

## Morphological analysis of personal names in Chindali language, Ileje District of the Songwe Region, Tanzania

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<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.1.35>

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents a morphological analysis of personal names in Chindali, a variety of Ndali spoken in the Ileje District of the Songwe Region in the southern highlands of Tanzania. The study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to analyse the internal morphological structure of Chindali personal names. Data were collected from elderly native speakers selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods, basing in age and language proficiency. The sample size depended on the saturation point of data. The primary data collection techniques included structured elicitation, introspection, and document analysis. The researcher used onomastics theory to study Chindali personal names. Data were analysed by analysing the morphological patterns of Chindali personal names such as roots and affixes. The findings reveal that Chindali personal names exhibit three major morphological patterns: monomorphemic, dimorphemic, and polymorphemic. These patterns reflect not only morphological variation but also embedded cultural, social, and grammatical meanings within the Ndali-speaking community. The study concludes by recommending further research into the phonological and syntactic constraints influencing name formation in Ndali, as well as comparative morphological analyses across related Bantu languages to assess potential universality in naming structures.

**Keywords:** Chindali, Morphology, Morphological Analysis, Personal Names

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### I. INTRODUCTION

A name is a crucial marker of identity that distinguishes one individual from others within a group. As Thomas and Wareing (1999:138) observe, a naming system is the method by which individuals are assigned names to differentiate them from others. According to Nkweto (1998:36), “names sometimes carry important meaning for an individual identity.” Naming systems often reflect cultural memory, commemorating significant events, seasons, heroes, rituals, problems, disabilities, and other societal experiences. This study seeks to analyze the morphological structure of personal names in Chindali, a Bantu language spoken in parts of southern Tanzania and northern Malawi. Crystal (2008) defines proper names as unique identifiers entities, categorizing them into anthroponyms for personal names and toponyms for geographical names. This study focuses on personal nomenclature.

Previous studies have investigated naming systems from various linguistic angles, encompassing toponymy, morphology, and sociolinguistics (Helleland, 2012; Nash, 2013; Abdul, 2014; Ainiala et al., 2012; Hough, 2016), in addition to African-centric research by Mwang'eka (2013), Shigini & Mapunda (2023), and Anindo (2016). However, there is a lack of research focused exclusively on the morphological creation of personal names in Chindali.

The principal objective of this study is to examine the morphological structures of personal names in Chindali language, emphasizing name conventions, to facilitate its documentation and preservation. Simons and Fenning (2018) underscore the importance of linguistic documentation in safeguarding endangered languages, particularly the examination of name systems as an essential component of cultural preservation.

There is insufficient information regarding Chindali, and a comprehensive examination of its naming conventions addresses this gap in the literature. Brenzinger et al. (2003) emphasize the importance of conducting thorough linguistic studies of lesser-known African languages to ensure a more balanced representation in global linguistic research. This study fulfills that need by elucidating Chindali's morphology, thereby enhancing our understanding of the diversity of languages in Africa.

The significance of this study extends beyond mere documentation; it clarifies the language's grammar, which aids in developing all language skills. This is crucial for creating culturally appropriate reference materials for teaching the local language and for use in schools worldwide. Katamba (1993) contends that morphological analysis is essential for comprehending the structure of words and the rules that dictate word development. Trudell (2009) talks about how important morphological analysis is for making good lesson plans and other educational resources that are relevant to certain situations.



Names have a lot of social, cultural, and historical meaning. A morphological examination can elucidate how these names embody our identities and convictions. Agyekum (2006) posits that personal names in African countries possess both semantic and pragmatic significance, reflecting cultural philosophies, practices, and values. This makes the study very useful for finding out how Chindali people name things based on their culture.

The research enhances African onomastic studies, a field that has limited recognition in international academic communities. Obeng (2001) asserts that African naming systems, when examined morphologically, yield critical information for both onomastic and sociolinguistic theories. From this perspective, the research not only safeguards a linguistic system but also enhances theoretical discourse regarding name evolution and cultural expression in African languages.

