



Research Article

Volume-07/Issue-07/2026

Semantic Meanings Encoded in Indigenous Kikamba Personal Names: A Componential Analysis

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Article History

Received: 11.06.2026

Accepted: 16.07.2026

Published: 31.07.2026

Citation

Musele, K. E., Simiyu, E. E., Itumo, J. M. (2026). Semantic Meanings Encoded in Indigenous Kikamba Personal Names: A Componential Analysis. *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7(7):28-35.

Abstract: Personal names are crucial linguistic devices by which societies transmit knowledge, values and historical experiences. The purpose of this paper was to establish the semantic information encoded in indigenous Kikamba personal names using the Componential Analysis of Lyons (1977). Six elders were drawn from Kitui, Machakos and Makueni counties which comprise the three main dialect zones of Kikamba. Their names were elicited using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The data indicate that Kikamba personal names encode semantic meanings that can be grouped under three broad fields: phenomena of nature, society and administration and values, desires and feelings. The research found the following semantic components recurrent in Kikamba personal names: [+Strength], [+Authority], [+Continuity], [+Resilience] and [+Symbolic Meaning]. The research concludes that indigenous Kikamba personal names can be regarded as an embodiment of knowledge, social values and identity. The research adds to African onomastics by showing the significance of indigenous naming patterns in representing communal values.

Keywords: Kikamba, personal names, semantics, componential analysis, onomastics, cultural identity

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INTRODUCTION

Indigenous African personal names are of crucial significance in African societies as they are not only indices of identification but also carriers of cultural ideologies, experiences and social attitudes. In a majority of African communities, names are not merely designations; they are meaningful statements which communicate circumstances of one's birth, his life-experiences, aspirations, relationship and the like (Mbiti, 1969). Therefore, personal names in African societies stand for key cultural texts in the retention of a community's past and construction of its identities. Among the Akamba people of Kenya, Kamba indigenous personal names are very crucial parts of their cultural identity and are rich with connotations in leadership, courage, persistence, symbolism of nature and feeling/emotions. Although Kamba personal names are of great importance to the community, there has not been much of research carried out on their semantics. This work endeavors to explicate the semantic meanings of indigenous Akamba personal names employing Lyons' (1977) theory of Componential Analysis. It aims to show that they are semantically structured lexical items and that the Kamba worldview is revealed through the semantics of their personal names.

investigated by semantic components or features that discriminate one lexical item from another. Componential Analysis offers a method for dissecting meaning in to minimal semantic components.

Wierzbicka (1996) builds on this concept, suggesting that meanings are cultural and the meanings in lexemes are determined by cultural conceptual system. Such perspective proves useful when examining the study of indigenous naming where the meanings of names reside in cultural knowledge.

In African Onomastics, name meanings commonly rely on metaphorical invocations, symbolism, and pragmatic functions (Obeng, 2001). In personal names, we find not only identification, but also values held in common, historical references from the past and contextual narratives (Obeng, 2001). It is recognized that names in many African societies represent coded modes of articulating experience, morality, and different worldviews (Makumbi, 2020). Kikamba names generally also embody meanings about values around things such as resilience, fertility, misfortune, or gratitude. This presents a good situation for exploring the use of semantic analysis to highlight culturally embedded meanings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Semantics and Componential Analysis

Semantics is the study of meaning. Lyons (1977) suggested that lexical meaning could be

Personal Names and Cultural Meaning

The present study further explores how semantic features are encoded in indigenous Kkamba personal names. African personal names, generally, are

semantically transparent and are motivated by the social context of culture. According to Mbiti (1969), personal names are used for noting social occurrences, natural settings and communal desires. This is corroborated by Agyekum (2006) who claims that names can be regarded as language archives of social knowledge and identity.

Charwi (2019) study on “A Semantic Analysis of Personal Names in Datooga” investigates the association between Datooga names and socio-cultural backgrounds. Using qualitative research approach data was collected from Datooga speaking students studying at the Dar Salaam University College of Education, through Interviews and Questionnaire. The findings of the study show that in the Datooga society, naming is associated with different phenomena particularly time of birth and prevailing situations, traditions, norms and customs.

