

Affecting Performance

**Meaning,
Movement,
and Experience
in Okiek
Women's
Initiation**

Corinne A. Kratz

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MEANING, MOVEMENT, AND EXPERIENCE
IN OKIEK WOMEN'S INITIATION

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Preface: Linguistic Setting and Orthography

Okiek is a Southern Nilotic language, one of the related languages of the Kalenjin branch. Maa, the language spoken by Maasai neighbors to Okiek, is an Eastern Nilotic language. Other Kalenjin languages are Kipsigis (the most similar to Kipchornwonek Okiek), Nandi, Tuken, Keiyo, Sebei, Pokot, and Marakwet. Kalenjin languages have been described by Tucker and Bryan (1966), Towett (1979a), and Creider (1981). I have discussed Okiek linguistic repertoires, lexical borrowing, and language use elsewhere (Kratz 1986). I remark here on some of the most prominent aspects of Okiek language structure that come up in the course of talking about Okiek initiation.

First, unmarked word order in Okiek is verb initial. Orders that front other constituents are used for clarification, emphasis, or other rhetorical purposes in various discourse conditions. The change is marked by the particle *ko* after the fronted word or phrase (cf. Creider 1976).

Nouns occur in two forms, primary and secondary. These terms are used by Tucker and Bryan (1964–65), who base the distinction on formal criteria rather than frequency of use; secondary forms are primary forms with suffixes. Secondary noun forms are by far the most common in conversational use; primary forms are used more frequently in song than in speech. The semantic distinctions between the two forms have yet to be precisely characterized.

According to Towett 1979, referents of nouns in primary form are in implicit comparison with other members of the set denoted by the noun, while referents of nouns in secondary form are in implicit comparison with members of sets denoted by other nouns. Thus *tany* ‘cow’ (primary form) refers to some cow (but not another), and *teeta* ‘cow’ (secondary form) refers to a cow (and not to a goat or a human). (Creider 1982:27–28).

Towett calls the two noun forms inclusive and exclusive instead of primary and secondary.

Okiek use a number of affective particles that indicate a range of attitudes. The particles relate to the speaker's relation to the addressee (for example, *-wei*, a friendly marker, used between age-mates among others), attitude to what is said (for example, *ara*, indicating doubt, uncertainty, tentativeness), and/or the ongoing interaction (for example, *-a*, *-ai*, which have some senses similar to "then" or "now" in English examples such as "take it, then"). These are difficult to translate, and a number of them appear in text translations here inadequately rendered as "then," "now," or "friend."

One of the most ubiquitous and difficult to translate is *-toi*, used in Maa as well as Okiek. *-toi* has the sense of "friend" in some interchanges and is commonly used between age-mates. Yet in other contexts it indicates exasperation, something like "buddy" in an English example such as "listen, buddy," though still retaining a friendly sense that is not entirely ironic. In the texts included here, *-toi* is common in accounts of *pesenweek* (social debts), where I usually translate it simply as "friend."

I have maintained one feature of Okiek in the English translations, the use of *-ii* at the end of phrases. *-ii* is said with a jump of pitch, higher than the rest of the utterance, sometimes with rising pitch. This raised pitch is incorporated into the final syllable if it is a vowel. It occurs in several contexts. First, it is question intonation, added to the end of the sentence. Second, it is listing intonation, which can be used at the end of each item when going through a list; the pitch of listing intonation rises but does not jump as much as that of questions. Occurring by itself, *ii?* is a request for clarification, repetition, or an indication that the listener has heard or agreed. With repeated use, *ii* can take on a tone of insistence or anger, as in arguments.

When Okiek hesitate in speaking, they usually say *in* or *en*. This is the equivalent of English speakers' hesitations such as "uh" or "um."

The rendering of Okiek here is simplified in one important way: I do not indicate tonal distinctions, which carry both semantic meaning and grammatical information. This impoverishes the detail and accuracy of the transcription, but tonal distinctions are not central to the analyses presented here.

Okiek has a series of four unvoiced stop phonemes that become voiced after nasals, and after /l/: /p/, /t/, /c/, and /k/. Between vowels, /p/ and /k/ also become voiced. The stop /c/ sounds much like "ch." Nasal phonemes also number four, corresponding to the stops in place of articulation: /m/, /n/, /ny'/, and /ng'/. The other consonant phonemes in Okiek are /s/, /l/, /r/, /w/, and /y/.

The distinction of vowel quality within a five-vowel system produces ten vowel phonemes in Okiek, each further differentiated by length. Vowel quality distinguishes between vowels pronounced with advanced tongue root and those with retracted tongue root. The latter are shown here with underlining (cf. Creider and Creider 1980). Aurally, these correspond to some extent to distinctions heard between tense and lax vowels, though the distinction is not one of height. The difference between /a/ and /o/ is the most difficult to hear.

The following list of sound correspondances will guide pronunciation of Okiek words.

<i>Phoneme</i>	<i>Example</i>
/i/	English “beat”; Kiswahili “ <i>nini</i> ”
/i/	English “bit”
/e/	English “bake”; Kiswahili “ <i>cheza</i> ”
/e/	English “bet”
/u/	English “boot”; Kiswahili “ <i>uma</i> ”
/u/	English “but”
/o/	English “boat”; Kiswahili “ <i>ona</i> ”
/o/	English “bought”
/a/	English “bought,” but with a fuller, more open sound
/a/	English “father”; Kiswahili “ <i>ama</i> ”

The Maa language uses a similar vowel system; scholars of that language distinguish the difference in quality as open and close vowels (Tucker and Ole Mpaayei 1952; Mol 1980). Open vowels in Maa correspond to the vowels pronounced with retracted tongue root in Okiek (and other Kalenjin languages such as Kipsigis and Nandi). When Maa words appear in this book, the open vowels are underlined. Unlike Okiek nouns, Maasai nouns are usually preceded by gender prefixes (masculine: *ol-* in singular, *il-* in plural; feminine: *en-* in singular, *in-* in plural).

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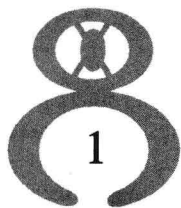
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8 Part 1

The Challenge of
Ritual Efficacy



Introduction

If you usually go about laughing and thinking, “Initiation is a game,” well, it’s no longer a game today. It’s tomorrow that you will put your body down. That woman [comes] and cuts. If you yell, you’ll see what happens. All these people in the house will laugh and leave. We’ll leave this liquor [without drinking it]. . . . Do you hear? If you shame people? It’s not a game.

Daniel Arap Sityene, 9 December 1983

Initiation is something that everyone has done. *ii?* But initiation—initiation—we must be completely brave for initiation. . . . It’s something you do bravely. And sit still like a person. . . . The only thing to say is just do that job that you have chosen for yourselves early in the morning. We’ll stand [and watch]. But don’t jump, don’t do what [squirm or twitch]. Just be still. So the woman comes and you lean against her. She just holds your arms and you just do this and are still. Even if she doesn’t come to hold you, you just be still and lean against something in your own way, [like] a person. Until you are finished. Somebody’s child who has become a person.

Tiongik Kiamar, 9 December 1983

This book explores how Okiek children in Kenya are made into adults through initiation and the diverse experiences involved in that process. The central problem concerns ritual efficacy: how does ceremonial performance and participation effectively transform the children? The book’s secondary aim is to consider Okiek conceptions of gender and cultural identity as they relate to