

# A Linguistic Study of Village Names in Ngara District, Kagera Region, Tanzania

Tarasis Nahayo Elias (Corresponding author)

Department of Languages and Linguistics, St Augustine University of Tanzania

Mwanza, Tanzania

E-mail: [eliasnate6@gmail.com](mailto:eliasnate6@gmail.com)

Lea Mpobela

Department of Languages and Linguistics, St Augustine University of Tanzania

Mwanza, Tanzania

E-mail: [rafikilea@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rafikilea@yahoo.co.uk)

Eustard R. Tibategeza

Department of Languages and Linguistics, St Augustine University of Tanzania

Mwanza, Tanzania

E-mail: [eustard.tibategeza@saut.ac.tz](mailto:eustard.tibategeza@saut.ac.tz)

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## Abstract

This paper examines the linguistic features of village names in Ngara district in Kagera region -Tanzania. It specifically discusses the meanings, and the morphological and phonological features of Ngara village names. The natives speak two related Bantu languages, namely Kishubi and Kihangaza. The study focuses on village names since they are part of the historical, cultural and linguistic heritage of the given society. Additionally, place names have meaning as argued by several scholars (Anindo, 2016; Buberwa, 2012; Kihara, 2020;

Wanjiru-mwita & Giraut, 2020) that nearly all African place names have meanings. Despite having meanings, place names differ in the way they are formed in each society hence, language specific. This uniqueness raised the need to investigate Ngara village names to see what they mean and how they are formed. This is a qualitative paper which employs two theories namely, Frame theory by Fillmore (1985) to define concepts that guided the retrieval of meanings of village names and Lexeme-Morpheme Base Morphology theory pioneered by Beard (1995) which assisted on observation and identification of structural patterns of Ngara village names. The paper employed descriptive research design with the data collected from eight informants. The informants were involved in semi-structured interview, questionnaire and focus group discussions. The findings reveal that all village names in Ngara district have meanings derived from various phenomena such as geographical features, flora and fauna, social services or behaviours, calamities, agricultural activities, boundaries, economic activities and famous people. Furthermore, the findings reveal that the formation of Ngara village names involves both the morphological (affixation, compounding and reduplication) and phonological (deletion, hardening and devoicing) processes.

**Keywords:** village names, naming, name giver, morphological features, phonological features

## 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on investigating the meanings and structural patterns of village names in Ngara district. Place names, in this case village names, play a vital role in human society as they exist in all languages and they are an indispensable part of social communication. Place names form an important part of language, culture and history of the society in which they are found. According to Baitani (2010), names and naming system in general are fundamental and universal aspects which can be found in all languages. Being universal, place names should be studied in specific languages to preserve the names, culture and history of particular languages.

Place names have been studied in different communities by various scholars (Anindo, 2016; Buberwa, 2012; Kihara, 2020; Wanjiru-mwita & Giraut, 2020). They are of the view that nearly all African place names have meanings. These meanings are derived from geographical features, events such as war, and natural phenomena like floods, volcanic eruptions and culture of the society. In Kenya, for instance, some place names are derived from plants as in *Kidundu* 'reed' the place whose name is depicted by reed plants (Anindo, 2016). Also, Buberwa (2012) studied place names in Ruhaya, a Bantu language spoken in Kagera region - Tanzania in which place names have meanings which tend to be derived from phenomena like flora and fauna, crops raised, habitation information, and activity carried out in a place at which the name is given. For instance, a place name *Buyango* belongs to Bayango 'clan' is derived from habitation.

Apart from having meanings, all place names differ in the way they are formed in each society. Place names, just like other words are formed through various word formation processes. This is revealed by the findings from several scholars (Anindo, 2016; Basciano, 2008; Crystal, 2003; Fahrutdinov et al., 2017; Kihara, 2020; Köhnlein, 2015; Mufwene, 2001)

who came up with different structural forms of place names. Some of these structural patterns involve morphological processes like affixation, reduplication, compounding, clipping etc. Place names possess phonological features such as sound alterations which make them have different sounds from the words they are derived from. For example, Kihara (2020) asserts that place names are formed by involving prefixes like *ki-I* n *Kileleshwa* from *Oleleshwa* the Maasai language. Therefore, the findings from the discussed scholars reveal that meanings and structural patterns of place names differ from one language to another. This variation raised a need to carry out this study on village names to find out what meanings and structural patterns village names possess in Ngara district.

Several scholars (Anindo, 2016; Baitani, 2010; Cresswell, 2004; Devereaux, 2017; Helleland, 2012; Lauder & Lauder, 2015; Mphande, 2006) argue that place names have meanings. Meanings of place names, in which village names are part, have been studied in several areas. For instance Mphande (2006) is of the view that what is in a name depends on a particular culture from which it is framed. In African cultures, a name tells about the individual that it signifies, the language from which it is drawn and the society that describes it.

## 2. Place Names in Various Languages

Naming is among the most crucial actions of language which enable people to communicate with regard to human or non-human, animate or inanimate referents in everyday life. Since village names are place names, this section reviews the meanings of place names and their structural patterns in different languages.

### 2.1 Meanings of Place Names

Naming system differs from language to language where one name can be used to refer to two phenomena as in Western Norway where the place name *Frammarsvik* means village and farm, whereas *Ullensvang* refers to a parish and a farm. The possible way to distinguish the two is through the context of a given conversation which makes it possible to create mental relationship. However, not all place names in this area refer to two phenomena as revealed by Villette (2021: p. 25, 44, 48). Most place names in Switzerland refer to a single object as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Place names in Switzerland

Place name	meaning	language
<i>Night cliff</i>	Suburb city	British English
<i>Schwarzberg</i>	black mountain	German
<i>Bergholz</i>	frest mountain	German
<i>Côte d'Azur</i>	coast of blue	French

The place names in Table 1 are from three different languages. Each of the names presents a single meaning. They also reflect the fact that place names are found in all languages and are necessary names as they reflect human experience when interacting with environment. Hagström (2006) argues that the identity concept of one generation may not be the same for the next generation. In identity, there are two terms namely place and space and one way of separating place from space is to name it: applying a name to a piece of space means creating a place. Literatures on place names lead to a better understanding of the concepts concerning the role that language, culture, and environment play. They become necessary for a foundational understanding of naming behaviour and motivation which is within village names. Humankind's entry into a geographic area and the dependence upon the local geography like cultivation create peculiar changes to their way of life and language on place names. In the same view, Cresswell (2004) asserts that humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in such a way that it becomes a place. This concept of place positioning human landscape interactions is of integral importance to this study as it is thought to produce place names which symbolize this interface and identification. The sense of place is an umbrella concept that includes other concepts such as place attachment, national identity and regional awareness.

