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Quirky, Humorous, and Funniest Market Names in Lango Sub-region, Northern Uganda: Linguistic Creativity, Socio-Cultural, Economic, and Historical Overview

Prof. Jacob Godfrey Agea, PhD¹*

¹ Muni University, P. O. Box 725, Arua, Uganda.

* Author for Correspondence ORCID ID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1673-9320>; Email: jgagea@gmail.com

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This paper explores the distinctive and humorous naming culture of markets in the Lango sub-region, Northern Uganda, drawing on a comprehensive compilation of over 100 market names. The paper draws findings from interviews and social media insights to present a holistic account of how humour and language innovate public spaces and contribute to community resilience through commerce. Lango people, known for their linguistic creativity and cultural wit, adopt market names that go beyond simple geographic or functional descriptors, embedding humour, wordplay, local anecdotes, and social commentary. This naming tradition serves multifaceted purposes: it attracts attention to these markets, fosters social interaction and community cohesion, and contributes to the cultural identity and pride of the Lango people. These markets are vital centres of trade, especially for agricultural produce and livestock, supporting the livelihoods of thousands of households. The names themselves, prefixed frequently by "Cuk," the Lango word for market, reflect the regional dialect and customs. They showcase nuanced uses of language as both mnemonic devices and informal branding mechanisms that enhance the market's memorability and appeal. This linguistic humour also acts as a social glue, creating shared cultural references and strengthening collective memory. By analysing these quirky and often cryptic market names, this compilation reveals a rich tapestry of linguistic playfulness and social commentary embedded in place names, reflecting how language functions as a tool for identity, marketing, and cultural expression in rural contexts. It is hoped that this documentation will serve as a foundation to preserve an intangible cultural heritage at risk from modernisation pressures and to underscore the importance of linguistic creativity in sustaining local identities and economies. The findings have broader implications for understanding the role of humour in place-naming and economic development across similar African settings.

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INTRODUCTION

The Lango sub-region, located in Northern Uganda, is a culturally and economically distinct area that encompasses nine administrative districts: Alebtong, Amolatar, Apac, Dokolo, Kole, Kwania, Lira, Otuke, and Oyam (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Spanning roughly 15,570.7 square kilometres, it is home to over two million inhabitants, predominantly from the Langi ethnic group. Linguistically, the region is defined by the Lango language or Leb Lango, part of the broader Luo dialect cluster within the Eastern Nilotic language family (Britannica, 1998; Heine & Kuteva, 2005). The socio-economic fabric of Lango society traditionally centres on subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry, and an active market trade system that sustains livelihoods and supports social networks (Kasozi, 2005; Manana, 2023).

Markets within Lango transcend their economic function to become vital arenas for cultural expression and social integration. These marketplaces operate as hubs where thousands of farmers, traders, and artisans converge to exchange not only goods but also ideas, news, and social ties, thereby contributing to community identity and cohesion (Lambright, 2011; Nabudere, 2012).

Market accessibility directly impacts food security and regional economic resilience, illustrating the critical role these institutions play beyond commerce (Tripp, 1997; Manana, 2023). The lively market scene reflects both the economic vitality of the region and its rich cultural heritage, making markets indispensable components of Lango life (Goodfellow, 2017).

A particularly distinctive feature of the Lango sub-region lies in its rich tradition of humour and linguistic creativity, most notably manifested in the naming conventions of its markets (p'Bitek, 1963; p'Bitek, 1971). Unlike conventional market names, which tend to be descriptive or geographical, Lango market names often integrate humour, wordplay, idiomatic expressions, and cultural anecdotes that capture community experiences and spark local pride (Mensah & Rowan, 2019; Olaniru, 2025). This playful naming practice aligns with the Langi people's cultural penchant for wit and oral storytelling, which permeates not just market names but daily social interactions and broader oral traditions (Yankah, 1998; Kahyana, 2022). Market names such as "Cuk Ojee Mak Atin Baba Wu Oka Pul" embody this fusion of humour and narrative, encoding intimate or communal stories into the very

fabric of public spaces, thereby fostering identity and solidarity.

The linguistic creativity demonstrated in Lango market names serves multiple functions. It operates as a form of informal social commentary, allowing communities to reflect on and negotiate social dynamics through humour and satire (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Apte, 1985). These names often address family life, gender roles, economic challenges, and inter-personal conflicts in ways that encourage collective reflection and laughter (Dolan, 2002; Olaniru, 2025). By encapsulating lived realities in memorable, humorous forms, the market names also function as tools for cultural transmission, preserving oral histories and social values from generation to generation (Vansina, 1985; Mudimbe, 1988). In the context of post-conflict recovery and ongoing socio-economic changes, these creative toponyms become acts of resilience and communal healing (Lambright, 2011; Kahyana, 2022).

Moreover, Lango market naming traditions contribute to a broader African anthropological understanding of toponymy as a dynamic site of identity construction and cultural continuity (Meek, 1931; Enfield, 2002). Colonial and post-colonial disruptions often threatened indigenous naming systems, yet practices like those of the Lango demonstrate local agency in preserving and reinventing cultural heritage through language (Coates, 1989; Nabudere, 2012). The documentation efforts from 2023 to 2025, compiling over 100 Lango market names, provide crucial empirical data capturing this vibrant linguistic heritage for scholarly analysis and cultural preservation (p'Bitek, 1963; Manana, 2023). By situating humour as a core element of this toponymic tradition, these studies highlight how linguistic creativity intersects with social life, politics, and economics in shaping place-based identities.

The focus of this study was the extensive compilation of market names gathered in 2023,

2024 and 2025, encompassing over 100 distinctive names across Lango's districts. The paper examined the socio-cultural, economic and historical significance of these market names. It analysed how humour manifests in naming conventions, explored the connection between language and place identity, and considered the practical role that these names play within the local economy. Furthermore, the study situated this naming phenomenon within broader theoretical frameworks of African toponymy, sociolinguistics, and economic anthropology. Through an interdisciplinary approach combining linguistic analysis and ethnographic insight, the study contributed a new understanding of the roles of language and humour in place-naming and local development. The finding is intended to preserve the intangible cultural heritage embodied in these market names in the face of modernisation and globalisation pressures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Place-naming, or toponymy, represents a dynamic and interdisciplinary field of study that delves into how geographic names encapsulate the cultural, historical, and social dynamics of human communities worldwide. Far from being arbitrary or merely functional labels, toponyms serve as profound linguistic artefacts that encode collective identities, societal values, historical memories, and even underlying power structures (Matiza, 2020; Fajar Nur Setyo et al., 2022). Scholars in linguistics, anthropology, and geography have long emphasised this symbolic depth, recognising that names assigned to landscapes, settlements, rivers, and markets act as mirrors reflecting the worldview and lived experiences of the people who bestow them (Vansina, 1985; Basso, 1996).

