

# A Pragmatic Analysis of Selected Personal and Place Names in John Habwe's Novel, *Maisha Kitendawili*

Frida Akinyi Miruka

PhD Candidate at the Department of Languages, Linguistics & Literature, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, (JOUST), Kenya

**Abstract** Names are an important aspect in the analysis of any literary work. Besides helping in the understanding of the character in question, names also help in communicating important thematic aspects in various works of literature. Many literary critics hence pay a lot of attention to the use of names to help unveil the writer's message, ideology and themes as he is perceived to communicate through them. In most cases, these names usually obtain their meanings contextually hence giving a clear connection between onomastics and pragmatics. This paper presents a pragmatic analysis of selected personal and place names as depicted in John Habwe's novel, *Maisha Kitendawili*.

**Keywords** Onomastics, Pragmatics, Names

## 1. Introduction

Names are one of the features of style used by authors to communicate their messages in works of literature. They hence become an important point of focus to literary critics in order to unveil the writer's message. Although there are several branches of onomastics, this paper focuses on two branches: toponomastics and anthroponomastics as it gives a pragmatic analysis of personal and place names [1, 2]. In literary onomastics, scholars are more concerned with the levels of significance of names in drama, poetry, fiction and folklore. These include names of places, characters and cosmic symbols as they relate to theme, structure and other literary considerations [3]. Less attention is hence paid to the novel. Its against this background that this paper sought to carry out a pragmatic analysis of personal and place names in John Habwe's novel *Maisha Kitendawili*.

According to [4], theorists pay so much attention to naming in fiction since proper names are the nodal points through which actions and descriptions are interconnected. Names can be used to describe a character, communicate a theme and even develop other characters. Such names are proper names given to people and places. Though the study of names appears in onomastics as a discipline, its features can be seen in other branches of linguistics and literature. In pragmatics we analyze language use in social contexts and the ways in which people produce and comprehend meanings through language [5]. In *Maisha Kitendawili* [6]

uses a more sociological approach in naming. The various types of names evident are historical family names like *Farida Omar* and *Kibibi Omar*; chimerical names like *Papi*, *Kim* and *Safu*; national identity names of places like *Mzalendo*; typonimical family names like *Price House* and *Hotel Intercontinental* and hagiographic names like *Angela* and *Mary* [3].

Besides the various classes of names, various approaches can be employed to the study of pragmatics in contemporary literary onomastics [7]. These include the humanistic approach which is traced back to Plato. This approach gives moral lessons or ethical teachings derived from the character. The name Chifu Mazuri is a good example. The sociological approach takes into consideration names which easily reflect some characteristics of a society. Most of the typonyms discussed in this article bear a sociological aspect e.g Soweto, Jamboni, Sunrise and Eden. The archetypal approach, which traces names back to the classical or epic period can also be employed. In this thesis, classical names include Rose, Mary, Moses, Farida, Omar and Angela. These are old fashioned names derived from the bible and ancient cultures. The psychological approach involves certain assumptions about human behavior and the way they function. Examples include Mtoro (Moses), Marufuku and Mjomba. Lastly, the aesthetic approach dwells upon the form rather the substance. It includes names that sound great or lovely but have no special meanings. Farida, Kasu, Kim and Papi are such examples. The central thesis in this paper is that besides individualizing the characters and places, names are coined on a significant pragmatic import which is seen in the overall structure of the work of art. In analyzing names therefore one is engaged in a pragmatic analysis of the social, political and ideological considerations predominating at various points.

\* Corresponding author:

fridanyalik@yahoo.com (Frida Akinyi Miruka)

Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/linguistics>

Copyright © 2018 Scientific & Academic Publishing. All Rights Reserved

Such a study hence does not rely on one but employs a number of approaches as illustrated in [7].

According to [3], it is not enough just to collect and list names for a work of literature. The scholar must hence determine the authors intended meaning of the names and what they really mean to us. This paper seeks to examine the pragmatic use of names in Kiswahili literature with specific reference to John Habwe's *Maisha Kitendawili* hence defining the relationship between onomastics and pragmatics. In this novel the writer portrays different situations facing the youth in the society. Among them are joblessness, greed, contempt of the poor, rape and gender abuse. The writer also shows why the youth are prompted to embrace a lifestyle that goes against the societal moral expectations. He shows that the main factor coercing the youth into immorality is poverty. *Farida* the main character finds herself in difficult situations that leave her with only one option, to yield to the demands of an immoral society.

