

**Edited by**  
**IWONA KRASKA-SZLENK ■ BEATA WÓJTOWICZ**

# **LANGUAGE CULTURE LITERATURE INTERTWINED**

**The Swahili Perspective**



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## Introduction

This collection of texts focuses on the main language of Sub-Saharan Africa—Swahili, also known as Kiswahili. Spoken by more than 100 million inhabitants of East Africa and by a comparable number of people scattered in diasporas around the world, it is recognized as an important international language and ranks first among African languages taught to foreigners. This publication presents Swahili in its cultural setting by discussing selected issues pertaining to social values reflected in language usage and literary tradition, as well as issues of modern terminology and pragmatics. All contributions contain original and novel proposals, showing that the interdependence between language and culture can take many forms and can be analyzed from various perspectives. The volume is intended for Swahili language researchers, as well as for a wider audience of all interested in the intersection of language, literary and cultural studies.

The book opens with two contributions situated within the model of Cognitive Linguistics, focusing on metaphor and other cultural conceptualizations reflected in linguistic expressions and proverbs, respectively. The first article, by Rosanna Tramutoli, discusses cultural conceptualizations of emotions in Swahili compared to the Zulu language, which belongs to the same Bantu linguistic group. It shows that metaphors and expressions of emotions are closely linked to traditional healing practices, as well as philosophical ideas, such as the humoral theory in Swahili and the cosmological and moral order in Zulu. At the same time, both cultures recognize and emphasize the concept of “balance” in the well-being of the body and its relation to the world.

In the following chapter, Iwona Kraska-Szlenk applies the methodology of Cognitive Linguistics to the analysis of Swahili proverbs. Her study



focuses on the mapping between the proverbs' source domains (the literal reading) and their target domains (the intended figurative meaning) from the perspective of cognitive processes, such as metaphor and metonymy, but also taking into account culture-specific choices of the domains. It shows that the rich imagery of proverbs draws from the local environment, traditions and people's beliefs but also from universal source domains, which are creatively explored in unique ways.

While proverbs are situated on the border between linguistic and literary studies, the next article provides insight into cultural issues reflected in contemporary Swahili literature, using examples from a play (*Heshima Yangu* 'My Honor' by Penina Muhando Mlamba) and a novel (*Mungu Hakopeshwi* 'God Doesn't Borrow Time' by Zainab Alwi Baharoon). Applying feminist critical analysis, Izabela Romańczuk argues that the two works by Tanzanian women writers reconstruct the discourse on key moral concepts of Swahili ethics: *utu* (humanity, morality) and *heshima* (honor, respect, dignity). The Author shows how these concepts are intertwined with socio-cultural constructions of gender and patriarchal order, as well as with class hierarchies.

The following text likewise touches upon literary issues, this time from the perspective of the lexicon characteristic of traditional Swahili poetry. Thomas J. Hinnebusch presents a report on a digitized, web-based project conducted at the University of California, Los Angeles, devoted to documenting the vocabulary used in the canon of classical Swahili poetry. The database contains a glossary, textual citations, bibliographic notes on Swahili poets, information on Swahili poetry, including annotated references, and other useful data. The Author's discussion of this ongoing project provides not only its detailed description but also encouragement for anyone interested in continuing the work.

The subsequent two articles focus on specific aspects of the Swahili language usage. Beata Wójtowicz looks at the recent problem of the coronavirus pandemic and the terminological challenges associated with it. A list of COVID-19-related terms proposed by the Tanzanian National Kiswahili Council (BAKITA) is discussed and contrasted with the lexicon used in Swahili-language Kenyan and Tanzanian journalistic texts. After analyzing selected keywords and collocations, the Author finds a number of discrepancies between the official recommendations and actual language usage.

Magreth J. Kibiki's study focuses on the pragmatic marker *tu*, which can be used in Swahili in many contexts, playing a variety of roles. Using Grice's implicature theory, the Author discusses a number of conventional and conversational types of implicature characteristic of the Swahili marker *tu*, such as those associated with, among others, inevitability, simplicity, reassurance, nearness, warning, immediacy/temporariness, a reason for something, commonness and disappointment. The analysis is illustrated with examples collected during fieldwork—excerpts from actual conversations that took place in the Tanzanian cultural setting.

The book closes with Leonard Muaka's discussion of the challenges faced by foreign-language learners and second-language speakers in mastering Swahili's complex system of grammatical genders, also known as "noun classes". Having analyzed various approaches to this problem, the Author advocates a solution that combines morphosyntactic, phonological and semantic knowledge, enriched with culturally relevant input.

We thank all the Authors for their contributions. We are grateful to the Reviewers, Prof. Jacek Pawlik and Prof. Jarosław Różański, for their insightful comments and to Ms. Aleksandra Zych for her excellent work of proofreading and final editing of the manuscript. We also acknowledge the support given to this work by the Polish National Science Centre (grant no. 2018/31/B/HS2/01114).

Editors



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## Cultural metaphors of emotions in Swahili and Zulu: language, body and healing practices

### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes cultural metaphors of emotions related to traditional healing in two Bantu languages, Swahili and Zulu, considering the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations. Cross-linguistic studies have shown that emotional language and descriptions of character traits are an echo of cultural practices, ethnomedical resources, traditions and beliefs. Taking into account traditional healing practices in Swahili (*uganga*) and Zulu (*umuthi*), the author seeks to illustrate the cultural conceptualizations of the body that are involved in describing emotions, in order to shed light on the problematic correspondence between linguistic expression and cultural context in metaphorical processes. Examples of cultural metaphors in the two languages will show how the description of emotions draws from humoral theory, color symbolism and medical practices, which are also relevant to the treatment of diseases.

KEYWORDS: cultural metaphors, emotions, traditional healing, Swahili, Zulu

### 1. CULTURAL METAPHORS: LANGUAGE AND MEDICAL PRACTICES

This study analyzes cultural metaphors, i.e., conceptual metaphors that are culturally constructed (Sharifian 2017), in the wider cultural context of Swahili and Zulu ethnomedical practices to see which cultural traditions correspond to conceptual metaphors of emotions in these languages.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Swahili data analyzed in this paper are taken from Tramutoli (2020). Zulu data are mainly derived from bibliographical sources (e.g., Ngubane 1977; Donda 1997).

The term “metaphor” is used in this paper as a general label that also includes metonymies, idioms and semantic extensions in a broader sense since the purpose here is not to classify these expressions from a linguistic point of view but rather to reflect on the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations.

We start from the assumption that the ways in which different languages encode complex abstract concepts, such as love, sadness, anger or surprise, are not isolated but form a part of a conceptual system that is influenced by the social and cultural environment both in a synchronic and diachronic dimension. According to Sharifian, historical cultural practices, like ethnomedical practices, have left traces in the current language, some of which are in fossilized forms that may no longer be analyzable. In this sense, language is a “memory bank” for storing and communicating cultural conceptualizations (Sharifian 2014: 476).

It would undoubtedly be too simplistic to assume that there is a perfect correspondence between linguistic and cultural practices, but it is possible to observe references to ancient medical practices and beliefs in some conceptualizations of the body and linguistic expressions, especially in emotional and body metaphors.

Traditional healing practices, known in Swahili as *uganga* (or *tiba ya asili*) and in Zulu as *umuthi*, encompass practices, remedies, ingredients and procedures of all kinds that enable people to cope with diseases through the use of traditional herbs and medicines. The Swahili and Zulu terms for ‘traditional healer’, *mganga* and *inyanga*, respectively, derive from the same proto-Bantu root *\*xanga* ‘to cure’ (Donda 1997: 123), as does the Swahili noun *uganga* ‘traditional healing practices’, belonging to class 11 (noun prefix *u-*), which is typical of abstract nouns.

*Mganga/inyanga* is an expert in traditional medicine who has acquired medical knowledge accumulated over generations and knows how to use plants, roots and herbs to treat various types of illnesses, both physical and mental. Indeed, traditional healers can cure illnesses that have biological origins or are caused by witchcraft or environmental factors.

The Zulu term *umuthi* is not semantically limited to ‘medicine’ since it also refers to ‘the tree and its parts, all substances used to restore health, the art of healing practices’ in general. Specifically, two types of *umuthi*

can be distinguished: *umuthi wokuphilisa* ‘medicine for healing’ and *umuthi wokubulala* ‘medicine for killing’ (Ngubane 1977: 22).

In this study, we will show that although linguistic data, especially linguistic descriptions of emotions and feelings, largely reflect cultural conceptualizations, cultural metaphors are often difficult to examine because some expressions are “fossilized” conceptualizations that do not allow for any cognitive mapping from the source domain to the target domain (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), nor do they imply that current speakers are aware of the cultural roots of these expressions.

We find examples of fossilized expressions related to humoral theory (Swartz 1992; Geeraerts and Grondelaers 1995) and medical practices also in European languages, for instance, in Italian *umore* ‘humor’, *flemmatico* ‘phlegmatic’; in Dutch *zwartgallig* (lit. ‘bilious black’) ‘sad, depressed’; in English *spleen* ‘sadness’, *phlegmatic* (*phlegm*) ‘calm, apathetic’; in French *avoir du sang dans les veines* ‘be brave’. Even though speakers are no longer familiar with ancient practices, they still use these expressions, which have undergone a process of reinterpretation over time.

Indeed, Cardona (2006: 126) acknowledges that

[i]t almost never happens that the explanation given by the speaker follows exactly that which we could establish scientifically, that is, going back to older stages of the language ... the speaker usually does not have, nor can he have, awareness of the older forms of his language (unless he is a professional scholar and has access to written documents) and cannot explain the form that within the language he speaks at that moment.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to being linked to humoral theory, many of these beliefs find their roots in a more universal schema of cold-hot opposition (Cardona 1995), so it would be superficial to assume that some cultural practices (such as the use of cold and hot substances) are derived exclusively from the humoral theory. Since this opposition has been attested in languages

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<sup>2</sup> “Non accade quasi mai che la spiegazione data dal parlante ricalchi esattamente quella che noi potremmo stabilire scientificamente, cioè risalendo a stadi più antichi della lingua ... il parlante non ha, nè può avere, coscienza, per solito delle forme più antiche della sua lingua (a meno che non sia un letterato di professione e abbia accesso a documenti scritti) e non può spiegare la forma che all’interno della lingua che egli parla in quel momento”.

from different regions of the world (Africa, Australia, New Guinea), it could be considered a universal conceptual model (Cardona 1995).

Moreover, in many Bantu languages, the concept of purification is semantically related to “cold” and thus “cure” (Parkin 2013), like the Swahili verb *-pona* and its Zulu counterpart *-pholisa*, both of which mean ‘to cool, to heal’.

## 2. THE BALANCE OF HUMORS IN SWAHILI

Although it seems to be a universal thing to consider the body as a container of emotions, we should nevertheless note that, despite the similarities at the generic level, the specific container metaphors are composed of greatly differing elements (Kövecses 1995). Thus, when analyzing emotion expressions, it is important to take into account the cultural background of our concepts of emotions (in our case, the humoral theory) (Geeraerts and Grondelaers 1995), that is, we should consider the significance of the body in Swahili culture, where specific organs, such as *ini* ‘liver’, and bodily fluids, like *damu* ‘blood’ and *nyongo* ‘bile’, play a prominent cultural role.

The Swahili view of the body’s functioning is based on Galen’s ideas about physiology, which influenced Swahili through Islamic culture (Swartz 1992, 1997; Parkin 2000). The Swahili humoral theory sees four *matabia* ‘elements’ or ‘characters’, i.e., *baridi* ‘cold’, *hari* ‘hot’, *yabisi* ‘dry’ and *rutuba* ‘wet’,<sup>3</sup> as the basis of the body’s functioning (Swartz 1992: 41). According to this view, the body functions properly only when the four elements are all in balance (*muutadil* or *mizani*) (Swartz 1992: 41). Each of the four *matabia* is associated with a bodily fluid, a body part and a character trait (Swartz 1992: 41):

<i>baridi</i> ‘cold’	phlegm – lungs – impassive
<i>hari</i> ‘hot’	blood – liver – courageous
<i>yabisi</i> ‘dry’	black bile – spleen – moody, depressive, suspicious
<i>rutuba</i> ‘wet’	yellow bile – gallbladder – proud, quick-tempered

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<sup>3</sup> Swartz (1992: 41) spells it *rugthba*.

In addition to body organs, bodily fluids seem to be culturally relevant in Swahili conceptualizations of emotions since they are also associated with people's feelings and character traits.

A person's character is determined by his/her particular balance of bodily fluids, which react differently to changes in food, weather conditions, seasons and, if they are unbalanced (meaning that the person is ill), to the specific properties of medicinal herbs. Each person's character/temperament predisposes him/her to certain emotional responses. For instance, someone with a "hot" temperament may commit terrible acts under certain circumstances. Seasons also indirectly influence the functioning of the body since external temperature affects digestion: foods that increase body heat are more easily absorbed in summer, and vice versa. Even foods and beverages are classified according to the four elements; not according to the substances of which they are composed but according to the effect they have on the functioning of the body. For example, ice is not "cold" but "dry", and honey is "hot" (even if it has just come out of a fridge).

Both the functioning of the body and the morality of social relations are described using the same "balance" metaphor. Thus, language usage supports the hypothesis that there is an important correspondence between these two theories (Swartz 1992).

### 3. THE BODY AS THE *LOCUS* OF EMOTIONS IN SWAHILI

There are several Swahili expressions in which body organs/bodily fluids appear as the *locus* of emotions or in metonymical descriptions of character traits. From a diachronic perspective, *nyongo* 'bile, gallbladder' and *ini* 'liver' of the *matabia* theory, with their related bodily fluids (bile and blood), seem to play a significant role in Swahili body conceptualizations. In particular, *nyongo* 'bile', which in the humoral theory is linked to depression (*yabisi* 'dry') and anger (*rutuba* 'wet'), has several connotations in Swahili as the seat of negative emotions (anger, resentment):

- (1) *Ana mtimanyongo.* lit. 'S/he has a bile-heart' (s/he feels resentment).
- (2) *Ana kinyongo.* lit. 'S/he has bile' (s/he feels resentment).
- (3) *Kutumbukia nyongo.* lit. 'To fall into the bile (of someone)' (to get angry).



As can be seen from the above examples, many similarities exist between the humoral theory and Swahili metaphorical expressions, although there are also notable differences. In (1), the two types of bile of the humoral theory (black bile and yellow bile) are combined and located in the heart rather than in the liver (*mtimanyongo*). The bile is not a source domain for the abstract concept of resentment, but it is the origin of resentment according to the humoral theory; indeed, the same term (*kinyongo*) is used for both ‘bile’ and ‘resentment, anger, hate’. In other words, body parts are not simply an easier notion to grasp but are the seat or even the cause of an emotion or a disease.

Thus, we observe that Swahili expressions such as (1)–(3) are “fossilized” body metaphors influenced by the humoral theory and ethnomedical traditions that have left traces in the language. Speakers are not aware of the cultural and historical sources of the metaphorical expressions involving bile and use them in their extended emotional meaning, i.e., ‘resentment’, without knowing anything about the functioning of the bodily fluids and their traditional medical value.

This link with ancient medical traditions and the balance of bodily humors can be clearly seen in the descriptions provided by Swahili *waganga* (‘traditional healers’, plural of *mganga*) during interviews:

[*Majimaji ndani ya mwili*] ... *tunaita nyongo* ... *nyongo ni kitu fulani nyeusi ambayo iko ndani ya moyo ambayo inatengeneza hasira, chuki na mambo kama haya.*

[The fluids in the body] ... are what we call bile ... bile is something black that is inside the heart and causes anger, hate and things like that.

Moreover, *nyongo* is further described as “*uchungu, acid nyeusi ndani ya moyo, hasira, chuki. Mtume ametolewa nyongo*” (“bitterness, black acid in the heart, anger, hate. The Prophet has no bile”).

These *waganga*’s descriptions recall the yellow bile of the humoral theory, located in *nyongo* ‘gallbladder’ and associated with the *tabia* ‘character’ of a proud, quick-tempered person and with the element of *rutuba* ‘wet’, which is described as *majimaji* ‘fluid’ or *uchungu nyeusi* ‘black acid’.

According to Kraska-Szlenk,

[w]hile ‘heart’ may imply positive feelings, negative emotions, such as envy, malice, bitterness, are cross-linguistically linked to two other inner organs: liver, in which bile is secreted, and gall-bladder, in which it is stored. The folk thinking is not without a medical substantiation – long-termed stress and negative emotions indeed badly affect these organs (Kraska-Szlenk 2014: 169).

Indeed, *ini* ‘liver’ also appears in body metaphors in Swahili, as can be seen in expressions where it is the seat of emotions. In particular, this organ stands for suffering (4) or love (5)–(6), while in the humoral theory, it represents courage and is related to the elements of *hari* ‘hot’ and blood.

- (4) *Alinikata maini.*      lit. ‘S/he has cut me to the liver’ (s/he has made me suffer).
- (5) *Nyonga mkalia ini.*      lit. ‘The hip sitting on my liver’ (my love).
- (6) *Kipande cha ini.*      lit. ‘A piece of my liver’ (my love).

The explanation of expression (4) given by a Swahili speaker highlights the function of the liver in the human body, namely, the fact that it is the seat of interiority that can be negatively affected by poisonous substances, thus causing deep suffering:

*Mtu amesikitika sana, amepata athari ya ndani, kama sumu ilimwingia. Ini kazi yake ni kunyonya sumu inayoingia mwilini, [maumivu] yalikuwa sumu kwa sababu yaliathiri ini pia siyo moyo tu, alipata athari ya ndani.*

A person has suffered a lot, s/he was internally affected, as if poison had entered him/her. The function of the liver is to suck out the poison that enters the body, [the pain] was poisoning because it also affected the liver, not just the heart, s/he was affected internally.

This image-schema of *ini* as “deep interiority” is also attested by the process of grammaticalization of this term, which has become the most common locative suffix in Swahili (*-ni*) (Heine and Kuteva 2002: 198).

*Ini* is thus conceptualized by speakers as the seat of emotions and interiority in general. Nevertheless, the body parts that recur most frequently in the linguistic description of emotions are *moyo* ‘heart’ and *roho* ‘spirit, soul’, even though they are not relevant in the humoral theory since they

are not containers of bodily fluids. They are used in the conceptualization of emotions especially in combination with the color association where black and white recall the concept of black bile (spleen) versus yellow bile (gallbladder) of the humoral theory. However, while in the humoral theory, black bile is related to the melancholic temperament and yellow bile to anger, in (7) and (8), the color white seems to have a positive meaning.

- (7) *Ana roho/moyo nyeusi/mweusi.* lit. 'S/he has a black soul/heart' (s/he is a bad, selfish person).  
 (8) *Ana roho/moyo nyeupe/mweupe.* lit. 'S/he has a white soul/heart' (s/he is a good, generous person).

Moreover, *damu* 'blood' and *mishipa* 'veins, nerves' are also sources of metaphorical expressions of fear, anxiety, desire. While in the humoral theory, blood is related to the liver, the "hot" element and courage, in expressions such as (10) and (11), we find it associated with the "hot" (*ilichemka* 'boiled') or "cold" (*ilisisimka* 'cause the blood to run cold') elements that express fear. *Mishipa* 'veins', which do not seem to be relevant in the humoral theory, occur in idiomatic expressions related to shame (12) and anxiety or fear (13).

- (9) *Kulazia damu.* lit. 'To make the blood sleep' (to calm the desire).  
 (10) *Damu ilichemka.* lit. 'My blood boiled' (I was afraid).  
 (11) *Damu ilisisimka mwilini.* lit. 'The blood was running cold in the body' (s/he was afraid).  
 (12) *Hata mishipa wa aibu hana.* lit. 'S/he does not even have the vein/nerve of shame' (s/he has no shame).  
 (13) *Mikono imesimama mishipa.* lit. 'His/her hands show raised veins/nerves' (s/he is anxious, worried).

The examples analyzed above show that there are different conceptual constructs with respect to how the body and embodied concepts are understood. Linguistic data regarding body terms, such as *moyo*, *ini* or *damu*, can give insights into the conceptualization model of Swahili culture and highlight correspondences and discrepancies between cultural conceptualizations and linguistic representation.

## 4. SWAHILI METAPHORS OF EMOTIONS AND HEALING PRACTICES

There is a number of Swahili metaphors describing a state of intense anger, rage, confusion and lack of self-control in general, often involving the verb *kupanda* ‘to climb up’ (also in causative form *-pandisha* or passive form *-pandwa*). In addition to being currently used to express anger (19), they reflect cultural conceptualizations related to Swahili spirit possession and ethnomedical practices. This is evident in (14)–(18), where the terms *pepo*, *mzuka*, *shetani* ‘spirit’ indicate the idea of being overwhelmed or overcome by a particular emotion. The state of extreme rage is expressed through the image of a spirit climbing on someone (14)–(16) or filling their body (17) and thus causing a lack of self-control.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (14) <i>[Shetani] amempanda kichwani.</i>  | lit. ‘[A spirit] has climbed on his/her head’. |
| (15) <i>Pepo/mzuka/shetani amekupanda.</i> | lit. ‘A spirit has climbed on him/her’.        |
| (16) <i>Amempandisha shetani wake.</i>     | lit. ‘S/he has made his/her spirit come up’.   |
| (17) <i>Alijazwa pepo.</i>                 | lit. ‘S/he was filled with spirit’.            |
| (18) <i>Anaumwa shetani.</i>               | lit. ‘S/he is suffering from the spirit’.      |
| (19) <i>Alipandwa na hasira.</i>           | lit. ‘S/he was climbed/overcome by anger’.     |

In the context of spirit possession cults, the verb *kupanda* recalls the movement of the spirit within the patient’s body during the rituals. Erdtsieck explains the role of *pepo/shetani* within the human body, highlighting the physical and spiritual dimensions of a disease:

*Pepo* is an internal force, an internal spirit of the human being, whose quietness is important in order to have a good life ... *pepo* is something that can cause the origin of a mental or physical illness (Erdtsieck 2001: 3).<sup>4</sup>

Spirit possession thus involves both physical and “spiritual” matters since both the body and the spirit of the patient (and the spirit’s “movement” within the body) are interlinked from the very beginning of the process of falling ill (Topan 1992: 58). According to Topan (1992: 58), *maradhi*

<sup>4</sup> “*Pepo* ni nguvu ya ndani, roho ya ndani katika binadamu, ambayo utulivu wake ni muhimu ili mtu apate maisha mazuri ... *pepo* ni kitu ambacho kinaweza kuwa sababu ya chanzo cha ugonjwa wa akili na/au mwili”.

‘illness’ is “the primary signal of a spirit’s presence in a human body”, as inferred from the explanation given by a *mganga* from Zanzibar:

*Shetani anaingia mwilini ... kichwani anapanda ... yule mtu anapiga kelele ...  
anaumwa shetani, sisi tunamfanya dawa anapata afadhali.*

The spirit enters the body ... he climbs on the head ... that person cries ...  
s/he is suffering from a spirit, we prepare a medicine for him/her so that  
s/he gets better.

The traditional healer explains that when someone is affected by *shetani*, he usually gives them a specific *dawa* ‘medicine’. In this description, *maradhi* ‘illness’ linked to spirit possession is conceptualized as a physical disease, which is treated with specific medicines/practices, such as *dawa za majani* ‘herbal medicines’, and, in some cases, with the support of Qur’anic medicines, such as (holy) medicinal verses (*kombe*),<sup>5</sup> Qur’anic charms written on the clothes worn by the patient (*hirizi*), prayers (*dua*), etc.

Moreover, the patient’s helplessness in the face of *maradhi* ‘physical and spiritual illness’ is reflected in the use of passive constructions involving, for instance, the passive verb *-umwa* (lit. ‘to be bitten’), usually followed by a body part (20) and occurring in Swahili descriptions of physical pain; in (21) and (22), on the other hand, the cause of the disease and the illness itself are represented by *shetani* ‘spirit’:

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| (20) <i>Anaumwa kichwa.</i>      | lit. ‘His/her head hurts’.               |
| (21) <i>Anaumwa shetani.</i>     | lit. ‘S/he is suffering from a spirit’.  |
| (22) <i>Ana ugonjwa wa pepo.</i> | lit. ‘S/he has a disease of the spirit’. |

In (22), the term *ugonjwa* ‘disease’, usually associated with various types of disease (e.g., *ugonjwa wa ukimwi* ‘HIV’, *ugonjwa wa sukari* ‘diabetes’), followed by the noun *pepo* (*ugonjwa wa pepo* ‘spiritual disease’), represents the physical and spiritual dimensions of the illness.

These cultural conceptualizations shed light on the correlation between linguistic expressions of emotions, spirit possession rituals and

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<sup>5</sup> Qur’anic verses written with saffron on a plate, which is washed, and then the liquid is drunk by the ailing person.

ethnomedical practices. The examples analyzed above show how during spirit possession rituals, the body plays a central role, being concretely involved as a “container of emotions”, losing its allusive or figurative character.

## 5. ZULU MEDICINE AND COSMOLOGY

According to Lambert (1995), at the basis of traditional Zulu medicine, as in the Hippocratic tradition of ancient Greece, lies the principle of balance, which Ngubane (1977) calls “ecological balance” (*-lungisa*) since in Zulu society, there is a special relationship between the lives of people, animals and plants in their environment. This balance must also be preserved between people and their ancestors; the disease can be caused by the anger of ancestors and other mystical forces that cause “pollution” (Lambert 1995: 76).

Unlike the Hippocratic system, which does not involve the supernatural, the concept of balance in the Zulu tradition seems more inclusive, holistic; disease is rooted in a social context that includes the living and the dead (Lambert 1995).

According to Ngubane (1997), three elements can cause diseases: natural, moral and mystical/spiritual. Natural illnesses (*umkhuhlane*) cannot be controlled by the patient, who has no agency.

“Ecological” diseases, called *ukufa kwabantu* in Zulu, are the “illnesses of the Africans”, not in the sense that they affect only Africans but because their interpretation is linked to the views on health and illness present in Zulu cosmology. Indeed, according to the Zulu, this type of illness is unknown to the people in the West.

The moral dimension of a disease depends on the social situation. For instance, an illness can be caused by witchcraft or immoral behavior contrary to the rules of society. It can be prevented and cured by people with a good moral balance, that is, *balungusiwe* (lit. ‘those who are correct, in order’).

Finally, the mystical element occurs when people are not considered ill due to the malfunctioning of some body organs but rather because of an existential crisis and so are seen as “victims of impurity”.

Color plays a dominant role in the symbolism related to the treatment of spiritual diseases. In particular, black, red and white have important symbolic value and are always used in this order, each assigned special powers. Black medicines (*imithi emnyama*) and red medicines (*imithi ebomvu*) are ambiguous as they can signify both positive and negative elements, whereas white medicines (*imithi emhlophe*) always represent what is good. Healing with these “colored” medicines is aimed at restoring the balance between the person and the environment. Black and red medicines are used to expel what is harmful from the organism and to strengthen it against other possible attacks, while the white ones serve to heal it. According to Ngubane (1977), the symbolism of colors is closely correlated with the cosmic order of day and night and with the bodily functions of eating and excreting. White means light, good health, birth, eating, while black means darkness, death, excretions, all that is the antithesis of society. This is attested by expressions used on a daily basis. The term *umnyama* indicates ‘the color black; the darkness of the night; pollution/impurity’; in fact, “impure” people are called *banomnyama* (lit. ‘are with, have darkness’), the adjective *-mnyama* meaning ‘black/dark’.

Similarly, *-mhlophe* ‘white, bright’ is associated with ‘good, good luck’. In the middle, we find *-bomvu* ‘red’ (from *ibomvu* ‘red ochre’), which is less explicit than the black-white opposition in representing good and evil but still belongs to the fundamental colors as there can be neither night nor daylight without twilight in between. Red signifies a bridge across which a sick person comes back to life; it represents transformation, transition, birth. Being sick (spiritually) is like passing from the light of day through the twilight of dusk to the darkness of night. In order to heal, it is necessary to go backward through this cycle from one point (night) to another (day), thus healing with black, red and white medicines is a continuous process, not a sudden change from “black” to “white”. Another symbolic opposition associated with colors is that between hot–disease–black medicines (*iyaphekwa* ‘cooked’) and cold–white medicines (*ayiphekwa* ‘raw’). Cooked black medicines are also associated with the moral element of “losing balance”.

## 6. ZULU METAPHORS AND HEALING PRACTICES

In Zulu, the description of states of mind and feelings is often associated with colors; *mnyama* ‘black’, *bomvu* ‘red’ and *mhlophe* ‘white’, in particular, play an important role in the symbolism related to the treatment of spiritual diseases, as each is believed to have special “powers” (Ngubane 1977: 113). Zulu color symbolism and the related cosmological order are reflected in linguistic expressions usually involving *inhliziy*o ‘heart’, used with adjectival function, as in (23)–(25):

- (23) *-nhliziyomnyama* (lit. ‘black heart’) ‘melancholic, depressed, with no appetite’
- (24) *-nhliziyomhlophe* (lit. ‘white heart’) ‘calm, peaceful, honest’
- (25) *-nhliziyobomvu* (lit. ‘red heart’) ‘angry, irritable, bad-tempered’

(Doke et al. 2001)

As can be seen from the above examples, *mnyama* ‘black, dark’ is symbolically associated with a negative state of mind and is used to express feelings of melancholy, depression and lack of appetite (23). The color white describes a peaceful, honest person (24), while red represents the conceptualization of anger; being “red-hearted” (*-nhliziyobomvu*) means being angry, irritable and bad-tempered (25). According to Taylor and Mbense (1998: 202–203), the Zulu expression *-nhliziyobomvu*, similar to *wavukainja ebomvu* ‘turns into a red dog’, is all the more remarkable because dark-skinned people (unlike those with fair skin) do not literally “turn red” with increased blood circulation.

Moreover, in Zulu, as in Swahili, natural illnesses (*umkhuhlane*) are described using passive constructions; for example, in (26) and (27), we note the use of the verb *-phatha* ‘to hold’ and *-khwela* ‘to go up’ (similar to the Swahili *-panda*) in the passive form, followed by the agentive *y-* and the term indicating the affected body part, in this case, *ikhanda* ‘head’:

- (26) *Ukuphathiwa yikhanda.* lit. ‘Be controlled by the head’ (have a headache).
- (27) *Ukukhwelwa yikhanda.* lit. ‘Have gone up from the head’ (have a headache).

(Donda 1997: 88)

These passive constructions, reminiscent of the Swahili examples (20)–(21), reflect the idea of the patient’s inability to control the natural disease.



However, diseases are also conceptualized as enemies that the patient must fight; an ill person can win or lose the battle. In (28)–(31), the disease is indicated by the infinitive noun *ukufa* ‘to die, death’, and in (32) by *isifo* ‘death’, the corresponding deverbal noun from the same root *-fa* ‘to die’.

