

A Linguistic Analysis of Bade Personal Names: Structure and Meaning

Adamu AGO Saleh

Department of African Languages and Cultures

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

adamuago@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2597-5257>

Abstract

This paper undertakes a linguistic analysis of Bade personal names, spoken in Yobe State, Nigeria, examining their structure and meaning. The paper is anchored on Morphosemantic Theory and complemented by the Referential Theory of Meaning. It investigates fifty-one (51) Bade personal names, collected through oral interviews with eighteen respondents across six villages in Bade and Jakusko Local Government Areas. The names are analysed at two levels. Structurally, the analysis identifies the morphological processes involved in their formation: prefixation, suffixation, compounding, reduplication, and borrowing. Semantically, it classifies the socio-cultural motivations the names encode. Findings show that thirty-one names (60.8%) are morphologically transparent, exhibiting recurrent prefixes {a-, da-, ma-, ga-}, a nominalising suffix {-be}, and a gender-marking suffix pair (-an/-ən), while twenty names (39.2%) are morphologically opaque and function as pure referential labels. Semantically, the names fall into twelve categories, the largest being circumstances surrounding birth (21.6%) and twin status (15.7%). Cross-tabulating structure and meaning reveals a clear pattern. Descriptive, event-motivated names remain overwhelmingly transparent, while classificatory names, especially those marking twin status, are overwhelmingly opaque. This suggests that Bade twin-naming constitutes a closed, traditionally memorised sub-lexicon rather than a productive naming process. The paper concludes that Bade personal names function simultaneously as linguistic and cultural texts, and recommends the continued documentation of Bade naming practices as a means of preserving the community's linguistic heritage.

Keywords: *Bade, morphosemantics, onomastics, structure and meaning, twin names, Chadic*

Introduction

Onomastics is the study of the origins of proper names and their historical and present functions within linguistic and cultural systems. Names serve as sources for understanding human relations across various levels, providing input for studies in archaeology, history, sociology, and psychology. Etymology and semantics are core aspects of the discipline, and, applied more widely, onomastic research provides a basis for new knowledge about natural and cultural history. The most important categories of names investigated within the field are place names and personal names. The field also extends to animal names, boat names, brand names, and the names of official measures, alongside broader concerns with names as cultural heritage, as a means of communication, and as carriers of identity.

This study addresses personal names among the Bade people of Yobe State, Nigeria, and situates the inquiry within anthroponomastics, the branch of onomastics concerned specifically with personal names. Bade names are treated here not as arbitrary labels assigned at individual discretion, but as socio-cultural tags carrying identifiable socio-cultural functions and meanings. Lyons (1977) observes that names carry both referential and vocative functions. The referential function draws the hearer's attention to the presence of the person being named, while the vocative function is used to call or summon the person being addressed. This distinction between reference and address is foundational to the theoretical framework adopted in Section 3.2, and to the analysis developed later in the paper.

The specific aim of the research is to obtain systematic knowledge of the linguistic, and social variation of personal names in Bade land. Two further, more specific objectives follow from this: to identify the meaning of each name, both etymologically, through internal morphological decomposition, and semantically, through the socio-cultural circumstance the name encodes; and to establish how both the form and the use of Bade names have evolved and are distributed across the community. Section 2.0 reviews the literature relevant to these aims, situating Bade naming practice within the wider comparative study of African, and specifically Nigerian, anthroponymy. Section 3.0, immediately below, sets out the method of data collection of the study and the theoretical framework used to interpret the data, while Section 4.0 presents and analyses the corpus of fifty-one Bade personal names collected for the paper, structurally and semantically.

The Bade People and Their Language

The land inhabited by Bade Emirate lies between latitude 11°50' and 12°55' North and longitude 10°35' and 11°15' East, in the north-western part of Yobe State, Nigeria. The Emirate secretariat is situated at Gashua, capital of Bade Local Government, and the area covers a land mass of 5,094 square kilometres. Bade is bounded to the west by Zaki and Gamawa Local Government Areas and by Katagum Local Government Area in Bauchi State; to the south by Nangere and Fune Local Government Areas; to the north by Yusufari and Karasuwa Local Government Areas; and to the east by Bursari Local Government Area, all in Yobe State. The word “Bade” refers both to the people and to their language (Chris, 1995). Bade is a Chadic language classified within Group B of West Chadic, under the Afroasiatic phylum (Greenberg, 1963; Newman, 1977; Schuh, 1981), one of four recognised sub-families within Chadic. Within West Chadic Group B, Bade is most closely related to Ngizim, spoken to the south around Potiskum, and to Duwai, spoken east of Gashua. The language is dialectally diverse, with three principal varieties: Western Bade, Southern Bade, and Gashua Bade. The last of these serves as the administrative dialect and, for the purposes of this paper, the primary reference dialect. Bade is also a tonal language (Schuh, 2007).

