

## **Hypocoristics in isi Zulu anthroponomy**

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### **Abstract**

This article focuses on the context and meaning of hypocoristics in isiZulu. The analysis provided is based on names collected randomly within the isiZulu speaking community. The objective of this paper is to discuss hypocoristics in isiZulu, one of the eleven official languages of South Africa which is also spoken in slightly different forms in other countries of the sub southern African region. Hypocoristics has a variety of definitions. Depending on the context, it could mean one of the following.

1. An expressive or informal form of a proper name that derives morphologically from a personal name. E.g. Bill and Dick for William and Richard respectively in English.
2. A diminutive form of a personal name.
3. An affective diminutive form of a personal name.
4. A familiar personal name modified by abbreviation.
5. An expressive form of a child language that sometimes renders the personal name unrecognisable.
6. A nickname

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### **Introduction**

The words of Paul Newman and Mustapha Ahmad (1992:159) summarise the notion of hypocoristics in a way that will be considered fairly appropriate in an isiZulu context:

Hypocoristic (henceforth HC) formation involves modification in a given name, by affixation or reduplication, in order to indicate information about the person referred to. HC forms are referred to variously as pet names, fondling endings, terms of endearment, diminutives, effeminate diminutives and familiarity markers. Sometimes, the HC form portrays both the affection of the speaker and the diminutive nature of the referent.

This article gives a thorough analysis and identification of hypocoristics – linguistically related nicknames- as having regular construction properties to regular names. Driscoll (2013:77) mentions that:

While hypocoristics formation is subject to complex constraints, a number of basic processes can be described that tend to be presenting many cases in a large number of languages.

- Truncation, often described as the primary process in creating short-form nicknames, refers to shortening by eliminating one or more parts of the word, typically syllables. Constraints governing truncation often include anchoring constraints to determine which part of the base name is truncated.
- In reduplication, part of the base name is repeated to create the hypocoristic.
- Affixation is the addition of new addition of new morpheme, like a prefix or suffix, to the base name to form the hypocoristic.

While these processes sometimes operate independently, in many cases more than one is at work, complicating the determination of the resulting hypocoristic.

In English, one personal name can “give birth” to as many as fourteen as is the case with Elizabeth which gives us the following: Lizzy, Betty, Elisa, Eliza, Lib, Libby, Liz, Lizzie, Lisa, Beth, Bess, Bessie, Bessy, Betsy (Millward in [grammar.about.com/od/il/Least\\_Effort.htm](http://grammar.about.com/od/il/Least_Effort.htm)). Given the variety of nuances – expressive, informal, diminutive, etc. – hypocoristics is a very rich area for intellectual discourse in anthroponomy. Some of the nuances just alluded to are captured in the etymology of the word. The term “hypocoristics” has its roots in the Greek word “hypocoristikos” which means to cajole, to kiss. The tender and expressive intention or import is also implied in its Latin equivalent – “hypocoristicos”.

A survey of the literature on hypocoristics reveals that the subject has been the object of extensive study in a wide variety of the major languages of the world. For instance, while worked on English hypocoristics, have written articles on French,, Spanish and Chinese hypocoristic anthroponomy respectively. Looking at these studies, one can deduce that hypocoristics has a broad universal application. However, full length articles on the subject regarding African languages are hard to come by. We could lay hands on just three in the course of our research: “Hypocoristic formation in Hausa” by Paul Newman and Mustapha Ahmed (1992) “From Morphology to Sociolinguistics: The Case of Akan Hypocoristic Day-names” by S. G. Obeng (1997) and “La formation des hypocoristiques en français et en yoruba”, a conference paper by Isaiah Bariki and Tajudeen A. Osunniran in 2014.

Talking specifically about isiZulu, studies on hypocoristics are in bits here and there. The notion is mentioned in passing with no details. Here again, two examples are worth mentioning. Koopman (2012) who has written extensively on isiZulu names and Lupenga Mphande who made allusion to shortened forms of isiZulu names with some linguistic explanations and exemplifications in his article. Hypocoristics can be viewed from different angles of (socio)linguistics. The approach in this paper is primarily morphophonological with a few comments that will be incorporated here and there from a sociolinguistic perspective. To fully appreciate the issues involved, there will be a brief word on salient facts about isiZulu as a language and its anthroponomy in general.