In the Bulina, Solnyshkina and Bahtiozina (2020) article Semantics of Wainamoinen's Proper Names in Kalevala the semantic depth of the proper names of the central character in the Finnish epic Kalevala, Wainamoinen, is discussed. His proper names Wainamoinen, Kalevalainen, and Osmoinen, are not just appellations but contain information regarding his nature, role, and connections with the epic. The analysis highlights several aspects of Wainamoinen's names such as the names of Wainamoinen, including "Wainamoinen" itself, have transparent internal forms in the Finnish language, with "waina" referring to water. This connection to water is a recurring motif throughout the Kalevala. Further, the names provide clues about the time of creation, geographical area, and other details, as well as a cultural dimension where the use of names reveals the speaker's attitude towards the addressee. Bulina et al study is limited to a literary epic while the current study dealt with personal names in a living community to highlight the sociolinguistic dimension, that is, how names reflect culture, environment, lineage among others.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Lyons' (1977) Componential Analysis forms the theoretical framework. According to the theory, the meaning of a word is understood as a bundle of semantic features, which by analysis can provide access to the cognitive structure of words and names. It is a fitting paradigm for the study of the symbolic meaning of indigenous Kkamba personal names.

METHODOLOGY

The research was a qualitative study involving six elders from Kitui, Machakos and Makueni counties. Semi-structured interview and focus group discussions were used in order to derive indigenous names and their meanings. The data collected were analyzed using componential semantic analysis. Recurrent semantic components of the names were identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Names Encoding Circumstances of Birth

A significant area of importance in indigenous Kūkamba personal names is the recording of various aspects of a child's birth. It is common for Kūkamba personal names to serve as records of the specific time, environmental context and social conditions during which the child was born. Using Lyons (1995) componential analysis, we can deconstruct these name meanings into specific semantic attributes, including [+time], [+event], [+environment] and [+condition]. This allows us to provide an organized interpretation of how a given context is expressed through language.

Many Kūkamba personal names encode semantic features linked to the conditions surrounding a child's birth. Through componential analysis, these names can be decomposed into identifiable semantic components as shown in the examples below:

Example 1: Mutua (“one born late”)

Table 1: Semantic features of the name ‘Mutua’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Late Birth]	✓
[+Contextual Event]	✓
[+Gender Specific]	✓

The analysis above shows that the name Mutua expresses the semantic feature [+Late Birth], reflecting delayed childbirth or prolonged labour.

Similarly, the name Kioko shows that the person was born [born in the Morning] because of its association with morning while Mutuku indicates the person was [+born at night] because of its association with the word "night" as shown in the analysis below:

Example 2: Kioko- Born in the morning

Table 2: Semantic features of the name ‘kioko’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Time: Morning]	✓
[+Contextual Event]	✓
[+Gender Specific]	✓

In example 2, the name Kioko reflects the semantic feature [+Time] showing a person who was born in the morning. Example 68 below reflects the name of a person born at night:

Example 3: Mutuku-Born at night

Table 3: Semantic features of the name ‘Mutuku’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Time: Night]	✓
[+Contextual Event]	✓
[+Gender Specific]	✓

Example 2 and 3 illustrate how Kĩukamba names function as contextual records of lived experiences. Similarly, some names ascertain birth order or family relations. For instance, Katunge indicates being born after a death or repeated deaths of siblings or a relative and has additional meanings that can also include [+delayed birth] or [+special arrival] as shown in the analysis below:

Example 4: Katunge: Special arrival (born after the death of a sibling/relative)

Table 4: Semantic features of the name ‘Katunge’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Special arrival]	✓
[+Contextual Event]	✓
[+special arrival]	✓

The analysis shows that naming also serves to express the feelings or social significance ascribed to a child by their parent rather than simply being a reference to the time/place of that child's birth. This study builds on and supports previous research findings relating to the naming of African children, where children's names often reflect important life events surrounding the time of their birth (seasons, weather patterns, environment, time of birth.) Neethling (2005) made the same observation, noting that there is a distinct pattern in that many Bantu people utilized naming practices as a vehicle by which to express their parental emotion, provide for their expectations and as a method to convey their social commentary as well.

