MORPHOLOGICAL AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS' NAMES IN SELECTED XITSONGA DRAMAS

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ABSTRACT

Character naming is a significant literary and linguistic practice through which authors construct identities, communicate themes, and reflect cultural values. Despite the growing body of research on naming practices in Xitsonga, previous studies have largely focused on sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and onomastic aspects of personal names, dog names, nicknames, and names in songs. Consequently, the morphological processes and semantic features of character names in Xitsonga literary works have remained largely unexplored. This study addresses this gap by analysing the morphological processes and semantic features employed in the formation of character names in Xitsonga literary texts. The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm and employed a qualitative descriptive research design. Data were collected through desktop research from purposively selected Xitsonga drama books and analysed using thematic analysis. The study was underpinned by an eclectic theoretical framework comprising Lexical Pragmatic Theory and Linguistic Theory. These theories provided a framework for examining how character names are formed, interpreted, and used to convey meaning within literary and cultural contexts.

The findings reveal that character names in Xitsonga literary texts are systematically constructed through diverse morphological processes, including affixation, compounding, reduplication, borrowing, and single-stem formations. Affixation emerged as the most dominant strategy, while compounding and reduplication demonstrated the creativity and expressive potential of Xitsonga morphology. Semantic analysis showed that character names convey themes of love, peace, hope, gratitude, morality, emotional disposition, power, memory, and lived experiences. The study further established that character names function as symbolic and communicative devices that reflect social values, cultural beliefs, identity, moral commentary, and thematic concerns within literary narratives. This study contributes to the fields of morphology, semantics, onomastics, and African literary studies by providing the first comprehensive analysis of character naming in Xitsonga literary texts. It enriches understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and literature, while preserving and promoting indigenous linguistic knowledge and cultural heritage.

Key Words: Morphology**;** Semantic; Characters; Naming; Literary works

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and Background of the Study

Just as literary works mirror human beings' real life issues using characters with names for identification and other purposes, it is imperative to know the morphological and semantic processes involved in naming characters in the literary works. The goal of this study is to analyse the morphology and semantics of character names in Xitsonga literary works. This research aims to provide insights into the linguistic patterns, etymology, and cultural connotations of character names to better understand the structure of the language, cultural values, and the innovative choices made by authors as name-givers in literary works. This Chapter comprises the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the aim of the study and the objectives of the study. It also includes research questions, the rationale, and the study's significance.

The scope delimitation, definitions of key terms used in the study, the layout of the study's chapters, and the conclusion are also included. The section also describes the background in which the issue addressed by this research study was identified and highlights the need for conducting the present research study. This section is important because it will help readers understand the rationale for the research and the significance of the findings, as well as set the stage for the rest of the research.

Xitsonga, also known as Tsonga or Xichangana, is a Bantu language spoken largely in Southern African countries, including Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland (Hlungwani, 2003). It is one of the twelve official languages of South Africa and has a rich history and cultural significance. It became an official language in South Africa following the 1994 collapse of the apartheid government. It also has various Xitsonga dialects, most of which are mutually intelligible but differ in significant ways. Xinkuna, Xigwamba, Xihlengwe, Xin'walungu, Xiluleke, Xihlave, Xihlanganu, Xidzonga, Xirhonga, Xitshwa, and Xichangana are among the Xitsonga dialects that were unified to create the standard language (Nkhwashu, 2010:16). The main

difference between these dialects is found in the geographical areas where they are spoken and the structures of their pronunciation.

Literary works in Xitsonga have a long history and a rich tradition. Folktales, oral traditions, and storytelling have long been important parts of Xitsonga culture, passing on knowledge, principles, and historical information from one generation to the next. However, it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that official documentation of Xitsonga literary works started to appear through the efforts of Swiss missionaries (Masunga, 1999). Nkhwashu (2010:16) posits that “all African languages in Southern Africa, including Xitsonga, owe their written forms to European missionaries who came to the region in the twentieth century with the main objective of converting the ‘benevolent souls’ of the Africans to Christianity.”

This implies that missionaries have undertaken numerous projects to help Xitsonga become a written language. These include creating holy texts, publishing books about language structure, compiling dictionaries and creating Xitsonga orthography (Bill & Masunga, 1983). They also worked to advance education by integrating subjects such as science, hygiene, and geography into the curricula of church schools (Masunga, 1999).

Following the missionary era, the growth of Xitsonga was left to the language speakers and the South African government. The Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) was founded in the new democratic South Africa to promote and foster the growth and use of all official languages (Fredericks, 2011). On the other hand, Xitsonga speakers themselves began to contribute to the development of their language by authoring a range of literary forms, including novels, short stories, drama, poetry, and grammar books. The cultural, social, and linguistic characteristics of the Xitsonga are reflected in these literary texts.

Naming practices in Xitsonga are highly significant and represent the Vatsonga people's cultural and linguistic history. Names are often carefully chosen because they symbolise a person's identity, genealogy, and ties to the community (Dhlamini et al., 2013). Chauke (2015: 303) posits that the meanings of names go beyond being simple

labels to reveal significant social, cultural, and political developments at the time of birth. Meanwhile, Penzura (2021), states that despite their similarity as creatures made from the same basic elements, namely blood and flesh, and sharing a similar design, humans differ in naming customs due to various beliefs. Based on these assertions above, it may be inferred that naming practices in communities are therefore inevitably as important as language itself (Mateos, 2014).

Recent studies on naming practices in Xitsonga have been conducted in several ways. Baloyi (2014), Chauke (2015), Mushwana and Chauke (2015), Babane (2016), Chauke (2016), Babane and Chauke (2017), Makgopa and Rugwiji (2021), Mathye, Mandende, and Mabaso-Nkuna (2022), Chauke, Memory and Motlhaka (2022), and Chauke (2022) are a few of the studies. None of these studies has attempted to analyse the morphology and semantics aspects of Xitsonga in literary works.

These studies mostly emphasised sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and onomastic analyses of naming practices centred on personal names, dog names, the naming of "characters" in songs, nicknaming of some soccer players, naming related to culture, and naming linked with religion.

This demonstrates the gap that exists in Xitsonga's study of the morphological and semantic components of naming patterns. Meanwhile, scholars and researchers such as Mojapelo (2009), Kibet (2011), Barnabas and Peter (2013), Anindo (2016), Kinyua (2020), and Tahat (2020) have investigated the morphology and semantics of various naming practices, including proper names, nicknames, place names, and personal names, in their respective languages, which includes Northern Sotho, Kipsigis, Kamue, Lulogooli, Turkana and Arabic language respectively. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct a thorough morphological and semantic analysis of naming patterns in general, and of character naming in Xitsonga literary works.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Xitsonga literary works, like literature in many other languages worldwide, feature character names as part of their structure. Allagbé (2016) defined character naming as the process by which a writer assigns names or labels to characters in a literary

work, which often serves a particular function. Mathye et al., (2022) concur with Allagbé (2016) that the use of character naming in literary works is important in the development of the themes that the author intends to emphasise in the story. This highlights the idea that readers use character names to infer themes when those themes are not explicitly presented in the story.

It is also hypothesised that a character's naming had morphological and semantic components that authors utilised in their development. These components are extremely important cultural heritage and for linguistic and literary analysis. In support, Gerba (2014) states that naming is a subset of a language's vocabulary that follows phonological, morphological, syntactic, orthographic, and semantic norms. The statement of the problem in this study is informed by the lack of studies examining the morphological processes and semantic features of character names in Xitsonga literary works.

The absence of extensive research in this area impedes a greater knowledge and enjoyment of Xitsonga literature. The full potential of Xitsonga literary works remains unexplored without a systematic analysis of the morphology processes that govern the formation and construction of character names, as well as the semantic features that cover the core meanings and cultural connotations of these names.

The scarcity of research in this field also limits prospects for comparative studies with other literary traditions, hampered by limited knowledge and cross-cultural engagement. Therefore, there is an urgent need to conduct comprehensive research into the morphological processes and semantic features of characters' names in Xitsonga literary works.

1.3 Main aim of the study

The primary aim of the study is to analyse the morphological processes and the semantic features of characters' names in selected Xitsonga literary works.

1.4 Objective of the study

The following objectives were realised by the study:

- To identify and describe morphological processes that are used in the formation of character names in Xitsonga literary works.

- To determine the semantic features that are used in the formation of character names in Xitsonga literary works.

- To find out the social and cultural significance of the meanings expressed in the formation of character names in Xitsonga literary works.

1.5 Research questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the morphological processes that are used in the formation of character names in Xitsonga literary works?

- What are the semantic features that are used in the formation of character names in Xitsonga literary works?

- What is the social and cultural significance of meanings expressed in the formation of character names in Xitsonga literary works?

1.6 Rationale and significance of the study

The study of the morphological processes and the semantical features of character naming in Xitsonga literary works is significant for several reasons. The study's findings will contribute to the body of knowledge in onomastics and general linguistics, particularly in an area that has yet to be explored in Xitsonga. Xitsonga literary works are an important source of cultural legacy that represent Vatsonga traditions, beliefs, and values. This work adds to the preservation and understanding of Xitsonga cultural

identity by examining the morphology and semantics of character names. It also facilitates the identification of the historical, social, and cultural backgrounds of the names employed in Xitsonga literary works.

This study provides insights into the linguistic structures and patterns of the Xitsonga language by examining the morphological processes of character names. It clarified the morphological principles and procedures unique to Xitsonga, offering light on the formation and development of names within the language. The study's findings are especially important, as they can be incorporated into educational curricula and teaching materials to encourage the study of Xitsonga literature and language.

Understanding the morphology and meanings of character names improves learners' language ability and cultural awareness. In addition, by understanding how names create meaning, readers can gain a deeper appreciation for the artistry of Xitsonga authors.

Furthermore, the research may serve as a resource for Xitsonga literary authors, translators, and researchers, supporting their creative and scholarly work. The research findings will also serve as a starting point for comparisons with other African or international literary works. Character names in Xitsonga literary works may be compared to names in other languages and cultures to identify similarities, differences, and potential influences. Such cross-cultural comparison studies provide a greater understanding of literary works and advance the study of comparative literature.

1.7 Scope of the study

The main concern of the study was to describe and analyse the morphological processes and semantic features involved in the formation of character names; however, it may not include other disciplines of linguistics, such as syntax, phonetics, and phonology. Due to the vastness of Xitsonga's literary works, the study concentrated on the names of characters that were extracted from Xitsonga drama books for analysis, and character names found in other genres, such as poetry, prose, folklore and short stories, were not considered. The drama books were chosen based on their availability, accessibility, and relevance to the study objectives.

The researcher will also not draw comparisons between character names in Xitsonga literary works with those of other languages. It is also critical to recognise some of the study's limitations. The study is restricted to currently available Xitsonga literary works, and the researcher's understanding and viewpoints may influence how character names are interpreted morphologically and semantically. Lastly, due to the scope of the subject, the study may not cover all facets of morphological processes and the semantic aspects of character names.

1.8 Definition of terms

This section focuses on identifying and defining the key terms and concepts inherent to the present study. The terms are explained as used in the study. The views of other researchers backed up the definitions of each term. The terms are as follows: morphology**,** semantics, characters, naming and literary works.

1.8.1 Morphology

Morphology is a field of linguistics concerned with the formation of words in a language. In support, Lieber (2009:2) defined morphology as a “study of word formation including the ways new words are coined in the languages of the world and the ways a form of words is varied depending on how they are used in sentences”. On the other hand, Kusumawardhani (2018) described morphology as a study of morphemes, which are the smallest meaningful lexical units of meaning or grammatical function to which a word may be simplified.

Morphemes are categorised into two forms: free morphemes and bound morphemes. Free morphemes are words that can stand on their own, whereas bound morphemes are morphemes that cannot function alone as a word; they require another word to stand alone as a word (Vaherni, 2021).

Words can be created through morphological processes that exist in a language. In a language, different morphological processes transform a morpheme into a word. Coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, bank formation, conversion, acronyms, affixation, reduplication, and derivation are among morphological

processes that may be employed to produce new complex words in a language (Yule, 2006). These morphological processes serve several functions. Some arise to change the meaning and/or lexical category of words, while others demonstrate grammatical relations between words, others combine free or bound morphemes, and yet others produce new complex words by adopting from other languages.

Based on the information presented above, we can conclude that morphology is a linguistic discipline that studies words, their internal structure, and their combination or formation to create new complex words in a language. This study investigated character names in Xitsonga literary works to highlight the morphological processes employed in naming them.

1.8.2 Semantics

Semantics is a field of linguistics that focuses on the meaning of words. While Griffiths (2006:21-22) described semantics as a “study of context-independent knowledge that users of a language have of word and sentence meaning. The meanings of constructions are compositionally assembled out of the meanings of smaller units, and what comes into the scope of which operations can influence the meaning of a construction”. Fromkin and Rodman (2003:593) support Griffiths by stating that “semantics is the study of the linguistic meaning of morphemes, words, phrases, and sentences”. These definitions lead us to conclude that semantics focuses on how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning and how individuals interpret that meaning.

Semantic is divided into two subfields: lexical semantics and phrasal or sentential semantics. Novitri (2021:22) stated that “lexical semantics is a way of identifying how the meaning of lexical units correlates with the structure of language’’. Contrarily, phrasal or sentential semantics is the study of the meaning of whole sentences or syntactic structures that go beyond a single word (Fromkin, Rodman, Hyams, Amberber, Cox, & Thornton, 2017). In other words, lexical semantics deals with the meaning of words and phrases, while sentential semantics deals with the meaning of sentences. In this study, the analysis was on the lexical semantics of the meaning attached to character names.

1.8.3 Naming

Naming is a vital aspect of our culture, as it identifies individuals, places, and things and satisfies the urge for distinctive identity (Anindo, 2016). Language speakers identify the entities they refer to in their immediate surroundings, whether actual or fictional, through naming (Letsoela, 2015). Machaba (2004: vii) affirmed that “naming is a very important tool used among various African cultures to convey certain messages, either to an individual, family members or a community”. Agyekum (2001:211) asserted that:

> naming can be considered as a universal cultural practice; every human society in the world gives names to its newborns as tags, mainly as a means of identification, but how the names are given, the practices and rituals involved, and the interpretations attached to the names differ from society to society and from one culture to another.

Naming, as an act of giving a name to someone or something, has been centred on people's names, place names, names of domestic animals, names of literary characters, and so on. In this study, the focus is on character names in Xitsonga literary works to determine the morphological and semantic features applied during naming. Character names, according to Wamitila (1999), are utilised artistically to achieve a variety of aims, such as embedding a major attribute in a character's meaning, embracing essential thematic elements, shaping an ideological tone, and even displaying the writer's point of view. This emphasises that authors utilise a certain naming approach to attain their goal, which may involve linguistic characteristics which were investigated in this study.

1.8.4 Characters

Childs and Fowler (2006:23) defined characters as a “fictional representation of a person, which is likely to change, both as a presence in literature and as an object of critical attention, much as it changes in society.” On the other hand, Saraswati (2019) described characters as people depicted in dramatic or storytelling work who are perceived by the reader as having specific ethical, mental, and psychological qualities

based on assumptions drawn from what the individuals declare and their instinctive ways of saying it (the dialogue) and what they do (the action).

Based on the definitions above, characters are fictional individuals who drive the story and engage viewers or readers through their characteristics, actions, and dialogue. Characters are represented in literary genres such as novels, drama, poetry, or short stories and a story may include one or more characters. This primarily implies that characters in a piece of fiction are seen as representations of human beings, and they may be sophisticated and understanding individuals with diverse personalities, objectives, and interactions.

1.8.5 Literary works

Fananie (2001) defines literary work as a work of fiction that, which arise from unexpected feelings and demonstrates strong beauty elements through language and semantic aspects. Similarly, Sumarni (2014) asserts that, when we talk about literary works, we tend to think of them as expressing messages through language. Literature is an art that links to the emotional component of humans. This emphasises the idea that literary works are examples of real life transformed into art that can be seen, heard, and read.

Purbo et al. (2021) argue that literary works are among the most distinctive ways to communicate these feelings, as they are commonly used to convey human emotion through language. Sumampouw (2021) further points out that literary works are highly useful in life because they can educate readers about the realities of life, even when presented as fiction, as well as bring them joy and happiness. Depending on the structure and messages the authors are trying to convey, literary works can take many forms, such as novels, short stories, plays, poetry, and prose. In this study, character names from drama, a literary genre, were extracted and analysed morphologically and semantically.

1.9 Chapter breakdown

This study has been systematically structured into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 introduced the study. It comprises the background of the study, a statement of the specific problem under investigation, the main aim, and the objectives of the study. It also presents the research questions investigated, the rationale, and the study's significance. In addition, it also consists of the scope (delimitation), the definition of terms, the organisation of the study and the conclusion.

Chapter 2 discusses the literature review. It reviewed the available literature directly related to the current study to place this research within the context of similar studies and provide justification for it.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology used in the study. It first describes the research approach, research design, and research paradigm of the study. This is followed by the description of the population and sampling method. It also provides the data collection method, data analysis procedure, quality criteria, and ethical considerations. It also consists of a theoretical framework.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the examination of the findings and discussion of morphological components and semantic components structure in character naming in Xitsonga literary works based on the data obtained.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the previous chapters. Based on these findings, the study concludes the morphological and semantic analyses of character names in Xitsonga literary works and offers recommendations for future research.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the investigation into morphological and semantic analysis of character names in Xitsonga literary works. The presentation began with background information on the subject. The problem statement, main aim and study objectives were then described in the chapter. The chapter also included information

on the research questions, the study's significance and scope. The chapter goes on to define key words and provide information on how the dissertation is organised.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section provides a review of relevant literature to the current study. According to Arshed & Danson (2015), a literature review enables understanding the current state of a field, relating it to ongoing research, and identifying gaps in knowledge. Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic (2015) describe Literature review as a crucial consideration as well as an assessment that usually contains a summary, clarification, and an evaluation of previous studies, difficulties or obstacles in current research, and recognises or sets up new research challenges and stimulating research topics. This can include using available data to achieve goals and to express viewpoints.

Mabasa (2009) asserts that when conducting a literature review, the researcher investigates what other authors have to say about the topic they have chosen, as this helps them better understand it.

