

## **Factors determining Goat Names in the Sukuma Speech Community of Tanzania**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article describes the factors that influence the choice of goat names in the Basukuma communities of Tanzania. No study being conducted to investigate these names is known, a reason this study was conducted under the guidance of Nick name and Mediated Reference or Descriptive Theories. The study used a case study design and was grounded on the Phenomenology Paradigm which was considered appropriate for obtaining qualitative information about the concerned topic. Ten informants were selected purposively through snowball sampling techniques from two villages: Mwamashimba village located in Kwimba District in Mwanza Region and Kasamwa Village in Geita District. Unstructured interviews and focus group discussion were the instruments used to collect data. The study revealed three determinant factors of goat names given by the Basukuma people namely: Structure (e.g. Bhuyenze, Busolo or nsolo), color (e.g. Matimyabhili, Shilungu, Ng’hubha, Bhulegi and Ibhala or Wilongo) and etymology (e.g. Subhi). Each goat name has cultural signification in the Sukuma speech community. Based on the findings, it was concluded that names are very important in social and cultural maintenance in Sukuma speech communities. It is recommended that children have to be taught the traditional names that signify phenomena related to lives such as events, birth, beliefs, agriculture, unity, peace and healing.

**Keywords:** Factors; goat; names; Basukuma.

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### **Introduction**

This paper analyzed the Sukuma goat names and the socio-cultural factors behind the choices of those names among the Basukuma people of Tanzania. Goat naming is the phenomenon of assigning identification marks to goats kept by human beings for particularistic. The significance behind the study is envisioned in the sociocultural practices and functions of these names within Sukuma speech communities of Tanzania. Goats, like other animals are domesticated for different purposes such as serving as a source of income and food. Various linguists (e.g. Pieters, 2007; Peacock, 2005; Traoré, 2017; Mona et al., 2020; Pelle *et al.*, 2022; Magoro et al., 2022; Oseni et al., 2017); Banda et al., 1993) did research on goats but not on the aspect of their names and their socio-cultural implications.

### **Literature Review**

Magoro et al. (2022) looked into the genetic diversity and conservation of indigenous goat ecotypes in South Africa. Their study sought to establish the genetic diversity of the indigenous goat ecotypes of South Africa and the relationships among the ecotypes and their structures. They argued that despite studies which have described the phenotypic and genetic variations among indigenous goats, targeting the major goat-producing regions and the breeds of South Africa, the available information is restricted to certain breeds and regions and that the experimental design is often not adequate to inform the conservation and prioritization of goat breeds in changing environments. They continue arguing that

advances in genomics technologies have availed more opportunities for the assessment of the biodiversity, demographic histories and detection regions associated with local adaptation. Thus their review focused on the status of indigenous goats in South Africa and the application of genomics technologies for characterization with emphasis on prioritization of goat breeds for conservation and sustainable utilization. Their target was to see the knowledge that has been gathered on the genetic diversity and conservation of indigenous goat ecotypes so as to identify the gaps that remain and the niches for future research. However, these scholars did not touch the aspect of names given to the goats. This study goes further by analyzing the socio-cultural factors influencing goat naming among the *Basukuma* in Tanzania.

Peacock (2005) wrote a paper on Goats titled *Unlocking their potential for Africa's farmers*. The paper focused on the potential of goat keeping in reducing poverty in Africa. In other words, Peacock focused on the unique role and potential contribution of goats in lifting poor people out of poverty in the Sub-Sahara onto a path of improved welfare and prosperity. The author established that for various reasons, goats are coming to the fore in both smallholder and large-scale pastoral systems. From this base, the author highlighted social and economic roles played by goat keeping in ensuring food security and income generation. For example, goats provide their owners with a broad range of products and play an important role in their sociocultural life, being used as gifts, dowry, sacrifices in religious rituals and rites of passage (Peacock, 1996). Peacock (2005) did not touch the aspect of goat names and their socio-cultural significance despite the fact that they are very important in poverty alleviation in African continent. The current study analyzes the factors that determine the choice of goat names and their socio-cultural embedment with reference to the Sukuma speech community found in the United Republic of Tanzania. The intent is to know the nature of the names of goats we keep at home and their semantic connotations. The significance for this study pertinent to goat name is to show the practical reflection of goat names kept in these communities and their functions and to remind the current globalized youth group on the names and their associations in the community they live.

