

Cultural Implications of the Kipsigis Clan Names

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Abstract

The present paper investigated the Kipsigis clan names under the major family name category with the aim of establishing the cultural implications in them. The study was done in Kericho and Bomet counties in Kenya from December 2023 to January 2025. Thirty clan names were collected and broken down into their components, and examined for their meaning, usage, and cultural context using a theory of personal names which was propounded by Makondo (2009) and principles from Lexical Pragmatics Theory by Wilson (2003) & Carston (2002). The findings of the analysis are that the Kipsigis society is structured into clans which were divided according to their origin into special clans, clans from the wider Kalenjin tribes, clans from the Maasai community and clans from Kisii community. Several cultural implications from the clan names were established. One is that that the Kipsigis value identity which they derive from clans. Second, they also value preservation of bloodlines by not allowing marriage between members of the same clan. Third, patriarchal system was seen in the tracing of lineage from fathers to sons beginning from the clans' founding fathers. Fourth, their value for animals and connection to them is seen in the totems that every clan identifies with. Finally, through the clan system,

preservation of the Kipsigis history is done in the oral narratives that each clan has of their lineage.

Keywords: clan, totem, pragmatic meaning, cultural implications

Introduction

Clan names are very important to the Kipsigis community as they help to establish one's identity and background. They also guide young people on who to marry and who not to. This is because it is a great taboo among the Kipsigis people for members of the same clan to get married. For a Kipsigis, it is not enough to be known just by one's personal names but by one's clan name as well. The most common question among the Kipsigis of the older generation when they meet a new person from the community is to ask: *ii an or a?* This means "which clan are you?" The Kipsigis name for clan is *oret* which literally means "a road". This indicates that to the Kipsigis, a clan system is likened to a path showing where they have come from and where they are going. In essence, a clan system shows one's lineage that is followed from the father's side of the family and handed down to the sons. A Kipsigis young man can therefore trace his roots even up to six generations backwards. The elders are usually very happy to make acquaintances and to point out people from the clan mentioned that they know. The elders only begin getting to know a person not just from the personal name but also from the wider family that one comes from.

During large gatherings where there are new people, introductions are made beginning with the personal name, then family name and finally the clan names that they belong to, those of their mothers and spouses. The men will call themselves by their clan names, but the women will mention the clans they were born into and the clans they are married into. This shows patriarchy in that the men are born into a clan and get their identity from it. It implies the men are the

owners and custodians of the clan. For example, a man who is from *kipkenda* clan will say *oo kipkenda* meaning “I am *kipkenda*” but a woman from this clan will say “I was born by *kipkenda* and got married to such and such a clan.” This shows women are born into a clan and transferred into another through marriage.

Each clan has its totem or an animal they identify with and which they regard as symbols of their importance in society. This shows that the Kipsigis community still is closely connected to animals. Respondent C 14 narrated that their totem is *moset* “monkey” and whenever monkeys stray into their compound, they are not turned back but are well received and fed.

Methodology

This was a qualitative research study whereby the researcher obtained first-hand information from the Kipsigis people through participant observation, interviews and questionnaires. The data collected was analyzed according to the principles from the Anthroponym-pragma-semio-semantic decompositional theory which was developed by Makondo (2009) in his study of Shona names. This theory is multi-disciplinary, borrowing tenets from anthropology, semantics, morphology, and pragmatics. It asserts that to get the cultural meaning of a name, it is first broken down into the morphemes making up the name to get the literal meaning. From the morphological level, it is possible to determine the semantic meaning by establishing both the denotative and the connotative meaning. The pragmatic meaning is then asserted by considering the context within which the name is being used. The data was also subjected to the principles from the Unitary Approach to Lexical Pragmatics Theory by Wilson, Deidre, and Carston (2007). From this theory, the principles of implicature, inference, and context were used to obtain the implied meaning of the clan names.

The research study was conducted among the Kipsigis people living in two counties: Kericho and Bomet, as these are the areas where the Kipsigis are the predominant community. Snowball sampling method led the researcher to 15 respondents who had immense knowledge in the Kipsigis naming culture.

Focus group interviews with eight respondents, five men and three women of the age bracket (50-90) from Bomet county, enabled the researcher to collect more information on the clan system. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted to gather information from ten respondents who live in the Kipteris location. The researcher also benefitted from the work of Rutto (2016), who did interviews with several members of the generation aged between 90-100 years in 2016 meaning most of them are no longer alive. Their explanation of the clan system corroborated with the work of Toweett, 1979, pp.28-32).

Morpho-Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis of Clan Names

The Kipsigis clan names collected were categorized by origin. To do this, the researcher relied on the oral traditions surrounding every clan to determine the community of origin. In the overall structure of the clan system is an umbrella classification called sibs to which all the clans belong. This section will present the sibs, the clans in their various categories, and their cultural implications. In the clan system, there are rules and regulations governing every member's conduct in the community. These customs are also presented as they help in determining the cultural implications.

