

Research Article

# Socio-Semantic Analysis of Place Names in Chagga-Uru

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## Abstract

Place names have been studied mainly under linguistic field by several scholars who argue that place names have meaning though they differ in the way they are formed in each society. This study sought to scrutinize socio-semantic analysis of place names in Chagga-Uru, specifically, to identify place names found in Chagga-Uru, to examine the meanings of those place names and lastly to find out how Chagga-Uru place names relate to their socio-cultural background. The study employed qualitative method guided by causal theory of names and referential theory of meaning. The study employed explanatory research design with data collected using unstructured interviews and focus group discussions where 24 native speakers were consulted. Chagga-Uru place names are either villages, hamlets, names of farms, names of streams of water, names of ritual performing places and names of meeting places. The findings also show that Chagga-Uru place names have meanings derived from several aspects such as names of people, clan names, mountains, hills, economic activities, water sources, traditional food, wars, trees, farms and beliefs. Furthermore, the findings revealed that some place names describe the culture of the society such as traditions, norms and beliefs in natural power. We recommend that other studies should be conducted on place names in different Bantu and non Bantu languages focusing on linguistic fields such as morpho-semantics, sociolinguistics, morpho-syntax and phonology.

## Keywords

Chagga-Uru, Place Name, Meaning, Socio-cultural Background, Morpho-semantics

## 1. Introduction

The Chagga people of Tanzania's Kilimanjaro region speak one of the ethnic community languages, Chagga-Uru along other languages like Kirombo, Kikibosho, Kimachame, Kimochi and Kivunjo [15]. Chagga-Uru is classified by Guthrie [7] as belonging to Niger- Congo under the Bantu language family.

According to Kripke [12], a name's meaning is what is called by it or how it directly relates to the person or object that bears it. Buberwa [2] argues that Ruhaya place names are associated with specific social-cultural phenomena such as local heroes, people who made significant contributions to the

society, or individuals who accomplished noteworthy events that became recognised.

This research identified and examined place names, exploring their meanings and the relationship between place names and socio-cultural background of the Chagga-Uru and how such names carry the meaning in a given society. The previous scholars are of the view that nearly all African place names have meanings which are derived from geographical features like hills, mountains, landscape, events such as war, and natural phenomena like floods, volcanic eruptions and culture of the society.

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Because of this, a research on place names including their origin, meanings and socio-cultural background has piqued the interest of the researchers to conduct this study in order to identify place names, look into their meanings, and determine how place names and their sociocultural background in Chagga-Uru are related.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Place Names in Different Languages

With multiple definitions provided for the phrase "place name," all language users should be somewhat familiar with what a place name entails. It is argued by Helleland and Wilkström [8] that place identification is a complex identity marking process in which people use names to signify their affiliation with a certain location. According to Pall [19], a location can be identified by certain linguistic cues that set it apart from all other locations regardless of how similar or unlike they are. As a result, words and phrases used as place names have a single meaning and one point of reference. It is possible to argue that a place name's purpose is the sole way as a proper name in general differs from an appellative (common noun) ([9, 19]). They go on to say that there appear to be a widespread perception that each location has a name that it may be related to. However, the reality looks a little different as many names given to the place have a relationship with its referent. A contemporary toponym collector frequently discovers locations, or at the very least, natural items, when exploring a terrain for toponyms that the informant is unable to name. Names are linguistic objects that belong to a language rather than a place. Therefore, even though names are linguistic items, their existence depends on extra-linguistic elements. Man has chosen to reside in locations with various natural conditions depending on the pre-dominate style of life during different historical periods. In this sense, place names get meanings depending on a given language and society where the names may be used from generation to generation. Therefore, the researcher conducted the study to identify place names in Chagga-Uru and their meanings.

Knezovic and Alujevic [11] studied the old toponyms of split, a city in the centre of the Croatian region of Dalmatia after being inspired by Ayanovna [1] research. Three main sources, namely oral tradition, written documents and antique charts were used to compile their data. According to their research, street names, names of museums, parks, amusement parks, schools and other establishments still contain the old split toponyms. The goal of their research is to revitalise the historical toponyms of the researched area.

