The Role of Toponyms in Cultural Heritage Preservation: A Case of Lubukusu Toponyms in Kimilili Sub County, Bungoma County

Milkah Nasimiyu Namunguba[1], Dr. Anashia Nancy Ong'onda[2]

[1]Department of Languages and Humanities, School of Social Sciences, Mount Kenya University

[2]Senior Lecturer, Department of Languages and Linguistics, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Machakos University, Kenya

ABSTRACT: Names are an essential part of human existence since almost every real object, from man himself to the objects of nature, has its own name. Names of places in linguistics are known as toponyms. Toponyms play a multidimensional role in the society be it geographically, historically or sociocultural. Thus, toponyms have caught the attention of researchers since they offer a wide range of research from form to motivation. This paper analyses Lubukusu toponyms from a social cultural context. The paper aims at showing how toponyms are embedded in cultural and historical features of Bukusu people. The study applied Tent and Blair's (2011, 2014) toponymic typology theoretical framework. The study employed a descriptive research design and more so ethnography. The place names analyzed were observed from various sources such streets which were later interpreted through interviews and focused group discussions. The findings of the study show that Lubukusu toponyms remain important cultural sources and spatial records of past generations. Therefore, toponyms play a significant role in preserving the identity of the local population and as such, they are also an important part of the cultural heritage.

KEY WORDS: Toponyms, Culture, Lubukusu language, Bukusu people

1. INTRODUCTION

Toponymy means name of place from Greek (tópos), place and (ónoma), name. Toponymy is a branch of the onomastic which studies the toponyms and anthropology. It is one of the two main branches of onomastic study of proper nouns which is a branch of linguistics. Toponymy, in its broad sense, involves the study of the origin and meaning of names of place (Cano, 2008). Toponymy study is interested in the linguistic evolution (etymology) of place names and the reason behind the giving of a name to a place, whether the motive is cultural, historical, or geographical in nature. Thus, the study of toponyms is devoted to linguistics; thus is not a historical or geographical study but it can be useful to these subjects. The study of toponyms focus on monuments, works of art or a language, names of places, witnesses of forgotten languages, belong to the collective memory and deserve to be preserved. Such a study may be studied using taxonomic, epistemic, ideological and semiotic methodological approaches. According to Crystal (2003) names is an essential part of human existence since they are used to designate people, places, things, pets and houses and it seems a universal practice.

The study of toponyms is of interest to many disciplines and particularly to linguistics because it allows linguistics to observe the phenomena of language change and language contact (Naussel (1992). Naussel notes that the motivation for naming geographic entities respond to either material senses of the people living in a given area or imposition of given names by outsiders. Toponyms, have a direct link between a language and its territory which may be current or ancestral. Place names are an important part of their cultural heritage, encapsulating rights to land and recalling events, activities, and knowledge (Radding and Western (2010). Thus, the society determines the types of names allotted to an entity.

This study focused on toponyms of Lubukusu people in Kimilili Sub County Bungoma County. Bungoma County was established in 2013 as per the Constitution of Kenya 2010 which provides for the two levels of government. The County historically is inhabited by the Bukusu, Tachoni, Batura, Sabaot, Iteso and other Kenyan communities who reside side by side in peace. The County is generally cosmopolitan and has good representation of both local and foreign expatriates. In Kimili Sub-County the people speak Lubukusu. According to Guthrie (1967) Lubukusu is a dialect of Luhya language which is a branch of Bantu languages spoken in Western region of Kenya. According to Angogo (1980) Luhya language comprises eighteen dialects. Apart from Lubukusu, Angogo notes that the following are the other dialects of Luhya spoken in Western region: Lutiriki, Luloogoli, Lunyore, Lukhayo, Lumarachi,

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Lusamia, Lwitakho, Lushitsa, Lutsotso, Lukabarasi, Lutachoni, Luwanga, Lumarama, Lunyala west, Lunyala, Lutura and Lwisukha. Bantu languages are generally agglutinative in nature (Diercks, 2010). Mutonyi (2000) notes that phonologically, Lubukusu language has three main variants: the form spoken north of Kimilili, that spoken west of Webuye area and the third spoken East of Webuye extending to Kakamega and Lugari. Lewis (2009) reclassifies Lubukusu as a Niger-Congo (Narrow) Bantu Luhya language under J 30.