### 1.1 Research Objective

The study aimed to examine the morphological structure of personal names in Chindali language spoken in Ileje district Songwe region in the southern highland of Tanzania.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is based on the theory of African Onomastic Theory of Proper Names (AOTPN) advocated by Batoma (2006). It states that names can mean different things depending on the situation: linguistic (literal), cultural, and pragmatic (contextual). This concept suggests that naming is a social act shaped by collective norms, traditions, and communicative needs. Nicolaisen (2015) explains the onomastic theory as the studies of names of all kinds that clarify distinction between names and words. In analyzing Ndali names, the linguistic layer revealed their basic meanings, the cultural layer reflected socio-cultural influences, and the pragmatic layer emphasized context-specific interpretations. AOTPN was good at figuring out what names meant and why they were used in different cultures, but it could not look at how they were formed. Therefore, the researcher also applied construction morphology to study the structural composition of Ndali personal names. Construction morphology, as developed by Booij (2005), explores both the distinctions and commonalities between word-level and phrase-level constructions. It is based on construction grammar, which sees language as a system of "constructions," or pairs of form and meaning. Within construction morphology, morphological constructions such as compounding, prefixation, and suffixation are depicted through schemas that generalize patterns of word formation, thereby enabling the generation of new words. Krško (2024) posits that onomastic enabled not only the analysis of the formal structure of proper names but also family relationship of the deceased expressed through certain formal signs found on gravestone. This perspective suggests that schemas and subschemas linking form and meaning organize the lexicon. This theory provides support for both morpheme-based and word-based analyses. This theory is relevant for analyzing the morphological structure of Chindali personal names because the study aims to examine these names at both the morpheme and word levels.

#### 2.1.1 Chindali Surnames

Mwang'eka (2013) notes that in some African communities, surnames are derived from the father, grandfather, or other male ancestors, forming a patronymic system. These family names remain consistent across generations and signify clan identity. For example, Mwangeka (Ibid) in his article on naming system and gender construction in Chindali, he exposed factors influencing Chindali names, and collected and analysed typically, Chindali names without the influence of Christianity and western culture, which became the base of data analysis:

**Table 1**

*Chindali Names without the Influence of Christianity and Western Culture*

First Name	Middle Name	Surname
Nyasi		Kabuje
Lyangalamu		Kamwela
Kisha	Lyangalamu	Kamwela
Kafuki	Lyangalamu	Kamwela
Shindika	Lyangalamu	Kamwela
Makwegho	Lyangalamu	Kamwela

### 2.2 Factors Influencing First Names in Chindali

A range of cultural and contextual factors often influences Chindali personal names. These include:

#### 2.2.1 Societal Change and Religious Influence

Traditional Chindali names are increasingly being replaced by biblical or Western names, giving a child a traditional name is seen as “uncivilized” or even pagan, and thus incompatible with Christian beliefs. This trend is contributing to the decline of indigenous naming practices. These are some examples:

**Table 2**  
*Societal Change and Religious Influence on First Names in Chindali*

Factor	Name	Meaning
<b>Christianity Names</b>	Bhurahamu	Ibrahim (The name of prophet)
	Jhohani	John (The name of the prophet)
	Jhesajha	Isaiah (The name of prophet)
	Jholotani	Jordan (The country/river nominated in the holy bible)
	Malita	Biblical hospitality woman
	Malijha	A mother of Jesus
	Lusalo	Lazarus (The dead man raised by Jesus)
	Luka	Luke (The name of evangelist)
<b>Kinyakyusa Names</b>	Ambokile	He saved me (God save me)
	Tupokighwe	grabbing (The Jesus has grabbed us)
	Nikupokighwa	The grabbed one
	Tuntufwe	We are to praise him (we to praise the God)
	Noswe	baptize me
	Anganile	S/he loved me
	Atupokile	He saved us

Both Christianity and the Kinyakyusa language have influenced the Chindali naming system. Notably, many Kinyakyusa names are closely associated with Christianity, largely due to the role of Christian missionaries who settled in Rungwe—an area where Chinyakyusa is spoken. These missionaries established churches that gradually expanded into neighboring Ileje, an area historically considered part of Tukuyu, where Chindali is spoken. To spread Christianity, the missionaries often relied on local African religious leaders and used the Chinyakyusa language and Bible in their teachings. As a result, the Ndali community began adopting both biblical and Chinyakyusa names, which now prominently feature in the Chindali naming system—though this paper does not focus on that aspect. Zwane (2020) notes that Chindali naming practices are deeply embedded in the community’s social and familial structures, oral traditions, and cultural symbolism. These practices reflect both personal events surrounding a child’s birth and broader intergenerational values. The multi-layered system allows individuals to express personal, familial, and clan identities, while also adapting to societal changes and external cultural influences.