The Sibs

The Kipsigis society is structured into families with a common founding father. In the genealogy of the clan names, there is a wider classification of the Kipsigis people called *poryeet*,

which means “a group of people with the same ancestral lineage. The wider classification comprises four divisions, each arising from a brother. According to Kipsigis oral tradition, the names of the brothers in the order of their birth are *kipng’etuny* “of the lion”, *kebeni* “sojourner”, *kipwaige* “one who isolates himself” and *kasamet* “one who is heard” (Rutto, 2016, p. 24). The Kipsigis used to identify themselves using these sibs. Still, as numbers increased and other people were incorporated into the community the sibs became so wide such that sub-sibs (clans) were formed, which are now clan names like *kapyosit*, *kipkendek*, *narachek*, that shall be discussed below. These sibs also formed the four war divisions in order of the number of the brothers. The Kipsigis people would go to war in their war divisions.

The names below reflect the Kipsigis naming pattern of marking the prevailing circumstances connected to a name as explained below:

- (1) *kip-ngetuny*
MASC-lion
‘Lion man’
- (2) *ke-beni*
INF-delay
‘A sojourner’
- (3) *kip-wai-ge*
MASC-isolate-REFL
‘One who isolates himself’
- (4) *kas-anet*
hear-SG
‘One who demands for attention’

The first sib (1) *kip-ngetuny* is from a man who came to be known as *kip-ngetuny* “lion man”. It is made up of the masculine prefix *kip-* and the Kipsigis word for lion. According to oral tradition, the man is said to have nursed an injured lion that had crawled onto his farm. The lion is said to have had a bamboo stick lodged in its foot. The man cut the wound, drained the pus, and removed a four-inch bamboo stick. After that, the man would go hunting and share whatever

he got with the lion. Thus, the lion grew strong and on recovery, it also brought home two buffalo to the man in appreciation and then went back to the jungle. The people thus called the man *kip-ng'etuny* because he nursed a wounded lion and forged a friendship with it. C 10 explained that it is a taboo in Kipsigis to kill an animal that has young ones or to kill cubs or puppies, which are helpless creatures, even if that animal is not one's totem. The Kipsigis value animals and treat them well as seen in *kip-ngetuny's* case.

The second sib is *kebeni* which means "sojourner". According to B2, the context of the name is that it was given to the second son when his mother went on a journey while pregnant to give birth in her home because she would be well taken care of there. While on the way, she gave birth and so named him "sojourner" to mark the event of her arrival home being delayed. Thus, the second founder was named and all the male members from his side belonged to it. Hence, the name documents this history. The third sib is *kip-waige*, "one who isolates himself," which was given to him as a nickname to mark the way he loved to do things alone, like eating by himself, as explained by C5. This name became the name of the sib and of every male descending from him.

The fourth and last sib is *kasamet*, meaning, "one who wants to be heard". The contextual information is that the fourth brother was a very noisy and demanding baby who would often demand attention from the mother, according to C5. Therefore, this name was given to mark his demands, which then became the name of the sib. It is important to note that each sib has numerous sub-sibs (clans) under it. Marriage within a sib is allowed if the people concerned are distant. What is unacceptable is marriage within a sub-sib (henceforth referred to as clans) because the relation is quite close. These sub-sibs have different names, but through oral history,

oral stories on the origin of the clans are handed down to the next generation, keeping this memory alive. For example, (26) *narachek* “descendants of a Kisii man called *Naroche*” and (17) *kap-soi-go-ek* “family of the dropping roof” are sub-sibs; therefore, they cannot intermarry.

In application of the Lexical Pragmatics Theory, several implicatures can be drawn from the names. To start with is Example (1) *kip-ngetuny* “man of the lions.” The meaning of the lexical concept *-ngetuny* “lion” is inferred through the principle of the ad hoc concept by the consideration of the discourse context. In the context of a man who nursed a wounded lion back to its good health, the name given to the man describes the man’s brave act of hosting the lion and treating him. There is a metonymic relationship between the man and the name in that he is known through his association with the lion. In the interpretation process, the hearer must narrow the context to that of a specific lion that got injured and not all the lions in the jungle. The implicature is that the man is brave in trusting that the lion cannot harm him. It can also be inferred that the man is merciful, as he treated the injured lion. The cultural implication is that the name is being used to mark the historical event as well as applaud the man for his bravery and kindness to the animal. The cultural value of bravery and compassion towards animals in general comes out.

Example (2) *kebeni* “sojourner” also brings out the broadening process of metonymy. The context of the lexicalized item is that of a long journey, walking on foot, over rough terrain. The context of the name is that of a pregnant mother going on a journey and giving birth on the way. The man so named is associated with the events surrounding his birth, as the mother's journey was delayed. The cultural value of the name is to mark the history of the founding father.

