

Article

Metaphorical Personal Names in Mabia Languages of West Africa

Hasiyatu Abubakari ^{1,2,*}  and Samuel Alhassan Issah ³¹ Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon P.O. Box LG 73, Ghana² School of Languages and Literatures, Rhodes University, Makhanda 6139, South Africa³ College of Languages Education, University of Education Winneba, Ajumako P.O. Box 72, Ghana; samuel_issah@yahoo.com

* Correspondence: haabubakari@ug.edu.gh

Abstract: Cultural philosophies, belief systems and experiences serve as superordinate cultural concepts that are reconceptualised and expressed using metaphorical personal names in Mabia languages. Metaphorical personal names are ‘vehicles’ that transport the worldviews of speakers of Mabia languages to the target audiences. Every metaphorical personal name shares properties of a superordinate umbrella concept such that even newly created metaphorical names fall within an already existing cultural philosophy. This study argues that there is a corresponding relationship between a metaphorical personal name, the source domain, and its superordinate umbrella philosophical concept, the target domain. The study uses data from four Mabia ‘sister’ languages of West Africa: Dagbani, Kusaal, Likpakpaln, and Sisaali. The findings show that the source domains of these names include the name-bearer and the personal name itself, and the name-giver, whilst the target domains include flora and fauna terms, belief systems, innuendos and proverbs, experiences of name-givers, ‘death prevention’ labels, among others. The article also establishes that both sociocultural and ethnolinguistic factors influence the use of metaphorical personal names in the cultures under study. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is employed for the analysis of data in this research. The work uses the qualitative method and data are sourced from semi-structured interviews, from school registers and other previous studies on personal names in the selected languages.



Citation: Abubakari, Hasiyatu, and Samuel Alhassan Issah. 2024. Metaphorical Personal Names in Mabia Languages of West Africa. *Languages* 9: 163. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages9050163>

Academic Editor: Eyo Mensah

Received: 13 February 2024

Revised: 13 April 2024

Accepted: 16 April 2024

Published: 1 May 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Keywords: personal names; metaphors; Mabia languages; culture; sociolinguistics; ethnolinguistics

1. Introduction

Every name is identifiable with an entity whether abstract or physical in the world. The identification of abstract concepts and philosophies in concrete entities makes the latter symbolic representations of the former. Thus, the term name is a reference that can refer to anything; the unnamed is what has not been noticed (Bright 2003; Algeo and Algeo 2000, p. 265). Anthroponomastics, the study of personal names, falls under the major umbrella of onomastics. This study is a socio-onomastic exploration of how personal names are used in expressing the socio-cultural philosophies in creating bonds and tracing histories of four distinct but related ethnic communities in Ghana.

Several theoretical frameworks have been employed to explain names and naming practices cross-linguistically. Onomastics, though autonomous, is an interdisciplinary research field traceable in anthropology, language and linguistics, literature, politics, religion, history, sociology, among other disciplines (Algeo and Algeo 2000; Agyekum 2006). This implies that the theories within these interdisciplinary research fields are often used to explain studies and concepts in onomastics. Algeo wonders if onomastics can develop a strong theory independently, which he contends by indicating that such a theory can only be a weak one which is generally incapable of disproof but remains a useful study guideline (Algeo 2010, p. 90). As an interdisciplinary research area, several theories can explain the concepts in names and naming practices.

Recent theories in this field include cognitive onomastics ([Karpenko 2006](#); [Robustova 2014](#)), a somewhat new approach to the study of proper names based on the cognitive approach to the study of language. One of the key tenets of this theoretical lens is that names as linguistic elements should be analysed as parts of a cognitive system, and for that matter it should be possible to describe the mental representation and usage of proper names within the principles of general cognitive processes. Thus, the researchers within this domain explore how cognitive structures are used as a basis of the naming process. In the light of [Karpenko \(2006\)](#), the scope of cognitive onomastics' tasks is as follows: studying the mechanisms of the cognition of names from the point of view of a person as a key element of cognition and investigating the ways of the existence and functioning of proper names in the mental lexicon. These tasks differentiate cognitive onomastics from onomastics, as the latter studies proper names without addressing the cognitive processes. [Robustova \(2014, pp. 41–42\)](#), in interpreting cognitive onomastics as a new viable approach to the study of proper names, notes that there is a significant difference between cognitive onomastics and traditional onomastics. According to him, whereas the latter aims to collect onomastic material, classify it, and linguistically describe it, the former aims to identify models for constructing onyms and study the specifics of storing information (also expanding and updating it).

[Wee \(2005a, 2005b, 2006\)](#) proposes the class-inclusion model which identifies the proper name as the source rather than the target for the analysis of Metaphoric Proper Names (MPNs). The author emphasises that the proposal is not intended to have all metaphors analysed using this theory ([Wee 2006](#), p. 356). The proposed model does not consider metaphors as analogies; rather, the source is treated as a prototypical instantiation of a larger, newly created superordinate category which encompasses both the source and target domains. According to [Wee \(2006\)](#), the class-inclusion model checks situations where the choice of the source needs to follow from some pre-existing hierarchy of more abstract correspondences. Additionally, a name, following the class-inclusion model can, depending on context, stand for different categories of individuals. This is because in each case the particular category that the name is supposed to invoke must be inferred locally. Furthermore, the category is clearly ad hoc since the name can be used to create an indefinite number of superordinate categories, where each such category selects a property or set of properties associated with the selected name while ignoring any other properties that it might actually have ([Wee 2006](#), pp. 361–62). Although the class-inclusion model aligns in a way with the findings of this research, the challenge is that the reverse of the model appears to be the case for the data and observations in this study. Thus, the metaphorical personal names in Mabia (Gur) languages cannot be used to create an indefinite number of superordinate names; rather, a definite number of superordinate umbrella concepts contain indefinite numbers of metaphorical personal names such that the names are categorised under the superordinate concepts whose properties the names carry. However, in line with the class model, the source domain comprises metaphorical personal names which transport cultural concepts and philosophies expressed by the target domains: belief systems, experiences, among others. The properties of the target domains are inherent in the source domains for which reason the latter is symbolically emboldened in the former. For instance, DEATH WEAPONS ARE PERSONAL NAMES (§ 5) is a superordinate umbrella target domain which contains several personal names believed to have the potency to combat neo-natal deaths. These names can only metaphorically imply names given to children who are born to parents who suffer the consistent neo-natal deaths of their babies. Similarly, names that fall under the target domain of circumstantial names also cannot be given to people other than those born under the circumstances that require the use of such names. The choice of a metaphorical theory of name is always influenced by the data and culture of individual languages or language groups. The personal names and cultural context of the speakers of the languages under study present a superordinate abstract target domain which has direct correspondence with names in the source domain. These names express the general notions of the target domain before their specific semantic

literal and metaphorical interpretations. Studies that look at metaphorical personal names in the Mabilia languages of West Africa are generally scarce, making this a novel contribution to our knowledge of onomastics in the selected under-studied languages in this discipline and how the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explains the correspondence relation between the source and target domains (discussed in detail in Section 3).

Dagbani, Kusaal, Likpakpaln and Sisaali are Mabilia languages spoken in the northern part of Ghana by the Dagbamba, Kusaas, Kokomba and Sisaala, respectively (Abubakari 2018, 2020). Bodomo (2020) advocates for the use of the term Mabilia in place of what was previously referred to as the Gur languages. He explains that the term Gur was proposed for these languages based on the argument that the morpheme ‘gur’ begins the names of the languages. Apparently, the morpheme is found in only three of these languages: Gurma, Gurense and Gurene. He suggests the term Mabilia, which is a compound word consisting of the morphemes *ma* ‘mother’ and *bia* ‘child’. These morphemes are present in almost all the languages and the compound means ‘My mother’s child’, also showing that these languages are closely related phonologically, morphologically, syntactically, sociolinguistically and, in this current article, ‘onomastically’. According to Bodomo (2020, p. 8), speakers of Dagbani number around 900,000, Kusaal Likpakpaln 600,000, Kusaal 500,000 and Sisaali 300,000 based on the 2010 population and housing census. Dagbani and Kusaal belong to the Mabilia central group of languages and are mutually intelligible, whilst Sisaali and Likpakpaln belong to Mabilia west and Mabilia east groups, respectively. Thus, this study further shows that speakers of these languages have similar world views, tradition and customary practices. The classification of these languages in Figure 1 is taken from Abubakari (2022), which is also modified from Bodomo (2020).

