



# A structural analysis of personal names in Kusaal

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## ABSTRACT

New names are created on daily bases but old names never change in form. Thus, names offer a window where the archaic linguistics structure of a language can be traced. This study explores the grammatical structure of personal names in Kusaal by focusing on their phonology, morphonology and syntax. Phonologically, the paper explores the phonotactics of personal names; morphologically, it discusses the various morphemes that constitute this category of names, and syntactically, it analyses the rules that underlie the construction of personal names that are phrases, clauses and sentences. The meaning of personal names in Kusaal have been discussed extensively in previous studies for which reason minimal attention is dedicated to it in the current work. The findings show that personal names in Kusaal conform to almost all the structural rules of the language. They occupy specific positions in the noun phrase and in the sentence; they are neutral to syntactic features such as definiteness and plurality. Personal names also take prefixes and affixes and can be compound words. There are instances where insertions and deletions are observed in the compound formation of personal names in the language. The study uses the Basic Linguistics Theory for its descriptive analysis of personal names. Both primary and secondary data are used in this study.

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## 1. Introduction

The study of names, especially personal names has gained considerable attention in the literature and recently, Kusaal and its sister languages have not been left out (Dakubu, 2000, Awedoba, 1996, Abubakari, 2020; Abubakari et al., 2023 among others). Previous studies on names in these languages have mainly focused on their sociolinguistic, and ethnolinguistic analyses. Numerous cross-linguistic studies reveal that personal names exhibit many linguistic features in relation to their syntax, semantics, morphology and phonology. For instance, some personal names are amenable to some phonological influences such as vowel elision, syllable truncation, consonant deletion and assimilation among others. Obeng (1998) suggests that Akan death-prevention personal names may be classified into simple and complex names. The simple names consist of either a root alone or a root with an affix or affixes. The complex names may be classified into phrases (usually possessive

*Abbreviations:* ADV, Adverb; C, Consonant; COP, Copula; EMPH, Emphatic; FUT, Future; IMP, Imperative; INT, Interrogative marker; N, Noun/nasal; NP, Noun phrase; NEG, Negative; NOM, Nominal; PL, Plural; PST, Past; PERF, Perfect; POSS, Possessive; Pro, Pronoun; SGL, Singular; V, Vowel; VP, Verb phrase; 1, First person; 2, Second person; 3, Third person.

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constructions), incomplete sentences and complete sentences. Agyekum (2006) states that certain phonological processes take place during Anglicisation of some Akan personal names while Adomako (2015, 2019) confirms that some personal names in Akan undergo some morphological operations including; compounding, truncation, and affixation (prefixation) as well as phonological processes such as elision, ATR harmony, V-raising, compensatory lengthening among others occur at the morpheme boundaries in casual speech context. Owu-Ewie (2014) additionally, presents a morpho-syntactic analysis of some Fante habitation names. He observes that some compound names as well as names which are formed by reduplication undergo some phonological processes such as vowel elision and assimilation. For instance, he argues that the word *man* (town) + *kese* (big) + *mu* (in) becomes *mankesim* where the vowel /u/ ending the postposition is elided and that though, the vowel is elided, its ATR influence is still felt to assimilate the high vowel /e (ɛ)/ to become /i/. Similarly, Owu-Ewie et al. (2021) indicate that some personal names in Akan are formed by reduplication and when that happens some reduplicated names undergo some phonological processes such as elision, assimilation, vowel raising and vowel addition. For example, *Kyεkyεr* (a person who delays) is made up of *Kyεr* (to delay) + *Kyεr* (to delay) where there is deletion and vowel lengthening. They further explain that the liquid sound /r/ is deleted in the base form and compensated for with /ε/ and pointed to this phenomenon as compensatory lengthening (Owu-Ewie et al., 2021: 38). Their study also notes that at the morphological level, some Akan names are single stems, compounds, affixations, and reduplications, while at the syntactic level some names are by function, being declaratives, imperatives or interrogatives and structurally as simple, compound or complex. Quite a number of the studies grammar of personal names is traced to Akan compared to other languages in Ghana.

Caesar (2019) provides a morphosyntactic analysis of allusive names in Dangme. Morphologically, she points out that Dangme allusive names can take the form of mono-morphemic, di-morphemic and poly-morphemic. Syntactically, she reveals that allusive names in Dangme can take lexical, phrasal and sentential forms and function as declarative, imperative, interrogative clauses reduced to personal names and that at the phrasal level, noun phrases are the only forms that the allusive names take in Dangme. At the sentential level, simple and compound clauses were identified.

With respect to the literature on Mabia languages, Awedoba (1996) points out that Kasena personal names exhibit a varied structure and are amenable to several kinds of classifications. He argues that many personal names in Kasena are derived from nouns rather than verbs. For instance, names like *Agao*, *Anao*, *Kadoa*, *Kachana* etc. morphemically contain a prefix and a noun root (Awedoba 1996: 12–13). Moreover, Kasena personal names do not have gender affixes (Awedoba 1996). In addition, Awedoba notes that Kasena personal names do not contain suffixes, however, it is shown that some Kusaal personal names take suffixes. Syntactically, Kasena personal names exhibit forms that are derived from potential sentences such as regular statements, questions, commands or exclamations (Awedoba, 1996).

Although Kasena and Kusaal are sister Mabia languages, this study will show that Kusaal personal names differ in some structural ways compared to Kasena. Names in the former are formed from all lexical categories and also, though limited, mark gender using suffixes in some nouns. Sentential personal names are common in both languages.

Rahman (2013 as cited by Fatawu, 2020) argues that the most common phonological process in the formation of compounds in Dagbani personal names is elision and that it deals with the loss of a segment; a vowel, a consonant and sometimes a syllable. Similarly, it is confirmed in the work of Abdul-Mumin (2019) that some compound personal names in Dagbani undergo deletion as a way of avoiding consonant clusters from occurring. This corroborates with Kusaal where the formation of some compound personal names goes through phonological processes like deletion or vowel insertion for the purposes of fulfilling syllable structure requirement of the language. In Likpakpaam, personal names exhibit linguistic characteristics both morphologically and syntactically. Morphologically, Bisilki (2018) opines that a typical personal name can consist of a maximum of three morphemes. That is, a personal name contains only one root or free form, with or without other bound morphological segments. Syntactically, he observed that many of the Likpakpaam personal names are nominal phrases and clauses and in terms of functions, some names can be declarative, an interrogative, a command or even an exclamative. It is noted in Bisilki (2018) that some personal names in Likpakpaam succumb to some assimilatory processes like homorganic nasal assimilation. Kusaal personal names also exhibit similar linguistic features. Some Kusaal compound personal names are amenable to some phonological processes such as deletion and assimilation and also exhibit some morphological and syntactical features (Abubakari, 2020).