According to the National Population Commission's 2006 census, the population of the Bade people stood at 267,311. The estimated number of Bade speakers had reached 362,062 by 2010 (Salisu, 2010). The main occupations of the Bade people are farming and fishing, supplemented by trading. Staple crops include millet, guinea corn, maize, and rice, with wheat, vegetables, groundnut, cassava, okra, beans, and melon also cultivated. These are grown both for domestic consumption and for the market, particularly through the fadama irrigation system (Gusau, 1992; Shuaibu, 1991).

Review of the Related Literature

Names are widely treated in the literature not as arbitrary labels but as condensed linguistic texts encoding history, belief, identity, and social experience. Keats-Rohan (2007) observes that personal names are central markers of identity and social affiliation, revealing relationships between individuals and communities rather than functioning merely as labels. Round (2011) likewise argues that proper names derive meaning from linguistic form, cultural knowledge, naming practices and discourse context, challenging the view that names are semantically empty. These perspectives reinforce the view adopted in this study that Bade personal

names encode both linguistic structure and socio-cultural meaning. In addition, Gadaka's contrastive analysis of Hausa and Ngamo personal names demonstrates that affixation, especially prefixation and suffixation, is a productive morphological strategy in Chadic naming systems. His findings provide useful comparative support for the morphological processes identified in Bade personal names.

Hough (2017) situates this paper of names within onomastics, divided into anthroponymy (personal names) and toponymy (place names), while John (2016) reviews the long-standing philosophical debate on whether proper names carry meaning at all, concluding that most names, especially those drawn from ordinary vocabulary as in most African languages, do carry recoverable meaning, while a minority function purely as referential labels. This distinction is directly relevant to the Bade names examined in this paper: most of them remain transparent, while a substantial minority no longer are. This African emphasis on meaning-bearing names is reinforced by Marjie-Okyerere (2015). Citing Agyekum (2006), she lists circumstances of birth, theophoric reference, physical appearance, occupation, and kinship as recurring African naming motivations. Bedu and Modu (2024) make a similar point for Hausa and Sesotho by citing Chamo (2016) and Mohome (1972) that naming in both languages likewise encodes the manner and circumstance of birth and is popularly believed to shape the bearer's character.

Abbas (2018) classifies Hausa personal names into five categories: time of birth, circumstances of birth, physical appearance, kinship, and occupation. He shows that these names are formed by compounding, prefixation, or the compression of full phrases and sentences. The Hausa loanwords Kobo and Danka identified in the present Bade corpus directly reflect the contact he documents. Marjie-Okyerere (2015) shows that Babukusu personal names mark gender through the prefixes {wa-} (male) and {na-} (female), attached to a circumstantial root. This pattern parallels the gender-marking suffix {-an}/{-ən} found in the Bade pair {gaajan/gaajən}, though the position of the marker is mirrored. John (2016), working within structural grammar and referential theory, pairs a morphological analysis, covering noun-based, verb-based, and adjective-based compounds, with a semantic classification of Agatu and Alago (Idoma) names into circumstantial, twin, sentential, theophoric, and death-derivative categories. This study follows the same methodological pairing directly. John also finds that only Alago has a dedicated twin-naming category, a finding that supports the present observation that Bade twin names form a similarly distinct, largely opaque sub-lexicon. Ilori and Are

(2021) show that Okun-Yoruba names, though unfamiliar-sounding, follow Akinnaso's (1980) established Yoruba patterns of prefixal and desententialised, or compressed-clause, name formation. This offers a parallel for the agentive prefix *a-* found in Bade names such as *Azam*. Belonwu (2025) identifies compounding, derivation, and semantic extension in Ihemboisi (Igbo) names built from recurring roots such as *Nwa* and *Obi*, with elaborate circumstantial compounds such as *Atuonyeilonduoziataonwu* ('one who saves from death') closely paralleling the long apotropaic Bade compound {*Kaakazu*} / {*ngabza*}.