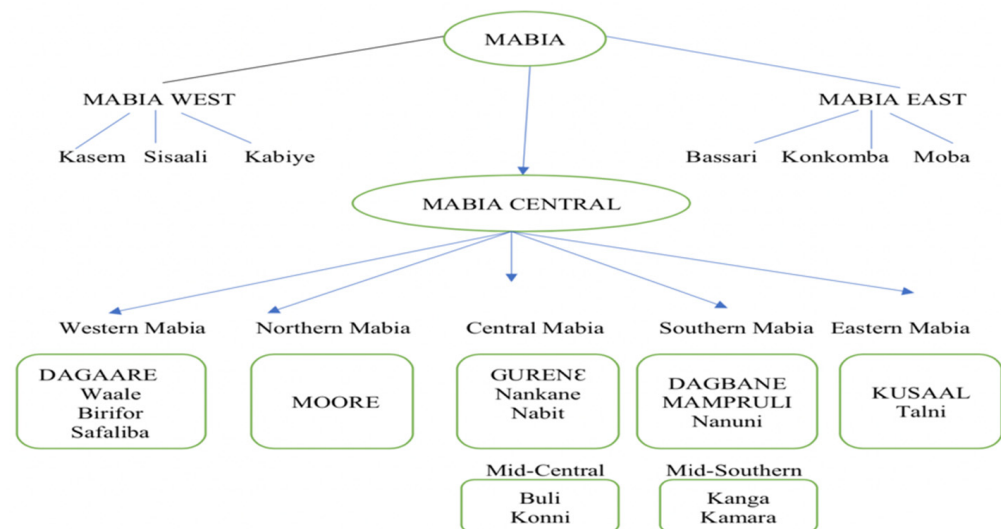


Figure 1. Classification of Mabilia languages (Abubakari 2022; Bodomo 2020).

The main purpose of this work is to examine the motif behind the use of metaphorical personal names among speakers of these languages. We intend to further explore the categories of names that often can be described as metaphorical and the reasons why. Thus, the main objectives of this study are to (i) investigate the categories of metaphorical personal names in the four selected Mabilia languages; (ii) explain reasons behind the use of metaphorical names in these languages; (iii) examine the source and target domains of metaphorical names in these languages; and, finally, (iv) explain the concepts and phenomena that underlie the use of metaphorical names in the socio-cultural beliefs and world views of speakers of these languages.

2. Previous Studies on Metaphorical Personal Names

Studies on names have prominently gained attention in the fields of philosophy, onomastics, anthropology, linguistics and, more recently, cognitive psychology. However, the dearth of the literature on the use of metaphors in names and naming practices of the Maba languages of Ghana and West Africa is, in general, apparent since very little information is traceable on the subject matter when the languages in this subfamily are mentioned. An aspect of onomastic research that has benefited in a way comprises studies on the sociolinguistics of personal names in individual Maba languages. Fortes (1955) provides a pioneering study on names of the Talensi. His work explores names and name-giving among the Talensi of Ghana. He indicates that each person has a public and a private name, the latter not being a secret. The private name, generally, makes reference to an ancestor who is the guardian spirit of the owner of the name. The public name, on the other hand, can refer to almost any circumstance of interest to the name-giver. He also, briefly, mentions names taken at the investiture of chiefs and the *ten'daanas* 'landowners'. Awedoba (1996, 2000) also explores collocational patterns in Kasem personal names and gender determiners. The study, thus, highlights how names in Kasem relate to the nominal classification system of that language. Kröger (1978) and cf. Dakubu (2000, p. 53) consider the names used by the Bulsa (see Dakubu 2000, p. 53). Dakubu (2000) put together the preliminary work on personal names in Dagbani. She indicates it is a common practice among the Dagbamba of northern Ghana to give a name of Arabic origin as the primary or initial name. She classifies names among the Dagbamba as either "traditional" or "Islamic", which she argues is an indigenous classification reflecting the linguistic, social and historical distinctions. She also investigates appellatives and modes of addresses as well as titles of the main Dagbamba chiefs. Recent additions to the study of personal names in Maba languages include the work of Gariba (2009), who analyses Sisaali personal names. He groups these names into seven different categories: spiritual names, philosophical names, experiential and episodic names, descriptive names, praise names and ancestral names. The central theme in the work of Gariba (2009) is the meaning of these names. Bisilki (2018) contributes an addition to the study of names in Maba languages. He examines the personal names of the Birkpakpaam (the Konkomba) of Ghana. In his work, he focuses on the typology, the changing patterns, the linguistic structures and the communicative usage of personal names in Birkpakpaam linguistic context. He classified the personal names in the language into six classes: birthday names, family names, circumstantial names, flora and fauna names, physical structure names, theophoric names, honorifics/title names and insinuation/proverbial names. Bisilki (2018) argues that insinuation/proverbial names constitute the most preponderant category. Abubakari (2020) also studies the personal names in Kusaal with attention to the sociolinguistics and semantics of these names. She observes a significant socio-cultural as well as religious belief of the people exhibited through their naming practices. She argues that names in Kusaal have semantic content and cannot be said to be given randomly. Names are tied to specific circumstances surrounding the birth of the bearer among other things. Eleven categories of names in Kusaal are identified in the work of (Abubakari 2020; Abubakari et al. 2023) examine the socio-cultural significance and typology of personal names in four Maba languages: Dagbani, Kusaal, Likpakpaal and Sisaali. In this comparative study, the authors discuss the ceremonies that accompany the naming of a newborn among speakers of the various languages and observe that the activities that are performed during these ceremonies are very similar with only snippets of divergence. For instance, in all four cultures, naming ceremonies are occasions of merry making which bring together family members and friends. The child is mostly out doors on the 7th day except among the Likpakpaal where this takes place after 3 months. It is also a general practice to keep both mother and baby indoors prior to the naming ceremony. It is further claimed that within this period that the two are kept out of public and that they are given hot water baths with herbal concoction. These baths are meant to strengthen them and heal any wounds in the mother, which might have occurred during labour. They indicate that before the newborn is officially given a name,

it is usually called *Sandoo/Sanpaya* (which could refer to a boy/girl), *Asaandau/Asaanpua* (boy/girl) *Uchaan* (Unisex) and *Nihvɔra* (Unisex) in Dagbani, Kusaal, Bìkpakpaln and Sisaali, respectively, which means a stranger. Names are not just conferred on people but rather speakers of these languages traditionally consult a diviner or soothsayer to determine the appropriate name to be given to a newborn baby. [Abubakari et al. \(2023\)](#) also explain that names in Mabilia languages are not given after a consultation with a soothsayer and can also be influenced based on the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child. They group personal names into 13 categories in their study. Thus, following earlier scholars, ([Abubakari 2020](#); [Abubakari et al. 2023](#); [Agyekum 2006](#); [Obeng 1998a, 1998b](#)), we contend that names in these languages have meanings and cannot be said to be arbitrary.

Studies on metaphors in Mabilia languages are also just a handful. Only two identified resources were traced in the literature at the time of this work. [Musah and Atibiri \(2020\)](#) explore the metaphors of death in Kusaal using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory of [Lakoff and Johnson \(1980\)](#). They observe some of the conventional usages that speakers of Kusaal draw upon when they conceptualise death. The following comprises the key findings: DEATH IS ANIMATE, DEATH IS A JOURNEY, DEATH IS A DEPARTURE, DEATH IS RETURN, DEATH IS ARRIVING AT A DESTINATION, DEATH IS RESTING and DEATH IS SLEEP. According to [Musah and Atibiri \(2020, p. 5\)](#), the cross-domain mapping inherent in these metaphors include ascribing the concrete attributes of the source domain (the agents or the animate entities) whilst the more abstract target domain is *death*, a less tangible feature.

A recent addition to the literature on metaphors is the work of [Bisilki and Yakpo \(2021\)](#) who study anger metaphors in Likpakpaln using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory as an analytical framework. They explain that anger in Likpakpaln is conceptualised using the human body part, which is *liɣuul* 'heart'. They identify five clause structures in which anger expressions occur in the language. Some of the conceptualisations of anger found in the language include ANGER IS HUMAN, ANGER IS HEAT, AN ANGRY PERSON IS A PRESSURED CONTAINER and THE BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR ANGER.

Although the previous studies on the subject matter as discussed provide useful secondary data to this work (especially [Abubakari et al. 2023](#)), none of these studies have explored the metaphorical connotations of personal names in these languages. We aim to show that a set of classes of personal names within the typologies of personal names in Mabilia languages go beyond the literal meanings that are commonly associated with them. With the background that personal names have meanings and tell stories on their own ([Abubakari et al. 2023](#); [Abubakari 2020](#)), metaphorical personal names are here analysed as 'container metaphors' ([Lakoff and Johnson 1980](#)) where the name-bearer is the supposed 'container' or entity that expresses abstract notions of belief systems, philosophies, and experiences of speakers of these languages.

