Journal of Linguistics and Language in Education Vol 8, Number 1 (2014) 90-107

What Do My Students Call Me? Nicknaming of Lecturers by Students at the University of Dar es Salaam

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Abstract

This study analyses lecturers' nicknames given by students at the University of Dar es Salaam. It focuses on the ways in which less powerful members of a community use nicknames as a way of mobilizing solidarity among themselves and of forming identities of those in authority, as an othering strategy. Tact and care is particularly important to the less powerful members because lack of it may get them into trouble. The Faircloughian three-dimensional framework provides a theoretical lens through which the data are discussed. The findings reveal that the more popular nicknames relate to the lecturers' unacceptable behaviours and level of competence in the subjects they teach. Others have to do with the linguistic mannerisms the lecturers display while they are in the lecture rooms, their dressing, sexual craving, and physical appearance. All these lead students to coin nicknames. The findings and the discussion show that it is important for both lecturers and students – indeed for all those who are in superior-subordinate relationships – to reflect upon the social processes they are involved in and change their "behaviours" if such behaviours are unacceptable, for them to co-exist amicably.

Key words: *nicknames, superior-subordinate relationships, social processes, unacceptable behaviour, identities*

Introduction

The current study is concerned with the nicknames that students at the University of Dar es Salaam (henceforth UDSM), Mwalimu J.K. Nyerere Mlimani campus, give their lecturers[1]. It is an attempt to show how students, due to the subordinate position they occupy, give clandestine identities to their lecturers. Thus, these names are the students' preferred way of referring to their lecturers.

De Klerk and Bosch (1997a:95) define nicknames as names "invented by companions, and classmates, or by members of tight-knit subcultures". I partly concur with them, but I would like to point out that nicknames may come from a wide range of sources and relationships. For example, some nicknames originate from work-related settings that involve members who are not companions, but whose social relations and distance dictate what sort of names or nicknames are given to the members. It is commonplace in Tanzanian secondary schools for students to nickname their teachers. Nicknaming may, in that case, be viewed as an identity forming process

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[1] Note that the word lecturer is used in this paper to refer to all academic members of staff, regardless of their ranks: tutorial assistant, assistant lecturer, lecturer or professor.

based on distal social ties between related groups. In this paper, the nicknames given to lecturers by their students form the students' perception of their lecturers based on the latter's behaviours, level of competence in the subjects they teach, and the like. For the purpose of this paper, I will call the students who coin the names *referencers* and the lecturers the *referenced.* Since the nicknames are secret, it is not possible for all who use them to know each other. In addition, some are used by more than one cohort as long as the referenced are still at the university. In that case, those who coined the nicknames may not be known. Of course, what is important here is not who coined the nicknames, but rather the names themselves and the functions they are meant to serve.

Previous studies reveal that students nickname their teachers in order to express their solidarity and to derive pleasure from doing so (De Klerk & Bosch, 1997a; Crozier, 2002:133). The continued use of the nicknames is indicative of the fact that the students have agreed to nickname their lecturers the way they do. It is said that the nicknames given to teachers and lecturers are clandestine and are usually used for reference purposes.

De Klerk and Bosch (1997b) have noticed that the nicknames that students give their teachers are pejorative, negative, and, very often, hurtful. Talking about their nature, they say that:

> [p]ejorative or derogatory nicknames are atypical in that they are not used in the vocative, as terms of address, but rather as terms of reference ...which, because of their hurtful, scathing nature, are often kept secret from their bearers (De Klerk & Bosch, 1997b:103).

Crozier (2002) also has something to talk about regarding the nicknames students use to refer to their teachers and lecturers:

> Name-calling and coining hurtful nicknames usually reflect an imbalance of power where the weaker are called names by the stronger. However, weaker individuals can use names in a clandestine way to retaliate against their oppressors and to express solidarity and support for one another (Crozier, 2002:133).

The nicknames are discussed in detail in order to show what they are, what functions they are meant to serve, and what the nicknaming process achieves in similar power-shaped relationships in terms of identity formation processes. Consequently, this kind of identity formation process also applies in other contexts with asymmetrical power relations. As such, the study can function as an eye-opener to people in different sociocultural settings in order for them to be able to know how their subordinates view them, and even how they talk about them, as their way of exposing their inner-emotions and sentiments particularly about them. The *referenced* themselves can find these nicknames useful and use them as a way of evaluating how their identities are viewed by their students.

An Overview of Naming and Nicknaming Practices at UDSM

Nicknaming can be viewed broadly as part of naming practices, but of its own sociocultural image and importance as contrasted with the ordinary naming practice. Nicknaming at an institution can be viewed partly as an identity formation practice within the institution itself, but it also draws from larger societal relations between and among members of the larger community within which an institution is located.