In Oromo, a language spoken in Ethiopia, personal names are derived from nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and verbs (Gerba, 2014). He notes that while a few Oromo personal names are neutral and can be given to both males and females, many are gender specific. It has been observed that the suffixes attached to these names serve as markers of gender. Names ending with suffixes like *-a*, *-aa*, *-an*, *-uu*, and *-saa* are typically associated with males, whereas names ending with suffixes such as *-tii*, *-tuu*, and *-ee* are more commonly given to females (Gerba, 2014; 258). Similarly, it is observed in Tamil of India that some personal names are also distinguished by gender specific suffixes such as *-an* for male and *-i* as in *Isvaran* and *Isvari* respectively (Britto, 1986; 251). Kusaal follows a similar pattern, however, unlike in Oromo, this analysis reveals that there are only a limited number of gender-specific suffixes used for personal names. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that in both Kusaal and the languages examined thus far, gender is not determined by the use of prefixes but suffixes.

In Yoruba, spoken in Nigeria, Akinnaso (1980) proposes that personal names are either derived from nominal forms or from complete sentences with varying levels of complexity. Names derived from nominals can take the forms of: (1) a single noun, for example, *Dàda* (child born with curly hair); (2) a compound, like *òkéowó* → *òké* + *owó* (bag + money); and (3) a verb phrase nominalization, as seen in *Àbíké* → *à bí ké* (one who is born to be petted) (Akinnaso, 1980; 288). On the other hand, names derived from sentences are marked for different moods: declarative, as seen in *Omóniyi* → *omó ní iyì* (child has prestige); interrogative, as in *Kíladéjo* → *kí ní adé jo* (What is crown like?); and imperative, as in *Dúrójáyé* → *dúró je ayé* (stay

and enjoy life), as explained in (Akinnaso, 1980; 294–295). This pattern of Yoruba personal name structure closely resembles the structure of personal names in Kusaal, as argued in this study.

The Turkish language employs various word-formation processes for creating personal names, with compounding being a commonly used method (Duman, 2004). It is interesting to note that many personal names in Turkish have been and continue to be formed through compounding using elements from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. Duman (2004; 163) highlights that Turkish personal names can be created by combining two nouns or an adjective and a noun from different languages, such as *Nuray* (combining Persian “nur,” meaning ‘radiance,’ and Turkish “ay,” meaning ‘moon’), *Songül* (combining Turkish “son,” meaning ‘last,’ and Persian “gül,” meaning ‘rose’), or *Nurşen* (combining Persian “nur,” meaning ‘radiance,’ and Arabic “şen,” meaning ‘cheerful’). It’s worth noting that Arabic or Persian elements can take Turkish derivational suffixes, as seen in *Nurdan*, which means ‘made out of light’ (formed by combining Persian “nur” with the Turkish derivational suffix {-DAn}) as presented in Duman (2004; 163). While Kusaal has personal names borrowed from Arabic, Hausa, English, and Akan, no suffix morpheme is observed to be borrowed from another language into Kusaal. Borrowed names in Kusaal are rather adopted to suit the structure of Kusaal be it phonologically, morphologically and syntactically.

The main objectives of this study are to (i) analyse the internal syntactic structure of personal names in Kusaal, (ii) discuss the morphological properties of personal names in the language, and (iii) explore the various phonological processes available in personal names in Kusaal. In general, personal names in Kusaal are not arbitrary. The typology of these names shows that they are not randomly given to newborn babies but are rather informed by special events and circumstances surrounding the birth of the name bearers (Abubakari, 2020; Musah & Abubakari, (forthcoming); Abubakari et al., 2023). All the personal names discussed in this study include their meanings which express the cultural philosophies of the people and further strengthen previous arguments that names are not randomly assigned but influenced by circumstances including the belief system of the people among others (Abubakari, 2020; Abubakari et al., 2023). The meanings of the names form a basis of their semantic analysis. To avoid redundancy, a separate section, therefore, will not be dedicated for the semantics of personal names in Kusaal in this work. This is because every aspect of the linguistics analysis: syntax, morphology and phonology give the meanings of the names with further explanations where necessary. These explanations clarify sources of some of the names and the reasons why some names are assigned as personal names.

The significance of this study cannot be overemphasised. Studies on the grammar of personal names in the Mabia languages of Ghana and West African has received very little attention if any at all. The literature, as can be seen shows research where authors focus on aspects of the structure of the grammar of personal names in some Ghanaian languages: syntax, morphology and phonology. This work serves as a pioneering attempt of an all-encompassing analysis of the grammar of personal names in a single study with data from one language, Kusaal. The research further adds to the growing body of knowledge on Ghanaian and by extension African anthroponym. It demonstrates how names can be used as a tool to study the grammar of a language and its potential in unraveling the linguistics competence of speakers of a given language. The study employs the Basic Linguistic Theory (Dixon 2010) to describe and discuss the grammar of personal names in Kusaal. The data forms part of the daily discourses of the speakers of the language.

The paper is organised as follows; section 1.1 discusses the methodology and data collection, 1.2. briefly talks about the Kusaal language and its speakers and 1.3 looks at personal names as cultural artifacts. Section 2.0 examines the syntactic structure of Kusaal personal names while the morphological analysis of Kusaal personal names is the focus in section 3.0. In section 4.0, the phonological analysis of personal is discussed and section 5.0 provides a conclusion to the paper.