Though implicit in the thesis, this article is based on the classical or Sense theory of proper names [8]. The theory sees a name as describing the object it names. The paper is guided by the two objectives: to identify the proper names as used in John Habwe's novel *Maisha Kitendawili*, and to interpret the contextual meaning of the names as used in the novel.

## 2. Related Literature

A number of studies have been done concerning the relationship between onomastics and other disciplines. As [9] asserts, onomastics is central to human activity hence it overlaps the subject matter of many disciplines. Further they examine the role of place names as a cross disciplinary activity. [10] takes an anthropological view to personal and place names among North American Indians. He also shows some grammatical peculiarities of place names and the aspect of their universality.

While proper nouns are not universal some are terms which embody descriptions while others are given and never used. In the article 'What's in a name: Towards literary onomastics in Kiswahili Literature', [4] shows that names are not mere tags that distinguish one fictional character from another. Citing examples from varied Swahili texts, he shows that character names can be used as expressions of experience, ethos, teleology, values, ideology, culture and attitudes of varying shades. This article gives a pragmatic analysis of names in Wamitila's novel *Maisha Kitendawili*. In this article reference is made to [3] who gives an analytic guideline to literary onomastics. He identifies five formal approaches to literary criticism and further explains the different name types. He asserts that it is not enough just to collect and list names for a work of literature. The researcher therefore has a task to determine what the names mean and the author intended names to mean.

## 3. Methodology

This paper uses a descriptive research design while its study area was the genre of novel in Kiswahili literature. The study which was basically library based targeted proper nouns. Critical case purposive sampling was used to chose John Habwe's novel *Maisha Kitendawili*. In this type of purposive sampling one case is chosen for study because the researcher expects that studying it will reveal insights that can be applied to other cases [11]. Personal and place names were purposively sampled and subjected to a content analysis.

## 4. Discussions

A number of personal and place names have been purposively selected for discussion. The charactonyms discussed under anthroponomastics are *Mzee Omar* (*Omar the old man*), *Kibibi Omar*, *Moses Mtoro*, *Chifu Mazuri*, *Mzee Marufuku*, *Mjomba*, *Rose* and *Angela* while the toponyms are *Sokomoko*, *Soweto*, *Jamboni*, *Sunrise*, *Eden* and *Mzalendo*.

**Omar** is a personal name that means happiness or good luck [12]. Omar is a lucky and happy man who finds a good wife. Despite his poverty and poor state of health almost throughout his life, his wife Kibibi never gets tired of showing him tender love and care. *Omar's* marriage is equally a happy one despite the challenges of poverty and ailments. Compared to other marriages depicted in the novel *Omar* earns a lot of respect, love and care from his wife. The name Omar hence suits him contextually. On the other hand Omar is unlucky because he lives in poor health for a better part of his life. He also fails to get a baby boy a fact which however does not bother him. This hence does not perfectly suit him.

Omar's wife is called **Kibibi**. The noun bears several meanings [13]: *Ki-bibi*

Cl 1 (prefix) – *bibi* (noun) - princess, peacock, eldest daughter, young lady, a type of deep fried sweet bread, grandmother.

*Kibibi* is depicted as a good woman and wife in the story. She works hard to fend for her family. A good care taker and wife to her husband *Mzee Omar*. Since they only had daughters for children she is like their eldest sister hence suits the description of the eldest daughter to *Mzee Omar*. She only brings good memories to her family. However the diminutive prefix /*ki*/ is well placed to denote her state of poverty. This works well for the authors idea of imperfection that runs through the novel. From the novel title '*Maisha Kitendawili*', the writer shows that life is full of imperfection and hence is a riddle to most of its players.

**Moses Mtoro** is the boyfriend and lover to *Angela*. The name *Mtoro* means fugitive or escapee. His physical appearance however betrays him for a thug. The writer describes that he was a very tall man who had lost one of his

teeth. The imagery employed in his description portrays him as a drunkard. The name Moses which means 'draw out' shows how Angela draws him from the street life and adopts him into her life. He however disappears from the flow of the story and cannot be traced to the end.

**Chifu Mazuri** is a Swahili equivalent of a good chief. He is the area chief and is portrayed as a good person. After the death of *Omar* and his wife, he gives a suggestion that people should raise funds to assist *Farida* and *Kasu* after the death of their parents. The writer through this name presents the moral teaching to humanity. Orphans are to be supported through every possible way. He suggests that leaders like chiefs should be at the front line in promoting ethical standards in the society.

**Mzee Marufuku** is *Farida*'s uncle who adopts them after the death of their father. His name 'Marufuku' means prohibition and depicts his character. Whenever his wife becomes stubborn, *Marufuku* prohibits anything to do with her. After that she would humble and do anything for *Marufuku*.

