

Analysis of Female Names among the Tugen Sub-tribe of Kalenjin Community in Kenya: A Linguistic Approach

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Abstract: This paper is aimed at analyzing the female names among the Tugen community a Kalenjin sub-tribe in Baringo County, Kenya, East Africa. While proper names are given to people, geographical features, places and some settlements, I will restrict this paper discussion to the names applied to females only. I have divided this paper into the following main sections; a brief description of Tugen sub-tribe, Naming customs, the traditional naming ceremonies, female names and their meaning, elements of Tugen female names and conclusion. This study was based and guided by Semiotic theory. To help deal with the topic, the following questions were asked; Who are the Tugen-Sub tribe? What were the traditions which accompanied naming? What dictated their names? Which female name categories existed? What were the meanings of female names? What were the elements which formed female names? The answers to the questions were the basis of this paper.

Keywords: Female names, Name Meaning, Traditions, Society and Semiotics.

INTRODUCTION

The Tugen people mostly live in Baringo County in Kenya, East Africa. The County is formed by the following sub Counties; Mogotio, Eldama-Ravine, Tiaty, Baringo Central and Baringo North. Tugen language is the principal form of language in virtually the whole of the County, though the Southern part and urban centres of the County contains foreigners who speak different languages.

In such areas Kiswahili is used as a form of communication. Therefore, Kiswahili is the principal Lingua Franca in the County.

In the County, we have almost five dialects i.e Samor-Central Baringo, Lembus-Eldama-Ravine, Keben-East Baringo, Aror-North Baringo, Pokot-East Baringo [1-3]. The five languages are the dialects of the same language since there is total intelligibility among speakers of the five languages not only can they communicate but they share almost everything. For example, they have the same culture, same beliefs traditions and same history. It is also worth noting that in each of the dialect community there are distinct clans.

Naming Customs

Onomastics experts posit that naming in communities occur based on various community contexts and traditions [4]. According to Herbert [4] as cited by Leyew [5], there are socio-cultural issues that should be addressed in any research paper dealing with onomastics. These include: Who names a child? When is a child named? How is a name selected? Is the name

bestowal marked publicly or privately? Are names drawn from a stock of available names or coined freely? Naming of female girls among the Tugen people seem to answer all the questions raised by Herbert. The community took seriously the naming of children, regardless of the gender. Naming ceremonies and names were taken seriously in Tugen community just like in other African community. Crane [6] seems to concur with the above thesis in his discussion of African names, when he observes that 'peoples' names are perhaps their most valuable possession.

It is the one possession that survives them after death. He goes on to say that the primary purpose of personal names is to identify their bearers in most African cultures; personal names play a role beyond identifying their bearers. They embody a semantic content and referential meaning strongly tied with socio-economic and political situations. Indeed, like in several African languages and cultures, Tugen women names are transparent and meaningful. No name was meaningless, every woman name signified something in the community as we will see and discuss in a short while.

Tutoek [7] Posits that the social significance of the Tugen women names clearly indicate how intimately they are connected with important events and occurrence which have either direct or indirect bearing upon the birth of the girl child. Once the child is born the circumstance or an event is connected with the birth is given. The name becomes meaningful and significant. There were certain prominent several categories into which the names would seem to fall for example, women names would express circumstances related to birth, others would signify time of birth, their characters and others signified procreation difficulties in a certain family etc.

The traditional naming ceremonies

The naming ceremonies among the Tugens for female children are generally the same as those for male children. Tutoek [7] says the naming ceremony among Tugens was known as *Lugumian* ceremony. The child, as a practice was not named immediately after birth. The naming process started a few days after birth. Naming of the new born was the prerogative of the child's parents. However, the parents were expected to consult other significant members of the family, for example, grandparents and aunts. Therefore, the naming process started by the child's parents consulting the grandparents. The grandparents were highly regarded in the society among the Tugens. The grandparents were consulted on the appropriate name of the child depending on the child sex. This was the case because it was believed that the old generation was well conversant with the clan's genealogy. On the consultation day, the parents gave the grandparents a guard of local brew called *komek*. The grandparents gave the child the name according to her sex. It was the practice that after two weeks later, the neighbouring mothers visited the child's home to confirm the name given by the grandparents. This mothers gathering was taken to be the official and actual child naming ceremony.

