



A Sociolinguistics analysis on Sukuma Hen names

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Abstract

The paper analyses Hen naming system among the Sukuma speech community of Tanzania. Most literature has concentrated on personal, cow, dog, and tree names but not Hen names despite their socio-cultural significance. Thus, this paper accounts for Sukuma Hen names and their associated meaning under the Cognitive Grammar Theory. The researcher used snowball sampling to get six participants. The participants selected purposively included three Hen keepers and three traditional healers from Njingani village of Geita rural district in Tanzania. Unstructured interviews and focus group discussions were the instruments for data collection. The study found eight Hen names in Sukuma speech community and the associated reasons for their names. These are *Jomo*, *Sagala*, and *Holasi* 'for appearance'; *Shingamagaji*, 'for beliefs'; *Nzoma* 'for color', *kaMende*, *Mbuni*, and *Mhando* 'for body size'. From this base, the color, beliefs, and physical appearance determine Hen names in Sukuma speech community. The study concludes that Hen names in the Sukuma speech community are meaningful and they connote function in accordance with conceptualizations ground. Further, there is need to conduct a study on the names and the associated factors for Hens that are bred using the new breeding technology.

Introduction

This article focuses on Sukuma Hen names and their connotations within the field of onomastics. Onomastics is the study of proper names and their denominations. In other words, onomastics research distinguishes between proper nouns and appellative; the former refers to the names of people, animals, places and companies, while the latter refers to the words describing creatures, objects, places and their characteristics (Saarelm & Sjoblom, 2012, p.13). Saarelm & Sjoblom continued to explain that the proper noun identifies its target while the appellative describes and categorises a specific target as in physical appearance or character traits of the creature. For example, an adjective describing colour can be the fact or particular proper name and its denominations. From the basis of these findings, the current investigation uses Hens as creatures which are domesticated at home and have not been investigated pertinent to their names and connotations in socio-cultural context to see the factors that influence the Sukuma speech community to assign Hen names and their connotations.



Several studies have been done from other angles pertinent to the naming system in the world as in Asheli (2017), Mhute, (2016), Mberwa & Tibategeza (2022), Rubanza (2000), Massinen (2023), Abubakari (2020) to mention just but a few. One of the recent documents on the naming system is personal names (Lusekelo, 2015). Lusekelo provided a study in Hadzabe pertinent to personal names, and he argued that personal names are meaningful because they bear important cultural contents whose reading provides direct interpretation and understanding of central substances of cultures. He continued romanticizing that African names bear cultural information embedded in them, as it may personal names are not empty vessels. Lusekelo's argument is based on the fact that names have meaning and that meaning is from society's cultural experiences. The author reports that in Hadzabe, there are meaningful names, and others are not meaningful or in the fact that their meaning cannot be found or traced. The present study aims to provide adequate socio-cultural analysis of the Hen names in the Sukuma speech community, the reason for the study was the fact that Hens are creatures like other creatures domesticated by human beings but there is no discussion on their names together with their connotation meanings, thus it is a neglected topic under discussion which needs investigation.

Asheli (2017) conducted a study on personal names in three languages namely: Kuria, Iraqw and Maai (Masai). His uniqueness of the study was the incorporation of three different languages, each belonging to a different family, with the aim of comparing name patterns across language families as Kuria (belongs to the Niger-Congo family), Maasai (belongs to the Nilo-Saharan family) and Iraqw (belongs to Afro-Asiatic family). All three communities believe that names determine bearers' destiny. Under the level of analysis, Asheli's study believes that the names of African societies have meaning compared to the names of Western cultures. However, Asheli's investigation confirmed in the field of Anthroponyms, but the current study crosses another angle looking at domesticated birds called Hens and their associated meanings names with emphasis from Sukuma speakers.

Mhute, (2016) investigated on sub-branch in onomastics, that is of dog names' reality in Shona speech community. The author emphasized on the secret behind the dog names in the Shona society. Shona or ChiShona is the Bantu language spoken in Zimbabwe and Southern Zambia. It came out that, though in a certain situation, names are just tags that were given to most African children following the coming of the former white masters, thus almost every Shona dog name has a story behind it. With this regard, the current study investigates on Sukuma Hen names, the topic that most linguists have not investigated on the matter of facts and it has socio-cultural significances in the society. That is to say, these names have meaning and traditionally reflect activities or behaviors which are manifested in their speech community.