**Mjomba** (Uncle) is *Kasu*'s husband. He is a good, hospitable man who values and cares for his relatives and in-laws. He would do anything within his reach to extend a hand of help to them. *Marufuku* and *Mjomba* are examples of names that give a psychoanalytic interpretation of the character. The writer through them digs deeper into the family relations and challenges. However it comes out that the family unit is of great significance in the society. The two play a vital role in the lives of *Farida* and *Kasu*.

**Rose** (a flower), **Mary** and **Angela** (angel) are hagiographic names denoting lives of saints [3]. They are names of the classical or epic perioda that suit the archetypal approach. They are given to the young girls most of whom are students at the *Mzalendo* University together with *Farida*. Though their names are angelic, their lives are so hypocritical and don't portray what is in their names. *Mary* for instance is a prostitute who poses as an angel in the church. *Angela* is not able to give necessary assistance to *Farida* at her greatest point of need. *Rose* on the other hand suddenly changes and her character pushes *Farida* out of her house to the streets where she finally meets her sister. The writer through them depicts the paradox of life as in the riddle 'Maisha kitendawili'. Though they come from strong traditional and religious background, their lives are ironic.

On the other hand, a number of place names are evident too. **Sokomoko** is a Swahili word meaning 'dilemma'. It is a name given to the village where *Omar* lived with *Kibibi* his wife and their two daughters *Farida* and *Kasu*. On the day of the coincidental deaths of *Omar* and his wife, the writer says 'Wanakijiji wa Sokomoko walijawa na Sokomoko', that means 'The villagers of Sokomoko (dilemma) were in a state of dilemma'. This is a situation where there is no clear easy choice or answer, it also refers to a serious problem [10]. The villagers were thus faced with a serious problem of losing *Omar* and his wife *Kibibi* who dies hours after the death of her husband following serious mourning. The villagers could

not explain this hence according to one character *Mzee Zinzi*, *Omar* and the wife had been bewitched.

**Soweto** is the name of the village where *Kasu* lived with *Yasmin* after escaping from his uncle who had raped her. Place names have a variety of origins, some are transferred, some are borrowed while others are descriptive coinages [14]. The name *Soweto*, an acronym developed from South Western Township for black people is transferred from a South African city. It was characterized by a dense population of over 2 million with homes ranging from extravagant mansions to makeshift shacks. It is a city of enterprise and cultural interaction [15].

In *Maisha Kitendawili* Soweto is characterized by a mixture of classes of people from the very poor to the affluent. It's a cosmopolitan settlement with mixed traditional and cultural practices. *Kasu* is on one occasion perplexed by a group of people participating in a traditional ceremony which she did not understand. *Yasmin* explains that it's a group of the *Gisu* in an initiation ceremony. Equally, a lot of social evils like abortion and prostitution were rampant. The name Soweto hence befits the village.

Another place name is **Jamboni**. This is the place where *Kasu* lived with her husband *Mjomba*. Her sister *Farida* later joins her and finds refuge in her house after all her friends abandoned her. The name is a Swahili word with a variety of meanings.

*Jambo – ni*

Jambo (noun) – occurrence / wonder /Hello / actual state of affairs / good day

Suffix – ni (plural)

After joining the university, *Farida* despises her sister as a stupid character who never went to school and would not wish to be associated with her. It however turns ironical that after experiencing the riddle of life, *Farida* is only left with an option of going back to her people whom she had despised. Therefore it was a wonder occurrence that *Farida* went to stay with *Kasu*. She had faced the reality of life (the actual state of affairs) and affirms that 'relatives are not bought at the market'. The day *Farida* meets *Kasu* is indeed a good day to her. They greet each other passionately, she gets to know her in-law *Mjomba* and this occurrence changes her sorrows to joy since she finally finds a place she could call home.

**Mzalendo**, a Swahili word for 'patriot' is the name of the national University where *Farida* pursued her studies. It assumes the name of the country called Mzalendo.

*M- zalendo*

Cl 1 (prefix) - zalendo (noun) - patriotic / native / inhabitant

The University of **Mzalendo** is attended by the native students. They believe that they are the treasures of the society and that after being graduated they deserve to be placed in the best positions in the society. This however turns ironical as they realize the troubles of life such as joblessness and other difficulties which they had to endure even after acquiring education. One of them *Peter Manoti* asserts 'the government expects us to pay back the education loans, so

they must find a way of getting us jobs'. *Farida* however complains about the flooded job market and dreads that the situation would worsen with the influx of graduands from foreign countries like India since most of the native students studied at *Mzalendo*.