In the actual naming ceremony, apart from the surrounding mothers all the children under seven (7) years in the neighborhood were invited. The women were expected to confirm the child's name in a loud acclamation. The declaration was known as *Keostoji kainet*. The name confirmation and eventual declaration was a very important day for the born child. In the meantime the invited children were sent out of the house where they danced and jumped up and down in jubilation to mark the arrival and naming of the newborn baby. They sang a song known as *Ang tolagat kou ra angot anee, ang tolagat kou no* the song was repeated continuously. After that the children were invited into the house where they sat in a big circle and they were served with millet *ugali* without milk nor vegetables. The children took the simple meal in silence to signify the celebration of welcoming a newborn baby

into their congregation. It is said that the child grew up and came to know her name later though she was not expected to mention her name because that was taken to mean madness. Therefore, it was a taboo for one to shout her name. The naming ceremony was important to the child and her parents too [8].

The Theory that Guided this Study

This research was based on the theory of Semiotics. Halliday [9] defines Semiotics as a Greek word *semainon or semainomenon* ('signifier or signified'). Semiotics is the study of signs; it deals with signs and meanings [10]. It enables human beings to see things and situations as signs with meanings [11]. The origin of Semiotics theory can be traced to Linguists like Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) who is associated with structuralism and Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914), who was a philosopher.

Ferdinand de Saussure stressed the importance of signs in the community whereas Pierce dwelled on how the signs are related to logic so as to have specific meaning. Saussure emphasized that signs have two parts: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the material or physical form, a sign that takes something that can be seen, heard, touched, smelled or tested. The signified is the object or concept to which the signifier refers. The signifier and signified relate to each other through the process of signification. Signs are used to explain specific actions in a specific tradition based on a specific language system. It is used by people who understand the specific tradition and language [12]. The Semiotics theory helps us to understand how to interpret, predict and comprehend the meaning of the Tugen female names as an objective of signifier. Names are based on the traditions of the society and the context. In this study context the meaning of Tugen female names have specific meanings. The meaning of names can only be understood by considering the sign as a system and not in isolation.

Data Collection

Data was collected through interviewing the residence of Baring County, Kenya who speak Tugen language and conversant with the naming and meanings of Female names. In total twenty respondents were interviewed. Furthermore, past literature on Tugen traditions and culture were read. The collected data was analyzed guided by Semiotics theory. The Tugen female names and their meanings were recorded and grouped according to their occurrences and reasons.

Results of the Study

The results of the analysis showed that Tugen female names had a special meaning about the person given. In Tugen community, culturally, each female child had to be given two names and each name had a special meaning to the child, family and the culture.

The same culture also applied to male children. The first name was in reference to the sex, for example when a girl was born she was given a female name which had a reference to the family into which she was born. Her name sake or patron must be or must have been a member of the family and who must have been of good character or must have possessed good and desired attributes. The first name of the child is called *Kainet ab musarek*.

The second name had to be given following that time of the day or night that the child was born. For example, others are named according to seasons or activities taking place at the time of their births or point while others are given animal names because the family had perhaps undergone through a bad omen or any other birth predicament. The analysis of Tugen female names showed that they can be grouped as in table-1.

Table-1: Female Names Based on the Time Born within the 24 Hours of the Day

<i>Time Born</i>	<i>Girl's Name</i>
3 am-5am	<i>Jepkorir.</i>
5 am-6am	<i>Jepkoech/Jepyegon.</i>
6am-8am	<i>Jemutai.</i>
8am-10 am	<i>Jelimo.</i>
10am-11 am	<i>Jepng'etich/Jepng'eno.</i>
11am- 2pm	<i>Jebet.</i>
3pm-4pm	<i>Jerono.</i>
7pm-9pm	<i>Jelagat.</i>
10pm-12 am	<i>Jepkemoi.</i>
12am-3am	<i>Jepkurui/Jeruyot.</i>

Female Names Based on Place of Birth

Place of birth is one of the popular method of naming people in many African communities [13].

Place of birth among the Tugens place a crucial role in the naming process. It played a role in giving women proper names as in table-2.