Beyond this section, the article is organised as follows: section three outlines the tenets of the theoretical framework adopted for the study. It, thus, discusses the Conceptual Metaphor Theory ([Lakoff and Johnson 1980](#); [Lakoff 1993](#); [Croft and Cruse 2004](#); among others) and further situates the current study in this framework. Section four describes the data collection and research methodology employed for this work. Section five, on the other hand, is devoted to the data presentation and analysis. Accordingly, the section explores the metaphors of personal names in the selected Mabilia languages and examines both the source and target domains of these metaphors. Section six is the discussion where the Conceptual Metaphor Theory is used to explain the data analysed in the previous section. Section seven is the summary and conclusion of this study.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) of [Lakoff and Johnson \(1980\)](#). Contemporary studies have overwhelmingly proven that metaphors are indeed central to human daily conversations. They are an integral part of everyday language and quite impossible to do away with. The strong

motivation for the use of metaphoric expressions falls on the fact that they capture concepts and opinions that ordinarily may not be easily expressed. Croft and Cruse (2004, p. 124) explain that metaphoric expressions are used because “figurative construct is the fact that no equally accessible and relevant literal construct is available”. For instance, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 8) demonstrate how metaphorical expressions in our everyday language can give us an opinion on the metaphorical nature of the concepts that structure our daily activities. Such an instance, as given by Lakoff and Johnson, is the concept relating to TIME IS MONEY:

I have *invested* a lot of time in her
you do not use time *profitably*.

Time is unarguably related to money, especially in Western cultures, and this notion has gained some high level of global acceptance, though it is important to indicate that there are cultures where this may not be found to be the norm. The words ‘investment’ and ‘profit’ are all financial jargons to show how invaluable time is to us. Thus, cultures may relate concepts, beliefs and experiences common to them to other entities that may not be analogously related.

Croft and Cruse (2004, p. 55) also explain that metaphor is another construal operation widely discussed in cognitive linguistics. It involves judgement or comparison. Metaphor establishes a relationship between a source domain, which is the source of the literal meaning of the metaphorical expression, and a target domain, which is the domain of the experience being described by the metaphor. For instance, to *invest time* involves comparing TIME (the target domain) to MONEY (the source domain) in the metaphor represented by the Lakoffian formula time is money (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 8; Croft and Cruse 2004, p. 55). Croft and Cruse add that the use of time in this way reveals how people construe and interpret the value of time as an asset that is possessed by human beings and can be ‘used’ in the same way that money is. An interesting observation by Croft and Cruse (2004, p. 55) is the claim that “the choice of metaphor to describe situation in a particular domain construes the structure of that domain in a particular way that differs depending on the metaphor chosen. For example, the metaphor in *stockmarket crash* construes the low level of the market as abnormal, the result of defective operation, whereas a high (or rising) market is normal.” Relatedly, the proverbial use of metaphors may garner different interpretations in different domains of use as will be seen in this work. What remains debatable is the exact relationship between the source and target domains in a metaphorical expression within cognitive linguistics (Croft and Cruse 2004, p. 55). The main thesis on Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of (conventional) metaphor have very little to do with individual linguistic expressions and their meanings; rather, they are meant for conceptual domains. What this means is that any concept from the source domain—the domain supporting the literal meaning of the expression that can be used to describe a concept in the target domain—the domain the sentence is about (Croft and Cruse 2004, p. 195). Cross-linguistic concepts that are often expressed metaphorically include the concept of space, emotion and time which cognitive linguists argue to be because these concepts are conventionalised (Lakoff and Turner 1989, p. 99; Lakoff 1993, p. 229; Croft and Cruse 2004, p. 195). Following Lakoff and Johnson, a formula they use is the target domain or source domain, which describes the metaphorical link between the domains. Using the LOVE IS A JOURNEY METAPHOR, for instance, Lakoff (1993, p. 208) explains that what constitutes the love is a journey metaphor that is not any word or expression but rather the ontological mapping across conceptual domains, from the source domain of journeys to the target domain of love. The source domain corresponds to the ‘vehicle’, the target domains to the ‘destination’ and the mapping to the ‘ground’ (Richards 1936; cf. Geeraerts 2010, p. 206). The metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason; thus, the language is secondary. To understand a particular metaphor is to have adequate knowledge of both the source and the target domains. The mapping is primary, in that it sanctions the use of source domain language and inference patterns for target domain concepts. The mapping

is conventional; that is, it is a fixed part of our conceptual system, one of our conventional ways of conceptualizing love relationships (Lakoff 1993, p. 208). In this article, a personal name and its bearer become vehicles used to transfer cultural knowledge of belief systems, philosophies, experiences, among other things. The bearer is assumed to be a ‘container’ that represents and concretises experiences, belief systems and ideologies as an identifiable entity in the world. The cross-domain mappings of metaphorical personal names, therefore, identify the name and its bearer as source domains whilst the more abstract notions of beliefs systems, philosophies, among others are the target domains. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors involve “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). They further explain that “every experience takes place within a vast background of cultural presuppositions” (p. 57).

Metaphorical personal names are full of analogies such that there is always a comparison between two entities. In these kinds of comparisons, personal names, which are common and form part of the culture of the people, are used as vehicles to convey messages that may literally have little or no bearing with the name-bearer. These messages reveal the emotions, experiences, beliefs and worldviews of the speakers of these languages. These are often aimed at concretizing abstract notions to achieve several purposes among which the key ones are (i) to showcase the religious beliefs of the people, (ii) to iconicise and make memorable personal experiences of the people and (iii) to help others understand something that could not easily be expressed directly or even literally.

4. Data Collection and Research Methodology

The data for this study were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. About eighty percent of the data comes from previous studies on onomastics in the selected languages. Abubakari et al. (2023) serve as the main source of most of the secondary data whilst Abubakari (2020), Gariba (2009), Dakubu (2000), Bisilki (2018) and others were also consulted. These previous studies already have grouped personal names into typologies, and this work analyses the data by selecting the ones that have metaphorical underpinnings from the various typologies already established by the earlier scholars. More importantly, semi-structured interviews were conducted to ascertain the meaning of some of the names which were still not clear to the authors. The researchers used one language consultant for each of the four languages. Three of the consultants are PhD candidates at the Faculty of Ghanaian Languages Education, University of Education Winneba, and these people granted interviews for Dagbani, Likpakpaln and Sisaali, whilst Mr Sampson Abuosi, a native speaker of Kusaal based in Kugsabila, in the Upper East Region of Ghana, granted the interview for Kusaal. Their roles were to offer explanations on why certain personal names are used and to also give the meanings of some personal names. The reasons offered on why these names are given were almost similar across cultures. The central ideas are paraphrased and used in the discussion and analysis. Few voices are also captured to support the claims made. The personal intuitions and cultural knowledge of the authors who are native speakers of two of the languages also contributed to the judgement of some of the information that was received during this study. School registers in some of the language speaking communities were also used to cross check the active use of the names used for this study. The data were gathered in January 2021. Thus, the names presented in this study are still traceable among speakers of the various languages. The ones that are getting extinct are clearly described as such in Section 4 on the findings and analyses.

The research methodology is entirely qualitative. The study describes and analyses text with no numerals, statistical or quantitative strings attached. Interviews were recorded, and explanations and names were transcribed and translated for this exercise. This research is largely an empirical analysis with primary data that can be used in other theoretical onomastic studies.

The metaphorical analysis of personal names in the selected languages is significant because it is the first of its kind in studies in the Maba languages of West Africa. It is an additional resource to researchers of onomastics, sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics. It

enlightens us in not only the metaphorical meanings of the personal names but also the culture, worldviews and perceptions of the speakers of these languages.