- |                                   |                               |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (28) <i>Ukuhlathswa wukufa.</i>   | ‘Be stabbed by the disease’.  |
| (29) <i>Ukudutshuliwa wukufa.</i> | ‘Be affected by the disease’. |
| (30) <i>Ukunqotshwa wukufa.</i>   | ‘Be defeated by the disease’. |
| (31) <i>Ukunqoba ukufa.</i>       | ‘Defeating the disease’.      |
| (32) <i>Ukuhlaselwa yisifo.</i>   | ‘Be attacked by the disease’. |

(Donda 1997: 22)

In addition, diseases caused by witchcraft of unknown origin are referred to by the term *ilumbo* (lit. ‘magical element’), from the verb *-lumba*, like in (33)–(35). Passive constructions are also used in this context, involving the intransitive verbs *-ngena* ‘to enter’ and *-dla* ‘to eat’, which metaphorically depict the disease “entering” or “eating” the body.

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| (33) <i>Ukubutha ilumbo.</i> | ‘Contract a disease (of unknown origin)’. |
| (34) <i>Ungenwa yilumbo.</i> | ‘The disease got into him’.               |
| (35) <i>Udliwa yilumbo.</i>  | ‘S/he is eaten by the disease’.           |

(Donda 1997: 102)

## 7. OTHER CULTURAL METAPHORS OF *UMUTHI*

In Zulu, there are several metaphorical expressions that testify to the connection between medical practices and plants/nature (Donda 1997) and their relation to the cosmological order. As we have shown at the beginning, the term *umuthi* itself refers in Zulu to plants and by semantic extension also to the cures they produce; another term for medicine is *induku* ‘stick, branch of a tree’ (pl. *izinduku*: ingredients used by the *inyanga* to prepare the medicinal compounds), which occurs in proverbs such as (36)–(39), where the superficial meaning, related to traditional medical practices, can be metaphorically extended to the moral sphere.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (36) <i>Isihlahla asinyelwa.</i>            | lit. 'Do not defecate under a tree'.              |
| (37) <i>Wogawula ubheke.</i>                | lit. 'Be careful when cutting down (a tree)'.     |
| (38) <i>Induku enhle igawulwa ezizweni.</i> | lit. 'Good medicine is found in remote places'.   |
| (39) <i>Azumbiwa ndawonye.</i>              | lit. '(Good medicine) is not found in one place'. |

(Donda 1997: 111–112)

These examples highlight the importance of protecting nature and herbal plants, which are fundamental in maintaining “balance” in Zulu society through good healing practices and moral behavior. For instance, one should not defecate under a tree because its bark and leaves are used to produce medicinal cures, so it would mean soiling *umuthi* (36). Since only trees of certain species, which are scarce and not easy to find, can be used to produce medicine, it is important to keep them clean. The warning in (37) means that we have to be careful when dealing with certain people, just as one has to be careful when cutting down a tree. Expression (38) emphasizes that although forests are everywhere, *izinduku* ‘branches’ (i.e., ingredients for medicine) are only found in remote places; good doctors are needed to make medicinal compounds with good ingredients. Figuratively speaking, anything of value is not easily obtained (used especially in reference to wives). Finally, the meaning of (39) is similar to (38), that is, good medicine is not found in one place only; it must be well mixed, and the ingredients must come from different places.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

We have shown that it would be difficult to explain the meaning of certain metaphorical expressions in Swahili and Zulu without taking into account the cultural traditions and medical practices related to the functioning of the body. Both Swahili and Zulu cultures emphasize the concept of “balance” in the functioning of the body in relation to the outside world. In Swahili society, the treatment of diseases (*maradhi*) draws both from the humoral theory, dating back to ancient times, and spirit possession rituals involving the use of specific healing treatments (like Swahili *mitishamba*/

*dawa za majani* ‘herbal medicines’). The Zulu, in turn, assign symbolic value to certain types of medicines (*imithi*) and the colors associated with them. Zulu expressions, such as *-nhliziyomnyama* (lit. ‘black heart’), indicating a melancholic, depressed person, reflect the interconnection of traditional medical practices (e.g., *imithi emnyama* ‘black medicines’) with the natural and cosmological order, which involves the moral and emotional dimensions. Some expressions (like the Swahili *anaumuwa shetani* ‘s/he is suffering from the spirit’) should therefore be read in their concrete sense, related to cultural practices, rather than be considered abstract conceptualizations, that is, it would probably be more appropriate to consider them from the emic perspective, closely linked to specific cultural practices and conceptualizations of the body, rather than “metaphorically”. Indeed, we have shown that the body plays a central role during spirit possession rituals, being concretely involved in the ritual and overcome by the disease. Furthermore, both Swahili and Zulu use similar passive construction strategies to represent the physical and spiritual dimensions of the illness. Finally, some Zulu metaphorical expressions reflect the value of nature and traditional medicine, which are fundamental to preserving the cosmological and moral order in society.

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## Swahili proverbs from a cultural and cognitive perspective<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes Swahili proverbs from the perspective of cognitive processes, such as metaphor and metonymy, involved in the mapping between the proverbs' surface structures (source domains) and their figurative meanings (target domains). Special attention is paid to the rich imagery of proverbs and the highly culture-specific choices of source domains, which draw from the geographical environment, local traditions and people's beliefs and ideas. Swahili proverbs also creatively explore universal source domains, such as those of the human body or family relations.

KEYWORDS: metaphor, metonymy, proverbs, Swahili culture, Swahili language

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Proverbs have a particularly important status in African languages and cultures. They are valued as witty pieces of oral literature and depositories of traditional wisdom, but also as handy stylistic devices used on various occasions in modern society (e.g., Finnegan 2012; Yakub 2019; Načisčione 2020). Swahili-speaking people, too, love their proverbs and appreciate knowing how to use them properly in speech and writing, in everyday conversations and literary works. As Finnegan (2012: 384, 391) observes, African proverbs have a compact, economical structure but are often characterized by

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special rhythm and contain picturesque wording. The same is true of many Swahili proverbs, which can have a rhythm and rhyme typical of poetry (cf. Mulokozi 1996), as illustrated by the example in (1a) and many others later in this paper.

Some proverbs are general statements expressed in a direct (or close to direct) way, as in the case in (1a), and offer advice or moral guidance. More often, however, they have a figurative form, in which the surface, literal meaning serves as a vehicle for revealing the hidden intended meaning, typically by means of metaphor, as in (1b), metonymy, as in (1c), or their combination, as in (1d). Proverbs are also often built on hyperbole, as in (1e), or antithesis, as in (1f), and may include other stylistic devices (pun, tautology, euphemism, etc.).

(1)

a/ *Haraka haraka haina baraka.*

‘Haste, haste has no blessing’.

b/ *Uzi hufuata sindano.*

‘The thread follows the needle’.

c/ *Moyo hujua uchungu wa nafsi yake.*

‘The heart knows its own pain’.

d/ *Kinywa ni jumba la maneno.*

‘The mouth is a palace of words’.

e/ *Hata simba hula majani.*

‘Even a lion eats grass’.

f/ *Mwenda pole hufika mbali.*

‘A slow traveler goes far’.

As elsewhere in Africa, Swahili proverbs are passed on to children and play a didactic role in teaching proper behavior and social values (cf. Kobia 2016). However, this function of proverbs should not be overemphasized, especially since their “teachings” can be contradictory (cf. Finnegan 2012: 403). For example, the Swahili proverb in (1a) advises not to hurry, while a different proverb encourages not to delay, cf. *Aliyengoja hawezi kuja* ‘The one who waits will not arrive’ (see also [2b] discussed later). Still another proverb asserts that it is better late than never, cf. *Kawia ufike* lit. ‘Be late [and] arrive’. As these and similar examples demonstrate, proverbs are

more often used to provide commentary appropriate in a given contextual situation rather than to educate language speakers with a set of rules. This function of proverbs becomes particularly important in those communities, including the Swahili-speaking one, in which indirect speech is valued for cultural reasons. As Maalej (2009: 136) comments, “proverbs offer their users the freedom to conceptualize indirectly what they would have thought about twice before saying directly without offending their targets”. In Swahili culture, proverbs play this role as one of the many indirect discursive strategies used for various pragmatic reasons (e.g., Yahya-Othman 1994; Vierke 2012; Kraska-Szlenk 2018a, 2018b). In addition, the use of proverbs conforms to Swahili esthetic norms of coloring speech with “ornamentation” and is simply pleasing to the speaker and the listener or the reader of a written text.

Looking at proverbs in the context of their usage provides clues for understanding their figurative meanings and conventionalized pragmatic functions. It also helps to determine which proverbs are more popular within the Swahili-speaking community and which, even though presumably well understood, remain as a cultural inheritance. However, the question of proverbs’ contextual usage is beyond the scope of this article, and only a brief illustration of a few points is given below. The examples are excerpted from contemporary novels (see “Swahili sources”).

Some proverbs have a narrow scope of pragmatic application, being limited to a specific interpretation of a metaphorical reading. This is illustrated by the proverb in (2a), with its typical mapping from the domain of the human body onto the domain of kinship relations. In the context of the protagonist’s argument, the proverb is cited (transposed as a question) to stress the fact that the father does not see the inappropriate behavior of his own son. Also, the proverb in (2b) is most likely to be used in the context of dating or marriage, which is due to its source domain and the direct, although not explicitly verbalized, link between procrastinating in the process of looking for a spouse and not having children. Other proverbs, however, can freely be used in a wide variety of contexts, provided that there is a general schema of mapping between the source domain and the target domain. A typical example of this is the earlier mentioned proverb in (1a), which is applicable in a very broad range of contexts. The speaker



may also intentionally extend the proverb's use and apply it in a novel way in a new context, as illustrated by the somewhat amusing passage in (2c). This proverb links achieving a goal with making an effort. However, because of the concept of *mvungu* 'the place under the bed' and the verb *inama* 'to bend down', which in their literary and metaphorical readings both indicate a low position, the proverb carries the connotation of degrading oneself to a certain degree while achieving a goal, as in the case of spying on people and taking an interest in other people's secrets, which is the typical context of the proverb's use (cf. Knappert 1983: 68). The words quoted in (2c) are spoken by the young protagonist to his friend just after the boys had considered visiting a church to satisfy their curiosity but decided not to because it would be inappropriate for them as Muslims. However, one of them, tempted by the sight of a beautiful girl entering the church, decides to "lower" himself and follows her into the forbidden place. (Here and later in this section, the quoted proverbs and their English translations are underlined.)

(2)

a/ *Ndio tuseme haviujui vituko vya mtoto wake? Au ndio kidonda cha pua hakinuki?*  
(Baharoon 2017: 52)

'Really, should we say that he does not know about actions of his son? Or is it that a wound on [your own] nose does not smell?'

b/ *Mzee, mimi nipo tayari, hata leo kama unataka kuniozesha niozeshe, chelewa chelewa utamkuta mtoto si wako.* (Himid 2016: 47)

'Sir, I am ready, if you want to get me married, you can do it even today; postpone, postpone [and] you will find a child who is not yours'.

c/ *He! Anaingia kanisani, hebu nimfuate mimi nikajionee vizuri. Mtaka cha mvunguni huinama.* (Himid 2016: 32)

'Ha! She is entering the church, let me follow her and look at her well. The one who wants [something] from under the bed must bend down'.

Context can also highlight one aspect of a proverb and hide another. The examples in (3) contain the proverb saying that 'God is not [a man called] Athumani', which means that God's will and power are stronger than those of an ordinary man. This implication of the proverb, focusing on God's omnipotence, is straightforward in (3a). The excerpt comes from the protagonist's comment on bad people who discriminate against others

and his supposition that they will be punished by God. The same proverb is used in a different context in (3b), where the protagonist explains that he could not afford the long-term medical treatment of his sister. Here, the focus is not on God's power but on the powerlessness of a common man.

(3)

a/ *Mungu si Athumani*, anayashuhudia kwa ndani na nje na kila mmoja atalipwa kwa kila pumzi moja aivutayo kwa wema na ubaya wake. (Baharoon 2017: 10)

'God is not Athumani, he is a witness from inside and outside and everybody will be paid for each breath s/he takes for his/her rights and wrongs'.

b/ Lakini *Mungu si Athumani*. (Himid 2016: 62)

'But God is not Athumani'.

Other differences observed between proverbs used in various pragmatic contexts relate to their illocutionary and perlocutionary force, as shown by the uses of the pair of proverbs in (4). In (4a), the proverb draws attention to the kinship relation between the protagonist and his murdered nephew and in this way contributes significantly to the expression of the emotional pain that he and his sister went through as close relatives of the victim. No such effect is observed in the excerpt in (4b), in which the same proverb serves merely as a stylistic device to encode the kinship relation that the protagonist thinks might be the reason why his cousin treated him well, even though she did not seem to like him very much.

(4)

a/ *Damu nzito kuliko maji*. Kifo hiki cha ukatili, kilinitia majonzi makubwa. (Himid 2016: 118)

'Blood is thicker than water. That cruel death caused me a great distress'.

b/ Au katenda kwa sababu *damu nzito kuliko maji*? (Walibora 2014: 66)

'Or, did she do [so] because blood is thicker than water?'

Given that proverbs are typically used to give opinions and judgments about people's actions and character traits, as well as to express general views on the nature of the world and social values, their figurative, intended meanings usually fall within certain preferred domains. Collections of proverbs are often organized according to these target domains. Scheven's (1981) anthology, which is used as the main source of Swahili proverbs

in this study (see the next section for details), consists of 56 thematic sections. Those that are culturally important are represented by a large number of different proverbs. They include domains related to general beliefs and ideas, e.g., “God and Religion” (68 proverbs), “Death” (66), “Misfortunes” (66); social norms, e.g., “Association” (80), “Alertness” (70), “Work/Laziness” (68), “Speech/Silence” (59), “Parents/Children” (59), “Cooperation” (38), “Manners” (38); emotions and character traits, e.g., “Cunning” (82), “Love” (57), “Foolishness/Wisdom” (42), “Greed” (40); and stereotypical images of people, e.g., “Women/Men” (121), “Master/Servant” (40). Even though the target domains of Swahili proverbs will be referred to in this study, the focus will be on the source domains, which are also important from a cultural and cognitive perspective, as will be shown in the following sections.

There exist many published collections of Swahili proverbs, including Farsi (1958), Omari et al. (1979), Scheven (1981), Ndalulwa and King’ei (1988), Mkota (2009) and Wamitila (2015). There are also works devoted to specific topics of Swahili proverbs, such as Kisanji (1995) or Kobia (2016), or to comparing selected aspects of proverbs in Swahili and other languages, for example, Gikuyu (Ndungo 2002), Arabic (Karakacha 2021) or Twi (Kambon and Dzahene-Quarshie 2017). General works on Swahili oral literature also contain sections on proverbs, for example, Mulokozi (1996) or Njogu and Chimera (1999). The data in this study has been drawn mainly from Scheven’s (1981) anthology of 2,053 proverbs and the online collection *Methali za Kiswahili (MK)*, based on Scheven’s work but greatly expanded due to later additions. The *MK* online database contains 4,855 entries consisting of Swahili proverbs (sometimes with alternative versions), with annotations about their original sources, English translations<sup>2</sup> and occasional comments on the proverb’s use or other remarks.

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<sup>2</sup> The translations given in this study do not always correspond to the translations used in the above-mentioned works.

## 2. THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Paremiology has developed into its own field of research, with many possible topics to focus on and many alternative models available as theoretical background, cf. Hrisztova-Gotthardt and Varga (2015). Cognitive Linguistics, which I have adopted as a general framework for this study, has also successfully been applied to the analysis of proverbs, sometimes with minor theoretical differences, cf. Lakoff and Turner (1989), Maalej (2009), Načičione (2020), Belkhir (2021), among others. Since proverbs are often based on metaphor and metaphor constitutes one of the key concepts of Cognitive Linguistics, as first proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), research on proverbs within this framework often goes hand in hand with research on metaphor. This traditional approach will be largely continued in this study, although proverbs with other structures will also be included in the discussion.

Research in Cognitive Linguistics has shown that human speech is highly metaphorical, to the extent that “[m]etaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice it” (Lakoff and Turner 1989: xi). It has also been observed that there are strong tendencies toward unidirectional conceptual mapping in the sense that some domains are preferred as sources and others as targets (e.g., Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Sweetser 1990; Heine 1997; Kövecses 2002). Typically, more concrete domains, accessible to direct experience, serve as the former, and more abstract domains become targets. Thus, people, the human body and its parts, as well as various objects and landmarks that are perceptible through the senses and frequent experience, tend to be the source domains, while abstract concepts, such as time, cognition, emotions, human relations, values, grammatical notions, etc., are situated on the opposite end of conceptual mapping. Various metaphors co-occurring worldwide illustrate the principle of unidirectionality, as, for example, TIME IS SPACE, KNOWING IS SEEING/HEARING or EMOTIONS ARE THINGS IN A CONTAINER (A BODY PART). A similar unidirectionality of mapping is true of proverbs in which the surface reading provides the source domain, while the intended understanding of the proverb requires a different, target domain. Conceptual metaphors, such as HUMANS ARE ANIMALS/BODY PARTS/THINGS,

HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR, HUMAN CHARACTER TRAITS/EMOTIONS ARE PROPERTIES OF THINGS, which tend to co-occur in proverbs throughout the world, are a good illustration of this. Similarly, we find many proverbs in which a schematic relationship described on the surface in reference to a “mundane” situation can be mapped on a number of more “sophisticated” target domains of people’s actions or belief and value systems, in line with the typical metaphorical mapping from the concrete to the abstract.

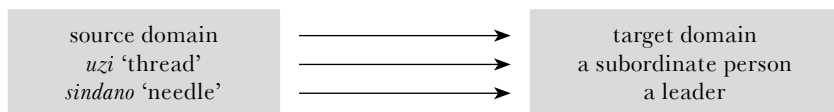
Lakoff and Turner (1989) propose two universal mechanisms that can account for the generalizations found in the structure of proverbs worldwide. One is the GREAT CHAIN metaphor, which links things and beings (organized according to their higher and lower status), and the other is the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor, which allows the general schema of the proverb to be interpreted in a specific way that is appropriate in a given context. It has been observed, however, that proverbs in different languages are also governed by cultural conceptualizations, which may favor the choice of specific source domains for desired targets, including unique language-specific mappings (e.g., Kövecses 2005; Maalej 2009; Belkhir 2021).

As for the present study, it will be shown that while Swahili proverbs follow certain universal tendencies in cross-domain mapping, their culture-situatedness is strongly manifested not only by the choice of their targets but also by the choice of the source domains and the frequency of specific lexemes representing them. While the mapping between source and target domains is often based on metaphor, it sometimes involves a process of metonymy, as well. The former can be illustrated by the example given above in (2b), repeated in Diagram 1, where *uzi* ‘thread’ and *sindano* ‘needle’ of the source domain correspond, respectively, to ‘a subordinate person’ (or ‘a follower’) and ‘a leader’ in the target domain, in line with a specific instantiation of the general metaphor people are things. The latter kind of mapping is illustrated in Diagram 2 by the example given above in (2c). Here, the transfer from the source domain to the target domain is due to the metonymy<sup>3</sup> A BODY PART (HEART) FOR A (FEELING) PERSON.

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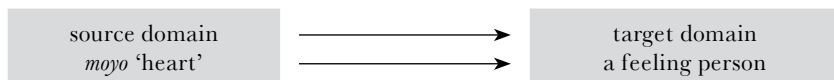
<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed analysis involving a metonymic chain, cf. Kraska-Szlenk (2014a: 41).

Diagram 1. Metaphorical mapping



*Uzi hufuata sindano.* 'The thread follows the needle'.

Diagram 2. Metonymic mapping



*Moyo hujua uchungu wa nafsi yake.* 'The heart knows its own pain'.

The analysis of proverbs proposed in this study is based on the assumption that the target domain provides a schematic interpretation of a proverb that can be applied to a specific pragmatic situation, in line with Lakoff and Turner's (1989) metaphor *GENERIC IS SPECIFIC*. However, some proverbs, especially those that offer moral or practical advice, do not require an intermediate stage of the target domain in their analysis and involve a direct mapping from the source to the pragmatic context (cf. section 3.6).

Table 1 lists the typical source domains of Swahili proverbs, which have been determined on the basis of two collections of proverbs: Scheven's (1981) anthology and its extended online version (*MK*). The domains are represented by lexemes (nouns only) that appear with high frequency in both these sources and can be identified as cultural keywords. The numbers in the rightmost column indicate how many occurrences of a given lexeme are found in each source, with Scheven's (1981) given first, followed by *MK* in parentheses. It should be noted that both numbers are only rough estimates and may not always be accurate. The *MK* figures have been obtained in a semi-automated fashion and in some cases may be higher than the actual number of occurrences of the lexemes.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the numbers referring to Scheven's (1981) collection may sometimes be too low

<sup>4</sup> For example, because the proverb was repeated in a slightly different version or because it was quoted in a discussion.

because the Index, which was used as a source, contains apparent occasional omissions. Although an attempt was made to eliminate inaccuracies whenever they were noticed, it was impossible to make such corrections manually for all the lexemes. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that the figures give a rough idea of frequency, even if only in the relative sense of certain lexemes having considerably more occurrences in proverbs than others.

**Table 1.** Source domains of Swahili proverbs with the number of occurrences

Source domain	Lexemes	Occurrences
People and supernatural beings	<i>maskini</i> (pl. <i>maskini</i> ) ‘poor person’	21 (57)
	<i>mwana</i> (pl. <i>wana</i> ) ‘child’	19 (117)
	<i>mwungwana</i> (pl. <i>waungwana</i> ) ‘a civilized person’	19 (16)
	<i>Mungu</i> ‘God’	18 (156)
	<i>mama</i> (pl. <i>mama</i> ) ‘mother’	12 (50)
	<i>mtoto</i> (pl. <i>watoto</i> ) ‘child’	12 (99)
	<i>mtu</i> (pl. <i>watu</i> ) ‘person’	12 (343)
	<i>adui</i> (pl. <i>adui</i> , <i>maadui</i> ) ‘enemy’	11 (32)
	<i>ndugu</i> (pl. <i>ndugu</i> ) ‘relative’	11 (47)
	<i>rafiki</i> (pl. <i>rafiki</i> , <i>marafiki</i> ) ‘friend’	10 (41)
	<i>mganga</i> (pl. <i>waganga</i> ) ‘healer’	8 (17)
	<i>mwenzi</i> (pl. <i>wenzi</i> ) ‘friend’	8 (24)
	<i>shetani</i> (pl. <i>mashetani</i> ) ‘devil, bad spirit’	8 (18)
	<i>mwanaumke</i> (pl. <i>wanaumke</i> ) ‘woman’	6 (21)
Body parts and fluids	<i>pepo</i> (pl. <i>mapipo</i> ) ‘spirit’	4 (5)
	<i>baba</i> (pl. <i>baba</i> ) ‘father’	3 (26)
	<i>mkono</i> (pl. <i>mikono</i> ) ‘hand/arm’	24 (68)
	<i>ulimi</i> (pl. <i>ndimi</i> ) ‘tongue’	15 (46)
	<i>jicho</i> (pl. <i>macho</i> ) ‘eye’	17 (70)
	<i>moyo</i> (pl. <i>mioyo</i> ) ‘heart’	13 (59)
	<i>jino</i> (pl. <i>meno</i> ) ‘tooth’	10 (37)
	<i>tumbo</i> (pl. <i>matumbo</i> ) ‘stomach, belly’	10 (30)
	<i>uso</i> (pl. <i>nyuso</i> ) ‘face’	10 (19)
	<i>kidole</i> (pl. <i>vidole</i> ) ‘finger’	10 (27)
	<i>chanda</i> (pl. <i>vyanda</i> ) ‘finger’	9 (14)
	<i>mdomo</i> (pl. <i>midomo</i> ) ‘mouth’	8 (25)
	<i>damu</i> ‘blood’	6 (11)
	<i>kinywa</i> (pl. <i>vinywa</i> ) ‘mouth’	4 (19)
	<i>kichwa</i> (pl. <i>vichwa</i> ) ‘head’	4 (30)
	<i>mate</i> ‘saliva’	3 (7)
	<i>jasho</i> ‘sweat’	2 (6)

Source domain	Lexemes	Occurrences
Wild animals	<i>nyoka</i> (pl. <i>nyoka</i> ) 'snake' <i>simba</i> (pl. <i>simba</i> ) 'lion' <i>chui</i> (pl. <i>chui</i> ) 'leopard' <i>samaki</i> (pl. <i>samaki</i> ) 'fish' <i>tembo</i> (pl. <i>tembo</i> ) 'elephant' <i>ndovu</i> (pl. <i>ndovu</i> ) 'elephant' <i>nyani</i> (pl. <i>nyani</i> ) 'baboon' <i>papa</i> (pl. <i>papa</i> ) 'shark' <i>sungura</i> (pl. <i>sungura</i> ) 'hare'	18 (47) 17 (48) 13 (27) 13 (35) 8 (25) 6 (13) 5 (17) 5 (6) 4 (9)
Domestic animals	<i>kuku</i> (pl. <i>kuku</i> ) 'chicken, hen' <i>ng'ombe</i> (pl. <i>ng'ombe</i> ) 'cow, cattle' <i>mbwa</i> (pl. <i>mbwa</i> ) 'dog' <i>paka</i> (pl. <i>paka</i> ) 'cat' <i>punda</i> (pl. <i>punda</i> ) 'donkey' <i>ndege</i> (pl. <i>ndege</i> ) 'bird' <i>mbuzi</i> (pl. <i>mbuzi</i> ) 'goat' <i>jogoo</i> (pl. <i>majogoo</i> ) 'rooster'	37 (78) 17 (42) 12 (55) 12 (28) 10 (22) 10 (36) 9 (31) 7 (20)
Plants and parts of plants	<i>miti</i> (pl. <i>miti</i> ) 'tree' <i>mitama</i> (pl. <i>mitama</i> ) 'millet' <i>nazi</i> (pl. <i>nazi</i> ) 'coconut' <i>mwiba</i> (pl. <i>miiba</i> ) 'thorn' <i>jani</i> (pl. <i>majani</i> ) 'leaf' <i>mgomba</i> (pl. <i>migomba</i> ) 'banana tree' <i>tunda</i> (pl. <i>matunda</i> ) 'fruit'	17 (66) 10 (14) 10 (21) 8 (22) 7 (22) 5 (14) 4 (26)
Landmarks and environment	<i>maji</i> 'water' <i>moto</i> 'fire' <i>njia</i> (pl. <i>njia</i> ) 'road' <i>mlima</i> (pl. <i>milima</i> ) 'mountain' <i>mvua</i> 'rain' <i>mto</i> (pl. <i>mito</i> ) 'river' <i>upepo</i> (pl. <i>pepo</i> ) 'wind'	47 (159) 18 (67) 11 (53) 10 (8) 10 (36) 6 (19) 4 (14)
Foods	<i>nyama</i> 'meat' <i>maziwa</i> 'milk' <i>sumu</i> 'poison' <i>yai</i> (pl. <i>mayai</i> ) 'egg' <i>ugali</i> 'thick porridge' <i>uji</i> 'gruel'	18 (58) 9 (20) 6 (27) 6 (15) 4 (9) 4 (5)



Source domain	Lexemes	Occurrences
Artifacts and other man-made objects	<i>dawa</i> (pl. <i>dawa, madawa</i> ) ‘medicine’	19 (46)
	<i>chungu</i> (pl. <i>vyungu</i> ) ‘pot’	17 (37)
	<i>nyumba</i> (pl. <i>nyumba</i> ) ‘house, home’	15 (69)
	<i>chombo</i> (pl. <i>vyombo</i> ) ‘vessel’	13 (33)
	<i>ngoma</i> (pl. <i>ngoma</i> ) ‘drum; traditional dance’	12 (36)
	<i>nguo</i> (pl. <i>nguo</i> ) ‘clothes’	12 (46)
	<i>jembe</i> (pl. <i>majembe</i> ) ‘hoe’	10 (21)
	<i>shoka</i> (pl. <i>mashoka</i> ) ‘axe’	6 (11)
	<i>dau</i> (pl. <i>madau</i> ) ‘dhow’	5 (8)
	<i>ngalawa</i> (pl. <i>ngalawa</i> ) ‘a sailboat with outriggers’	3 (4)
Emotions, values and other abstract notions	<i>mali</i> ‘wealth’	19 (67)
	<i>kazi</i> (pl. <i>kazi</i> ) ‘work, occupation’	15 (64)
	<i>uchungu</i> ‘bitterness’	15 (35)
	<i>njaa</i> ‘hunger’	14 (46)
	<i>saburi</i> ‘patience’	11 (8)
	<i>siri</i> ‘secret’	10 (29)
	<i>utumwa</i> ‘slavery’	10 (12)
	<i>heshima</i> ‘respect’	7 (23)
	<i>vita</i> ‘war’	7 (25)
	<i>adabu</i> ‘good manners’	6 (9)

In the following sections, the conceptual mappings in Swahili proverbs will be discussed in the order of the source domains distinguished in Table 1.

### 3. SOURCE AND TARGET DOMAINS OF CONCEPTUAL MAPPING

#### 3.1. THE SOURCE DOMAIN OF PEOPLE AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

One of the typical source domains includes people in their daily activities, as in the examples in (5), which, respectively, refer to cooking, hunting and making a fire. In their target domains, all of these and similar proverbs carry a more general message about achieving goals and taking responsibility for one’s actions: (5a) reminds us to be patient, (5b) to deal with necessary difficulties and (5c) to face the consequences of doing wrong (cf. English *As you have made your bed, so you will have to lie in it*).

(5)

a/ *Pole pole ugali hupikwa.*

‘Slowly, slowly, the porridge is cooked’.

b/ *Msasi haogopi miiba.*

‘A hunter is not afraid of thorns’.

c/ *Ndiwe ulotia moto sasa moshi umo machoni mwako.*

‘You were the one who started the fire, now the smoke is in your eyes’.

The examples in (6) illustrate the metonymic base of the relationship between the source and the target domains in proverbs. In their source domain, these proverbs refer either to specific activities related to farming, as in (6a–b), or to other kinds of hard work, as in (6c), while the example in (6d) depicts a person lying idly, and therefore not working. Through the metonymy SPECIFIC FOR GENERIC, the proverbs carry more general ideas of working and, consequently, having profit and sufficient economic means: the proverb in (6a) makes it clear that the profit is proportional to the effort, as do (6b), which alludes to procrastinating at work, and (6d), where there is no profit at all. The proverb in (6c) introduces the additional domain of begging, which is metonymically associated with stretching out an arm and, by further extension, with making a profit (through the metonymy CAUSE FOR EFFECT). However, the proverb explicitly asserts that this type of income-seeking is judged morally inferior to work, even as hard and low in status as cutting firewood.