Nonetheless, Spociter, [25] argues that names are selected and the acts of naming are done with purpose and reason. For instance, the naming of streets facilitates mobility and effective urban governance. This means that the naming system of any place has a reason which might present a certain issue or

event in a given society. Place names, according to Weichart [28], can be seen as condensed narratives that tell stories about the communities that gave those names as well as the geographical elements they represent. Since some place names are very old, having originated in earlier languages or stages of a language spoken in the area and have been morphologically, semantically and phonetically adapted to the current language of the place, their meaning is not always obvious to us today when we use them in our daily lives.

The study demonstrates that some place names alludes to geographical characteristics, local celebrities, trees and forests, particularly those found at various elevations. Place names delineate the boundaries of all tiers and sizes of human societies. It is a person's name that presumes to maintain the status of a place name, signifying that there is a room whereby a particular person has greater rights and obligations than others. They also say that place names aid in the feature-by-feature breakdown of intricate spatial reality. All geographical features are mental constructs, understood as sub units of geographical space. Lack of physical or distinct borders such as existing administrative boundaries or natural barriers like mountain ranges or rivers, is particularly evident in landscapes, cultural areas, or macro regions. Therefore, it would not be able to create, transmit or preserve a system of notions relating to space without place names.

Tent et al. [26] suggests that place names identify human habitation sites, natural geographic features such as rivers, lakes, mountains, seas and political boundaries. Place names also reflect cultural heritage and landscape. Therefore, place names might reflect the physical features found in the area like trees, stones, streams, dams, forests, and waterfalls among other features.

In his research on place names, Pohl [21] discovered that certain place names are derived from geographical features. For instance, the Indo-European *\*gholo-*, meaning "the frothing," is the source of the river name "Gail." He goes on to say that this river's quality clearly impressed and was significant to the people who gave its name. According to Pohl, this river in southwest Carinthia, Austria, has a tendency to flood in the spring and autumn because of significant precipitation in its catchment, which is brought on by moist air moving northward from the Adriatic Sea, and the narrow glacier valley's bottom gradient.

According to Shodhganga [24], place names are of great help as they bear the identifiable association with physical and cultural characteristics of the region and serves as a basic source of information about geographical surrounding. He further says that people, whether indigenous or foreigners, perceive a place according to their cultural background by naming the place according to their dialectal wealth. In African context, it is argued that almost all African place names have meanings which vary depending on the civilization in which they are developed. Those names correspond to geographical location, seasons and events in the given society as war, natural phenomena and the culture of the society [27].

Furthermore, Lusekelo and Moshi [14] claim that in Machami, a Bantu language spoken in Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania, the foreigners brought a great change in naming practices. This shows that naming reflects the culture of the superior group where the two groups exist.

Moreover, Shigini [23] contends that place names are essential language forms because they are ingrained with information about their ethnic origins in his study on a morphological analysis of Sukuma place names. Mpobela [16] present similar findings in Runyambo through meanings of place names in Runyambo as she discusses the morphological properties of the same. These are essential sources of sociocultural, historical, geographical and linguistic information. According to a study by Elias et al. [3] on village names in Ngara district, every village name in the district has a meaning that is derived from a variety of phenomena, including boundaries, agricultural activities, flora and fauna, social services or behaviours, calamities, agricultural activities, and famous people. This paper discusses place names to find out which features are reflected in their meanings.

Nevertheless, in their research on the socio-cultural foundations of toponyms in Nsukka, Southeast Nigeria, Ozoagba et al. [18] contended that Nsuka Igbo toponyms are not given out at random. They further contend that Nsuka-Igbo toponyms are assigned based on a number of socio-cultural criteria such as the site's location, historical events and experiences, ancestral and genealogical ties and geographical scenery. Additionally, it was noted that the Nsuka-Igbo gave names to places in honour of their ancestors and ultimate being, demonstrating their high love for both. Nsuka-Igbo toponyms are derived from a variety of sociocultural elements, including the physical environment, ancestry, place location and historical occurrences. In order to determine how the names are betrothed to places in the research area and how they are related to the socio-cultural context, this study analyses the relationship between place names and socio-cultural background.

Place names have a long history of formation and are strongly associated with the social life, customs and worldview of the local populace claims [1]. Ayanovna [1] employed the classification method in his analysis of the place names of the ancient Turks to determine the general and nomination principles of place-name formation among the ancient Turks. The names' etymology and their functional characteristics related to historical, socioeconomic and psychological factors were also discussed. He continues by saying that since the beginning of time, people have gave names to geographical objects and have done so by using appellatives that reflect the unique characteristics of the physical and geographical landscapes, the names of ethnic groups and nations, social groups and class titles of the people who live there.