What is happening at the University of Dar es Salaam, and in all other universities in Tanzania, is a reflection of the social distance between those regarded as superior in some ways (e.g. in terms of age, wealth, academic qualification, etc.) and the subordinate along the same traits. Those in subordinate positions tend to be acquiescent to those in authority, not always because of their willingness to behave as such, but because they have an obligation to do so. This is because failure to do so is likely to activate friction which may impact negatively on them.

Unlike in most Western universities where the naming practice is mostly on first-name basis, in Tanzania the default pattern is to call lecturers by their academic titles. Sometimes, surnames are used along with their titles, but it is also not uncommon that the titles are used without the surnames. This is especially so if the bearers of the names are present. The common practice is to call lecturers Sir, Madam, Doctor, or Professor. The social distance causes the subordinates to think that mentioning the name of a superior is insubordination and may be viewed as face threatening.

The pattern at the university is also reflective of the naming practices in the wider Tanzanian society where in many families children would not even mention their parents' first names with ease, and particularly so in their presence. Culturally, a younger person is usually not allowed to mention a name of an older person because doing so is regarded as bad manners.

The practice of using terms of address at the university suggests a whopping social distance between students and their lecturers, sometimes leading to complaints by Western students[2] that their lecturers are not "easily accessible". This pattern of asymmetry in interaction makes socialization between students and lecturers rather difficult because the level of formality is immense and horrendous. The social distance reflected through the naming pattern at the university makes students' lives rather uncomfortable, somewhat unfriendly, and possibly not enjoyable (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As such, students opt for 'safety valves' and nicknaming becomes one of them. Crozier (2002:134) observes that nicknames add to students' enjoyment of their school lives. Martineau (1972) also notes that nicknames used by a group also promote a hostile attitude towards the out-group. Indeed, factors such as age, economic status, education, or other kinds of authority characteristically decide whether or not one is referred to by their first-name, surname or title, or a

[2] In a staff-student seminar and in informal talks foreign students have complained that their lecturers are not easily accessible for consultation. They complained that the use of academic titles makes them unsure of how to address them properly. They feel like they cannot communicate with them when they need their help.

combination of a surname and a title. Consideration of such factors is a common practice in many parts of Tanzania. For example, a wealthy young man is usually referred to as *mzee*, which literally means 'old man', even by people who are older than himself.

Rationale for Research on Nicknaming at the University

People usually identify themselves in terms of how they conduct themselves with regard to attributes such as age, wealth, sex, and job performance. This becomes a common way of their identities. Very often it is not easy for one to know what other people say about them, especially if what they say is negative. It is commonplace for people to search for people's own identities, and this realism is echoed even in the Gospel of Mark 8:27 when Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" (Vaughan, 1967). The responses that the disciples provided for this question are a clear manifestation of multiple identities people have on the basis of whom one interacts with, and how much they know or claim to know about others. For lecturers, their more natural interactants are students, and this study is one way of providing answers to such questions. It is a way of helping them know their identities; but possibly more importantly, when lecturers know how they are looked upon by students they can spend a bit of their time reflecting on how they conduct themselves if they find traces of truth in the nicknames they are given.

Regarding universities in Tanzania in general, in teaching there are practices, features, and manners which may lead to nicknaming as a way of identity formation. The practices range from mannerisms, dressing style, common phraseologies, to our levels of efficiency in teaching. Age and morphological appearance are to some extent also seen as factors, although the lecturers cannot do much about age and some aspects of their physiology. In the Tanzanian context, this onomastic paper serves as an eye-opener in understanding superordinate-subordinate relationships using nicknames.

Methodological Approach

A total of 43 students pursuing different degree programmes at the University of Dar es Salaam participated in the study. They came from the following degree programmes: Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Arts with Education, Bachelor of Arts in Language Studies, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Commerce (Accountancy), and Bachelor of Arts in Kiswahili. So the study has incorporated nicknames from a reasonably broad range of disciplines at the university. The question of how many informants should participate in a study for its findings to be generalizable is not a concern of qualitative research; what is important is that the informants are well selected to provide good and relevant information so that relevant insights can be drawn. Some of the nicknames were repeatedly mentioned by students from the same discipline, so these are presented only once.

The selection of the participants was based on their willingness to participate in the study. They were given a semi-structured questionnaire to fill in. The questionnaire asked the participants to mention the nicknames they give to lecturers, say what they mean, why the nicknames were given, whether they regard them as positive or negative, and what functions they serve. Some of the students took part in the study

willingly. Others refused, arguing that they were being trapped and would suffer in the end.