Table-2: Female Names Based on Place of Birth

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place of Birth</i>
<i>Jebor</i>	A girl born on the village path.
<i>Jebii</i>	a girl born at the cattle pen.
<i>Jesang</i>	a girl born outside the house.
<i>Jepkures</i>	a girl born under the yorphobia tree.
<i>Jeptarus</i>	a girl born in the initiates house.
<i>Jepng'eny</i>	a girl born at the salt soil place for cows.
<i>Jeptabut</i>	a girl born on top of the traditional loft.
<i>Jepkiyeng</i>	a girl born outside the house.
<i>Jepketer</i>	a girl born at the verandah.
<i>Jeserem</i>	a girl born outside the family compound.

The above names show the specific place expected mothers gave birth, for example, in the compound, at the verandah, under atree or in the sore. Therefore, names showed were the child was born.

Female Names Based on Events.

Special events in the society were also used to name girls. Giving children names based on eventes is one of the popular method used to name children in African communities [14]. See table-3.

Table-3: Female Names Based on Events

<i>Name</i>	<i>The Event and Birth</i>
<i>Jeptoo</i>	a girl born when there were visitors.
<i>Jerop</i>	a girl born during heavy rains.
<i>Jebiwoot</i>	a girl born during rainy season.
<i>Jeruto</i>	a girl born during visiting.
<i>Tuitoek</i>	a girl born when many visitors met.
<i>Jepkemei</i>	a girl born during a draught spell.
<i>Toroitich</i>	a girl born when cows were coming home
<i>Jepkarin</i>	a girl born during war time.
<i>Jeboiwo</i>	a girl born during farm clearing time.
<i>Jeptum</i>	a girl born during a traditional ceremony.

Female Names Based on How they Behaved/their Attributes

Tugen community, named girls based on the behaviour or the attributes of the child for example,

brown, black, small, troublesome, humble etc. This was based on the physical attributes of the child. Generally such names were based on the various adjectives [15]. See table-4.

Table-4: Female names based on how they behaved/their attributes

<i>Name</i>	<i>Girl's Attributes at Birth</i>
<i>Jeptui</i>	a girl with a black complexion.
<i>Jepyator</i>	a girl who opened the way/path.
<i>Jepkeror</i>	a girl who closed the way/path.
<i>Jeptai</i>	a girl who was the first.
<i>Toweet</i>	a girl who was the last born.
<i>Jemaru</i>	a girl who never slept in most cases.
<i>Jepyakwai</i>	a girl who was fat.
<i>Jeptanui</i>	a girl who occasionally fainted.
<i>Jebichii</i>	a girl who was troublesome.
<i>Jematia</i>	a girl who was small body wise.

Female Names Based on their 'Refusal' to Be Born Till the Arrival of Relatives.

Such names were given in situations where the expectant mothers took abnormally long to deliver and only delivered on arrival of special relatives like an uncle, aunty or grandparents.

- Jepkosgei*
- Kanygogo.*
- Kanykwony*
- Kanymama.*

- Jepleting.*
- Jepsige*
- Jepsuge.*

Female Names Based on Special Naming

The Tugen community had some female names which were special in that they were given under special cases in the community to signify some difficulty in procreation in certain families. Such names were given to girls born after many miscarriages or after parents fail to get a child for a long time. The said child was euphemistically referred to as *Tegerin*. Interestingly such names sounded bad and depicted names of animal associated with bad omen. The reason was to protect the child from evil befalling her. Some of the names are as in table-5 below:

Female Names Born Without Midwife Assistance

There were occurrences where mothers gave birth successfully on their own without the presence and assistance of Midwives. Such names were given and they are still used up to date. The following are some of such names.

Table-5: Female names based on special naming

<i>Name</i>	<i>The animal associated with</i>
<i>Jeberen</i>	Snake.
<i>Jepkuto</i>	Ant eater.
<i>Jemoso</i>	Monkey
<i>Jemugung</i>	Lame.
<i>Jemaget</i>	Hyena.
<i>Jemelilil</i>	Leopard.
<i>Jepnyetung'</i>	Lion.
<i>Jebusii</i>	Cat.
<i>Jepsese</i>	Dog.
<i>Jeboi</i>	Evil spirits.
<i>Kugui</i>	Crocodile.

Female Names Based on Foreign/ Christian Names

Today many Tugen women have Christian names. The presence and use of Christian names reflect nearly over one century of the Christian Missionaries in the region, especially the African Inland Missionaries who came and set their operation centres in Eldama-Ravine in South Baringo and Kabartonjo in North

Baringo. Also the Roman Catholic Church influenced some of the Christian female names available up to date among the Tugen community.