The paper most directly relevant to the present research is Bedu and Modu's (2024) onomastic account of Bade anthroponyms. It classifies Bade names into family background/occupational, characteristic, circumstantial, and attributive/loan categories, and independently identifies the hunter-namesake root /*mzam*/, as in *Wunāmzam*, which recurs in the present corpus as *Azam* and {*əmzam*} / {*awumzam*}. Their account is also linked to a shared oral-tradition record of Bade contact with Hausa- and Kanuri-speaking areas, which corroborates the loanwords found here. Their classification, however, is source-based rather than structural. It does not offer a dedicated morphological breakdown of prefixation, suffixation, compounding, and reduplication, nor a fine-grained semantic taxonomy of the kind developed in this paper. The present paper therefore builds on the comparative structural-semantic methods of Keats-Rohan (2007), Round (2011), Abbas (2018), Marjie-Okyere (2015), John (2016), Ilori and Aṛe (2021), and Belonwu (2025). It then extends Bedu and Modu's (2024) pioneering but broad-grained treatment of Bade names, addressing a clear gap in the structural and semantic documentation of Bade, and more widely Chadic, naming practices.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Research Design and Data Collection

Data for this paper were obtained through an extensive field survey conducted by the researcher, a native speaker of Bade, across six villages purposively selected from the two main Bade-speaking Local Government Areas of Yobe State: Gashua, Jawa, and Tarbutu in Bade LGA, and Arvane, Dachia, and Karage in Jakusko LGA. Three respondents were purposively sampled in each of the six villages, giving a total of eighteen respondents. They were interviewed on the forms, origins, and meanings of Bade traditional personal names. The interviews yielded fifty-one (51) Bade personal names, along with informant explanations of each name's literal

meaning, where recoverable, and its derived, contextual meaning. These names constitute the corpus presented and analysed in Section 4.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored primarily on Morphosemantic Theory, a framework already applied to African personal names by Belonwu (2025) in her paper of Ihembosi (Igbo) names. The theory is situated more broadly within the discipline of onomastics. Morphosemantic theory treats naming as a special case of word formation. A name's meaning is arrived at, first, by decomposing the name into its constituent morphemes, roots, prefixes, suffixes, and compounded or reduplicated elements, following standard morphological analysis (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011). Secondly, interpreting the semantic contribution of each morpheme, and of the derived name as a whole, against the socio-cultural circumstance that motivated the naming. Under this framework, the transparent portion of the Bade corpus, the thirty-one names (60.8%) analysed structurally in Sections 4.1.1 to 4.1.5, is accounted for directly. The prefixes {a-}, {da-}, {ma-}, and {ga-}, the suffixes {-be} and the gender pair {-an}/{-ən}, and the compounding and reduplication patterns identified in the data are each mapped onto the twelve semantic categories established in Section 4.2. In this way, a name's morphological composition and its derived cultural meaning are analysed as two faces of a single naming act. Morphosemantic theory, however, presupposes that a name is internally decomposable. This assumption does not hold for the twenty names in the corpus (39.2%, Section 4.1.6) that are morphologically opaque. These names are supplemented, for the purposes of this paper, by the Referential Theory of Meaning. This theory holds that a proper name may function correctly as an identifying label for its bearer without contributing any decomposable descriptive content of its own. Under this complementary framework, names such as those marking twin status (e.g. *Aktavi*, *Cakwa*, *Kaaku*) are treated as names whose primary function is reference rather than description. They continue to be used correctly and consistently by the Bade community to identify their bearers, even though speakers can no longer recover the internal morphemic content, if any, from which they may originally have been formed.

Taken together, morphosemantic theory and referential theory form a composite framework matched to the bimodal structure of the corpus established in Section 4.3. The transparent, descriptively motivated names are analysed

morphosemantically, while morphologically opaque, classificatory names are accounted for referentially.

Structural and Semantic Analysis of Bade Names

This section presents and analyses the data elicited for this paper. Section 4.1 presents a structural (morphological) analysis of the names, while section 4.2 classifies the names semantically into distinct thematic categories. Section 4.3 draws the two levels of analysis together to show how the internal structure of a Bade name correlates with the type of meaning it encodes.

Structural Analysis of Bade Names

Bade personal names are formed through several morphological processes typical of the derivational and compounding strategies attested across West Chadic languages: prefixation, suffixation, compounding, reduplication, and borrowing. A substantial proportion of the corpus, however, shows no synchronically recoverable internal structure at all, and is treated separately in Section 4.1.6.