5. Data Presentation and Analyses

This section explores the various metaphorical personal names observed in the selected languages. They signify the ontological conceptualisation of the human body as a container, which houses the concrete entity (the human being), referred to by the personal name. Personal names in these languages are therefore ‘container metaphors’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, pp. 25–26) that carry, store, share and convey stories of the daily activities, experiences and socio-cultural practices of the people. Previous studies on personal names in Maba languages have discussed extensively the typology of personal names (Abubakari 2020; Abubakari et al. 2023; Bisilki 2018; Gariba 2009; Dakubu 2000; among others). These studies have identified between 10 and 13 typologies of personal names. In this article, and as indicated elsewhere, the secondary data are taken from all the studies. Metaphorical personal names are observed in five of the typologies of personal names in the works of Abubakari et al. (2023), Abubakari (2020), Bisilki (2018), etc. The types of names that are used in this article are innuendos and proverbial names, death prevention names, theophoric names, shrines and initiated names and names from flora and fauna. Structurally, all these names have the form $X = Y$ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Croft and Cruse 2004; among others) where X is the target domain and Y is the source domain. For instance, *an experience is a personal name* implies that a *personal name* is the source domain whilst *an experience* is the target domain. Name-givers, among the speakers of the languages under study, often name their newborn babies after their personal experiences making a name a historical oral artefact. It is important to add that, although everybody has a name, not all personal names express experiences. Since names and naming practices are integral aspects of the culture of the speakers of these languages, personal names serve as a familiar and well-understood phenomenon that conveys the less known abstract concepts that are shared through metaphors. In general, one may say that experiences, belief systems, world views and concepts are ‘personified’ in the identity of a metaphorical name-bearer for ease of understanding for the larger language speaking communities. To this effect, the conceptualisation of metaphorical personal names in the selected languages are EXPERIENCES ARE PERSONAL NAMES, BELIEF SYSTEMS AS PERSONAL NAMES, ‘DEATH WEAPONS’ ARE PERSONAL NAMES, FLORA AND FAUNA NAMES ARE PERSONAL NAMES, NAMES OF DEITIES ARE PERSONAL NAMES, among others. The following subsections discuss these conceptualisations one after the other.

5.1. EXPERIENCES ARE PERSONAL NAMES

It is a common practice for a newborn to be named after a personal experience of the name-giver, usually the parent of the infant. The daily experiences of speakers of these languages give rise to the use of this category of metaphorical names. Metaphorical personal names in this category include those that are both figurative and non-figurative. Both innuendos and proverbial names are often used to express the daily experiences of the speakers of these languages. As people with a very rich and vibrant oral tradition, this category of metaphorical names functions as historical records where people name their children after their experiences mostly unpalatable in proverbial expressions. Names, therefore, serve as historical records of experiences. These experiences are born out of some circumstances the name-giver or parents of the child may have encountered. Although the meaning of these names may have literal explanations, their actual connotations may only be known by the name-giver and of course possibly the one to whom the aspersion, if any, is directed at. These names are coined, and new ones are formed by speakers as and when necessary, per their circumstances and experiences. These names are ordinary daily expressions for casual speech and conversation. However, it is unusual for a name-giver to just decide to give this type of name to a newborn without any prior experience that influences these types of aspersions unless the said name is given as an ancestral name

(Abubakari 2020; Abubakari et al. 2023). The names in Table 1 are taken from Abubakari et al. (2023) as illustrations of names that are aspersions expressing the experiences of name-givers which are used as personal names.

Table 1. EXPERIENCES ARE PERSONAL NAMES.

Dagbani	Kusaal	Likpakpaaln	Sisaali
Dinnani 'it is possible'	Amɔrbɔ 'What do you have?'	Mananjɔ 'I don't hate my friend'	'Basumbɛnsɔ 'don't maltreat me'
Nnɪndini 'What is my offence?'	Abangiba 'I know them'	Torbi 'The reconciler has spoilt it'	chɛwɪrtɔɔ 'angry world'
Chentiwuni 'leave to God'	Apeligiba 'God has exposed them'	Binantɔb 'They hate each other.'	'Basɪn-aʒee 'what did they asked me to do'

This category of personal names shows that someone's experience, in essence, becomes another person's personal name. To understand and interpret this name means decoding the metaphorical meaning associated with the experience of the name-giver which gave birth to the prescribed name. Thus, the metaphorical names in Table 1 have referents to individuals or entities that are not directly mentioned. The interpreter may have to identify the referent where possible. The actual meanings of these names also go beyond the literal meanings and can best be explained by the name-giver. As indicated early on, names in this category combine both aspersions and proverbs. In Table 2 below, we identify some names that are only aspersions and used as personal names in the selected languages under study.

Table 2. An aspersion is personal name.

Language	Personal Name	Meaning
Dagbani	Bɛchɛti	'They have left us'
Kusaal	Adi'ebɔ	'What have you gained?'
Likpakpaaln	N-neeɓini	'I am in their midst'
Sisaali	'Basɪn-aʒee	'What did they asked me to do'

It is important to add that the meaning of the names in Table 2 may sound 'nonsensical' to anyone who hears them once the person lacks the background information surrounding the giving of the name. Thus, disambiguating the metaphorical meaning of this category of names remains a task that may not be achieved unless the necessary questions are asked and the required answers provided by the most appropriate persons. Similarly, proverbial personal names also have concealed meanings in these languages. Though the literal meanings of proverbial names are easily discernible, the metaphoric meanings require deeper knowledge of the language and culture of the people. More importantly, the context may have a role to play because proverbial names may be interpreted differently depending on context. Table 3 illustrates the use of proverbs as metaphorical personal names. The meanings of these proverbs are also provided.

Table 3. A proverbial is a personal name.

Language	Personal Name	Meaning
Dagbani	Salpawuni	'Human being is not God'
Kusaal	Azing	'Fish'
Likpakpaaln	Udinaanu	'The enemy does not smell'
Sisaali	Hartwanawɛ	'Those behind see things'

Most often, proverbial names are derived from proverbs in these Mabia languages. However, for reasons of economy, the proverbial names are elliptical forms as evident in the Dagbani proverbial names *Tikuma* and *Salpawuni*. These two personal names are derived from the proverbs *Tikuma ni puhi vari n-libigi dakabiriba* ‘Dried trees will develop fresh leaves to the surprise of firewood hunters’ and *Sala pa Wuni ka b̄ri ni o tum Wuni tuma* ‘Man is not God and yet wants to do what is God’s work’, respectively. It is not only in Dagbani that these proverbial names are derived from proverbs, but the same pertains to all the other sister languages. In Kusaal, the names *Azing* ‘Fish’ is from *Zing kuruk zugu ku kong zaahim* ‘No matter how old a fish may be, there is flavour in its head’, to wit ‘Do not discount the wisdom/experience of the old person’. *Adebure* ‘Victorious litigant’ is derived from the proverb *Adebur bu zi Na’yiri ne* ‘A victorious litigant should not tarry for too long in the chief’s palace for fear the chief might change his mind’, whilst the name *Ayit* ‘House’ is derived from *Ma yit bupa’an ne agoba* ‘You don’t point to your mother’s house with your left hand’ to wit ‘Never show disrespect to your mother’. In Sisaali as well as, the name *Harizwaanawie* is derived from the proverb *Hatigina nu na wie* ‘it is the later comers that see things’ and *Janwaadi* is derived from *Sabuna jan waa di* ‘your bad intentions will never materialise’.

In addition, there is language internal evidence to the effect that in Likpakpaanl too, whereby proverbial names are derived from proverbs. This is illustrated in the name *Udinaanu* ‘the enemy does not smell’ which is an abridge version of the proverb *Udinaanu n ga ŋa kinye ki bee u* meaning ‘the enemy does not smell so how would I identify him’. The same is said of the name *Tiŋanadoor* ‘kindness does not end’, which is also derived from the *Tiŋan aapar aa door* meaning ‘the reward for doing good does not end.’

Personal names are generally required to be short for reasons of easier production and this claim is supported by the findings of [Umar et al. \(2020\)](#) who explored the characteristics of names (that is name length/number of characters in personal names in Indonesia, with the conclusion that the maximum number of characters found in the about fourteen thousand five hundred (14,500) personal names collected for their analysis was eleven characters. Thus, it is not surprising that in the Mabia languages, these proverbial names are elided as a way of reducing the number of characters to facilitate the production process.

Mr Abuosi (50 years) explains that the Kusaas “. . . use proverbs to name children, but these are short forms of the long ones. We use proverbs to name children when we want to say something indirectly. For instance, if someone wants to insult another person, they will use these proverbs to name their children and say what they want to say. We either use to proverbs for insult or the bearer takes the proverb as a nickname”.

Proverbial names, therefore, allow speakers of the selected languages to express their personal experiences in objects and fellow human beings. Thus, the named entities become concrete referents to the abstract experiences of the name-givers. Although there is no literal connection between the said and the intended, the cultural knowledge of speakers makes interpretation an easy assignment. Proverbial metaphorical names in these languages facilitate the ability of speakers to express their thoughts and experiences in very easy and indirect ways than otherwise imaginable. [Yakub \(2023\)](#) also discusses Nzema allusive names which perform similar functions as what is described in this study for proverbial names. He explains that they exhibit good communicative and symbolic qualities that provide a perfect reflection of the people’s philosophies and beliefs. This author also notes from data in Nzema that allusive names are very useful in making insinuations which directly target specific people and that name-givers take this opportunity to register their thoughts, grievances, concerns and emotions towards a specific audience.