Tendonkeng et al. (2007) examined some of the major studies on goat production in Africa during

the past forty years. They covered research works on goat management, feeding and nutrition and reproduction. According to these scholars, none of these topics has been investigated in a coherent and sustained manner. From this base, these authors filled the knowledge gaps for developing a coherent problem-solving package for sustained goat production. Thus it was found that research is needed in adopting a forage production system for sustainable development of specific breeds, as well as in the area of nutrition, reproduction, environmental stress and their possible interactions.

The authors concluded that more knowledge about the farmers' understanding, the characteristics of their enterprises and their available resources is required in making changes in the management practices to improve the kidding intervals. This can be achieved through strategic feeding and disease control as well as reduction of environmental stress that will improve the utilization efficiency of forage for meat and milk production, modern research techniques are available and can be used to expand our understanding on African breeds within their environment. Therefore, their study exhausted on goats production and the way such production can be managed.

Monau et al. (2020) investigated 'Sustainable Utilization of Indigenous Goats in Southern Africa.' They found that the indigenous goats dominate and are of high significance due to their adaptive traits that are tolerant to climate change and require fewer efforts to manage. The lack of emphasis on farmer-centered technology development and proper breed characterization remain a drawback to sustainable utilization and breed development of indigenous goats. This can be solved through proper linkage between market and production, workable regional and national agricultural policies, community breeding programs, collaborative research within the region and consistent government support. The study concluded that Sustainable utilization and conservation of these genetic resources should be linked to the market. This will help in supporting and exploiting niche products efficiently. In each country, there should be regulatory policies designed to protect and regulate sustainable utilization of indigenous goats and development policies that will impose rules and regulations to facilitate marketing process of indigenous goat products. Farmer participation, informed policies and ring-fenced budget allocation to national indigenous genetic resources will

promote and ensure sustainable utilization of indigenous goats in the region.

The issue of goat names in African languages has been forgotten as it is not well documented. Most of the scholars focused on sustainable utilization and conservation of indigenous goat breeds in a favorable economic context, what they produce and the value they have in society. This can be observed from the study on communal goat production in Southern Africa. Here, it has been noted that goat keepers in rural communities face challenges in the different phases of the goat production value chain. One of those challenges is scarcity and high costs of input supplies such as medicine, vaccines and feeds. To mitigate the effects of diseases, internal and external parasites and seasonal fluctuations are needed in high quality and quantity (Gwaze et al., 2009).

In his book chapter, Traoré (2017) presents a review of the characterization (phenotypic) conducted on some goat breeds and production systems, rearing conditions and breeds' distribution in their natural environments. The author argued that the West African zones present different types of goats: long-legged goat presented by the Sahel and Touareg goats and the dwarf type, represented by the Djallonke goat. The local goat breeds are mainly raised for meat production, although some other breeds or varieties (e.g., Sahel and Touareg goats) in Sahelian or Saharian areas are also raised for milk production. With this regard, there is a need of understanding goat names alongside with their utilities in our communities.

Pelle et al. (2022) examined the typology and characteristics of indigenous goats and production systems in different agro-ecological zones of Tanzania. The motivation behind their study was that different goat populations and the production system in which they are raised are not well characterized, thus depriving animal breeders information that could help them in designing and running improvement and conservation programs. The study revealed morphological variations between and within these goat populations. The quantitative data showed that the goats were categorized into two groups. High twinning was observed in Ujiji and Lindi goats and low twinning in the Sukuma community. The dominant goat color was plain white in Pare community, gogo community, Maasai community and Tanga. Other goat color patterns were mixed black and white in

the Sukuma community, reddish-brown for Lindi community, black and reddish-brown in Ujiji and white and reddish-brown in Pwani and the Maasai Community. Thus, a high variation in the goat populations was observed, which is important as it can be used as a basis of genetic improvement through selection.

With reference to available literatures, it seems that goats are very important in our life existence like cows but they have not been investigated to understand their names' relationship pertinent to sociocultural practices, which is the focus of this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study used two theories namely: Nick name Theory and Mediated Reference or Descriptive Theory. Nickname theory was founded by Leslie and Skipper et al., (1990). The theory postulates that the meanings of names are a function of complex social negotiations learned, interpreted and reified through socialization. Whether apocryphal or scientifically factual, the meaning of a nickname depends on the contextual properties, even if it means nothing more than the mere identification of a person, place, day, time or thing (Skipper & Leslie, 1988). The theory has the following tenets: (i) cultural conventions provide meaningful classifications and determine whether some phenomena in the social or physical world have been appropriately employed as a name source (ii) the type of name used is based on the social situation, as participants more or less share an understanding of contextual properties. In other words, individuals' nicknames cannot be fully understood without consideration of situational and contextual exigencies (iii) General contextual properties and specific naming properties are mutually indicative of similar meanings. The nickname theory fits the current socio-cultural analysis of goat names as it rigorous theoretical knowledge of actors' social structures of which naming is an important part, as human constructions and their everyday life existence.