(6)

a/ *Mpanda ovyo hula ovyo.*

‘The one who plants carelessly will eat carelessly’.

b/ *Mchagua jembe si mkulima.*

‘The one who picks a hoe [i.e., cannot decide] is not a farmer’.

c/ *Kutema kuni ku bora kuliko kunyosha mkono kwa kiumbe.*

‘Cutting firewood is better than extending an arm’.

d/ *Mlala mvulini, atakula nini?*

‘The one who sleeps in the shade, what will s/he eat?’

Even though the source domain of people discussed thus far is largely universal, it also features certain aspects specific to Swahili culture, such as traditional occupations or foods. The examples in (7) further illustrate the

cultural references found in the source domains of Swahili proverbs. The expressions in (7a–c) are based on the cultural script of sailing, so important in the Swahili maritime tradition, including both local fishing and oceanic voyages. In the target domains, all these proverbs refer to competence and proper organization of work and other enterprises: (7a) stresses the importance of collaboration, (7b) reminds us of the value of wise leadership (cf. English *Too many cooks spoil the broth*) and (7c) advises that responsibility should be given only to those who can handle it. The proverb in (7d), with its cultural message expressed in the interesting form of a pun, alludes to social ties as indispensable for a human being to be a complete person.

(7)

a/ *Mmoja hashui chombo.*

‘One man cannot launch a vessel’.

b/ *Nahodha wengi, chombo huenda mrama.*

‘Too many captains [and] the ship rolls’.

c/ *Nahodha mtaka chombo si mjinga wa safari.*

‘A captain who wants a ship is not ignorant of voyage’.

d/ *Mtu ni watu.*

‘A human being is people’.

In some cases, the cultural setting is much less clear on the surface. All three examples in (8) allude to the Swahili cultural practice of showing affection and care by providing gifts. The well-known proverb in (8a) contends that giving clothing to one’s wife should be as obvious as weeding food plants. In (8b), the love of a poor man does not show because he cannot afford “visible” presents; the same is true of a poor parent’s love in (8c), where “not showing off” (with gifts) is metonymically equated with “not existing”.

(8)

a/ *Mke ni nguo, mgomba kupalilia.*

‘A wife is clothes, a banana plant is weeding’.

b/ *Mapenzi ya maskini hayaonekani.*

‘A poor man’s love is not visible’.

c/ *Mkata hapendi mwana.*

‘A poor man does not love [his] child’.

The source domain of proverbs also readily hosts supernatural beings associated with people's beliefs or the imagery of myths and fables. The proverb in (9a) reflects the Muslims' belief in God's perfection and infallibility in deciding the fate of people and events, which is written in heaven with a divine pen. In (9b), the two supernatural beings are juxtaposed as addressees of a person's good and bad behavior, metonymically represented as different "faces" of a hypocrite. In (9c), the devil metonymically stands for evil, hence the meaning of the proverb that accidents or misfortunes tend to co-occur. The figure of the "known monster" in (9d) metaphorically refers to someone close to us, like a family member or a friend, who, even if they hurt us, will not do too much harm.

(9)

a/ *Kalamu ya Mungu haikosi.*

'God's pen does not make mistakes'.

b/ *Ana uso mwingine kwa Mungu na mwingine kwa shetani.*

'S/he has one face to God and another to the devil'.

c/ *Kila shetani ana rafiki yake.*

'Every devil has a companion'.

d/ *Zimwi likujualo, halikuli likakwisha.*

'A monster who knows you will not eat you up completely'.

### 3.2. THE SOURCE DOMAIN OF THE HUMAN BODY

Another common source domain is that of the human body and its specific parts. Swahili, like other languages of the world, draws extensively on this domain in conceptualizing various notions (Kraska-Szlenk 2014a, 2014b; Tramutoli 2020a, 2020b). While in everyday usage, the embodied conceptualization patterns are typically reflected by fully conventionalized language structures, their linguistic instantiations in proverbs enjoy greater freedom and come in varied and imaginative forms. As shown in Table 1, the body part that appears most frequently in Scheven's (1981) collection is *mkono* (pl. *mikono*) 'hand/arm', which occurs in 24 proverbs, while the second most frequently used body part is 'finger', with a total of 19 occurrences of the lexeme *kidole* (pl. *vidole*) and its synonym *chanda* (pl. *vyanda*). Both of these body parts often appear in metaphors referring

to helping each other within the family and the whole community, figuratively conceptualized as “one body” (THE COMMUNITY/FAMILY IS ONE BODY and PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY/FAMILY ARE BODY PARTS, cf. Kraska-Szlenk 2014b). In some proverbs, the “collaborating” body parts – *mkono* ‘hand/arm’ and *kidole* ‘finger’ – can be used interchangeably, as illustrated in (10a), while others use only one of these lexemes, depending on which imagery is more appropriate; for example, *mkono* ‘hand/arm’ is used in the context of washing hands in (10b) or carrying a baby in (10c), while *kidole* ‘finger’ is figuratively used in the sense of one of many relatives or community members, as illustrated in (10g–i).

(10)

a/ *Mkono mmoja (kidole kimoja) hauvunji (hakivunji) chawa.*

‘One hand (one finger) does not kill a louse’.

b/ *Mikono miwili ni kuoshana.*

‘Two hands wash each other’.

c/ *Mkono mmoja haubebi mtoto.*

‘One arm does not carry a baby’.

d/ *Mkono mmoja haulei mwana.*

‘One hand does not bring up a child’.

e/ *Mkono mmoja hauchinji ng’ombe.*

‘One hand does not slaughter a cow’.

f/ *Mkono wa kuume haukati mkono wa kushoto.*

‘The right hand does not cut off the left one’.

g/ *Kidole chako kibaya chaweza kufaa siku baya.*

‘Your bad finger can be of use on a bad day’.

h/ *Kidole kimoja kikiumia, vidole vingine vyatoa damu.*

‘If one finger is hurt, the other fingers are bleeding’.

i/ *Athari ya kidole hasara ya mwili.*

‘A sore finger damages the whole body’.

Other terms denoting body parts or fluids are also often used in proverbs in various metaphorical meanings. Some reflect conventionalized conceptualizations, like in the proverb (11a), which is based on the metonymic association of the eyes with seeing and further extended by the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING onto the domain of rational evaluation and judgment, or in (11b), where *kichwa* ‘head’ figuratively stands for a superior and *sikio* ‘ear’ for the one who should listen and obey. In (11c), the three metonymies

of the general schema BODY PART FOR ITS FUNCTION, with explicit reference to paired eyes and ears and only one mouth, carry the advice to watch and listen rather than speak. Likewise, the examples in (11d) and (11e) demonstrate two different but both well-conventionalized conceptualizations of the body part *moyo* ‘heart’: the former as the “inner self”, hence the proverb’s implication that it is impossible to fully know another person, and the latter associated with courage and incentive for action. The remaining proverbs in (11) use less typical conceptualizations and imagery; in (11f), the mouth (rather than the conventional head) signifies a leader of the community, and saliva stands for community members who are dispersed without leadership. In (11g), two juxtaposed body parts, *jicho* ‘eye’ and *pua* ‘nose’, are relativized in terms of their value (cf. Kisanji 1995): one metaphorically stands for someone closer and more important, such as a family member, and the other for someone less important, such as a friend or acquaintance, hence the former must always be supported and endured, while the latter may be “disposed” of. The proverb in (11h) is based on the conventionalized expression *kula jasho (la mtu)* ‘to exploit (someone)’, with the literal meaning of ‘to eat (someone’s) sweat’, unlike the example in (11g), in which the phrase *kunywa jasho* ‘to drink sweat’ is a creative expression with vivid imagery; the proverb encourages us not to lose hope for a better future (cf. English *After the rain, there is sunshine*).

(11)

- a/ *Mapenzi hayana macho.*  
‘Love has no eyes’.
- b/ *Sikio halipatii kichwa.*  
‘The ear does not surpass the head’.
- c/ *Binadamu ana macho mawili, masikio mawili na mdomo mmoja.*  
‘Man has two eyes, two ears and one mouth’.
- d/ *Moyo wa mwenzi ni msitu wa giza.*  
‘The heart of your friend is a dark forest’.
- e/ *Heri kufa macho kuliko kufa moyo.*  
‘It is better to lose [lit. die] your eyes than to lose [lit. die] your heart’.
- f/ *Kufa kwa mdomo, mate hutawanyika.*  
‘When the mouth dies, the saliva gets scattered around’.
- g/ *Kinaota ku jicho; kingeota ku pua, ningekitosha.*  
‘It grows in the eye, but if it grew on the nose, I would remove it’.

h/ *Jasho la mtu haliliki.*

'A person's sweat is not eatable'.

i/ *Usinywe jasho, maji yako mbele.*

'Do not drink sweat, there is water ahead'.

### 3.3. THE SOURCE DOMAIN OF ANIMALS

Both wild and domesticated animals are an important source domain in Swahili proverbs and are used for various target domains. Most often, animals personify human behavior and character traits. Some such metaphors refer in their source domain to the inherent features of particular animals. For example, *simba* 'lion' in (12a–b) exemplifies a predator who must hunt for prey, thus being a metaphorical personification of someone who achieves a goal or gain with some effort; both versions of the proverb advise not to advertise too much one's assets and accomplishments. Likewise, the proverb in (12c) alludes to the slow way of moving of a tortoise. In other cases, character traits attributed to specific animals are derived from cultural traditions, including oral narratives. This is the case of *sungura* 'hare', which represents a cunning trickster in numerous Swahili stories, as exemplified by the proverb in (12d). In (12e), the warning against foolish people who may become dangerous uses the metaphor of a cow, which is an animal conventionally associated with carelessness and stupidity. However, in other contexts, the animal representing human behavior is chosen more arbitrarily to fit the parallel constructed in the mapping from the source onto the target domain, cf. (12f), with its imagery of a cow looking for a safe place like people in need who turn to their families, or (12g), which has similar equivalents in many other languages, due to the clear mapping of cats and mice onto the domain of people in power and those without it. The familiar source domain of the dog, with its natural tendency to bite, is mapped in (12h) onto the domain of the family; the proverb advises an outsider not to interfere in family quarrels.

(12)

a/ *Simba angurumaye si mwindaji.*

'A roaring lion is not a hunter'.

b/ *Simba mwenda kinya ndiye mla nyama.*

'A lion who moves quietly is the one who eats meat'.

- c/ *Polepole ya kobe humfisha mbali.*  
‘The slow [movement] of tortoise takes it far’.
- d/ *Duma hukamata, sungura hupata.*  
‘The cheetah catches [the prey], the hare obtains it’.
- e/ *Asiyeogopa ng’ombe, ng’ombe ni yeye.*  
‘One who is not afraid of a cow is itself a cow’.
- f/ *Ng’ombe akivunjika guu hukimbilia zizini.*  
‘When a cow breaks a leg, it goes back to the cattle corral’.
- g/ *Paka akiondoka, panya hutawala.*  
‘When the cat goes away, mice reign’.
- h/ *Meno ya mbwa hayaumani.*  
‘The teeth of a dog do not bite each other’.

Even though many animals are used as source domains in Swahili proverbs, *kuku* ‘chicken’ ranks first in terms of frequency. The chicken metaphor in Swahili has already been analyzed in its various uses, the most typical of which are those related to the target domain of the family and relations within it, as well as constructions of stereotypes of femininity and masculinity (Kobia 2016; Karakacha et al. 2021). The example in (13a) refers to a mother’s care for her child, while (13b) to her right to discipline her child when necessary. The two versions of the proverb in (13c) point to a rigid distinction between gender roles in society, and (13d) alludes to a woman’s subordinated status in relation to a man; at the same time, however, (13e) underlines a man’s duty as a protector of the family and the community. A different construction involving the word *jogoo* ‘rooster’ is seen in (13f), where it is used as a metaphor for an important and pompous country man. In a pragmatic context, this proverb may also refer to an authoritarian husband who loses his dominance outside the home.

- (13)
  - a/ *Kuku havunji yaile.*  
‘A hen does not break her own eggs’.
  - b/ *Teke la kuku halimwumizi mwanawe.*  
‘A hen’s kick does not hurt her chick’.
  - c/ *Jogoo hatagi mayai. / Jogoo halei mwana.*  
‘A rooster does not lay eggs’. / ‘A rooster does not rear a child’.
  - d/ *Kuku jike hawiki penye jogoo.*  
‘A hen does not crow where there is a cock’.



e/ *Jogoo halali na kichwa chake shingoni.*

'A rooster does not sleep with [his] head [buried] in the neck'.

f/ *Jogoo la shamba haliwiki mjini.*

'The country rooster does not crow in town'.

In still other proverbs, domesticated animals are conceptualized as a commodity with a greater or lesser value, depending on whether they are a source of profit. Typically, a more valuable cow is juxtaposed with a less prized animal, such as a goat or a chicken; consequently, the two commodities of different value are mapped onto target domains. The example in (14a) once again refers to the metaphorical lack of voice and the inferior status of a woman relative to a man. The proverb in (14b) cautions against too much ambition when a person is not experienced enough, and (14c) warns against taking bribes, which may prove more costly than the expected profit.

(14)

a/ *Mbuzi angelia mlio wa ng'ombe angejipasua.*

'If a goat would [try to] roar like a cow, it would break open'.

b/ *Atakaye kufuga ng'ombe aanze na kuku.*

'The one who wants to raise a cow should start with a chicken'.

c/ *Mla mbuzi hulipa ng'ombe.*

'The one who eats a goat pays with a cow'.

### 3.4. THE SOURCE DOMAIN OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

It comes as no surprise that out of all the lexemes related to the natural environment, *maji* 'water' has the highest frequency in Swahili proverbs (cf. Table 1). The Swahili lexeme, just like in English, may denote any kind of water: water of the falling rain, of lakes and rivers, of the ocean, as well as drinking water drawn from wells or bought bottled. The examples in (15) reflect these different conceptualizations of *maji* 'water', which are mapped onto more abstract target domains, keeping the implicit or explicit cause-effect schema. The proverb in (15a) cautions about warning signs that may come earlier than the danger itself, the example in (15b) suggests that the natural way of doing things is best, and (15c), like many other proverbs, points to the benefits of work.

(15)

a/ *Dalili ya mvua [ni] mawingu.*

‘The sign of rain is clouds’.

b/ *Maji hufuata mkondo.*

‘Water follows [its] course’.

c/ *Mchimba kisima hakatazwi maji.*

‘A well-digger is not refused water’.

While water as an important resource is usually conceptualized with a positive connotation, the opposite element *moto* ‘fire’, due to its destructive power, often appears in proverbs with negative overtones. This usage is illustrated by the proverb in (16a), which alludes to an action of a cruel or insulting person that can only be stopped by a similar action, and by the example in (16b), which underlines the cause-effect schema.

(16)

a/ *Dawa ya moto ni moto.*

‘The cure against fire is fire’.

b/ *Palipo na moshi pana moto.*

‘Where there is smoke, there is fire’.

Plants, with their many types and various usable parts, constitute an important feature of people’s environment and economy. A wide range of wild as well as cultivated plants appear in the source domain of Swahili proverbs in reference to various target domains. In (17a), the two plants serve as metaphors for people’s character traits: *mpilipili* ‘pepper bush’ can be understood as a bad parent from whom one cannot expect good offspring, figuratively conceptualized as *mbaazi* ‘peas’. A similar personification takes place with respect to *nazi* ‘coconut’ in (17b), which has a reading similar to the English *One rotten apple spoils the barrel*. In (17c), the same fruit is mapped not onto a person but onto the target domain of things or goods, warning against being too picky, unsatisfied with what one has. Even though the source domain of the flora in Swahili proverbs is strongly oriented toward the specific geographical environment of East Africa, some plants and their parts, due to their characteristic shape or function, are universally associated with particular figurative meanings. This is illustrated in (17d) by the lexeme *mwiba* (pl. *miiba*) ‘thorn’, which metaphorically stands for a problem,

difficulty or quarrel. Another example is the lexeme *tunda* (pl. *matunda*) ‘fruit’, which in Swahili, as in many other languages, is positively associated with either one’s offspring, results of one’s work or profit, or an even more abstract concept of a good outcome, as illustrated in (17e), which warns that not all good beginnings end well.

(17)

a/ *Kwenye mpilipili hutafuti mbaazi.*

‘You do not look for peas on a pepper bush’.

b/ *Nazi mbovu harabu ya nzima.*

‘One bad coconut spoils all of them’.

c/ *Amechagua nazi akapata dafu.*

‘S/he has picked out a ripe coconut, s/he has gotten an unripe one’.

d/ *Anayechomwa na mwiba ndiye anasikia uchungu.*

‘The one who is pierced by a thorn is the one who feels the pain’.

e/ *Si maua yote yanayotoa matunda.*

‘It is not all flowers that produce fruit’.

### 3.5. THE SOURCE DOMAIN OF FOODS, ARTIFACTS AND OTHER OBJECTS

For the most part, foods derive from plants and animals found in the geographical environment in which people live, but cultural factors also contribute significantly to the shaping of culinary traditions. Among the various names of specific foods used in the source domain of Swahili proverbs, *nyama* ‘meat’ occurs with higher frequency than others. More than being a reflection of dietary practice, this fact seems to demonstrate the importance of meat as a valuable and hard-to-get commodity. Even though nowadays, meat products can be conveniently bought like other foods at the market or in the supermarket, it is worth keeping in mind that the proverbs reflect older traditions when this type of food was obtained with great effort through hunting or breeding domestic animals for individual needs, both of which were subject to all kinds of threats, including unfavorable weather, pests or wild animals. Meat must be cut in order to be consumed, hence the lexeme *nyama* ‘meat’ often co-occurs in proverbs with the lexeme *kisu* ‘knife’, as illustrated below in (18a–b), which in the target domain indicate taking advantage of an opportunity if one has appropriate means. In traditional East African cuisine, meat is often cooked and served in its

sauce, called *mchuzi*, as alluded to in the proverb in (18c), which implies that one should take responsibility for wrongdoing. In (18d), *nyama* ‘meat’ co-occurs with *matumbo* ‘bowels’, with the reading that everybody deserves respect. The proverb in (18e) contains the idiomatic expression *nyama ya ulimi* ‘sweet talk, nice words’ or ‘flattery’, with the literal meaning ‘meat of the tongue’. The proverb has a certain intercontextual reference, too, since there is a well-known traditional narrative in which the ambiguous meaning of this expression serves as a pun: feeding a wife with nice words or literally serving her the meat of a (cow’s) tongue as a dish.

(18)

a/ *Shika kisu ule nyama.*

‘Grasp a knife and eat meat’.

b/ *Mwenye kisu kikali ndiye atakayekula nyama.*

‘The person who has a sharp knife is the one who will eat meat’.

c/ *Hutumiaje mchuzi nyama usile?*

‘How can one use the gravy without eating the meat?’

d/ *Hata matumbo ni nyama.*

‘Even the bowels are meat’.

e/ *Nyama ya ulimi tamu.*

‘Flattery is tasty’.

The examples below illustrate other uses of foods in the source domain of Swahili proverbs. The metaphor of a cow that gives a lot of milk in (19a) stands for a good person who does not live long. The following two proverbs use *yai* ‘egg’ in the source domain. The example in (19b) compares something valuable, even if incomplete (like half of an egg), with something useless, even if complete (like an eggshell). Likewise, the proverb in (19c) is based on a comparison: the unrepairable loss of respect is likened to a broken egg. The proverb in (19d) alludes to the fact that *uji* ‘gruel, soft porridge’ is the traditional food given to a sick person. Another kind of staple food – rice – appears in the proverb in (19e). The cultural importance of this dish in the diet of East Africans is attested by the abundance of specific terms denoting the various stages of rice production and preparing: from *mpunga*, which denotes the growing plant, through *mchele*, which is used to describe the uncooked seeds, to *wali*, which is the term for the cooked rice.

(19)

a/ *Ng'ombe wa maziwa hakai zizini.*

'A cow that produces much milk does not stay [long] in the pen'.

b/ *Bora nusu yai kuliko ganda tupu.*

'Better half an egg than an empty shell'.

c/ *Heshima ikivunjika ni yai limeanguka.*

'Lost respect is [like] a broken egg'.

d/ *Mgonjwa haulizwi uji.*'A sick person is not asked [i.e., should not be asked – IKS] for *uji*'.e/ *Apendaye kula wali husubiri mpunga kuiva.*

'One who likes to eat rice waits patiently for the rice [plant] to be ripe'.

All kinds of man-made artifacts, instruments and various other objects appear in Swahili proverbs. Some of them have already been illustrated above, for example, *jembe* 'hoe' in (6b), *kisu* 'knife' in (18a–b) or *chombo* 'vessel' in (7a–c). The following examples include another useful object, namely, *chungu* '(clay) pot'. In (20a), it is conceptualized as a container that can easily be broken; it is used as a metaphor for a communal (good) relationship that can be challenged by a single person. In (20b), it metonymically stands for generic objects that should not be constantly replaced with new ones, but it can also refer metaphorically to people in relationships, such as marriage or friendship. The subsequent proverbs use another common object – *shoka* 'axe', which is mapped onto various target domains. In (20c), the domain of training and competence is invoked by the construal of a carpenter with his tool. The proverb in (20d), which mentions an imperfect axe, alludes to an impotent man. A very specific reading is also attributed to the proverb in (20e), in which the action of cutting down a tree metaphorically stands for beating children (or other forms of punishing them), which is easily forgotten by the parents (the metaphorical axe) but not their offspring (the metaphorical tree).

(20)

a/ *Chungu cha mifupa huvunjwa na fupa.*

'A cooking pot full of bones is broken by a [single] bone'.

b/ *Ukiona chungu kipya, usitupe cha zamani.*

'If you see a new cooking pot, do not throw away the old one'.

c/ *Kila ajaye na shoka hapo hawi msaramala.*

'Whoever comes with an axe is not necessarily a carpenter'.

- d/ *Shoka lisilo mpini, halichanji kuni.*  
 ‘An axe without a handle does not cut firewood’.
- e/ *Shoka husahau, mti hausahau.*  
 ‘The axe forgets, the tree does not forget’.

Another lexeme that occurs with a relatively high frequency in Swahili proverbs is *nyumba* ‘house, home’. One of the reasons for this is the importance of home as a place where family members live, organize their activities and build relationships with each other. Another reason is the considerable polysemy of the word *nyumba*, which occurs in many extended meanings, including those related to family (cf. Kraska-Szlenk 2010). The proverb in (21a) construes *nyumba* as an impermanent building, which serves as a metaphor for a quick-tempered person who “breaks down”, that is, cannot be pacified. A similar construal, but this time of a house with solid foundations, is seen in (21b), which metaphorically refers to a good marriage. The conceptualization of *nyumba* as a place where people live is illustrated in (21c), where the two incompatible animals personify people with different character traits. The proverb in (21d), which is a line from a well-known poem by Muyaka (cf. Abdulaziz 1979: 326), constructs the meaning of *nyumba* as the atmosphere of home created by family relations. The extended metonymic sense of *nyumba* as ‘family’ is clearly seen in (21e), where the “big house” can be interpreted as a prominent family that has “big things”, that is, all kinds of secrets and problems. Due to the presence of family and the support it guarantees, *nyumba* is also conceptualized as a person’s refuge from the dangerous *dunia* ‘world’, as illustrated in (21f), where the two meanings of the lexeme are juxtaposed; while the former *nyumba* denotes simply a dwelling, the latter implies a safe place, with a caring and supportive family. The final example in (21g) illustrates a different construal of *nyumba* as a general container. In the context of the proverb, it “houses” *njaa* ‘hunger’, which is metonymically related to *uvivu* ‘laziness’.

- (21)
- a/ *Nyumba ya udongo haihimili vishindo.*  
 ‘A mud hut cannot withstand great shocks’.
- b/ *Ukitaka nyumba njema utie msingi mwema.*  
 ‘If you want a good house, lay a good foundation’.

- c/ *Chui na mbuzi hawalali nyumba moja.*  
 ‘The leopard and the goat do not sleep in the same house’.
- d/ *Nyumba njema si mlango, fungua uigie ndani.*  
 ‘A good home is not only the door; open it and enter’.
- e/ *Nyumba kubwa husitiri mambo makubwa.*  
 ‘A big house hides big things’.
- f/ *Dunia ni nyumba ya mtu asiye na nyumba.*  
 ‘The world is a house for the one who has no home’.
- g/ *Uvivu [ni] nyumba ya njaa.*  
 ‘Laziness is the house of hunger’.

### 3.6. THE SOURCE DOMAIN OF ABSTRACT NOTIONS

Abstract concepts which occur in Swahili proverbs with high frequency comprise those which denote states of affairs, such as *mali* ‘wealth’, *kazi* ‘work, occupation’, *njaa* ‘hunger’ or *vita* ‘war’; emotions, such as *mapenzi* (*upendo, mahaba*) ‘love’, *furaha* ‘joy’ or *uchungu* ‘bitterness, sadness’; but often also those which code social values and obligations, for example, *saburi* ‘patience’, *heshima* ‘respect’, *utu* ‘human nature, humanness’ or *adabu* ‘good manners’. Proverbs that use abstract notions at the surface level tend to have a different structure than most of the proverbs discussed thus far. Instead of expressing their message in a figurative way, they may directly verbalize views on the nature of the world and life, filtered through cultural norms. The more important a particular cultural value is in Swahili society, the bigger the number of proverbs that mention it explicitly, pointing out its various aspects and looking at them from different perspectives. This is illustrated by the first three proverbs in (22), which provide detailed statements about *adabu* ‘good manners’. In a similar vein, (22d) captures the highly-regarded cultural value of *heshima* ‘respect’, while the proverb in (22e) contains the more universal message that happiness comes with sorrow. The proverb in (22f) indirectly refers to the ethical obligation to be obedient and caring to one’s parents, who will then reciprocate by leaving the child an inheritance in the form of their ‘blessing’ (*radhi*, lit. ‘contentment, gratification’), which is juxtaposed in the proverb with the less valuable *mali* ‘wealth’.

(22)

a/ *Adabu ni ustaarabu.*

‘Good manners is civilization [i.e., civilized behavior]’.

b/ *Adabu si adhabu, faida yake yaonekana mtoto akuapo.*

‘Good manners is not punishment; the profit is seen when a child grows up’.

c/ *Adabu ya mtoto huwapatia sifa bora wazazi.*

‘A child’s good manners give great credit to the parents’.

d/ *Heshima ni bora kuliko mali.*

‘Respect is better than wealth’.

e/ *Hakuna furaha bila uchungu.*

‘There is no joy without sadness’.

f/ *Radhi ni bora kuliko mali.*

‘[Parents’] blessing [lit. gratification] is better than wealth’.

Abstract concepts also co-occur with metaphors, as illustrated in (23a), in which animals (crows) personify people who benefit from the misfortunes of others (metaphorical grasshoppers), or in (23b), where love is conceptualized as a disease for which there is no cure, or in (23c), where patience is the metaphorical “key” to a feeling of comfort and relief after going through painful times.

(23)

a/ *Vita vya panzi [ni] furaha ya kunguru.*

‘War among grasshoppers delights the crow(s)’.

b/ *Haina tabibu ndivele ya mapenzi.*

‘The disease of love has no cure (lit. ‘doctor’)’.

c/ *Subira ni ufunguo wa faraji.*

‘Patience is the key to relief’.

Very often metaphors are combined with metonymical “shortcuts” to give proverbs a compact form. This is illustrated by the following examples. In (24a), *akili* ‘mind’ metonymically stands for being a brilliant, clever person, and furthermore, for actions of such a person which result in all kinds of gain, not necessarily the literal *mali* ‘wealth’. In (24b), the abstract notions of young and old age are metonymically understood as people’s actions, emotions and experiences that happen to them when they are young or old, expressing the philosophical idea that the former condition is richer and better (metaphorical *mali* ‘wealth’) than the latter (metaphorical *kutu*



'rust'). Similarly, *upweke* 'loneliness' in (24c) stands for everything metonymically associated with living alone, without the support of friends and family, which is negatively evaluated as the figurative *uvundo* 'bad smell'. The proverb in (24d) and its slightly different variant in (24e) mention the abstract notion of *utu*, which is a word morphologically related to *mtu* 'human person', hence can be translated literally as 'human nature' or 'humanness', but its typical understanding in language usage, and in this proverb in particular, comes with a number of positive connotations, such as 'good personality', 'kindness', 'integrity', 'mercy', etc. All these qualities of *utu* can be read in both these proverbs, with possible further metonymical extensions onto the domain of good deeds performed by a person with such character traits.

(24)

a/ *Akili [ni] mali.*

'Wits are wealth'.

b/ *Ujana mali, uzee kutu.*

'Youth is wealth, old age is rust'.

c/ *Upweke ni uvundo.*

'Loneliness is [like] a bad smell'.

d/ *Thamani ya mtu ni utu.*

'The value of people is their human nature'.

e/ *Asiyejua utu si mtu.*

'One who does not know human nature is not human'.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The paper has demonstrated that Swahili proverbs represent a rich source of imagery that employs both metaphor and metonymy as cognitive tools. The cultural heritage of Swahili proverbs is evident in the choice of the source domains, which often refer to people's traditional occupations, everyday activities and habits, but also to social norms imposed on an individual living in a community, as well as to people's beliefs and philosophical ideas. Moreover, Swahili proverbs draw heavily from the domains associated with the geographical environment, represented by the coastal area of the Indian Ocean on the one hand and by the savanna of the interior on the other. In

a very unique way, Swahili proverbs explore universal source domains, such as those related to the human body, diseases, family relations, household, etc. While the proverbs' source domains are a mirror of Swahili material and spiritual culture, the cross-domain mapping reflects not only human cognitive experience but also the imaginative and playful humor so characteristic of Swahili culture and literature.

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### Feminist discourses on *utu* and *heshima* in selected works by Tanzanian women writers<sup>1</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

The paper examines references to Swahili ethics in the literary works of Tanzanian women writers. It focuses in particular on analyzing the moral concepts of *utu* ‘humanity, morality’ and *heshima* ‘honor, respect, dignity’ discussed in the short play *Heshima Yangu* ‘My Honor’ by Penina Muhando Mlama from 1974 and the novel *Mungu Hakopeshwi* ‘God Doesn’t Borrow Time’ by Zainab Alwi Baharoon from 2017. The author argues that in their feminist critique, these two narratives turn to the basic principles of Swahili philosophy and reconstruct the discourse on the essence of humanity, morality and wisdom.