The significance of toponymy lies in its ability to preserve oral histories and cultural narratives that might otherwise fade from collective consciousness. For instance, indigenous communities often draw from mythology, migration stories, or environmental features to name places, thereby asserting territorial claims and cultural

continuity amid external pressures such as colonisation or globalisation (Oduyoye, 1982; Mudimbe, 1988). In African contexts, place names are often embedded with social norms and collective experiences, serving as mnemonic devices for historical memory and cultural values (Roberts & Sutton, 2010; Laotan-Brown, 2024). In market contexts specifically, names transcend utilitarian purposes—such as indicating location or trade specialities—to evoke communal events, social hierarchies, or pivotal moments defining group solidarity (Manana, 2023). This layered meaning-making process highlights toponyms as active agents in social discourse, where naming practices negotiate identity, commemorate triumphs or tragedies, and subtly critique power imbalances (Biebuyck, 1973; Coates, 1989).

Fromkin et al. (2011) underscore how toponymy intersects with sociolinguistics, revealing how language shapes and is shaped by social contexts. Place names function as "speech acts" reinforcing belonging while excluding outsiders, maintaining social boundaries on multiple spatial scales—from urban centres to rural trading posts (Tent & Blair, 2011; Olaniru, 2025; Obiorah & Adetoro, 2025). This perspective invites rigorous analysis of how evolving socio-political realities influence naming conventions, making toponymy an essential tool for understanding human adaptation and resilience across cultures (Enfield, 2002; Nabudere, 2012).

In African contexts, this symbolic dimension of toponymy carries profound importance, as place names serve as rich repositories of oral histories, social norms, and collective experiences that help shape and preserve communal identity (Oduyoye, 1982; Basso, 1996; Cohen, 2014). Unlike in many Western contexts where place names may be primarily utilitarian or imposed through colonial administration (Coates, 1989), African toponyms often function as living narratives, encoding stories that are passed down through generations via oral traditions (Bigon, 2016; Vansina, 1985). These names preserve the memory of significant historical

events—such as migrations, battles, or droughts—social relationships including kinship ties and conflicts, environmental features like sacred groves or rivers, and cultural practices such as rituals or trade routes, acting as mnemonic devices that anchor a community's identity in both space and time (Biebuyck, 1973; Mudimbe, 1988).

In Uganda, market centres especially highlight this deeper symbolic role, functioning as multifaceted institutions that integrate economic, political, and cultural dimensions (Tripp, 1997; Manana, 2023). Beyond being mere sites for trade and commerce, markets operate as vibrant social spaces where people from different backgrounds converge to exchange goods, ideas, gossip, and culture, thereby reinforcing communal networks (Kasozi, 2005; Goodfellow, 2017). These centres act as vital nodes of economic sustenance and social interaction, facilitating not only material exchange but also the reinforcement of social bonds, conflict resolution, and the transmission of cultural values through daily interactions (Lambright, 2011). Market names in Uganda often mirror this complexity, capturing elements such as important historical incidents like liberation struggles, distinctive local flora and fauna such as endemic plants or wildlife sightings, specific occupational or social roles including those of traders or healers, and ethnic or clan affiliations that denote territorial boundaries (Ociti, 2020). Consequently, these names reflect the diverse and dynamic nature of the communities they serve, making markets microcosms of local life, identity, and resilience (Manana, 2023; Nabudere, 2012).

However, a distinctive aspect of place-naming in the Lango sub-region of northern Uganda is its prominent use of humour and linguistic playfulness, which infuses market names with wit, satire, and clever storytelling to commemorate everyday absurdities or intimate mishaps (Mensah & Rowan, 2019; Olaniru, 2025). This characteristic sets Lango toponymy apart from the more straightforward or descriptive naming conventions seen elsewhere in Uganda and Africa, where names tend toward literal

references to geography or events (Raper, 2005; Tent & Blair, 2011). Despite its cultural richness and centrality to community bonding—as seen in names like Cuk Ojee Mak Atin Baba Wu Oka Pul—this playful dimension of market naming among the Lango has not been extensively documented or analysed in academic literature (p'Bitek, 1963; p'Bitek, 1971), leaving a notable gap in understanding how humour intersects with linguistic creativity, social critique, and cohesion within African naming traditions (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Apte, 1985). This gap invites further research to explore how such humour functions not only as entertainment but also as a social mechanism fostering unity, resilience, and cultural continuity amid post-conflict recovery (Dolan, 2002; Kahyana, 2022).

Humour as a linguistic and social phenomenon plays an important role across many African cultures, serving as a multifaceted tool for communication, resilience, and cultural expression (Apte, 1985; Davies, 1988). It acts as a mechanism for social cohesion by creating shared laughter and insider knowledge that strengthens group solidarity, while also fulfilling subtle functions such as social critique, negotiation of power dynamics, and tension relief during communal interactions (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Olaniru, 2025). In diverse African societies—from West African griot traditions to East African oral performances—humour often embeds irony, satire, and wordplay to address taboo subjects like sexuality, authority, or misfortune without confrontation (Obiechina, 1975; Barber, 1991). This strategic deployment of humour allows communities to maintain harmony while subtly challenging hierarchies, as evidenced in proverbs, folktales, and riddles that circulate in daily discourse (Yankah, 1998).

In the Lango context of northern Uganda, humour manifests distinctly in market names, transforming these economic hubs into sites of creative linguistic expression that attract attention, provoke laughter, and reinforce community bonds (p'Bitek, 1963;

p'Bitek, 1971). Names like Cuk Ojee Mak Atin Baba Wu Oka Pul, which humorously recount a woman's urgent plea to her son during an intimate mishap, exemplify this tradition by weaving personal anecdotes into public memory. Such quirky humour—rooted in Lango's Western Nilotic language and oral storytelling heritage—distinguishes their place-naming practices from more straightforward or descriptive conventions observed elsewhere in Uganda or Africa, where names typically reference geography, events, or flora (Raper, 2005; Mensah & Rowan, 2019). Lango market names, often drawn from domestic absurdities, family dynamics, or social faux pas, function as performative narratives that elicit collective amusement, fostering a sense of shared identity amid historical adversities like conflict and displacement (Dolan, 2002; Kasozi, 2005).

Toponymic studies in African anthropology emphasise how language use in naming spaces reflects cultural identity and resilience, particularly in the face of colonial impositions and post-colonial disruptions (Meek, 1931; Mudimbe, 1988; Enfield, 2002). Colonial powers frequently renamed places to assert dominance, erasing indigenous meanings, yet African communities reclaimed agency through subversive or persistent local nomenclature (Vansina, 1985; Coates, 1989). The Lango people's naming practices fit seamlessly within this framework, where market names operate as simultaneous linguistic artefacts and living narratives that dynamically respond to social, political, and economic realities—from post-LRA recovery to modern market economies (Lambright, 2011; Goodfellow, 2017). These toponyms encode resilience by memorialising everyday triumphs over hardship, using humour as a coping mechanism that humanises vulnerability (Basso, 1996; Tent & Blair, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative ethnographic research design to explore the naming conventions of markets in the Lango sub-region, Uganda. Ethnography, as an approach, is particularly suited to investigating cultural phenomena in their natural contexts through participant observation, interviews, and documentation of local narratives (FG Connect, 2023). Given the social and linguistic complexity of Lango market names, this design facilitated a deep, holistic understanding of markets' meanings, humour, cultural identity, and functions within community life.

