

# **A Study of Luo Ethnobotanical Terminology with Implications for Lexicographic Practice**



**Humphrey J. Ojwang, Ph.D.**

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## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to the fond memory of my parents, Charles Isaiah Otieno Ojwang and Yukabet Obuya Otieno Ojwang who were my first teachers to introduce me to the joys of seeking indigenous environmental knowledge in the land of Kenya and beyond. May what they taught me about our natural and cultural heritage of the Luo-speaking peoples inspire further ethnographic research in Luo language, history and ecology to flourish beyond the rivers and lakes of Eastern Africa from Southern Sudan to Gambella in South Western Ethiopia; Northern Uganda to North Eastern Congo; and from Western Kenya to North Mara in Tanzania. The book is also dedicated to the memory of Professor John Kokwaro, formerly of the Department of Botany, University of Nairobi, Kenya for his great work in the compilation of ethnobotanical dictionaries in Eastern Africa.

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## **KEY TERMS**

- Luo
- Ethnobotany
- Terminology
- Configuration
- Lexicography
- Culture
- Ecology

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LSP	:	Language for Specific Purposes
B.A	:	Bachelor of Arts
M.A	:	Master of Arts
D.L.tt	:	Doctor of Literature
Ph.D	:	Doctor of Philosophy
KUPNet:		Kenya Unreached Peoples Network
TD	:	Terminology Division
NLS	:	National Language Service
HIV/AIDS:		Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
PANSALB:		Pan South African Language Board
CINE:		Centre for Indigenous People's Nutrition and Environment
KOLA:		Kenya Oral Literature Association
L <sub>1</sub> :		First Language
L <sub>2</sub> :		Second Language
AFRILEX:		African Association of Lexicography
ACK:		Anglican Church of Kenya
DBL:		Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory
KEDAHR:		Kenyan-Danish Health Research Project
ICRAF:		International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
MoU:		Memorandum of Understanding
NARC:		National Rainbow Coalition
KANU:		Kenya African National Union
NLU:		National Lexicography Unites
UNESCO:		United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
S.I.L:		Summer Institute of Linguistics
KENRIK:		Kenya Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge
KES:		Kenya Ethnoecology Society
DAAD:		German Academic Exchange Service

WAT:           Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal  
AILA:          International Association of Applied Linguistics

## **ABSTRACT**

This study focusses on the study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology in a culture specific configuration. It takes into account the cultural and linguistic aspects of plant names and how their meanings are derived in the Luo speech community in Kenya. This study also examines how these linguistic and ecological features can be incorporated in future lexicographic works, documentation, and mainstreaming in environmental conservation.

The work is relevant in the study of linguistics, botany, and anthropology.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Introduction

In the present study, we look at Luo ethnobotanical terminology with implications for lexicographic practice. In his attempt to reconstruct Luo identity and history, Ogot examines the roots of historiography by relying on oral traditions, which include: construction, recitation, and performance of the collective narratives. These are continuing processes in which people from different backgrounds try to understand and produce knowledge about the Luo people. The present study relies on the cultural and linguistic resources of the Luo in an attempt to understand the Luo ethnobotanical terminology.

### 1.2 Background

This study is about the manner in which plants are named in the Luo speech community. The people known as **Joluo** live in the Nyanza Province of Kenya and the Mara Region in Tanzania along the shores of Lake Victoria. They are classified as Nilotes. The language they speak is known as **Dholuo**. For our purposes in the present study, we shall stick to the English version, Luo, without the prefixes **Jo-** (for people) and **Dho-** (for language) for consistency purposes except where a cited author has specifically used the prefixes. The use of Luo without the prefixes is purely for reasons of consistency in the study since the medium of communication is English. Ogot (1967) has called the Luo of Kenya and Tanzania the **Southern Luo** presumably because there are the **Central Luo** in Uganda (Okot p'Bitek 1971) and the **Northern Luo** in Sudan and Ethiopia.

According to Ogot (1967: 32 – 33) The Luo people belong to a larger category known as the Nilotes, who may be divided into two:-

- a) The Dinka-Nuer Group



b) The Luo-Speaking Group

In Ogot's categorization, the Luo-speaking cluster may be further sub-divided, on linguistic and cultural grounds, into two important groups, namely:-

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>
The Shilluk	The Alur
The Anuak	The Padhola
The Acholi	The Kenya Luo
The Lango	
The Palwo	

This particular study will focus on the Southern Luo as distinct from Central Luo and Northern Luo. According to Ogot, the history of the Nilotes from about 1500 AD to 1900 AD is the story of their migration and settlement in Eastern Africa and that their traditions have been dynamic and not static during these expansionist settlements in their present territories. Clearly, the Luo expanded their numbers in East Africa through natural reproduction and more significantly, cultural assimilation of neighbouring ethnic groups.

Despite the relatively large population of the Luo in Kenya and Tanzania, the number of Luo dialects is small and the linguistic differences are minor. Blount (1971) has given three main dialects, namely:-

- (i) The Trans-Yala Dialect
- (ii) The Central Nyanza Dialect
- (iii) The South Nyanza Dialect

Other linguists (cf. Stafford 1967; Odhiambo, 1981) seem to perceive the main dialects as two, namely:-

- (i) The Trans-Yala Dialect

(ii) The South Nyanza Dialect

The present study explores the names and naming system of plants in the Luo speech community. According to Kokwaro (1972: vii): “Among those who appreciate the dynamics of biology in Africa are the Luos. Their advances in agriculture and fishery over many years have produced some of the best known scientists in East Africa.”

It is evident from the Luo Ethnobotanical lexicon that some plant names are shared with other speech communities in Kenya, for example: *Zea mays (Gramineae)*. The botanical description given in Kokwaro (1972:19) states that it is “an annual 1-4 m. high, usually unbranched, suckering at the base, brace-roots springing from lower joints.” The plant has fruit that is “flattened grain with convex or indented top and more or less pointed base.” The grain is “used widely and in various ways as food and forage.” While the common English name maize is derived from the scientific name, in Kenyan languages, there are a lot of similarities, namely:-

- **BANDO** (Luo)
- **BANDET** (Kalenjin)
- **CHIBANDO** (Gusii)

Quite obviously, the socio-economic interaction of the Luo people and their neighbours, the Kalenjin and the Gusii has a bearing on the names of food crops such as maize. There are many such shared plant names in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

Based on the Luo ethnobotanical terminology, the present study focuses on the cultural and linguistic aspects of meaning of plant names. It is a linguistic study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology in a “culture-specific configuration” (Wierzbicka: 1992) with implications for lexicographic practice.

### **1.3 Identification of Research Problem**

An ethnolinguistic analysis of plant names of any speech community relies on what ethnobotanists speak of as data that is: “the broad range of information they collect on how local people interact with the natural environment.” (Martin 1995: 10). The Ethnobotanical terminological data recorded will necessarily include the plant names and their meanings in a given language. Professor John O. Kokwaro has conducted Ethnobotanical research in the Luo speech community, resulting in the publication of a *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* and a *Luo-Biological Dictionary*, which form the basis of this study.

In Ethnobotanical terminology, perspectives may be as wide-ranging as in wood-technology, biology, agriculture, forestry, biochemistry, geography, ethnolinguistic, and other disciplines focusing on plants. In the available sources on research published by Professor John O. Kokwaro and his colleagues in the field of Luo Ethnobotany, local names have been matched against their Latin, Greek or Scientific equivalents. However, the derivation of the meaning of plant names has not been given in a culture-specific context. The present study identifies this as the main research problem area within a Luo culture-specific configuration. The plant names have their meanings retrieved from the cultural-linguistic reality of the speakers of Luo.

The justification of the study derives from culture-specific concerns in Ethnobotanical terminology and their relevance in enhancing Luo lexicographic practice.

### **1.4 The Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of the present study is to determine the derivation and meaning of Luo Ethnobotanical terminology within a culture-specific configuration. The study focuses on the

systematics of Ethnobotanical nomenclature and seeks to identify the patterns followed in naming plants in the Luo speech community. A corpus of identified plants names are analysed linguistically within cultural configurations in order to gain deeper understanding of the environment.

The specific objectives of the study are:-

- a) To examine a corpus of identified plant names in the Luo speech community
- b) To determine the formation of plant names in the Luo speech community
- c) To establish the connection of the meaning of plant names in the Luo speech community with specific reference to uses, characteristics, properties and other features derived from the ethnoecology.

### **1.5 Theoretical Considerations**

The theoretical framework of this study is derived from Duranti (1997), Foley (1997) and Salzmann (1998). These three authorities focus on the study of language, culture and society. Duranti sees anthropological linguistics as a variant of linguistic anthropology since they have been used interchangeably for a long time in the past. In this understanding, culture is seen as being closely related to nature, but it is part and parcel of knowledge, which is learned. Duranti (1997:27) argues that: “If culture is learned, then much of it can be thought of in terms of knowledge of the world.”

Defining the concept of culture helps us to understand ways in which people around the world live in their natural environments. Duranti (1997:24) avoids the danger of reviewing the many different theories of culture proposed by linguists and anthropologists over the last century by reducing them to only six theories of culture in which language plays an important role. These theories are outlined below:-

1. Culture as distinct from nature.
2. Culture as knowledge.
3. Culture as communication.
4. Culture as a system of mediation.
5. Culture as a system of practices.
6. Culture as a system of participation.

It is necessary to explain, what these theoretical postulations of Duranti (1997) entail.

That culture is something that people learn from childhood is a commonly held view by social scientists. It is transmitted and handed down from one generation to the next through interactions in society using language as the medium of communication. Culture is therefore distinct from nature although they may influence each other. While culture is learnt through language socialization, nature is understood to mean the genetic endowment of humanity through biological inheritance. Oswalt (1986:25) reckons that one is “not born with culture but with the ability to acquire it by such means as observation, imitation and trial and error.” In the same vein, Boas (1911/1963:149) states that culture is “the totality of the mental and physical reactions and activities... in relation to the systematic naming of plants in the natural environment by a people group is necessarily a cultural process.

If we are to understand culture as a learning process, “then much of it can be thought of in terms of knowledge of the world” (Duranti: 1997:27). What this means is that members of a language group or a speech community understand of, for instance, objects, places, people, around them. They will also share patterns of thought about their natural environment. Duranti (1997:27) declares that: “To know a culture is like knowing a language. They are both mental realities.”

Organizing knowledge about the natural environment is, therefore, part of interpreting lifeforms in terms of what they mean in the social and cultural context of the people. Plants and animals, humans have to be given names for purposes of identification and codification of environmental knowledge.

The systematic theory of culture states that culture, being a system of signs, is the same as communication or representation of the world. In this view: “To believe that culture is communication also means that a people’s theory of the world must be communicated in order to be lived” (Duranti 1997:33).

Among the cultural products of a people group are: myths, rituals, proverbs, legends and other expressive linguistic and literary forms. All these underscore the fact that understanding culture is a communicative process.

The view that culture is a mediational object means that it is an effective tool or instrument used to do things. Culture is seen as creating the possibility of mediating alternative between human beings and their natural environment. If, for instance, human beings use plants in a specific way to treat sickness or disease emanating from the environment, the cultural products used are known as medicines which facilitate healing from sickness or disease. Duranti (1997:42) postulates that.

The instrumental view of language implies the theory of language as a system of classification since it recognizes that linguistic expressions allow us to exchange ideas with others. However, it also assumes that linguistic expressions are not just representatives of an external reality; they are very much part of that reality and instruments of that action in the world. To speak of language as a mediating activity means of doing things in the world, for reproducing as much as changing reality. It is through language that we make friends or enemies, exacerbate or try to solve conflict, learn about our society and try to either conform to it or change it.

According to John Ole Sakunda of Simba Maasai Outreach, a typical example of the instrumentality of culture and language in the context of ritual ethnobotany is the use of “peace plants.” These plants are placed between warring groups by elders accompanied by the utterance of certain words meant to resolve conflict among some East African communities. Theoretically, it is the symbolism, of the words and the action of placing the leaves and branches of the plants between warring parties that signal the reality of cessation of hostilities. The “peace plants”, therefore, have socio-cultural meaning among these East African peoples with similar traditional practices.

Language is used in culture specific context as:-

A set of practices that imply not only a particular system of words and grammatical rules, but also an often forgotten or hidden struggle over the symbolic power of a particular way of communicating, with particular systems of classification, address and reference forms, specialized lexicons, and metaphors... (Duranti, 1997:45)

This view, which has preoccupied both linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists, see language and culture as being part of the social institutions, for example: family, church, workplace, or community. The meanings attributed to words in a culture-specific configuration are part and parcel of the practices of a given language or speech community and are expected to “remain within an acceptable range” (Duranti, 1997:46).

Hence, the ethnobotanical lexicon of a given language group, such as the Luo community which is the focus of this study, would necessarily be understood in terms of the socio-cultural meanings assigned to the life-forms known as plants in the said community.

In an attempt to understand both language and culture, it is necessary to appreciate that the participation of members of a speech community and their traditional practices are

interlinked. This theoretical perspective is a particularly useful notion of culture and its interaction with the environment. According to Duranti's (1997:46) words may carry:-

A myriad possibility for connecting us to other human beings, other situations, events, acts, beliefs, feelings. This is the ability that language has to describe the world as well as its ability to connect us with its inhabitants, objects, places and periods: each time reaffirming a socio-historical dimension of human action among others.

Language is, therefore, part of the cultural resources shared by a people group which also includes belief systems, biodiversity (plants and animals), and the natural environment. The shared knowledge of a people group includes the names given to plants and their implied meanings in a culture-specific configuration. Members of a people group who share a common language and culture are able to interpret the meanings assigned to objects in the real world since they also share common environmental knowledge. Clearly, the six theoretical considerations which provide the framework for our linguistic study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology since according to Duranti (1997:50) the postulations: “Together form a broad mandate for the study of culture and for the analysis of language as a conceptual and social tool that is both a product and an instrument of culture.”

The theoretical considerations in the present study takes into account the analysis of Luo ethnobotanical terminology in a culture-specific configuration. The study seeks to do three things concerning Luo ethnobotanical terminology, namely:-

- a) Translating Luo plant names
- b) Interpreting the meaning of Luo plant names
- c) Paraphrasing any culture-specific information from Luo oral folklore

The theoretical approach is based on the fact that words relate to the socio-cultural environment and are “the means that a person uses to express something about the world”



(Arensen 1992:49). People gather information about their environment and biological resources (both plants and animals) and codify such information in folk-names, which gain currency in the society and are handed down from one generation to the next through oral tradition.

Quite obviously, ethnobotanical terminology is part of and parcel of cultural knowledge that is learned. Culture is also seen as communication. According to Duranti (1997:33) culture is a system of signs: “This is the semiotic theory of culture. In its most basic version, this view holds that culture is a representative of the world, a way of making sense of reality by objectifying it in stories, myths, descriptions, theories, proverbs, artistic products and performances.”

In Foley’s (1997:108) cognitive interpretation of culture, the methodology used is: “To collect all the words in a native language denoting various categories within a semantic domain, for example ... all the words for types of plants in the Ethnobotanical domain. Such a domain of terms is called folk classification.”

Similarly, Salzmann (1998:64) sees a connection between language and culture by stating that the relationship is a reality in that culture can: “be encoded in the vocabulary of the corresponding language.” With these theoretical considerations, the study of meaning of Ethnobotanical terminology of the Luo within a culture-specific configuration will be approached.

## **1.6 Literature Review**

Generally, Luo as a language has been analysed in various degrees of complexity by different scholars. These will not constitute the focus of the present study since the main influence of

this work is what is known as Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), a movement that is slowly gaining recognition in East African languages. Lexicographic and terminological studies in East African languages has been championed by Heine et al (1988) in an *Ethnobotanical Survey of the Semi-Arid and Arid Lands of East Africa*. The project included languages of the So of Uganda, Chamus of Kenya, and the Borana of Ethiopia and Kenya but not the Luo of the Lake Victoria Basin of Kenya and Tanzania. The main Luo lexicographic and terminological sources, examined in this work are:-

- Kokwaro's *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* (1972);
- Kokwaro's *Medicinal Plants of East Africa* (1976);
- Kokwaro's and John's *Luo Biological Dictionary* (1998);

Other more general lexicographic and terminological sources, used are:-

- Capen's *Bilingual Dholuo-English Dictionary / Kenya* (1998); and
- Odaga's *English-Dholuo Dictionary* (1997).

The works on Luo language range from rudimentary grammars designed to assist learners of the language to technical treatments. Elementary grammars have been provided by:-

- G.W.B. Huntingford (1960): *Elementary Lessons in Dholuo*;
- St. Josephs Society (1962): *Dholuo Grammar*
- R.L. Stafford (1967): *An Elementary Luo Grammar with Vocabularies*.

More technical treatments have been given by:-

- E.A. Gregersen (1962): *Luo: A Grammar*;
- A.N. Tucker (1966): *Nilotic Languages*;
- J.H.A. Odhiambo (1981): *Dholuo Phonology: A Study of Major Vowel Processes*;

- D. Okoth-Okombo (1982): *Dholuo Morphophonemics in a Generative Framework*;
- L.N. Omondi (1982): *The Major Syntactic Structures of Dholuo*.

From the body of literature mentioned, it would appear that much of the work has been on the phonology, morphology and syntax of Luo in a general sense. Little has been done (if at all) in the more applied areas such as lexicography. Blount (1971) has attempted a lexical analysis of the language, which resulted in *Luo-English Dictionary with Notes on Luo Grammar*.

The main influence on this study is what has become known in modern applied linguistic research as Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP). According to Jan Ulijn (1988:3) the first international symposium on LSP took place in 1982 at Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven, The Netherlands. The second international LSP symposium (which was attended by the present researcher through generous support from the University of Nairobi Deans' Committee) took place again at Eindhoven University of Technology in 1988. Kenya was the only African country represented.

Jan Ulijn has suggested that LSP should be seen in a broad rather than a narrow perspective. This implies that it is not only the botany student who has to master the scientific (Latin) terminology that is confronted with LSP but also the lexicographer who is compiling the Ethnobotanical terms for use by researchers in a rural community in Kenya. The agroforestry expert who has to communicate with farmers must also come to grips with the question of how to bring the message across in a language that is not only simple and effective, but also familiar to the farmer. This also falls under the rubric of LSP.

The study of scientific and technical terminology has found its way into numerous publications but that is only one aspect of communication for specialists. They must also address themselves to lay people they come into contact with. Clearly, Kenyan botanists or agroforestry experts would not address local farmers using Latin or scientific names. Communication would only be effective when familiar Ethnobotanical terms in local languages such as Luo are used. Coombes (1986:7) has said that in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries:-

Latin was the common language of intellectuals of Europe and it was second nature for many to use it. Today, although Latin has evolved from the Latin in the classical and medieval times to meet the needs of botany it forms a method of all nationalities.

It should be noted that not all botanical names have Latinate origins; some names derive from Greek and personal names. In most botanical dictionaries, however, names are treated as Latin i.e. names of species and varieties are adjectival and their endings follow rules of Latin grammar, for instance, the English word 'white' translates into Latin as: '*albus*' (masculine), '*alba*' (feminine), '*album*' (neuter).

In his dictionary, Coombes has given his aim as providing a guide to: "The derivation, meaning and pronunciation of scientific names of more commonly grown plants." Kokwaro (1972: vii) has given the aim of his dictionary as: "a simplified guide to the field of plant names and uses." In another more extensive work, *Medicinal Plants of East Africa* (1976:2-8) Kokwaro's aim is to provide a guide to plants with "therapeutic and medicinal properties."

From the above citations, it appears that neither the content nor the structure and methods of LSP dictionaries are exclusively or predominantly determined by purely linguistic considerations (cf. Opitz 1983:163). Most dictionaries embrace the totality of any given

language at whatever level: semantic, syntactic, phonological, morphological and other levels of language. Scientific and technical dictionaries, on the other hand, are segmental, focusing on a distinctly restricted language area dictated by a specialist ‘context of situation’. Hence, some dictionaries, such as Coombes’ and Kokwaro’s, are technical in a narrow sense, dealing with the botanical terms and their equivalents in English and Luo respectively.

A critical reading of the lexicographic and terminological sources is situated in a Luo culture-specific environment in order to fathom the linguistic interaction between the people and their plants.

### **1.7 The Corpus**

Writing about the Luo Gregersen (1962:2) had the following to say: “At present, cereal agriculture constitutes the principle subsistence activity, but cattle complex remains an important cultural focus, with both milk and blood used for food...”

A year later, Whisson (1963:7) wrote that:-

The Luo are predominantly agricultural people... sorghum and maize are the staple foods and most widely grown crops. Cassava, simsim, finger millet, bananas, sweet potatoes, green vegetables, tomatoes and citrus fruits are grown for subsistence and local sale. Groundnuts, cotton, sisal and coffee are grown as cash crops where land is suitable. There are many small gardens of sugar (cane) in the more fertile valleys, and in one or two areas, sugar is grown on a commercial basis...

Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo (1989:46) have captured the Luo landscape of an open-air market in Boro, Siaya District thus: “Twice a week, the market place, an enclosure the size of a football field, comes alive with people and goods. On a typical market day, one might find ... forty or fifty women selling small quantities of locally grown grains, tubers and spices...”

From these citations, it is quite clear how important crops are in the daily lives of the Luo. Our corpus consists of identified agricultural plants, those used for medical purposes, fodder, building and others. Our main terminological source is based on the lexicographic works of Kokwaro's already cited. The Ethnobotanical nomenclature lists of Johns, Wallunya and Yuko (March – April, 1988) have also been consulted for a more balanced picture. The lists are of plants collected from Siaya District during the Ethnobotanical survey by the Department of Botany, University of Nairobi.

The corpus consists of a total of 656 lexical entries in Kokwaro's *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*. The scientific (Latin) equivalents are given purely for reference purposes, but do not constitute the corpus for analysis (see Appendix A).

## 1.8 Hypothesis

There are six hypotheses to be tested in the present study, namely:-

- a) Some ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from the characteristics of plants.
- b) Some ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from uses of plants.
- c) Some ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from human attributes of plants.
- d) Some ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from animal attributes of plants.
- e) Some ethnobotanical names of plants derive their meanings from folklore.
- f) Some ethnobotanical names of plants derive their meanings from borrowing words from other languages (neighboring or foreign).

These hypotheses on ethnobotanical terms and their meanings are explained below:-

- Some Ethnobotanical names derive from the characteristics of plants. Take the example of **Harungana madagascariensis** (Hypericaceae), which is known in

Dholuo as **aremo**. This is a tree that grows up to 12 m high. It has a scaly red-brown bark. When slashed, it exudes an orange resin in layers; **the sap is blood red**. The stem is remo (blood). The prefix “a-“gives it the descriptive name **aremo**, which means: “that which produce blood-like sap.”

- Some ethnobotanical names derive from the **uses** of the plants. An example is **Paspalum Commersonii** (Grammineae) known in Luo as **arombo**. This is a tufted perennial 30-120 cm. high. It has light green leaves, usually glabrous, under 8 mm. wide, slightly constricted at the base. Inflorescence usually of two racemes only; spikelets awnless, 2-2.5 mm. long, brown at maturity. A good **grazing grass**.

The stem is **rombo** (sheep). The prefix “a-” gives the grass a description by associating it with sheep because it is good grazing grass for the animals.

- Some Ethnobotanical terms derive from **human attributes**. An example is **Bidens pilosa** (Compositae), which is known in Luo as **nyanyiek-mon**. It is an erect annual herb 0.6-1 m. high, glabrous or nearly so. It has sharply serrated segments, more or less ovate, 45-60 cm. long. It is glabrous or slightly setulose on the upper surface. Flower heads 7 – 15 cm. in diameter, pudunculate in lax open corymbose cymes; ray flowers usually white sometimes yellow. Achenes black, ribbed; bristles usually 2 or 3, with reflexed barbs. A disturbing weed with achenes sticking on clothes and livestock skins. Cures diarrhoea in sucking babies.

The stem in this case is nyiego (jealousy). The full name translates as: “the jealousy of women.” Another term used is **onyiego**, which translates as “co-wife.”

Presumably, the “disturbing” nature of the weed arises from the acheness that stick on clothes and animal skins can only be compared to the jealousy of co-wives, a human manifestation observable in polygamous societies such as is found Luoland.

- Some Ethnobotanical terms derive from **animal attributes**. An example is **coccinia grandis** (Cucurbitaceae) known in Luo as **nyathund-guok**. It is a slender twiner with angular and dotted stems. Leaves variable, lobes 3-5, rather thin; young leaves often with reddish glandular tips to the lobes and marginal teeth. Flowers solitary and pedicellate, white to yellowish cream. Fruit green with white dots, red when ripe, up to 7cm. long and 3.5 cm. broad, ellipsoid.

The ethnobotanical term **nyathund guok** translates as: “the tits of a dog” which means that the plant looks like the tits of a dog. Probably because of the rather thin lobes and green fruits with white dots – (dog’s tits are sometimes spotted?).

- Some ethnobotanical terms derive from folklore. An example is **Biophytum petersium** (Oxalidaceae) known in Dholuo as **Awuor-Awuor Banpiende**. This is an annual herb up to 30 cm. high. Its **leaves are quite sensitive to weather and touch**; leaflets up to 10 pairs, obliquely oblong – obovate, about 1cm. long. Flowers pale orange to red, on short peduncles. Fruit hardly as long as the persistent calyx.

There is a story in Luo folklore about a mother-in-law who was called Awuor-Awuor. She was supposed to remove the ‘sleeping mats’ or ‘skins’ from the yard since her sons-in-law were coming for a traditional visit. Sons-in-laws are not supposed to see the ‘sleeping mats or skins’ of their mother-in-law as it is considered taboo. Folklore



has it that the song: “Awuor-Awuor fold your sleeping mat, your sons-in-law are coming for a visit.”

This song would make her fold the sleeping mats immediately. “Piende” means “skins” which means that people used cow hides as bedding in the olden days.

The plant probably derives its name from the instinctive manner in which the proverbial Awuor-Awuor would fold her bedding and keep them away whenever she was told that her sons-in-law were coming for a visit.

- A number of ethnobotanical terms are actually **borrowed** but have now become part and parcel of Luo. These are basically exotic plants that were introduced during the colonial period but some could have also been borrowed from other communities with whom the Luo had socio-economic contact.

By and large, the individual names are interpreted along these lines. The hypotheses given are tested using derivational cannons which we shall pay closer attention to under research methods.

## **1.9 Research Methodology**

The linguistic method used in seeking to understand the meaning of plant names and other terms of the natural environment is two-fold, namely:-

- a) Using the facility of native-speaker-intuition
- b) Consulting native-speakers of the language
- c) Consulting bilingual Luo-English dictionaries

Through these three methods, the study seeks to find out the meanings of the identified plant names. In addition to using the facility of native-speaker-intuition of Luo (this researcher is a fluent speaker of both Luo and English), 5 native speakers of Luo have been consulted on the meanings of various plant names in the corpus. Bilingual Luo-English dictionaries have also been consulted in the study, according to the recommendation of Martin (1995:206) who states that:-

At times, you will have to consult technical linguistic works to interpret some terms... Keep in mind that ... referential meaning is only one aspect of semantic analysis of folk classification. Meaning is also derived from how the plant is used and perceived in the community, including its symbolic importance as portrayed in myths and rituals.

The study also seeks to establish any borrowing in the Luo ethnobotanical lexicon, especially from English and Swahili which are used as official languages in both Kenya and Tanzania.



**Figure 1: A group of native speakers of Luo during one of the discussion sessions at the Lasjona Complex in Rongo Town.**

From Left to Right: Mr. Walter Okello Wambi, Mr. Erasto Ang'ienda Orwa, the researcher, Mr. Mishael Ochwa Ojwang, Mr. Damianus Kawuondi and Mr. Samson Eric Obonyo all of Kamagambo in Southern Nyanza, Kenya.

## **1.10 Significance and Implications of Study**

The linguistic study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology in a culture-specific configuration with implications for lexicographic practice should go a long way in encouraging a cultural and linguistic approach to dictionary making in the biological sciences. This approach should enable lexicographic and terminological practices to be deployed in the biological sciences namely: botany, zoology, forestry, agriculture, ecology, geography, and other disciplines which may benefit from a linguistic study of specialized terminology.

## **1.11 Summary of Chapters**

### *Chapter 1: Introduction and Background*

This chapter deals with the introductory material regarding the present study and gives background information concerning the Luo people of East Africa. The chapter shows the connection between the language spoken by the Luo of Kenya and Tanzania. The research problem, aims and objectives; theoretical considerations, review of literature; the corpus; hypotheses; research methodology and the significance (including implications) of the study have been exhaustively covered in this chapter.

### *Chapter 2: Ethnoecology and Onomastics in a Luo Cultural Context*

This chapter focuses attention on the interaction between ethnoecological issues and onomastics (that is, the naming system) used by the Luo people. The cultural context and how it influences names and naming systems in traditional historical perspective has been given attention.

### *Chapter 3: Ethnosemantics and Ethnobotanical Terminology in a Luo Cultural Context*

This chapter deals with ethnosemantics as a sub-discipline with interest in meaning in a culture-specific configuration, and links it to ethnobotanical terminological concerns which form the basis of the present study.

### *Chapter 4: Interdisciplinary Nature of Ethnobotanical Terminology in a Luo Cultural Context*

This chapter looks into the interdisciplinary nature of analysing the meanings of plant names by situating the study in the cultural context of the Luo people. It also outlines the institutional context in which terminological studies may operate from linguistic, anthropological and botanical perspectives in Kenya.

### *Chapter 5: Ethnobotany and Lexicography in a Luo Culture-Specific Context*

The chapter further elucidates how ethnobotanical dictionaries may draw information from traditional sources such as: oral literature and folklore in an attempt to understand the connection between language and ecology. This chapter expands the notion that the approach adopted in the study is interdisciplinary in orientation.

### *Chapter 6: Luo Ethnobotanical Lexicon toward Macro-structural possibilities*

This chapter examines the Luo-English Botanical Dictionary with reference to the technique of alphabetization used by the compiler, using the following: Frequency Table; Statistics; Bar Graph; Pie Chart; and a Line Graph with percentages of occurrence of each alphabet. Details and figures are given in Appendices B1-B5 at the end of this work. The chapter also covers other illustrative features in ethnobotanical dictionaries.

### *Chapter 7: Analysis of Meanings of Plant Names in a Luo Cultural Context*

This chapter deals with the cultural and linguistic analysis of meaning of Luo plant names, thus forming the ‘main building’ of the structural framework of the present study. The six hypotheses set out in Chapter 1 are subjected to analysis using the ethnobotanical lexicon from Kokwaro’s dictionaries, with a detailed discussion of the findings of the study. The chapter also situates the meanings in the socio-cultural context of the Luo people whose language and ecological framework constitute the major focus of the present study.

### *Chapter 8: Conclusions and Implications for Lexicographic Practice*

The chapter discusses the implications of the findings of Chapter 7 (and other earlier chapters) to lexicographic practices especially in the compilation of ethnobotanical dictionaries. The chapter also examines the institutional framework in which lexicographic work may be undertaken in Kenya; a task which has not been given necessary attention. The chapter further examines specialised lexicographic practice with reference to ethnobotanical dictionaries.

In this concluding chapter, the study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology with implications for the future is seen as a challenging endeavour. It will need to improve in terms of content and structure. This chapter gives illustrations derived from the study to give future direction to the compilation of good Luo ethnobotanical dictionaries, based on the seminal works of Kokwaro and his colleagues over the years. The findings will enable lexicographers to deploy culturally and linguistically relevant ethnobotanical information in the compilation of dictionaries in the future.

## CHAPTER 2

### ETHNOECOLOGY AND ONOMASTICS IN A LUO CULTURAL CONTEXT

#### 2.1 Introduction

The connection between ethnoecology, onomastics (study of names) and culture will form the basis of this chapter. The chapter deals with the cultural context of the Luo naming system of plants. The connection between Language and Ecology has been elucidated. Stibble (2008:1) who is categorised in stating that it “does not take many steps to get to that connection” because of the fact that “ecology is the interaction of organisms with each other and with the natural environment.” In this context, language use in a given community has profound impacts on the ecosystems and the cultura-specific configurations of a people group. In this chapter, we examine the ethnoecological and onomastic issues in a Luo cultural context. As already explained in the introductory chapter, the history of the Luo language can be traced back to the Nile Basin in Southern Sudan. As the Luo people migrated southward owing to social, political and economic conflicts because of ethno-ecological reasons, some of them found permanent settlements in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. The Southern Luo settled around the shores of Lake Victoria at the turn of the sixteenth century (Ogot 1967). The Luo people believe in supernatural powers that manifest in the form of mountains, valleys, lakes, rivers, large rocks, animals, birds, snakes and other natural phenomena and their religion is based on a hierarchy of territorial and ancestral spiritual forces who are worshipped and venerated at traditional sacred sites. According to Muhando (2003:1):-

The little known traditional sacred sites in Kenya are home to unique biodiversity and these sites are now under serious threat... One such feature is Ramogi Hill located a few kilometres from Usenge Town, Bondo District, on the border of Nyanza and Western Provinces. Massive rocks cover the Hill, which has two peaks overlooking Lake Victoria. These are the major and minor Ramogi. The Hill is said to be the first place where the Luo settled as they migrated from Sudan and later on their dispersal point. This is the most important cultural site of the Luo and is largely considered to be holy.

