Historicity in the Semantics of the Locative Prefixes of Toponyms in Mwanza City of Tanzania

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*The paper outlines the semantics associated with prefixes attached to place names in Mwanza City located in the shores of Lake Victoria in northern Tanzania. The main intent had been to replicate the findings obtained for the role of the locative prefix i- in Tanzanian Bantu languages and the historicity of toponyms obtained in South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. We dealt with a sample of 70 names of bus stops in the city through spontaneous approaches, we conducted interviews with native inhabitants of the city and surveying documents. Findings showed that place names in Mwanza City are predominantly assigned with the locative prefixes i- (e.g. **Iseni** 'place of fertile soil'), nya- (e.g., **Nyakato** 'home of the Kato clan'), bu- (e.g., **Buiru** 'place of Europeans'), and ki- (e.g., **Kisesa** 'an isolated area'). All these locative prefixes bear referential meanings. Also, findings underscored the cultural and historical narratives embedded in the toponyms of Mwanza City and the importance of preserving oral traditions to keep alive linguistic and cultural heritage.*

Keywords: *historicity, toponyms, nominal prefixes, Mwanza City, Tanzania.*

1 Introduction[1]

The motivation for conducting the research that culminated into this paper is three-fold. Firstly, many scholars envisaged studies to determine the meaning of toponyms found in African countries such as Ghana (Osei-Tutu, Mensah & Appiah 2020), Kenya (Anindo 2016), Nigeria (Adebayo 2022; Ehineni 2022a, 2022b), South Africa (Abrahams & Mlambo 2019; Ntuli & Dlamini 2023; Raper & Moller 2014), Sudan (Komara, Sobarna, Gunardi & Sya 2019),Tanzania (Alphonce & Sane 2019; Buberwa 2016; Mpobela 2024; Schotsman 2003), and Zimbabwe (Chabata 2012; Ndlovu 2013). In these studies, much attention had been paid on the position of morphology in the creation of the semantics of place names in metropolitan spaces such as Accra in Ghana (Osei-Tutu et al. 2020) and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania (Schotsman 2003). Also, some studies focused on a single ethnic group such as Yoruba (Ehineni, 2022a, 2022b) and Akan (Osei-Tutu et al. 2020). Consequently, the linguistic morphology in question had been particularly on the use of prefixes and suffixes in the creation of the place names which are primarily in African languages. The current research was envisaged to replicate the methodological procedures and findings in the previous studies.

Secondly, the current research is not unique because a couple of scientific studies on toponyms had already been carried out in Tanzania (Alphonce & Sane 2019; Buberwa 2014, 2016; Matoke 2016; Mtavangu 2020; Schotsman 2003; Schotsman & Bryceson 2006).

However, we found that there is need of further research because Mtavangu (2020) dealt with only toponyms bearing the locative nominal prefix *i-* in Bantu languages, while Buberwa (2014), Mpobela (2024) and Matoke (2016) focused on the morphology of place names in individual languages of Ruhaya, Runyambo and Jita respectively. The specific intent of the present contribution, therefore, surrounds the morphology of place names in a city inhabited by many native people speaking Jita, Kara, Kerewe, Ruhaya, Sukuma, and Zinza languages (LoT 2009). We examined how each of these societies contributed to the place names in the Metropolitan Mwanza in Tanzania.

Thirdly, the previous studies acknowledge that place names reflect the recollections and experiences of the local indigenous people in that, just like all the other linguistic symbols, a toponym may carry the meaning of a place name in terms of how a particular group of people's community interacts with its surroundings using the indigenous language and the names of associated features (Buberwa 2016; Matoke 2016; Mpobela 2024; Schotsman & Bryceson 2006; Yonazi 2014). It is, therefore, tenable to argue that the derivation of toponyms is determined by linguistic elements such as morphology and semantics. Researchers have in fact addressed these morphological elements in the said direction, analysing words' forms and meanings and parts of words such as stems, root words, prefixes, and suffixes (Buberwa 2014; Ilonga 2024; Matoke 2016; Mpobela 2024; Yonazi 2014). Nevertheless, place names retain a very important part in civilisation throughout the world, and there are no new concepts to add to their relevance. Instead, because the naming system is always influenced by the linguistic morphology and cultural norms of the society in question, it follows that place names and their interpretations are never universal. This means further research is necessary to understand the memories and experiences encoded in place names.

