

A GENEALOGICAL LINGUISTIC IMPLICATION OF THE ABALUHYIA NAMING SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Most African communities have a systematic way of naming their children. The naming system of a given community speaks a lot about their way of life. Some communities have family names which cannot be attributed to any meaning. Such names may be regarded generally as clan names. Some names may be attributed to some events and seasons. Others may be inherited in a situation where communities name their children after their dead or living relatives. Therefore, names are not only cultural but also linguistic. The study investigated the naming systems of the Luhyia sub-tribes with a view of establishing the genealogical relatedness of the Luluhya language dialects. The study established three levels of naming children shared by most of the Luhyia sub-nations. These are based on seasons, events and naming after their dead relatives.

Key words: genealogical, language, name, male and female

Background to the Study

Luhya dialects have been extensively studied over a long period of time. The speakers of Luluhya dialects are generally referred to as AbaLuhya who were initially known as Bantu Kavirondo as a result of their being close to Lake Victoria in Kavirondo Gulf. The Luhyia nation, tribe or ethnic group consists of seventeen sub-nations or dialect speaking sub-groups. These include Abakhayo, Babukusu, Abanyala, Abanyore, Abatsotso, Abetakho, Abesukha, Abakabras, Abakisa, Abalogoli, Abamarachi, Abasamia, Abatachoni, Abatiriki and Abawanga. It is worth noting that some Luluhya speaking communities such as Abagisu, Abamasaba, Abagire, Abanyole and Abasamia are found in Uganda. However, the term

“Luluhya” strictly refers to those dialects spoken in Kenya. The title “Abaluhya” was coined in the 1930s and adopted as a designation for the Kenyan group in 1960s.

Linguistically, Luluhya is a Western Bantu language whose dialects speakers mutually understand each other. The degree of mutual intelligibility of the Luluhya dialects’ speakers varies according to the closeness or farness of the sub nations. For example, the degree of mutual intelligibility between a Lulogooli dialect speaker and a Lubukusu dialect speaker is lesser than either that of Lutiriki and Lulogooli speakers or a Lubukusu and Lutachoni speakers. That is, the degree of intelligibility between dialects which border each other is greater than that between dialects that are far apart.

According to Simiyu (2000) the Luhya migration to their present western Kenya location dates back to as early as the second half of the fifteenth century. Immigrants into present-day Luhya land came mainly from eastern and western Uganda and trace their ancestry mainly to several Bantu groups, and to other non-Bantu groups such as the Kalenjin, Luo, and Maasai. Early migration was probably motivated by a search for more and better land, and to escape local conflicts, tsetse flies, and mosquitoes. By about 1850, migration into Luhyaland was largely complete, and only minor internal movements took place after that due to food shortages, disease, and domestic conflicts.

Literature Review

The Abalagooli or Maragoli are considered to be related to the Kisii (Abagusii), their separation from the rest results from Lake Victoria, Kano plains and Luo Nyanza to the South and the Nandi Escarpment and Kipsigis to the South East. The relationship between the Maragoli and the Kisii or Abagusii is mainly based on their oral tradition of myth of origin. It is also notable that the sound forms of Maragoli and Tiriki dialects are slightly different from the other Luluhya dialects and closer to the Kisii Language (Muhindi 1981, Lwangale 2007).

According to Kweya (2011) Lulogooli shares the same ancestry with Lunyole. He delves into the study of Luhya sub tribes which he calls 'sub nations'. Kweya's presentation of the Luluhya dialects presents a background against which the current study can take off.

The Luhya are divided into sub-groups, each speaking a certain Luluhya language. These subgroups overlap in some cases, with mini-dialects that are composed of two or more dialects. The Tachoni of Lugari area, for example, speak a dialect that is mixture of the Kabras and Tachoni dialects. The Lutachoni dialect which Odden (2009) describes as tonal, is a language like any other languages in the world whose language variation might have been due to historical, geographical, spatial or functional changes in a language. Lutachoni is supposedly a splinter group from the now sabbaot of Mt. Elgon who were assimilated by the Wanga (Kipsisey 2010). Lutachoni is regarded a minority dialect since its speakers are not many and are confined mostly in Western Kenya (and partially in the Rift Valley). In order to understand its characteristics a critical observation and therefore comparison is made alongside other minority languages found within the globe.