### 2.2.2 Situational or Contextual Naming

Names may reflect the context of the child's birth or parental experiences:

**Table 3**  
*Situational or Contextual Naming in Chindali*

Factor	Name	Meaning
Problem	Bhutulwe	Problem
	Twakibhagha	We tolerated
	Tamika	One who is disturbed or oppressed
	Pyanaghwe	Be disturbed with him
Disability	Napotwa	I have failed
	Mbotwa	The failed one
Heroism	Makwegho	From <i>ngwegho</i> , a traditional weapon
	Lyangalamu	From <i>ngalamu</i> , meaning lion
Rituals	Chiputo	Prays through ancestors
	Chiputa	Prays through ancestors
	Maghwila	Gift from God through ancestors
	Mushuka	One born after a deceased sibling
Praise/Attribute	Mboka	Save me
	Malafyale	The son of God
	Ghwalughano	With love
Occasion	Mboto	Fertile/Born during the harvest season

	Nafula/Mwafula	Born during the rainy season
Twins	Shindika	First twin
	Ndembwa	Second twin
Birth Condition	Musolobhwa	Born feet first

### 2.2.3 Naming as Protest or Social Commentary

According to Mwang'eka (Ibid), personal names in Chindali are often intentionally used to express dissatisfaction or resistance against oppression, as illustrated below:

**Table 4**

*Protesting Names in Chindali*

Name	Meaning
Tamika	One who is disturbed and oppressed
Twakibhagha	We tolerated
Sibhateme	It is silent now
Pyanaghwe	Be disturbed with him
Ngupya	I'm in difficulties
Sutile	I am tamed/accustomed

The examples provided early show the personal names in Chindali function as essential sociolinguistic instruments for conveying emotions, solidarity, and resistance. The geographical indicators and repositories of cultural memory are toponyms that encapsulate historical narratives, traditions, and social experiences (Ainiala et al., 2012; Helleland, 2012). They often discuss about natural objects like rivers and mountains, or they praise important persons and events (Liu & Rybakov, 2021; Nyström, 2016). Naming is shaped by both denotative meanings and connotative associations derived from communal experiences (Rennick, 2005). Previous studies have predominantly focused on the semantic or sociocultural functions of names; this research redirects attention to morphological formation, particularly the construction of names from smaller meaningful units known as morphemes. For instance, *Lyangalamu* comes from *ngalamu* (lion), and the prefix *lya-* means "of or belonging to." *Makwegho* comes from *ngwegho*, which means, "one associated with heroes"

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Ngulugulu Village, located in the Bundali Division of Ileje District, within the Songwe Region of Tanzania, where Chindali is natively spoken. A qualitative approach employing a descriptive research design was adopted to examine the morphological structure of personal names in Chindali. The researcher chose a descriptive research design since the study's goal was to examine the morphological structure of Chindali personal names and how they are characterised in natural settings. The design was suitable to analyze morphemes that form Chindali personal names.

A purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to select 10 elderly native speakers from the village. These informants were chosen to ensure a diverse representation in terms of age and levels of language proficiency. The emphasis on elderly participants was informed by their extensive cultural and linguistic knowledge, particularly concerning traditional naming practices.

Three primary methods were used for data collection: structured elicitation, introspection, and document analysis. Structured Elicitation: This involved face-to-face interviews conducted at the informants' residences. Elicitation sessions followed a structured format but were supplemented with unstructured and probing questions to validate and expand upon initial responses. This approach facilitated the collection of rich, contextually grounded data. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved. Introspection: The introspection technique supplemented elicitation by involving the researcher as a principal data source. As a native speaker of Chindali, the researcher employed personal linguistic intuition to analyze personal names. This method enabled the researcher to provide insights in identifying typical Ndali names, the morphological features, semantic implications, and cultural relevance of those names. Drawing on Newmeyer's (1996) approach in generative grammar, the researcher acted as an informant in evaluating the acceptability and interpretation of Chindali names. Document Analysis: The study also drew from existing literature, specifically the Chindali article on naming systems and gender construction by Mwang'eka (2013). This provided secondary data regarding personal names determination.