### **IsiZulu language**

IsiZulu is a Bantu language placed in group S40 of Guthrie’s classification as a Nguni. The language is well-known for its agglutinative morphology and rich consonantal system of click sounds, implosive and ejectives. Among the Zulu people, hypocoristics can be used in a multidirectional way: horizontally and vertically, depending on the context.

Among peers, its use is horizontal, but parents and older people may use the shortened forms vertically downwards to show endearment. The younger ones or children do not have the liberty to do same in an ascending order. This contrasts with an English or Izon (a Nigerian language) contexts where the child can use hypocoristic form of the parent's name in very informal circumstances. Among the isiZulu-speaking people, parents may use endearment names while dandling their children. Some names may be the mother's imitation of her child's poor pronunciation e.g. in a case where the child is unable to articulate the click sound of his/her own name. Some shortened forms of names may last just for a while, others may enjoy a life-long duration

### IsiZulu Names

Like names in many other African languages, names in isiZulu have very elaborate syntactic functions. The grammar and sociolinguistics of some African languages can be appreciated to a large extent through a study of proper names. Bariki (2009) puts it beautifully this way:

In many African languages, personal names have a strong historical, sociocultural and ethnopragmatic bearing that go beyond mere identity or referentiality. In most cases, the names are neither arbitrary nor asemantic. African names have a strikingly semantic and semiotic load. In other words, they have communicative functions. Personal names in Nigeria are multifunctional despite their mono-referential status.

Kofi Agyekum (in Bariki 2009:46) says that among the Akans (a Ghanaian ethnic group), names are “an iconic representation of complete social variables that indexicalize and relate to the name of the person”. What is said of these other African languages is generally true of isiZulu names. Two examples from our interviewees will suffice’

Interviewee 1: My name is **Philiswayinkosi** which literally means looked after by the Lord “When my mother was pregnant for me, my father was very sick, he had cancer and the doctors had given up on him; so, he was sent home to wait for his death. When I was born, they took me to him and he said “My daughter, eventually, I will leave you, so, I cannot promise to take care of you. **Usuyophiliswayinkosi** and he died a week after”.

Interviewee 2: My son's name is **Lunathi/uthando/iwenkosi**. It means “The love of the Lord is with us”. When he was born in 2009, I had complications which led to near death experience, but God being with us and loving us so much, we survived; so, I called him. “**Lunathi**” meaning **uthando lwenkosi** (...).

In addition to these interesting sociolinguistic factors, the names reveal an important point: names in isiZulu can be phrasal and sentential. However, not all are phrasal and sentential. IsiZulu names reflect other different syntactic structures. They can be polymorphemic, monomorphemic or in compound forms as can be seen from the following names:

1. Morphonorphic names: **Msa, No, Da, Za**
2. Compound names: **Buhlebhakhe, Bongumusa, Siphesile, Zipho Zethu** (adj+noun)
3. Polymorphemic: **Sithandesonke, Musawenkosi**
4. Full sentential: **Bongumusawenkosi, Ziphezinhle Zomusa, Sinenhlanhla Siphiwokuhle**
5. Phrasal: **Wenkosi, Ntandomayenziwe, Thandonjani**

Some of the compound or complex names have head e.g. **Olu** in **Oluhle** and **Ama** in **Amahle** and **Amakhulu**.

### Name Construction in isiZulu

According to Mphande (2006:110), “the process of naming is largely based on the development of a network of affixes that are harmonized by the relevant phonological rules”. The phonological rules and the morphological process in full length names are often transferred to hypocoristic formation. The other words, names (including hypocoristics) are “morphologically related to other grammatical categories” as the following derivational process affixes where the verbs ending in (a) changes to (o) or (i) and become nouns and personal names (Mphande 2006:110).

**Zonda** - to hate) —————> **Mzondi** - hater  
**thakatha** to bewitch – —> **Mthakathi** – a witch  
**bonga** - to thank, praise - **Mbongi** (praiser).