Despite the nickname theory's suitability for this study, it cannot capture some of the goat names' meaning or descriptions that are indirect. To capture them, the study used Descriptive Theory of Reference put forth by Russell (as in Marsh, 1956) and Frege (as cited in Geach & Black, 1960). The theory is also known as Frege-Russell theory (Saul, 1972). It states that the meaning or semantic

content of a proper name is identical to the descriptions associated with it by speakers and its referent must be something that satisfies these descriptions. Building on the earlier assumptions of the founders (i.e. Frege & Russell), Siobhan (2009) emerged with Mediated Reference Theory, also known as Indirect Reference Theory, which assumes that, apart from having meanings derived from direct relationship between objects and descriptions, names have indirect reference too. In other words, the theory posits that words refer to something in the external world, but there is more to the meaning of a name than simply the object to which it refers (Leszek, 2001). Therefore, the two theories satisfied the demand in explaining the topic under discussion.

## **Methodology**

The study was grounded in the phenomenology, which is one among the sub-paradigms of interpretivism. Phenomenology holds that an attempt to understand a phenomenon has to be grounded in people's experiences of social reality. Thus, to capture social reality, a researcher should study the subjects' actions and matters from the perspectives of the subjects themselves (Gray, 2014). Therefore, this study used Basukuma community experiences of naming goats they keep and the socio-cultural actions or practices and meanings from these names. The researcher used a qualitative approach with data analysis through words, phrases, clauses and sentences.

## **Design**

The study used a case study design to explore the phenomenon under investigation. A case study is an in-depth investigation of individuals, a group, a phenomenon, a role occupation, a policy or organization Punch (2005). With this research design, a detailed examination of a single subject, group or phenomenon is done (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Therefore, the researcher used "Goats" as 'a case' in investigating the socio-cultural factors influencing the choice of names given to goats in the Basukuma speech community.

## **Population and Sampling**

Sukuma from Kasamwa Village in Geita District and Mwamashimba Village of Kwimba District were the study population. Ten goat keepers who are also local healers were selected purposively by virtue of their roles in their community such that they could explain deeply the goat names, colors, appearances, origins and functions in their socio-cultural

practices. Six of them were located in Kasamwa Village in Geita District and four of them were located in Mwamashimba Village of Kwimba District. Since the author is a native speaker of Kisukuma and was raised in the area under discussion, the snowball sampling procedure was easy for him to use in selecting ten participants.

## **Instruments**

Unstructured interview and focus group discussion were used for data collections. Question guides were prepared for the interviews with informants on the names of goats and the reasons as to why they are used. Focus group discussions were conducted in two days following the fact the geographical locations of the informants were different as in Kasamwa and Njingani villages of Geita Region. In the discussion, some informants had goats which made the discussion to go hand in hand with observation.

## **Validity and Reliability**

Reliability was achieved by employing both unstructured interview and focus group discussion with informants who were goat keepers and traditional healers. Their comprehensive understanding experiences pertinent to goats they keep for both economic and ritual practices ensured similar and consistent knowledge on goat names. Also the researcher ensured that the content in the tools was relevant and appropriate to the Sukuma goat keepers and local healers' experiences pertinent to goat names and their practicability in their community. This was possible through the prepared checklists and the focus group discussion questions in which determined the goat names, reasons for each names and the sociocultural function of these goats because are the ones they use.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher assured informed consent as all informants were informed on the aim of the discussion. This made them free and happy for the discussion. As the result, they participated well by mentioning goat names and reasons associated with each goat. Some were free to show the goats they kept for references without any problem. The researcher registered the project in the department of languages and literature at Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy of Tanzania and was offered a letter for research.

## Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the findings from the field. The findings revealed four goat names and four different associated socio-cultural factors behind the Basukuma people's choice of those names to be assigned to their goats. Each factor is associated with one name of the goat, which means that a goat is named depending on one particular factor.

**Research Question 1:** What goat names are related to structures?

### Bhuyenze

Bhuyenze is one among the names given to goats in the Sukuma speech community. The Sukuma lexeme

Bhuyenze is used to mean kernels. Kernels are found at the front part of the maize plant, which happens when the maize plants are at the mature stage. The Basukuma assign the name Bhuyenze to a goat whose head has long hairs similar to the sprouted kernels of maize. See Figure 1.