### 1.1. Methodology and data collection

This study is qualitative in nature as it describes language use in its natural context. It is entirely textual, devoid of any statistical analysis. The data form part of the daily discourses of speakers of the Kusaal language in the Upper East Region of Ghana. About seventy percent (70%) of the Kusaal personal names used in this study were gathered from the class attendance registers of pupils in a basic school in Barbuaka, a suburb in the Garu District of the Upper East Region of Ghana in 2022. The meaning of the names were cross-checked using four elders whose ages are between 50 and 80 years and are native speakers of Kusaal. These are Ayamba Asandaug (Male, 57 years), Apengi Azumbilla (Male, 80 years), and Awimbun Ayaaba (Female, 66 years). All reside in Bansi in the Binduri District and Sampson Abuosi (Male 55 years) from Kuksabila, in the Garu District. Unfortunately, Apengi Azumbilla is late at the time of putting this together. The two were chosen because they have deep cultural knowledge of the Kusaas and have lived all their lives in the Kusaug traditional area. We also conducted a semi-structured interview with four graduate students who are studying at the University of Education, Winneba and are native speakers of Kusaal. These are: Moses Aputeeda (Male, 35 years), John Ndeogo Ayaabugri (Male, 37 years), Justina Anane (Female, 36 years), Grace Akotey (Female, 35 years). These interviews were recorded and transcribed for purposes of this work. The secondary source of data includes names which were drawn from 2014 matriculation and 2019–2021 graduation books of The University of Education, Winneba where two of the authors come from. These matriculation and graduation books contain names of students who bare Kusaal personal names. It is important to add that all the three authors are native speakers of Kusaal and their personal intuitions played a role in identifying data that potentially needed extra attention and consultations.

## 1.2. The Kusaal language and its speakers

Kusaal is a minority language spoken by the group of people called the Kusaa (SG), Kusaas (PL). It falls under the Central Mabia subgroup of Mabia languages (Bodomo, 2020), which was called the Western Oti-Volta subgroup of Gur languages (Westermann and Bryan, 1952; Greenberg, 1963) of the Niger–Congo language family. The endonym ‘Mabia’ is a compound word composed of two nouns: *ma* ‘mother’ and *bia* ‘child’ and means ‘mother’s child’/‘sibling’. Bodomo (2020: 11) explains that the meaning of this endonym renders credence to the fact that these languages are metaphorically believed to have been born from a single mother or proto language hence the argument that this term is more representative of the languages under this group since these two words can be traced in almost all the languages compared to the term ‘Gur’ which is derived from the initial syllables of only three/four of the languages in this group: Gurensi, Gurma and Gurene (see Bodomo, 2020).

The Kusaal language is spoken in three West African countries: Ghana, Burkina Faso and Togo. However, the data on personal names that are analysed in this paper are collected from the Ghanaian community although some of these names may also be traced in Burkina Faso and Togo. In Ghana, Kusaal is spoken in the Upper East Region of the country. The Kusaal traditional area has six district capitals: Bawku, Garu-Tempane, Pusiga, Zebilla, and Binduri (see Abubakari 2018, 2020, 2022). Kusaal has two dialects: Agolle and Atoende. The Atoende dialect is spoken in Zebilla and its surrounding areas and the Agolle dialect is spoken in Bawku Municipal, Garu-Tempane and adjoining areas. Fig. 1<sup>1</sup> is the map of the Upper East Region of Ghana showing Kusaal-speaking communities. It is taken from Abubakari (2022).

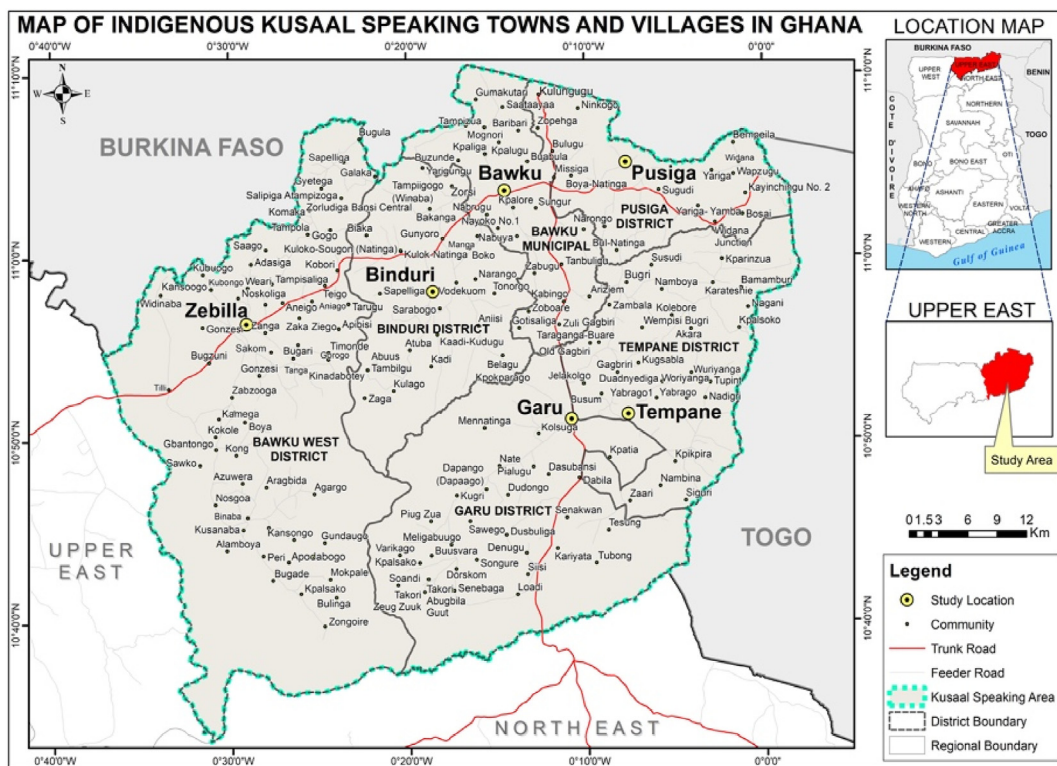


Fig. 1. Map of Kusaal the Kusaal traditional area in the upper east region of Ghana.

Abubakari (2018, 2020) argues that although there is no official census on the number of speakers of Kusaal, it is estimated that there are over 2 million people who use the language as their native language across the West African sub-regions. Data gathered from the Ghana Statistical Service Department, according to the 2010 population and housing census, shows that there are 534,681 speakers of Kusaal in Ghana. With a total population of 24,658,823 (GSS, 2012) people in Ghana, the Kusaas make approximately 2.2% of the population of Ghana as at 2010 (Abubakari, 2018, 2020).