In the case of hypocoristics, it is common to add suffixes which modify the different phonological and grammatical realizations of the names and “their semantic impulses of the social meaning” (Mphande 2006:111). For instance, deleting the suffix (-ni) in a name e.g. **Bongani** (be thankful) and **Mzondeni** (hate them), means eliminating also the semantic elements denoting formation. What should be noted is that the morphophonological processes are in executed in harmony with isiZulu derivation rules.

Truncated names in isiZulu have a template. Mphande asserts that two syllables are the maximum size of hypocoristics. In other words, shortened forms of names should minimally be bi-moraic. However, evidence available in current hypocoristic formation negates this assertion. For instance, the following names can both have minimum foot size that is less than bi-moraic as they can **Zo** and **Ze** respectively: **Zibusisizomusawenkosi** and **Ukezesimдумise**. It should also be observed that in contemporary use and contrary to Mphande’s observations, the shortened forms of names can be considered as culturally accepted for the full name and can be used for official purposes.

Compounding and derivation are two principal ways of hypocoristic and name formation.

### Methodology

The data collection was done basically through observation and interviews. The interviewees from KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa were asked questions about their personal names and the various hypocoristic forms inherent in them. Specifically, they were told to give the preferred hypocoristic form in their family. Two of the researchers being isiZulu speakers, their knowledge and intuition on isiZulu names were of considerable help in the analysis. This is coupled with the fact that one of the researchers has written extensively on French, Ison and Yoruba names. The researchers also consulted extensively on books and articles on anthroponomy. Koopman’s (2012) book and articles were particularly stimulating. The researchers discussed with and/or interviewed over 50 native speakers of isiZulu, mainly students of Durban University of Technology. Eighty isiZulu names were critically examined.

## Theoretical framework

Linguistic Principle of Economy aptly applies to our discussion on hypocoristics. It is used generally to apply to virtually every sphere of human endeavour: psychology, sociology, economics, etc. to include linguistics also. The notion can be transferred metaphorically to language to imply the principle of the least effort where minimum input produces maximum output. Andre Martinet (1955) applied the concept specifically to phonology and syntax. His definition of linguistic economy attempted to create a balance between ever changing communication needs and natural human inertia. George Kingsley Zipf's efforts gave further credence to notion of language economy. George Kingsley Zipf's primary interest was a statistical study of the frequency of word use, but the principle has been applied to linguistics to encapsulate words that are abridged, eliminated, changed, permuted, borrowed or altered.

The principle is however "handled" in languages in such a way as to ensure equilibrium. Martinet (in Vicentini 2003:40) observes a tendency towards economy as a composition of two contrary forces – effort limitation, on the one hand, and needs, satisfaction on the other. Given Martinet's emphasis on "needs factor" in communication, critics have given a teleological interpretation to Martinet's views. Teleological reading implies that communication changes occur due to a desire for optimisation of communication. While Martinet would not allow himself to be drawn to a debate based on terminologies, it is safe to conclude that hypocoristics gives room for a simultaneous interaction between economy and optimisation.

Martinet and Zipf were not the only ones to talk of linguistic economy. Vendryes (in Vicentini 2003:41) had in 1939 linked phonetic changes to the language economy and the hypothesis of the least effort. According to Vicentini, slightly different notions were theorized by others e.g. Paul Passy (1880), Sweet (1888) and Frei (1929) and Leopold (1930). Paul Passy is of the view that a phonetic modifications are the least of a principle of economy that ensures the rejection superfluous elements. For Werner Leopold (in Vicentini p42) linguistic evolutions stems from two contrasting linguistic tendencies: towards distinctness and towards economy. He further elaborates on man's innate tendency not to expend more energy than is necessary in any task.

The overriding desire for maximum gain with minimum effort is always at play in communication and is transferred into anthroponomy. In the case of isiZulu, there appears to be social factors and impulses that create balance between effort and gain.. These factors and impulses seem to account partially for hypocoristic names in Zulu in terms of endearment and related emotions.

Linguistic economy manifesting in names has two major advantages for non-mother tongue speakers: simplicity and facility. Most Zulu names are polysyllabic. Some are reduced to bisyllabic or even monosyllabic names. In some cases, the click sound which is difficult for non-Zulu speakers is eliminated completely.