Figure 1 is a goat with whiskers around it, in front and at the middle of the head. The structure of the head makes the Basukuma to name this goat Bhuyenze. Thus, Bhuyenze is synonymous to long hairs. The name given to this kind of goat in Sukuma speaking community reflects the long kernels like hairs in its head.



**Figure 1: Bhuyenze**



**Figure 2: Nsolo (Busolo)**

This name reflects the assumption of the Mediate Reference Theory that the meaning or semantic content of a proper name is identical to the descriptions associated with it by speakers while their referents are determined to be the objects that satisfy these descriptions (Mendelsohn, 2005; Nicholas, 2020). This means that the structure of

this goat satisfies its descriptions by the speakers of Sukuma language.

### Busolo

In figure 2, Busolo is one among the Sukuma goat names which sometimes is known as *nsolo* which has been nicknamed as 'earring' in Sukuma speech communities. *Nsolo* in Kisukuma language is the

term used to refer to objects which are used when playing local games. Currently, the term can be associated with pool table objects used by pool table players. A goat is named *hinda* if its physical outlook has natural two breast-like structures in its neck. Note that *Hinda* is a metal accessory (a traditional jingle bell/ dancing bell) worn on the leg by traditional dancers when dancing so that it produce rhythmical and musical beats that resonate with the songs they are singing.

The figure in 2 shows that the goat has two hanging breast-like structures in its neck. The respondents said that such a goat is not associated with traditional association myth; it is only God's blessing to human beings. However, the interpretation of *Busolo* goat name lines with the Nickname Theory which articulates that the actors' understanding of

nicknames are dependent on the contextual properties creating belief and recognition of meaning. This means that the two hanging structures on the neck of the goat are reason why it is named so.

**Research Question 2:** What goat names are related to color?

**Matimyabhili**

This is the ukuma name given to a goat which has only two symbolic colors on its body. The name **Matimya-abhili** is a compound term which is made up of two words namely: *matimya* which means "sign or symbol" and *bhili* means "two". Thus *matimyabhili* implies two signs or symbols. These symbols are the black and white colors that this goat has on its body. See the figure 3.



**Figure 3: Matimyabhili**



**Figure 4: Shilungu**

Figure 3 shows a goat with two colors: white and black. The white color must be around the spinal cord and the stomach. Additionally its front legs must be black but its back legs can be either black or white. According to the native speakers, a goat with this color is used by male gender persons to either evacuate a bad situation or call ancestors for

blessing. This concurs with Skipper and Leslie's (1990) argument that names are not just arbitrary symbols; they signify status, achievement, privilege and meaningful social organization. In other words, they may communicate ethnicity, social status and social prestige all of which are understood within the social contexts. Thus, *Matimyabhili* has a

powerful status in the Sukuma community due to its roles. The practical function of the goat is to serve as a symbol of family wealth. Sukuma people believe that such goats have blessings since their reproduction rate is very high, thus they multiply very fast.

### Shilungu

In figure 4, Shilungu is a goat name that refers to the made structure like a tail. It is used by Sukuma people by either serve local medicine or play traditional dances. Shilungu as a goat has white color which is created by either cow or goat white skin through rounding skin on the short stick or tail.

Figure 4 shows a goat with two symbolic colors: white at the middle of its head and black in all other parts of its body. This goat has an important practical function in socio-cultural life within the Basukuma speech communities; it is believed that when a person is lost from the society or community without any reason, this goat is used by traditional chiefs to make the lost one come back. If the person has died or has been killed with no reason, the community can face challenges such as a shortage of rainfall or poor crop harvest. Thus, this goat is believed to have power to eliminate challenges in the entire society. With this regard, the white color is the one which is believed to be visible provided

that the whole body's color is black. Thus, a goat with white color at the middle head is believed to be a sign that good things are coming. Skipper and Leslie (1990) stressed that since names provide meanings – they also guide activities by providing plans which transmit cultural knowledge and help us to choose among projects of action. This is within the scope of the Nickname Theory which puts forth an assumption that the kind of names used in a certain community are defined by the social situation as participants more or less share an understanding of situational and contextual exigencies. For brawny interpretation, the scope of Indirect Reference Theory (Siobhan, 2009) proves that apart from having a direct relationship with some features e.g. color, the names of goats are associated with the functions of the goats in the external world, which affect the community either positively or negatively.