According to Mudavanhu (2017:191), literature reviews document and analyse information published on a topic over time using a combination of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. In other words, a literature review serves as a basis for expanding on existing knowledge and developing research in a particular area. Therefore, a literature review is crucial to research as it helps in understanding the body of knowledge already known to avoid duplication, identifying research methodologies, assessing previous research and generating new research ideas. This chapter explores and analyses the viewpoints of other scholars on naming practices.

The chapter commences with a review of significant research on naming practices in Xitsonga as a whole. The review of relevant literature on the morphological and semantic analysis of name patterns undertaken by researchers across different languages follows. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the information reviewed.

2.2 Naming as a carrier of cultural, social and experiential meaning

The literature suggests that African names are deeply rooted in the social, cultural, and experiential contexts of the communities where they are employed. The Xitsonga investigations by Mushwana and Chauke (2015), Chauke, Memory and Motlhaka (2022), and Babane (2017) provide complementary viewpoints on this relationship. According to Mushwana and Chauke (2015), the names of characters in Thomas Hasani Chauke's songs are carefully chosen to reflect their behaviour, circumstances, and characteristics.

Similarly, Chauke et al. (2022) found that Vatsonga naming practices are influenced by cultural and religious factors, including birth events, maternal behaviour, family circumstances, and religious beliefs. Babane (2017) research on grief naming supports the idea that names can help preserve and transmit memories of loss, difficulty, and family history.

As a result, these studies all agree that names are more than just labels. They serve as condensed manifestations of social experience. They take distinct approaches to this notion, though. While Babane concentrates on the emotive and commemorative role of names, Chauke et al. (2022) concentrate on community naming customs, and Mushwana and Chauke (2015) concentrate especially on names as tools for character depiction in music. When considered collectively, the research indicates that a name's meaning is best understood in relation to the context in which it is given and utilised.

Beyond Xitsonga, the same pattern is also visible. According to Matfunjwa (2022), Siswati personal names function as context-dependent speech acts that name-givers use to convey instructions, requests, intents, and other social meanings. In a similar vein, Alphonce (2023) shows how Iraqi personal names include information about history, politics, society, and the environment.

Mahwasane and Tshifaro (2019) also demonstrate how Tshivenḓa names convey cultural, social, political, and environmental traits. These results support the claim that African naming customs are not random acts of identification but rather are ingrained in social knowledge systems.

2.3 Naming, communication and identity

A second theme is about the communicative and identity-forming functions of names. Babane and Chauke (2017), Babane and Chauke (2015), Chauke (2022), and studies on naming outside Xitsonga show that names can convey meanings that are not explicitly articulated. Babane and Chauke (2015) study on dog names reveals that certain names are symbolic of people rather than animals. Names like Vadyamina and Hangalakani provide an indirect way to vent frustrations and interpersonal difficulties. Naming can be a culturally acceptable way to convey sensitive messages.

A related communicative function occurs in nicknaming. Babane and Chauke (2015) demonstrate that soccer nicknames may be motivated by behaviour, playing style, physical characteristics, commitment, music and other social associations. Chauke (2022), examining self-given Xitsonga nicknames, similarly finds that individuals may use names to praise themselves, represent personal experiences or construct a particular social identity. The convergence between these studies is important: whether a name is bestowed by others or selected by the bearer, naming can participate in the construction and negotiation of identity.

The identity dimension is also strongly visible in studies of geographical and institutional names. Jenjekwa (2018), Meiring (2012), Machaba (2004), and Mabunda (2012) show that place and institutional names can encode collective memory, political change, cultural heritage and social power. Jenjekwa (2018) demonstrates how post-colonial renaming in Zimbabwe was connected to reclaiming African identity and distancing communities from colonial histories.

Meiring (2012) similarly interprets South African geographical names as reflections of the country's layered linguistic, cultural and political history, while Machaba (2004) links post-apartheid naming to identity formation and the African Renaissance. Mabunda's study of school names adds a local Xitsonga-related perspective by showing how names may reproduce histories of leadership, family, patriarchy, religion and community experience.

Viewed together, these studies demonstrate that naming is both communicative and ideological. Names can express individual experiences, interpersonal relationships and collective identities. Nevertheless, most of these studies concentrate on the social, cultural or pragmatic significance of names rather than providing a detailed account of the internal linguistic structure through which those meanings are produced.

2.4 Morphological and semantic structure of names

The third major theme is the relationship between morphological structure and semantic interpretation. This is particularly relevant to the current study because the literature indicates that names often derive their meanings from identifiable linguistic components and word-formation processes. Mojapelo (2009), Kinyua (2020), Anindo (2016), Barnabas and Peter (2013), Kabaso (2016), Mandende (2009), Owu-Ewie and Obeng (2021), Tahat (2020), and Kibet (2011) collectively demonstrate that personal names, nicknames and place names can exhibit systematic morphological patterns.

Mojapelo (2009) establishes that Northern Sotho proper names can display morphological distinctions involving stems and prefixes and that these components can contribute to meaning. Kinyua (2020) extends the morpho-semantic perspective to Turkana personal names, identifying processes such as derivation, inflection, blending and compounding and showing how morphological structure interacts with semantic and pragmatic interpretation.

Anindo (2016) similarly identifies derivation, inflection, blending and compounding in Lulogooli place names and argues that the meanings of names can be understood partly through their morphological components. These studies collectively support the principle that the analysis of names should consider both their formal construction and their contextual meaning.

The same relationship is evident in the studies of Kamue, Ng'umbo and Tshivenḓa. Barnabas and Peter (2013) show that Kamue personal names may be formed through noun-based and verb-based compounds and that their structural elements contribute to the interpretation of names associated with birth order, twins and circumstances. Kabaso (2016) identifies structures such as prefix plus stem and prefix plus root plus extension in Ng'umbo nicknames, demonstrating that prefixes, suffixes and extensions can modify meaning.

Mandende (2009) provides a particularly relevant comparison for the present study by showing that Tshivenḓa personal names are constructed from several word categories and morphemes, and that their morphological organisation is closely connected to the circumstances in which names are given.

Owu-Ewie and Obeng (2021) broaden the comparison to Akan, identifying single stems, affixation, reduplication and compounding, as well as syntactic structures ranging from simple forms to complex constructions.

Tahat (2020) identifies derivation, compounding, diminutivisation, reduplication and inflection in Jordanian personal names. Kibet (2011), working with Kipsigis toponyms, likewise identifies systematic processes such as affixation, compounding and conversion and shows that literal and metaphorical meanings coexist. Although these languages differ from Xitsonga, the convergence of their findings demonstrates that names can be analysed as linguistically structured forms rather than simply as culturally significant labels.

2.5 Character names in literary works

A particularly important sub-theme for the present research is the use of names in literary characterisation. Mushwana and Chauke (2015) demonstrate that character names in songs can be deliberately selected to correspond with characters' behaviour and roles. More directly, Mathye, Mandende and Mabaso-Nkuna (2022) examine naming techniques in two Xitsonga novels and show that character names contribute to character depiction and the development of themes. Their examples, including Tlhomandloti and Phosakufa, demonstrate how names may be connected to character status, experiences and thematic development.

The importance of this finding becomes clearer when compared with the broader morpho-semantic literature. Studies such as Mojapelo (2009), Kinyua (2020), Anindo (2016), Kabaso (2016), and Mandende (2009) demonstrate how the internal structure of names can contribute to their meanings, while Mathye et al. (2022) demonstrates how those meanings operate within literary narratives. Thus, the two bodies of literature complement one another: the morpho-semantic studies explain how meaning can be encoded in the form of a name, while literary studies demonstrate how that meaning contributes to characterisation and themes.

However, the literature also reveals a clear limitation. Mathye et al. (2022) acknowledge the semantic significance of character names in Xitsonga novels but do not provide an extensive morphological and semantic analysis of the names. Similarly, Mushwana and Chauke (2015) establish the deliberate relationship between character

names and character traits in songs but do not provide the same systematic morphological analysis. The current study responds to this limitation by bringing morphological segmentation and semantic interpretation together in the analysis of character names in selected Xitsonga dramas.

2.6 Comparative synthesis and research gap

The literature reviewed above reveals several areas of convergence. First, researchers across Xitsonga and other African languages consistently demonstrate that names are meaningful and culturally situated. Second, names function as communicative resources through which individuals and communities express experiences, relationships, emotions and identities. Third, a substantial body of linguistic research demonstrates that names have identifiable morphological structures and that their semantic interpretation can be related to those structures. Finally, literary studies show that character names can contribute directly to characterisation and thematic development.

Despite these convergences, the literature is unevenly distributed across the different dimensions of naming. Xitsonga research has produced valuable studies of cultural naming, dog names, nicknames, grief names, songs and literary naming. Other African-language studies provide stronger examples of detailed morphological and morpho-semantic analysis. The gap therefore lies not in the absence of research on Xitsonga naming as such, but in the limited integration of morphological analysis, semantic interpretation and literary characterisation within a single study of Xitsonga character names.

The current study addresses this gap by examining the morphological and semantic properties of character names in selected Xitsonga dramas. In doing so, it builds on the cultural and literary insights of previous Xitsonga scholarship while drawing methodological and analytical support from morpho-semantic studies in other African languages. The contribution of the study is consequently not simply to identify what Xitsonga character names mean, but to explain how their morphological construction interacts with their meanings and with the characterisation and thematic functions they perform in dramatic texts.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature demonstrates that naming is a multidimensional practice involving language, culture, communication, identity and literary representation. Previous Xitsonga studies establish the cultural and communicative importance of names, while studies in other African languages provide useful models for examining morphological structure and semantic interpretation. Literary research further indicates that names can contribute to the representation of characters and themes.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed some related works with respect to local and worldwide naming practices. It summarised and assessed the research conducted by other researchers on the subject at hand. Finding procedures like those that would be utilised in this chapter in previous research was helpful to the researcher. This chapter presents the research methodology and theoretical framework. It provides an overview of the study's methodological framework and research methods, including the research paradigm, design, and method. It also focuses on the study's population and the data sampling process.

The chapter goes into further detail on data collection and analysis. The quality standards are also discussed. The discussion of the theoretical frameworks supporting this investigation is also included in this chapter. The conclusion, which summarises all the issues mentioned above, will bring the chapter to a close.

3.2 Research paradigm

The word paradigm originates from the Greek word *paradeigma*, and it means pattern or model. Kuhn (1962) defines research paradigms as ‘the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed. This is supported by Dick (2019:39), who explains paradigm as a “framework for observation and understanding which shapes both what we see and how we understand it”.

Schwandt (2001), on the other hand, describes a research paradigm as a common viewpoint that characterises a discipline's ideas and values and directs how issues are resolved. This implies that the theories and practices of a research project function from the set of beliefs and understanding given by the research paradigm. They provide ways of looking at life and are grounded in sets of assumptions about the nature of reality.

There are four elements of a paradigm considered in a research project: ontology, methodology, epistemology, and axiology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemology is the study of knowledge and how it is acquired, whilst ontology focuses on the nature of reality (Kant, 2014). The design, techniques, approaches, and processes utilised in research are referred to as methodology. The ethical problem that must be considered while planning research is axiology. Therefore, a paradigm is a set of ideas and practices that directs study. It may be compared to the lens through which a researcher views the outside world. In other words, it helps the researcher concentrate and set goals; more specifically, it places the researcher on their technical objectives, ensuring they are met in the eventuality.

The three research paradigms of constructivism, positivism, and pragmatism should all be represented in a study. Due to the use of qualitative research methodologies that offer a variety of viewpoints, this study fits the interpretivism research paradigm approach well, because it allows the researcher to interpret the morphological structures and semantic meanings that are used in naming characters in the selected Xitsonga literary texts. The paradigm is relevant to this study because it literary texts as culturally and socially significant structures.

The interpretivism paradigm's main goal is to comprehend the subjective domain of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To maintain the study's coherence, interpretivists contend that its conclusion should be supported by qualitative evidence. It seeks to address "why"-related queries. In this study, it is useful to comprehend the morphological and semantic aspects of character names in Xitsonga literary works.

3.3 Research Design

Research design is the strategy used by the researcher to include different parts of the study in an understandable way. It helps the researcher ensure that different components of the research, such as the research problem and research questions, are addressed. Research design is a conceptual structure within which research is conducted; it constitutes the blueprint for data collection and analysis.

According to Nieuwenhuis (2016:72), “research design is a plan or strategy that moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to specifying the selection of participants, the data gathering methods to be used, and the data analysis to be done. This definition of research design is also supported by Chalakkal’s (2021) argument:

> *… is a blueprint or detailed plan of how a research study is to be completed - operationalising variables so they can be measured, selecting a sample of interest to study, collecting data to be used as a basis for testing hypotheses, and analysing the results.*

Accordingly, a study design is a strategy that details how the necessary data were gathered and analysed. Consequently, a research design is a tactical framework for action that connects the research questions to their execution or application. Research design thus provides a framework for how the study will be conducted. According to Akhtar (2016), there are several research designs, including narrative, case study, grounded theory, descriptive, exploratory, and phenomenology. In this study, the descriptive research design was used.

The descriptive research design, in the opinion of Bless et al., (2009:47), helps the researcher in gaining a comprehensive grasp of a circumstance, phenomenon, community, or individual. Maboa (2022:33), on the other hand, posits that descriptive research design “permits the researcher to analyse data to provide adequate findings and conclusions from the research which will allow for the advancement of recommendations or implications based on the study’’. This design worked successfully for this study, as it helped the researcher gather and analyse character names, focusing on their meaning and form.

3.4 Research method

According to Creswell (2014), a research method may be defined as the plans and procedures for the study that outline the processes from general and underlying assumptions to specific techniques of data collection, analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, Creswell (2014) noted that there are three research methodologies: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Creswell (2014) defined qualitative

research as a method for studying and understanding the meaning individuals or communities assign to a social or human situation. This is supported by Kembo & Tromp (2006: 9), “is a form of research that includes description since it aims to describe and analyse human culture and behaviour from the perspective of the groups being investigated.” It is used to make sense of non-numerical data and comprehend people's attitudes, behaviours, interactions, and worldviews in research.

On the other hand, the quantitative method is described by Gravetter & Forzano (2012) as a method in which factors are measured for each participant to provide scores, which are typically numerical values that are then subjected to statistical analysis for summarisation and interpretation. This method is based on numerical data and reproducible, objective methodologies that may be used by other researchers. Meanwhile, a mixed-methods approach combines quantitative and qualitative research methodologies within a single study (Selolo, 2018). It allows researchers to capture the richness and depth of qualitative data while also providing the statistical rigour and generalisability of quantitative data.

The qualitative research approach was used for this study. This is mostly because the fundamental objective of the qualitative research technique is to describe the situation and communicate its relevance and views. This approach was chosen because it allows for a wide range of data interpretations. Pajo (2018), on the other hand, added that the qualitative research approach frequently focuses on how members of a particular group understand their subjective experiences and that it largely relies on descriptive language to communicate its main findings. Additionally, according to Creswell (2014:233), qualitative research exhibits the following characteristics:

- The researcher is a key instrument. This means the qualitative researcher gathers the information.
- Multiple sources of data. Qualitative researchers gather multiple forms of data through interviews, observations and documents, rather than relying on a single data source.

- Inductive data source. Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories and themes by organising the data into increasingly more abstract units of knowledge.
- Participants' meaning. In the entire qualitative research process, the researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researcher or writers from literature bring to the research.
- Emergent design. The researcher's initial research plan cannot be tightly prescribed. All phases of the process may change after the researcher has entered the field and begun collecting data.
- Theoretical lens. Qualitative researchers often use a lens to view their studies.
- Interpretive enquiry. Qualitative research is a form of enquiry in which researchers interpret what they see, hear and understand.
- Holistic account. Qualitative researchers aim to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under discussion, leading to the reporting of multiple perspectives, the identification of the many factors involved in a situation, and the sketching of the larger picture that emerges.

The qualitative research method fits this study perfectly, as the researcher will collect information that will be used in the study. In this study, the researcher is essential in ensuring that relevant information is gathered and that character names remain central to the investigation.

3.5 Population

Bless et al. (2009) assert that a population is a group of individuals or inhabitants that a researcher focuses on to identify some common characteristics. On the other hand, Punch (1998:) indicates that a population is essentially a large group of interest to the researcher, from which the researcher should draw a sample to learn more about the larger group. In other terms, a population is the total collection of things, groups of people, or any other set of phenomena used to gather new knowledge and information. In this study, the population consisted of character names that were extracted from Xitsonga drama books.

3.6 Sampling

Sampling refers to a process used to choose the respondents or participants who will provide the data required to address the research questions. Neuman (2000) explains that sampling involves selecting a subsection of a population that represents the entire population to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest. In support of this view, Trachoma (2006) defines sampling as the process of selecting units from a population of interest to generalise the findings back to the population from which they were selected by examining the sample.

Punch (2003) agrees with Trachoma (2006) and Neuman (2000) that sampling is a technical term in research denoting the collection of small amounts of material from a larger group, usually the population. This implies that the sample chosen must accurately reflect the population, as the study's findings are often projected to the entire population. The benefit of choosing a sample is that it is less expensive and time-consuming than gathering data from many respondents.

There are several sampling techniques that may be categorised as either probability-based or non-probability-based according to Etikan & Bala (2017). Kasinja (2009) defines probability sampling technique as a process of picking respondents into the study, ensuring that every person or element of the population has an equal chance of being picked into the study, preventing subjectivity and prejudice, and allowing the results to be generalised to the target population. In other words, probability sampling prevents the researcher from deliberately excluding any segment of the population, as each unit has an equal chance of being selected.

The fundamental sampling techniques for probability include simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, systematic random sampling, cluster sampling, and multi-stage systematic sampling. On the other hand, Etikan & Bala (2017) describe non-probability sampling as a sampling method that does not provide a foundation for any judgment regarding the likelihood that any universe-wide element will have a chance of being included in the research sample.

Compared with probability sampling, non-probability sampling is considered less costly, simpler to use, and easier to implement. Convenience sampling, purposeful sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling are a few non-probability sampling

techniques. In this study, non-probability sampling in the form of a purposive sampling method was adopted, and purposeful sampling was implemented.

Creswell and Cheryl (2013:271) assert that “using a method known as purposeful sampling, a researcher chooses the components of the study while keeping in mind the major phenomena under investigation and the research challenge.” Using a purposive sampling technique, the researcher randomly selected character names from Xitsonga literary works.

