

Culture, Change and Continuity in Riddle and Riddle Performance among the Kipsigis, Kenya

Esther Cheronu, Fugich Wako and Dishon Kweya

*Department of Literature, Languages, and Linguistics,
Egerton University*

E-mail:essynamu@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper interrogates contemporary riddles and riddle performance in the Kipsigis community. It illustrates the ways in which post-colonial social changes have influenced Kipsigis riddles. Review of related literature reveals that the question of change and continuity in riddles and riddle performance has not received much attention in the corpus of the genre. The paper is based on the theoretical stipulation that privileges cultural circulation and appropriation of fragments from other cultures and genres in the process of cultural production as opposed to the assumption that culture is stable and its constituent elements functions to maintain its stability. Data was collected from the Kipsigis respondents aged eight years and above, sampled from Kapsorok, Chepyegon, Barn'goror and Kaplelartet locations in Soin Division of Kericho County, Kenya. These areas are appreciably rich in oral traditions because most oral genres are still being lively performed. Participant observation method was used to collect riddles, while interviews were used for data about the culture and historical background of the community against which the changes were assessed. We conclude that formation of riddles is dependent on the cultural context both in the past and at the present. Thus new figures of speech in contemporary Kipsigis riddles reflect change in Kipsigis perspective of life during and after the colonial era.

Introduction

This paper focuses on a critical interrogation of post-colonial social changes and the ways they have influenced Kipsigis riddles. The Kipsigis are one of the nine sub-ethnic groups that comprise the larger Nilotic Kalenjin

community. The Kalenjin groups share similar traditions, norms and values which are passed on from one generation to the other through cultural genres such as proverbs and riddles. The paper is specifically geared towards explaining the process of composition and modes of arriving at the meaning of contemporary Kipsigis riddles. The composition of these riddles makes use of the elements of the community's past tradition as well as those of the present. In this particular context, the paper explores how modernity has impacted on the modes of production of riddles and riddle meaning. Relevant literature reviewed in this area reveals that most studies emphasized linguistic or religious education, what Finnegan (1992) has described as "fitting for children to know". There was little attempt to relate the text to their social context, elucidate their literary significance or to describe the normal circumstances of their formation. Pepicello & Green (1984) have theorized how linguistic ambiguity is exploited in the riddle genre to produce wit. They assert that in the manipulation of linguistic and aesthetic codes, "we find an affirmation of the cultural convention, the message which is hidden in the riddle form" Pepicello & Green (1984; 5). Comparatively, other scholars (Nakene, 1943, Cole-Beuchat, 1957, Blackings, 1961, Ishengoma, 2005) have pointed to the way riddles and stories are told around the fire place in traditional African cultures and that they are rich sources of educational information. Bukenya (1984) and Chesaina (1997) generally suggest that riddles and riddling are age-bound, thus limiting genre and genre practice to time, space and age.

The paper is informed by Karin Barber's (1989) ideas that what the texts say is inseparable from history in the sense of the past. In Barber's view, texts are transmitted through time, bringing with them elements of the past even as they themselves undergo a process of erasure and layering as they are refashioned in accordance with the changing spatial and temporal contexts. More importantly, the issue of erasure and layering (Barber, 1989; Hofmeyr, 1994) plays an important role in exploring the changes that the riddles have had to undergo in order to remain relevant in a postcolonial context. Some riddles have had to lose some content and had been replaced with new content in accordance with the current concerns.

Other riddles have retained their content but have acquired new meaning. For instance the Kipsigis riddle, *Bun yon abun yu ng'etuitosi ko biriren eunek'-chobinik*, ("pass here, let me pass there when we meet our hands will be red"). The response to which was "red wild berries" in the past. However, the