Clan Customs

According to B1, before a Kipsigis young man asks a Kipsigis girl out, he must first find out the girl's clan. This custom is still practiced (Rutto, 2006, p. 106). In the unfortunate event that members of the same clan marry, a ritual has to be done that will first exterminate the couple from their clans then they form their own clan. Marriage negotiations will not be done in the homestead of the girl; instead, the elders will conduct it on the outskirts of the home or near a river. The viewing of the cattle for dowry will also be done at the river to look like the cows are being raided and not being given out. This way, according to C20, the ancestral spirits will not be incensed. If a member of a clan kills somebody, all the families belonging to that clan must each give a cow to the deceased's family to appease the spirits; otherwise, more deaths will follow. This is called *muget* meaning "an offering for shedding blood". Some clans are said to be original in that they were founded by Kipsigis, whereas others were formed out of inter-tribal alliances. According to some Kipsigis elders, there are two pure founding clans; *kipasisek* "of Asis" and *kipsamaek* "those who hunt for honey." Members of these two clans are said to have been founded by all the clans that descended from Keiyo and Tugen at *tuluap psikis* "hill of the Kipsigis" which is in Londiani, Kericho county, on their migration route (Rutto, 2016, p. 25).

Each clan name reflects the community-assigned roles. Some had the mandate for leadership like the *talai* 'gentle' clan, others were religious leaders who presided over religious ceremonies like the *kip-asis-ek* "those who worship the Sun" were called upon to bless the warriors as they set out for battle or raiding, and *kip-samach-ek* were called to pronounce curses on the enemies of the Kipsigis and curse evildoers. This shows the cultural division of roles that clans play in the community.

Special Clans

There are key clans in the Kipsigis community that have special roles. Some have the mandate of leading in worship, others can predict the future, and others have the power to curse.

The clan names from the wider Kalenjin community include:

- (5) *kip-asis-ek*
MASC-sun-PL
'Followers of the Asis'
- (6) *kip-samach-ek*
MASC-hunt wild honey-PL
'Those who hunt wild honey'
- (7) *talai*
gentle
'Clan of the gentle'

Clan names numbers (5-7) mark special cultural roles. Number (5) is made up of the masculine gender prefix *kip-*, a noun root *-asis-* denoting a supernatural being and the plural suffix *-ek*. The name literally means "people of the sun-god". The Kipsigis believed in the supernatural being they called Asis, which is also a term they use for the sun. It was not the sun itself they worshipped, but they believed the sun represented the god's power, according to the explanation by C6. The clan's totem is the sun. In the Kipsigis cultural context, the sun was highly hallowed as it rises every morning, symbolizing the power of the Kipsigis god named Asis, who gives the sun the ability to shine. In relating this to the cultural context of the clan's religious role of presiding in worship and their totem being the sun itself, the implicature is that the clan is equally powerful as that of the sun. The name plays the cultural role of establishing the identity of their clan and their special duty of taking the community's prayers to Asis. Therefore, the name marks their special status as mediators between God and the people.

The term *asisek* “Sun people” is therefore metonymic as it represents the clan’s special standing in the community as priests. Every year, the Kipsigis people had corporate prayers at *kap-koros*, meaning “place of worship”, according to oral tradition explained by B1. The members of *kip-asis-ek* would preside over the worship, taking the community’s prayers to God. Every member of the community had to observe purity before and after going to worship. This meant not having sexual relations before and after worship for everyone. At the place of worship, a fire was lit, and at the end of worship, every household would carry home a firebrand. It was the duty of the woman to carry the firebrand and put it in her fireplace. At the place of worship, four virgins representing each sib would bring water from a brook to be used in blessing. Milk from a pure cow that had calved only once would also be used for blessing. In addition, a white he-goat without blemish would be brought for sacrifice as the members approached in their sibs. Worship was done at sunrise, facing the rising sun. The people would ask for fertility in their women, good harvests, and victory over their enemies.

The role of clan name number (6) *kipsamachek* “wild honey hunters” reflects social justice and community defense. The name is made up of the masculine prefix, a compound root made up of a verb and a noun and ends with a plural suffix. The verb-noun compound root is *samach* “look for”. The discourse context is that of a process of studying the ground, looking for certain insects that make wild honey. According to C4, the name marks the habit of the members of this clan of following the trails left by honey-making insects until they reach a place where the insects hide their hives. The clan also had a special role in cursing evil in the Kipsigis community. Members of this clan have the power to pronounce a curse upon a person who has committed any crime, such as shedding blood or stealing someone’s cow (raiding was not

considered stealing because it was regulated, and the proceeds were divided equally). Every time there was a dispute, they would be called upon, and the wrongdoers would usually be urged to confess before a curse was pronounced. Those who have attended the cursing ceremony say that first, the elders begin by showing them a sign of what is about to happen. One of the elders would simply stare at a bird in the sky and it falls dead. This usually works, as the culprit would quickly kneel and ask for forgiveness. In some areas in the Kipsigis land, cursing rituals are still performed.