Lutachoni falls under vulnerable intergenerational transfer group of languages due to the degree of bilingualism dominant in the language for most of its speakers have and are likely to shift to the Bukusu dominant language or any other dialect (Batibo 2005) a view supported by Kipsisey (2010) who attributes loss of sabbaot language to have been due to sabbaot children having been introduced to early reading in Bukusu, a dominant language in Bungoma county and negligence by the government to have minority language mother tongue syllabus in favor of dominant language. In Kenya no native Kenya –African languages including Lutachoni enjoys the prestige of being a first or second language constitutionally neither is any of the dialects from minority groups officially protected through the language groups (and dialects) only feature in political rankings. Lutachoni is spoken beyond the home by its native speakers and other speech communities can speak it fluently though it is not a language of other communities' preference as they regard it hard to speak.

Although Tachoni is a dialect community with many speakers estimated 253,000 in population (Kenya Population and Housing Census 2009) majority as mostly identified practices one dominant being 'okhulicha' ritual typical to Tachoni only as opposed to other Luhya sub groups. Not much study has been carried out on the Tachoni speech community. The few in existence include Odden (2009) on Tachoni verbal tonology and Kakai (1995) on

Tachoni initiation ritual ideas. However the Tachoni easily code switch to other languages with ease while some others have shifted to languages of neighboring communities (Luhya at Ethnology, 17th ed. 2013) other communities understand Lutaachoni and can switch to it if they choose for there is a mutual intelligibility in existence in the heterogeneous society in which they live and either of the dialects can be regarded as being more prestigious than the other. Economically all the Luhya dialects have almost the same economic status and therefore it cannot be claimed for instance that the Bukusu are more economically empowered than Tachoni neither can it be said of Maragoli.

The sub-groups of the Luhya are Babukusu, Abatirichi (Tiriki), Maragoli (Balogoli), Abanyole (Banyore), Abakhayo (Khayo), Abanyala (Nyala), Abasamia, Abisukha, Abidakho, Abashisa, Abamarachi, Abatsotso, Abakabarasi (Kabras), Abatachoni (Tachoni), Abamasaba (Masaba), Abagisu (Gisu), Abawanga (Wanga), and Abamarama (Marama) (Lwangale, 2007).

Geographically, Abanyala is a Luhya sub-group which resides in two counties, Busia and Kakamega of Kenya. It is claimed that the Banyala of Kakamega originated from Busia with Mukhamba considered as their ancestral father. They are closely related with the Abanyala residing in Busia as they speak the same dialect, only having minor differences in pronunciation.

The Kabras are considered to be originally Banyala. They reside in Malava, in Kakamega County. The Kabras are sandwiched by the Isukha, Banyala and the Tachoni. The name "Kabras" comes from "Avalasi" which refers to warriors or Mighty Hunters as that is what the Kabras were. They were fierce warriors who fought with the neighbouring Nandi for cattle and were known to be fearless. This explains why generally they are few as compared to other sub-groups such as the Maragoli and Bukusu. They claim to be descendants of Nangwiro associated with the Biblical Nimrod. The Lukabras dialect sounds close to Tachoni though to the native ear, someone can detect some differences. Originally, the Kabras were few families which ended up as the head of the clans. The names of the fathers of the families also ended up as the names of the clans (Arnold, 1981).

The literature reviewed in this research shows that there are many linguistic gaps concerning the local African languages. Therefore, there is need for research to be undertaken to

establish the immediate ancestry of especially East African languages rather than leave them upon political boundaries to distinguish them. For example, in the Kenyan situation: Angogo (1983) Kasaya (1992), Wamalwa (1996) and Lwangale (2007) have classified Lubukusu as one of the established dialects of Luluhya language without reconstructing the presumed protoLuluhya language which the current study sets out to do. There is a gap in the linguistic world to prove the historical claim of Luluhya dialects having a common origin. Therefore, naming system of the Luluhya dialects would give a linguistic direction on their origin.

According to Uzo (2011) "giving a child a meaningful name in Africa requires accepting that the child has a personal dignity right from the moment of conception that needs to be respected and protected. This respect for the dignity of the newly born is symbolized through practices associated with the naming ceremony. Among the Yorubas of Western Nigeria, water is dabbed on the child's face during the ceremony to symbolize the child's purity and the importance of having no enemies. In some other African countries, honey and bitter kolanuts represent the sweet and bitter dimensions of the life that the child is about to begin."