Most names given to individuals are reflective of the type of climate or environment the individual was born into, for example, the name Wambua means "rain" which indicates the person was [+born during rain] as shown in the analysis below:

Example 5: Wambua: born during rainy season or when it was raining

Table 5: Semantic features of the name ‘Wambua’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+born during rain]	✓
[+Contextual Event]	✓
[+Gender specific]	✓

Examples 4 to 5 reflect that names in the Akamba community refer to the period an individual was born as well as help to indicate the relationship between the Akamba people and their environment. The data analysis shows that children's names document both the physical place where a child is born and when the child was born physically. Therefore, names show that language represents not only where we live and work, but also the experiences we encounter socially (Akinnaso, 1980; Koopman, 2002).

Names also represent specific social or historical factors that were represented at the time of a baby's birth. The name ‘Ndunda’ is generally interpreted as being associated with birth during difficult times, lack of something, or during times of drought, so the name ‘Ndunda’ contains semantic characteristics such as [+adversity], and [+endurance] as shown in the analysis below:

Example 6: Ndunda: born during difficult times, lack of something, or during times of drought

Table 6: Semantic features of the name ‘Ndunda’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+adversity]	✓
[+Contextual Event]	✓
[+endurance]	✓

Similarly, the name ‘Muthiani’ may be seen as a testing or transitional period as shown in the analysis under example 6:

Example 7: Muthiani: born during a testing or transitional period

Table 7: Semantic features of the name ‘Muthiani’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+challenging phase]	✓
[+Contextual Event]	✓
[+transitional period]	✓

From the analysis above, a child born during this transitional phase, or a difficult time in their family or community's lives, can also be identified with the name Muthiani. These names act as mnemonic devices, preserving the collective experience and historical memory of a family or community and its place within an individual's sense of personal identity.

Names Derived from Environmental and Natural Phenomena

The names that express the circumstances of a person's birth are also related to Earth and natural phenomena and reflect the Akamba view of reality. In the Akamba perspective, the elements in the natural world—rain, the land, the seasons, the animals, and the ecological

features represent core components of life and the structure of society. The names of the natural elements are also often found in individual names to convey meanings associated with fertility, sustenance, strength, abundance, and continuity. Through the approach of Componential Analysis by Lyons (1975), individual names can be described according to their semantic components. These components can be described as having a [+environment] component, a [+natural phenomenon], a [+symbolic value], and a [+communal relevance].

The most common names in this category are taken from rain and water, which symbolize life and abundance among the Akamba. The names 'Mbua' and 'Wambua' encode the [+rain] semantic component, and often take on the extended metaphorical meanings of [+blessing] or [+abundance] as analyzed below:

Table 8: Semantic features of the names 'Mbua, Mumbua, Mbula, Syombua and Wambua'

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Natural Phenomenon]	✓
[+blessing]	✓
[+Life-Giving]	✓
[+Symbolic Meaning]	✓

In various cultures, rain is seen as a sign of fertility, blessings and abundance. The name *mbua* has an inherent meaning of renewal, as well as sustenance, which is commonly given to children when born during periods of heavy rainfall; however the name's inherent meaning can also refer to prosperity and abundance.

The data collected also show that the words used to describe the physical appearance of the land where a child is born can also give us insight into the relationship that a person has with their community as analyzed in example:

Example 8: Mutulu 'elevated land'

Table 9: Semantic features of the name 'Mutulu'

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Landscape Feature]	✓
[+Strength]	✓
[+Stability]	✓

In the Kamba community, (as in many others in Africa), names are associated with strength and stability of connection to the land and territory.

Animal names and those connected to animal attributes or characteristics that are generally associated with resilience, strength and alertness also appear within this domain. Additionally, these types of names typically

contain symbolic rather than literal meanings because of the nature of animal-nature being resilient and alert. The semantic features of these names are [+strength], [+endurance], and [+alertness] and represent qualities to which the parent by symbolic association would ascribe the child as shown in example 9:

Example 9: Nzoka: 'snake'

Table 10: Semantic features of the name 'Nzoka'

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Animal Reference]	✓
[+Power]	✓
[+protection].	✓
[+Metaphorical Meaning]	✓

Another name in Kĩkamba culture is 'Munyambu' (lion). Lions are known for their strength, bravery, power and ability to lead. The name *Munyambu* is derived from Kĩkamba culture's lion reference (animal reference). The word lion in Kĩkamba culture is a symbolic representation and is not understood as having literal meaning within Kĩkamba culture. Based on Lyons' componential analysis of animals, the term *Munyambu* has a number of general features of meaning that can be separated from one another (decomposed).