KEYWORDS: *utu*, *heshima*, Swahili literature, Swahili philosophy, women writers, feminist literary criticism

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

*Utu* ‘humanity, morality’ and *heshima* ‘respect’ belong to the most important ethical concepts of the Swahili-speaking community and are interconnected in a meaningful way. The former conveys the idea of the essence of humanity and morality, that is, goodness and gentleness. *Utu* provides insight into the moral life of the Swahili community, its moral codes and the shared pursuit of non-material values. The latter concept of *heshima*, together with the notions of *uaminifu* ‘honesty’ and *uadilifu* ‘integrity’, are

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those non-material values that are pursued as elements of a good life, both for the individual and the community. They constitute the moral foundations of Swahili culture, i.e., “they are fundamentals of one’s *utu*” (Saleh 2004: 145–146).

In recent decades, the Swahili philosophical concept of *utu* has received much attention from researchers of the Swahili language and culture (see, for example, Saleh 2004; Kresse 2007; Rettová 2007, 2020; Romańczuk 2020, 2022; Kraska-Szlenk 2021a). It has been examined in various Swahili texts: proverbs and popular sayings, poetry and prose, and most recently in online resources (Rettová 2020). In this paper, I aim to contribute to the study of Swahili intellectual discourse on humanity and morality by adding to these reflections the voices of Swahili women.

The role of women’s voices and their position in shaping Swahili intellectual and philosophical discourse is crucial but too often overlooked, as I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere (Romańczuk 2020, 2021, 2022). Swahili women artists, through their texts, have been igniting debates about the lives of their communities, the condition of women and humanity in general. Like many prominent male writers, they are committed to creating texts that will have an impact on society, prompting self-reflection and critical assessment of reality. These features characterize the established tradition of Swahili writing in which literature is valued primarily for conforming to the paradigm of engaged realism, i.e., acting as a “mirror of society” (*kioo cha jamii*) (Diegner 2018: 122). This aesthetic norm corresponds with the principles of Swahili ethics, “in which the duty to pass on wisdom, including moral recommendations, to others is deeply rooted” (Kraska-Szlenk 2021a: 17).

In this paper, I will analyze two contemporary texts from Swahili literature written by women: a short play by Penina Muhando Mlamba with the significant title *Heshima Yangu* ‘My Honor’, published in 1974, and Zainab Alwi Baharoon’s 2017 novel *Mungu Hakopeshwi* ‘God Doesn’t Borrow Time’.<sup>2</sup> The narratives focus on the oppression experienced by the female protagonists, criticizing sexism and misogyny, as well as domestic and gender-based

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<sup>2</sup> I use the English translation of the title given on the official website of the Mabati Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature: <https://kiswahiliprize.cornell.edu/2018-winners/>.

violence. They question the concept of *heshima*, specifically its gender implications, and condemn patriarchal ideologies and practices as immoral and contradicting the non-material norms and values embodied in the idea of *utu*. I will argue that these narratives express a feminist critique that conceptualizes itself in the realm of Swahili ethics and aesthetic principles of literature.

## 2. MORAL INTEGRITY AND DIGNITY IN SWAHILI CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Swahili philosophy is notably a humanistic philosophy, as “it focuses on the human sphere, deals primarily with human interactions, and develops a human-centred vision of the world” (Rettová 2020: 34). This view is expressed in various sayings directly explaining the principles of *utu*, especially *mtu ni watu* ‘to be a human being is to be among people’ and *mtu si kitu* ‘a human being is not a thing’.<sup>3</sup> The latter saying distinguishes human beings from other beings, especially non-living things, material objects. It also encapsulates the idea that other people should not be treated instrumentally (like things) because everyone deserves respect (Rettová 2020: 37; see also Kresse 2007: 140).

The moral content of *utu* is conveyed in other popular sayings, such as *mtu ni utu* ‘to be a human being is to have humanity’ or *utu ni kitendo* ‘humanity is action’, which emphasize the importance of manifesting *utu* through one’s actions. Another proverb worth mentioning here is *si hoja kitu bora utu* ‘one’s dignity and integrity are worth more than material objects’ (see Saleh 2004: 146–149), which conveys a philosophical perspective that values the non-material sphere of human life, and the non-material values of *utu*, higher than material goods. Moreover, the morality of *utu* is strongly connected to wisdom and intellectual contribution to society, as “true wisdom includes kindness to others and noble conduct” (Kraska-Szlenk 2015: 47; cf. also Kraska-Szlenk 2021b: 158). Therefore, in Swahili ethics, to act morally is to be a wise person, and to be wise means not only to be educated

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<sup>3</sup> The translations of the proverbs and sayings that refer to *utu* are given after Rettová (2020).



but also well-mannered, kind and respectful to other people. This brings us to the concept of *heshima*. Contrary to the opinion presented by Kai Kresse (2007: 143), who argues that *heshima* is primarily a social category rather than a moral one, Mohamed Ahmed Saleh (2004: 145–146) has described it as one of the key moral principles and fundamental components of *utu*. In my opinion, both views are true.

Nowadays, *heshima* means respect but also dignity, honor, esteem, social position and courtesy (McMahon 2006: 202–203). According to a study by Kresse (2007), in the Swahili-speaking community, the concept of *heshima* is associated with rules of etiquette and good manners (*adabu*). As such, it is considered a source of guidance for appropriate behavior among members of society, especially with regard to elders and those in authority. These rules of proper conduct also apply to family members: spouses, parents and their children (Kresse 2007: 143; see Saleh 2004: 148).

The concept of *heshima* is a crucial component of the generally accepted code of conduct. Adhering to it involves recognizing a person's social attributes, such as age, gender, role and function in society, and then acknowledging them appropriately in speech and behavior. In return for showing respect to others, one is recognized as being well-mannered and cultured and is treated with due respect. By behaving with courtesy, delicacy and politeness toward other members of the community, a person gains social respect and simultaneously bestows it on the person they are addressing (Middleton 1992: 194; McMahon 2006: 197; Kresse 2007: 143).

Therefore, it can be stated that *heshima* conveys the idea of a reward. As a form of public recognition, it is a source of pride and prestige. The opposite concept to esteem is *aibu* 'shame and disgrace', a public punishment for a person's immoral conduct that is contrary to generally accepted cultural and social rules (Swartz 1988; see also Kraska-Szlenk 2021a: 18; Romańczuk 2021: 130). The concepts of honor and dishonor and, as Saleh (2004: 147) points out, the other Swahili moral values (honesty and integrity) were intended to "encourage people to ... avoid acts which could compromise their worth and reputation in the society".

It is important to note that the negotiating of honor and respect took place in the public space. Moreover, a good reputation was granted by society not only to individuals but also to their families, based on an assessment

of the behavior of all its members. The honor and prestige of families rested on women in particular (McMahon 2006: 215; cf. Middleton 1992: 114; Gower et al. 1996: 256).

The fact that *heshima* is a gendered concept entangled in patriarchal and class ideologies has been demonstrated by many scholars (Fair 2001; McMahon 2006; Decker 2010). In her work on the Zanzibari Muslim community, Corrie Decker even pointed out that

[i]n Arabic, *heshima* can mean both “shame” and “modesty.” One derivation of the word in Arabic (*mahashim*) is defined as “genitals,” and points to the fact that sexual purity is an important component of female honor (Decker 2010: 92).

While men gained respect and recognition for their education, piety, honesty and business skills (Middleton 1992: 138), women earned esteem by dressing appropriately, speaking softly and politely, lowering their gaze and being modest.

Gentleness (*upole*) is a virtue highly valued in women. It is indicative of their personal culture, manners and upbringing. A woman is expected to be gentle and at the same time reserved in both behavior and speech. Adherence to these cultural and social rules shows a woman’s respect for those with whom she interacts in various social ways. As Susan Hirsch (1998: 64) explains, “[l]inguistic prescriptions demand that Swahili women’s speech maintain *heshima*”, and they are expected “to speak softly, politely, and deferentially in order to show respect, especially in the presence of elders”. And although, as Rose Beck (2003: 328) states, *upole* is generally valued in the behavior and speech of both men and women, many more restrictions are imposed on the latter.

In Muslim Swahili culture, recommendations of modesty refer to a woman’s appropriate communicative behavior expressed in gestures, body posture (e.g., downcast gaze), speech and dress. They are an outward expression of a woman’s morality and are intended to protect her from the loss of virginity and extramarital pregnancy. The consequence of premarital relations is shame and public disgrace, which falls not only on the offending individual but also on her family. Therefore, the public assessment of

a woman's reputation and, at the same time, her morality is based mainly on her subjection to the principle of sexual chastity.

*Heshima* has many meanings, referring both to a person's position and social status, as well as to the accepted moral codes. It describes rules of behavior that are defined as befitting a cultured and well-mannered person. At the same time, as I have tried to emphasize, the significance of the notion of honor and dignity extends beyond the rules of courtesy and politeness. *Heshima* is inherently connected to the principle of morality, as "*utu* has been linked to a general command to show respect to everyone" (Kresse 2007: 148). In the case of women, the concepts of moral integrity and dignity are limited to sexuality. As Nadine Beckmann has pointed out in reference to the Swahili Muslim community in Zanzibar,

... discourses about sex are closely bound up with ideas of what it means to be a morally good person and a good Muslim. Several local terms describe immorality, and most of them have some sexual connotations: *uasherati* literally means promiscuity, extramarital sex, and indecency; *uhuni* is translated as vagrancy and decadence; and *zinaa* (nonmarital sex) and *umalaya* (prostitution) explicitly refer to sexual immorality (Beckmann 2015: 119; see also Decker 2015: 35–36).

These rules do not apply only to the female members of the Swahili society, at least not in theory. However, as stated previously, the public judgment of women's moral integrity and dignity is closely linked to their good (moral) sexual behavior.<sup>4</sup>

Taking all this into account, in the following sections, I will outline how the narratives of Penina Muhando Mluma and Zainab Alwi Baharoon reveal the very tangible consequences of patriarchal ideology and sexist interpretations of *heshima* for the lives of the less privileged members of society, i.e., women and children.

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<sup>4</sup> This is true not only of the Swahili society. Double standards concerning sex appear wherever gender-based prejudices are to be found.

### 3. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ANALYZED WORKS

*Heshima Yangu* is a short and very simple play. Despite this, it is rich in content, revealing the mastery of its author. For Penina Muhando Mlama has managed to present complex social and cultural themes in a straightforward manner, as well as to provide an apt critique of patriarchal ideology and its impact on the lives of women and men in Tanzania.

In the play, Mzee Isa, a highly respected elderly village chief, opposes and tries to prevent a romantic relationship between his daughter Rukia and a young man Salum. Mzee Isa's main concern appears to be Salum's social and economic status. His daughter's chosen one is a poor illegitimate child (*mwanaharamu*) who does not know his father's name or descent and has been raised only by his mother, Mama Salum. Mzee Isa fears that his daughter's relationship with a man of such low economic and social status will affect his reputation. The dramatic climax is reached when Mama Salum, after twenty-five years of silence, confesses the truth about Salum's father, who turns out to be Mzee Isa. The woman's admission marks the end of the play.

The novel *Mungu Hakopeshwi* is much more elaborate. However, I will focus here only on two distinct themes that connect the critique presented in both works.

The story narrated in *Mungu Hakopeshwi* describes the tragic events that befall a Zanzibari Muslim family: Ahmed bin Said and Khadija Binti Najash, a married couple, and their four children – Said, Layla, Zahra and the youngest son Saleh. It is a pious family, wealthy and respected by the local community. However, the household of Ahmed and Khadija hides many secrets from the public eye, above all, behavior that shows disrespect and disregard toward women. Cruelty and psychological violence are inflicted daily on the female protagonists, Khadija, Layla and Zahra, by the despotic ruler of the household, Ahmed bin Said.

The plot of the novel centers on Ahmed's decision to marry off his eldest daughter Layla to Hafidh, despite the fact that he is a man with an extremely bad reputation, abusing alcohol and engaging in numerous extramarital sexual relationships. Knowing the truth about Layla's future husband, all the other members of the family try to convince Ahmed to

change his decision. Layla is secretly in love with Hassan, who comes from a poor family and works as a bus driver. For this reason, Ahmed bin Said treats him with scorn as an unsuitable candidate. Instead, he sends his eldest daughter away to live with Hafidh.

In her marriage, Layla experiences psychological and physical violence. However, despite pleading with her father to intervene, she is forced to remain in the abusive relationship. Layla dies tragically at the hands of her husband, a fact that is kept secret by Hafidh and his family.

Ahmed bin Said then tries to force another of his children into marriage, this time his son Said. The young man rebels against his father and runs away from home with his secret love Farhat. After Said's escape, Ahmed bin Said finds comfort in the friendship of one of his employees, a young man also named Ahmed. The latter gradually befriends the rest of Ahmed bin Said's family and falls in love with Zahra, who returns his feelings. Her mother, Khadija, arranges Zahra's wedding against the wishes of Ahmed bin Said, who again objects to his daughter's union with a man of lower social and economic status.

On the day of the wedding, a confrontation takes place between Ahmed bin Said and Lulu, the mother of Zahra's chosen one. She confesses that in her youth, she was in a relationship with Ahmed bin Said, as a result of which she became pregnant. However, the man abandoned her without a word and disappeared from her life. Lulu thus reveals that her son Ahmed, Zahra's intended, is the illegitimate child of Ahmed bin Said.

Both analyzed texts feature the motif of an illegitimate child, *mwanaharamu*. It is central to the tragic plot that is similar in both works and ultimately serves as a means to carry out a critique of the patriarchal and sexist ideologies, in particular the double standards in the judgment of male and female sexuality. Another narrative thread intertwined with the aforementioned motif is the tragic and impossible love between half-siblings who are unaware of their kinship. Both themes vividly highlight the hypocrisy of venerable men, convinced of their (moral) superiority over women.

In the analyzed works, the attitudes of male and female characters are contrasted in order to expose the dissonance between the words and actions of the former. The voices of the female protagonists shatter the deceptive façades and reveal the truth about the actions of men, which

are completely inconsistent with society's ethics. In the following sections, I will focus on showing how this stylistic device is used to reclaim women's voices and ultimately their moral integrity, dignity and reason.

#### 4. FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF SEXISM

*Hivi nyinyi wanaume mnatuchukulia vipi sisi wanawake enh? Mnataka mkituburuta tu vile mtakavyo nyinyi. Wala hamjali tunahitaji nini wala tunataka nini. Kama vile ni wanyama hatuna hisia juu ya chochote. Kila kitu mtuamulie nyinyi tu! ... Sisi ni binadamu wenye mioyo na hisia kama nyinyi. (Mungu Hakopeshiwi, p. 109)*

Why do you men hate us women so much? You want to push us around. You don't care what we need or want. You treat us like animals who have no emotions. You want to decide for us! ... We too are human beings, we have hearts and feelings, just like you.

*Heshima Yangu* addresses the issue of the social and economic exclusion and discrimination of single mothers and their illegitimate children. Underlying the marginalization of these social group is a double standard in society's judgment of women's and men's sexual conduct. The play demonstrates how men are absolved of guilt and responsibility in sexual relations, whereas women are condemned for transgressing culturally established sexual codes.

While Mama Salum and her illegitimate son Salum suffer public disgrace and are subjected to economic exclusion, Mzee Isa is a man held in high esteem by the local community. He is also in a significantly more privileged economic position compared to the two former characters. Salum's background and poverty seem to be the reasons why Mzee Isa is so strongly opposed to the marriage between the young man and his daughter Rukia, as can be inferred from the following quote:

*MZEE ISA: Unavuka mpaka sasa. Walahi, Rukia mwanangu, unavuka mpaka kabisa. Yaani natarajia kuwa siku moja nitakuwa kuarifiwa kuwa unataka kuolewa na Salum! Salum! Salum, mwana haramu yule! **Huku ni kutaka kunivunjia heshima yangu.** Niambie, ... umeshawahi kukutana na baba-mjomba, angalau babashangazi wa Salum. Hana. ... Hata kidogo siwezi kumwoza binti yangu kijana namna hii. (Heshima Yangu, p. 9)*

MZEE ISA: You have crossed the line. My god, Rukia, my child, you have crossed the line. Did you think that one day I would notify you that I want to marry you off to Salum?! Salum?! Salum, that bastard child! This is **to deprive me of my honor**. Tell me ... have you ever met his uncle from your mother's side or from your father's side? Well, no ... I will never marry off my daughter to such a boy.

However, the real reason why Mzee Isa rejects Salum's candidacy as a husband for his daughter is that he is the young man's biological father. All the same, his privileged social and economic position allows him to manipulate notions of honor and morality to his advantage.

Mzee Isa's and Ahmed bin Said's expectations of being treated with respect are in line with the Swahili cultural and social codes of behavior, as outlined earlier. Both characters are older men, husbands and fathers, who also play important political and economic roles in their local communities. However, as is particularly evident from the actions of Ahmed bin Said, men who position themselves as honorable authorities do not show similar respect and recognition to other people, neither women nor other less privileged social groups.

The feminist critique that, as I argue, can be found in Baharoon's narrative focuses on exposing Ahmed's sexist prejudices and his extremely dismissive and contemptuous attitude toward women. Ahmed bin Said is primarily portrayed as an authoritarian and violent husband and father. He uses verbal and psychological violence against his family and establishes his authority in the household through terror (Romańczuk 2021, 2022: 139–148). He treats his wife, Khadija, with great disrespect (*Mungu Hakopeshwi*, pp. 32–33) and views his two daughters as a burden that he wants to get rid of as quickly as possible, not caring much about where they “end up” (*Mungu Hakopeshwi*, p. 44).

Ahmed's behavior ultimately causes the downfall of his entire family. Firstly, it contributes to a significant deterioration of his wife's physical health. Secondly, Ahmed is also partly responsible for Layla's death, having ignored the abuse she suffered at the hands of her husband Hafidh and thus failing to protect his daughter and ensure her happiness. Thirdly, Zahra's resentment toward her father grows stronger. Finally, Ahmed's behavior

is the direct cause of Said's flight when the abusive father tries to force his son into an arranged marriage with a young woman named Sifat. The failure of Ahmed and his son to fulfill the marriage contract leads to the dishonoring of Sifat and her family, which in turn brings shame on Ahmed and his household (see also Romańczuk 2022: 146).

The critique of the sexual double standard is at the center of both narratives. As I demonstrated earlier, it is the basis of the plot of the play *Heshima Yangu*, and the motif of the illegitimate child (*mwana haramu*) serves to highlight the social injustice resulting from gender-based prejudices.

In the novel *Mungu Hakopeshwi*, this critique resonates in two tragic plot threads. The first is the forced marriage of Layla and Hafidh; the second Zahra's forthcoming marriage to her half-brother, the illegitimate child of Ahmed bin Said. Both tragedies are the result of Ahmed's selfishness and his highly sexist, disrespectful attitude toward women, even those who belong to his family.

For Ahmed bin Said, his family's honor and public recognition are very important. Nevertheless, they rest on the shoulders of young women and strongly depend on the public judgment of their moral conduct, i.e., their sexual behavior. In the sexist rhetoric presented by Ahmed bin Said, women are incapable of making good moral choices and therefore must be governed and guarded by men so that they do not "bring disgrace on the family", *aibu ndani ya nyumba* (*Mungu Hakopeshwi*, p. 33). However, when it comes to sexuality/morality, Ahmed bin Said applies double standards. The protagonist is aware of the bad reputation of his daughter's future husband Hafidh. Yet he chooses to ignore it and downplays the reports of the young man's adultery and drunkenness, finding justification in his gender and young age:

*Huo ni ujana tu, akishaoa tu atayaacha yote hayo. Wangapi wanakuwa hivyo baadae wanaacha. Ujana uwendawazimu chochote unafanya ... hao ndiyo vijanawa kiume ndivyo wanavyokuwa.* (*Mungu Hakopeshwi*, p. 111)

It is only youth, it will stop when he gets married. Many behave similarly, and then they stop. Youth is mad, it does everything ... that's how young men are.

These double moral standards are explicitly criticized at the end of the novel when the truth about Ahmed bin Said's past is revealed by Lulu,



his former lover and the mother of his illegitimate son. The motif of the illegitimate child, as I have stated before, is present in both texts and strongly emphasizes not only the hypocrisy of the men and their immoral conduct but also their gender-based prejudices.

The male characters, Mzee Isa and Ahmed bin Said, are criticized not only for being sexist but also for their highly materialistic approach, which also translates into their interpretation and implementation of the concept of *heshima*, as their treatment of other human beings is influenced by economic factors. In a broader context, it involves the materialistic conceptualization of the ideas of respect and honor, which manifests itself in class discrimination. This can be seen particularly in Mzee Isa's attitude toward Mama Salum and Salum, whom the main protagonist greatly disrespects because of their poverty.

In the novel *Mungu Hakopeshwi*, Layla's beloved, Hassan, is a poor bus driver. He is thus rejected by Ahmed bin Said due to his economic and social position. Moreover, Ahmed's authoritarian decision to marry Layla off to Hafidh, who comes from an economically privileged family, is motivated by the desire to protect his own respected position, as well as to raise his social status. Indeed, he determines a person's worth based on their wealth. Forcing Layla to marry Hafidh is an act of extreme selfishness and a commercial transaction that the father carries out at the expense of his daughter.

The narrator draws particular attention to the fact that Ahmed bin Said, the father figure and patriarch of the family, places value only on material things and dismisses non-material values, thus behaving contrary to Swahili ethical principles. He is also criticized for his dismissive attitude toward education and the acquisition of knowledge, especially by women. Since he despises and humiliates others, women in particular, he is neither a moral nor a wise person.

The attitudes of the male characters from the analyzed texts are strongly contrasted with those of the female protagonists. Rukia and Mama Salum, Khadija, Zahra and Layla introduce the voices of reason and wisdom, and it is they who become the authorities imparting (moral) knowledge to their families and communities.

## 5. WOMEN'S MORAL INTEGRITY, DIGNITY AND WISDOM

*Heshima na mwenye mali hubebwa na mali yake, siku mali ikianguka huanguka na heshima yake. Elimu haijilisiki ila kuzidi utukufu wake, basi vipi mwenye elimu atapotezea heshima yake wakati alibeba elimu kichwani mwake. Hata akitajwa baada ya kifo chake bado huheshimiwa na kutukuzwa kwa elimu na maarifa yake. (Mungu Hakopeshwi, p. 83)*

He or she who is rich and owes his or her respectable position to wealth will lose it eventually when he or she loses his wealth. A man cannot lose knowledge, it brings him pride and glory, therefore one who is intelligent cannot lose respectability because he or she accumulates all knowledge in his or her head. He or she is remembered after his or her death, is still respected and celebrated for his or her knowledge and wisdom.

Throughout the play, Mzee Isa desperately tries to silence any criticism from the female characters by devaluing their importance and undermining their credibility, as he fears that the truth about his past immoral acts will be revealed. Therefore, he presents the women's voices as irrational, nonsensical and dangerous. He describes his daughter Rukia's attempts to regain her subjectivity and the ability to decide about her own life as nonsense (*upuuzi*) and madness (*wazimu*) (*Heshima Yangu*, p. 10). Moreover, at the end of the play, Mama Salum reveals that she was forced into silence by Mzee Isa's threats to harm not only her but also their son Salum.

Ahmed bin Said, like Mzee Isa, treats authority and social respect as his privilege of power, due to his age, gender, wealth and role in the family. To silence women, Ahmed uses a discourse of sexist prejudice and a language ideology that depicts women's speech as unreasonable, meaningless and refers to it as nonsense (*upuuzi*), blathering (*kidomodomo*), lies and gossip (*uzushi, umbea, fitina*) (see Romańczuk 2021: 106, 2022: 172–192).

In the analyzed texts, the voices of the female characters are privileged, and they themselves are elevated to the status of moral authorities. They challenge social injustice and expose a patriarchal ideology that manipulates the notions of honor and morality. The individual honor and social recognition to which Mzee Isa continually refers do not stem from the protagonist's adherence to appropriate moral principles. They are the result of gender and age, as well as his economic position, and are criticized as

a patriarchal and class privilege. In an attempt to reclaim her subjectivity and autonomy, Rukia becomes an even more radical voice of defiance and criticism when she challenges these norms and presents them as serving only a narrow, privileged group of men.

*RUKIA: ... „Heshima yangu, heshima yangu”. ... Ni heshima gani ipatikanayo katika kumkatalia furaha kijana mzuri, mwenye tabia nzuri na moyo wa imani, eti kwa sababu ni mwana haramu. Ni kosa la nani Salum kutokujua baba yake? Ni kosa la nani mama yake Salum kuzaliwa peke yake, ... Sherehe ya harusi ni heshima kuliko furaha ya maisha ya binadamu asiye na kosa. ... Hivyo hizi heshima ni za wazee tu? (Heshima Yangu, p. 10)*

*RUKIA: ... “My honor, my honor”. ... What an honor one gets by taking away the happiness of a good young man, of good character and a heart full of faith. Just because he is an illegitimate child. Who is to blame that Salum does not know his father? Whose fault is it that his mother raised him alone ... The wedding is more important than the happiness of a man who, after all, is not guilty of anything. ... Is respect due only to older men?*

In the final act, Mama Salum confronts Mzee Isa and publicly accuses him not only of extreme selfishness but also of hypocrisy. When the man comes to Mama Salum to ensure that she will not reveal the truth about their past relationship, he cites his high social standing, respectability and authority. The heroine reacts to this with great anger:

*MAMA SALUM: (Akicheka.) Wasema juu ya heshima saa hizi. Heshima unaijua wewe. Mimi sijui hata siku moja. Miaka yote hii nimeishi kwenye aibu ya kuwa na mtoto asiye na baba. Heshima yangu uliivunja wewe zamani sana. ... Kama ni heshima uliyoililia, mimi siifahamu. ... Kama ni kudanganya watu na kutesa wengine ndiyo heshima unayoidhamiri wewe basi mimi leo niko tayari kuivunja mbali. Hakujua maana ya heshima toka mwanzo wala hujui sasa na sioni kwa nini ujidanganye wewe pamoja na watu wengine kuwa una heshima ya kujivunia. (Heshima Yangu, pp. 17–19)*

*MAMA SALUM: (Laughing.) Today you are preaching to me about honor. Do you know what it is? I haven't experienced respect one day. All these years I have lived with shame because my child has no father. You deprived me of my honor a long time ago ... I do not know the honor you weep for ... If it is about deceiving and persecuting others, I am ready to take that honor away from you. You once did not understand what honor is and you still do not grasp its meaning. I don't understand why you continue to lie to yourself and others that you have any honor to boast about.*

Breaking years of silence, Mama Salum performs an act of rebellion against Mzee Isa's authority and the ideology behind it. Shedding the shame and disgrace imposed on her by society, she lays them on her persecutor, Mzee Isa, accusing him of hypocrisy, lies, selfishness and cruelty. The protagonist challenges the patriarchal rhetoric, also revealing how it controls the social discourse, essentially serving only those already in power.

In *Mungu Hakopeshwi*, the contestation of patriarchal oppression takes place within a critique of the institution of forced marriage and domestic violence. A young female character, Zahra, has the bravest voice of all those described in the novel. She speaks out primarily in defense of women's humanity and morality (*utu/ubinadamu*), their ability to make informed and moral decisions, and finally, their right to be treated with due respect (Romańczuk 2021). However, even muffled voices such as that of Khadija ultimately grow stronger in the face of the injustices suffered by her children at the hands of Ahmed bin Said.

Khadija is unable to stand up to her husband in Layla's defense. Her first act of rebellion comes after her eldest son Said runs away, when she realizes that Ahmed's behavior is ruining her family and causing her to lose her children. This is the first time she addresses her husband with such firmness and courage:

*... sikiliza nikwambie Ahmed! ... Imani, huruma, upendo na utii wa mwanamke usichukulie kuwa ndio udhaifu wake, ukifikiria hivyo utaangamia. ... Mwanamke si dhaiifu kama mnavyofikiria, ana uwezo wa kufanya chochote ikiwa ataamua. Basi chungu sana, mapenzi na utii wangu juu yako ni katika haki zangu juu yako kama ni mume wangu, lakini pia kumbuka kuwa nina haki juu ya watoto wangu. (Mungu Hakopeshwi, pp. 137–138)*

... listen to what I tell you, Ahmed! ... Do not take for weakness the faith, compassion, love and obedience of a woman, do not think that these are the causes of her doom. ... A woman is not weak, as you think, she can achieve anything if she so chooses. Be careful, my love and obedience to you are your rights because you are my husband, however, remember that I am also obliged to my children.

Khadija experiences yet another psychological shift when she learns the true cause of Layla's death from Hafidh's mother, Bibi Maimuna, who visits Khadija's house tormented by remorse for concealing the truth. After

a conversation with Bibi Maimuna, Khadija's consciousness is transformed, and this change is reflected in her behavior: she recognizes her husband's involvement in Layla's death and interprets the tragedy as a painful lesson for herself, as a mother who should have taken more responsibility for the lives and happiness of her children. When she discovers that Zahra and a young family friend, Ahmed, have feelings for each other, she decides, against her husband's will, to unite the young couple. Unfortunately, Khadija does not know that the young man is Ahmed bin Said's illegitimate son. Defying the will of her husband is necessary in the face of the violence and discrimination suffered by the female characters. Nevertheless, Khadija's rebellion is presented as an act motivated primarily by her maternal love. It is shown as a moral and parental duty that Ahmed fails to fulfill.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The analyzed narratives focus on gender-based injustice and domestic violence. They also criticize patriarchal social practices and the rhetoric that absolves men of responsibility for sexual relations, while at the same time disciplining female sexuality and subjecting it to public moral judgment. They create very strong female characters who have the potential to become unforgettable. As the female protagonists regain their voices, and at the same time their dignity, they establish justice and bring reason to the debate about Swahili ethical principles. The interpretations and implications of *heshima* (dignity and respectability) are shown in their entanglement with socio-cultural constructs of gender and class.

In their feminist critique, the narratives are guided by concepts derived from Swahili humanistic philosophy, the ethical principles of being a moral person. The texts ignite discussion about women's rights and their place in the Swahili society and also provoke debate on humanity and ethics.

The women's voices condemn selfishness, egoism, materialism, lack of consideration for other people, aggression and violence. They contrast these traits and behaviors with empathy, truthfulness and respect for other people regardless of their class or gender. Above all, they draw attention to the non-material values which are the fundamentals of one's *utu*: *heshima*

‘respect’, *uaminifu* ‘honesty’ and *uadilifu* ‘integrity’, and which are regarded as elements of a good life in Swahili culture and philosophy. Criticizing the exclusion, discrimination and oppression experienced by women, the voices of the female characters are in tune with their cultural and social identities, as well as with the Swahili intellectual and philosophical tradition.

