

## On Defining Interpreting and Translation: An Ordinary Language and Terminological Analysis of the Current Meanings of Kiswahili Terms *Ukalimani* and *Tafsiri*

*Titus Mpemba\**

### **Abstract**

*This paper undertakes an ordinary language and terminological analysis of the current meanings of “ukalimani” and “tafsiri”, the Kiswahili equivalents of the English terms “interpreting” and “translation”, respectively. Specifically, the paper examines the semantic confusion between the two terms, their evolutionary trend and the distinction between their ordinary language and terminological conceptualisation. Following an increased need for interpreting and translation services, there has been the intensification of research, establishment and expansion of interpreting and translation institutions and courses worldwide, and in East Africa in particular. As a result, the terms “ukalimani” and “tafsiri” have recently gained prominence. The paper argues that following these recent developments, the terms have become terminological and ordinary. It argues further that, despite the prominence they now have, these terms have remained complicated and unclear to Kiswahili experts, interpreting and translation scholars, and the public at large. Their definitions, as reflected in Kiswahili publications on “ukalimani” and “tafsiri” and dictionaries, have failed to catch up, and hence have failed to capture the terms’ current meanings in everyday use and in translation and interpreting studies contexts.*

**Keywords:** *ukalimani, tafsiri, source language, target language, interpreting and translation scholars/studies*

### **Introduction**

In an attempt to harness African languages in the 1960s, East African countries chose to honour Kiswahili as their official and national language. Tanzania made more deliberate efforts to promote the language by making it the medium of primary and teacher education and a compulsory subject in ordinary level secondary education (Sewangi, 2007: 333). She also introduced it as a university academic course. In 1970, the Department of Kiswahili was established at the University of Dar es Salaam to respond more closely to these efforts. Today, many universities in Tanzania, and in East Africa at large, offer Kiswahili degrees in various disciplines (Mpemba, forthcoming).

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\* Lecturer, Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Zimbabwe, P. O. Box MP 167, Mount Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe, Email: mpemba@yahoo.com

In the endeavour to make Kiswahili the language of academia, thousands of terminologies have been created (Tumbo-Masabo & Mwansoko, 1992; BAKITA, 2005) and many more, especially in young disciplines like translation and interpreting, are still in the making. Among the terminologies that have found their way into Kiswahili academic discourse are *ukalimani* and *tafsiri*, the equivalents of English concepts "interpreting" and "translation" respectively. These terms have entered the discourse due to the introduction of *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* courses in universities and secondary schools as a response to the growing need of translation and interpreting services.

Today, the demand and importance of interpreting and translation are increasing due to globalisation needs and cultural openness. Due to globalisation, the need for interaction among people speaking different languages is increasing. This increase in the need for these services has led to the intensification of research, establishment and expansion of interpreting and translation institutions and courses worldwide (Riccardi, 2002; Mshindo, 2010; Pöchhacker, 2011). As a response, many universities in East Africa have also introduced *ukalimani na tafsiri* courses (Mpemba, forthcoming). In the same vein, the government of the United Republic of Tanzania made a decision to introduce such components in advanced secondary education curriculum in 2005.

Preliminary documentary analysis and interviews with interpreting and translation experts and non-expert respondents indicated that the two terms have become prominent in both ordinary language and that of specialised jargon due to the developments highlighted above. The preliminary investigation revealed that many university and secondary school students, including their parents and relatives, now know these terms well, whereas before these developments, the terms were used in government interpretation and translation departments, agencies and Kiswahili translation studies curricula in some East African universities. Among others, the terms were common in the National Kiswahili Council (commonly known as BAKITA) and the Institute of Kiswahili Research (commonly known as TUKI, now the Institute of Kiswahili Studies - TATAKI).

It should be noted here that although it is growing rapidly, the need for interpreting and translation services is not a new phenomenon. It arose a long time ago (Pöchhacker, 2004 & 2009; Giamb Bruno, 2008; Baker & Saldanha, 2009; Wanjala, 2011) during the advent of polyglossia<sup>1</sup> which imposed communication constraints upon humans (Mpemba, forthcoming).

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<sup>1</sup> Language multiplicity or diversity whereby multiple languages coexist in the same area.

Given that people can learn languages other than their native ones, their exposure to polyglossia promoted a need for them to acquire additional languages, the result of which was multilingualism. The individuals who became multilingual served their communities with communication mediation (Ricoeur, 2004; Mpemba, forthcoming). Hence, interpreting was born, subsequent to which translation, in the sense of written transfer, ensued following the discovery of writing systems.

Against the above backdrop, Kiswahili scholars have taken more interest in questions concerning interpreting and translation in recent years than before. The fields of *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* have recently become subjects of academic research leading to an increase in the production of academic papers, dissertations and books. For example, in the 1990s there was only one Kiswahili textbook on *tafsiri* (see Mwansoko, 1996) and no one on *ukalimani*, whereas in the 2010s a proliferation of four textbooks has been recorded. The first is on *tafsiri*, but also touches on the concept *ukalimani* (see Mshindo, 2010). The second is on *ukalimani* only (see Haule & Feslas, 2012). Two are on both *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* (see Wanjala, 2011; Bakize, 2013). The first master's degree dissertation on *ukalimani* also appeared in 2012 at the University of Dar es Salaam (see Mwaituka, 2012). Hence, the terms *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* have become deeply rooted in and have developed into a cornerstone<sup>2</sup> of Kiswahili interpreting and translation studies teaching.

Despite the increased interest in *ukalimani* and *tafsiri*, the concepts have remained something of inscrutability. They have remained complicated and unclear to both ordinary people and experts of the fields. Their definitions have failed to catch up, and hence have failed to capture the terms' current meanings in everyday use and in interpreting and translation studies contexts. Although many people may know how to use the words properly in everyday discourse, it has proved quite difficult to give a short and adequate summary statement that captures the range of their present meanings. As such, this paper attempts an ordinary language and terminological analysis of the current meanings of the two terms. Specifically, the paper examines the semantic confusion between the two terms, their evolutionary trend and the distinction between their ordinary language and terminological conceptualisation.

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<sup>2</sup> These terms have become a cornerstone because they are in common use, but are not the only ones which can represent the concepts they represent. For example, Mohamed A. Mohamed (1998) identifies in his *Kamusi ya Visawe: Swahili Dictionary of Synonyms* such synonymous words to the verb *tafsiri* as *fasiri*, *eleza*, *fafanua*, *bambanua*, *agua*, *dadavua*, *abiri*, *tabiri*, *dhihirisha*, *pambanua*, *changanua*, *ainisha*, *sherehi*, *fumbua* and *tarjumi*. He also identifies synonymous words to the noun *tafsiri* as *maelezo* and *tarjumi*. Although there is no entry for the word *ukalimani*, there is a related word *mkalimani* whose synonyms are *mtarjumuani*, *mfasiri*, *mtafsiri*, *mtapta*.

### **Justification and Methodology**

Our notions of the concepts *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* have been changing and, as noted earlier, have remained complicated and unclear. However, there has not been any attempt to analyse them as they are used in the current ordinary language and as terminologies. This study, therefore, is seen as an apposite opportunity to unveil various current facts about these two Kiswahili terms and to highlight how Kiswahili dictionary compilers, and interpreting and translation scholars can use and benefit from current changes and ordinary people's understanding of the words they enter in dictionaries and the changing notions of the concepts they pursue scholarly.

The data were solicited from two types of sources. First, casual interviews with 20 ordinary Kiswahili speakers from Tanzania were conducted to find out information relating to definitions of the terms *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* as regards participants' understanding. Additional 5 participants from various countries other than Tanzania were consulted through the *WhatsApp* platform. These methodological options were based on accessibility grounds as the researcher could not access many respondents from the countries other than Tanzania. Secondly, such documents as dictionaries and publications on *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* were consulted to find out how the two terms have been defined over time. To assess how much the meanings of *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* have or have not changed, before surveying the definitions of the two terms in contemporary dictionaries, their first appearance in earliest dictionaries and vocabularies, and their subsequent developments, were traced.

### **Ordinary Language and Terminology Defined**

When we speak of ordinary language, we use the word *ordinary* to implicitly or explicitly contrast it with such words, inter alia, as *poetic*, *archaic*, and *technical*. As such, it means:

...'common', 'current', 'colloquial', 'vernacular', 'natural', 'prosaic', 'non-notational'...and is usually in contrast with dictions which only a few people know how to use, such as the technical terms or artificial symbolisms of lawyers, theologians, economists, philosophers... (Ryle, 1953:167).

Therefore, in this paper, the term ordinary language is used to mean the language of the common people as opposed to that which is known and used by a few individuals. It is the language that dictionary compilers and lexicographers try to capture and represent in general purpose dictionaries (Sewangi, 2007: 336).

Terminology, on the other hand, is the opposite of ordinary language and is twofold. First, it refers to that language which is known and used by only a few people who share common characteristics as a result of training and socialisation in a specific domain or field. Secondly, it means the process through which such a language is created. Hartley (2009: 112-113) defines terminology as “both the process of identifying, organizing and presenting terms to users and the product of this process – collections of domain-specific expressions, often multi-word expressions.” To save us from the trouble of wondering what terms are, Hartley (2009: 112) further articulates, “Terms are lexical items which have specialized reference within a particular subject domain.” This paper is not concerned with the process through which terms are created. As such, terminology is used to refer to the domain-specific expressions, the language known and used by only a few people who belong to one domain and share common characteristics as such.

### **What Ordinary People, Dictionaries and Publications on *Ukalimani* and *Tafsiri* Say**

The language of the common people is the one that dictionary compilers and lexicographers try to capture and represent in general purpose dictionaries. As such, when language users encounter any difficult word, or any word whose such information as spelling, pronunciation, etymology, meaning, usage, and syllable structure is not clear to them, the first reference they think of is a general purpose dictionary (Mdee, 1995: 35), not a specialised publication.

Therefore, dictionaries have to represent the language as used by the people. Thus, before moving on to dictionary definitions of *ukalimani* and *tafsiri*, we need to examine how ordinary people define these terms for us to establish whether or not their understanding is properly represented. We also examine whether or not there is semantic confusion between the two terms. Therefore, the data from ordinary people’s understanding of the terms are presented and analysed first to ascertain their semantic confusion status and to establish an anchorage that will be used to ascertain their representation in dictionaries.

### ***Ordinary People’s Understanding of “Ukalimani” and “Tafsiri”***

In non-academic sense, *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* are used as alternatives (Schäffner, 2004: 1; Mwaituka, 2012: 17), suggesting that ordinary people confuse and/or use them or think they are used interchangeably. A sufficient number of participants in this study [7 (28%) out of 25 (100%)] seemed to prove this view. They proffered definitions suggesting that *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* refer to more or less the same thing; some of the definitions are tabulated hereunder.

Table 1: Ordinary People's Definitions that Confuse *Ukalimani* with *Tafsiri*

S/N	<i>Tafsiri</i>	English Translation	<i>Ukalimani</i>	English Translation
1.	<i>Maelezo yanayotolewa na mtu mmoja anayesaidia pande mbili zinazotumia lugha tofauti ziwasiliane; mchakato wa kutoa maelezo hayo</i>	Explanations provided by a person helping two parties communicate using different languages; the process of giving such explanations	<i>Urahisishaji wa mawasiliano baina ya watu wanaotumia lugha mbili tofauti.</i>	Facilitation of communication between people who speak two different languages
2.	<i>Ufafanuzi wa usemi katika lugha moja kwenda lugha nyingine ili kusaidia mawasiliano baina ya wazungumzaji wa lugha tofauti yafanyike.</i>	Clarification of an utterance in one language to another language to help communication between speakers of different languages be made	<i>Tafsiri ya kinachosemwa katika lugha moja kwenda lugha nyingine ili kusudi wazungumzaji wa lugha tofauti waweze kuwasiliana.</i>	Translation of what is said in one language to another so that speakers of different languages can communicate
3.	<i>Uhamishaji wa fikra na mawazo kutoka lugha moja hadi nyingine, bila kujali kama lugha hiyo ni ya maandishi au ni ya mazungumzo au kama lugha mojawapo au zote mbili ni za alama</i>	The transfer of thoughts and ideas from one language to another, whether the languages are in written or oral form or whether one or both languages are based on signs	<i>Uhawilishaji wa ujumbe kutoka lugha moja kwenda lugha nyingine. Ingawa mara nyingi ujumbe unaohawilishwa huwa katika mazungumzo, maandishi na lugha ya alama pia huweza kutumika katika mchakato huu</i>	Transfer of messages from one language to another. Although often the messages so transferred are oral, writing and sign language can also be used in this process

Source: Fieldwork, July 2014

Sharing similar sentiments, Hans-Martin and M'Pia (2001: 1) use *ukalimani* in the sense of *tafsiri*. Thanking translators of their book who rendered Kiswahili translation, they posit:

*Ukalimani uliofanyika kufanikisha toleo la kitabu hiki kufikia hapa, ni kutokana na ushirikiano na mchango wake*

aliotoa Mch. Richard J. Hermas (wa Bad Neustadt/Saale Ujerumani), ambaye pia ni kutoka Mkoa wa Tanga/Tanzania.

*Interpreting done to make this edition of the book* a success to this stage was due to cooperation and contribution from Rev. Richard J. Hermas (from Bad Neustadt/Saale Germany), who is also from Tanga region in Tanzania.

(Translation and emphasis mine)

However, the majority of participants [18 (72%) out of 25 (100%)] said the two terms are different and their definitions show that *tafsiri* is more diverse in meaning than *ukalimani* is. as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Ordinary People's Definitions that Differentiate *Ukalimani* and *Tafsiri*

S/N	<i>Tafsiri</i>	English Translation	<i>Ukalimani</i>	English Translation
1.	<p>1. <i>Hawilisha ujumbe wa maandishi kutoka lugha moja kwenda lugha nyingine</i></p> <p>2. <i>Maana inayotolewa kutoka lugha moja hadi nyingine kwa maandishi</i></p>	<p>1. Transfer a written message from one language to another</p> <p>2. The meaning rendered in writing from one language to another</p>	<p><i>Uhawilishaji wa ujumbe wa mazungumzo ya mdomo au lugha ya alama kutoka lugha moja kwenda nyingine</i></p>	<p>Transfer of an oral or sign language message from one language to another</p>
2.	<p>1. <i>Eleza maana ya maneno au matini yaliyoandikwa kutoka lugha moja kwenda lugha nyingine</i></p> <p>2. <i>Matini au maelezo yaliyotolewa kutoka lugha moja hadi nyingine</i></p>	<p>1. Explain the meaning of words or a written text from one language to another</p> <p>2. A text or explanations rendered in one language from another</p>	<p><i>Tafsiri kwa mdomo</i></p>	<p>Translate orally</p>
3.	<p>1. <i>Fasili/toa au eleza maana ya...</i></p> <p>2. <i>Fasili/maelezo kuhusu maana ya...</i></p>	<p>3. Define/give or explain the meaning of...</p> <p>4. Definition/explanations about the meaning of</p>		
4.	Fafanua kitu au jambo/ufafanuzi wa kitu au jambo fulani.	Describe something/description of something		
5.	Fafanua kitu kigumu au jambo gumu kwa kutumia lugha rahisi...	Describe something difficult by using a simple language		
6.	Fafanua kwa maneno mengine	Paraphrase		
7.	Fumbua ndoto	Interpret dream(s)		
8.	Ng'amua/fahamu maana ya...	construe		

Source: Fieldwork, July 2014



From the data in Table 1, Hans-Martin and M’Pia’s quotation and Table 2, it can be deduced that, although ordinary people differentiate the two terms under investigation, there is evidence of semantic confusion in their conceptualisation of the terms.

### *Dictionary Definitions of “Ukalimani” and “Tafsiri”*

To determine whether the ordinary people’s understanding of the two terms is reflected in the dictionaries, dictionary meanings are explored here. Since terms evolve over time, the evolutionary trend of *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* is also examined here to see whether or not the dictionary compilers and lexicographers are coping with changes.

A dictionary is generally understood to be a reference book containing an alphabetically structured list of words collected from language speakers of a given community intended to help people retrieve words and their various uses (Vuzo, 1995: 103; Mkude, 2008: 162). People need to retrieve words and their various uses from dictionaries because no individual knows the whole language lexicon and its usage.

Since there is no specialised dictionary in Kiswahili on Interpreting and Translation Studies, our analysis of *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* dictionary definitions draws on monolingual and bilingual general purpose dictionaries. However, in trying to trace the first appearance and subsequent developments of the two terms in dictionaries or in writings of related nature, reference is also made to trilingual dictionaries and lexicon and vocabulary lists at the author’s disposal.

It may be worth noting here two things in advance. First, regarding Kiswahili dictionary-making, the first dictionaries and vocabulary lists were the work of missionaries and were exclusively bilingual. Secondly, since the Kiswahili language was not yet standardised prior to the 1930s, the dictionaries appearing before standardisation drew much of their data from Kiswahili forms spoken in the area where the compilers lived and worked.

Although the first Kiswahili lexicons were compiled between 1809 and 1810<sup>3</sup>, the first Kiswahili dictionary was compiled by a German

<sup>3</sup> Kineene wa Mutiso gives this date in a web post “Lexicography” which appeared on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2005 in *The Nation* and is retrievable from <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-swahili&month=0501&week=c&msg=3kIRyxm9D8kcTKIND1fAvA&user=&pw=>. Mutiso substantiates this by referring to Edward Steere’s (1870) “Remarks of the North-East Coast of Africa and the Various Tribes which It Is Inhabited,” *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society*, 67–92.

missionary, linguist and explorer, Johann Ludwig Krapf, from 1844 to 1881 and published in 1882 (Kiango, 1992: 49; Mieke & Firsching, 2009: 1). It was based on the variety of Kiswahili spoken at Mombasa, Lamu, and Pate in Kenya as Krapf spent most of his time there (Hollingsworth, 1929: 146-148; Kiango, 1992: 50). This dictionary featured one entry on *tafsiri* as “translate”, “translation”, “explain”, “interpret” and “interpretation”, but no one on *ukalimani* or words related to it.