According to oral tradition on Luo ethnoecology reported by Muhando (2003:1):

Ramogi is a famous Luo ancestor and a leader. He had six wives. He settled on the Hill after migrating from Uganda. His homesteads were scattered all over the Hill. The community uses the Hill for cultural and religious practices. Traditional doctors use the forest as a source of herbal medicine, whereas church elders use it as a place for retreat and meditation.

The name Ramogi is both significant as an ethnonymic and toponymic category in Luo culture. The Luo fondly refer to themselves as “Jo-Karamogi” (the people of Ramogi’s place” or “Nyikwa Ramogi” (the grandchildren of Ramogi). The Ramogi Hill is traditionally considered a religio-cultural site where Luo people from all over East Africa offer sacrifices and pay homage to their ancestors and the high God in times of trouble and bounty. A number of Imbo clans of the Luo nation are settled around Ramogi Hill; from the top, there is excellent view of Lake Victoria across to Kenya’s Western neighbour, Uganda. Two significant personalities in the struggle for *Uhuru* (Swahili for “Freedom”) in Kenya from the Luo nation were Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and Ramogi Achieng Oneko. It is noteworthy that these two nationalists who also served in senior cabinet portfolios in President Jomo Kenyatta’s post-independence government, drew inspiration from Luo language, culture and ecology.

Jaramogi Oginga Odinga was the founder chairman and *Ker* (Cultural Leader) of the Luo Union (East Africa) from its formative years in the 1940’s and 1950’s. He earned the name Jaramogi (son of Ramogi) which was elevated to a specific politico-cultural title for himself.

Later, the title even became more specific: *The Jaramogi*, quite similar to *The Mahatma* or *The Budha* in Indian culture. He wrote in his autobiography *Not Yet Uhuru* that during the struggle for freedom in Kenya: “The people began to call me Jaramogi Ramogi is the legendary ancestor of the Luo and because I encouraged the *preservation* of our customary ways I was given a name symbolizing that I continued in the example of our ancestral fathers...”(Odinga 1967:133).

After Independence, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga became the First Vice-President and Minister for Home Affairs in President Jomo Kenyatta’s Government. The Jaramogi later became a symbol of struggle for democracy after the 1966 fall-out which saw the split in the ruling Kenyan African National Union and subsequently the formation of the Kenyan People’s Union. Two decades later in 1991 the Jaramogi formed the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy and died in 1994 as the respected Leader of Official Opposition in Parliament. His protege Achieng’ Oneko edited two publications during the struggle for Independence, namely *Ramogi* and the *Nyanza Times*. *Ramogi* newspaper was a clandestine venture since Achieng Oneko was an employee of the British Colonial Government at the time and was not allowed to involve in political activities. He was also the Nairobi representative of the Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation. He gave the Luo politico-economic activities coverage in the columns of *Ramogi* newspaper. According to Jaramogi Oginga Odinga: “The sales of *Ramogi* began to grow. Its readers were my contemporaries who were perhaps for the first time beginning to thin about national, as distinct from local affairs...” Odinga (1967:81)

The political activist Achieng Oneko later adopted the name *Ramogi*, also identifying with the legendary ancestor of the Luo people. But what exactly is in a name? Why study names? Do they have any meaning?



## 2.2 Onomastics

The word for 'name' in the Greek is *Onoma*. Koopman defines *onomastics* (derived from the Greek *Onoma*) as: "the study of names and naming systems..." He continues:-

In any language, names are nouns that are linguistic units. As names are linguistic units which normally operate in a social context, onomastics can be considered a branch of socio-linguistics. Although onomasticians (names scholars) may also be geographers, historians, cartographers, librarians, archaeologists, genealogists and scientists, generally they work in departments of linguistics or departments of specific language studies. (Koopman, 2002:8).

The study of names in Africa seems to lag behind Europe and America in the scope and quality of training offered. In East Africa, the three oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher learning are: Makerere University in Uganda, University of Nairobi in Kenya and the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. A number of younger universities have sprang up in the three East African countries of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania but there is no indication that Onomastics / Names Research Units have been established in any of the Departments of Linguistics, Languages or Cultural Studies. For that reason, information about onomastics is sporadic and scattered in various disciplines and departments without any co-ordinated approach. Archival materials on onomastics are not easy to come by in centralized facilities at the said universities in East Africa. With the coming together of the three countries under the East African Community with its Secretariat and Parliament at Arusha on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, there is hope that the study of the peoples, languages, and cultures of East Africa will be better co-ordinated through such institutions as the Inter-University Council of East Africa. Initiatives should also come from establishments such as the National Museums of Kenya, the Kenyan Society of Ethnoecology, Kenya Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge, Nature Kenya, the East African Natural History Society and other national and international institutions with focus on ecology, environment and habitat operating in Kenya. Under the rubric of language and ecology, the institutions named above

could sponsor and promote onomastics research among the cultural groups found in the Republic of Kenya. The same should be encouraged in Uganda and Tanzania as well.

In South Africa, the situation seems to be a little better than in East Africa. Throughout the last century, onomastics in South Africa was restricted to toponymy (place names). However, in 1980 the South African Names Society was formed. By 1987, there was already journal – *Nomina Africana* – published through the efforts of the Names Society. More than 12 volumes of *Nomina Africana* have already been published to date (2003). The South African Names Society has also held several conferences (Koopman, 2002:8). Several short-courses have been held by Africa South Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. These courses have mainly concentrated on toponyms with special emphasis on: place names, their translation, mapping techniques, standardization, national policies Geographical Information Systems, and other relevant aspects of geographical names and naming systems. Participation has been recorded from the entire Southern African Sub-Continent over the last decade.

There has also been limited formal training in onomastics in South African Universities. The University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, has offered courses in Zulu onomastics at B.A (Honours) level since 1991. The University of the Western Cape has also offered a similar course in Xhosa onomastics since 1992. In 1999, the Department of Zulu at the Durban Campus of the University of Natal offered a BA. (Honours) course in Zulu onomastics for the first time (Koopman, 2002:9). At the time of writing, the material from Names Research Unit at the Human Sciences Research Council which was phased out in May 2000 were transferred to the Onomastics Studies Unit under the leadership of Professor Adrian

Koopman of the School of Language, Culture and Communication at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

At the Department of African Languages University of Pretoria, has been done in the areas of lexicography and terminology. With the present study of Luo botanical terminology in the Department it is believed that more onomastic research in African languages will be done both at the University of Pretoria and at the University of Nairobi in Kenya where two researchers have been doing pioneering work in biological onomastics. The leading researchers in the area of Luo biological onomastics, that is, the study of botanical and zoological names known today are Professor John O. Kokwaro of the Department of Botany, University of Nairobi and his collaborator, Professor Timothy Johns of the Centre for Indigenous People's Nutrition and Environment, McGill University, Canada. In the introductory pages of their joint publication *Luo Biological Dictionary*, they examine the ecology of the Luo people and their cultural history. The two biologists, Kokwaro and Johns (1998) have a stated interest in the the Kenyan and Tanzanian Luo who originally settled mainly along the shores of Lake Victoria.

The Luo have been known to historians as Rivers and Lakes Nilotes: they derive their toponym from the River Nile (known as *Kiira* among the Basoga of Uganda) and Lake Victoria (known as *Nam Lolwe* among the Luo of Kenya). The *ecology* of the Luo is thus tied to these two enormous geographic features of the largest fresh water lake and longest river on the African continent. The word *ecology* is used to refer to the interactions between organisms and their environment. The word is derived from the Greek *Oikos*, meaning *home*.

The study of Luo ecology would necessarily take into account the home life of individuals, the population and the community in general.

- *Individuals*

The study of individuals looks into how they have affected their environment

- *Population*

The study of the population entails numbers (including abundance or rarity) and demographic trends.

- *Community*

The study of the community entails the analysis of composition, structure, energy, nutrition and functioning of members of the social group. From the foregoing it can be said that ecology is concerned with both nature and culture. The former is the biological realm including both physical and chemical resources in the ecosystem. Human influences on both plant and animal resources are definitely a concern to ecologists. The present study is ethnosemantic and seeks to unravel the meanings assigned to plants by the Luo people. Extreme care must be taken in our attempt to analyze the meanings of Luo plant names otherwise we may not reach the correct conclusions. This is the reason why we have taken the following into consideration:-

- Culture
- Context
- Words (terms)

The principle in this study is that words or terms in themselves are arbitrary and therefore, mean *nothing*; it is people who assign meanings to words or terms so that they may mean *something*.

Over a period of between 600-800 years of migration from the Nile Valley and settlement in Eastern Africa, the Luo people have had ecological experiences which are codified in their botanical names and naming systems. The Luo, having settled along the shores of Lake

Victoria (Nam Lolwe) have built a large oral culture about their ethnoecology especially of the Lake Basin in Kenya and Tanzania. Kokwaro and Johns (1998: ix) state that:-

According to the 1962 census, the Luos formed the second largest tribe in Kenya with a population of 1.2 million people. In the Tanzania mainland (Tanganyika) there were 0.1 million Luos, being the 29<sup>th</sup> largest tribe out of 129 tribes according to the 1957 census. In Kenya today, the population is about 3.5 million, whereas in Tanzania their number is estimated at 0.5 million.

### **2.3 The Four Main Columns of the Luo Migration**

The migration and settlement of the Luo from Uganda into Kenya came in four main columns. Today, the Luo in Kenya can be divided into four groups (Ochieng 1985: 4):-

- Jo-Kajok
- Jo-Kowiny
- Jo-Komolo
- Jo-Suba

#### **2.3.1 Jo-Kajok:**

This was the largest of the Luo clans to enter the present day Kenya from Uganda. The Jo-Kajok (the people of Jok) were the first to arrive in the present day Nyanza Province, Kenya. It is said that they arrived about 1490 under the political and military leadership of Jok. When their leader Jok died, the leadership of the group passed on to a warrior with boundless courage and energy by the name Ramogi Ajwang while they still lived at a place called Ligala, in Samia, Busia District. Ker Ramogi Ajwang led his people against the Abagusii who occupied a hill overlooking the Lake. After several battles with these Bantu-speaking peoples, the Luo speakers of the Jo-Kajok column occupied the Hill which they named Got Ramogi (Ramogi Hill) and are still known by that name today. The Abagusii migrated southward after their defeat by the Jo-Kajok column of the Luo Nation (cf. Ochieng' 1985:5).

As the population increased, the Jo-Kajok spread out and dispersed to the present Sakwa-Waringa in Bondo District, Uyoma in Bondo District, Alego in Siaya District and later crossed the Winam Gulf of Nam Lolwe (Lake Victoria) into Southern Nyanza Region in Kenya and North Mara Region in Tanzania.

### **2.3.2 Jo-Kowiny:**

The people of Owiny (Jo-Kowiny) broke away from the people of Adhola (Jo-Padhola) of Eastern Uganda migrated southwards into Kenya arriving in Alego, Siaya District around 1625 teaming up with the earlier Luo migrants the Jo-Kajok column. They found some Bantu-speaking people in the area whom they conquered and Luoized. The Jo-Kowiny and Jo-Kajok united under the leadership of Alego. Later some of them crossed River Yala and settled in the present day Yimbo, conquering the Bantu speaking groups there and Luoizing them (cf. Ochieng' 1985:6). The Luo rule in Yimbo was imposed under Dimo's chiefdom. The people of Yimbo whom he ruled took his name and became Jo-Kadimo (people of Dimo).

### **2.3.3 Jo-Komolo:**

The people of Omolo (Jo-Komolo) arrived in the present Siaya District from northern Uganda. They settled in Yimbo in Bondo District and later migrated to the present Alego, Ugenya and Gem areas in the present Siaya District and the evolution of hereditary chiefdoms commenced in the 1300s. Some of the people of Omolo (Jo-Komolo) crossed over to Southern Nyanza Region.

#### 2.3.4 The Jo-Suba:

Among the people of Suba (Jo-Suba) cluster of the Luo speakers are to be found an amalgam of Nilotic speakers from Uganda and Bantu-speakers from Buganda Kingdom and, Busoga Kingdom. It noteworthy that a column of the Luo speaking people migrated from the Sudan through northern Uganda into Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom in western Uganda, Buganda Kingdom in central and southern Uganda and Busoga Kingdom in eastern Uganda influencing the royal families through the Luo-Babito dynasties which in terms of influence went all the way to the Karagwe Kingdom in north western Tanzania. According to Richard W. Hull in his book *Munyakare: African Civilization Before the Batuuere*, the Nilotic Luo pastoral groups migrating southwards met the Bantu-speaking cultivators and so the institution of centralized monarch evolved in response to these encounters between immigrant Nilotic pastoralists and the Bantu cultivators. Through this encounter, *federations* of clans under their leaders were transformed into confederations of towns headed by powerful dynastic families or hereditary chiefs in what is today known as Uganda and the Great Lakes Region. Hull (1972:35) relies on legends, which suggest that, the process of centralized political systems in the Great Lakes Region:-

Bito heads claimed decadence from the Chwezi whom they expelled. They subsequently consolidated their authority by binding conquered chiefs through an ingenious system of mutual gift giving; a practice widely employed in pre-colonial Africa. Gift giving symbolized a power relationship in which paramount chiefs or Kings and their territorial subordinates depended on each other for their mutual well being and political existence. Gifts in the form of slaves, cloth, beads, or other cherished items were exchanged upon installation in office and at least annually thereafter. They became visible affirmations of loyalty, good will, and mutual respect.

According to the legendary accounts reported by Richard W. Hull in his book *Munyankare: African Civilization before the Batuuere*, the Luo Kings forged marriage alliances between themselves and important Bunyoro-Kitara families in conquered areas. In this way, the Luo

pastoral immigrants became accepted by their Bantu subjects. They became indigenised and lost their alien identity. He observes that:-

Marriage enabled them to rule as one great family dynasty with many branches in outlying settlements. It also gave them the advantage of claiming dual ancestry: from their fearless alien forebears and the indigenous founding heroes of pre-Luo society. The phenomenon was not unique. Many conquest groups in Africa had legitimized and consolidate their position through marriage bonds with vanquished majorities. To put it rather succinctly, it was a form of *cooptation* through *copulation*. It possessed the virtue of achieving conquest and assimilation without violent revolution, war, and bloodshed (Hull, 1972:35).

Among the Baganda, the process of consolidation of power was achieved by the Luo-Babito dynasty through the same process of “*cooptation* through *copulation*.” Buganda Kingdom was very prosperous. The economy experienced tremendous growth owing to the cultivation of nutritious banana plants (known as *matoke* in Luganda). Its rulers took full advantage of growing opportunities for external trade with the brisk movements of along the caravan routes to the East Coast of Africa via both the present day Kenya and Tanzania. According to legendary accounts:-

Buganda’s monarchs chose to exploit their weaker neighbours’ human and natural resources. By the early nineteenth century, warriors of Buganda’s Kabakas or Kings had begun to raid deeply into neighbouring Kingdoms. Successive Kabakas had already consolidated power within Buganda by linking themselves through marriage to nearly every Luo-Bito subdynasty or clan. (Hull, 1972:36)

This informative work of Professor Richard W. Hull, who at the time of its publication, was engaged in teaching African history at New York University has given quite illuminating ideas of the ecological reality and cultural transformation of the Luo people and their Bantu neighbours in East Africa. The term *Munyakare* which is the main title of the book is the Shona lexical item for “traditional way of life” while the term *Batuuree* is the Hausa word meaning “European” or “white man.” In picking lexical items from the Shona of Zimbabwe and Hausa of Nigeria, Richard W. Hull succeeds in Africa’s past civilization before the



advent of European colonialism; it is an inter-disciplinary approach relying heavily on data drawn from anthropology, ethnomusicology, art history, theology, sociology, political science and law. He examines diffuse communities in Africa and the very fabric of their civilizations by exploiting authentic African terminology to good explanatory effect.

Like the Luo-Babito of Uganda, the Luo-Basuba of Kenya intermingled with the Nilotic Luo for centuries. The Suba people mainly came into the present day Nyanza Province in the mid-1700's. They originated from Buganda Kingdom. In Kenya they settled on islands and the lakeshore to the east occupying what is topographically known as *Pinje Abich* (Luo for Five Locations or Territories) namely:-

- Rusinga
- Mfangano
- Gwasi
- Kaksingri
- Gembe

Pockets of Suba are also found in Migori District. It was estimated that the population of the Luo-Basuba as at 1995 was 129,000. The Luo-Basuba are famous for fishing, boat-building and hippo hunting. Farming is a growing occupation in Suba territories. They also keep livestock for payment of bride price. According to a report of the Kenya Unreached Peoples Network (KUPNet) in Co-operation with the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Daystar University, Kenya (1995:61).

The Suba have been overshadowed by other ethnic groups, particularly by the Luo of the east. The result has been a reliance on others for trade and survival. Intermarriage with the Luo is common place, but Luo customs are generally dominant when this happens. European

influence, which penetrated Africa from the East, viewed the Suba as a sub-group of the Luo. This further caused the Suba minority to lose recognition of their distinct culture.

Because the Suba language is very different from other languages in the area, it came to be viewed as inferior. Education was introduced in English and Luo, and some Suba people have lost the ability to speak their own language. Christianity too was brought to this area through Luo people.

The reality about the Suba people in Kenya is that they have been assimilated into the Luo speech community totally. Linguistically, politically and culturally, the Suba people of Kenya are an integral part of the Luo speech community. The Government of Kenya created a new district in 1992 to give the people a distinct identity. However, as Gerald Otieno Kajwang says:-

Much as the people of Suba appreciated the creation of a new district for them, they could not extricate themselves politically, economically, culturally and linguistically from their Luo neighbours and kinsfolk with whom they had intermarried and *co-existed* for over three centuries. (Personal Communication: January 2003).

Like the example of the Luo-Babito dynasties in Uganda's Bunyoro-Kitara, Buganda and Busoga Kingdoms, for the Luo-Basuba in Kenya, it was also another case of "cooptation by copulation" (Hull, 1972:35).

According to a sociolinguistic survey by Heine and Mohlig (1980:32)

SUBA is spoken on Rusinga and Mfangano Islands in Lake Victoria and ashore around the Gembe and Gwasi Hills. Besides these, there are small pockets of SUBA speaking settlements west of Musoma-Kisumu road along the Tanzania border. It seems that there is a general tendency among SUBA speakers to give up the old Bantu dialect in favour of western-nilotic LUO. The estimated number of SUBA speakers amounts to about 75,000...

As has already been noted that the population of the Luo-Basuba was around 129,000 in 1995 and that fifteen years earlier in 1980 only 75,000 of the Luo-Basuba population could speak the language, it would be reasonable to estimate that about half the Luo-Basuba population

have already lost the old Bantu dialect in favour of the Luo language. Efforts of the Summer Institute of Linguistics at promoting Suba language are commendable but the reality on the ground is that Luo is quickly replacing Suba, as education and all church services are conducted in Luo and English. There have been insignificant attempts at translating portions of the Bible but efforts at standardization are painfully slow. Meanwhile, the tide of Luoization continues unabated. For the Suba who still speak the old Bantu dialect in addition to Luo, English, and Swahili, perhaps the policy of multi-lingualism would be most realistic. The dominant language in Suba District however is Luo because of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history of the Suba people.

According to the sociolinguistics survey by Heine and Mohlig (1980:76) the Suba form a minority among the Luo of Southern Nyanza.

As a Bantu language, Suba differs considerably from Luo which is a Nilotic language. Suba is divided into various dialects which can be related to differing geographical and ethnic origins of the Suba population. The Suba are gradually being assimilated culturally and linguistically by the Luo. The cultural aspect of this process is marked, for example, by a development towards abandoning circumcision and adopting the Luo custom of extracting six lower incisors, whereas linguistically this process leads towards the replacement of the mother tongue by Luo. Historical relationships have been established by historians between the Suba people and ethno-linguistic groups in East Africa such as the Baganda, Abagusii and Abakuria.

From the sociolinguistics survey reported above, it is clear that Luo is first replacing Suba as the primary language of communication. For others it is a second language. Swahili and English are used in education and other official matters for wider communication with the rest of Kenyan society.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have examined the historical origins of the Luo speaking people in Kenya, and their ecological and onomastic categories according to their migration patterns. The

major sub-groups of the Luo and their interaction with Bantu – speaking groups in the Lake Victoria Basin have been examined, showing how language, culture and ecology are closely inter-linked. In the next chapter, we shall examine how ethno-linguistics and ethnobotany interact in given cultural contexts.

## CHAPTER 3

### ETHNOSEMANTICS AND ETHNOBOTANICAL TERMINOLOGY IN A LUO CULTURAL CONTEXT

#### 3.1 Introduction

Ethnosemantics as a sub-discipline of linguistic anthropological inquiry has been given limited attention at the University of Nairobi, Kenya and other institutions of higher learning in Africa. At the University of Nairobi's Institute of African Studies, ethnosemantics is one of the courses offered on the Bachelor of Arts (Anthropology) programme. Ethnosemantics, which falls under linguistic anthropology, is listed as an *elective* and not a *compulsory* course on the B.A. (Anthropology) programme in the University of Nairobi, which indicates that it is not considered a *core* in the study of anthropology. However, semantics, without the prefix "ethno" – enjoys a role both on the Bachelor of Education (Linguistics and Literature) programme and the Bachelor of Arts (Linguistics and African Languages) programme at the same university and other institutions of higher learning in Kenya, such as: Kenyatta University, Egerton University, Moi University and Maseno University. An ethnosemantic study of any language enjoys some kind of duality in the sense that it falls squarely within the ambit of linguistic anthropology (or its variant, anthropological linguistics). What then is ethnosemantics?

#### 3.2 Definition of Ethnosemantics

According to Duranti, the terms ethno-linguistics anthropological linguistics and linguistic anthropology deal with the same subject matter. That sub-field focuses on "the study of

language and culture” (Duranti, 1997:2). Linguistic anthropology is defined as “the study of language as a cultural resource and speaking as a cultural practice “(Duranti, 1997:2). The sub-field of ethnolinguistics is interdisciplinary and borrows heavily from linguistics and anthropology, with the aim of creating understanding in the “multifarious aspects of language as a set of cultural practices...” (Duranti, 1997:3). Those who study linguistic anthropology (or its variant, anthropological linguistics) or ethnolinguistics see the subjects of their study (speakers) first as social actors, that is: “Members of particular, interestingly complex, communities, each organized in a variety of social institutions and through a network of intersecting but not necessarily overlapping sets of expectations, beliefs, and morals about the world” (Duranti, 1997:3).

According to another linguist, Crystal, ethnolinguistics is: “A branch of linguistics which studies language in relation to the investigation of ethnic types and behaviour” (Crystal 1985:113). He acknowledges the fact that anthropological linguistics and socio-linguistics have areas of common concerns. This overlap reflects the interests of correlative disciplines involved, namely: ethnology, anthropology and sociology. The study of language in relation to culture and people is known as an ethnolinguistics.

We need to define semantics before we zero on ethno-semantics. According to Yule (1985, 1996:114), linguists are more interested in the conceptual meaning of words when they study language than the associative meaning. Conceptual meaning is concerned with the literal aspects or components of a world like tree (“yath” in Luo), which may include the stem, branches and leaves of the plant. These aspects may give meaning to the concept of tree (or “yath”) in a given speech community. However, there are associations or connotations attached to tree the Luo word “yath”) which leads the knowledgeable speaker of the language

to associate it with herbal medicine. To restrict ourselves to the literal aspects of meaning is therefore very limiting. It is people who do and mean things with words; in themselves, words are decontextualised, and, therefore, meaningless. In George Yule's definition:-

Semantics is the study of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences. In semantic analysis, there is always an attempt to focus on what the words conventionally mean, rather than on what a speaker might want the words to mean on a particular occasion. This technical approach to meaning emphasizes the objective and the general. It avoids the subjective and the local. Linguistic semantics deals with the conventional meaning conveyed by the use of words and sentences of a language (Yule, 1985, 1996:114).

If we are to take Yule's definition and explanation at face value, then we would lose much information in our attempt to understand the global and objective reality of the plant kingdom at the expense of the local and subjective reality of the same. For us to understand Luo botanical terminology we must, necessarily, take our inquiry into the realm of local cultural ecology of the people; hence, the analysis would have to be ethnoecologically focussed in order to comprehend the meanings of the names of plants in the Luo speech community. Words or lexical items get meaning from the relations among signs throughout the entire communication ecosystem. Closely related to ethnobotanical terminology is what is technically referred to in biology as ethnosystematics. According to a Kenyan ethnobotanist, Owuor (1995: 154): "Botanical ethnosystematics among the Southern Luo is rich, with both original and adopted nouns commonly used in reference to plants."

The Luo idea systems with specific reference to the plant kingdom are tied to knowledge about ethnobotanical terminology. It entails the mastering of a body of ethnolinguistic material about plants, that is, names and concepts concerning the flora of a given cultural ecological system. Terms and concepts give members of a speech community the ability to establish categories in order to process information. Names of plants are part and parcel of idea systems of linguistic and ethnocultural groups based on first hand experience and

learning over many generations of epistemological codification. Through knowledge of ethnobotanical vocabularies, which sometimes are highly specialised, we discover information about the plant kingdom and how the Luo people interact with their environment. Botanical ethnosystematics as a field of interest or category of knowledge enables the members of the Luo speech community who share same ideas and concepts about plants to understand and utilize the botanical resources available to them.

From the foregoing, if semantics is understood as the study of meaning in language; then ethnosemantics is, therefore, the study of what groups of people or speech community mean in their use of language.

### **3.3 Ethnosemantic Analysis of Luo Botanical Terminology.**

An ethnosemantic analysis of Luo botanical terminology is based on the morphological processes, which have cultural ramifications. Luo botanical terms derive from various stems or morpheme roots, as we shall exemplify (see Chapter 7) through the following hypotheses:-

- Some Luo botanical names derive their meanings from the characteristics of plants.
- Some Luo botanical names derive their meanings from the uses of the plants.
- Some Luo botanical names derive their meanings from human attributes.
- Some Luo botanical names derive their meanings from animal attributes.
- Some Luo botanical names derive their meanings from folklore.
- Some Luo botanical names derive their meanings from loan or borrowed words from other languages.



### **3.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have examined the connection of ethnosemantics and ethnobotany in a Luo cultural context. The chapter further outlines the six major areas of derivation of meanings of Luo plant names. More on meanings is covered in chapter 7. In the next chapter, we endeavour to show the interdisciplinary nature of the study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology.

## CHAPTER 4

### INTERDISCIPLINARY NATURE OF ETHNOBOTANICAL TERMINOLOGY IN A LUO CULTURAL CONTEXT

#### 4.1 Introduction

Ethnobotanical terminology includes the study of plant names and concepts. It is not possible to study botanical systematics without looking at a people group's perception of their plants in their environment. One way of systematically understanding the flora and other natural resources in an ethnolinguistic group is by giving names to the plants in a systematic manner. The need of people communicating with one another about plants and their relationships can only be realized by the use of plant names and concepts. Jones and Luchsinger (1979:5) assert that:-

Other fields of endeavour depend on taxonomists to supply names. Scientific names are of little interest in themselves, but the act of naming, or changing names, is important and not merely an academic sport of systematic botanists. Names provide a designation for each plant. Nameless items, whether new or previously known, cannot be utilized until named or identified.

It is also the work of folk taxonomists to supply names given to plants by specific ethnolinguistic groups. They need to work with linguistic anthropologists (anthropological linguists) to understand how people relate with plants in their environment by assigning names to them.

#### 4.2 Ethnoterminological Perspectives

Clearly, a study of ethnobotanical terminology in a Luo culture-specific configuration would necessarily be influenced by linguistic anthropology (anthropological linguistics) which deals with the interaction between language and culture. According to Cabré (1999: 32), the word *terminology* refers to at least three different concepts:-

- (a) The principles and conceptual bases that govern the study of terms
- (b) The guidelines used in terminographic work

(c) The set of terms of a particular special subject.

In this understanding of terminology, field, methodology and setting of terms in a specific topic, all need to be given attention for the Luo plant names and concepts to be fully accounted for. According to Cabré (1999: 32): “Terminology is generally seen as an interdisciplinary field that deals with the naming of concepts of special subjects, and their realization in linguistic or other forms.”

Even though terminology is interdisciplinary, it has acquired its own identity and autonomy with the implication that it has its own principles and applications in the compilation of:-

- Vocabularies
- Glossaries
- Dictionaries

Terminology also deals with the standardization of the designations. The prime object of study in terminology are specialized words occurring in natural language, which belong to specific domains of usage. The three most important approaches to the study of terminology listed by Cabré (1999: 33) are as follows:-

- (a) “For linguistics, terminology is part of the special lexicon that is characterised by subject and pragmatic criteria
- (b) For scientific-technical disciplines, terminology is the formal reflection of their conceptual organization and thus an essential means of expression and communication

(c) For the user (either direct or intermediate), terminology is a set of useful communicative units, which must be evaluated from the point of view of economy, precision and suitability of expression.”

Throughout the previous chapters, it has been underscored that ethnobotanical terminological studies is by its very nature interdisciplinary. Linguistics, Anthropology and Botany all have a role to play and there is a need for an environment provided by both institutional and governmental structures for effective study of terminology to take place. In Kenya, where Luo is one of the major indigenous languages, there is no structure within the Department of Culture or the Department of National Heritage, in the Government of Kenya, to provide for terminological studies in various disciplines offered in universities and other institutions of higher learning. It would appear that lessons may be learned by the Government of the Republic of Kenya, from the Government of the Republic of South Africa, which has created a Terminology Division of the National Language Service within the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. According to Alberts (2000: 235):-

The Terminology Division (TD) is the national office assisting the Government by providing terminology information in all the official South African languages. The TD documents, develops, standardises and publishes term lists covering various registers - the objective being to reduce ambiguity and misunderstanding, and thereby, improving on the exactness of scientific and technical communication in the working environment.

The facility described by Alberts (2000: 235) about the terminological studies in the Republic of South Africa does not exist in Kenya as yet. For that reason, both lexicography and terminology, as linguistics inspired sub-disciplines in the service of other disciplines, have suffered a great deal of neglect if it were not for the sporadic individual and institutional initiatives of scholars like Kokwaro and the Department of Botany, University of Nairobi. According to Alberts (200: 235), the Terminological Division “*worked according to subject fields*” before it was incorporated into the National Language Service.

According to Alberts (2000: 237), the Terminology Division of the National Language Service works in close contact and in partnership with the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) and other related institutions. The interdisciplinary approach of terminological work in the Republic of South Africa is captured by Alberts (2000: 239) rather succinctly:-

The TD is at present working on a variety of multilingual terminology lists on various subjects such as Geography, Physics, Basic Science, Statistics, Computers, Meteorology, and a variety of lists concerning terminology related to the Building Industry, Political Sciences, Law, Public Administration, Mechanical Engineering, Education, Olympic Games, Mammals, Dietetics, Frail Care, Basic Health, HIV/AIDS, Agriculture, etc.

The situation in Southern Africa is characterised by multilingualism, multiculturalism, and multiethnicity, which is quite similar to Eastern Africa in general and Kenya in particular. According to Alberts (2000: 248): “The African terminologies should be developed to enhance the multilingual heritage of the country ...”

However, there are practical problems of economic viability and the non-availability of well-trained and qualified terminologists to do the work. This is where the University of Nairobi in Kenya could borrow a leaf from the Department of African Languages at the University of Pretoria, which offers courses at undergraduate and post-graduate levels in:-

- Translation
- Lexicography
- Terminology

All these courses are relevant to careers in the National Language Service and industry where language skills are currently in great demand in the African continent. The South African multilingual approach to communication problems is one which should be considered by the East African countries of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, which currently concentrate on English and Kiswahili as their **lingua franca** in the region, at the expense of the hundreds of languages and dialects spoken by the various people of the **three countries**.

### **4.3 Anthropology, Linguistics and Botany**

An ethnobotanical terminological project would necessarily work best in the multilingual and multicultural context of Kenya and East Africa by drawing from the following disciplines:-

- Anthropology
- Linguistics
- Botany

While anthropology is, according to Salzmann (1998: 1): “the study of human kind”, especially the culture of different people groups, Cabré (1999: 28) says that linguistics in its applied context is the study of: “language in its total function as a structure and as a tool for communication, as a system and a way to solve the communicative and informative needs of society.”

Botany is simply the scientific study of plants and their uses. Botany and the two disciplines of linguistics and anthropology are useful in the analysis of ethnobotanical terminology in a culture-specific configuration.

In the next chapter we shall focus on the relationship between ethnobotany and lexicography in a Luo culture-specific context.

### **4.4 Ecolinguistics**

A linguistic study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology necessarily belongs in the realm of ecolinguistics as well, which is a growth area in the sub-field of applied language studies since the early 1990s. Interest in the interactions of language and ecology emerged as a new paradigm after Michael Halliday’s seminal paper; *New Ways of Meaning: the challenge of*

*applied linguistics*. This paper was presented at the International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA) at Saloniki in 1990 (see: wikipedia, update: 23 September 2008). This presentation of Michael Halliday inspired the study of language in ecological contexts, and making it relevant to the challenges of the prevention of the ecosystems.