After this introduction, we organize the paper in the following manner. Section 2 is envisaged to offer a detailed overview of the existing literature on the topics of toponyms, focusing mainly on the African continent. Section 3 is dedicated to the preview of the theory of causal theory of names (Evans 1973; Kripke 1972). The tenets of the theory which are used in the paper had been outlined in the section. Section 4 is presenting the methods and materials for the current paper, while findings are provided in section 5. Section 6 is envisaged to interrogate further the literature and incorporate the findings from Mwanza City into the major picture of the toponyms in African settings. This is achieved through the discussion of the findings. The conclusion is in section 7.

2 Literature on place names

2.1 *Socio-cultural and environmental phenomena embedded in toponyms*

In this review of the literature, four points are considered. Firstly, many scholars have been interested in the study of place names (or toponomy) because of the possibility it gives in unravelling the cultural, historical, and linguistic dynamics of human societies. In themselves, place names are artefacts of language that frequently encode detailed information about geographical features, past events, and the socio-cultural identity of their creators (Komara et al. 2019; Smith 2021). Also, Johnson and Martens (2018) hold that toponyms are living records that preserve narratives of human interaction with the environment. They point out that many place names reflect the change of power structures, migrations, and cultural influences.

Toponymy of regions around the world presents important aspects on how societies use place names in structuring and communicating their identity. For instance, Lee and Park (2019) explore place names of Korea with a view to showing how affixes in toponyms hint at past changes in land ownership and administrative practices. These observations are corroborated by the work of Kim and Yoon (2021), which shows that toponyms of East Asia also share common morphological strategies for encoding geographic and cultural features. Similarly, Ndlovu (2013) explored toponyms in Zimbabwe and unravelled their role in keeping historic knowledge and their resilience amidst the erasure of indigenous narrations in the era of colonialism.

Secondly, there is an aspect relating the strong link between indigenous languages and the people's cultural memory, especially in Africa. Specifically, Smith (2021) holds the argument that prefixes and suffixes frequently function as linguistic markers of cultural identity. In this vein, Osei-Tutu et al. (2020) investigated place names in Ghana and discovered that affixes such as *ku-*, meaning 'hill', and *do-*, meaning 'valley', served as locative markers deeply connected with the linguistic heritage of the Akan people. Mtavangu (2020) examined the use of the locative prefix *i-* as occurring in the Bantu languages spoken in southwestern Tanzania and concludes that it still retains the historical facts of the inhabitants of a given area. Similarly, Ahmed and Suleiman (2021) note a peculiar pattern in the Swahili place names: affixes and root words describe both physical and symbolic aspects of locations. They point out that in Bantu languages, for example, locative prefixes like *ka-*, *ki-*, and *bu-* are often used to indicate places or origins. According to Ahmed and Suleiman (2021), the said prefixes in Swahili-derived toponyms indicate spatial relationships, while the root words bear meanings that are specifically attached to geography or cultural practices.

Lastly, the role of indigenous languages in the naming of places is common in African regions. For instance, both Adebayo (2022) and Ehineni (2022a) analysed Yoruba toponyms in Nigeria and revealed that prefixes and suffixes code not only the physical environment but also metaphysical and religious thoughts. These observations are shared in a work done by Abrahams and Mlambo (2019) on the toponymy of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, whereby indigenous Xhosa and colonial English naming practices are merged. However, the Xhosa names bear nominal prefixes such as which help to decipher the historical facts about the inhabitants of the area.

In Tanzania, the works of Buberwa (2014) and Matoke (2016) have contributed much toward this area with their study of the semantic features and morphological patterns of place names in the Lake Victoria area. Both studies revealed that the nominal prefixes attested in the noun class system of an individual language are employed to the place names that reveal indigenous inhabitants of such an area. The toponyms in Kagera region in the western part of Lake Victoria are primarily bearing the nominal prefixes from Ruhaya (Buberwa 2014), while the place names in the eastern part of Lake Victoria are predominantly from Kijita (Matoke, 2016). Since Lusekelo and Manyasa (2022) show the cultural and gendered dimensions of the naming practices among the Sukuma people, the study of toponyms in Mwanza City is required so as to examine whether toponyms do preserve historical narratives and portray societal hierarchies and changes in culture.