UNESCO (2003) called for convention for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage – including oral traditions, languages, (toponyms) and performing arts. One of the things that threaten toponyms is a lack of interest in the toponyms used by linguistic minorities to relate to the features in their environment. Therefore, a study of Lubukusu toponyms in Kimilili Subcounty, Bungoma County was an attempt to unearth how language plays a key role in history and culture preservation. The study intended to desribe the motivation and the connection between language and culture in Lubukusu toponyms of the Kimilili Subcounty, Bungoma County.

This study makes a contribution to indigenous linguistics. The paper shows how toponymy can be used to preserve Lubukusu cultural and historical heritage i.e., the legacy of physical and ideational attributes of a group of people that are inherited from the past generations, transmitted to the present and preserved for future generations. The paper also shows that the most popular place names are cultural.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis of toponymes applied Tent and Blair's (2011, 2014) toponymic typology theoretical framework. Tent and Blair's model is the latest toponymic model that borrows heavily from Mencken (1967), Stewart (1975), Baker and Carmony (1975), Glaser (1994), Smith (1996), among others. Tent and Blair's model is applicable in the analysis of toponyms of different groups of people and cultures. According to Tent and Blair (2014) a typology of toponyms classifies the actual names bestowed on natural and cultural features, and the classification is determined by such elements as what the names do, where they come from, what they mean, why a particular name was bestowed. Thus, Tent and Blair toponymic theory focuses on three main levels, namely, form, naming process and motivation.

Form concerns the generic elements of the toponym. Generic elements are influenced by the 'geographic feature' (Tent and Blair, 2011). For example, in a toponym like River Murray, 'river' serves as the generic element. The naming process, which is the second level, involves the linguistic substance in the toponym, which discusses the morphological, syntactic and semantic elements in the toponym. An analysis of form therefore entails distinguishing between specific and generic elements and identifying the linguistic substance (morphology, syntax and semantic) of a typology as the mechanism that underlies the bestowal of the name. The study therefore applied this tenet to analyze the linguistic substance of Lubukusu toponyms. The researcher analyzed the elements of toponymes and separate morphemes because each of the morphemes in Lubukusu has its own meaning.

Tent and Blair's second tenet of toponymic typology focus on the naming process. They argue that the model is centered on on the modus operandi of the naming. Tent and Blair propose a nine category typological model for classifying toponyms. The categories include; the descriptive type which is the description of three inherent characteristics – topographic, relational and locations. The second group is associative which is local, occupational or structural. Occurent is the third category that relates to an event, incident or occasion by recording the event, incident, occasion (or date), or action associated with the feature. The fourth category is evaluative which is either commendatory by giving a positive response to a feature as in 'Fair Cape' or condemnatory which is characterised by a negative response to a feature. The fifth category is the shift that is use of a toponym in whole or in part from a location feature. The sixth category is indigenous that is those that import indigenous words into the naming process. The seventh group is the eponymous group. These toponyms commemorate a person or an entity for example Masinde Muliro University, Tom mboya street both living and non-living. The eighth is the linguistic innovation which involves introducing a new linguistic form through the manipulation of language such as blends, anagrams and humour as the language manipulation methods. The final category is referred to as erroneous that involves introducing a new form through garbled transmission, misspelling and mistaken meaning. The naming process was important in the explanation of toponyms.

The third tenet of Tent and Blair's toponymic model focuses on the namer's "motivation" or "intention. They argue that the intent behind the typology is to indicate the mechanism or modus operandi of the naming process in each case. This level takes the analysis into the namer's mind and speculates about the source and significance of such a name to the namer. Based on the levels of analysis, Tent and Blair believe that one can design an effective typology only by distinguishing between specific and generic elements and identifying the linguistic substance (morphology, syntax and semantic) of a typology as the mechanism that underlies the bestowal of the name. The combination of these three levels, Tent and Blair believe, should yield a good typonymic analysis and an effective classification of toponyms.

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3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study was guided by a descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is qualitative and it fits the current study for the purpose of the study is to achieve understanding, knowing, and describing the Lubukusu toponyms of Kimilili subcounty. More so, Kothari (2004) argues that studies concerned with specific predictions, with narration of facts and characteristics concerning individual, group or situation are all examples of descriptive research studies. The study also included ethnographic qualitative methods that aimed to bring in the social and cultural aspects of Lubukusu toponyms.