Theoretical Consideration

Nicknaming is multifaceted, and it is sometimes difficult to think about a coherent and unanimous theory on nicknaming. However, considering the kind of nicknames in this paper, one gets the feeling that possibly a theory on politeness or power relations may be appropriate. For example, a theory on politeness, which might somehow relate to nicknaming, has more to do with consideration for another person's face saving. But possibly such a theory would be appropriate when the *referenced* came into direct address by the *referencers*, which is not the case in this study. Likewise, a theory on power relations would work well where the *referencer* and the *referenced* meet in the nicknaming process. Nevertheless, the nicknames here are given by people who do not address the named directly. So, it is between people who do not meet in the nicknaming process. The referencers use the names undercover, and dare not expose themselves to the referenced, regardless of whether the nicknames are positive, neutral, or negative. Finch (1998) argues that nicknaming fits well in the ideational function of language. He views language as a symbolic instrument for talking about and understanding the world around us. He holds that:

> In using language to identify things, or as instrument of thought, or to provide a record, we are using language as a symbolic code to represent the world around us. The ideational function, then, is that function in which we conceptualize the world for our own benefit and that of others (Finch, 1998:42).

The world shared by and circumventing lecturers and students at the University of Dar es Salaam is aptly coded in the way students perceive their lecturers, and also how lecturers perceive their students. In this case, how students perceive their lecturers is obviated through the nicknames they give them, but because the lecturers are the more powerful members, they do not have to apply this strategy because they have alternative ways of dealing with their students. As such, part of the impetus for the nicknaming strategy is the social distance obtaining between students and their lecturers, and partly because the two groups sometimes, and indeed very often, have conflicting interests.

I want to argue that a unitary theory on nicknaming has to be multi-dimensional, and there is no theory yet which can be said to have the capability of comprehensively addressing all kinds of nicknames. This is so because there are different contexts that lead to the giving of nicknames. Some people give themselves nicknames as prestige identities, some are given at birth due to circumstances and traditions, and yet some are given for the purpose of airing grievances. A number of studies have looked into nicknames and how a unanimous theory is difficult to arrive at. For example, the discussion by Adams (2009) shows some complications related to the establishment of a theory on nicknaming. He talks of nicknaming in terms of distribution of power within a group. But, as he correctly notes, nicknaming does not follow just one pattern; it can be by imposition or by agreement. Another study by

Omari (2011:70) refers to "self-chosen" nicknames used by stage performers. Both authors point to the fact that nicknaming does not follow a unilateral path.

Nevertheless, for us to get an understanding of nicknaming in general, and of nicknaming by UDSM students in particular, I find Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for understanding texts relevant (Fairclough, 1992:73). Fairclough views discourse as text, as discursive practice, and as social practice. Discourse as text has to do with how the text is designed; discourse as discursive practice relates to the process of text production, distribution, and consumption, whereas discourse as social practice has to do with sociocultural practices related as social relations and identities as they relate to the text. The leaf I am borrowing from Fairclough is the view of discourse as text. In relation to nicknames, it is important to say at the outset that nicknames constitute a kind of text, a view also held by Philips and Hardy (2002:4), who describe texts in terms of their ability to take a variety of forms including spoken words, pictures, symbols and artifacts. A paraphrase of Fairclough's (op. cit.) framework, which is crucial for making sense of what the nicknames reveal, would have it that, in the construction of texts, choices are made on what the *referencer* finds most appropriate for their purpose. That being the case, in decoding what texts mean, we look at their contexts of production, relationships between participants, their situation at the time of their production, how the text relates to other texts, and so forth. But another important use of looking at nicknames as discourse is why the students decided to give their lecturers the nicknames they have given them, despite the numberless possible options of nicknames that they might have had. In this way, it is possible to uncover the more underlying meanings attached to the texts.

In the process of making sense of a text, it is not necessary that all the elements of the three dimensions that Fairclough proposes are equally relevant in all kinds of texts, but it depends on the attributes of the text in question and the purposes for which it is studied. So while with this kind of nicknaming it is almost impossible to tell with precision who the *referenced* are in terms of their actual names (even though it might be possible to know some of them if one is a member of the said community); through intertextuality some people in the wider Tanzanian society can tell what kinds of persons some of those nicknamed lecturers are, because some of the meanings of the names in the broader social contexts are known. For example, people who watch Tanzanian music videos or films would have the feeling of nicknames referring to an artiste. By looking at the nicknames, and with the help of the wide societal happenings, one can link the lecturers' nicknames to their sources. Other sources of help in making sense of the nicknames are the books that students read, societal happenings where the university originates, the internet, and so forth. As such, some of the nicknames will make different senses to different readers.