response to this riddle has now changed to "money". The metaphor of "red wild berries" is replaced by new metaphor "money" which was first introduced into the community by the Indian merchants before the arrival of the Europeans and has since been widely used as legal tender. When a challenger poses the riddle, any of these answers may be given by the respondent but the challenger is the sole arbiter of determining the acceptability of responses offered. Such options were not there in pre-colonial time as the notion of money was nonexistent. The riddle underscores the changes in the economic and social activities of the Kipsigis after the introduction and usage of money. Kiptalam, one of the resource persons and a farmer, explained that the riddle above has taken a new meaning because nowadays the wild fruits which hunters and gatherers used to collect are rarely found as the forested areas initially endowed with wild fruits have been cleared for farming. The riddle reflects the past when the Kipsigis land, particularly the *Soim* area (Lowland parts of Kericho County) had abundant natural vegetation. A new metaphor in the riddle thus unveils the reality of the new life situation in the contemporary Kipsigis community. Whereas the riddle remains largely the same, the new situation brought about by the postcolonial experience guides the audience to another level of reference in play. The dynamics of change in the contemporary Kipsigis community is evidenced by the changing metaphor of the riddle itself. The change in the response reflects the change in the community lifestyle. Continuity of riddles is also apparent as the riddle retains its ancient form despite the change in meaning which maintains the community's cultural values. Consequently, as Hamnet (1976) suggests, new and alien ideas appear to be re-classified and inculcated into the old riddles through a process that brings it into a relationship with familiar experiences while at the same time retaining the traditional knowledge (Hamnett, 1976, 388).

The Kipsigis riddles have undergone mutations and replacement of metaphors. Additionally, new riddles have been created in the midst of the changing cultural milieu. The riddles were obtained from interviewees in their respective homes during a research fieldwork carried out in the year 2014. Other riddles were obtained from children aged between eight and fourteen years during riddle sessions carried out in the selected schools. The study of these riddles shows the interaction of the past and present ideas in the minds of the composers. Riddle formation and the implication of riddle meaning are influenced by socio-cultural and economic activities, historical background and beliefs of the society including norms and taboos. In addition, interaction

with other cultures, colonial influence which includes Christianity and modern education has contributed immensely to composition of new riddles. The pre-colonial context and post-colonial context are brought together through the process termed as “composition by fragments” (Barber 1989: 20). This is best illustrated in her analysis of the *Oriki* oral text of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. In that context, she asserts “an *Oriki* text is woven out of fragments from a diversity of times and voices, that are pieced together by a sort of hybridization process (Barber 1989: 96), “a device of bringing the past into the understanding of the present of the text” (Bakhtin 1981: 4). Similarly, by looking at the present composition of riddles and their interpretation in the Kipsigis community, the “hybridization” process is prevalent in most riddles as the elements of the past as well as those of the present are pieced together in the riddle content or implied in the riddle meaning. The riddle may contain ancient terms but its meaning may be current. The hybridization process has been used to bring the past into the understanding of the present of the riddle as the following riddle illustrates: *Arereni Chelang’at en kapolis – benderet* (Chelang’at is hysterically dancing in the police station – a flag).

The riddle has significant metaphorical implication of the main aspect of Kipsigis life right from birth to marriage. The name Chelang’at is given to a female child born in the evening between 5.00 p.m. and 11.00 p.m. Some names in the Kipsigis were used as nuances and were indicative of some aspect of the foreign culture which impacted either negatively or positively on the Kipsigis social order. Hence, the use of the name Chelang’at here implies the colonial administration which distracted the community’s social order and challenged the cultural life of the Kipsigis. The flag as used in this riddle represents the national flag which in this case has replaced the traditional flag worn by girls during their circumcision. The latter was an emblem of honour. During the pre-colonial time both girls and boys in the Kipsigis community underwent circumcision as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. The night before the circumcision marked the climax of the ceremonial songs and dance for the initiates. They were dressed for the occasion and those who maintained their dignity were crowned with a flag decorated with beautiful feathers. The flag signified that the bearer was a virgin. Colonial and the subsequent Kenyan state authorities suppressed this social order. The people mocked the new system of governance hence the new riddle was composed to reflect this new governance system. The national flag which stood for the new regime was perceived as a symbol of colonialism that upset traditional social order for which the people coined the phrase “hysterically dancing”.

Though the practice of female circumcision has greatly diminished in this community, values that were instilled into initiates during the seclusion period are retained in riddles and traditional songs which appraise the cultural norms and mock the foreign culture which is deemed to have degraded the cherished values of the society. The riddle alludes to the clash between the two cultures and creates a vent through which the nostalgia of the “lost culture” is expressed.