5.2. BELIEF SYSTEMS AS PERSONAL NAMES

Names under this category are born out of one's faith in an object of worship. This observation affirms Mensah's (2020) argument that naming is a productive site for name-givers to construct, perform and reinforce their religious beliefs. Sociocultural, theophoric personal names reveal that speakers of these languages believe in deities and worship the Supreme God. These names show some of the attributes of the Supreme God as well as deities depending on the type of faith that is practiced by the name-giver. From this category of names, we contend that names of God and His attributes as well as names of deities are all used as personal names in the selected languages. The reason(s) for giving a particular theophoric name is also based on circumstances that are best known by the name-giver. It may be in a form of appreciation or reverence or a way of seeking for protection. The name *Uwumbɔrapuan* 'God's power' among the speakers of Likpakpaaln indeed expresses the fact that God is powerful. However, a name-giver is highly likely to give this name to a newborn if the person has successfully come out of a very difficult situation and wants to exclaim his/her total belief and dependence on God as well as appreciation for what he/she has achieved through the mercies of God. Names of deities are also given to newborns to equally express appreciation and reverence to a deity. Different deities are believed to possess different powers and perform different roles. The name of a particular deity when given to a child could also signal that the child is possessed by that deity, expected to worship that deity, gifted to that deity, expected to be protected by the said deity, among other things. Examples include *Tɔŋdoo* 'a child gifted by this deity *tɔŋ* which is a male' (Dagbon), *Awinbun* and 'God's own' (Kusaas). Thus, theophoric names have additional meanings and messages other than the surface or literal meaning one may deduce. The connotative meaning may also be traceable only by consulting the name-giver and at times the bearer in case the latter is equipped with such information. Examples of theophoric personal names in the four languages are provided in Table 4 below. They are sourced from Abubakari et al. (2023).

Table 4. BELIEF SYSTEMS AS PERSONAL NAMES.

Dagbani	Kusaal	Likpakpaaln	Sisaali
Wumpini 'God's gift'	Abewin 'It is with God'	Uwumbɔrakumi 'God has not killed me'	Luri/Haluri 'medicine spirit'
Tɔŋpaya 'a child gifted by this deity (tɔŋ) who is a female'	Abugur 'deity'	Uwumbɔrkan 'God has seen'	Javuno 'deity'
Buyili 'shrine'	Agɔswin 'Looking to God'	Uwumbɔrapuan 'God's power'	Lopawusi 'leave to God'
Jaagbo 'deity'	Ati'ewin 'I depend on God.'	Uwumbɔradak 'God does not think so'	Nala/Hanala 'Shrine'
Kɔŋbo 'what don't I have?'	Abewin 'It is with God/I leave it with God'	Ubinche 'He (God) is with me'	Fuo/Hafuo 'river spirit'

From the various examples of theophoric personal names in Table 4, it can be said that theophoric personal names are also metaphoric with the structure X is Y, such that personal names are names of God and deities; attributes of God and deities are also personal names in the selected Mabia languages. Tables 5 and 6 illustrate personal names from objects of worship or divination and attributes of God, respectively.

Table 5. The name of an object of worship is a personal name.

Language	Personal Name	Meaning
Dagbani	Ñebuni	‘Name of a deity’
Kusaal	Awin	‘God’
Sisaali	Bawuusi/Hawuusi	‘God’

Table 6. Properties/attributes of God are personal names.

Language	Personal Name	Meaning
Dagbani	Busayiri	‘God alone is enough’
Kusaal	Awingur	‘God preserves/protects’
Likpakpaaln	Uwumborja	‘God defends/fights’
Sisaali	Wuwuwero	‘God is good’

A careful study of the data in Tables 4–6 illustrated above reveals that theophoric personal names among speakers of these languages often have at least one morpheme that refers to a deity, shrine, or God. In general, theophoric names tell stories that connote that speakers of these languages believe in the existence of a Supreme Being. The name-bearer is the source domain whilst the target is the belief system of the people, which is iconically represented in the name-bearer.

5.3. DEATH WEAPONS ARE PERSONAL NAMES

Names in this category fall under the death-preventive names in the typology of personal names in these selected languages (Abubakari 2020; Abubakari et al. 2023). These names mostly have at least one morpheme that means ‘death’ or forms part of the registers of ‘death’. Speakers of these languages believe in the potency of these names as ‘death weapons’ that can combat the spirit of death and save the infant name-bearer from dying. This category of metaphorical names is picturesque: it iconifies ‘death’ and death-related beliefs and notions among the speakers of these languages in the name-bearer. It conveys the message that the name-bearer is saved from death by virtue of the names they are given. The spirit of death is, thus, portrayed in words like ‘death’, ‘grave’, ‘refuse dump’, among others. These names are very derogatory, despicable and, in some instances, insulting. These names are believed to be direct attacks on the spirit of death believed to have possessed the child. It is believed that the rejection of the child in the world makes the spirit of death reject what human beings have rejected. It is also believed that these names serve as tools for combating death, however, only among infants of a mother who suffers several neonatal deaths. The more derogatory, filthy and unwelcoming a name maybe to the community, the more potent it is in driving death far away from its bearer. The main reason for giving ‘despicable and derogatory’ names in this category is supported by the claim that the spirit of death does not like what human beings reject and will also reject such a child making it survive. Some of the names in this category are so symbolic and they picture unpleasant scenes: *Ayavg* ‘Grave’ (Kusaal), *Kitindo* ‘The ground is finished’ (Likpakpaaln), *Balubvo* ‘they have dug the grave’ (Sisaali). Others are names of filthy ground and places: *Tampuli* ‘refuse dumping site’ Napodoo/Naporo/Napoyu ‘A man from the hencoop’ and (Dagbani). Some of these names also fail to even identify the name-bearer as someone who has a name or identity: *Aka’ayur* ‘Have no name’/‘Mr no name’ (Kusaal), *N-yiripa* ‘I will not name you’ (Sisaali), etc. In all, death is portrayed as filthy, wicked, an enemy and an unwelcome visitor. These negative properties assigned to death by human beings are believed to function as ‘death missiles’ that combat the spirit of death and are, therefore, used as personal names to save infants from neonatal mortality. Table 7 gives examples of these names. The data are taken from Abubakari et al. (2023).

Table 7. DEATH WEAPONS ARE PERSONAL NAMES.

Dagbani	Kusaal	Likpakpaanl	Sisaalt
Sando 'male stranger/traveller'	Akumbar 'will not know'	Nkunsiiimi 'Death has insulted me'	Muɔɔɛ 'wickid person'
Modoo(M)/Mopaya(F) 'Moshi man/Woman'	Abindau/Abinpu'a Bimoba man/Bimoba woman	Taakicha 'Do not go again'	N-yɔɔɔɔɔ 'I bought death'
Fulaani 'Fulaani man/woman'		Moja/Mopii man/Bimoba woman	Suunen 'Death has seen me'

Most, if not all, vocabulary associated with death can be used as personal names. The word for death can be used as a personal name as in Table 8.

Table 8. A noun for 'death' is a personal name.

Language	Personal Name	Meaning
Dagbani	Kumbicheso	'death does not leave out anyone'
Kusaal	Akpiid	'Death'
Likpakpaln	Nkumbaan	'The same death'
Sisaalt	Nkasuu	'I am death'

Table 9 contains examples that express some properties of death used as personal names. In this category, death is seen as wielding a great amount of superpower and the victim is seen as pleading for clemency.

Table 9. Characteristics of death are personal names.

Language	Personal Name	Meaning
Likpakpaln	Nkumfami	'Death has hit me'
Sisaalt	Svutaŋ	'will death spare me'

The personal names in Table 10, show that death is rejected as the child is named as the 'unknown', 'unrecognized' and 'unwelcomed'. *Dabili* 'slave' (Dagbani) also symbolises the defeat over war. The newborn is named as a 'slave of war' or 'captives after war'.

Table 10. 'War against death' is also used as personal names.

Language	Personal Name	Meaning
Dagbani	Bije	'They do not want'
Kusaal	Azi	'Unknown'
Likpakpaln	Maanyi	'I don't know'
Sisaalt	N-yiripa	'I will not name you'

The use of metaphorical personal names as death weapons enhances our understanding of the socio-cultural beliefs and practices of the speakers of these languages on the issue of neonatal mortality. It is believed that neonatal deaths are caused by an evil spirit 'death' and supernatural forces that must be defeated to save the lives of children. Whilst some of the death prevention names are emotional and connote feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, i.e., Svutaŋ 'will death spare me' from Sisaalt, others are militarical, i.e., *Nkumfami* 'Death has hit me' from Likpakpaln and insulting against the spirit of death, i.e., Muɔɔɛ 'wickid person' from Sisaalt.