Since the previous studies mention of the role of prefixes in recording historical, sociological, and environment phenomena (Buberwa 2014; Mtavangu 2020; Schotsman & Bryceson 2006; Smith 2021), the current research analyses the semantic extension of affixes like *bu-*, *ki-*, *nya-* and *nye-* in toponyms in Mwanza City in order to examine the contents presented by these nominal prefixes. In addition, since Mtavangu (2020), who examined the

locative *i-* and concludes that it bears historical and sociological information of the speakers, we investigated the existence of the locative prefix *i-* in Mwanza City and determine its functions.

2.2 *Historicity in the creation of toponyms in Africa*

Three issues are covered in this section. The first issue concerns a fact that a couple of studies dealt with the history of place names that emanate from the creation of names at a particular period in time. Their findings revealed that countries in Africa reveal three layers of place names, namely, indigenous names used by the local inhabitants, toponyms bestowed during colonial period, and new names bestowed after independence right from early 1960s to early 1990s (Abrahams & Mlambo 2019; Alphonce & Sane 2019; Guyot & Seethal 2007; Ndletyana 2012; Ntuli & Dlamini 2023; Raper & Moller 2014; Schotsman & Bryceson 2006). In South Africa, for instance, the native names are Khoisan in nature as the first peoples, followed by Afrikaans names bestowed during apartheid period, then English or Bantu names named after independence in the 1990s (Guyot & Seethal 2007; Ndletyana 2012; Ntuli & Dlamini 2023; Raper & Moller 2014). In Dar es Salaam, for instance, there are native names such as Mzizima and Magomeni bestowed, followed by the colonial names of Oyster Bay and Ohio, then names such as Uhuru and Madaraka bestowed during independent Tanzania (Schotsman 2003; Schotsman & Bryceson 2006). The morphology of the names help to decipher the history of a place within a country, for instance, while Oyster Bay was inhabited solely by Europeans, Magomeni was for black Africans (Schotsman, 2003). In the previous studies (Buberwa 2014; Matoke 2016), this kind of historical information is not completely analysed for the Lake Victoria area.

Another issue concerns the fact that a couple of other previous studies on the names of places have focused on specific themes such as the importance of historical events in choosing place names and natural and artificial features used to bestow names, as had been the case of many place names in Tanzania (Alphonce & Sane 2019; Buberwa 2016; Matoke 2016; Schotsman 2003).While much has been done to uncover the historical and linguistic aspects of place names, there still remains a need for further research to bridge gaps in understanding the use of morphology in reckoning historical facts of a given place. According to a number of studies, such as those by El-Masry and Hassan (2021) on the role played by Arabic in North African toponymy and that by Ntuli and Dlamini (2023) dealing with cross-border naming practices in Southern Africa, toponyms are dynamic units in constant socio-political and linguistic changes. This study, focusing on Mwanza City, adds to this growing body of literature by examining the interaction between affixes and the semantic properties of local toponyms.

It is pointed out that place names play a huge role in civilisations throughout the world, and there is nothing to be added that could make them more pertinent (Chabata 2012; Guyot & Seethal 2007; Ndlovu 2013; Smith 2021). In fact, because the naming system is always determined by the linguistic morphology and cultural norms of the society concerned, this ultimately means that place names and their meanings are never universal. Hence, more research is required so as to interpret the memories and experiences imbedded in place names. This study, in this regard, focused on unveiling how the historical and cultural values in terms of semantic features of some toponyms are embedded with some affixes, which trace the origins influenced by the surrounding society and the place names in Mwanza City.

The last issue concerns the fact that most of previous studies (see, Anindo 2016; Buberwa 2016; Chabata 2012; Schotsman 2003) have posited that place names represent the memories and experiences of the indigenous people within that area. The studies report that place names, just like any other linguistic element, carry the sense of a place name regarding how a particular group of people's community relates to its environment by making use of the indigenous language and the names of the features associated with it. In addition, a part of the studies on onomastics, especially those on toponymy, show that the process of naming, in general, is linked to languages. It is appropriate to exploit how linguistic levels like morphology and semantics play a role in the process of creating. In the process of analysing toponyms, scholars (e.g., Buberwa 2014; Matoke 2016; Mtavangu 2020) deal with the meanings and forms of words and word parts, like stems, root words, prefixes, and suffixes. However, there is much controversy surrounding the semantic extension of affixes with regard to their etymologies, as they relate to a great number of phenomena. Thus, the purpose of this research was to fill this gap.