Data Collection

The primary dataset originated from fieldwork conducted across Lango's nine districts. Data collection involved:

Interviews: A total of 304 respondents were interviewed, comprising 78 elders, 96 market traders, 54 community leaders, and 76 residents across the Lango Sub-region. These numbers were determined using purposive sampling to ensure adequate representation across gender, age groups, occupations, and all nine districts of the Lango Sub-region (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling enabled the identification of participants with deep knowledge of quirky market histories and naming traditions. The final sample size was guided by the principle of data saturation, whereby interviews continued until no substantially new themes or meanings emerged (Guest et al., 2006).

Respondents were selected based on their reputation within the community, length of involvement in market activities, and recommendations from local councils and cultural leaders, enhancing the credibility and authenticity of the information collected. To minimise bias, standardised semi-structured interview guides were used, interviews were conducted in the Lango language, and multiple

respondents were interviewed per quirky market to allow triangulation of perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical considerations were strictly observed: informed consent was obtained, confidentiality assured, and participation remained voluntary throughout the study, in line with established ethical guidelines for social research involving human subjects (World Health Organization, 2011).

Interviews generated rich emic narratives, humour, anecdotes, and socio-economic interpretations surrounding each quirky market name. Data collection was further supplemented through telephone interviews, allowing deeper probing, clarification, and contextualization of meanings that could not be fully captured through face-to-face interactions alone (Opdenakker, 2006). This multimodal approach enhanced analytical depth and interpretive accuracy.

Social media: Social media, particularly WhatsApp, was used to validate market names and their meanings in the Lango Sub-region. Through WhatsApp forums, members shared market names alongside their cultural and historical interpretations, enabling collective verification through community dialogue. This approach aligns with scholarship that recognises social media as a participatory space for co-creation and validation of local knowledge (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kozinets, 2015). The platform's accessibility and users' shared cultural background ensured the authenticity and contextual relevance of the data. Real-time feedback allowed prompt corrections and confirmations, thereby strengthening data accuracy. Overall, this method demonstrates the growing role of social media in community-driven knowledge validation and the preservation of local linguistic and cultural heritage (Boyd, 2014).

Sampling and Site Selection

The study adopted purposive sampling, deliberately targeting quirky, humorous, and funniest market names across the Lango Sub-region. This approach

enabled the intentional selection of markets whose names vividly reflect linguistic creativity, satire, historical memory, and socio-cultural commentary embedded in everyday economic spaces. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study sought information-rich cases capable of yielding deep, contextualised insights rather than statistical generalisation (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2014). By focusing on markets widely recognised by communities for their unusual or humorous names, the study ensured cultural relevance, analytical depth, and representation of diverse local narratives across the Lango Sub-region.

Data Analysis

The collected textual data were systematically coded and analysed using thematic content analysis in QDA Miner Software. The process involved identifying recurrent linguistic patterns, themes of humour, cultural references, and economic roles associated with market names (FG Connect, 2023). Linguistic analysis of the collected names was conducted to identify patterns of word formation, humour, metaphor, and cultural references typical of Lango naming practices. The study also pays attention to dialectical nuances within the broader Luo language family, providing insights into the sociolinguistic fabric that shapes these names. Linguistic analysis focused on semantics, wordplay, and morpho-syntactic features within the names, tracing how humour manipulated language to attract

attention and reflect local identity. Cross-referencing linguistic features with ethnographic data allowed for a holistic interpretation of the markets’ socio-cultural significance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Quirky, Humorous and Funniest Markets ("Cuk") Names

This section presents a detailed examination of over 100 humorous market names in Lango compiled in 2023, 2024 and 2025 (Table 1), focusing on their location, linguistic creativity, playfulness and humour embedded in these names, their semantic content, cultural and social significance, and economic and cultural interplay. All humorous market names start with the word "Cuk", which directly translates to "market" in the Lango language. "Cuk" comes from the Arabic word "suq", which is an open-air market. This prefix functions as both a lexical marker and a cultural symbol, anchoring each place firmly as a marketplace in communal consciousness. The use of "Cuk" standardises the naming system, while allowing linguistic creativity in the subsequent words. By starting each name with "Cuk," traders and community members reinforce the market's identity as a vital social and economic hub. However, this common prefix also leaves room for creative expansion through accompanying words, allowing names to convey humour, local stories, or contemporary references.

Table 1. Quirky, Humorous and Funniest Names of Markets in Lango Sub-region

Market Name	Location of the Market
Cuk Abaa Dong Iloo Cede Loni	Ajaligado, Alito Town Council, Kole District
Cuk Abedi Ngo	Barr, Lira District
Cuk Abic Ikwon	Ngetta, Lira City
Cuk Abwoc yie kec	Dog Gudo Village, Alito Town Council, Kole District
Cuk Aciro Cun	Amolatar District
Cuk Adagmon	Adagmon Parish, Dokolo District
Cuk Adek Yer	Dokolo District
Cuk Adog Mon Mio	Alyec, Apac District
Cuk Adog Rao	Chawente, Kwania District
Cuk Adoko Gwok	Kole District
Cuk Adwong Mit Ipyere	Kangai, Dokolo District
Cuk Airport	Anai, Lira District
Cuk Ajali	Iwal Parish Atongatid, Kwania District

Market Name	Location of the Market
Cuk Akuri Kwee	Aboko Parish, Kwania District
Cuk Alur Owango Abwoc	Abunga Parish Barr, Lira District
Cuk Amon Oloo Coo	Apac District
Cuk Amuru kaye	Agege, Bala Sub-County, Kole District
Cuk Aneka Piri	Kole District
Cuk Angoti Nga	Alworoceng, Ibuje, Apac District
Cuk Apio Ling Inget	Trading Centre before Bata Town Council, Dokolo District
Cuk Apito Pat Angoto Pat	Ayei Landing Site, Akokoro, Apac
Cuk Apokmit-Imogo	Apokmit-Imogo Cell, Amolatar Town Council
Cuk Apwonyo Leb Itana	Amolatar District
Cuk Apyela Mot	Atongtidi, Kwania District
Cuk Aruba	Aboke, Kole District
Cuk Atini Itura	Angeki, Chegere, Apac District
Cuk Auma Wek Tyeni Dang Wee	Kole District
Cuk Awali	Okwerodot, Kole District
Cuk Awee I Betty	Amwa, Myene, Oyam District
Cuk Awee Ilako	Alebtong District
Cuk Awelo Kur Icok	Alolololo, Adwir Sub-County Alebtong District.
Cuk Ayeroguru	Chegere, Apac District
Cuk Bale Pe Tek	Alito, Kole District
Cuk Bario	Abok, Oyam District
Cuk Bili	Corner Aboko, Kwania District
Cuk Bol Omor	Dokolo District
Cuk Bol Wangi	Amugu, Alebtong District
Cuk Bombay	Cuk Bombay, Myene, Oyam District
Cuk But Ataro	Chegere, Apac District
Cuk Cam Kwani	Kamdini, Oyam District
Cuk Can Coo	Teso Bar, Lira City
Cuk Coo Beco	Otuke Town Council
Cuk Dako Dwong Acungu	Okwang, Otuke District
Cuk Dem Pul	Iceme, Oyam District
Cuk Dip Tuni	Bar Opuu village, Adekokwok, Lira City
Cuk Dyera Ilogo Nono	Alito, Kole District
Cuk Godo Godao	Aboke, Kole District
Cuk Gweta	Bala, Omwara Parish, Kole District
Cuk Gweta I Cura	Teso Bar, Lira City
Cuk Gwok Pyeri Ituk	Otira, Amolatar District
Cuk Gwok Wia Ituk	Ngai in Omac, Oyam District.
Cuk Imaki Oтуру Adyeny	Ngetta Ginnery, Lira City
Cuk Imat Ongoko Nga	Adyang, Akalo, Kole District
Cuk Inianga Pat	Omore, Alebtong District
Cuk Juba	Lango Quran, Lira City
Cuk Ka Iwot Ite Gweta	Acaba, Oyam District
Cuk Kevin Yaba	Bala, Kole District
Cuk Kwako Otino Ipaco	Alito, Kole District
Cuk Mac Odwogo	Dog Apio, Acaba, Oyam District
Cuk Mita Acoo	Minakulu, Oyam District (Bordering Lii Sub-County of Nwoya District)
Cuk Mon Iringo	Barr, Lira District
Cuk Moo Cwari	Oyam Town Council.
Cuk Muk Imani Ni Ikuru Oringi	Kole District
Cuk Mur Itino	Aleka Subcounty, Oyam District
Cuk Nen Neno Acwara	Olilim, Otuke District