The researcher collected data from the following Xitsonga drama books: ***Mavondzo a ya Hakeri*** (1981) by Rikhotso, ***Nyuku wa Mbyana*** by Mabuza (1996). ***Matlhari Hansi*** (1998) by Magagane, ***Mahlo ma Nkwahle*** (1999) by Chauke, ***Byi le tintihweni*** (2005) by Lubisi, ***Xivoni xa Vutomi*** (2008) by Shabangu, ***Ndlandlalati ya Malenga*** by Mahatlane (1993), ***Vukosi i Mberha*** (2008) by Ndlovu, ***Ndzi ta fa ndzi dyile*** by Ngobeni and Malungana (2005) and ***Vadyondzi va namuntlha*** (2015) by Makhubele. The researcher gathered 100 characters names from these books and then analysed them to answer the research questions.

3.6 Data collection

The process of collecting data entails gathering information from all pertinent sources to identify solutions to the study problems. According to Mahlo (2006), data collection is the process by which researchers gather information to analyse it, answer their research questions, and draw conclusions and make suggestions based on their results.

Meanwhile, Paradis et al., (2016) affirm that data collecting techniques are crucial because they affect the methodology and analytical strategy utilised by the researcher, which in turn affects how the information is used and what explanations it might produce. This indicates that gathering data is a difficult activity that requires careful preparation, dedication, perseverance, and more to complete the task properly.

There are two categories of data-gathering techniques: primary and secondary. Primary data is information gathered from first-hand experience that has not yet been

published and is more trustworthy, authentic, and objective than secondary data, which refers to information gathered from a source that has already been published in any format and was gathered by someone else for a different reason (Kabir, 2016).

In other words, whereas secondary data offers efficiency, broader perspectives, and historical insights, primary data is valued for its originality, accuracy, and control. The choice between primary and secondary data depends on the study's specific needs, accessible resources, and the study's goals.

The study adopted a desktop methodology as an approach of data collection. According to Cohen & Manion (1989:307), this method entails the gathering of data from secondary sources such as articles, newspapers, grammar books, academic books, magazines, the internet and dissertations. Similarly, Ntoiti & Jagongo (2021:29) state that “desktop research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources, hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in the executive’s time, telephone charges and directories”.

It implies that the desktop research approach offers various benefits, such as cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, access to a wide range of up-to-date information, and the ability to conduct retrospective investigations.

3.8 Data analysis

Data analysis can be seen as a way of organising the obtained data. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), data analysis is a process that involves careful reflection and the grouping or clustering of information into specific categories and themes. In accordance with Flick (2014), data analysis entails categorising and interpreting verbal or visual content to draw conclusions regarding the implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of subjective or social meanings.

Meanwhile, Kubayi (2013:113) asserts that “in the process of analysing the data, the researcher is simultaneously interpreting them because he engages in the active process of simultaneously noting significant data and ignoring insignificant data”. In other words, to interpret vast volumes of acquired data, data analysis condenses them into a manageable amount. The five categories of data analysis recognised by

Liamputtong (2009) are content analysis, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis and semiotic analysis. These categories influence the analysis process in various ways depending on the types of data gathered.

This study used thematic analysis to analyse data gathered using the desktop method. Thematic analysis is regarded as a core approach in qualitative research because it enables the identification, analysis, organisation, description, and reporting of themes from collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this way, the researcher was able to analyse the names of characters from Xitsonga drama books to the themes that were determined from the data that was gathered.

3.9 Trustworthiness

According to Polit and Beck (2014), the degree of trustworthiness or rigor of a study is based on the level of confidence in the data, interpretation, and procedures employed to assure the calibre of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) revealed that the credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of the study's findings are used to assess their quality and trustworthiness. The researcher has provided detailed explanations of how each criterion was used throughout the study to increase confidence in the study's quality.

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility is the confidence that one can have regarding the truth value of what has been found in a research study. Polit & Beck (2008) define credibility as the truthfulness of the data and analysis thereof, and thus the ability to believe the findings and their interpretation. The researcher triangulated data using multiple data sources and available literature sources to arrive at credible data and inferences in this study. The researcher conducted the study by collecting and analysing morphosemantic features of character names from Xitsonga literary works.

To ensure the triangulation of data sources, notes were taken. Triangulation ensured that there is an in-depth analysis of multiple data sources. This warrants that the study is credible. An expert independent co-coder was involved in analysing the transcripts

to enhance the credibility of the findings. To document the context, environment and communication, a reflective diary and notes were kept. Member checks, such as probing and paraphrasing for confirming and reflecting the understanding, meaning and any uncertainties where appropriate, were used. A thick description of the context, and contents were provided to validate inferences that would be made.

3.9.2 Dependability

Dependability is how accurate and replicable the method used in the study is. According to Bitsch (2005), Dependability refers to the durability of results over time and entails reviewing the findings, interpreting them, and approving the study to ensure that all the data used support the conclusions. Dependability relates to credibility and underscores the truth value of the data as provided.

This study depended on the outlined processes to ensure it is conducted following the proposed method of data collection and analysis, interpretation of the findings, and reporting of the results of the study. The researcher also described the study setting and sampling process. The supervisor will check if the study is dependable. Research documents, such as transcripts and observation notes, will be kept safe for verification that the content is acceptable and reliable, and to attest that there is data to support the findings. The logic used for sampling and events to be observed, written documents, and the conclusion of the study will be presented.

3.9.3 Confirmability

The collected data in this study were utilised, and the findings of the study will be made available to the public to ensure that there is confirmability. Confirmability refers to the quality of the study's results, specifically how well they are supported by the participants involved in the study. Creswell (2003) argues that confirmability relates to the need to remain as objective as possible throughout the study. Confirmability of the study in addition to the information that will be obtained, in addition to the information that will be obtained, will be strengthened by reference to the literature and the findings of other authors.

This will confirm the researcher’s interpretations. This study will be available for other scholars to use, as it will be hosted in the institutional repository of the University of South Africa. The researcher also ensured the confirmability of the study by providing data and interpretations of the findings that are not the product of the researcher's imagination but rather are based on evidence from the data.

3.9.4 Transferability

Research studies can be transferred from one area to another, a phenomenon known as transferability. This usually happens when the study involves multiple data sources. According to Maboa (2022), the term "translatability" describes how well the findings of qualitative research may be applied to other contexts or settings with different respondents. Korstjens & Moser (2017) state that the issue of transferability relates to the issue of application, and it is the researcher's duty to give a "thick description" of the research process so that the reader may decide whether the outcomes are transferable or not.

In this study, the findings on the morphological and semantic aspects of character naming in Xitsonga literary works may be transferable to other African communities, such as the Zulus, Swazis, Sothos, Gikuyu community and many cultures in central Africa, for many of these communities share similar cultural practices. According to Idang (2015) African cultures are similar when it comes to cultural practices, some examples include the matter of polygamy, kinship and even spiritual beliefs.

A linguistic analysis of the morphological and semantic aspects of character naming in Xitsonga literary works and recommendations on this matter will be developed.

3.10 Ethical consideration

Research and ethics are inseparable. A researcher cannot conduct a study without taking ethics seriously, and one cannot take ethics seriously without conducting research scientifically. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that a research study is conducted ethically. According to Gay (2009), research ethics means

conducting research in a way that goes beyond merely adopting the most appropriate research methodology, but rather in a responsible and morally defensible way.

The application for ethical clearance was submitted to the University's Higher Degrees Committees for approval before commencing the study. Informed consent is the ethical issue that was considered in this study, and it involves providing full information about the purpose of the study. Gay (2009) states that in informed consent, the respondents must give consent to give information. This is supported by Richie and Lewis (2005), who state that it is unethical to collect information without participants' knowledge, their expressed willingness, and informed consent.

Since it is desktop research, no human subjects were used in this study. However, the researcher made sure that ethics remained a key concern throughout the investigation. In addition, the researcher also applied for ethical clearance to conduct the study from the University of South Africa Research Ethics Committee.

3.11 Theoretical Framework

The phrase "theoretical framework" is made up of two words: "theory" and "framework". As a result, it is critical to define what a theory and a framework are. A theory, according to Hofstee (2006:30) "is a method in which things are described and clarified in order to explain why things are the way they are, and why they happen the way they happen". Meanwhile, framework "is a set of ideas that you use when you are forming your decisions and judgements" (Rundell, 2006: 561).

Therefore, the theoretical framework is the foundation upon which all knowledge (metaphorically and literally) for a research study is built, and it serves as the structure and support for the study's rationale, problem statement, purpose, significance, and research questions Grant and Osanloo, 2012). Furthermore, like a home that cannot be built without a plan, a study's structure and goals are unclear without a theoretical framework (Grant & Osanloo, ibid).

The current study employed a theoretical approach that is eclectic in nature. This is to say that the study draws on theoretical insights from two theories: lexical-pragmatic

theory and linguistic theory. Blutner (1998) first presented the lexical pragmatic theory, which was further expanded by Carston (2002) and Wilson (2003). According to Blutner (1998), the basic assumptions of this theory are to provide a systematic and explicative account of pragmatic events related to the semantic under-specification of lexical elements. Furthermore, Kinyua (2020) asserted that the relevance theory, which claims that the search for relevance initiates lexical pragmatic processes, is a key pillar of the lexical pragmatic theory.

This framework is crucial for understanding how authors use language to convey meaning and elicit specific reactions from their audience. In other words, lexical pragmatic theory provides a framework for analysing the pragmatic uses of language in literature, such as character names. Using this theory, the researcher set out to learn how character names are chosen, how they are used, how important they are to society, and what each character name means. Researchers may better understand how writers use language pragmatics to communicate complicated concepts, create characters, and involve readers in the interpretation process by putting this theory into practice.

The second framework in which the study's objectives are aligned is linguistic theory. This theory was developed by Robert R.M.W Dixon (1997) to investigate different types of linguistic knowledge (grammar) and what resources are required to provide accurate explanations of the grammar that represents speakers' knowledge of their language. According to Hayes et al. (2000:7)

> *Linguistic knowledge includes everything one knows about the structure of one's language – its lexicon (the words or vocabulary in the mental dictionary), its morphology (the structure of words), its syntax (the structure of phrases and sentences and the constraints on well-formedness of sentences), its semantics (the meaning of words and sentences) and its phonetics and phonology (the sounds and the sound system or patterns)*

In this study, linguistic theory was used only to cover two aspects of linguistic knowledge: the morphology and semantics of character names in Xitsonga drama

books. This theory was chosen for its ability to help researchers interpret and reveal the linguistic characteristics of a given language.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter covered the research methodology and the study's theoretical framework. The chapter provided an overview discussion of the study's methodological framework and research methodology, including the research paradigm, research design and research method. It is also revealed that the study was informed by the interpretivist paradigm; a qualitative and descriptive research approach was used to accomplish the objectives of the study, since the aim was to explore the morphology and semantics of character names in Xitsonga literary works. To achieve this, Xitsonga drama books were selected as the study population, and purposive sampling was adopted as the sampling method.

It was also determined that desktop research was used as a data collection method, and the collected data was analysed using thematic analysis. The chapter also discussed quality criteria, whereby the research outlined different criteria and their importance and how the researcher used quality criteria to ensure the study’s trustworthiness. Ethical considerations were also covered in this chapter. Moreover, it was affirmed that lexical pragmatic theory and linguistic theory underpinned the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter described the research methodology and theoretical framework that underpinned the study. It described the theoretical framework that guided the research, the design to be used, and the qualitative methods for gathering and assessing data. The study population, sampling methodologies, and criteria used to assure validity, reliability, and trustworthiness throughout the process were all considered. In this approach, the chapter provided a solid methodological framework for the study's conclusions.

In addition, the chapter discussed various theoretical perspectives that influenced the study, with a focus on the interpretivist paradigm. This viewpoint, along with a descriptive qualitative design, enabled the systematic collection and thematic analysis of character names from selected Xitsonga drama books. The methodological and theoretical approaches were presented as appropriate for addressing the research questions and consistent with the study's overall aims and objectives.

This section undertakes a morphological and semantic analysis of character naming in the Xitsonga selected literary texts, examining both the structural patterns and the cultural meanings embedded in names. The discussion considers how character names are generated through diverse word-formation processes in Xitsonga, such as derivation, compounding, and reduplication and how these linguistic forms are imbued with semantic layers that extend beyond literal meaning.

4.2. Morphological processes of characters naming in Xitsonga literary texts

Morphology is a branch of linguistics concerned with the internal structure of words and the principles governing their formation (Plag, 2018). It examines how the smallest meaningful units of language, known as morphemes, combine to form words and how these combinations shape meaning and grammatical function (Khanetnok et al., 2023). Through various morphological processes such as affixation, compounding, borrowing, blending, clipping, back-formation, and conversion, languages expand their

vocabularies, encode relationships between words, and reflect cultural and communicative practices (Christianto, 2020).

According to Harley (2015), morphological processes are the mechanisms by which new words are created, or existing words are modified to convey meaning. These processes play a central role in vocabulary development and cultural expression.

In literary contexts, morphology extends beyond routine communication, functioning as a stylistic tool that enhances creativity and symbolism. When applied to character naming, morphological processes influence how identities are constructed and perceived, often encoding social, cultural, or thematic significance. In the selected Xitsonga literary texts, character names are purposefully formed through identifiable morphological processes. Among the most prominent are affixation, compounding, reduplication, and borrowing, each contributing unique structural and semantic dimensions, as discussed in the following subheadings.

4.2.1. Affixation

Affixation is a fundamental morphological process in language, involving the attachment of prefixes, suffixes, infixes, or circumfixes to a base morpheme to create new words or modify existing ones (Van Goethem, 2020). Similarly, Pellicer (2020) describes affixation as the addition of bound morphemes, which are meaningful units of sound, to a root word, resulting in new lexical or grammatical forms. This process demonstrates how languages can generate a wide array of words with distinct meanings or functions from a relatively limited set of bases, enhancing both efficiency and expressiveness.

Affixation thus plays a central role in word formation, facilitating vocabulary expansion while encoding subtle semantic and grammatical nuances (Toluspayeva et al., 2024). Therefore, it is a vital linguistic mechanism that not only expands a language's lexical repertoire but also conveys nuanced grammatical and semantic information, highlighting its central role in the dynamic construction and enrichment of words.

Within linguistic systems, affixation primarily manifests through derivation and inflection, achieved via prefixes and suffixes. Prefixes are morphemes attached to the beginning of a root word to modify its meaning or grammatical role (Aslamiah, 2020).

In Xitsonga, the nominal class system spans classes 1–21, with exceptions in Classes 12, 13, 19, and 20 and categorises nouns such that odd-numbered classes denote singular forms and even-numbered classes indicate plurals (Mlambo & Matfunjwa, 2025; Lee & Hlungwani, 2020). Table 1 below demonstrates nominal prefixes categories in Xitsonga.

Table 1: Nominal prefixes categories in Xitsonga

Noun class numbers	**Noun class prefixes**	**Singular/Plural**	**Examples**
1	*Mu-*	*Vun'we*	*Muahluri*
2	*Va-*	*Vunyingi*	*Vaahluri*
1a	*Ø-*	*Vun'we*	*Sesi*
2a	*Va-*	*Vunyingi*	*Vasesi*
3	*Mu-*	*Vun'we*	*Mugodi*
4	*Mi-*	*Vunyingi*	*Migodi*
5	*Ri-*	*Vun'we*	*Rikoko*
6	*Ma-*	*Vunyingi*	*Makoko* *Madyimovha*
7	*Xi-*	*Vun'we*	*Xifaki*
8	*Swi-*	*Vunyingi*	*Swifaki*
9	*Yi(n)-*	*Vun'we*	*Yinhla*
10	*Ti(n)-*	*Vunyingi*	*Tiyinhla/Tintiho*
11	*Ri(n)-*	*Vun'we*	*Rintiho*
12	-	-	-
13	-	-	-
14	*Vu-*	-	*Vuloyi*
15	*Ku-*	-	*Ku dya*
16	*Ha-*	-	*Hansi*
17	*Ku-*	-	*Kule*
18	*Mu-/ndz(h)-*	-	*ndzeni/ndzhaku?*
19	-	-	-
20	-	-	-

21	*Dyi-*	*Vun'we*	*Dyimovha*

Suffixes, conversely, are morphemes added to the end of a root to modify its meaning or adjust its grammatical role (Nandito, 2016). In Xitsonga, both prefixes and suffixes play a central role in affixation, forming the backbone of word construction. They not only shape how words look and sound but also determine how they function within a sentence such as indicating tense, number, noun class, or degree (Mlambo & Matfunjwa, 2025). This system allows Xitsonga to generate a wide range of nuanced meanings from a single root, highlighting the language's rich morphological structure and its capacity for precise expression.

In Xitsonga literary texts, affixation is a prominent linguistic feature in character naming, shaping both the structural formation and semantic richness of names while reflecting the language's deep linguistic heritage and intricate cultural nuances. Through processes of derivation and inflection, affixation enables authors to construct names that encapsulate social roles, personality traits, moral characteristics, and even mythological or ancestral associations. This morphological creativity demonstrates how linguistic form and cultural meaning are intricately intertwined in Xitsonga literature. The following subsection illustrates the application of affixation through both derivational and inflectional processes in the formation of character names within literary works.

4.2.1.1. Derivation

The term "derivation" originates from the Latin word *derivatio*, meaning "the formation of a new word" (Alimovna, 2022: 127) or expansively meaning the formation of new words from existing roots, stems, or words, primarily through suffixation, prefixation, and compounding. Derivation is a key type of affixation in which affixes are attached to a base morpheme to generate a new word with a distinct meaning and often a different grammatical category. In supports, Kiango (2000: 74) defines derivation as "a process of word formation which uses morphological rules in forming new lexemes from the base forms of other lexemes." In Xitsonga, derivational affixes, including prefixes and suffixes, frequently transform words from one syntactic category to another, thereby expanding the expressive capacity of the language.

In the selected Xitsonga literary texts, authors employed derivational processes strategically in character naming, producing names that are semantically and functionally significant within the narrative. Notably, a significant number of derived character names in Xitsonga literary texts are deverbals, formed from verbs through the addition of nominal prefixes or other derivational processes. This linguistic phenomenon highlights the dynamic relationship between action and identity in Xitsonga storytelling. Table 2 below presents examples of such derived character names that incorporate nominal prefixes.

Table 2: Deverbal character names that incorporate nominal prefixes.