Additionally, a police station was seen as a place of torture, as similarly expressed in the following riddle: *Katyechyu kabum yu karkang – asikarindet* (He stepped here, he passed here with a thud! – Policeman). This is a sound riddle reflective of the coercive rule introduced by the British in Kenya during colonialism. The police worked for the new administration and were brutal in their actions such that they were presumed to be an anathema to everyday social life. This perception is captured in these two riddles to imply some suspicion and open distaste for colonialism and its signifiers.

Another riddle which alludes to the colonial culture is: *Arwap ilat kerer ng’wony – mogombetab eik* (Son of lightning splits the ground – ox-plough). Ox-ploughing was a new way of land cultivation brought by the colonialists in the 19th Century. It was considered as a cruel activity thus the Kipsigis reacted negatively to its use when ploughing by oxen was first introduced by the British colonial masters. The Kipsigis people adored their cattle; they were held in high esteem – almost considered sacred – and for this reason it was felt that they should not be subjected to torture through yoking for reasons of ploughing (Hotchkiss, 1937: 121-122; Fish & Fish, 1995:148). The use of plough which involved the use of the oxen was viewed as a kind of mistreatment of the oxen. The practice could even lead to the death of these animals through exhaustion and fatigue or excessive beating. Thus the association of the ox-plough with lightning is indicative of how dangerous the use of the plough was. It was perceived to be an ill-fated phenomenon hence the practice took long time to be accepted by the Kipsigis.

In Kipsigis *Ilet* (lightning) is a natural phenomenon which might cause sudden death of individuals or animals. If a man or domestic stock is killed by lightning, a day is set apart on which no work may be done over a wide area of the neighbourhood. If it strikes a house or land, consultations from the diviners on the cause and implication of the catastrophe are sought and necessary precautions prescribed by the diviners. The use of the term in the riddle

denotes some distaste of the practice by the community. However, ploughing by oxen was progressively accepted and is still carried out even today hence the retention of the riddle. The contents of the riddle show the Kipsigis' perception of life in the past whereas the response to the riddle points to the modern ways of farming. This reflects the continuity of some aspects of the community as well as the changes wrought by the European colonists.

The following riddles trace the Kipsigis migrational routes and the spread of the Kipsigis people into their present lands: *Kilul ketit en Terik koit simamik oli – oret* (A tree fell in Terik and its branches reached this side – road). *Kilul ketit en Bureti koit simamik koroni – oret ab lam* (A tree fell from Bureti and its branches reached this side – tarmac road). The two riddles allude to the migratory paths the Kipsigis followed to settle in their present location. At the same time it introduces the infrastructure – road, which has made it easier for the Kipsigis to move further from their settlement areas to newer places. The first riddle depicts the migration of the Kipsigis from their cradle land while the second one shows the relatively recent movement of the Kipsigis to newer places such as Bureti, Belgut and Soin areas.

“Terik people” seems to refer to those who were left behind by the Kalenjin people at the time of migration. Mwanzi (1977) has suggested that part of the Kipoiis clan of Nandi tribe came from Kipsigis country and settled on Terik Hill, overlooking Kisumu. These early settlers moved to occupy more land further north and east in the present Nandi County. The riddle alludes to the Kalenjin migration story as described by the scholars, Peristiany (1939) and Orchardson (1961) who studied the oral history of the Kalenjin. According to these scholars, Terik people seem to have been lost on the way and decided to live on their own. However the Kipsigis and other Kalenjin ethnic groups still remember them and keep reminding the new generations of their existence. The Kipsigis riddle therefore is a form of oral art that is capable of storing the whole or part of the history of a community. The use of Terik in the riddle justifies the migration narrative of the community whereas the meaning of the riddle denotes the present road infrastructure. The change in the riddle meaning reflects change in the perception of things and the events that impacted on the Kipsigis' life in general.