The connection between place names and social processes is examined by Giles and Coupland [5]. They investigate how within a particular civilization, place names can both contribute to and reflect social dynamics, cultural identity and

linguistic expressions. By demonstrating how speakers select language forms to fit their situations, viewpoints and social occurrences. They further argue that language and social contexts are related. For a language to be used in meaningful communication, the context in which it is encoded is essential. This study aimed at examining the meanings of place names in Chagga-Uru.

Letsoela [13], on the other hand, views place names as rich cultural resources that influence the naming of bus stops. The findings about place names indicates that most of place names are formed due to individual's behaviour and generates the referent concerning with a given place name. This influenced the study on identifying the place names in Chagga-Uru.

## 2.2. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Referential Theory of Meaning and Causal theory of Names. Russell (1903–1918) proposed the referential theory of meaning, which is also called the direct reference. Russell later uses referential theory of meaning as the theory where the meaning of an expression is the object that the expression refers to. The referential theory of meaning, according to Russell [22], highlights the referent side of the sense and also pinpoints the meanings of the concepts.

The Causal Theory of names, also known as the Naming Theory, was first proposed by Bertrand Russell in 1905 as the descriptivist theory of the reference of names. Then Kripke, [12] championed it as the Causal Theory of the reference of names, suggesting that the theory of naming might account for meaning in addition to reference. Later, Evans [4] modifies Kripke's causal theory of reference of names into the Causal Theory of Names. This theory states that a name refers to something due to special causal relationship between the use of the name and the thing it refers to. Referential theory of meaning and causal theory of names enhanced the data collection process and enabled the researchers to gather reliable information concerning Chagga-Uru place names.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative including descriptions of the place names. This enabled the researchers to obtain natural and primary data with the relevant information from the respondents. The study used an explanatory design in this investigation for the reason that qualitative research is descriptive in nature so the respondents had the chance to give out their views and experiences about place names in Chagga-Uru. A total of 24 native speakers of Chagga-Uru were consulted. Furthermore, the researchers used focus groups discussion and interviews in data collection which allowed the researchers and the respondents to meet face to face and get enough time and opportunity to explain their knowledge and views on the meanings of names given to their areas. Participants were free to discuss the connotations and socio-cultural background of place names in Chagga-Uru.

## 4. Place Names in Chagga-Uru

The researchers collected place names in Chagga Uru. The names were analysed by grouping them into categories depending on what they refer to including villages, hamlets, etc. Also their meanings were found and their socio- cultural backgrounds discussed as presented below.

### 4.1. Classification of Place Names in Chagga-Uru

Chagga-Uru was found to have many place names than those which may be only recognized by the government like villages and hamelets. Therefore, the collected place names are classified into several groups depending on the categories of places including villages, hamlets, farms, ritual performing areas, water streams, etc.

#### 4.1.1. Village Names in Chagga-Uru

The researchers identified village names in the researched area in which a total of 20 village names were collected. The mentioned villages were named basing on several phenomena like trees, people, water sources, farms and other related aspects. Table 1 presents village names in Chagga-Uru as identified by the respondents.

Table 1. Village Names in Chagga-Uru.

Ward	Village names	Meaning
Uru-Mashariki	Kishumundu	Knife sickle
	Materuni	In Materu clan
	Mnini	Little
	Kyaseni	Ground area
	Mruwia	Water source
	Mwasi kaskazini	At upper farm
	Mwasi kusini	At lower farm
	Okasen	Plain land
	Kimanganuni	At kimanganu tree
	Rau	Main river
Uru-Kusini	Kariwa	Maize farm
Uru-Kaskazini	Longuo	Farm
	Kitandu	A place of stubborn people
	Shinga	Protector
	Mrawi	Bananas farm
	Msuni	At java plum tree
	Njari	A person name

Ward	Village names	Meaning
Uru-Shimbwe	Ongoma	At drumming area
	Shimbwe Juu	At upper area
	Shimbwe Chini	At lower area

Table 1 presents village names in Chagga-Uru. Most of these villages are named after places where the community members conduct their meetings in different seasons of the year to discuss various matters arising in their communities and to perform different rituals and celebrations.

#### 4.1.2. Hamlets Names in Chagga-Uru

Just like other villages in Tanzania, villages in Uru are divided into hamlets. The hamlet names in Chagga-Uru were reported by the respondents. A total of 11 such names were collected as presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Hamlets Names in Chagga-Uru.