The study of the interaction of language and the environment must be of necessity involve documentation of plant names. According to Blench (2006: 191) the biodiversity of African plants remain to be fully documented:-

There are perhaps 10,000 species of indigenous to the continent, and although very few have no use, for many their importance is scattered, and they have made no impact on the linguistic repertoire of tree names. . . . The reason for this absence of reconstructions may reflect biological factors; the relative diversity of tropical as opposed to temperate flora. With such a wealth of species to choose from, only those of considerable and widespread economic importance are likely to show up in the linguistic record, and even there, the significance of a particular species can fade in and out.

Since Halliday's comments, the sub-field of ecolinguistic has developed into: (a) eco-critical discourse analysis which deals with texts on the environment and (b) linguistic ecology which sees language as being embedded in the ecological context in which societies are also embedded. Those who have carried on work in the sub-field include people like:-

- Jørgen Christian Bang of Denmark
- Jørgen Døør of Denmark
- Sune Vork Steffensen also of Denmark, and
- Joshua Nash of Australia

The former two authored a theoretical monograph entitled: *Language, Ecology and Society: A Dialectical Approach*. The monograph editors are the latter two. In this publication, they critically examine the interaction between language and the environment. In this approach, language is shaped by the mind, the natural environment and the human society. The present

study is an exemplification of how the natural environment has a bearing on the meanings of plant names in a local speech community.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have examined the interdisciplinary nature of analysing the meanings of plant names. The chapter has also explained the institutional context in which lexicographic work in Africa may be accomplished, giving further insights into the interactions between language and ecological contexts. In the next chapter, we shall focus on the relationship between ethnobotany and lexicography in a Luo culture-specific context.



## CHAPTER 5

### ETHNOBOTANY AND LEXICOGRAPHY IN A LUO CULTURE-SPECIFIC CONTEXT

#### 5.1 Introduction

In chapter four, we looked at the broad concepts of ethnosemantics and ethnobotany and how the two sub-disciplines relate to each other. In this chapter, we shall examine how a linguistic analysis, especially at the ethnosemantic level, is important in the work of the ethnobotanist. We shall also analyse the corpus of Luo botanical terminology systematically before looking at the lexicographic implications of the corpus we are dealing with. According to Martin (1995: 203), ethnobotanists should seek to understand the meanings of plant names and other terms used to describe the environment. He is critical of ethnobotanists who do not make any conscious effort in their learned articles:-

Even to give a rough translation of the local name. There are even stories of researchers who have recorded apparently local names of plants, only to have other ethnobotanists discover later that the local people are simply saying ‘I don’t know’ or ‘That’s a rock’. These misunderstandings can be avoided by analysing with local people the meaning of each plant name...  
Martin (1995: 203).

It would appear that translation plays a major role in the understanding of the meaning of plant names in any given speech community. Both literal and free translations can be used to shed light on the plant names: “free translations, also called ‘glosses’, are the closest English (or other language) equivalent to a native term. Literal translations are word-for-word renditions” (Martin 1995:205).

He suggests that ethnobotanists should rely on the assistance of native speakers who are fluent in both the local language, (for example, Luo), and the target language, (for example, English, French or Spanish). The use of bilingual dictionaries is also highly recommended in the process of seeking to establish the meanings of plant names. However, there may be difficulties of intranslatability from the local language such as Luo into an internationally spoken language such as English because of cross-cultural complexities. The exact equivalents for many concepts may not actually exist but that should not deter the ethnobotanist or ethnolinguist from seeking to establish the lexico-semanticity of plant names. The use of a biological dictionary is useful in helping the ethnobotanist or ethnolinguist to detect cognates, namely: ethnobotanical terms and their equivalents in ordinary language usage. The language used in ethnobotany may be seen as one variety while the language in every day usage may be seen as yet another variety. The bilingual dictionary helps the ethnolinguistic analyst to detect cognates:-

When it can be shown they are variations of the same word and refer to the same object. If you are working in more than one community in a region where people speak the same or related languages, you will find that many plant and animal species are called by a similar name in each locale. Although some of these may have arisen coincidentally or through linguistic borrowing from one community to another, many of these names can be considered true cognates (Martin 1995: 207).

In this study we have relied on a bilingual Luo-English dictionary to detect cognates. We shall now turn to this bilingual dictionary and explain its role in illuminating the ethnosemantics of Luo botanical terminology.

## **5.2 Bilingual Dholuo-English Dictionary (Kenya)**

Work on this bilingual dictionary was based on the Luo word list compiled by missionaries who worked among the Luo people. Henry C. Capen, together with his wife Anne Capen, their Luo co-translator, Daniel Songa, Grace A. Clark and other foreign missionaries who worked among the Luo people in the Nyanza region of Kenya and neighbouring North Mara region in Tanzania were instrumental in early lexicographic work. The compiler of the

dictionary, Carole A. Capen, was a daughter-in-law to American pioneer Christian worker with the Africa Inland Mission, Henry C. Capen and his wife Anne H. Capen, who arrived in Kenya as missionaries in 1929 at Letein in Kericho District but were transferred to Nyakach in the present Nyando District in 1931 where they learned Luo. Their son, Bob Capen (husband to the compiler of the dictionary, Carole Capen), was born in what is today known as the City of Kisumu in 1945, but grew up in Nyakach area where he acquired Luo like any other native speaker of the language. His wife Carole A. Capen was trained in dictionary making by Doris Batholomew, Head of the Dictionary Team of the Mexico branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a reputable American missionary organization dedicated to doing linguistic work especially translation and lexicography on the mission field. Says Capen (1998: V) in his dedication:-

I cannot forget the land of my birth and the rich cultural heritage it has given to me. It has been my desire to return to the Luo people something of enduring value. This dictionary fulfils the desire .... Now my dream is a reality and it is a privilege to dedicate this knowledge to the rightful owners, the Joluo.

The compilation of the *Bilingual Dholuo-English Dictionary /Kenya* relied on the specialist informants or consultants as they are presently known from all the major dialectological areas of Luo speakers of Victoria Nyanza region in Kenya. For that reason, the work is definitely lexicographically authentic and useful for ethnosemantic analysis of the cognates in the Luo speech community (of the ethnobotanical terminology under scrutiny).

### **5.3 Luo-English Botanical Dictionary**

In East Africa, one of the most prominent names in ethnobotany is Professor John O. Kokwaro of the Department of Botany, University of Nairobi, Kenya. His first bilingual dictionary (Luo-English) was published by the East African Publishing House, Nairobi, Kenya, in 1972. The seminal lexicographic work may seem modest with only 200 pages of

Luo-English botanical terminological entries, but it marks an epoch in the realm of scientific and technical lexicography in the region, especially in one of the indigenous languages of Eastern Africa. Trained in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Sweden, Professor John O. Kokwaro specialised in agriculture and taxonomic botany, the latter taking his entire working career at the University of Nairobi.

In 1993, Kokwaro published the *Medicinal Plants of East Africa* with the Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi. He has also contributed a number of articles in taxonomic botany in scientific publications including *The Flora of Tropical East Africa*. As an authoritative source, the *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* examines plant names and uses among the Luo people of East Africa. He calls the Luo people first-class botanists who know what plants are useful to people and animals, and what plants are poisonous (Kokwaro 1972: vii):- “Among those who appreciate the dynamics of biology in Africa are the Luos. Their advances in agriculture and fishery over many years have produced some of the best known scientists in East Africa.”

The structure of the bilingual dictionary is in two parts, namely:-

- Part I deals with the Luo-Botanical terminology;
- Part II deals with Botanical-Luo or English-Luo terminology.

In between the two parts are *Plates*, which are illustrations of the plants to help the dictionary user to relate the plant names and the visual representation of the plants. There is also a section at the end of the dictionary devoted to: Illustrated botanical terms, for example, the plant body which includes the *root system* below the *soil level* and *stem system* above the *soil level*. Taking the body of any common plant for instance, the illustration in the dictionary

indicates that the plant has the primary root (also called *tap root*) and the secondary roots, below the soil level, which provide the *support system* to the plant. Above the soil level are the following: primary root, secondary root, stem, buds, leaves, nodes, internodes, fruits, flowers, and terminal buds.

The translations of the botanical terms already mentioned are given below with their equivalents in the Dholuo:-

English	Dholuo
(1) Primary Root/Tap Root	“Tiend Yath Maduong”
(2) Secondary Root	“Tiend Yath Matin”
(3) Stem	“Kor Yath”
(4) Auxillary bud	_____
(5) Leaf	“It Yath”
(6) Node	“Omuot”
(7) Internode	“Kind Omuot”
(8) Fruit	“Olemo/Nyak”
(9) Flower	“Thiepe/Maua”
(10) Terminal bud	_____

The Luo people like many other ethnic groups in Africa are so conscious of their environment that the family system is often compared with a big wooded tree or fruit tree. The taproot refers to the main genealogical line known as *Kwaro* (paternal grandfather). The secondary roots may refer to brothers and cousins of *kwaro*. The soil level, *lowo*, marks the divide between the living (quick) members of the family and departed (dead) members of the family (ancestors) who have been referred to as the ‘living dead’ (Mbiti 1992: 125). There is

a physical, psychological and spiritual connection between the quick and the dead within the context of the Luo extended family system. The Luo extended family is like a big tree with the primary root, secondary roots, stem, auxiliary buds, leaves, nodes internodes, fruits, flowers, terminal buds and other parts of the big tree. According to William R. Ochieng (1985: 10), the family tree is defined from the male side:-

Luo society is patrilineal, by which is meant that inheritance of property, children, wives, power and so on, comes from the male side, from father to son. The smallest important social unit is the family. The family is made up of the man, his wife or wives, his sons and daughters, and if the sons are married, his sons' wives and grand children.

Sometimes the idea of the family, among the Luo, may be extended to include a man's brothers and sisters, his brother's wives and children, as well as his brother's grand children. The size of a Luo family was also sometimes swollen by the grandparents, nephews, aunts and servants. The Luo people often say: "*Anyuola chalo yath maduong.*" Translation: "A family is like a big tree." A study of language, culture and society of the Luo people shows how they are closely related with their environment.

The bilingual *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* gives a socio-cultural context of the plant names and uses. The technique of **alphabetization** has been employed with the **CAPITALIZATION** of plant names in Luo for ease of reference by the user.

#### **5.4 Luo Biological Dictionary**

Another bilingual dictionary by Kokwaro and his collaborator, Johns of the Centre for Indigenous People's Nutrition and Environment (CINE), McGill University, Canada, needs mention in this context as well: *The Luo Biological Dictionary*. The bilingual biological dictionary was published by the East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, Kenya, in

1998. It is also an improvement of the earlier work, *The Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*, already mentioned. The bilingual biological dictionary is divided into two parts, namely:-

- Part I deals with botany
- Part II deals with zoology, which includes birds; mammals; insects and insect allies; fishes, reptiles and amphibians.

The zoological dictionary is outside the scope of the present study because we are focussing on the ethnosemantic of botanical terminology. For that reason, we may only acknowledge the fact that the lexicographic work of Kokwaro and his collaborators has expanded and may require future attention by researchers interested in the following major areas:-

- Ethnosemantic Analysis of Luo Onithological Terminology
- Ethnosemantic Analysis of Luo Entomological Terminology
- Ethnosemantic Analysis of Luo Zoological Terminology with special reference to mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

This kind of future research will need to be necessarily extended to cover the entire ethnoecology of the Luo people by addressing the terminological concerns from cultural and linguistic perspectives. For our purposes in the present study, we need to focus on the botanical part of *Luo Biological Dictionary*. Generously illustrated with colour, photographs and drawings, the work forms exciting lexicographic reading for linguists and non -linguists alike. The dictionary is dedicated to Professor David P.S. Wasawo, the first East African to be awarded a degree in science (M.A. Zoology at Oxford University, England). He has an exemplary teaching career which started at Makerekere University, Kampala, in Uganda, in 1952, and later moved to the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Professor Wasawo subsequently earned a PhD degree from the University of London and rose through the ranks

to become Professor of Zoology at the University of Nairobi, and Chairman of the University Council.

Interestingly, Professor John O. Kokwaro dedicated his earlier lexicographic work to Professor Olov Hedberg, who taught him at Uppsala University, Sweden, and Professor Bethwell A. Ogot, formerly of the University of Nairobi and author of the authoritative *History of the Southern Luo: Migration and Settlement* (Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1967). It would appear that the lexicographic practice in the biological sciences in Kenya and East Africa adopted the tradition of dedicating dictionaries to leading scholars in universities who have distinguished themselves in academic disciplines. Professor Bethwell A. Ogot became the first African Professor of History at the University of Nairobi and rose to become a Director of the Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Nairobi and Chancellor of Moi University, Eldoret in Kenya.

It is noteworthy that the botanist-turned-lexicographer, Professor John O. Kokwaro, the world famous historian Professor Bethwell A. Ogot and the Oxford trained pioneer zoologist, Professor David P. S. Wasawo, all hail from *Luoland*, at a place called Gem-Yala, in Siaya District, Nyanza Province, Kenya. Two historical anthropologists, Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo (1989: 9) have written the following account of the people from Siaya that:-

For the person of Siaya, 'landscape' is not a reference to the physiognomy of the terrain. Rather, it evokes the possibilities and limitations of space: encompassing the physical land, the people on it, and the culture through which people work out possibilities of the land. 'Landscape' means existence.

In this conception, 'landscape' refers to the total human ecology with all its economic, political, social, and cultural possibilities, including the utilization of the intellectual and natural resources available to the Luo people in Kenya and East Africa. It is this



understanding that has catapulted Kokwaro and his collaborators from the taxonomic to the lexicographic realm. The possibilities and limitations of the Luo space, culture, and environment gave rise to the mystical herbal practitioners. Some Luo traditional elders, medical practitioners and spiritualists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries feature in the introductory pages of the *Luo Biological Dictionary*. These Luo mystics, referred to by the lexicographers, were schooled in the traditional art and/or science of **yath** (herbal medicine).

Their names are given below:-

NAME	OCCUPATION	HOME
Ogweyo Omolo	Luo leader of repute	Kakwajuok-Kogol, Alego
Omedo Onoka	Luo elder and warrior	Kisumu
Ochola Ayieko	Luo warrior	Konyango-Karachuonyo
Gawo Mboya	Luo medicine man-seer	Kogweno-Karachuonyo
Ogengo Rapudo Alai	Luo medicine man	Kotetni-Kisumu
Nyaudi Omulo	Luo medicine woman	Seme Kakelo, Kisumu
Ombogo	Luo warrior of repute	Kapuonja, Kisumu

According to Kokwaro and Johns, the Luo dignitaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were not engaged in warfare to capture ‘landscape’ for the community; they were involved in traditional medical practice using their intimate herbal knowledge before the advent of European medicine in East Africa.

## 5.5 Luo Legends and Traditional Medicine

In Luoland, traditional medical practitioners still thrive today. Also closely linked to the people who had the knowledge of “yath” (medicine) or “bilo” (protective charms) most of them derived from plants, were those referred to by Mr. A. W. Mayor, a missionary and educator of the Church Missionary Society, at Maseno School in 1938 as *Thuond Luo* (translation: Luo Legends). This work was reprinted in 1984 by the Anyange Press, Kisumu, Kenya. The Luo legendary personages were so-designated because of their boundless courage, energy, valour, and mystical powers which qualified them in the eyes of their

people. They were called “thuondi” (heroes) of the entire Luo Nation. These heroes are given below in an alphabetical order:-

**5.5.1 Gor “Mahia” Wuod Ogalo of Kanyamwa:** He was a magician and medicine man who was reputed for turning himself into an animal or old woman. Remembered for his magical tricks, there is a famous Football Club named after him in Kenya today.

**5.5.2 Lala Kabanda of Ugenya Karadolo:** He was a reputable warrior who successfully fought off the enemy group of Omia attackers of Ugenya settlement.

**5.5.3 Lwanda Magere of Kano Sidho:** He was a mysterious warlord who fought off the enemy group of Lango attackers of Kano settlements, who gave him a beautiful bride as a sign of peace but was betrayed into enemy hands by the same bride. There is a close parallel between the story of Lwanda Magere and Samson, son of Manoah, in the Bible. The story goes that the Lwanda Magere turned into a large rock, which is a cultural tourist site today in Kano Plains of Nyando District, Kenya.

**5.5.4 Mboga of Uyoma:** He was a reputed medicine man and magician who was rather elusive but fought the European colonisers without being apprehended. However, he died of a mysterious illness which local people gave the name Nyalolwe (translation: disease of Lolwe - the Luo name of Lake Victoria) or Nyakamboga (disease of Mboga). Although Mboga was a medicine man; his expertise did not help him to treat this mysterious illness.

**5.5.5 Mien Olanda of Asembo:** He was a courageous Luo warrior and medicine man who defied even the traditions and customs of his own Asembo people; he was known to be a friend of Gor “Mahia” Wuod Ogalo of Kanyamwa and they practiced their magical arts together. Mien Olanda handed down his magical powers to his son known as Migesi Abogi.

**5.5.6 Nganyi of Umuri near Maseno:** He was a mysterious medicine man and rainmaker among the Luo and Abanyole; he inherited his powers from a mysterious woman

from Lake Victoria (called Lolwe, by the Luo people). He handed down his rainmaking powers and medicine to one of his sons.

**5.5.7 Ng'ong'a Wuod Odima of Alego:** He was the chief of Alego people and one of the first Africans to own a gun in that part of Kenya; he loved hunting very much. His people of Alego believed that he had the ability to talk with wild animals like elephants. He is a maternal ancestor of the famous Kenyan politician and cabinet minister, Hon. Raila Amolo Odinga (also called Agwambo by the Luo people and Njamba by the Gukuyu people for his role in Kenya's second liberation struggle); many lyrics have been composed in honour of Ng'ong'a Wuod Odima of Alego and Raila Amolo Odinga.

**5.5.8 Nyagudi Wuod Ogambi of Seme:** He was a courageous warlord and medicine man of no mean repute. He offered himself and a sheep for immolation as the ultimate sacrifice to bring peace between his people of Seme and their perennial enemies, the Asembo people.

**5.5.9 Nyawande Wuod Ojak of Ugenya Kager:** He was a reputable warlord who fought successfully the soldiers of Nabongo (King) Mumia of the Great Wanga Kingdom; his other name was Akunda. His ancestors came from Sigomere, in Uholo area.

**5.5.10 Obondo "Mumbo" Wuod Adenyo of Sakwa Kowak:** When Obondo was a young man; he saw a rainbow-like vision, which refused to go away. He became mentally disturbed and disappeared from Sakwa Kowak. It is said that he went into the lake (Lolwe) where he met the Fish Mother known in Dholuo as Min Rech; it was a large serpent in the lake. When he returned home. Obondo was possessed by a water spirit known as Mumbo, which would tell him which herbs or weeds he could harvest from the bottom of the lake to treat sick people. He emerged from the bottom of the lake with mystical powers and great knowledge of herbal medicine. The Kenyan nationalist leader, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga (1912-1994) belonged to Obondo "Mumbo's" clan of Sakwa Kowak. The clan members are reputed for their valour and mystical powers.

- 5.5.11 Odera Akang’o Wuod of Gem :** He was a powerful chief of the Gem people; he introduced schools, roads, modern agriculture and afforestation in Gem Yala after paying a visit to the Kabaka of Bugangda Kingdom. Chief Odera did not like some of the policies of the British colonialists. He was deported or exiled to Kisimayu in Somalia, and later died. It is not clear whether his body was buried in Kisimayu, Somalia or buried in Nairobi, Kenya. The people of Gem Yala still remember him for the introduction of exotic trees in the whole area and introducing modern techniques in agriculture. He was not known to have mystical powers in the form of traditional medicine.
- 5.5.12 Ogola Wuod Ayieke of Kareteng’:** He was a reputable medicine man and a very wealthy man. He was also a farmer, a livestock owner, and a community leader. He set up his base at Nyawita near Maseno from where he ruled both Luo and neighbouring Bantu clans such as; Umadhi, Ulago, Umajiga, Abasakami, Umtete and others. He collaborated with the British colonial authorities and helped establish Maseno as an administration and mission station of the British colonial government. Among his descendents are Joab Onyango Omino, a distinguished civil administrator and a legislator in the Government of Kenya.
- 5.5.13 Ogotu Wuod Kipapi of Warodi, Imbo-Kadimo:** He was well known as a warrior who defended his people of Imbo-Kadimo especially against the Sakwa people also of the same District. Ogotu was also known by the nickname “Raruoch.”
- 5.5.14 Okore “Chieng” Wuod Ogonda of Kagony:** He was a celebrated warlord who fought off the Lango intruders. His nickname was “Chieng” meaning “the sun.” Songs and lyrics were composed in his honour for the achievements he realized in his war career against the Lango intruders. He was a true hero. A Housing Estate in Kisumu City has been named after him.
- 5.5.15 Olango Wuod Odido of Tiengre:** He was a Luo warlord who built a fortified homestead and named it Ogik Chutho, which meant that the security of his homestead ensured that any enemy could not assail it.

**5.5.16 Onyango Randar Wuod Misumi of Sakwa Waora:** He was a courageous and tough warlord of the Wajal sub-clan of Sakwa Waora. He led the column of the Sakwa people who crossed the Winam Gulf (of Lake Victoria) to find new homelands in Sakwa-Awendo, in Southern Nyanza. He crossed the Winam Gulf again leading a band of warriors to Sakwa Bondo where he built a fortified homestead right at the centre of Sakwa territory, in order to monitor security from a point of vantage. He did not die in battle but of old age, having lived for well over 100 years.

**5.5.17 Poka Wuod Odima of Karaduodi Clan, near River Yala:** He was a warlord who had no ears. He successfully fought off Lango intruders and never died in battle. It is said that he died of a mysterious disease known as *nundu* (small pox).

**5.5.18 Tawo Kogot of Alego Mur:** He was a tough warlord who fought off all the enemies of the Alego people. He settled on Got Ngiya, a raised ground from where he could see all enemies when they were approaching. His career as a warlord lasted until the arrival of European colonisers. He died around 1922; two years after parts of Kenya became a crown colony of the British Government.

## **5.6 Luo Oral Literature and Folklore**

The collection 'Keep My Words': Luo Oral Literature, is an authoritative work by Benedict Onyango-Ogutu, an ethnographer who pioneered work in Luo folklore in the early 1970's in collaboration with Adrian A. Roscoe, a former lecturer in literature at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. In welcoming the work when it was published, Kenyan Africanist scholar Ogot wrote:-

During the post-independence period in Africa, there has been a great and legitimate concern among Africanists on the continent and in foreign lands with traditional African culture and its continuing relevance in the modern world. Many African Institutes have been established to study complex culture phenomena such as thought systems, art forms, traditional religions, and systems of government. These phenomena are studied partly for their intrinsic interest and value, and partly because the African response to the challenge of the modern world is conditioned at every turn by the wealth and complexity of traditional ideas and attitudes. (Ogot 1974: 5).

The words of Pristine, “bury my bones but keep my words”, have been appropriately used as the title of this seminal work on Luo oral literature in the sense that although generations come and go, but folklore is handed down over the ages. It is in this context that knowledge of ethnobotanical terminology must be understood as part of “the wealth and complexity of traditional ideas” but which still have relevance in the modern world, as so aptly elucidated by Professor Bethwell A. Ogot in his foreword to *Keep My Words: Luo Oral Literature* (1974: 5). We need to explain what is meant by folklore. According to Dorson (1959: 1):-

Folklore is a word with a short but turbulent history. An Englishman named William John Thoms coined it in 1846, to replace the cumbersome popular antiquities then in vogue to designate the loving study of old customs, usages, and superstitions.

Interest increased with the Darwinian theory of biological evolution taking root. Books were published on the subject with Thomas Sternberg taking a leading role with the publication in 1851, *The Dialect and Folklore of Northhamshire*. In 1878, a group of scholars formed the Folklore Society, which has been publishing a journal on the subject. In the next few years, the word “folklore” was adopted in the European continent, North America and other parts of the world. The American Folklore Society was founded in 1888 and the most active membership came from anthropologists, who were interested in North American Indian “folk-tales”, later, interest developed in “folk-songs” as well. In North America, “folklore” has customarily focussed on the oral traditions of;

- Narratives,
- Songs,
- Proverbs, and
- Sayings and other aspects of the spoken word.

In Africa, the study of “folklore” has assumed “a nationalistic spirit” especially after most African countries gained political independence from former colonial masters. Perhaps, the person who revolutionised folklore studies in Africa was Ruth Finnegan when she published *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford University Press, 1970). Before the publication of the voluminous book, what was then “folklore” or “oral literature” was not systematic; it was

also not readily accessible to students of African cultural studies or researchers in the field. It has been argued that:-

The concept of oral literature is an unfamiliar one to most people brought up in cultures which like those contemporary Europe, lay stress on the idea of literacy and written tradition. In the popular view it seems to convey on the one hand, the idea of mystery, on the other, that of crude and artistically undeveloped formulations... [...] Oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion - There is no other way it can be realised as a literary product (Finnegan 1970:1-2).

Scholars interested in the *interpretation* of the oral literary or folk-lore material may find already collected sources very useful. In East Africa, a number of educators and literary personages emerged in the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's, putting a lot of stress on oral literature or folklore. At the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University in Nairobi, oral literature and folklore took centre stage in the curriculum of the departments of Linguistics, Languages and Literature. The Institute of African Studies at the University of Nairobi also played a leading role in conducting research and publishing the District Socio-Cultural Profiles in Kenya, which included material from oral literary sources.

It was also during the same period that Kokwaro endeavoured to do Afrocentric lexicographic research in "folk-taxonomy" of plants in East Africa which saw the publication of his two influential bilingual *Luo-English/Botanical Dictionary* and *Luo Biological Dictionary* (with Johns); all these sources cited are included in the bibliography of this work for further reference. Clearly, an ethno-semantic analysis of Luo botanical terminology in this study must necessarily blend a number of disciplines which stress culture-specific configurations, namely: botany, ethnobotany, ethnoecology, oral history, oral literature/folklore, linguistics, ethnosemantics, mythology, anthropology, lexicography, terminology, and many other areas which take cognisance of the cultural reality of a people and their environment.

In East Africa, the Kenya Oral Literature Association (KOLA) was formed in 1986 as an autonomous body of artistes, researchers, scholars and teachers with academic and professional backgrounds in literature, linguistics, sociology, history, Kiswahili, philosophy, and other relevant disciplines. The basic interest of KOLA is to advance the interdisciplinary study of African oral cultures and organizing workshops, facilitating performances, conducting research and publishing findings of the study of oral cultures in Kenya. Included in one of the study of the KOLA activities was the *Oral Testimonies Project* in which the association worked in collaboration with Panos London and Ford-Foundation to document people's perception of development through oral testimonies in five districts of Kenya, namely: Mount Elgon, Kwale, Migori, Kitui and Nyeri.

KOLA has also trained people in research techniques, which bring together scholars from diverse disciplines to tackle culture-specific developmental and environmental concerns in Kenya. In the next chapter, we shall look at the meanings of plant names in Luo society and how they are derived.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have examined the context of ethnobotany as a sub-field and lexicographic works in Luo-English bilingual dictionaries. We have also examined the connection between Luo oral tradition, folklore, and history; and the manner in which these help in the contextualization of ethnobotanical terminology in general and the meanings of plant names specifically. The next chapter examines briefly the macro-structural possibilities of the Luo ethnobotanical lexicon.



## CHAPTER 6

### LUO ETHNOBOTANICAL LEXICON: TOWARD MACRO-STRUCTURAL POSSIBILITIES

#### 6.1 Introduction

In lexicographic practice, the languages in use are often designated  $L_1$  (for First Language) and  $L_2$  (for Second Language). Landau (2001: 9) has categorized bilingual dictionaries into two, namely:-

#### 6.2 Unidirectional and Bidirectional Dictionaries

- **Unidirectional:** This means that the bilingual dictionaries are in the format  $L_1/L_2$ , (also known as **monodirectional**). Such dictionaries go in one direction only, for instance, from English to French.
- **Bidirectional:** The bi-directional dictionaries which really consist of two dictionaries in one, in the format  $L_1/L_2$  and  $L_2/L_1$ , as is the case with Kokwaro's *Luo-English/Botanical Dictionary*. Such dictionaries go in two directions, for instance, from English to French and from French to English.

The  $L_1/L_2$  bilingual dictionary is sometimes called “an active dictionary”, while the  $L_2/L_1$  bilingual dictionary is known as “a passive dictionary”, (Landau, 2001: 1).

The *Luo-English/Botanical Dictionary* is both *active* and *passive* because it can be used both for comprehension of meaning of plant names and concepts, and as a reference as well. The lexical entries in Part II include botanical nomenclature and, occasionally, common English

names and their Luo equivalents. For the purpose of this study, we shall use the *unidirectional* format of L<sub>1</sub>/L<sub>2</sub> with Luo as our frame of reference.

The L<sub>1</sub> in our context is Luo while the L<sub>2</sub> is the scientific botanical nomenclature given in the published lexicon of Professor John O. Kokwaro of the Department of Botany, at the University of Nairobi. In Appendix A, the ethnobotanical lexicon which the present study is based upon is arranged in alphabetical order. Alphabetization of the Luo plant names and their botanical descriptions form the lexicon.

### **6.3 The Structure and Style of Luo-English Botanical Dictionary**

In dictionary making, there are four basic systems of classification of lexical entries, namely:-

- alphabetic (word lists are arranged alphabetically)
- morphemic (word lists are arranged according to morphemic forms)
- semantic (word lists are arranged according to word meanings)
- haphazard classification (no system at all is used in arranging the word lists)

Landau (2001:107) explains the system of alphabetization thus:-

Dictionaries usually alphabetize letter-by-letter rather than word by word. Letter-by-letter arrangement has the great virtue that readers need not know whether a compound is spelled as one word, a hyphenated word, or as two words. Since usage is divided on compounds ... and is constantly shifting, the ability to locate such terms is of considerable practical importance.

The lexical entries in the *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* have many compound words, some hyphenated, and others spelled as two words. The method used by Kokwaro of letter-by-letter alphabetization is, therefore, of practical accessibility of the ethnobotanical terms to the user of the dictionary.

From Landau’s work, it is clearly understood that alphabetization taps a “universal skill” among both specialists and non-specialists. The only requirement for access is literacy of the alphabet, in order to access the descriptions of lexical entries. Alphabetization is, therefore, the only way of arranging words for quick access in lexicographic practice. Kokwaro’s *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* and his subsequent work (with Johns).