In the second riddle, a different interpretation is realized through the use of the name of a place – Bureti as opposed to the sub-ethnic group name – Terik indicates that the meaning is slightly different. However, it still talks about

migration, but in this case the migration process is more recent. Bureti was formerly inhabited by the Gusii people. After a protracted battle between the two communities at Chemoiben area, the Kipsigis conquered the Gusii people and occupied their lands. Jamji, Chemosit, Chemosot, Litein and Chemoiben in Bureti area were annexed as new Kipsigis land (Toweett, 1978, 14-15). The Kipsigis spread to these areas all the way from Lumbwa (the present Kipkelion) where they first settled at a place called Tuluap Sigis, eight miles to the west of Lumbwa. They pushed south and west from the Tuluap Sigis into the bush and forest country near Belgut in Kericho and finally to Bureti ousting the Gusii (*Kosobek*). The origin and migration history of the Kipsigis are veiled in these riddles and they are passed on from generation to generation. Riddles then can be said to be powerful condensers of unarticulated societal history.

New riddles have also been created. Formation of these riddles and the response thereof illustrate the new items which have been adapted for use in the community. *Chematweek ako chang ng'alek – Kitabut* (Dumb but with many words – book). The riddle is newly invented as depicted by the alien metaphor – book. The referent – book in this riddle symbolizes formal education in general. The composition of this riddle rests in the assumption that texts cannot speak for themselves; they are “dumb” unless someone talks of them. The riddle signifies formal education which gradually affected informal learning that was part of the Kipsigis lifestyle. Learning in the past took place informally and in non-formal occasions such as the initiation period where the initiates were secluded for a period of six to twelve months and taught lessons on cultural lifestyle. The initiates learned many practical things which would help them in later life. They were also initiated into the secret rituals and customs of the society. The riddle thus emphasizes the fact that texts contain lots of information which can be retrieved through reading.

Further riddles are also formulated by borrowing some values from the past and inculcating them into the present as in the following riddle. *Chepkulung kituiyo met – chemakurer/muguryot* (A wristlet with its head closed – a string-like bangle tied round a baby's wrist). This is one of the old riddles which have been refashioned to fit into the current society. The framing of the riddle and the answer thereof has not changed. But during performance several responses to the same riddle were given. These included *kiptimbo*, *tamokiet*, *olmera* and *oliondo* all of which are cultural bangles worn for decoration purposes but a *tamokiet* had an added significance: it was made from the hide

of an animal killed for a sacrifice or for some guests and the entrails had shown good omen thus wearing of it was a sign of honour. The latter two bracelets were metal ornaments made from metals obtained from the neighbouring Luo and Gusii communities respectively. Many participants contested that the initial answer to the riddle should not be neglected as it carried with it moral lessons to be passed on to the new generations.

The social background from which the riddle was formulated in the past seemed to have dominated the minds of the riddle users, especially the older members of the society. The riddle is symbolic and was cited as a typical Kipsigis riddle by almost every resource person during fieldwork. Two women respondents explained that *muguryot* was a traditional bangle tied to a child's wrist to monitor his or her growth. As the child grew it was supposed to tighten to the extent that it was removed and another one put on. This showed that the mother took care of the child well. It also implied that she had not had any sexual affair with her husband or any other man; it was an offence to do so or even mingle with men before the baby attained six months as it was believed that the baby would be subjected to several ailments and would grow thin and weak. This was the main reason why the *muguryot* was tied to a baby's wrist. The offence was punishable by culturally sanctioned beating of the wife by her husband.

The same riddle was explained by a respondent, Kiptalam, 53, who added that the meaning of the riddle has changed. The new answer of the same riddle is "handcuffs" with which a suspect is tied when arrested over an offence. The "bangle" (*muguryot*) is thus regarded as a reminder of deep and extensive social memories, which are retrieved and recounted through the riddle. The ancient term used in the riddle calls for the need to continue some aspects of social life remembered from the past. The new answer of the riddle depicts how societal laws have been supplanted by the national laws. However both versions of the response to the riddle have a common goal geared towards the maintenance of social order.

New riddles have also been created based on technology and new invention as depicted in the following riddles: *Kutkutenin koris koitin chumbeek – ndegeit* (Let the wind blow you to the Whiteman's land –aero plane). This is a new riddle which describes how the aero plane flies. Air travel is a new and fast mode of transport. New innovations as perceived in this community brought a lot of risks to the people's lives. They were therefore cautiously accepted.