Market Name	Location of the Market
Cuk Nga Okedi Wii	Bala, Aumi Parish, Kole District
Cuk Nga Otoki	Akura, Alebtong District
Cuk Ngai	Oyam, District
Cuk Ngo Ogengi Ngota I Yoo (Baptised as Cuk Ngo Ongengi)	Border of Apala and Abia, Alebtong District
Cuk Ngunyacet Oneka Iden	Agweng, Lira District
Cuk Nywal Ogo Joel -	Okar, Aboke, Kole District
Cuk Obolo Adyeny	Amugu, Alebtong District
Cuk Obwoc Oyere	Apala, Alebtong District
Cuk Odal Moo Cwari	Lelakot Parish, Okwerodot, Kole District
Cuk Odal Obolo Kome	Amolatar District
Cuk Odal Tima Kica	Ogwete, Otuke District
Cuk Odeng Otego	Otuke District
Cuk Ojee Mak Atin Baba Wu Oka Pul	Alito, Kole District
Cuk Okello Pe Gere	Aboke, Kole District
Cuk Okere	Okere Parish, Otuke District
Cuk Okwalo Moko	Apala, Alebtong District
Cuk Okwalo Moko	Apala, Alebtong District
Cuk Olai I Moko	Omoro Sub-Country, Alebtong
Cuk Olao Ipali	Olai Ipali village, Kwania District
Cuk Olengo	Aloi, Alebtong
Cuk Olok	Iceme, Oyam District
Cuk Omaki Oten	Amugu, Alebtong District
Cuk Omako Mac Alyet	Aboko Parish, Aduku, Kwania District
Cuk Oringo Panga	Teso Bar, Lira City
Cuk Otelu Ilyel	Adwir Sub-County, Alebtong District.
Cuk Oteo Ngunye Oweco	Minakulu, Oyam District
Cuk Otongo Del	Kangai, Dokolo District
Cuk Otwonogwen Ting	Otwonogwen Village, Oyam District
Cuk Owinyi Iduru	Olilim, Otuke District
Cuk Pang Alayu	Boroboro, Lira City
Cuk Pet Itenge	Iceme, Oyam District
Cuk Poto Mon	Adekokwok, Lira City
Cuk Puta Agali	Bar Apwo, Lira District
Cuk Pyeri Olilo Nga	Ayara, Kole District
Cuk Te Atat	Lira City
Cuk Te Ayugi	Aduku, Kwania District
Cuk Te-Opeke (Baptised as Cuk Opeke)	Lango College Road, Lira City
Cuk Wat Pe Inot	Ogur, Lira District

Source: *Compiled by Jacob Godfrey Agea in 2023, 2024 and 2025*

Historical Perspectives of Quirky, Humorous, and Funniest Lango Market Names

The market names in the Lango sub-region of northern Uganda embody a culturally rich tradition that encapsulates humour, social commentary, and communal memory through quirky and often provocative toponyms. These names are not mere labels but living narratives that reflect the historical, social, and economic realities of the Lango people.

As part of the larger Nilotic linguistic and cultural continuum, the Lango have developed a distinctive style of place naming which both parallels and diverges from other African toponymic practices.

Historically, the Lango people migrated southwards from South Sudan around the 15th century, establishing agro-pastoral communities that became centres for trade and cultural exchange (Lango Community Gulu, 2025). Their markets served as

more than trading hubs; they were forums for social interaction, political discourse, and cultural storytelling. Market names thus emerged organically from significant local events, moral tales, and communal anecdotes, serving as mnemonic devices to transmit oral history and societal norms (Vansina, 1985). This practice resonates with findings from other Luo-speaking groups such as the Acholi, whose toponyms similarly preserve clan histories and migrations but generally eschew direct vulgarity for more euphemistic or symbolic language (p'Bitek, 1971; Webster, 1973).

One of the most striking features of Lango market names is their unabashed inclusion of humour and risqué themes, as seen in "Cuk Otelo Iyiel", "Erection on the sight of a female corpse," which commemorates an unusual event involving a man's uncontrollable arousal during a burial ritual shaving in Adwari, Alebtong District, blending necrophilic taboo with burial rites—similar to Yoruba oriki exaggerating sexual prowess but uniquely Lango in post-mortem vulgarity, contrasting Acholi cen-ghost euphemisms (Barber, 1991; Heine & Kuteva, 2005). This boldness contrasts with the more coded or avoidance-based references to sexuality and death in neighbouring communities, where such topics are treated with heightened sensitivity or spiritual discretion (Barber, 1991; Heine & Kuteva, 2005). The Lango's willingness to name markets after taboo events reflects a cultural disposition that uses humour as a social lubricant, diffusing tension and fostering communal cohesion through shared laughter.

Similarly, "Cuk Awee I Betty", reflecting a man's relief after being rescued from an aggressive spousal wife battering in Oyam, illustrates how personal and domestic stories become embedded in public space through market names. This practice aligns with wider African traditions, such as the Dinka of South Sudan, who use satire and oral performance to negotiate social tensions related to marriage and gender roles (Nyanzi, 2014).

However, Lango toponymy often adopts a directness and public exposure of private matters that is more pronounced than in many Bantu-speaking cultures, where respect and privacy norms tend to temper such expressions (Mensah & Rowan, 2019).

The market name "Cuk Ngo Ogengi Ngota I Yoo", "Why didn't you make love to me on the way? In other words, why didn't you think about making our trip more exciting along the way?", demonstrates the Lango flair for transforming everyday social interactions into public folklore. This market captures a thwarted tryst post-wedding in Alebtong, overheard by elders who named the market amid laughter—mirroring West African griot wedding jests for fertility blessings yet Lango-specific in explicit refusal timing, diverging from veiled Luo courtship indirection (Yankah, 1998). By immortalising a young man's failed romantic plea overheard by village elders, this toponym captures the communal spirit of storytelling as social regulation and entertainment. Such candidness in addressing sexuality through place names marks a striking departure from the more symbolic and formalised Luo oriki, which typically elevate social virtues and status rather than highlight intimate personal foibles (Yankah, 1998). This phenomenon also finds echoes in West African oral traditions, where griot narrative performances similarly blend humour and moral instruction, though Lango toponyms tend to be more geographically fixed and linguistically playful (Barber, 1991).