*Luo-Biological Dictionary* employs the technique of alphabetization to good effect. A detailed analysis of the alphabet clusters as outlined below:-

#### **ALPHABETICAL FREQUENCY TABLE**

<b>Alphabet</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A	113	17.2
B	26	4
C	5	0.8
D	10	1.5
F	2	0.3
G	2	0.3
H	3	0.5
I	1	0.2
J	5	0.8
K	37	5.6
L	8	1.2
M	66	10.1
N	77	11.7
O	198	30.2
P	14	2.1
R	31	4.7
S	29	4.4
T	17	2.6
U	1	0.2
W	3	0.5
Y	8	1.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>100</b>

## STATISTICS

Statistics

		A	B	C	D	F	G
N	Valid	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		113.00	26.00	5.00	10.00	2.00	2.00
Median		113.00	26.00	5.00	10.00	2.00	2.00
Mode		113	26	5	10	2	2
Range		0	0	0	0	0	0
Minimum		113	26	5	10	2	2
Maximum		113	26	5	10	2	2
Sum		113	26	5	10	2	2

Statistics

		H	I	J	K	L	M
N	Valid	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.00	1.00	5.00	37.00	8.00	66.00
Median		3.00	1.00	5.00	37.00	8.00	66.00
Mode		3	1	5	37	8	66
Range		0	0	0	0	0	0
Minimum		3	1	5	37	8	66
Maximum		3	1	5	37	8	66
Sum		3	1	5	37	8	66

Statistics

		N	O	P	R	S	T
N	Valid	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		77.00	198.00	14.00	31.00	29.00	17.00
Median		77.00	198.00	14.00	31.00	29.00	17.00
Mode		77	198	14	31	29	17
Range		0	0	0	0	0	0
Minimum		77	198	14	31	29	17
Maximum		77	198	14	31	29	17
Sum		77	198	14	31	29	17

Statistics

		U	W	Y
N	Valid	1	1	1
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		1.00	3.00	8.00
Median		1.00	3.00	8.00
Mode		1	3	8
Range		0	0	0
Minimum		1	3	8
Maximum		1	3	8
Sum		1	3	8

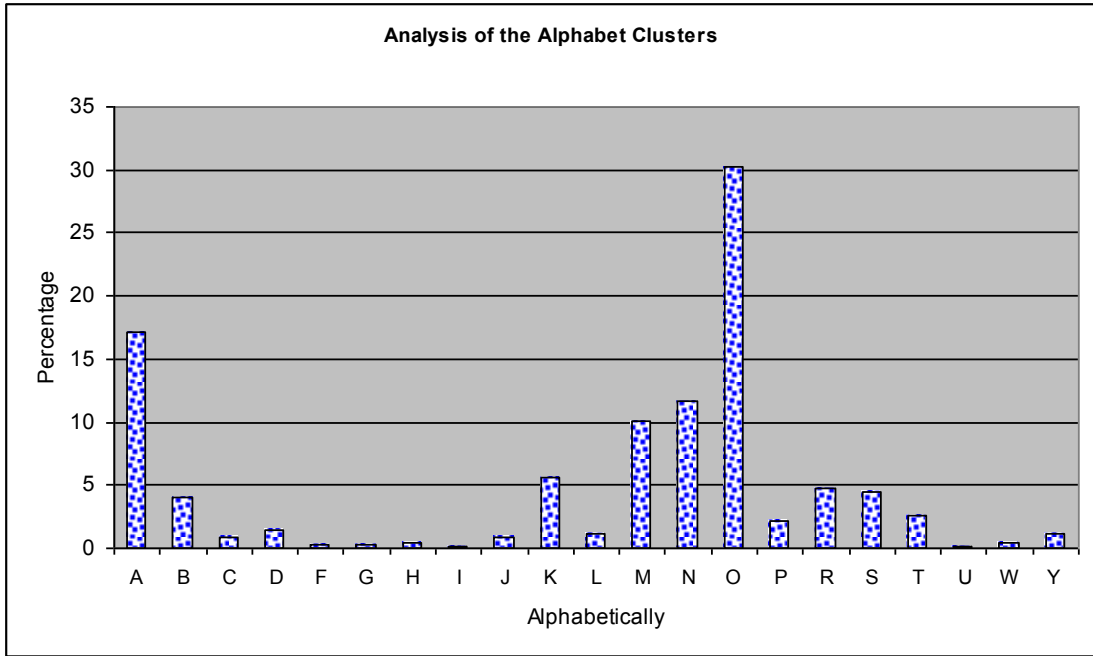


Figure 2: A Bar Graph Analysis of the Alphabet clusters

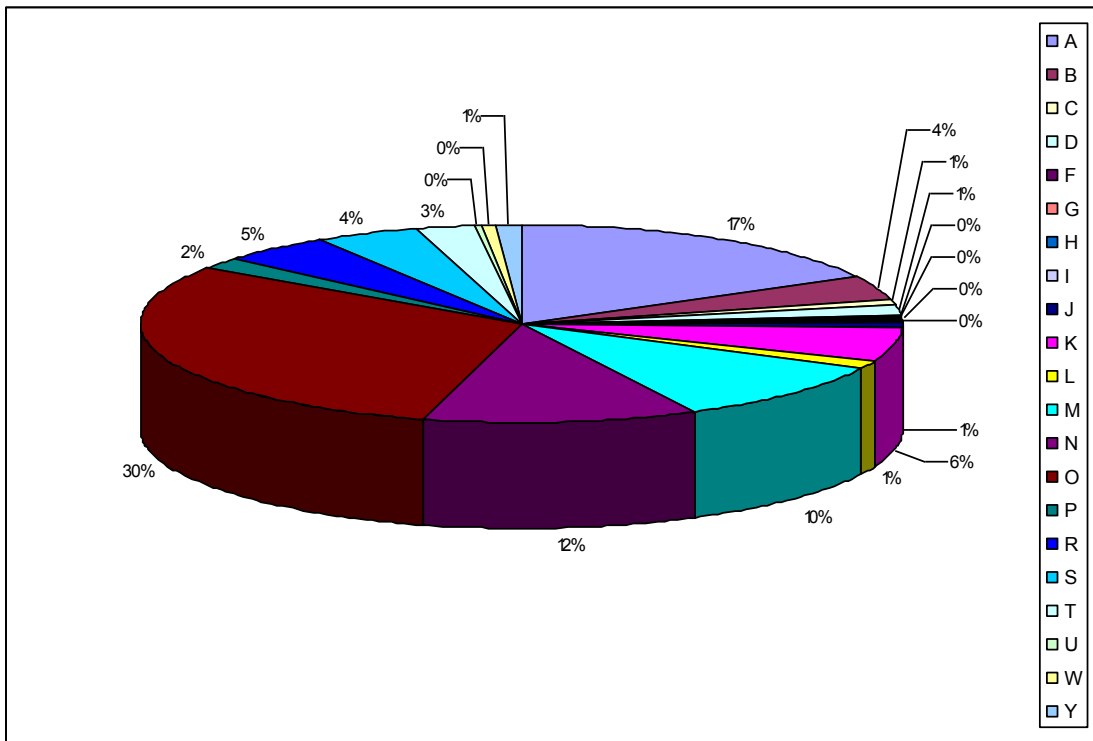
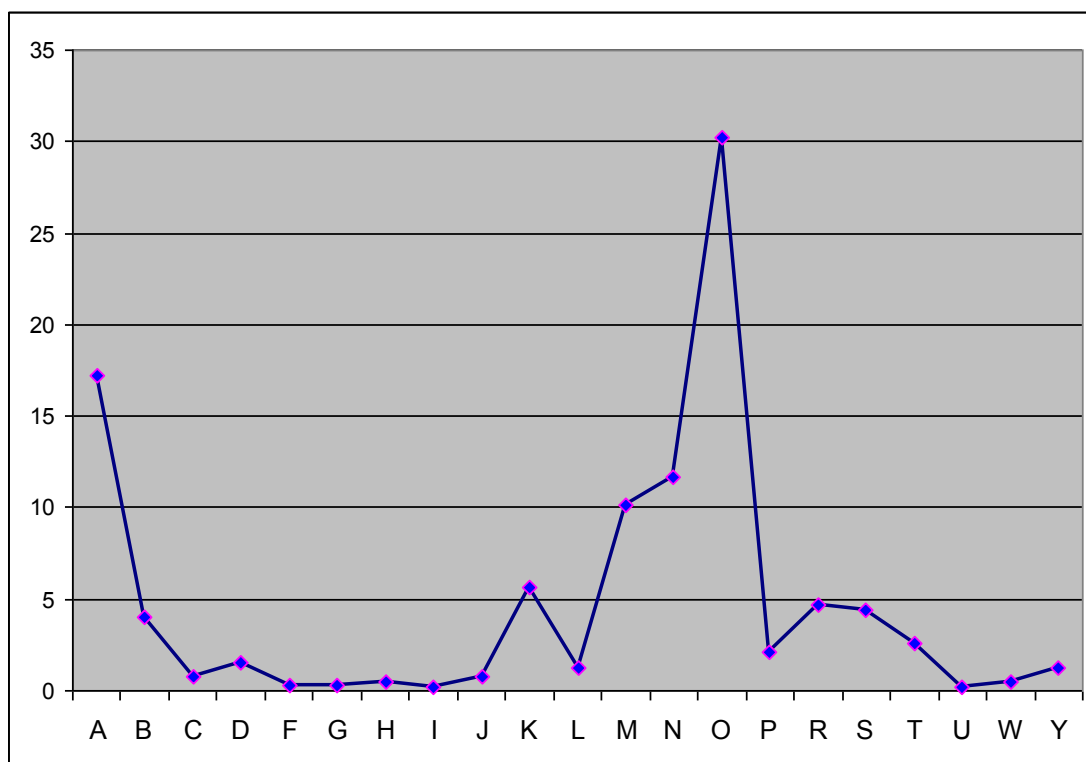


Figure 3: A Pie Chart Showing the Alphabet Clusters

## LINE GRAPH



**Figure 4: Line graph of the Alphabet Clusters**

A count of all the headwords in the *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* reveals a total of 656 lexical entries. An analysis of the ethnobotanical terminology in alphabetic clusters reveals that the 'O' cluster and the 'A' cluster of lexical entries lead. The head-words with the 'O' cluster lead with 198(30.2 %), the 'A' cluster is second with 113(17.2 %) followed by the 'M' cluster with 66(10.1 %). The 'K' cluster has 37(5.6 %) while the 'R' cluster has 31(4.7 %), 'S' cluster has 29 (4.4 %) and the 'B' cluster has 26(4.0 %). The other clusters represented are: 'T' cluster 17(2.6 %), 'P' cluster 14(2.1 %), 'D' cluster 10(1.5 %), 'Y' cluster 8(1.2 %) and 'L' cluster 8(1.2 %). The alphabetic groupings which fall below 1.0 % are as follows: 'C' cluster 5(0.8 %), 'J' cluster 5(0.8 %), 'H' cluster 3(0.5 %), 'G' cluster 2(0.3 %), 'I' cluster 1(0.2 %), 'U' cluster 1(0.2 %).

There were no lexical entries recorded under letters ‘E’, ‘V’, ‘X’ and ‘Z’. The possibility of an ethnobotanical term under the ‘E’ cluster is not remote since the letter does exist in Luo orthography. However, letters ‘V’, ‘X’ and ‘Z’ do not exist in Luo and if borrowing does take place from English, Swahili or other languages, ‘V’ is rendered as ‘B’, ‘X’ is rendered as ‘S’ and ‘Z’ is also rendered as ‘S’ in Luo orthography.

In Kokwaro’s *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*, the head-word is printed in capital letters. The botanical nomenclature is printed in italics. There is a comma separating the headword and the botanical equivalent. The botanical descriptions are placed under the headword and their botanical equivalents in a new paragraph. This method has been used consistently throughout Kokwaro’s *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*. An example is given below for illustration purposes:-

**ANG’WE,** *Cymbopogon excavatus (Gramineae) (Plate C6c)*

Perennial 60-120 cm. high, usually with a short rhizome. Leaf blades up to 15 mm. wide, rounded at the base. A grass of low palatability because of its bitter leaves and “peppery” scent. A less disturbing weed.

The traditional method of arranging the entry words (or head-words) in dictionaries by alphabetical order (**ALPHABETIZATION**) is part of the macro-structural possibilities in lexicographic practice. Usually, the words are printed in bold type. Some dictionaries have the headwords in lower-case while others have them in upper case (**CAPITALIZATION**). In Kokwaro’s *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*, both **ALPHABETIZATION** and **CAPITALIZATION** have been used to good effect. Apparently, the two techniques have been employed for ease of reference. That is the reason for the Luo ethnobotanical head-

words in this study being bold and in upper case, for consistency and harmony with the *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*.

The contents of Kokwaro's dictionary include different botanical features of the plants to be found in Luo country. The macro-structure of the dictionary is outlined below:-

**Preface:**

The lexicographer gives introductory and background information about the work.

**Part I of the Dictionary (Luo-Botanical Names):**

The lexicographer gives the Luo plant names, their botanical equivalent and their taxonomic descriptions.

**Plates:**

The lexicographer uses botanic illustrations (drawings) to facilitate accessibility of information and ease of identification.

**Part II of the Dictionary (Botanical-Luo or English-Luo):**

The lexicographer reverses the alphabetic order using the L<sub>2</sub>/L<sub>1</sub> format with the botanical names being arranged alphabetically.

**Illustrated Botanical Terms:**

The lexicographer deploys the effective use of botanical illustrations of different types for ease of accessibility of technical terminology in botany, especially plant body including leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, stems and roots in great detail.

**Artificial Key to Types of Fruits:**

The lexicographer gives a key to different types of fruits including the simple, aggregate and multiple structures and formations.



**Units of Classification:**

The lexicographer gives a list of botanical classifications used universally by scientists.

**Bibliography:**

The lexicographer gives a list of bibliographic sources which informed the compilation of the dictionary.

In this study, we have mainly focused on the plant names and their descriptions. We have also focused on the meanings of the plant names in a Luo culture specific configuration. The study is limited to the ethnobotanical corpus of Kokwaro in *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*, first published in 1972 by the East African Publishing House, Nairobi, Kenya and the botanical section of his subsequent work (with John's) the *Luo Biological Dictionary*, published 1998 by the East African Education Publishers, Nairobi, Kenya.

**6.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have examined the macro-structural possibilities of the Luo ethnobotanical lexicon. The effective use of alphabetization and capitalization in Kokwaro's dictionaries have also been elucidated. In the next chapter, a detailed analysis of Luo plant names with implications for future LSP dictionaries in ethnobotany will be adequately covered.

## CHAPTER 7

### ANALYSIS OF MEANINGS OF PLANT NAMES IN A LUO CULTURAL CONTEXT

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the cultural and linguistic analysis of the meaning of Luo plant names. In addition to establishing the suffixes involved in the formation of Luo plant names, the socio-cultural meaning of the plant names is also explored. Alphabetization has been exploited for ease of reference.

According to Lekganyane (2000:22) the socio-cultural meaning of language is an important element in the study of lexicography since: “It is not only the instrumental value of language that stimulates its development but also the socio-cultural status given to it by its speakers... The community plays an important role in as far as the continuous use of the language is concerned.”

In the case of the Luo language, Kokwaro has made a major contribution to the socio-cultural status of the language by documenting the plant names and plant uses. He has also contributed generally to the documentation of ethnobotanical terminology in other East African languages.

Some of his works are given below:-

- Kokwaro (1976) *Medicinal Plants of East Africa.*
- Kokwaro (1979) *Classification of East African Crops.*
- Kokwaro (1982) *A Check-List of Botanical, Samburu and Rendile Names of Plants of “IPAL” Study Area, Marsabit District Kenya*

- Kokwaro (1994) *Flowering plant families of East Africa*

While the above named works of Kokwaro are a useful technical reading on plant systematics in an East African context, the two major lexicographic works that constitute our center of interest are:-

- Kokwaro (1972) *Luo English Botanical Dictionary*
- Kokwaro and Johns (1998) *Luo Biological Dictionary*

According to Lekganyane (2001:22) when a speech community chooses to hold a language in high status, members of the community will engage in different cultural events to promote the language. Lekganyane (2001: 22-23) asserts that: “Such events will result in the community respecting and having confidence in the language. It is important to note that people can only communicate and know their cultures through the use of their mother tongue...”

In the case of the Luo language, an organization known as Luo Union-East Africa used to promote the language by sponsoring annual cultural festivals in the City of Kisumu and holding debates in the language. Among the Luo people of Kenya specifically and East Africa in general, cultural debates are an integral part of the production of knowledge.

In modern Kenya, the Luo have kept their language and culture alive not only in so-called Luo Nyanza on the shores of Lake Victoria, but also in large cities like Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa. In the 1990’s the Luo Council of Elders under the “kanship” (leadership) of Jaduong’ Fanuel Adala Otuko, independent Kenya’s first ambassador to the former Soviet Union in the 1960’s, among other leaders such as Jaduong’ Koyo Opien of Karachuonyo

(Kakwajuok), Jaduong Riaga Ogalo of Kasipul-Kabondo and the Secretary-General of the Luo Council of Elders, Professor Gilbert E.M. Ogutu of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, held a number of cultural events promoting the language, culture and civic participation in community development in Luo country and other parts of Kenya. These events have taken place with much energy and gusto. Through the institution of the Luo Council of Elders, Professor Gilbert E.M. Ogutu organized a number of environmental forums in the Nyanza Province of Kenya to create awareness on issues related to health, with special reference to HIV/AIDS: other themes included food production, afforestation, cultural tourism, fishing industry and other ecological matters related to Luo living traditions.

In Ogutu's work on the institution of "Ker" (the Luo Paramount Cultural Leader) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he reckons that "without our roots we are fruitless dead leaves" as a community. Ogutu (2001:24) states further that: "The Luo Council of Elders, has, over the years, remained a grassroots outfit. Its foremost role and responsibility is people driven, that is, to mobilize, sensitize and educate the masses on all matters affecting their well-being."

The preservation of the biodiversity of the Luo people and the practice of social forestry, including the cultivation of different plants for food, medicine and other purposes in the Luo community would necessarily entail institutions such as the Luo Council of Elders mobilizing the populace from the grassroots level to the entire region of Lake Victoria Basin. Understanding the interaction of the people and their plants would necessarily include linguistic analysis in ethnobotany.



**Figure 5: Obuola Nyandiga (left), a tobacco farmer, with John Onyango Oyier (right,) a village elder at Kamagambo. In the background is natural grassland and trees overshadowing the human settlement.**

## **7.2 Linguistic Analysis in Ethnobotany: Towards “Cultural Grammar” in a Luo Context.**

To borrow a leaf from Lekganyane (2001:23) people, can only communicate and know their culture through their mother tongue; in this case, the Luo language like other indigenous African languages will enable the people to communicate effectively about environment and natural resources which include the flora and fauna in any given locality.

According to Gary J. Martin in *Ethnobotany: A “People and Plants” Conservation Manual*, learning a local language when doing ethnobotanical work is essential. There are various ways of analysing the plant names but the two major methods employed by ethnologists and lexicographers are to:-

- Work with native speakers of the language
- Study any cultural grammar books and dictionaries that may be available.

In our attempt to study language, culture and society it is noted that: “of the world’s estimated 6000 living languages, most are spoken by small ethnic minorities ranging from a few individuals to several thousand people.” Martin (1995:2002). Most of these minority languages have not been reduced into written form. Fortunately for the Luo language, it is not only written but many scholars have actually studied the culture and the language. Apparently, this cultural and linguistic attention that Luo is enjoying has parallels in South African languages, for example, Patricia Schonstein Pinnock’s *Xhosa: A Cultural Grammar for Beginners*, which draws from the framework of linguistic anthropologists/anthropological linguists like Alessandro Duranti (1997:27) who reckon that: “to know a culture is like knowing a language. They are both mental realities. Furthermore, to describe a culture is like describing a language.” Hence, the goal of ethnographic descriptions is the writing of “cultural grammar.” In Pinnock (1994:1) the culture, history and language of the Xhosa people “consisting of various centuries-old societies called Mpondo, Bomvana, Thembu, Mpondomise, Xesibe, Mfengu, Hlubi, the Xhosa proper and others, which were bound century after century by ties of marriage...” is described for the learner of the language and culture of the people. The cultural grammar includes topics of interest for example, folktales, idioms and the first Xhosa dictionaries. Other topics of interest include illnesses, remedies and medicinal plants (Pinnock 1994:59-60).

In the same tradition of combining culture with language in an attempt to understand a people is Paul Mboya’s *Luo: Kitgi Gi Timbegi*, a handbook on Luo customs first published in 1938. The handbook on Luo customs was translated into English by Jane Achieng of the University of Nairobi Library and published by Atai Joint Limited, Nairobi, Kenya in November 2001. Paul Mboya’s *Luo: “Kitgi Gi Timbegi”* is more or less a cultural grammar of the Luo people covering topics of interest such as: cultural leadership; religion; food; fishing; building;

homes; marriage and the family; parenthood; death and burial; livestock; celebrations and festivals; agriculture; rainmaking; trade and work; social status; fundraising; traditional medical practitioners; handling boats on the lake; criminology and social order; hunting; travelling; illnesses and diseases; numerology; oral narratives and folklore; proverbs and sayings; word list / glossary; vegetables and mushrooms, and other fields.

These fields do provide any lexicographic and terminological work with ethnosemantic fields to draw from in any attempt to understand the interaction between people and plants; culture and nature as it were. Crystal (1985:274) states that:-

Vocabulary of a language is not simply a listing of independent items (as the head words in a dictionary would suggest) but is organised into areas, or FIELDS, within which words interrelate and define each other in various ways. The words denoting color can be understood only by placing it in relation to other terms which occur with it in demarcating the colour spectrum.

For us to understand the meaning of plant names, we must necessarily look at the fields given in the works of pioneer ethnographers like Paul Mboya. Another “cultural grammar” by the same author is *Richo Ema Kelo Chira* first published in 1978 by the East African Publishing House, Nairobi Kenya and translated by Ojwang and Okungu (2001) under the heading *It is Evil Which Breeds the Curse*. This ethnographic work is more or less a brief version of *Luo: Kitgi Gi Timbegi* (which translates as *Luo: Their Traditions and Customs*).

Paul Mboya served the Luo society with distinction as a pastor, educator, civil administrator, ethnographer, and as the Ker (Paramount Cultural Leader) of Luo Union-East Africa. He blended both African (Luo) cultures with British culture during his long public life. He was honoured by British Government as an M.B.E. (Member of the British Empire); but he, at the

same time advocated for having firm cultural foundations for the Luo people in East Africa. His motivation in writing the ethnography was the fact that many people went to him to seek guidance and counsel on Luo culture. In this abridged version of Luo “cultural grammar” Paul Mboya covers ethno-semantic fields such as: How Curses Vanquish Families; Illnesses Related to Curses; Widow Custody; Infertility and Marriage; Diseases of Women; Sons and Fathers; Polygamy; The Bedroom; Land; Death in the Family; Social Misfits; Christianity in Context; Intimacy; Sexuality; Naming of Children; Honouring Parents; Crime; Theft of Livestock; Elopement; Homicide; Marriage; Drinking Alcohol in Two Homes; Drowning; Prayer of the Dying; Killing Animals; Chastity; Mortuary Rites; Symbol of an Axe; Lactating Mothers; Losing a Baby; Organizing the Home; Death and Burial; Clan Systems; How to “Eat Bones”; Twins; Customs Regarding Death and Burial; Modern Society and Development; Incest; Food; Polygamy and Co-Wives; Conflicts; Greetings; Hierarchy of Authority; Chiefdoms; Clans; Eldership; Visitation; Genealogy.

Another ethnographer, Dr. Nicholas Antipas Othieno-Ochieng’, in his book *Luo Social System (with a Special Analysis of Marriage Rituals)*, wrote a simplified version of Luo “cultural grammar” by covering the following fields: Brief Historical Outline; Social And Political Groupings; Luo Character; Clan System; Family Structure; Analysis of Marriage Rituals; Kinship; and Effects of Social Change in Family and Clan Structure.

Three other works in the tradition of Pinnock’s “cultural grammars” include: Shadrack Malo’s *Dholuo Without Tears* first published in 1952 by, the Church Missionary Society, Maseno; and Reenish Achieng Odhiambo and Jens Aagaard – Hansen’s *DhoLuo Course Book* published in 1998 in collaboration with the Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory (DBL), the



Kenyan-Danish Health Research Project (KEDAHR) and the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) Language Orientation School, Nairobi. Another work on “cultural grammar” is *Dholuo Grammar for Beginners* by Peter Onyango Onyoyo published in 2001 by Lake Publishers and Enterprises Ltd, Kisumu, Kenya. Among the fields covered are: The Language Variation Groups; Provenance of Luo People; Nationality; People of other Ethnic Groups; and many other fields such as onomastics or naming system according to: time; events; place; phenomenon and inheritance.

### **7.3 Translating, Interpreting and Paraphrasing in the Study of the Luo Ethnobotanical Terminology.**

No attempt has been made to study Luo plant names within a cultural and linguistic configuration with specific reference to meaning; this study seeks to do *three* things, namely:-

- Translating Luo plant names into English
- Interpreting the meaning of Luo plant names
- Paraphrasing any culture-specific information that may be gleaned from Luo oral folklore.

In the analysis, the prefixes and suffixes, which contribute to the formation of plant names, will also be examined. The items mentioned above are dealt with in more detail later on in this chapter.

The technique of alphabetization has been used in the art and craft of lexicography for a long time. Kokwaro in his two seminal lexicographic works, namely: *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* and *Luo Biological Dictionary*, has employed the technique of alphabetization quite effectively. According to Landau (2001: 107):

Dictionaries usually alphabetize letter-by-letter rather than word-by-word ... Letter-by-letter arrangement has the great virtue that readers need not know whether a compound is spelled as one word, as a hyphenated word, or as two words. Since usage is often divided about compounds ... and is constantly shifting, the ability to locate such terms is of considerable practical importance.

Capen in her work *Bilingual Dholuo-English Dictionary / Kenya* and Odaga in her work *English-Dholuo Dictionary* have also used the technique of alphabetization effectively. In the Luo “cultural grammars” or ethnographic descriptions of Luo culture, glossaries or word-lists have been given at the end of the books. In Paul Mboya’s *Luo: Kitgi Gi Timbegi* (translation into English by Jane Achieng), a glossary has been given to help the reader understand the Luo culture-specific terms and concepts. Here are some of these words relevant to the semantic field in ethnobotany (Achieng 2001: 249-254):-

- AJAWA** : Calabash with pebbles inside *Nyakalondo* spirits are said to talk from the calabash to treat people.
- APOTH** : A type of vegetable often cooked with others to soften them. It is slippery and very delicious when properly cooked.
- ATIPA** : A type of green vegetables.
- AWINJA** : Simsim roasted, pounded and then mixed with oil often used in rituals and sacrifices.
- BONDO** : Euphorbia tree
- BUOMBWE** : A climbing or trailing herb from a tuberous root, with or without tendrils. Can be pounded and in the treatment of boils or abscess.
- BWARE** : Shrub or tree up to about 10 m. high, with spreading or drooping branches.
- DEK** : A type of vegetable

- DUNGA** : Shrub or tree of Acacia up to 5 m. high.
- JANAWI** : A medicine man using *nawi* (concoctions) which may be harmful
- MAGIRA** : Maize roasted and the skin removed then pounded and crushed and cooked with oil. Other Luo refer to *magira* when talking of any type of soup and thick soup-like foods.
- MIKINGA** : Special grass cut for a broom to sweep a grave.
- MUTKURU** : A plant used as poison
- NGETA** : Waist beads made from sword beans.
- NG'OYE** : Leaves used to keep awake when chewed
- OSIRI** : Shrub or climber of Acacia up to 6 m. high.
- OTHO** : Date tree
- POWO** : A common shrub in Luoland
- WANANDE** : Woody shrub, often climbing.

From the above Luo glossary in the field of ethnobotany, English translations and interpretations have been given to make the culture and language accessible to the reader. In “cultural grammars” which give ethnographic descriptions of cultures, cross-lingual glossaries are employed to achieve simplification for the benefit of the reader. Terminologies within the context of ethnobotany are embedded in the cultural configuration as can be seen from the different uses to which different plant products are put within the community. Achieng (2001: 255) has also given a short glossary of some popular Luo vegetables with English translations namely:-

- ARUDA** : Pumpkin leaves
- AWAYO** : Double thorn, jimson weed, and yellow sorrel
- ALANG'O** : Green pulses

<b>BOO</b>	:	Scarlet runner
<b>DEK</b>	:	Spider flower
<b>NDEMRA</b>	:	Bassela alba
<b>ODIELO</b>	:	Spiderwort
<b>OBWANDA</b>	:	Vegetables that grows wild as weeds
<b>OKURO</b>	:	Khaki weed puncture vine
<b>MITOO</b>	:	Vegetables with a tangy taste when cooked. Also grow wild.

In Gordon Wilson's *Luo Customary Law and Marriage Law*, a glossary covering cultural knowledge, with some lexical items in the field related to ethnobotany are alphabetically listed and translated into English to make the customary laws accessible to the reader. Some examples of the Luo words given by Wilson (1968:12-14) and English translations are given below:-

<b>AJUOGA</b>	:	Medicine man, dealing with individuals
<b>BILO</b>	:	Medicines made by <i>Jabilo</i> ; <i>Porobilo</i> , to make medicines or to divine.
<b>BONDO</b>	:	A tree used to demarcate boundaries
<b>LEK</b>	:	Communal grazing
<b>OGAKA</b>	:	Small sisal like plant used to demarcate boundaries.
<b>OJUOK</b>	:	A plant used for fencing
<b>OKANG</b>	:	Land cultivated for the first time
<b>THIM</b>	:	Wasteland or forest
<b>WUON</b>	:	Father, owner, usually qualified, <i>wuon dala</i> (owner of the home)
<b>WUON LOWO:</b>		Owner of the land

In the Luo community, a homestead is known as “dala” or “pacho.” In Ochieng’s (1985: 10-11) ethnographic description of the Luo people round Lake Victoria, we get a visual representation of a traditional Luo homestead, enclosed with a live fence of euphorbia or thorn trees. Typically, the homestead is round in shape. (For details see Appendix E). According to Ochieng’ (1985: 10) a family in Luo society consists of:-

- A man
- His wife or wives
- His sons and daughters
- His sons’ wives
- His grandchildren

The idea of a Luo family may be extended to include:-

- A man’s brothers
- A man’s sisters
- His brothers’ wife or wives
- His brothers’ children
- His brothers’ grandchildren.

The size of the family could also be “swollen by grandparents, nephews, aunts and servants” and other extended relatives of the man or his wife/wives. The Luo society is patrilineal: “by which is meant that inheritance of property, children, wives, power and so on comes from the male side, from father to son ...” (Ochieng’ 1985: 10).

With this family scenario, a typical Luo homestead is well planned for purposes of effective organization. The fence round the homestead was usually thorn trees or euphorbia trees

which have been always ritually significant in Luo homesteads. A man is king inside his euphorbia – fenced homestead, cultural speaking.

The key to ground plan include:-

1. **Od Mikayi** : House of First Wife  
(with a granary)
2. **Od Nyachira** : House of Second Wife  
(with a granary)
3. **Od Reru** : House of Third Wife  
(with a granary)
4. **Od Wuon Dala** (Pacho): House of the Owner of the Homestead also known as “*Abila*.” He had his granary attached to his house. This was to ensure food security for the households in the Homestead.
5. **Dipo** : Cattle Pen
6. **Simba Wuoyi Ma Kayo** : Cottage of Eldest Son
7. **Simba Wuoyi Matin** : Cottage of Younger Son
8. **Kirundu (Orundu)** : Small Garden
9. **Kirundu (Orundu)** : Small Garden
10. **Chiel Mar Ojuok Kata Kudho** : Fence of euphorbia or thorn trees
11. **Rot**: Minor Gate
12. **Kirundu (Orundu)**: Vegetable Garden
13. **Chiel Mar Ojuok Kata Kudho**: Fence of euphorbia or thorn trees
14. **Dero**: Granary

In Luo “cultural grammar” euphorbia or thorns used for fencing the homestead hold very special meaning. The ethnobotanical description (Kokwaro, 1972: 66) is given below:-

**OJUOK** : *Euphorbia tirucalii* (*Euphorbiaceae*)

Shrub or tree to 6 m; branchlets green, succulent, alternate or clustered, leafless except when young. Involucres creamy white in dense subsessile terminal clusters. Young branches, when roasted and chewed, the juice acts as a remedy for sore throat; frequently planted as a live hedge.

In the ethnobotanical description given by ICRAF (International Centre for Research in Agroforestry) in *A Selection of Useful Trees and Shrubs for Kenya*, the entry for *Ojuok* has the following culture-specific information:-

**Ecology:** Succulent shrub frequently planted as a boma (homestead) hedge in dry areas but also found as tree. It may come from India but now widespread and naturalized throughout Africa.

**Uses:** Live fence, boundary marking, fuel wood, cattle bomas, medicine (young branches) fodder, glue, latex (fish poison, insecticide).

**Description:** A dense straight stemmed tree to 6 m. or more, the branches smooth green, cylindrical in dense masses. Leaves: Small, present on young stems, soon dropping. Flowers: yellow-cream, small in dense clusters. Fruit: 3 part capsules, hard purple green across.

**Propagation:** Cuttings

**Management:** Fast growing, coppicing. Trim and top prune to make a hedge.

**Remarks:** Latex is very poisonous and dangerous to the eyes. Human milk is said a remedy if latex gets into the eyes. Medicine from the plant must be used with extreme care due to high toxicity. Trees said to harbour snakes.

It is only the “*wuon dala or pacho*” (owner of the homestead), and he must also be “*wuon lowo*” (owner of the land), who must perform the duty of “*chielo dala*” or “*pacho*” (fence the homestead) and “*chungo dhorangach*” (erect the gates of the homestead). In Luo “cultural grammar” and in accordance with the “Law of Property : Land Tenure and the Right Owner” (Wilson 1968:20) the land in border areas is kept clear of habitation and land owners are expected to build homesteads in such a way that communal grazing land (*lek*) is protected for the common good.

According to Richard Evans Schulte’s and Albert Hoffman in *Plants of the Gods*, (1992) plants have sacred, healing and hallucinogenic powers. Among the Luo people other plants, which have socio-cultural meaning and significance, include “*yago*” (sausage tree) and “*ng’owo*” (fig tree). According to B. Onyango-Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe (1974 and 1992: 19):-

Elders have singled out particular trees and rocks and declared them to be places where *Juok* (Luo High God) dwells on earth. The *Yago* or sausage tree is one example, the “*ngowo*” or fig tree another. Such trees belong to no one; only God is their owner and the land about them is sacrasanct. Likewise lakes and rivers are chosen as special places of veneration.

According to Kokwaro (1972: 94), the Ethnobotanical information about *yago* is as follows:-

**YAGO** : *Kigelia africana* (*bignoniaceae*)



Wide-spreading low-branched savannah tree up to 16 m. high; bark grey to pale brown. Leaves in threes, up to 45 cm. Long, pinnate, leaflets usually 7-9, 6-12 cm. long, scabrous. Corolla pale with reddish line outside, reddish-purple, up to 10 cm. Long. Fruit grey-green, sausage-shaped, 30-80 cm. Long, 7-10 cm. Broad, usually rounded at both ends, fibrous, slightly rough on both surfaces.

The ethnobotanical description of “yago” given in *ICRAF: A Selection of Useful Trees and Shrubs for Kenya*, the field notes on their identification, propagation and management for use by agricultural and pastoral communities, is given below:-

**YAGO:** *Kigelia africana (K.aethiopium) Bignoniaceae*

**Ecology:** Widespread in Africa, found wet savannah and along rivers in arid areas, from the Kenyan coast to the highlands, 0-1850 m.