The totem of *kip-samach-ek* ‘those who hunt wild honey’ clan is the lion. The clan’s origin is the Ogiek people who live in the forest. Their chant is *kap-mabel amaiyo* ‘the family of those that don’t roast nor cook’ because the lion eats its prey uncooked. This clan gets its identity from the lion. It shows the Kipsigis valued strength and bravery. This clan belongs to the *kipng-etuny* “of the lion” sib.

The clan name number (7) reflects spiritual duty. *talai* means “gentle”. This name originated first from the Maasai, then they relocated to the Nandi and took over the spiritual leadership of the Nandi community. They are also called the *Laibon*, which is a Maasai name. A famous descendant of this clan is Koitalel arap Samoei who was killed by the British settlers in 1890 for not collaborating. When this happened, one of his sons called *Kipchomber arap Koilegen* migrated to the Kipsigis land together with some of his relatives (Rutto, 2016, p. 28). They established themselves in Kipsigis land and took on the role of spiritual and political leaders. They influenced the Kipsigis into resisting the colonial rule in the early 1900s. The *talai* are known for their supernatural powers to predict the future and perform other magical things like creating or stopping rain. When members of this clan introduce themselves, they are

regarded with respect and a mixture of curiosity about their powers. The *talai* connotes spiritual superiority and leadership.

Members of the *talai* clan were never allowed to marry women who had previously been married or who already had children because their bloodlines had to be kept pure. This is due to their sacred role. So, they only married newly initiated girls who were virgins. Purity of all girls would be examined during initiation, and any girl found to have lost her virginity would not have a bell on her legs and would also not sit on her father's stool during circumcision. This shows that the community valued purity.

The three examples above show the belief of Kipsigis people in the supernatural being and his powers. There is a cultural division of spiritual roles into those who presided over worship, those who pronounced curses, and those who predicted the future and were rainmakers. The Kipsigis believed in worship and offering sacrifices to Asis. They also believed in punishing wrongdoers because crime was unacceptable.

Clan names from Kalenjin sub-groups

Some Kipsigis clan names originate from different communities, from the wider Kalenjin community, and from other neighboring tribes such as the Kisii and Maasai. There are many clans, but I narrowed them down to a few as the scope may not allow an exhaustive discussion. This first category of the clan names with Kalenjin reflects how the Kipsigis draw their identity from their contact with animals. Consider the following examples:

- (8) *bo-ek*
antelope-PL
'Clan associated with antelopes'
- (9) *kap-chep-talam-ek*
MASC-FEM-grasshopper-PL
'Clan associated with huge birds that feed on grasshoppers'

- (10) *kap-kogose-ek*
 MASC-eagle-PL
 ‘Clan of the eagle’
- (11) *kip-legen-ek*
 MASC-dotted-PL
 ‘Clan associated with the leopard’

Clan name number (8) above *bo-ek* “of the bushbucks” has no prefix. It has a noun root *bo*, which is the short form of *boinet* ‘bushbuck’, and the plural morpheme *-ek*, making it a plural noun. The name arose out of the nickname *kip-boe-ek* “man of the bushbuck” that was given to the founder of the clan because of his expertise in hunting bushbucks after running away from home due to a quarrel with his brother. All the sons of this family belong to the *bo-ek* clan. The term *bo-ek* is metonymic as it represents the bushbucks that were being hunted as well as the hunting skills of the founding father. This clan belongs to *kip-wai-ge* ‘one who isolates’ war division. This name shows that hunting was a skill that ensured the survival of the Kipsigis people as their way of getting food.

Clan number (9) *kap-chep-talam-ek* “family of the grasshopper eating birds” is made up of the masculine prefix *kap-* signifying that it refers to a wider family, followed by the feminine prefix *chep-* which is tied to the noun root *talam* ‘grasshopper’ and ends with the plural morpheme *-ek*. According to oral tradition, a woman gave birth by herself by the edge of the forest and was noticed by the big birds which alerted people who were living near the place. They came and helped the woman. Descendants of this woman formed a clan and named themselves after the birds that helped rescue their mother. This name marks the history of the origin of this clan as well as establishing the clan’s identity. Contextually, the term *kap-chep-talam-ek* brings out metonymy because it represents the birds that rescued them as well as their identity since it is also their totem. This clan is the one that also welcomed a Keiyo man and a

Kisii woman into their home, who later formed the *kapyosit* clan (12). These two clans are called *or-tany-iit* ‘path of the cow,’ meaning they are one family and cannot intermarry.