## 1.3. Personal names as cultural artifacts

Undeniably, personal names in Kusaal go beyond assigning identities to persons as Abubakari (2020) rightly opines, ‘any name given to a child in the Kusaal community is expected to have some kind of impact on the bearer both positively and

<sup>1</sup> The concept and data in this map was provided by the author whilst the drawing was done by Bashara Abubakar.

negatively'. A name is not selected randomly for a newborn baby among the Kusaas. There are several cultural dimensions that are considered before a name is conferred on a baby. Paramount among these is the religious factor. A soothsayer or diviner is traditionally consulted to divine if the newborn is an ancestor or associated with any spirit or god for which reason the ancestor's name or the god's or spirit's name should be given to it. Additionally, the belief that the destiny as well as the future of a newborn baby or a person is encapsulated in the name it bears is kernel among the Kusaas. Thus, personal names are symbolic of the beliefs and cultural values of the Kusaas (Abubakari, 2020; Abubakari et al., 2023). Among the Kusaas, personal names are believed to have the protective powers such that they are even used as weapons against death. Neonatal deaths are curbed by the use of death preventive names (Abubakari, 2020; Abubakari et al., 2023). Personal names also allow people to express their emotions and experiences of particular moments in history. People name their newborns based on their current circumstances or experiences. Some of these names maybe innuendos and proverbial. The name bearer metaphorically becomes a 'historical record' such as the individual by virtue of its name reminds people of the experience of the name giver at the time the name was given. These could be both pleasant and bitter memories. The names *Nde-daug* (M), *Nde-pɔka* (F) mean a parent of the name bearer saw chameleons mating during the pregnancy. This is a taboo and to atone for this, the baby is names after the taboo object, a chameleon. The name *Akaagur* 'Have no protector/guardian' could also be an innuendo when one feels he/she has been rejected by people who should provide some protection (see Abubakari, 2020; Abubakari et al., 2023 for details). Notwithstanding these social and cultural functions of personal names in Kusaal, another interesting aspect of these names that must not be overlooked is their linguistic structure which is central to the discussion of this paper.

## 2. Syntactic analysis of Kusaal personal names

The basic sentence structure of Kusaal is Subject + Verb + Object (SVO) (Abubakari 2011, 2018; Musah 2010, 2018; Eddyshaw 2019; Niggli, 2014 among others). Personal names in Kusaal can be in the forms of phrases and sentences. There are names that are of the structures: simple, complex and compound complex sentences. All such names follow the word order of sentences in the language. Additionally, personal names that are sentences also perform the functions of their respective sentence types. Personal names can be declaratives constructions, interrogative constructions and imperative constructions. This section sheds lights on the syntactic properties that are inherent in Kusaal personal names.

### 2.1. Personal names with phrasal structures

The data indicate that Kusaal personal names can be phrases and usually in the domain of nominal phrases (1a-d) and verbal (1e-g) phrases as presented below:

- |     |    |   |                      |                |           |
|-----|----|---|----------------------|----------------|-----------|
| (1) | a. | M<br>1SG.POSS<br>'My mother's<br>'god'                        | ma<br>mother         | win<br>god     | Mmawin    |
|     | b. | M<br>1SG.POSS<br>'my father's<br>'deity'                      | ba<br>father         | bugor<br>deity | Mbabugor  |
|     | c. | A-win<br>NOM-NP<br>God.POSS<br>'God's<br>'tree'               | tiig<br>NP<br>tree   |                | Awintiig  |
|     | d. | A-win<br>NOM-NP<br>God.POSS<br>'God's<br>'property'           | bɔn<br>NP<br>thing   |                | Awimbɔn   |
|     | e. | A-kpɛlim<br>NOM-ADV.<br>Still<br>'Still<br>'exit'             | bɛ<br>VP<br>exist    |                | Akpɛlimbɛ |
|     | f. | A-kɔ<br>NOM-NEG<br>(fut.)<br>Not (will)<br>'Will not<br>'end' | naae<br>VP<br>finish |                | Akɔnaae   |
|     | g. | A-pɔ<br>NOM-NEG.<br>COP<br>Not<br>'Doesn't<br>'deserve'       | nar<br>VP<br>deserve |                | Aponar    |

The examples above demonstrate that personal names in Kusaal are made of noun phrases. In example (1a), the noun phrase is made up of three elements, that is, a possessive pronoun *m* 'my' followed by a noun *ma* 'mother' which function as modifier to the head word *win* 'god'. Similarly, in (1b) the noun phrase comprises a possessive pronoun *m* 'my' a noun *ba* 'father' which all function as a pre-modifier to the head noun *bvgor* 'deity'. Moreover, the examples in (1c-d) contain two elements in the noun phrase. The first element *Awin* 'God' is a noun functioning as an adjective to qualify the head noun *tiig* 'tree' and *bvn* 'thing' respectively. It is observed that personal names with these structures are mostly theophoric names. The personal names in (1e-f), on the other hand, are verb phrases. In (1e) the phrase is composed of the adverbial intensifier *kpelim* 'still' which is modifying the head verb *bε* 'exist' whereas in (1e-g), the head verbs *naae* 'finish' and *nar* 'deserve' respectively are negated using the negative particles: *kv* 'will not' and *pυ* 'not' respectively.

## 2.2. Personal names with clausal structures

Structurally, Kusaal personal names can occur as clauses. In such instances, they mostly have covert subjects, like imperative sentences, with accompanying verb phrases (Abubakari, 2020). The data below demonstrate personal names with clausal structures.

(2)	a.	A-bɔɔd NOM-VP Want '(I) like family'	Buudi NP Family	Abɔɔdbuudi
	b.	A-gɔs NOM-VP Look '(I) look up to God'	Win NP God	Agɔswin
	c.	A-la'a NOM-VP Laugh 'Laughs with only the mouth'	nɔɔr NP Mouth	Alaanɔɔr
	d.	A-ka'a NOM-NEG.COP Not 'Have no protector/guardian'	Gur NP Protector	Akaagur
	e.	A-pυ NOM-NEG.COP Not 'Doesn't love him/her'	nɔŋ VP love	o 3SGL s/he
	f.	A-bam NOM-3PLEMPH Some 'Others want/need'	bɔɔd VP want	Abambɔɔd

In examples (2a-c) the clauses are introduced with transitive verbs like *bɔɔd* 'like' *gɔs* 'look' and *la'a* 'laugh' respectively with implied subjects which often refers to the name bearer making the interpretation assume a covert 1st person singular pronoun 'I'. The examples in (2d-e) are negative constructions. The preverbal negative particle is prefixed with the name prefix -a. The construction in (2f), on the other hand, is an affirmative clausal name with an intransitive verb *bɔɔd* 'want'. Personal names that fall under this category are often innuendos (Abubakari, 2020).