S/N	Place names	Gloss
1	Nganyeni	Iron smelting
2	Ndishini	Kind of bananas
3	Mengeni	At the shadow
4	Kifuni	Ritual performing place
5	Mresheni	Big hole
6	Kitirini	Foot step
7	Wasale	Kind of green snake
8	Mariocha	Roasted bananas
9	Tembeni	At Temba clan's
10	Kireiyo	A trap
11	Kisarika	A name of the chief

Table 2 presents some of the names of hamlets in Chagga-Uru. Such names include *Kisarika* which represent one of the chiefs who ruled Uru. Also, *Mariocha* refers to the roasted bananas which are taken as delicious food among the Uru community. Wasale "a green snake" is the name given to dangerous green snakes found in the area.

#### 4.1.3. Names of Other Places

The researchers found that apart from villages and hamlets names, the people in Uru give names to other places found in the researched area including farms, ritual performing areas, etc.

*Names of Farms:* The researchers collected names of



farms in Uru including *pichini*, ‘ground farm’ referring to a fertile and productive lowland farm. This place is believed to receive fertility from the highland areas which flows with the water and nourishes the lower land during the rainy season. Therefore, the area is occupied by various farms where crops such as maize, beans, vegetable, millet and other food crops are cultivated. Again *Msengoni* ‘prune’ and *Mchuru* ‘far farm’ are the names given to the farms found a way from the residence making the community members to walk from home early in the morning and come back in the evening.

*Names of Meeting Places:* The findings also indicate that some place names signify meeting places. The researchers found some names referring places where the community members meet for various issues concerning their clans and society such as politics, spiritual and cultural issues. For instance government meetings for election campaign, discussion of economic issues like farming activities and social issues as education, church issues, funerals and weeding matters are always done at specific places which are given unique names. Such names include *Mengeni* ‘at the shadow’, *Kirunda* ‘door’ and *Makasingoni* ‘at the milk tree’. These locations serve as central meeting points where community members gather with their chiefs, government leaders, religious leaders and family heads to discuss various issues.

*Names of Streams of Water:* The study reveals that in Uru, there are names of the physical features found in the area such as streams of water which are significant to the society members. These streams are essential in various aspects in Chagga-Uru community specifically in home activities as cooking, washing, cleaning, drinking as well as in farming activities. The respondents identified several names as: *Mfongoni*, ‘at the canal’ *Kyoyo* ‘river’, *Kachi*, ‘stream’ *Rononi* ‘stream’, *Kitongoroso* ‘stream’.

*Ritual Performing Places:* These are names that denote societal beliefs in certain aspects such as ancestral worships where the community member gather in the specific places to perform rituals to their ancestors. The respondents mentioned place names which are found in Chagga-Uru which seems to be apart from the names of villages and hamlets. Such names include; *Moromeni*, ‘at the fig tree’, *Masaoni*, ‘at the remains’ *Kifuni* ‘at the deaths’ and *Pukeni*, ‘at Puka’s place’. They reported these areas as the areas where the community members meet for the purpose of performing rituals. This is supported by the findings bestowed by Peter [20] who asserts that toponym is an essential source of linguistic data because they tend to be remarkably resistant to change and thus frequently preserve archaisms. This is relevant to the findings of the study on Chagga-Uru place names where the researcher found that there are some place names which reflect ritual performing places as reported by the respondents.

## 4.2. Meanings of Place Names

The researchers found that place names in Chagga-Uru have meanings that refer to various phenomena such as peo-

ple's names, names of trees, clan names, ancestry, beliefs, transport, war and water sources among others as presented in the sub-sections below.

### 4.2.1. Place Names Referring to People

The researcher found that some Chagga-Uru place names are related to famous people who did notable things in their society. This is evident in the name *Kokinyasha* which is associated with a famous witch doctor known for treating people and influencing rainfall even during dry seasons. This was reported during an interview with the researcher, where the respondent stated that some names in Chagga-Uru refer to famous people who performed certain extra ordinarily things in the society. The name as *Kokinyasha* is derived from the name of a person *Kinyasha*. This is evident that some of the place names in any society are given depending on what people did for a certain period of time. The other names in this group are presented on Table 3.

Table 3. Place names referring to people.