Prefixation

The most frequent process attested in the transparent portion of the corpus is prefixation. Several recurring prefixes can be isolated. The prefix {a-} functions broadly as a nominalising/agentive prefix that attaches to a nominal or verbal root to derive an agent or event-based name, as shown below.

Example 1: Prefix {a-}

Base Form	+ Prefix	Derived Name
/əmzam ¹ / (hunter)	/a-əmzam/	{Azam}
/əzɡù/ (to mention/say)	/a-əzɡu/	{Azgwa}
/usù-aja/ (to hang + Pronoun we)	/a-usu-aja/	{Ausaaja}

¹ Glossing abbreviations used in this paper: AGT = agentive; LOC = locative; TEMP = temporal; COMP = comparative; INST = instrumental; NMLZ = nominaliser; LINK = linking element; EXCL = exclusive; HORT = hortative; RED = reduplicant; EXIST = existential; ITER = iterative; IDEO = ideophone; N = noun; ADJ = adjective; M = masculine; F = feminine; 1PL = first-person plural; 3SG = third-person singular.

In *Azam* (a-əmzam, AGT-hunter), the prefix attaches to a nominal root denoting an occupation, yielding a name commemorating a hunter within the kin group. *Azgwa* (a-əzgu, AGT-mention/say) exhibits the same prefix on a verbal root, here deriving an event-based name for a child whose birth had been foretold. *Ausaaja* (a-usu-aja, AGT-hang-1PL) further extends the pattern to a verbal root inflected for a first-person plural object, producing a name that encodes the expectation that the child will become a source of support for the family — literally, one on whom 'we' will 'hang'. Taken together, these forms suggest that {a-} is not restricted to a single word class but operates productively across nominal and verbal bases alike, with its precise interpretation (agentive or eventive) recoverable only from the semantics of the base and the pragmatic context of naming. A second prefix, {da-}, is a locative/temporal preposition meaning roughly 'at/during/on', and is attached to a verb or noun root describing the activity or location associated with the birth, as in example (2) below:

Example 2: Prefix {da-}

Base Form	+ Prefix	Derived Name
/ buwan/ (travel)	/daa-buwan/	{Daabuwa}
/əgdù/ (to cut)	/da-əgdu /	{Dagdu}
/kwakwiri/ from /kurù/ (to refuse/ reject several time)	/da-kwakuri/	{Dakwakuri}

Daabuwa (da-buwan, LOC/TEMP-travel) situates the naming event with respect to an act of travel, most plausibly indexing the father's or family's absence or movement at the time of birth. *Dagdu* (da-əgdu, LOC/TEMP-cut) attaches the same prefix to a verb of severance, and is reported to be reserved for a twin whose co-twin did not survive — the 'cutting' here metaphorically encoding incompleteness. *Dakwakuri* (da-kwakuri, LOC/TEMP-refuse.ITER), built on a reduplicated iterative stem, encodes repeated refusal, presumably referring to prior miscarriages or a reluctance surrounding the pregnancy. Across all three forms, {da-} appears to anchor the derived name to a specific circumstantial or temporal frame surrounding the birth, distinguishing it functionally from the more agentive {a-}.

Prefix {ma-} carries an instrumental or agentive value, deriving names that reference an activity or its characteristic outcome. This is illustrated by *Maada* (< maa-dawu, PFX-rear.herds), in which the prefix attaches to a verbal root denoting animal husbandry, yielding a name that foregrounds the referent's (or family's) association with herding.

Another more restricted prefix observed is {ga-}. It carries a comparative or locative sense glossable as 'like/on'. It is attested in *Gagzu* (< ga-ugzən, COMP-public.hair), where the prefix derives a name for a girl born with an unusually full head of hair, the comparison drawing on the base noun's association with body hair as a marker of maturity or abundance.

