



## TUGEN CULTURE AND ARTS: A CRITICAL STUDY OF TUGEN MOTHER LANGUAGE IN PRESERVATION OF TUGEN CULTURAL IDENTITY

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### Abstract

This paper examines and analyses use of Tugen mother language that is explicitly manifested in both verbal and nonverbal communication. Over the years, Tugen culture has been preserved and passed on to generations using mother language. It is, therefore, imperative to examine deeper and hidden meanings expressed in use of Tugen mother language in preservation of its cultural identity. The study first examined and then proceeded to analyse the use of the Tugen mother language. Research methods used in this study are descriptive: observation, interviews, focus group and personal experience. The paper discusses the use of Tugen mother language in instilling a set of standard behaviours being expressed in art and nonverbal communication, e.g. models, symbolism, magical objects, ceremonial dance, etc. and verbal communication, i.e. beliefs/spiritual, physical, social and ideational environment. This paper is intended to enhance knowledge, skills and norms guiding people's way of interactions and coping with the ideational environment by identifying norms affecting knowledge, rituals, ideas, magic, and emotions that are being shared by the Tugen so as to cope with the various and numerous demands of life. The study concludes that without proper understanding of the deeper and hidden use of Tugen mother language will result in the misrepresentation of Tugen culture. And that the proper use of Tugen mother language will also lead to protection, provision and treatment against the exigencies of life experienced in the physical and spiritual world, especially in handling stressful life challenges to the "known meaningful" worldview of the Tugen people.

**Key terms:** Emic, ethno science, ideational, syntactic, Tugen.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Tugen people belong to the Nilo-Saharan language family of the Southern Nilotic branch. The community is part of the Kalenjin group, which includes the Kipsigis, Nandi, Keiyo, Marakwet, Terik, Sabaot and Pokot. Of these, the largest group is the Kipsigis, and the second largest is Nandi, followed by the Tugen. The word "Tugen" implies people who hide their identity and possessions; that is, they 'keep secrets' (Tuchei Tugun). This hiding of identity and possessions is also found in all other Kalenjin groups, as evidenced by the fact that no one would count the number of children in a household. Among the Tugen, droughts and raids probably contributed to the idea of keeping secrets.

The Tugen are semi-pastoralists and farmers who occupy a rectangle of the Rift Valley floor. They live within the Tugen hills in Baringo County. The Tugen District Headquarters are Kabarnet and E1dama-Ravine respectively. Other growing centres in population are; Kabartonjo, Marigat, Mogotio and Tenges. The Tugen clans claim to have come from different places: Elgon region, Uasin Gishu plateau, Ichamus, and Mount Kenya.

In the Tugen fertile uplands, where Mosop - Lembus and North Baringo – Aror dialects are spoken, finger millet, beans, and sorghum are grown, and in recent times, they have introduced crops like coffee and pyrethrum. They also keep crossbreed cattle. While those occupying the semi-arid lowlands, where the Soi-Somor dialect is spoken, grow cassava, groundnuts, onions, cotton, and sisal and keep livestock. The Tugen follow a patrilineal lineage and practice the rites of passage, which involve the initiation of boys and sometimes girls secretly. Polygamy is practised, and respect for elders is still practised as the norm to date. Mother language is an integral part of the preservation of cultural identity of a community. Over the years, Tugen culture has been preserved and passed on to generations using mother language. It is, therefore, imperative to examine the deeper and hidden meanings expressed in the use of the Tugen mother language in the preservation of its cultural identity.

A superficial use of Tugen mother language will lead to a misinterpretation of Tugen cultural identity. The use of Tugen mother language explicitly manifested itself in both verbal and nonverbal communication. The proper use of Tugen mother language will lead to defence, provision and treatment against the challenges of life experienced in the physical and spiritual realms.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Daystar Communication (1982), "Unreached peoples of Kenya" records Traditional Tugen cultural affiliation as the majority group who believe the spiritual world to be real in their day-to-day living and so live in fear. The population of Baringo is 66,763 persons, on the average, one household has five people, while the Tugen population is 197,556 (The Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The study of Tugen culture refers to the culture of Tugen people who speak the same or related language and have similar social and ideological systems in Baringo region. People who interact with one another more closely than with the rest of Kalenjin tribe. This study interests the researcher in finding out how the use of the Tugen mother language forms an integral part in the preservation of the cultural identity of Tugen culture.