3.2 Participants

Thus, the researcher purposely chooses a total number of 50 respondents ranging from age 50 and above. This age group was well versed with the Lubukusu culture, history and assisted in the identification and analysis of Toponyms. 50 participants is an adequate sample in linguistics (Cf. Mestherie, Swan, Deumart & Leap, 2000) who argue that linguistic studies do not require large samples as small samples are able to provide data that is representative of the wider reality. More so, Ritchie, Lewis & Elam (2003) suggest that qualitatively inclined samples should "lie under 50". The researcher also used snowball sampling method to identify the participants who are well known to the Lubukusu culture.

3.3 Data collection instruments

The interview schedule was administered to 6 groups (30) participants. An interview schedule in the study was used to interview Lubukusu speakers on the naming process of toponyms. This schedule consisted of semi-structured questions. The researcher recorded responses by way of taking notes in a note book where detailed descriptions of the responses were noted down, by the use of a voice recorder. Focus group Discussions (FGD) was used to gain information about the relation between Toponyms and how they reflect Lubukusu culture. The focus groups comprised of 20 men and women of above 50 so that they give detailed information on place names in Lubukusu language in Kimilili Sub-county.

3.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis methods were used in the current study. The data collected was analyzed through thematic analysis. The analysis involved classifying toponyms according to the naming process as stipulated in toponymic typology by Tent and Blair (2011, 2014). The analysis entailed analyzing the toponyms structure in terms of elements, form, structure and identifying the meanings of the toponym itself.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 How toponyms of the Kimilili Sub County reflect the preservation of Lubukusu language and culture

This section focuses on how the unique naming patterns that exist in the geographical area under investigation result from the socio-cultural background of the Lubukusu people. The analysis focuses on how the toponyms are based on socio-cultural and pragmatic contexts.

4.1.1   Names associated with the cultural background of Bukusu people

The analysis of names shows that the classification and choice of toponyms is associated with social and cultural considerations. In this vain the toponyms are not arbitrary lexemes that have no meaning. The toponyms in this section have meaning. One cultural practice that has influenced the formation of toponyms is circumcision. Bukusu people practice traditional circumcision which is part of their culture. Bukusu circumcision is carried out during the Imbalu festival and is characterized with Song, dance, rituals and music arts. Bukusu people view circumcision ritual with a lot of pride due to the cultural significance that is attached to it. The toponyms in table 1 below are adopted from the cultural background of circumcision of Bukusu people:

Table 1: Toponyms adopted from the circumcision ritual of Bukusu people

Toponyms adopted from the circumcision ritual	Semantic meaning
Sawa	*Sawa* in Lubukusu language corresponds to a circumcision age set *basawa*
Nakhobani	*Nakhobani* is a word formed from **khukhobana** which means noise. The village has a place where they smear mud on initiates on the day of circumcision. This activity is characterized by a lot of noise
Kamusinde	*Kamusinde* is a name of a school and place. The name is derived from the word **'omusinde'** which means an uncircumcised male. The name was given because the

	place was inhabited by tribes which did not male practise circumcision at that time.
Kolongolo.	**K**olongolo is a toponym derived from 'bakolongolo' a circumcision age group among the bukusu.

The toponyms above are used to affirm certain aspects of Lubukusu culture. The semantic meanings of the words were derived from the morphological parts of the words. For instance, the meaning of the toponym *Sawa is* derived from from the morphemes **ba**+**sawa** which implies circumcision age set (a social group with close reference to circumcision). *Basawa* therefore is a toponym that reflects important aspect of the culture of Lubukusu society. In this case, the toponym '***basawa***' closely relates to the linguistic anthropology of Lubukusu language. The meaning of the word *'basawa'* reflects the socio-cultural tag that carries socio- cultural function and meanings to the Bukusu people**.**

Nakhobani is a toponym formed from **khukhobana** to describe the embalu ritual. The embalu ritual has many sessions that involve songs and dances that are dramatic and theatrical hence it is very noisy. The semantic meaning of the word *Nakhobani* is thus adopted from the semantic meaning of the word ***khukhobana*** which gives the vivid description of the activities that takes place during embalu festival. Some of the activities involve the initiates being smeared with mud on the day of circumcision. This activity is also characterized by a lot of noise. The toponym *Nakhobani* therefore clearly illustrates how language in toponyms is used to reflect the cultural practices of a given cultural group. The toponym *Nakhobani* also reflects the social practices of Lubukusu people. The toponym reveals the kind of performance structure and context and aid in discovering of meaning from the community's perspective during circumcission performance. The noise described in this toponym is the songs that are normally characterized with response that is in a myriad of ways with marvellous creativity.