Helleland (2012), in his attempt to find the meanings of place names, argues that there is an intimate relationship between place and place names. He explains how place names create a sense of identity in a place through the feelings of belonging. On the contrary, Gardiner (1954) and Van Langendonck (2007) claim that names have reference but are empty of meaning. The claims that names do not have meanings are proved wrong by Helleland (2012) who says that names have meanings and meanings differ from individual to individual. This is proved in the Norwegian place names presented by Helleland (2012, pp. 1, 100, 102) in Table 2.

Table 2. Norwegian place names

<b>Place name</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<i>Frammarsvik,</i>	a village
<i>Børvehovden</i>	defensive site
<i>Legene</i>	cattle rest

The three place names in Table 2 prove wrong the claims that names have no meanings as they have meanings. On the other hand, Lauder and Lauder (2015) are of the view that place names of Ubiquitous in Indonesia are very important in human life. Since place names may refer to a village, town, region or nation, to them some place names denote a country name as in Table 3.

Table 3. Place names in Ubiquitous

Place name	Meaning
<i>Argentina</i>	the silver republic
<i>Gunung</i>	Mountain
<i>Sungai</i>	River
<i>Teluk</i>	Bay

Source: *Lauder and Lauder (2015, p. 400)*

The place name *Argentina* comes from Spanish and its meaning is ‘the silver republic’. Lauder and Lauder (2015) added that names exist in all languages and place names are indispensable parts of international communication. This shows that all names have meanings hence, a need to study meanings of place names in Ngara district.

Moreover, studies in Bantu languages have proved that place names have meanings as argued by Marjie-Okyere (2015) that every place name carries a meaning of an area it presents. Marjie-Okyere draws examples from Babukusu tribe of Kenya in Kibukusu language. For instance, a place name like *E-ka-ka-mega* >*e- kakamega* in Kiluhya has a meaning. *Kakamega* is a phrasal verb meaning ‘to cut little of stiff-porridge “morsel”’. *E-kapchai*, on the other hand, is a place where the white settlers first experimented the growing of *chai* ‘tea’. In addition, Anindo (2016, p. 52) in her study on Lulogooli place names argues that place names have meanings as they are the representative of human culture and the related. She adds that Lulogooli place names have meanings with regard to the objects of their referents as in Table 4.

Table 4. Place names in Lulogooli

Place name	Meaning
<i>Ilwanda</i>	at the rock
<i>Mukunya</i>	where stunted people live
<i>Wamage</i>	of termites
<i>Chavakali</i>	of women
<i>Chamakanga</i>	of guinea fowl

Lulogooli place names in Table 4 have meanings which are derived from landscapes, insects and human behaviour where most Lulogooli place names are derived from other nouns which are discussed in 2.2.

Buberwa (2012) discusses place names in Ruhaya, a Bantu language spoken in north western Tanzania in Kagera region. To her, Ruhaya place names can be categorized according to the features they refer to. These include names relating to fauna and flora that exist in a given place, names relating to names of people or parts of human body, names relating to natural phenomena, belongingness, social-cultural behaviours/mannerisms and experienced events. Some Ruhaya place names refer to animals (fauna) that lived in a particular area in the past. Place names relating to animals were selected based on the population size of such particular animals as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Place names referring to animals in Ruhaya

Place Names	Meaning
<i>Kyenjubu</i>	of hippopotamus
<i>Kyebikobe</i>	of big monkeys
<i>Kakajoju</i>	of small elephant
<i>Kankende</i>	of monkey'

The place names in Table 5 reveal that some Ruhaya place names refer to fauna. Since all place names have meanings and are parts of social aspects, it is through language that places are named and events are recorded as revealed in the reviewed literature in this section. This paper presents meanings of 77 village names in Ngara district in relation to the things/events/landscapes/people after which they were named.

### *2.2 Structural Patterns of Village Names*

Words have structure and such structures can be discussed in morphology which is sometimes affected by phonology hence, morpho-phonology. Ursini (2017) comments that place names in four languages of English, Mandarin, Italian and Finnish are analysed morphologically. The structure of place names in different languages has been discussed by several scholars (Cameron, 2003; Komara, 2019; Mills, 2003; Villette, 2021; Ursini, 2017; Wattsm 2004) who support that names are systematically formed following specific phonological and morphological patterns. Despite systematic structural patterns, the structures of place names are argued to be language specific. The said scholars put out some structural features like affixation, reduplication, compounding and phonological alterations involved in the formation of place names in different languages. According to Komara (2019, pp. 405), most

Sundanese (one of the ethnic groups of the island of Java, Indonesia) place names are formed through affixation as in Table 6.

Table 6. Place names in Sundanese

<b>Place name</b>	<b>Structural form</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
<i>Pamijahan</i>	prefix ( <i>pa</i> ) + stem ( <i>mijah</i> ) + suffix ( <i>an</i> )	The place for fish lays egg
<i>Ryedale</i>	ryeda + <i>le</i>	of valley
<i>Tashlyk river</i>	Tash + <i>lyk/</i>	of river stone

A place name *Pamijahan* in Table 6 comprises three elements of word formation namely ‘prefix (*pa-*) + stem (*-mijah-*) + suffix (*-an*)’. The composition of ‘stem + affixes’ refer to a poly-morphemic word signifying a derivative or complex form reflecting a complex way of thinking in naming a place.