During the sorting stage and validation of data, personal names influenced by other languages and external cultural systems—such as Kiswahili, Chinyakyusa, and Christianity—were identified and excluded to ensure focus on authentically Chindali personal names. The researcher's linguistic competence as a native speaker was instrumental in making these distinctions. The researcher was both a data collector and an analytical tool, using personal linguistic

intuition to interpret and validate findings. While acknowledging the subjective nature of introspection, care was taken to maintain objectivity and neutrality throughout data collection and analysis. This was achieved by strictly adhering to data-driven findings and verifying interpretations through crosschecks with informants.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Morphological Structure of Personal Names

This section presents the findings based on the morphological analysis of personal names in Chindali. The findings reveal that personal names in Chindali is broken into meaning unit, known as morphemes which are augment, prefix and root/stem. Analysis of personal names was based on CM paradigm to study the structural composition of Ndali personal names. Construction Morphology developed by Booij (2005) that explains both the differences and similarities between word-level and phrase-level constructions. In CM, morphological constructions—such as compounding, prefixation, and suffixation—are represented through schemas that generalize word formation patterns and allow for the creation of new words. Based on AOTPN theory the study exposed the morphological structure of both personal names and place names.

The morphological structure of personal names reveals how personal names are formed and broken down into meaningful morphemes, which determine their meaning. It demonstrates how personal names are organized through morphemes—meaningful elements such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes. Studies on personal names shows that Bantu personal names structure are broken into meaningful units. For example in Kisukuma and Kinyambo common names consist of an augment, prefix and root (Augment+Prefix+Root) as in the word *omuntu* ‘person’ the word is broken into augment ‘o’, prefix ‘mu’, and root ‘ntu’ (o-mu-ntu) but in personal names often omit the initial augment vowel to differentiate the morphological pattern for names as in the personal name *Nyanzala* ‘born in famine’. The noun *Nyanzala* is formed or broken into the prefix ‘Nya’ and the root ‘nzala’ ‘hunger’ (Nya-nzala) (Manyasa, 2009; Kitwili et al, 2022; Shigini & Mapunda, 2023). Batibo & Kgolo (2016) argues that noun class prefixes in an essential feature of the names nominal morphology. Ngubane (2013) discusses morphological construction including noun class prefixes and verbal elements in proper names in Zulu for example class one 1a, while Zwane (2020) exposed that Zulu clan names broken into prefix, root, and suffix morphology, thus Bantu languages use are noun class system with specific prefixes, in which personal names often retain these class prefixes for example the name *Hlabangane* broken into *Hlaba-nga-ne* parallels structure in personal given name. The name *Nomvula* in Zulu is broken into prefix N- the feminine prefix and the root *mvula* ‘rain’ (N-mvula), meaning ‘born during the rain’. These previous studies tried to address the issue of morphological structure of proper names that supports the findings of this study with the focus on the morphological structure of Chindali personal names. These are some collected typical Ndali names, which has been analysed and presented:

**Table 5**  
*Chindali Names Morphological Analysis*

Name	Morphology
Bhutolwe	Bhu-tolwe
Twakibhagha	Twa-kibha-gha
Tamika	Ø-Tamika
Pyanaghwe	Pya-naghwe
Napotwa	Na-potwa
Mbotwa	Ø-Mbotwa
Makwegho	Ma-kwegho
Lyangalamu	Lya-ngalamu
Chiputo	Chi-puto
Chiputa	Chi-puta
Maghwila	Ma-ghwila
Mushuka	Mu-shuka
Mboka	Ø-Mboka
Malafyale	Ø-Malafyale
Ghwalughano	Ghwa-lu-ghano
Mboto	Ø-Mboto
Nafula/Mwafula	Na/mwa-fula
Shindika	Ø-Shindika
Ndembwa	Ø-Ndembwa
Musolobhwa	Mu-solobhwa
Sutile	Ø-Sutile
Ngupya	Ngu-pya

Sibhateme Nakabhujhe malakabhujhe	Si-bhateme Na-kabhujhe Mala-kabhujhe
Nyasi	Ø-Nyasi
Kisha	Ø-Kisha
Kafuki Bhabhulagha Bhambilila	Ø-Kafuki Bha-bhulagha Bha-mbilila

Data analysis show that Ndali personal names fall into four morphological categories i.e monomorphemic, dimorphemic, and polymorphemic.