Place names	Meaning
Kokinyasha	At Kinyasha's home
Koseba	At Sebastian's residence
Kofarabu	At Farabu's place
Karsheni	Karsheni's land
Kokisawio	At Kisawio's place
Kwomseke	At Mseke's residence

Table 3 presents place names in Chagga-Uru associated with individuals who performed significant events in the community. For instance, the place name *Kofarabu* is derived from the name of a person, *Farabu*, the white man who owned a big coffee farm during the period of war. Also, he forced the community members to work in his farm for low wages. Again *Pukeni* is derived from a person's name *Puka* who was gifted with the ability of healing diseases like foot cancer and people affected with such diseases were brought to him to be cured using local medicine. Also *Msuko* is the place name referring to the name of a person *Msuko* ‘mad person’. This place refer to a mad person who seemed to pass in the area frequently. The name *Msuko* reflects the community's way of identifying and marking spaces based on the notable behaviors or events that occurred there. Thus, this creates an event to the community members which may be shared from generation to generation. This shows how the place names relate to the notable people of a given places in Chagga-Uru.

Furthermore, the place named *Karsheni* is the place named due to the presence of a person *Karsheni* who owned a big farm where the community members work in his farm for low

payment. This data relates to the findings reported by Elias et al. [3], who noted that some place names refer to individuals who performed notable deeds in the society.

#### 4.2.2. Place Names Referring to Traditional Food

There are also place names referring to traditional food found in Uru. The researchers identified that some place names in Chagga-Uru reflect traditional foods found in the area as presented on Table 4 as follows:

**Table 4.** Place names referring to traditional food.

Place names	Meaning
Mkwaleni	The hunger known as 'kikole' means a severe hunger
Kireiyo	The animals trap used by people to get their food
Mariocha	Roasted bananas
Ndishini	The kind of bananas
Kiwiri	Ripe bananas

The data on Table 4 present some place names in Chagga-Uru associated with traditional food. For example, *Ndishini* refers to the place where the type of banana named *Ndishini*, are found and *Mariocha* refers to roasted bananas which are commonly used with milk and they are very famous food during maternity period as food for a mother and her baby. Therefore, the researcher found some place names which refer to traditional food which Uru community use as their common and special food.



**Figure 1.** Ndishini.

Figure 1 present some Chagga-Uru bananas which are fa-

mous and used as traditional food or fruits. They prefer roasted banana which resulted into the place name *Mariocha*. Figure 1 shows some bananas which led to the naming of some of the places in Chagga-Uru including *Mariocha*, *Kiwiri* and *Ndishini*.

These bananas can be cooked in various delicacies according to the need of the community members as well as making the local beer. Again the presence of ripe bananas marked the beginning of using them as fruits and thus was the source of the place named *Kiwiri*.

#### 4.2.3. Place Names Referring to Water Sources

There are some place names in Chagga-Uru referring to water sources found in a given society which reflect their meanings depending on the society naming system and the way such streams of water came into being which might carry the meaning in that society. This was examined during interview and focus group discussion whereby most of the respondents reported that some place names in their area have meaning which refer to water bodies as follows:

**Table 5.** Place names referring to water sources.

Place name	Meaning
Mfongoni	Manmade canal
Kyoyo	Stream
Mnambe	Water falls
Kisanja	Water falls
Rau	river
Kitongoroso	Non manmade canal
Chombo	Collection of water
Mware	River

Table 5 concerns with the place names related to water sources reported during focus group discussion and interview which include rivers, canals, streams and waterfalls. Such place names include *Mnambe* referring to a waterfall which is known for its high slopes and dangerous depths, believed to swallow people. The other one is *Kachini*, a spring which historically provided the community with an essential source of safe drinking water. *Rononi* is the river where many other rivers meet while *Kisanja* refers to the area characterized by dangerous water spills where a large fish known as bull shark which is estimated to have high speed of 25 miles per hour is believed to reside. *Mnambe* water falls are presented in Figure 2 here under:



**Figure 2.** Mnambe water falls.

This place is very dangerous and it is known for its high slopes which attract the tourists for visitation and recreation matters and it contributes to the raise of the village revenue. Also, it is believed that there are living organisms such as crabs, frogs and bull shark which is very dangerous as it often swallows people. Currently, this place is used for tourist attractions and economic hub for surrounding villages. So, the name *Mnambe* highlights the natural beauty resources and potential water for various purposes.