In addition to affixation, another morphological process is compounding. For instance, British place names are treated as subordinate compounds (Cameron, 2003; Watts, 2004). British place names employ both left and right headed compounds as indicated in Table 7.

Table 7. Compound place names in British

<b>Place name</b>	<b>compound components</b>	<b>compound type</b>
<i>Aber-deen,</i>	Aber + deen	left-headed compound
<i>North-ampton,</i>	North + ampton	right-headed compound
<i>Edin-burg</i>	Edin + burg	right-headed compound

Table 7 presents place names which result from compound nouns. British place names are treated as subordinate compounds. These compounds are analogous to English or German compounds in a sense that the first constituent is a modifier while the second constituent is a head (Cameron, 2003; Watts 2004). Examples of this type of compounds are ‘blackboard’ and ‘snail mail’. Also, compounding process is found in the study done by Villette (2021, pp. 25,44,48) whose findings reveal that place names possess systematic structural patterns which can be analysed under the field of Morphology in three languages as in Table 8.

Table 8. Compound place names in three languages

Place name	compound elements	Language
<i>Nightcliff</i>	night + cliff	Britain English
<i>Schwarzberg</i>	Schwarz(black)+ berg(mountain)	German
<i>Côte d'Azur</i>	Côte (coast) + d'Azur(of blue)	French

The compounds presented in Table 8 from three different languages form different compounds. For instance, *Nightcliff* and *Côte d'Azur* are compound nouns while *Schwarzberg* from *schwarz* and *berg* is a compound adjective.

On the other hand, place names also undergo some phonological alterations. Discussing place names in Coorg, a language spoken in India, Lalitha (2015, pp. 77-78) divides them into two groups which are specific and generic. Both specific and generic place names are separate syllables. She gives some examples of Indian linguistic features on phonological alterations as in Table 9.

Table 9. Phonological alterations in Coorg place names

Place name	process undergone
<i>Kadu&gt;Godu</i>	Voicing /k/ >[g] Vowel alteration from /a/ >[o]
<i>Shettikari&gt;Shettigeri</i>	Voicing /k/ >[g] Vowel alteration from /a/ > [e]
<i>Hatturu&gt;Atturu</i>	Deletion of /h/
<i>Veeranga&gt;beeranga</i>	Hardening from /v/ > [b]

The presented place names in Table 9 have undergone phonological alterations. These are not considered in this paper as sound changes since their counterparts still exist when the same words do not refer to place names. Each of the first two names in Table 9 reflects two alterations including voicing and vowel alteration. On the other hand, each of the last three



place names in Table 9 has undergone one phonological alteration. For instance, *Atturu* has undergone deletion where a glottal fricative /h/ is deleted from the word *hatturu*. On the other hand, in *Beeranga*, the alteration is hardening in which a voiced labio-dental fricative/v/becomes a voiced bilabial plosive [b].

### 3. Methodology

This paper is qualitative in nature with descriptions of data on village names in Ngara district. The data were collected from four divisions, namely Rulenge, Murusagamba, Kanazi and Nyamiaga. A sample of eight respondents was obtained through snowball sampling technique. The data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interview and focus group discussions where a total of 77 village names were found and analysed.

### 4. Village Names in Ngara District

It was found from the field that Ngara district has 77 villages each with a unique name in structure and meaning. Also, it was found that name givers considered important environmental features and human activities, calamities and other phenomena in naming the village names in Ngara district. Hence, all the village names in Ngara have meanings referring to features which either existed during the naming or still exist today. The names are modified morphologically or phonologically to reflect the interest of the name givers or assimilate to the neighbouring high status languages like Kiswahili. This result is a proof to the argument by Helleland (2012) that names have meanings and such meanings differ from individual to individual or from one society to another.

#### 4.1 Meanings of Village Names in Ngara District

As argued earlier, village names in Ngara have meanings reflecting various features of the places in which the village is located. Some of the features still exist while others no longer exist due to various reasons including climatic changes, population growth and historical, political and even economic changes. Village names are discussed under Frame Semantics Theory which holds the proposition that meanings are relativized to scenes (Fillmore, 1977, 1982). He adds that a word represents a category of experience.

##### 4.1.1 Names Referring to Landscape

It was found that in Ngara district, there are village names that are derived from physical features of the land. A total of five place names referring to landscape were found as presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Village names referring to landscape

Place name	Meaning
<i>Rusumo</i>	water falls
<i>Nyabisindu</i>	of small anthills
<i>Munjebwe</i>	of muddy land
<i>Runzenze</i>	a big hill'
<i>Djululigwa</i>	a horizon

All the village names in Table 10 refer to different physical features of the land when a name was given. Some of these features are still present such as *Rusumo*, *Munjebwe* and *Nyabisindu*, while others due to human activities taking place in the said areas are no longer seen. For instance, in *Runzenze*, a hill is almost invisible due to human activities resulting into housing and farming that have filled the hill. On the other hand, *Djululigwa* is no longer seen as a horizon because of people's settlements. A village name *Nyabisindu* on the other hand refers to anthills which still exist in the area.

#### 4.1.2 Village Names Referring to Flora

Names derived from flora are those names which refer to plants like trees and crops which were and some are still found in the area which is named after them. In Ngara, there are natural forests that are dominantly found in specific areas that they are used by natives to refer to such places. There are also crops in which were or are still dominantly grown in the villages. Villages referring to flora are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Village names referring to flora

Place name	Meaning
<i>Murukulazo</i>	in the poles
<i>Nyamahwa</i>	of small thorns
<i>Buhororo</i>	a yellowish natural tree
<i>Murusagamba</i>	a tree that gives sparks when burnt
<i>Ruganzo</i>	a gourd bowl
<i>Mukarehe</i>	in a tobacco leaf
<i>Mwivuzza</i>	over grown pumpkin
<i>Ntobeye</i>	of short banana

The place names in Table 11 refer to fauna which covered a big part of the land when the places were named. For instance, *Murukurazo*, *Nyamawha*, *Buhororo* and *Murusagamba* refer to natural trees which dominated a large area of the named village. However, due to expansion of human settlements and economic activities, most of the natural vegetation has been replaced by farms, houses, animal sheds etc. Only a few of such vegetation are observed in a few areas within the villages. On the other hand, *Ruganzo* was named after the crops which were cultivated in the area. Such gourd bowls are no longer grown as a dominant crop in the area as other crops like beans, maize, potatoes and banana have been introduced. Most of these features got lost leaving the names due to human activities such as cutting down trees. Climatic changes which resulted into the introduction of many new crops in the same areas. Despite the changes in the environmental features, the names still reflect the history of the areas in question.