They repeatedly remind us of the impermanence of material things and point out that the measure of the esteem that a person enjoys is not their wealth or social position but their (moral) conduct, as well as their wisdom, which, as human beings, they are obliged to pass on. Finally, I want to conclude by stating that the studied texts, by turning to the ethical principles, meet Swahili aesthetic standards for literature in regard to the transmission and circulation of moral knowledge in society.

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## Capturing the lexical richness of Swahili poetry

### ABSTRACT

This paper is essentially a report on a web-based project that began over 20 years ago to document the vocabulary used mainly in the Swahili canon of classical Swahili poetry in the form of a glossary illustrated by textual citations from the poetry. It is a digital project, and part of the results have already been published in a WordPress site supported by HumTech, a technological support unit at the University of California, Los Angeles, California (UCLA). As the project evolved, it has expanded to include pedagogical and research tools to assist researchers and learners of advanced genres of Swahili literature in learning about and studying Swahili poetry, especially the poetry written in the so-called classical period. While the main thrust is still the documentation of lexis used in poetry and the construction of a comprehensive glossary, supported by citations from Swahili prosodic literature, other elements have been added: a bibliography of prosodic-focused literature, a section with information about specific poems and their authors, and a provision that allows the uploading of video and other relevant documentation. The project can be viewed online here: <http://swahilipoetry.humnet.ucla.edu/>.

**KEYWORDS:** Swahili language, Swahili poetry, Swahili lexis, anthology of Swahili poetry, bibliography of Swahili poetic works, online Swahili/English prosodic lexis, Swahili dictionary, African poetry, African language dictionaries

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper covers just the highlights of the UCLA Online Swahili Poetry Dictionary project. It consists of two main sections. The first is a short presentation about Swahili and its literary tradition, and the nature of Swahili dictionaries as they relate to my own work. The second is a look at some



details about the project itself as it is presented in a WordPress website. The first part is intended to give the reader some context before I launch into discussing the details about the dictionary.

## 2. SWAHILI, THE CLASSICAL TRADITION AND SWAHILI DICTIONARIES

### 2.1. THE SWAHILI STORY

The paper assumes that the reader is generally familiar with Swahili, both linguistically and culturally, and so I won't go into detail about the language itself.<sup>1</sup> The literature on and about Swahili and Swahili poetry is so rich that it would be superfluous to discuss the details here. However, I do want to call the reader's attention to two main points relative to the topic of this paper: 1) the earliest extant poetry we know about was written in one of the Northern Dialects (ND), most commonly the variant spoken in Lamu Town, referred to as *Kiamu* in Swahili and *Amu* in English, and it is these variants,<sup>2</sup> and/or their legendary ancestor, *Kingozi*, that still serve as the model of much prosodic composition written by coastal mother-tongue Swahili speakers today, as well as by many second-language speakers; 2) modern-day Swahili, the Standard dialect (based on *Kiunguja* of Zanzibar Town), is the focus of nearly all Swahili dictionaries. This dialectal dichotomy and the choice in the 1930s of *Kiunguja* as the basis for the standard rather than one of the northern literary dialects (*Kimvita* or *Kiamu*) underlies the paucity of dictionaries devoted to the lexis of Swahili poetry.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For readers who might like some suggestions for further reading, I recommend Hinnebusch (1996 and 1979), Mugane (2015) and Whiteley (1969). For an extensive bibliography of the literature dealing with Swahili, the reader should consult Geider (2003). For a bibliography that focuses on Swahili poetry, see the *Bibliography* on the current project's website.

<sup>2</sup> The Northern Dialects, besides *Amu* and other close-by dialects, include *Mvita* and other Mombasan variants (Nurse and Hinnebusch 1993).

<sup>3</sup> See Mbaabu (1991) for a history of the Swahili standardization process and the choice of *Kiunguja* as the basis for the standard language.

## 2.2. SWAHILI LITERATURE

Since the project focuses mainly on cataloging the lexis of Swahili poetry, I should say a bit about the genre itself. The tradition is old, going back centuries, if not longer. Swahili literacy probably developed slowly in the beginning; we can only speculate about this because the earliest surviving manuscripts and documents are dated to the first quarter or so of the 18th century, that is, the early 1700s.<sup>4</sup> They were all written using the Arabic orthography or a modified Swahili-Arabic script. The use of a Latin-based script entered the scene with the arrival of European missionaries and colonial administrations, but the Arabic-based script still continues to be used in some quarters. The extant Swahili poetry from the early period represents a fully mature, highly formalized prosodic genre. Most scholars agree that these mature works, if not based on an earlier oral tradition as they surely were, had to have been preceded by other earlier written compositions that simply did not survive the vagaries of a tropical environment or unsettled political conflicts.

Many scholars refer to this period of Swahili literacy and literary output as the Classical Age. For instance, the subtitle of Allen's (1971) book is "Six examples of a Swahili classical verse form with translations and notes". The term is also implicit in the title of Knappert's (1979) book, *Four Centuries of Swahili Verse*, and made explicit by the discussion within its pages.

The main features which define this poetry are: 1) subject matter that is often Islamic and didactic, at least, in the earliest compositions (and even today in compositions that follow ND models), and which usually includes large numbers of Arabic-sourced vocabulary.<sup>5</sup> Some of this vocabulary is part of the lexicon of present-day Swahili and is recorded in many dictionaries, part of it is not. Today's poets, though part of this tradition, write about diverse subjects from the construction of dhows to the rendering of the

<sup>4</sup> The earliest surviving Swahili poetical work is dated 1728 (Knappert 1979).

<sup>5</sup> Not all of the early poetry was religious. The poetry of Muyaka (c. 1776–1840) was more often secular than not; he wrote, for example, about love, local politics and the conflict between the Mazrui dynasty of Mombasa and the Omani sultanate of Zanzibar (see Abdulaziz 1979). Also, the long epic, *Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima 1307 A.H.*, deals with the Swahili revolt against their German overlords (see el Buhriy 1960; Mische and Vierke 2010).

Christian gospels into verse; 2) classical poetry adheres to strict prosodic forms; 3) classical poetry, as emphasized earlier, is mainly written in the northern Swahili dialects of Lamu and Mombasa, often patterned after an older, somewhat ephemeral literary model called *Kingozi*; and 4) classical poetry is looked upon by the core of Swahili speakers themselves, the heritage speakers,<sup>6</sup> as the product of a golden age of culture and civilization.

I would extend the reference, namely, “classical poetry”, to even modern compositions that follow the 18th-century models of prosody, scansion and rhyming. I should note too that I document the lexis found in modern compositions that do not fit within the classical model, e.g., the poetry of Kezilahabi plus others cited in the project’s *Bibliography*, Kahigi and Mulokozi (1976), Mulokozi and Kahigi (1979). Poets are wordsmiths; and the modern poets are on the cutting edge of the lexical growth of a language, as were the classical poets in their own time.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.3. SWAHILI DICTIONARIES

To further understand why there is a need for a dictionary of lexis encountered in Swahili poetry, we also need to take a look at the characteristics of the currently available stock of Swahili-English dictionaries, as follows:

1) Most early Swahili-English dictionaries are glossaries rather than monolingual, definitional dictionaries; even so, I will continue using the term “dictionary” in reference to both.

2) There is an impressive number of Swahili dictionaries and phrase books, and we see the publication of yet another one, in print or digital format, nearly every year. There are at least 150 print titles available in the UCLA library.

3) The earliest dictionaries were written by and for missionaries and government officials, beginning approximately in 1882 (Krapf 1882) up to 1939 (Johnson 1939).

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<sup>6</sup> I define “heritage Swahili speakers” as those mother-tongue speakers from mainly coastal Swahili communities to distinguish them from non-mother-tongue speakers of varieties of Standard Swahili.

<sup>7</sup> See Mazrui (2007) for an intriguing and philosophically informed discussion of Swahili literature and poetry.

4) From the early 1970s onward, there was a shift as compilers began to focus on Swahili speakers as consumers of their dictionaries, and so monolingual, definitional dictionaries started to appear.<sup>8</sup> Recently, at least three new substantial, monolingual dictionaries have been published (Kiango et al. 2007; Chiduo et al. 2016; Wamitila 2016).

5) Nearly all are “practical” in their orientation and written for speakers of Standard Swahili. Others are specialized and devoted to specific topics, such as modern, technical vocabulary and terminology.<sup>9</sup>

6) Most focus on the lexis of Standard Swahili and ignore the literary dialect.<sup>10</sup> Many seem to build on Johnson (1939), published by the Oxford University Press for the Interterritorial Swahili Committee.

7) Many, if not most, give some examples of usage; a lot of these are from everyday language, rather than literary; often, the source of the examples is not acknowledged.

8) Only three, by any definition, have anything to do with prosodic literary Swahili: Sacleux (1939)<sup>11</sup> and Wamitila (2006);<sup>12</sup> and one avowedly only by title, Knappert’s and van Kessel’s (2010) *Dictionary of Literary Swahili*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> However, as early as 1935, Johnson published a monolingual Swahili-Swahili dictionary with definitions apparently intended for speakers of Swahili.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili published a small 58-page, English-Swahili dictionary of linguistic terminology (TUKI 1990). The Baraza la Kiswahili la Zanzibar, in turn, published works on the lexis of two Swahili dialects, Pemba (Pemba Island) and Makunduchi (Zanzibar Island) (BAKIZA 2012a, 2012b). Another example is a specialized dictionary of diplomatic terminology (Mutiso 2013).

<sup>10</sup> I’ve not had a chance to closely examine the two newest, monolingual, comprehensive Swahili-Swahili dictionaries (Chiduo et al. 2016; Wamitila 2016) to see if there was any consistent effort to capture the lexis of the northern literary dialects of Swahili.

<sup>11</sup> Sacleux was a French Catholic priest whose initial motivation was probably evangelical, but clearly, as indicated by the content of his Swahili-French and French-Swahili productions, plus his work on the Comorian languages and other academic endeavors, his motivation was also scholarly and academic. In his work, he made specific use of literary sources to support his lexical entries for many headwords, more so than any other Swahili lexicographer.

<sup>12</sup> Wamitila’s glossary, although entitled *Kamusi ya Ushairi* [Dictionary of Poetry], is a limited work, paperback in size and 164 pages in length including 14 pages of preface and introduction. It is intended to be used by students of all levels in East Africa. It has relatively few quotes from literary sources, perhaps close to one per page.

<sup>13</sup> Sacleux’s work, in my view, is a model of what a useful bilingual glossary should be. Knappert’s and van Kessel’s dictionary is the antithesis of that. I say this with regret because of all the people who have done lexical work, including Sacleux, Knappert was by far

9) None are strictly citation dictionaries in the sense the Oxford English Dictionary is. Sacleux (1939) includes citations for some of his entries and identifies their source. Knappert's and van Kessel's (2010) so-called "literary" dictionary has many examples of usage, but nothing "literary" whose source can be identified, unless specifically mentioned. Wamitila's (2006) little pocket dictionary is hardly comprehensive since it only gives a very small subset of lexis and a scattering of citations.

10) With the beginning in 1964 of published lexicographical research, carried out by the Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili (TUKI) – Swahili Research Institute at the University of Dar es Salaam – there has been a huge growth of lexicographical output for the Standard dialect. This, I believe it is safe to say, has stimulated much commercial research and publication in Kenya, but not in Uganda (as far as I know), nor in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This reflects, somewhat, the status and role Swahili plays in these countries.<sup>14</sup>

11) Oxford University Press has been at the publishing forefront of dictionaries for about 80 years, but recently other local publishers have started taking advantage of the commercial opportunities granted by a language that has around 100 million speakers.

12) Now that we are well into the computer age, there is a growing number of web-based dictionaries. An early digital "crowd-based" effort was the Yale Kamusi, a Swahili-English/English-Swahili glossary, at Yale

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the best equipped intellectually, by training and by long study of literary texts, to do a literary Swahili dictionary. It's not certain how this dictionary came about, or what Knappert's original intention was. What is clear is that it was compiled, edited and published after his death. Their work, even looking beyond the many editing flaws, plus omissions and verbatim unattributed quotes from others' work, especially Johnson (1939), is almost useless for my purposes. Even so, I have consulted it from time to time. It is most helpful when it comes to borrowed lexis from Arabic. It has very few citations from literary sources.

<sup>14</sup> TUKI is the present-day descendent of the Interterritorial Swahili Committee, founded in 1930, and thus has nine decades of unmatched lexical research and publishing; see Mbaabu (1991) for a history of the Committee.

University.<sup>15</sup> Several other similar projects are now available.<sup>16</sup> However, none have been helpful for my project; they mainly cover only Standard Swahili. Many of them seem motivated by commercial concerns rather than academic goals.<sup>17</sup>

13) Google Translate. I only mention this to say it is useless for my project. No surprise there, I would wager.

With one exception, viz., Sacleux (1939), as the reader can surmise from the above summary, this huge body of lexicographical output has not been all that useful for cataloging the lexis used in poetry. With the exceptions already noted earlier, nearly all of it is concerned with Standard Swahili, and nearly all of it ignores the lexis of the Northern Swahili dialect in which much of the classical genre of poetry is written. While it might be considered presumptuous on my part to take on such a project and to think that I can improve on Sacleux's monumental work, my aim is limited. As inferred earlier, citations are important because each is a window reflecting how a quoted poet thought about a word and its meaning, plus providing an important historical perspective for any given lexical item. Therefore, being as thorough and comprehensive as possible in recording these in a glossary is important for lexical studies and research in general. I thus consider my work an extension of Sacleux's.<sup>18</sup> In some respects, doing so

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<sup>15</sup> This dictionary, started by Martin Benjamin at Yale University in 1994, has now been incorporated into a much more ambitious digital project involving numerous African languages, called Kamusi GOLD: The Global Online Living Dictionary. However, the Swahili part does not seem to be available presently. See a critique of an early incarnation of the Yale Kamusi (Hinnebusch 2001).

<sup>16</sup> A few of these can be mentioned: 1. The Online Kiswahili (Swahili) – English Dictionary (Hillewaert and Schryver 2004); 2. Glosbe – a multilingual online dictionary; 3. Lexilogos – Swahili Dictionary (a portal); 4. Oxford University Press – bab.la (a portal); 5. Wikamusi Kamusi Huru – the Swahili equivalent of the Wiktionary (Wikipedia's English Dictionary). Dozens of somewhat ad hoc, amateur-like glossaries can also be found on the web.

<sup>17</sup> As a consequence, they are minimal in what they offer. Some also suffer from the lack of consistent editorial oversight and sound lexicographical best practices. They have not been very useful for my purposes in understanding the lexis in Swahili poetry, and so I have mostly ignored them. In this connection I should also mention the growing body of analytical studies and reviews of Swahili dictionaries, e.g., Hinnebusch (1998) and De Pauw et al. (2009).

<sup>18</sup> This touches on an important consideration: my project has barely scratched the surface of the work remaining to be done to fully "capture the richness of Swahili poetry". I only

takes advantage of a resource Sacleux did not have: precisely, a much larger stock of research, translations and other publications is now available that wasn't when Sacleux began his foundational research and collection of lexis, long before his work was published in 1939. Because my project is digitally based, it opens up research doors that have generally been ignored, or not emphasized, because the tools have not been there to do the work. A digital project can help yield answers to questions such as, for a few examples: 1) what lexis did poets use that is not in use today, and why; 2) in what ways has the core lexis changed, e.g., between now and the time Muyaka was writing in Mombasa; 3) what differences are there, say, between the vocabulary used by Muyaka in Mombasa and by the authors of *Mwana Kupona* and *Al-Inkishafi* in the north; 4) what additional senses have expanded the meaning of specific sets of vocabulary; and so forth.

### 3. THE UCLA SWAHILI POETRY AND DICTIONARY WEBSITE

#### 3.1. METHODOLOGY

Before discussing the dictionary's user interface and its components, the methodological approach in deciding its content should be outlined. First, for any given poem, I concentrate on identifying and listing the vocabulary that has likely not been included in any of the Standard Swahili dictionaries; this includes identifiable ND vocabulary, which has distinctive phonological markers not found in the Standard dialect, and obscure borrowed vocabulary, usually Arabic in origin, that is not fully integrated into the standard lexicon. Second, this list is then expanded to include uncommon standard vocabulary, where "uncommon" is understood as likely unknown by an advanced student of Swahili, heuristically myself.<sup>19</sup> The next step

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regard what I've done so far as a model, a starting point, for a group of dedicated Swahili lexicographers to carry on. The project needs a team of workers. A single, superannuated, researcher can only get so far.

<sup>19</sup> This admittedly is a hit-or-miss affair and depends on my knowledge of Standard Swahili lexis, so I often overcompensate by including standard lexis that I consider unknown by a user not intimately familiar with the Swahili used in the older poetry. Since the project

is to select appropriate glosses and citations that adequately capture the meaning and sense of the lexical item in question. Usually, just one citation is sufficient, but sometimes more from different poems help elucidate usage and meaning. Citations are tagged with unique coding which identifies the poem and verse.

When I first started developing the project early on, the text base (see *Poets and Poems Inventory*) supplied a corpus of digitized poetry which was stored in a FileMaker Pro database. This could then be searched for specific instances of lexis; the output was an organized list of verses with accompanying associated citations. With such lists exemplified with citations, I could then define the word accordingly, or easily select the best citation to illustrate the meaning of the headword. However, because of numerous problems, mostly associated with breakdowns in the software's operation, I eventually scrapped the use of the software for doing the searching.

Also, at the outset, I began by gathering lexis from collections and anthologies whose poems had already been translated, e.g., those in Harries (1962) or Allen (1971), thinking that I could rely on their translations to supply the citations. However, I found it necessary to do extensive editing of those translations because they were either too literary (see Hichens 1939), left elements of Swahili grammar untranslated, or were inadequate in reflecting the meaning intended by the poem's author by his choice of a particular word. In the end, I found myself retranslating whole poems so that the citations and their translation would adequately illustrate the meaning of a particular word. Now, so far as the project has proceeded, all of the lexis cited in the project's glossary is backed up by a set of completely translated poems that are published, as it were, in the project's text base. Retranslating everything, however, is not sustainable, even though

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began, its goals have changed in emphasis. There is now the explicit aim of providing citations for lexis used in poetry, first to show how a particular word was used, second to provide documentation that a word – even if included in a standard language dictionary – was in use by writers at a specific time; and third, how it was understood at the time a poet used it in his poetry. The hope here is to maximize the project's potential usefulness as a research tool. So, in recent work I've been including most lexis found in a poem, usually excluding what I deem to be the most common lexis, such as function words, pronominal concords and elements common to nearly all variants of Swahili.



it might have certain advantages, such as providing the complete poem as a context for other researchers to build on. Even so, I have found myself devoting huge amounts of time to translating rather than adding to the content of the glossary.

For glosses, I depend a lot on what has been recorded in other dictionaries, many times supplemented by my own gloss, which follows my understanding of how a particular poet has used the word. If a gloss for a word is suggested by the original translator either in the translation itself or as a note in a glossary, I will also record that. Giving multiples of glosses from different sources is further information about how a certain word can be understood.

### 3.2. WEBSITE COMPONENTS

I use an online WordPress site to present the results of my work so far. This is supported by UCLA through the Humanities Technology (HumTech) unit. This, as it were, is the public face of the project. I have organized it into five main parts, as follows:

- (1) *About Swahili Poetry*
- (2) *Poets and Poems Inventory*
- (3) *Glossary*
- (4) *Documentation*
- (5) *Swahili Poetry Bibliography*

Two additional components are the *Acknowledgements* and a *List of Project Contributors*. It's self-evident what these are, and I won't discuss them further. The first component, *About Swahili Poetry*, and the last two in the list, *Documentation* and the *Swahili Poetry Bibliography*, are elements that have pedagogical or research uses, while the *Poets and Poems Inventory*, part of the core along with the *Glossary*, also includes information that is not per se lexical, such as information about the poets and the poems they have written. I will discuss each of these in turn in the following subsections. In the WordPress presentation, each of these components are selectable buttons that link the user accordingly to the desired component.

### 3.2.1. *About Swahili Poetry*

This section offers only a general outline of the topic. There are some brief comments to orient the user of the website, with references to more exhaustive treatments as found in the project's *Bibliography*.

### 3.2.2. *Poets and Poems Inventory*

Together with the *Glossary*, this section, which houses the text base, forms the lexical core of the project. It fulfills two functions. Primarily, it is the corpora for all the citations already used in the glossary; it's where the user can examine the complete textual context of any citation used in the glossary. Secondly, it can serve pedagogically as an anthology of poetry, where students can read and study a wide range of compositions, examples from both the classical canon and some written by modern poets, many of whom ignore the strict traditional rules governing a poem's rhyming and scansion. By selecting this component, the user opens a drop-down menu which gives an inventory of poets whose translated poetry can be found in the text base. Embedded in the list of authors' names are the poems themselves that I have translated. Each of the authors' names in the drop-down menu is linked to more information, often bibliographical, about the poets and the poems. (This feature was inspired by Mulokozi and Sengo 1995.) Thus, as an example, after opening the drop-down menu and selecting the name for Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany,<sup>20</sup> the user opens a page that gives some information about the author. Because it is digital, this can be expanded to include any number of topics, including, for instance, a bibliography listing works about his poetical and scholarly output.

Also, by selecting a poet's name, the user can open a side bar, which contains a linked list of the author's poetry. In Nabhany's case, the list of poems includes *Asoiyuwa Duniya* [The one who knows not the world], *Kobe na Sungura* [The tortoise and the hare], *Ndege* [Birds] and *Shaza* [Oyster shell].

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<sup>20</sup> Although Nabhany (1927–2017) is a contemporary poet who recently passed away, he followed the canonical models. I had the privilege of working and talking with him about poetry and its lexis on numerous occasions when I was in Kenya on research trips and when he visited UCLA as a Fulbright scholar.

Each work is presented following a standard format: 1) the poem itself with a parallel English translation; 2) a summary of the poem in English; and 3) a glossary of lexis specific to each poem.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the poem can stand on its own as part of a pedagogical lesson. Given that each poem has its own glossary, the reader of a particular work can stay within its dedicated page to look up a particular word without jumping to the master *Glossary*.

### 3.2.3. *Glossary*

This component is an alphabetized master list of all glossed lexis from all of the poems in the text base. A typical entry in the *Glossary* consists of the usual categories of information found in any dictionary: the headword,<sup>22</sup> followed by “part of speech”: nouns are identified as such along with their noun class membership, using the traditional Bantu numbering system, e.g., [n. 1/2], [n. 3/4], and so on; for verbs, following the practice in many Swahili and Bantu-language dictionaries, tagging is included for derived verbs, e.g., [v. cs.] for causatives, [v. appl.] for applied or prepositionals, [v. st.] for statives, and so forth.

The gloss follows next. This is usually based on the word’s use in the citation.<sup>23</sup> Other glosses – if available from other lexical sources, such as Johnson (1939), Sacleux (1939), etc. – are entered and coded, e.g., FJ for

<sup>21</sup> For each poem, I also have been working on a set of grammar notes to explain aspects of structure that diverge from those found in the Standard dialect. These have not yet been published on the site.

<sup>22</sup> For Swahili verbs, the bare infinitive is listed with a tag identifying its derived type; for Swahili count nouns, the singular form is given, e.g., *mtu* ‘person’, followed by the plural prefix, e.g., *mtu/wa-* plus a tag identifying its gender, viz., [n. 1/2]. For non-count nouns which don’t have singular noun shapes, such as *maji* [n. 6] ‘water’ and *mafuta* [n. 6] ‘oil’, the nouns are written in their usual form. Nouns where only singular or plural forms are possible are tagged accordingly, e.g., *kiza* [n. 7] ‘darkness’, *ubabe* [n. 14] ‘brutishness’, *zana* [n. 10] ‘apparatus’, *mikambe* [n. 4] ‘game played in water’, *mirimo* [n. 4] ‘secrets of traditional medical practitioners’.

<sup>23</sup> Usually, I give my own gloss first, based on my understanding of how the word is used in the poem being cited. If there is a close match between the meaning of a word as used in the citation and its gloss in a published source, I quote that also. Sometimes the gloss is a “summary” of the glosses found in other dictionaries, and sometimes it is a quote from another dictionary. Numerous glosses are given for comparative research reasons. All are tagged as to source.

Johnson (1939), Sx for Sacleux (1939). In some cases, glosses from the original translators are quoted either from their translations or lexical notes, e.g., Hichens' (1939) translation of *Al-Inkishafi*. Where known, dialect source and/or corresponding dialect lexis, usually as identified by Sacleux (1939), is recorded. Finally, if a word is borrowed, its source is indicated, usually as shown by Johnson (1939).<sup>24</sup> Otherwise, words of Bantu origin are the default and are not marked as such. Etymologies in the sense that we find in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) are not given. Eventually, however, where possible, I intend to give proto-reconstructions, à la Guthrie (1967–1971) or from other sources, e.g., Nurse and Hinnebusch (1993).

There are several categories of information that I have not included for lemmas in the project's *Glossary*. One is marking a metaphorical use of a word. That is, I usually don't overtly note when a word is used metaphorically. Even though metaphor is the currency of poetry, it can be inferred from the intersection of the glosses and the citations given for a specific word. Nor do I code vocabulary for membership in semantic sets, such as *agr.* (agriculture), *comm.* (commerce), *mil.* (military), *relig.* (religion), as is done in Knappert and van Kessel (2010). These labels, of course, could be added at any time.

Nor have I organized lemmas based on their root or stem structure, that is, I have not placed all related vocabulary under a single headword, often with unglossed related words included at the end of the entry, as has been the practice in other dictionaries of Bantu languages, e.g., Johnson (1939).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> I am aware that Johnson does not have the last word on loan words in Swahili and that a great deal more detailed research needs to be done; see Zawawi (1979), Lodhi (1982–1984, 2000) and Buell (1998). However, for now, Johnson's assessments of a word's origin are a starting point.

<sup>25</sup> The TUKI (2001) Swahili-English dictionary, intended for Swahili speakers, is another example of this practice, thus the headword *-gaagaa* 'roll from side to side' is followed by derivative forms without translation: *-gaagalia*, *-gaagalika*, *-gagalisha* and *mgaagaa*. Since the TUKI series of dictionaries is intended for native speakers who presumably understand the morphology of verb derivation, the lack of glosses is probably not a problem. For me it is, as it would be for learners. In this project, the goal has been to illustrate how derived forms are used because their meaning is not always obvious, even when one knows the meaning of the root or stem and the rules of derivation. For students who are non-Swahili speakers, there are the obvious pedagogical reasons for glossing derived verb forms; they don't necessarily know the rules and don't realize how derivational suffixes can subtly change the sense of a root. In two recently published monolingual dictionaries (Chiduo

Instead, as a rule, I treat all derivations – whether deverbative nouns or inflected verbs – as separate glossed entries with cross-referencing as needed. For example, *-funga* ‘tie, close, etc.’, *-fungika* ‘be closed, be closable, etc.’, *-fungisha* ‘cause to fasten, bind tight, etc.’ and *-fungana* ‘be fastened together, etc.’ are treated as different lexemes and are listed separately, even though they are etymologically related. In practice, most verbal lexemes usually appear together in an alphabetized list, but not so nouns derived from a verb root, thus *mfungo* [n. 3/4] ‘fasting as during Ramadhan’ and *kifungo* [n. 7/8] ‘prison, button, etc.’ (both from *-funga* ‘shut, tie’) are found in different places in the alphabetically-ordered list. Sometimes, then, associated lemmas are separated from each other by words not etymologically related. In a digital dictionary I would argue that theoretical considerations as to how lexemes should be treated do not matter since it can be searched without regard to the guiding principles of a linguist’s lexicon.

Finally, a citation for each headword is provided. The citation, of course, is the main point of this dictionary. Each is coded as to source, e.g., Ink-50 for *Al-Inkishafi*, verse 50, MK-1 for *Mwana Kupona*, verse 1, and so forth. Multiple citations can be given, especially if there are differences in usage or meaning. They can also demonstrate a word’s range of senses, as used by any number of poets. I should emphasize that no other dictionary, published to date, provides citations as comprehensively as is done in this lexical project.<sup>26</sup> Two examples from the *Glossary* follow:

**ao/ma-** [n. 5/6] Couch, bed (WH). Not in FJ. See *-lala* sleep, and *ulalo/ma-* place (time, accessories, manner) of lying down or sleeping, camping-place, bed; (2) something lying or laid down, e.g., a tree or plank laid as a bridge across a stream (FJ). ND *maao* :: St. Sw. *malalo* (Sx).

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et al. 2016; Wamitila 2016), derived verbs are given separate status apart from their root. And they are all glossed.

<sup>26</sup> There are two observations I would like to note here: 1) The advantage of providing multiple glosses from other dictionaries for a given entry is that it allows researchers who might be interested in refining the meaning or senses of particular headwords to immediately see how others have glossed a lemma. Ideally, of course, the more comparisons, the better. Often included is a quote from the translator of the citation as to what they consider the meaning to be. 2) Multiple citations also have a research function if, for instance, a researcher wants to study how a word has shifted in meaning or usage over time, or how different poets have used a word.

*Kwa maa*o mema ya kukhitari, Iyu la zitanda za majodori, Na mito kuwili ya akhad-hari, Kwa kazi ya pote wanakishiye; On fine well-chosen couches, On beds of padded cushions, With green pillows at both ends, Decorated with embroidered work (Ink-42).

**-bwagika** [v. st.] Be thrown down, be spilled out (TJH). See *-bwa* throw off, throw down, relieve oneself of ... (FJ).

*Ghafla bwa! Sote chini tukabwagika*, Suddenly *bwa!* We were all spilled out on the ground (M&K-MU12).

Key: FJ = Frederick Johnson 1939; Ink-42 = *Al-Inkishafi*, verse 42 (W. Hichens 1939); M&K-Mu12 = Mulokozi & Kahigi 1979, *Msiba uliotuangukia*, verse 12; [n 5/6] = Class 5/6 noun; ND = Northern Dialects; St. Sw. = Standard Swahili; Sx = Sacleux 1939; TJH = T.J. Hinnebusch; v. st. = Stative verb; WH = W. Hichens 1939

### 3.2.4. Documentation<sup>27</sup>

*Documentation* is a place where annotated references in the form of URLs to interesting and germane research accessible on the internet can be cited. It is also the component for storing and even publishing works that are not readily obtainable elsewhere. So far, it includes three resources: 1) a bibliography of Swahili literature, linguistics, culture and history published in the *Swahili Forum* (Geider 2003); 2) an unpublished study by Leston Buell (n.d.) of the Arabic-sourced vocabulary in the *Utenzi wa Vita vya Wadachi Kutamalaki Mrima* (el Buhriy 1960), a long epic poem about the German conquest of the Swahili Coast; and 3) a talk given at UCLA by the Swahili poet Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany, discussing his classification of the types of Swahili poetry.

