999, p. 162). The predicate *-mea* may also be used to refer to the growth of abstract objects, such as *kiburi* 'pride'. They are said to grow on or in human beings, e.g. *kiburi kimemlea* 'he has become proud, lit. pride has sprouted in him'. The predicate *-mea* is, therefore, not ordinarily used to refer to the growth of human beings, except in tendentious speech. *Mea*, therefore, correctly applies to the kinds of coconut fruits in (33)-(36). One sprouts when it is a seedling, but the other cannot sprout because it has dried up.

We see in (33)-(35) that the use of *nani* refers to inanimate denoting NPs, even if a metaphoric use suggests that the inanimate objects imply human beings in higher order semantics. Grammatically, higher order semantics fails to explain the synonymy of (33) and (36). What matters therefore grammatically is that Muyaka uses *nani* to ask about inanimate denoting NPs and as a synonym for *nini*. His use confirms that traditional animate semantic rules fail to explain many agreement patterns and lexical collocations in Kiswahili. The data confirm that *nani* can function as the WH word of [ $\pm$ animate] denoting terms. We discover at once that the secret behind the use of *nani* in naming strings arises from its polysemy. As a result, a translation of *nani* as just 'who, whom?' is misleading. The context of use must be taken into account as well.

If our analysis is motivated, could *nini* 'what?' also be used as a synonym of *nani*? Consider for example (37) taken from El-Busaidy (1958, p. 16).

- (37) *Muhalali ni nini? Muhalali ni mtu aliyemtaliki (kumwacha) mke talaka tatu na kutaka kumwoa tena.*

'Who is a permissible claimant? A permissible claimant is a person who has divorced (left) his wife through the three divorce processes but wishes to remarry her.'

- (38) *Muhalali ni nini?*

Cl. 1-permissible claimant Cl. 1 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 9-what

'Who is a permissible claimant? Lit. a permissible claimant is what?'

El-Busaidy uses *nini*, instead of *nani*, to ask a question about a person. One could say he is referring to the *jina* 'name' *muhalali* and not the person, but the second sentence in (37) says that *muhalali* is a person. Compare (38) with (39).

- (39) *Muhalali ni nani?*  
 Cl. 1-permissible claimant Cl. 1 SM  $\emptyset$ -COP-be Cl. 1-who  
 'Who is a permissible claimant? Lit. a permissible claimant is who?'

The evidence reveals that *nini* is a synonym of *nani* and so *nani* correctly expresses the senses of both pronouns in Kiswahili and *nini* can do the same too.

## 7. Conclusion

We have seen that WH *nani* 'who? whom?' contrasts with WH *nini* 'what?, which?' in meaning in certain contexts of use in Kiswahili (Ashton, 1947, pp. 151-152). At the same time WH *nani* may imply WH *nini* as well as animate and inanimate denoting NPs in naming strings and *nini* could do likewise. We have thus unravelled the mystery behind the function of *nani* in naming strings in Kiswahili, a mystery that eluded linguists for so long. When enquiring about the name of a person or object, the preferred WH is *nani*. This gives us an animacy hierarchy *nani* > *nini*. Polysemic uses of *nani* and *nini* are restricted to naming strings. For the Waswahili, animate and even inanimate objects are the targets of names. Specific verb types, e.g. *ita* 'call', also occur regularly in naming syntax and may be subject to agreement constraints. Our study has also found that WH words are distinct from relative operations in Kiswahili. Relatives are signalled by 'O' topicalized class concord markers, and not WH elements which are argument or modifying strings of Pn-S. We believe and hope that our findings will enable linguists to comprehend the interface between Kiswahili Bantu conceptual thought and its syntax more deeply than before.

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