Thus they were introduced to the riddle with some kind of horror words as in the expression *kutkutenin koris*. The phrase *kutkutenin koris* is a curse in itself which literally means, "may the wind blow you away". Orchardson (1961) argues that it is the curse that is feared by the Kipsigis and not the spirits. The curse (*chupisiet*) comprises two different activities: the verbal cursing of a person or persons by individuals; and the curse which is brought upon the man when he breaks any law or custom. According to Orchardson (1961, 117), the natural curse plays a very important role in Kipsigis life, as it is the ultimate sanction behind the recognition and maintenance of tribal custom. The riddle implies that air travel, though fast may involve some unforeseen risks, like being blown away by the wind literally.

Similar riddles were formulated later as follows: *Kutkutenin akoi Indoi – ndegeit* (Let it fly you to India – aeroplane) also implies the strong "wind" which might carry one overseas. Aeroplanes seem to have captivated the minds of the Kipsigis people such that they formulated more riddles about them and sometimes even associate other new items with them as in the following riddle: *Siling mi barak – Ndegeit* (a shilling in the air – aeroplane). The shilling as used in this riddle represents Kipsigis attempt to make sense of the currency introduced first by the Arabs, then Europeans in the early 19th Century. An aeroplane is also a new figure representing the new technology and innovation that changed our understanding of travel, distance and time, which has been appreciated by the Kipsigis people. The modern concept of currency thus radically changed people's understanding of the world in relation to the pre-colonial mode of trade and exchange, which was mainly barter. Often, people had to travel long distances with the items for exchange using donkeys, or even their own backs. Animals like goats and sheep were also driven for long distances to be exchanged with foodstuff, particularly millet from the neighbouring Kisii people. This happened usually during prolonged drought. The challenge was valuing the goods. The advent of money therefore changed the way the existing relationship of exchange of goods was understood. The trading pattern shifted from the pre-colonial past to post-colonial present as people's conception of trade and exchange also shifted. Thus, as the novel mode of transport, aeroplane so captivated the imagination of the Kipsigis people that for a long time it was the focus of everyday discourses. Children would run outside the houses at the detection of the slightest sound that was deemed similar to that of the aeroplane so as not to miss the opportunity to gaze at the aeroplane that might be overflying the village. Over time, children even formulated a song about aeroplanes which

they would sing as they gazed into the skies. The association of the two signifiers of modernity therefore invokes the creative mind to think of the appearance of these two objects in the riddle and establish a relation. For instance, through observation objects appear big when they are near while they appear small when they are far away. In this case an aeroplane appears too big on the ground but high up in the sky it is no bigger than a shilling. Thus the response to the riddle is arrived at through comparison of the size of the shilling to the apparent size of the distant plane in full flight. At another level, the shilling might represent the monetary value of the aeroplane; it is the most expensive innovation ever made by the white people.

Other new riddles carry the elements of the past though the response reflects the current innovation and information as in the following riddle: *Kiptiltilyet mi itit – simoit* (A woodpecker on the ear – mobile phone). This is a new riddle which compares two objects: a bird and a mobile phone. Apparently the old and the new metaphors have parallel implication. *Kiptiltilyet* was one of the birds connected with omen in the Kipsigis community. Omen is very important in the Kipsigis cultural life and controlled numerous activities (Rutto & Maritim, 2016). No omen was to be ignored. It was believed that *Asis* (God) and the ancestral spirits send messages to people through omen. A positive or good omen was a sign that a good decision had been made and that *Asis* agreed with what was being done or would be done (Fish & Fish, 1995: 221-223). Three birds especially were connected with omen. One was *Kiptiltilyet* (a kind of woodpecker); the direction from which it sang was indicative of good or bad. It was especially significant when cattle raiders were leaving home to engage in raids. When in conflict, this bird on the right meant victory, but on the left it meant defeat.

Another bird which was considered a bad omen was the *chepkokosyot*, the brown hawk with a white abdomen. However this bird sitting on a tree with its white abdomen facing towards a person was good omen (Fish & Fish, 1995: 221-223). The Kipsigis believed in the intervention of these birds thus the interpretation of the message deemed to be conveyed by these birds meant that the spirits of the dead or any other supernatural powers had something to complain about therefore these birds acted as agents (Toweett, 1978: 34-35).