### 3.2.5. Swahili Poetry Bibliography

The *Bibliography*, with its focus on works that deal with Swahili poetry, is self-explanatory. However, though it is still a work in progress, and always will be, it can include pertinent general works on Swahili itself, linguistics, lexicography and references to most Swahili dictionaries.

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<sup>27</sup> In earlier iterations of the project's interface, this component was called *Texts*.

#### 4. POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES OF THIS APPROACH TO SWAHILI LEXICOGRAPHY

A web-based project has certain advantages. My approach allows the lexicographer to provide additional resources that traditional lexicographers never had at their disposal, such as information about poems and poets and a bibliography. As a result, the project can easily blend pedagogy with lexicography. Languages are living entities whose lexicons are ever-changing with the frequent, if not daily, creation of neologisms and the never-ending loss of words. Thus, dictionaries are never finished. Digital dictionaries are easy to keep updated with new entries, unlike printed works that have to await the publication of a new edition.<sup>28</sup> This is the main advantage of doing digital Swahili lexicography.

Once the initial digitalization has been done, the corpora are easily accessible and offer flexible and efficient searchability, in contrast to the laborious process involved in searching books and other written sources and recording citations from the literature on slips of paper. Moreover, it's easy to check entries and do cross-referencing, even using the simple search protocols that browsers now provide.

Most importantly, providing the full texts from which the citations are gleaned gives each user the wherewithal to do, with a single keystroke, additional checking and confirming, especially for those who are interested in refining, even correcting, the gloss of a particular lexical item or seeing it in a broader context. The OED's developers were seriously handicapped when they wanted to do a similar verification. Finally, and this hardly needs to be said, a digital dictionary is available to anyone with access to the internet.

Unfortunately, nothing is free in this life. The digital world is ephemeral. I need not go into detail about its transitory nature. This, I feel, is the most serious issue facing any project of this type, even this one, in spite of the fact that it is supported by UCLA's Humanities Technology unit (HumTech) of the university's Humanities Division, which has provided

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<sup>28</sup> The OED is now available on the internet with a subscription service. It has been said that the OED will probably never be printed again, but will rather maximize the use of the internet.

the project with free access to the WordPress software, space on their servers and technologists to help negotiate the WordPress software. However, there is no guarantee that this support will continue. UCLA could cancel the contract with WordPress and replace it with something else. WordPress itself could cease to exist.

Another difficulty with an online project is complying with U.S. and international copyright conventions and law. Some of the works whose texts I republish are in the public domain. Quoting definitions or glosses from other dictionaries also comes under the rubric of fair use.<sup>29</sup> What may be problematic, however, is that modern recensions and transliterations from the Swahili-Arabic script may still be protected work. Who does one ask? It's a muddle, and dealing with it would be an administrative hurdle.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For more information on what constitutes "fair use", see <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/fair-use/what-is-fair-use/>.

<sup>30</sup> Quoting poetical works to illustrate each entry in my dictionary complies with the law under a common interpretation of the doctrine of fair use. As does my own translation of this work. Using direct quotes or close paraphrases of entries from other dictionaries also comes under that rubric. And unlike other dictionaries, I am careful in identifying sources. This is not only important for compliance with copyright laws but is helpful to others who might use what I've done as a jumping-off point for their own research. Sources and attribution are important in lexicographical endeavors; I try to be scrupulous in giving credit where credit is due.

There is however a problem. In the *Poets and Poems Inventory* section, I republish the poetry of others. The older poems, such as *Al-Inkishafi* and *Mwana Kupona*, are no longer protected by copyright. Even if they were, it would be very difficult to trace ownership to get permission. Did the heirs, for example, ever exercise their legal rights? And certainly, publishing houses cannot exercise control over this work either. As a matter of fact, the publication and republication of transliterations of much of this poetry was never done under any interpretation of copyright law, as far as I can determine, not that anyone should take cover under the blanket of possible unethical practices by others. It's a muddle, for sure.

What is not clear, however, is the question of the re-published recensions and transliterations of the classical pieces. For instance, who has the rights to Allen's transliterations of the manuscripts he translated in Allen (1971)? Surely Allen, but maybe the publisher.

Why am I so concerned? On the one hand, we academics often approach our research and studies as an open playing field where the usual rules do not apply; after all, we are advancing scholarship and human knowledge, rarely for extra compensation, truly a righteous enterprise! Well, for one thing, since my university sponsors my work by providing university resources, they don't want to be sued. For another, there is the ethical question of giving proper due and credit to the work of others.

As for modern poetry written by presently living poets, I have been careful in seeking their permission to republish their poetry.



In conclusion, I hope this paper will provide the catalyst to encourage others to work in similar ways to add citations from Swahili literature in their own lexical studies.

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## *Kirusi* or *virusi*? Corpus-based research on COVID-19-related terminology in Swahili<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The most recent coronavirus outbreak that began in China in December 2019 has affected every aspect of our lives. Not only has it forced many changes in our daily routines but also influenced our language and brought new words and phrases that are constantly evolving to describe the new reality. In times of crisis, it is very important that people get reliable information in a language they know and understand. Therefore, many efforts have been made to provide information and educational materials to African people in their mother tongues or well-known local languages. This is also true for Swahili, which is the main vernacular language of East Africa. The beginning of the pandemic was accompanied by terminological chaos, as many new terms had to be invented to describe the new situation. In the case of Swahili, the Tanzanian National Kiswahili Council (BAKITA) published a terminology list with Swahili equivalents of English terms related to COVID-19. This list formed the basis of the author's study on the usage of such terminology, e.g., *UVIKO* and *virusi vya korona*, in Swahili news texts. The research was based on the corpus "Swahili News 2021" compiled for this purpose from online resources in the Sketch Engine corpus tool.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, coronavirus pandemic, Swahili language, terminology development, terminology lists

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2020, the world unexpectedly had to face a new challenge, an epidemic of a new variant of coronavirus that had already been observed in China at the end of the previous year (Chaplin 2020). At the time of writing this paper, in April 2022, we are still struggling with the virus. Fortunately, most of the restrictions imposed in 2020 have already been lifted in most countries, especially in Europe. People who have been exposed to the virus are no longer required to self-isolate, there is no mandatory (post-entry) quarantine, wearing masks is not obligatory anymore, and there are no restrictions on the size of public gatherings. However, it is still recommended to protect oneself and prevent the spread of COVID-19 by social distancing, washing one's hands frequently and wearing masks when maintaining a physical distance is not possible. One should also get vaccinated if possible and watch oneself for symptoms of the coronavirus. If any appear, one is advised to get tested, and if the result is positive, to stay home and self-isolate.

Daily business is running normally again, and schools have gone back to in-person teaching. Remote work and education have come to an end, even if some have found it quite convenient and are now calling for the introduction of hybrid learning. The blended mode is still used, especially in education and research, for meetings and conferences. In such cases, some students or conference participants attend the class/meeting in person, while others join in remotely.

It is no surprise that the current global coronavirus pandemic crisis has affected many spheres of our lives. For more than two years, we have had to learn how to deal with the new situation but also how to communicate about it. How to talk about the virus and describe its impact on our lives. Back in 2019, we were not yet familiar with such terms as “hybrid learning”, “self-isolation” or “social distancing”. Now, we all know what they mean and what is expected of us when someone refers to them.

This period has led to the creation of many new words and phrases, and changes have been observed in the frequency of use of terms that were already well established. Terms that were in use before COVID-19, though on a very small scale, include “pandemic”, “self-isolation”, “lockdown” and “quarantine”, among others. The term “coronavirus” was introduced by

virologists as early as the 1960s (Cierpich-Kozieł 2020), but initially, its usage was limited to health-related contexts, discussed only in specialized journals. Today, it is one of the most frequently used terms, and language users have coined coronavirus-based neologisms that have become very popular, such as “coronaparty” (similar in meaning to “quaranteam”), “covidiot” or “coronacoaster”, a term used to describe the emotional experience of life during the pandemic. New terms are being invented all over the world by language users themselves, while at the same time, various organizations and governments are promoting more specialized terms and their uses.

The official name of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is SARS-CoV-2, which stands for “severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2”. It was introduced in February 2020 by the World Health Organization. COVID-19 means “coronavirus disease 2019”. The term “pandemic” was first used in June 2009 to describe the influenza pandemic of the time. Probably no one remembers it, but the term itself no longer surprises anyone since “pandemic” is among the most frequently used words in all the researched languages.

To facilitate understanding of the coronavirus outbreak and the spread of COVID-19 by individuals, as well as to enable and improve international communication, many glossaries and terminology lists have been created and distributed online. These include mono- and multilingual resources published by governments, dictionary publishers and various organizations involved in language documentation and development, health and translation services, etc.

The impact of the pandemic on languages has been studied from different perspectives since the outbreak of COVID-19. One approach is to look at corpus data and identify keywords and collocations that have been much more frequently used during the period in question than in the entire dataset of a given corpus. This will be discussed in later sections.

In general, the present paper deals with the coronavirus terminology in Swahili. It examines the recommendations of the Swahili language councils, terminology lists and other sources and verifies them against the practice of language use in East African and, more generally, Swahili online resources. The analysis was conducted on data extracted from Swahili news sources that are available online, with special attention paid to two newspapers, *Taifa Leo* from Kenya and *Habari Leo* from Tanzania.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

In addition to media reports about the pandemic, the coronavirus crisis was reflected in scientific research. One very active field was linguistics. Linguists studying various languages collected vocabulary and data related to the coronavirus and created corpora of texts to analyze and interpret the pandemic-related discourse from a linguistic perspective. Some studies concentrated on language creativity (Lawson 2020), while others analyzed the discourse on the topic to see, on the one hand, how people's behavior had been modified by government and media messages and, on the other, how audiences perceived the COVID-19 pandemic (Yu et al. 2021). In her analysis of President Emmanuel Macron's speech broadcasted on French television on March 16, 2020, Frach (2021) noted that it used the rhetoric of fear and was full of sensational metaphors and references to war. The expression *nous sommes en guerre* 'we are at war', which appeared in it several times, was repeated around the world to describe the coronavirus crisis and evoke the expected public response. Similar strategies were used in communication concerning the threat in other languages. Both government and media messages were studied in different languages to identify ideologies hidden in the speeches and the use of metaphors (a comparative study by Gulzar et al. 2021; see also Bates 2020; Abdel-Raheem 2021; Waśko 2021; Przybysz and Wójtowicz 2022; on South Africa, see Rudwick et al. 2021).

The Oxford English Dictionary<sup>2</sup> has been tracking words and phrases that have become unexpectedly and overwhelmingly popular during the last two years. The data shows that the global discourse of the period was dominated by such words as "coronavirus" and "COVID-19". While "COVID-19" is a new term, "coronavirus" was previously used mainly in medical and scientific discourse, so the average language user was not familiar with it. Examining the different and changing contexts of the terms' usage reveals the perceptions and concerns of users at a given time.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://public.oed.com/blog/corpus-analysis-of-the-language-of-covid-19/> [accessed 19.05.2022].

The frequency of words in Polish media is monitored at the University of Warsaw as part of the “Słowa na czasie” project.<sup>3</sup> The loanword *koronawirus* ‘coronavirus’ entered the top ranking already in January 2020 and has been gaining popularity ever since. Cierpich-Kozieł (2020) conducted a study of *koronawirus* neologisms by examining media corpus data from that period.

Other research focused on the development of terminology and its standardization in different languages. Tomaszewska and Zawadzka-Paluckta (2020: 13) examined a parallel corpus of EU press releases in English and Polish to determine how multiword terms relating to the COVID-19 pandemic were translated from the former language into the latter in expert-to-lay communication. Not surprisingly, the terminology was not yet “fully stabilized” (Tomaszewska and Zawadzka-Paluckta 2020: 38) in 2020.

Much less attention has been paid to the terminology in languages other than English. Even in Europe, it was expected that translation services could be delayed due to the rapidly changing and evolving epidemiological situation, as the crisis posed a challenge in rendering COVID-19-related terminology. This also resulted in a greater terminological variation.

The threat of a language gap in coronavirus information was anticipated in Africa too. At the same time, the importance of disseminating information about COVID-19 in local languages was well recognized. Although European languages have the status of official languages in most African states, they are mainly accessible to people with a certain level of education, so local languages are used in everyday communication instead. Some of the media and educational institutions also provide news and information to local communities in the languages they know and use on a daily basis. Therefore, many initiatives were undertaken to standardize COVID-19-related terminology in African languages. Some of these were launched by various non-governmental organizations, bottom-up movements and volunteers; others by governmental bodies and language councils dedicated to the promotion and standardization of local languages.<sup>4</sup> In the following section, I will focus on such initiatives concerning Swahili.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.slowanaczasie.uw.edu.pl/> [accessed 19.05.2022].

<sup>4</sup> In Europe, one such example is the European Union’s multilingual database of terminology (Interactive Terminology for Europe 2020: <https://iate.europa.eu>), which has been updated



## 3. INFORMATION ON COVID-19 IN SWAHILI

During the coronavirus pandemic, a sudden influx of new terminology was recorded in all the world's languages. The need to provide crucial information in various local languages became urgent, as it was observed that only information in languages that people understood, i.e., their mother tongues, could save lives. As Ahmad (2020) put it, "[t]he availability of knowledge in the languages of the people not only ensures that the message is not misunderstood due to a poor level of command of the official language but also creates trust, which increases the likelihood of acceptance". Furthermore, Rudwick et al. (2021: 243) noted that "South Africans can be expected to be most receptive and responsive to briefings and information of epidemiologists, health and government officials when the message is conveyed in their first and home language". Also, Translators without Borders found that "providing health information in Swahili ... produced a significant increase in comprehension compared with providing the same information in English. ... the local form of Swahili was the most effective language for risk communication and community engagement for the Ebola response in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, compared with the French and standard Swahili languages" (Utunen et al. 2020).

At the same time, most African languages are under-resourced, endangered and hinder access to globally available information and services. Terminological confusion could be observed in many languages, which prompted the need for terminological standardization, especially in the field of medical language translation (Svongoro et al. 2021).

Many bottom-up initiatives were undertaken by local language users themselves. Volunteers for WikiAfrica translated COVID-19-related online content into nearly 20 African languages and created many new words to describe the situation (Harrisberg and Eaton 2021). The Engage Africa Foundation<sup>5</sup> published COVID-19 public health guidelines in 18 of the most widely spoken African languages.

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to register and recommend new COVID-19-related terms in the official languages of the EU.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.engageafricafoundation.org/covid-19?lang=swh#infographics> [accessed 6.07.2022].

Swahili stands out from other African languages. It is a well-established, well-resourced (compared to others) and well-studied language, spoken by millions of people in East Africa. Its importance and usefulness in communicating with the local population was recognized already during the colonial period when efforts were made to standardize the language. Since then, various governmental and scientific institutions have stimulated and regulated its development. Swahili is widely used in everyday communication, administration, media and education. Swahili scholars have demonstrated that an African language can be successfully used in scientific research and academic writing, therefore a lot of attention has been paid to terminology development and translation studies.

The Interterritorial Language Committee was established by British colonial rule back in the 1930s with the task of language standardization. After fulfilling its role, the Committee was reorganized in 1964 into a research institution called Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili (TATAKI) and then integrated as a unit of the University of Dar es Salaam in 1970. Meanwhile, Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa (BAKITA) ‘The National Kiswahili Council’ was founded in Tanzania in 1967 to promote, standardize and further develop the language. Concurrently, other regional and national councils, such as BAKIZA (Zanzibar), BAKIKE (Kenya) and BAKIU (Uganda), were established in countries where Swahili was promoted as a national and later official language.

From the very beginning, information about the coronavirus outbreak was widely published in Swahili by various African and non-African health and (non-)governmental agencies, and the situation was commented on by Swahili-language mass media. In line with the assumption that “the best way to fight its [COVID-19] outbreak is to make people aware of how it spreads and how it can be stopped” (Ahmad 2020), various information channels were used to spread the news. Many websites promoted prevention resources and educational materials in the form of leaflets, instructional videos and even children’s books, such as *Hakuna Jinamizi Nje: ni Kirusi* (Ndibalema et al. 2020).

According to a study that tested knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding the coronavirus outbreak among Swahili speakers at the beginning of the crisis in Tanzania, the educational and information

materials were well distributed and reached their intended audience. The report stated that “findings revealed good knowledge, optimistic attitudes, and appropriate practices towards preventing COVID-19 infection. Suggesting that community-based health education programs about COVID-19 is helpful and necessary to control the disease” (Rugarabamu et al. 2020: 3).

### 3.1. COVID-19-RELATED TERMS AND TERMINOLOGY LISTS IN SWAHILI

Swahili is spoken by approximately 100 million users in the vast region of East Africa (Eberhard et al. 2021). It has many regional variants, and the large area of its use hinders its standardization. In the face of the new coronavirus reality, it was necessary to come up with new terms to name it. The pandemic initially caused terminological chaos. English borrowings for coronavirus and COVID-19 were commonly used at first, but with time, several proposals for naming the phenomenon in Swahili were introduced. The newly-created names were mainly based on two words meaning disease/sickness in Swahili, which are *ugonjwa* and *maradhi*. Suggestions included such acronyms as *MAVIKU-19*, which stands for *Maradhi ya Virusi vya Korona* ‘coronavirus disease’, *UVIKU-19* for *Ugonjwa wa Virusi vya Korona* ‘coronavirus disease’ and *VVK-19* for *Virusi vya Korona* ‘coronavirus’.

Among the most important proposals was the acronym *UVIKO 19* – *Ugonjwa wa Virusi vya KORona*, an equivalent of COVID-19 introduced by BAKITA (2021). The Tanzanian Council also suggested adapting the Swahili spelling to the pronunciation by replacing the letter “c” with the letter “k” in other terms. As a result, *korona* was proposed instead of *corona*, and the name for the coronavirus became therefore *virusi vya korona*.

Before BAKITA published its recommendations, an interesting discussion about the equivalent of the English word “virus” was initiated by Swahili scholars. They debated whether *virusi* was the plural form of *kirusi*, formed according to the rules of the *ki-/vi-* noun class, where the prefix *ki-* signals the singularity and *vi-* the plurality of a noun, as in *kiti* ‘chair’ – *viti* ‘chairs’, or whether it was a generic name for a virus with no singular-plural distinction and should be used in this form in all cases while adhering to the agreement rules of the *vi-* class. The opinions of the researchers varied,

but the variant proposed by BAKITA and the data presented further in this article support the second option.

Many borrowings from English can also be found among other COVID-19-related terms, such as *maski* ‘mask’ and *glavu* ‘gloves’. However, other strategies for creating the terms have also been used. These include semantic extension, when new meanings are assigned to existing words, e.g., *barakoa* or *kizuizui*<sup>6</sup> ‘veil’ for “mask” and *janga* ‘calamity’ for “epidemic/pandemic”, as well as derivation or paraphrasing, e.g., *kuepuka msongamano/kutokaribiana* lit. ‘avoiding crowds/not getting close to each other’ for “social distancing” and *zuio la kutotoka nyumbani* lit. ‘a ban on leaving the house’ for “lockdown”.

A detailed review of the term-creation strategies is beyond the scope of this paper, therefore I will now focus on analyzing the use of the terms in different sources.

The importance of establishing a standard vocabulary concerning COVID-19 so that information could be communicated with clarity and precision was recognized by BAKITA, which in December 2020 published online *Istilahi za Korona* ‘Coronavirus Terminology’. It was then updated in 2021 as part of the document *Istilahi sanifu za hali ya hewa, UVIKO-19 na mazingira* ‘Standard Terminology – Climate, COVID-19 and Environment’ (BAKITA 2021). In the introduction, it was stated that “[t]hese terms have been a great help to various stakeholders as they have closed the existing gap of shortage of terminological synonyms in the relevant fields”<sup>7</sup> (BAKITA 2021: iv). The list of terms in the PDF file includes Swahili translations for 103 English scientific terms relating to COVID-19. As I have mentioned earlier, BAKITA suggested to call the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus *UVIKO-19* (*Ugonjwa wa Virusi vya Korona* ‘coronavirus disease’) and to use the letter “k” instead of the English “c” in *korona*.

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<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank Mohamed R. Karama for the information on this term. As he explained in an email to me, *kizuizui* comes from the face covering of Swahili women with the now archaic/extinct *buibui la wazee* ‘old women veil’. It is a way of covering with a small cloth attached to the *buibui* that covers the nose and part of the face but leaves an opening for the eyes.

<sup>7</sup> “[i]stilahi hizi zimekuwa ni msaada mkubwa kwa wadau mbalimbali kwani zimeziba pengo lililokuwapo la uhaba wa visawe vya istilahi katika nyuga zinazohusika”.

Another initiative was undertaken by Oxford University Press – Oxford Languages. The “Covid 19 Language Hub”<sup>8</sup> project provides key COVID-19 terminology translated into the world’s major languages, among them African, including Afrikaans, Northern Sotho, Setswana, Xhosa, Zulu and Swahili. The list in the PDF file contains 73 Swahili translations of English scientific terms, but also words and phrases relating to government and individual actions to stop the spread of the virus.

“TICO 19: the Translation Initiative for COvid 19”<sup>9</sup> was founded by several academic and industry organizations (Amazon, Appen, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Translated) that collaborated with Translators without Borders to prepare materials on COVID-19 in more than 100 world languages to be used by professional translators and for training state-of-the-art Machine Translation (MT) models. It recorded 328 English terms with Swahili translations and made them available for download in a CSV format. The translation benchmark was created by combining English open-source data from various sources. It is not a simple wordlist and includes many detailed phrases and collocations that can be useful in translation, e.g., ‘14 days in isolation’ *kujitenga kwa siku 14*, ‘2019 novel coronavirus’ *virusi vipya vya korona 2019*, ‘about coronavirus’ *kuhusu virusi vya korona*, ‘avoid exposure’ *epuka kujiweka hatarini*.

Translators without Borders<sup>10</sup> also published a terminology list that contains 185 English terms with Swahili equivalents. It was created to identify “key terminology that people use to talk about COVID-19 as well as commonly used technical terms to develop a multilingual, plain-language glossary”.

In general, all the above-mentioned lists contain a lot of vocabulary. Unfortunately, they differ significantly from one another. A comparison of the list published by BAKITA with the one compiled by the Oxford Languages (OL) shows that there are only 20 identical English terms and 10 identical Swahili equivalents in both of them (see example [1]). The non-equivalent translations differ in lexical choices, as shown in example (2).

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<sup>8</sup> <https://languages.oup.com/covid-19-language-resources/> [accessed 5.05.2022].

<sup>9</sup> <https://tico-19.github.io/> [accessed 5.05.2022].

<sup>10</sup> <https://translatorswithoutborders.org/twb-glossary-for-covid-19> [accessed 5.05.2022].

- (1) Equivalent translations  
coronavirus *virusi vya korona*  
work from home *fanyia kazi nyumbani*
- (2) Non-equivalent translations  
face covering  
*vikinga uso* (BAKITA), *kufunika uso* (OL)  
herd immunity  
*kingajamii* (BAKITA), *kinga ya kundi* (OL)  
lockdown  
*zuio la kutotoka nyumbani* (BAKITA),  
*kusitisha safari za ndani na nje ya eneo fulani* (OL)

Based on this data, we can further analyze the use of terminology and track variability in the use of particular terms. To deepen the study, I collected more data using a corpus management tool, i.e., Sketch Engine.

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODS

The media play a vital role in influencing citizens' attitudes and behavior since the public turns to them for up-to-date information. Citizens also rely heavily on the media in crisis situations. From the very beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, the media have constantly monitored and reported on the situation, which is why the news corpus seems to be an appropriate source of data for the analysis of COVID-19-related terms.

Based on a self-built corpus called "Swahili News 2021", this study aims to explore how the COVID-19-related terminology in Swahili was used in various information sources. For this purpose, Swahili news and communications containing the keywords *coronavirus*, *koronavirus*, *COVID*, *UVIKO*, *mgonjwa*, *virusi*, *chanjo*, *maradhi* and *hospitali* were collected and aggregated in text format in Sketch Engine.<sup>11</sup> Manual filtering of press and media releases based on the above keywords resulted in 6,000 documents from various online news sources, such as *BBC*, *Deutsche Welle*, *Taifa Leo*, *Mtanzania*, *Mwanahalisi online*, *Mwanaspoti*, *Habari Leo*, *Mwananchi* and *Jamii Forums*. The entire text corpus consists of over 5 million words.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.sketchengine.eu/> [accessed 5.05.2022].

The “Swahili web 2014” (SwahiliWaC) already available in Sketch Engine was used as a reference corpus. It was crawled from various online sources in 2014 and consists of 18 million words.

To identify relevant terms, the frequency lists of the newly compiled and the reference corpora were compared first, and then the keywords and term extraction feature of Sketch Engine was used. Keywords – both individual words and multiword expressions – indicate which topics are characteristic of a given corpus. The Sketch Engine tool compares the corpora and identifies what is unique or typical in the analyzed corpus compared to the reference corpus, presenting only those elements that appear more frequently in the former.

In the second step, two sub-corpora were built in order to track the differences in term usage in Tanzanian and Kenyan varieties of Swahili. One was created using texts from the Tanzanian newspaper *Habari Leo* and the other from the Kenyan newspaper *Taifa Leo*. The analysis was based on a comparison of the newspapers’ wordlists and the results of keyword identification.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency wordlists contain those words that occur most frequently in the analyzed data and, together with keywords extraction, can indicate the most relevant topics. Due to the nature of the compiled corpus, which was intentionally built from coronavirus-related texts, the frequency of COVID-19-related terms was expected to be high, probably higher than in the general corpus from the same period. Nevertheless, the main aim of the study was to identify terms that were frequently used to describe the outbreak and compare them with those proposed by BAKITA (2021) to evaluate their usage.

The first 500 items on the “Swahili News 2021” frequency wordlist were analyzed to identify terms related to COVID-19. Their context of use was then checked using the concordance tool. For comparison, the terms were searched for among the 1,000 most frequent words in the reference corpus to see how the frequency of use of generic words such as “hospital”

or “symptom” had changed because of the pandemic. It turned out to be, respectively, 3 and 4 times higher than before. The frequency of use of *ugonjwa* ‘disease’ had increased 10 times. Some of the terms that were known and used before the crisis, e.g., *maambukizi* ‘infection’ or *chanjo* ‘vaccination’, were not found among the top 1,000 items on the Web 2014 list at all.

Table 1 below shows how often various COVID-19-related terms were used in the “Swahili News 2021” corpus (News 2021) compared to the corpus compiled in 2014 (Web 2014). The numbers in the columns indicate the term’s place on the wordlist in the given corpus; the lower the number, the more frequently the term was used. The lack of a number indicates the absence of the term in the analyzed subset of the frequency wordlist.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the frequency wordlists from the two analyzed corpora

News 2021	Lemma	Web 2014
62	<i>afya</i> ‘health’	382
75	<i>chanjo</i> ‘vaccination’	–
77	<i>ugonjwa</i> ‘illness, disease’	783
89	<i>virusi</i> ‘virus’	–
161	<i>magonjwa</i> ‘sickness’	–
196	<i>maambukizi</i> ‘infection’	–
197	<i>dalili</i> ‘symptom’	879
227	<i>corona</i>	–
270	<i>hospitali</i> ‘hospital’	796
278	<i>COVID-19</i>	–
460	<i>janga</i> ‘calamity; epidemic’	–

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that COVID-19-related terms are well represented in the recent news corpus. The frequency of their use is so high that they can be expected to be found as entries even in very small dictionaries. So far, the lemma *virusi* (nor *kirusi*) has not been recorded in comprehensive dictionaries of Swahili, such as those compiled by TUKI (2001) and BAKIZA (2010), even though it was widely used before the current crisis as part of the expression *virusi vya UKIMWI* ‘AIDS virus’. The Web 2014 corpus contains nearly 1,500 occurrences of *virusi*. Moreover, some



generic words that were frequently used even before the coronavirus crisis, e.g., *hospitali* ‘hospital’ and *dalili* ‘symptoms’, have now gained in popularity.

Judging by the keywords of the News 2021 corpus, coronavirus-related topics constitute an important part of it. The top 50 keywords include such terms as *corona*, *COVID*, *COVID-19*, *barakoa* ‘mask’, *korona* ‘corona’, *UVIKO* ‘COVID’, *coronavirus*, *UVIKO 19* ‘COVID-19’, *chanjo* ‘vaccination’, *karantini* ‘quarantine’, vaccine, Wuhan. The terms proposed by BAKITA (2021), i.e., the Swahili equivalent for COVID – *UVIKO* and *korona* ‘corona’, are among the top 10 keywords.

The words accompanying the terms and the changing contexts in which they occur provide information on users’ perceptions and concerns. Table 2 below shows the top 20 collocates of *korona/virusi vya korona* ‘corona(virus)’ in the News 2021 corpus, that is, words occurring near the term with a statistically significant frequency.<sup>12</sup> It appeared most often together with such nouns as “outbreak”, “spreading” and “pandemic” and verbs like “spread”, “kill” and “infect”, which suggests that the texts portrayed it as a highly contagious virus that must be fought against because it threatens people’s health and even kills them.

**Table 2.** Top 20 collocates of *korona/virusi vya korona* ‘corona(virus)’ in the News 2021 corpus

Noun	English translation	Verb	English translation
<i>kipimo</i>	health examination	<i>sambaa</i>	spread
<i>kanga</i>	pandemic	<i>sababisha</i>	cause
<i>ueneaji</i>	spreading	<i>pima</i>	examine
<i>mlipuko</i>	outbreak	<i>ambukiza</i>	infect
<i>chanjo</i>	vaccination	<i>enea</i>	spread
<i>maambukizi</i>	infection	<i>ua</i>	kill
<i>ugonjwa</i>	sickness	<i>athiri</i>	infect
<i>dalili</i>	symptoms	<i>pasa</i>	be obliged
<i>aina</i>	kinds	<i>chanja</i>	vaccinate
<i>wagonjwa</i>	sick people	<i>pambana</i>	fight with

<sup>12</sup> The collocates are presented separately for nouns and verbs, as analyzed in Sketch Engine.

The list of the top 500 n-grams (multiword expressions) from the News 2021 corpus also includes many COVID-19-related phrases. These are, for example, *virusi vya corona* ‘coronavirus’, *chanjo dhidi ya virusi* ‘vaccination against the virus’, *ugonjwa wa corona* ‘coronavirus disease’, *janga la corona* ‘coronavirus pandemic’, *maambukizi ya virusi* ‘virus infection’, *mfumo wa kinga* ‘immune system’, *dalili za covid 19* ‘COVID-19 symptoms’. N-grams help to identify discursive units of language that can be considered fixed phrases and multiword expressions and used in further linguistic analysis of a language or language teaching.