#### 4.1.3 Village Names Referring to Fauna

These are village names derived from animals and birds. It was found that village names in Ngara district refer to both domesticated and wild animals. The names do not mean the animals they refer to did not exist in other areas of Ngara district but they dominantly lived in such areas or they caused or faced disasters. They represent the unique features of the number or intensity of calamities that faced or were caused by the animals in the areas. Such village names are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Village names referring to Fauna

Place name	Meaning
<i>Rulenge</i>	foot-augmented
<i>Rwinyana</i>	of calves
<i>Mubinyange</i>	among the white birds
<i>Katerere</i>	a small wild bird

Some village names in Ngara district refer to animals which lived in a given area when the villages were named as in Table 12. Place names relating to animals were selected based on the population of such particular animals in the area, the calamities which befell the animals and the intensity of the effects they caused on the land. For example, *Rwinyana* was given to the village in which the cows were sold leaving the calves in large numbers due to hunger that caused them to sell cows to buy food or exchange them with food. Whereas *Mubinyange* was given to the village in which white birds covered the area and the traditional army used by the Chief for security was in the same place and it was given the name referring to the white birds. *Rulenge* was said to be the path of lions leaving their footsteps after which the village was named. *Katerere*, on the other hand, refers to small wild birds which attack farms in flocks. A village was attacked by such birds and named that way as a result.

#### 4.1.4 Village Names Referring to Social Services, Character or Behaviour

The names referring to social services like health and security; character like greedy, kindness and generosity; and behaviour like good or bad were also found among the village names in Ngara district. This part presents village names referring to activities or behaviours performed by the inhabitants of the area. This group consists of eight village names as presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Village names referring to human behaviour and social services

Place name	Meaning
<i>Bukiro</i>	where healing takes place
<i>Bugarama</i>	without fear
<i>Mumiramira</i>	in the hospitality
<i>Rhuba</i>	Greedy
<i>Goyagoya</i>	a weak state
<i>Muganza</i>	Confidence
<i>Murugalama</i>	in a peaceful place
<i>Kumuuzuz</i>	at full of something

Based on the observations of the data in Table 13, it is revealed that some village names display a wide variety of meanings including behaviour and activities conducted in the areas. For example, a village name *Rhuba* signifies the behaviour of being greedy, not sharing whatever the inhabitants of this area had with people from other places. The people in these villages were believed to be stingy. Apart from bad habit, there were good deeds like *Murugarama* whose people were believed to be peace keepers and generous. *Bukiro* was given to a village where traditional healers lived and traditional medicines were found making it to be called a healing place where sick people could go and get healed.

#### 4.1.5 Village Names Referring to Calamities

In Ngara district, there are village names referring to calamities. These kinds of names were derived from events which took place in different circumstances. This group of names consists of only four names as presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Village names referring to calamities

Place name	Meaning
<i>Muhweza</i>	Killer
<i>Kititiza</i>	destroyer (thing)
<i>Kasharazi</i>	destroyer (demunitive)
<i>Mumuhamba</i>	in a cemetery /graveyard

The category of village names in Table 14 shows that villages can be named after bad situations that befall the places in question. The village names in Table 14 are said to reflect the disasters that befell the community. For instance, in *Muhweza*, people were killed miserably leaving their dependants in a hard time of living. Also, the village name *Kasharazi* was given to a village in which people were driven to despair due to random deaths which left them in a puzzle without knowing what to do. For the village name *Mumuhamba*, the livestock were attacked by a dangerous disease which killed most of the cows. The dead cows were not eaten by anyone. They were rather buried in that village resulting into the name *Mumuhamba* ‘grave yard’. This is relevant to the studies done by scholars like Jenjekwa (2018) and Tichelaar (2002) who are of the argument that some place names were derived from historical events like war. So, events contribute to the formation of place names which reflect the difficult situations which human beings experience.

#### 4.1.6 Place names referring to Agricultural activities

This sub-section presents the village names derived from activities relating to agriculture including livestock keeping, bee keeping, cultivation of crops, hunting and the like as presented in Table 15.

Table 15. Place names referring to agricultural activities

Place name	Meaning
<i>Mubuhenge</i>	among the beehives
<i>Muruvyagira</i>	in the resting place during grazing
<i>Magamba</i>	for/of farming
<i>Kihinga</i>	beans and the related

The naming of different villages in Ngara district based on the quantity of agricultural products such as excessive overgrown pumpkins, bananas or beehives. For instance, a village named *Mubuhenge* means there were plenty of beehives in that village and the people in such villages were identified as bee keepers. The beehives, however, do not exist today due to population growth and climatic change that led to deforestation and change of economic activities. *Muruvyagira*, on the other hand, was named after the village in which herds of cattle could be seen in the whole area resting after grazing. The area today is occupied by human settlements and agricultural activities which force the animal keepers away in search of pastures. This is in line with Komara et al. (2019) and Kwanyuen et al. (2011) who comment that place names contain meaning referring to economic commodities. The dominant type of commodity and the situation of agriculture are likely to depict the meaning of a place or village name.

#### 4.1.7 Place Names Referring to Boundaries

The researcher found four village names referring to geographical boundaries. The village names presented in this part were derived from boundaries which separated one clan from the other, prohibited people from crossing, and marked an area etc. The village names in this group are presented in Table 16.