Verb stem (Gloss)	Derived Name	Morphological Formation
-*vona* (to see)	*Xivoni*	*Xi*- (class 7 prefix) + -*von*- (verbal root) + -i (final vowel)
-*feriwa* (to be bereaved)	*Muferiwa*	*Mu*- (class 1 prefix) + -*fer*-*iw*- (verb stem)-*a* (final vowel)
-*rhandza* (to love)	*Xirhandziwa*	*Xi*- (class 7 prefix) + -*rhandz*- (verbal root) + -*iw*- (passive suffix) + -*a* (final vowel)
-*lunghisa* (to repair)	*Mulunghisi*	*Mu*- (class 1 prefix) + -*lungh*- (verbal root) + -*is*- (causative suffix) + -*i* (final vowel)
-*khensa* (to appreciate)	*Mikhenso*	*Mi*- (class 4 prefix) + -*khens*- (verbal root) + -*o* (final vowel)
-*laya* (to reprimand someone)	*Malayi*	*Ma*- (class 6 prefix) + -*lay*- (verbal root) + -*i* (final vowel)

The character names under consideration are all deverbal from Table 2, meaning they are derived from verbs through the addition of nominal prefixes and, in some cases, other derivational morphemes. *Xivoni* is formed from the verbal stem -*vona* (to see) by attaching the Class 7 nominal prefix *Xi*-, the root -*von*-, and changing the final vowel from -*a* to -*i*, producing a nominal form that retains the verbal meaning in a noun format. *Muferiwa* is derived by attaching the Class 1 prefix *Mu*- to the passive verb -*feriwa*, maintaining the morphological integrity of the verb while converting it into a proper name.

Xirhandziwa originates from the verb *rhandza* (to love) and involves the Class 7 prefix *Xi-*, the passive morpheme *-iw-*, the root *-rhandz-*, and the final vowel *-a*, resulting in a complex derived nominal form that reflects both passivity and nominalisation. *Mulunghisi* is created from the verb *lunghisa* (to repair) by combining the Class 1 prefix *Mu-*, the verbal root *-lungh-*, the causative suffix *-is-*, and a final vowel change from *-a* to *-i*, producing a causative-derived proper name. *Mikhenso* comes from *khensa* (to appreciate) and is formed with the Class 4 prefix *Mi-*, the root *-khens-*, and the final vowel change from *-a* to *-o*.

Finally, *Malayi* is derived from *laya* (to reprimand) by attaching the Class 6 prefix *Ma-*, the root *-lay-*, and the final vowel change from *-a* to *-i*. These examples illustrate how nominal prefixes, along with derivational morphemes, allow Xitsonga authors to create morphologically rich and meaningful character names.

In the selected Xitsonga literary texts, some character names were created directly from verbs without using Xitsonga nominal prefixes. Unlike names that rely on class-based prefixes to show grammatical features, these names stick closely to the original verb, keeping its core meaning intact. This shows a different naming approach, where authors can craft meaningful and memorable character names without the added complexity of prefixation. These names often feel simple and immediate, letting the action or quality of the verb define the character. Table 3 lists the deverbal character names formed without nominal prefixes.

Table 3: Deverbal Character Names Formed Without Nominal Prefixes

Verb stem (Gloss)	Derived Name	Morphological Formation
-tsaka (to be happy)	*Ntsako*	*N-* (Class 3 nominal prefix allomorph) + *-tsak-* (verbal root) + -o (final vowel)
-tsaka (to be happy)	*Ntsakisi*	*N-* (Class 3 nominal prefix allomorph) + *-tsak-* (verbal root) + causative suffix /*-is-*/ + *-i* (final vowel)
-nyika (to give)	*Nyiko*	*Nyik-* (verbal root) + *-o* (final vowel)
-ntshunxeka (to be exempted)	*Ntshunxeko*	*Ntshunxek-* (verbal root) + *-o* (final vowel)

-xaniseka (to suffer)	*Nxaniseko*	*N-* (Class 3 nominal prefix allomorph) + *xanisek-* (verbal root) + *-o* (final vowel)

In Table 3, the selected Xitsonga literary texts show several character names derived directly from verbs, demonstrating consistent and meaningful morphological processes. The names *Ntsako* and *Ntsakisi* both originate from the verb *tsaka* (to be happy). *Ntsako* is formed by attaching the Class 3 nominal prefix *N-* to the verbal root ***-tsak-*,** followed by a final vowel change from *-a* to ***-o***, creating a noun that retains the basic semantic meaning of the verb. *Ntsakisi*, on the other hand, extends this derivation by adding the causative suffix *-is-*, indicating the idea of causing happiness. This form also incorporates the Class 3 prefix *N-*, with the final vowel changing from *-a* to *-i*, producing a causative deverbal noun with a more specific semantic nuance.

The name *Nyiko* is derived from the verb *nyika* (to give) through a simple final vowel modification from *-a* to *-o*, notably without the use of a nominal prefix. This demonstrates an alternative strategy in Xitsonga derivation where vowel change alone can produce a noun with a clear meaning. *Ntshunxeko* comes from *tshunxeka* (to be freed), formed through the verbal root *-tshunxek-* and altering the final vowel from ***-a*** to *-o*, resulting in a noun that encapsulates the concept of exemption. Finally, *Nxaniseko* is derived from *xaniseka* (to suffer) by combining the Class 3 prefix ***N-*,** the root ***-xanisek-*,** and a final vowel change from *-a* to ***-o***. These examples reveal how Xitsonga authors creatively use verbal roots, nominal prefixes, and vowel alternations to form expressive and semantically grounded character names.

4.2.1.2. Inflectional morphology

Inflection is an important morphological process that involves adding affixes to a base morpheme to express grammatical features such as number, tense, aspect, mood, person, or case, without changing the word's basic meaning or grammatical category (Çinar, 2022; Samosir, Pasaribu & Sembiring, 2023). The term inflection, derived from the Latin *inflectere* meaning "to bend" or "to modify," highlights its role in adjusting a word's form to suit its grammatical or contextual function (Nordquist, 2025).

In Bantu languages, including Xitsonga, inflection takes place through prefixes and suffixes that mark distinctions such as noun class, tense, agreement, and possession.

These morphological markers help maintain grammatical consistency and contribute to the expressive and structural richness of the language. They also ensure grammatical accuracy, syntactic harmony, and semantic clarity, allowing words to align naturally within different sentence contexts (Wahid & Farooq, 2019). Inflection therefore plays a crucial role in enhancing communication by reinforcing precision, cohesion, and the intricate relationship between form, function, and meaning in language.

In the selected Xitsonga literary texts, authors make creative use of inflectional processes in character naming to convey subtle expressions of respect, familiarity, and social hierarchy within cultural settings. Character names are often derived from verbs and nouns using nominal prefixes and suffixes, reflecting the complex morphological structure of the language. These include names formed from verbs using Xitsonga verbal extension suffixes, those created by attaching the associative suffix /*-ni*/ for instance, the verb *kula* (grow) to *kulani* ((grow) signifying the plural form) to verb stems to express plurality or commanding more than one person, as well as names generated by adding nominal prefixes to existing nouns. Such inflectional formations go beyond grammatical modification as they act as carriers of cultural meaning, embedding relationships, social roles, and shared community values in Xitsonga naming traditions. The following sections discuss how inflectional processes are applied in forming character names in the selected Xitsonga literary works.

4.2.1.2.1. Verbal Extension

Verbal extension is a morphological word formation process that involves adding affixes usually suffixes to verb stems to modify or extend their meaning (Werigbelegha & Kwokwo, 2019). This process is common in Bantu languages, including Xitsonga, where it performs several grammatical and semantic functions such as expressing causative, applicative, reciprocal, passive, intensive, or stative meanings (Lee & Hlungwani, 2016). Verbal extension illustrates the agglutinative nature of the language, where meaning is systematically built up through the addition of affixes.

In the selected Xitsonga literary texts, authors use verbal extensions creatively in character naming to express specific actions, roles, or traits linked to the characters. Through this linguistic technique, names symbolically reflect aspects of a character's behaviour, social status, or relationships with others. The authors employ various

types of verbal extension suffixes in Xitsonga such as causative, applicative, neuter, and reflexive to construct names that carry deeper cultural and contextual significance. The following sections explore how verbal extension suffixes were utilised in the formation of character names in the selected Xitsonga literature.

a. **Causative /*-is-*/**

The causative suffix /*-is-*/ is added to a verb stem to indicate that the subject causes an action to happen. In character naming, Xitsonga authors used it to convey agency or influence, highlighting a character's ability to initiate or provoke events. Consider the examples in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Examples of character names inflected from verbal extension of causative suffix *-is-*

Verb stem (Gloss)	**Inflected Name**	**Morphological Formation**
Chingha-	*Chinghisa*	*Chingh-* (verbal root) + *-is-* (causative suffix) + *-a* (final vowel)
Hada-	*Hadisa*	*Had-* (verbal root) + *-is-* (causative suffix) + *-a* (final vowel)
Sindza-	*Sindzisa*	*Sindz-* (verbal root) + *-is-* (causative suffix) + *-a* (final vowel)

In Table 4 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts illustrate how character names are systematically derived through verbal extension processes, particularly the productive causative suffix *-is-.* These formations demonstrate the agglutinative nature of Xitsonga morphology, where complex meanings are built through the linear combination of morphemes. The character name *Chinghisa* originates from the verbal stem *chingha* (to swear). Morphologically, the name is formed by attaching the causative morpheme *-is-* to the verbal root *chingh-,* followed by the final vowel *-a*, producing the structure *chingh-* + *-is-* + *-a*. This yields the causative meaning 'to cause to swear' or 'to be cheeky', thus extending the semantic base of the verb.

Finally, a similar process is observed in Hadisa, derived from the verb *hada* (to mow). The formation involves the root *had-*, the causative suffix *-is-*, and the final vowel *-a*,

creating the structure *had-* + *-is-* + *-a*. The resulting meaning ‘to cause to mow’ reflects the characteristic Xitsonga pattern of forming causatives through verbal extension.,

These examples collectively highlight how Xitsonga employs regular morphological rules to generate meaningful character names with embedded semantic nuance, revealing the close relationship between Xitsonga verbal morphology and onomastics.

b. **Applicative /*-el-*/**

In Xitsonga, the applicative suffix /*-el-*/ extends the verb to indicate that the action is performed for, on, or with respect to an additional participant. Character Names formed with this suffix often suggest interaction, service, or relational involvement, reflecting social or communal roles of characters. Consider the examples in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Examples of character names inflected using the applicative morpheme *-el-*

Verb stem (Gloss)	**Inflected Name**	**Morphological Formation**
Khwaxa (to be rough or coarse)	*Khwaxela*	*Khwax-* (verbal root) + *-el-* (applicative suffix) *-a* (final vowel)
Chaya (to play musical instrument)	*Chayela*	*Chay-* (verbal root) + *-el-* (applicative suffix) *-a* (final vowel)
Vuyeta (to do for the second time)	*Vuyetela*	*Vuyet-* (verbal root) + *-el-* (applicative suffix) *-a* (final vowel)
Khanga (the action of evoking someone)	*Khangela*	*Khang-* (verbal root) + *-el-* (applicative suffix) *-a* (final vowel)

In Table 5 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts demonstrate that several character names are formed through productive verbal extension processes, particularly the use of the applicative morpheme *-el-*. These formations illustrate how Xitsonga verbal morphology can be refunctionalised for onomastic purposes, allowing character names to encode semantic and grammatical information derived from underlying verb stems. The name *Khwaxela* originates from the verb *khwaxa* (to be rough or coarse). Morphologically, the verbal root *khwax-* combines with the applicative suffix *-el-*, which typically introduces a benefactive or locative semantic

extension, followed by the final vowel *-a*. The resulting form, *khwax-el-a*, produces a name that metaphorically foregrounds the character's rough or abrasive disposition.

Similarly, *Chayela* is derived from the verb *chaya* (to play a musical instrument). Here, the verbal root *chay-* is extended with *-el-* and the final vowel *-a*, yielding *chay-el-a*. This derivation suggests a character associated with music, performance, or rhythmic skill, thereby embedding culturally recognisable semantic cues. Finally, the name *Vuyetela* reflects a more complex verbal base. It originates from the verb *vuyeta* ('to do for the second time'), where the root *vuyet-* attaches the applicative *-el-* plus the final vowel *-a*. The derived form *vuyet-el-a* evokes notions of repetition or renewal.

c. Combination of reflexive prefix /*ti-*/, applicative suffix /*-el-*/ and associative suffix /*-ni*/

Character names formed through the combination of the reflexive prefix *ti-*, the applicative suffix *-el-,* and the associative suffix *-ni* illustrate inflectional morphology in Xitsonga. This structure marks self-directed action extended toward another, while the associative ending links the character to a specific role or group. Such morphological layering shapes meaningful, culturally grounded character identities. This combination allows names to reflect both personal qualities and social engagement. Consider the example in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Character names formed by combining reflexive prefix /*ti-*/, applicative suffix /*-el-*/ and associative suffix /*-ni*/

Verb stem (Gloss)	Inflected Name	Morphological Formation
-vona	*Tivoneleni*	*Ti-* (reflexive prefix) + *von-* (verbal root) + *-el-* (applicative suffix) -+ *-e-* (vowel /*e*/) + *-ni* (associative suffix)

In Table 6 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts show character name formed through a verbal extension process involving multiple morphemes attached to the verb root von**-** from the verb stem *vona* (to see). The structure of the name *Tivoneleni* combines the reflexive prefix *ti-*, the applicative suffix **-***el***-**, the raised final vowel **-***e***-** resulting from the alternation of /*a*/ to /*e*/*,* and the associative suffix **-***ni*. These morphemes create a morphologically complex form that encodes reflexivity,

applicative meaning, and association, illustrating layered inflectional morphology in Xitsonga naming practices.

d. Combination of applicative suffix /-*el*-/ and associative suffix /-*ni*/

In Xitsonga, character names formed through the combination of the applicative suffix /-*el*-/ and the associative suffix /-*ni*/ illustrate inflectional morphology that expands verb meaning into noun-based identities. The applicative /-*el*-/ adds the sense of doing something for or toward someone, while /-*ni*/ establishes association. They create character labels that reflect roles, actions, or social connections. Consider the examples in Table 7 below:

Table 7: Character names created by combining applicative suffix /-*el*-/ and associative suffix /-*ni*/

Verb stem (Gloss)	**Inflected Name**	**Morphological Formation**
Famba- (go/leave)	*Fambeleni* (why did you go/leave)	*Famb*- (verbal root) + -*el*- (applicative suffix) + -*e*- (vowel e) + -*ni* (associative suffix)
Tshama- (sit/stay)	*Tshameleni* (why did you stay)	*Tsham*- (verbal root) + -*el*- (applicative suffix) + -*e*- (vowel e) + -*ni* (associative suffix)

In Table 7, the character names are formed through a morphological process that involves combining several verbal extensions and suffixes. The construction includes the applicative suffix /-*el*-/**,** the raised final vowel -e resulting from the alternation -*a* → -*e,* and the associative suffix **-***ni*. The name *Fambeleni* derives from the verb stem *famba* ('to go'), where the morphemes -*el*-**,** -*e,* and -ni are attached to the verb root famb- to create a form expressing applied action and association. A similar morphological strategy is used in the formation of *Tshameleni*, derived from the verb stem -*tshama* ('to sit'), where the same morphemes are attached to the root -*tsham*-**.** These formations demonstrate systematic verbal extension processes used in Xitsonga to create meaningful character names.

4.2.1.2.2. Associative suffix /*-ni*/

In Xitsonga, the associative suffix /*-ni*/ functions as an imperative plural suffix used to issue commands directed at more than one person. As an inflectional marker, it modifies the verb stem to indicate plurality in the imperative form, signalling that the action should be performed collectively rather than individually. This morphological feature highlights the inclusive and communal orientation embedded in Xitsonga linguistic structure. In literary texts, the /*-ni*/ suffix is creatively applied in character naming to convey authority, unity, or collective responsibility. The following examples shows how associative suffix /*-ni*/ was used to form character names in the selected texts:

Table 8: Examples of character names inflected from verbs by attaching associative suffix /*-ni*/

Verb stem (Gloss)	**Inflected Name**	**Morphological Formation**
Vona- (to see)	*Vonani*	*Vona-* (verb stem) + *-ni* (associative suffix)
Tiya- (to be strong)	*Tiyani*	*Tiya-* (verb stem) + *-ni* (associative suffix)
Hanya- (to live)	*Hanyani*	*Hanya-* (verb stem) + *-ni* (associative suffix)
Tirha- (to work)	*Tirhani*	*Tirha-* (verb stem) + *-ni* (associative suffix)
Rivala- (to forget)	*Rivalani*	*Rivala-* (verb stem) + *-ni* (associative suffix)
Saseka- (to be pretty)	*Sasekani*	*Saseka-* (verb stem) + *-ni* (associative suffix)
Hangalaka- (to disperse)	*Hangalakani*	*Hangalaka-* (verb stem) + *-ni* (associative suffix)

In Table 8 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts exhibit a distinctive naming pattern in which several character names are formed through the attachment of the associative suffix *-ni* to pre-existing verb stems. In Xitsonga verbal morphology, *-ni* primarily functions as an imperative plural suffix, signalling commands addressed to

more than one person. When incorporated into character names, however, this imperative plural form is reinterpreted as a nominalised command that conveys an embedded moral, social, or behavioural directive within the narrative. The character name *Vonani* originates from the verb *vona* (to see), where the stem *vona-* combines with the imperative plural morpheme *-ni*. The resulting name *vona-ni* carries the extended meaning "you (plural) must see," imbuing the name with connotations of insight, awareness, or revelation.

A similar morphological process appears in *Hanyani*, derived from the verb *hanya* (to live). The combination *hanya-ni* yields a form meaning "live (you all)" foregrounding vitality or perseverance as character traits. The name *Tirhani***,** from the verb *tirha* (to work), results from the morphological combination *tirha-ni*, which translates as "work, all of you." This transformation embeds ideas of diligence and communal responsibility within the character's identity. *Rivalani***,** formed from *rivala* (to forget), yields *rivala-ni*, a structure whose imperative meaning may acquire symbolic or cautionary significance in literary contexts. Finally, *Hangalakani*, derived from *hangalaka* (to disperse), attaches *-ni* to form *hangalaka-ni,* suggesting collective scattering or movement. This inflectional morphological process demonstrates how Xitsonga employs imperative plural morphology to create character names that carry directive, thematic, and symbolic weight within the literary narrative.