Toponyms are a good form of language in which the Lubukusu people have used to preserve their history. The naming process of toponyms using words related the cultural practice of circumcision such as *Basawa* and *Nakhobani* clearly indicates the preservation of Bukusu culture since they are attached to the cultural practice of circumcision. Close to *basawa* is the toponym *Kolongolo* which is a toponym derived from '***bakolongolo***' that is a circumcision age group among the Bukusu people. Members of the Bukusu society are divided in different age sets that reveal the value of circumcision in the society. The two toponyms offer important insights into the patterns of social and cultural organisation of communities and can be key to broader cultural changes. For instance, the toponyms *Basawa* and *Kolongolo* reveal the categorizations of the males in lubukusu society basing on the social groups. The forms of the names reveal a given social group within the vocabulary of a language. In this case, toponyms are lexemes that reveal details about the social rank of a given society.

The toponyn *Kamusinde* is a name of a school and place. The toponym is derived from the word *omusinde* which means an uncircumcised male. The name was given because the place was inhabited by tribes which did not male circumcision at that time. The toponym clearly reveals the value that is attached to circumcision by the Bukusu people. Thus, the four toponyms discussed under this section reveal various issues concerning the Bukusu society such as norms and values of the society. The toponyms reveal a significant part of cultural heritage of Lubukusu people. The toponyms are embedded in Bukusu indigenous culture and ways of life that contributes to a common identity. The aspects of circumcision show the culture of Bukusu people. These findings are in line with (Rosenhouse, 2002) who observes that naming is a specific linguistic act, intimately linked with values, traditions, hopes, fears and events in people's lives. The toponyms in this section reveal information about the values and ideas of the Bukusu society revealing details about tradition and their social rank.

4.1.2 Names associated with the agricultural environment

Lubukusu language has also been preserved through names associated with the agricultural environment and weather. The data collected reveal the names of different types of plants (plants –fruits and vegetables) found in Kimilili Sub County. Table 2 below represents the toponyms found in this category:

Table 2: Toponyms adopted from agricultural environment

Toponyms adopted from agricultural environment	Semantic Meaning
Sikhendu	*Sikhendu* is a toponym for a name of school and a place. The place derives its name from 'lukhendu' a type of plant. The place had those plants.
Makunda	*Makunda* is derived from the word **kumukunda** meaning arable land. The place has fertile black cotton soil that is good for farming.

Lumuli	**Lumuli** is derived from the word **lumuli** which means a thing that glows. The place had a type of grass that produced glowing flowers.
Mapela	**Mapela** is a toponym derived from the word '**lipela**' a guava. The place had guava trees that produce guavas.
Siuna	**Siuna** is a toponym derived from **biuna**, a type of shrub. The place had those shrubs.
Naporori	**Naporori** is a topony derived from **liporori**, a place where is stagnant water that cows drink from.

Table 2 above shows examples of toponyms derived from the agricultural environment of the place. The first toponym *sikhendu* reveal the agricultural surrounding of the place named. The toponym *sikhendu* is derived from the word '**lukhendu**' a type of plant since the area is covered with chikhendu (plural). The toponym adapts the morpheme *si* thus the basic element of the toponym as in this analysis **si** (Der)+**khendu** (root) from **lu**+**khendu** (root) in order to modify the name of the plant to a place name.

The agricultural environment reveals the social practices of the Lubukusu people through toponyms. The data reveal the activities that people are involved in for livelihood, for instance the toponym *Makunda* derived from the word **kumukunda** means an arable land. The agricultural environment for this place is that it has fertile black cotton soil that is good for farming. The basic elements on the original word are **Ku+mu+kunda**. The root of the word is kunda (land). The elemts of the toponym is **ma**+ **kunda.** This is implies that to change the name to a toponym the morphemes had to change from **ku+mu** to **ma.** The social activity that has been revealed through the analyzed data is farming.