3 The "causal theory of names" as an adopted framework

The theoretical framework being used in the present study is the "causal theory of names", as developed by Kripke (1972) and extended by Evans (1973). This is an important theory that explains the semantic extension of affixes in place names with respect to knowledge or cultural significance attributed to the name. The theory postulates that the meaning of a name is derived from the causal relation that subsists between the entity being named and its understanding of importance by the society. This focus makes the theory highly relevant to the study's aim of exploring how toponyms in Mwanza City derive meaning through their morphological elements and cultural context.

The "causal theory of names" provides a strong framework through which the contribution of specific affixes to the meaning of place names can be scrutinized (Ahmed & Suleiman 2021; Osei-Tutu et al., 2020). To take an example, the prefix *i-* in the case of southwestern Tanzania, Mtavangu (2020) found that it extends semantically on the roots it attaches to in the process of formation of toponyms. Therefore, the theory enables an analysis of how such affixes can function as carriers of cultural and environmental identity through establishing a direct causal relation between linguistic features and their referential meanings.

The "causal theory of names", through the emphasis on societal knowledge as a determinant of meaning (Ndlovu 2013), is central to unveiling the historical and cultural narratives encoded in the toponyms of Mwanza City. For instance, Osei-Tutu et al. (2020) found that the affixes *ku-* (hill) and *do-* (valley), served as locative markers deeply connected with the linguistic heritage of the Akan people. Using the theory, this study has been able to link the morphological elements of toponyms to the lived experiences, histories, and cultural practices of the local population through the application of the causal framework.

Also, the "causal theory of names" enables the proper and systematic organization of the data collected on bus stop[2] names. The organization is according to morphological patterns and their semantic contributions. While Mtavangu (2020) deals with one locative prefix, we demonstrate in our investigation that six main prefixes were identified. We show that each

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[2] In Tanzania, bus stops or bus stations are common for *daladala*. A *daladala* is a minibus or converted truck that is used as a public transportation vehicle in Tanzania and Zanzibar. The word *daladala* comes from the Swahili word *dala*, which means dollar (Schotsman & Bryceson 2006).

nominal prefix carry different semantic implications when considered against the backdrop of cultural and environmental contexts.

Thus, the "causal theory of names" gives a strong framework for understanding the relevance of morphological features in place naming. The theory gives insight into how affixes are semantically extended in Mwanza City toponyms through their causal relationship with the referential meaning of the linguistic elements. This will contribute to the rich literature on toponymy and exemplify that there is almost no choice but to apply linguistic theory to the exploration of cultural-historical tales.

4 Methodology

4.1 *The study area*

This research was conducted in Nyakato area as a representative urban space of Mwanza City in northern Tanzania. Mwanza City, with the population of 1,104,521 inhabitants (URT, 2022), is the second largest city in Tanzania. According to LoT (2009), speakers of Sukuma is the largest population of the inhabitants of Mwanza City. The other native inhabitants of Mwanza City are speakers of Jita, Kara, Kerewe, Ruhaya, and Zinza (LoT 2009). Apart from these native languages, both Kiswahili and English are used as official languages of communication. Kiswahili is also used as a lingua franca between people speaking different ethnic languages in Mwanza City, as is the case of the entire country.

The importance of the study of Nyakato area lies in its linguistic and cultural setting, being based in the Ruhaya and Runyambo background within the Sukuma-land, which renders a unique viewpoint toward the morphological and semantic features of toponyms in Mwanza City. The use of Nyakato reveals the city's rich diversity, where various regional languages, such as Sukuma, Ruhaya, Runyambo, Zinza, and Kiswahili, are influential in toponymy. Much of the previous research has emphasized the role of indigenous languages in the formation of place names as a reflection of historical and cultural narratives (Buberwa 2016; Matoke 2016; Mtavangu 2020). This enriches the study by showing how the linguistic and cultural elements of the Ruhaya and Runyambo heritage contribute to the toponymic landscape of Mwanza City. Inclusion of Nyakato, therefore, allows an in-depth look at the interaction between language, culture, and the practice of place-naming, hence serving the objectives of the study.