## 3.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Why the Use of Models in Understanding Tugen Culture

- a) In examining and describing the real Tugen worldview.
- b) In dealing with complex phenomena, e.g. an abstract theory or empirical observation.
- c) Models help in understanding phenomena, both literary and symbolic or non-literary.
- d) Its representation in a diagram, drawing, or picture form helps retain knowledge.
- e) Create impact for expanding human knowledge.
- f) Pedagogically it proceeds from known to unknown i.e. it starts from simple learning of language to complex, organised management of language.
- g) It dramatises the implications of the particular analogy under study.
- h) Good models should be useful (informative, solve practical problems, open (has limitations, needs further clarifications), fitting (logical, consistent, simple, clear, aesthetic) and stimulating (arouse imagination and critical thinking (Luzbetak, 1988).
- i) To be holistic means ministering to an individual in totality, including physical, social, psychological, and spiritual entities.
- j) In case of emic: it helps in understanding the local culture by the insider in terms of verbal and nonverbal communication/emic model helps in understanding social, psychological and spiritual behaviour.
- k) It represents the true or authentic identity of people, e.g. the term "Tugen"- hide their things.
- l) Ideational models of culture: the description of culture in terms of cognitive dimension or system.

### Tugen Mother Language as an Integral Part of Culture:

- a) It reflects the cognitive system: forms the societal body of knowledge/cognitive system or ethno science) including verbal and nonverbal communication, e.g. Tum (ritual) and Tumin (Bush), Korot (sickness) and kotot (return from somewhere) - this needs clarity from an emic perspective.
- b) Communication that will help the members of the society cope with life.
- c) Analysis of categories of concepts: physical, social, psychological and spiritual entity.
- d) Tugen language or native language used to safeguard the Tugen categorisation of reality.
- e) It reflects verbal and nonverbal communication.
- f) Preservation of traditional knowledge and cultures in a sustainable way.
- g) Mother tongue is the language that a child starts hearing after being born, and thus, it helps in the provision of a definite shape to our emotions and thoughts. Learning in mother tongue is crucial in enhancing other skills like critical thinking, skills to learn a second language and literacy skills.
- h) Learning together and from each other is classically common within families where knowledge is shared down the generations.
- i) It is the way by which people communicate, build relationships, and foster a feeling of community.
- j) Language expressed in words in Tugen worldview is used in exercising control of both physical and spiritual realms, especially in handling stressful life challenges to the "known meaningful" worldview so as to cope with life.
- k) Have inherent power to deal with all realms of life.
- l) Language in Tugen worldview is used for protection, provision and treatment against the exigencies of life experienced in the physical and spiritual world.

## Ways of Learning/Communication of Tugen Mother Language

- a) Through deliberate observation and imitation.
- b) Through education/instructions by a socially appointed instructor or through storytelling, riddles, and myths by grandparents in the evening time.
- c) Unconscious imitation.
- d) Sharing of abstract ideas and knowledge in the form of symbolism/symbols, which are objects or physical phenomena to which a meaning has been ascribed or bestowed.
- e) By transmission within the framework of the community or family.
- f) Learning the rules of friendship and spending adequate time with them.
- g) Indirect interaction, especially in business or barter trade.
- h) Learning for humans, not animals, by means of interrelationships.

The above ways of learning Tugen mother language are intended to teach the grammar of one's culture: the ways of culture and the functional linkages e.g. Interconnections, emotions, attitudes, cognitive systems and character formation.