The use of the bird in the riddle therefore denotes the unforeseen dangers of a mobile phone: though accepted for its usefulness, speculations of it as potential bearer of bad news are cautiously taken. The riddle is synonymous to

a Kipsigis saying, *Telelenin kiptiltilya ketab it si kokur Chemunai ne mi oik* (may a woodpecker stand on your wooden ear-ornament and call Chemunai who is in evil spirit world). The name *Chemunai* in Kipsigis represents something hidden deep inside whereas *oik* generally stands for unseen evil. The saying seems to have prophesized the invention of a mobile phone with its unpredictable dangers. Some negative attributes of mobile phones as affecting emotions, increased stress levels and mental health and negative effects on immune system and vision problems have been identified. The association of the phone with the bird connected with omen is a reason enough to draw some caution to the mobile phone users. The metaphor as Bwonya (2010) observes in another context help in highlighting the community's attitude towards mobile phones.

More riddles were attributed to change in Kipsigis lifestyle generally as exemplified in the following riddle: *Bum yon abun yu ketuiyejin Nairobi – masibit* (Pass here I pass there we meet at Nairobi – a belt). The riddle is new and is metaphorically used to denote two things – travel and clothing. The two are signifiers of modernity. Nairobi has also been used by the challenger to symbolize modernity, being the first metropolitan centre; it becomes more convenient for use by the challenger. The riddle portrays how Kipsigis people have become exposed through travel across ethnic borders and also how they have changed their manner of dressing. A belt for instance has replaced the leather strap cut from hides and used to tie *kolikoik* (animal hides worn as clothes) together.

The emergence of modern clothes was seen as having some resemblance to their past clothes especially in matching of colour. Misik and Bunei (informants) explained that the Europeans emulated their dressing; they were made in such a way that it was easier for them to wear; a blouse, skirt and dress resembled in appearance with the Kipsigis attire – *koliket*, *chepkaut* and *menegubet* respectively. The colour combinations were the same as those used by the Kipsigis to decorate their hide clothes with beads. This cultural exchange apparently led to acceptance of the use of modern clothes. However, the Kipsigis' hides are reserved for initiation purposes. The riddle unveils the hybridization process which took place during colonization. Some of the symbols of assimilation included modern clothes and interaction with other cultures which was made easier through improved infrastructure. Travel across the ethnic border, made easier by the new infrastructure has also contributed to change in Kipsigis mode of dress; many people have abandoned the old ways

and adapted the new mode of dressing. Resource person Obot Kiptalam, interviewed on the historical background of the Kipsigis, narrated how the culture has gradually changed and that only a few old people still preserve their traditional clothes for commemoration of their past. Riddles therefore have been used as texts to store some societal history and culture.

Some riddles reflect the conflicting ideology of the past and the present as in the following riddle: *Atinye karinyun ne malanye chii-chepkokochet* (I have a car which nobody boards – tortoise). A tortoise is an animal creature that is known today just as it was in the past. It is a small animal covered with a hard protective shell and is recognized by its slow pace whereas a car is a recent innovation popular for its speed. The contrast here is the speed with which each one travels. A four legged tortoise is compared to a vehicle which also has four wheels but a significant contrast in speed is also registered. The riddle borrows from the past ideology to talk of the present; a concept which Noss (2006: 36) also observed in his study of Gbaya riddles. According to him, the riddle itself may be old or modern yet the setting of the riddle is always direct and contemporary. This is also true of Kipsigis riddles. The use of a tortoise and a car in the riddle depicts a conflict oriented view of social and cultural life in the mind of the composer. This confirms the argument made by Claude Levi-Straus (1963) and also observed by Okpewho (1992: 178-179) that in the process of acquiring competence in any language the human mind organizes the various concepts of that language into a scheme of oppositions so as to grasp them better, in other words the human mind naturally operates in a binary fashion.