Findings and Discussion

Findings of the Study

The lecturers' nicknames used here were provided by students from the following degree programmes: Bachelor of Commerce Accounting, Bachelor of Arts Kiswahili, Bachelor of Arts Political Science, Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Language, Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Philosophy, Bachelor of Arts in Statistics, Bachelor of Arts in Languages, Bachelor of

Education, and Bachelor of Arts with Education. Here they are not organized according to the informants' disciplines; as such an approach would have the potential of identifying the referenced.

The discussion is aided by students' own responses, the researcher's knowledge of the society, and also intertextuality. Porter (1986) describes intertextuality as follows:

> ..."intertextuality" means looking for "traces", the bits and pieces of text which writers or speakers borrow and sew together to create new discourse. The most mundane manifestation of intertextuality is explicit citation, but intertextuality animates all discourse and goes beyond mere citation (Porter, 1986:34).

Most of the nicknames draw from the wider societal discourses, but some relate parochially to classroom situations or intra-university context. These other texts are important reference points for the interpretation of the data.

Nicknames of the Lecturers at the University of Dar es Salaam

S/N	Nickname	Meaning	Meaning or description by the students
1	Uamsho	Renewal or Islamic fundamentalism	The lecturer comes dressed in Islamic religious style, and behaviour in class.
2	Isn't it?	Confirmation phrase	Two different lecturers commonly use the phrase in class.
3	Ngoswe	A character in a play who is a womanizer	The lecturer has the character of luring female students
4	The book you must read		This lecturer forces students to buy a book which he has authored. It is a common phrase.
5	Chapombe	Drunkard	This lecturer likes jokes with students, looks drunk, and lacks seriousness in handling different matters.
6	Mchomoko	Propulsion, impulsion	The lecturer teaches a topic which he translates into Kiswahili with the word *mchomoko* which in English can be translated as propulsion or impulsion. In this case the nicknames are after the content of the subject he teaches.
7	Ramsa	A jolly and talkative person Swahili comedy which is part of Swahili	The lecturer is very friendly to students. His appearance and deeds resemble a character in Swahili literature who talks a lot in class. The lecturer also engages in sexual

		literature	affairs with students. This behaviour is similar to that character in Kiswahili literature.
8	Mzazi	Parent	The lecturer uses the phrase commonly. Students use the name to remember the lesson that the lecturer teaches.
9	Von Ranke	A philosopher of ancient time	The lecturer teaches the ideas authored by this philosopher. Both the lecturer and the philosopher are difficult to understand.
10	Kitambi	Big tummy	The lecturer is obese, and many students don't understand him. In this case they attribute his failure to teach to his obesity.
11	Soni	Name of a character in a poem	The lecturer likes and mentions the character very often.
12	Makoti	Coats	The lecturer always dresses in coats. This lecturer is identified as such for always putting on coats, and sometimes wearing them even without washing them, to the extent that they give a bad smell.
13	Simple like that		The lecturer uses the phrase often.
14	Pastor		The way the lecturer dresses up, talks and looks is like the way pastors do.
15	Libido		The lecturer, who has been given this name, is fond of girls from his class for the purpose of sexual affairs. He teaches like someone in libido, and especially the examples that he gives.
16	Kamata kamata	Fail students in examinations arbitrarily	The lecturer fails many students in examinations. As such, the name has been given due to mass failures of students in the course that the lecturer teaches.
17	Machiavelli	Name of a philosopher	The lecturer teaches ideas by this philosopher, and students compare him with the philosopher Machiavelli. They like the lecturer.
18	Jembe	Hoe (farm implement)	The lecturer is very clever, so he is regarded as a tool. He teaches well and is fair in marking examinations.