5.4. FLORA AND FAUNA NAMES ARE PERSONAL NAMES

There is a synchronic relationship between names in this category and the category labelled as BELIEF SYSTEMS AS PERSONAL NAMES. Thus, both categories show that the speakers of these languages name newborns after objects and entities that they revere. The religious and belief systems of the people manifest so much in the name and naming practices exhibited through the language and culture of people. The difference between theophoric and flora and fauna personal names is that whilst the former refers to God and deities that not symbolised in plants and animals, the latter refers to flora or fauna entities that are revered. These flora and fauna entities may be totemic animals. An interviewee from the Sisaali community shares the opinion that “flora and fauna names are used because some of the plants and animals after which children are named have some spiritual connotation and these objects can serve as guiding angels”.

Abubakari (2020, 2021) alludes that in the traditional belief system of the Kusaas, objects such as trees, river bodies, stones and animals of different types and nature are revered. These objects serve as mediators and smaller gods between worshippers and the Supreme God. Similarly, the trend is seen as the same in Abubakari et al. (2023) where speakers of four of these languages exhibit similar belief systems. A personal name in this category metaphorically presents an angle of belief of the name-giver and name-bearer. It goes as far as revealing the family lineage of the bearer most especially if the animal or its part is the family/ clan’s totemic item. All interviewees assert the fact that the literal meaning of the personal names in this category are far beyond what is intended. To be called *Atiig*, *Tia*, *Tie* ‘Mr Tree’ in Kusaal, Dagbani and Sisaali, respectively does not mean the name-bearer is a tree. This name symbolically presents the tree as a deity, an object of divination or a place of worship and sacrifice. The name-bearer could, therefore, be dedicated to this deity for a particular reason that could most commonly be shared by the name-giver. These names could also infer that the bearer is desired to have the significant properties of the object it is named after (see Bisilki 2018 and examples below). Additionally, these names could also mean that the name-bearer was born at the location of the object that they are named after. Metaphorical flora and fauna personal names can also be influenced by the experiences of the name-giver coupled with their socio-cultural beliefs and practices. Bisilki (2018, p. 22) explains that Likpakpaln flora and fauna names are metaphorical names in the sense that bearers of such names may be expected to demonstrate certain traits of the plants or animals they are named after. For instance, the fauna name *ku’n* ‘elephant’ may be given to a child with an anticipated hefty physical stature whilst *Yɔ’nbùér* ‘a type of shady domestic tree’ is given to an individual in anticipation that the person will grow, flourish and benefit members of the community (Bisilki 2018, p. 22). Agyekum (2006, p. 222) also affirms that certain Akan names are derived from flora and fauna names to compare physical structures and complexions. He cites personal names of *Odum* and *Oyina* as examples of flora names and *Kweku Sono* ‘Kweku Elephant’, *Kofi Nantwi* ‘Bull/cow’ as fauna names. For complexions, examples cited include by Agyekum (2006) include *Buroni* ‘the white person’, *Tuntum* ‘the black person’, *Opoku Tenten* ‘Opoku the Taller’. The reason behind the use of flora and fauna names in the languages under study do not differ from what is established in the literature except that these names also have a religious implication and serve as names of totemic items among some speakers of the languages under study. Thus, the use of flora and fauna names is a cross-cultural phenomenon in Ghana and, most likely, across West Africa. This study further shows that the names that fall under this category and several others are metaphorical in the languages under study. It is hypothesised that a great deal of flora and fauna names cross-culturally may be metaphorical, although further studies need to be conducted to firmly establish this claim. Table 11 below provides examples of flora and fauna names that are used as personal names among speakers of the languages under study.

Table 11. FLORA AND FAUNA NAMES ARE PERSONAL NAMES.¹

Dagbani	Kusaal	Likpakpaanl	Sisaali
Tia/Tidoo/Tipaya 'Names after a tree'	Atiig 'Names after a tree'	Ujankpa 'Fish'	Tɛ 'Named after a tree spirit'
Jangbariga 'Mouse'	Anyar 'Named after the root of a tree'	Ukpiin 'Horn used as a trumpet especially during warfare/funerals'	Bapaal/Hapaal 'Named after a mountain'
Duunga 'Mosquito'	Alaal 'Named after a doormouse'	Umeen 'Turtle'	Diiwie/Hadiiwe 'Named after a bird'
Baa napɔŋ 'dog leg'	Abaa 'Named after a dog'	Ukaa 'Hawk'	Kachu 'Hawk'
Garinga 'Snake'	Andeog 'Named after a chameleon'	Salma 'the precious mineral 'Gold''	Anwon 'lion'

As the name suggests, metaphorical flora and fauna personal names are made up of names of plants and animals creating room for a two category of sub-names: one relating to animals and another relating to plants. Tables 12 and 13 present metaphorical personal names under animals and plants, respectively that come together to form FLORA AND FAUNA NAMES ARE PERSONAL NAMES.

Table 12. Totemic animals' names are personal names.

Name	Meaning
Aniig	'Named after a cow' The tail of the cow is a totemic symbol of the <i>Na'aram</i> clan among the Kusaas (Abubakari 2021, pp. 132–33)
Awaaf	'Named after a snake' The Python is a totemic animal of <i>Tensvɛ</i> clan among the Kusaas (Abubakari 2021, pp. 132–33)
Awief	'Named after a horse' The horse is a totemic animal of the <i>Nabidib</i> clan among the Kusaas (Abubakari 2021, pp. 132–33)

Table 13. Flora names are personal names.

Names from Kusaal	Meaning
Adoonr	'named after the African locust bean tree'
Atiig	'Named after a tree'

5.4.1. Fauna Names as Personal Names

This category is made of names of totemic animals that belong to various clans among the Kusaas. These animals are revered by the people. They range from names of reptiles and mammals. Children may be named after these totemic animals mainly upon the advice of a diviner. The use of the names of totemic animals is only observed among the Kusaas since data were not available to explicate similar practices among speakers of Dagbani, Likpakpaanl and Sisaali.

5.4.2. Flora Names as Personal Names

This sub-category has names of plants and other objects that are also used as personal names. Again, this is common among the Kusaas as similar practices could not be traced among speakers of the three other sister languages.

5.5. NAMES OF DEITIES ARE PERSONAL NAMES

Another instance of metaphoric use of personal names by speakers of these selected Mabilia languages is the use of shrine names and divined/initiated names so that the name of a deity becomes a personal name of a newborn. The analogy is complex, so several connotations could be associated with the practice. These connotations, more importantly, cannot be directly elicited from the literal meaning of these metaphorical personal names. Thus, using the names of deities as personal names does not connote that the bearers are or represent the objects of divination. However, it could suggest that the bearer's spirit is linked to the shrine or deity. As indicated by [Abubakari \(2020\)](#) and [Abubakari et al. \(2023\)](#), tradition and customs demand that before a new baby is named, the soothsayer must be consulted to divine the spirit of the child. The findings of the diviner could inform the name to be given to the child. The names in this category are names of shrines, family deities, among others. Mr Abuosi affirms that among the Kusaas "...names of deities are only given to newborns after a divination reveals that that is the name the child's spirit wants. When the child is, perhaps, supposed to serve the deity; that child is named after it". Additionally, when the names of deities are used as personal names, they could imply that the supposed deity provided some support to the bearer's parents at a point when they were in need. The newborn is named after the deity to show reverence and appreciation. For instance, the name Kipo 'A powerful shrine noted for helping barren women' among the Likpakpaan symbolizes that the deity 'Kipo' aided in the conception of the baby. This was attested in an interview with Birkpakpaam who explains that "when people are named after deities, it is an honour or a way of thanking these deities for their aid in getting a child".

Table 14 below gives examples names of deities, spirits, gods and other objects of reverence that are used as personal names in the various languages used for this study.

Table 14. NAMES OF DEITIES ARE PERSONAL NAMES.