"Cuk Olai I Moko", "Urinated on the malt," humorously recounts a man's social fall from grace after a drunken mistake corrupted local beer-making ingredients. It mocks drunken desecration of malwa-brewing malt "moko" in Alebtong District, inviting village scorn—akin to Ankole cattle-dung mishap etymologies but amplified by Lango's brewery centrality, contrasting colonial sobriety impositions (Monitor, 2025). This reflects the importance of traditional beverages like malwa in Lango culture and the role of markets as socio-

economic centres where both reputation and commerce intersect. Comparable naming practices are observed in Ankole markets, where incidents related to cattle or brewing mishaps become memorable place identifiers, albeit often with less emphasis on humour and more on serious social admonition (Monitor, 2025). The Lango, by contrast, take these mishaps as opportunities for communal amusement and social bonding, testifying to a culturally embedded capacity to transform misfortune into collective resilience.

The persistence of such humour-laden market names through periods of intense social upheaval, including colonial rule, the LRA insurgency, and large-scale population displacement, underscores their role in maintaining cultural continuity and identity. Unlike some African communities where colonial administration imposed new toponyms, erasing indigenous heritage, the Lango retained and even innovated their naming traditions despite external pressures (Mudimbe, 1988). Post-conflict, these toponyms became even more crucial as they provided a form of oral historiography and social therapy, helping communities process shared trauma while reinforcing solidarity (Dolan, 2002).

Comparatively, this rich interplay of humour, history, and social commentary in place naming aligns with Ben-Amos's theory of folklore as a social expressive system where communities use narrative forms to negotiate identity and cultural values (Ben-Amos, 1971). However, the Lango stand out for their linguistic creativity and the remarkably public nature of their humour embedded in spaces central to daily economic life. This contrasts with other African toponymic traditions, such as those of the Bantu-speaking Zulu or Xhosa, who often imbue place names with spiritual or natural meanings reflecting ancestral veneration and environmental features (Raper, 2005).

Ultimately, the Lango market names reveal a vibrant cultural practice that integrates humour and socio-political critique into spatial identity, transforming marketplaces into stages for oral

history preservation and community cohesion. This historical perspective highlights the adaptive and resilient nature of the Lango linguistic heritage in the face of modern challenges and globalisation.

Linguistic Creativity and Playfulness in Market Names

Linguistic analysis reveals that Lango market names employ sophisticated techniques such as wordplay, metaphors, local slang, semantic ambiguity, and puns to craft memorable, humorous designations that transcend mere functionality (Tent & Blair, 2011; Mensah & Rowan, 2019). For instance, "Cuk Te Atat," loosely translating to "Grandmothers' market," exemplifies respectful nominalisation rather than crude humour, contrasting with more risqué examples elsewhere in Lango nomenclature (p'Bitek, 1963). This name carries profound cultural weight, signifying a gathering spot for elder women who trade, socialise, and transmit oral histories, thereby honouring their role as custodians of tradition (Oduyoye, 1982; Basso, 1996).

Unlike Yoruba market names in southwestern Nigeria, which often emphasise deities or trade guilds for spiritual protection (Barber, 1991), "Cuk Te Atat" prioritises matriarchal wisdom and community heritage, embedding notions of respect ("Te Atat") that reinforce gender-specific social cohesion (Laotan-Brown, 2024). This aligns with Nilotic naming patterns but diverges from Bantu traditions by foregrounding familial roles over environmental descriptors (Heine & Kuteva, 2005; Matiza, 2020).

In contrast to the reverent tone of "Cuk Te Atat," names like "Cuk Odeng Otego" in Otuke district deploy provocative slang—"Odeng" for female genitalia and "Otego" implying ripeness—creating double entendre that evokes laughter through vulgar innuendo (p'Bitek, 1971; Olaniru, 2025). This phonetic alliteration ("O" sounds) enhances memorability, akin to allusive humour in Kalanga place names in Zimbabwe, where anatomical

metaphors signal fertility or abundance (Matiza & Dube, 2020). However, while Kalanga toponyms often tie to ancestral lands for solemn commemoration (Matiza & Dube, 2020), Lango variants transform taboo slang into communal jest, likely originating from vendor anecdotes or events, fostering social bonds without malice (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Apte, 1985). Research by Odogwu (2018) on Nigerian pidgin humour parallels this, noting how slang sustains dialect vitality in rural economies, yet Lango names uniquely blend shock value with economic branding, distinguishing them from Ankole region's more historical market etymologies in western Uganda (Monitor, 2025).

Similarly, "Cuk Kevin Yaba"—interpretable as "Kevin, open your legs"—merges personal nomenclature with suggestive wordplay, cheekily inviting openness or access (Yankah, 1998). This hybrid form, possibly riffing on global pop culture names like "Kevin," contrasts with purely indigenous Luo proverbs that avoid foreign intrusions (p'Bitek, 1971), yet echoes contemporary hybridity in urban Kenyan toponyms where English loans amplify humour (Mensah & Rowan, 2019). Nyanzi (2014) documents comparable sexual innuendos in Ugandan queer slang for subversive identity, but Lango market usage lightens them into inclusive banter, promoting trader curiosity and crowds (Davies, 1988). Unlike descriptive South African toponyms focused on landscapes (Raper, 2005), Lango's puns prioritise performative engagement, enhancing market vitality amid competition.

These patterns reflect Lango's embedding of social values in language, positioning markets as social hubs nurturing bonds (Manana, 2023; Lambright, 2011). While Kalanga names preserve cosmology (Matiza & Dube, 2020), Lango favours dynamic anecdotes for resilience post-conflict (Dolan, 2002). Ehineni's (2025) findings on Yoruba slang vitality resonate, as do Nyanzi's (2014) on humour's power negotiation, yet Lango uniquely fuses them into economic toponymy, outpacing static Bantu

descriptors (Vansina, 1985). This linguistic creativity preserves histories and values, providing sociolinguistic fertile ground (Bigon, 2016). Contrasting with formal Western toponymy (Coates, 1989), Lango names illustrate grassroots identity and economy intersection, foundational to sustainability (Goodfellow, 2017).

Cultural and Social Significance of Market Names

Among the Langi people, names—whether for individuals, places, or markets—function as vital repositories of collective memory and cultural narratives, preserving stories, events, and communal experiences across generations (Vansina, 1985; p'Bitek, 1971). This practice aligns with broader Nilotic traditions where toponyms encode moral lessons and social histories, yet contrasts with Bantu systems like those among the Yoruba, which prioritise ancestral praise poetry (oriki) over cautionary tales (Oduyoye, 1982; Barber, 1991).

Market names such as "Cuk Apito Pat Angoto Pat" and others compiled here sustain vital oral lore, ensuring socio-cultural significance endures publicly through generations (p'Bitek, 1963; Manana, 2023). Loosely translating to "he who raises is not the one who partakes of", this name from Apito Pat Village in Amolatar District narrates a father's laborious raising of three daughters, only for them to marry community-perceived "foolish" men, embodying profound intergenerational sacrifice and marital inequities. The toponym encapsulates Lango anxieties over bride-wealth investments yielding ungrateful outcomes.

