

Abstract

Title: Categorization of adjectives in Kiswahili

This paper presents the morphosyntactic issues of Kiswahili adjectives. I examine the morphology of Kiswahili adjective and present its distribution and the different forms, used to modify nouns in Kiswahili. I show that the morphology of an adjective is determined by animacy which should be a feature of the head noun. Categorization of adjectives poses a challenge in Bantu languages. One issue of concern is related to whether an adjective should be classified as an independent class or not. Several approaches to categorization of adjectives have been proposed. For example, Maho (1999) categorizes adjectives, numerals, demonstratives and possessives under adnominal class, a class in which Gauton (1994) includes adjectives, relatives and enumeratives in Isizulu. On the other hand, Carnie (2007) puts adjectives and adverbs in what he calls category A. Other studies consider every element that occur in the noun phrase as an adjective. As regards whether or not an adjective is a universal category, most scholars (Baker 2003; Rugemalira 2008, Dixon 1977, 1982, 2004), among others agree that an adjective is not a universal category. Precisely speaking, linguists seem to be divided in deciding whether or not an adjective forms a distinct class and whether all languages contain adjectives. Other scholars (Dixon 1977, 1982, 2004, Rugemalira 2008) argue that some languages may exist without an adjective.

As pointed out earlier, categorization of adjectives in Bantu raises practical and theoretical problems that call for the attention of linguists. One area of concern is the criterion of its identification. As regards the number of adjectives in individual Bantu languages, it is claimed that Bantu languages have few adjectives that form a closed class (Welmers 1973; Rugemalira 2008). The number of adjectives in Bantu varies from 2 (Kele zone B to 26 adjectives (Shingazija , zone G) (Guillaume 2008). In fact one would argue that these figures are estimations and it is possible that some other adjectives were left out. Defending the position that African languages have few adjectives scholars (Welmers 1973; Rugemalira 2008) argue that concepts that are expressed by adjectives in Indo-European languages can be captured by nouns and/or verbs in Bantu languages.

In brief, the status and identity of the adjective category in Bantu languages is not always clear. It has always raised a very hot debate. Some of the questions asked about the adjective category include the following: i. What is the status of the adjective category in Bantu? ii. How can one make a clear distinction between an adjective and members of the closed system? What criteria are appropriate for the identification of adjectives in Bantu?

Data for this study were collected from secondary sources which are newspapers and Kiswahili literature books. I used newspapers published between 2010 and 2018. The newspapers were randomly selected in the college library. From these secondary sources, I extracted some collocations involving the occurrence of different adjectives in different contexts. I examined the different forms that Kiswahili adjectives co-occur with the head noun. These different forms were presented and analyzed using morphosyntactic criteria.

I have shown that morphologically an adjective in Kiswahili looks similar to the morphology of the noun. However, using morphosemantics criteria one can observe that an adjective root conveys transparent meaning unlike a noun root whose meaning is not transparent. I has also

been noted that adjective roots can be listed in a dictionary to represent several meanings. With regard to the adjective inventory, the study has revealed that using morphosyntactic criteria, adjectives in Kiswahili form an open class. This class is productive in the sense that most verbs may be suffixed and be used adjectively. Finally, the study has noted that animacy plays a crucial role in deciding what prefix an adjective should appear with.

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