Hypocoristics is a confirmation at least in part of Zipf's theory of the principle of least effort in commutation. The strength of the principle of least economy vis-à-vis hypocoristics is that even though hypocoristics may not always portay a shortened form, it adds social factors and other cultural meanings to the name..In hypocoristics can be observed three main productive methods: "internal" (derivation), "external" (borrowing) and "mixed" (semantic calque). Through names, isiZulu attempts to devise internal mechanism for adapting new cultural facts.

## Phonological Changes in Names

Having given morphophonological background of names and their semantic and sociolinguistic import, it behoves us to discuss the template of hypocoristics formation. Some of the processes will be viewed in terms of metaplasm which is a rhetorical or phonological term involving addition, substitution or subtraction of sounds or letters in words or names. Examples of metplasmic expressions are: apocope, aphaeresis, syncope, paragoge and epenthesis.

According to Alber and Arndt-Lappe (2102) in Artes (2014), *proceedings of phonology* “truncation is a morphological process that separates a sequence from base”. There are two basic patterns of truncation, namely subtractive and templatic. Subtractive truncation consists in the deletion of some phonological material from the stem while in templatic truncation. The output form has to adapt to a prosodic template. In isi-Zulu, the deleted or truncated portion may not relate directly to the word or name stem, a situation that sometimes make hypocoristics asemantic.

In the chosen examples, the same hypocoristics can be accounted for differently depending on the parameters used.

### Apocope

Apocope is a truncation of final letters or sounds of a word or name.

#### Monosyllabic Truncations

Hlengiwe – Hlengi

#### Dissyllabic Truncations

Thokozani – Thoko

Siphokuhle – Siphokuhle

Ayanda - Aya, Ayo

Asanda - Asa, a female child born after Ayanda

#### Tri-syllabic Truncations

Musawenkosi – Musa

### Apocope + Thematic Vowels

These are instances of re-suffixation of the truncated name (apocope) with evidence of vowel deletion and replacement.

Khayelihle – Khayo/Khaya

Thulebona – Thuli/Thula **explain Thula Bona, Thulebona**

**Ayanda - Ayo**

Khulubuse – Khula

Lethukuthula – Letha/Letho

### Apocope + re-suffixation + Euro-western assimilation

IsiZulu phonological structure has no room for final consonant word structure. These examples are clear examples of Euro-western assimilation, they are used only by educated Zulu people particularly youths. The double final vowel structure in the cited examples can be traced to Afrikaans” influence.

Thokozani – Thoks, Tokkie  
 Hlengiwe – Hlengs  
 Nokuthula – Thulas/Thulaks  
 Njabulo – Njabs  
 Zinhle - Zin  
 Yenkosi – Yenkos  
 Andile - Andy

### **Aphaeresis**

Aphaersis is the phonological term for initial letter, sound or syllable deletion.

#### **Monosyllabic truncation**

Andile – Ndile

#### **Dissyllabic truncations**

Nompumelelo – Lelo

Busisiwe – Siwe

#### **Trisyllables truncations**

Sindiswa – Swa

Ntombezinhle – Zinhle

### **Naturalized or phonologised English words to suit isiZulu structure**

#### **Boy - Bhoyo, bhoyi**

These are examples of Euro-western assimilation (English to be precise) and epenthesis i.e. there is an insertion of [h] in boy and a re-suffixation (thematic vowel) of [i] and [o].

These can be said to be non-standardized forms of hypocoristics. In some cases, they could be peculiar to the name bearers only. This observation is akin to Plenat's (1999: ) remarks about diminutives forms of names in Spanish which are not treated same why certain diminutives ----sont lexicalises D'autres au contraire sont exceptionals ..... particularites recurrentes. These examples have a tendency that seem to uphold Leopold's new in Vicentinni (2003:42) that linguistic development and towards economy. Either of these prevails, but both are present and alternately preponderant.