## Tugen Language: Verbal Communication and Nonverbal Communication

Tugen language forms an integral part of Tugen culture. The use of Tugen language is intended to instil a set of standard behaviours (expressed by symbolism found in Tugen use of nonverbal communication, and belief/spiritual, physical, social and ideational environment (expressed by verbal communication) associated with demands for meaningful living. The usage of the Tugen language enhanced interactions, knowledge, skills, and countless norms guiding people in their interactions and coping with the ideational environment. This is achieved by identifying norms affecting knowledge, rituals, ideas, magic, and emotions that are shared by the Tugen people. As a result, they are able to cope with the various and numerous demands of life. Tugen language forms an integral aspect of the modern educational system.

## Use of Ritual-Mother Language in Verbal Communication:

### In Times of Sickness

According to an interview with Elder Wilson Chebii, Cheberen from Katabwa village, language in the form of words has magic power, especially when they are used in the right way that will produce the desired results. Using ritualistic words of invocation, the specialist commands the malevolent spirit of illness and destruction to leave the sick person e.g. **UUI CHESAWIL** (evil spirit leave). This will create an exchange of the life of the animal for the life of the patient, implying the impact of innate.

### In Times of Drought

According to an interview, Elder Kiriba Kimwei, Cheberen Location –Katabwa village, says that when there is drought, men will go to a hilly place belonging to a particular elder, then a sheep is strangled, and a special kind of tree is identified for the making of a fire. The skin is then put into the fire which will generate a lot of fire that will illuminate covering a wide area to be seen by the whole village, then the elders will sing a ritualistic song and foreign song, **"WOOEYAAHAAHAYA..."**, then followed by **KIMI YE TILIL**(we are in a holy alter) three times. The fourth time is repeated, but is ended with a response of **"HOO..."** After this, it is alleged that rain will fall immediately.

The study observed that the use of repetitive singing will ascribe magical properties, and it must be followed by prescribed intonations and certain formulas coupled with employing the holy names of the

deity. This compels the deity to respond by giving the rain right away. This agrees with the findings of Musk (2003) that when certain formulas are probably followed with the involvement of the deity, then the evil spirit will be driven away. The words are intoned with a strong, melodious cadence (rhythm) and are repeated over and over again with a persuasive voice so as to exert magical power. It is unnecessary to know what the words mean (Steyne, 1989).

## Using the Names of the Deity

For successful travel, one will bless the other person using the name of God by saying, **IBERURIN CHEPKOJOR! IBERURIN CHEBOKIPKOYO! IBERURIN CHEPTALEL** (Blessing from morning star, ancient of days, bright one). On successful arrival, "**Kongoi CHEPKOJOR! KONGOI CHEBOKIPKOYO O! KONGOI CHEPTALEL** (Thank you Morning Star, Ancient of Days, Bright One)". In times of drought, women assemble under a particular special tree and pour milk, millet and wild fruits and thereafter, with a loud voice, call the names of God, **KAIKAI CHEPKOJOR! KAIKAI CHEBOKIPKOYO! KAIKAI CHEPTALEL YOTWECH KORIKAB BEEK!** (Please Morning Star, Ancient of Days, Bright One open for us the fountain of water). Rain will then fall immediately.

## In Case of Reversing Curses

Use of Tugen mother language has special efficacy in producing the desired results in bringing wholeness of life or adverse effects as asserted by elder Wilson Chebii in an interview who pointed out in an interview that, there are certain magical symbols being expressed in ritualistic mother language form, like music and dance that are used to communicate ways of worship as well as for education in Tugen worldview. Tugens have a way of reverting curses when a curse is made by parents, "I curse you to go down the cliff and not to come back again to this world". To reverse such a curse, the cursed victim has to offer traditional honey brew, which has to be poured into a special calabash. The person who pronounced the curse will take the drink into his mouth and then spill out all over the body of the victim while mentioning the following words: "**SERE KUTINYU** (receive **blessing** from my mouth-mouth for blessing); **SERE KUTTAP MWAI** (receive blessing from my mouth of oil); **SERE KUTTAP KOSOMNYON** (receive blessing from my honey-mouth)", while the old men are pronouncing blessings, elderly women present will respond by noting their heads and saying, "**UUU**". In this ritual language, no payment is made. This will reverse the curse pronounced earlier on.