A cursory analysis of the frequency wordlists of two newspapers, Kenyan *Taifa Leo* and Tanzanian *Habari Leo*, shows that coronavirus-related terms were used more often in Tanzanian texts, despite the fact that both countries’ attitudes toward the virus might indicate otherwise.<sup>13</sup>

To check whether the terms used in the newspapers corresponded to those proposed by BAKITA (2021), the occurrences of selected terms – including COVID, *UVIKO*, *kirusi*, *virusi*, *corona* and its Swahili variant *korona* – were further analyzed.

In the Kenyan *Taifa Leo*, the term COVID was used 12 times, while no occurrences of *UVIKO* were noted. Corona was used 38 times, in phrases such as *virusi vya corona* ‘coronavirus’, *chanjo ya corona* ‘coronavirus vaccination’, *dhidi ya corona* ‘against coronavirus’, *kudhibiti corona* ‘to control coronavirus’, *janga la corona* ‘coronavirus pandemic’, *hali ya corona* ‘coronavirus condition’, *maambukizi ya corona* ‘coronavirus infection’, *ugonjwa wa corona* ‘coronavirus disease’. There were no instances of the Swahili variant for corona, i.e., *korona*, and no occurrences of *kirusi* ‘virus’, while 11 examples were noted for *virusi*.

In the Tanzanian *Habari Leo*, the term COVID was used 17 times and *UVIKO* 16 times. Corona had 26 occurrences, in similar phrases as in *Taifa Leo*. As in the former newspaper, no instances of *korona* and *kirusi* were noted. *Virusi* was used 25 times.

The data is scarce, but it clearly shows that Tanzanian Swahili was more responsive to the language recommendations announced by the National Kiswahili Council (which is Tanzanian).

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<sup>13</sup> From the beginning of the outbreak, Tanzania’s then-president John Magufuli had been one of the most prominent coronavirus skeptics and had even stopped testing for the virus. Also, already in May 2020, he declared the country free of the virus (Nicolini 2021).

There are many more occurrences of the search terms throughout the News 2021 corpus. COVID appears 1,300 times and corona over 3,000 times. Swahili variants of these terms, namely, *UVIKO* and *korona*, have 600 and 400 occurrences, respectively. Further analysis of the sources where *UVIKO* and *korona* have been noted shows that these terms are used by non-African newspapers, like *BBC*, *DW*, *Vatican News*; Tanzanian newspapers, e.g., *Mwanaspoti*; and Tanzanian private webpages and forums, such as *Muungwana Blog ya Kitanzania*, *Jamii Forums*, etc.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 crisis has affected people and their lives around the world, also impacting languages and the way we communicate about it. During the pandemic, providing information about the health crisis in languages that people use on a regular basis became a necessity. It has been proven that reliable information that is easy to understand by everyone can save people's lives. That is why it was so important to produce information about the coronavirus pandemic in various local languages around the world.

The new situation caused terminological chaos and led to a proliferation of new words and phrases. Some of the terms appeared in the dictionaries for the first time, others gained new meanings and frequency of use. All languages faced the same problem of how to talk and inform about the ongoing crisis in a way that everyone could understand. English became the source of new terms that had to be introduced into other languages. Many initiatives were undertaken to develop and standardize terminology. One of these was the COVID-19-related terminology list published by the Tanzanian National Kiswahili Council (BAKITA 2021), which proposed Swahili equivalents for English terms. Among other things, it suggested using *UVIKO-19* as the equivalent of COVID-19 and standardizing the name for "coronavirus" as *virusi vya korona*.

Drawing on corpus data compiled in 2021, the article examined the extent to which the terminology proposed by BAKITA has been used in Swahili media texts. The terms *UVIKO* and *korona* were used thousands of times in the analyzed corpus; in fact, they were among the top 10 keywords.

They appeared mainly in non-African newspapers and Tanzanian private webpages and forums. The selected terms were also searched for in two newspapers, one Kenyan and the other Tanzanian. It was noted that neither of them used words such as *kirusi* and *korona*. The Kenyan *Taifa Leo* also did not use the term *UVIKO* instead of COVID, whereas the Tanzanian *Habari Leo* did so several times.

In summary, the terminological chaos has not yet been resolved for Swahili, but efforts have been made in that direction. Recommendations published by the Tanzanian National Kiswahili Council have reached a wide audience and are being implemented, although mainly by Tanzanian and non-African bodies. Kenyan Swahili is so far more influenced by English borrowings.

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## Pragmatic marker *tu* as a source of implicature in Kiswahili

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the pragmatic marker *tu* as a source of implicature in Kiswahili. The natural observation method was used to collect data from Kiswahili speakers in their normal daily conversations, which was then analyzed using Grice's (1975) implicature theory. It was observed that the pragmatic marker *tu* conveys various implicatures depending on the context of use. These include expressing inadequacy or insufficiency, signaling dissatisfaction, showing contempt, inevitability and simplicity. Interestingly, the findings of the study also showed that intonation plays a role in determining the implicature invoked by this marker.

KEYWORDS: pragmatic markers, spoken Kiswahili, implicature theory

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Sometimes we mean more than what we say (Kroeger 2018: 139). The meaning conveyed beyond what has been said is what is referred to as implicature (Grice 1975: 43–44). Pragmatic markers (henceforth, PMs) are one of the elements that when used in an utterance, give rise to various implicatures. PMs are “linguistically encoded clues which signal the speaker’s potential communicative intentions” (Fraser 1996: 168). They provide information for interlocutors on how to interpret the relation between the current utterance and the previous one, or the other way around. “PMs have one core meaning, which is procedural rather than conceptual, although their specific meaning can vary depending on the context (thus, pragmatic meaning)” (Nasir 2017: 15). Since the concept was first proposed by Schiffrin (1987), who

worked on discourse markers in English, research efforts have expanded and PMs have been studied in various languages, such as English (Beach 1995; Guthrie 1997), German (Barske 2009), Dutch (Hoek 2013), Modern Greek (Archakis 2001), Chinese (Chen and He 2001), Italian (Bazzanella 1990), Spanish (Durán and Unamuno 2001), Turkish (Yilmaz 2004), Indonesian (Nasir 2017) and Kiswahili (Kibiki 2019; Goodness 2020; Marjie and Sosoo 2021), to name a few. PMs have been studied using a number of frameworks reflecting diverse research interests such as second-language learning (cf. Yang 2011; Li 2015), translation (cf. Stede and Schmitz 2000), semantics (cf. Adegbija and Bello 2001) and pragmatics (cf. Fraser 1996; Alami 2015). However, the research conducted in the field of semantics and pragmatics has mainly focused on identifying PMs and analyzing their types, features and functions. There is still a lack of pragmatic information on how PMs can be a source of implicature. Therefore, the current study examines the pragmatic marker (henceforth, PM) *tu* as a source of implicature in Kiswahili.

The Kiswahili PM *tu* is equivalent to the English PMs *only* and *just*. While the English PMs *only* and *just* have been the focus of many analyses (e.g., Lee 1987; Atlas 1991, 1993; Bonomi and Casalegno 1993; Horn 1996; Fintel 1997; Dekker 2001; Beaver 2004; Rooij and Schulz 2005; Molina and Romano 2011; Wiegand 2018; Alonso-Ovalle and Hirsch 2022), little effort has been made to study the Kiswahili PM *tu*. Only a few meanings of it are given in Kiswahili dictionaries, such as BAKIZA (2010), TUKI (2012) and BAKITA (2017). These include its use to *show that something is being done for no reason* and to *indicate a specific amount*. Accordingly, this paper presents a systematic interactional use of this marker in natural settings by identifying the different implicatures invoked when the PM *tu* is used in different contexts. The PM *tu* was chosen over others based on the results of a pilot study, which showed that *tu* is the most frequently used PM by Kiswahili speakers in different conversational contexts and invokes various implicatures in numerous speech occasions. This study thus investigates the PM *tu* in Kiswahili spoken discourse. One of the reasons for choosing spoken discourse was that it includes some important cues for conveying meaning that are not present in written discourse. In addition, spoken discourse is richer in PMs than written discourse, which is mainly filtered (Stede and Schmitz 2000: 125; Fung and Carter 2007: 410).

## 2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

This study adopts the implicature theory developed by Herbert Paul Grice (1975), who noted that in conversations, meaning often goes beyond what is said and that this additional meaning is inferred and predictable. He suggested that participants in a communicative exchange are guided by a principle that determines the way in which language is used with maximum efficiency to achieve rational communication. He called it the cooperative principle. The principle states: “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice 1975: 45). This cooperative principle is an umbrella term for nine components that guide how we communicate. These nine components are grouped into four categories, called the maxims of conversation: the maxim of quality (truthfulness), the maxim of quantity (informativeness), the maxim of relation (relevance) and the maxim of manner (perspicuity). The maxim of quality requires the participants in a conversation not to say what they believe to be false and for which they do not have adequate evidence. The maxim of quantity states that the participants should make their contribution as informative as is required, but they should not make it more informative than is required. The maxim of relation requires participants to be relevant. Finally, the maxim of manner dictates that the participants should avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity, and be brief and orderly (Grice 1975: 45–46). Consequently, adhering to the cooperative principle and its maxims ensures that the right amount of information is provided and that the exchange is conducted in a truthful, relevant and perspicuous manner.

Grice accepts that speakers do not follow these maxims; they usually flout them, which gives rise to implicature. Even though the maxims are flouted, the addressee understands that the speaker flouted the maxims for a reason and infers further meaning from this breach of convention. Grice (1975: 50) divided implicature into conventional and conversational implicature. In the first case, the conventional meaning of the words used determines what is implicated. The conventional implicature is attributed by the presence of lexical elements used in an utterance. Conversational implicature, on the other hand, is triggered by certain general features of



discourse rather than by the conventional meaning of a particular word. It arises as a result of flouting the maxims of conversation.

This paper argues that the PM *tu* is a source of implicature in spoken Kiswahili, which is both conventional and conversational. It is conventional because the PM *tu* can be used as a lexical word that helps to identify the implied meaning. It is conversational because the use of the PM *tu* is optional – it can be omitted without affecting the propositional meaning of an utterance. Therefore, when used, it adds more information than required, thus flouting the maxim of quantity and conveying the implied meaning.

The data for the study was collected in Dar es Salaam from January to March 2022 by using the natural observation method. The data was obtained by observing how Kiswahili speakers use the PM *tu* in normal social settings or in their natural environment. Whenever the researcher encountered the use of the PM *tu*, she recorded the spoken discourse in her notebook.

### 3. PM *TU* AS A SOURCE OF IMPLICATURE IN SPOKEN KISWAHILI

The data obtained shows that the PM *tu* is used to convey both conventional (by identifying the implied meaning of an utterance) and sometimes conversational implicature (by being an optional element that can be omitted without affecting the propositional meaning of an utterance). As already established, when used as an optional element (conversational implicature), it flouts the maxim of quantity by adding more information than is required to convey the implied meaning. The following sections present a discussion of various implicatures conveyed by the PM *tu* in Kiswahili spoken discourse.

#### 3.1. PM *TU* IMPLYING AN AMOUNT

The data shows that PM *tu* is used to imply the exact number of items mentioned by the speaker in a talk exchange. These can be money, people, or some other things that are the subject of the conversation. This implied meaning resembles the meaning given in Kiswahili dictionaries, e.g., BAKIZA (2010), TUKI (2012) and BAKITA (2017). Consider the following examples:

- (1) *Mpatie mtoto matone mawili tu ya dawa.*  
'Give a child only two drops of medicine'.
- (2) *Ninahitaji watu wawili tu.*  
'I need only two people'.
- (3) *Mpatie fimbo mbili tu.*  
'Give him/her only two sticks'.
- (4) *\*Nitakupa tunda moja.*  
'I will give you one fruit'.

In the first three cases, the PM *tu* appears after the quantifiers *mawili/wawili/mbili* 'two', which follow the nouns *matone* 'drops', *watu* 'people' and *fimbo* 'sticks'. In (1), the speaker emphasizes the exact number of drops of medicine to be given (only two drops); in (2), the number of people needed (only two people), and in (3), the number of sticks to be given (only two). However, in (4), the PM *tu* is not used, which indicates that another fruit may be added, unlike in (1), (2) and (3). There is no lexical item in (4) which could help the interlocutors assume implicitly that only one fruit will be given. Therefore, the PM *tu* stands as a lexical word that signals the speaker's implied wish that there will be no more items than indicated. This means that the implied meaning of showing the exact amount of money, people or something else cannot be implied when the PM *tu* is omitted.

Apart from playing a limiting role by implying the exact number of items, the PM *tu* is also used to indicate inadequacy or insufficiency. In this context, the speaker intends to convey the implicature that the amount referred to is not sufficient based on what was expected or anticipated. This expresses a kind of disappointment or dissatisfaction, as shown by the following examples:

- (5) *Una watoto wawili tu! Ongeza hata mmoja zaidi bwana.*  
'You have only two kids! Add at least one more, my dear'.
- (6) *Kulima mahindi kote kule alipata gunia mbili tu!*  
'With all the farm work s/he did, s/he got only two sacks of maize!'.
- (7) *Yaani yule jamaa kajenga bongwe la jumba kwa miezi miwili tu!*  
'You know what, that fellow has built a huge building in only two months!'.
- (8) *Yaani elfu kumi tu ndiyo alishindwa kulipa!*  
'You see, he failed to pay only ten thousand!'.

In (5), the speaker exclaims, *Una watoto wawili tu!* 'You have only two kids!' Due to the preconceived knowledge based on background information, the speaker expects that the addressee might have more than two children and is surprised that there are only two of them. The use of the PM *tu* and the addition of the utterance, *Ongeza hata mmoja zaidi bwana* 'Add at least one more, my dear', indicates that the number of children is inadequate or insufficient. Example (6) points out that a person who makes an effort in farm work (growing maize) should have more harvest. However, the speaker realizes that despite all the hard work, the harvest is only two sacks of maize, and uses the PM *tu* to express their disappointment. In (7), the speaker reflects on the short time it took to build a big house. The pragmatic context of the discourse underlying the use of the PM *tu* in this case is that, under normal circumstances, the addressee should have spent more than two months building the supposedly large house. This preassumed knowledge is revealed by the speaker's disbelief that it took only two months to build such a big house. Similarly, (8) shows that the speaker knows the current financial situation of the addressee in terms of ability. S/he is therefore shocked that the person has failed to return an amount considered small in the context of the conversation. During data collecting, it was noted that when the PM *tu* was used in this context, it was usually uttered with an exclamation to suggest that the speaker was puzzled because s/he had expected the number to be bigger.

Additionally, the PM *tu* is used in commercial advertisements to persuade customers to buy products. The use of the PM *tu* in this context has positive overtones, showing that the price is low and the customer can easily afford it.

- (9) *Hili gauni zuri sana. Nitakupa kwa shilingi elfu tano tu maana wewe ni mteja wangu.*  
 'This is a very nice gown. I will give it to you for only five thousand, for you are my customer'.  
 (10) *Nitakuuzia elfu mbili tu usijali dada.*  
 'I will give it to you for only two thousand, don't worry, my sister'.

Examples (9) and (10) consist of three elements. First, the speaker mentions the price of the product. Second, the speaker adds the PM *tu*. Third, s/he adds clauses such as *maana wewe ni mteja wangu* 'you are my

customer’ and *usijali dada* ‘don’t worry, my sister’. In both cases, the PM *tu* serves as a way of telling the customer that the product is affordable and that s/he should consider buying it. The added clauses complement the PM *tu* by informing the customer of the reason for the mentioned low price in (9), and by reassuring the customer in (10).

### 3.2. PM *TU* IMPLYING INEVITABILITY

The PM *tu* is also used to imply that something must happen, as evidenced by the following examples:

- (11) *Unamnunulia mtoto bastola! Inamjenga? Hako katoto lazima kaje kuwa kakatili tu.*  
‘You buy a gun for your kid! Is that helping him? He must become so cruel. No way’.
- (12) *Unaambiwa uache wizi, wewe unakaidi, utapigwa tu.*  
‘You are forbidden to steal, but if you refuse, you will just be beaten. No way’.
- (13) *Eti unamtegemea mwanamme mpaka pedi. Lazima akunyanyase tu.*  
‘You see! You depend on your husband even for pads. He must torment you. No way’.

In the above statements, the PM *tu* is used after the verbs *kuwa* ‘to be’, *utapigwa* ‘you will be beaten’ and *akunyanyase* ‘s/he will torment you’ to indicate that, based on the previous information given in the utterances, it is unavoidable that someone will be beaten, get tormented or become cruel. For instance, in (10), the speaker uses the PM *tu* to emphasize that a child must become cruel if his/her parents give him/her a gun. The PM *tu* in (11) implies that a person must be beaten because s/he refused not to steal. Similarly, in (12), the PM *tu* is used to imply that a woman cannot avoid abuse if she depends on her husband for everything, even pads. Usually, when the PM *tu* was used to imply this meaning, it was spoken with more emphasis to show that the speaker was certain that the consequence would happen exactly as it had been predicted.

Furthermore, the PM *tu* was also used to imply that something would happen no matter what, as shown vividly by the following examples:

- (14) *Hawezi kuondoka na mali zote. Lazima akupe tu.*  
‘S/he can’t leave with all the wealth. S/he must give it to you, no matter what’.

- (15) *Weve usiogope mtihani. Utafulu tu.*  
 ‘Don’t be afraid of the exams. You will pass, no matter what’.
- (16) *Wale wanajifanya wanapendana. Wataachana tu.*  
 ‘They pretend to love each other. They will divorce, no matter what’.
- (17) *Mimi simwogopi yule. Nitamwambia tu ukweli.*  
 ‘I am not afraid of him/her. I will tell him/her the truth, no matter what’.

In these examples, what has been said before and after the use of the PM *tu* serves as contextual cues that help to identify the implied meaning. The person referred to has to give something to someone else, no matter what (14), will pass the exam, no matter what (15), will divorce, no matter what (16), and will tell someone else the truth, no matter what (17).

### 3.3. PM *TU* IMPLYING SIMPLICITY

The PM *tu* is also used to imply that an action should just be done without a second thought because it is easy or simple. It is an indirect way of saying not to make things hard or complicated, as can be seen from the following examples:

- (18) *We nenda tu waelezee shida yako. Watakuelewa tu.*  
 ‘You just go and explain your problem to them. They will just understand you’.
- (19) *Mwambie tu, hana shida yule.*  
 ‘You just tell him/her. S/he is not difficult’.
- (20) *We achana naye tu.*  
 ‘You just leave him/her’.
- (21) *Kula tu maisha mtoto wa kike.*  
 ‘Just enjoy life, baby girl’.

The pragmatic context of (18) shows an instance where the addressee is having second thoughts or hesitating to explain his/her problem. Knowing that, the speaker uses the PM *tu* to encourage him/her to simply go and do it. Also in (19), the speaker advises the listener to address the issue by simply telling the concerned person because s/he will not cause any problems. In (20), in turn, the PM *tu* is used to imply that a person should just get a divorce without complicating matters. Finally, the speaker in (21)

implies that the addressee should not complicate life but just enjoy it. It is thus clear that the PM *tu* suggests the simplicity of the action to be taken. A crucial role is played here by the pragmatic context of the discourse.

The PM *tu* is sometimes used together with the Kiswahili PMs *si* and/ or *hata* ‘even’, which emphasize that something is surprising or extreme. In this case, they underline the ease with which a given action can be performed. Consider the following examples:

- (22) *Huu ujinga wa kusema “sina kazi namtegemea mwanamme” mimi sikubaliani nao. Si ufuge hata kuku tu!*  
 ‘I don’t agree with this foolishness of saying, “I am not employed, so I just depend on my husband”. Why can’t you tend even chickens?’.
- (23) *Mimi huwa siwaelewi wanawake ambao wanapigwa na waume zao. Si uachane naye tu!*  
 ‘I usually don’t understand women who are beaten by their husbands. Why can’t they just divorce?’.
- (24) *Weve kila siku huwa unasema huna hela. Ulishindwa hata kukopa tu.*  
 ‘You usually claim that you don’t have money. You just failed even to borrow it?’.
- (25) *Sasa unaogopa nini? Si umwambie tu!*  
 ‘Why are you being afraid? Just tell him/her’.

In (22), the speaker uses the PM *tu* together with the PMs *si* and *hata* to imply that it is very easy to tend even chickens instead of relying on one’s husband for everything. In (23), both the PM *tu* and the PM *si* are used to imply that it is very easy to get a divorce if a woman is beaten by her husband. The speaker in (24) uses the PM *tu* in conjunction with the PM *hata* to imply that it is very easy to borrow some money instead of saying, “I don’t have it”. Finally, the PM *tu* is used together with the PM *si* in (25) to imply that it is very easy to tell something to the person who is the subject of the conversation.

### 3.4. PM *TU* IMPLYING REASSURANCE

The PM *tu* also serves as a polite way of reassuring people that they should not worry about something, as can be seen from the following examples:

- (26) *Natania tu.*  
 'I am just kidding'.  
 (27) *Ni utani tu.*  
 'I am just kidding'.  
 (28) *Nitakupa tu.*  
 'I will just give [it] to you'.

The PM *tu* is used in (26) and (27) to imply insignificance. In (28), in turn, the speaker wants the addressee to ignore the possibility that something will not happen and instead assures him/her that it will. In such instances, if the PM *tu* were to be omitted, the utterance would be just a piece of information without any pragmatic effect.

The PM *tu* is also used to imply that the listener should not worry about the current discomfort, which will pass in a while.

- (29) *Utaona tu.*  
 'You will just recover'.  
 (30) *Mungu atakusaidia utakuwa sawa tu.*  
 'God will help you, you will just be fine'.  
 (31) *Yatakwisha tu.*  
 'Everything will just be over'.

If the PM *tu* were removed from examples (29)–(31), they would become simply statements of fact: *Utaona* 'You will recover', *Mungu atakusaidia utakuwa sawa* 'God will help you, you will be fine' and *Yatakwisha* 'It will be over'. By adding the PM *tu*, the speaker emphasizes that the discomfort is temporary (it will not last) and that the addressee should not worry.

### 3.5. PM *TU* IMPLYING NEARNESS (NOT FAR AWAY)

The PM *tu* is used to convince the addressee that the distance is not that great. The following examples show this implied meaning:

- (32) *Nisindikize mpaka pale tu.*  
 'Accompany me, just there'.  
 (33) *Kwangu ni jirani tu na hapa.*  
 'My home is just near from here'.

- (34) *Ni pale tu jirani na duka la Sanga.*  
 ‘Just there near Sanga’s shop’.

In these utterances, the speaker emphasizes that the place referred to is not far away. This emphasis disappears when the PM *tu* is omitted (as in *Nisindikize mpaka pale* ‘Escort me there’, *Kwangu ni jirani na hapa* ‘My place is nearby’ and *Ni pale jirani na duka la Sanga* ‘It is next door to Sanga’s shop’). Thus, it is clear that the PM *tu* is used in communication to indicate that the speaker emphasizes that the place referred to is nearby.

### 3.6. PM *TU* IMPLYING A WARNING

The PM *tu* is used as an indirect way of saying that someone should not do something. This implied meaning is usually conveyed in a context where a certain behavior has already been forbidden, but the addressee is repeating it. The PM *tu* is therefore used to imply a warning, as in the following examples:

- (35) *We cheza tu. Utafaulu bila hata kusoma.*  
 ‘Just play. You will pass the exams without even reading’.  
 (36) *We lala tu. Chakula kitajipika chenyewe.*  
 ‘Just lay down. The food will be cooked by itself’.  
 (37) *Nyie kaeni tu. Maana yupo wa kuwapikia.*  
 ‘You just sit down. There is somebody to cook for you’.  
 (38) *We cheka tu. Mwenzio ameshamaliza kazi zake.*  
 ‘Just laugh. Your fellow has already done his/her work’.

Although the utterances in (35)–(38) seem to simplify the issue like those in (18)–(21), here, the speakers use the PM *tu* to imply that the addressee should do the opposite or stop behaving in a certain way. In (35), it serves as an indirect way of saying not to play; in (36), the speaker implies that the person should stop lying down and do the necessary work; in (37), the PM *tu* implies that the addressed person should get up and do what the other person is doing; finally, in (38), the PM *tu* is used to imply that the addressee should stop laughing. It is clear from these examples that the PM *tu* is sometimes used in an utterance to show that the speaker is being ironic.



It was also observed that the PM *tu* is used to imply that something bad might/must happen in the future:

- (39) *Mimi kila siku ninamwambia hasikii. We ngoja tu.*  
 'I usually tell him/her, but s/he does not listen. You just wait'.  
 (40) *Anaingilia mambo yasiyomhusu. We mwache tu.*  
 S/he always interferes in matters that s/he is not concerned with. Just leave him/her'.

In (39), the speaker uses the PM *tu* to emphasize that something bad will happen because the person does not pay attention despite being told about it many times, while in (40), the PM *tu* is used to stress that something bad will happen because the person referred to always interferes in matters that do not concern him/her. The findings indicate that verbs such as *ngoja* 'wait' and *acha* 'leave' help to determine the implied meaning.

### 3.7. PM *TU* IMPLYING IMMEDIACY/TEMPORARINESS

The PM *tu* is also used to imply that something happened immediately after another incident.

- (41) *Yaani huyu mtoto, akimwona tu mama yake, anaanza kulia.*  
 'You see this kid, as soon as he sees his mother, he starts crying.'  
 (42) *Nikila tu dagaa, vidonda vya tumbo vinaanza kuuma.*  
 'I start feeling ulcer pain immediately after eating anchovies.'

In (41), the child starts to cry immediately after seeing his mother, and in (42), the speaker claims that he usually starts to feel ulcer pain immediately after eating anchovies. If the PM *tu* were to be removed from these statements (such as *Yaani huyu mtoto, akimwona mama yake, anaanza kulia* 'You see this kid, when he sees his mother, he starts crying' and *Nikila dagaa, vidonda vya tumbo vinaanza kuuma* 'I start feeling ulcer pain after eating anchovies'), the sense that something occurs immediately after something else would be lost. This implies that the action of crying or feeling ulcer pain does not necessarily happen immediately. It is possible for the child to cry any time after seeing his mother, and the person may experience ulcer pain at any time after eating anchovies.

Moreover, speakers use the PM *tu* to emphasize that something happened just a few hours or days earlier, as can be seen in the following examples:

- (43) *Jana tu alikuwa hapa.*  
'He was here just yesterday'.
- (44) *Nilikutana naye juzi tu.*  
'I met him/her just a few days ago'.
- (45) *Sasa hivi tu alikuwa hapa.*  
'He was here just now'.
- (46) *Wameoana juzijuzi tu hapa.*  
'They married each other just a few days ago'.

In all these examples, the PM *tu* serves to emphasize that something has happened very recently. For instance, "yesterday" in (43), "just a few days ago" in (44) and (46) or "just now" in (45).

It was also noted that the PM *tu* is used to imply a transitional period (something is happening only for a while, it will not last forever):

- (47) *Raha ni ya muda tu.*  
'Pleasure is just for a while'.
- (48) *Starehe ni ya muda tu.*  
'Luxury is just for a while'.
- (49) *Kuteseka ni kwa muda tu.*  
'Sufferings are just for a while'.

When the PM *tu* is removed from the statements in (47)–(49), they stop carrying the meaning that something is "just for a while" (such as *Raha ni ya muda* 'Pleasure is temporary', *Starehe ni ya muda* 'Luxury is temporary' and *Kuteseka ni kwa muda* 'Sufferings are temporary').

### 3.8. PM *TU* IMPLYING A REASON FOR SOMETHING OR THE LACK OF IT

The PM *tu* is also used to indicate that something is done without deep thought/reflection, as can be illustrated by the following examples:

- (50) *Unaamua tu.*  
'You just decide (without reasoning)'.
- (51) *Analazimisha tu.*  
'S/he is just forcing things'.

- (52) *Unaongea tu.*  
 'You are just talking (nonsense)'.  
 (53) *Unalalamika tu.*  
 'You are just complaining'.

Removing the PM *tu* from the above utterances (*Unaamua* 'You decide', *Analazimisha* 'S/he is forcing things', *Unaongea* 'You are talking' and *Unalalamika* 'You are complaining') makes them regular explanations/pieces of information.

It was also noted that the PM *tu* is used to imply that there is no other reason except the indicated one, as shown by the following conversations:

- (54) A: *Kwa nini waliachana?*  
 'Why did they divorce?'.  
 B: *Ni wivu tu.*  
 'Just because of jealousy'.  
 (55) A: *Kwa nini alimpiga sasa?*  
 'Why did he beat him/her?'.  
 B: *Ubishi tu.*  
 'Just an argument'.  
 (56) A: *Sasa mbona mpaka leo hajapaboresha pale?*  
 'Now, why didn't he make some improvements there?'.  
 B: *Ushamba tu.*  
 'Just ignorance'.

As can be seen, the speakers use the PM *tu* to indicate that there is only one reason for something: jealousy in (54), an argument in (55) and ignorance in (56).

Furthermore, the PM *tu* is used to imply that someone is doing something without a reason:

- (57) *Analia tu.*  
 'She is just crying'.  
 (58) *Niliamua kumuacha tu.*  
 'I just decided to leave him/her'.  
 (59) *Yaani mimi yule dada nampenda tu.*  
 'I just love that girl'.  
 (60) *Bosi wake anamtukana tu.*  
 'His boss just insults him/her'.

In these examples, people cry (57), divorce their spouse (58), love someone (59) and insult another person (60) for no reason. When the PM *tu* is removed from these statements (such as *Analia* ‘She is crying’, *Niliamua kumuacha* ‘I decided to leave him/her’, *Yaani mimi yule dada nampenda* ‘I love that girl’ and *Bosi wake anamtukana* ‘His boss insults him/her’), they lose the meaning of “doing something without reason”.

### 3.9. PM *TU* IMPLYING THAT NOTHING IMPORTANT IS BEING DONE

The PM *tu* is used to imply that nothing important is being done. The person to whom the speaker is referring is just idle (doing nothing).

- (61) A: *Kwa hiyo siku hizi unafanya nini?*  
 ‘What are you doing nowadays?’  
 B: *Siku hizi nipo tu.*  
 ‘I am just idle nowadays’.
- (62) A: *Tangu ametumbuliwa anafanya nini sasa?*  
 ‘What has he been doing since termination?’  
 B: *Yupo tu siku hizi.*  
 ‘He is just doing nothing nowadays’.
- (63) *Huyu anashinda anaka tu kijiweni.*  
 ‘He usually just sits in a cornerstone’.