## 2.3. Personal names as simple sentences

In simple sentences, Kusaal personal names have explicit subjects and a transitive or intransitive verb. Below is a demonstration of personal names in simple sentences.

(3)	a.	M N (Pro) 1SG.POSS	ma N mother	leb-na VP return-PERF	Mmalcbina
	b.	M N (Pro) 1SGL.POSS	ba NP father	siak-ya VP-PST agree-PERF	Mbasiakiya
	c.	A-nyan NOM-NP	di VP	ba NP	Anyandiba

	Shame	eat	3PL	
	'They are put to shame'			
d.	A-win	nɔŋ	ti	Awinnɔŋjiti
	NOM-NP	VP	1PL	
	God	love	us	
	'God loves us'			
e.	A-win	tis	mam	Awintisimam
	NOM-NP	VP	1SGL	
	God		gave	me
	'God gave it to me'			
f.	A-yɔ'ɔr	yi-ya		Ayɔ'ɔyiya
	NOM-NP	VP-PST		
	Name	go-past		
	'Name has gone out/Famous person'			

In the examples illustrated above, the sentences in (3a-b) have the SV structure, which have *m ma'* 'my mother' and *m ba* 'my father' respectively as the subjects of the clauses. It is also observable that verbs are intransitive. The perfective '-na' and '-ya' do not take objects in Kusaal (Abubakari, 2011). Moreover, the sentences in (3c-e) follow the SVO structure. In these sentences, *Anyan* and *Awin* are the subjects of the sentences, while the transitive verbs *di*, *nɔŋ* and *tis* take the objects *ba*, *ti* and *mam* respectively. Example (f) on the other hand, is a SV sentence. The subject *A-yɔ'ɔr* 'name' is followed by a perfective verb *yiya* 'gone out'. It is observed that mostly, names that fall under this category are names that cast insinuations or related to certain events or occasions.

#### 2.4. Interrogative constructions as personal names

The data also indicate that some personal names are interrogative sentences. The names under this category are mostly rhetorical questions and use the inversion question form. A main verb is nominalised into a name by using the name prefix *a-*. The question word then follows after the nominalised verb. The questions always use inversion question. These names are often given based on personal experiences of the name giver and they often fall under innuendos (Abubakari 2020). It is important to add that the implicit subject of the question can refer to the name giver, the name bearer of the name or a person(s) to whom the innuendo is thrown at. The name giver is the best person to explain the referent of the question. Although little to no restrictions are observed on the types of interrogative pronouns that can be used for personal names, the commonest interrogative-words that are observed include: *bɔ* 'what' and *ya* 'where'. This is illustrated below:

(4)	a.	A-maal	bɔ?	Amaalbɔ
		NOM-VP	INT	
		Do	what	
		'What have I done?'		
	b.	A-kis	bɔ?	Akisbɔ
		NOM-VP	INT	
		Hate	what	
		'What do (you) forbid?'		
	c.	A-lɛbid	ya?	Alɛbidya
		NOM-VP	INT	
		Return	where	
		'Where do I turn to?'		
	d.	A-bɔɔd	bɔ?	Abɔɔbɔ
		NOM-VP	INT	
		Want	what	
		'What do you want?'		
	e.	A-nɛn	bɔ?	Anɛmbɔ
		NOM-VP	INT	
		Jealous	what	
		'What are you jealous of?'		
	F.	A-nɔ'ɔn	bɔɔda?	Anɔ'ɔnbɔɔda
		NOM-who	want	
		'Who wants/likes it?'		

It is observable in the above examples that all the personal names above are interrogative constructions. In examples (4a-d) the constructions begin with the verbs *maal* 'do', *kis* 'hate', *lɛbid* 'return' and *bɔɔd* 'want' respectively and end with interrogative pronouns such as *bɔ* 'what' and *ya* 'where'. The subjects that characterise these constructions are implicit. Whereas, in example (4e) the structure is made up of a relative pronoun *anɔ'ɔn* 'who' and a verb *bɔɔd* 'want'. The *a-* prefix

nominalises the verbs into names before the interrogative pronouns are introduced. These names are allusive names because they refer to persons in an indirect way.

### 2.5. Imperative constructions as personal names

Personal names in Kusaal are also expressed in the imperative form. In this type of name, the subject of the construction is always implied. Kusaal has both positive and negative imperative morphemes. Whilst the positive is a suffix morpheme *-m* the negative is a preverbal particle *da* (Abubakari 2018; Musah, 2018) and both forms can be used in personal names. The examples below are used for illustration:

(5)	a.	Ba 3PL 'Let them say!'	pian'a-m! talk.IMP		Bapian'am
	b.	A-da Do not 'Don't forget about them!'	tam forget	ba! 3PL	Adatamba
	c.	A-keɛ NOM-let 'Let/allow them!'	ba! 3PP		Akeliba
	d.	A-luk-um NOM-Separate! 'Take (it) out!'			Alukum

The sentences presented above are personal names that perform imperative functions. The construction in (5a) has the object pronoun *ba* 'them' and the imperative verb form *pian'am* 'talk'. Whereas, in (5b) the verb *tam* 'forget' and the plural pronoun *ba* 'them' are preceded by the negative imperative morpheme *da*. The negative morpheme is preceded by the name prefix *a-*. However, in (5c) the imperative form is introduced by *keɛ* 'let/allow'. Musah (2018) suggests that *keɛ/keɛ* 'let/allow' impresses upon the addresser to take a certain action in a manner or tone that does not command but implores.