Apparently more new riddles are being created especially as new inventions are being appreciated in this community. The following riddle is an example of such riddles: *Keron amatweku – kamera* (It sees me but it cannot talk – camera). This is a new riddle which was created by a pupil on the spur of the moment during our fieldwork at Barg'oror Primary school. One of the tools used for data collection was a video camera, a challenger critically observed its working and formulated and posed the riddle to the audience. Several responses were given by the audience before one of them, after careful observation of the items in the classroom and its surrounding gave the correct answer – camera. The poser accepted the answer challenging others to be keener on the new items around. The continual creation of riddles can be observed through this riddle; as a phenomenon occurs, people think of ways of bringing them into daily experience therefore they express it in different ways.

Putting it in riddle form seems to be the easiest way as riddles allow for repetition and through this process the meaning is retained in the mind of the participant and can be passed on from one generation to the other. The following riddle also follows the same trend as is it formulated in the classroom situation: *Tindo Cherono kuinoik ang'wan – mapit*. (Cherono has four horns – map). Cherono is a name given to a girl born in the late afternoon, "when the goats are returning home" as the Kipsigis would say. It was perceived to be a good time and good expectations were anticipated at that time. As explained earlier, some names were used as nuances in the Kipsigis community. Thus, Cherono here is used to indicate the positive appreciation of the map. The "horns" as used in the riddle implies cattle herding which was the main economic activity of the Kipsigis community in the past. The riddle is a metaphor introducing the map, a recent innovation which shows position and direction of a place. Though initially the Kalenjin were aware of the four major directions – East, West, North and South – only two – the East and the West – seem to have been of major significance in their ceremonies and practices. The East plays an important part in all Kipsigis ceremonies associated with God (*Asis*) and the spirit world (Orchardson, 1961: 25). East was the direction of health, life and prosperity whereas west was the direction of darkness, death, decline and cursing of enemies (Fish & Fish, 1995: 177). The introduction of the map therefore was just but a continuation of what was there though it was not yet represented on paper. The four horns referring to four compass directions – North, East, South and West – serve to emphasize the cultural aspect of the Kipsigis as regard to map use. Initially, the answer to the riddle was rainbow which was usually observed in the evening after the rain. Change in the riddle answer denotes a shift in the idea. The formal learning which introduced the use of a map, created this shift. The girl with the four horns represents the Kipsigisland which initially had four districts namely Belgut, Waldai, Bureti, and Sot. These districts have been classified under one county which is Kericho County.

Apart from the socio-cultural activities in this community, many people engage themselves in athletic competition in various capacities. Thus it is common to find riddles formulated in relation to this activity as in the following riddle: *Atinye rwoik che rwaie sait age tugul – Mugungonikab karit* (I have athletes who run all the time – car tyres); *Atinye lagok ang'wan che onege ako manomege – Mugungonikab karit* (I have four children who chase each other but cannot catch each other – car tyres). These two riddles have the same meaning which introduces a new innovation. The metaphor of runners

(*rwoik*) is associated with car tyres in the first riddle. Running was and is still a hobby for many Kipsigis people and the Kalenjin as a whole. Fast runners served the community by carrying messages from one place to another during colonial and pre-colonial days. This was usually so when the recipient of the message lived far away from the village to which they are sent. Those messengers could run as far as Nandi from Kipsigis area, a distance of over fifty kilometers. They were not supposed to stop or greet anyone before delivering their message. Running was treated as a hobby but also served the community in delivering crucial messages. A vehicle with its tyres in motion is compared to the fast runners.

In the second riddle, the implication is that the past and the present means of communication are of a diverse nature as the latter have obtained faster means of communication than it has hitherto been realized. The riddle thus represent the "past in the present" to paraphrase the words of Karin Barber: "a past which they have brought with them and which can be re-opened and re-activated by their agency" (1989: 25). They also represent the "present in the past", for through all the stages of their transmission they do not lose their relationship of contemporaneity to the events they refer to. They are not thought to be about the past; they are fragments of the past, living encapsulated in the present (Barber, 1989). Riddles then can open windows simultaneously onto the past and the present. The running activity as a way of relaying important information in the past is remembered through this riddle. Riddles can thus be regarded as the principal means by which a living relationship with the past is daily apprehended and reconstituted in the present. Consequently, contemporary riddle can be said to be a way of experiencing the past by bringing it back to the present.