Table 16. Village names referring to boundaries

<b>Place name</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<i>Mukikomero</i>	at the border
<i>Mugoma</i>	at a barrier
<i>Murutabo</i>	in the land mark
<i>Murukukumbo</i>	in a place which takes away everyone

The village names in Table 16 show that each speech community inhabits some unique geographical locations which are different from other communities. This means, each place name carries meaning of its referent. For instance, the village name *Mukikomero* was given to a village at a border that separated two clans of Wajiji, and Watasha, by that time. The village name *Mugoma* was a barrier at which inspection of livestock taken from one place to another crossing the boundaries of Washambo clan, was done. The village name *Murukukumbo* was given to a village in which all the arrested people of a certain clan were gathered waiting to be taken to the powerful clan as slaves. It was narrated by one of the informants that once people of Bhachabha clan were overpowered by Wanyongozi clan and taken to that place. So, when those masters came to take them, they took everyone found in a place even those who

were not arrested but were around which is traditionally known as *gukukumba* (take everything or everyone). This is line with Batoma (2006) and Marjie-Okyere (2015) who are of the argument that place names carry meaning of the place or area they present. This means, each place name carries meaning of its referent. It also proves that most of the place names play the same role but in different ways depending on culture of the society concern.

#### 4.1.8 Place Names Referring to Economic Activities

It was found from the field that some villages in Ngara are named after the economic activities that took place in the named areas. This part presents village names derived from economic activities which were conducted in the area. The names are presented in Table 17.

Table 17. Village names referring to economic activities

Place name	Meaning
<i>Kumugamba</i>	at the market of livestock
<i>Mukubu</i>	at the business area
<i>Kasulo</i>	inspect something such as a trap

Each of the village names in Table 17 has a different meaning though all refer to economic activities conducted in different ways. Taking an example, *Kumugamba* was given due to the presence of a livestock market that dominated in the area. Also, the business of various commodities led to the adoption of the village name *Mukubu*, whereas *Kasulo* was given to the area in which hunters set traps and they were inspecting them. This means each place name has meaning that reflects how a human being interacts with the environment of his or her locality through various economic activities.

#### 4.1.9 Place Names Referring to People

This part presents a village name derived from a person's name. The village name is *Mbuba* which was derived from a name of a person who is believed to have lived longer in the area as a founder of the place. He is also believed to have been the first person to live in that place. He settled at the top of a hill which had a steep slope with twelve sharp corners. These were referred to as twelve corners of Mbuba. Later other people settle on the hill making it a village.

#### 4.2 Structural Patterns of Village Names

From the field, the researchers found that the structural features involved in naming include morphological processes like affixation, reduplication and compounding. Also, the formation of village names involved the phonological processes of vowel shortening, frication,



hardening and devoicing. The researchers employ lexeme-morpheme based Morphology theory in analysing the structure of village names. Their formation processes together with phonological features are discussed.

#### 4.2.1 Morphological Structure of Village Names

This part presents the morphological analysis of Ngara village names and classifies them according to their structural patterns. Village names in Ngara district are derived from verbs, adjectives and nouns. Nominal village names possess the inherent features of nouns as they belong to a noun class system which determines the noun class to which they belong. Demuth (2000) asserts that noun classes in Bantu languages tend to be realized as grammatical morphemes rather than independent lexical items. It means that noun classes depend on grammatical morphemes which, according to LMBM theory, are affixes. In line with the theory, the formation of Ngara village names involved affixation in which such names were formed from other word categories. It was found that village names belonging to the word category of nouns differ from other nouns by not having augments. While almost all nouns in Kishubi and Kihangaza have augments, village names lack this feature as presented in Table 18.

Table 18. Noun class system of village names

CI	Pref	Example	Gloss
1	<i>mu-</i>	<i>Mu-hweza</i>	Killer
3	<i>mu-</i>	<i>Mu-ganza</i>	Confidence
6	<i>ma-</i>	<i>Ma-bawe</i>	short grasses
		<i>Ma-yenzi</i>	green edible grasshoppers' sound
		<i>Ma-gamba</i>	Beans and the related
7	<i>ki-</i>	<i>Ki-goyi</i>	Weak
		<i>Ki-titiza</i>	Which destroy
		<i>Ki-rushya</i>	what causes tiredness
		<i>Ki-hinga</i>	For farming.
		<i>Ki-gina</i>	Anthill.
9/10	<i>chi-N</i>	<i>Chi-vu</i>	Loam soil
		<i>Ntanga</i>	A place of potters
		<i>Ntobe-ye</i>	Type of banana
11	<i>ru-</i>	<i>Ru-lenge</i>	Foot-path
		<i>Ru-nzenze</i>	A name of a hill.
		<i>Ru-ganzo</i>	Tradition bowl.
		<i>Ru-sumo</i>	Sound of waterfalls.
12	<i>ka-</i>	<i>Ka-zingati</i>	something small to consider
		<i>Ka-terere</i>	A wild bird.
		<i>Ka-nazi</i>	A natural tree which bear fruits like coconuts.
		<i>Ka-shinga</i>	With small thorns.
		<i>Ka-sharazi</i>	which cause paralysis
		<i>Ka-sulo</i>	Inspect something like trap

14	<i>bu-</i>	<i>Bu-kiriro</i>	A healing place.
		<i>Bu-hororo</i>	A natural yellowish tree.
		<i>Bu-garama</i>	With peace
		<i>Bu-lengo</i>	Great valley
17	<i>ku-</i>	<i>Ku-mu-endo</i>	At a resting place
		<i>Ku-mu-uzuzza</i>	At a place which fills
		<i>Ku-mu-bogora</i>	At a safe place.
		<i>Ku-mu-buga</i>	At a plain land for pastures
		<i>Ku-mu-gamba</i>	at the market of livestock
		<i>Ku-mu-tana</i>	At a place with thin and tall natural trees
18	<i>Mu-</i>	<i>Mu-mu-hamba</i>	At a burial/cemetery
		<i>Mu-ru-lama</i>	At a very strong natural tree
		<i>Mu-ru-kulazo</i>	At a place with poles
		<i>Mu-mi-ramira</i>	In a lovely/kind reception
		<i>Mu-bi-nyange</i>	Among the birds
		<i>Mu-mi-gereka</i>	In addition or reserve army
		<i>Mu-ka-rehe</i>	In a small leaf of tobacco
		<i>Mu-ki-rehe</i>	In twisted tobacco ready for smoking
	<i>Mu-ru-sagamba</i>	in the natural tree which gives spark when burnt	
	<i>Mu-bu-henge</i>	Among the beehives.	