### 3. Morphological analysis of Kusaal personal names

Morphology concerns word formation and how words in the same language relate to one another. Most of the personal names in Kusaal are derived from common nouns, proper nouns and abstract nouns that refer to deities and shrines, day names, fauna and flora names, circumstantial names, objects, experiences, innuendos among others (Abubakari 2020). Names are also derived from verbs and other lexical categories in the language. To differentiate personal names from nouns, verbs and other lexical categories, a prefix *a-* is attached to the lexical item to make it a personal name. One may refer to this prefix as a personal name typifier or a personal name marker in Kusaal. Previous research has also described it as a nominaliser (Bodomo et al., 2018). The role as a nominaliser often concerns changing verbs or series of verbs into a name or depicting the acts conveyed by a series of verbs (see Bodomo et al., 2018). Bodomo et al. explain that the Kusaas create names from verb phrases by the use of this prefix. They demonstrate this by using the examples below:

(6)	a.	à-dá'á-níŋi NOM-buy-cattle '(Mr) cattle buyer'
	b.	à-mí-wús-dím NOM-know-all-owners '(Mr) know all' (Bodomo et al., 2018: 20)

Since nouns are also changed into personal names using the same prefix, the function of the said prefix can then be said to go beyond being a nominaliser to something that serves more as a personal name prefix. However, words that begin with the voiced alveolar stop /d/ and the bilabial /m/ sounds are prefixed with the nasal /n-/ and /m/ respectively. Thus, most of the personal names in Kusaal either begins with the prefix *a-* or the nasal *n-* or *m-* (Also see Musah & Abubakari, (forthcoming); Abubakari 2020).

The composition of a basic Kusaal personal name can be said to be di-morphemic (prefix + a head word). Others can be up to three or more morphemes. This implies that Kusaal names can be divided into several morphemes, usually a bound and a free morpheme, a bound and two free morphemes or a bound, free and a bound morpheme among other possible permutations. Abubakari (2020), however, observes that instances where the above prefixes are not used for personal names include names that relate to chieftaincy titles and some nicknames. This section provides a discussion on some morphological properties in Kusaal personal names.

### 3.1. A prefix + a noun

Many personal names in Kusaal are derived by prefixing proper nouns, common nouns and abstract nouns that designate things such as deities, names of places, day names, fauna and flora among others with *-a*. The data below exemplify this assertion.

**Table 1**

Personal names formed from two morphemes; a prefix and root (noun).

	Prefix	Noun	Gloss	Name	Meaning	Explanation
a.	a-	win	god	Awin	god	named after a god
b.	a-	bugur	deity	Abogur	deity	named after a deity
c.	a-	ba'ar	idol	Aba'ar	idol	named after an idol
d.	a-	tree	tree	Atiig	tree	named after a tree
e.	a-	kugur	stone	Akugur	stone	named after a stone
f.	a-	naaf	cow	Anaaf	cow	named after a cow (a clan's totemic item)
g.	a-	baa	dog	Abaa	dog	named after a dog (a clan's totemic item)
h.	a-	gbauŋ	skin	Agbauŋ	skin	to be tough like the skin of an animal
i.	a-	laarib	Wednesday	Alaarib	Wednesday	a day name
j.	a-	suor	path	Asuor	path/road	A child born on the road/path
k.	a-	suguru	patience	Asuguru	patience	It means patience
l.	a-	kom	hunger	Akom	hunger	name of a person who was born during famine

A closer look shows that all the personal names in [Table 1](#) have two morphemes, the prefix *a-* and the head noun. The root word also points to the source of the name. For instance, examples (a-c) indicate that the names *Awin*, *Abogur* and *Aba'ar* are from 'a god, a deity and an idol' respectively. Moreover, in Kusaal, personal name may be derived from trees, animals, day names and other objects as observed in (d-j) and these objects have spiritual connotations, i.e. they may be gods, idols or family totems among others. In addition, a personal name such as *Asuor* 'Road' in (j), is derived from a common noun which indicates where the person was born. The examples in (k and l) demonstrate personal names that are derived from abstract nouns such as *Asuguru* 'Patience' and *Akom* 'Hunger'.

### 3.2. The 'a-' prefix + a verb

[Bodomo et al. \(2018\)](#) explain that the prefix *a-* has the ability to nominalise series of verb in a complex construction to denote the act of carrying out the various activities denoted by the verbs sequentially.

- (7) à-z<sub>5</sub>-kiŋ -dí-tá'amá  
 NOM-ran-go-eat-shea fruit  
 'the act of running to go and eat shea fruit/running in order to go and eat shea-fruits' ([Bodomo et al., 2018: 2](#))

The data reveal that some personal names can also be formed by prefixing verbs with *a-*. Thus, the verb becomes a name by being attached to the prefix. The examples below demonstrate personal names that are formed by using this process. It is important to add that these names are all gender neutral. They can be given to both boys and girls.

**Table 2**

Personal names formed from a prefix and root word (verb).

S/N	Prefix	Verb	Gloss	Name	Meaning
a.	a-	tu'as	'to imitate'	Átuas-i	Imitate
b.	a-	Tiel	'to reach out'	Atiel-i	Support
c.	a-	ba'as	'to finish'	Aba'as-i	Finish
d.	a-	bi'es	'to doubt'	Abi'es-i	Doubt
e.	a-	di'ig	'to unexpect'	Adi'ig-i	Unexpected/unannounced
f.	a-	san'am	'to destroy'	Asan'am-i	Destroy
g.	a-	zi'i	'to not know'	Azi'i	Unknown
h.	a-	zan'as	'to refuse'	Azanas-i	Refuse
i.	a-	siak	'to accept'	Atiak-i	Accept
j.	a-	tiak	'to change'	Atiak-i	Change

Table 2 illustrates the formation of some personal names by combining the prefix *a-* and a verb form. The long forms of the verbs are used in this situation (Abubakari 2017, 2018). Generally, words in Kusaal have long and short forms with the former considered as the archaic form. Whilst the long forms are used in questions and negation, the short forms are used elsewhere. The short forms, basically, delete the final vowel. In personal names the untruncated forms are also used.

Similarly, in the sentential names below, the long forms of verbs are used. They are combined with object pronouns and prefixed by *a-* to form personal names.

(8)	Composition	Full form	Name	Meaning
a.	/a-d l # ba/ a.follow.3PL	[ad l ba]	Adoliba	'It is following them'
b.	/a-g t # ba/ a.look.3PL	[ag t ba]	Agotiba	'Look at them'
c.	/a-k l # ba/ a.spare#3PL	[ak l ba]	Ak liba	'Spare (leave) them'
d.	/a-w n # n mi i/ a-god#know	[aw n mi i]	Aw nimi i	'God knows best'
e.	/a-w n # n ŋ # t / a.god.love.2PL	[aw n ŋ t ]	Aw n ŋiti	'God loves us'
f.	/a-na am # s akya/ a-majesty satisfy.PST	[ana ans akq ya]	Ana ansiakiya	'Your majesty is satisfying'

In the examples presented above the verb, whether it occurs after the prefix and before the object, or it occurs at the extreme right periphery of the name must be in the full form. Thus, it must end with a vowel. The use of the full form prevents the undesirable occurrence of consonant clusters in the language (see §4).