**Uses:** Fuel wood, charcoal, poles, medicine (fruit and leaves) bee-forage, fodder (leaves), windbreaks, ornamental, fermentation of sugarcane and honey beer.

**Description:** A tree with a rounded crown, to 9m in open woodland, but 18 m. beside rivers.

**Bark:** Grey-brown, smooth, fissured and flaking with age.

**Leaves:** Compound, growing in trees, at the end of branches, few leaflets, each broadly oval, very rough and hard, up to 10 cm, often with a sharp tip, edge wavy.

**Flowers:** On long rope-like stalks, horizontal, reddish branches, in trees, bear upturned trumpet flower, petals folded and wavy, dark maroon with heavy yellow veins outside, an unpleasant smell.

**Fruit:** Large grey-green “sausage” heavy, about 30-60 cm long. Hanging stalks remain on tree.

**Propagation:** Seedlings

**Seed information:** Not prolific seeder. Poor germination rate and slow to germinate. 3400-6000 seeds per kg.

**Pre-sowing treatment:** Not necessary.

**Storage:** Seed does not store

**Management:** Slow growing

**Remarks:** Not planted around the homestead. Planted to grave sites and the trunk is buried to symbolize the body of people whose remain cannot be traced. The unripe fruit is poisonous. The tree is not competitive to crops.

The Ethnobotanical term (*Ng’owo*) (Kokwaro 1972:45) may apply to several species of *Ficus* occurring in the Nyanza Province of Kenya. Examples are *Ficus Capen* (*Moraceae*) and *Ficus vallischoude* (*Moroceae*). Most of ngowo are regarded as “sacred” among the Luo people.

We need to explain what is meant by translating, interpreting and paraphrasing in the study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology.

### **Translating**

According to Glassman (1981: 23)

The word *translate* literally means ‘to bear or carry across’ ... it means ‘to turn from one language into another, to change into another language, retaining the sense; to render; to express in other words; to paraphrase.

## **Interpreting**

According to Glassman (1981:23), the word interpret comes from two components “between” and “to spread ahead.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word *interpret* as: to expound the meaning of, to render clear, explicit, to elucidate or to explain. Glassman (1981:24) states that in modern English: “To *interpret* usually refers to an immediate *oral* translation of a message. For written texts, we generally use the word *translate* to indicate a more or less literal rendering and *interpret* to indicate a translation plus commentary on translation.”

## **Paraphrasing**

The word paraphrase is made up of two elements, “beside” or “alongside of” and “to declare” or “tell.” (Glassmann 1981:26).

Glassman (1981: 27) in reviewing the work of Eugene A. Nida and Charles A. Taber in *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, states that the term *paraphrase* in technical linguistic usage is distinguished in three particular ways summarised below:-

- It is intralingual rather than intralingual i.e. it is another way of saying the same thing in the same language.
- It is rigorous, in that there are no changes in semantic components: no additions, no deletions; no skewing of relationships; only a different marking of some elements.
- Specifically, as relates to back transformation, it is aimed at restatement at a particular level, that of the Kernels.

In the study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology in a culture-specific configuration, all the techniques of translating, interpreting and paraphrasing the terms in English are employed for maximum accessibility of the cultural knowledge of the “plant kingdom.” The words are carried across from the source language (Luo) to the target language (English). It is argued that a translation of oral folklore is a worthwhile exercise but: “the translator has the responsibility of facilitating communication between members of different cultures and language communities” (Okoth Okombo 1994: 24).

#### **7.4 Formation of Plant Names in Luo Culture-Specific Context**

There are six hypotheses to be tested in the present study, namely:-

- i. Some Ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from the characteristics of plants
- ii. Some Ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from the uses of plants
- iii. Some Ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from the human attributes of plants
- iv. Some Ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from the animal attributes of plants
- v. Some Ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from the folklore of a people group.
- vi. Some Ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from borrowing (loan words) from other languages (neighboring or foreign).

We shall now look at the derivation of Ethnobotanical names in a Luo culture-specific context and interpret their meanings.

## **7.5 Ethnobotanical Names which Derive their Meanings from Characteristics of Plants**

In the present study, first hypothesis to be tested is: Some ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from the characteristics of plants.

Standard works by lexicographers in the area of botany have tended to compile dictionaries of plant names; they mainly concentrate on the derivation and meaning of botanical names and their common name equivalent. Where indigenous African languages are used, the lexicographers give the vernacular equivalents, but no attempt is made to understand how the common names or vernacular equivalents and their meaning are derived.

A typical standard lexicographic work in the area of plant names is Allen J. Coombes' *Dictionary of Plant Names* which was published by Collingridge books, an imprint of the Hamlyn publishing Group in England in 1985. The contents of the specialized botanical dictionary cover the derivation and meaning of botanical names, and their common name equivalents but do not delve into how ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from the unique characteristics of the plants in the target languages.

The lexicographic work that constitutes the core of this study, *Luo- English Botanical Dictionary* first published by the East African Publishing House Nairobi in 1972 also concentrates mainly on the plant names and uses but does not delve deeper into the meanings in relations to the unique characteristics of plants.

The present study has subjected the headwords or lexical entries to a linguistics analysis within the broader context of Luo language use in a culture specific configuration in order to

gain understanding of the meaning of plant names in relation to the unique characteristics of plants.

We will now look at the six hypotheses in turn.

**APOTH**, *Corchorus olitorius* (Tiliaceae)

This is a herbaceous or semi-woody annual herbs whose leaves are used as vegetables. The vegetable derives its name from its “slimy” and “viscid” characteristics when cooked. The name is derived from the nominalized verb “poth” which means: To be “slimy” and “viscid.” Another meaning for the word APOTH is “semen.” Culturally, the vegetable is believed to enhance sexual stamina and verity in men. Some traditional herbal practitioners recommend the vegetable as a cure for impotence or low-libido in males.

Related Luo Words	English
<i>Apoth</i>	Semen
<i>Poth poth</i>	be glossy; be smooth; be slick
<i>Poth</i>	slimy; viscid

**Interpretation of Meaning**

It is clear that the derivation and meaning of the botanical name **APOTH** is not only related to the unique characteristics of the vegetable but is also medicinally significant in a culture – specific context, namely: the treatment of impotence or infertility. Commenting on the cultural significance of sexuality in the life of the Luo-speaking people (Lango) of Uganda, Laurenti Magesa (1997:144) reckons that impotence has “psychological and moral effects upon men. Everything possible is done to try to reverse the situation.” Among the Luo-speaking people of East Africa traditional herbal practitioners are often consulted to undo the condition of impotence which is interpreted as a curse.

They often recommend a treatment regime which includes both medicine and dietary remedies to the condition. Treatment may include the use of vegetables such as APOTH, *Corchorus clitorius* (Tiliaceae).

The word “ang’we” is derived from the root “ng’we” which means *stink* or *smell* in English. The prefix ‘a’ gives the plant a description name “ang’we” based on the sense of smell in the derivation of the plant names(s). In Kokwaro’s Luo-English Botanical dictionary, there are three different entries under the ANG’WE, namely: -

**AN’GWE**, *Cymbopogon excavatus* (Graminae)

The botanical description is given as:- “a grass of low palatability because of it’s bitter leaves and ‘peppery’ scent. (Kokwaro 1972:11).

The “peppery” scent is significant here as in the other entries. In the next one, we have the following: -

**ANG’WE**, *Kedrostis foetidissima* (Cucurbataceae)

The botanical description is given as: “A perennial climber with simple tendrils .... With a repelling smell (from which this native name is derived,” (Kokwaro 1972:11).

The lexicographer has taken it upon himself to explain the significance of the name and its derivation from the Luo word “ng’we.” In the third entry, we get the following:-

**ANG’WE**, *Tagetes minuta* (Compositae) see plate C44a)The lexicographer gives the botanical description as a stiff herb “with a very strong smell” (Kokwaro 1972:12). Again, we see how the smell (or *ng’we*) aspect plays a role in the derivation of the plant name.

**APAMA**, *Chloris psynothrix* (Gramineae) in the Luo-English Botanical Dictionary, Kokwaro (1972:13) gives the description of this plant as “a weed in activation” with prostrate

stems.” The name “apama” which means “pat flat.” The Luo nominalized verb “pamore” means to “be flat” “to be even” to be prostrate” which gives the derivation “apama.” The prefix “a-” and suffix “-a” combine with root “-pam-“ which gives the descriptive name: “that plant which prostrates” (or plant with a flat stem). The examples of the plant names given above may, be given as follows: -

**ANG’WE**, *Cymbopogon excavatus* (*Graminae*)

Related Luo Word	English
‘Ng’we’	stink; smell

### **Interpretation of Meaning:**

The three entries in Kokwaro’s Luo-English Botanical Dictionary under the lemma or head-word ANG’WE are all related with the sense of smell. In the Luo speech community, the environment is keenly interpreted through the five senses, which feed into the ethnobotanical terminology and onomastic tradition of the community.

**APAMA**, *Chloris pynothrix* (*Gramineae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
<i>Pamo</i>	clap; slap
<i>Pamo luedo</i>	clapping hands
<i>Pamore</i>	be flat; be even; be smooth; be prostrate.

### **Interpretation of Meaning**

Because of the prostrate or flat stem, this particular plant is so named (“apama”). The name is based on the physical characteristic which gives it the unique descriptive features of flat stem which distinguishes it from other plants in the Luo ecology.

In the corpus of the ethnobotanical names, a number of lexemes were identified which derive their meaning from the unique characteristics of plants. In Kokwaro’s *Luo-English Botanical*



*Dictionary* there are five head-words entered as ACHAK implying that they have something to do with the noun “chak” which means “milk.” In capen’s *Bilingual Dholuo-English Dictionary* (1998:4) the ethnobotanical term ACHAK has three different meanings;-

**ACHAK** (noun)

1. Milk weed used as a vegetable
2. Special tree which exudes white sap
3. Special snake which lives in this tree and is the same colour

In Asenath Bole Odaga’s *English-Dholuo Dictionary* the headword “milk” (noun) is listed as the equivalent of “chak” clearly, the botanical name ACHAK denotes the milky colour of trait of the plants.

**ACHOKRA**, *Conthium gueinzii* (*Rubiaceae*)

This ethnobotanical name ACHOKRA derives from the transitive verb “choko” which means: “to collect” or “to gather” or “to heap together.”

Related Luo Words

*Choko*

*Chokore*

*Chokruok*

English

to gather; to collect; to heap together

assemble; meet; gather (together)

gathering; meeting; assembly

**Interpretation of Meaning**

The ethonobotanical name ACHOKRA literally translates as: “Let me gather myself together.” The idea of “togetherness” is significant in Luo society. The individual is a member of family which in turn is part of the local community and the larger Luo society.

**AILA**, *Fluery ovalifolia* (*urticaceae*)

The plant name derives its meaning from the transitive verb “ilo” which means “to string” or “to itch” or “to irritate.” The herb has leaves with stinging hairs.

**AKUDHO**, *Dovyalis macroclyx* (*Flacourtiaceae*)

The plant name derives its meaning from the noun “kudho” which means “thorn.” It is because of the sharp spines that the shrub is so-named.

**ANYUONGI**, *Pistia stratiotes* (*araceae*)

The floating freshwater herb derives its meaning from the intransitive verb “nyuongo” which means, “to squat” or “to sit back of heels.” It is a common weed in ponds. The Luo often refer to squatters as “Anyuongi.”

**AREMO**, *Harungana madagascariensis* (*Hypericaceae*)

The plant name derives its meaning from the noun “remo” which means: “blood” the sap produced by the tree is blood-red in colour while the bark is red-brown this explains the meaning of the plant name.

**AWAYO**, *Oxallis corniculata* (*Oxalidaceae*)

The name of the herb derives its meaning from the transitive verb “wayo” which means “to sting or burn the mouth.” The leaves or fruits are sour in taste, and has numbing effect on the teeth.

Other examples of plant names which derive their meanings from the characteristics are:-

**KAGNO/KAGNA**, *Phyllanthus guineensis* (*Euphorbiaceae*)

The other name of this shrub in Luo is ANYETHRA. It has woody branches. The meaning of the plant name KAGNO/KAGNA is derived from the nominalised verb “kagore” e.g. the

shrub is forked (ikagore). Thus, the forked or branched characteristic of the shrub is anomoustically significant in giving the plant its name.

**KAMINAMINA**, *Jasminum fluminense* (*Oleaceae*) (see Plate C27a)

The name of this climbing or scrambling shrub derives its meaning from “to twist” or “to turn” or “to gange.” There is an element of reduplication in this Luo plant name (cf. Louwrens 2001: 147-160).

**MAGWAGWA**, *Lantana Camara* (*verbenaceae*)

The name of this shrub with prickly stems derives its meaning from the adjective “gwa” which means “rough” e.g. sandpaper, cat’s tongue or hands from long periods of physical labour.

There is also an element of reduplication in this Luo plant name (cf. Louwrens 2001: 147-160).

**MWODI/MODI**, *Oreobamboos buchwaldii* (*Gramineae*)

The name of this tall perennial bamboo derives its meaning form the noun “Omout” which means: “node” or “knot” or “joint” of reeds or bamboo.

## **7.6 Ethnobotanical Names Which Derive their Meanings from Plant Uses**

In their *Luo Biological Dictionary*, Kokwaro and Johns (1998:xi) argue that: “The use of plants and animals, as well as their subsequent products reflects their way of life wherever you find them in East Africa.”

The two lexicographers have given detailed descriptions of biological species in Luoland, and a number of cases the uses of these species by the community. Most of the ethnobotanical materials in the expended biological dictionary came from Kokwaro's original text published in 1972 under the title *Luo – English Botanical Dictionary of Plant Names and Uses*, which forms the lexicographic basis of the present study. It has been observed that the Luo people, since time immemorial, have distinguished themselves as “first-class botanists, making use of indigenous plants as food, building material, medicine, in witchcraft, for furniture, and so on...” (Kokwaro 1972: vii). It is also noted that not all plants can be put to good use: “some can be detrimental both to us and to our domesticated animals, and hence we should also know those plants which are poisonous,” (Kokwaro 1972: vii).

The cultural configuration in which human beings make good use of both plant and animals resources is captured in the area of onomastics, which is defined as: “the study of names and naming systems,” Koopman (2002: 8).

In this onomastic configuration: “one cultural use of both plants and animals which has been silently practiced by the Luo community for many generations is to name their newborn after a popular plant or animal...” Kokwaro and Johns 1998: xi).

Prominent examples of Luo personal names derived from the animal kingdom are:-

**KWACH:** Leopard; the best known Luo personage with the name in Kenya today is Justice Richard Otieno **KWACH**, formerly of the Kenyan Court of Appeal.

**JOWI:** Buffalo; Kenya's former economic Planning and Development was known as Joseph Odera **JOWI**. He took over the portfolio after the holder of the office, Thomas Joseph Mboya, was assassinated in July 1969.

**RACHIER:** Cobra; Kenya's prominent lawyer Ambrose Otieno **RACHIER** crafted the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which brought together various political parties to form the so-called National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) in 2002. This coalition of disparate parties defeated the Kenya African National Union (KANU) in the presidential and parliamentary elections, but it soon disintegrated after ascending to power.

Other prominent examples of Luo personal names derived from the plant kingdom are:-

**RAILA:** This personal name is derived from the stinging nettle.

**AILA:** *Fleurya ovalifolia (urticaceae)* a herb up to 1 m high, occasionally straggling. Leaves with stinging hairs. The most prominent Luo who bears the name is **RAILA** Amolo Odinga, the Kenyan Prime Minister; a forceful leader of the pro-democracy movement in Kenya and Pan-Africanist crusader.

**ORUKA:** An edible mushroom; *Termitomyces magoyensis (Agaricaceae)*; also referred to as **OBUOCH – ORUKA**; A white fungus 30 cm. In diameter when undisturbed. A delicious and popular “vegetable,” generally *used* fresh.

The most prominent Luo to bear the name was Prof. Henry Odera **ORUKA** (Born 1944, died 1995) formally the chairman of the Department of Philosophy, University of Nairobi. He

produced many works in African Philosophy and is best remembered for his book *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on Africa Philosophy* published in 1991 by African Centre of Technology Studies, Nairobi, Kenya.

**ORENGO:** *Mollugo Nudicaulis (Aizoaceae)*; also known as **ATARO**; an annual herb with a rosette of spatulate leaves, flowers pink or red. USE: Infusion of plant introduced into nostrils to treat mental illness (cf. Kokwaro and Johns 1998: 26). The most prominent Luo to bear the name is James ORENGO, Kenya Minister for Lands.

That plant names are of cultural significance in the naming of people in Luo society is an indication of how intrinsically biological resources are tied to human ecology. Another area that calls for attention is the domestic and industrial uses of wooden trees. The illustration of a plant name which derives its meaning from both domestic and industrial use is **BAO** (or **BAWO**), *Eucalyptus spp. (Myrtaceae)* which is widely cultivated in Luo in particular and East Africa in general. It is commonly known as the “gum tree.” The name derives its meaning from the word “bao” (variant: “bawo” which is borrowed from Swahili for “timber” or “plank” or “board” or “wood.” In the ethnobotanical descriptions by Kokwaro and Johns (1998: 30) they indicate that:-

The name **BAO** is also applied to many introduced timber-producing species which might not be *Eucalyptus*. USE: Gum trees furnish valuable timber. Decoctions of leaves and barks drunk or use in steam baths to treat ‘Yamo’ (a general term of diseases such as anthrax).

The cultural importance of **BAO** is that it is used in the construction of houses, providing poles for the walls in semi-permanent structure or for roofing. Although the basic function of the roof are the provision of shelter (weather-proofing) and insulation (against heat and cold) for the owner of the house, culturally the roof has great significance because it is part of the Luo social organization. In Luo society, the homestead belongs to the man; it has several

houses which belong to the wives (in polygamous contexts) and sons as indicated in the Traditional Luo homestead (see: Appendix E). The Luo use of **BAO** in the construction of Luo homesteads is culturally significant. Andersen (1997:132-133) describes traditional Luo architecture as follows: -

“The traditional Luo house, especially of the older kind, is more solidly build and of a higher finish than most examples found in Kenya. The building area is marked by drawing the perimeter using a piece of string attached to a peg in the ground, and it is not unusual to find houses with a 10 meter diameter....

The thick walls are filled up using mud, and then plastered with a thin layer of mixture of clay and cow dung. The inner face and floor are decorated with a pattern made by pressing a piece of cactus plant on the wet surface – the stiff prickly leaves give the desired effect.

The materials used for constructing the roof depend on what is easily available. Wood of various types, stems of sisal flower and strong papyrus stems are common is use as rafters... the roof of a big house is constructed on the house, other types of roof are made separately on a single, low, central post and are carried before thatching and placed in position and secured...”

The Luo of East Africa keep livestock which means the use of different grasses is significant understanding of the names of different grasses. Generally speaking, the name **LUM** refers to grass. The two types of grasses of cultural use to the Luo people which come to mind are:-

**LUMB-APWOYO**, *Chloris gayana* (Gramineae) and

**LUMB –AROMBO**, *Branchiaria solute* (Gramineae)

An explanation of the meanings of the names of these grasses is necessary.

**LUMB-APWOYO**, *Chloris gayana* (Graminea). The name literally translates as “Rabbit Grass” which implies that it forms good habitat for rabbits, and, therefore, a good hunting ground for rabbits which are a delicacy among the Luo. Kokwaro (1972: 14) gives the following ethobotanical description of the grass: “A common and valuable grazing grass of many varieties found in open grassland and sown pastures.” When looking after their parents

herds, the Luo boys also preoccupy themselves by hunting rabbits which live in the open grasslands of the Lake Victoria Basin, hence the name “Lum mar Apwoyo” (Grass of Rabbit).

**LUMB –AROMBO**, *Brachiara solute* (*Gramineae*)

The name literally translates as “Sheep- Grass.” The ethnobotanical description given by Kokwaro and Johns (1998: 24) is as follows: “A loopy tufted perennial, up to 60 cm. high. Inflorescence of dense spike like racemes, spikelets over 3 mm. long and in two rows leaf blades 10 – 30 cm. long. USES: Very important for grazing.”

The translation “Sheep-Grass” or “Grass of Sheep” (Lum Mar Rombo) indicates the derivational origin of the meaning of the name. The grass is used for grazing livestock, especially sheep (Singular: Rombo, Plural: Rombe). Some Luo ethnobotanical names derive their meanings from the uses of plants. A typical example is **AROMBO**, *Paspalum commersonii* (*Grammineae*). This is a tufted perennial 30-120 cm. high.

Related Luo Word	English
‘Rombo’	Sheep

**Interpretation of Meaning**

AROMBO is “a good grazing grass” (kokwaro 1972:15). The word ‘rombo’ refers to sheep. The grass is especially good for sheep, hence the prefix “a-” attached to the morpheme root ‘rombo’. Other examples of ethnobotanical names, which derive their meanings from plant uses, are:-

- **ARUPINY** or **ARUPIEN**, *Commiphora africana* (*Burseraceae*)
- **BAO**, *Eucalyptus spp.* (*Myrtaceae*)
- **ONYALO-BIRO**, *Schkuhria pinnata* (*compositae*)
- **OSENO**, *Cordia ovalis* (*Boraginaceae*)
- **RAYWE-OLANDO**, *Indigofera spicata* (*Papilionaceae*)



- **YATH**, A general term for shrub, tree or medicine

We shall now look at the above named Luo plant names in turn:

**ARUPINY** or **ARUPIEN**, *Commiphora africana* (*Burseraceae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Ru’	Dawn; getting light
‘Oru’	It is getting light
‘Piny’	World
‘Rupiny’	Outlast the night
‘Pien’	Sleeping skins
‘Rupien’	Waking up; (from sleeping skins); Outlast the night

### **Interpretation of Meaning**

**ARUPINY** or **ARUPIEN** is a shrub found in many parts of the Luo country in the Nyanza Province of Kenya. It grows on rocky sites, clay or sand with minimal rainfall, which means that it is a handy plant with a high degree of endurance. It is used for fuel wood, utensils, water troughs, fruit, tea, (from bark), medicine (roots, bark, resins, fruits, and twigs), fodder (young shoots), ornamental insecticide, beads, gum, live fence (ICRAF 1992:85). In traditional Luo homesteads, a fire is made in the middle of the homestead at dusk. This fire is known as “*duol*” where members of the family sit, talk and hand down oral folklore from one generation to the next. This particular tree is good for such fire because of its enduring quality as fuel wood. By the time people wake up in the morning from their sleeping skins, **ARUPINY** or **ARUPIEN** would still be smouldering, which means that the wood from the tree is so enduring that it outlasts the night. The Luo people have the saying:-

## Luo

Otoyo moluor emaru

### English:

It is the timid hyena that outlasts the night.

According to ethnographer Okumba Miruka (2001:57):-

People living in hyena-infested areas are on the lookout for the animals and have laid traps. A daring hyena, which does not check the traps, will obviously be caught in one. But the one which feels its way cautiously will make it round the traps.

From the foregoing, it is quite clear that **ARUPINY** or **ARUPIEN** is so-named because it produces fuel wood that is enduring and can outlast the night.

### **BAO**, *Eucalyptus spp. (Myrtaceae)*

Related Luo Word	English
'Bao'	Timber

### **Interpretation of Meaning**

The main use of this tree is timber (heavy and light construction), poles, posts, fuel wood, charcoal, pulp, veneer/plywood, bee-forage, medicine, windbreaks, essential oil (ICRAF, 1992:111).

The Luo ethnobotanical name **BAO** (and its variant **BAWO**) is a loan word from Swahili word **BAO** for timber, which means: *plank, board* or *wood* (Capen 1998:15). From the interpretation, it is clear that the Ethnobotanical name derives its meaning from the uses to which the tree is put as *timber*.

**ONYALO BIRO**, *Schkuhria pinnata (compositae)*

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Nyalo’	Ability; be able; be possible; manage to
Biro’	Arrive; come

**Interpretation of Meaning**

**ONYALO BIRO** translates as: “It is good that they managed to arrive” or it could also mean: “their arrival is a welcome event.” It is an annual herb, diffusely branched at the top, used as brooms. Because of its use of cleaning the yard of the homestead, this plant’s presence, which is fairly recent, is deemed as welcome by the Luo people.

Metaphorically, **ONYALO BIRO** is a term used to refer to new settlers or immigrants in any locality in Luo country according to Gordon Wilson (1968:12), the other word used in Luo is *Jodak* which means unrelated people: “Who are given land on a permanent usufruct which is determined by his fulfillment of customary obligations ...”

There is therefore a symbiotic relationship between *Jodak* (onyalo biro) and *Jolowo* (native people of land) because of the mutual-social responsibility have for each other in traditional Luo society.

**OSENO**, *Cordia ovalis (Boraginaceae)*

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Seno’	Polish (furniture)
Maseno	Place name derived from ‘Seno; Maseno Town; Maseno Primary School; Maseno National School, Maseno University, Anglican Dioceses of Maseno South, West and North.

## Interpretation of Meaning

When the Church Missionary Society workers arrived in the Nyanza Province of Kenya, they established a school under the famous Oseno Tree in 1906. They also built a church. Both features still stand as landmarks on the Maseno National School grounds today. Ojwang (2003:20) in the introduction to the translation of *Thuond Luo* (Luo Legends) has commented:

It is noteworthy that the Church Missionary Society founded the Maseno National School in 1906 under the **OSENO** tree which is preserved to date. The school later lent its name to the university next door. The name Maseno is derived from the Luo ethnobotanical name **OSENO** (sand paper tree). The scientific name is *Cordia ovalis* (*Boraginaceae*); its rough leaves are used as sandpaper. The word *seno* in Kenyan Luo means: *to polish* (furniture); to make smooth; to make clean; to remove rough surface. Here lies the origin of the name *Maseno* meaning: *yien mar seno*, translating as: the tree where rough leaves are used for polishing or smoothening or cleaning furniture.

Symbolically, it was at Maseno National School that Church Missionary Society (CMS) educators from England were to venture into the enterprise of *seno* (polishing) African children through teaching them:-

- Reading skills
- Writing skills and
- Numerical skills

They were also taught the Bible so that they could function more effectively under the British colonial dispensation. From the **OSENO** tree at Maseno National School, it is clear the way ethnobotanical names can have socio-cultural meaning in the national heritage of a modern nation-state such as Kenya.

**RAYWE-ORLANDO**, *Indigofera spicata* (*Papilionaceae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Raywe’	Brush;
‘Ywech’	Broom;

‘Yweyo’	To sweep;
‘Olando’	Creeping indigo bush; twigs used in basket making, also used for making brush broom.

### **Interpretation of Meaning**

The name of the ethnobotanical name **RAYWE-OLANDO** is clearly derived from the use to which it is put; namely: making brooms or brush brooms for domestic use in the Luo homestead.

**YATH**, A General term for shrub, tree or medicine

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Bungu’	Shrub
‘Yien’	Tree
‘Bungu’	thicket, bush; forest
‘Yien’	Medicine

### **Interpretation of Meaning**

The Luo ethnobotanical term **YATH** has more than one meaning as indicated above. In Luo language, the polysemous nature of the term **YATH** is derived from the many uses of shrubs and trees, and more specifically for medical purposes. According to Kokwaro (1976:1):

The use of plants for the treatment of various diseases, as a specific against magic, and for religious ceremonies is universal, and has been practiced by many peoples for years. The East African herbalist has referred to as ‘Bwana Mganga’ (Swahili) or similar terminology meaning ‘medicine man’ in other languages. We all know that people were living in various parts of Africa long before the arrival of the early European explorers and missionaries. It is also true that these people and their domestic animals, from time to time were sick or injured under their existing environmental conditions. Even now when many people are treated by modern drugs, East Africans, both literate and illiterate, still use local drug plants in many ways.

According to Sindiga (1995:68):

The Luo believe that Western medicine is ineffective for disease for which causes are human-related, but is taken to be efficacious in natural diseases

which have their origins in environmental circumstances. Traditional medicine deals with both.

In Luo ethnomedical terminology, traditional medicine is known as: **YADH NYALUO**; one who practices traditional medicine is known as: **JA-YATH NYALUO** (singular) and; **JO-YADH NYALUO** (plural). In English, the traditional medical practitioner who relies purely on the therapeutic qualities of herbs in treating illnesses is known as a *herbalist*. The general ethnobotanical term **YATH** must therefore be interpreted within the culture-specific configurations of the uses to which shrubs, trees and medicines are understood, by the Luo people.

#### **7.7 Ethnobotanical Names Which Derive Their Meanings From Human Attributes of Plants**

A typical example of a Luo ethnobotanical name, which derives from human attributes, is **NYANYIEK-MON**, *Bidens pilos (compositae)*. It is a disturbing weed with achenes sticking on clothes and livestock skins. It cures diarrhoea in sucking babies.

**NYANYIEK-MON** is a compound with two elements:

- NYANYIEK, (jealousy)
- MON, (wives)

The word(s) related to NYANYIEK include:-

- ‘nyiek’ (co-wife of; sister-in-law of; competitor of)
- ‘nyiego’ (envy ; jealousy)
- ‘onyiego’ ( a shorter version of NYANYIEK-MON)
- ‘janyiego’ (a jealous person)
- ‘mond nyiego’ (wives of a polygamist)

The Luo words which are related to the element **MON** (plural form for **DHAKO**) is ‘mon’ (hating, showing hate, showing animosity). The interpretation of **NYANYIEK-MON** would be “the jealousy of envy of co-wives or women in a polygamous marital arrangement.” The Luo society is polygamous. Naturally, there is stiff competition (sometimes very unhealthy) between co-wives of a polygamist and their children. According to Okumba Miruka (2001:128) who has conducted ethnographic research in Kenya for many years:-

The Luo seem to consider jealousy as a trait that only exists among women folk. Apparently, men are not expected to be jealous... This concept is entrenched even in the institution of polygamy where co-wives refer to one another as “nyieka” a reference derived from ‘nyiego’ meaning jealousy. It is assumed that where women share a husband, jealousy is bound to thrive with the co-wife as its direct object. The stories of jealous and evil stepmothers hence fit into this worldview. While the jealous are condemned, the children listening to the story are sensitized to the experience of such realities, and they are challenged to wary of such parents.

In many Luo oral narratives, jealousy is discouraged, if not condemned; women are admonished to treat their own children and those of their co-wives with justice and fairness, an expectation which many fall short of because of human frailties. In one such story, a jealous step mother plans to kill her step-daughter in the night, but a fate would have it, her on daughter and her step-daughter change places on the sleeping mat; she ends up killing her own daughter! Such a story definitely has a moral lesson for women who live in polygamous unions not to yield to the temptation of envy or jealousy. The “disturbing weed with achenes sticking on clothes and livestock skins” (Kokwaro 1972: 50) reminds one of the co-wives who “sticks” to the husband without realizing the fact that there are other co-wives also competing for the polygamists attention. In a gender-sensitive modern society, this kind of worldview is not tolerated. However, for a lexicographer interested in cultural information, the meaning of such plant names with close human association in African society would still be recorded. In Luo society, sisters-in-law (i.e. wives of brothers) are potential co-wives because, in the event of one of the brothers dying, the Luo people (like the Hebrews during

the time of Moses in the Old Testament) recommend that the surviving brother take over the dead brother's widow:

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her, marry her, and fulfill the duty of the brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

A Custom among the Luo similar to this Hebrew leviratic requirement is that when a man dies, all the mourning rites by the widow are performed, and after that (Wilson 1968: 132):

It is the time for her to be taken, TERO, by the person either named by her husband on his death bed or chosen by herself ... the levir, JATER, is usually a full brother, half-brother or close agnatic kinsman who stands to the dead man as brother.

From the above, it is clear why co-wives and/or sisters-in-law (wives of brothers or half-brothers or close agnatic kinsmen) in Luo society address each other as "nyieka" which means "a competitor" for the attention of the polygamous or potentially polygamous union.

Another plant name which derives from human attributes is **ACHONDRADOHO**, *Euclea divinorum subsp. Keniensis (Ebenaceae)* which is described as "a much branched small tree" (cf. Kokwaro 1972: 4). This is a compound plant name with two elements, that is:-

**ACHOND**, is derived from 'dichol' adverb. (black, very dark)

**RADOHO**, is derived from 'doho' noun. (polygamy)

For the Luo words 'dichol' and 'ochol' which are related to the first element of the compound plant name (cf. Capen 1998:13; and Capen 1998:116) the attribute of being black, very dark, or blackish. Another related word is "Achol" which is an ethnonym of a group of Luo-speaking people in Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan (Nzita and Niwampa 1993; 1998: 90-96) means dark-skinned people; Luo words related to RADOHO are: 'doho' (state of



polygamy) ‘reiyo doho’ (having many wives); the word ‘radoho’ simply means polygamist or a polygamous man or having polygamous tendencies. The interpretation of the meaning of ACHONDRADOHO would then be a small tree with “darkish bark”; the second element comes from the fact that the tree is “much branched” or “has many branches” (cf. Kokwaro 1972: 4) which symbolizes a man with many wives (representing many houses) hence many branches of his family tree. When a man or woman is very dark in complexion, the Luo people have a saying for it;

Luo:

Orateng’ ka ochondo

English:

He/she is as dark (black) as *Ochondo*

Which is botanical nomenclature is known as *Sphacelotheca reiliana* (Ustilaginaceae) with the following description “sori destroying the sorghum (and other species of grasses) inflorescence, dark brown with long, shredded remnants of the vascular bundles remaining after spore dispersal, or sometimes with merely a single central columella, at first covered by a peridium of fungus tissue which soon ruptures to release granular to dusty spore mass” (Kokwaro 1972:59).