Suffixation

Two suffixes recur in the corpus. The nominaliser {-be}, glossable as 'thing', closes off a compound root, and gender-agreement marker are observed. Consider the following:

Base Form	(Prefix) + Suffix	Derived Name
/əbdam/ (way)	/a-əbdam-be/	{Abdambe}
/dangwaramma/ ideophone	/dangwaramma-be/	{Dangwarambe}
/əskunù/ (to add)	/ma-əskunu-an/	{Maskunan}

It is observed that *Abdambe* (a-əbdam-be, PFX-road-NMLZ) combines the agentive prefix {a-} with the nominaliser {-be}, converting the root for 'way/road' into a bound nominal reading roughly as 'thing of the road'. *Dangwarambe* (dangwaramma-be, IDEO-NMLZ) attaches the same suffix directly to an ideophonic base, again yielding a nominalised 'thing' reading. Here, it means approximating 'the thing that brought [people] together'. The suffix {-be} thus appears to serve a general nominalising function, closing off both verbal/nominal roots and ideophones alike, and rendering them eligible to function as proper names.

However, *Maskunan* (ma-əskunu-an, INST-add-M) differs from the two preceding forms in taking the suffix {-an} rather than {-be}. Rather than nominalising the root, {-an} here marks masculine gender agreement on an already-derived name-stem, indicating that the suffix operates independently of {-be} and is not restricted

to a single morphological slot. This is corroborated by the paired forms *gaajan/gaajən* ('last-born child'), both realised orthographically as *Gaaji*, in which the alternation between {-an} (masculine) and {-ən} (feminine) on an otherwise invariant root confirms that the suffix functions productively as a gender-agreement marker within the name-formation system, distinct from — and potentially co-occurring with — the nominalising function of {-be}.

Compounding

Compounding creates names by joining two independent roots together. This process demonstrates how full phrases or sentence-like structures are compressed into a single name. A number of names are transparent compounds of two independent roots rather than root-plus-affix formations. *əvdagaaru* combines *əvdan* ('open area') and *gaaru* ('big'), literally 'the big open area', referring to the festival ground where the mother was attending a sacrifice at the time of birth. *Jagduwa/sagduwa* ('born at the riverside') shows a gender-linked alternation between a masculine form (*ja-g-duwa*, 'we(exclusive)-linker-river') and a feminine form (*san-g-duwa*, 'during-linker-river').

The most elaborate compound in the corpus is *Kaakazu* and *ngabza*, a combining *kaaka-azu* ('God-there is'), and *nga-əbzū* ('let-leave behind'), used for a child born after the mother has lost several previous children, expressing the wish that this child 'leave the pattern of loss behind'. *Makəci* (*maku-aci*, 'to find something-him') is another compounded name.

Reduplication

Reduplication involves the repetition of a part of the word to signal a specific meaning. A single but instructive case of reduplication is found in *Muzamzama*, derived from the borrowed name *Musa* through partial reduplication of the final syllable (*Muza-zama*), used for a second son whose elder sibling was also male. The reduplicated form iconically doubles the naming root to signal repetition in the birth sequence.

Borrowing

A small number of names are loans, chiefly from Hausa, the dominant regional lingua franca. *Kobo*, from Hausa *kwabo* 'coin', is given to a first-born daughter, apparently reflecting a popular association between a first daughter and wealth brought into the family. *Danka*, cognate with Hausa *danga* 'fenced enclosure', is

given to a child born beside a thatched fence. Borrowing of this kind reflects the long-standing contact between Bade and Hausa, and the tendency for culturally salient concepts, such as currency and enclosures, to retain their source-language form even when nativised as personal names.

Morphologically Opaque Names

Twenty of the fifty-one names in the corpus (39.2%) could not be assigned a literal, morpheme-by-morpheme meaning by informants (for example *Adiga/Yabo*, *Aago/Aawo*, *Maska*). For these, only a derived, contextual meaning survives: speakers know when and why a name of that form is given, but not what its internal parts, if any, once meant. As Section 4.3 shows, these opaque names are not randomly distributed across the semantic categories established in Section 4.2; they cluster overwhelmingly in two categories: names marking twin status and names marking birth order.

Semantic Analysis of Bade Names

Beyond their internal structure, Bade names can be classified according to the socio-cultural motivation encoded in their derived meaning. Table 1 presents the twelve semantic categories identified in the corpus, together with their frequency and percentage.