Uzo (2011) maintains that Africa has distinctive cultural qualities that the rest of the world can learn from. One of those who have emphasized this fact is Pope John Paul II who said in 1980 during his visit to Ghana: "The essential aspects of African culture are a vision of the world where the sacred is central, a deep awareness of the link between Creator and nature, a great respect for all life, a sense of family and of community that blossoms into an open and joyful hospitality, reverence for dialogue as a means of settling differences and sharing insights, spontaneity and the joy of living expressed in poetic language, song and dance". Furthermore, Uzo (2011) notes that each child is given at least three names: one from the parents and two from the maternal and paternal grandparents. This is a common practice in several African countries such as Kenya, Togo, Sudan, Ghana, Cote'Ivoire and Nigeria.

Among the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria, The first name is the personal name (oruko). The second name is the praise name (oriki), which reflects the hopes for the child. The third name connects the child to its family or community (orile).

According to the teachings of African spirituality, “when one bestows a name upon a child that person is not simply naming the flesh of the child, but rather the name is for the person’s soul”, (Sharon). Askhari Hodari’s book *The African Book of Names* states that the people of Nigeria consider the state of their affairs before naming a child. Gomez (1998) and Rucker (2005) note that names, as words by which reality is known and spoken of, are the most meaningful lexicon in the vocabulary of any language, and they are an important part of the language inventory as they not only name the environment, but also store all the distinctions about the fauna and flora. Mphande (2006) observes that of all Bantu languages, Nguni has perhaps the more elaborate and overt morphological and derivational semantic processes for naming, and therefore offers an interesting opportunity to adequately describe and account for the morphological and semantic processes involved in naming.

As all African communities practice some trend in naming, the Abaluyia of Kenya have their systematic ways of naming children as was revealed and presented in the results in this paper. The systematic naming of children by the Luluhya dialect speakers had a linguistic implication.

Methodology

The study employed qualitative method in which ethnography design was applicable. The researcher collected open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data. Ethnographic research, or ethnography, is both a study of interactive strategies in human life and an analytical descriptions of social scenes, individuals, and groups that recreate their shared feelings, beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and actions. In other words, it is both a process and product of describing and interpreting cultural behaviors

of which language was inclusive in the current study. Ethnography methodology was born in anthropology. It unites both fieldwork and artifact such as written text. Fieldwork, undertaken as participant observation and ethnographic interview, is the process by which the ethnographer comes to know a culture; the collection of artifact is how culture is portrayed. There is general agreement that culture itself is not visible or tangible but is co-constructed and reconstructed by the act of ethnographic writing.

Sample in this study was selected from the speakers of the native Luluhya dialects who formed the target population. The sample size of 170 respondents was used with each of the 17 Luuhya dialects represented by 10 subjects of whom 5 were males and five females. All the 17 Luluhya dialects were purposively involved in the study for the purpose to reconstructing an all inclusive Proto-Luluhya language. Sample members were purposively selected. Purposive sampling represents a group of different non-probability sampling techniques. Also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, purposive sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units (for example, people, cases/organizations, events, pieces of data) that are to be studied. In this study the type of purposive sampling was critical case.

Results

The study was on a genealogical linguistic implication of the Abaluhya naming system. The study found out various ways in which children are named among the Abaluhya people of Kenya. Some name their children based on particular seasons as discussed in this section. Tables 1.1 a-f present Luhyia Sub-tribes which name their children based on seasons.

Table 1.1a: Abaluhya Harvest Season Names

Sub-tribe	Male	Female
Bukusu	Wekesa	Nekesa
Khayo	Wekesa	Nekesa
Tachoni	Wekesa	Nekesa
Kabras	Wekesa	Nekesa
Marachi	Wekesa	Nekesa
Nyala (B)	Wekesa	Nekesa
Batsotso	Wekesa	Nekesa
Tiriki	Wekesa	Nekesa
Nyala (K)	Wekesa	Nekesa
Samia	Wekesa	Nekesa

Source Field Data (2016)