Table 18 presents village names which belong to noun classes. The village name *Muhweza* ‘killer’ belong to class 1 which, in Bantu languages including Kihangaza and Kishubi, represents human beings (in singular). There are no village names in classes 2, 3, 4 and 5 in Ngara district. Noun class 6 presents village names referring to vegetation and insects by the prefix *ma-* as in *Ma-bawe* ‘short grasses’. In Ngara district, only 3 names belonging to class 6 were found as listed in Table 19. Names belonging to classes 7 take the prefix *ki-/chi-* as in *Ki-hinga* and *Chi-vu*. Nouns in classes 9 and 10 include names designating animals, birds, objects, and they employ prefix *N-* which represent all nasal sounds /*n, ŋ, m*/. In this group we found two village names, namely *Ntanga* and *Ntobeye*.

Class 11 nouns employ prefix *ru-* which denotes long and flat objects and sometimes augmentative things. Village names belonging to this class include *Rulenge*, *Rusumo*, *Runzenze* and others. Class 12 employs diminutive prefixes *ka-/ga-*. The researchers found village names belonging to class 12 in Ngara district including: *Ka-sharazi*, *Ka-sulo*, *Ka-nazi*, *Ka-shinga*. Place names belonging to locative noun classes 17 and 18 possess a unique feature just like other nouns in these classes in Kihangaza and Kishubi. They take as their input the already formed nouns from other classes hence, they have two noun classes with the first identifying the class to which a noun belong but acting as a preposition ‘at’ in class 17 and ‘in’ in class 18. For instance, Class 17 involves locatives with the prefix *ku-* as in *Ku-mu-tana*, *Ku-mu-uzuzza*, *Ku-mu-gamba* whose inputs are from noun class 3 *mu-tana*, *mu-uzuzza* and *mu-gamba*. Class 18, on the other hand, presents locative nouns with the locative prefix *mu-* as in village names like *Mu-ru-garama*, *Mu-ki-rehe* and *Mu-mi-gereka*

with inputs from class 11 *ru-garama*, class 7 *ki-rehe* and class 4 *mi-gereka*.

#### 4.2.1.1 Village Names Derived from Verbs

It was found that some village names in Ngara are derived from verbs. Names in this group are derived by attaching a noun class prefix to the verb to nominalise it by attaching both the prefix and the nominalizing suffix. The names formed by attaching the noun class prefix are presented in Table 19.

Table 19. Nouns derived from verbs by NCP

Verb	Gloss	Noun class prefix	Village name	Gloss
<i>Hinga</i>	‘cultivate’	cl. 7 <i>ki-</i>	<i>Kihinga</i>	Farm
<i>hweza</i>	‘kill’	cl 1 <i>mu-</i>	<i>Muhweza</i>	Killer
<i>Ganza</i>	‘be confident’	Cl3 <i>mu-</i>	<i>Muganza</i>	Confidence

From the study, the findings show that all village names derived from verbs indicate actions. The verbs receive prefixes to become nouns. For instance, noun class 1 prefix *mu-* is attached to the verb *hweza* ‘kill’ to form a place name *Muhweza* ‘killer’. Here the verb stems do not change. They rather receive the noun class prefixes which make them nouns.

Place names can also be derived from verbs into locative noun classes by attaching two noun class prefixes just as with other locative nouns. Each of the nouns in Table 20 falls into the locative noun class in which the nouns have their inherent noun class prefix and acquire the locative prefix to indicate the location.

Table 20. Village names formed from verbs by 2 NCP

Verb	Gloss	Village formation	Gloss
<i>Vyagira</i>	Rest	<i>Mu-ru-vyagira</i> <i>cl.18-cl11-rest</i>	inthe resting place
<i>Galama</i>	rest/be at peace	<i>Mu-ru-galama</i> <i>cl.18-cl.11-rest</i>	in the peaceful place
<i>Ramira</i>	Be generous	<i>Mu-mi-ramira</i> <i>Cl.18-cl.4-welcome</i>	at the lovely reception
<i>Gereka</i>	add/extra	<i>Mu-mi-gereka</i> <i>cl.18-cl.4-add</i>	in the reserve such as army

The presented names in Table 20 receive two prefixes from different noun classes, including class 17 prefix *mu-*. In the village names *Muruvyagira* and *Murugalama*, class 11 prefix *ru-* combines with class 17 prefix *mu-* to form village names. On the other hand, noun class 4 prefix *mi-* combines with noun class 17 prefix *mu-* to form village names *Mumiramira* and *Mumigereka*. This indicates that the formation of locative nouns in Kishubi and Kihangaza involve two noun classes and that some place names belong to this group of nouns except that they do not possess an augment a feature that makes village names in Ngara different from other nouns.

The findings also indicate that some village names were derived from verbs by attaching both prefixes and suffixes in their formation. Some of the village names in Ngara district are derived from verbs by attaching noun class prefix and a nominalizing suffix to the verb root as in Table 21.