Dagbani	Kusaal	Likpakpaanl	Sisaali
Wumbee 'Means God's leg. Every house has God's leg they worship'	Atvbig <i>Tvbig</i> is the name of a shrine that protects a house and can be used against your enemies.	Kipo 'A powerful shrine noted for helping barren women'	Gbene/Hagbene chameleon spirit/a guardian shine
Buyili 'shrine'	Abugur 'deity'	Tingbaki 'The earth goddess has accepted me'	Luri Hunting/healing/war spirit
ηmambuyu 'calabash'.	Awin 'god'	'Liwaal' 'Shrine/god'	Veni/Haveni family deity Nala/Hanala initiated into a deity
Laasiche 'deity'	Azuur 'tail/tail god'	Chito Children with this name are believed to have been given to the parents by 'Chito' goddess.	Tuww/Hatuww magic spirit family deity
Buyulana 'A name given to the one who is in charge of the shrine and other deities that belongs to the community'	Anweliη <i>Nweliη</i> is a shrine spirit. It is believed to have powers/charms that confuse or attack the enemy.	Krupo Named after the shrine 'Krupo'	Batoη/Hatoη deity/god

Table 15 specifically identifies names of shrines and deities that are given as personal names. It gives further elucidation on these names.

Table 15. Names of shrines and deities as personal names.

Language	Personal Name	Meaning	Additional Information
Dagbani	Wumbee	‘Means God’s leg’	Every house has God’s leg they worship. This name does not imply that the bearer is ‘God’s leg’ but rather that the bearer is named after the deity which is supposed to provide some protection for the baby.
Kusaal	Asataŋ	‘Sataŋ’ is a blacksmith’s anvil-stone’	It is used as a personal or shrine god. Similarly, the Kusaas give this name when it symbolically means that the deity is the bearer’s personal spirit and protector.
Likpakpaln	Kundi	‘A shrine that is believed to protect and also give children’.	This name may suggest that the name-bearer is dedicated to this shrine.

The names in Table 16 are mainly metonymies where the names of tools are used to refer to their respective professions. The names of professional tools when given to newborn babies imply that these babies are initiated into the supposed profession where the specific tool is the main operational tool or instrument. These names are, however, not given randomly. They can only be given after a soothsayer or diviner has confirmed that the child came to the world to practice the said profession.

Table 16. Professions and tools for professions as personal names.

Language	Personal Name	Meaning
Kusaal	Zan’ar	‘A traditional iron hammer used by the blacksmith’
Sisaali	Luki or Balu/Haluki or Halu	‘blacksmith god’

The metaphorical names discussed under NAMES OF DEITIES ARE PERSONAL NAMES equally portray the culture and the belief systems of speakers of these languages. Unlike theophoric personal names that can be coined anytime, personal names from shrines and deities can only be obtained from an existing shrine or deity. The more speakers and believers convert into Islam and Christianity, the more names of deities used as of personal name get endangered and extinct.

6. Discussion

Central to the discussion in this section is the application of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory to explain each of the five categories of metaphorical names discussed so far. We intend to show the ontological correspondence between the source and target domains, the ‘vehicle’ used in the process, the goal or destination of each concept as well as the likely impediments each reconceptualisation may come with, especially for the audience that is supposed to interpret these concepts from the respective personal names and their categories. Generally, the discussion in this section shows how cultural philosophies are reconceptualised into personal names to generate new information, meanings and create new expectations (Lakoff 1993; Kövecses 2002; cf. Geeraerts 2010). The source domains include the name, the giver of the name and its bearer. The target domain, on the other hand, represents the concepts, message and intent the name is supposed to have for both the bearer and the hearer. We answer the question: what goal is this name meant to achieve? Beginning with names under EXPERIENCES ARE PERSONAL NAMES, we sample the Sisaali personal name: ‘*Basimbensa*’ ‘don’t maltreat me’. On the side of the name-giver, this name is a possible indication of a personal, unfavourable experience endured by the name-giver or his immediate or external family from the hands of some other person(s)

who indirectly may see this name as an insinuation. The name-bearer is the ontological representation of the personal name who admonishes everyone by his/her name to desist from any act of maltreatment. The actual name also serves as an oral account of a past experience that can best be explained by the name-giver.

(1) ‘ <i>Basimbensɔ</i> ‘Don’t Maltreat Me’	
Source Domain	Target Domain
Name giver	‘Possible experiencer of maltreatment’
Name-bearer; admonisher/carrier of message	Every listener or mentioner of the name is reminded to desist from maltreating the name-bearer, giver or every other potential victim of such an act.
Name	Historical oral account of the past experience of an individual or group of people.

Thus, the lived experience of the name-giver corresponds to the bearer of the name that expresses this experience. The name is the vehicle whilst the common goals or destination of both giver and bearer of the name are to historicize the experience of the name-giver. The inability of people other than the name-giver to explain the reason behind the name is an impediment that hinders the smooth transfer of the supposed historicisation of the lived experience of the name-giver which may lead to several (mis)interpretations. The linking of a personal name to the experience of a name-giver reconceptualises personal names as historical oral artefacts that convey new information content and meaning, to especially people other than the name-giver, and create new expectations.

The next category is BELIEF SYSTEMS AS PERSONAL NAMES and we use the personal name: *Ati’ewin* ‘I depend on God’ from Kusaal. This is not a name of a deity or shrine; however, it propagates a general belief in the existence of God among speakers of this language. It cuts across denominations and is used by anyone who believes in the Supreme Being. The source for target mapping is exemplified in (2).

(2) <i>Ati’ewin</i> ‘I Depend on God’.	
Source Domain	Target Domain
Name-giver	The name informs everyone of the name-giver’s belief in God.
Name-bearer; admonisher/carrier of message	Iconic figure who reminds everyone; mentioner or hearer of the name that the bearer and the giver believe in a Supreme Being.
Name	The name is an expression of a strong belief in God. It may be given to symbolise the difficulty the name-giver may have gone through or is going through but the person remains resolute based on his/her belief in God.

In this category of names, the spiritual belief system of a name-giver corresponds to the personal name of a bearer. The bearer becomes the vehicle that conveys the belief system. The common goal of both the name-giver and the bearer is to express a strong belief in an object of worship. An impediment is often when the bearer decides to change their religious belief; the supposed personal name will suffer neglect. The mapping of personal name to belief system reconceptualises names as tools for religious advocacy expressing the object of worship of both the name-giver and the name-bearer. It always conveys information and meaning and creates new expectations.

On the category of ‘DEATH WEAPONS’ ARE PERSONAL NAMES, we employ the Dagbani personal name: *Bije* ‘They do not want’. This is a derogatory death prevention personal name which metaphorically shows that the name-bearer belongs to a succession of children whose parents suffer from neonatal deaths. The bearer of the name is, thus, rejected by both family and death for which reason s/he has survived. This is illustrated in example (3).

(3) <i>Bije</i> ‘They Do Not Want’	
Source Domain	Target Domain
Name-giver	Expresses rejection of the child.
Name-bearer; admonisher/carrier of message	Every listener or mentioner of the name recognises the bearer as a survivor whose parents have suffered several neonatal deaths of their babies. The bearer is also identified as having survived because death also rejected him/her.
Name	Historical oral account of the past experience of parents of the name-bearer.

In this group of names, there is corresponding relationship between names believed to be potent tools against death, ‘death weapon’, and the bearers of the names who have survived neo-natal deaths. The bearer is the vehicle that carries this missile against death. The goal of both the name-giver and -bearer is to reach the destination (where the bearer survives neo-natal death). The impediment is the struggle to overcome death which comes with rituals accompanying the choice of a particular death prevention name. The mapping of personal names to ‘death weapon’ brings about the reconceptualisation of neo-natal deaths as something that can be fought through names which conveys new information and meaning and create new expectations of an unimaginable situation.

Considering FLORA AND FAUNA NAMES ARE PERSONAL NAMES, the Kusaal personal name *Atiig* ‘Tree’ is used. This name has several cultural connotations when used as a personal name. Some of these are shown in example (4).

(4) <i>Atiig</i> ‘Tree’	
Source Domain	Target Domain
Name-giver	Expression of name-giver’s reverence to the tree, or to carry a message in relation to the tree that may be known to the giver and the immediate family.
Name-bearer; admonisher/carrier of message	Every listener or mentioner of the name recognises the bearer as having been born under or close to a tree or the bearer may have been named after a tree because the parents want to show their reverence to the tree.
Name	Historical oral account of the location of birth of the bearer and/or family reverence to the tree.

In this category, the names of ‘revered’ plants and animals correspond to personal names, the name-bearer is the vehicle that conveys this message and the common goal of the name-giver and -bearer include announcing the location of birth and reverence to a totemic item which may be an animal or a plant. The impediment in this relationship is possible misinterpretation since items may mean different things to different name-givers. Whilst a tree may be a source of reverence in one situation, it may connote a place of birth in another. In all situations, however, this mapping leads to the reconceptualisation of flora and fauna names which now convey new information and meaning other than what they typically are known for. This creates in new expectations from the side of the name-giver and the interpreters of these names (Lakoff 1993).