19	Ambouteillage	Traffic jam	The lecturer uses the word to stop students who come to class late.
20	Shemeji	Sister- or brother-in-law	The lecturer calls students sister- or brother-in-law in the classroom.
21	Karl Marx		The lecturer believes in Marxist theories and propagates them.
22	Cogito ego sum	I think therefore I am	The lecturer likes this catch phrase when he teaches about thinking in philosophy. He is regarded as "someone who thinks" - philosopher, which is to do with a topic that he teaches in class.
23	Mwarabu	A person of Arabic origin	The lecturer is an Arab. So he is identified by the colour of his skin and race. Racism is not an acceptable behaviour.
24	Sugar dady	A womanizer	The lecturer is fond of girl students.
25	Nondoz	Knowledge	Makes life at university difficult by setting difficult tests and assignments.
26	Copy and paste		The lecturer is not clever, but copies and reproduces everything without analysis.
27	Kuhn-Tucker	Names of scholars	The lecturer teaches about ideas propagated by these scholars, and the topic is difficult.
28	Idle server	A theory in a lesson	The lecturer is not competent enough to make the lesson clear. So, he is regarded as 'an idle' server.
29	Mzee wa maarifa	A knowledgeable old man (or with techniques)	The lecturer awards students low coursework grades, so they would go to him and ask him to use his *maarifa* (knowledge, techniques) to rescue their situation.
30	Kitumbo	Big tummy	The lecturer has a big tummy, and is lazy.
31	Ray C	A famous Tanzanian female musician (whose public image is not acceptable)	The lecturer looks and dresses like the musician: mini-skirts and clothes that expose many parts of her body.
32	Kidevu	A long chin	The lecturer has a long chin. Students simply call him *kidevu* for fun.
33	Kipanga	Kite	The lecturer is a genius, and delivers very well in class. He understands things as quickly as a kite picks up a chick.
34	Sweet heart		A phrase commonly used by the

			lecturer
35	Miakili mingi	Very brainy	The lecturer knows the subject very well, and is believed to be the only lecturer who can teach the subject.
36	Amphioxus	A vertebrate organism	The lecturer is called so because of one of the topics that he teaches. It is a difficult topic, and students cannot understand it.
37	Another bullet		The lecturer uses this phrase commonly in class, and is boring.
38	Mzee wa zipu	A zip man	The lecturer is a womanizer, and is fond of female students.
39	Friend of mine		The lecturer uses this phrase commonly in class.
40	Babu	Grandfather, an old man	The lecturer is an old man, and is nicknamed as such due to his age. He is liked by students.
41	Bibi	Grandmother, an old woman	The lecturer is an old woman. She is kind to students, and so they like her.

Profiling the Nicknames

From the table, the nicknames that have been provided by students at the University of Dar es Salaam can be put in the following categories: (i) physical appearance (ii) competence in teaching (iii) mannerisms and common phraseology (iv) topics taught (v) mastery of the subject areas, and (vi) leniency in the allocation of scores. However, in the course of discussing them, it is possible to group them into five categories because some of the above categories relate. As such, I will discuss them under the following categories: a) physical appearance b) handling teaching and evaluation c) mannerisms and common phraseology d) topics or sub-topics in the classroom, and e) relating to sexual behaviour.

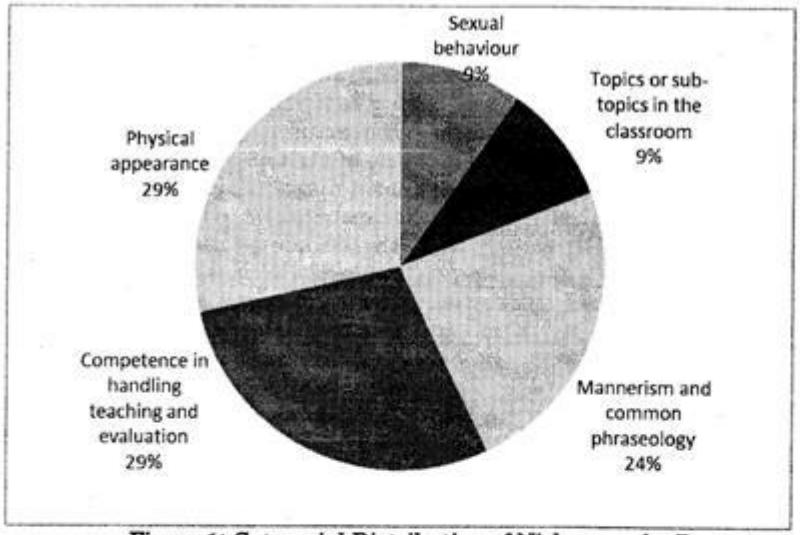


Figure 1: Categorial Distribution of Nicknames by Percentage

Nicknames Based on Physical Appearance

Uamsho is a Swahili word which literally means *renewal* or *revival*. In the context of the lecturer being talked about here, it refers specifically to Islamic fundamentalism and is obviated by the dressing, long beard, and speaking styles of the lecturer. In the large Tanzanian societal context, religious fundamentalism is not taken positively by non-fundamentalists. Religious fundamentalists are regarded as people fond of chaos, irrational, and not ready to live with people who are not like themselves. As such, it is not very likely that the referencer is a fellow Islamic fundamentalist.