Table 21. Village names formed by affixes and suffixes

Verb	Gloss	Village name	Gloss
<i>kirir-a</i>	get cured at/for	<i>bu-kirir-o</i> ( <i>Bukiriro</i> )	a healing place
<i>tab-a</i>	mark/put a mark	<i>mu-ru-tab-o</i> ( <i>Murutabo</i> )	in the mark
<i>sum-a</i>	Blow	<i>Ru-sum-o</i> ( <i>Rusumo</i> )	sound of waterfalls
<i>sul-a</i>	Inspect	<i>Ka-sul-o</i> ( <i>Kasulo</i> )	inspect something such as trap
<i>kukumb-a</i>	take everything	<i>Mu-ru-kukumb-o</i> ( <i>Murukukumbo</i> )	take away everything
<i>sharara</i>	faint/paralyse	<i>Ka-sharar-i</i> ( <i>kasharazi</i> )	what cause paralysis/destroyer
<i>Titira</i>	Destroy	<i>Ki-titir-a</i> ( <i>Kititiza</i> )	which destroys

The village names in Table 21 have varying characteristics in prefix position as they attach to different noun classes while in suffix position, some names share the behaviour. For instance, the village name *Mu-ru-tab-o* employs two prefixes (a feature of all locatives in Kishubi and Kihangaza) which are class 17 *mu-* and class 11 *ru-* that and a nominalising suffix *-o* resulting into *Murutabo* from the verb *tab-*. The nominalising suffix *-o* is attached to the village names *Bukiriro* with noun class 14 prefix *bu-*, *Rusumo* with noun class 11 prefix *ru-* and *Kasulo* with noun class 12 prefix *ka-*.

In a different process, the village name *Ka-sharaz-i* employs noun class 12 prefix *ka-*. The verb root *sharar-* receives an agentive suffix *-i* which changes the last consonant of the verb root from /r/ to [z] resulting into a village name *Kasharazi*. This phonological effect of an agentive suffix *-i* is common in Bantu languages including Runyambo as argued by Mpobela (2022) and Rugemarila (2005). A similar effect is seen on *Kititiza* in which the verb root *titir-* ‘destroy’ attaches to a causative suffix *-i* and the final vowel *-a* resulting into the change from /r/ to [z] before the causative suffix is lost hence *titir* > *titir-i-a* > *titiza*. Finally the derived verb *titiza* combines with noun class 7 prefix *ki-* to form a village name *Kititiza* ‘which destroys.’

#### 4.2.1.2 Village Names Derived from Adjectives

The researchers found another group of village names which are made up of adjectives as exemplified in Table 22.

Table 22. Village names derived from adjectives

Adjective	name formation	village name	Gloss
-goyi 'weak'	<i>ki-goyi</i>	<i>Kigoyi</i>	weak (class 7)
-iza 'good'	<i>ka-iza</i>	<i>Keeza</i>	good (diminutive)

The village names presented on 22 are formed from adjectives –*goyi* ‘weak’ and *-iza* ‘good’ respectively. The Village names *Kigoyi* and *Keeza* are formed with the attachment of noun class prefixes *ski-* and *ka-* respectively. For instance, noun class 7 prefix *ki-* is attached to the adjective *-goyi* ‘weak’ to form a village name *Kigoyi*. Also, noun class 12 prefix *ka-* combines with the adjective *-iza* ‘good’ to form a village name *Keeza* which involve other phonological alterations which are discussed in 4.2.2

#### 4.2.1.3 Village Names Derived from Nouns

From the field, it was found that some village names were derived from nouns. These were formed by adding a prefix to the existing noun stem. These prefixes include “*ku-*, *mu-*, *nya-*“, as presented in Table23.

Table 23. Village names derived from nouns

Noun	Village formation	Gloss of village name
<i>-bi-hanga</i> “holes”	<i>Nya-bihanga</i> > <i>Nyabihanga</i>	of holes
<i>-mi-aga</i> “winds”	<i>Nya-miaga</i> > <i>Nyamiaga</i>	of winds
<i>-ka-riba</i> “small puddle”	<i>Nya-kariba</i> > <i>Nyakariba</i>	Of small puddle
<i>-ma-hwa</i> “ thorns”	<i>Nya-mahwa</i> > <i>Nyamahwa</i>	of thorns
<i>-ru-kulazo</i> “ pole”	<i>Mu-rukulazo</i> > <i>Murukulazo</i>	in the pole
<i>-mu-tana</i> “tree”	<i>Ku-mutana</i> > <i>Kumutana</i>	at a tree
<i>Ntobe-</i> “banana”	<i>Ntobe-ye</i> > <i>Ntobeye</i>	in the banana

The village names in Table 22are derived from nouns in different noun classes. The prefix

*nya-* which in Ngara seems to refer to a preposition ‘of’ combines with the nouns to form village names in Ngara district. For example, class 8 noun *bihanga* combines with the prefix *nya-* to form a village name *Nyabihanga*. The same happens with *Nyamiaga*, *Nyakariba* and *Nyamahwa* which however seem to differ from other locative nouns hence do not belong to a noun class system of Kihangaza and Kishubi. The village names *Murukulazo* and *kumutana* are formed from nouns in class 11 and 3 with noun class 17 and 18 prefixes respectively. On the other hand, the village name *Ntobeye* is made up of class 9 noun *ntobe* and the suffix *-ye*.

#### 4.2.1.4 Village Names with Zero Derivation

These Village names directly take the names of objects they refer to without any structural modification. Such names refer to the plants that are dominant in the area. The common nouns and adjectives do not undergo any derivation as in 24;

Table 24. Village names with zero derivation

Village name	Gloss
<i>Ntanga</i>	Potters
<i>Ngundusi</i>	red soil
<i>Shanga</i>	marshy area
<i>Mbuba</i>	a person

The presented village names in Table 24 have not undergone changes hence remained in their base form.

#### 4.2.1.5 Names Formed through Reduplication

Some village names in Ngara district were formed through reduplication which is a morphological process where the word is repeated partially or totally. Partial reduplication is the process of reproducing apart of the word, while total reduplication refers to the process of reproducing the entire word (Zapata, 2000). It was found that in Ngara, only one village name was formed through reduplication. A village name *Goyagoya* is a product of total reduplication of the property concept verb *-goya* ‘be weak’ which denotes a weak walking. A verb *-goya* is reduplicated to form a village names *Goyagoya* which reflect the state the people climbing up the village got into. That is they were weakened by the steepness of the hill.