**OCHONDO** (the fungal sorus) is known to be edible and Luo children normally go looking for the stuff to eat in rural Luo communities.

Other Ethnobotanical names which derive their meanings from “the darkish complexion” (Kokwaro 1972: 57 – 59) are listed below:-

- **OCHOL**, *Alphania senegalensis* (Sapindaceae)
- **OCHOL**, *Blighia unijugata* (Sapindaceae)
- **OCHOL**, *Diospyros abyssinica* (Ebenaceae)
- **OCHOL**, *Mystroxydon aethiopicum* (Celastraceae)

(For description see **ACHOND-RATENG** in the ethnobotanical lexicon Appendix A).

- **OCHOL**, *Pseudospondias microcarpa* (*Anacardiaceae*)
- **OCHOL**, *Schrebera alata* (*Oleaceae*)
- **OCHOND-ABOKE**, *Suregada procera* (*Euphorbiaceae*)
- **OCHOND-ACHAK**, *Mimusops kummel* (*Sapotaceae*)
- **OCHOND-ATEGO**, *Allophylus africanus* (*Sapindaceae*)
- **OCHOND-ATHUTH**, *Trichilia ametica* (*Meliaceae*)
- **OCHOND-MENEME**, *Muystroxylon aethiopicum* (*Celastraceae*)
- **OCHONDOBOK**, *Apodytes dimidiata* (*Icacinaceae*) (For description see **LEMO** in the ethnobotanical lexicon Appendix A).
- **OCHOND-RADOKO**, *Euclea divinorum subsp. Keniensis* (*Ebenaceae*)  
(For description see **ACHONDRADOHO** in the ethnobotanical lexicon Appendix A).
- **OCHOND-RATENG'**, *Muystroxylon aethiopicum* (*Celastraceae*)  
(For description see **ACHOND-RATENG'** in the ethnobotanical lexicon Appendix A).
- **OCHOND-RATENG'**, *Trichilia emetica* (*Meliaceae*) (For description see **OCHOND-ATHUTH** in the ethnobotanical lexicon Appendix A).

What is noteworthy is that “darkish complexion” may range from black to *dark brown* or *dark grey*. The Luo ethnobotanical lexicon is given with descriptions of entries can be accessed in Appendix A.

## 7.8 Ethnobotanical Names which are derived from Animal Attributes

The interaction between language, culture and society does not only include the plant kingdom but also the animal kingdom. Animals, both domestic and wild, are an integral part of the ethnoecology of any given people group. The Luo speaking people of Kenya and their Suba neighbours do not have large national parks in their Province, except Ruma Game Reserve in the Lambwe Valley, Suba District, in the Nyanza Province of Kenya. However, a study of Luo oral literature and folklore does reveal that animals form part and parcel of Luo culture. There are narratives, proverbs, myths, legends and other verbal art forms, such as

tongue twisters about animals that show that once upon a time, before the British Colonial Government established Game Reserves and National Parks in East Africa, the Luo people lived in harmony with animals in their ecosystems and coped with them like the Maasai people still do today in the Maasai Mara in Kenya and the Serengeti in Tanzania.

Domestic animals such as cattle, goats and sheep are part of Luo culture for centuries. Mbiti (1992: 136) has said that:-

Livestock play a very important role in the life of the people, not only for food but also for social and economic purposes. These animals are valued greatly everywhere, and there is a whole culture revolving around stock-keeping. Consequently many rituals are performed in connection with the keeping and use of animals.

In some places, such as Kenya, Tanzania and the Sudan, there are people who value their cattle as much as, and often more than their fellow human beings. They would even choose to die in the process of protecting or rescuing their cattle. They give their personal names to their cattle, they sing to them, they talk to them, they take infinite care of them. Their whole life is occupied with the welfare of their animals.

What Professor John S. Mbiti, one of Africa's leading social philosophers says of domestic animals is also underscored by C.T. Astley Maberly in *Animals of East Africa* published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1960, concerning wildlife in Kenya and other neighbouring countries of Eastern Africa. In his guide to the wild animals, he devotes space to what he calls "the more popularly interesting animals" such as: the African Elephant, the Black Rhinoceros, The Zebras, The African Buffalo, The Large Antelopes, The Medium-Sized Antelopes, The Giraffes, The Hippopotamus, The African Wild Pigs, The Large Carnivore, and the Primates (Monkeys, Baboons and Galagos).

Astley Maberly also includes other miscellaneous animals such as: Rock Hyrax, Tree Hyrax, Ant-Bear or Aard Vark, Temminck's Ground Pangolin, Porcupine, Cane Rat, African Hare, Squirrels, Hegehog, Spring-Hare or Jumping Hare, and the Giant Rat.

As a naturalist, Astley Maberly has included in the guide to the interesting animals of East Africa the following items:-

- Field impression,
- Descriptive Notes,
- Horns/Tasks,
- Habits and Distribution.

Other characteristics and features of the animals are also included.

Among the Luo people of East Africa, the naming of plants is closely connected with the naming of animals. Some plant names derive from their meanings attributes of animals. This means that a study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology must necessarily delve into Luo ethnozoological terminology for the complete picture to be appreciated. Examples of Luo plant names which have a connection with the animal kingdom are given below:-

- ADHIANG', *Voacanga obtuse (Apocynaceae)*  
Related Luo Word(S)                      English  
'Dhiang'    Cow

### **Interpretation of Meaning:**

It is possible that since the tree provides shed to cows, the Luo people have named it "adhiang" (which literally translates as 'tree of cow').

- **ANGWE-RAO**, *Lippia javanica (verbenaceae)*  
Related Luo Word(S)    English  
'Ng'we'    Smell; scent  
'Rao'    Hippopotumus

### Interpretation of Meaning

“An infusion of leaves of this plant is given to patients with fever and “stuffy nose”, according to Kokwaro (Kokwaro (1976:223). “The leaves and flowers are first rubbed between the hand to get the maximum scent emitted, and when sniffed. The subject is set sneezing which then clears the nose.”

Patients are sometimes bathed in a concoction of boiled leaves. The name is derived from the strong smell or scent. Its ecology is associated with that of the hippopotamus hence the name ANGWE-RAO.

**AROMBO**, *Brachiaria soluta* (Gramineae)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
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‘Rombo’	Sheep
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### Interpretation of Meaning:

This is a type of perennial which is “very important grazing” especially for sheep hence the name **AROMBO** which translates as “perennial of the sheep or perennial belonging to or liked by sheep.” There are other varieties of the grass, which have good grazing value especially for sheep (singular: ROMBO, plural: ROMBE).

**ATHUNO**, *Bridelia micrantha* (Euphorbiaceae)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
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‘Thuno’	breasts; udder
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‘Rathuno’	Woman well endowed with large breasts
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“Athuno’	thorn tree (good for firewood); the thorns resemble tits or nipples
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### Intepretation of Meaning:

The name **ATHUNO** is derived from the thorny features of the tree; the prickly thorns are associated with the tits or nipples of a woman’s breast; feminine characteristics are attributed

to the tree by the Luo people of Kenya. When uterine brothers (owete ma oa e ich achiel) fight over land or any other property, the Luo people have a saying that: “gilaro thuno” (translation: they are fighting over their mothers breasts which is a source of milk for sustenance). A woman is normally referred to as: “**DHAKO RATHUNO**” (endowed with breasts). The Luo people have a song about breasts:

Related Luo Word(S)	English
Dhako ny’Owawa	Woman daughter of Owawa
Dhako rathuno	Woman with breasts
Chieng’ mokele	The day you marry one
To omedo hawi	She increases blessings

(Based on a song composed by Daudi Ajwang Nyakwamba, 1972)

In Luo culture, breasts are seen in symbolic terms, of milk (breast feeding) and sustenance for the young children in a family. There are many uses of **ATHUNO** namely: fuel wood; charcoal; timber; poles; granary building; tool handles; fruit; medicine (bark and roots) fodder (leaves); mulch; and shade.

A look at these many uses of the tree **ATHUNO** indicates why the tree is so important in the socio-cultural environment of the Luo family unit; the brothers and sisters from the same mother often referred to as having “sucked the same breasts (in Luo : *Dhodho thuno achiel*). The tree, therefore, underscores the close connection between *nature* in the wider environment and *nurture* in the household unit represented by a mother in the Luo extended family network.

**AROYA**, *Grewia similis* (*Tiliaceae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Roya’	Calf; heifer

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

A shrub with leaves which are of high value as fodder especially for livestock (for calves; heifer especially) hence the Luo name **AROYA** which translates as: “shrub of the calf; shrub of the heifer) (cf. ICRAF 1992: 126).

**BO-DHOK**, *Vigna luteola* (*Papilionaceae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Bo’	Pea; a type of vegetable
‘Dhok’ (plural.)	Cattle
‘Dhiang’ (singular)	Cow

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

Cow-pea; a type of vegetable used as fodder for livestock.

**BWOMBWE-LIECH**, *Rhoicissus tridentate* (*Vitaceae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Bwombwe’	A climbing or trailing herb
‘Liech’	Elephant

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

A trailing or climbing herb of the elephant, BWOMBWE-LIECH, associated with the ecology of elephants. According to Astley Maberly (1960; 1966: 4) “elephants feed mainly on leaves, tender shoots, bamboo shoots ... seed pods, and wild fruits, roots and bark.: The trailing climbing herb and its tendrils and glamorous leaves fall in this category of elephant fodder, hence the name.

**KURGWENO, *Clerodendrum myricoides* (Verbenaceae)**

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Kur’	Smolder
‘Kuro’	Sound made by hen in danger
‘Gweno’	Hen; chicken

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The name is derived from *kur* (to smoulder or burn with rage) and *kuro* (sound made by hen in danger); the Luo people have a saying: “Tim ma gweno kuro” which means:” an act which makes hens to wonder; smolder with rage; make sound as though in danger or distress.” It is not clear why the Luo associate this plant with the burning rage of a hen or sound made by hen in danger.

**LUMB-OYUNDI, *Harpachne schimperi* (Gramineae)**

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Lum’	grass
‘Lumb’	grass of
‘Oyundi’	titmouse (bird)



**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The ecology of *Oyundi* (titmouse-bird) is associated with this “stemmy grass of low grazing value, it is used for thatching in some parts of Luo country. Also known as AGINGA (cf. Kokwaro 1972: 6)

**MANYAS-OLELE, *Dissotis irvingiana* (Melastomataceae)**

‘Manyasi’	herbal medicine
‘Olele’	gecko; small flat lizard
‘Pidho olele’	uncut hair as a sign of pregnancy of newly married woman.

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

Herbal medicine “of the gecko or small flat lizard” believed to cause a disease known as “olele” (Kokwaro 1972: 36)

**NG’OCH-ONGER, *Cassia petersiana* (Caesalpiniaceae)**

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Ng’or’	Peas; lentils; beans
‘Onger’	Monkey

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

Peas, lentils or beans of monkey. The common East African monkeys feed on most agricultural produce, including the peas, lentils and bean family hence the name NGOCH ONGER which grows wild in some parts of Luo country.

**NYABEND-WINY, *Lantana trifolia***

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Bel’	sorghum
‘Winy’ (pl.)	birds
‘Winyo’ (sing.)	bird

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The “sorghum of birds” is well known as food for birds, and that is how it is propagated over most of the Luo country in East Africa.

**NYABOND-OTENGA, *Orobanche minor (Orobancheaceae)***

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Nyabondo’	A weed plant
‘Otenga’	Hawk

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

This is an occasional “weed in cultivation” (Kokwaro 1972:47). This plant is associated with the ecosystem of the hawk (Otenga) hence the name which means, the “weed of the hawk.”

**NYACHIETH-ONG’ER, *Cassia petersiana (Caesalpinaceae)***

Related Luo Word (S)	English
‘Chieth’	dross; waste; dung; excrement
‘Nyachieth’	small particles of excrement
‘Ong’er’	monkey

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The seeds have some resemblance with the excrement of a monkey hence the association with the “waste” or “dross” of a monkey.

**NYAKOM-ONDIEK, *Polyporus sp. (Polyporaceae)***

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Kom’	stool; chair; throne;
‘Nyakom’	small stool; small chair or small throne
‘Ondiek’	hyena; carnivorous animal such as the leopard (generic)

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The small stool; small chair or small throne of a hyena or any generic carnivorous animal: “A semicircular shaped fungus growing from the bark of old wood or living trees ... caps will protrude horizontally and form a saddle shape, thus the local name refers to it as *The Leopards Chair*” (Kokwaro 1972:48).

**NYAKOR-ALURU, *Acalypha indica (Euphorbiaceae)***

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Kor’	chest (anatomy)
‘Nyakor’	small chest of (anatomy)
‘Aluru’	quail (bird)

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The Luo people call this plant “the chest of breast of the quail”; it has some features of the quail (a bird common in the Luo country of the Lake Victoria Basin in East Africa).

**NYALAK-DEDE**, *Trichodesma zeylanicum* (*Boraginataceae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Lak’	teeth
‘Nyalak’	small teeth of
‘Dede’	grasshopper

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The “rough and hairy” stems of the plant are associated with the “small teeth of the grasshopper” hence the name NYALAK-DEDE.

**NYALWET – KWACH**, *Toddalia asiatica* (*Rutaceae*)

Related Luo Word(S):	English
‘Lwedo’	hand / paws
‘Lwet’	hand of / paws
‘Nyalwet’	small hand of / small paws of

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The “scrambling prickly” features of the shrub are associated with “the paws of a leopard.”

**NYANG’ – LIECH / NYANIANG’ – LIECH**, *Steganotaenia araliaceae*  
(*Umbelliferae*)

Related Luo Word(S): English

‘Nyang’      Crocodile

‘Niang’	Sugarcane; A common term for other species of <i>saccharum</i> too; a major source of sugar.
‘Tiang’	Stalk (of maize, sorghum, sugarcane)
‘Liech’	Elephant

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The “crocodile of the elephant” or the “stalk of the elephant” The tree provides fodder to the African elephant; “Leaves much liked by elephant, from which the name may be more applicably be NIANG’-LIECH” (Kokwaro 1972:50).

**NYATIEND-GWENO, *Oxygonum polygoraceae***

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Tielo’	foot; leg; claw; root
‘Tiend’	foot have; leg of; claw of; root of
‘Tiende’ (plural)	feet of; legs of; claws of; roots of
‘Nyatielo’	small foot; small leg; small root;
‘Nyatiend’	small foot of; small leg small claw of; small root of

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

Literal translation would give us the following meanings:

- (Small) Foot of Hen
- (Small) Leg of Hen
- (Small) Claw of Hen
- (Small) Root of Hen.

**NYATIEND-GWENO** has the same meaning botanical description as **AWAYO**, *Oxygonum sinuatum* (*Polygonaceae*) which is a woody annual of average height 30cm: “fruit fusiform, 2-4 to each bract, with three spreading prickles”, which look like “the claws of a hen” (cf. Kokwaro 1972:17).

**NYATIK-OTENGA**, *Rhynchosia albiflora* (*Papilionaceae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Tik’	chin
‘Nyatik’	small chin of
‘Otenga’	hawk (bird)

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The “small chin of a hawk” is a “woody climber, stems pubescent with soft brown hairs especially on the younger parts.” (Kokwaro 1972:52); the three types of hawk known in Luo country (Capen 1998:302) are:-

- Otenga
- Okun Okun (Black with tuft on head)
- Olith (with white neck)

The Luo people associate the woody climber with the hawk because of its “soft brow hairs especially on the younger parts” (Kokwaro 1972:52)

**NYANYODHI**, *Leonotis spp.* (*Labiatae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Nyodho’	suck nectar; draw blood; kiss
‘Nyoth’	kiss

‘Nyanyodhi’ sunbird; sunbird flower which bears groups of red flowers up the stalk eaten by the sunbird

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The sunbird flower normally sucks or draws nectar with its long beak when eating the red flowers; in Luo, both the sunbird and the plant bear the same name **NYANYODHI**.

**NYATHUND-GUOK**, *Coccinia grandis* (*Cucurbitaceae*)

<b>Related Luo Word(S)</b>	<b>English</b>
‘Thuno’	udder; breast
‘Nyathuno’	tit (in plural, female’s breasts)
‘Thund’	breast of ‘Nyathund’ tits of; nipples of ‘Dhotuno’ nipple (especially of female) (literal: mouth of nipple from which milk oozes)
‘Guok’	dog.

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The tits or nipples of the dog is an apt Luo name because of: “dotted stems”; “variable” and “rather thin” leaves; “reddish glandular tips to the lobes and marginal teeth ... fruit green with white dots, red when ripe ...” (Kokwaro 1972:51); all these characteristics of dots and other distinctive features are associated with “the tits or nipples of the dog.”

**OKURGWENO**, *Psiadia arabica* (*Compositae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Kur’	smoulder

‘Kuro’	sound made by hen in danger
‘Gweno’	hen; chicken

### Interpretation of Meaning:

This plant has more or less the same ethnobotanical description with **ATILILI**, *Psiadia arabica* (*Compositae*). The poetic (or rhythmic) sound of the Luo name **ATILILI** is reminiscent of others such as:-

- **ASELELE**, *Echinochloa haploclada* (*Gramineae*)
- **ASILILI**, *Heteropogon contortus* (*Gramineae*)

It would appear that **OKURGWENO** refers to the same botanical classification as **ATILILI** while **KURGWENO**; *Clerodendrum myricoides* (*Verbenaceae*) also refers to the same botanical classification as **OKWEROGWENO**, *Clerodendrum myricoides* (*Verbenaceae*).

### **OKWEROGWENO**, *Clerodendrum myricoides* (*Verbenaceae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Okwero’	a species of plant used for treating sore throat or coughs in humans and poultry
‘Kwero’	refuse; reject; forbid; prohibit; be taboo
‘Gweno’	chicken

### Interpretation of Meaning:

The term ‘Okwero’ is used in Luo language to denote a plant species whose roots are chewed to treat sore throat or coughs in humans, and the decoction made from the roots is given to poultry suffering from respiratory infections. According to Kokwaro (1976:219):



The roots are cooked in soup or bone broth and drunk for the treatment of pains in the chest. Root extract is drunk for treatment of colds and to stop gum bleeding. Roots are also pounded, water added and the extract given to cattle for treatment of East Coast fever, or drunk to relieve indigestion in humans. Roots may simply be chewed or pounded and water added; the liquid is drunk in cases of sore throat, tonsillitis, malaria, and rheumatism. A decoction of the roots is also taken as a purgative, as an emetic, and for treating gonorrhoea.

Speakers of the Acholi variety of Luo (Ugandan variant spelt: LWOO) also refer to the plant in their local dialect as OKWERO and use it for the same purposes (Kokwaro 1976:219). It would appear that the Southern Luo of Kenya and Tanzania, the Central Luo of Uganda and the Northern Luo of the Sudan and Ethiopia have used this plant and other plant-based medicinal decoctions since time immemorial. More research by ethnopharmacologists and plant taxonomists would be necessary to establish the uses of the plants for medicinal purposes among the Luo speaking groups in the Nile River Basin countries, both for use by humans and their domestic animals and birds (e.g. Gweno, hen).

**OMBONG'-ROYE, *Cissus oliveri* (Vitaceae)**

Related Luo Word(S)	English
'Ombong'	hoof; ankle
'Roye' (plural)	heifers; calves

**Interpretation of Meaning:**

The “hoof or ankle of the heifers or calves” refers to a: “perennial climber with somewhat quadrangular stem developing cocky wings when old. Leaves membranous, cordate to almost orbicular, acuminate; pedicel glabrous” (Kokwaro 1972:71). Why Luo speakers refer to the plant OMBONG'-ROYE, is not readily accessible but as a previously pastoral group, the Luo related much of their Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) with their livestock.

**OPUK**, *Neoboutonia melleri* (*Euphorbiaceae*)

Related Luo Word(S)	English
‘Opuk’	tortoise; turtle
‘Opuk pek ne otenga’	Luo saying: “tortoise is too heavy for a hawk.”

### **Interpretation of Meaning:**

The plant produces a “capsule 3-lobed, 8-13 mm. in diameter, pubescent” (Kokwaro 1972:76); apparently, the shell-like “capsule” creates room for association of the plant with a tortoise or turtle.

### **7.9 Ethnobotanical Names Which Derive Their Meanings from Folklore**

From the corpus of Kokwaro and his colleagues, it is observable that some plant names derive their meaning from folklore. According to Richard M. Dorson (1959:1), the term *folklore* was used by an Englishman William John Thomas who coined it in 1846 to replace the term “Popular antiquities then in vogue to designate the loving study of old customs, usages and superstition.” According to Leteipa ole Sunkuli and Simon Okumba Miruka in *A Dictionary of Oral Literature*, published in 1990 by the East African Educational Publishers in Nairobi, the term *Folklore* refers to: “The body of knowledge, traditions, customs, habits, beliefs, and practices and the Oral Literature of a community handed down through generations: the social, material and oral culture of a community.” The study of folklore focuses on concepts such as *folk-songs* and *folk-tales* which Sunkuli and Miruka (1990:35-36) define as follows:-

- **Folk-song**

A popular country song perpetuated through generations by oral transmission and performed in traditional gear.

- **Folk-tale**

A popular traditional story handed down orally through generations. An oral narrative.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines the term folk as follows:-

- **Folk**

A people, nation, race. People in general; people of specified class; One's relatives.

The attributive usage of the term *folk* refers to things or entities belonging traditionally to a community of people, nationality or race, for example:-

- **Folk-dance**

Music for dance of popular origin

- **Folk-etymology**

Popular modifying of words form to make it seem to be derived from familiar words (sparrow grass for asparagus)

- **Folk-memory**

Recollection of past persisting among a people

- **Folk-music**

Music of popular origin or style.

- **Folk-singer**

Singer of folk songs.

- **Folk-ways**

Traditional behavior of a people

- **Folk-weave**

Rough loosely woven fabric

- **Folk-art**

The artistic expression of a people

The same *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* gives the description of *taxonomy* as the “principles of classification, especially in biology...” The noun form *taxon* is referred to as a *taxonomic group*, especially *genus* or smaller group. In linguistic anthropology (and its variant anthropological linguistics) the term *folk-taxonomy* refers to the way a people group use the principles of classification to understand their environment, within a culture-specific configuration especially in the broad area of ethnobiology which includes understanding their plant and animal resources in the ethno-ecosystem.

In Luo society, folklore is closely linked to the naming of plants. The following Ethnobotanical terms are typical examples of names, which have their meanings, embedded in the folkloristic landscape of the Luo people.

Below are some of the plant names with meanings derived from Luo folklore for demonstration purposes:-

The long version of the name: “Awuor Awuor Ban Piende, Kachuo Nyari Biro!” is an expression translating as: “Awuor Awuor Fold Your Sleeping Skins (Bedding?), the Husbands of Your Daughter are Approaching (Coming)!”

**AWUOR-BANPIENDE**, *Biophytum petersianum* (*Oxalidaceae*)

Related Luo Word(S)

English

‘Awuor’	Proper name ‘Awuor’ is given to one born at midnight.
‘Ban’	Fold up
‘Pien’ (singular); ‘Piende’ (plural.)	sleeping skin; sleeping skins
‘Chuor’	Husband
‘Kachuo’	Husbands; Brothers in law
‘Nyar’	Daughter
‘Nyari’	your daughter
‘Biro’	is arriving; is coming

### **Interpretation of Meaning**

‘Awuor Awuor’ is an annual herb, which is quite sensitive to touch and weather conditions. It folds its leaves immediately when touched. Luo children growing-up in the rural areas of Luo country are fond of tapping the leaves of this sensitive annual herb and singing: Awuor Awuor Ban Piende (as already explained above).

This popular country folk-song ‘Awuor Awuor’ has been transmitted from one generation of Luo people to the next. Awuor Awuor is also a popular character in Luo oral folklore; because of her ‘sensitivity’ like a mother in law who is supposed to fold up her ‘sleeping skins’ (or ‘bedding’ in modern days) in the yard and put them out of sight when important guests (especially sons in law; husbands of daughter) are about to arrive for a visit as expected by custom. It is important to note here that in Luo society, the relationship between *maro* (mother in law) and *ore; chuor nyare* (son in law; husband of daughter) is based on avoidance relationship based on much sensitivity.

According to Ayisi (1992:117) avoidance relationship refers to: “Situation in which persons who stand in some definite relationship avoid one another formally eg. sons-in-law and mothers-in-law maintain asymmetrical relations, with the sons in law having to avoid mothers in law.” In this context, the vegetable, **KANDHIRA**, *Brassica oleracea* “var.acephala” (*Cruciferae*) commonly called “Collards” in English and “Sukuma Wiki” in Swahili (translation: Pushing the week), has another interesting Luo name: **BAD MARO** (translation: the hand of mother-in-law), which is a fairly recent coinage because it is a vegetable which is exotic in origin (it is not indigenous to the Luo culture). Another common name for “the hand of the mother-in-law” is “Kale.”

Apparently, the coinage “the hand of mother-in-law” was employed when the vegetable was introduced in Luo country; it is possible that because it was an unfamiliar vegetable which people tended to “avoid” in preference to other well known indigenous vegetables, it got its name from the folk-ways of the Luo people. A son-in-law is not supposed to shake hands with his mother-in-law; hence “the hand of the mother-in-law” is a reminder to this avoidance relationship in a Luo cultural context. With time, however, **BAD MARO** has become unavoidable in many Luo homes forming a favorite vegetable dish eaten with *Kuon* (the equivalent of *Pap* in South Africa). Clearly, **AWUOR AWUOR BAN PIENDE KACHUO NYARI BIRO** and **BAD MARO** are two ethnobotanical names, which derive their meanings from the socio-cultural reality of the Luo people.

**AYIERGWENG'**, *Boscia angustifolia* var. *corymbosa* (*Capparidaceae*)

Related Word(S) In Luo	English
‘Yier’	Choose
‘Yiero’	Choice
‘Ayier’	let me choose
‘Gweng’	Territory

### Interpretation of Meaning:

This is a compound name given to an evergreen tree based on the choice of territory or topography presumably during the Luo migration and settlement in their present homelands in Kenya and Tanzania.

**BILO**, *Blighia unijugata* (Sapindaceae)

Related Word(S) In Luo	English
‘Bilo’	magic; spell; charm used to weaken the enemy
‘Jabilo’	one who makes magical charms to make a fighter invincible.
‘Yath’	medicine

### Interpretation of Meaning:

Among the Luo people, the use of *spell* or *magical charms* in sports such as wrestling was not uncommon in traditional society. The Luo people believed that their neighbors the, *Abamanyala*, were experts in the area of magical arts in wrestling, hence the saying: “Jamanyala ong’enyoyadh amen” (Translation: The Manyala man knows the medicine of wrestling).

Most of the *Thuond Luo* (Luo legends) were considered heroic because it was believed they possessed **BILO** powers to vanquish the enemy. The **BILO** tree had a cultural significance in the context of making magical charms. Agot Kawango (1995:84) in the study of ethnobotanical remedies has defined **BILO** as a: “Protective charm... worn or rubbed into

small cuts on the skin (*saro*) to ward off any harmful intent by man or evil spirits (jochiende).”

**BONGU**, *Ficus* sp. (*Moraceae*)

Related Luo Word

English

‘Ng’owo’

Fig tree

The Ethnobotanical terminology ‘ng’owo’ has an orthographic variant ‘ng’ou’, which refers to the same family of fig trees found in the Nyanza Province of Kenya and the Mara Region of Tanzania.

### **Interpretation of Meaning:**

This is the bark-cloth tree, **BONGU**, considered to have both cultural and religious significance in Luo folklore. Another Luo name for the tree is **NG’OWO**, *Ficus vallis-chounde* (*Moraceae*) and another variety of **NG’OWO** is *Ficus capensis* (*Moraceae*). Several of these varieties of tree have been observed to occur in the Nyanza Province of Kenya, and some toponymns (or place names) are based on the name of the tree, for example:-

- BONGU-KASERE
- BONGU-KAMBIJA

In Kamagambo, Rongo Division of Migori District, according to the local oral history of the area, there were important ritual sites. According to ethnographers Benedict Onyango-Ogutu and Adrian Roscoe (1974; 1982:19) there were special trees such as **NG’OWO** or **BONGU** which were considered to be “sacrosanct” and were seen as “temples and worship” sites in traditional Luo society. Oral folk history has it that Bongu-Kasere was named after a



patriarch figure known as Asere Wuod Wanga Ja-Kanyamkago (Katieno). He was a brother to Odundo Wuod Wanga Ja-Kanyamkago (Katieno) who was also referred to as Odundo Bade Dongo, (translasyon: Odundo the Man with Big Arms) and Odundo Racham (translation: Odundo the Left-Handed Man). According to oral folk history, Odundo Wuod Wanga returned to Kanyamkago in Rapogi while his brother, Asere Wuod Wanga remained in Kamagambo along the Rongo-Homa Bay highway where the legendary tree Bongu-Kasere still stands preserved.

Activities of traditional worship and sacrifices were conducted by the local people under the Bongu tree which was given immortality by the locals when the place was named after a patriarch Asere Wuod Wanga, who remained in Kamagambo when his brother Odundo Wuod Wanga migrated to Kanyamkago-Rapogi near Got Agongo (Agongo Hill).



*Rosalia Wapongo  
Nyar Odundo in her tradi-  
tional homestead at Kama-  
gambo. She was the eldest  
daughter of Odundo Wuod  
Wanga of Kanyamkago and  
wife of Ojwang Wuod Ogan-  
do. In the background is her  
thatched house, a granary  
and a euphobia fence.*

The descendants of Asere Wuod Wanga still live among the people of Kamagambo while their main clan of Katieno live in Kanyamkago-Rapogi.

The other important place named after the tree species is Bongu-Kambija in River Misadhi Valley near Nyaburu Trading Centre in Kamagambo. The name Mbija is significant according to Luo oral history. Mbija was a sister to a patriarch called Oluoch in Kamagambo. Local oral history has it that Mbija was married to a man known as Onyango Onyiero of Sakwa-Waora in Awendo Division, Migori District. Onyango Onyiero and Mbija settled in Kamagambo with the permission of her brother Oluoch. She begot many children and became a legendary Matriarch. Many people were named after her. There is a large **BONGU** tree named after this Matriarch (Bongu-Kambija). A local elder's *gunda* (old homestead) is situated near the **BONGU** tree. The local elder's name was Mbija Arenjo having been named after Mbija the Matriarch. One of the descendants, Michael Opot Onje, became the sub-chief of Kambija Sub-Location. Bongu-Kambija has been well preserved till today. Local people have stories to tell about the sacrifices and acts of traditional worship their ancestors conducted under the **BONGU** tree in the area. The Kambija clan traces its origins to Sakwa-Waora. An elder of the clan known by the name Dison Orina Ondeyo of Kanyadigi Village and his fellow kins-folk always remind their Kamagambo counterparts that: "Wan Jo-Waora ma ka uwang'o iwa to ok oowa mit waoree!"

Translation:

"We are people of Waora and if you annoy us we are never appeased!"

One of the *Luo Legends* already mentioned earlier in this study is Onyango Randar, who hailed from Sakwa-Waora in Bondo District. He was one of the Luo warriors who crossed the Winam Gulf into Southern Nyanza in the present Awendo Division. He later went back

to Bondo after making sure that the Sakwa settlements in Southern Nyanza were secure. From Bongu-Kambija, the name of a tree, we can glean the oral folk history of different clans of the Luo people in Kamagambo Location by gathering stories, sayings and other forms of folk reminiscences in a culture-specific context.

According to Jan Vansina (1992:10) popular etymologies about place and people names are significant in understanding the local folk history of a landscape: “popular etymologies do not apply merely to place names but also to personal names and titles, and often give rise to tales.” Adrian Koopman (2002:12) has defined toponymy as:-

The study of place names, sometimes referred to as ‘geographical names’ ... under the general heading of ‘toponyms’ we could consider then the names of rivers, mountains, lakes, forests, seas, and deserts, on the one hand, and countries, provinces, cities, towns, villages and settlements on the other!

In the present study, Bongu-Kasere and Bongu-Kambija in Kamagambo are good illustrations of toponymy. The study of ‘geographical names’ is also closely linked to the *ethnonyms*, which, according to Adrian Koopman (2002:12) are the names of races, tribes (ethnic groups), clans, nations and similar groups. Ethnonymic classifications in East Kamagambo where Bongu-Kasere and Bongu-Kambija are to be found include the following clans:-

- **Jo-Koluoch**
- **Jo-Kambija**
- **Jo-Kanyadieto**
- **Jo-Kong’udi**
- **Jo-Kong’oma**
- **Jo-Kasigunga**
- **Jo-Waregi**
- **Jo-Katieno**

Bongu-Kasere, Bongu-Kambija and other similar “traditional sacred sites” in Luo country like Got Ramogi need to be documented and their “secrets” and “unexplored potential” in terms of their “unique biodiversity” researched into before it is too late because the “sites are now under serious threat” (Muhando 2003:1,6,7).