Table 1.1a indicates that some Luhyia sub-tribes name their children based on harvest seasons. The harvest season is referred to as “mulikesa”. Its verb “khukesa” means to harvest”. The male name is differentiated from the female one by the initial sound. The male name begins with /w/ as the female starts with/n/. The similarity in the names based on harvest season across the sub-tribes featured in table 1.1a is not by borrowing or coincidence. For example, the Bukusu sub-tribe is far from the Tiriki in the Luhyia dialect continuum just as the Marachi are far from the Tachoni but all have the same names for the harvest season. This finding is of linguistic interest in that Lubukusu, Lukhayo, Lutachoni, Lukabras, Lumarachi, Lunyala (K and B), Lutsotso, Lutiriki, and Lusamia dialects have similar word for the harvest season from which the names *Wekesa* and *Nekesa* are derived. This is an indication that members of the sub-tribes of the concerned dialects share a common ancestry; an indication that they are genealogically related.

The Luhya sub-tribes also name their children based on planting season. However, only a few of the sub-tribes have some names as shown in table 1.1b.

Table 1.1b: Planting Season Names

Sub-tribe	Male	Female
Bukusu	-	Nakhumicha
Nyala –B	-	Nakhumicha
Nyala –K	-	Nakhumicha
Tachoni	-	Nakhumicha
Wanga	Nyarotso	-

Source: Field Data (2015)

Table 1.1b conspicuously shows that the male planting season name is not there in most of the sub-tribes in the captured data. It is only the Wanga sub-tribe that has a name for the male child “Nyarotso” during the planting season. However, the Wanga community has no female name for the planting season. Contrary, all the other Sub-tribes captured in table 1.1b have female name “Nakhumicha” for the planting season. Nakhumicha is derived from the verb “Khumicha” meaning broadcasting the seeds. It is quite unlikely that the Tachoni, Bukusu, Nyala K and Nyala B use the name Nakhumicha by chance. There must be a common origin of the name which could be genealogically attested.

Some Luhya sub-tribes name their children based on the rain season. Data on this aspect are presented in table 1.1c.

Table 1.1c: Rain Season Names

Sub-tribe	Male	Female
Bukusu	Wafula	Nafula
Tiriki	Wafula	Nafula
Tachoni	Wafula	Nafula
Khayo	Wafula	Nafula
Nyala-B	Wafula	Nafula
Nyala-K	Wafula	Nafula
Kabras	Wafula	Nafula
Marachi	Wafula	Nafula
Batsotso	Wafula	Nafula
Samia	Wafula	Nafula

Source: Field Data (2016)

Data in table 1.1c show that ten sub-tribes of the Luhya nation have one name “Wafula” for the male child and another “Nafula” for the female child born during rainy season. The names Wafula and Nafula are derived from the noun efula/ifula meaning rain. Rain is regarded as blessings and assurance for food among the Abaluhya people. The Luhya nation is basically a rain fed agricultural region. The names ‘Wafula’ and ‘Nafula’ are not coincidentally used by Bukusu, Tiriki, Tachoni, Nyala-B, Nyala-K, Kabras, Marachi, Batsotso, Khayo and Samia. Linguistically, the noun “efula/ifula” from which “Wafula and Nafula” are derived must have come from a single proto-word and therefore supporting the genealogical relatedness of the dialects in question.

Some Luhya Sub-tribes name their children based on weeding season as indicated in table 1.1d.

Table 1.1d: Weeding Season Names

Sub-tribe	Male	Female
Bukusu	Wanyonyi	Naliaka
Khayo	-	Naliaka
Tachoni	Wanyonyi	Naliaka
Kabras	Wanyonyi	Naliaka
Nyala-K	Wanyonyi	Naliaka
Nyala-B	Wanyonyi	Naliaka

Source: Field Data (2016)

Data in table 1.1d indicate that five out of the six Luhyia sub-tribes featured have a male name “Wanyonyi during the weeding season. All the six sub-tribes have the name “Naliaka” for the female child born during weeding season. The name Wanyonyi is derived from the noun “enyonyi” which means weeds. The name Naliaka is derived from the noun “liliaka” which means weeding. The two nouns *enyonyi* and *liliaka* suggest that there is some linguistic similarity across the dialects featured in table 1.1d. Furthermore, the commonality of the names Wanyonyi and Naliaka shows that Lubukusu, Lukhayo, Lutachoni, Lukabras, Lunyala-K and Lunyala-B have lexical shared retention from their pro-language. The dialects are thus genealogically related.