Initially, women converts were given Christian names, to signify their new faith in Christianity. However later it became the norm and a practice for

each woman to be given a Christian name as a first name once she is born. The female family name became a second name while the maiden name became the third. At present some Tugen women use their husbands' names while others use their clan names for example, *Tungo, Kimoi, Targog, Toyoi, Kabilo, Sote, Sogoom* etc but a majority identify themselves with Christian names. Women who are either married or are

passed adolescence stage across the board would be comfortable to identify themselves with her childhood name (*Kainet ab musarek*). The Christian names among the Tugen community were of two types: Those which were corrupted to enable them pronounced like Tugen words and those which were directly taken from the Bible. Some of the commonly used female Christian names among the Tugen community are as in table-6.

Table-6: Female names based on foreign/ christian names

<i>Female Christian Name</i>	<i>How it was Pronounced and Adopted</i>
Ruth	Ruse
Roseline	Rosalina
Anne	Anna
Pauline	Paulina
Juliet	Chulia
Elizabeth	Elisabet
Josphine	Chosfina
Hellen	Elena
Catherine	Katarina
Selina	Salina
Nahum	Naumi
Rose	Ruse
Mary	Maria

The corrupted names were as a result of inability to pronounce foreign names. It was also established that among the Tugen community, some women possess Muslim names though they are few. This is a clear proof that the Tugen had also a Islam influence at some stage in their history. Such Muslim names exist and are found around Mogotio and Eldama-Ravine parts of Baringo County. It is mainly found among the Nubians who have intermarried with the Tugen women. Such female Muslim names are as follows;

- Fatuma
- Helima
- Hadija
- Amina

The 'Tab' Prefix Female Naming

Most female names which begin with {*Tab*} prefix are associated with cows or other things surrounding cows. This is so because the Tugens were herders and placed a high premium on cows. These names were given to women after they are circumcised and married off. Some of the names are as in table-7.

Table-7: The 'tab' prefix female naming

<i>Name</i>	<i>The type of the Cow</i>
<i>Tabtuwei</i>	a girl given a black cow.
<i>Tabutany</i>	a girl who loves a cow.
<i>Tabrusei</i>	a girl given a grey cow.
<i>Tabrantich</i>	a born when cows are driven from the cattle enclosure(Pen).
<i>Tabsurorei</i>	a girl associated with a cow with one teat.
<i>Tabartwol</i>	a girl born when the cow bells were stolen from the community enemies.etc.
<i>Tabtuwei</i>	a girl given a black cow.
<i>Tabutany</i>	a girl who loves a cow.
<i>Tabrusei</i>	a girl given a grey cow.
<i>Tabrantich</i>	a born when cows are driven from the cattle enclosure(Pen).
<i>Tabsurorei</i>	a girl associated with a cow with one teat.

Furthermore, from the analysis of this study, it came out clearly that Tugen women names are composed of two elements Prefix and stem. A prefix of

the shape CVC or CV and finally the stem itself. For example see table-8.

Table-8: Two elements (Prefix and stem) that comprise Tugen women names

<i>Prefix</i>	<i>Stem</i>	<i>The word</i>
Jep	Koech	Jepkoech
Je	Rop	Jerop
Jep	Kemoi	Jepkemoi
Tab	Tuwei	Tabtuwei
Ta	Murei	Tamurei
Cha	Ngwony	Changwony

From the above examples, it is evident that Tugen Women names had different prefix that is {Jep}, {Je}, {Tab}, {Cha} or {Ta} depending on the name type. However, there were instances where female and male names were the same [7], for example, Changwony, Lelmen, Kuigui, Tirop, Talabaan, Kigen, Komen, Kiyai etc, such names did not take the name prefixes given above.

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the Tugen female names among the Tugen community and established that Tugen female names carry various meanings and are derived from existing stock but depend on the time, an event, place of birth, their behaviour and how they were born. Female names signify a meaning in the society. Though the Tugens did not coin new names they had special names for females just like for males. Special names were given after a procreation difficulty in a family. Such names were picked from animals which were associated with the bad omen. However, regardless of the name origin, Tugen women were given two names initially but adopted foreign names afterwards in life, especially when they got married and get children.

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