### 3.3. The 'a-' prefix + a noun + a noun

Personal names in Kusaal can also be Noun–Noun compounds prefixed by *a-*. This is demonstrated in Table 3 below:

**Table 3**

Personal names formed by three morphemes; a prefix, a noun and a noun.

	Prefix	Noun	Gloss	Noun	Gloss	Name	Meaning	Explanation
a.	a-	pu'a	female	saan	guest	Apoasaan	female guest	A name given to the first female child
b.	a-	naŋ	scorpion	zoor	tail	Anaŋzoor	scorpion tail'	It means to be tiny but dangerous like the tail of a scorpion
c.	a-	win	god	tiig	tree	Awintiig	god's tree	Named after a tree which is a deity
d.	a-	win	god	na'ab	chief	Awina'ab	head of the gods	Named after the head of all the deities.
e.	a-	sa'ab	thick porridge	na'ab	chief	Asa'abna'ab	king of thick porridge	To have plenty to eat
f.	a-	win	god	ma	mother	Awimma	god's mother	The mother of my god
g.	a.	saan	guest	dau	male	Asaandau	male guest	A name given to the first male child
h.	a-	ba'ar	idol	win	god	Aba'arwin	idol's god	It means an idol
i.	a-	na'am	chieftaincy	baŋ	ring	Ana'ambaŋ	chieftaincy ring	Named after a ring worn for chieftaincy
j.	a-	na'am	chieftaincy	vuak	hat	Anaanvuak	chieftaincy hat	Named after a hat worn for chieftaincy

### 3.4. The 'a-' prefix + a noun + an adjective

Kusaal personal names can also consist of a prefix, a noun (N) and an adjective (Adj.). Thus, personal names in Kusaal can be Noun-Adjective compounds as demonstrated in Table 4.

**Table 4**

Personal names formed by three morphemes.

S/n	Prefix	Noun	Gloss	Adjective	Gloss	Name	Meaning	Explanation
a.	a-	win	'god'	su'om	good	Awinsuum	god is good	My god is good
b.	a-	zoor	'tail'	bil	small	Azobil	Azu Junior	There are two Azos; the younger is called Azobil.
c.	HE	a.	win	'god'	bil	small	Awinbil	small god/Awin Junior
d.	a-	nua	'fowl'	bil	small	Anobil	small fowl	Named after a chicken
e.	a-	ba'ar	'idol'	bon	own	Aba'arbon	belong to the idol	Dedicated to the idol
f.	a-	laa	'bowl'	fõinf	little	Alafinf	small bowl	named after a small bowl
g.	a-	daug	'wood'	kudog	old	Adakudog	old wood	Named after an old wood

In Kusaal, *bil* 'small can either be a free or a bound morpheme. When used as a bound morpheme, *-bil*, it functions as a diminutive marker. In personal names, it means 'junior' or the diminutive form of the head word. If two people have the same name in a compound, the younger word gets *-bil*, attached to their name.

### 3.5. The 'a-' prefix + a verb + a modifying adverb

Personal names in Kusaal can also be of the compound type: Verb-Adverb, prefixed with -a. Examples of these names are presented in Table 5 below:

**Table 5**

Personal names comprise of three morphemes.

	Prefix	Verb	Gloss	Adverb	Gloss	Name	Meaning
a.	a-	mər	handle	sum	well	Amərsum	Handle with care well
b.	a-	yi	came out	be'ɛd	badly	Ayibɛɛd	Unlucky
c.	a-	kul	arrive	sum	well	Akulsom	Go home safely
d.	a-	paae	reach	sum	well	Apaaesom	Arrived safely
e.	a-	maal	do	sum	well	Amaalsom	Done well
f.	a-	kis	hate	nɛɛm	nothing	Akisnɛɛm	Hate me for nothing
g.	a-	gɔnlɔg	bent	sum	well	Agɔnlɔsom	Miss. Bent well'

### 3.6. The 'a-' prefix + a nominalised verb

Personal names in Kusaal can also be formed by using the prefix *a-*, a verb and a derivational suffix. In this process, the verb is nominalised by the suffix and the 'name' prefix *a-* is attached to the nominalised verb. Some examples to support this claim are presented in Table 6 below.

**Table 6**

Personal names comprise a prefix, a root and a suffix.

S/N	Prefix	Verb	Gloss	Suffix	Name	Meaning	Explanation
a.	a-	zi'i	don't know	-lim	Aziilim	Ignorance	They are doing it out ignorance
b.	a-	zi'e	stand	-lib	Azielib	Standing	I stand here
c.	a-	luak	avoid	-b	Aluakob	Avoid (them)	Avoid them
d.	a-	pɛlig	expose	-b	Apɛligib	Expose (them)	They have been exposed
e.	a-	dɔl	follow	-b	Adolib	Follow (them)	I follow them
f.	a-	saans	to stress	-m	Asaansim	Stress/discipline (them)	I have stressed them
g.	a-	luk	separate	-m	Alukum	Separate me!	I am different from them
h.	a-	nyɛ	see	-t	Anyɛt	Anyet	I have seen it/them
i.	a-	kɛ	to fault	-ya	Akeya	At fault	I am at fault
j.	a-	gɛn	to be tired	-ya	Agenya	Tired	They are tired

In the examples above, it can be observed that there are different nominalisation suffixes for different verbs in Kusaal. Verbs that end with consonants and nasals also undergo some form of vowel insertion. This shows that in forming personal names in the language, all the underlying rules in the phonotactics of the language must be adhered to.

### 3.7. Gender distinguishing personal names

There are some personal names which distinguish between masculine and feminine forms. Such names mark the masculine mostly by using the suffix *-daug* 'man' and the feminine forms are invariably marked by *-pɔka* 'woman'. Table 7 provides examples of names under this category. Most of the items people are named after, in the data below, are totemic items, gods and deities.

**Table 7**

Gender distinguishing personal names in Kusaal.