Example 11: Munyambu 'Lion'

Table 11: Semantic features of the name 'Munyambu'

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Animal Reference]	✓
[+Wild Animal]	✓
[+Strength]	✓
[+Bravery]	✓
[+Leadership/Authority]	✓
[+Symbolic Meaning]	✓
[-Literal Animal]	✓

While the semantic feature of [+Animal Reference] gives a name association to an animal's place in nature, its features [+Strength], [+Bravery], and [+Leadership] place emphasis on the cultural metaphors that lions embody. Conversely, the feature [-Literal Animal] suggests that the name does not literally depict the living form of the animal but rather what the animal signifies through symbolically defined character traits.

Another name with Animal reference is *Mbiti* (Hyena). The Kĩkamba personal name, *Mbiti* means hyena and refers to an animal in its environment. In Kĩkamba cultural symbolism, the hyena represents cleverness, resilience, survival, and adaptability as well as having both positive and negative associations with respect to ambivalent or cautionary connotations. Lyons'

Componential Analysis may decompose the semantic meaning of *Mbiti* into a set of contrastive semantic features.

Example 12: Mbiti: ‘Hyena’

Table 12: Semantic features of the name ‘Mbiti’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Animal Reference]	✓
[+Wild Animal]	✓
[+Cunning/Cleverness]	✓
[+Survival Instinct]	✓
[+Adaptability]	✓
[±Moral Ambivalence]	✓
[+Symbolic Meaning]	✓
[–Literal Animal]	✓

Based on the semantic features, *Mbiti* represents a poetic or figurative reference rather than a literal classification of a specific animal. The [±Moral Ambivalence] designation indicates that in traditional societies there exists a dual perception of the hyena, being both viewed as highly intelligent and additionally seen as a social outsider.

The cultural concept of *Mbiti* denotes a greater degree of sophistication regarding animal symbolism than do many people's customary tales regarding hyenas. Many traditional stories depicting the characters of hyena typically indicate a very negative impression, but the ability of hyena to adapt to extreme environmental conditions, utilize animal leftovers, and use their intelligence and creativity to achieve success is also viewed by some as a trait that is admirable.

Overall, names derived from environmental and natural phenomena demonstrate that Kūkamba personal naming practices are deeply ecologically grounded. These names do not merely describe nature but transform environmental elements into symbolic markers of identity. Through Componential Analysis, it becomes evident that semantic meaning in these names arises from the interaction between physical environment, cultural interpretation, and social expectation. In this way, Kūkamba personal names serve as linguistic expressions of the community's relationship with its natural world.

Names Expressing Personal Traits and Character

An additional significant semantic domain in the Kamba indigenous people's personal names is the representation of personal traits. When Kamba people name a child, it is not merely a description of their birth situation/environment but rather an assessment/evaluation of who they are and what attributes will be desired and admired within the community in which they will live. According to Lyons' (1995) Componential Analysis, names of this type can be

broken down into constituent semantic aspects/units such as [+attribute], [+positive evaluation], [+social desirability], and [+marker of identity] as shown in the analysis below:

Example 13: Mutheu: ‘pure / clean one’

Table 13: Semantic analysis of the name ‘Mutheu’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Positive Attribute]	✓
[+Moral Quality]	✓
[–Event-Based]	✓

The description of moral and aesthetic values through the semantics of Kūkamba names indicates that they are also used as descriptors of an individual's ideal personal characteristics. Many names within the Kūkamba culture are derived from lexical terms which indicate a positive personal quality, including wisdom, calmness, strength and kindness. For instance, the name *Umanyi* as shown in the analysis below:

Example 14: Umanyi: (wisdom or intelligence)

Table 14: Semantic features of the name ‘Umanyi’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Positive Attribute]	✓
[+wisdom]	✓
[+cognitive Strength]	✓

The name *Umanyi* which signifies ‘wisdom’ or ‘intelligence’, carries with it a meaning of semantic features associated with [+wisdom] and [+cognitive Strength]. Another name with such positive attributes is *Kavoo* as shown in the analysis below:

Example 15: Kavoo: (to cool or calm)

Table 15: Semantic features of the name ‘Kavoo’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Positive Attribute]	✓
[+calmness]	✓
[+emotional Stability]	✓

The name *Kavoo*, comes from the verb ‘voa’ (to cool or calm), represents [+calmness] and [+emotional Stability]. Both examples 82 and 83 illustrate how these names are a symbolic way of attributing important traits to an individual, either as a result of a parent's hope for their child or as recognized by society.