Finally, in the category of names referred to as NAMES OF DEITIES ARE PERSONAL NAMES, we use the Likpakpaanl personal name *Kipo* ‘A powerful shrine noted for helping barren women’. This name is given to children to show that they are initiated to the shrine *Kipo* which most likely was consulted when their parents desperately needed a child. When such assistance is offered by the shrine, a precondition often is to name the first child after the shrine and or initiate such a person into the service(s) of the shrine or deity.

(5) Name: <i>Kipo</i> ‘A Powerful Shrine Noted for Helping Barren Women’	
Source Domain	Target Domain
Name-giver	Initiation of the bearer into the worship of the shrine. Expression of name-giver’s reverence for the shrine.
Name-bearer; admonisher / carrier of message	Every listener or mentioner of the name recognises the bearer as someone who was conceived with spiritual support from this shrine. The name-bearer is also initiated into the service of the shrine.
Name	Historical oral account of how the name-bearer was ‘conceived’.

Names of deities correspond to personal names. The name-bearers are vehicles that carry these names with the final goal or destination being the expression of gratitude to the deity for support and to initiate the name-bearer as a servant of the deity. The main obstacle is misinterpretation since such names may be given based on individual circumstances. Whilst they may be given to show appreciation in one situation, they may be used as an initiation rite in another situation. Thus, the mapping of personal names to names of deities also leads to the reconceptualisation of the names of deities to convey new information and meaning: initiation, gratitude, among others.

7. Conclusions

This article set out to explore metaphors in personal names in four Mabia languages: Dagbani, Kusaal, Likpakpaln and Sisaali. It has shown the overwhelming use of metaphors in the personal names of the speakers of these languages. This is an indication that metaphors form an integral part of the daily experiences and interactions of these people. They serve as a conduit for capturing concepts, opinions, belief systems and other things that the ordinary use of language would have challenges in expressing. Personal names metaphorically recount the histories of experiences in several domains of life by the speakers of these languages.

The conceptualisation of personal names among the speakers of these languages draws from a wide range of their cultural and customary practices, which inform the selection of a particular metaphoric personal name for a newborn child. The five conceptualisations of personal names found in the languages under study are EXPERIENCES ARE PERSONAL NAMES, BELIEF SYSTEMS AS PERSONAL NAMES, ‘DEATH WEAPONS’ ARE PERSONAL NAMES, FLORA AND FAUNA NAMES ARE PERSONAL NAMES and NAMES OF DEITIES ARE PERSONAL NAMES. Personal names are considered as symbolic: the bearer is assumed to be a ‘container’ that represents and concretises the personal name as an identifiable entity in the world. The study establishes that the cross-domain mappings of metaphorical personal names identify the name-bearer as the source domain whilst the more abstract notions of experience, belief systems, worldviews and other things are the target domains.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, H.A.; methodology, H.A. and S.A.I.; formal analysis, H.A. and S.A.I.; investigation, H.A. and S.A.I.; resources, H.A. and S.A.I.; data curation, H.A. and S.A.I.; writing—original draft, H.A.; writing—review and editing, H.A. and S.A.I. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Note

- ¹ In Kusaal the prefix A- turns the faunym *baa* ‘dog’ into a personal name. Thus, whilst *baa* is ‘dog’ and *Abaa* is a human being named after a dog. Similarly, whilst *Ndeog* is chameleon *Andeog* is a person named after the chameleon.

References

- Abubakari, Hasiyatu. 2018. Aspects of Kusaal Grammar: The Syntax-Information Structure Interface. Ph.D. thesis, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria.
- Abubakari, Hasiyatu. 2020. Personal names in Kusaal: A sociolinguistic analysis. *Language and Communication* 75: 21–35. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Abubakari, Hasiyatu. 2021. Noun Class System of Kusaal. *Studies in African Linguistics* 50: 116–39. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Abubakari, Hasiyatu. 2022. *A Grammar of Kusaal: An Introduction to the Structure of a Mabia Language*. Accra: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Unpublished monograph.
- Abubakari, Hasiyatu, A. Samuel Issah, O. Samuel Acheampong, D. Moses Luri, and N. John Napari. 2023. Mabia languages and cultures expressed through personal names. *International Journal of Language and Culture* 10: 87–114. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Agyekum, Kofi. 2006. The sociolinguistics of Akan personal names. *Nordic Journal African Studies* 15: 206–34.
- Algeo, John. 2010. Is a theory of names possible? *Names* 58: 90–96. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Algeo, John, and Katie Algeo. 2000. Onomastics as an interdisciplinary study. *Names* 48: 265–74. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Awedoba, Albert K. 1996. Kasem Nominal Genders and. Names. *Research Review* 12: 8–24.
- Awedoba, Albert K. 2000. *An Introduction to Kasena Society and Culture through Their Proverbs*. New York: University Press of America.
- Bisilki, Abraham Kwesi. 2018. A study of personal names among the Bikappaam (the Konkomba) of Ghana: The linguistics, typology and paradigm shifts. *Language Sciences* 66: 15–27. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bisilki, Abraham Kwesi, and Kofi Yakpo. 2021. ‘The heart has caught me’: Anger metaphors in Likpakpaln (Konkomba). *Sociolinguistic Studies* 15: 65–89. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bodomo, Adams. 2020. Mabia: Its etymological genesis, geographical spread, and some salient genetic features. In *Handbook of the Mabia Languages of West Africa*. Edited by Bodomo Adams, Abubakari Hasiyatu and Issah A. Samuel. Glienicke: Galda Verlag, pp. 5–34.
- Bright, William. 2003. What is a name? Reflections on onomastics. *Language and Linguistics* 4: 669–81.
- Croft, William, and D. Alan Cruse. 2004. *Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dakubu, Esther Mary Kropp. 2000. Personal names of the Dagomba. *Research Review New Series* 6: 53–65. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Fortes, Meyer. 1955. Names among the Talensi of the Gold Coast. In *Afrikanistische Studien, Diedrich Westermann Zuin 80*. Edited by Johannes Lukas. Geburtstag Gewidmet. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, pp. 337–49.
- Gariba, Abudu Chieminah. 2009. *Sissala Names and Meanings*. Tumu: Chieminah Abudu Gariba/SHF.
- Geeraerts, Dirk. 2010. *Theories of Lexical Semantics*. Oxford: OUP Oxford.
- Karpenko, Elena Yu. 2006. Cognitive Onomastics as a Direction of Studying Proper Names. Doctoral dissertation, Odesa I. I. Mechnikov National University, Odesa, Ukraine. Unpublished. (In Ukrainian).
- Kövecses, Zoltán. 2002. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kröger, Franz. 1978. *Übergangstritten im Wandel*. Henschäftlarn: Kommissionsverlag Klaus Renner.
- Lakoff, George. 1993. The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor. In *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd ed. Edited by Andrew Ortony. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 202–51.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live by*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Turner. 1989. *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Mensah, Eyo. 2020. Name this child: Religious identity and ideology in Tiv personal names. *Names*, 1–15. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Musah, Anthony Agoswin, and Aweaka Sandow Atibiri. 2020. Metaphors of Death in Kusaal. *Journal of West African Languages* 47: 1–9.
- Obeng, Samuel Gyasi. 1998a. Akan Death-Prevention Names: A Pragmatic and Structural Analysis. *Names* 46: 163–87. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Obeng, Samuel Gyasi. 1998b. Hypocoristic day-names. *Multilingua* 16: 39–56. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Richards, Ivor Armstrong. 1936. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Robustova, V. V. 2014. Towards cognitive onomastics. *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta* 1: 41–49. (In Russian).
- Umar, Najirah, Yuyun Wabula, and Hazriani Zainuddin. 2020. Personal Popular Name Identification Through Twitter Data. *International Journal of Advanced Trends in Computer Science and Engineering* 9: 8184–90. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Wee, Lionel. 2005a. Class-inclusion and correspondence models as discourse types: A framework for approaching metaphorical discourse. *Language in Society* 34: 219–38. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Wee, Lionel. 2005b. Constructing the source: Metaphor as a discourse strategy. *Discourse Studies* 7: 363–84. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

Wee, Lionel. 2006. Proper names and the theory of metaphor. *Journal of Linguistics* 42: 355–71. [[CrossRef](#)]

Yakub, Mohammed. 2023. “You can only see their teeth”: A pragma-linguistic analysis of allusive personal names among the Nzema of Ghana. *Nomina Africana* 37: 37–57. [[CrossRef](#)]

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.