Mberwa & Tibategeza (2022) investigated on the factors influencing cattle naming in the Haya society of Tanzania. Their investigation was qualitative and centred in Haya because Haya people tend to bestow different names of cattle than other animals they kept. Specifically, the study searched for connotative and denotative meanings of the names bestowed to cattle under the theories of onomastics theory, semantic field theory and descriptive theory. They found that a total of seven socio-cultural names that cattle givers consider in cattle naming were found, namely: colour of the cattle, behaviour, structure and horn size, origin/etymology of the cattle, body benefits, and sex of the cattle and structure of the reproductive organs. The study of these scholars is very significant to the current study because Hens are also bestowed birds and flesh providers as in cattle and goats, thus this study studies Hen names and the reasons for naming because it seems that there are beyond socio-cultural factors for the naming of Sukuma Hen names following the fact that traditional beliefs have been connected into naming systems of these Hens.



Rubanza (2000) investigated personal names in the Oruhaya language of Tanzania, he is in the group of scholars who are of the opinion that personal names are meaningful. To him, names' meanings surround circumstances of birth, family continuity, family friction and conflicts found in the community concern. The author gave us some Haya examples: *Byarugaba* (God's blessings), *Rwekaza* (who fights oneself), *Kajuna* (helper), to mention just but a few. These names are meaningful following the fact that they possess the background against which they are assigned or bestowed. Thus, the current investigation was conducted, drawing attention from Sukuma Hen names and their implication for analyzing the socio-cultural significance of the bestowed Hens in the Sukuma speech community.

Massinen (2023) investigated the Karelian cow names of Russian origin. The emphasis was on the exploration of Russian-origin names, most principles of naming and whether Russian names have Karelian equivalents. Through the interview method, it was found that the most important principle of naming was the time of birth and names based on colouration. Massine's study is beneficial to the current study following the fact that it has exposed us to basic issues such as in colour and physical appearance in naming domesticated animals like cows. Can this be equivalent to domesticated Hens? The paper investigates Hen's names and the principles triggering their names.

Abubakari (2020) conducted research on personal names in Kusaal language spoken in Ghana with a focus on the sociolinguistics and semantics of these names. His study revealed sociocultural, and religious beliefs and practices of Kusaal, it is argued that personal names in Kusaal have semantic content and constitute a set of linguistics forms that are meaningful rather than being assumed or classified as 'mere forms' (Kripke, 1980). The author continued giving evidence of day names, family names, nicknames, and shrine names to mention just but a few. The name given to a child in the Kusaal community is expected to have a great impact on the bearer, either negative or positive. It is important for parents to give their child a good name for positive expectations (Agyekum (2006) argued that Kusaas like other African societies have similar customary practices in naming a newborn. They consider circumstances surrounding the birth of a child in choosing a name. Thus, in Kusaal, names have a direct relation to the cultural beliefs (Sociocultural function) of individuals as well as the events surrounding the birth names of the bearers. Therefore, this informs the current investigation that names have socio-cultural relationships which could be juxtaposed between Sukuma Hen names and their cultural beliefs.

Chucks-Orji (1972) speculated that the belief system of Africans is usually anchored on names given to a person who determined their personhood and characteristics. This is agreed with the argument that person names are related to the core part of people's culture to show solidarity, social cohesion, and history, to mention just but a few. In other words, the naming system in Africa is different from that of Western culture. The Western culture considers the issues of names as just fashions and merely no sense. The current study considers names are things and things are action, this is proved under the current investigation that Hen names are meaningful because are references and referents of things which reflect socio-cultural conduct in the Sukuma speech community.

