

Swahili Journalistic Language: A Linguistics Study (view)

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INTRODUCTION

This study arose from a desire to present Swahili journalistic language as a linguistic variant of its own and to dispel the notion that this style is the standard variety of the language. It is an attempt to contrast Swahili journalistic texts with texts written in standard Swahili, that is, "irreproachably correct Swahili or current Swahili at its best".

The usual view has been that the Swahili newspaper style is an expression of the standard. But a careful lexical and grammatical examination of journalistic texts reveals a divergence from the standard. It shows features which are typical of informal language style, such lexemes and structures which occur in casual, relaxed social settings in which speech is spontaneous and uncensored by the speaker, or occasions when one is sure of one's audience or readership. It shows substrata that are nonstandard, eg. colloquialisms, slang, jargons, patois, nonstandard vocabulary in common usage, etc. Grammatical irregularities are commonplace and there is a heavy influence of English on the newspaper style.

Swahili publications increasingly appear in which the sentence structure is far different from what the Waswahili themselves regard as appropriate. Nouns do not concordially agree with other word classes associated with them in a syntactic relationship. The style shows a composite of grammatical regularities and irregularities, that is to say, there are well-formed as well as ill-formed sentences. The use of the nonstandard lexical items like those jargons used in the sports columns (as will be seen later) is sometimes due to its unique register whereas other nonstandard vocabulary and grammatical irregularities and attributable to linguistic incompetence on the part of the pressmen.

ON DEFINING STANDARD SWAHILI

In accordance with Akmajian, Demers and Harnish (1984), I define standard Swahili as a variety of the Swahili language whose base has been to come extent, the Zanzibar town dialect - Kiunguja - and which, as a result of language planning, has been officially developed and has become widely acceptable as linguistically appropriate to function as the proper 27 medium of formal writing, in legal and

governmental functions, in textbooks and generally as a vehicle of education. It is the variety that is taught to learners of Swahili as a foreign language. It has an agreed set of codified norms which are accepted by the speech community and forms the basis of the formal teaching of the language, whether as language 1 or 2. It is also sometimes used in the National Media, especially in news programmes and in journalism. It is the developed super-stratum in relation to all other strata (Akmajian, Demers, Harnish 1984: 294).

This definition therefore excludes newspaper languages in the definition of standard Swahili as was done by Maw (1987) and Temu (1984).

Certain expression in the newspapers are slang and by definition, slang words (expressions) are nonstandard. Mario Pei's definition of slang to which I am inclined is "A nonstandard vocabulary, characterised by extreme informality and composed of coinages or arbitrarily changed words, clipped forms, extravagant of facetious figures of speech, verbal novelties and subject to rapid decline into disuse. It is a type of language in common use, produced by popular adaptation and extension of meaning of existing words **without regard for scholastic standards and the principles** of the linguistics formation of words" (Pei 1954: 250).

This definition categorizes slang words (expressions) as unconventional (nonstandard). They are typical of casual style. **Rajmund Ohly refers to slang** and other language varieties, among them, jargons, patois, argot etc. as constituting an **illegitimate unconventional speech** (Ohly 1987: 2).

The dailies and weeklies of both Kenya and Tanzania manifest words and expressions that are outside of conventional usage and are slang. The point needs mentioning however that the use of some of these nonstandard varieties is because the newspapers have their own register(s). If the pressmen write like a scientific paper, their readers will not be very interested. They therefore write to arouse interest or to lure their numerous readers to their papers.

SLANG WORDS (PHRASES) IN THE NEWSPAPERS

Tapeli/Utapeli

These are slang words that are in use in informal contexts in Tanzania. Apart from overhearing them in casual conversations, they are often heard in the law-courts and are seen in the dailies and weeklies of Tanzania. The etymology is that the word 'tapeli' came from French 'taper' - literally 'to beat'. The Vijana Jazz Band of Dar es Salaam is supposed to have used it in one of its compositions on their return from Zaire. It is used informally to refer to a process whereby one is dispossessed of his property through cheating, tricks or deceit. From the verb form 'tapeli' they derive the abstract noun form 'utapeli'. This is expressed in standard Swahili as **kujipatia fedha au mali kwa njia ya danganyifu or kumlaghai mtu**. This literally means, "to dispossess one of his money or property through deceit or

trickish means or to defraud one by use of tricks". The word 'taper' is used in French informally to refer to the same process, that is defraud by using trickish means. The expressions 'tapeli'/'utapeli' are outside of conventional usage.