Clan number (10) *kap-kogose-ek* ‘family of the eagle’ begins with the prefix *kap-* indicating that it is a family name. The root is *kogos-* ‘eagle’ and the *-ek* is a plural morpheme. The name was given as a nickname to a man who loved hunting eagles as a hobby. His descendants were called *kap-kogosek* to mark his love for hunting the birds. The term *kogosek* is metonymic as it represents the hunting expeditions of the founder. They belong to the sib of *kebeni* ‘to delay’ war division.

Clan number (11) *kip-legen-ek* literally means “the dotted ones” symbolizing the dots in a leopard’s skin. This name came to be associated with the members of this clan when, according to oral tradition, a leopard gave birth in one of the clan members’ homes. It is said that the family never touched the leopard and its cubs until they moved on their own. As was stated earlier, it was a taboo to kill a helpless animal. This is how the family came to associate itself with the leopard and took its name as their clan’s name. They interpreted the event as a sign that somehow, they were spiritually connected to the leopards. This name is metonymic as it represents the whole event of the leopard and its cubs being taken care of by the founder of the clan. It also marks the identity of the clan members. The second category of clans from Kalenjin origin shows different aspects of the Kipsigis people as a pastoralist community, such as movement from place to place, cattle raiding, and hunting. Consider the examples shown below:

- (12) *kap-yos-it*
MASC-old-SG
‘Clan of the old (man)’
- (13) *kap-sosom-ek*
MASC-thirty-PL
‘Clan of thirty’

- (14) *kap-komosi-ik*
 MASC-this side-PL
 ‘Clan of this side’

The clan name (12) *kap-yos-it* which means ‘family of the old’ begins with the prefix *kap-* signifying that it is denoting a family and ends with the singular suffix *-it*. The adjective root is *yos* which means ‘old’. According to respondent B1, a member of this clan, the founder was an old man who originated from Keiyo called *Sigowo* arap *Mereng*. He had come to Kipsigis land with cattle. He was welcomed by the clan of *kap-chep-talaam-ek* and he settled with them. See clan number (9). It happened that an old Kisii woman also came to the same place looking for her lost cattle. She could not find them and after getting stranded for some time, she was advised to live with the old man from Keiyo. This shows the Kipsigis belief of showing hospitality to one who needed help. So, the old man married the old woman, and they got one son called *seger-iit* “one whose ears are spread out”. *Segeriit* grew up and had his own family, and they became many in number. The family later decided to break away from *kapcheptalaamek* who frequently got into conflicts with other members of the community, which necessitated paying fines by all the clans’ men called *muget* “blood money”. So, the descendants of the old Keiyo man called themselves *kap-yos-it* “family of the old” after their old parents. The name, therefore, helped *Segerit* to forge his own identity and break away from the *kapcheptalaamek* clan.

The pastoralist activity of cattle raiding is also evident in the clan names. Clan number (13) above *kap-sosom-ek* “clan of the thirty” is an example. It begins with the prefix *kap-*, denoting ‘family of’. The adjective root *sosom* means ‘thirty’ and *-ek* is the plural morpheme. The contextual background of the name is of twenty-nine warriors who set off to Maasai land for

a raid. As they came back, they captured a Maasai warrior whom they added to their number, so they became thirty (Rutto, 2016, p. 123).

Hunting and movement from place to place as part of the Kipsigis past activities is seen in the clan name (14) *kap-komos-i-ik*. It consists of the masculine prefix *kap-* symbolizing a wider family, an adverbial morpheme *komos-* meaning ‘side’, and a demonstrative pronoun *-i* ‘this’. It makes up a noun phrase ‘this side’. The context of this name is that of two well-known hunters who were brothers and descendants of Maasai. One was called *Komosi* ‘this side’ another one *boboi* ‘look around’. It is said that the two brothers wanted to break away from the bigger *kenyogoreek* clan for survival, so one brother said *komosi* ‘I will go this side’ and the other one said let me *boboi* ‘let me look around’ (Rutto, 2016, p.117). Thus, the two brothers went separate ways and formed two different but related clans namely *boboek* from ‘to look around’ and *komosiik* from ‘let me go this side’. Thus, these two names help in tracing the kinship ties of these two clans. These names mark the fact that a pastoralist life may have necessitated groups separating to look for more land for pasture. The cultural aspects such as herbal remedies, human sacrifice, and gender roles are evident in clan names (15-17) respectively:

- (15) *kap-kerich-ek*
MASC-medicine-PL
‘Clan of medicine’
- (16) *kap-bár-ge-sa-e-ek*
MASC-kill-when-praying-PL
‘Clan of those who kill during worship’
- (17) *kap-soi-go-ek*
MASC-drop-hut-PL
‘Clan of the dropping/leaking hut’

The clan name (15) *kap-kerich-ek* reflects the Kipsigis knowledge and use of herbal remedies. It has the prefix *kap-* which is a masculine prefix meaning ‘family of’. The root *kerich*

is a noun meaning ‘medicine’, and *-ek* is a plural morpheme. The name was given to a man who had immense knowledge in herbal medicine, and the Kipsigis would go and seek his services. The name-giver was therefore marking the man’s knowledge of herbal medicine. In the present day, Kericho county is named after him and that is where he and his family lived. The term *kerichek* is metonymic as it represents the man’s medical knowledge as well as the treatment people received from him. Since there were no hospitals in the past, this clan had a special role in providing medicinal care.