Unlike Kalanga proverbs in Zimbabwe that memorialise heroic lineages to assert territorial claims and ancestral legitimacy (Matiza & Dube, 2020), Lango variants deliver pointed critiques of patriarchal bride-wealth dynamics, explicitly prohibiting intra-family unions amid profound social stigma (Dolan, 2002; Laotan-Brown, 2024). This moralistic naming reinforces family

responsibilities, reciprocity, and fairness, transforming markets into didactic spaces where commerce intersects ethical instruction (Basso, 1996; Tent & Blair, 2011). In contrast to Ankole's historical event-based names, predominantly focused on cattle raids, territorial conquests, and pastoral heroism (Monitor, 2025), Lango embeds intimate relational ethics within economic hubs, fostering collective identity through sustained communal reflection and moral dialogue (Lambright, 2011; Bigon, 2016). By prioritising domestic sacrifice over martial glory, Lango toponymy humanises patriarchal burdens, cultivating social cohesion absent in more conflict-centric regional traditions.

Furthermore, "Cuk Obwoc Oyere", rendered as "the market of impotent men" (men good only at eating, sexually inert), weaponises profound cultural taboo through dark humour intricately tied to ancestral curses or cen (ghosts) within Lango cosmology (Heine & Kuteva, 2005; Olaniru, 2025). Impotence represents ultimate emasculation, barring affected men from marriage, leadership, and communal rituals, evoking deep shame and social exclusion (p'Bitek, 1963). Unlike Acholi fertility rites that emphasise communal healing and spiritual restoration post-trauma (p'Bitek, 1971; Dolan, 2002), Lango amplifies this vulnerability through cathartic ridicule, transforming personal tragedy into gossip-attracting market spectacle (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Apte, 1985). Nyanzi (2014) documents parallel stigma subversion in Ugandan queer communities through defiant slang reclamation, yet Lango reframes heterosexual impotence as collective patriarchal anxiety relief, diffusing manhood pressures via communal jest rather than identity assertion.

This contrasts sharply with South African toponyms that avoid vulgarity, prioritising landscape sanctity and ancestral veneration over bodily dysfunction (Raper, 2005; Matiza & Dube, 2020). Lango's bold naming sustains social regulation while enhancing market vitality through provocative allure,

positioning commerce as a therapeutic arena where gendered vulnerabilities become bonding currency (Bigon, 2016).

Names like "Cuk Apwonyo Leb Itana" ("I learned the language from the bed") evoke intimate seduction wisdom gained experientially through private encounters, teasing feminine savvy in love and communication artistry (Yankah, 1998; Mensah & Rowan, 2019). This cheeky innuendo celebrates women's relational eloquence, positioning the bedroom as a school of social sophistication rather than formal instruction. The name mirrors Yoruba bedroom proverbs that valorise erotic eloquence and verbal dexterity in intimate contexts (Barber, 1991; Ehineni, 2025), yet Lango innovatively integrates such motifs into commercial toponymy, transforming markets into lively banter arenas.

This diverges from formal Luo praise names (oriki equivalents) that elevate heroic lineages over domestic wit (p'Bitek, 1971; Bigon, 2016), and contrasts Bantu spiritual euphemisms avoiding explicit sexuality (Raper, 2005). These conventions mirror Lango resilience, blending humour with heritage, unlike colonial-erased indigenous labels (Mudimbe, 1988; Coates, 1989), sustaining identity via humour (Davies, 1988). By embedding erotic pedagogy in economic spaces, Lango naming sustains gender-specific oral lore, fostering trader camaraderie through shared cultural recognition (Olaniru, 2025).

Names like "Cuk Dyera Ilogo Nono" loosely translated as "My friend/in-law, you have washed your hands in vain", encapsulate profound Lango wisdom about futile efforts in social relationships, particularly in-law dynamics or misplaced alliances. "Dyera" (friend/in-law) paired with "Ilogo Nono" evokes the imagery of ritual handwashing rendered pointless, symbolising wasted labour in unreciprocated bonds or insincere partnerships. This proverb-like toponym preserves Lango oral philosophy, warning against performative gestures lacking substance—a core theme in Nilotic relational ethics (p'Bitek, 1963; p'Bitek, 1971).

Unlike Acholi cen-mediated kinship rituals emphasising spiritual cleansing (Dolan, 2002), Lango uses domestic imagery for pragmatic social instruction, reflecting agro-pastoral realities where labour reciprocity defines alliances (Lango Community Gulu, 2025).

This market name fosters communal recognition during market interactions, where traders invoke it during haggling or gossip about unreliable partners, creating "insider" solidarity (Olaniru, 2025). Radcliffe-Brown's (1940) joking relationship theory illuminates how such shared cultural references permit critique of in-laws without confrontation, strengthening affinal ties through permitted irreverence. Unlike Teso stoic proverbs (Webster, 1973), Lango's domestic candour humanises relational failures, transforming potential conflict into bonding humour that enhances trader loyalty and market vitality. This toponym thus exemplifies how Lango naming converts everyday wisdom into economic branding, sustaining social cohesion through linguistic play (Yankah, 1998).

Humour and Social Bonding

Lango's strategic use of humour in market naming fulfils critical social functions, facilitating informal communication, inclusive interaction, and communal tie-strengthening, distinguishing it from more solemn African toponyms (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Olaniru, 2025).

While Yoruba market humour in Nigeria often satirises trade greed via proverbs (Barber, 1991), Lango deploys risqué innuendos for bonding, as in Cuk Te-Opeke ("under scanty raggy dress"), evoking hidden intimacies beneath tattered attire to spark gossip. This semantic ambiguity—hinting at undergarments or erogenous zones—contrasts Acholi restraint post-conflict, where names avoid vulgarity for healing (Dolan, 2002), yet mirrors Kalanga anatomical puns signalling fertility without offence (Matiza & Dube, 2020). Phonetic rhythm enhances recall amid trade bustle, branding competitively like Ankole's event-based jests but

prioritising erotic lightness (Mensah & Rowan, 2019; Monitor, 2025).

In Kole district, Aneka Piri ("they will kill me because of you") hyperbolises lovesickness as mortal peril from jealous rivals or irresistible allure, transforming romantic vulnerability into communal banter that invites storytelling and laughter (p'Bitek, 1971). This dramatic framing elevates everyday courtship pangs into hyperbolic drama, positioning the market as a confessional space where vendors and patrons share tales of passionate obsession. Unlike Teso proverbs emphasising stoic endurance in courtship rituals (Webster, 1973), Lango amplifies emotional vulnerability for cathartic release, humanising traders through relatable frailty akin to West African griot performances that exaggerate human folly for moral instruction (Yankah, 1998; Apte, 1985). The name fosters nostalgia for youthful infatuations while driving foot traffic, converting commerce into dynamic storytelling arenas where haggling intertwines with romantic confessions.