- (a) Karani wa NBC **atapeliwa** sh. 440,000/- (Uhuru, Jun. 15, 1989: 1).
A clerk of the NBC defrauded 440,000/-.
- (b) Watatu jela miaka mitano kwa **utapeli** (Uhuru, Jun. 15, 1989: 1).
Three people in jail 5 years for fraud.

These are expressible in standard Swahili as:

- (a) Mtu alimlaghai Karani wa NBC sh. 440,000/-.
Somebody defrauded a clerk of NBC sh. 440,000/- through trickish means.
- (b) Watatu jela miaka mitano kwa kumlaghai mtu.
Three people in jail 5 years for fraud through trickish means.

JARGONS

The Swahili dailies and weeklies manifest expressions or language variety that are peculiar to some professional groups or 'special-interest' groups. These are jargons.

DEFINITION OF A JARGON

Akmajian, Demers and Harnish offer as a definition of Jargon, "A set of special vocabulary items that are used by members of some **profession or specialized social group and 'special-interest' groups**". This special vocabulary evolves to meet the special needs of the profession. These jargons or vocabulary items are specially suited to the particular interests of the professional group (Akmajian, Demers & Harnish 1984: 323, 525).

Mario Pei defines the same as "A collective term for words, expressions, technical terms, etc. intelligible to members of a specific group, social circle or public" (Pei 1954: 135).

I have no objection to either definition.

JARGONS OF SPORTSMEN OR SPORTS-ENTHUSIASTS

TIMU A iliichababga, (choma), (rarua), (nyoa), (charuka), (charaza), (chuna), (tandika), (lamba), (nyuka), (zima), (tafuna), (kula), (bugiza), (bomoa), TIMU B maboa...

All the above mean Team A defeated Team B by...goals. All these expressions are outside of conventional usage. Although they are appropriate in the language of football or sports, they are not utilisable in formal contexts, for instance in teaching Swahili to foreigners.

Mwansoko (1984: 3) exemplified some of these and as such I give just a few more examples of these.

1. rarua - literally 'tear', eg. paper or cloth.
rarua...mabao. Meaning *defeat by...goals*.
 - (a) Kirinyaga yararua KTM nyumbani (Taifa Leo, Aug. 13, 1988: 10).
Kirinyaga whipped hosts KTM.
 - (b) Simba yairarua Yanga kwa tabu (Taifa Leo, Aug. 13, 1988: 10).
Simba beat Yanga through difficulties.
2. nyoa - literally 'shave'.
nyoa...mabao. Meaning *beat by...goals*.
 - (a) Pamba yainyoya Sigara 3-1 (Mzalendo, Jan. 1, 1989: 10).
Pamba whipped Sigara 3-1.
 - (b) Kilanguni Lodge waliwanyoya Nyota kwa mabao 4-0 (Kenya Leo, Aug. 17, 1986: 15).
Kilanguni Lodge whipped Nyota 4-0.
3. chuna - literally 'deskin'.
chuna...mabao. Meaning *defeat by...goals*.
Kwenye mechi za Robo-fainali..., Olimpia ikaichuna Gasgestoes 1-0 (Taifa Leo, Feb. 18, 1989: 12).
In the Quarter-final match.... Olimpia whipped Gasgestoes 1-0.
4. kula - literally 'eat'.
kula...mabao. Meaning *defeat by...goals*.
Jumamosi wiki jana, Mumias ilikula 1-0 ya Transcom...(Taifa Leo, Aug. 12, 1989: 11).
Last Saturday, Mumias whipped Transcom 1-0....
5. tafuna - literally 'chew'.
tafuna...mabao. Meaning *defeat by...goals*.
Wiki jana Leopards nayo ikiwa hasusa ya Wanabia kwa kutafunwa 2-0 (Taifa Leo, Jul. 26, 1990: 10).
Last week Leopards were made as if they were the snacks of Breweries when they were whipped 2-0 by them.
6. kunja - literally 'fold'.
kunja...mabao. Meaning *beat by...goals*.
Katika City Stadium, Gor Mahia ilikunja Transcom 1-0 kwa bao lililofungwa na Ali Tumani (Taifa Leo, Jul. 24, 1990: 10).
At the City Stadium, Gor Mahia whipped Transcom with a loan goal scored by Ali Tumani.
7. lima - literally 'farm'.
lima...mabao. Meaning *defeat...by...goals*.
Leopards walilima Kitale mabao 3-0 (Taifa Leo, Nov. 26, 1988: 10).
Leopards whipped Kitale 3-0.

