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CONSTRUCTING AN ENTRY IN A LEARNER'S DICTIONARY
OF STANDARD KISWAHILI

Introduction

A learner's dictionary is a dictionary specially prepared to help a person acquiring a new language to master the use of words, compounds and idioms, together with their pronunciation, spelling, and meaning. The learner's dictionary complements the grammar book because it shows in a pragmatic way how the words of a language function in combination with others.

Kiswahili, a national language in Tanzania and Kenya, a lingua franca in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (cf. Woods forthcoming) and a language taught and used in many other countries, is fast attaining the status of an international language, and many people are keen to learn it. However, there is still a shortage of teaching materials and reference books to help foreign learners overcome the numerous phonological, syntactic and semantic difficulties. Very little has been done to analyse the vocabulary of Kiswahili in terms of pronunciation, form and meaning, and existing dictionaries, such as Johnson's KISWAHILI-KISWAHILI DICTIONARY and the STANDARD KISWAHILI DICTIONARY prepared by T.U.K.I.¹ still have many deficiencies.

A Kiswahili learner's dictionary must register in its entries any morphological and contextual information about the headword that will illustrate its use. This paper attempts a model for such an entry.

Morphological information

The dictionary user expects to obtain from the text of the entry information about doublets, affixes, derivatives, and compounds of the headword, which would enable him to determine its grammatical status in the sentence. Thus T.U.K.I.'s STANDARD KISWAHILI DICTIONARY shows a high degree of doublets, e.g. 110 pairs between pages 45 and 54, while Johnson's KISWAHILI-KISWAHILI DICTIONARY has none. It is important that the range of application of doublets is rendered to indicate what factors influence usage, as in entry E₁ (cf. also E₁₁ below).

E ₁ : tafauti	j.	(Mvita ²)	angalia	<u>tofauti</u>
'difference'	n.	(Mvita dialect)	see	<u>tofauti</u>

Productive derivatives of a lexical unit need to be entered, together with their grammatical markers, meanings, and examples of usage. The order in which they are presented depends on how the derivational process affects the morphology of the base word. Where prefixes are used to form a derivative, they should be entered at their proper place in the dictionary:

E₂: mkulima 'farmer'...

E₃: kilimo 'agriculture'...

E₄: ukulima 'farming'...

However, if the derivatives are formed by suffixation (as in English), it may be appropriate to put them under the base word:

E₅: lima ... limika ... limwa ...
'cultivate' 'arable' 'cultivated by'
(cf. also E₁₃ below)

Phonological information

Some linguists have argued against providing phonological information in the dictionary of a language where there is a one-to-one correlation between the written form and the spoken word (cf. Zgusta 1971, Mkude 1982). However, this argument cannot be defended in Kiswahili as it fails to take account of supraphonemic features which cause different realizations of homographs. If such phonemic information is not given in the entry, the foreign learner would be unable to reproduce the native sounds correctly.

E₆: mboga /mboga/ 'vegetables' ...
 /m.boga/ 'boga - edible gourd' ...

E₇: tembo /t^hembo/ 'elephant' ...
 /tⁿembo/ 'palm wine' ...

From the above examples, two phonemic features may be observed. Firstly, some clusters of phonemes are pronounced differently: /mb/ is realized as a nasalized plosive, /m.b/ as syllabic nasal plus plosive.

Secondly, phonemic variation is caused by suprasegmental features such as stress, aspiration, tone or juncture: /t/ is an unaspirated dental plosive, /t^h/ is aspirated.

Not all the headwords need to be differentiated in this way. It may be enough to mark only the unpredictable part of the lexical unit in question:

E₈: mbaya /mb-/ ...

E₉: mbaya /m.b-/ ...

Semantic information

The presentation of the different senses of a headword varies depending on the sort of information the compiler wishes to convey to the user. Semantic information can be arranged etymologically, showing a word's historical development (as in the WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD DICTIONARY), in order of presumed frequency of use (as in the CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY), or according to a 'central' meaning cluster from which related and additional senses may be said to derive (as in the AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY).

The 'core-periphery' approach seems most appropriate to the learner's dictionary because it perceives all the senses of a complex word as a structured unit and presents first the central meaning from which the secondary meanings are derived. It builds up a semantic relationship between the senses, a factor which helps the learner to understand the secondary senses as meanings transferred from the primary ones. This principle is illustrated in entry E₁₀ from the STANDARD KISWAHILI DICTIONARY (1981:110).

- E₁₀: kichwa j. (1) sehemu ya mwili wa mnayama au binadamu ... ambayo inachukua mdomo, pua, macho, masikio na nywele
(2) kiongozi (3) kitu kilichotangulia
Translation: head n. (1) part of animal or human body which has mouth, nose, eyes, ears and hair
(2) leader (3) s.th. in front or ahead

A word with multiple senses implies that it occurs in more than one domain. Thus, when poor is contrasted with good as in good work/poor work or with rich as in rich man/poor man, we find that it belongs to two domains, that of performance and that of wealth. If we want to explain the different meanings of poor, we have to specify (at least) these two domains.