The kind of dressing which the participants have described as the reason for the nickname is improper in a secular university, like the University of Dar es Salaam, is possibly unnecessary. Accordingly, any religiously charged occurrence by a lecturer is likely to be frowned upon.

Chapombe is a colloquial word for a drunkard. This name is given to a person who usually looks drunk, less serious in whatever they are doing, or at least a person who likes joking unnecessarily. Such a person is viewed as not being a committed person and may also be regarded as irresponsible.

Kitambi and **Kitumbo** are words which literally refer to a big tummy, and refer to an obese person. In this respect, the names refer to a lecture with a big tummy. It is not straightforward whether they approve or disapprove of the look because some people in Tanzania view big tummies as related to obesity, which is a sign of malnutrition and others to wealth. Whatever the case, no one would be happy to know that students identify them by such names.

Makoti simply means coats. This nickname is given to a lecturer who always wears a coat. Students have said that the lecturer does not usually wash his/her coat, thus giving an obnoxious smell. He/she wears this regardless of the weather, whether or not it is warm. I regard this as a way of registering their disapproval of the coats.

Pastor has to do with the way the lecturer dresses up, talks, and looks. It is like the way pastors do. The person wears coats and speaks like someone preaching. Dressing up uniformly and speaking in idiosyncratic ways may be boring to students.

Ray C is a name of a famous female Tanzanian artiste whose actual name is Rehema Chalamila, and whose public image is not positive in the eyes of many. Intertextuality helps us to liken the lecturer to the artiste. The artiste has featured in pornographic photos (e.g. http://www.udakumagazine.com/2014/01/aibu-ray-c-nae-atupia-picha-yake-ya.html), dresses up indecently, and had used illicit drugs and become drug addicted. It is likely that there is a lecturer whose looks resemble those of the artiste, possibly in terms of dressing or other aspects.

Babu is a Swahili word for grandfather, but whose expanded meaning is an old man. The lecturer is an old man. According to the student who provided this nickname to the researcher, the lecturer does not know this name. Generally, this nickname is neutral, and the lecturer is liked by students because he teaches well.

Bibi is a Swahili word for grandmother, but whose extended meaning is an old woman. The lecturer is an old woman. According to the student who provided this nickname to the researcher, like *Babu*, the nickname is also regarded as neutral by students. The lecturer is nice to students and so is liked.

Mwarabu is a person of Arabic origin. Students have decided to call him by his race. This kind of naming is racist. What is difficult to say here is whether the use of race to identify a person can be regarded as totally negative in the Tanzanian context. In fact, for people of races other than black Africans, the usual notion is that these are more successful and richer than themselves. Arabs in particular are business people in the country. As such, they are regarded as rich people. Whatever the case, it is difficult to regard this kind of naming appropriate. This nature of identification of the lecturer is not known to the lecturer himself, and as such it is like a secret code among the students who are taught by this lecturer.

Kidevu is a Swahili word for chin. This lecturer has a long chin, and students simply call him *kidevu* for fun. Hence the students have decided to identify him by his chin, which is easy for the students but possibly not socially appropriate.

Nicknames Relating to Competence in Handling Teaching and Evaluation

In this aspect, there are lecturers who were viewed as strong, and others weak. Consequently, on the basis of competence in teaching, there are both positive and negative nicknames of lecturers.

Machiavelli This is a name of a philosopher. The lecturer teaches ideas by this philosopher, and students compare him with the philosopher Machiavelli. They like the lecturer because they see him as comparable to Machiavelli.

Jembe is a Kiswahili word for hoe (a farming implement or tool). The lecturer is very clever, and so, he is regarded as a tool or an instrument. He teaches well and is fair in grading tests and examinations. As a result, students respect and like him because of his ability.

Copy and paste is a name given to a lecturer who is dull and copies everything from books, and presents without any analysis.

Mzee wa maarifa can be literally translated as an old man with knowledge. Students used to get low coursework marks from his course. So they would go to him and ask him to use his '*maarifa*' (knowledge) to rescue their situation.

Kipanga is the Kiswahili word for kite. This is metaphorically used to relate the sharpness of a kite when snatching a chicken with strong claws. It is used at the university to refer to intelligent people who understand things fast in the likeness of a kite snatching a chicken. The lecturer nicknamed '*kipanga*' is described by the participants as a genius, and delivers his lesson very well in class. He understands what he teaches and is also able to apply it.

Miakili mingi means many brains. The lecturer knows the subject very well, and is believed to be the only lecturer who can teach the subject.

Nondoz literally this refers to 'iron bars', but students use it to mean 'knowledge'. The lecturer is described as being knowledgeable, but makes students' life at the university very difficult by setting difficult tests and assignments.