#### 4.1.1 Monomorphemic Morphological Structure

The study revealed monomorphemic structure morphological pattern in Chindali personal names, where personal names consist of a single free morpheme that carries independent semantic weight. These names, such as *Tamika* ‘be disturbed and oppressed’, *Mbotwa* ‘The failed one’, *Mboka* ‘save me’, *Malafyale* ‘the son of God’, *Mboto* ‘fertile/born during harvest period’, *Shindika* ‘first twin’ *Ndembwa* ‘second twin’, *Sutile* ‘I am tamed/accustomed’, and *Kisha* ‘chase’ are indivisible into smaller morphological units yet convey clear referential meanings. These findings are consistent with those of Shigini and Mapunda (2023), who identified monomorphemic personal names in Kemunasukuma such as *Dalali* ‘nothing’, *Komanya* ‘separate/sort’, *Shija* ‘spare’, *Fumbuka* ‘appear or emerge’, and *Cheyo* ‘broom’. These names are independent nouns that are used as personal names without any inflection or derivation. Similarly, Katamba (2004) states that in Bantu languages and other African languages proper names do not undergo the same morphological process as common nouns. Personal names often lack an augment that marks other nouns. Therefore, these previous studies concurs with the findings of this study.

Linguistically, this indicates that Ndali, like other Bantu languages, preserves a strong correlation between semantic transparency and morphological simplicity in its anthroponyms (personal names). The findings show that Chindali personal names are made up of just one noun stem and lack the visible augment typically found in common nouns and other types of nouns. This structural feature highlights their distinct grammatical role and sociocultural significance.

#### 4.1.2 Dimorphemic Morphological Structure

The data analysis also revealed a dimorphemic morphological pattern in Chindali personal names. Many of these names are formed through prefixation, reflecting various grammatical features. For instance, plurality is expressed in names such as *Mapumba* (ma-pumba, ‘graves’), and *Bhambilila* (bha-mbilila, ‘they receive’). Singular forms include *Ngupya* (Ngu-pya, ‘I am in difficulties’), *Maghwila* (ma-ghwila, ‘gift from God through ancestors or the graveyard’), and *Chiputo* (chi-puto, ‘prays through ancestors’). Diminutive forms are observed in names like *Kalongoti* (ka-longoti, ‘a small cypress tree’) and *Kabhujhe* (ka-bhujhe, ‘a small wild giant plant’). Gender distinctions are also marked, as in *Nakabhujhe* (Na-kabhujhe, ‘daughter of Kabhujhe’), *Nakamwela* (Na-kamwela, ‘daughter of Kamwela’), *Malakabhujhe* (mala-kabhujhe, ‘son of Kabhujhe’), and *Malakamwela* (mala-kamwela, ‘son of Kamwela’). These morphological structures align with Booij’s (2005) Construction Morphology framework, which emphasizes the systematic relationship between form and meaning and the rule-governed combination of morphemes.

#### 4.1.3 Polymorphemic Morphological Structure

The study affirmed a polymorphemic morphological structure for example personal names such as *Twakibhagha* (Twa-kibh-agma, "we tolerated") and *Bhabhulagha* (bha-bhul-agma, "they released"), which combine more than two morphemes to produce personal names. These personal names have agglutinative patterns similar to those seen in the Haya and Babukusu languages (Buberwa, 2016; Marjie-Okyere, 2015). The morphological structure includes both prefixation and suffixation. *Twakibhagha* and *Bhabhulagha* use the prefixes *twa-* and *bha-* to signify subject agreement, whereas *-agma* is an anterior verbal suffix.