4.2 *Study approach*

This study adopted the qualitative approach in collecting extensive information on the semantic extension of affixes of place names in the study area (Creswell 2010). This is informed by earlier studies on the linguistic and cultural dynamics of toponyms, like those done by Buberwa (2016) and Matoke (2016), where it is argued that the use of qualitative methods serves to reveal cultural and linguistic meanings embedded in place names.

Questionnaires were used first as part of the data collection methods in place to record the names of bus stops and to verify information from bus records. However, their primary function was that of observation in line with Ahmed and Suleiman's assertion (2021) on the importance of contextual observation in toponymic research. Surveys in this study involved systematic observations of place names in natural settings, coupled with interviews and documentary evaluations, to make sure that the data were grounded in cultural and linguistic

contexts. The approach is reflective of the methodological framework by Osei-Tutu et al. (2020), which calls for a combination of observation with oral and documentary evidence to increase the reliability of linguistic analyses.

Moreover, interviews were held with four indigenous persons in Mwanza City in gaining historical and cultural information. This approach is adopted from Ndlovu (2013) and Schotsman and Bryceson (2006) who pointed out the importance of oral accounts in toponymic studies. Two elderly residents and two bus conductors were selected as main consultants for oral sources of information of place names. The bus conductors were chosen not only because they were involved professionally with the daily workings and the naming conventions of the bus stops, but also for their indigenous heritage. Such a dual perspective provided insights into both the formal and informal names of the stops, connecting professional knowledge with cultural context. Elder persons were specifically chosen because such elderly people normally have more extensive knowledge about historical and cultural practices as older people traditionally become custodians of group memory and oral tradition. Their testimony proved very fundamental in unravelling the historical narrative enshrined in Mwanza's toponyms. Moreover, documentary analysis via a review of city bus records further solidified the legitimacy of the study by verifying both the official and unofficial names of stops (Smith, 2021).

4.3 *Data analysis*

There are 70 place names gathered from bus stops in Mwanza City. Each of the place names was identified as a unique unit of analysis (Creswell, 2010). Based on Schotsman and Bryceson (2006), some place names were abbreviations of the main industrial places, e.g. *MECCO* (Mwananchi Engineering and Contracting Company)*, MWATEX* (Mwanza Textile) and *TANESCO* (Tanzania Electricity Supply Company), loanwords from English, e.g., *Airport*, *Clinic* and *Rock City Mall*. All such names are ignored in the analysis herein. In the process of data analysis, layers of European and African names as described by Raper and Moller (2014), will not be revealed.

In Tanzania, numerous names come from Kiswahili, the national and official language (Buberwa, 2016; Schotsman and Bryceson (2006). Names from Kiswahili such as *Maliasili* (natural resource), *Mbao* (timber), *Msikitini* (at the mosque area), *Sabasaba* (Trade Fair grounds),*Shule* (school), and *Stendi* (stand; bus stop) are ignored in the analysis of the roles of affixes in the formation of toponyms in Mwanza City of Tanzania.

The remaining names are central to the contribution of this paper. They are typical Bantu in morphology as they precede in the structure of nouns, namely the locative prefix *i-*, which is discussed in Mtavangu (2020), the common locative prefix *nya-*/*nye-*, which is absent in the noun class system (van de Velde, 2019), nominal prefix *bu-*, which is attested in previous studies by Buberwa (2014), and the prefix *ka-*/*ki-*, which is common as the diminutive class in Bantu (van de Velde, 2019). Each of these prefixes is examined in detail as manifesting in the toponyms of Mwanza City.

5 Findings

In this section, we present data for the four nominal prefixes attested in the place names of Mwanza City. The intent is to provide data and related interpretation in order to open space for the discussion of the findings in the next section.