JARGONS OF SPORTSMEN OR SPORTS-ENTHUSIASTS - ADAPTED LOANWORDS

This second category of Jargons of Sportsmen differs from the preceding one in that, in the first case the words are actually Swahili words but whose usage is unconventional. That is to say, in texts written in standard Swahili or in formal contexts, they cannot be used the way they are used in the newspapers. This second category are English words that the pressmen incorporate into the Swahili newspapers either with or without modification. In some cases the English loans appear as they are in English but in others they are subjected to the phonological and morphological shape of Swahili words.

- (a) kwota-fainali - from English 'Quarter-final'.

Gor Mahia waliondolewa katika **kwota-fainali** na El-Merreik ya Sudan 2-0 (Taifa Leo, Nov. 11, 1989: 11).

Gor Mahia were eliminated in the Quarter-final by El-Merreik of Sudan 2-0. Standard Swahili for quarter-final is a compound of initial Arabic 'Robo' and followed by the English loan modified-fainali - hence **robo-fainali**. The pressmen is using a compound of two English loanwords.

- (b) semi-fainali - from English 'semi-final'.

Gor Mahia iliingia katika semi-fainali baada ya...(Taifa Leo, Okt. 21, 1989: 11).

Gor Mahia qualified for the semi-final after...

As in the preceding example, the pressman incorporates the English compound semi-final into the style with modification. But in standard Swahili, semi-final is a compound of initial Arabic 'nusu' followed by the English loanword modified - fainali - hence **nusu-fainali**. Influence of English on newspaper style is quite considerable.

GEOGRAPHICAL JARGONS

Bakita's glossaries in 'Tafsiri Sanifu' include Swahili names for certain countries. Texts written in standard Swahili have these Swahili equivalents utilised but the pressmen often make use of the English forms. Their reason for so doing is their being unconversant with the Swahili forms which are the standard. They have limited time to find out the standard equivalents and they feel so far as readers understand these English forms their message is carried across. Also these English forms have wider usage among the elite.

- (1) Iran jana iliamuru afisa mmoja wa **Switzerland** aliyoko mjini Tehran...(Taifa Leo, Apr. 1, 1989: 3).

Iran yesterday ordered a diplomat of the Swiss Embassy in Teheran to.... Standard is **Uswisi**.

- (2) Alisema anakumbuka kuwa kulikuwa na kambi ya watalii kutoka Switzerland, **Netherlands** na **Greece** (Taifa Leo, Sept. 16, 1989: 12).

He remarked that he remembered there was a group of tourists from Switzerland, Netherlands and Greece.

A text written in standard Swahili, eg. a translation, comprehension passage or composition by students in High Schools in Tanzania would use Uswisi, Uholanzi and Ugiriki respectively instead of the English forms.

- (3) Seychelles

Madagascar

Standard Swahili for these are **Ushelisheli** and **Buki(ni)** respectively.

Seychelles, Madagascar...ni nchi nyingine ambazo zimealikwa kwa mashindano hayo ya siku mbili na zitajiunga mwenyekiti Mauritius (Taifa Leo, Okt. 28, 1989: 3).

Seychelles, Madagascar...are some of the countries which have been invited for this two-day contest with host Mauritius.