Farming was also reflected through the toponym *naporori* which is derived from liporori, a place where is stagnant water that cows drink from. The data also reveal information on the types of fruits found in Kimilili sub-county such as guavas through the toponym *mapela* derived from the word *'lipela'* a guava. The place had guava trees that produce guavas. Through a change of the inflection morpheme **li** to **ma** the toponym mapela was formed. The naming of the place **mapela** helps in the preservation of the history of the area. The data also revealed the names of plants as preserved by use of toponyms as in the word *lumuli* which is adopted from the original *word lumuli,* (a thing that glows). The place had a type of grass that produced glowing flowers. The toponym therefore is used to preserve the name of the glowing flowers. The toponym *Siuna* on the other hand is derived from *biuna* by changing the morpheme **bi** to **si**. *Biuna* is a type of shrub. The area was named so due to the presence of shrubs that grows in a sunny environment. The data reveal environmental changes such as rainy and dry seasons as shown in toponym **biuna.**

4.1.3 Lubukusu cultural values in Toponyms

The data collected revealed that Toponyms are intricately embedded in Lubukusu people's culture and are part and parcel of everyone's way of life. One cultural value that is reflected in Lubukusu toponyms is peace and unity as reflected analysis below:

Toponym: Mulembe which a name of a village which is derived from the word Mulembe
Semantic meaning: The word mulembe means peace. The bukusu wanted peace to prevail in the said village.

The analysis above clearly shows that one of the cultural values among the Bukusu people is to live in peace. The toponym emphasizes on the community living in harmony, love and remaining united. Mulembe is therefore a toponym of the clan that emphasizes peace. Thus, the naming system reflects essential values and important traits in their respective social organization. The toponym *mulembe* reveal norms that relate to patterns of behaviour designed for individual members of a society in particular situations. The word *mulembe* is meaningful among any dialect of Luhya. Thus, to the Bukusu speakers the mention of the word reminds them of peaceful existence since the extra information of the word including the meaning (semantic); syntactic structure or use and how they are morphologically structured stored in their minds. The toponym *mulembe* therefore reminds the Bukusu people of all aspects of culture of peace, values such as unity, commonness, and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts. The toponym mulembe therefore relate with other sections of culture and depict solidarity and identity.

The borrowed toponym *Taracha Mungu* from *Daraja ya Mungu* is a Swahili phrase meaning God's bridge shows the cultural beliefs of Lubukusu people as symbolized by God. This area has a natural bridge that people believe is God given. In terms of description this area has a river that disappears underground and emerges from the other end creating a natural bridge. Thus, the toponym *Taracha Mungu* is an example of an artifacts or objects that are produced from the values and norms of a culture. A bridge in this sense is artifact that shows the religion beliefs of Lubukusu people. They believe in God as a supernatural being and also being extraordinary. Thus, cultural toponyms reflect a society's systems, beliefs and worldviews. This findings relates to (Rosenhouse, 2002) argues that names reveal the many preferences of their owners (or givers) in terms of real life objects, actions, features and beliefs.

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4.1.4   Toponyms of indigenous and medicinal trees in Lubukusu Language

The analyzed data also show preservation of indigenous and medicinal trees through toponyms. In this case, the toponyms reveal traditional information about the Bukusu people. For instance, the analysis below reveals toponyms of indigenous and trees:

Table 3: Toponyms of indigenous and medicinal trees

Toponym	Semantic Meaning
Nasianda	**Nasianda** is a toponym derived from **kumuandanda**, a type of hard tree. The place had those trees and they are medicinal.
Miruri	**Miruri**, is a toponym derived from kumururi a type of indigenous tree
Namirembe	**Namirembe**, from **kumurembe**, a type of tree. The place had those trees.
Makhonge	**Makhonge**, from **'kumukhonge'** a type of indigenous tree. The place had those trees.

The toponyms above offer meaningful linguistic information about nature of indigenous and medicinal trees. The toponym **nasianda** is derived from *kumuandanda* is formed by the change of morpheme **ku+mu+andanda** to **na+sianda**. *Kumuandanda* is a type of hard tree which is considered as a medicinal tree. This area is inhabited by these types of trees. The toponym reveals information on the aesthetics indigenous trees. The naming of places using names of indigenous tree and medicinal tree reveals the communities values in terms of the relationship with their values and environment. These values are in line with the cultural beliefs about the trees in the Lubukusu language.