5.1 *Meaning in the locative prefix i-*

In the noun class system of Bantu languages, the prefix *i-* is primarily manifesting in the noun in class 5 (van de Velde, 2019). However, as we have pointed out above, it occurs as locative noun in many place names in Tanzania (Mtavangu, 2020). In our data in (1), we have a couple of bus stops which bear this nominal prefix.

(1)	*Igogo*	A place of the log of a large tree.
	Igoma	A hideout place of the bad people (thieves, robbers)
	Igombe	A place where people kept/reared their cows.
	Ilemela	A place where people could not cross to the other side of the river.
	Iloganzala	A place with no hunger; a very productive place.
	Iseni	A place with very fertile soil that was best for farming.

In the place names of Mwanza City, the locative prefix *i-* is still productive and it offers readings related to a place or location, similar to languages in southern Tanzania described by Mtavangu (2020). The meaning that derived from this locative prefix signifies "a place with" or "a location of," often tied to environmental features as in *Iseni* "a place with fertile soil" and*Igoma* "a hideout place of thiefs and robbers". This is a small corber which shows the significance of analyzing the interplay between linguistic morphology and environmental contexts.

5.2 *Meaning derived from the prefix nya-/nye-*

The prefixes *nya-* and *nye-* derive from the same source. Batibo (2022) argues that it is an archaic nominal prefix used to denote a place of origin. Our data in (2) demonstrates that it is a common prefix in Mwanza City.

(2)	*Nyakato*	At the place of the clan head of the Kato, the place of Kato.
	Nyamhongoro	At place where bone marrow.
	Nyamonoro	A place of meat (beef).
	Nyashishi	At a place of the tamarind trees.
	Nyegezi	At the place of the Negeji people.

While the prefix might have been eroded in the noun class system of Bantu languages (van de Velde 2019), it still functions to denote place of something in Mwanza City. The interpretation obtained from data in (2) is that the prefix signifies "a place inhabited by" as illustrated by *Nyashishi* that refers to "a place inhabited by tamarind trees" called *shishi* (tamarind) in Sukuma (Lusekelo & Amir 2022). Another example is *Nyegezi*"a home/place of Negeji clan".

As pointed out by Mtavangu (2020), the prefix *nya-/nye-* has a referential meaning in Bantu locative nouns. The locative also bears the role of preservation of historical memory in toponyms, as pointed out by Ndlovu (2013) for other locative prefixes.

5.3 *Derived meaning in the locative prefix bu-*

A few place names bear the nominal prefix *bu-*, as shown in (3). Across Bantu languages, the prefix *bu-* is popularly referring to the abstract nouns (van de Velde, 2019). In Sukuma language, the nominal prefix *bu-* has reference to collective nouns (Batibo, 2022), while in Runyambo language is refers to abstract nouns (Rugemalira, 2005).

(3) *Buhongwa*   A place of sacrifice (sacred area).
    Bwiru   A place of the Europeans (white people).
    Buzuruga   An isolated and uninhabited trench/place.

The historicity in the locative prefix *bu-* is usually related to the sacred place. In short, the prefix is associated with rituals and historical significance, as illustrated by *Buhongwa* that denotes "a place of sacrifice" whereby the verb *hongwa* meaning sacrifice in Sukuma language. The name *Buiru*, which is orthographically written as *Bwiru* has reference to the residential area of the white people (Europeans) during the colonial era. Europeans are called *Bairu* in Sukuma language. This phenomenon echoes Ahmed and Suleiman's (2021) findings on the cultural narratives encoded in Swahili-derived toponyms.

5.4 *Meaning in the locative prefix ka-/ki-*

In Bantu languages, the prefix *ka-* (also manifesting as *ki-* in other Bantu languages), has reference to the diminutive class (van de Velde, 2019). It unfolds in many place names in Mwanza City, as illustrated in (4).

(4) *Kanyama*   A place where meat was found.
    Kemondo   A popular name of a port in Lake Victoria.
    Kijereshi   A name of person who settled in the area.
    Kitangiri   A place where plenty of wild pigs were found.
    Kirumba   A place where people made sacrifices.
    Kisesa   An isolated area away from the city centre.