According to a study by Elias et al. [3] every village name in the Ngara district has a meaning that is derived from a variety of phenomena, including boundaries, agricultural activities, flora and fauna, social services or behaviours, calamities, agricultural activities, and famous people. The researcher was motivated to conduct this study on place names identification and investigate their meaning and cultural connotations of names in Moshi Rural District specifically in four wards.

### 4.3. The Relationship Between Place Names and Their Socio-Cultural Background in Chagga-Uru

The place names in Chagga-Uru are deeply intertwined with the socio-cultural background of the Chagga people. These names reflect various aspects of their history, traditions and daily life. Each place name carries a story that reveals insights into the values, beliefs and practices of the Chagga community. Thus, language cannot be separated from culture. This is supported by Klugah [10] who contends that toponyms are history-preserving tools and some societal culture among the Asogli. This means that place names present beliefs, practices and norms performing in the society which enable the society to maintain their cultural aspects. Furthermore, Guma [6] argues that African names and naming system is a socio-cultural interpretation of historical events. He adds that a name is more than a word or words by which a person, animal, or thing is identified. This indicates that there are several aspects which the society members' use in naming a place and these reflect the cultural issues performed in the society. This is done to preserve the essence of

a given society for the new generation where they will be made aware about the issues practiced by their ancestors.

The place name *Mararo* identifies a place where people eat and leave without paying. It has its roots in a local legend. According to the data obtained from the field, a guest once arrived at *Mararo* and the locals generously provided him with food and shelter, expecting him to pay the following day. However, to their surprise, the guest eloped without settling his debt. This unexpected departure left a lasting impression on the community, leading them to name the place *Mararo*, encapsulating the memory of that event and the lesson learned from it was that the guest can stay in the area freely and depart without paying their debt.

Also *Kifuni* is a place associated with rituals where the remains of human skulls were formerly kept for the honour of their dead. Historically inhabited by the Minja clan. *Kifuni* served as a sacred site for performing various rituals. These rituals included sacrifices of goats and sheep with the blood sprinkled on a specific area believed to be received by their gods. The rituals were conducted for significant reasons such as invoking rain during droughts, seeking mercy during periods of consecutive deaths and introducing new-borns to their ancestors. Therefore the sacrificial practices at *Kifuni* highlight the Chagga people's deep spiritual connection to their environment and their reliance on ritualistic traditions to address communal challenges. This shows that there is a relationship between place names and their socio-cultural background in Chagga community.

*Ngombo* is a forest area where the dead bodies were historically thrown, making it taboo for anyone to cross the area with corpses or wedding convoys. The name *Ngombo* reflects cultural taboos and the community's practices surrounding death, indicating areas designated for specific purposes and rituals associated with them. Even today, the community keep this myth that they are forbidden to pass there with wedding convoys or dead bodies for burial. Moreover, *Kwomseke* is a place that was historically used for disposing dead bodies, as the community did not bury their deceased. Instead, they would throw their bodies into this desolate area, which eventually became known as *Kwomseke*. The name is derived from a person named *Mseke* and the name itself evokes a sense of fear and respect, shrouded in ominous folklore. It was considered a terrifying place, filled with the unseen presence of restless spirits. People were strictly prohibited from passing through it, as the area was believed to be cursed. The air around *Kwomseke* felt heavy with dread, and its isolation contributed to its reputation as a forsaken wilderness. This place, surrounded by dense undergrowth and eerie silence, instilled an instinctual fear in anyone who came near. Generally the locals whispered about *Kwomseke* in hushed tones, acknowledging its dark history and the supernatural aura that seemed to emanate from the ground itself. The area is no longer used so, instead it is used as the farm where the community plant various crops such as maize, beans, vegetables, fruits among other food crops.



Nevertheless, *Kisanja* ‘washing place’ a river which refers to a perilous area characterized by dangerous water spills, where it is believed that a large and menacing fish known as ‘*Chunusi*’ ‘a bull shark’ resides. That fish is known as a night fish in the area. This fish is reputed to be capable of swallowing people, adding to the area's ominous reputation. The name *Kisanja* thus serves not only as a geographical identifier but also as a warning, encapsulating the community's deep awareness of and respect for the natural hazards present in their environment. Therefore this designation reflects the Chagga people's intricate understanding of local dangers and their tradition of integrating such warnings into place names, thereby preserving cultural knowledge and ensuring the safety of future generations.