### Ng'hubha

In Figure 5, the term Ng'hubha is used in the Sukuma community to mean "thunderstorm." It is a goat name that is associated with thunderstorm. The goat given this name is used by Sukuma chiefs and traditional healers to test and bring rainfall in the context where there is prolonged period with no rainfall.



Figure 5: Ng'hubha

Figure 6 is a picture of a goat that has reddish simple color all over its body. Due to its color, it is believed to be rainfall bringers in the Sukuma community. The connection is that when the rainfall is likely to rain or fall, radiation of "thunderstorm" starts showing that the rain is likely to fall. Therefore, this goat is given a name that reflects the

function of testing and bringing rainfall in the Sukuma community. With regard to nicknames' theory, the name given to goat reflects by indicating to the participants the meaning of the situation itself. Skipper and Leslie (1990) added that the application of a name makes sense when the general contextual properties and the specific

naming properties denote similar meanings. Thus, we cannot necessarily specify any uniform indicators for sociological variables such as nicknames without extrapolating from common uses. For that matter, Ng'hubha as a goat name has a meaning that is related to the context of use.

**Wilongo**

In Figure 6, Wilongo is another type of Sukuma goat name which is sometimes known as *Ibhala* or *mabhala*. *Ibhala* means spot or stain and its plural is *mabhala*. The structure of these spots must be round like as observed in figure 6. The practical

function assigned to *Wilongo* is to cure unpredictable diseases. It is believed that some suffers from alternating diseases such that, when they recover, another disease appears. Thus, due to having different spots, this goat is used traditionally to ensure that the sick person recovers. Therefore, the name given to this kind of goat comes from its color structure or style.



**Figure 6: Wilongo**



**Figure 7: Bhulegi**

Theoretically, Skipper and Leslie's (1990) theory of nicknames figures the understanding of *Willongo* Sukuma goat names as it is argued that the appropriate image of a common understanding is an operation rather than just a common intersection of overlapping sets of meaning. This means that it is the traditional function of this goat in the Sukuma

speech community which connotes its name and not just mealy meaning.

**Bulegi**

In Figure 7, Bulegi is a term which refers to *sorghum* in Sukuma language. Thus, a goat whose color is like that of sorghum is known as *Bhulegi* or *mbuliya* *Bhulegi* meaning 'the sorghum Goat. The name



reflects the goat's color, i.e. a little black, red purple, with some white features in the middle. In short, the name is directly related with the color of *sorghum*.

The goats in Figure 7 have black, red purple and brown color. These goats are not associated with any traditional practice and belief unlike other goats such as Matimyabhili and Shilungu. Therefore, the factor behind the choice of the name *Bhulegi* is nothing but the color of the goats. The choice of this name reflects the theory of proper names or/and the descriptive theory of reference in specific (Katz, 1977) which postulates that naming involves connecting a set of properties that an object has with properties of other objects around us. This

means that the goat name *Bhulegi* is derived from the properties that the goat, which are similar with the properties of sorghum.

**Research Question 3:** What goat names are related to etymology?

### Subhi

Subhi is a name given to a goat whose origin is Lusubi, a place found in the Biharamulo District of Kagera Region in Tanzania. The people who live in Lusubi are known as Wasubi and they speak Kisubi language. Therefore, there are goats domesticated in different parts of Tanzania whose origin is Lusubi (See Figure 8).



**Figure 8: Subhi**

Figure 8 shows a goat with khaki color. Such color is considered as the identity of goats coming from Lusubi. Consistent with Crystal's (1997) description of a name as word or phrase that identifies a specific person, place or thing, the Sukuma people name the goats with Khaki color that way since they bear the identity of objects that come from Lusubi.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

The foregoing discussion has shown that three (3) factors are considered by the Basukuma when choosing goat names. These factors are structure as in Bhuyenze and Busolo. These names reflect the structure in which the goat looks like. The second factor is color whereby goat names like Matimyabhili, Shilungu, Ng'hubha, Bhulegi and Wilongo have different colors and each goat has its

own practical function in the Sukuma speech community. The third factor is etymology or origin. Here the study observed Subhi whose origin is from Biharamulo area of Tanzania. Basing on the three factors, each goat name is associated with the status and function. Therefore, goat names have a symbolic relationship with socio-cultural values and practices in the Sukuma community.

### Recommendations

It can be advised that children have to be taught about traditional names and their meanings because they signify realities related to various aspects of life such as agriculture, climate, ceremony, birth, medicine, healing, leadership and ancestors, to mention just a few. This would foster inheritance of historical facts from one generation to another generation.

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