## Morphosyntactic variation in present-day Swahili

While dialectal variation in Swahili - in relation to phonology and morphology - has long been noted (e.g. Bakari 1985, Stigand 1915), there has been little attention paid to structural variation. Moreover, much of the early descriptive work on Swahili focused on the higher prestige coastal varieties. We report on new preliminary evidence on present-day morphosyntactic variation in Swahili.

In this talk, we focus on morphosyntactic features for which variation has been previously noted in Swahili and discuss methodological considerations involved in examining this. This includes areas in which there is evidence for variation in Swahili or for which there is observed variation within Bantu languages, such as:

- Nominal agreement patterns (Marten 2000)
- Diminutive systems (Gibson et al 2017, King'ei 2000)
- > Distinct forms of the subject marker (Miyazaki & Takemura 2019)
- Variation in TAM marking (Abe 2009, Drolc 1992, Rugemalira 2000, Stigand 1915)
- Object marking (Gibson et al 2019)
- ➤ Locative marking (Gibson et al 2021)
- Relative clauses (Shinagawa 2019)

We focus on two areas of variation illustrated below. In Standard Swahili, habitual meaning is express by the use of the prefix hu- (1). In colloquial Swahili the suffix -ag- is used (2).

- (1) Wewe **hu**-l-a wapi? [Standard Swahili] 2SG.PRO HAB-eat-FV where 'Where do you (usually) eat?'
- (2) U-na-ku-l-**ag**-a wapi? [Colloquial Swahili] SM2SG-PRS-STM-eat-HAB-FV where 'Where do you (usually) eat?' (Rugemalira 2010: 232)

The suffix -ag- can be found in other Bantu languages such as Bende, Sukuma and Nyamwezi (Abe 2009) as well as in the reconstructed Proto-Bantu form (Meeuseen 1967). It is therefore unclear whether this feature has found its way back into Swahili through language contact or other processes of language innovation and change. And while some suggestions have been formulated on the current use of -ag- in Swahili (e.g. 'urbanism vs. rurality' — Abe 2009), the distribution of this feature in present day Swahili remains to be seen.

Gibson et al (2021) examined variation in Swahili locative marking. Among the results of this study, variation in speakers' judgement revealed a possible shift in animacy constrains. While the preposition *kwa* in locative phrases is reserved to introduce only humans in coastal varieties, its use with inanimates is increasingly more common in other varieties. This was attested also in the study with certain degrees of variation: the majority of participants considered example (3) somewhat acceptable while none of the participants accepted sentences like (4) as fully grammatical.

- (3) Peleka ma-jembe **kwa** shamba Take 6-hoe PREP 5.field
  - 'Take the hoes to the field'

'There is a lot of water in the river.'

(4) Ku-na maji m-engi **kwa** mto. sm15-have 6.water 6-many PREP 3.river

(Gibson et al 2021)

This talk provides insights into processes of contact and change, and variation across Bantu languages more broadly.

## **References**

- Abe, Yuko. 2009. The use of -ag- in colloquial Swahili in Tanzania: Report of a preliminary survey conducted in 2008. In: Kawaguchi, Yuji, Makoto Minegishi and Jacques Durand (eds.) *Corpus analysis and variation in linguistics*. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies: Studies in linguistics.
- Bakari, Mohamed. 1985. The Morphophonology of the Kenyan Swahili Dialects. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.
- Drolc, Ursula. 1992. On the perfect in Swahili. Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere 29: 63-87.
- Gibson, Hannah, Rozenn Guerois and Lutz Marten. 2017. Patterns and Developments in the Marking of Diminutives in Bantu. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* Vol. 26 No. 4.
- Gibson, Hannah, Gastor Mapunda, Lutz Marten, Sheena Shah and Julius Taji. 2019. Variation in double object marking in Swahili. Special Issue 'Variation in Swahili', ed. by Daisuke Shinagawa and Nico Nassenstein, *Swahili Forum* 26: 142-165.
- Gibson, Hannah, Lutz Marten, Kristina Riedel and Julius Taji. 2021. *Shifting animacy restrictions for locatives in Swahili and beyond*. Presented at: Language Association of Eastern Africa conference 2021.
- King'ei, K. 2000. Problems of Acceptability of Standard Swahili Forms by Non-Kiunguja Native Kiswahili speakers. In: K. Kahigi, Y. Kihore and M. Mous (eds.), *Lugha za Tanzania*. *Languages of Tanzania*, pp. 81–88. CNWS Publications, Universiteit Leiden.
- Marten, Lutz. 2000. Agreement with conjoined noun phrases in Swahili. *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere 64: Swahili Forum VII*, 75-96.
- Marten, Lutz. 2010. The great siSwati locative shift. In Anne Breitbarth, Christopher Lucas, Sheila Watts and David Willis, eds, *Continuity and Change in Grammar*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 249-267.
- Meeuseen, A. 1967. Bantu grammatical reconstructions. Africana Linguistica 3: 79-121.
- Rugemalira, Josephat M. 2010. The -ag- TAM marker and the boundary between cliticization and inflection in Bantu. In Karsten Legère and Christina Thornell (eds.) Bantu Languages: Analyses, Description and Theory. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe, 229–237.
- Shinagawa, Daisuke. 2019. 'The syntactic distribution of relativizers and the development of -enye relative constructions in Sheng'. Swahili Forum 26: 122-141.
- Stigand, Chauncy Hugh. 1915. *Dialect in Swahili: A Grammar of Dialectic Changes in the Kiswahili Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.