Past research on African naming conventions indicates that the naming practices represent many character traits. For example, Akinnaso (1980) found almost all names in a naming convention contain an

element reflecting values held by the parents or society. In addition to this, Neethling (2005) noted that the Bantu naming conventions contained a number of qualities valued by the community, providing identification for the individual, as well as a teaching tool for others to learn from. Furthermore, Suzman (1994) cites names as providing social indicators of how people view themselves and how others view them, leading to how each person lives within their community. In conclusion, Kĩkamba indigenous personal names, through their portrayal of character traits, demonstrate how those names are semantic representations of social and moral ideals.

Names Reflecting Social Roles and Communal Expectations

The study also found that indigenous Kĩkamba personal names encode their meaning with respect to social roles and communal expectations therefore displaying the relationship between individual identities on an individual level, as well as collectively constructed within Akamba culture. In Kĩkamba culture, an individual is viewed within the context of both their individual characteristics, such as physicality and personality; and their relationship to their community through their duties, responsibilities and the ways that they contribute to Kĩkamba culture. The componential analysis of Kĩkamba names demonstrated how the names are constructed by semantic features such as [+social role], [+communal function], [+responsibility], and [+collective identity] (Lyons, 1995).

Example 16 shows that certain names encode societal expectations or anticipated roles:

Example 16: Mutai: (one who advises)

Table 16: Semantic features of the name ‘Mutai’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Social role]	✓
[+Wisdom]	✓
[-physical Attribute]	✓

The name conveys the semantic components [+Advisor] and [+Wisdom], suggesting expectations placed upon the bearer to embody guidance and leadership.

Kĩkamba names have semantic components associated with authority, leadership and guidance as shown in the analysis of example 17:

Example 17: Musumbi (King)

Table 17: Semantic features of the name ‘Musumbi’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Social role]	✓
[+Supreme Authority]	✓

[+Leadership]	✓
[+Protection]	✓
[+Prestige]	✓
[+Symbolic Meaning]	✓
[±Hereditary Association]	✓

Power, guardianship, and honor are all encoded in the term *Musumbi*. While kingship may not be evidenced through a centralized monarchy in the Kĩkamba society as it relates to the name, it represents leadership, respect, and community responsibility.

Example 18 gives a semantic analysis of the name *Musili* meaning judge and that derives from a social role associated with justice, wisdom, and conflict resolution.

Example 18: Musili (Judge)

Table 18: Semantic features of the name ‘Musili’

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Social role]	✓
[+Judicial Authority]	✓
[+Wisdom]	✓
[+Impartiality]	✓
[+Moral Responsibility]	✓
[+Symbolic Meaning]	✓
[-Hereditary role]	✓

Fairness and morality are both possessed through the term *Musili*. By naming the child *Musili*, parents send a symbolic message reminding their child about the value of dorsal vision and ethical judgment in regard to the principle of justice within the Kĩkamba society.

Both *Mutongoi* and *Musili* have the semantic components of a leader as shown below:

Example 19: Mutongoi (Leader)

Example 20: Musili(judge)

Table 19: Semantic features of Mutongoi and Musili

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Social role]	✓
[+Leadership]	✓
[+Guidance/decision making]	✓
[+Collective Responsibility]	✓
[-Authoritarian]	✓
[+Symbolic Meaning]	✓

The word *Mutongoi* denotes leader, and it comes from the verb *-tongosya*, which means to guide/lead. The term *Mutongoi* indicates that the type of

leadership is based primarily upon servitude, direction, and unity within a community, rather than through aggression or coercion. The focus of the term is upon the common good and the social harmony of its people. The results found in this research augment the previous findings by showing that personal names in the Kūkamba culture encode social positions and communal roles across a variety of different social contexts.