4.2.1.2.3. Adding nominal prefixes to existing nouns

Adding nominal prefixes to existing nouns is one of the inflectional morphological processes used in forming character names. In this process, a prefix is added to the beginning of a noun to adjust its grammatical or semantic role while retaining its original meaning. In the selected Xitsonga literary texts, authors applied this process by attaching different noun class prefixes to nouns, thereby modifying their meaning to reflect aspects such as quantity or classification. This technique not only follows the grammatical structure of Xitsonga but also allows authors to convey subtle layers of meaning within character names. Table 9 below exemplifies examples of how this inflectional process was employed in shaping character names, highlighting its role in expressing linguistic creativity and cultural significance in Xitsonga literature.

Table 9: Examples of character names formed by adding nominal prefixes to existing nouns

Nouns (Gloss)	Inflected Name	Morphological Formation
-Socha (soldier)	*Masocha*	*ma-* (class 6 prefix) + *-socha* (noun stem)
-Kungu (plan)	*Makungu*	*ma-* (class 6 prefix) + *-kungu* (noun stem)
-Fenya (joke)	*Mafenya*	*ma-* (class 6 prefix) + *-fenya* (noun stem)
-hlori (wonder)	*Mahlori*	*ma-* (class 6 prefix) + *-hlori* (noun stem)
-Ndyelo (dish)	*Tindyelo*	*ti-* (class 10 prefix) + *-ndyelo* (noun stem)
-Khamba (leaf)	*Rikhamba*	*ri-* (class 11 prefix) + *-khamba* (noun stem)
-nhloti (tear)	*Mihloti*	*mi-* (class 4 prefix) + *-hloti* (noun stem)

In Table 9 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts demonstrate a productive onomastic strategy in which character names are formed through the attachment of nominal prefixes to existing noun stems. These prefixes, drawn from the Xitsonga noun-class system, typically encode number, plurality, or categorical classification. When used in naming, however, they extend beyond grammatical marking to create character names that symbolically amplify meaning through notions of collectivity, magnitude, or conceptual emphasis.

The names *Masocha, Makungu, Mafenya, and Mahlori* illustrate this process clearly. Each name derives from a singular noun *socha* (soldier), *kungu* (plan), *fenya* (comedy), and *hlori* (wonder) respectively, through the addition of the class 6 plural prefix *ma-*. These derived forms (*ma-socha*, *ma-kungu*, *ma-fenya*, *ma-hlori*) foreground plurality or abundance, suggesting groups, multiplicity, or intensified thematic significance. For instance, *Masocha* may evoke collective strength or military presence, while *Mahlori* emphasises multiple wonders or extraordinary occurrences.

A similar pluralising function appears in *Tindyelo*, formed by attaching the class 10 prefix *ti-* to *ndyelo* (‘dish’). The resulting form, *ti-ndyelo* denotes a set or collection of dishes, and in a literary context, the name may symbolically reference variety, distribution, or communal sharing.

The name *Mihloti***,** from *nhloti* (tear), incorporates the class 4 prefix *mi-*, yielding *mi-nhloti*, a plural form meaning tears. This transformation often conveys emotional intensity or collective suffering. Finally, *Rikhamba* is derived from the noun *khamba* (leaf) through the class 5/ma- prefix *ri-*, producing *ri-khamba*. Class 5 often marks singular nouns with augmentative or specialised semantic nuances, giving the name a distinctive, individualised character identity. Collectively, these formations highlight how Xitsonga noun-class prefixes are creatively mobilised to construct semantically rich and symbolically layered character names.

4.2.2. Compounding

Compounding is an essential word formation process in which two or more independent words are combined to form a new lexical item with a distinct meaning (Manokaran, Nian & Shuoh, 2021). This process is highly productive in many languages, including Xitsonga and other African languages, as it allows speakers and writers to expand their vocabulary and express complex ideas more precisely and creatively (Mlambo, Matfunjwa & Skosana, 2025). In most cases, the meaning of a compound extends beyond the literal meanings of its individual parts, reflecting cultural, contextual, or conceptual associations that enrich communication (Mlambo et al., 2025; To’rayevna, 2025).

Depending on the language’s writing conventions and the degree of lexicalisation, compounds can appear as single words, hyphenated forms, or separate words (Sun & Baayen, 2021). The resulting compound word often conveys a meaning greater than the sum of its components, representing a concept or identity that is deeply shaped by cultural and contextual motivations. According to PanSALB (2019) on Xitsonga orthography addressing new rules for hyphenation, particularly for compound words, compound words do not require a hyphen when written because they become one word after compounding. Prior to the regulation change, people might write compound

words with or without hyphens; for example, a compound of *nhloko* and *mhaka* would be *nhloko-mhaka* rather than just being one word.

In literary texts, compounding functions as both a stylistic and semantic device, particularly in the naming of characters. Through compounding, authors create names that carry symbolic and metaphorical meanings, adding thematic depth and cultural resonance to their narratives (Machate-Kabinde, Mandende & Cekiso, 2023). This technique allows writers to embed layers of meaning into character names, often reflecting their roles, traits, values, or social positions within the story (Mabuza, 2022). Compounding, therefore, becomes a form of linguistic creativity that aligns character development with broader cultural and linguistic patterns.

In the selected Xitsonga literary texts, compounding is used as an expressive device that enhances creativity, precision, and imagery. Authors employ compounds to create vivid descriptions, establish distinctive tones, and communicate abstract ideas through character naming. The compounds are formed by combining words from various grammatical categories, including nouns, verbs, interrogatives, and adjectival stems. The following sections explore how compounding was applied in the creation of character names in the selected Xitsonga literature.

a. **Verb + Noun Compound**

This type of compound combines a verb with a noun to create a name that reflects an action or behaviour associated with the character, often highlighting their role, personality, or relationship to their environment. The verb component typically conveys dynamic qualities, while the noun grounds the name in a concrete concept or entity. Consider the examples in Table 10 below:

Table 10: Examples of character names formed through combining verb and noun

Morphological Formation	**Character Names**
Dlaya- (verb) [kill] + *-khwati* (noun) [small bush/dense forest]	*Dlayakhwati*
Khoma- (verb) [touch] + *-xandla* (noun) [hand]	*Khomaxandla*

In Table 10 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts demonstrate the productive use of verb–noun compounding as a strategy for forming semantically expressive

character names. This compounding process involves combining a verbal stem with a nominal element to create structurally complex names that encode both action and entity, thereby conveying symbolic or metaphorical meaning within the narrative. The character name *Dlayakhwati* exemplifies this pattern. It is formed by combining the verb *dlaya* (to kill) with the noun *khwati* (small bush/dense forest). The resulting compound *dlaya + khwati* yields a name that evokes imagery of forceful action directed toward nature or an entity, possibly symbolising destructive power, dominance, or resilience depending on the narrative context.

Similarly, *Khomaxandla* is derived from the verb *khoma* (to touch) and the noun *xandla* (hand). In the compound *khoma + xandla*, the combination produces a meaning associated with physical contact or interaction, metaphorically highlighting influence, intervention, or agency. These verb–noun compounds illustrate how Xitsonga literary naming practices leverage morphological fusion to construct character identities that are both linguistically rich and narratively meaningful.

b. **Noun class prefix + Verb + Noun Compound**

In this type of compound, the three parts a noun class prefix, a verb stem, and a noun are combined to create one full word. The noun class prefix marks the word as a noun, the verb stem shows the action or process, and the final noun explains what the action is linked to. When these pieces come together, they form a meaningful compound that works as a single noun but still shows how its parts fit together. This type of compound is common in Bantu languages and is often used when creating character names in Xitsonga literary texts. It allows writers to build new, descriptive names that are rich in meaning and easy to interpret. Consider the examples in Table 11 below:

Table 11: Examples of character names formed through combining noun class prefix, verb and noun

Morphological Formation	**Character Names**
Xi- (class 7 prefix) + *-hlaya-* (verb) [count] + *-magoza* (noun) [footsteps]	*Xihlayamagoza*
Ma- (class 6 prefix) + *-dyisa* (verb) [to feed] + *-mbitsi* (noun) [distress]	*Madyisambitsi*

In Table 11 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts illustrate a complex morphological strategy in which character names are formed through the combination of a noun-class prefix, a verb stem, and a noun to create compound structures with layered semantic significance. These formations demonstrate the creative application of Xitsonga's agglutinative morphology in literary onomastics, where grammatical elements are combined to yield names enriched with both action-based and nominal meaning.

The character name *Xihlayamagoza* exemplifies this pattern. It is constructed from the class 7 nominal prefix *xi-*, the verb stem *hlaya* (to read/count), and the noun *magoza* (footsteps). The compound structure *xi-hlaya-magoza* can be interpreted as to make calculated moves, evoking imagery of tracking, interpreting traces, or uncovering hidden paths. This construction showcases how morphological components can be fused to create metaphorically dense character identities.

Similarly, *Madyisambitsi* is formed by combining the class 6 prefix *ma-*, the verb stem *dyisa* (to feed), and the noun *mbitsi* (distress). The verb stem *dyisa* itself derives from a causative extension of the base verb *dya* (eat), through the addition of the causative suffix *-is-* and the final vowel *-a*. The resulting compound *ma-dyisa-mbitsi* suggests "those who cause distress" or "sources of affliction," depending on the narrative interpretation. These formations demonstrate the expressive potential of Xitsonga morphology in generating character names that are grammatically complex and semantically symbolic.

c. **Noun + Interrogative Marker Compound**

This compound type merges a noun with an interrogative marker to produce a name that can imply curiosity, questioning, or a sense of mystery. It often encodes cultural or social commentary, giving the character a name that invites interpretation or reflects particular social contexts. Consider the examples in Table 12 below:

Table 12: Examples of character names formed through combining noun and Interrogative marker

Morphological Formation	**Character Names**
Nsati- (noun) [wife] + *-muni* (interrogative Marker)	*Nsatimuni*

Vukati- (noun) [marriage] + *-muni* (Interrogative Marker)	*Vukatimuni*
Khombo- (noun) [misforture] + *-muni* (Interrogative Marker)	*Khombomuni*

In Table 12 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts demonstrate a distinctive naming strategy in which authors construct character names through the combination of a noun and the interrogative marker *muni?* (an adjectival stem) which functions semantically to question identity, nature, or origin. When incorporated into a compound name, *muni?* adds an evaluative or reflective dimension, transforming the noun into a concept that invites inquiry or ambiguity within the narrative.

The character name *Nsatimuni* is formed by combining the noun *nsati* (wife) with the interrogative marker *muni?* The compound *nsati-muni* can be interpreted as "what kind of wife?", suggesting uncertainty, complexity, or a defining mystery surrounding the character. Similarly, *Vukatimuni* results from the fusion of *vukati* (marriage) and *muni?* producing *vukati-muni*, which may be understood as "what kind of marriage?". This construction raises thematic questions about the nature or stability of the marriage being referenced. The name *Khombomuni***,** formed from *khombo* (misfortune) and *muni?* yields *khombo-muni*, meaning "what kind of misfortune?" This compound foregrounds the enigmatic or unfolding nature of adversity. These noun–interrogative compound names demonstrate how Xitsonga authors strategically employ morphological structure to construct character names that convey inquiry, ambiguity, and layered thematic significance.

d. **Noun class prefix + Verb + Adverb Compound**

In this type, a noun-class prefix is combined with a verb and an adverb to form a name that emphasises both an action and a descriptive quality of the character. This structure allows authors to communicate traits, behaviours, or dispositions in a single, compact lexical unit, enhancing expressiveness and memorability. Consider the example in Table 13 below:

Table 13: Examples of character names formed through combining verb and adverb

Morphological Formation	**Character Names**

Xi- (class 7 prefix) + *-sala-* (verb) [remain] + *-ndzhaku* (adverb) [back-wards]	*Xisandzhaku* (a shortened form of *Xisalandzhaku*)

In Table 13, the character name is formed through compounding, where a noun-class prefix is combined with a verb and an adverb to create a single meaningful unit. In the name *Xisalandzhaku*, which is shortened to Xisandzhaku through the process of elision whereby one or more sounds like consonants or vowels are omitted in a word to make pronunciation faster (Babayev, 2022). The class 7 prefix xi- is attached to the verb *sala* (remain) and the adverb *ndzhaku* (behind/backwards). These morphemes form a compound that encodes both the action and its directional nuance, illustrating how Xitsonga naming practices use morphological compounding to convey character traits and narrative significance.

e. **Noun class prefix + verb + concord + noun compound**

In this type, a noun class prefix is combined with a verb, a concord element, and a noun to form a compound that encodes both an action and a participant within a single lexical unit. This structure enables authors to express complex relationships, roles, or behaviours concisely while maintaining semantic clarity in naming practices. Through this morphological pattern, character identities become richer and more revealing, as each component contributes functional meaning. Consider the example in Table 14 below:

Table 14: Examples of character names formed through combining noun class prefix, verb, concord and noun

Morphological Formation	**Character Names**
Ma- (class 6 prefix) + *-dya-* (verb) [eat] + *-swa-* (concord) + *-vanhu* (noun) [people]	*Madyaswavanhu*

In Table 14 above, the character name illustrates a compounding process in which multiple morphological elements are combined to create a semantically rich lexical unit. This naming strategy involves the integration of a noun-class prefix, a verb stem, a concord marker, and a noun, resulting in a structurally layered and meaningful character name. The name *Madyaswavanhu* exemplifies this pattern. It is formed from the class 6 prefix *ma-*, the verb *dya* (eat), the class 8 concord *swa*, and the noun *vanhu*

(people). When combined its form *ma-dya-swa-vanhu*, the compound encodes the notion of “those who eat people things” or “consumers of people things,” depending on the narrative context.

This complex morphological construction demonstrates how Xitsonga authors creatively employ compounding to build character names that convey action, agency, and social or moral implications within a single, cohesive form.

f. **Noun class prefix + verb + concord + verb compound**

In this type, a noun-class prefix is combined with a verb, followed by an agreement concord and an additional verb to form a compound name that encodes a layered sequence of actions linked to a specific grammatical subject. This structure enables authors to express complex behavioural patterns or dynamic processes within a single lexical unit, thereby enriching character representation and thematic depth. Consider the example in Table 15 below:

Table 15: Examples of character names formed through combining noun class prefix, verb, concord and verb

Morphological Formation	**Character Names**
Ma- (class 6 prefix) + *-sa-* (verb) [acronym] + *-swi-* (concord) *-vona* (verb) [to see]	*Masaswivona*

In Table 15 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts demonstrate a compounding strategy in which a noun-class prefix is combined with a verb, followed by an agreement concord and an additional verb to create a structurally complex character name. The name *Masaswivona* exemplifies this morphological process. It is derived from the class 6 prefix *ma-*, the verb *-sala-* (to remain), the class 8 concord *-swi*, and the verb *-vona* (to see). In this construction, the segment *sa* functions as an acronymic reduction of the full verb *sala*.

Additionally, the vowel /*u*/originally occurring between *sala* and the concord *swi* was also omitted for grammatical economy and phonological smoothness. Thus, the underlying full form of the name can be reconstructed as *ma-sala-u-swi-vona*. The resulting compound encodes the meaning “those who remain and see,” reflecting a sequential action embedded within a single lexical unit. This pattern illustrates how

Xitsonga authors employ compounding to create character names that convey layered actions, agency, and narrative significance.

4.2.3. Reduplication

Reduplication is a word formation process in which a whole word or part of it is repeated to create a new form that carries a modified or intensified meaning (Shirindzi & Mushwana, 2025). This process is common across many languages, and it serves a variety of grammatical, semantic, and stylistic functions. Linguistically, reduplication is usually classified as either full or partial, depending on whether the entire word or only a segment is repeated (Rubino, 2005). It can express plurality, intensity, repetition, diminution, or emphasis, depending on the context.

As a word formation strategy, reduplication highlights the creative and flexible nature of language, allowing speakers to convey subtle shades of meaning and emotion through repetition (Aziz & Nolikasari, 2020). The reduplication also adds rhythm and phonological texture, enhancing the expressive and aesthetic quality of communication. In this way, reduplication functions not only as a grammatical tool but also as a means of stylistic and affective expression.

In literary texts, reduplication serves as both a creative and meaningful way to name characters. The repeated sound pattern in reduplication adds rhythm, emphasis, and memorability, making names stand out and feel more expressive. Authors often use this technique to highlight certain cultural, emotional, or social meanings, allowing reduplication to draw attention to key traits of a character's personality, role, or identity in the story. As a result, reduplicated names carry a deeper sense of expression that connects strongly with readers and enriches the cultural and artistic feel of the text.

In the chosen Xitsonga literary works, authors show linguistic creativity by using both full and partial reduplication when naming their characters. These forms not only show the structural richness of the Xitsonga language but also demonstrate how language can be used to express meaning, emotion, and cultural symbolism. The next sections discuss how full and partial reduplication are applied in creating character names in Xitsonga literature, focusing on their roles and meanings in literary naming traditions.

4.2.3.1. Full reduplication

Full reduplication is a word formation process in which an entire word is repeated to create a new lexical form with a modified or intensified meaning. According to Lieber (2009), this involves doubling the whole base of a word, including its stem and root, without altering the consonants or vowels. This process often serves both grammatical and stylistic purposes, such as expressing emphasis, plurality, or continuity (Aziz & Nolikasari, 2020). In Xitsonga literary texts, full reduplication was used in character naming to enhance rhythm, memorability, and expressive depth, adding a distinctive and engaging quality to the narrative. Consider the examples in Table 16 below:

Table 16: Examples of character names formed through full reduplication

Words	**Repeated parts**	**Character Names**
Gandaganda	*Ganda-* (to sew)	*Gandaganda*
Khapakhapa	*Khapa-* (overflow)	*Khapakhapa*
Gwayigwayi	*Gwayi-* (cigarette)	*Gwayigwayi*

Table 16 above, presents character names formed through full reduplication, a morphological process in which an entire word, root, or stem is repeated to create a new lexical item. In this naming practice, reduplication functions not only as a word-formation strategy but also as a stylistic device that enhances memorability and rhythmic sound patterns. The character name *Gandaganda* illustrates full reduplication of the verb stem -*ganda* (to sew). By repeating the stem, the name acquires an intensified and playful phonological effect while retaining the semantic association of the base form. A similar morphological strategy is used in *Khapakhapa*, derived from the verb stem -*khapa* (to overflow), which is duplicated in its entirety to form the character's name.