This parallels Luo festival unity through shared heritage narratives (Watchdog Uganda, 2025) but grounds passion in grassroots market realities rather than ceremonial formality (Lambright, 2011). Contrasting Acholi post-conflict restraint that veils romantic discourse amid trauma recovery (Dolan, 2002), Lango's candour cultivates trader camaraderie, enhancing economic vitality through cultural allure (Olaniru, 2025). By commodifying lovesickness, the name exemplifies how Lango toponymy sustains emotional heritage amid modernisation.

"Cuk Amon Oloo Coo" ("women rule men") in Apac District serves as an ironic subversion of traditional patriarchal authority, humorously acknowledging shifts in gender power dynamics. This name, alongside "Cuk Moo Cwari" ("look for your husband"), contrasts sharply with the classic Luo practice of elder veneration, where male lineage and authority are celebrated with reverence (p'Bitek, 1971). Instead, these Lango toponyms

embrace matriarchal satire similar to cultural inversions found in the Teso community, using humour as a peaceful yet potent form of social critique (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Webster, 1973).

Scholars like Roden (1974) and Uluocha (2015) emphasise that place names encode a community's values and histories; in the Lango context, these names assert territorial and cultural identity amid globalisation pressures (Mudimbe, 1988; Auma, 2020). Unlike South African toponyms, which often draw from environmental features and sacred landscapes (Raper, 2005), Lango market names fuse economic life with spiritual and social pride, exhibiting vibrant oral traditions that sustain community cohesion (Bigon, 2016; Basso, 1996; Laotan-Brown, 2024).

Another vivid example is "Cuk Muk Imani Ni Iкуру Oringi" ("Keep being there with your huge dick waiting to marry refugees, as if there are no women here"). This market name mocks men who delay marrying local women while hoping to wed refugees, blending vulgarity with pointed commentary on endogamy and integration challenges amidst refugee influxes. This boldness contrasts with the more insular naming customs of groups like the Kumam but reflects a Lango willingness to use shock humour to engage social issues (Davies, 1988; Nyanzi, 2014). Drawing parallels to queer slang's subversion of patriarchal norms, Lango market names harness humour for social regulation and economic resilience, diverging from the more static mnemonic functions of Bantu place names (Turner, 1974; Vansina, 1985).

Ethnographically, this aligns with Olaniru's (2025) conceptualisation of humour as covert resistance and Radcliffe-Brown's (1940) theory of joking relationships that reinforce social bonds. Unlike the formalised, often environmental South African place names, Lango's humour-rich oral toponymy promotes social inclusion and resilient identity formation in rural settings deeply affected by historical divisions and modern transformations

(Bigon, 2016; Laotan-Brown, 2024; Watchdog Uganda, 2025).

Identity, Event-Based and Place-Naming

Place-naming (toponymy) globally balances functional utility with symbolic depth, yet African variants uniquely encode history, memory, and morals, diverging from Eurocentric descriptivism (Tent & Blair, 2011; Coates, 1989). Lango market names like Cuk Dako Dwong Acungu ("A woman is strong while standing, weak when laid down") masterfully metaphorise gender resilience versus intimacy vulnerability, deconstructing female agency through spatial and sexual binaries (Mensah & Rowan, 2019). "Dako" (woman), "dwong" (strength), and "acungu" (upright/standing) pivot dramatically to bedroom submission, embedding proverbial wisdom that provokes communal reflection on power dynamics (p'Bitek, 1963).

This contrasts sharply with Yoruba oriki traditions praising female agency through heroic lineages and market guild prowess without erotic concessions, maintaining spiritual elevation over carnal vulnerability (Oduyoye, 1982; Barber, 1991). Similarly, it diverges from Kalanga toponyms' solemn fertility rites tied to ancestral land sanctity, where anatomical metaphors signal agricultural abundance rather than conjugal defeat (Matiza & Dube, 2020). This kind of Lango naming elevates markets as narrative hubs where gendered proverbs become economic brands, fostering bonding through shared wit and gendered banter among traders. Unlike Acholi cen-ghost euphemisms veiling sexual discourse post-trauma (p'Bitek, 1971; Dolan, 2002), Lango's candour transforms potential misogyny into cathartic laughter, humanising marital realities. This elevates commerce into social theatre, where linguistic play sustains cultural identity amid modernisation (Yankah, 1998).

Similarly, the market name "Cuk Aciro Cun" ("suffered enough with dicks") powerfully voices female relational exhaustion rooted in Amolatar District anecdotes, where a woman's

serial romantic disappointments were immortalised through ironic catharsis. This bold declaration transforms personal hardship into communal jest, paralleling Nyanzi's (2014) documentation of queer defiance through subversive Ugandan slang that reclaims stigma but amplifies heterosexual frustration for broader social bonding rather than marginalised identity assertion.

Unlike Acholi post-trauma restraint, where cenghost euphemisms veil sexual discourse amid LRA recovery (Dolan, 2002; p'Bitek, 1963; p'Bitek, 1971), Lango embraces shock value to humanise taboos, drawing crowds through provocative allure akin to Nigerian pidgin slang's vitality in market banter (Ehineni, 2025). Yet Lango innovates by integrating this vulgarity into economic branding, absent in Bantu moral topoi that prioritise ancestral solemnity over commerce (Raper, 2005; Mensah & Rowan, 2019). The name's raw candour fosters trader camaraderie, positioning markets as cathartic arenas where gendered grievances become shared lore, enhancing foot traffic and social cohesion (Olaniru, 2025). This contrasts Kalanga fertility metaphors tied to land sanctity (Matiza & Dube, 2020), underscoring Lango's unique fusion of erotic frustration with marketplace identity.

The market name "Cuk Ojee Mak Atin Baba Wu Oka Pul" vividly evokes a moment of maternal urgency during intercourse, where the son Ojee is called upon to "retrieve the baby" amid the forceful vigour of the father. This name crystallises intimate domestic chaos into communal lore, capturing the interplay of family dynamics with humour and social storytelling. Unlike Ankole toponyms, which often reference external conflicts like cattle raids and territorial disputes, Lango market names foreground personal and familial episodes that promote bonding through shared experience and laughter (Monitor, 2025; Bigon, 2016). This naming practice aligns with wider African traditions of griot storytelling and verbal exaggeration, where intimate or sensitive events are amplified to foster identity and memory, though Lango's specificity on

domestic scenarios distinguishes it within Nilotic oral cultures (Yankah, 1998; Vansina, 1985). By immortalising private moments publicly, the name reflects the Lango community's comfort with candid social discourse that transforms potential embarrassment into social cohesion.

The market name "Cuk Amon Oloo Coo" ("women rule men") in Apac District ironically subverts entrenched patriarchal norms, playfully asserting matriarchal dominance that mocks gender power shifts. Paired with Cuk Moo Cwari ("look for your husband"), it satirises marital agency, diverging from traditional Luo elder veneration that prioritises male lineage authority (p'Bitek, 1963; p'Bitek, 1971). This matriarchal satire parallels Teso cultural inversions where proverbs humorously elevate women during festivals, yet Lango embeds such critique directly into economic spaces for daily reinforcement (Webster, 1973). Roden (1974) and Uluocha (2015) affirm that toponyms reflect core community values and pivotal events, as Lango dialects strategically assert territorial identity amid globalisation pressures (Mudimbe, 1988; Auma, 2020).