Responses of speaker B in the above dialogues show that the PM *tu* is used to explain that the person referred to is not doing anything meaningful or important. Without the PM *tu*, this special meaning is lost, and the utterances are merely strange statements (such as *Siku hizi nipo* ‘I am here nowadays’, *Yupo siku hizi* ‘He is here nowadays’ and *Huyu anashinda anaka kijiweni* ‘He remains sitting in a cornerstone’).

### 3.10. PM *TU* IMPLYING COMMONNESS

The PM *tu* also serves to imply commonness, i.e., when the speaker wants the addressee to understand that the referent is just an ordinary entity with no special features. Consider the following examples:

- (64) A: ... *Kwani mimi nimesemaje? mimi nimetoa mtazamo wa watu waliokuwa wanasema hayo.*  
 ‘... What did I say? I have just given the view of the people who said so’.  
 B: *Sasa hao si watu tu!*  
 ‘Aren’t they just people?’.  
 A: *Na wewe si mtu tu. Kwani wewe malaika?*  
 ‘You are also a mere person. Are you an angel?’.
- (65) *Yaani mimi nihangaika kumlea halafu mtu tu aje aninyang’anye mwanangu?*  
 ‘So after all the efforts to raise him/her, then a mere person will come and snatch my kid?’.

In both cases, the speakers use the PM *tu* to imply that the persons they are referring to have no special qualities (they are just normal people like others). Sometimes when the PM *tu* is used in this way, it is accompanied by a participle verb *si* indicating negation, as in example (64). This meaning is lost when the PM *tu* is removed from the utterance (such as *Sasa hao si watu!* ‘Now those are not people!’, *Na wewe si mtu!* ‘You are not a person!’, *Yaani mimi nihangaika kumlea halafu mtu aje aninyang’anye mwanangu?* ‘So after all the efforts to raise him/her, then someone will come and snatch my kid?’). Those statements are just questions or exclamations and do not emphasize the ordinariness of the person(s).

### 3.1.1. PM *TU* IMPLYING, “DON’T QUOTE ME” (“I AM JUST THINKING”)

The PM *tu* is also used in conversation as an indirect way to say, “Don’t quote me”. The speaker implies that s/he is just saying a thought out loud, does not mean what s/he is saying or does not want to be misunderstood. Consider the following examples:

- (66) *Watu waache utajiri wa manyoka bwana. Hivi unawezaje kufurahia kukaa kwenye gari ambalo limetokana na damu ya mwanao jamani! Nawaza tu.*  
 ‘People should stop earning wealth by witchcraft. I wonder how you can enjoy sitting in a car which is a result of your son’s blood sacrifice. I’m just thinking’.
- (67) *Najiuliza tu, kama ni sahihi kweli kumuadhibu mtoto wako kiasi hiki. Unampiga mtoto kama mnyama!*  
 ‘I am just asking myself if it is right to punish your own kid to such an extent! You punish your own kid like an animal!’.

By using the PM *tu*, the speakers in (66) and (67) imply that they do not mean anything bad by what they are saying and that their words should not be taken seriously.

### 3.12. PM *TU* IMPLYING DISAPPOINTMENT

The PM *tu* also serves to imply that something that was expected has not happened yet, as illustrated by the following examples:

- (68) *Hajarudi tu?*  
'Is s/he not back yet?'
- (69) *Humalizi tu?*  
'Haven't you finished yet?'
- (70) *Hajaolewa tu?*  
'Hasn't s/he married yet?'

The speakers in (68)–(70) use the PM *tu* to show that the person referred to was expected to have returned, finished and married, respectively. Without the PM *tu*, the statement becomes a general inquiry and not a question asking for an explanation why something has not happened yet (such as *Hajarudi?* 'Has s/he not returned?', *Humalizi?* 'Haven't you finished?' and *Hajaolewa?* 'Is s/he not married?').

### 3.13. PM *TU* IMPLYING "NOBODY/NOTHING ELSE"

The PM *tu* is used to imply "none other than that", as illustrated by the following examples:

- (71) *Huyo atakuwa Yasini tu.*  
'That will be only Yassin'.
- (72) *Atakuwa aliambiwa na Anna tu.*  
'He was told by Anna and not otherwise'.
- (73) *Atakuwa ameiba Neema tu.*  
'It must be stolen by Neema and not otherwise'.

In these three examples, the PM *tu* serves to imply that no one else but the indicated person could have done something. Without the PM *tu*, the

statements cannot indicate that something was done by no one else but the named person (as in *Huyo atakuwa Yasin* ‘That will be Yasin’, *Atakuwa aliambiwa na Anna* ‘He was told by Anna’ and *Atakuwa ameiba Neema* ‘Neema will have stolen’).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the PM *tu* as a source of implicature in spoken Kiswahili. The results show that the PM *tu* conveys different types of implicature depending on the context of use and specific conversational experiences. It serves, among others, to imply an amount, inevitability, simplicity, reassurance, nearness, a warning, immediacy/temporariness, a lack of reason, commonness, “Don’t quote me” and disappointment. These implied meanings are unique to the PM *tu*, as they have not been noted in other research on the PMs in Kiswahili, like *sawa* (Kibiki 2019), *sasa* (Goodness 2020), *yaani* (Marjie and Sosoo 2021) and *hivi* (Kibiki 2022). Therefore, each PM is unique in the way it conveys meaning in Kiswahili. More research should be done to compare the PM *tu* with other similar PMs in other languages so as to identify some of the cultural factors that underlie the way PMs cause implicature in language.

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## The complexities of noun class system in the acquisition and learning of Swahili language

### ABSTRACT

The hallmark of Bantu languages is their robust noun class system. At the same time, the major challenge that foreign-language learners and second-language (L2) speakers of these languages face is mastering and using the noun class system consistently and appropriately in their language production. This paper demonstrates how L2 speakers and learners of Swahili as a foreign language assign and reassign nouns to different noun classes and identifies the noun classes that cause them the most problems. The author argues that by adopting a culturally informed morphosyntactic, phonological and semantic approach, L2 speakers and learners of Swahili as a foreign language can easily resolve problems with noun class agreement in Swahili.

**KEYWORDS:** noun class, L2 speakers, foreign-language learners, Swahili morpho-syntax, grammatical agreement, semantics, morphophonology

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of the noun classes remains a major topic of interest but also an area that frustrates many foreign-language learners and second-language (L2) speakers<sup>1</sup> of Swahili when ensuring agreement is maintained in sentence construction. The data collected over a long period of time shows that speakers often struggle with assigning nouns to their respective noun classes. Nevertheless, this paper aims to prove that it is possible to learn

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<sup>1</sup> The term “L2 speakers” is used here in reference to people who use Swahili as a second or third language.

and begin to use noun classes intuitively. It does so by addressing the following questions:

- What is a noun class, and why is it important in Swahili and other Bantu languages?
- What are the common errors and mistakes that speakers of Swahili make?
- What causes challenges in learning and using the noun class system in Swahili?
- What are the best strategies that L2 speakers and foreign-language learners can deploy to master the noun class system in Swahili?

## 2. NOUN CLASSES IN BANTU LANGUAGES

Swahili is one of over 500 Bantu languages spoken in Central, Southern and Eastern Africa that use the noun class system in determining grammatical agreement. The noun class system in Bantu languages can be compared to the grammatical gender in languages such as English or Spanish (Demuth 2000; Ud Deen 2005). This shows that noun classification and grammatical agreement are universal linguistic phenomena common to many languages, despite the different strategies used to achieve them. Bantu languages, for instance, use noun class markers or prefixes to indicate grammatical agreement. In her analysis of Swahili noun classes, Contini-Morava (1996) refers to the concordial agreement of demonstratives, possessives and verbal markers.

Earlier scholars who studied the noun class system in African languages have distinguished 24 noun classes and proposed a system of numbering them that takes into consideration the characteristics of nouns (see, for example, Meinhof 1932; as cited in Katamba 2003). However, as Mutaka and Tamanji (2000) note, not all languages that use the noun class system have the same number of noun classes since some of them have combined two or more noun classes into one. Other scholars who have studied African languages and paid attention to their classification and features, such as noun classes, include Bokamba (1985), Contini-Morava (1997), Demuth (2003), Katamba (2003), Mohamed (2001), Moxley (1998), Mugane (1997), Nurse and Hinnebusch (1993), Polome (1967), Ziesler and Demuth (1995).

One of the major challenges for learners of Bantu languages is the uncertainty about the number of noun classes that a given language has. It is estimated that there are between 10 and 20 noun classes. This lack of clarity confirms the complexity involved in the study and understanding of the noun class system. For this reason, the correct assignment of nouns to their classes remains the yardstick that demonstrates the user's/speaker's mastery of the grammar of the language and/or their language proficiency.

### 3. UNDERSTANDING THE NOUN CLASS SYSTEM

Many learners hear of the concept of a “noun class” for the first time when they begin to learn or study an African language. In this paper, I do not seek to reinvent the wheel and will use the definition proposed by other scholars mentioned above. Thus, the term “noun class” refers to the idea of categorizing nouns into specific groups based on a number of linguistic variables, such as semantics, phonology, morphosyntax, etc. Therefore, there must be some basic underlying features that allow for this classification to take place.

It is also important to point out that in the noun class system, head nouns determine the morphology of almost all nominal elements, including demonstratives, adjectives, numerals, quantifiers as well as associative words. This is true not only for Swahili but also for all the languages that use the noun class system. In principle, therefore, the head noun licenses agreement on the verb and any modifiers of the noun.

### 4. THE SWAHILI NOUN CLASS SYSTEM

As has been stated before, Swahili uses a noun class system. The number of noun classes (hereafter, NC) is not quite clear because of the different ways that nouns are perceived. For example, diminutives are considered derogatory and thus not a part of standard Swahili. However, they are still used colloquially and in creative works, so they have not completely disappeared from the language. These nouns are classified in NC12 and

NC13, respectively (e.g., *katoto* ‘a little child’ and *tutoto* ‘little children’). The use of such nouns can indicate endearment or ridicule, depending on the type of interaction between the speakers. Moreover, some scholars lump together two types of nouns into one noun class. Good examples are NC11 and NC14, which include nouns that begin with *u*. However, I argue that it is possible to distinguish between NC14 in the case of abstract nouns and NC11, which exhibits different characteristics, such as long and thin objects. In my opinion, phonological similarities do not override other basic variables, such as semantics.

Despite these differing views, it is generally accepted that the Swahili noun class system contains 18 noun classes (see Table 1). Each has a noun class prefix attached to the nominal stem, with corresponding agreement markers on adjectives, possessives, demonstratives, independent pronouns, relatives, verbs and object pronouns. Ashton (1944) notes that the Swahili noun has two sets of concords: pronominal and adjectival. The concords on the adjectives are the same as the noun class prefixes and are obligatory. For instance, in example (1) below, the prefix *m-* in *mrefu* ‘tall’ is used to bring the root *-refu* into a concordial agreement with *mtoto* ‘child’. The quantifiers used in this sentence follow the same pattern.

- (1) *Yeye ni mtoto waangu mmoja mrefu*. ‘S/he is my one tall child’.  
NC1-s/he is NC1-child NC1-my NC1-one NC1-tall
- (2) *Wao ni watoto waangu watano warefu*. ‘They are my five tall children’.  
NC2-they are NC2-children NC2-my NC2-five NC2-tall

Examples (1) and (2) show agreement patterns of the singular form of nouns in NC1 and their plural form in NC2, respectively. This is very similar to other Bantu languages, e.g., Sukuma and Luhya. Scholars have indicated that Swahili noun classes occur in singular/plural pairs except NC15 and the locative noun classes 16, 17 and 18 (Ashton 1944; Myachina 1981; Hinnebusch and Mirza 1998). As shown in Table 1, all nouns except those in NC9 and NC10 take a noun class prefix. Some scholars claim that NC5 also has a zero morpheme ( $\emptyset$ ). However, the traditional way of categorizing the noun class marker for NC5 is to assume that the original members of this noun class used the *ji-* prefix.

**Table 1.** Noun classes in Swahili and their prefixes

Singular		Plural	
1	<i>m-tu</i> 'person'	2	<i>wa-tu</i> 'people'
3	<i>m-ti</i> 'tree'	4	<i>mi-ti</i> 'trees'
5	<i>ji-na</i> 'name'	6	<i>ma-jina</i> 'names'
7	<i>ki-ti</i> 'chair'	8	<i>vi-ti</i> 'chairs'
9	$\emptyset$ - <i>nyumba</i> 'house'	10	$\emptyset$ - <i>nyumba</i> 'house'
11	<i>u-kuta</i> 'wall'		
12	<i>ka-toto</i> 'little child' (diminutive/ endearment)	13	<i>tu-toto</i> 'little children' (diminutive/endearment)
14	<i>u-moja</i> 'unity'		
15	<i>kuimba</i> 'singing'		
16	<i>pa – mahali hapa</i> 'in this place' – specific place		
17	<i>ku – mahali huku</i> 'in this place' – general place		
18	<i>mu – mahali humu</i> 'in this place' – inside a place		

Although, in general, the numbering of nouns in Swahili and other Bantu languages follows a pattern where the lower number signals the singular and the higher number the plural, as shown in (1) and (2), there are exceptions to this rule. For example, the plural of NC11 can be realized in NC10, as in (3) and (4). Similarly, some plurals of nouns in NC14 are realized in NC6, e.g., *ugonjwa* 'sickness', which is an abstract noun, has its plural in NC6 – *magonjwa* 'sicknesses'.

- (3) *Utepe wangu umeanguka*. 'My tape has fallen (down)'.

NC11-tepe NC11-angu NC11-tense-anguka

- (4) *Tepe zangu zimeanguka*. 'My tapes have fallen (down)'.

NC10-tepe NC10-angu NC10-tense-anguka

There are different methods for placing nouns in specific noun classes, ranging from phonological cues (what does the prefix look like?) through morphosyntactic properties of the word to the semantics of the noun (e.g., is it animate or not?). Since grammatical agreement in Swahili is obligatory, even a learner who has not yet been acquainted with the agreement system is still expected to observe the rules. However, the reason why a noun

should be in NC3 and not in NC1 is not always clear, especially when the learner is using only phonological cues.

In the following section, I discuss some of the errors and mistakes that language users make in their language production and how to avoid them.

## 5. LEARNING NOUN CLASS ASSIGNMENT IN SWAHILI – CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

### 5.1. MISTAKES AND ERRORS MADE BY LEARNERS WHEN ASSIGNING NOUNS TO NOUN CLASSES

The goal of grammar is to achieve grammatical agreement in language. However, many L2 speakers fail to assign nouns to their appropriate noun classes. Observations indicate that when they are not monitoring their speech, the majority of them put most nouns into NC9, a noun class that is also referred to as the N class. The most noticeable error that learners make is assigning agreement markers of NC9 demonstratives and adjectives to NC1 nouns, as in example (5). In examples (6)–(8), everything is dumped into NC4, which seems to be typical for most speakers, especially in Kenya.

- (5) *Mbwa yangu inabwika*. ‘My dog is barking’. – The speaker assigns NC9 prefixes to NC1/2 head nouns.
- (6) *Nina pesa mingi*. ‘I have a lot of money’. – The speaker assigns NC4 prefixes to NC9/10 head nouns.
- (7) *Mvua ni mingi sana*. ‘The rain is a lot’. – The speaker assigns NC4 prefixes to NC9/10 head nouns.
- (8) *Mambo mingi*. ‘The issues are many’. – The speaker assigns NC4 prefixes to NC6 head nouns.

In a study that I have been conducting since 2007 among college students studying Swahili on how foreign-language learners acquire knowledge of noun classes, I have noted that they tend to perform better after being given explicit instruction on how to assign them. It also appears that the higher the level of the learner, the better his/her comprehension and proper use of noun classes. Additionally, although native speakers also

make mistakes when unmonitored, they still outperform foreign-language learners in accuracy.

The confusion between semantics, phonological cues and morphosyntactic agreement seems evident to all participants in grammatical judgment tasks. Most learners who rely heavily on phonological cues make overgeneralization errors, although such type of errors could also be due to the lack of advanced knowledge and lack of control of vocabulary. Consider NC7 and NC8, for instance. In Swahili, when a learner looks at the word **kiboko**, which can mean a cane or a hippo, s/he can interpret the noun as either a hippo or a cane. Since the learner's language proficiency is low, their major challenge is to distinguish the two meanings. Based on phonological cues, s/he may easily treat the noun as an object that takes NC7 and NC8 concordial agreement markers. However, if the learner employs semantic knowledge, then s/he can reassign all concordial agreement features to the correct noun class. See examples (9) and (10) below.

- (9) *Kiboko huyu ni mkubwa sana.* 'This hippo is very big'.  
 NC1-hippo NC1-this is NC1-big very
- (10) *Kiboko hiki ni kikubwa sana.* 'This cane is very big'.  
 NC7-cane NC7-this is NC7-big very

Clearly, the meanings of the two nouns are very different once one looks at the demonstrative and the adjectival prefix markers on both the demonstrative and the adjective. In this case, therefore, reliance on phonological cues is inadequate. The learner must be able to think of what the word means. The same is true for nouns such as **kiongozi** 'a leader', **kijana** 'a youthful person', etc. If the learners take into account only the phonological cues, they will not achieve the expected concordial agreement.

Another problem that L2 speakers of Swahili and those that learn it as a foreign language face are the similarities observed in the prefix markers for certain noun classes. Learners always begin their language learning by focusing on themselves, their family members and objects in their immediate environment. An observed error that they often make is treating nouns in NC3 as members of NC1 and thus incorrectly using agreement markers for NC1.



Why do speakers not follow agreement rules, and how does this affect communication? L2 speakers and even near-native speakers may transfer some features of their L1 into Swahili. Even if their L1 is a Bantu language, this can cause inaccurate noun class assignment and lead, in turn, to ungrammaticality in sentence construction. For example, in the Luhya language, animals are grouped in NC9/10 and most birds are grouped in NC5/6. In Proto-Bantu and in most synchronic classifications of nouns, animals belong in NC9, while their plurals are categorized in NC10. Many speakers of Swahili as a second language classify animals such as cows, dogs, goats and sheep in NC9/10. Surprisingly for some languages such as Luhya, speakers place chicken in NC9 and NC10 but put other birds in NC5 and NC6, including the main head noun, e.g., *linyonyi* – *manyonyi* ‘bird – birds’, *libada* – *mabada* ‘turkey – turkeys’, *ingoko* – *zingoko* ‘chicken – chickens’, *idaywa* – *zidaywa* ‘rooster – roosters’. This suggests that the speakers may be transferring L1 features into their Swahili speech.

A different explanation needs to be given for learners of Swahili as a foreign language who fail to assign nouns to their proper noun classes. I argue that they lack the required linguistic knowledge to do it correctly. Many learners use phonological cues, and while in some cases, they may get it right (unless their proficiency is high), most of their noun class classifications will be overgeneralized. Learners at this early stage of learning noun classes make errors because they do not know which noun belongs to which noun class/group, except for the high-frequency nouns that revolve around humans.

Phonologically, NC9/10 is marked by the prefix *n-*. Therefore, this noun class is sometimes referred to as the N/N class. Semantically, it accommodates borrowed nouns, especially words from Arabic and English. Because most Bantu languages place animals in NC9, speakers and learners of Swahili tend to assign animals to this noun class. According to the animacy criterion, however, animals are supposed to follow the NC1/2 agreement pattern.

Speakers of Swahili put meat in NC9. For example, in (11) below, *nyama* ‘meat’, which is a derivative of animals, is placed in NC9. Even when one refers to a slaughtered sheep or goat, they use concordial agreement for NC9/10. However, the animal should be placed in NC1 and NC2 in terms of concordial agreement.

- (11) *Nyama hii ni yako*. 'This meat is yours'.  
 NC9-meat NC9-demonstrative verb NC9-possessive

In the learning and acquisition of a new language, errors are often made due to the grammatical requirements of each language. Swahili is an agglutinating language, which renders it morphologically rich. Sometimes speakers extend the rules that are used in their L1 to achieve agreement in Swahili, especially in the case of plural marking. For example, adding 's' to nouns in Swahili to form plurals, such as *mwanafunzis* 'students', *dadas* 'sisters', *mamas* 'mothers', *rafikis* 'friends', clearly demonstrates that the L2 speaker is transferring the plural-marking rule for regular nouns from his/her native English. In Swahili, plurals are formed by adding a prefix and not a suffix as in English. Therefore, because noun classes determine the plural marker, the lack of adequate knowledge about pluralization results in the learner falling back on his/her L1 knowledge when encountering a noun in Swahili for the first time. In most cases, s/he masters singular forms first, and so plural marking is often achieved by guesswork or over-generalization, as shown above.

## 5.2. STRATEGIES FOR PROPER ACQUISITION AND LEARNING OF THE NOUN CLASS SYSTEM

In the preceding sections, it has been determined that noun class assignment is not an easy task in Swahili and presents a challenge to both foreign-language learners and L2 speakers. To assign nouns accurately to their respective noun classes, the following parameters must be considered: morphology, phonology, syntax/agreement, semantics (animacy vs. inanimacy). Let us look at the following examples:

- (12) *Mambo **mingi**, shida **mingi**, mvua **mingi***

The adjective prefixes used here are not the right ones because they belong to NC4 and the nouns in (12) do not. Nouns must be identified and assigned to their appropriate noun classes first. The word *mambo* 'affairs' should be assigned to NC6, which is also a mass count noun class. The proper noun class prefix for NC6 is *ma-*, but the interaction between "a"

and “i” produces “e” and therefore the adjective should be *mengi* instead of *maingi*. The other nouns (*shida* ‘trouble’ and *mvua* ‘rain’) are in NC9 and their agreement marker is different.

Although there are several strategies that can be used to assign nouns to their appropriate noun classes, not all are considered adequate. For example, Kihore, Massamba and Msanjila (2012) dismiss the importance of the semantic classification of nouns in Swahili. However, the examples listed below clearly demonstrate how important it is to understand the semantics of any given noun.

- (13) *Kiongozi kinapenda watu*. ‘The leader likes people’. – erroneously assigned to NC7  
NC7-leader NC7-like people
- (14) *Ndizi langu ni tamu*. ‘My banana is sweet’. – erroneously assigned to NC5  
NC9-banana NC5-my verb to be Ø-sweet
- (15) *Ng’ombe zangu zinasumbua sana*. ‘My cows are very troublesome’. – erroneously assigned to NC10  
Cow – NC10-my NC-2 disturbing very

As these examples indicate, learners and speakers can make errors in assigning nouns to noun classes for a variety of reasons. In (13), the L2 learner uses phonological cues to mark a NC7 marker on the verb. In (14), the speaker assumes that since fruits are members of NC5/6, the word *ndizi* ‘banana’ can be assigned NC5 prefixes. Finally, in (15), the word *ng’ombe* ‘cow’ is assigned NC9/10 prefixes because of phonological cues or as a result of an L1 transfer.

Research on noun classes and grammatical gender in Swahili and many other languages shows that nouns can be classified in various ways (Demuth 2000; Senft 2000). One good strategy is to categorize nouns based on their prefixes. Another way is to use semantics, that is, assign nouns to a noun class based on the meaning they carry. However, it does not mean that if nouns are in the same noun class or if they have similar prefixes that they carry the same semantic qualities.

There is semantic overlap across the noun classes in Swahili, which confuses L2 learners. A good example is NC3, which is believed to be a noun class that encompasses plants and natural features, such as mountains and

rivers. However, NC3 and NC4 also include body parts (*mkono* ‘arm/hand’, *mgongo* ‘back’, *mguu* ‘leg’) and objects (*mfuko* ‘bag’, *mifuko* ‘bags’). This inconsistency is particularly confusing to L2 learners, who may wonder why a hand, which is a part of a human being, is in NC3 instead of NC1. That is why some scholars, e.g., Myachina (1981), believe that semantic categorizations have become blurry and that it is no longer possible to rely on them.

At the same time, if a learner was to rely on prefixing alone to ensure that concordial agreement was achieved, the results would not necessarily be accurate. For example, not all nouns that begin with “m” belong to NC1; some are found in NC3 instead. Likewise, there are nouns that do not begin with “m” but are still grouped in NC1. Consequently, another approach to classifying nouns can be used: the syntactic or grammatical approach, in which the speaker focuses on achieving concordial agreement on all categories in the entire sentence or phrase. However, this requires him or her to have good knowledge of the language.

The Swahili noun class system cannot be fully understood using one classification method. Although the prefixing method which relies on the first prefix is inadequate, it is the first step to establishing a pattern. At the same time, the semantics-based classification contains some important cues that learners can use to reanalyze their agreement efforts (specifically, the role of animacy in assigning nouns to NC1 and NC2). For example, the knowledge of semantics and animacy would allow a speaker to assign the word *kifaru* to NC1 and NC2 in its meaning ‘a rhino’ (an animal) and to NC7 in its other meaning, i.e., ‘a tank’ (equipment used in war).

Therefore, a much more effective approach to learning noun class assignment would be to acknowledge that one method is insufficient and to use a combination of the strategies discussed above. This goes hand in hand with the principle that to fully understand language, one needs to go beyond grammar.

An L2 speaker or learner first needs to know the prefixes that mark each noun class (see Table 1). They must also be aware of nouns that do not have noun class prefixes, such as some nouns in NC5 and NC9/10. Where there are noun markers, they ensure that speakers know how a word sounds and the sounds that need to be attached to nouns as well as adjectives and verbs.

Below, I briefly discuss how each strategy can be used to help assign nouns to their appropriate noun classes.

### 5.2.1. Semantics

Because some noun classes do not have a prefix, learners and speakers need to apply another level of understanding. A good example is NC5, which originally would be signaled by the *ji-* prefix, as in the word *jina* ‘name’. However, some nouns that belong in this class, such as *tunda* ‘fruit’, do not have a prefix. Similarly, in NC9 and NC10, there are several nouns that do not have the *n-* noun class prefix, e.g., *simu* ‘phone’, *kompyuta* ‘computer’. To reduce the chances of making a grammatical agreement error, a learner can thus use the semantics criterion. Table 2 below shows the meanings associated with the 18 noun classes in Swahili. Despite some overlap across the classes, the semantic methodology is quite helpful. However, it requires the language user to have good control of vocabulary.

**Table 2.** Noun classes and their associated meanings

Noun class	Meaning
1/2	humans, other animates
3/4	trees, plants, non-paired body parts, other inanimates
5/6	fruits, paired body parts, natural phenomena
6	liquids, water, milk
7/8	objects
9/10	animals, inanimates, borrowed nouns
11	long thin objects
12/13	diminutives, derogatory nouns
14	abstract nouns, mass nouns
15	infinitives or gerunds
16, 17, 18	locatives

The most consistent parameter is the animacy factor, which forces every noun that is animate to follow NC1 and NC2 agreement markers. Therefore, anything that has blood will behave like humans grammatically,

e.g., *nyuki* ‘bees’, *kipofu* ‘a blind person’, *ng’ombe* ‘cow’, *dada* ‘sister’. Even though these nouns do not begin with “m”, as expected of animate nouns, their semantics based on animacy requires speakers to assign them to the M-WA noun class or numerically NC1 and NC2.

Most borrowed words can be classified in NC9 with their plurals in NC10, even if they do not begin with “n”. However, that is not always the case since many loanwords fall in other noun classes, especially NC5, e.g., *shati* ‘shirt(s)’, *duka* ‘store’, *dawa* ‘medicine’, *darasa* ‘class’. Nouns that begin with “d” usually end up in NC5. As stated earlier, these nouns have a zero morpheme, that is, they do not have the noun class prefix like the other noun classes.

### 5.2.2. Morphosyntactic factors

All languages strive for grammatical agreement. In Swahili and other Bantu languages, the noun must agree with the verb using specific markers. At the same time, all modifiers, including adjectives, quantifiers and demonstratives such as this/these, are licensed by the head noun. Therefore, Bantu languages must demonstrate concordial agreement across the board. This requires knowing to which noun class the noun belongs and assigning the right markers to each category of the sentence that must take a prefix marker. Consider the following examples:

- (16) *Huyu mtoto wangu mzuri*. ‘This is my good child’.  
 NC1-toto NC1-wangu NC1-zuri
- (17) *Hiki kitabu changu kizuri*. ‘This is my good book’.  
 NC7-tabu NC7-angu NC7-zuri

Examples (16) and (17) show that there is grammatical agreement on the key elements of the sentence, e.g., in NC1, the agreement markers are *m-* and appear on all modifiers.

## 5.2.3. Morphophonological factors

Sometimes, the sequence of sounds results in sounds that are different from what would normally be the prefix of certain nouns. For example, while it is commonly believed that sound “n” precedes nouns and other elements such as adjectives in NC9 and NC10, a different prefix may surface due to a sound change. In the phrase *nyumba kubwa* ‘a big house’, for instance, one could expect the adjective *-kubwa* ‘big’ to be preceded by “n”, which is not the case. In the case of *nyumba mbaya* ‘a bad house’, the adjective has the *m-* prefix instead of the expected *n-*. The reason for the sound change is assimilation. These morphophonemic transformations are very confusing to a learner, who does not know whether to insert “m” or “n”. The foregoing discussions further justify the need to adopt broader strategies that will enable the speaker or learner to acquire and master the Swahili noun class system so that even if the noun has an NC9 prefix, s/he would know that it should be transferred to NC1 if it has animate qualities.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Classifying nouns in noun groups and making it obligatory ensures that meaning is not lost. Ideas need to be communicated in such a way that both the speaker and the listener can understand what is being said with as little ambiguity as possible. Therefore, noun classes are critical in languages that adopt them, and they should be mastered at all levels.

This paper sought to show one of the challenges that foreign-language learners and L2 speakers of Swahili encounter as they learn and use this language, which involves assigning nouns to their proper noun classes. It described the most common mistakes and errors that learners make and showed the inadequacy of relying only on one classification method. The ways that allow the speaker to align sentence structure include the prefixing method, which takes into account the first noun prefix, semantics-based classification (specifically, the role of animacy in assigning nouns to NC1 and NC2), as well as syntactic concordial agreement, which, however, requires focus and a good knowledge of the language.

I therefore argue that for learners and L2 speakers who may be influenced by their first languages to successfully learn the noun class system of Swahili, using a combination of these three methods is essential. Knowing the prefixes that mark each noun class ensures that speakers know how a word sounds and what sounds need to be attached to the nouns as well as adjectives and verbs. In addition to these markers, the meanings of nouns help the user to place them in their appropriate noun classes.

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Swahili is recognized as an important international language and ranks first among African languages taught to foreigners. This publication presents Swahili in its cultural setting by discussing selected issues pertaining to social values reflected in language usage and literary tradition, as well as issues of modern terminology and pragmatics. All contributions contain original and novel proposals, showing that the interdependence between language and culture can take many forms and can be analyzed from various perspectives.

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