In both examples, the reduplicated forms maintain the lexical meaning of the original stem, although their function in naming is largely symbolic rather than semantic. In *Gwayigwayi***,** the borrowed Nguni lexical item *gwayi* (cigarette) undergoes full reduplication to produce a rhythmic and expressive name. These examples demonstrate that full reduplication serves as a versatile naming strategy in Xitsonga, capable of drawing on meaningful stems and borrowed lexical items to create

expressive, phonologically appealing character names that align with the language's morphological rules.

4.2.3.2. Partial reduplication

Partial reduplication, on the other hand, involves repeating only a segment of a word rather than the entire form, producing a new word with a nuanced or intensified meaning (Olsson, 2015). This process allows authors to convey subtle semantic or stylistic effects, such as plurality, diminution, emphasis, or repetition (Rubino, 2005). In the selected Xitsonga literary texts, partial reduplication was used in character naming to highlight specific traits, aspects of identity, or social roles. By repeating only part of a name, authors create a sense of rhythm and expressiveness, while also enriching the cultural and symbolic significance of the characters within the story. Consider the examples in Table 17 below:

Table 17: Examples of character names formed through partial reduplication

Words	**Repeated part**	**Character Names**
xikolokolo	*Kolo*	*xikolokolo*
Xifafa	*Fa*	*Xifafa*
Xingwangwa	*Ngwa*	*Xingwangwa*
Marilele	*Le*	*Marilele*
Nhlalala	*La*	*Nhlalala*
Khakhan'wa	*Kha*	*Khakhan'wa*
Khalakhasa	*Kha*	*Khalakhasa*

In Table 17 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts reveal the use of partial reduplication as a productive morphological strategy in the formation of several character names. Partial reduplication involves the repetition of only a portion of a word typically a syllable or consonant–vowel sequence rather than the entire lexical form (Shirindzi & Mushwana, 2025). This process contributes to the creation of names that are rhythmically expressive, memorable, and stylistically marked, even when the reduplicated segments do not carry independent lexical meaning. The character name *Xikolokolo* illustrates this pattern. The segment -*kolo*, which lacks inherent meaning in

Xitsonga, is repeated to form -*kolokolo*. This reduplication is partial because the class 7 prefix *xi*- is not duplicated in the process.

A similar strategy is used in *Xifafa***,** where the syllable *fa* is reduplicated to create *fafa*, with the prefix *xi*- again remaining unduplicated. In *Xingwangwa*, the reduplicated element is *ngwa* which duplicated to form *ngwangwa*, while the class 7 prefix *xi*- is excluded from the reduplication sequence. Other examples in Table 17 follow the same pattern. The name *Marilele* is formed through the reduplication of the syllable *le*, which occurs at the end of the name. In *Nhlalala***,** the final syllable *la* is repeated to produce a rhythmic and expressive form. The name *Khakhan'wa* incorporates reduplication of the medial syllable *kha*, which is repeated to form *kha-kha-n'wa*. Similarly, in *Khalakhasa*, the author repeats the syllable *kha*, creating a distinctive phonological pattern.

These names demonstrate how Xitsonga authors draw on partial reduplication to produce character names that are phonetically playful, stylistically marked, and rich in oral-aesthetic appeal, even when the reduplicated forms lack independent semantic content.

4.2.4. Borrowing

Borrowing refers to the process of taking elements from one language and using them in another when speakers of different languages interact. Arkadiev (2016) explains it as adopting or transferring certain features from a donor language to a recipient language during contact. In linguistics, borrowing usually happens to fill lexical gaps when a language doesn't have a word for a new object, idea, or practice, speakers simply borrow one from a language where the concept already exists (Ugwuona, 2020).

Borrowing is also seen as a normal part of how languages grow and change. It's almost impossible to avoid, except in unusual cases, and it often reflects cultural exchange in areas like art, religion, food, and technology (Slaba et al., 2021). According to Lee and Hlungwani (2020), there are two main ways words get borrowed: either through bilingual speakers within the same community or when speakers deliberately bring foreign words into their own language.

In Xitsonga literary works, two borrowing methods are commonly used when naming literary characters: direct borrowing and indirect borrowing. Seifart (2015) describes direct borrowing as taking a word straight from another language and using it with little or no change in pronunciation or form. Indirect borrowing, on the other hand, involves taking the meaning or structure of a word from another language and translating it instead of adopting its sound and form (Arokoyo, 2020). Based on the data, most authors use direct borrowing from English and other African languages when naming characters in drama texts, while only a few names are created through indirect borrowing.

4.2.4.1. Direct borrowing

Direct borrowing, as used in naming characters in Xitsonga literary texts, refers to the process of taking names directly from another language and using them in Xitsonga without making significant changes to their form or pronunciation. In this context, the authors select names from languages such as English, Afrikaans, the Nguni languages (isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, and Siswati), the Sotho languages (Setswana, Sesotho, Sepedi), and Tshivenḓa. These borrowed names are incorporated as they are, reflecting the linguistic diversity that influences Xitsonga-speaking communities. This process shows how language contact shapes literary naming practices, allowing authors to integrate names from various linguistic backgrounds while maintaining their original structure. The following sections explore how direct borrowing was used to create character names in the selected Xitsonga literature.

(a) English

Xitsonga has incorporated a substantial number of English loanwords to broaden its terminology across domains such as science, economics, politics, and religion. Similarly, Xitsonga literary authors employ direct borrowing as a naming strategy, integrating English lexical items as character names within narrative texts. Table 18 below provides examples of character names formed through this direct borrowing process from English.

Table 18: Examples of character names directly borrowed from English

Character Names	**Origin**

Eveready	English
Chester	English
Rose	English
Shiver	English
Sunday	English
James	English
Joyce	English

In Table 18 above, the character names are formed through direct borrowing, a naming strategy whereby Xitsonga authors adopt English lexical items without subjecting them to the language's morphological processes. These borrowed names, such as Eveready, Chester, Rose, Shiver, Sunday, James, and Joyce, were transferred into Xitsonga literary texts in their original phonological and orthographic forms. Unlike indigenous names that undergo noun-class prefixation, verbal extension, or compounding, borrowed names remain morphologically un-adapted. This practice highlights the permeability of the Xitsonga onomastic system and reflects broader sociolinguistic influences, including prestige, modernisation, and cross-linguistic contact.

(b) Other notable languages

In a manner comparable to the borrowing of English names, Xitsonga authors in the selected texts also draw on other languages, like Afrikaans and Arabic, lexical items when assigning character names in Xitsonga literature. Table 19 below, presents examples of character names that have been created through this direct borrowing process from Afrikaans.

Table 19: Examples of character names that have been directly borrowed from the Afrikaans

Character Names	**Origin**
Jean	Dutch/Afrikaans
Duiker	Afrikaans
Hannekom	Afrikaans
Fazel	Arabic and Persian

In Table 19 above, some character names are formed through direct borrowing, a process in which Xitsonga authors adopt lexical items from Afrikaans without significant phonological or morphological modification. In this naming practice, the borrowed words are incorporated into Xitsonga literary texts in their original form and used as character names. Examples include Jean, Duiker, and Hannekom, all of which are directly drawn from Afrikaans, and Fazel, which is drawn from Arabic and Persian languages. These names demonstrate a straightforward borrowing strategy in which the authors retain the source-language structure while integrating the names into the narrative context of Xitsonga literature.

(c) Nguni languages

As with borrowing names from Afrikaans and English, Xitsonga authors in the selected texts also incorporate lexical items from Nguni languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, and Siswati when assigning character names. Through this direct borrowing strategy, Nguni names are integrated into Xitsonga literary narratives with little to no phonological or morphological alteration. Table 20 below provides examples of character names that have been adopted through this direct borrowing from the Nguni language family.

Table 20: Character names that have been adopted directly from the Nguni language family

Character Names	**Origin**
Dudu	Nguni languages
Phuthumile	Nguni languages
Vusi	Nguni languages
Nokuthula	Nguni languages
Khambule	Nguni languages
Thuli	Nguni languages
Mzimba	Nguni languages
Nyezi	Nguni languages
Zonke	Nguni languages

In Table 20 above, the character names are created through direct borrowing from Nguni languages, including isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, and Siswati. In this naming

practice, Xitsonga authors incorporate Nguni personal names and surnames without modifying their phonological or morphological structure. Names such as *Dudu, Phuthumile, Vusi, Nokuthula, Khambule, Thuli, Mzimba, Nyezi,* and *Zonke* appear in Xitsonga texts unchanged, retaining their original morphological forms and semantic associations. Unlike indigenous Xitsonga names that undergo noun-class affixation or verbal inflection, these borrowed names remain morphologically unintegrated, reflecting patterns of inter-linguistic contact and socio-cultural interaction within Southern Africa.

(d) Sotho-Tswana languages

In addition to borrowing from Nguni languages, Xitsonga authors in the selected texts also draw on lexical items from the Sotho-Tswana language group, including Setswana, Sepedi, and Sesotho, when assigning character names. Through this direct borrowing approach, names from these languages are incorporated into Xitsonga literary narratives with minimal phonological or morphological modification. Table 21 below presents examples of character names that have been adopted through this direct borrowing process from the Sotho-Tswana language group.

Table 21: Character names that have been adopted directly from the Sotho-Tswana language group

Character Names	**Origin**
Masilo	Setswana/Sesotho
Dikeledi	Setswana/Sepedi
Tebogo	Setswana/Sepedi
Matome	Sepedi
Lekgetla	Setswana
Maepa	Sepedi
Tshepo	Sesotho/Setswana

In Table 21 above, the character names were formed through direct borrowing, where Xitsonga authors adopt names from Sotho-Tswana languages, including Sesotho, Sepedi, and Setswana, without modifying their phonological or morphological structure. In this naming strategy, borrowed names are incorporated into Xitsonga

texts exactly as they appear in the source languages, preserving their original noun-class markers, semantic value, and cultural associations.

Examples such as *Masilo, Dikeledi, Tebogo, Matome, Lekgetla, Maepa*, and *Tshepo* demonstrate this direct transfer, reflecting broader patterns of linguistic contact and social interaction between Xitsonga- and Sotho-Tswana-speaking communities. This borrowing process results in names that remain fully recognisable as Sotho-Tswana forms while functioning seamlessly within Xitsonga literary texts.

(e) Tshivenḓa

Xitsonga authors in the selected texts also incorporate lexical items from Tshivenḓa when assigning character names. Through this direct borrowing strategy, Tshivenḓa names are inserted into Xitsonga literary narratives with minimal or no phonological or morphological modification. As with other African languages' borrowings, these names are adopted in their original form, preserving Tshivenḓa structures, tonal patterns, and semantic associations. Table 22 below thus illustrates how character names from Tshivenḓa enter Xitsonga texts through straightforward lexical transfer:

Table 22: Character names that have been adopted directly from the Tshivenḓa

Character Names	**Origin**
Maṱodzi	Tshivenḓa
Mudau	Tshivenḓa
Nḓou	Tshivenḓa

In Table 22 above, certain character names are derived from Tshivenḓa through direct borrowing, reflecting the close linguistic and cultural contact between the two languages. In this naming practice, Xitsonga authors adopt Tshivenḓa names without substantial phonological or morphological modification, integrating them directly into Xitsonga literary texts. Examples include Tshivenḓa surnames such as *Maṱodzi*, *Mudau*, and *Nḓou*, all of which retain their original Tshivenḓa forms. These borrowed names illustrate a straightforward borrowing strategy in which the structural integrity of the Tshivenḓa lexical items is preserved while they are repurposed as character names within Xitsonga narratives.

4.2.4.2. Indirect borrowing

Indirect borrowing happens when a language takes the *idea* or *meaning* of a word from another language instead of using the word itself (Seifart, 2015). Rather than keeping the original sound or form, speakers translate the concept into their own language in a way that feels natural (Zepedda, 2020). This creates a new expression that carries the borrowed meaning but still fits the style, structure, and cultural norms of the receiving language. Indirect borrowing shows how languages can influence each other quietly, sharing ideas without taking on foreign words. In the selected Xitsonga literary texts, many character names were indirectly borrowed from English and Afrikaans. This means English ideas are present but blended smoothly into Xitsonga naming practices. Table 23 below presents examples of character names that were created through this indirect borrowing process.

Table 23: Examples of character names which are indirectly borrowed from English and Afrikaans.

Character Names	**Origin**	**Original word**
Talenta	English	Talent
Ndhayimani	English	Diamond
Jelazi	English	Jealous
Jele	English	Jail
Manghilazi	English	Glasses

In Table 23 above, the selected Xitsonga literary texts demonstrate the use of indirect borrowing as a morphological strategy for forming character names. Indirect borrowing occurs when words from source languages such as English or Afrikaans are adapted into Xitsonga through processes that include phonological accommodation, morphological integration, and semantic reinterpretation. Rather than adopting the original forms wholesale, Xitsonga writers reshape these borrowed items to fit the language's phonotactic and morphological constraints, often through loan translation (calques) or loan shifts, in which the meaning of a native word is extended to match a foreign concept (Abdulrazzaq & Al-Ubaidy, 2023).

The character names *Talenta, Ndhayimani, Jelazi, Jele,* and *Manghilazi* reflect this process. Each name was drawn from an English lexical item: ‘talent’, ‘diamond’,

‘jealous’, ‘jail’, and ‘glasses’ respectively, although these words originated from other languages like Greek and French. In their Xitsonga adaptations, these forms undergo systematic modification. For instance, *talent* becomes *Talenta* through the addition of a final vowel typical of Xitsonga noun structure; *diamond* shifts to *Ndhayimani* through phonological reshaping to accommodate the consonant and syllable patterns of the language; *jealous* is realised as *Jelazi*, incorporating Xitsonga vowel harmony and syllabic structure; *jail* becomes *Jele* through simplification and morphological regularisation; and *glasses* develops into *Manghilazi*, incorporating a Xitsonga plural noun-class prefix (*ma-*) and phonological adjustment.

These examples illustrate how Xitsonga authors employ indirect borrowing to create character names that preserve the semantic core of the original foreign terms while aligning them with the phonological, morphological, and structural norms of Xitsonga. This strategy enriches character naming practices by blending external linguistic influences with indigenous grammatical systems.

4.2.5. Single stem structure character names

Single-stem structure character names are names that consist of a single, indivisible unit and cannot be broken down or traced to recognisable morphemes in the language. Unlike complex names formed through affixation, compounding or reduplication, these names do not reveal information about meaning, grammatical function, or derivational patterns. In Xitsonga literary texts, single-stem names are often chosen for their simplicity, uniqueness, or stylistic effect, giving characters distinct identities while remaining opaque to linguistic analysis or semantic interpretation. Consider the examples in 24 below:

Table 24: Examples of character names which are single stem structure

Single stem Character names
Xiluva
Matimu
Nyeleti
Madambi
Xiculu

Xiphongo
Vutomi
Matimba
Khegu

In Table 24 above, some character names are formed through a single-stem structure, a morphological type in which the name consists of an indivisible unit that cannot be segmented into smaller meaningful morphemes. These names function as monomorphemic lexical items whose internal structure does not reveal identifiable roots or affixes within Xitsonga. Authors of the selected texts employ this strategy to assign character names that are semantically holistic rather than morphologically complex. Examples such as *Xiluva, Matimu, Nyeleti, Khegu, Madambi, Xiphongo, Xiculu, Vutomi* and *Matimba* exemplify this naming approach. Although these forms carry lexical meaning within the language, they do not break down into smaller morphemic units that transparently show how the names were constructed. Most of these names belong to the noun category in Xitsonga, further highlighting their status as complete lexical items rather than derived or compound forms. This single-stem structure, therefore, represents a straightforward yet meaningful naming strategy in Xitsonga literary texts.

4.3. Semantic analysis of character naming

Semantics is a branch of linguistics concerned with the study of meaning in language and the principles that govern how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and conveyed (Hurford, Heasley & Smith, 2007). It looks at the different linguistic units, from single words and phrases to full sentences and larger discourse patterns, and how they convey both conceptual and relational meanings (Malau, 2020). According to Saeed (2015), semantics is the study of the systematic ways in which the mind represents meaning and verbal expression realises it. Such processes of meaning creation form the basis for interpretation, comprehension, and even, to some extent, human communication.

In literary contexts, semantics is a field of study that usually goes beyond the common construction of meaning and instead serves as a highly appreciated stylistic and symbolic tool. The semantic choices made when naming characters directly impact

how identities are communicated and understood, often embedding cultural values, emotional associations, or even thematic significance in the name (Mensah, Rowan & Ekpe, 2024). In the chosen Xitsonga literary texts, the names of the characters reflect carefully thought-out semantic choices which incorporate literal, metaphorical, and culturally informed meanings.

The authors are making readers of the literature aware of the various semantic levels inherent in the character names, thereby enriching the characters and the plot, as discussed in the subsequent subheadings. Below is a structured thematic classification of the character names according to the meaning each name carries. Themes show how Xitsonga literary naming encodes personality, morality, emotional tone, social roles, beauty, power and lived experience.

4.3.1. Character names conveying love, affection and peace

The theme of love, affection and peace foregrounds positive emotional relations, harmony and mutual care within Xitsonga narratives. Semantically, such names index intimacy, calmness, and compassion, and are often used to symbolise unity or emotional resolution. In literary contexts, they humanise characters, soften conflict, and foreground restorative, relational values that sustain community well-being, as shown in Table 25 below.

Table 25: Character names reflecting expressions of love, affection, and peace

Character names	**Denotational meanings**
Xirhandziwa	beloved
Nokuthula	mother of peace
Thuli	quietness
Ntsako	joy/happiness
Vuyetela	calm down
Khongotela	comfort

Vonani	see

The denotational meanings of these character names collectively highlight themes of emotional harmony, interpersonal care, and restorative values within Xitsonga narratives. As shown in Table 25 above, they directly encode affection and relational attachment, signalling individuals who are valued, cherished, or occupy an emotionally significant role within their social environment. *Nokuthula* (mother of peace) denotes tranquillity and the cessation of conflict, positioning such characters as stabilising forces who embody serenity or mediate tensions. Similarly, the name *Thuli* is derived from the Nguni language's verb *-thula* (quiet), which denotes stillness and calm, suggesting inward composure or a soothing presence that contributes to harmonious social environments.