## In the Case of Sickness

A specialist is invited in the presence of ten relatives to come and perform a special ritual: a small pyramid is constructed comprising of several sticks. After completion, the specialist in a loud voice will pronounce the following words, "*Kingen kele kainyo imirmir/ken'gem sobetab (kigen), pakach/metem (Kigen) ak iwe oren'gung (We know that you have come to bring destruction in the life of so and so (Kigen), so leave this person (Kigen) and miss your way).*" When a child is born with deformities like unusual cries, deformed scars, the elders will examine the child's body, then place tobacco at the nose of the child while calling the names of the living dead/ancestors (**TAPRANTICH, TABUNEI, KIMOI, ARAPTUITOECK**) 'we have identify you' of the relatives that has such marks twice and if the child stops crying or sneezes then the child is given the responding name which the child has responded to. In case of a deep hole in the child's body, it is believed it will heal between three and seven days.

## In Case of Impotency or Barrenness

Impotence is related to nerve issues; a specialist will instruct the killing of a sacrificial animal with the skin of the animal inserted into the left hand of the victim with the taking of certain herbs. However, if the impotency is from a powerful spirit, the victim is to lie on the skin of the sacrificial animal, and then he is carried to a nearby river. Reaching the river, the elders will use sticks to beat the waters and thereafter throw away the sticks shouting, "You evil spirit be carried away by the waters and never come back again". After this, the person is removed from the skin. The barren woman brings traditional brew, and one elder will spill over her stomach, and the men will pronounce ritualistic words, **BOIETMOISE; OIS ALE OIS** and all will respond, **KIING KOLE KIING** as the women make melodious sounds by rubbing their metal instruments in their forearms. Then another elder will say, **JJO, JJO**, and all the women will spread their hands together with the barren woman.

## On Identification of the Owner of the Child

If the child is suspected to have been given a wrong clan name while he/she belongs to another clan, then the clan elders are called, and a ritual is conducted. Milk is poured on cow dung, and the uncle says the following ritualistic words twice: **"KOSOR KET KAPKELIEN, KASOR ANA OLOO"** (Let there be a hole in this 'particular family tree or no'). After this is uttered, within three to seven days, the identification of the child will be known by either the mother getting sick or the mother confessing to the elders the right clan of the child.

## In Cases of Curses

Curses are binding and should be reversed to nullify its effects. If a daughter disobeys the parents in case of marriage and the father pronounces the following words, "Go forever and do not come back to my home again". Such words have great effects. If the daughter comes back in need of blessing, then the clan elders are called and the father will bless her by saying certain ritualistic words, **"USIG NE KUSIS"**.

## Blessings for Long Life

An uncle is invited to come and conduct the blessing. A bull is slaughtered with the preparation of the traditional brew and milk. The uncle will spill the milk around the neck and the head and then say the following ritualistic words, **"KOBITKATIT /KIBOKAT** (may your neck grow) **IYOBTOI** (will grow), **IWEKENY** (long life), **SERE** (blessings) and the participants will respond in a ritualistic language, **"NGABUWOWU, AIS, KIING"**. After three days, the age set will take the person to the river to bath. He or she will then return to the homestead. The above illustrations point out that language in Tugen culture reflects the cognitive system of communication, both verbal and nonverbal communication.

## The Cognitive Categorisation or Systems of Tugen Mother Language

Humans have a built-in capacity to learn a language which is absent in nonhumans, hence not a tabula rasa, I.e. a clean slate ability to analyse and understand the complex sound systems of languages (Luzbetak, 1988). The Tugen's use of verbal communication can be an expression of friendship in general for example; the Tugen word *Chorwet* is a cognitive system, which excludes an enemy (BUNYOT) while the ritual form of friendship (BAKULE) is used to include enemies. This means that use of language in Tugen mother language need clear understanding and interpretation since language has hidden and deeper meaning.