The cultural practice of human sacrifice is seen in the clan name (16) above, *kap-bár-ge-sa-e-ek* “family that kills during worship” is made up of the prefix *kap-* which may be used as a locative prefix, but in this case it refers to a family. There is a verb-verb compound root *bar* ‘to kill’ and *ke-sae* ‘while praying’ and the plural morpheme *-ek* that makes the noun plural. According to C4, the discourse context is that of a famous legend among the Kipsigis about a girl named Chesong’ony. This was a virgin girl, the only child in her family, who was given out as a sacrifice to the rain god during an arid period in Kipsigis land. When her suitor heard of it he followed the entourage going for the sacrifice and when the rain god called *ilet* “thunder” appeared, he cut the rain god into two and ran away with Chesong’ony. This name therefore is given to mark the man’s quest to rescue his bride from being sacrificed. According to C 10 Chesong’ony came from *ki-baek* clan who are believed to be rainmakers.

The name also brings out the Kipsigis belief of in the supernatural. They interpret conditions such as famine, disease, floods and rain as an act of god. As such, they believe that there is a god who controls when it rains and when it does not; they also believe that if they sacrifice to the god of rain, they will be heard, and it will rain. When there is a severe drought, a

ritual called *sosimo* is performed, and the rain comes. When it failed to work, they would do human sacrifices. Another belief is that to get to the heart of god you have to sacrifice something pure and of a very high value. That is why they chose Chesong'ony, a pure girl and the only child to mean it must have been very painful both to the family and the girl herself.

Clan name number (17) *kap-soi-go-ek* reflects the Kipsigis gender role of a father's mandate to build and repair the family house. The name is made up of the verb-noun compound root *soi* 'drop' and *go* (n) meaning 'house'. According to B2, who was born into this clan, the name arose out of the bitterness and frustration of a young man whose mother had been abandoned by the husband (the young man's father). The father was originally from Kisii and was named Naroche. He was brought as a child to Kipsigis land after a raid in Kisii, and was brought up just like a Kipsigis child after going through a ritual of making him a Kipsigis. Later, he got married to two women, but he ended up abandoning and neglecting the second wife. The roof of the second wife's hut started leaking and remained so because Naroche did not come to repair it.

Culturally, it was only the man of the house who could build and repair his hut; if somebody else did it, it would imply that the man of the house had died. This shows there were different roles for women and men. The only other person who could repair the roof was the initiated son. So, the hut of Naroche's second wife remained that way until the firstborn son got initiated. Upon his initiation, Naroche wanted to bestow the son his name and that of the clan, but the son refused and said that from then on, his clan would be called *kap-soi-go-ek* 'family of the leaking house'. This name, therefore, marks the failure of a father to take care of his family

and also the bitterness of the young man towards his father. His father's clan name was *narachek* from his name Naroche. See clan name number (26).

The *kap-soi-go-ek* clan also has the lion as its totem. Their chant is *kap-ma-ki-mu* “the family of those who can never be frightened”. They draw their inspiration from the lion's bravery and fierceness. These clans would chant these words when they were going to war or on raids. They still do the chants when they introduce themselves. These shows the Kipsigis culture highly valued bravery and strength as they constantly fought with their neighboring communities.

The last category depicts aspects of human interaction as illustrated below:

- (18) *kap-keswa-ek*
MASC-knife-PL
'Clan of harvesting knife'
- (19) *kip-kenda-ek*
MASC-use sparingly-PL
'Clan known for sparing use of resources'
- (20) *kap-mo-sos-won-ek*
MASC-NEG-despise-APP-PL
'Clan of those who pleaded not to be despised'

The clan name (18) *kap-keswa-ek* “family of the harvesting knife” marks a human vice of theft. It begins with the family prefix *kap-* followed by the verb *kes-* meaning ‘harvest’ and the nominalizer *-waat* - meaning ‘a tool for harvesting and ends with the plural suffix *-ek*. The clan is said to have originated from the Nandi people. The founders of the clan are two young men who used to steal millet from people's gardens by cutting it using a harvesting knife called *chep-kes-wa-at* (Rutto, 2016, p. 128). The root of the word forms the clan's name. Hence, the name may have begun as a nickname for the brothers, and when their descendants increased, they formed a clan. The name-giver is therefore marking the vice that the brothers were known for, and may have been punished for it because they were going against the values of honesty.