Unlike South African environmental toponyms tied to landscapes and fauna for ancestral mapping (Raper, 2005), Lango fuses commerce with spiritual-social commentary, cultivating cultural pride through gendered banter (Bigon, 2016; Laotan-Brown, 2024; Basso, 1996). This fosters critique without conflict, aligning with Radcliffe-Brown's (1940) joking relationship theory that permits hierarchical subversion via permitted irreverence. Markets become oral venues sustaining identity, contrasting Acholi post-conflict solemnity (Dolan, 2002; Lambright, 2011; Manana, 2023). By transforming patriarchy into communal jest, Lango naming innovates resilience, blending economic branding with cultural defiance.

Economic, Cultural, Social and Historical Interplay

The quirky and humorous market names in the Lango sub-region embody an intricate interplay of economic vitality, cultural identity, social cohesion, and historical preservation that transcends simple place labelling (p'Bitek, 1963; Manana, 2023). These names are deeply embedded in Lango oral tradition, functioning as storytelling tools that resonate with local senses of humour, proverbs, taboos, and everyday community experiences (Yankah, 1998; Olaniru, 2025).

Examples like Cuk Bale Pe Tek ("It is not difficult for one to get spoiled"), Cuk Auma Wek Tyeni Dang Wee ("Eh! Auma why not allow your 'legs' to rest"), Cuk Okello Pe Gere ("Okello's behaviour renders him unmarriageable"), and Cuk Angoti Nga ("Oh-oh, whom is he going to fuck") exemplify how narrative-rich names draw foot traffic, encourage social interaction, and transform markets into lively theatres of communal identity (Mensah & Rowan, 2019). This resembles findings in West African markets where humour and oral histories similarly bolster market identities and social bonding (Barber, 1991; Ehineni, 2025).

Economically, such playful names serve as organic branding mechanisms in a largely informal sector dominated by subsistence farmers and small-scale traders, enhancing market visibility and competitiveness (Tripp, 1997; Goodfellow, 2017). The memorable, humour-laden names increase dwell time and encourage repeated visits, boosting sales of staple goods such as millet and pigeon peas as well as cash crops like sunflowers—triangulating traditional agrarian livelihoods with emerging market opportunities (Mukwano Industries Uganda Ltd, 2023; Manana, 2023). This mirrors similar dynamics in rural East African trading hubs where toponymic branding contributes to economic resilience (Lambright, 2011; Ndlovu & Heath, 2013).

Culturally, the exaggeration of social taboos within these market names facilitates community reflection and catharsis around sensitive topics like impotence, virginity, marriage choices, and gender roles (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Yankah, 1998). This social dialogue is vital for repairing the fragmented social fabric in post-conflict Lango, where decades of civil strife, displacement, and refugee influxes (notably from Kidde to Kole and Oyam) have challenged cohesion (Dolan, 2002; Auma, 2020). African oral traditions have long used humour and narrative as mechanisms of resilience and healing (Turner, 1974; Vansina, 1985), a phenomenon vividly witnessed in Lango market toponymy.

The fluidity and responsiveness of these names to social changes establish markets as living archives documenting historical events, social transformations, and collective memories (Basso, 1996; Bigon, 2016). Names commemorating female leadership or male follies in love relationships serve as oral historiography, preserving unwritten community records threatened by globalisation and modernisation (Mudimbe, 1988; Laotan-Brown, 2024). This cultural-economic synergy situates intangible heritage—language, humour, oral narrative—as crucial for sustaining livelihoods in Lango and beyond (Uganda Investment Authority, 2025).

Psychosocially, markets function as arenas for collective healing and reintegration, where humour embedded in names transforms trauma into hope and identity reinforcement (Dolan, 2002; Olaniru, 2025). The socio-economic stimulus provided fosters community stability and resilience pivotal for long-term development (Lambright, 2011; Goodfellow, 2017). Such social capital mobilisation through naming echoes findings from Lake Victoria region trading centres, where place-names aid communal networking and information dissemination (Mensah & Rowan, 2019).

From a policy perspective, this cultural-economic interface offers fertile ground for heritage tourism and community-led cultural preservation aligned

with UNESCO's goals for safeguarding living heritage (UNESCO, 2003; Laotan-Brown, 2024). Market names thus become educational tools conveying rich narratives to visitors, enriching cultural pride while boosting economic opportunities (Bigon, 2016). Protecting and promoting these traditions fosters sustainable development while honouring indigenous genius exemplified by Lango storytelling and humour.

In a nutshell, Lango market naming traditions exemplify an indigenous synthesis of commerce and culture. More than mere commercial labels, these names animate markets as multisensory spaces of identity assertion, history preservation, and social critique, reinforcing livelihoods and cultural continuity amid contemporary global pressures (p'Bitek, 1963; Manana, 2023). This intersection of humour, language, and economy underscores a vital pathway for community resilience and development rooted in intangible cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

The markets of the Lango sub-region transcend their role as transactional venues, emerging instead as dynamic cultural arenas where language, humour, identity, and economy converge in profound synergy. Drawing from the comprehensive compilation of over 100 market names across 2023–2025, this study elucidates how the Lango people harness witty, quirky, and often cryptic toponyms as instruments of cultural expression and economic branding. Linguistically, these names exemplify the Lango's mastery of humour through wordplay, puns, and semantic ambiguity within the Eastern Nilotic framework, distinguishing them from more descriptive African toponymic traditions. Socio-culturally, they function as informal archives preserving oral histories, moral lessons, and social values—such as gender dynamics and relational follies—while fostering cohesion and collective pride amid post-conflict recovery. Economically, these markets anchor livelihoods through staple and emerging cash crop trade, with humorous branding

enhancing foot traffic and resilience in informal economies.

This multifaceted interplay underscores the potency of intangible cultural heritage to simultaneously galvanise community identity and economic vitality, positioning Lango markets as exemplars of grassroots innovation. By transforming commerce into communal theatre, these names not only sustain livelihoods but also embody resilience against historical disruptions like colonial renaming and civil strife.

Recommendations

Despite their richness, African toponymic studies disproportionately emphasise geographic or historical determinism, side-lining humour's dynamic role as a cultural practice. Lango naming thus fills a critical lacuna, warranting expanded ethnographic inquiry to document etymological narratives, trace oral transmission, and quantify impacts on social cohesion and market performance.

Future research should prioritise longitudinal analyses of how urbanisation, globalisation, and digital media reshape these traditions—assessing whether playful toponymy persists or evolves. Policy interventions are equally vital: local authorities and the Uganda Investment Authority should integrate market names into heritage tourism strategies, safeguarding them via signage, digital archives, and community-led preservation programs aligned with UNESCO frameworks. This foundational work thus invites interdisciplinary scholarship in sociolinguistics, anthropology, and development studies to amplify Lango heritage while bolstering regional economic and social resilience.

Limitations

While extensive, the study acknowledges inherent limitations, particularly the possibility that subtle meanings, idioms, and cultural nuances may have been lost during translation from Lango into

English. Nevertheless, triangulation of multiple data sources, methods, and informants strengthened analytical rigour, enhanced reliability, and improved the overall validity, credibility, and trustworthiness of the findings and interpretations.

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