Other Seviant forms are the pressmen's usage of **Amerika** and **Marekani** interchangeably. In Bakita's wordlists on geographical terminology and in the standard Swahili-Swahili Dictionary, **Amerika** stands for the continents of North and South America whereas **Marekani** stands for the country USA. In careful speech or in formal contexts, these are used with the distinction shown. The press deviation from this can be seen in the Aug. 17, 1986 (p. 1) issue of Kenya Leo in an extract which is an open confrontation between Libya and the United States of America (USA) which led to the crashing of a USA bomber.

Ndege ya kivita ya **Amerika** iliyoagushwa na majeshi ya Libya...na majeshi ya **Amerika** mwezi uliopita. ...rubani mmoja wa **Amerika** aliyeangushwa wakati wa mashindano dhidi ya Libya...kofia ya rubani mwingine wa **Amerika** ambayo ilisukumwa... (Kenya Leo, Aug. 17, 1986: 1).

...a US fighter plane which was shot by the Libyan Air Force...and the American troops last month. ...an US pilot who was shot in the attack by Libya. ...the hut of another US pilot which was pushed....

The four occurrences of **Amerika** in this extract would have been better substituted by **Marekani** in texts written in standard Swahili in-so-far-as it is an issue between two countries - Libya and the USA.

MEDICAL JARGONS

As in the previous examples the pressmen are using **adapted** loanwords from English instead of the standard Swahili words.

- (1) Kolera - from English 'cholera'.

Kolera yaua watu 100 Angola (a headline in Kenya Leo, Apr. 17, 1986:5).
Cholera kills 100 people in Angola.

Standard for cholera is **kipindupindu**.

- (2) Wodi - from English 'ward'.

...alikuwa akiwakilisha wodi ya Kaplamai, alifariki... (Taifa Leo, Apr. 18, 1987: 10).

...he was brought to the Kaplamai ward, died....

Standard for ward is **chumba cha wagonjwa**.

- (3) mochari - from English 'mortuary'.

Maiti za watu hao waliokufa zilipelekwa **mochari**, hali watu wengine waliojeruhiwa walipelekwa Kenyatta National Hospital (Kenya Leo, Aug. 19, 1989: 8).

The bodies of the deceased persons were sent to the mortuary, others who sustained injuries were sent to the Kenyatta National Hospital.

Standard for mortuary is:

- (a) nyumba ya maiti, or
- (b) chumba cha kuhifadhia maiti.

- (4) laboratori - from English 'laboratory'.

...ujenzi wa mabweni, **laboratori** na ukumbi wa kulia chakula katika shule yao... (Taifa Leo, May 27, 1989: 9).

...the construction of dormitories, laboratories and dining-hall in their school....

Standard for laboratory is **maabara** or **lebu**.

To sum up, most of these words that are jargons and nonstandard are adapted English loanwords that the pressmen use as they are not conversant with the standard words. As can be seen from the referred examples, most of these deviations from the standard are from the Kenyan press. The Tanzanian pressmen use to a greater extent the standard.

It is not always because the pressmen are trying to use words which their readers can better understand but rather they are not aware of the standard equivalents and as there is not ample time to find out the standard forms before going to the press, they incorporate the English loans with or without adaptation.

GRAMMAR - MORPHOLOGY AND SYNTAX

Grammatical irregularities are commonplace in the newspapers. Some of the sentences are not in any way deviant or ill-formed but are too long and winding and therefore difficult to understand. Some are ambiguous. Others are ill-formed or they violate some grammatical rules. Some need breaking into shorter or simpler sentences for readers to better understand. Bersha (1983) in her *Muundo wa Sentensi ya Matumizi ya Vituo katika Magazeti* exemplified some of these deviant sentences.

Nouns, especially from the locative classes (C.16, C.17 and C.18) do not concordially agree with other word classes associated with them in a syntactic relationship. These irregularities are not the result of style but are due to the linguistic incompetence on the part of the pressmen.

- (a) Watu 6 wafariki **ajalini ya** matatu (Taifa Leo, Sept. 17, 1988: 3).
Six people died in an accident involving a private commercial vehicle.
- (b) Wananchi wachungulia kwa makini **dirishani la** kioski...(Taifa Leo, Sept. 17, 1988: 3).
People kept on gazing quietly at the window of a kiosk....