According to a study by Okumba Miruka (2001:55) sources of imagery used in Luo folklore are taken from a wide range of plant life forms. Okumba Miruka (2001:58) gives the following examples of images derived from the plant world in Luo proverbs:

The Green and the Dry

Luo: Motwo ne owuondo manumu

English : The dry cheated the green.

### **Interpretation of Meaning**

This proverb is taken from a Luo anecdote which may be paraphrased as follows:-

Once upon a time there were two bundles of firewood. One bundle was dry. Another bundle was green. The dry bundle of firewood told the wet bundle: “Let’s go for a swim.” The green bundle of firewood responded: “Why not?” The two went to the Lake and started to swim. In the process of what promised to be an exciting exercise, the green bundle of firewood drowned and perished! The dry bundle floated and survived.

The proverb: “The dry cheated the green” is a warning about people “who fool others.” (Okumba Miruka 2001:58). Another Luo proverb drawn from ethnobotany is about **YAGO**, *Kigelia africana* (*Bignoniaceae*) common known as the Sausage Fruit

Luo: Yago ohewo tonde

English: The sausage fruit is heavier than its suspender.

## **Interpretation and Meaning**

According to Okumba Miruka (2001:58) the Luo proverb about the sausage tree is: “used when one is overwhelmed by his/her responsibilities and obligations...” However, custom demands that one should not complain about his or her responsibility as a parent, spouse or sibling within the family or other responsibilities demanded of one within the larger society.

### **7.10 Ethnobotanical Names Which Derive Their Meanings from Borrowing (Loan Words).**

The term borrowing according to Crystal (1985:36) is used in Linguistics to mean: “Linguistic forms being taken over by one language from another; such ‘borrowings’ are usually known as loan words...”

Owino (2003:192) has listed some Luo loan words in the field of food and nutrition as follows:-

<b>Luo</b>	<b>English</b>
APOYO	Paw Paw
ABICH	Cabbage
KARAT	Carrot

Other examples given by Owino (2003:192) are:-

<b>Luo</b>	<b>Swahili</b>	<b>(English)</b>
MACHUNGA	Machungwa	(Orange)
CHAE	Chai	(Tea)
SIKARI	Sukari	(Sugar)
APILO	Pili Pili	(Pepper)
BAO	Bawo	(Timber)
DENGO	Dengu	(Green grams)
MAWEMBE	Mawembe	(Mango)
MICHELE	Michele	(Rice)

The parenthesized translations into English are my own additions to the second set of Owino's list of loan words.

In the area of ethnobotanical terminology, Luo as a language has borrowed many words especially from English, which is the official language in Kenya, and Swahili, which is the national language. This is because; the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Natural Resources use a lot of English and Swahili in their extension programmes. Where a new crop, or tree, or shrub or grass was introduced into the Luo speech community, naturally there was borrowing from the two languages. Examples of English acquisitions in Luo ethnobotanical terminology are listed in this section and can be accessed in Kokwaro's *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*.

<b>Luo</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>ABOKADO/ ABUKADO</b>	Avocado pear
<b>KABICH</b>	Cabbage
<b>KARAT</b>	Carrot
<b>POI POI</b>	Paw Paw

The following are examples of Swahili acquisitions in Luo ethnobotanical terminology:

<b>Luo</b>	<b>Swahili</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>KAHAWA</b>	Kahawa	Coffee
<b>KANDHIRA</b>	Kanzira-sukuma	Kale
<b>KITUNGU</b>	Kitungu	Onions
<b>KONGA</b>	Mkongge	Sisal
<b>MALMAO</b>	Malimao	Lemon
<b>MAPERA</b>	Mapera	Guava
<b>NDIM</b>	Ndinu	Citrus

Language and culture are closely linked; colonial and post-colonial cultures have definitely introduced these new plants in Luo society and with the external cultural influence, Luo

language has acquired the new plant names as most other languages do when they have no original name for the new plant.

### **7.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has covered in detail, the meanings of the Luo plant names. The six hypotheses proposed in chapter 1 have been subjected to detailed analysis and discussion of the findings in a culture-specific configuration. The analysis has been contextualised in a Luo ecological framework, which constitutes the major focus of the present study. Given the fact that African languages have been largely ignored in the documentation of indigenous plants, this has led to “an unbalanced picture of the cultigen repertoires in traditional agriculture and a tendency to underestimate the significance of minor crops ...” (Blench 2006:202). The analysis in this chapter is an attempt to situate the meanings of plant names for purposes of lexicographic documentation, not just for the specialists in the biological sciences, but also the extension workers and general readers with an interest in ethnobotany. The Luo plant names have been used for demonstration purposes, but the analytical approach used in this chapter can inform the study of plant names elsewhere. In the next chapter, we shall examine the lexicographic implications of the analysis of the Luo plant names.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LEXICOGRAPHIC PRACTICE

#### 8.1 Introduction

In this study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology in a culture-specific configuration, the primary research problem was a lexico-semantic analysis of plant names in a given context of a specific language group in Kenya. The analysis was based on the data collected by Professor John O. Kowaro, a leading botanist at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. The study specifically examined the form and content of the two dictionaries, namely: *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* and the section of *Luo Biological Dictionary*, *Luo Biological Dictionary* dealing with the plant names and descriptions. What has emerged is that there is much encyclopedic information, some of it cultural, linguistic, and botanical. According to *A Pocket Directory of Trees and Seeds in Kenya*, a lot of information about plants are culture-specific since: “The environment and resources of any area are an intimate part of the culture. Growing trees could be enhanced by knowing how one may understand with the culture” (Teel, 1988: 142).

This study points to future research in the area of LSP lexicography as being the most important implication of the particular study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology. In the next section, we shall look at these multicultural and multilingual implications of the study.



## 8.2 Framework For African Lexicography

A number of researchers would necessarily be interested in encyclopedic information about a people group and their plant resources as part of the general environment. Language provides us with the window to access the information about these plant resources. Writing about the South African context will regard to lexicography, Fr. Alberts (2003: 1) stated that: “Dictionaries are indications of mirrors of a country’s social, cultural, scientific and technological development .... Judications are that the language communities of all the official languages in South Africa need national dictionaries, not only to bridge the communication gap but also to dominant and preserve the rich variety of his South African Community in South African languages.”

The same could be said of the Kenyan situation in particular and the east African Community in general. The difference between Kenya and South Africa is that the latter has engaged in deliberate language planning and language policy to embrace eleven lexicographic units all over the Republic of South Africa. According to Alberts (2003: 1):

The national Lexicography Units Bill was incorporated into Pan South African Language Board Amendment Act, (Act 10 of 1999). Section 8(8)(c) of this Act states that Pan SALB must establish eleven national lexicography units (NLUs) to operate as companies limited by guarantee under section 21 of the Companies Act, 1973 (Act 61 of 1973). A national lexicography unit (NLU) for each of the official languages in South Africa had been established and registered as a section 21 company by March 2001.

An overview given by Alberts includes the following National Lexicography Units (NLUs) in the entire Republic of South Africa (as the time of writing):

Afrikaans NLU	University of Stellenbosch
English NLU	Rhodes University, Grahamstown
Isi Ndebele NLU	University of Pretoria, Pretoria
Isi -Xhosa NLU	University of Fort Hare, Alice
Isi -Zulu NLU	University of Zululand, Umlazi
Si Swati NLU	Pretoria Technikon, Nelspruit
SeTswana NLU	University of the North West
SeSotho NLU	University of the Free State, Bloemfontein
TshiVenda NLU	University of Venda, Thohoyandou
XiTsonga NLU	Tivumbeni Multipurpose Centre, Nkowankowa

The idea here is to locate each National Lexicography Unit “at a tertiary institution within the boundaries of the geolinguistic area in which the majority of the speakers of the language are found ...” (Alberts 2003: 1).

In Kenya, the situation is different in that only English and Swahili are *recognized* as the official languages (Whitely 1974). There has been a long debate about the status of the other indigenous languages spoken in Kenya since the early 1970s but little has change in terms of language planning and language policy to promote lexicography in the indigenous languages. While the two official languages, namely: English and Swahili have enjoyed attention in terms of

lexicographic research, there has not been systematic language policy formulated in post-colonial Kenya to regulate lexicographic work in the forty (42) indigenous Kenyan languages. The multicultural and multilingual complexity in Kenya is reflected also in the cross-border populations from neighbouring countries, in Eastern Africa.

It is a fact that, like the Republic of South Africa, Kenya is indeed a complex society and the language planning and language policy must take that into account (Ojwang 2003: 4). The following concepts need to be addressed concerning lexicography and terminology in Kenya: ethnic identity in Kenya is a very important factor in the political, economic and socio-cultural realms of national life. Given that “dictionaries are indications or mirrors” (Alberts 2003: 1) of socio-cultural and scientific progress of any population group, there is need to initiate lexicographic projects to document the language, cultures and ecological realities of the 42 distinct language/ethnic groups in order to enrich the national life from the multiplicity of ethnic heritage of Kenya.

There is a close connection between language and culture as we have already noted. There are many distinct cultural and religious groups in Kenya. Deliberate language policy based on sound planning strategies needs to be adopted to encourage dictionary projects which will document the multiplicity of Kenya’s cultural heritage.

There are at least forty-two (42) languages spoken in Kenya; the count continues with some ethnic groups agitating that their dialects be recognized as full-fledged languages. With this kind of scenario, it is important that the Government of Kenya in collaboration with international organizations, for example, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization) and other bodies concerned with the preservation and promotion of African languages should sponsor dictionary projects on the indigenous Kenyan languages. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) is already doing some work among the minority language groups but there is need for the Government of Kenya to support this kind of effort, and also mobilize resources from the private sector such as the Oxford University Press and other publishers to engage in multilingual dictionary projects.

Lexicographic initiatives such as Odaga's *English-Dholuo Dictionary*, Capen's *Bilingual Dholuo – English Dictionary / Kenya* and specialized works like Kokwaro's *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* need the institutional support of the Government of Kenya for such initiatives to be sustainable (on an on-going basis). Future work on constitutional reforms in Kenya should learn lessons from the successful constitutional transition in South Africa in 1994 which gave recognition to nine African languages as official languages alongside Afrikaans and English. Similarly, it is hoped that indigenous Kenyan languages will be given due recognition when a new constitution is implemented in future. Hartman (1990: 72) has said that very few of the African countries have "a professional body specializing in lexicography, but several promote dictionary-making by other means." It is in this connection that the role of the South African based African Association for Lexicography (AFRILEX) should not only promote the languages and cultures of Southern Africa but also Eastern Africa, and the rest of the continent. There is need for the establishment of an Eastern African Chapter to promote lexicography in indigenous languages, in that part of the continent.

### **8.3 Institutional Framework for Lexicographic Work in Kenya**

There are a number of public-sector universities operating in Kenya which need to be supported by the Government to start lexicographic units.

At the University of Nairobi, for instance, a National Lexicography Unit operating under an expanded Department of Linguistics and Languages could be the nucleus of such an initiative with six sub-units focusing on specialized lexicography as follows:-

- The Lexicography Sub-Unit of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences
- The Lexicography Sub-Unit of Architecture and Engineering
- The Lexicography Sub-Unit of Biological and Physical Sciences
- The Lexicography Sub-Unit of Education and External Studies.
- The Lexicography Sub-Unit of Health Sciences
- The Lexicography Sub-Unit of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Several other private-sector universities and colleges accredited by the Government of Kenya could also be involved. Since major lexicographic projects to cover all the 42 language groups will require concerted efforts and effective mobilization of resources from all provinces and geolinguistic regions, public and private sector establishments must not be excluded from the enormous task ahead as can be observed from the South African context. Language committees on all the 42 languages should be instituted to help linguists, lexicographers and other researchers to do their work effectively from the grassroots communities.

#### **8.4 Specialized Lexicographic Practice with Reference to Ethnobotany**

There are dictionaries, which deal with a special subject such as law, biology or medicine. Other dictionaries deal with an aspect of the language “such as a pronunciation dictionary or a slang dictionary” (Landau 2001 a; 32). The special subject dictionaries are also known as “special field” dictionaries according to the terminology of Barnhart (Landau 2001: 32). A brief historical overview of the development of lexicography indicates that “special field” dictionaries since the episodic *Cocker’s English Dictionary* of 1704 covered special subject areas such as:-

- Latin Medical Dictionaries
- Latin Legal Dictionaries
- Military Science Dictionaries
- Nautical Science Dictionaries

According to Landau, these “special field” dictionaries existed long before the development of English monolingual dictionaries. Landau (2001: 34) asserts that:-

Subject-field dictionaries, like scholarly dictionaries, are directed to a vertical and restricted market. Unlike scholarly dictionaries, however, which as a rule are entirely descriptive and lexical, subject field dictionaries often have a normative purpose as well as a informative one, and they tend to be more encyclopedic in content.

Landau (2001: 35) observes that subject-field dictionaries are to be found in almost every subject one can think of:-

Among the most widely used are those of law, medicine and other branches of biology, electronics, computing and architecture. Some specialized works, however, though called dictionaries, are entirely encyclopedic in content, depending on concepts rather than terms for classifying their information.

In looking at the cultural context of words in lexicographic practice, Kavanagh (2000 : 99-118) of the Dictionary Unit for South African English, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Republic of South Africa argues that: “Successful communication is dependent upon an adequate level of cultural as well as linguistic understanding. Language is itself part of culture and reflects social structures and attitudes.”

Kavanagh (2000:106) explains what is meant by encyclopedic dictionaries and the sort of information they provide on linguistic and or cultural information in the same volume, arguing that the word “dictionary” is a powerful one:

Many lists of subject terms, on topics ranging from psychology to geology, are called ‘dictionaries’. Dictionaries of terminology, learner’s dictionaries, and cultural dictionaries, can all be classified as “*dictionaries for special purposes.*” Perhaps there is scope for future collaboration between dictionary units on a range of cultural dictionaries. Culture can be divisive, insular, and threatening, especially if it appears closed to others. More widely available information may lead to greater interest, greater acceptance.

It is within the milieu of dictionaries for special purposes that Kokwaro’s *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* and similar bilingual and bicultural lexicographic works must be understood. The purpose of any bilingual or multilingual lexicographic works must be understood. The purpose of any bilingual or multilingual lexicographic work is to enhance cross-cultural communication especially in a socially complex context such as Kenya. Encyclopedic works must necessarily contain both linguistic and cultural information “about society and social practices, history, traditions, and values ...” (Kavanagh : 2000 : 116). The subject-field of ethnobotany in future lexicographic practice will have to contend with having a closer look at dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and directories. In the Kenyan context, works such as: *Teel’s A Pocket Directory of Trees and Seeds in Kenya* published by the Kenya Energy Non-Governmental

Organizations (KENGO) in 1984, Nairobi, and *Backe's and Ahenda's Facing Sikulu Masaba: Indigenous Trees in Bukusuland: A Selection of Useful Trees and Shrubs for Social Forestry in Bungoma / Tree Propagation* need to be taken into account in future lexicographic work that entail the balancing of linguistic and encyclopedic information.

Hartmann (1990: 66 – 75) has pointed out the lack of a complete picture of the state of lexicography in some regions of Africa. In Eastern Africa, dictionaries are limited in size and are quite old, being the work of early European missionaries and colonial administrators.

Further more, there are no reliable estimate of dictionaries make in Eastern Africa generally and Kenya in particular. It is hard to find people working in lexicography full time, if at all.

Hartmann (1990:71) observes that:-

Traditionally, compilers tended to be European missionaries and colonial administrators; more linguists engaged in field-work have taken an interest in dictionary work, language planning officials, translators, terminologists and university teachers also occasionally contribute to the enterprise, but projects often remain incomplete or partial because of limited resources or expertise.

There are institutional limitations and impediments in dictionary work. In East Africa, the “National Kiswahili Council” in Tanzania is the only specialized organization that has shown a keen interest in specialized lexicographic and terminological work. In Kenya, however, no serious lexicographic work is going on. There are some signs of interest activities in the Department of linguistics and languages, University of Nairobi where courses in lexicography are offered.



According to the University of Nairobi, Calender (2005 – 2006) CLL 404: Lexicography is offered to fourth year students on the Bachelor of Arts (BA) Linguistics Programme. The course is meant to equip students with basic skills in lexicography. The course covers both the historical and contemporary aspects of dictionary making. It also attempts to balance lexicographic theory and practice in an African context, particularly in the area of specialized terminology.

Beyond the course offering, there is no Lexicography Unit at the University of Nairobi to implement some of the theoretical aspects taught in the Department of Linguistics and Languages. The same situation also exists in other public and private sector higher education establishments in Kenya.

Hartmann (1990: 74) has recommended the following:-

Most importantly for the long-term development of lexicography in Africa, the subject of systematic training must be stressed. It is only by a combination of systematic study and research as well as the sharing of practical experience that public awareness of the problems of dictionary production and use can be encouraged...

He further recommends at least *ten* potential components for training courses in lexicography:

- 1) ‘recording’: delimitation, gathering and processing of lexical data, including fieldwork and or corpus collection.
- 2) “description’: analysis, structuring and arrangement of processed material, including definition work.
- 3) ‘presentation’: preparation of material for production, taking account of target user’s needs.
- 4) ‘planning and organization’: including finance.

- 5) 'procedures and tools': including computing
- 6) 'reflecting and experimentation'
- 7) 'history of dictionary-making'
- 8) 'dictionary use'
- 9) 'dictionary criticism'
- 10) 'dictionary use'

This recommended pedagogical approach makes: “reference to various contributing disciplines (such as linguistics and information technology) and strengthened by practical hands-on experience,” (Hartmann 1990:74-75).

Dictionaries contain categories of information, with lexicographers giving preferential treatment to meanings of the lexical entries. According to Gouws (1990:56) “reflecting on lexicographical information, the macrostructural treatment of other lexical elements is neglected.”

He recommends that different subdomains of linguistics should be reflected in a dictionary article in order to ensure what he calls a comprehensive information transfer to guarantee the user access to the most important properties of a specific lexical item.

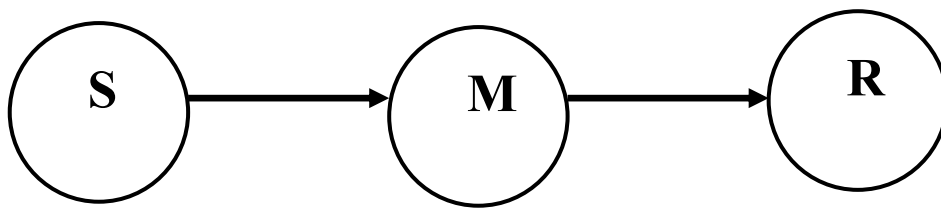
The linguistic properties include (among others):-

- Semantics
- Syntax
- Morphology
- Phonology
- Etymology

Gouws argues that the lexicographer should not allow “semantic bias” to adversely influence the compilation of dictionaries in a manner that is detrimental to other aspects of lexicographic information already listed above. He advocates for the treatment of all subdomains of linguistics in dictionaries with equal care. Gouws (1990: 57) observed that: “Within the wider field of semantics, the lexicographer is primarily concerned with lexical semantics because this is the subdomain directed at meaning attached to lexical items ...” He suggests that lexicographers of general monolingual and translation dictionaries have three main assignments regarding lexicographic information, namely:-

- a) The description of lexical meaning
- b) The presentation of translation, equivalents and
- c) The indication of semantic relations

This study is not concerned with general monolingual translation dictionaries, but specialized lexicographic practice in the area of ethnobotany. The trend in this area is that lexical semantic information in the context of botanical description is given prominence because of the informative functions of this type of dictionary. Kokwaro’s Luo-English Botanical Dictionary presents the lexicographer with a trans-cultural challenge which requires both translation and lexical semantics across cultures (i.e. Luo and English), but with ethnobotanical terminology as the emphasis of the analysis. A model of “meaning across cultures” proposed by Nida and Reyburn (1981:5) is useful in this discussion. In this kind of analysis, the point of departure in translation must be the original communication, namely: source (S), the message (M), and the receptor (R) which may be diagrammatically represented as follows.



Without these three elements, there is simply no communication. In the *Luo English Botanical Dictionary*, for instance, the interlingual communicative context involves the following:-

- Source (S) = Lexicographer (compiler of specialized dictionary)
- Message (M) = Content of the specialized dictionary
- Receptor (R) = User of the specialized dictionary (readers who are either technical or non-technical in their orientation.)

In this model, it is essential that the lexicographer compiling the ethnobotanical dictionary should know as much as possible the cultural knowledge of plants which are essential in determining the form and content of the dictionary, “for the words of any language have meaning only in terms of ideas, values and circumstances of concrete human lives,” (Nida and Reurn 1981:1).

In analyzing the *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*, we discover that the referential meanings of plant names depend upon the cultural knowledge of the Luo society. The cultural knowledge which helps in the interpretation of meanings is based on contextual factors such as:-

- Assumptions;
- Beliefs;
- Ideas; and
- Values.

All of these are shared by people of a given community, although they are not always basic and obvious to the members of that particular community. There must be a process of learning or acquiring such cultural knowledge through socialization. Any specialized lexicographic practice within the context of ethnobotany will necessarily borrow from Cruse (1997:1) who observed that: “the semantic properties of a lexical item are fully reflected in appropriate aspects of the relations it contracts with actual and potential contexts.”

In this understanding of meaning, relevant contexts could include the extra-linguistic features embedded in the culture, since extra-lingual contexts often get mirrored linguistically. The lexical items used as the corpus for this study is taken from the Luo ethnobotanical lexicon forming the main body of primary data.

The meanings of the plant names formed the departure from Kokwaro’s *Luo-English Botany Dictionary*. Native speakers of Luo were relied on for cross-checking the intuitive semantic judgments through elicitation of information needed from the native informants in order to fully understand the plant names in Luo.

The native speakers who acted as informants were asked the following information:

- The meaning of plant names
- The judgments (in a controlled manner) on plant names
- The intuitions on word meanings (especially on those which appeared to be related to plant names)

- The extra-linguistic contexts which could have any bearing on the meaning of plant names.

In the study, the informants' intuitions were compared with the dictionary meanings of related items, and were found most informative. From the foregoing, it is clear that there are several theoretical and practical challenges in specialized lexicographic practice.

Lexicography is intrinsically related to linguistics; however, it cuts across various disciplines because of the nature of its mandate. Tarp (2000:200-201) looks at the theoretical challenges to practical specialized lexicography by attempting to answer the question: "What skills are needed to conceive and produce a specialized dictionary?" Tarp suggests that all kinds of dictionaries require a combination of several skills, which are outlined below:-

- 1) Lexicographic skills (specialized knowledge of lexicography)
- 2) Linguistics knowledge (general information of the language)
- 3) General cultural and encyclopedia knowledge (communication oriented and knowledge oriented dictionaries)
- 4) Knowledge about the subject field in question.
- 5) Knowledge about the LSP in question in all the languages covered by the dictionary.

It is clear that any lexicographic project requires multi-disciplinary skills especially in LSP contexts. Tarp (2000:20) concludes that: "A lexicographic project must from the very start be seen as a co-operation between various specialists within very different fields of knowledge. This required a capacity for planning and co-operation with other specialists."

The recommendation here that the production and review of lexicographic works should be undertaken co-operatively by specialists with different skills is something that has been proposed for any future dictionary work at the University of Nairobi and other institutional contexts in Kenya.

A review of the *Manual Specialized Lexicography* edited by Bergenholtz and Tarp also gives a framework for LSP lexicographic practice. Bergenholtz and Tarp (1995:70) dedicate a section of their manual to “dictionaries of science and technology” which, broadly speaking, cover the subject of this study (Luo ethnobotanical terminology.) The two lexicographers also dedicate another section of their manual to “culture-dependent and culture-independent specialized dictionaries” (Bergenholtz and Tarp 1995:60 – 61)

The subject matter of the present study falls in the broad areas of science and technology. Many specialized dictionaries fall in this are e.g. Kokwaro’s *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* and *Luo-Biological Dictionary* (Co-authored with Johns). The scientific or technical dictionaries usually fall under any of the following three categories:-

- Mono-lingual dictionaries
- Bi-lingual dictionaries
- Multi-lingual dictionaries

They may cover the following fields

- Multi-disciplines
- Single-disciplines
- Sub-disciplines

Berngenholtz and Tarp (1995:70) state that dictionaries of science and technology generally:-

Comprise an extremely broad spectrum of subject fields and topics with widely different user requirements for linguistic and encyclopedic information. The only common denominator in this host of possibilities is that the subject fields involved are invariably independent of culture.

The assumption here is that specialists in science and technology are largely free from local culture and share common terminology and methods in their work with their peers. In the area of botany, the derivation of meanings of the names of commonly grown plants was largely from Latin, although other languages (e.g. Greek) and personal names, have also been used. Coombes (1985:7) observes that:-

It should be remembered, however, that when a scientific attitude was first taken towards the naming of plants in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Latin was a common language among intellectuals of Europe and it was second nature to use it. Today, although Latin has evolved from the Latin used in classical and medieval times to meet the needs of botany it forms a method of communication between botanists of all nationalities.

In botanical circles, the scientific and technical terminology derived from the Latin (and sometimes Greek) origins forming the shared communication of the experts; these have to be cross-referenced against the indigenous plant names for accessibility in an ethnobotanical context as in Kokwaro's *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*.

Ethnobotany is, therefore, people and culture-specific while botany as a science transcends local cultures. Berngenholtz and Tarp (1995: 60 – 61) have argued that there is a basic distinction between “culture-dependent” and “culture – independent” subject or knowledge areas since:-

In culture-dependent knowledge, the subject matter is culture dependent, since his historically and culturally it has developed its own specific features within delimited geographical areas. For this reason the subject-matter usually differs from country to country, from language community to language community...In



culture-independent knowledge, the subject matter does not change with country or language community.

From the above explanation, it is clear that where the subject-matter is people and culture-specific as in Luo plant names, we rely on culture-dependent knowledge to access the meanings of plant names, in our study of ethnobotanical terminology as opposed to using scientific terminology standardized over the last three centuries by botanists communicating internationally across countries, nationalities and language communities.

In Kokwaro's *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*, there is a meeting of the culture-dependent ethnobotanical knowledge and the culture-independent botanical knowledge because of the bilingual nature of the dictionary to fulfill its specialist function, albeit in a transcultural configuration.

### **8.5 Lexicographic Typology: Dictionaries, Directories, Encyclopedias and Guide-Books**

The lexicographic implications of this study can be felt in the area of dictionary typology, which has to do with making realistic choices. Writing about the South African lexicographic situation Gouws and Prinsloo (2005:45) state that:-

When deciding on the typology of a new dictionary the needs of the target users and the reference situation within a given speech community should play a decisive role... A small dictionary in the hand is preferred to a comprehensive dictionary in the planning.

They recommend that a National Lexicographic Unit should draw up a typological hierarchy indicating:-

- Short-term goals/ priorities

- Medium-term goals/ priorities, and
- Long-term goals/ priorities.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1985) defines a dictionary as a: “book explaining, usually in alphabetical order, the words of a language or words and topics of some special subjects, author, etc. woodwork, lexicon.”

In Odaga’s bilingual *English-Dholuo Dictionary* (1997) the word dictionary is defined in Luo as: buk manyiso tiend weche; bug weche kaka ma eri” (Translation: book which gives the meaning of words; work book like this one.”

The implications in the specialized lexicographic context in Kenya particularly in the area of biological sciences. The four identified categories are:-

- 1) Dictionaries
- 2) Directories
- 3) Encyclopedia
- 4) Guide-Books

These are the games which would offer the best typologies in the treatment of the lexical material in biological sciences in a culture-specific context. According to Gouws and Prinsloo (2005:46)

Dictionary typology has been a favourite topic for discussion among theoretical and practical lexicographers and a wide range of suggestions and models have been formulated. It has been emphasized that none of these classifications can be regarded as absolute.

We will now turn to the definitions of the four typological categories in specialized lexicographic practice relevant to this study; dictionaries, directories, encyclopedias and guide-books. The definition is found in *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (1973) prepared by:

- William Little
- H. W. Fowler, and
- Jessie Coulson.

The lexicographic work has been revised by C. T. Onions several times after the initial publication in 1973.

### **8.5.1 Dictionaries**

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* defines a dictionary as:-

- A book dealing with the words of a language, so as to set forth their orthography, pronunciation, signification and use, their synonyms, derivation and history or at least some of these; the words are arranged in some stated orders, now, usually, alphabetical; a word-book, vocabulary, lexicon.
- By extension: A book of information or reference on any subject or branch of knowledge, the items of which are arranged alphabetically, as a Dictionary of Architecture, Biography, of the Bible, of Dates.

### **8.5.2 Directories**

The same *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* defines a directory as:-

- Something that serves to direct; especially a book of rules or directions
- Ecclesiastical: A book containing directions for order of public or private worship e.g. that compiled in 1644 by the Westminster Assembly.
- A book containing one or more alphabetical lists of the inhabitants of any locality, or classes of them, with their addresses, occupations etc.

### **8.5.3 Encyclopedias**

The same *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* defines an encyclopedia as:-

- The circle of learning; a general course of instruction.
- A work containing information on all branches alphabetically.
- A work containing exhaustive information on some one art or branch of knowledge, arranged systematically.
- Encyclopedic (adjective): of, pertaining to, or resembling an encyclopaedia; hence, embracing all branches of learning; full of information, comprehensive.

### **8.5.4 Guide-Books**

The same *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* defines a guide-book as: a book for the guidance of visitors or strangers in a district, town, building, etc.

In the subdomain of ethnobotany, field guides are designed to identify prominent species of plants observed in a given locality, especially in gardens, homesteads and open countryside. Such field guides highlight the importance of plants to communities in economic, social, cultural,

and spiritual lives of the people. Field guides fall under the general rubric of encyclopedic lexicography. Two examples which come to mind are: Najma Dharani's *Field Guide to Common Trees and Shrubs of East Africa* (2002) and *Field Guide to Acacias of East Africa* (2006).

The author uses maps, glossaries of botanical and medicinal terms and diagrams depicting flower part, leaf shapes and leaf arrangements of the plants described in the field guides.

A study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology necessarily has implications for specialized dictionaries, in addition to what have already been published by Professor John O. Kokwaro and his colleagues in the Department of Botany University of Nairobi. There is need to compile plant lexicons which include ethnobotanical descriptions based on the existing literature, field research, and pharmacological evidence from laboratory work going on at the College of Biological and Physical Sciences, University of Nairobi. In the specialized dictionaries, the following information should be included (see Schultes and Hofmann 1992:231)

- Plant names arranged alphabetically according to the Latin name of the genus and the Luo (or any other vernacular equivalent in the variety of the many indigenous languages of East Africa).
- An index of the plant names in indigenous languages (including Luo) for cross-referencing the botanical information.
- Brief botanical descriptions stressing the most obvious and most easily visible characteristics of the plants; the descriptions will need to be kept deliberately brief for the general reader who does not have an interest going beyond consultation of the ethnobotanical dictionaries.

- Additional information should be included of historical ethnological, phytochemical, and even psychopharmacological information based on researched evidence available at the College of Biological and Physical Sciences, University of Nairobi and other research establishments in Kenya.
- An interdisciplinary view of the dictionaries (or lexicons) should be encouraged in the compilation of such lexicographic works and projects with contributions coming from: biology, chemistry, geography, history, anthropology, linguistics, archaeology, medicine, pharmacy, and other disciplines with an interest in the plant kingdom within the lazier environment.
- Illustrations of the plants should include both drawings and photographs (preferably in full color) for ease of identification and association by the users of the specialized dictionaries. The note of fine artists, designers and photographers is very important in such a lexicographic project on ethnobotany.

According to Schultes and Hofmann (1992:231) the purpose of any dictionary or lexicon is: “Manifestly to help guide the reader more easily into admittedly complex array of facts and stories that comprise only a small fraction of the extensive knowledge from many fields concerning these plants.”

A linguistic study of ethnobotanical terminology in a culture-specific configuration has implications for projects on plant directories for farmers and extension workers, encyclopedias for specialized and general readership, and field guides for ethnobotanical researchers and practitioners in new areas such as cultural heritage studies and ecotourism which are growing

quick ascendancy in Eastern Africa and the rest of the world. Any lexicographic project in the biological and physical sciences at the University of Nairobi will have to build on the solid foundations built by Professor John O. Kokwaro in his pioneering and seminal publications, namely:-

- Luo-English Botanical Dictionary of Plant Names and Uses (1972)
- Medicinal Plants of East Africa (1976) and
- Luo Biological Dictionary (1998)

Lexicographic projects in the area of biological sciences will also require input from other disciplines within the University of Nairobi as already indicated before this study.