## Examples of Emic Complex Sound Systems/ Intonation of Sounds of Tugen Mother Language:

- i) Sotee (callabas ) Sotee (clan),
- ii) Moe (stomach), Moe (injury),
- iii) Beek (millet), Beek ( water),
- iv) Koliel(lightning), Koliel – spark in the body
- v) korot (sickness), korot (animals return from grazing activities)
- vi) Soet (atmosphere), Soet (buffalo)
- vii) Ore ( path), Ore (clan),
- viii) Cherere ( small baby) Cherere (monkey)
- ix) M'oi (clan) Moi ( one calf),
- x) Sim (overjoyed), Sim (dirt),
- xi) Cham (love), Cham (taste)
- xii) Cham (Love), Cham (Gossip)
- xiii) Mamae (not dead), Mamae (uncle)

From the above examples, the study can deduce that humans have the ability to abstract the basic rules of grammar, generate, and understand an infinite number of vowel and consonant combinations.

**Proverbs, riddles and myths:** These have social, historical, mental (creativity, imagination, critical thinking) and spiritual orientations (feelings, desires, attitudes).

**Nonverbal Communication:** The Tugen nonverbal communication is expressed in object forms. The following examples are cited:

**Symbolism:** is a form of ideational, environment expressed in cultural forms. Here there is need to examine the functions of these nonverbal communication of the Tugen language .One has to examine linguistic metaphors being modelled around three schools of thought/meaning: syntactic- the grammar of the cultural language, semantics-the meaning and pragmatics- the rules governing the practical usage of the signs.

**Use of symbolism** in Tugen language is of paramount importance. It speaks to the emotions, the mind and the soul of the Tugen people e.g. use of magical objects. Symbolism is used to protect people from spirits attacks and to invite good spirits to bring goodness in life. This brings security, power and confidence in facing life challenges.

**Fetishes** are objects endowed with supernatural spiritual power. These are performed when charm seems to be powerless and can be used to bring success in life, alter one's mind and cause evil, as well as provide presence and remove loneliness. It is ritualistic in nature therefore will help in manipulating the spirit-world.

**Charms and amulets** are objects endowed with power. It involves the use of animals' parts, sacred cords, animal claws, precious stones and animal hair made as bracelets, made into rings or worn to provide strength, to attract and bring success, to overcome particular difficulties, challenges or problems and to assist a person to live a life of confidence in life's troubles or exigencies in life. Charm ointments can also be used to ensure protection, guarantee security against sorcery, and warding off and drawing good fortune ward an evil eye and witchcraft. Some objects are put in the corner of the house for protection.

**Charms** can be used during women's rites to control the husband from hostility or used by men to attract women. The efficacy of such charms is associated with the spirit worldview of the Tugen people.

**Ceremonial/ritual dance and music:** These have social (socialisation –songs done by both men and women, singing in pairs), historical, mental (creativity, imagination, critical thinking), physical (physical exercise for fitness and spiritual (medicine to the soul) orientation.

**Dressing:** These have social, historical, physical and spiritual (medicine to the soul, feeling, desires, attitudes) and mental (creativity, imagination, critical thinking) orientation.

**Sacrifices and offerings:** This will result in goodwill or expectation from the deity or spirit and should be appreciated by the deity or the spirit in terms of offering bits of food or pouring libation. It dialogues with the spirit world.

**Rites of passage:** naming (identification), initiation (where, why, how, when), marriage (why, how and when i.e. slaughtering of a bull three days prior to arrival of a new bride to the new home) and death (where, how: dressing, food, burial rites, speeches, priestly ritual activities, burial site). These have numerous rituals with functional significance.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

**Conclusion:** The use of Tugen mother language brings positive results in meeting holistic human needs e.g. the cognitive categorisation: knowledge, skills (nonverbal communication) and values. This paper was presented on indigenous mother language, based on scientific research, reviewed and even translated into indigenous learning materials, made accessible and used in both formal education and the indigenous catchment area.

**Recommendation:** There is a need to study Tugen cultural factors that contribute to cognitive systems, e.g. the physical environment, the state of technology and intra and extra-tribal politics.

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