Non-contiguous segments form a hypocoristic item in Makochan – (Mariki+chan = Marichan). This type of hypocoristics is known as **Poser truncation** in recognition of Poser's (1990) detailed work in the area. (NOT COMPLETE)

### **Syncope**

Multiple truncations leading to monosyllabic hypocoristics

Zibusisizomusawenkosi – Zo

Nizenande – Ze

Ukuzesimdumise – Ze

### **Multiple syllabic truncations with evidence of apocope and aphaeresis**

Nompumelelo – Mpume

Notmbizizile – Zizi  
Mayenziwe – Yenzi

### **Dimunitives /Elongation**

Nonzuzo – Nonzuzwana  
Dudu – Madudware  
Sandla – Sandlana  
Mafana – Fanyana  
Sphiwe – Mapiwana  
Holile – Maholozana  
Dinga – Dinilizana

### **Tonology**

IsiZulu is a tonal language. A slight change in tone may change the meaning of a word as well as a name. In some instances, the tone differentiates between a name belonging to a man and a woman. An example of names like **Celani** (what are you asking for?) and **Celani** (ask/request). In their shortened form **Celani** could be **Cela** (for a boy) and **Celi** (for a girl). A similar example is that of **Phiwani**, (one of the authors of this article), which follows a similar pattern to that of the previous example, it could be pronounced as a question (what are we going to feed her?) or to mean (be given something).

### **Reduplication for Nicknames**

Koopman (2002:24) mentions that:

Nicknames are basically of three types: the “baby name” or “pet name” which a mother gives to a very young child, the nickname which is given by peers to an older child or an adult, and be abbreviated form of the **igama lasekhaya** ... these names are “hugging, kissing and tickling names”, used when bouncing a small boy on the knee. These names are usually given by the mother and are generally only used by her and then only in intimate moments.

### **Reduplication**

In some examples the stem is reduplicated which creates a particular rhythm.

Ntombi Ntombi  
Thoks la Thoks  
Nonsekanskana

Mostly nicknames will have a duplicated morpheme, e.g., **Gigigi** (the steppy one). These nicknames can also be accounted for through prosthesis and re-suffixation.

**Mabhadubhadu** (spotted one)

**Ginsiginsi** (short and fat one)

**Maqinsiqinsi** (fatty one)



Nicknames are not only used in childhood. Once a nickname becomes common knowledge of the community where the name-bearer lives, it becomes difficult for it to die for the name bearer to be addressed by their **igama lasekhaya**. This name sticks and replaces the personal name in social settings. However, the name-bearer continues to use the formal **igama lasekhaya** in official documents. Only in rare circumstances where one finds hypocoristics in official documents.

**Mandlevangeli** becomes Mandla. The full name is derived from Mandla+ivangeli

In the above example, [a] is collided with [i] to form a new vowel [e].

A few observations need to be made as deductions from the issues raised earlier. A single hypocoristic realisation can correspond to two or more names. For instance, **Ze** could stand for **Nizenande** or **Ukuzesimdumise**. Conversely, a name can have a variety of hypocoristics, at times as many as five. E.g. From **Ntombezinhle**, one can have **Ntombe**, **Zinhle**, **Zin**, **Nhle**. Findings reveal that most hypocoristics in isiZulu are due to internal derivation processes. These can be seen in forms of apocope, aphaeresis, syncope, epenthesis, vowel deletion or coalescence, prosthesis or posers' truncation or borrowing. A few may however, be attributed to external influences like foreign language adaptations: **Thoks la Thoks**, **Yenkos**, **Andy**. The third and final cases are characterised by foreign names or words phonologised to conform into isiZulu.

## Conclusion

The morphophonological template for the derivational and compounding processes in isiZulu hypocoristics formation can be summarized in terms of internal, external and mixed (socio)linguistic factors. While some derivational forms can be explained solely in isiZulu grammatical terms, others are clear evidences of acculturation and foreign influence. Yet, a few others are a mixture of local and foreign resources. Our findings are in part a confirmation of Koopman's (2012:297) observations that there is a "widening of a cultural view which is also seen in the weakening of ethnic boundaries in naming. Zulu names are no longer drawn from exclusively Zulu sources".

In our view, this is a pioneer work that should generate some discussion and further incursion into isiZulu hypocoristics in particular and isiZulu anthroponomy in general.

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