Mensah (2020) described that in the Effik community, children are given names following days of a week, time of birth or circumstances surrounding the birth of a child also determines the names choices of a child or children. This behaviour is proper to Basà language found in Nigeria, whereby personal names bear significance socio-cultural importance in the preservation of cultural heritage



from generation to generation. The scholar is in the group of Semanticians who believe that personal names have meaning simply because they reflect the reality of cultural phenomena that the community lives in (Cf. Mensah, 2019). The questions to be asked are: Are these names real compared to the abstracted history, event, activity or socio-cultural operation? Can this be tested in other names as cows, plants, dogs, snakes and hens? Therefore, the current study uses Hen names in Sukuma society to see the names and reasons associated with Hen names.

The current sociolinguistics study of Sukuma Hen names was framed within cognitive theory known as *Cognitive Grammar Theory*. This theory believes that meaning is conceptual, meaning that words or names are propertized into basic or non-basic or core and peripheral domains. The strength of CG as an approach to meaning is also seen in its broad conceptualist view of meaning in language (Chabata, 2007). Cognitive Grammar Theory is based on several assumptions (monosemy and polysemy, compositionality, prototype model, metaphor, and metonym). Chief amongst these is the assumption that language is inherently symbolic in nature; in other words, linguistic expressions stand for conceptualisation (Langacker, 1982, 1987, 2000 & Taylor, 2002). That is to say, the name can have a basic sense. Still, such basic sense has attracted other senses native speakers to an open-ended set of linguistic signs or expressions, each of which associates a semantic representation of some kind with a phonological representation (Chabata, 2007). However, Taylor (2002, p.30) said, "in cognitive grammar, language is understood as, "a set of resources available to language users for symbolisation of thought and the communication of these symbolisations". This means that language users have symbols, categories and functions that trigger the language representation in use. Note that the practical function of Cognitive Grammar is manifested in the discussion of the findings.

Methodology

The study used the interpretivism paradigm, which believes that reality comes from the natural settings in which people interact with the facts. In other words, activities that people do in their everyday lives reflect their behaviour, understanding, and naming and describing things. The researcher used a qualitative approach with data analysis through words, phrases, clauses and sentences. Thus, qualitative data is not so much about behaviour but about the actions of the participants. Such data occur in specific situations (Enon, 1998). The study used unstructured interviews and focus group discussions to collect data on the factors triggering Hen names in the Sukuma speech community. The study used a case study design in which Hens were cases bestowed in the Sukuma speech community. A non-probability sampling design was used in which the researcher was interested in a small group's representativeness for explanation. It is sometimes known as purposive sampling, which means the researcher selects purposively individuals or objects that fit his or her study (Bryman, 2004, 2008). From this base, a snowball sampling procedure was used to select six participants for an interview and focus group discussion, whereby three were Hen domesticators, and three were Hen domesticators and traditional healers. The use of the former was because they were Sukuma Native language experts who had been in Sukuma land for 40 years, and the latter group was consulted following the fact that some of the Hen names were associated with miracles from traditional healers.

Two data collection methods were employed: interview and focus group discussion. The unstructured interview was used for traditional hearers (as they did not have enough time for the latter) in which the researcher prepared to interview for interviewing, here, unstructured interview questions were prepared pertinent to Hens' names and reasons for their names. The focus group discussion was used for Hen domesticators as they had enough time for discussion compared to traditional healers. The



discussion had two sections: the first was morning in three hours (8:00 AM-11 AM] and the second was evening for three hours [4:00 PM-7 PM]. When discussing, the researcher jotted down field notes and a voice recorder to record information for later data analysis. Participants acted positively in the discussion group with no fear.

Discussion of the findings

This subsection discusses the findings from Sukuma Hen names based on the answers obtained from both unstructured interviews and focus group discussions. It was identified that the colour, physical appearance and local beliefs determine Hen name givers and their conceptualisations in the Sukuma speech community. Under discussion bases, Cognitive Grammar Theory's theoretical apparatus was used to show its practical function pertinent to the Hen naming system in the Sukuma speech community of the United Republic of Tanzania. Thus, the next subsection anchors Hen's names and their associated factors for naming.

Hen names by physical form

Morphology or physical appearance was identified as one of the factors triggering Hen names in the Sukuma speech community of the United Republic of Tanzania. Participants were on the fact that some Hens have no feathers or have partial feathers in their body, some have, but their feathers are of different style, and others are small as in short morphologically. These physical features are factual factors for their names. The next subsection illustrates each name and its associated Hen's physical or morphological appearance.