Table 1: Semantic Classification of Bade Names

Semantic Category	Frequency	Percentage
Circumstances surrounding birth (time/place/event)	11	21.6%
Twin status	8	15.7%
Birth order / sibling sequence	7	13.7%
Occupation or social status	5	9.8%
Physical attribute / manner of birth	5	9.8%
Animal reference	4	7.8%
Protective / apotropaic	3	5.9%
Family crisis or bereavement	3	5.9%
Plant reference	2	3.9%
Religious/spiritual namesake	1	2.0%
Kinship term	1	2.0%
Social attitude	1	2.0%

Semantic Category	Frequency	Percentage
Total	51	100%

The largest category, comprising 11 names (21.6%), encodes the specific spatial or temporal circumstances obtaining at the moment of birth: *Abdam/Abdambe* (born while the mother was in transit), *Daduwa* (born while the mother was fetching water), *Dangwarambe* (born at a gathering/playground), *Danka* (born beside a thatched fence), *əvdagaaru* (born during a sacrificial festival), *Jagduwa/sagduwa* (born at the riverside), *əbzədako* (born after an unusually long pregnancy), *Azgwa* (born as predicted), *Maskunan* (born while the mother was nursing another child), *Makəci* (born while the father was searching for something), and *Kabogzam* (born the day the father killed a spiritually possessed alligator). This category demonstrates the strongly indexical function of Bade naming: the name serves as a permanent linguistic record of an ephemeral biographical event.

A second, closely related category marks twin status. Bade culture accords special significance to twin birth, reflected in a dedicated sub-set of eight names (15.7%) that encode gender and birth-order distinctions among twins and the child born immediately after them: *Adiga* (female twin whose co-twin is male) and its male counterpart *Yabo*, *Aktavi* (first male twin), *Cakwa* (female twin born first), *Dagdu* (a twin whose partner is 'incomplete'), *Kaaku* (first male twin), *Kavayo* (twin brother), and *Dajlu/Kabajlu* and *Kabo* (the child born immediately after twins). Seven of these eight names have no recoverable literal meaning, and this internal consistency suggests that Bade twin-naming operates as a closed, memorised terminological set rather than as a productive descriptive process.

Closely related to twin naming is a category marking birth order and sibling sequence more generally. Seven names (13.7%) encode a child's position within the family's birth history: *Ago/Aawo* (first-born son), *Kobo* (first-born daughter), *Gaaji* (last-born child), *Jlambo* (born after several elder sisters), *Jlaawi* (born after two or three elder sisters), *Gaakiyo* (child following one named Gambo), and *Muzamzama* (second son whose elder sibling was also male).

A further five names (9.8%) commemorate an occupation or office held by an ancestor, a co-natal individual, or the family itself: *Azam* and *əmzam/awumzam* (both 'namesake of a hunter'), *Dəma* (named after the blacksmith's anvil), *əzgawarya* (namesake of a herdsman), and *Karva* (*karvan* 'chieftaincy', given to the

heir of a village head). A comparable number, also five names (9.8%), instead encode observable physical characteristics of the infant or unusual features of the delivery: *Dabuwa* (born with a navel peculiarity), *Dəmza/Zaaci* (delivered legs-first), *Duna* (dark-skinned child), *Gagzu* (girl born with a full head of hair), and *Maada* (boy born already circumcised).

A smaller set of four names (7.8%) is triggered by a coincidence between an animal-related event and the moment of birth, rather than by any perceived resemblance between the animal and the child: *Askiya* (namesake of a cow born the same day), *Bugzum* (namesake of a fish), *Kabulu/akabulu/sakabulu* (named for a fish the mother accidentally caught while in labour), and *Kaduwa* (named after a gazelle the father killed immediately before the birth).

Three names (5.9%) function performatively, in that the naming act itself is believed to help secure the child's survival, a strategy widely attested across African naming systems where infant mortality has historically been high. *Ausaja* expresses the family's hope of being 'saved' or supported by the child; *Adəbziki* was given to a child abandoned at a dump site for fear that he would otherwise die; and *Kaakazu/suware/əngabza* is given after a mother has lost several children in succession, expressing the wish that this child 'leave the pattern behind'. A related but distinct set of three names (5.9%) memorialises a significant, often tragic, family event contemporaneous with the birth, rather than functioning protectively: *Deedee* (a girl whose father died before her birth), *Jlaamutu* (a child who survives a delivery in which the mother does not), and *Kəntapo* (born on the occasion of a herdsman's reunion with his wife).