A further example is given below:

Toponym: Namirembe,

Origin: from k**umurembe**, a type of medicinal tree.

Semantic meaning: The place had the Kumurembe trees (a type of desert cactus) which was believed could cure mumps.

The formation of the toponym is formed by the change of the morphological elements of the word Kumurembe: **Ku** (Morp) +**mu** (Morp) +**rembe** (root) to **Na** (Morph) +**mi** (Morph) +**rembe** (root). The toponym *Namiremebe* from *Kumurembe* signifies the traditional value of herbs and indigenous trees among Bukusu people. This tree is considered to have cultural value of, psycho-medicinal trees which are believed to confer health to the sick from a simple ritual done around the tree. In the Luhya community this tree grows in western Kenya and has been found among most of the sub-ethnic groups the Banyore, Kisa, Idakho, Isukha, Wanga, Bukusu among others and was believed to heal mumps. Traditionally it was believed that children who were affected by mumps could find healing by performing a simple ritual. The ritual involved the children affected by mumps singing and dancing around the tree while carrying bundles of firewood several times before throwing the firewood at the tree and taking off without looking back at the tree. With the attachment of such value to this tree would enhance the conversation of this tree. The *Kumurembe* tree therefore reveals the beliefs of Bukusu people. The ritual reveals the people believe of the people in *Kumurembe* tree to restore health. The older participants in the study testify to the healing powers of this tree which they experienced when young.

The toponym *Miruri* from the word *kumururi*; a type of indigenous tree also reveal the cultural values attached to this tree. For the toponym *mururi* to be formed the morphological structure of the word changed from **ku (Morp) +mu (Morph) +ruri (root) to mi (Morp)+ruri (root)**. Another indigenous tree from the data collected is **'kumukhonge'** which the toponym *Makhonge* is derived from. The toponym was named so due to the many indigenous tree of that type found in this area. Due to the value attached to this trees the participants explained the trees are not used as firewood among many of the Luhya sub-ethnic groups – notably Kisa, Idakho, Isukha among others which is a way of preserving the indegenous trees. Thus, historical toponyms of indegenous tree are a linguistic mean of preserving the history and culture of a given community. The rituals associated with the indigenous trees such as *Kumurembe* show the religious values of the Lubukusu community.

Thus, the findings in this section are in line with Crystal (2003) who observes that toponyms are a record of a community's culture, customs, and traditions that would be lost in history (Crystal 2003). It is also true that the study of toponyms is based on the assumption that there is a strong interface between a people's language and their cultural practices. The analysis reveals that language is used for cultural practices and language is a powerful tool used to view and understand the world view of a particular society. The data clearly show how language reveals social practices and day-to-day activities of a society of the Bukusu people. Thus, naming of toponyms can be considered as a universal cultural practice.

The analysis in this section provides information on the aspect of linguistic anthropology of the toponyms of Lubukusu language within the framework of socio-cultural contexts in which they occur. That is, the toponyms are well understood within a given
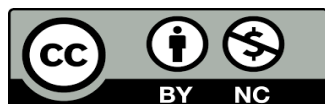
cultural background since meaning may vary from one society to another one culture to another. The data clearly show the toponyms in this section are closely related to the socio-cultural of the Bukusu people. Place names with indigenous names of trees acts to preserve cultural heritage through toponyms.

5. CONCLUSION

The current study investigated Lubukusu toponyms of the Kimilili Sub County, Bungoma County from a linguistic perspective. The study has revealed anthrotoponymic nature of Lubukusu toponyms. The data shows that the naming process of toponyms is motivated by various factors such as social and cultural systems and values of Bukusu people. The data shows that toponyms contain precious elements of information on the history of Bukusu people. The analysis revealed that language is used for cultural practices and that language is a powerful tool used to view and understand the world view of a particular society. Thus, the study concludes that there is a strong interface between a people's language and their cultural practices. Thus, toponyms carry cultural significance. The study therefore recommends that the government should take care of toponyms as cultural monuments since toponyms have multidimensional importance that is geographically, historically or socio-culturally. There is a need for intensified information, education and communication campaign for preserving cultural heritage elements. Therefore, boo Books and television programmes should celebrate the heritage value of geographical names.

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