The clan name (19) *kip-kenda-ek* depicts the habit of frugality even when resources are plentiful. This clan originated from Nandi. It has the masculine prefix *kip-*, the verb root *-kenda-* meaning ‘use sparingly and the suffix *-ek*. According to respondent C5 who belongs to this clan, the founding father was nicknamed *kip-kenda* “one who sparingly uses resources” because of his tendency not to waste any resources be it food in the store or in the use of any other property. The members of this clan, just like their founding father, are also said to be very careful in how they use resources. The name is therefore marking this kind of behavior. The clan’s totem is the bee and their chant is *sololo!* to mark the buzzing of the bees. Some of the clan names, like this one, seem to have arisen as a nickname given to mark a certain behavior of the founding fathers. It may have been given by peers or elders who made a comment on the unique behavior that the other members of the community agreed on and was taken up as the clan’s identity.

The clan (20) *kap-mo-sos-won-ek* “family of don’t despise” which begins with the masculine prefix *kap* which shows it is signifying a family, the negative morpheme *mo-*, meaning ‘do not’, the verb *-sos* ‘despise’ *-won* is an applicative which literally means ‘for me’, and *-ek-* which is a plural suffix. The structure is sentential, which literally means ‘don’t despise me’. This clan descended from the Tugen people.

According to oral tradition, the name originated with a man who lived near a riverbank and lost eight sons in a mudslide. He remained with one son, who, as a result of the trauma of losing his brothers, became a sort of weakling. Boys his age were naturally known to be rough and tough, which contrasted with what the survivor's son was. As a result, the father would plead to the other boys not to despise his only son. So, the name was given to the father as a nickname because of his constant plea for the son not to be despised. It reflects a father’s desperate desire

for his son to be understood and respected. From this we also get to know the historical occurrence of mudslides in the area.

Clan Names from Maasai

The Kipsigis clan system documents the history of some of the Kipsigis connected to the Maasai community. There are various Kipsigis clans that have Maasai origin are:

- (21) *kap-bàr-sum-eek*
MASC-raid-hair-PL
'Clan of those who raid hair'
- (22) *kap-angwan-ek*
MASC-four-PL
'Clan of the four'

The first two names (21-22) in this category have Kipsigis words, but the next two (23-24) are possibly loan words from Maasai. Example (21) *kap-bar-sum-ek* has two versions of how the name came to be. According to respondent B1, whose mother came from this clan, some Kipsigis warriors had gone for a raid in Maasai land. They came back with a young Maasai boy whose name was *bar-simei*, but since the Kipsigis could not pronounce his name right, they changed it to sound Kipsigis, thus *bar-sum-eek*, which would mean 'one who raided hair'. He was turned into a Kipsigis, and he later had his own family, which was named after him, hence *bar-sum-eek*.

The other version also has to do with hair whereby a man from the *kap-komosik* (14) clan captured a Maasai young man with his cattle (Rutto, 2016, p. 117). He was initiated into the Kipsigis community and because the Maasai warrior had long hair, they called him *sum-eek* meaning "hair". It was therefore said that *Komosi* had brought home 'hair' symbolizing the Maasai young man. The young man later married and formed his own clan, called *kap-bar-sum-eek*, "family of the one who raided hair". From the two versions of the origin of the clan name,

what stands out are the roots *simei*, which is a Maasai name, and or *sumeek*, which means ‘hair’. These two terms are related in that the Maasai morans are known to keep their hair long. So, the conclusion can be made that the clan has Maasai origin, and this history was preserved by the name-giver through the name.

Clan name (22) starts with the masculine prefix *kip-* followed by the adjective *angwan-* denoting the number “four” and ending with the plural suffix *-ek*. According to the Kipsigis oral tradition, this clan originated from the Maasai. There were eight brothers in total, but they split into two groups; one half remained in the Maasai land, and the second half came to the Kipsigis land (Rutto, 2016, p. 125). The name, therefore, marks the four founding fathers of the clan and is also a reminder of the other four that went to the Maasai land. The next two clan names are derived from the founders’ personal names are as shown below:

(23) *kap-chep-umbwe-ek*
MASC-FEM-maasai-PL
‘Clan from a maasai person’

(24) *kap-mwerer-ek*
MASC-maasai name-PL
‘Clan from a Maasai person called Mwerere’

Clan names (23) *kap-chep-umbw-eeek* and (24) *kap-mwerer-ek* according to C5 belong to two Maasai men who relocated to Kipsigis land. The names have been made to sound Kipsigis by the addition of the prefix *kap-* which means ‘family of’ and suffix *-eeek* which shows plural number. According to oral tradition (23) *Chepumbwo* was expelled by his Maasai community for his close association with the Kipsigis people. At the same time (24) *Mwerer* is the name of a Maasai man who came to live in Kipsigis land (Rutto, 2016, p. 120). What is significant about these two names is that they bring out the Kipsigis cultural practice of *ke-ng’wos*, which means

to “incorporate who or what into the clan”. Respondent B1 explained that in the past, the practice was a means of making the community populous for security reasons since they were frequently invaded by the Maasai and Kisii tribes in retaliation to the Kipsigis raiding their cattle. The Kipsigis, therefore, did everything to increase their numbers so that they would not be outnumbered.