Two names (3.9%) derive from plants of cultural significance: *Kaalu/kaakuwa* (namesake of the baobab tree, following the custom of bringing baobab leaves at a birth) and *Maska* (namesake of a tree Bade people tap for water in the bush). The remaining three names (2.0% each) do not fit any of the above patterns and each form a single-member category of their own. *Saabudu* is the namesake of a traditional Bade shrine spirit; *Naaru*, sharing the root *Gaaru* ('big/elder') with *əvdagaaru*, is a kinship term for the elder sister of one's mother, showing that not every item in the corpus is a birth-name proper; and *Dakwakuri* (da-kwakuri, 'during-refuse severally') is the sole name in the corpus that encodes the social reception of the child rather than a circumstance, attribute, or status.

The Structure–Meaning Interface

When the morphological findings of Section 4.1 are cross-tabulated with the semantic categories of Section 4.2, a clear pattern emerges, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Morphological Transparency by Semantic Category

Semantic Category	Total	Transparent	Opaque
Circumstances surrounding birth	11	10	1
Twin status	8	1	7
Birth order / sibling sequence	7	3	4
Occupation or social status	5	4	1
Physical attribute / manner of birth	5	5	0
Animal reference	4	1	3
Protective / apotropaic	3	3	0
Family crisis or bereavement	3	1	2
Plant reference	2	0	2
Religious/spiritual namesake	1	1	0
Kinship term	1	1	0
Social attitude	1	1	0
Total	51	31	20

Categories built around a descriptive circumstance remain almost entirely transparent: birth circumstance (10 of 11 transparent), physical attribute or manner of birth (5 of 5), protective/apotropaic naming (3 of 3), occupation or status (4 of 5), and the residual religious and kinship names. This is expected: such names are formed compositionally, at the moment of naming, from ordinary Bade vocabulary describing the triggering event, so their internal structure remains recoverable as long as the vocabulary items themselves survive in the language.

By contrast, categories built around a fixed social classification are overwhelmingly opaque. Only one of the eight twin-status names (12.5%) retains a literal meaning, and only three of the seven birth-order names (43%) do; the two plant-namesake names are both opaque. These are precisely the categories in which the name functions less as a description of an event and more as a label drawn from a closed, traditional taxonomy. This taxonomy is a fixed inventory of twin-names, order-names, and namesakes, which speakers acquire and use correctly without

needing to know, or being able to recover, what the label originally meant. It is plausible that these opaque names were themselves once transparent compounds that have since undergone semantic bleaching and phonological erosion through frequent, ritualised use, a pathway well attested for closed grammatical and classificatory paradigms cross-linguistically.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the structure and meaning of personal names among the Bade people of Yobe State. Fifty-one names were collected through interviews with eighteen respondents. These respondents were drawn from six villages in Bade and Jakusko Local Government Areas. The data were analysed using a combined morphosemantic and referential framework. The findings reveal five main word-formation processes in the corpus. These are prefixation, suffixation, compounding, reduplication, and borrowing from Hausa. However, about thirty-nine percent of the names could not be broken down into clear literal meanings. Informants themselves were unable to supply these meanings. Semantically, the names were classified into twelve categories. Most names reflected the circumstances of birth, twin status, or birth order. Smaller categories covered occupation, physical traits, nature, protection, bereavement, religion, kinship, and social attitudes. A key pattern emerged when the structural and semantic findings were compared. Names that are easy to break down into meaningful parts tend to describe specific birth events. Names that resist such breakdown tend to belong to fixed naming categories. This pattern is especially clear among twin names. Most twin names have lost their internal structure over time. From this, the paper concludes that Bade personal names function as cultural records. They are not arbitrary labels. The two theoretical approaches used in the paper are not in competition. Instead, they apply to different parts of the same naming system. One approach explains names still actively built from meaningful pieces. The other explains names that now survive simply as fixed labels. This distinction could usefully extend to other Chadic and West African naming systems.

Given these findings, the paper makes three recommendations. First, Bade traditional names should be documented urgently. This is particularly important for names already opaque to speakers. Such documentation could follow the model of existing Bade folktale documentation efforts. Second, community elders should continue passing on the circumstantial and cultural background of names. This should be done for younger generations. In this way, even names whose literal

meaning is lost can retain their remembered significance. Third, local government and cultural bodies in Bade and Jakusko should support the compilation of a fuller Bade anthroponymic dictionary. This dictionary should build on the corpus gathered in this paper. The paper also acknowledges its limitations. The sample size was relatively small. Broader research is therefore suggested. Such research should cover Western, Southern, and Gashua Bade. This would help test whether the identified patterns hold across the wider Bade-speaking area. Comparative work with related languages, such as Ngizim and Duwai, is also suggested. This would help distinguish features inherited within the language group from those specific to Bade. Finally, a follow-up sociolinguistic paper is recommended. This paper should track how traditional names are being displaced by Islamic and Western names over time.