The prefix manifests as *ka-*, *ke-* or *ki-*. Each of these forms of the prefix refer to a place of certain significance. For example, *Kirumba* had been a place for thanksgiving or sacrifices and *Kanyama* signifies a place where meat was found. Both examples show the reflecting localized resource identification. This supports findings by Alphonce and Sane (2019) on the integration of cultural values into Tanzanian toponyms. Also, this usage aligns with Komara et al. (2019) who document the diminutive functions of similar prefixes in Sudanese toponyms.

6 Discussion

Proper names appear to occur without nominal prefixes in Bantu languages (van de Velde 2019). This phenomenon is not fully confirmed in the names of places used in Mwanza City in Tanzania. Numerous place names bear both the root and the four nominal prefixes presented in the foregoing discussion. The semantic interpretation of the toponyms appears to be similar to the semantic classification of the common nouns in Bantu languages such as Sukuma (Batibo, 2022) and Runyambo (Rugemalira, 2005).

The morphosemantics of the locative prefix *i-* in southern Tanzanian Bantu comprises the following readings: physical environment like a red rock, habitation of wild animals like lions, warfare places, sacred places or places of outcast, and a place for resting (Mtavangu 2020: 333). We find that common phenomenon has to do with physical features such as rocks, soils and rivers, as well as fauna and flora for the names in Mwanza City. The rest of the toponyms comprise these new interpretations: a hideout for bad people in the society, and grazing ground for the pastoral Sukuma people. Therefore, the semantics of the locative prefix *i-* in Bantu languages appear to offer a wide range of interpretations.

The locative prefix *nya-* or *nye-* is common in Bantu toponyms, although it does not manifest in the noun classes (van de Velde, 2019). Batibo (2022) appears to have been convinced that it has become frozen and remains only in place names. In our findings, we see three interpretations of the place names prefixed with it: a place of the residence of a specific clan or group of people, a significant locale for beef, either hunted or sold, and a place for specific plant species. Given this feature, we argue that rhe locative prefix *nya-* or *nye-* is still productive in the formation of place names in the Bantu speaking area.

The historicity of place names is highly attested in the use of peculiar names assigned to abstract class bearing the prefix *bu-*. In Bantu languages, abstract nouns have to do with collective nouns (Batibo, 2022) and spiritual matters such as beliefs (van de Velde, 2019). In the course of examining the place names in Mwanza City, we found that there is a small angle that points to the special locations, say for sacrifices, where assigned to the toponyms with this prefix. This kind of findings require further scrutiny as previous studies by Buberwa (2014) and Matoke (2016) could not offer detailed results of the special locations such as burial sites, sites for outcasts, and sacrifice places were assigned the prefix *bu-* or not.

Lastly, Mtavangu (2020) pointed out that the nominal prefixes *ka-*, *ha-*, *ga-*, *ko-* and *ku-* are wide spread in southern Africa. Their dispersal is common across Bantu (van de Velde, 2019). However, the locative class *ha-*, *ga-* and *gi-* are not attested in languages such as Sukuma (Batibo, 2022) or Runyambo (Rugemalira, 2005), which are spoken in Nyakato area of Mwanza City. The manifestation of the nominal prefixes *ka-* and *ki-* is a linguistic evidence which reveals their erosion in the common nouns. But, their manifestation in place names still retains their semantic interpretations as nominal prefixes for location.

7 Conclusion

The intent of the study had been to evaluate the information contained in the place names in Tanzania. Specifically, the study looked at place names which are elaborative in structure and indigene to Mwanza City, hence we purposefully eliminating the outcome of contacts with Kiswahili and English. The analysis looked at four prefixes, namely, the noun class *i-* that occurs for noun class 5, locative prefix *nya-* which is frozen, prolific diminutive prefix *ka-* and

prorific abstract noun class *bu-*, each occurring in toponyms. We found that the cultural and historical narratives embedded in toponyms unfolded in many previous studies (cf.Mtavangu 2020; Ndlovu 2013; Raper & Moller 2014; Smith 2021) do manifest in the toponyms of Tanzania as represented by names of bus stops in Mwanza City. Each of the prefixes offer a specific role in assigning meaning to the toponyms they attach to. Therefore, toponyms illustrate a deep interplay between linguistic elements and societal identity. Therefore, the contribution of this research has been on an outline of the importance of preserving toponyms as cultural and linguistic resources which encode collective memory and sociocultural practices of a given place.

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