#### 4.2.1.6 Names Formed through Compounding

The researchers found that there is a village name whose formation was through

compounding. Compounding is a morphological process in which two or more words are combined to form one word (Zapata, 2000). The researchers discovered that one of the village names was formed by two words which are *djulu* and *ligwa*. The term *djulu-* which is a noun refers to a sky whereas *-li-gwa* which is a verb means ‘which falls’ with the verb root *gu-*, a Final Vowel-*a* and a subject marker *li-* referring back to the noun *djulu*. The detailed analysis of this compound is given as *djulu* (N) + *ligwa* (v), “sky + fall” *Djululigwa* falling sky/horizon (Noun), hence compound noun.

#### 4.2.2 Names with Phonological Alterations

This sub-section presents and discusses village names formed through various phonological processes, as in the following sections:

##### 4.2.2.1 Vowel Shortening

The researchers found some village names which have undergone vowel shortening. This is when the names are compared to the frames from which they are drawn. The examples of villages found in this category with the words after which they are named are presented in Table 25.

Table 25. Vowel shortening in village names

Natural word	Changed to	Gloss
<i>Chiivu</i>	<i>Chivu</i>	red soil
<i>Mugaanza</i>	<i>Muganza</i>	Confidence
<i>Mwivuuza</i>	<i>Mwivuza</i>	In the old pumpkin
<i>Rusuumo</i>	<i>Rusumo</i>	water falls

From the field, the researchers noted that some names underwent vowel shortening, though they did not affect the meaning of the village names. The words on the left are the words that exist today in Kishubi and Kihangaza but when referring to villages the vowels are shortened.

##### 4.2.2.2 Devoicing

Some village names which were derived from verbs also underwent phonological alterations as the field deals with human sounds of all languages. The following are names which undergo sound alterations when they refer to places names. A voiced velar plosive /g/ changes to voiceless plosive /k/. This alteration is referred to as devoicing in which a voiced sound becomes voiceless as in Table 26.



Table 26. Devoicing

Village name	Changed to
<i>Gihinga</i>	<i>Kihinga</i>
<i>Gasaange</i>	<i>Kasaange</i>
<i>Gititiza</i>	<i>Kititiza</i>
<i>Gasharazi</i>	<i>Kasharazi</i>
<i>Mugikomero</i>	<i>Mukikomero</i>

It is believed that language lexicons are born, grow and can also die. This means language change as the cause in life time where some words disappear and others are coined in. Language birth means the introduction of new words (innovation) while language growth means it acquires users according to the need of the society and lastly it dies due to lack of users or when its function is no longer in use (Mufwene, 2001). This calls for the application of “Historical Linguistics” as the branch of linguistics which deals with language change and development (O’Glady et al., 2009).

The researchers found that factors leading to these changes like *Gihinga* changing to *Kihinga* include that of natives trying to make the *Swahili* pronunciation as a means of changing from traditional sounds to modern ones. *Kihanganza* and *Kishubi* are languages which inherently undergo devoicing when one of the two voiceless consonants appearing in two consecutive syllables becomes voiced (Dahl’s law). The consonant on the left always undergo such changes making the words like *gihinga*, *gasaange*, *gititiza* and others.

Therefore, changing the village names to make the two voiceless consonants follow each other is not an inherent feature of the two languages hence the effect of the sounds from other languages in this case Kiswahili in which noun class 7 prefix is *ki-*. The noun class 7 prefix *gi-* seems to be getting lost in the language names *Kihanganza* and *Kishubi* which by themselves are inherently *Gihangaza* and *Gishubi*. The two names are losing their popularity while *Kihanganza* and *Kishubi* are mostly used by people in and outside Ngara.

#### 4.2.2.3 Hardening

This change affects the voiced bilabial fricative /ɓ/ which becomes voiced bilabial plosive /b/. The data collected from the field show that there are village names formed from words with /ɓ/ but when referring to village names the *Hangaza* and *Shubi* pronounce them with voiced bilabial plosive /b/. This means that inherently the noun frame from which a village name was formed has a fricative but the current village name has changed to a plosive. This change/alteration is referred to as hardening as in Table 27.

Table 27. Hardening in village names

<i>Inherent form</i>	<i>Village name</i>
<i>Nhobheye</i>	<i>Ntobeye</i>
<i>Nyabhisindu</i>	<i>Nyabisindu</i>
<i>Mubhinyange</i>	<i>Mubinyange</i>
<i>Kumubhuga</i>	<i>Kumubuga</i>
<i>Nyabhihanga</i>	<i>Nyabihanga</i>

The researchers noticed that among many factors for sound change was spelling pronunciation as the village names are written in the current forms. People try to pronounce them as they are spelt.

#### 4.2.2.4 Deletion

The researchers noted the phonological alteration under the process of deletion which involves loss of sounds in some words, the process which is also known as lenition. For instance, a palatal glide /j/ is deleted from the noun *kirushya* to form a village name *Kirusha*.

## 5. Conclusion

Village names do have value both in a practical sense and as a necessary and persistent aspect of social functioning in a globalized world. The focus of the study was to analyse all seventy seven village names in Ngara district. It is true that through village names one can view and understand the culture of a certain society since names act as a mirror that reflects past life. This helps a certain society to publish and make other people know the language of a given society, how they use village names to express their culture through language since the language is part of culture of the given society. The study has described the meanings of village names and the structural patterns involved in the formation of the same.

In addition, village names were derived from landscapes, flora and fauna, social services or behaviours, calamities, agricultural activities, boundaries, economic activities and famous people. Also, Ngara village names consist of structural patterns which involve two linguistic levels namely morphological and phonological patterns. To start with, morphological processes forming village names include affixation, derivation, reduplication and compounding whereas phonological processes include vowel shortening, devoicing and hardening. Therefore, the naming of Ngara villages keeps alive the memories of the past through associating the name with an event, activity, incident and the related which took place.

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