Conclusion

Riddles in the contemporary Kipsigis community are composed through a careful consideration of all aspect of life in the past and that of the present. This phenomenon is reflective of the dynamic nature of culture which imbibes changes and also keeps the old features intact at the same time. Continuity of riddles is evident in the content in which the ancient terms are included for instance *Muguryot* (a string-like bangle) and *Kiptiltilyet* (a woodpecker) and traditional names such as Cheronno and Chelang'at. New meaning is created by making use of all available contemporary resources. These include new innovations such as motor vehicles, aeroplanes, tarmac road, mobile phones,

camera and national flag among others. Consequently, more riddles are refashioned to fit into the modern context. Some riddles have undergone mutations with replacement of old metaphors with new metaphors. Contemporary riddles also reveal that modern education, Christianity and the media have greatly influenced the way riddles are formulated and disseminated to the audience. New riddles are formulated by school children in the classroom context. Formal education has inculcated in them ingenuity and creativity in addition to learning riddles through their peers and elderly people, in the traditional system. Evidently, children formulate their own riddles based on the cultural knowledge, the knowledge acquired in school, social interaction and the media. These locales are new sites for riddle performances that not only compliment the old sites but compete with it, reflecting change and continuity of cultural values among the Kipsigis.

References

- Bakhtin, M.M (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Austin Press.
- Barber, K. (1989). *Discourse and Its Disguises: The Interpretation of African Oral Texts*. Birmingham: Birmingham University African Studies Series.
- Barker, K. (1991). *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town*. Edinburg: Edinburg University Press.
- Blackings, J. (1961). "The Social Value of Venda Riddles". *African Studies*, Vol. 20, pp. 1-32.
- Bukenya, A. S. and Gachanja, M. (1984). *Understanding Oral Literature*. Nairobi: University of Nairobi Press.
- Bwonya, J. (2010). "Style in the Lulogoli Riddle". *The Nairobi Journal of Literature*, No. 6, pp. 49-57.
- Chesaina, C. (1997). *Oral Literature of the Kalenjin*. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd.
- Cole-Beuchat, P.D. (1957). "Riddles in Bantu". *African Studies*, Vol.16, pp.133-149.

- Finnegan, R. (1992). *Oral Traditions and Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*. London: Routledge.
- Fish, C. F. & Fish, G. W. (1995). *The Kalenjin Heritage: Traditional Religious and Social Practices*. Nairobi: Kenwide Media Ltd.
- Hamnet, I. (1976). "Ambiguity, Classification and Change: The Function of Riddles". *Man* 2, pp. 379-382.
- Hofmeyr, I. (1994). *We Spend Our Years as a Tale Told: Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom*. London: James Currey.
- Hotchkiss, W. R. (1937) *Then and Now in Kenya Colony: Fourty Adventurous Years in East Africa*. Ada, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell.
- Ishengoma J. M. (2005). "African Oral Traditions: Riddles among the Haya of Northwestern Tanzania". *International Review of Education*, Vol.51, Nos 2-3, pp. 139-153.
- Levi-Straus C. (1963). *Structural Anthropology*. Trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic Books.
- Mwanzi, H. (1977). *A History of the Kipsigis*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- Nakene G. (1943). "Tlokwa Riddles". *African Studies*, Vol. 2, pp. 125-38.
- Noss, A. (2006). 'Gbaya Riddles in Changing Times.' *Research in African Literatures*, Vol.37, No.2: pp.34-42.
- Okpehwo, I. (1992). *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character and Continuity*. Indiana polis: Indiana University Press.
- Orchardson I. (1961). *The Kipsigis, History, Religious Beliefs, Marriage, Birth, War, Initiation, Agriculture, Property and Inheritance*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- Pepicello, W. J and T. A. Green (1978). 'The Riddle Process'. *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol.97, No.3: pp.84-89.
- Pepicello, W. J and T. A. Green (1984). *The Language of Riddles: New Perspectives*. Columbus. Ohio University Press.
- Peristiany J. G. (1939). *The Social Institution of the Kipsigis*. London: George Routledge & Sons.

- Rutto, B. and Maritim, K. (2016). *Kipsigis Heritage and Origins of Clans*. Nairobi. Spotlight Publishers.
- Toweett, T. (1978). *Oral Traditional History of the Kipsigis*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd.