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Tonto – Archiving Memory of a vital socio-cultural Local Brew with a rich Vocabulary facing Extinction

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Abstract

This article examines *tonto* as an indigenous drink, its rich and specialised vocabulary, the indigenous knowledge process of making it, and the materials as well as the social and/or gender relations, rituals, and traditions associated with its making. *Tonto* is part of indigenous knowledge that has faced the wrath of forces of 'modernity' and its imperatives. According to Mulumba (2017), *tonto* is a short form of *tontomera* – (which means "Do not bump into me because of your drunkard state"). For centuries, *tonto* as a drink has been at the centre of all socio-political and economic activities among the Banyankore and other tribes, such as Baganda. However, key societal changes have significantly minimised the place of, and more or less demonised, *tonto* and its rich heritage in the social milieu. The specific interest of this article is that the rich heritage of *tonto* and the language associated with its production and consumption is rapidly disappearing and will soon become extinct. Fewer and fewer people are engaged in its processing and consumption, and the vocabulary for it is so specialised that inactive use will gradually lead to its extinction. The information was generated through extended conversations with purposively selected participants in the Bushenyi District. In essence, this archival initiative aims to preserve the specialised vocabulary associated with *tonto* and its threatened language register.

Keywords: *Tonto*, Heritage, Language Register; Vocabulary, Archive

Introduction

Tonto, according to Mulumba (2017), is short form of *tontomera* – (which means "Don't bump into me because of your drunkard state"). For centuries, *tonto* has been at the centre of all socio-political and economic activities among the Banyankore and other tribes, such as Baganda. It does not have an equivalent name in English, as *tonto* is indigenous to the Banyankore cultural setup, although some sections of people erroneously refer to it as a wine. The indigenous knowledge associated with its production and its rich vocabulary have been passed on from one generation to another through action and word of mouth. At present, there is no known written literature on the process involved in its making, while its vocabulary has also not been documented, a situation that may make the vocabulary extinct. What exists are mainly the 'evils' or negatives associated with it as indicated in *Amaarwa n'eminywere yaago* by Benedicto Mubangizi (1978), and little of its positive importance.

In this sense, *Tonto* is part of indigenous knowledge that has faced the wrath of forces of 'modernity' and its imperatives. It is a question of time that the indigenous knowledge associated with *tonto* and its rich vocabulary associated with it shall no longer be, possibly in the next decade or two. Fewer and fewer people are engaged in its processing, and its vocabulary is so specialised that inactive use will gradually lead to its extinction. This paper examines *tonto* as an indigenous drink, its rich and specialised vocabulary, the indigenous knowledge process of making it, and the materials as well as the social and/or gender relations, rituals, and traditions associated with its making. The usage or importance and threat from modern drinks, religion, and the future of *Tonto* are addressed to predict its future and its threatened language register.

This analysis shows that there are critical threats. First, banana varieties for making *tonto* have experienced stiff commercial competition from edible banana varieties as the cash returns on the latter are higher. Many people have uprooted *embiire* in favour of *enyamwonyo* for sale. Moreover, the majority of urbanites who get good money tend to drink beer, wine, or whisky which are considered prestigious compared to *tonto*. As a result, *tonto* remains a drink for low-income earners and its price remains very low. This also undermined its existence. As a result, *enyamwonyo* gained more commercial value than *embiire*. Similarly, there is a vivid threat owing to the rising popularity of 'modern 'beer, wine, and spirits. These have undermined *tonto* and made it look inferior, despite its rich heritage. These drinks have substituted *tonto* at most functions where they play an important role.

Foreign religions have also not spared *tonto* either. Although it is not as addictive as spirits like *waragi*, which is now made from ethanol and water, it has been over-demonised

by different religious denominations. The Born-again section of the Anglican Church led the crusade against *tonto,* and it is virtually rare to find an Anglican household that engages in *tonto* production. This was followed by Catholics, especially the charismatic renewals who did the same. *Embiire* banana varieties were massively uprooted, especially in the 1990s in favour of the *enyamwonyo* varieties. Only a few diehards with *embiire* bananas remained.

The interest in this rather side-line phenomenon of *tonto* production originated from concerns about African languages and how some of the processes that contribute to their richness are now falling by the way side. This paper was based on in-depth conversations with respondents in Bushenyi. The respondents were from Kigoma, Kikuba, and Bunyarigi villages, and were selected through snowball sampling. The first two persons were selected through consultation with merry makers at a local bar selling *tonto* who then provided directions to the homes of those known for brewing *tonto*. Indeed, as a requirement for purposive sampling, all five key informants were quite knowledgeable about *tonto* and the associated language and practice. To further enrich this proposition, a video recording of some of the *tonto* processes was made with the consent of the participants in the same area. The video recording process also enabled deeper conversations on the associated vocabulary and its evolution.

The varieties of bananas involved in Making *tonto*

Tonto is extracted from an indigenous banana variety, *musa* spp. The exact banana type is not clear as encyclopaedia Britannica names classifies bananas under the botanical name of Musaceae, the banana family of plants (order Zingiberales), consisting of two general types namely, *Musa* and *Ensete,* with about 50 species native to Africa, Asia, and Australia. The common banana (*M. sapientum*) is a subspecies of the plantain (*M. paradisiaca*). The encyclopedia identifies both as important food plants and names plants that are not edible but as flowers.

Among the Banyankore, the banana variety used in the making of *tonto* is locally called *embiire*. It is primarily used for *tonto* brewing but may only be edible during severe famine. In such unusual circumstances, *embiire* varieties are made to become edible in the form of *rwabikona, empaate, ekicumbe,* and *oburiga*. The process of making them edible is deeply rooted in indigenous knowledge where the *empaate* involves peeling them while placing them in water and leaving them there for some minutes and rinsing them five times or more. R*wabikona* involves peeling and drying on the sun for several days before cooking. For *ekicumbe,* this involves peeling and washing numerous times before cooking when mixed with beans. When fully cooked, they are mingled, allowed to stay overnight, and eaten when cold. If

this is not done, the prepared *ekicumbe meal* tastes sour.

There are different varieties of bananas, namely *embiire, engambaani, enyarukira, butende, musa, kayingya,* and *kabaragara.* The different types can be differentiated from *enyamwonyo* - the edible variety- by looking at the banana stem and the mature bunch itself. Initial identification is purely indigenous knowledge that can be passed on from one generation to another. The proven procedure for identifying the *embiire* varieties that resemble the edible varieties is mainly by knowing and earmarking their location within the banana plantation, with this information passed on by parents to the children as they grow. In a situation where one enters the banana plantation and does not know how to identify them, there are two distinct ways. The first one is through the banana sheath. The *enyarukira* variety has a slightly longer banana sheath when it is young. As it grows, with its exact resemblance to the edible varieties, especially after cutting off the sheath, it becomes difficult to differentiate, to the extent that some families cook it only for them to notice that it is an *embiire* variety when food is ready and is found to be dark and sour. The second identification method is conscious peeling, in which the person peeling looks at the amount of sap that comes out. When very fresh, *enyarukira,* like any other *embiire* variety, produces large amount of sap. However, this is insufficient. When the sap indicates a possible *enyarukira* variety, another banana is harvested and peeled, and two or three banana fingers are identified and cooked together. At the time of serving, if the variety is *enyarukira*, it will be quite distinct from the rest of the food because it is dark and sour. It should be noted that if more than three fingers are mixed and cooked, the taste and colour of the food changes.

The process and language of making *tonto*

The process of making *tonto* is elaborate and labourious. It begins with the cutting of mature *embiire* banana varieties. The varieties are cut in a process called *okutema embiire*. They are carried mainly on the head in a process called *okushomba embiire* to one place where *orwina*- a hole dag to about three feet deep – is piled together in an open place and allowed to stay overnight before they are clustered, locally called *okuhagura*, or the bunch is dissected into two called *okushatura* the next day. Some people harvest the *embiire* by cutting the banana stem, bending, and leaving them on their banana trees the night before the *okushomba embiire* is done. After clustering them (*okuhagura* or *okushatura*), they are packed in that pit – *orwina* in an orderly and compacted manner that preserves heat. *Orwina* is an inverted cone-shaped circular pit dug in the ground with a small square pit dag on its side. The square pit has a hole that connects to the *orwina* and is called *karongyero* or *karongyezo*, depending on its place in Ankole.

After clustering, they are left to dry the sticky sap or gum called *amakanca* for a short time. In this process, the people involved in the preparations cut banana leaves and remove part of the midrib in a process called *okwoboora endeere*. This is done to make the banana leaves flexible. The *orwina* is cleaned, and dry banana leaves (*amashansha)* are burnt inside there to make it warm. This is called *okuhembera*. It is thought that *okuhembera* ensures that some warmth remains in the *orwina*. If the *orwina* is new, the process is necessary. However, this may not be repeated for the subsequent use of *orwina*. Its continuous usage depends on the texture of the soil and whether it can generate heat on its own.

Banana leaves are then carefully laid in the *orwina* by ensuring that the sides of the *orwina* are not visible. The clustered bananas are placed in an orderly manner, which we may call parking. The entire process is known as the *okuhanika*.

Okuhanika - Source: Video Capture June 2025

The banana leaves are bent on top of the clusters when packed. As this process is going on, some people are collecting decaying banana trees called *embooreera*. The *embooreera* is placed on top of the banana leaves, forming approximately four to five layers. Thereafter, the soil is dug around the *orwina* as a circular trench made around to channel water away in case of rain, and is also used to add another layer from the bottom. The soil covers the now-buried bananas halfway. The soil is placed in such a way that when it rains heavily, water does not enter inside the *orwina,* but is absorbed by the soil or drains away.

In the meantime, the *karongyezo* that had been dug on the side of the *orwina* is also covered with banana stems and four layers of fresh banana leaves. In the evening, dry millet chaff called *omweziga* or goat and sheep dropping – *amahurunguru-* or both combined are placed in the *karongyezo* and burnt. These may burn for about 24 hours, and generate heat that passes through the small round channel that connects to the *orwina*. The heat is instrumental in quickly ripening the bananas. This process of heating, called *okurongyeza* or *okuhuuhira,* is performed once a day for two or three days, mostly in the evening. On the third or fourth day, checking is done to see whether the bananas are ripe by drilling a small hole using one hand to reach the bananas. If they are not yet ripe, the small hole is covered with *embooreera* to prevent the heat from escaping, and the same hole is used some days after to check again. When they are found to be ripe, the soil and *embooreera* are removed, also known as *okushuuruura*, which some people call *okuteera eitaka*.

Bananas are left for one or two days depending on how ripe they are. When the heat is high, the banana leaves are removed from the top to allow the heat to escape for a few hours. If the heat is high, it is allowed to reduce slowly without uncovering the banana leaves. It should be noted that at times, the bananas may not get ripe in what is called *okukona*. Although rare, it can occur for various reasons. If this happens, either the entire process of *okuhanika* is repeated, or more *embooreera* is added. If there are some that are ripe while others are not, the ripe ones are removed and squeezed, while those that are not ripe are put back, and the *okuhanika* process is repeated all over again.

The process of making *tonto* continues with ripe bananas, now called *eminekye* out of *orwina,* in a process called *okuhanura*. The banana peels, which are now very soft and easily detachable from the *eminekye,* are removed by hands in a process called *okutondora*.

Okutondora in progress ***Source:*** *Ankole Beauty Spot facebook.com/1000 657944101115/posts/ tontostep…*

The hand-peeled bananas are put in a boat-shaped wooden open vessel called *obwato,* at times called *ekibya*. In places where they do not have *obwato*, they use *orureebo*, a hide placed in a shallow hole dug into the ground. It is important to note that while all previous activities could be restricted to close family members, men in particular, *okutondora* tends to be a more collective activity done by all family members and neighbours, in most cases, clansmen and women. It is a social activity, and children like it most as they are able to eat the sweet bananas as they remove the peels. At times, children overeat the sweet bananas and develop stomach upsets called *okugwa-empihi,* literally meaning englut. In case the bananas are plenty, the *okutondora* is done in the evening, and they stay overnight. This is known as *okuraaza emitangye*. In the morning, when all the bananas have been pilled, pressing the banana, locally called *okunyuuka,* starts. This involves putting the grass that has been cut into pieces into the boat and squeezing them. The grass used for squeezing bananas can be speargrass - *omushojwa, eyojo, egunga,* or papyrus spikes-*obugaara*.

The cut grass is always harvested on the eve of squeezing ripe bananas. Able and energetic men squeeze using their feet, which is unwashed in some cases[1], they hold sticks called *emihindo* to support them and

[1] At times, such men may even have jiggers in their feet or visibly dirty feet, but that does not stop them from participating in the activity of *okunyuuka.* In contemporary times, members of modernised homes would not like to consume the juice squeezed by such a person.

to prevent them from falling. After the bananas have mingled with grass, they are turned using a stick that a person squeezing holds as support, from the sides upside down, in a process referred to as *okuhindura ebitookye*. The purpose is to ensure that all squeezed bananas are mixed well with the grass. The squeezing continues, and after a while, some foam starts to form. This indicates that the juice is on its way. In case the foam is not seen, it is an indication that little energy is being exerted, and caution is taken as they might fail to bring juice, which is called *okurita*. Upon the first turning of the bananas called *okuhindura* using *omuhindo* and one leg, squeezing continues and juice starts to form. Pressing continues until the bananas are no longer in the form of banana juice dregs, called *ebituna*. The process of sieving juice begins when the juice is ready. This is known as the *okukamuura*. It involves raising the boat on one side using a banana stump and pilling the bananas on the raised side to enable the juice to collect together. The first juice is concentrated and called *eshande y'omuti*. The concentrated juice is drawn using *ekishare*, a drawing container from a calabash that is cut on the side, sieved using a funnel called *omutaho*, made out of the long neck of a calabash or weaved using papyrus reeds, and placed in large pots called *enkuute*. The *omutaho* has grass to sieve dregs called *ebituna*, which are put back in the boat for further squeezing as *okukamuura* goes on. After the first round *of okukamuuura*, water is added to the *omukambi, a mixture of grass used in squeezing and banana dregs*. The amount of water is usually proportional to the *eshande y'omuti* or concentrated juice. If *eshande y'omuti* is five pots called *enkuute*, four *enkuute* pots of water are added into *omukambi*. Another round of squeezing and *okukamuura* commences thereafter, although for a short time and the juice got is called *eshande y'amaizi*.

Source: *Video capture by researcher of Okukamura in the tonto making process (June 2025)*

It should be noted that some of the juice is given to the neighbours as a gesture of good neighbourliness, especially those that have helped in *okutondora* or fetching water. This juice is usually given in calabash containers of approximately three litres or less volume. It is not a good idea to give diluted juice to the neighbours, although some individuals will add some little of *eshande y'amaizi* into *eshande y'omuti* for them.

Entabo, a place where juice is to be fermented is prepared. It is a shallow ditch where *obwato*, which was used for squeezing, is placed. Depending on the warmth of the soil in a certain locality, peelings of squeezed sweet bananas are placed on the floor. A part of the *omukambi* is added before the *obwato* is placed. All the juices,

both *eshande y'omuti*-concentrated juice and *eshande y'amaizi* - dilute juice are mixed in the same boat with roast sorghum flour.

The process of roasting sorghum, called *okukaranga omugusha*, involves roasting an amount that is determined after squeezing is successful. The sorghum is half –roasted. Thereafter, it is ground with a grinding stone (*Orubengo*). Unlike other grinding of sorghum with the aim of obtaining fine flour, the sorghum for *tonto* making is done in such a way that it is more like splitting the grains in order to support fermentation. After mixing juice with flour of roasted sorghum called *okuteera omugusha* –soothing the flour sorghum with juice using hands, a banana stem is cut based on the size of the boat and divided into two. The stem sheaths, called *ebigogo*, are then placed on top of the boat in a 'carpet' way. *Omukambi* (a mixture of grass and bananas after squeezing out the refined juice) is then placed on top of them. *Omukambi* is instrumental in generating heat that enables fermentation. If the locality is a place that easily generates heat, the banana leaves that had been used for *okuhanika* are placed last on the top. However, if it is a place that does not generate heat easily, the *embooreera* and banana leaves which had been used for *okuhanika* are placed on top respectively.

It should be noted that sometimes the *tonto* can be much more and cannot fit in one boat for *okutaba*. In this case, the two boats are placed alongside each other and covered together. Similarly, the quantity may sometimes be insufficient for boat usage in *okutaba*. If the amount was about one or two *enkuute* pots, they use those pots and do a similar procedure.

The following morning, an adult with the requisite skills checks the fermentation process using a hollow stick known as *orushekye* got from a shrub called *ekishekashekye* (Clerodendrum rotundifolium). The person sinks it into the fermenting beer and determines the time at which it will be ready to be removed.

When the fermented juice is still sweet, it is referred to as *ebishand*e. Fermentation may take one or two days. The family head and neighbours have to wait until it is ready, and they get the beer out, called *okutaha*. At this stage, when the *tonto* is still very warm, it is called *omutahe*.

When the beer is ready, it is removed from the boat and placed in pots. Large pots are called *rushengye*. If pots are not available in the home, they use large calabashes called *ebisisi*. Because beer must be lifted from the place in the banana plantation where it is brewed, the pots and calabashes are wrapped using a plant with long pliable stems called *enshuri*. If these are not readily available in the village, then dry banana fibres are used. *Enshuri* is preferred to dry banana leaves because the latter does not hold the calabash firmly, and hence, is risky. In a situation where *tonto* is a lot and the containers available are not enough, it is kept in an *embisho*, a silo, or underground beer storage place.

Upon placing the *tonto* in those utensils, and because the *tonto* is still warm *omutahe*, it develops froth that can lead to a serious reduction through bubbling and hence pouring to the ground slowly but over an extended time until it becomes cold. To avoid this, a plant called *orunyamajuta*, a grass with hairy leaves, is put on top of the alcohol. This grass stops the formation of froth at the moment it mixes with *tonto*. The froth that falls on the pot or calabash is called *embiriro,* and the froth tracks are clearly seen on the outside of the beer calabash or pot. *Orunyamajuta* is also known to reduce the availability of *tinshengyeera*. *Tinshengyeera* are very small insects known in English as drosophila that invade any place that has *tonto* or juice and their rate of multiplication is fast, although they are not known to transmit any diseases. The way *orunyamajuta* operates indicates that it has certain chemical compounds that are not known or have not been investigated but were invented by past generations to decisively deal with froth development.

Once *okutaha* is done, some *tonto* is shared with kin or neighbours using a utensil called *orugunda.* It is a long-necked calabash beer. It should be noted that buying came with the introduction of money and has since taken root, with *tonto* becoming a tradable and commercial item. In case one could not get free *tonto* during *okutereka*, he or she could buy. If one buys for another, it is called *okushengyeera.*

Vocabulary specific to stage, quality and type of *tonto*

The story of *Tonto* clearly demonstrates that the enormous indigenous knowledge developed and tested for generations is applied with perfection. Any deviations may lead to undesirable results. Successful and good quality *tonto* is determined by mixing sufficient quantities of the ingredients. The best quality *tonto* is called *omuguruka*. This is done by fermenting only concentrated juice called *eshande y'omuti* and sorghum in sufficient quantities. Its alcohol content is high, although no standard measures are available. When the concentrated juice is mixed with insufficient water, juice called *eshande y'amaizi*, the *tonto* fermented out of it, even when it has sufficient sorghum, becomes slippery and is called *erende.* When concentrated juice is mixed with more diluted juice, the *tonto* cannot be sweet and remains watery even when sorghum is sufficient. This *tonto* is called *gyuuri.* When the mixture of juice is done properly but insufficient sorghum is added, the taste is not good, and the fermented beer is called *omuceeri* or *katara.* There is, however, a situation in which the mixing of concentrated juice and watery juice is proper, but sorghum is more than it should be. The fermented beer is not sweet, as expected, and is called *encenku*. If the concentrated juice is properly mixed with watery juice but the sorghum is burnt even though the quantity is sufficient, the fermented *tonto* is called *embakire*. The local

beer that is prepared from the juice of bananas that had initially failed to produce juice, but after hard work, juice comes and is fermented is called *omurite*. All of these types are realised after getting the *tonto* out of the boat at the appropriate time, called *okutaha*. The quality of *tonto* is also determined by getting it out of the boat (*okutaha*) at an appropriate time. If the *tonto* overstays and becomes overheated before being drawn from the boat, it becomes burnt and is called *omusyokore* or *amaarwa gasyokwire*. It should be noted that at times and in some places, sorghum could become scarce and the little available is mixed with millet floor with proper mixing of *eshande y'omuti* and *eshande y'amaizi*. The resultant *tonto* is called *obuseetura.*

At every stage, *tonto* has a description or type and a name associated with it from the time fermentation begins, resulting in a total of twenty-one different types. Immediately after *okutaba*, it ceases to be *eshande* (banana juice) after it has been mixed with sorghum making the first stage of becoming *tonto* as the process of fermentation begins. At this stage, with a change in temperature going upward, this type of *tonto* is called *agaatagata. Okutagata* literally means warming up that begins a few hours after *okutaba*. The next stage, which occurs after approximately eight hours and is warmer, is called *agaahwamu ebigyere*. This is followed by *ekinywubwa-bakazi*, meaning what is drunk by women. Essentially, the *ekinywubwa bakazi* is not yet tough and is assumed to be good for women to avoid making them drank. At this stage, *tonto* is not yet fully fermented and is still very sweet, although not like the juice that it was many hours earlier.

When fermentation is complete, the *tonto* is removed from the boat in *entabo* into containers in a process called *okutaha*, the drawn out of the boat *tonto* is very warm and is called *omutahe.* This name remains, even when it is still slightly cool, which can be referred to as room-temperature *tonto*.

The *tonto* that has stayed for about one day is called *ebishande*, meaning that it still has a major characteristic similar to that of juice. When the *tonto* has stayed for two days, it is called *oruhoro*. Thereafter, when the *tonto* spends more than two days after drawing from the boat, it is called *omubisi*. After spending more than three to six days, it is referred to as *omucurikye*. The moment *tonto* has stayed for over a week; it is called *amaarwa agakaikwire* from the verb *okukaikura* meaning aged. Thereafter, upon staying beyond this stage, it is called *obwengura*. This type of beer is bitter and has an acidic taste, although some people who are desperate can still drink it. Beyond that stage, when the *tonto* has surely overstayed beyond *obwengura* and is considered inappropriate for consumption because it is very sour, it is called *encunku*. The final stage of *tonto,* which is considered unfit for human consumption, is called *enyoshe*. At times, early intervention would be done by adding honey as a sweetener to reduce the acidity or toughness of

the *tonto*, which would again become consumable, though not liked. The process of making it consumable is called *okuturira.*

Another form of *tonto* is associated with storage. This includes *eibonde*, a type of *tonto* that remains at the bottom of the pot. It is a mixture of sorghum residues called *entooto* and unsieved *tonto*. This is rarely consumed, except under conditions of shortage. *Ekikanja* is another type. This *tonto* remains at the bottom of the pot, or the big calabash (ekisisi). It is drunk by inserting and sucking with long stick tubes *ebishekye*. Traditionally, this *tonto* was drunk by women during a time of happiness, called *okutereka. Okutereka* is the act of inviting friends and neighbours to come to your home for a drink on the beer brewed in the family.

As a form of long-term preservation, the last type of *tonto* is the boiled and distilled using airtight drums. This transforms it into gin *waragi,* making it the most potent, as waragi is steam from the boiling *tonto.* Considering that distillation is not under the industrial guidelines, the alcohol content is unknown, although it could be approximately 40% similar to whiskey's alcohol content.

Tonto - the beer in a social context

While various factors, demonised *tonto* to be a dangerous drink and has been demonised, it was and still remains an important drink among the Banyankore and their heritage, and with layers of gender subtexts. For instance, there quite a number of rituals associated with its production and processing. The key ritual is that a woman cannot sleep with another man who is not her husband when the bananas are in the process of ripening. It is feared that bananas will not ripen. In addition, a pregnant woman who conceived outside wedlock is not allowed to put sorghum in the juice during *okutaba.* It is assumed that the *tonto* will take a long time to get ready. A woman does not drink with men during *etereko* because, accordingly, she might abuse the men and end up being beaten. Furthermore, a man who is of age and is not married does not drink with married men because he is considered to be a boy. Quite evidently, *tonto* was used as a tool in the mechanisms of social control and norm actualisation, reminiscent of Judith Butler's (1988) notion of performing gender. The gender division of labour also tends to place women and men differently, where women mostly participate in pre-beer activities and men are almost solely in charge of the product and its consumption. During the conversations, key voices emitted the fact that women were supposed to be protected from the ills of drinking the *tonto* and getting drunk because they needed to preserve the family's sobriety. Again, gender performativity and the sanctity of motherhood come into play in a powerful manner.

In terms of roles, the most obvious in contemporary times relates to income from commercial

value. Most local bars sell it. Initially, when beer was not available, only *tonto* could be found in bars in villages and peri-urban areas. At times, *waragi* was also available alongside *tonto*. Thus, it provided income to brewers, especially those with large banana plantations. There are still many people who attest to having been educated using the school fees generated from the proceeds of *tonto*. However, there are other socially embedded roles which also add to the richness of the vocabulary, as we proceed to elaborate

For centuries, *tonto* been associated with the entire process of marriage among the Banyankore. According to Mubangizi (1963) in his book *Emicwe y'ensi omu Banyankore*, the process of marriage starts with *Amaarwa g'ekigambo* which is *tonto,* presented right away before one mentions that they intend to request a daughter's hand in marriage This is presented in one big calabash called *ekisisi*. The *tonto* is tasted in what is called *okuroza* or *okushogongyera,* and if found to be perfect, the leader of the delegation or the person normally referred to as a go-between is allowed to present his intention of the visit. Regarding the determination of bride wealth, *tonto* is given in sets, but usually in one set of *ebisisi*. *Tonto* also precedes the functions of the offer of *enjugano* which has been loosely translated into bride-wealth as well as determination of the date of commissioning the new family by the fathers of the girl and boy with the father of the bride handing over his daughterer to the groom's father, also known as *okuhingira*. It is important to note that some English translations have watered down the notion that, for instance, *okuhingira* has been loosely translated as give-away. On the day of *okuhingira*, the bridegroom's party is required to bring a set or two of *tonto,* known as *amaarwa g'abakaikuru*. In case there is a delay in payment of bride-wealth, the bridegroom's side must keep bringing *tonto* in a big *ekisisi* to check on his bride until he finishes payment, before *okuhingira* is organised for him. This continuous bringing of *tonto* is known as *okuhuuta*. The entertainment of guests on all functions, small or big, is done with *tonto*. Because the amount required for entertainment in the case of *okuhingira* or *okushwererera* was large, the neighbours contributed *embiire* to the family to enable them to prepare the right quantity of *tonto*. Failure to have sufficient *tonto* for the function was culturally taken as ungrateful to the visitors.

Furthermore, in a situation where *okugamba obugyenyi* as a form of marriage was not followed as required, some suitors used other forms of marriage, such as *okusugura, okuteera oruhoko, okujumba, okuyamba, okukiriza,* and *okuhungura*. To enable the family of the boy to inform the family of the girl, *ekiiru* which was *ekisisi* of *tonto*, had to be placed before the elders before saying anything. It should be noted that in all marriage-related functions, the visiting party was and is still given

amaarwa g'enkoni to go with and drink along the way or as they tell the story of what has transpired back home. This indicates that one has to go with sufficient *tonto* container numbers, mostly even numbers.

Tonto is also essential in resolving marriage problems. In case of disagreement or misunderstanding, a husband may chase the wife away from his home. The wife is expected to go back to her parents, but if they are no more, she goes to one of the brothers or close relatives. To resolve their issues and bring back the wife, the husband has to go with *tonto* that elders drink after resolving their problems/conflicts and counselling them. Going with *tonto* was a sure deal to be given back the wife with fewer reprimands. In general, *tonto* plays a significant role in local conflict resolution, especially land disputes, fights, and disagreements among relatives and neighbours. To convene neighbours, *tonto* must be available so that immediately after the discussion and resolutions, drinking *tonto* takes place.

In relation to divination, *tonto* was one of the basic requirements for offerings to spirits which kept the traditional religious value of *tonto* high. It was common to find calabashes filled with *tonto* in shrines for spirits to drink. The coming of foreign religions has greatly undermined this function. In local governance contexts, *tonto* was for long used to pay royalties to local chiefs as a form of appreciation for their services. Local leaders called *abakungu ab'ekireku* (from *endeku* –calabash) were paid with *tonto* because they were not part of the paid government civil servants, although they worked under the parish chief who was and is still paid a salary. According to Mulumba (2017), local chiefs had some power and took charge of the parishes as areas of jurisdiction, but the local council administration system of governance rendered them useless.

There is also a clear space in labour and entertainment. *Tonto* was and still remains essential in collective labour, especially during the construction of houses, digging graves, village bridges, pit latrine digging, *burungi bwansi* road construction and maintenance, and any other activity that requires collective work. As long as *tonto* is available, labour is easily mobilised and there is no payment but enjoyment of *tonto* after work. In entertainment, *tonto* was for a long time essential in social relations, either by a few in a home or collectively in what is called *Etereko*. Initially, this was done when one brewed large quantities, sold enough, and kept some for collective consumption. Neighbours would be notified the day when *etereko* is to take place. In most cases, *okutereka* would preferably be on the evenings of Saturdays. Saturday came after the arrival of Christianity, which Sunday a resting day. A large pot was placed in the compound and a big straw, *orushekye*, was provided for drinking, which was used by all those present. On that day, women would not sit

with men, but would sit behind the house and were given *ekikanja*. This beer would remain at the bottom of the pot or calabash and would have lots of sorghum. The women used grass to make a sieve which was placed at the tail end of the long straw. *Etereko* involved dancing and merry-making to the extent that sometimes, if the family was rich, a goat was slaughtered, roasted, and enjoyed with the *tonto*. In short, *tonto* played a critical role in social life, and in *Ankole*, it can be argued that *tonto* was at the centre of most significant aspects of life.

Conclusion

The indigenous knowledge and vocabulary of *tonto* faces a serious threat unless there is an intentional effort to preserve this rich cultural heritage. According to Nakijoba and Kiyimba (2024), such efforts should not exclude indigenous people's knowledge and perspectives. The rich vocabulary used in processing and consumption is not used for any other purpose, and the process may not be easily reactivated after extinction.

With the various forces working against the entire processing of *tonto*, it is a question of time that the indigenous knowledge associated with *tonto* and the rich vocabulary associated with it shall be no more, possibly in the next 20 years. Fewer and fewer people are engaged in its processing, and the vocabulary for it is so specialised that inactive use will gradually lead to its extinction since it is bound to reach a point when it will have no native speakers using its vocabulary because people will not be engaged in its production. This will be a big loss of heritage; hence, the need to archive this knowledge, the language, and all implements associated with it.

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