*Sunrise* is the name given to the place where *Farida* moves to stay after gaining stability by starting her own company where she was the manager. The name is a mark of hope and a bright future for *Farida* who had for a long time suffered abject poverty and joblessness. By using this name, the writer clearly indicates that it's a new dawn for *Farida* and the reader clearly follows the turn of events in the life of this main character.

*Eden* a name derived from the biblical garden of Eden is the place where *Farida* finally settles with her husband *Juma Mafumbo*. It means 'paradise, a delightful place, happiness and contentment'. The name denotes the state of contentment in *Faridas'* family. They had a very happy family to emulate the situation intended by the biblical God for Adam and Eve at the garden of Eden. This name like most of the names discussed in this article perfectly relays the writers intended ideas. The names Soweto, Jamboni and Eden are used by the writer to reflect the characteristics of the society. There are however other proper nouns in this text which do not bear any meaning. Examples are Yasmin, Mzee Zinzi, Peter Manono and Juliet.

## 5. Conclusions

This article gives a pragmatic analysis of charactonyms and toponyms with reference to John Habwe's novel *Maisha Kitendawili*. The introduction gives a highlight of the problem and the purpose of the work which is centered upon the fact that most studies on literary onomastics have not dealt with the swahili novel. Various approaches to the study of literary onomastics have been discussed and a highlight on the various types of names given. The discussion shows that writers employ a mixed approach to naming. In *Maisha Kitendawili* all the five approaches from Humanistic, sociological, archetypal, psychological and aesthetic approaches are evident. Highlights on related literature and methodology are also given. The discussion dwells on the interpretation of selected names and in each case views are given on whether the names help in revealing the authors ideas as intended. Apart from a few names like Omar and other classical names in use, it is evident that most of the selected nouns perfectly suit the authors ideas in the text. Other names which do not bear a pragmatic bearing include Kim, Papi, Juliet and Peter Manono. This paper hence reveals how personal and place names are used to convey

information discretely by the writer which can only be understood when given keen consideration contextually. The names discussed hence have a pragmatic bearing that helps in the understanding of the general work and the writers themes.

---

## REFERENCES

- [1] Hough, C. (2016). The oxford handbook of names and naming. Uk: Oxford University Press.  
<https://global.oup.com/.../the>.
- [2] A.N.S. (1951). Promoting the study of onomastics.  
[www.americannamesociety.org/names/](http://www.americannamesociety.org/names/).
- [3] Altman, A.G. (1981). Literary Onomastics Typology. Analytic guidelines to literary Onomastics Studies, *Literary Onomastics Studies* Vol.8 Article 21.
- [4] Wamitila, K.W. (1999). Whats in a name. Towards literary Onomastics in Kiswahili literature.  
<http://profiles.uonbi.ac.ke/node/66079>.
- [5] Nordquist, R. (2017). Pragmatics (Language)  
[www.thoughtco.com/pragmatics-language](http://www.thoughtco.com/pragmatics-language).
- [6] Habwe, J. (2000). *Maisha Kitendawili*. Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.
- [7] Altman, A.G. (1974). Onomastics as a modern critical Approach to literature. *Literary Onomastics studies* Vol.1 Article 13. <http://digitalcommons.brockpot.edu>.
- [8] Bal, M. (1985). Narratology. Introduction to theory of narrative <https://books.google.com/Narratology>.
- [9] Algeo, K. & Algeo, J. (2000). Onomastics as an interdisciplinary study. DOI 10.1179/nam.2000.48.30-4.265 [www.researchgate.net/](http://www.researchgate.net/).
- [10] Webster's new world college Dictionary 5<sup>th</sup> ed.  
[www.google.com/search?](http://www.google.com/search?)
- [11] Crossman, A. (2017). Understanding purposive sampling. An overview of the method and its Applications.  
[www.thoughtco.com/purposive-sampling](http://www.thoughtco.com/purposive-sampling).
- [12] Surname analysis .com@2010-2017 Maana ya Jina Omer. [sw.surnameanalysis.com](http://sw.surnameanalysis.com).
- [13] Glosbe, Swahili- English Dictionary  
<https://glosbe.com/sw/en>.
- [14] Bright, W. (2003). Whats in a name? Reflections on Onomastics. *Journal of Language and linguistics*. University of Colorado, <https://www.researchgate.net/.../2530851...>
- [15] About Soweto-South Africa/information/Tourist attraction & Destinations/Gauteng/Johannesburg/www.SA-Venus.com.