Clan names from Kisii community

Some Kipsigis clan names originate from Kisii community include:

- (25) *baswet-ek*
python-PL
'Clan of the python'

The clan name above (25) *baswet-ek* is derived from the Kisii name *e-baswet-i*, which means ‘python’ in the Kisii language and was loaned to Kipsigis. It has been made a Kipsigis name through the addition of the suffix *-ek*. According to Rutto (2016, p. 108), the clan originated from a Tugen man who had joined the Kipsigis for a raid in Kisii land. The raid was successful and the Tugen man even brought a Kisii bride. Kisii relatives of the bride later moved into the Kipsigis community and were accepted as part of it. They founded the *baswet-ek* “pythons” clan which in Kisii is called *abaketutu* clan. The name is given to mark the origin of this clan which connects them to their Kisii relatives.

There is the lexical broadening element of metonymy in the term *baswetek* “pythons”. It refers to all the members of the clan and their belief in their connection to pythons. Without knowledge that their totem is a python, it may be hard to see the link. It is from the contextual background that one can tell there is a lexical broadening in form of a metonymy. The term ‘pythons’ therefore represents everything to do with the clan, their belief system and their identity. It is said that pythons never harm the members of this clan, and they also do not harm

the snakes. The next clan names also mark the origin of the people by turning the founder's personal names into clan names. They are discussed below:

- (26) *narach-ek*
kisii name-PL
'Clan from naracha (kisii)
- (27) *baguser-ek*
kisii name-PL
'Clan from abagusero'
- (28) *kap-mogor-ek*
MASC-kisii name-PL
'Clan from a kisii man named *Mogoro*'
- (29) *mabasi-ik*
Kisii toponym-PL
'Clan from the Mabasi area in Kisii'
- (30) *kap-mocha-ek*
MASC-Kisii name-PL
'Clan from a Kisii man called Mocha'

Clan name (26) *narachek* meaning "descendants of Naroche" is derived from the founder of the clan called Naroche which is a Kisii name. This clan is related to *the kap-soi-go-EEK clan (17)*, which has been discussed. Naroche was naturalized into the Kipsigis community from Kisii and married two wives. The name connects the clan's origin to the man named Naroche.

The same morphological pattern is evident in clan names (26-30). They have been derived from Kisii words indicating their place of origin. The suffixes *-ik* and *-ek* have been added to make the names plural. The roots of all the names are from the Kisii language, which, to the Kipsigis ear, sounds foreign, and they can tell they are borrowed because the roots are in the Kisii language. Numbers (28) and (30) contain both the masculine gender prefix *kap-* and the plural suffix *-ek*. Every root denotes the name of the founder, which is adopted as the name of the clan. The names are given so that the members of the clan will know their ancestral origin.

Conclusion

In conclusion, clan names carry implicit meanings that are obtained through the analysis of the names using the principles of lexical pragmatic theory. Every clan name implies one's identity and one's social standing in the community based on the Kipsigis cultural knowledge of the clan. The mention of *talai* clan for instance leads to the activation of several contextual inferences which include spiritual supremacy in that they are believed to have a supernatural power to predict the future. Another inference is that of purity of the bloodlines in that they cannot marry girls who are not virgins. Third inference is that they are not to be joked with as they can use their power to retaliate. Hence this illustrates that clan names mean much more than the encoded concept.

Secondly, clan names show that lineage and kinship ties are very important to the Kipsigis. Lexical pragmatic processes of broadening and narrowing reveal several values that uphold the community. For example, through metaphorical broadening, war division name such as *kipngetuny* 'lion man' implicitly conveys the values of bravery, heroism, compassion and leadership. This demonstrates that a clan name is not just a label but is symbolic of the cultural role expected of every member of each clan.

Third, clan names reveal the patriarchal system in the Kipsigis society. Every clan has a founder, and the owners of the clan are the male members of the family. The family lineage is traced from fathers to sons. The girls become members of their husbands' clans. On the same note, the clan system reveal that the Kipsigis community does not allow marriage among members of the same clan. The clan system therefore marks the eligibility or otherwise of candidates for marriage showing one of the Kipsigis cultural values as clan purity.

Fourth, the oral narratives surrounding the origin of every clan activates the Kipsigis cultural practice of *keng'wos* meaning “naturalized into the community”. Hence the mention of a clan like (26) *narachek*, reveals a person with a Kisii origin. These clan names therefore perform an important aspect of documenting the cultural roots of the members of the Kipsigis community. Thus, through the oral narratives of each clan, preservation of cultural history is made possible.

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