Jomo: *Jomo* is an adjectival Hen name found in Sukuma society. This is the Hen with partial or no feathers in its neck from its origin. Sukuma speech community calls '*Ngok^{ho} ya Jomo*' to mean the hen of no feathers in its neck. The prefix *ya* means 'of' and '*Jomo*' comes from the Sukuma lexeme '*jomola*' meaning 'pick out'. Therefore, '*Jomo*' can imply the hen whose neck has no feathers from its birth. Generally, their necks have no feathers, and their body parts have incomplete feathers. With this regard, the name reflects the principle of 'Iconicity', which shows that some names echo some resemblance between the names and the referents (the named) (Asheli, 2017, p. 175). This cannot be confused with arbitrariness, which has no connection between reference and referent, The Iconicity principle is one of the semantic cognitive principles that shows that a sign represents something in the referent. During the focus group discussion and the interview, it was romanticised that the *Jomo* Hen is so much loved because of its beef sweetness. Sukuma society agrees that this kind of Hen has sweet beef for eating. With this regard, the factor for naming kind of this hen is associated with its structure of feathers. Consider the f figure in 1 below:

Figure 1: *Jomo*





The Hen referred to in Figure 1 has its name which reflects the metonymic principle of Cognitive Grammar Theory. Kövecses (2002) defined metonymy as “a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same domain ...” p. 145). Observing the close relationship between metonymy and metaphor, Kövecses further notes that, like metaphor, metonymies are conceptual in nature and, just like conceptual metaphors, are revealed by metaphorical linguistic expressions. That is to say, the name given to the above Hen reflects the meaning closely related within the same domain of its name and the sense of having no fathers.

KaMende: KaMende is the Sukuma local Hen name. It is the kind of Hen that is very short and lays more eggs than other Hens. The name ‘KaMende is made of two words, the prefix *-ka-* and ‘*Mende*’. The prefix *ka* is a diminutive prefix while the word *Mende* has two connotations; one is the sound that this Hen gives, the sound reflects its name (Cf. idiophonic meaning), and the second sense is that there are small organisms in Sukuma land like cockroaches in shape. They are very small and short in size; they are known as *Mende*. Thus, speakers associate the name *kaMende* because of being small and short. Thus, the factor triggering Hen name givers is nothing but ‘size’ and the sound reflection of this Hen. Another feature of KaMende is that it lays many eggs compared to other Hens, which results in many chicken nuggets. Apart from that, they possess hard cartilage compared to other Hens. Consider the figure in 2 below:

Figure 2: KaMende



With regard to the name of KaMende and diminutive case in specific, such noun reflects directly within the Cognitive Grammar apparatus being it metaphor. Metaphor is one of the central concepts to the cognitive grammatical approach to language (Chabata, 2007, p. 197). However, from the experience of smallness, it is reflected in metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon that involves a mapping relation between two domains; the source domain and the target domain. Thus, the source domain is conceived as concrete concepts as in distance, size to mention just but a few and the target domain is more abstract as in subjective experience. This means that the meaning of KaMende being short and small Hen name is the metaphorical factor used by Sukuma speech community for naming or giving the name.



Mbuni: This is one among the Sukuma kept Hens which is characterized with very small body size like that of KaMende. The Mbuni lays many eggs like KaMende but Mbuni has power compared to KaMende, Mbuni does not want to fail in anyhow, it cares eggs and its chicks. It must be noted that its head and tail look like an ostrich. Thus, its name is connected to ostriches as they share some features Consider figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Mbuni



The Hen in Figure 3 has a short tail, body size and few feathers on its neck. Its head is also short-rounded by nature. The Mbuni's mouth is short and strong enough, according to Sukuma Hen keepers. It was said that

This Hen is very strong when fighting with other Hens, it normally wins the game. Its body size is small and fit, and its mouth bites strongly. As a result, other Hens fear it despite their big body size...

This shows unlike KaMende, Mbuni has extra characteristics that make it different from other domesticated Hens in the Sukuma speech community. It is believed to be excellent and clean Hen among Hens if kept naturally. It does not need to stay with rubbish or muddiness in its body.