Ntsako (joy/happiness) introduces a positive emotional register, marking characters who bring delight, warmth or uplifting energy into the narrative. Names such as *Vuyetela* (calm down) and *Khongotela* (comfort) explicitly denote actions associated with emotional soothing and relational reassurance, signalling roles that involve healing, mediating or restoring wellbeing in moments of distress. *Vonani* (see) carries a denotational meaning linked to perception or attention, often symbolising acknowledgement, appreciation or the recognition of another's value.

Finally, *Rose*, derived from the flower, denotes beauty, delicacy and symbolic affection, aligning the character with tenderness and aesthetic grace. These names function not merely as labels but as semantic cues that direct readers toward themes of care, emotional balance and peaceful coexistence. Their denotational meanings shape expectations about characters' roles, the emotional atmosphere they create, and the broader moral and relational values the narrative seeks to foreground.

4.3.2. Character names that indicate hope, gratitude and blessing

This theme reflects aspirations for renewal, divine favour and positive transformation within Xitsonga narratives. Semantically, such names encode optimism, thankfulness and the anticipation of better circumstances. In literary contexts, they symbolise characters who embody resilience, future-oriented vision or communal appreciation. These names often serve to motivate action, uplift collective morale, and anchor

narratives in the values of faith, renewal, and enduring gratitude. Consider the examples in Table 26 below:

Table 26: Character names indicating hope, gratitude, and blessing

Character names	**Denotational meanings**
Mikhenso	Thanks/gratitude(s) (deeper than thanks)
Tebogo	Gratitude
Tshepo	Hope
Nhlalala	luck/ stroke of luck
Ndzalama	(luck/most valuable or prized asset)
Talenta	(talent)
Nyeleti	(star)

The denotational meanings of these character names, as presented in Table 26 above, foreground themes of gratitude, divine favour, optimism and personal potential within the Xitsonga narratives. *Mikhenso* (thanks/gratitude(s) (deeper than thanks in Xitsonga) and Tebogo (gratitude in Sesotho) explicitly encode appreciation and acknowledgement, suggesting characters associated with humility, recognition of support, or the fulfilment of a received blessing. Their meanings often symbolise restored harmony or the positive outcomes of communal solidarity. *Tshepo* (hope) directly denotes expectation and forward-looking confidence, positioning such a character as a symbol of perseverance, aspiration or faith in better circumstances. This name frequently signals resilience in the face of adversity and plays a central role in narrative moments that emphasise renewal.

Nhlalala (lucky/stroke of luck) introduces the semantic field of fortune and unexpected favour, suggesting that the character is either a bearer of good outcomes or a symbol of positive change. Similarly, *Ndzalama* (luck/most valuable or prized asset) denotes

preciousness, worth, and a rare blessing, indicating a character who is treasured, symbolically rich, or central to themes of prosperity and protection. These names often mark individuals whose narrative function is to restore dignity or uplift their surroundings. *Talenta* (talent) carries denotational meaning related to inherent ability and giftedness, representing characters endowed with natural skill or promise. This meaning aligns with themes of potential, self-actualisation and the unfolding of blessings through personal capability.

Finally, *Nyeleti* (star) denotes brightness, guidance and promise. As a material symbol, it evokes imagery of direction, destiny and illumination, suggesting a character who inspires hope or leads others toward positive transformation. These names serve as semantic anchors, infusing narratives with emotional elevation and spiritual resonance. Their denotational meanings reinforce values of thankfulness, divine provision, aspiration, and recognition of human worth, shaping characters who embody the possibility of renewal, abundance, and communal upliftment in Xitsonga storytelling.

4.3.3. Character names concerning life, existence and growth

Names in this theme draw on concepts of vitality, continuity and human development. Semantically, they highlight the significance of being, becoming and the unfolding of life cycles. Within literary contexts, these names foreground transformation, maturation and renewal, often used to parallel plot progression. They underscore the fragility and dynamism of existence, reinforcing themes of survival, continuity and the natural processes that shape personal and communal growth. Consider the examples in Table 27 below:

Table 27: Character names concerning life, existence, and growth

Character names	**Denotational meanings**
Vutomi	Life
Hanyani	Live
Vusi	to raise/bring up

Fumani	get rich
Tiyani	Persevere
Tirhani	Work

Table 27 above highlights character names whose denotational meanings foreground key aspects of vitality, survival, growth and sustained human effort within Xitsonga narratives. The name *Vutomi* (life) directly encodes the fundamental principle of existence, often signalling a character whose presence represents continuity, renewal or the intrinsic value of being. As a name, it centres the narrative on themes of survival and the sanctity of human experience. *Hanyani* (live) reinforces this orientation by denoting ongoing life and resilience. Its meaning suggests an imperative to endure, positioning such a character as a symbol of perseverance in the face of adversity or a reminder of the community's collective will to survive.

The name *Vusi* comes from the Nguni languages' verbal stem -*vusa* (to raise/bring up) and denotes nurturing, upbringing and developmental support. It typically marks characters associated with care, mentorship or social reproduction, emphasising the importance of intergenerational continuity. This name draws attention to processes through which individuals and communities grow, cultivate responsibility and pass on cultural knowledge. *Fumani* (get rich) introduces semantic associations with growth through prosperity, material advancement and economic upliftment. Its denotation implies social mobility or the possibility of improved circumstances, linking life's progression to personal or communal success.

Tiyani (persevere) conveys endurance and the capacity to withstand hardship. As a denotational marker of strength, it positions the character as a figure of persistence, reinforcing the idea that growth requires sustained effort. *Tirhani* (work) complements this by denoting purposeful labour and disciplined engagement with life's demands. Its meaning highlights the centrality of effort, productivity and contribution to the community. Together, these names serve as semantic anchors that articulate a holistic view of life as an interplay among existence, resilience, nurturing, economic opportunity, and committed labour. Their denotational meanings shape characters

who embody the dynamic processes of living, striving and evolving, thereby grounding Xitsonga narratives in themes of growth, continuity and human flourishing.

4.3.4. Character names portraying misery, pain and suffering

This theme foregrounds emotional hardship, adversity and human vulnerability. Semantically, these names index distress, misfortune or prolonged struggle, often used to highlight disruptive social conditions in Xitsonga narratives. In literary contexts, they intensify tension, evoke empathy and illuminate the psychological toll of conflict or injustice. Such names function as narrative devices that expose structural suffering and deepen readers' awareness of the human cost embedded in the storyline. Consider the examples in Table 28 below:

Table 28: Character names portraying misery, pain and suffering

Character names	**Denotational meanings**
Mihloti	tears (in Xitsonga)
Matodzi	tears (in Tshivenḓa)
Dikeledi	tears (in Sotho)
Nxaniseko	misery/suffering
Madyisambitsi	someone who causes distress
Masaswivona	someone who remains to suffer
Mashangu	struggle
Mbitsini	To be in troublesome/distressful situation
Madambi	witchcraft-related 'bad luck'
Khombomuni	What kind of misfortune?

Table 28 above illustrates character names whose denotational meanings evoke powerful associations with emotional anguish, hardship and the darker dimensions of human experience, enabling Xitsonga narratives to foreground the realities of suffering and social adversity. *Mihloti*, *Matodzi* and *Dikeledi* (all meaning tears) directly signal sorrow, grief and emotional breakdown, suggesting characters who embody or witness profound distress. Their denotational meanings often mark them as carriers of emotional burden, reflecting situations of loss, despair or unresolved trauma. *Nxaniseko* (misery) intensifies this thematic frame by naming a character through the explicit condition of prolonged suffering. The name evokes images of deprivation, discomfort or persistent hardship, portraying an existence marked by unrelenting emotional or material pain.

Madyisambitsi (someone who causes distress) carries a denotation that shifts the focus from suffering to the agent of suffering.

This type of name suggests a character whose actions create turmoil or emotional discomfort for others, reinforcing the narrative's depiction of interpersonal conflict. Similarly, *Masaswivona* (someone who remains to suffer) denotes endurance of pain without relief. Its meaning positions such a character within narratives of abandonment, marginalisation or inescapable hardship, symbolising long-term suffering that shapes the character's identity and social relationships. *Mashangu* (struggle) broadens the semantic field toward laborious effort, difficulty, and continual adversity, highlighting the strenuous conditions that shape the character's life journey.

Names such as *Mbitsini* (to be in troublesome/distress) denote a source of being in difficulties, signalling characters associated with conflict, disruption or behavioural disturbances. *Jele* (jail) introduces imagery of imprisonment, constraint and punishment, marking characters who embody social confinement or moral consequence. *Jelazi* (jealous) denotes emotional negativity and destructive comparison, linking the character to interpersonal tension, insecurity or conflict-motivated behaviour. *Madambi* (witchcraft-related 'bad luck) carries strong cultural connotations of misfortune, supernatural harm or unexplained adversity, suggesting a character shadowed by negativity or believed to attract danger.

Lastly, *Khombomuni* (what kind of misfortune?) explicitly encodes a rhetorical lament, naming the character through bewilderment at repeated or severe bad luck. These names operate as semantic markers that construct a narrative landscape defined by suffering, emotional turmoil and social strain. Their denotational meanings help authors portray the psychological and structural dimensions of pain, allowing characters to embody, cause, or signify the pervasive challenges faced within their communities.

4.3.5. Character names expressing social roles, occupations and actions

Character names under this theme highlight functional identity, purposeful activity and societal contribution. Semantically, they denote roles, professions or habitual actions that shape a character's place within the community. In literary contexts, these names anchor characters in practical responsibilities and social expectations, often symbolising duty, productivity or agency. They help depict broader socio-economic structures, emphasising how individuals enact labour, leadership or service within Xitsonga cultural settings. Consider the examples illustrated in Table 29 below:

Table 29: Character names expressing social roles, occupations and actions

Character names	**Denotational meanings**
Mulunghisi	Fixer
Dlayakhwati	one who clears the forest
Tlakula	Carry
Amukelani	Accept
Chinghisa	Help (cause) to swear
Hadisa	help (cause) to mow
Sindzisa	(to be cheeky/to force to)
Khatisa	Help (cause) to cut (to please/to bring joy)

Chayela	drive /assist
Tivoneleni	watch out
Xisandzhaku	straggler/ latecomer

Table 29 above presents character names whose literal meanings function as identities, labour practices and socially embedded actions that shape community dynamics in Xitsonga narratives. *Mulunghisi* (fixer) directly encodes a role centred on repair, resolution and problem-solving. This name suggests a character associated with restoring order, mediating disputes or correcting structural faults, signalling a position of responsibility and practical intelligence.

Dlayakhwati (one who clears the forest) denotes a physically demanding occupation rooted in the transformation of the natural environment. Its meaning implies bravery, strength, and productivity, marking the character as someone who prepares the space for settlement, farming, or communal expansion. *Tlakula* (carry) highlights manual labour, burden-sharing and mobility. The name denotes physical support and contribution, positioning the character within essential work that sustains community needs.

Amukelani (accept) moves toward social interaction and relational duties. Its denotational meaning suggests openness, hospitality or willingness to receive others, signalling characters who foster unity or cooperation. *Chinghisa* (cause to swear) encodes participation in ritual or formal processes, implying legal, traditional or ceremonial involvement, while *Hadisa* (help to mow) and *Sindzisa* (to be cheeky/force to) denote someone who forces someone to do something. These names reflect cooperative work systems where individuals contribute to shared productivity and stability. *Khatisa* (help to cut) similarly marks a character associated with productive manual tasks, linking identity to craftsmanship and collective effort.

Chayela (drive for/assist) conveys mobility, guidance and service. The denotation implies a supportive role that facilitates movement or transport for others, highlighting the value of assistance in navigating daily responsibilities. *Tivoneleni* (watch out) shifts from labour to protective vigilance. Its meaning suggests a character whose role

involves warning, safeguarding or monitoring, emphasising community security and collective awareness. Although not an occupation in the literal sense, its denotational meaning operates metaphorically to represent resource management, productivity or the ability to generate surplus.

The name may signify a character whose actions result in prosperity or who is associated with generosity and overflowing provision. *Xisandzhaku* (straggler/latecomer) denotes a social position rather than a task. Its meaning suggests marginality, delay or social disadvantage, marking a character whose actions or lack thereof place them behind others in productivity, status or involvement.

Collectively, these denotational meanings illuminate how Xitsonga narratives embed identity within labour, contribution and action-oriented roles. Each name functions as a semantic cue that shapes readers' expectations about a character's practical responsibilities, social value and behavioural tendencies. Through this network of meanings, the names foreground a worldview in which identity is closely tied to work, cooperation, duty, and participation in sustaining community life.

4.3.6. Character names illustrating morality, behaviour and judgement

This theme centres on ethical orientation, behavioural tendencies and evaluative social norms. Semantically, these names encode ideas of virtue, transgression, restraint or moral assessment. Within literary narratives, such names signal expected conduct or critique undesirable actions, often guiding reader interpretation. They reinforce communal values, highlight internal or external judgement, and frame moral conflicts, thereby shaping character arcs around accountability, ethical reasoning and social regulation. Consider the examples illustrated in Table 30 below:

Table 30: Character names illustrating morality, behaviour and judgement

Character names	**Denotational meanings**
Malayi	one who reprimands others
Bayizani	to be naughty
Masilo	merciful one/grace

Diza	Bribe
Madyaswavanhu	one who eats people's things (food stuff)

Table 30 above highlights character names whose denotational meanings foreground ethical orientation, behavioural tendencies and the moral evaluations embedded in Xitsonga social life. *Malayi* (one who reprimands others) directly encodes judgement and corrective behaviour, suggesting a character positioned as a moral overseer or disciplinarian. The denotation implies someone who enforces norms, challenges wrongdoing or guides others toward acceptable conduct. Such a name often signals authority in moral negotiation, highlighting tensions between communal expectations and individual behaviours.

Bayizani (to be naughty) stands in contrast, denoting mischievousness and behavioural deviation. Its meaning associates the character with disobedience, playful disorder or minor transgressions, providing a narrative lens through which youthful rebellion, social disruption or the consequences of poor behaviour can be explored. The denotation frames the character as someone who tests boundaries, thereby exposing the limits of tolerance within the community.

Masilo (merciful one/grace) introduces a positive moral attribute, denoting compassion, forgiveness, and moral generosity. This meaning positions the character as a symbol of restorative ethics, kindness or moral elevation. In narrative contexts, the name suggests a figure who mitigates conflict, provides second chances or embodies the virtues necessary for social cohesion. Such a character stands as a counterpoint to more harmful behavioural types, reinforcing the moral ideals valued within the community. *Diza* (bribe) carries strong negative connotations linked to corruption and moral compromise. Its denotational meaning suggests involvement in dishonesty, unethical exchange or the abuse of power for personal gain. Characters given such a name typically reflect structural critiques, exposing the social decay, inequality or moral shortcuts that undermine communal harmony.

Madyaswavanhu (one who eats people's things) denotes greed, exploitation and unethical consumption of shared resources. The name directly signals a character who takes advantage of others, embodying selfishness or predatory behaviour.

Denotationally, it critiques individuals who destabilise social trust by prioritising personal gain over collective wellbeing. Together, these names serve as moral signposts, encoding explicit judgments about behaviour and shaping narrative expectations. Their denotational meanings enable Xitsonga literature to portray a spectrum of moral positions, from virtuous compassion to corrupt self-interest, and to illuminate the social values, warnings, and ethical reflections central to community life.

4.3.7. Character names demonstrating nature, objects and material symbols

Names in this theme draw from environmental features, tangible objects and culturally significant material symbols. Semantically, they evoke imagery associated with place, texture, natural elements or artefacts. In literary contexts, these character names enrich descriptive detail, connect characters to the landscape, and symbolise stability, identity, or cultural memory. They function metaphorically to anchor meaning, emphasising ecological awareness and the material world that informs Xitsonga narrative imagination. Examine the examples presented in Table 31 below:

Table 31: Character names demonstrating nature, objects and material symbols

Character names	**Denotational meanings**
Xivoni	mirror
Xikhohlola	Mucus spat out
Xihlayamagoza	one who counts steps/slow mover
Xiphongo	male goat
Xiluva	flower
Gandaganda	bulldozer
Khakhan'wa	walking stick
Xingwangwa	small hatchet
Xifafa	epilepsy/ faintness/short tempered

Khalakhasa	unpleasant taste/bitterness
Xigodo	tree stump
Khapakhapa	overflow
Xikolokolo	persistence

The denotational meanings of these character names derived from natural elements, material objects, and symbolic items play a significant role in shaping character identity, guiding behavioural expectations, and informing thematic interpretation within Xitsonga narratives, as illustrated in Table 31. *Xivoni* (mirror) immediately invokes imagery of reflection, clarity and truth. Its denotational meaning suggests a character associated with revealing hidden realities, exposing contradictions or helping others "see themselves." Mirrors symbolise introspection; thus, a character with this name may function as a moral or emotional reflector whose presence forces other characters to confront their behaviours or motives (Lee, 2018).

In contrast, *Xikhohlola* (mucus spat out) carries a denotation associated with discomfort, irritation, or unpleasantness. As a name, it signals a character whose actions cling to, disturb, or disrupt normal functioning. The organic imagery evokes persistence of a negative condition, shaping associations of annoyance or contamination within narrative interactions.

Xihlayamagoza (one who counts steps/slow mover) suggests deliberate observation, patience or slow progress. Denotationally, it marks a character who moves cautiously or operates methodically, either symbolising wisdom through careful assessment or representing stagnation and delay. Its repetition in the list underscores its versatility as a metaphor for watchers, observers or individuals who advance gradually through hardship. *Xiphongo* (male goat) introduces a natural symbol associated with stubbornness, boldness and confrontational leadership. The name denotes a character who is assertive, potentially domineering or unyielding, and whose identity is framed through animalistic strength and resilience.

Xiluva (flower) draws on natural beauty, fragility and symbolic purity. Its denotational meaning highlights growth, elegance and transience, positioning the character as a

figure of admiration, delicacy or emotional significance. Flowers frequently symbolise affection, renewal or innocence, rendering the character narratively softening and aesthetically central. By contrast, *Gandaganda* (bulldozer) shifts from nature to machine imagery. The name denotes force, impact and overwhelming strength, signalling a character who pushes through obstacles, disrupts barriers or reshapes environments. Its denotation constructs an identity rooted in domination, transformation and unstoppable forward momentum.