Idle server is a theory in a lesson. The lecturer is not competent enough to make his teaching clear. Students regard him as 'being idle'.

Kamata kamata is a name given to a lecturer who fails students arbitrarily, and causes mass failures. He is regarded as ill-intentioned.

Ramsa is a nickname given to a lecturer who is jolly and talkative. His appearance and the things he does make him look friendly to students. He also talks a lot about Ramsa which is Kiswahili comedy, part of Kiswahili literature. Students describe him as having the behaviuor of beguiling female students for love affairs.

Von Ranke was a famous German historian of the 19th Century. The lecturer who has been given this nickname has taught his ideas in class.

Mchomoko is a Kiswahili word which in English can be translated as propulsion, or impulsion. The lecturer teaches a topic which he translates into Swahili with the word *mchomoko* which in English can be translated as propulsion or impulsion. So the nicknames are after the content of the subject he/she teaches.

Nicknames Relating to Mannerisms and Common Phraseology

Ambouteillage: A French word which means "traffic jam". Due to heavy traffic in Dar es Salaam in the morning, this lecturer of French uses this word to bar late arriving students from entering his classes, especially those whose reason is "traffic jam". So this lecturer means that there is traffic jam in his class as well, so late comers cannot come in because there is also 'ambouteillage' in his class.

Shemeji: This is a Swahili word for sister- or brother-in-law. The lecturer who has been branded this nickname calls students sister- or brother-in-law in the classroom. This may suggest that the lecturer is fond of sexual affairs with a girl student or girl students, and so views all students as in-laws.

Soni: Name of a character in a poem. The lecturer likes the character mentions it very often.

Sweetheart: A phrase commonly used by the lecturer. Such a phrase in the Tanzanian situation is ideally used by lovers, and not so much by lecturers and students.

Friend of mine: A phrase commonly used by the lecturer.

Isn't it? has become the nickname of a lecturer who repeatedly uses this phrase in his lectures. This name is given to two different lecturers who use the same tag.

Another bullet is a nickname given to a lecturer who uses this phrase commonly in class, and is regarded as boring. In case this lecturer gets to know this nickname, he/she should think of another way of presenting his/her lectures instead of repeatedly using the same phrase.

The book you must read is a name that has been given to a lecturer who forces students to buy a book which he had authored. So he threatens students to buy the book, and failure to do so would amount to failing his examination.

Simple like that is a common phrase that the lecturer uses.

Mzazi: The word means 'parent' in English. The lecturer uses the phrase commonly. Students use the name to remember the lesson that the lecturer teaches. They regard the nickname to be positive.

Nicknames Relating to Topics or Sub-topics in the Classroom

Karl Marx: The lecturer is a staunch believer in Marxist theories, and propagates such ideas to students. So in addition to teaching, he does advocacy work.

Cogito Ego Sum: The lecturer likes this catch phrase when he teaches about thinking in philosophy. The phrase means "I think therefore I am" or it may simply mean "A person who thinks". This is a topic that he teaches in class, and he teaches it well. As such, students liken him to a thinking philosopher.

Kuhn-Tucker: The lecturer teaches ideas propagated by these scholars, and the topic is difficult. Students regard the topic as difficult, and the lecturer is not capable of making it easy.

Amphioxus: This is a vertebrate organism, and the lecturer is called so because of the topics that he teaches. The topic is difficult and the lecturer is unable to make it understood.

Nicknames Relating to Sexual Behaviour

Libido: The origin of the nickname **libido** was not explained, but the explanation is that it refers to the lecturer' involvement in sexual behaviour. So the lecturer that was given that name has the bad behaviour of yearning for young girls who are his students. Several of the nicknames would also fall under the behaviour category.

Ngoswe: The name is from a character in a Swahili play who is a womanizer. The lecturer has the behaviour of luring female students into sexual affairs, a behaviour that is loathed and not expected of lecturers.

Sugar dady: This lecturer is a womanizer, and is fond of female students from his classes.

Mzee wa zipu: This can be translated literally as a zip man. The lecturer is a womanizer, and is fond of female students.