Sagala: The word 'Sagala' is an adjective in the Sukuma language which means 'bad' or something of excessive bad'. The Sukuma speech community calls 'ya Sagala' means 'of bad', thus, 'ngoko ya Sagala' connote the Hen of abnormal feathers around its body '. This is the Hen name given to the Hen, which has feathers with sluggish directions around the body. Consider the figure in 4 below:

Figure 4: *Holasi*



Figure 5: *Sagala*



Figure 5 shows that a Hen has feathers which are not in good form. Thus, it is like abnormal feathers on its body; as a result, it is named 'Sagala', meaning bad or something with a bad form style. Sukuma from the Geita region and rural district specifically name this name with the experience of features or structure of feathers that the Hen possesses, which is different from other Hens domesticated or kept by them. It is not an abnormality of the Hen, but it is the way it is. This justifies the use theory of meaning conceptualisation, which articulates that the meaning of a word (name) depends on the rules of its use in context. That is to say, the practice of these speakers is using rules and principles they have in accommodating meaning. From this conception, the issue of 'badness' or 'goodness' in Sukuma society depends on how something is, can be, appears or looks like. Thus, even the Hen denominated '*Sagala*' comes out because its feathers are abnormal compared to other Hens kept in Sukuma land. The Hen in Figure 3 had laid similar children like its structure as shown in Figure 4

Holasi: This is the Sukuma Hen name whose appearance and body size are covered by a lot of feathers in all parts of the body. Holasi has a thin and small body size after removing all feathers around its body. Most of the Sukuma people do not prefer this kind of Hen for business because they seem very big morphologically, but their meat is minimal. Holasi is shown in figure 4 above.

The Hen has a lot of feathers in its body, and when feathers are plucked, its body looks small compared to other Hens, as in Nzoma, and Mbuni, to mention just a few. However, the name Holasi resembles things being many or full. Hence, the name reflects the denomination. It must be noted that the factor that makes such a name appear is the reflection of the lexeme 'full' or 'many' translated as *Hola* in Sukuma speech community. Other prefixes associated with *Hola* are **Kahola**, 'small farm,' **Ihola** 'big farm' **mahola** 'many farms' to mention just a few. From this base, Cognitive Grammar Theory envisages naming by relating categories from nearby domains. In other words, the theory articulates that the source domain is concrete while the target domain is abstract (Cf. Taylor 2002, p. 491). Thus, the name *Holasi* is given from the base of concrete domain "many or full" which is connected to some Hens (target domain) whose feather are many in their body. In other words, the conceptualization of abstract categories is 'grounded' in peoples' experience with the concrete objects and events (Ungerer & Schmid 1996, p. 121). Basing on this explanation, it is evidence that the Cognitive Grammar Theory has direct envisioned pertinent to Sukuma Hen naming systems.

Mhando: This is the Hen name assigned by Sukuma society. It is the Hen whose physical appearance is tall with little feathers along its body. This Hen has long toes – and fingers compared to other Hen

domesticated in Sukuma land. The strong, long fingers that it possesses make Sukuma people call its name. In other words, it uses fingers to press down other Hens when fighting. Thus, *Mhando* is the term used to mean something or an instrument used for pressing down. Most of these Hens are loved by the community because they have a lot of flesh when slaughtered for beef stew or spice. They are more expensive Hens than other Hens in the Sukuma community. Consider the physical appearance of the Hen in Figure 6 below:

Figure 6: Mhando



The physical appearance together with strong muscles we observe in figure 6 shows that this kind of Hen is the tallest of all and that it has fewer feathers on its body compared to other Hens' feathers. The other characteristic of *Mhando* is that it has a lot of beef compared to other Hens kept in the Sukuma speech community. It has 2.5 -3 kilograms compared to other Hens like KaMende, whose kilogram is 1-1.75 kilograms.