Khakhan'wa (walking stick) introduces an object associated with support, stability and guidance. As a name, it implies a character who aids, steadiness or protection for others. Its denotational grounding in mobility support suggests wisdom, endurance and the ability to hold others steady during challenges. *Xingwangwa* (small hatchet) evokes sharpness, cutting ability and practicality. The name implies decisiveness or problem-solving, marking the character as someone capable of breaking through difficulties or severing unhelpful ties. Its association with a tool highlights functional value and resourcefulness.

Xifafa (epilepsy/faintness) denotes illness, unpredictability, and physical vulnerability. Although drawn from a medical condition, its denotational meaning symbolises instability, sudden change or loss of control. Characters with this name may reflect societal views on fragility, difference or the disruption of normalcy. *Khalakhasa* (unpleasant taste/bitterness) uses sensory imagery to signify discomfort, rejection or moral distaste. As a denotation, it marks a character whose presence or behaviour leaves a negative impression, symbolising bitterness, conflict or emotional toxicity.

Xigodo (tree stump) draws from natural materiality to signify rootedness, firmness and immovability. Denotationally, it may represent stability, endurance or stubborn refusal to change. The image of a stump also conveys remnants of past growth, linking the character to resilience or halted development. *Khapakhapa* (overflow) introduces abundance, excess or productive surplus. Its denotation suggests generosity, prosperity or uncontrolled expansion, shaping identity through notions of plenty and outpouring energy. Finally, *Xikolokolo* (persistence) draws from industrial material strength. Its denotational meaning evokes endurance, resilience and unbreakability, marking a character as capable of surviving pressure or resisting defeat.

Jointly, these names reveal how Xitsonga narratives employ material and natural referents to encode character traits, behavioural expectations and symbolic functions. The denotational meanings shape identities rooted in strength, beauty, discomfort, renewal, destruction or endurance, showing how everyday objects and natural symbols become powerful narrative tools that reflect cultural values and human experience.

4.3.8. Character names concerning emotion and psychological state

This theme foregrounds internal feelings, affective states and mental dispositions. Semantically, such names index emotional intensity, mood or psychological orientation, often capturing instability, joy, fear or introspection. In literary contexts, these character names externalise inner experiences, providing insight into characters' motivations and vulnerabilities. They deepen narrative empathy, illuminate internal conflict, and foreground emotional complexity as a central aspect of human expression within Xitsonga storytelling. Examine the examples presented in Table 32 below:

Table 32: Character names concerning emotion and psychological state

Character names	**Denotational meanings**
Miyelani	be silent
Shiver	trembling/fear
Rivalani	Forget

Table 32 above demonstrates character names whose literal meanings signal internal states, emotional dispositions and psychological tendencies that shape character identity and narrative dynamics. *Miyelani* (be silent) evokes emotional withdrawal, introspection or suppressed expression, suggesting a character whose quietness reflects contemplation, secrecy or muted suffering. Shiver (trembling/fear) directly encodes anxiety and vulnerability, positioning the character within states of insecurity, threat or emotional instability. Finally, *Rivalani* (forget) signifies emotional detachment, memory loss or deliberate disengagement, capturing psychological distance or avoidance of painful experience. Together, these names portray complex inner

landscapes, using denotational meanings to signal characters who embody silence, fear, rigidity or detachment, thereby enriching the narrative with nuanced emotional depth.

4.3.9. Character names showing power, strength and authority

Character names in this theme signify dominance, resilience and legitimate control. Semantically, they encode notions of physical force, leadership or hierarchical influence. Within literary narratives, such names emphasise characters who shape events, command respect, or impose order. They signal capacity for protection or intimidation, depending on context. These names reinforce themes of governance, social structure and collective security, highlighting power dynamics embedded in Xitsonga cultural settings. Examine the examples presented in Table 33 below:

Table 33: Character names showing power, strength and authority

Character names	**Denotational meanings**
Matimba	power/strength
Masocha	Soldiers
Dumakude	well-known/respected/renowned
Mzimba	body/physical presence

Table 33 above illustrates character names whose semantic meanings encode force, dominance and elevated social standing, shaping identities grounded in authority and physical or symbolic strength. *Matimba* (power) directly signifies control, influence and capacity, positioning the character as a central figure whose presence shapes outcomes and commands respect. *Masocha* (soldiers) evokes discipline, bravery and collective defence, implying characters associated with protection, strategic action or readiness for conflict.

Dumakude (well-known/respected/renowned) signals widespread recognition and status, indicating authority grounded in reputation or societal acknowledgement. *Mzimba* (body/physical presence) highlights strength, endurance and visibility,

marking a character whose authority emerges from physical power or commanding stature. Together, these names construct identities that embody dominance, resilience and influential leadership within Xitsonga storytelling.

4.3.10. Character names depicting historical, memory and knowledge themes

This theme highlights remembrance, inherited wisdom and the preservation of cultural experience. Semantically, such character names point to memory, knowledge, ancestry or significant past events. In literary contexts, they connect characters to collective history, legitimising tradition and grounding narratives in continuity. These names emphasise the transmission of knowledge, the value of reflection and the role of memory in shaping identity, thereby reinforcing cultural cohesion within Xitsonga storytelling. Refer to the examples provided in Table 34 below:

Table 34: Character names depicting historical, memory and knowledge themes

Character names	**Denotational meanings**
Matimu	History
Makungu	Plans
Marhumbi	Ruins

Table 34 above highlights character names whose denotational foreground connections to the past, collective memory, and intellectual insight within Xitsonga narratives. *Matimu* (history) directly encodes awareness of past events, positioning the character as a vessel of cultural memory or a custodian of communal heritage. *Makungu* (plans) denotes foresight, strategic thinking, and deliberate action, linking the character to knowledge, wisdom, and experience-informed decision-making.

Marhumbi (ruins) evokes the remnants of past destruction, symbolising the lingering effects of conflict or societal collapse. Its denotational meaning situates the character within reflection, remembrance, or cautionary observation, highlighting lessons drawn from previous experiences. Taken together, these names serve as semantic markers that connect individual characters to broader temporal and intellectual frameworks,

shaping narrative engagement with history, strategic insight, and memory as central forces in personal and communal identity formation.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the multifaceted nature of character naming in Xitsonga literary texts through a detailed morphological and semantic analyses. The discussion has demonstrated that naming in Xitsonga literature is far more than a stylistic choice; it is a linguistically structured and culturally grounded practice that reflects the complex interplay between morphological processes, semantic meanings, and the socio-cultural contexts from which the names emerge. By analysing character names through affixation, compounding, reduplication, borrowing, and single-stem structures, the chapter has highlighted the creative depth and linguistic sophistication inherent in Xitsonga onomastics.

The exploration of morphological patterns shows that Xitsonga authors engage a wide range of word-formation strategies to construct meaningful and contextually resonant character names. Affixation, particularly derivational and inflectional processes, emerged as a dominant pattern, illustrating how roots and stems are transformed to encode identity, action, social position, or evaluative meaning. Derivation enabled the conversion of verbs into nouns that symbolise attributes or states, while inflectional morphology through prefixes, verbal extensions, and associative suffixes underscored how grammatical markers carry semantic weight within naming traditions. The analysis also demonstrated that even seemingly grammatical processes such as imperative plurals or nominal prefixation are re-functionalised in literary contexts to convey thematic or moral undertones.

Compounding further highlighted the productive and imaginative dimensions of Xitsonga morphology. The ability to fuse verbs, nouns, interrogatives, adverbs, concords, and noun-class prefixes into cohesive, semantically loaded units reveals the language’s capacity to articulate complex ideas through compact lexical structures. These compounds are not merely structural combinations; they operate metaphorically, symbolically, and narratively by characterising social roles, behavioural tendencies, moral commentary, or existential conditions. The chapter has shown that such compounds allow authors to encapsulate intricate character identities

within a single lexical form, thereby enriching narrative depth and interpretive possibilities.

Reduplication, both full and partial, has been shown to serve as a creative stylistic tool that enhances expressiveness and memorability in character naming. The rhythmic and phonological qualities introduced by reduplication give names an aesthetic appeal while simultaneously encoding notions such as repetition, intensity, or emotional colouring. This section underscored the strong oral aesthetic tradition characteristic of Xitsonga storytelling, where sound, rhythm, and imagery are central to meaning making. Reduplicated names thus demonstrate how literary naming practices preserve linguistic artistry and cultural identity.

Borrowing, both direct and indirect, revealed the dynamic and adaptive nature of Xitsonga in multilingual environments. Direct borrowing from English, Afrikaans, Nguni, Sotho languages and Tshivenḓa brings into literature names that retain their phonological and semantic form, reflecting historical contact, social mobility, and inter-cultural exchange. Indirect borrowing showed how foreign concepts become naturalised within Xitsonga phonological and morphological patterns, demonstrating flexibility and linguistic integration. This phenomenon underscores how naming practices mirror broader sociolinguistic realities, where identities and linguistic boundaries are fluid rather than fixed.

Single-stem structures provided an important reminder that not all names are morphologically analysable. Some character names function as complete lexical items whose meaning is holistic rather than morphologically transparent. These names reflect an alternative naming strategy that relies on cultural resonance, symbolic value, and semantic clarity rather than morphological complexity. Their presence reinforces the diversity of naming approaches used by Xitsonga authors and the multiplicity of linguistic resources available within the language.

The semantic analysis further illuminated how character names perform important narrative and cultural functions beyond their morphological formation. By categorising names according to themes such as love, peace, hope, gratitude, moral alignment, emotional disposition, power, and lived experience, the chapter demonstrated that names are vehicles of meaning that shape readers' interpretation of character identity

and thematic development. The denotational meanings embedded in these names reveal how authors employ naming as a narrative strategy to express values, critique social norms, reinforce cultural ideologies, or articulate emotional landscapes. In this way, semantics adds an essential layer of interpretive richness to Xitsonga literary naming.

Overall, the chapter has shown that the naming of characters in Xitsonga literature operates at the intersection of linguistic structure, cultural symbolism, and narrative intention. Morphology provides the tools through which names are constructed, while semantics determines how these names function in meaning-making within the text. These dimensions reveal a sophisticated and culturally embedded onomastic tradition in Xitsonga literary practice.

Naming is thus not a random or superficial choice but a deliberate linguistic act that encodes social knowledge, cultural heritage, and narrative significance. This chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of how Xitsonga literature harnesses the expressive power of language to construct identities, convey themes, and engage readers. By highlighting the interplay between morphological creativity and semantic depth, the chapter affirms the centrality of naming as a linguistic, cultural, and literary device in Xitsonga storytelling.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings, recommendations, and conclusions of the study on the morphological and semantic analysis of character naming in Xitsonga literary texts. The study examined how Xitsonga authors employ various morphological processes and semantic strategies to construct character names in literary works.

The analysis revealed that character names in Xitsonga literature are not arbitrarily selected but are linguistically and culturally motivated. Through morphological processes such as affixation, compounding, reduplication, borrowing, and single-stem formations, authors create names that convey thematic, cultural, emotional, and symbolic meanings. Furthermore, the semantic analysis demonstrated that character names function as carriers of social values, moral commentary, emotional states, identity, and cultural beliefs. This chapter, therefore, summarises the major findings of the study, provides recommendations for future research and literary practice, and concludes the study.

5.2 Findings

5.2.1 Morphological processes of character naming in Xitsonga literary texts

The study established that Xitsonga literary authors employ a wide range of morphological processes to create character names. These processes demonstrate the richness, productivity, and creativity of Xitsonga morphology in literary expression. The findings revealed that affixation, compounding, reduplication, borrowing, and single-stem structures are the major morphological strategies used in naming characters in the selected literary texts.

The study found that affixation is one of the most dominant processes in character naming. Through derivational morphology, authors create deverbal names by attaching nominal prefixes and suffixes to verb stems. Names such as *Xivoni, Mulunghisi, Ntsako*, and *Nxaniseko* illustrate how verb roots are transformed into meaningful nouns that reflect actions, emotional states, or behavioural characteristics

associated with characters. The study further established that inflectional morphology contributes significantly to character naming through verbal extensions such as causative /-*is*-/, applicative /-*el*-/, neuter /-*ek*-/, and associative suffix /-*ni*/. These extensions allow authors to create names that encode actions, social relationships, commands, and states of being. The findings, therefore, confirm that Xitsonga character naming relies heavily on the agglutinative structure of the language.

The study also revealed that compounding is extensively used in Xitsonga literary texts. Authors combine verbs, nouns, adverbs, interrogative markers, concords, and noun class prefixes to construct semantically rich character names. Examples such as *Dlayakhwati, Xihlayamagoza, Nsatimuni,* and *Madyaswavanhu* demonstrate how compounding enables the formation of names that symbolically express personality traits, behaviour, social roles, and thematic ideas. The findings show that compound names often carry metaphorical and culturally loaded meanings that deepen literary interpretation.

Another important finding is the productive use of reduplication in character naming. Both full and partial reduplication were identified in the selected literary texts. Full reduplication was observed in names such as *Gandaganda* and *Khapakhapa*, while partial reduplication appeared in names such as *Xifafa* and *Marilele*. The study found that reduplication contributes to rhythm, memorability, emphasis, and stylistic creativity in literary naming. In addition, reduplication enhances the oral-aesthetic quality of Xitsonga literary texts and strengthens expressive meaning.

The study further established that borrowing is another significant morphological strategy employed in Xitsonga literary naming practices. Authors borrow names directly and indirectly from English, Afrikaans, Nguni languages, Sotho-Tswana languages, and Tshivenḓa. Directly borrowed names, such as James, Dudu, Tshepo, and Mudau, retain their original phonological and morphological structures, while indirectly borrowed names, such as *Talenta, Jele*, and *Manghilazi*, undergo phonological and morphological adaptation to align with Xitsonga linguistic patterns. These findings demonstrate the influence of language contact and multilingualism on Xitsonga literary naming practices.

Lastly, the study found that some character names are formed through single-stem structures. Names such as *Xiluva, Matimba,* and *Nyeleti* function as indivisible lexical units that cannot be morphologically segmented into smaller meaningful components. Although structurally simple, these names still carry important semantic and symbolic meanings within literary narratives.

5.2.2 Semantic Analysis of Character Names

The semantic analysis revealed that character names in Xitsonga literary texts are deeply meaningful and culturally motivated. The findings demonstrated that names are used strategically to communicate emotional states, moral values, personality traits, social identities, and thematic messages within literary narratives.

The study found that many character names convey themes of love, affection, peace, and emotional harmony. Names such as *Xirhandziwa, Nokuthula, Thuli,* and *Ntsako* symbolise affection, calmness, joy, and emotional stability. These names often represent characters who promote unity, compassion, and reconciliation within the narrative. The findings suggest that Xitsonga literary authors use names to reinforce positive social values and emotional well-being.

The study further revealed that some names express suffering, conflict, misfortune, and emotional pain. Names derived from words associated with hardship or sorrow symbolically reflect the difficult experiences characters face in the narrative. Such names function as thematic indicators that prepare readers for the emotional and social struggles represented in the literary texts.

Additionally, the findings established that character names are frequently used to portray personality traits and behavioural characteristics. Certain names reflect strength, bravery, wisdom, stubbornness, beauty, jealousy, or moral failure. Through semantic symbolism, authors can shape readers' perceptions of characters even before their actions are fully developed in the narrative. Character names, therefore, function as important literary devices for characterisation and thematic development.

The study also found that semantic meanings in character names are closely linked to cultural beliefs and social realities within Xitsonga society. Many names reflect

communal values, moral expectations, social relationships, and cultural identities. Some names communicate warnings, advice, or social commentary, while others preserve indigenous cultural knowledge and traditional worldviews. The findings, therefore, confirm that Xitsonga literary naming practices are deeply embedded in cultural and social contexts.

Furthermore, the study revealed that borrowed names also carry semantic significance within Xitsonga literary texts. Although borrowed from other languages, these names often acquire new contextual meanings within Xitsonga narratives. Their use reflects social interaction, multilingualism, urbanisation, and cultural hybridity in contemporary society.

Overall, the semantic findings demonstrate that character names in Xitsonga literature function beyond simple identification. They operate as symbolic, thematic, and communicative tools that contribute significantly to literary meaning, cultural representation, and narrative interpretation.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed as follows:

- Firstly, future studies should expand the scope of research by examining character naming in other Xitsonga literary genres such as poetry, folktales, novels, and oral literature. Such studies may provide broader insights into the relationship between morphology, semantics, and literary creativity in Xitsonga.
- Secondly, researchers should conduct comparative studies between Xitsonga and other African languages to explore similarities and differences in literary naming practices. Comparative research may contribute to the understanding of African onomastics and indigenous linguistic creativity across languages and cultures.
- Thirdly, there is a need for further research on the sociolinguistic and pragmatic dimensions of character naming in Xitsonga literature. Future studies may investigate how factors such as gender, social class, religion, politics, and modernisation influence naming practices in literary texts.

5.5 Conclusion

This study examined the morphological and semantic analysis of character naming in selected Xitsonga literary texts. The findings demonstrated that character names in Xitsonga literature are systematically constructed through diverse morphological processes, including affixation, compounding, reduplication, borrowing, and single-stem formations. These processes reflect the structural richness and creative potential of Xitsonga morphology in literary expression.

The study further established that character names carry significant semantic and cultural meanings. Through names, authors communicate emotions, social values, moral lessons, identity, conflict, and thematic messages that contribute to characterisation and narrative development. Character names, therefore, function not merely as labels but as meaningful linguistic and literary devices that enrich interpretation and cultural representation.

The study also highlighted the close relationship between language, culture, and literature in Xitsonga naming practices. Literary names preserve cultural knowledge, reflect social realities, and demonstrate the influence of multilingualism and language contact within contemporary society. The findings thus contribute to the broader fields of morphology, semantics, onomastics, and African literary studies by showing how linguistic structures are creatively employed in literary discourse.

In conclusion, the study confirms that character naming in Xitsonga literary texts is a deliberate and meaningful artistic practice rooted in linguistic creativity and cultural symbolism. Through the interaction of morphology and semantics, Xitsonga authors construct character identities that enrich literary narratives and preserve indigenous cultural expression.

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