Dictionaries use glosses or restrictive labels to mark these domains. The labels signal the referential meaning of a specific context in terms of a conceptual field, discourse genre, formality scale, attitudinal value, or geographical spread of a lexical unit.

- E₁₁: tafauti j. (1) (Mvita) hali ya kutofautiana
(cf. also E₁)

- E₁₂: gofu j. (1) (kwa jengo) masalia ya nyumba iliyovunjika au kubomoka
(2) (kwa mtu) mtu aliyekonda sana
Translation: (1) (of a building) ruin
(2) (of a human being) bony person

Restrictive labels help the language learner to understand the different contexts in which a certain word may be used and hence avoid unnecessary confusion.

Derivatives, affixes and compounds

When derivatives are listed as run-on words in a dictionary entry they are not explained unless they have meanings different from that of the base word. The argument is often put forward (e.g. in the AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY) that to repeat information which has already been given would be to waste valuable space. But this is valid only for a dictionary designed for native speakers; a foreign learner cannot easily deduce the meanings of derivatives encountered in a text. In the following entry E₁₃, knowledge of the meaning of lima does not automatically guarantee understanding of the derivatives limika, limwa or limia.

E₁₃: lima kt. andaa shamba liwe tayari kwa
kupanda mbegu ... limika wezekana kulimwa ...
limwa fanyiwa tendo la kulima ...
limia lima kwa niaba ya (mtu) ...
Translation: cultivate vb. make a farm ready
for sowing seeds ... cultivable (land) arable ...
cultivated made arable by s.b. ...
cultivate work for (s.b.)

Only when they are properly explained can the dictionary user know what these derived words mean and how they are used in combination with others.

Affixes constitute semantic units as they possess independent significance (Nida 1975:112). Thus, the affix -ish in womanish, girlish denotes 'the quality of woman or girl', and -er in player, keeper denotes an 'agent'. Some affixes possess only grammatical significance, marking a shift in word-class, e.g. beauty n., beautiful adj. or prohibit vb., prohibited adj.

In Kiswahili affixes are used as semantic units and grammatical markers. They may indicate a particular type of noun or sub-class of verb, e.g. ki- as in kiatu 'shoe' or m- as in mtu 'person' mark the two noun classes KI and M, the verbal affix -esha is a causative marker denoting 'cause to' (as in chekesha 'cause to laugh') and -ji is a habitual marker denoting regular activity; the nominal compound m.chek.esha.ji means 'joker' (i.e. someone who habitually causes others to laugh).

The dictionary headword should be decomposed into monomorphemic units in order to mark and isolate the various affixes from the root, which helps the learner to disambiguate the senses of a word by signalling each of its constituent parts. Entry E₁₄ illustrates this principle.

E ₁₄ : <u>mchezaji</u>	m	+	cheza	+	ji
'habitual	('person'		'play'		('habitual'
player'	noun class		(stem)		marker)
	marker)				

Compound words carry lexical meanings as wholes. Their meanings cannot be easily derived from the meanings of their constituent parts. Compounds could be made more transparent in dictionary entries by decomposing them into their monomorphemic units. Entry E₁₅ illustrates how the learner-user may be helped to comprehend the meaning of a composite word by means of distinct marking of each morpheme.

E ₁₅ : <u>kifunguakinywa</u>	ki	+	fungua	+	ki	+	nywa
'breakfast'	s.th.		open (vb.)		s.th.		drink (vb.)

Conclusion

A dictionary designed for the learner should give examples of usage that will guide him to the production of correct sentences. Examples are particularly important for words with multiple meanings because they help to illustrate the explanation provided in the entry (cf. Zgusta 1971). In Kiswahili, reciprocal, causative, pre-

positional and passive verb forms have complex combinations which are cumbersome for the learner; hence examples of usage geared to help him construct whole sentences are essential. In order to cut down the volume of the dictionary, however, phraseological examples are preferable to whole sentences. To give the reader an insight into the literal and figurative meanings of an idiomatic expression, he must be shown how they are used in a complete utterance:

- E₁₆: zunguka kt. (1) enda mwendo kwa kufanya duara.
Niliuzunguka mti mara tatu
(2) enda huko na huko bila kazi maalum; zurura;
amekuwa akizunguka kutwa
(3) (nh) zunguka mbuyu, toa rushwa; Mlanguzi
alipokamatwa na polisi alizunguka mbuyu akaachiliwa
Translation: (1) go round. I went round the tree
three times
(2) loiter; he has been loitering the whole day
(3) (fig) literal transl. go round a baobab tree,
give a bribe; the racketeer was released after
bribing the policeman

An entry in the learner's dictionary should be comprehensive and self-contained. It should present information that will be useful to the language learner in every aspect: phonologically, morphologically, syntactically and semantically.

Notes

- 1 T.U.K.I. stands for Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili, the Kiswahili name for the Institute of Kiswahili Research, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- 2 Mvita is the area in and around Mombasa in Kenya where the Kivita dialect of Kiswahili is spoken.

References

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