Hen names by coloration

Colour has been one of the factors triggering different societies worldwide in pertinent to naming persons, objects, creatures, and things. Specifically, colour was identified as one of the factors used by the Sukuma speech community for naming their Hens. The next subsection illustrates different Hen colours and their associated names in the Sukuma speech community:

Nzoma: This is another Sukuma name associated with colour. Its name is given because it has a draft colour design-like structure. The feathers of this kind of Hen are mixed; within its colours, it has white, grey and purple-black. The physical appearance makes the Sukuma speech community call Nzoma, meaning that it has no one colour in Sukuma meaning. The origin of this name is said to be from naming some animals whose colours are of different styles; in other words, it is a mixed colour as in the tail of some animals can have a white, black and red colour. Thus, when this kind of Hen appears in Sukuma land, they consider it as the Hen with no one colour style, but one feather has more than one colour. This goes hand in hand with cognitive semantics, which accounts that the meaning of the word or name is conceptual. In other words, one entity can be associated with either the same or a different domain entity. Consider the figure in 7 below:



Figure 7: Nzoma



Theoretically, cognitive Semanticist (Cf. Lakoff, 1987, p. 297) argues that meaning representation depends on linguistic and non-linguistic information, including people's beliefs. In other words, meaning in Cognitive Linguistics is derived from the experience of human beings functioning as being of a specific sort in an environment of a particular sort. With this Idealized Cognitive Model, Cognitive Grammar Theory conveys reality in Sukuma Hen names as the means of naming system. This means that Sukumas' mind has conceptualised the name (Cf. figure 5) with the reflection of their experience pertinent to other creatures with similar physical or colour appearances.

Beliefs

Traditional belief has been observed triggering name givers to assign a name to Hens. Concerning the Sukuma speech community, the belief is that some hens are traditionally used for detecting wrong conditions, doers or local medicine for curing people. According to Sukuma culture, the study observed and identified one Hen known as Shingamagaji.

Shingamagaji is one of the Sukuma Hen names. It is the name given to a Hen with two or three colours, including black, red and red. This name is the compound one with two particles, namely '*shinga*' meaning 'be there or stay there for a long time and *magaji*' something strong, or something of different colour with the strong or active reaction'. Thus, *Shingamagaji* is mostly used by traditional healers for people's treatment. Sometimes, Shingamagaji is known as Ng'hubha due to its visibility, as its feathers reflect red light. During the focus group discussion, discussants stipulated that they assimilate with thunder' lighting. This means that the way thunder booms suddenly it provides quickly visible lighting, and everybody observes such lighting. Traditional belief is the factor for the Sukuma Hen names givers for naming from this base. Consider the figure in 8 below:

Figure 8: *Shinga magaji*



The figure 8 shows the Hen with sometimes black and red-purple colors in its feathers. The mixture of this colour is traditionally believed to be a Hen of local medicine or a Hen used in curing people when mixed with other local medicine. This form of meaning is nothing but construal operation. Construal operation is the principle like other principles we have seen which argues that meaning is conceptualization. This means that the conceived meaning involves several operations (Croft & Cruse, 2004). These operations include judgement, comparison, situatedness and constitution. From this base, the Hen above is named following the number of operations as in colour appearance, its blood function in pertinent to curing sickness or perishing the expected wrong events to individual or the society at large. In other words, words are things and words in the life of the human circle.

Conclusion

The naming system or name denomination is very important in human life circle. Every individual human being has a name for social identification. From this base, the paper has analysed Sukuma Hen names and the factors triggering naming systems. It has been observed that the color, body size, behavior and beliefs influence the Sukuma speech community for naming Hen names as in Nzoma, Jomo, KaMende, Shinga magaji, Sagala and Mhando. These Hen names are being reflected under the cognitive grammar's conceptualization in that they configure both contexts from mental entity through the scope of re-checking alternative conceptual sense for capturing both the target and source domain of the Hen names. These names have function as it has been analysed in this paper; they represent colour, behavior, morphology or size and traditional beliefs for the Sukuma speech community. Therefore, names of persons, objects and creatures are meaningful in human development.

In the Sukuma speech community, there are Hens with mixed color or physical appearance. This is the result of Hen breeding of different types. These kinds of Hens need analysis for their names and factors for such names. Therefore, there is a need for another investigation to see what the real names are for these Hens. What factors trigger naming systems for these Hens? What are the characteristics



these Hens have? This will be very important to see if they possess equal features of the two bred Hens or embedded features of the two features.

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