Also deviant is **mahakamani ya** in Taifa Leo, Aug. 13, 1988 (p. 3). The pressmen seem to be generalizing nouns in the locative classes to be in the N Class (C.9).

Apart from the locative classes the pressmen use certain nouns without knowing their class membership. An example is **toleo mbili** as if it is a C.9 noun instead of **matoleo mawili**. Toleo belongs to the J: -Ma class (Taifa Leo, Aug. 26, 1989: 1).

Again the journalist uses **gwaride ya** and **gwaride hiyo** as if it is a C.9 noun although it is a C.5 noun and should have been **gwaride la** and **gwaride hilo** (Kenya Leo, Aug. 23, 1986: 1).

CONSTRUCTIONS WITH 'KABLA'

Other commercial deviant forms include constructions with 'kabla' (without 'ya'). Kabla without 'ya' is followed by the negative or 'ja' tense. Journalistic style shows a violation of this and it is a result of linguistic incompetence on the part of the pressmen.

- (a) **Kabla** mshtakiwa **kusomewa**...(Taifa Leo, Sept. 17, 1988: 3).
Prior to reading...the accused....
- (b) Kabla Bw Adamec **kujiuzulu**...(Taifa Leo, Dec. 9, 1989: 5).
Prior to his resignation, Mr. Adamec....
- (c) **...kabla** kesi **kuanza**...(Taifa Leo, June 10, 1989: 5).
...prior to the commencement of the case....
- (d) **Kabla** Mzungu kuwasili Kenya...(Taifa Leo, Apr. 22, 1989: 7).
Before the white man arrived in Kenya...

All 4 constructions are ill-formed as 'kabla' is followed by the infinitive form of the verb instead of the negative. Correct therefore is:

- (a) Kabla mshtakiwa hajasomewa....
- (b) Kabla Bw. Adamec hajajiuzulu....
- (c) Kabla kesi hajaanza....
- (d) Kabla Mzungu hajawasili....

Or, in each case there should be the insertion of 'ya' just immediately following 'kabla', hence:

- (a) kusomewa....
kabla ya (b) kujiuzulu....
(c) kuanza....
(d) kuwasili....

THE PRESS USE OF 'KATIKA' IN ENVIRONMENT OF A FOLLOWING PROPER NOUN

Rule: Katika ---> \emptyset / {Proper Nouns}

The preposition 'katika' meaning 'in' is deleted in the environment of a following Proper Noun which is a town, a country or a continent, hence: Anaishi Nairobi (*he lives in Nairobi*) and not Anaishi katika Nairobi. The newspaper style shows a violation of this and it is due to the newspapermen not being conversant with this rule.

- (1) Rais Kenneth Kaunda wa Zambia aliwasili Accra leo kuanza ziara ya siku mbili ya serikali **katika Ghana** (Taifa Weekly, May 14, 1987: 1).
President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia arrived in Accra today to begin a 2-day official visit to Ghana.
 - (2) Charles Sekano amekuwa mashuhuri na hivi majuzi, picha zake zilionyeshwa **katika Munich**, Ujerumani (Taifa Leo, Apr. 1, 1989: 1).
Charles Sekano was famous and recently his photographs were on display in Munich, Germany.
 - (3) Waislamu wanaoishi **katika Ubeljiji** jana...(Taifa Leo, Apr. 1, 1989: 1).
Moslems living in Belgium yesterday...
- Well-formed is the deletion of 'katika' in each case, hence:
- (1) ...serikali nchini Ghana...
 - (2) ...zilionyeshwa **mjini** Munich...
 - (3) ...wanaoishi **nchini** Ubeljiji...

CONCLUSION

Swahili journalistic language is not a standard variety of the language as it is thought to be. It has its own register, and it is a composite of standard and nonstandard language. The pressmen are not always trying to write the standard. They write what they feel their readers should understand and what amuses them. They therefore use nonstandard words in wider usage and these are acceptable to readers. But it happens in certain cases that the newspapermen write the nonstandard forms because they are not conversant with what is standard. From

lexical and grammatical standpoint there is quantitative evidence of disparity between journalistic texts and texts written in standard Swahili.

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