Furthermore, *Sambaluni* is a place believed to revive deceased children through a ritual involving a mythical snail. The name *Sambaluni* highlights the cultural beliefs and practices surrounding life and death in Chagga society, illustrating the rich mythology and rituals that are integral to their worldview. Historically, there was a mystical snail resided in this area believed to perform the healing of the dead children whereby the dead body were smeared with butter and placed near the carve where the snail lived. They believed that the snail would appear and leak the dead body until it resurrected. The snails are believed by the inhabitants to have been killed during the war resulting to excessive bleeding which miraculously lead into the germination of miraculous plant known as *sangaru* which grew in a day and produce ripe fruits famous as animal fruits. The community members use its leaves as local umbrellas to protect themselves during the rain.

Additionally, *Kokinyasha* ‘at Kinyasha’s place’ is named after *Kinyasha*, who was gifted a large farm by the chief and had the ability to influence rain. The name *Kokinyasha* highlights the cultural practice of gifting land and the belief in individuals with mystical powers to control natural elements, illustrating the interplay between social hierarchy and spiritual beliefs. These people are believed to be available today because they receive these powers from their ancestors where they pass them from generation to generation and in secret. They perform their task secretly not in public. For that reason, Chagga-Uru place names have meaning referring to beliefs where people’s problems are well solved because those people with power of doing so didn’t die with them but they shared with others through myth of a given society. Thus, the researcher concludes that, Chagga-Uru community believe in super natural power to sustain their need as rainfall for their agricultural activities, food in the period of scarcity of rainfall and protection from natural calamities.

These findings are supported by Nwoye [17] who conducted a research on place names and identified those referring to ritual artifacts such as cocks, bottles of dry gin, gallons of palm wine, kola nuts and alligator pepper. These artifacts are used as symbols in rituals and in Igbo naming traditions, they often convey meanings more profound than the tangible objects they represent. Lastly, *Moromeni* comes from

the tree *Moroma* ‘a fig tree’ and the area serves as a shrine for offerings to ancestors. The name *Moromeni* highlights the spiritual practices and the significance of ancestor worship in Chagga culture, emphasizing the importance of maintaining connections with the past. These are performed in the specific selected area for example in *Moromeni* ‘at the big fig tree’ from *moroma* ‘a fig tree’ as can be seen in figure 3 hereunder:



Figure 3. *Moromeni*.

This place is owned by Kilewo’s clan who perform their ritual ceremonies after each three months per year for the remembrance of their ancestors and ask the blessings upon their offspring and protections. Nevertheless, community members believe in the power of their ancestors when they meet some unexpected issues in the society. For example, natural calamities such as illness, death, accidents drought, floods and earthquakes. They believe that in order to get away from these issues, they should perform some rituals as bull, goat, milk and local beer. The findings is supported by Peter’s [20] study on Lenape and Abenaki region toponyms where he found that place names given to the place tend to preserve the archaism of the society.

## 5. Conclusion

The study identified and examined the Chagga-Uru place names to find out their meanings and the relationship between them and their socio-cultural backgrounds in Chagga-Uru. Basing on the findings of this study, it can be asserted that each community has its own ways of naming the places. In this study, the researcher found that Chagga-Uru place names include names of villages, hamlets or water streams, ritual performing areas, etc.

Additionally, people from different cultures use different means of providing the names to their area due to various aspects. The place are named basing on the present circumstances as observed from the field of the study where the



identified Chagga-Uru place names carry meanings derived from various aspects such as famous people in the community, vegetations, water sources, cultural practices, etc.

Furthermore, the analysed data show that place names in Chagga-Uru have the relationship with their socio-cultural background which significantly preserve the history of the speech community. The findings of this study revealed that there are some place names which reflect the history of the study area including food, beliefs, people's lives, wars etc.

Nevertheless, these Chagga-Uru place names have sources, meaning and origins depending on the existing history of the society. Most of the place names which were created during the colonial period exist in the present time and this contributed much in the preservation of the history of Chagga-Uru. Therefore this study emphasizes the tendency of keeping the information so as to preserve the socio-cultural and the history of the society.

Generally, these place names have their meanings depending on several characteristics. These meanings of place names are known by very few young Chagga-Uru native speakers. Thus, there is a need of having documented material in Chagga-Uru as pamphlets and books. By so doing, the history of the community and the information concerning Chagga-Uru will be preserved. This will also assists the young generation to be aware with their environment and enable them to share those information from generation to generation.

## Abbreviations

St. Saint

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## Data Availability Statement

The data for this study are included within the article

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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