The morphological structure includes both prefixation and suffixation. *Twakibhagha* and *Bhabhulagha* use the prefixes *twa-* and *bha-* to signify subject agreement, whereas *-agma* is an anterior verbal suffix. The morphological patterns found in Ndali personal names reflect a rich linguistic system shaped by both grammatical principles and sociocultural influences. While the data identify three broad morphological structures—monomorphemic, dimorphemic, and polymorphemic—the significance lies in how these structures function within the broader context of Bantu morphosyntax and naming system in Bantu languages and Chindali in particular.

The study has attested the presence of monomorphemic structural names, which consist of one free morpheme. These names are free from affixation such as *Tamika*, *Mboka*, and *Sutile*. The results conforms to Katamba (2004) who states that there are some Bantu personal names, which do not have standard noun morphology of Bantu languages

characterized by an augment. The Ndali naming system reflects a linguistic tendency to preserve root-level meaning in personal naming, which is consistent with research in other Bantu languages like Kemunasukuma (Shigini & Mapunda, 2023). This may be because names are culturally significant as carriers of personal history, emotion, or spiritual identity of names as symbols of one's spiritual identity, feelings, or past.

Furthermore, the study affirmed dimorphemic names. These names consist the morphology formed by affixes. Prefixes are used to model the structure, which makes it more complex. These prefixes are meaningful since they indicate the number, gender, and size. This morphological pattern can be seen in names such as Mapumba (ma-pumba) - 'abscess' and Ngupya (Ngu-pya) - 'I'm troubled. Names like Nakamwela (Na-Kamwela), 'a daughter of Kamwela,' and Malakamwela (Mala-kamwela), 'a son of Kamwela,' reveal the gender. Similarly, the study discovered that prefixes in personal morphology indicate size, such as Kalongoti (Ka-longoti) 'a small pine' and Kabhujhe (Ka-bhujhe) 'a small yam'. The inclusion of such Morphological traits in Chindali personal names demonstrates the identity of the Ndali community.

The results of this study concurs with Booij's (2005) Construction Morphology theory, which states that word formation lies on rules and its semantically meaning. Similarly, the analysis reveals polymorphemic names, which are composed of more than two morphemes. They are made up of three parts: prefix, root, and suffix. Personal names such as Twakibhagha (Twa-kibh-agma) 'we tolerated' and Bhabhulagha (Bha-bhul-agma) 'tell them' include three morphemes: the prefix Twa and Bha, the root bhul, and the anterior suffix -agma. These personal names are derived from the verbs kibha 'tolerate' and bhula 'tell', encoding the verbal phrase that expresses the life events into name morphology. The morphological structure of these names have grammatical meaning since they demonstrate syntactic particles such as subject agreement and aspects. This agglutinative form conforms to those found in other Bantu languages such as Haya and Babukusu (Buberwa, 2016; Marjie-Okyere, 2015).

The findings, indicate that, Ndali personal names are not merely lexical categories but also embedded in the linguistic and cultural aspects of speaking community. The morphological structure indicates that naming confronts both a linguistic and a social entity, as represented by the morphological pattern. The morphological variation—from simple roots to complex agglutinations—shows that naming is both a language activity and a social practice, storing identity, status, emotion, and historical memory via structure.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study analyzes the morphological structure of Ndali personal names, delineating three principal patterns: monomorphemic, dimorphemic, and polymorphemic. These naming patterns exhibit morphological diversity and are intricately linked to the cultural, social, and grammatical frameworks of the Ndali-speaking community, as demonstrated in the analysis. Monomorphemic names emphasize semantic transparency and structural economy, while dimorphemic names reflect grammatical distinctions such as gender and number. Polymorphemic names exemplify agglutinative complexity, frequently encoding entire verbal expressions.

These findings support broader observations in Bantu linguistics and confirm that anthroponymy serves as a rich site of morphological innovation and cultural expression. Ndali names act as linguistic artifacts, reflecting how speakers encode identity, heritage, and worldview within the constraints of morphosyntactic structure. This research enhances our understanding of name formation in Bantu languages and demonstrates the effective interplay between morphology and sociocultural significance.

### 5.2 Recommendation

The study recommends further exploration of the phonological and syntactic constraints that shape name formation in Ndali, as well as comparative studies across related Bantu languages to examine whether these morphological structures are universal across all languages.

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