S/N	Prefix	Noun	Gloss	Masculine	Feminine	Meaning	Explanation
a.	a-	laal	dormouse	Alaadau	Alaapɔka	A dormouse	Named after a dormouse (totemic item)
b.	a-	win	god	Awindau	Awimpɔka	A god	Named after a god
c.	a-	kugur	stone	Akudau	Akupɔka	A stone	Named after a stone (deity)
d.	a-	Ayam	wise'	Ayandau	Ayampɔka	A wise person	A wise person
e.	a-	zɔɔr	tail	Azɔɔdaug	Azɔɔpɔka	A tail	Named after a tail (totemic item)
f.	a-	bɔgɔr	deity	Abɔgɔ dau	Abɔgɔpɔka	A deity	Named after a deity
g.	n-	dindeog	chameleon	Ndedau	Ndepɔka	A chameleon	Named after a chameleon (totemic item)

#### 4. Phonological analysis of Kusaal personal names

The syllable structure of Kusaal is comprised of the regular syllable types: N, V, CV, CVC, CVN, CVV (Abubakari 2018) as also observed in (Musah 2010, 2017, 2018). The formation of personal names also conforms to this phonotactics. The syllable structure of Kusaal does not permit consonant clusters within syllables. This implies that a personal name in Kusaal which comprises two or more morphemes must have a way to avoid clusters of consonants. This section looks at some phonological processes that ensure that personal names conform to the phonotactics of the language.

##### 4.1. Deletion

Segment deletion is another phonological strategy that ensures that morphemes that come together to form a personal name follows the phonotactics of Kusaal. When two nouns are compounded to form a personal name, the first element in the compound loses its final segment(s) which is, mostly, a consonant. This process ensures that clusters or sequences of consonants at syllable boundaries are avoided.

(7)	UR	SR	Name	Meaning
a.	/a.k l g # b g r/ a.bag#divination	[ak l b g r]	Ak l b g r	Named after a divination bag
b.	/n.deog # bil/ n.chameleon#small	[nde bil]	Nde bil	Small chameleon/Nde Junior
c.	/a.nā:f # deŋ/	[anadeŋ]	Anadeŋ	
d.	/a.b g r # w n/ a.deity#god	[ab g w n]	Ab g w n	Named after the god of a shrine
e.	/m.ba ar # w n/ m.father#god	[aba aw n]	Aba aw n	'My father's god'
f.	/a.lal # da g/ a.squirrel#man	[a.la:da g]	Alaada g	'Named after a male squirrel'
g.	/a.ya:b # b g r/ a.ancentral# god	[a.ya:b g r]	Ayaab g r	'Named after astral deity'
h.	/a.wi:d # dā:n/ a.horse#owner	[a.wi:dā:n]	Awüdaaan	'Horse owner' (the horse is a totemic animal of a clan among the Kusaas)
i.	/a.w n # nā .āb/ a.god#chief	[aw nā āb]	Awina'ab	'Named after the chief of the gods'
j.	/a.ti g # ba/ a.tree#father	[ati ba]	Atiiba	Named after a tree believed to be the father tree if trees'

It is noted that all the final consonants of the first stems in the underlying representations are deleted at the compounded forms at the surface level. Noun-Noun personal names or Noun-adjective compound personal names are mostly the names which undergo this type of phonological process.

##### 4.2. Assimilation

Zsiga (2011) explains assimilation as a phonological alternation in which two sounds that are adjacent become more similar. In Kusaal personal names, nasals assimilate to the place of articulation of adjacent consonants at morpheme boundaries. Thus, the assimilation in this situation is always regressive. This is illustrated below.

(9)	UR	SR	Name	Meaning
a.	/a-tān # bil/ a.land.small	[atāmbil]	Atāmbil	'Named after a small land/Atam Junior
b.	/a-gbāŋ # b n/ a.skin.owner	[agbāmb n]	Agbāmb n	own by the skin (chief)
c.	/a-w n # b d/ a.god#like	[aw mb d]	Awimb d	'God's love'
d.	/a-w n # mā/ a.god#mother	[aw mmā]	Awimma	'God's mother'
e.	/a-mā ān # bil/ a.okra#small	[amā āmbil]	Ama'ambil	'A small okra/Okra Junior'
f.	/a-nān # b d/ a.still#like	[anāmb d]	Anāmb d	'Still loved'
g.	/a-kpelim # gad/ a.still#lead	[akpelimgad]	Akpelimgad	'Still above/ahead'
h.	/a-pām # daug/ a.strength#man	[apāndaug]	Apāndaug	'Strong man'
i.	/a-nā ām # siak ja/ a.majesty#satisfying	[anā āns ak ja]	Ana'āns akiya	'Your reign is satisfactory'

From the above data, nasals assimilate in place of articulation to a following consonant. In (9a-c) the velar nasal /ŋ/ becomes a labial nasal [m] following a labial consonant /b/. Similarly, the examples in (9d-f) have the alveolar nasal /n/

assimilating to the place of articulation of the following labial stops /b/ and /m/. However, it is observed in (9g-k) that the bilabial nasal stop /m/ becomes an alveolar stop /n/ as a result of the adjacent alveolar consonants /d/ and /s/. In terms of directionality, it is observed that it is the adjacent consonant at the right that undergoes the assimilatory process to become like the consonant at the left and this describes anticipatory or regressive assimilation.

## 5. Conclusion

This study was set out to analyse the core aspects of syntax, semantics, morphology and phonology of personal names in Kusaal. Syntactically, it is revealed that Kusaal personal names can be phrasal or clausal forms where the types of phrasal forms identified are noun phrases and verb phrases and personal names that take clauses do not have overt subjects. At sentential or functional level, Kusaal personal names occur as simple sentences that take transitive or intransitive verbs as demonstrated in (5a-d). Moreover, the study finds that Kusaal personal names can have interrogative and imperative constructions. With regard to morphology, it has shown that Kusaal personal names often comprise two to three morphemes. At di-morphemic level, a nominal prefix and a free morpheme can form a personal name where the free morpheme is either a noun or a verb. At poly-morphemic level, a personal name can contain a bound morpheme (a nominal prefix) and two free morphemes or two bound morphemes and a free morpheme as observed in 3.6. In addition, it has shown that gender distinguishing personal names can be marked by suffixes such as *-daug* for male and *-poka* for feminine personal names. At the phonological level, the study has indicated that personal names are subjected to the phonotactic constraints of Kusaal and therefore, phonological processes such as vowel insertion, consonant deletion and assimilation are employed to ensure that personal names conform to the phonotactic requirement of the language.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Hasiyatu Abubakari:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Lawrence Sandow:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation. **Samuel Akugri Asitanga:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Investigation, Data curation.

## Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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