The Functions that the Nicknames are Meant to Serve

According to the students who participated in the study, the functions of the lecturers' nicknames are many, but the more important ones are:

- It is a kind of language common among students as a group for reference purposes.
- Some lecturers are known only by their nicknames, so in such cases nicknames are used for identification purposes.
- It is used for enjoyment and remembering lessons, especially the difficult ones.
- The names are given depending on the nature of the lecturer and the courses they teach.
- The names are used by students to talk about their lecturers.
- It is the identification of lecturers who misbehave.
- Nicknames are used to motivate and encourage lecturers to teach well if they come to know them.
- Nicknames reflect what lecturers are always doing, their character, attitude, and appearance.
- Nicknames identify lecturers easier than their real names.
- Nicknames encourage lecturers if they are used in a positive way.
- Nicknaming is not a good behaviour because sometimes students do not know the real names of their lecturers.
- They serve three functions, namely secrecy, identification, and admiration.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the nicknames in terms of their orientation, whether they are positive, negative, or neutral. Out of all the nicknames, 23 are negative, 13 neutral, while only 6 are positive. These are presented in percentages below:

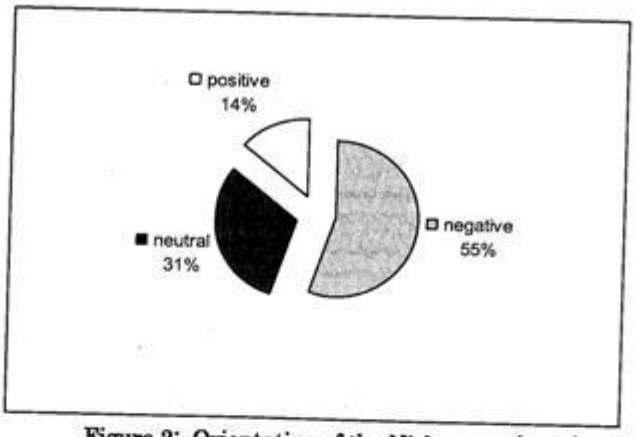


Figure 2: Orientation of the Nicknames (n=42)

At least three classificatory categories of nicknames can be identified from the list of the nicknames presented in this study. There are those which are negative, because they refer to attributes which are frowned upon at the university and the wider society at large. These have to do with lecturers' involvement in unacceptable sexual relations with students, inefficiency in work performance, mannerisms which are unnecessary, religious fundamentalism, failing students without proper reasons, being drunkards, and the like. The second category can be viewed as positive because the students evaluate the performance of the lecturers positively: very efficient in performing their duties, helpful to students. The third category is the neutral one which cannot be attributed to negativity or positivity. Names like *makoti* (coats), *kidevu* (chin), *babu* (grandfather) or *bibi* (grandmother) cannot be regarded as being charged with negativity or positivity. They have to do with age, race, and physiology. This is not to say that such names are condoned, but it is a way that students use to attach identities to their lecturers.-

Additionally, it is interesting to note that the most populous category is that of nicknames which are negative, followed by the positive ones, and the least is that of the neutral ones.

Conclusions

How we know and claim to know ourselves is sometimes unclear to ourselves particularly when there is a talk about us which goes unnoticed by ourselves. There is that part of ourselves which we know, but a significant part of our being remains concealed, and particularly the not-so-bright side. This part is hidden through the power relations existing between participants, and in this case between the *referencers* (in this paper the students) and the *referenced* (in this paper the lecturers). Most of the lecturers' nicknames remain clandestine because the *referencers* are aware of their subordinate status which, if known to the *referenced*, would jeopardize their fate as students. This is more so particularly because some of the names are face threatening and socially unutterable. That being the case, there are very slim chances that the referenced would know their names.

Additionally, while identity formation comes out prominently in this paper, identities are partly formed by the behaviour of the nicknamed, or at least their assumed behaviour, and the way they interact with students. But it is also important to note that the nature of relationship between those in power and those subordinated to them is almost conflicting in that students would want their score in examinations to always be good and interesting. In this way, any lecturer who threatens this expectation would potentially be nicknamed negative. The more threatening the lecturer is, the worse the nickname he is likely to get.

Another conclusion is that there are only two nicknames for women lecturers, one negative and one neutral. The names are Ray C, who is a famous Tanzanian female artiste who dresses up badly (so, negative), and the other one *Bibi* (grandmother), which is based on the age of the lecturer. This observation is also made by Crozier (2002:136) who observes that more teachers' nicknames are given to male teachers. From the findings of this study, this fact suggests two things: (i) female lecturers are more liked by students, and (ii) there are not as many female lecturers as there are male ones. Additionally, one may even suggest that female lecturers would avoid conflicts with students because they are generally assumed to be powerless physically.

Finally, I am of the opinion that the social distance reflected in the general naming practice at the university may not be welcome. I am, however, of the view that lecturers would retain their preference of identification but relax the way they interact with students. This is likely to make dialogue between the two parties possible.

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On Ray C. (ttp://www.udakumagazine.com/2014/01/aibu-ray-c-nae-atupia-picha-yake-ya.html) accessed on June 18, 2014.