## **8.6 Conclusions**

This study has endeavoured to interpret Luo ethnobotanical terminology in a culture-specific configuration, and highlight the lexicographic implications in a multilingual society such as Kenya. The plant names have been contextualised within the linguistic and cultural environment of speakers of Luo language. Based on the corpus of identified plants names in the Luo speech community, a connection has been established between meaning of ethnobotanical terminology and uses, characteristics, properties and other features derived the ethnoecology. Future research in the field of biological sciences should focus on a cultural and linguistic study of Luo ethnozoological terminology in a culture-specific configuration with implications for specialized lexicographic practice.

The institutional framework for lexicographic work in Kenya has also been specifically examined with implications for future dictionary work. In the next chapter, the overall conclusions of the study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology in a culture – specific configuration is undertaken, with the future of Luo biological dictionaries in mind.

This study has endeavoured to analyse Luo ethnobotanical terminology in a culture-specific configuration, and highlight lexicographic implications in a multilingual context such as Kenya. The study sought to contextualize ethnobotanical nomenclature within the linguistic and cultural environment of speakers of the Luo language. Based on the corpus of identified plant names in Kokwaro's *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary* (1972) and *Luo-Biological Dictionary* (1998) (co-authored with Timothy Johns), a connection has been established between meaning of plant names, and: uses, characteristics, properties and other features embedded in the Luo ethnoecology. The meanings of plant names covered the following areas:-

- Meanings derived from characteristics of plants
- Meanings derived from uses of plants
- Meanings derived from human attributes of plants
- Meanings derived from animal attributes of plants
- Meanings derived from folklore
- Meanings derived from borrowed or loan words of other languages

The above named features were covered in detail in Chapter 7 of this work. The study takes into account that the prefix “*ethno*”- has popular usage in anthropological circles, implying the description of how the Luo people understand their ecosystem. According to Martin (1998:xx), a



number of sub- disciplines have acquired the prefix “ethno”- which refers to how: “researchers are exploring local people’s perceptions of cultural and scientific knowledge.” Some of the sub-disciplines which come to mind are:-

- Ethnoastronomy: Local people’s perception of stars, planets, and other celestial bodies.
- Ethnobiology: Local people’s interaction with plants and animals in their natural habitat.
- Ethnobotany: Local people’s interaction with plants and their uses.
- Ethnoecology: Local people’s interaction with the natural environment (including the *flora* and *fauna*).
- Ethnozoology: Local people’s knowledge and use of animals,

The study has drawn from language and ecology which is reminiscent of the work of Stibbe (2008:1-9) in which **words** and **worlds** are studied in ecological contexts in order to understand their meanings. Ethnobotanical nomenclature may be seen in the context of “sustainability literacy” or “environmental literacy” and “ecological literacy” proposed by Stibbe (2008:2). This trajectory documents the ethnoecological concerns with future generations in mind. In the same school of thought is the article by Dr Manoel Soares Sarmiento of Brazil (2000:1- 7), entitled: “*Ecolexicography: Ecological and Unecological Words and Expressions*” in which he presents a background against which ecological lexicography (compilation of LSP dictionaries dealing with the environment) can be accomplished. Another contributor to the study of language and ecology (Mishra 2009:1) explains how the indigenous people of Orissa in India have a “sacred worldview” aimed at “sustaining nature through cultural actions” since “nature and indigenous people are inseparable ...“In the ecological view of language, the knowledge of the local people is taken into consideration since it is based on the collective memory over a long period of time:

The indigenous people acquired their knowledge from their close association and interdependence with nature. Their experiential knowledge has given them the skill of adapting themselves to changes in the natural environment. The earth and forest, the river and the hills, the birds and the animals constitute the lives of the tribal people who, dependent upon them, construct their knowledge, personality, folklore and culture. (Mishra 2009:1).

This linguistic study of Luo ethnobotanical terminology with implications for lexicographic practice was based on what was compiled by Kokwaro, a leading ethnobotanist in East Africa: It is notable that his two dictionaries already mentioned emphasized the following features:-

- **Recognition:**

The identification and recognition of a plant entails the matching of the scientific (Latin) names and the ‘common’ or ‘local’ or ‘vernacular’ names given by the people.

- **Alphabetization:**

Compilation of ethnobotanical dictionaries or field-guides use alphabetization for convenience since the order of plant families is sometimes controversial among botanists.

- **Localization vs Globalization:**

In the study, localization of ethnobotanical knowledge and globalization of that knowledge is lexicographically significant in that Latin names given in Kokwaro’s dictionaries and equivalent local names, give the endeavour a global and worldwide appeal among scholars and researchers. Though local names of plants make ethnobotanical terminology obscure, the Latin names in bilingual LSP dictionaries with botanical descriptions give lexicographic works wider global appeal.

- **Verification:**

Laboratory verification of claims by indigenous peoples' that specific plants have certain medicinal properties need to be done by expert pharmacologists for their toxicity levels; ethnobotanical dictionaries must not fall into the trap of giving users the impression that certain plants can cure this or that disease without pharmacological confirmation in the laboratory. Future dictionaries should simply note the therapeutic claims by the local communities and leave them as such, until confirmed to be the case.

The classifications and patterns observed in the present study are in tandem with what we set out to explore in Chapter 1, which dealt with the introduction and background to the study.

The findings of this study has futuristic perspective with profound implications for ethnobotanical dictionaries. Lexicographic works in the East African languages need to take into account the findings of this study and other lexicographic works of German linguist, Bernd Heine and his colleagues who conducted ethnobotanical surveys in East Africa and produced the following examples of excellent lexicographic works under the themes of plant concepts and plant uses, namely:-

- *Plants of the Chamus* (Kenya) (1988)
- *Plants of the So* (Uganda) (1988)
- *Plants of the Borana* (Ethiopia and Kenya) (1988)

The above mentioned series were based on extensive surveys with the primary purpose of documenting how the peoples of East Africa: “survive in spite of the loss of vital plant resources” (Hein and Brenzinger, 1988). The ethnobotanical surveys by Hein and his colleagues

revealed that the socio-cultural meaning of plant names entailed linguistic and ethno-ecological considerations, namely:-

- Food: human consumption
- Forage: animal consumption
- Material: manufacture of products
- Fuel: firewood and/or charcoal
- Medicine (human): medicinal use
- Veterinary medicine: medicinal use for animals
- Customs and traditions: ceremonial, ritual or religious use

The above mentioned cultural uses of plants are ethno-ecologically significant as explained in Chapter 7 of this study which gives them linguistic bearing on the meanings of plant names.



**Figure 6: Picture of BONGU (Fig Tree) planted by Asere Wuod Wanga in the early years of 1900s**

Plant vocabulary or lexicology covers the culture and ethnoecology of people groups. Future ethnobotanical dictionaries in East Africa will necessarily have to take into account how the uses listed above influence the derivation and formation of plant vocabulary. In the present study, examples of these classifications and patterns have been summarized (as envisioned in the

hypotheses spelt out in Chapter 1 and elucidated in the analysis in Chapter 7). A critical analysis of the lexicographic works which provided the corpus for this study revealed that meanings of plant names were embedded in the language and ethnology of the Luo people, such as characteristics of indigenous plants. A typical example is APOTH, *corchorus olitorius* (*Tiliaceace*) which is a herbaceous or semi-woody annual herb whose leaves are used as vegetables. When cooked, the leaves are rather *slimy*.

Future ethnobotanical dictionaries should include examples of linguistic and ecological features of dictionary articles based on the analysis of this study as elucidated in Chapter 7. Examples of lexical entries are given below:-

**i. Plant Characteristics**

APOTH, *corchorus olitorius* (*Tiliaceae*)

Description:

A herbaceous or semi-woody annual herb whose leaves are used as vegetables. Rather slimy when cooked, believed to be rich in nutrients and a booster of sexual virility among the Luo people.

Related Luo words and English Equivalentents (in parenthesis):

Apoth (semen)

Poth poth (be glossy/be smooth/be slick)

Poth (slimy/viscid)

**ii. Plant Uses**

BAWO (BAO), *Eucalyptus* spp (*Myrtaceae*).

Description:

A timber producing tree; also known commonly as “gum tree” used industrially to produce timber for construction. Used for construction of houses, providing poles for the walls in semi-permanent dwelling structures in Luo homesteads; also used for roofing. The word “bawo” (variant: “bao”) is derived from the Swahili word for *timber*.

Related Luo Word and English Equivalent:

Bawo/bao word from Swahili for timber)

**iii. Human Attributes**

NYANYIEK-MON, *Bidens pilosa* (Compositae)

Description:

A disturbing weed with achenes sticking on clothing and livestock skins.

Related Luo words and English equivalents:

“Nyanyiek-mon” is a compound with two elements NYANYIEK (Herb of jealousy of) and “Mon” (wives or women).

“Nyiego” (envy; jealousy)

“Onyiego” (shorter version for compound formation “Nyanyiek-mon”) “Janyiego” (jealous person)

“Mond nyiego” (co-wives; the wives of a polygamist husband)

**iv. Animal Attributes**

ADH IANG *Voacanga obtuse* (Apocynaceae)

Description:

Tree that grows 6-9m high occasionally attaining a height of 15m. Leaves crowded at the ends of the branches. Good shade for cows when sun is hot.

Related Luo word with English equivalent:

“Dhiang” (cow)

Another good example of a plant with animal attributes is: NYATHUND GUOK, *coccinia grandis* (Curubitaceae).

Description: It is a slender twiner with angular and dotted stems.

Related Luo Word with English equivalent:

The translation of “nyathund guok” is “tits of a dog” which means the rather thin lobes reminds one of “the tits of a dog.”

**v. Folklore**

AWUOR-BANPIENDE *Biophytum petersianum* (Oxalidaceae)

The name of this herb derives from a Luo folk narrative about a sensitive mother-in-law who folds her sleeping rags and keeps them out of sight as soon as it is announced to her that her son-in-law is approaching the homestead for a visit. It underscores the avoidance relationship between in-laws in Luo society. (See hypothesis in Chapter 1 and analysis in Chapter 7).

**vi. Borrowed or Loan Words:**

The term “borrowing” is used in linguistics to mean: “forms being taken over by one language from another; such ‘borrowings’ are usually known as loan words (Crystal

1985:36). The following examples of borrowed plant vocabulary are found in Kokwaro's *Luo-English Botanical Dictionary*.

<b>Luo</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>ABOKADO</b>	Avocado pear
<b>KABICH</b>	Cabbage
<b>KARAT</b>	Carrot
<b>POI POI</b>	Pawpaw

Language and culture are closely inter-linked; European colonial culture introduced exotic plants into African communities, and these found their place in plant vocabulary of the Luo people in East Africa as shown above. The Luo language acquired new (exotic) plant names as most other languages do when they have no original or indigenous name for the new plant.

In conclusion, the future of LSP dictionaries in the sub-field of ethnobotany will need to address the socio-cultural and ecological knowledge of local communities. An ethnolinguistic study of plant names in a local speech community relies on what ethnobotanists call **data**, which is: “the broad range of information they collect on how local people interact with the natural environment: (Martin, 1995:10). In ethnobotanical dictionaries, data recorded should necessarily include plant names and their meanings as we have done in this study, with culture-specific concerns with implications for lexicographic practice.

This study has future implications for LSP lexicographic practice in the sub-field of ethnobotany and related ecological disciplines. The findings will enable lexicographic and terminological



practices to be deployed in culturally relevant contexts, whether the dictionaries are “polyfunctional” (cf. Prinsloo and Gouws, 2000:138-156), or “monolingual or bilingual” (cf. Gouws 2004:264-274) in orientation. The future ethnobotanical dictionaries will also need to function as guides to learners and users on how meanings of lexemes are influenced by ecological and cultural factors such as the uses of plants and customs of the local people. This kind of approach to LSP dictionary-making in the sub-field of ethnobotany and related disciplines of ecological sciences should be more culture-specific and relevant, hence learning processes will not only be theoretically well grounded but also experientially more practical in cultural and linguistic terms.

Thu tinda!

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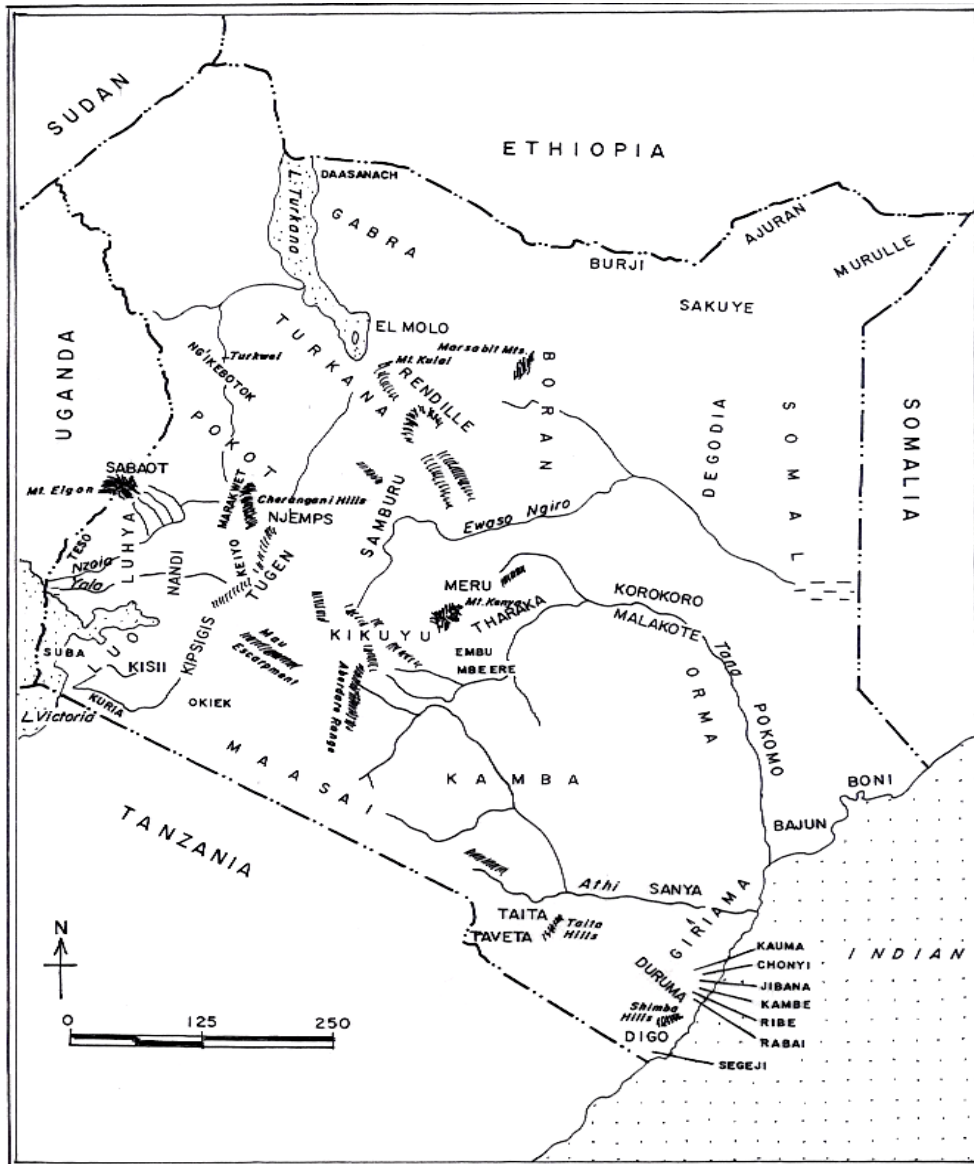
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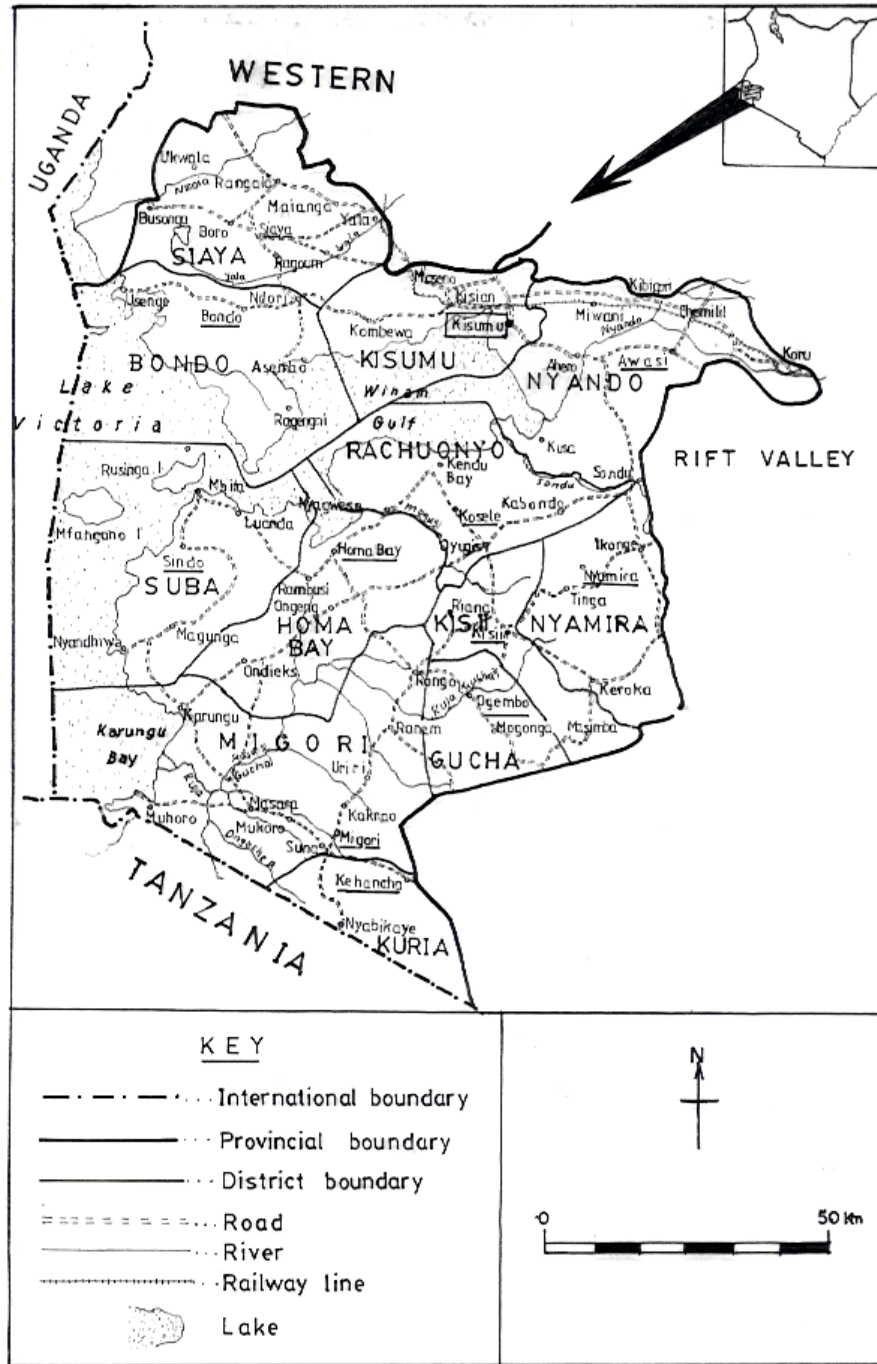
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## APPENDICES: MAPS

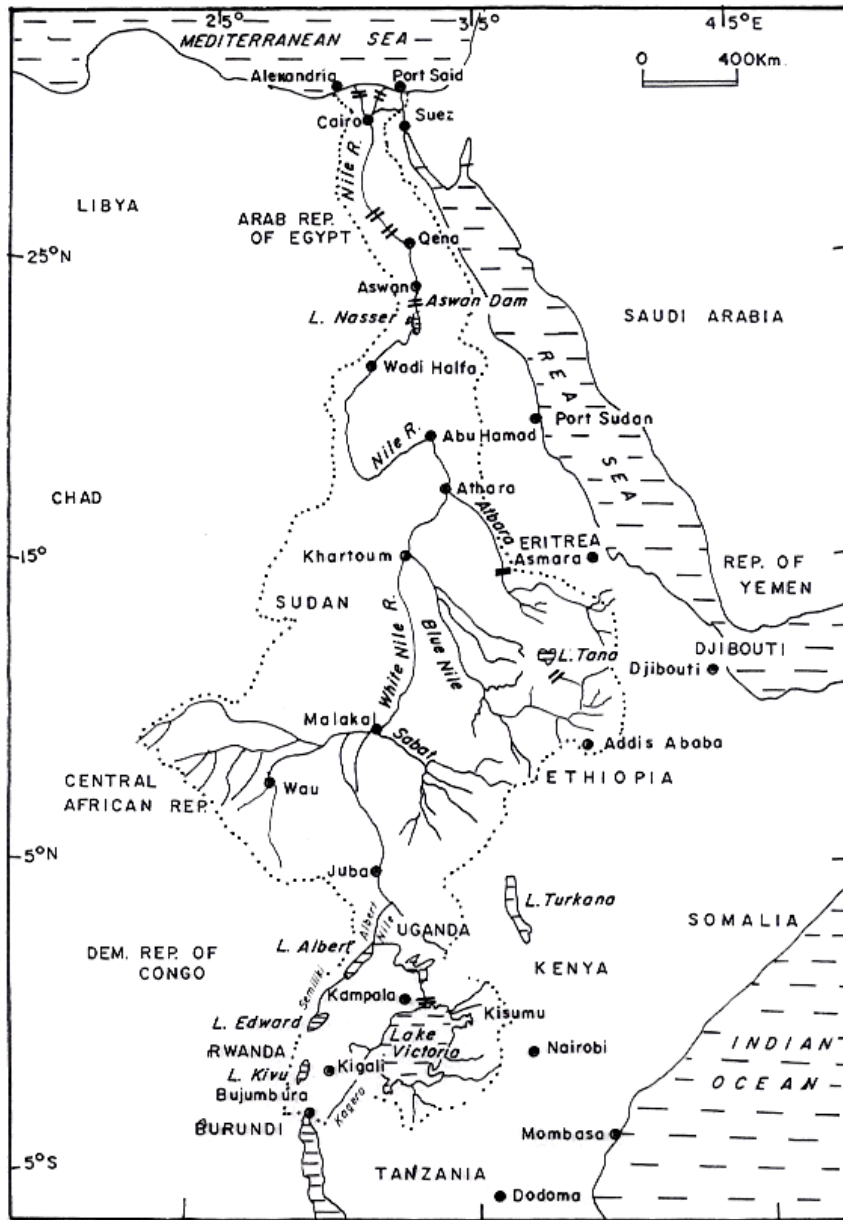
**Appendix 1: Distribution of major ethnolinguistic groups in Kenya.**



## Appendix 2: Nyanza Region in Kenya

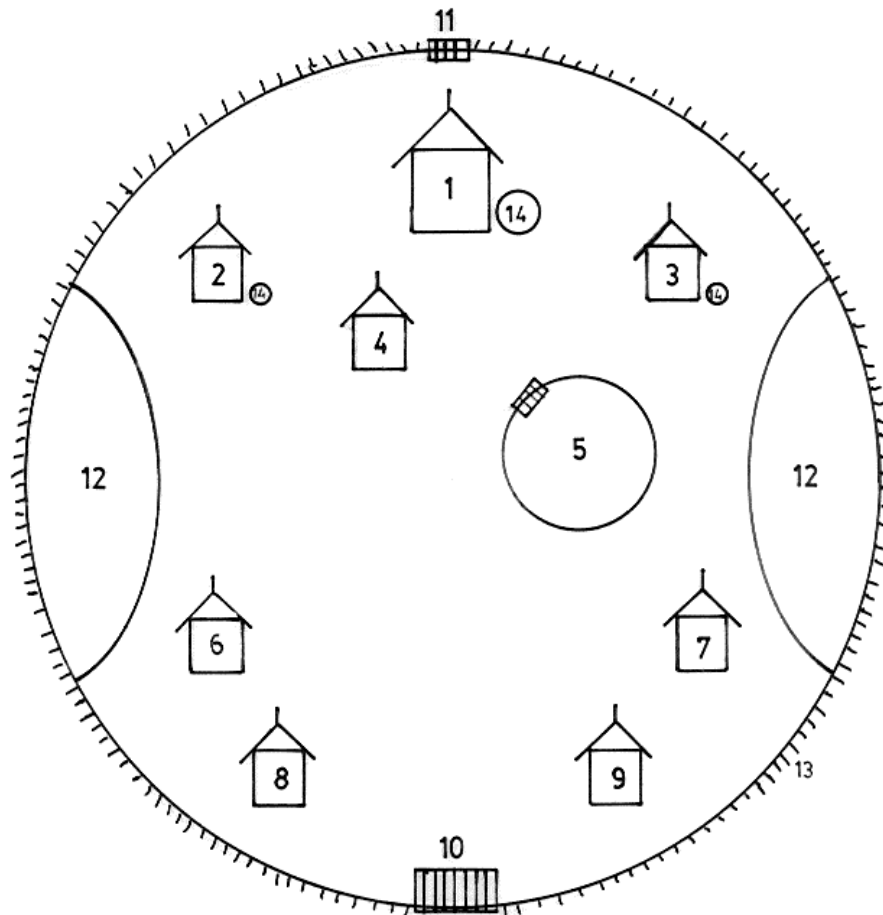


### Appendix 3: Nile River Basin Map



Source: Nile Basin Initiative

## APPENDIX 4: TRADITIONAL LUO HOMESTEAD



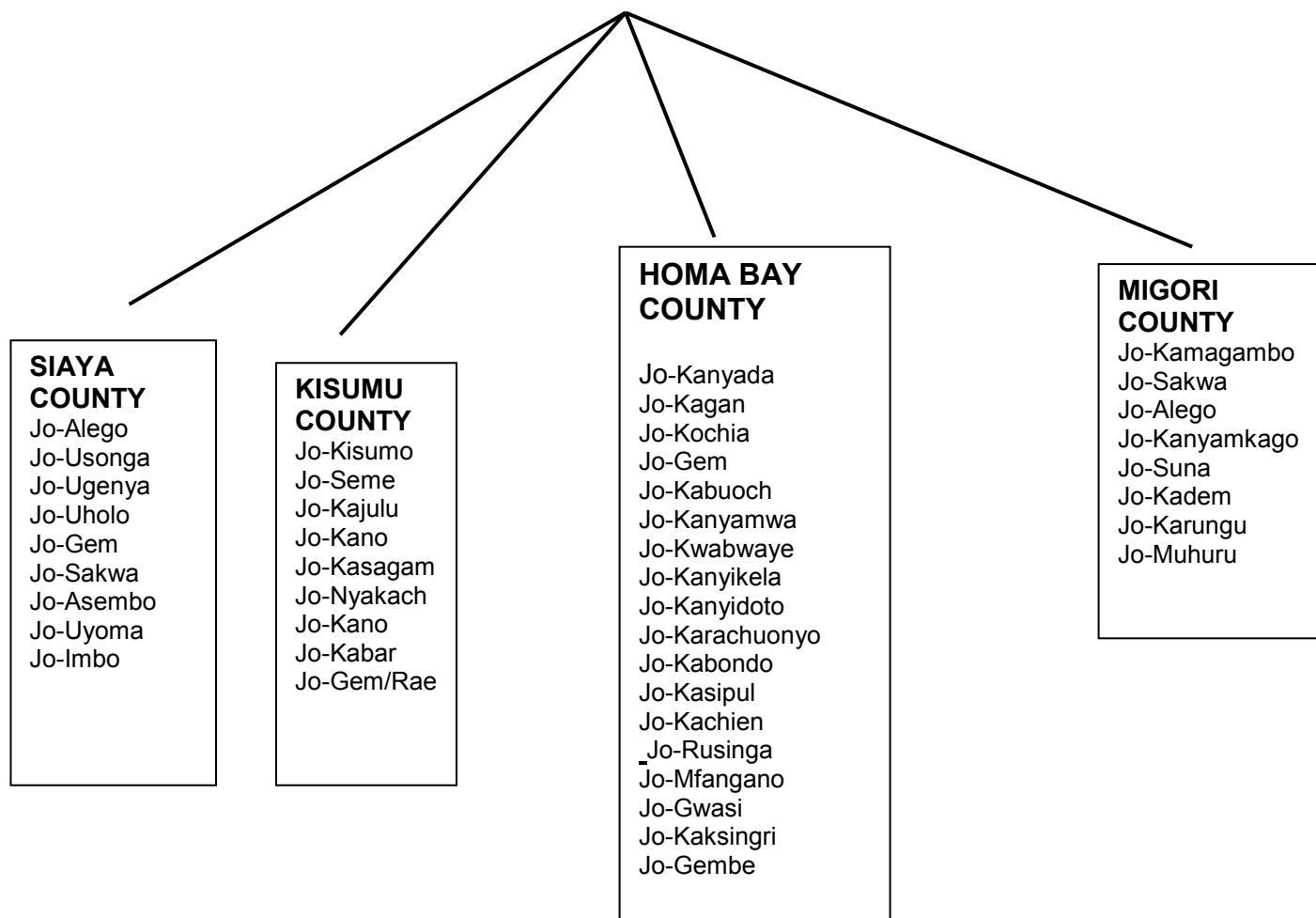
### KEY

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Od Mikayi : House of first wife                             | 11. Rot : Minor gate   |
| 2. Od Nyachira: House of second wife                           | 12. Orundu: Vegetable garden   |
| 3. Od Reru : House of third wife                               | 13. Chiel mar ojuok kata kudho:<br>Fence of euphobia or thorn trees. |
| 4. Od Wuon Dala/Pacho: House of the<br>owner of the Homestead. | 14. Dero : Granary   |
| 5. Dipo : Cattle pen   |  |
| 6. Simba Wuoyi MaKayo: Cottage of eldest<br>son.               |  |
| 7, 8. Cottages of other sons                                   |  |
| 9. Simba wuoyi matin: Cottage of the<br>youngest son.          |  |
| 10. Rangach: Main gate   |  |

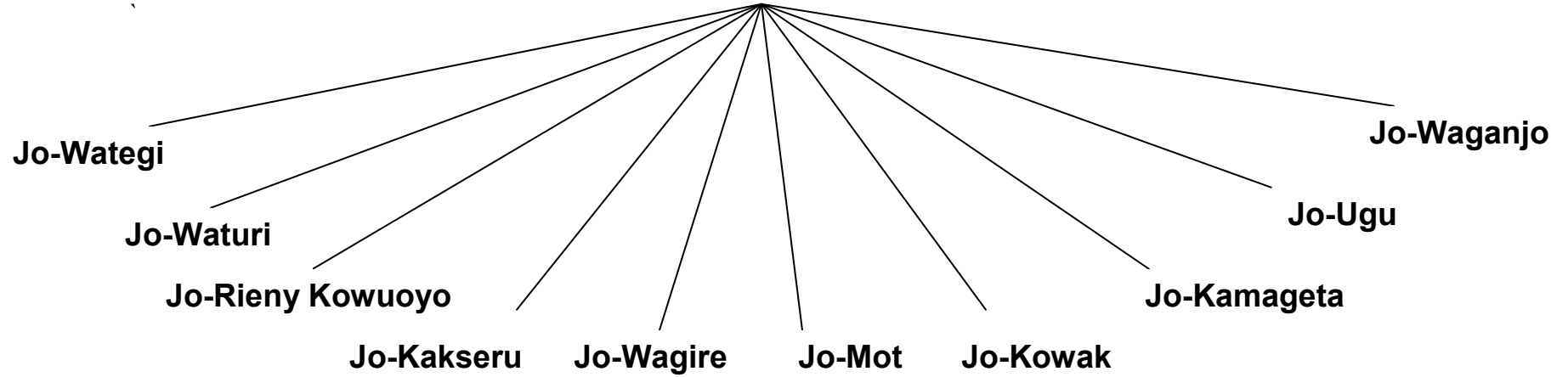


**APPENDIX 5: ETHNONYMIC AND TOPONYMIC CLASSIFICATIONS OF THE LUO SPEAKING**

**PEOPLES IN IN THE NYANZA REGION OF KENYA**



**APPENDIX 6: ETHNONYMIC AND TOPONYMIC CLASSIFICATIONS OF THE LUO SPEAKING PEOPLES  
IN IN THE NORTH MARA REGION OF TANZANIA**





**Humphrey Jeremiah Ojwang, is a Kenyan educator, biographer, playwright, poet, lexicographer, naturalist, environmental conservationist, and social critic. The author of this lexicographic work has taught in schools, colleges, national polytechnics, and universities for over forty years. He holds a B.Ed. (Hons) Degree in Linguistics, English Language and Literature from the University of Nairobi; M.Sc. Degree in Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching from the University of Aston in Birmingham, England where he was a British Council Scholar; and a Ph.D. Degree from the University of Nairobi. His doctoral thesis examined the life-stories and oral testimonies of women farmers on indigenous knowledge for food security in Homa Bay County, Kenya. The author is a Senior Lecturer in Linguistics and Anthropology at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. He has also been a German Academic Exchange Programme (DAAD) Regional Guest Researcher in Ethnobotany in the Department of African Languages, University of Pretoria, and Republic of South Africa.**

**The author is married and a father of two grown up children (daughter and son); he is also a proud grandfather; and a keen researcher into community-based environmental conservation activities and agroforestry projects among the Luo-speaking peoples in the Lake Region of Eastern Africa.**

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