Names Expressing Emotions, Values, and Aspirations

In Kūkamba culture, names that are indigenous to the community often express feelings, social values and wishes for the future, in addition to being a means of identifying the individual. Names serve as descriptive statements about the social conditions under which children are born, the values of the community in which they were born, and their parents' wishes for them. The semantic features of these names can be classified as containing components that are [+emotion], [+virtue], [+hope], [+gratitude], [+strength], or [+resilience].

There are four major types of semantic domains for each name:

The first are names expressing emotions such as joy, sorrow, gratitude, relief, or endurance associated with birth circumstances. For instance the semantic analysis of the name *Musyoka/Musyoki*

Example 21: Musyoka/Musyoki

The name means the “one who returns” / associated with joy after loss)

Table 20: Semantic features of Musyoka /Musyoki

Semantic Feature	Presence
[+Human]	✓
[+Emotional Association]	✓
[+Joy/Relief]	✓
[+Restoration]	✓
+Positive evaluation	✓
[+Symbolic Meaning]	✓

Musyoka/Musyoki could be given to a child born after a miscarriage by the mother or after the death of a sibling or a relative. Semantic features denote reproduction and emotional completion, with name serving as a narrative marker for relief and reinvention.

Close to the analysis of *Musyoka/Musyoki* are the names *Mutanu* and *Wendo* as shown in the analysis below:

Example 21: Mutanu-Root: -utanu (happiness/joy)
Semantic Features: [+gratitude], [+divine favour], [+joy]
Interpretation: A child is considered to be a blessing as she brings joy to the family.

Example 22: Wendo-Root: -enda (to love)
Semantic Features: [+affection], [+warmth]

The second semantic domain consists of names expressing hope and aspiration as shown in semantic analysis of the name *Mutua* below:

Example 23: Mutua

Mutua means one who is born after; in reference to the continuation of ancestral lineage). The name signals hope.

The third category are names expressing moral or ethical Values. Such names include *Muthui* which means and is often associated with “wealth”, blessing and prosperity as shown in the semantic analysis blow:

Example 24: Muthui (the rich one). The name *Muthui* stands for hope and aspiration. It shows the social and economic value that people have in the culture that surrounds them. The findings are in line with Wierzbicka (1996), who through her theory of Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) states that the meanings we use have a cultural origin and can be divided into shared “cultural scripts.” These scripts encompass universal semantic primes for emotions such as joy, hope, persistence and gratitude; however, there will be differences in how people experience these emotions based on the structures of their cultures.

The forth category are names expressing strength and endurance as exemplified by *Mwikali*.

Example 25: Mwikali (the resilient one)

Mwikali encodes strength and bravery. It exhibits either where the child was born or the community's feelings about how the child should be. According to Lyons (1977), there are cultural distinctions that can be analyzed with respect to their lexical meaning via semantic features (encoding distinctions). The lexical meaning of a name, as with other lexical items, can have various structural components that have semantic features and examples would be: [+human], [+emotion], [+evaluation], or [+social affiliation or role]. The analysis of Kūkamba names, such as *Mutanu* [+gratitude, +happiness], *Mwikali* [+resilience, +endurance] and *Muthui* [+wealth], provides clear examples to show that they are linguistically decomposable into culturally meaningful components. This supports Lyon's claim that these lexical items contain conceptual categories that are common to speakers of the same speech community.

DISCUSSION

The results thus reveal that indigenous Kkamba personal names are semantic and culturally significant. The features that repeat throughout the set suggest that naming in Kamba is not a random assignation of labels but a culturally driven selection of words or lexical items that express thematically shared meanings. The ubiquity of the features [+Authority], [+Strength], [+Resilience] and [+Continuity] are evidence of what Kamba culture

valorises and prioritises. These results are corroborative of Lyons (1977) and Wierzbicka (1996)'s argument that the organization of meaning is via differential semantic features and the argument that word-level meanings are inherently cultural. They are also concordant with Mbiti's (1969) statement that African names are narratives of the communal life.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study reveals the fact that the indigenous Kamba personal names bear sophisticated semantic values centred on nature, society and emotions. In so doing the analysis has through componential analysis pinpointed the consistent semantic features, which signify common and communal Kamba cultural values, norms, expectations and desires. The results go into African onomastics by presenting the Kamba names as culturally and semantically structured speech forms.

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