Based on season, some Luhyia Sub-tribes name their children in line with drought. Table 1.1e presents data on names based on drought season.

Table 1.1e Drought Season Names

Sub-tribe	Male	Female
Bukusu	Simiyu	Nasimiyu
Khayo	Simiyu	Nasimiyu
Marachi	Simiyu	Nasimiyu
Batsotso	Kubasu	-
Nyala-B	Simiyu	Nasimiyu
Nyala-K	Simiyu	Nasimiyu
Kabras	Simiyu	Nasimiyu
Tachoni	Simiyu	Nasimiyu

Source: Field Data (2016)

Data in table 1.1e show that majority of the Luhyia sub-tribes captured have similar names for children born during the drought season. The Bukusu, Khayo, Marachi, Nyala-B, Nyala-K, Kabras and Tachoni have similar name “Simiyu” for the male child born during season of drought. However, the Batsotso have a different name “Kubasu” meaning sunny season. For the female child, the Bukusu, Khayo, Marachi, Nyala-B, Nyala-K and Tachoni have the name “Nasimiyu”. The Kabras name the female child born during drought season Nashimiyu. Nasimiyu, Simiyu and Nashimiyu are derived from the noun “Simiyu” meaning drought season.

The similarity across the Luhyia Sub-tribes captured in table 1.1e in terms of the male and female names during drought season is not by chance since the names are derived from a common noun “simiyu” (drought) which is used by the sub-tribes in question. A question then arises about the source or cause of the similarity. The most possible answer is attributed to the genealogical relatedness of Lubukusu, Lukhayo, Lumarachi, Lunyala- B, Lunyala-K,

Lukabras and Lutachoni dialects of Luluhya language. The dialects must have descended from a common ancestor language; a proto-language.

The study further established that same Luhyia sub-tribes name their children based on the season of hunger. Data on this season are captured in table 1.1f.

Table 1.1f: Hunger Season Names

Sub-tribe	Male	Female
Marachi	Wanzala	Nanzala
Kabras	Wanjala	Nanjala
Bukusu	Wanjala	Nanjala
Tachoni	Wanjala	Nanjala
Nyala-K	Wanjala	Nanjala
Nyala-B	Wanjala	Nanjala
Khayo	Wanjala	Nanjala

Source: Field Data (2016)

Table 1.1f shows that Kabras, Bukusu, Tachoni, Nyala-B, Nyala-K and Khayo Luhyia sub-tribes have the name “Wanjala” for the male child born during season of hunger. The Marachi have the name “Wanzala” for the male child born in the same season. Similarly, the Marachi have the name Nanzala for the female child born during the season of hunger as the rest of the sub-tribes captured in table 1.1f have “Nanjala”. The names Wanzala and Nanzala are derived from the Marachi noun “enzala” meaning hunger. Similarly, Wanjala and Nanjala are derived from the noun “enjala” meaning hunger. The similarity in “enzala” and “enjala” and consequently Nanjala, Nanzala, Wanjala and Wanzala cannot be attributed to borrowing

or chance. Linguistically, the genealogical relatedness of the dialects in question can be held accountable for the similarity seen in table 1.1f.

Some Luhya sub-tribes give names to their children during ploughing season. This is notable with the Kabras, Bukusu, Nyala-K, Nyala-B and Tachoni sub-tribes who have the name “Nelima” for the girl child born during the ploughing season. There is no name for the male child born during ploughing season. Nelima is derived from the word “Khulima” which means ploughing or digging. This further illustrates the linguistic importance of the word “khulima” as shared by the Bukusu, Kabras, Nyala-K, Nyala-B and Tachoni as lexically genealogical.

Some children are given names based on the hour of the day they are born. For example Tachoni, Bukusu, and Nyala (K and B) have the name Nabwire and Wabwire for girl and boy child respectively born during sunset. Nevertheless, some Luluhya speaking people name their children after their dead relatives. They believe that the dead remains alive in the born children.

Conclusion

The Luluhya dialects’ speakers have virtually a common way of naming their children. There is an indication of shared culture and language in general. Specifically, the genealogical linguistic implication of the naming system of the Luluhya dialect speakers is quite evident and cannot be ruled out.

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