References

- Abbas, N. I. (2018). Linguistic connotation and structure of Hausa personal names. *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria (JOLAN)*, 21(3), 167–174.
- Agyekum, K. (2006). The sociolinguistics of Akan personal names. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15(2), 206–235.
- Akinnaso, F. N. (1980). The sociolinguistic basis of Yoruba personal names. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 22(7), 275–304.
- Aronoff, M., & Fudeman, K. (2011). *What is morphology?* Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bedu, A. M., & Modu, M. A. (2024). Onomastic issues in Bade anthroponym. *Uniuyo Journal of Humanities (UUJH)*, 28(1), 1–9.
- Belonwu, O. N. (2025). Morphosemantics analysis of Ihembosi personal names. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Law, Education and Humanities (MJLEH)*, 2(2), 158–161.
- Greenberg, J. H. (1963) *The Languages of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gusau, S. M. (1992) *Kadaura Dan Sulaiman: Tarihin Rayuwar Umar Sulaiman, Sarkin Bade daga 1919 zuwa 1981*. Kaduna: FISBAS Media Services.

- Hough, C. (2017). Onomastics. In L. J. Brinton & A. Bergs (Eds.), *The history of English: Historical outlines from sound to text* (pp. 185–199). De Gruyter Mouton.
- Ilori, F., & Arẹ, O. (2021). A morpho-semantic study of Okun names: Implications for Okun linguistic identity. *UNILAG Journal of Humanities*, 9(2), 1–23.
- John, M. O. (2016). A morpho-semantic analysis of names in Agatu and Alago dialects of Idoma [Unpublished master's dissertation]. Nasarawa State University, Keffi.
- Kempson, R. M. (1977). *Semantic theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics* (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.
- Marjie-Okoyere, S. (2015). A linguistic survey of types of names among the Babukusu of Kenya. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: G Linguistics & Education*, 15(3), 35–42.
- Newman, P. (1977). “Chadic Classification and Reconstructions.” *Afroasiatic Linguistics* 5(1):1-42.
- Newman, P. (1990). Nominal and verbal plurality in Chadic. *African Languages and Linguistics*, 12. Foris.
- Newman, P. (2000) *The Hausa language: an encyclopedic reference grammar*. London: Yale University Press Ltd.
- Onumajuru, V. C. (2016). A semantic and pragmatic analysis of Igbo names. *An International Multi-disciplinary Journal (Ethiopia)*, 10(2), Serial No. 41, 307–324.
- Schuh, R. G. (1981). Using dialect geography to determine prehistory: A Chadic case study. *Sprache und Geschichte*, 3, 201–250.
- Shuaibu, I. (1991). The Bade verbal morphology [Unpublished final-year essay]. Department of Languages and Linguistics, University of Maiduguri.
- Tarbutu, M. M. (2004). *Bade–English–Hausa dictionary*. Yobe Language Project.

Appendix: List of Bade Names Corpus

S/N	Name	S/N	Name
1	Abdam/Abdambe	27	əmzam/awumzam
2	Adiga/Yabo	28	əvdagaaru
3	Ago/awo	29	Izgawarya
4	Aktavi	30	Jagduwa/sagduwa
5	Askiya	31	Jlambo
6	Ausaja	32	Jlaamutu
7	Aɗɗabziki	33	Jlaawi
8	Azam	34	Kabo
9	Azgua	35	Kabogzam
10	Bugzum	36	Kabulu/akabulu/sakabulu
11	Cakwa	37	Kaduwa
12	Dabuwa	38	Kaakazu/suware/ingabza
13	Daduwa	39	Kaaku
14	Dagdu	40	Kaalu/kaakuwa
15	Dajlu/Kabajlu	41	Karva
16	Dakwakuri	42	Kavayo
17	Dangwarambe	43	Kəntapo
18	Danka	44	Kobo
19	Deedee	45	Maada
20	Dəma	46	Makəci
21	Dəmza/Zaaci	47	Maska
22	Duna	48	Maskunan
23	Gagzu	49	Muzamzama
24	Gaaji	50	Naaru
25	Gaakiyo	51	Sabudu
26	əbzədako		