

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.

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Editors