While Krapf was compiling his dictionary, to the south of Mombasa was Bishop Edward Steere, who was working on a *Handbook of the Swahili Language as Spoken at Zanzibar*. This appeared in print in 1870 containing two parts with English-Swahili vocabulary and vice versa. On its Swahili-English vocabulary list, Steere’s handbook features two entries on *tafsiri*, one as a verb and the other as a noun, meaning “to explain; to interpret” and “interpretation”, respectively. However, there is no entry on *ukalimani* or words related to it on the list. Moreover, on the English-Swahili vocabulary list, there are entries on “interpret” and “translate”, rendered as *fasiri; tafsiri* and *tafsiri; fasiri; geuza*, which would suggest that *tafsiri* also entailed interpreting. Based on Steere’s Handbook, “Charles Madan, a scholar from Oxford who worked for the UMCA,” also “produced a Swahili handbook” in 1884, after which he began compiling dictionaries (Kiango, 1992: 51).

Three years after Krapf’s dictionary publication, and a year after Madan’s handbook publication, Dawnes Shaw published *A Pocket Vocabulary of the Kiswahili Language* based on Krapf’s dictionary. It was followed by Sacleux’s (1891) *Swahili-French Dictionary* based on Kiamu and Kimvita forms of the Kiswahili spoken in Mombasa and the Kingwana spoken in Congo whose second edition appeared in 1939. Madan’s first version of *English-Swahili Dictionary* was published in 1894 and its second edition appeared in 1903, along with his *Swahili-English Dictionary*, which later became the basis for standardised dictionaries (Kiango, 1992: 51, making further reference to Benson, 1964). Shaw’s vocabulary and Madan’s dictionary contain no entry on *ukalimani*, but have two on *tafsiri*, the definitions of which are not different from Steere’s (1870) highlighted above.

The first Kiswahili monolingual dictionary, *Kamusi ya Kiswahili: Yaani Kitabu cha Maneno ya Kiswahili – Swahili-Swahili Dictionary*, based on standard Kiswahili, was compiled by Frederick Johnson and published for the first time in 1935. Frederick Johnson also published *Standard Swahili-English Dictionary* (1939) and *English-Swahili Dictionary* (1939) (Kiango, 1992: 51). Unfortunately, we could not access this monolingual dictionary and, therefore, do not know how it treated *tafsiri* and *ukalimani*.

The first dictionary to be prepared by indigenous Kiswahili scholars was *Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu* (Standard Swahili Dictionary), which was the work of scholars from TUKI. It was published in 1981 and remained in use for over twenty years until its second edition appeared in 2004. It was followed by Bosha's *The Influence of Arabic Language on Kiswahili with a Trilingual Dictionary (Swahili-Arabic-English)*, which appeared in 1993; BAKIZA's *Kamusi la Kiswahili Fasaha* (2010); Longhorn's *Kamusi ya Karne ya 21* and *Kamusi Kibindo ya Kiswahili* (2011). Then its third edition appeared in 2013.

Like its predecessors, *Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu* (1981) does not feature any entry on *ukalimani*, but has *tafsiri* as a verb defined as “*eleza maana ya maneno au matini yaliyoandikwa kutoka lugha moja kwenda lugha nyingine*” (explain meaning of words or written texts from one language to another) and as a noun defined as “*matini au maelezo yaliyotolewa kutoka lugha moja hadi nyingine*” (a text or explanations rendered in one language from another). This state of affairs remained unchanged in the second edition.

BAKIZA (2010), like TUKI (1981 & 2004), does not feature any entry on *ukalimani*, but defines *tafsiri* as “*maana inayotolewa kutoka lugha moja hadi nyingine kwa maandishi*” (meaning rendered from one language into another in writing).

Unlike its predecessors, Longhorn (2011) becomes the first to feature an entry on *ukalimani*, defined as “*kazi ya kutafsiri maongezi au mazungumzo, kazi ya mkalimani*” (an act of translating speech or a conversation; the work/job of an interpreter). It also has two entries on *tafsiri*, defined as “*eleza maana ya maneno au matini ambayo yameandikwa katika lugha moja iwe katika lugha nyingine*” (express the meaning of words or a text written in one language into another language) or “*maelezo ya maana ya maneno au maandishi ya lugha moja yaliyotolewa kutoka lugha nyingine*” (explanations on the meaning of words or writings in one language that are rendered from another language).

TUKI (2013) also differs from its predecessors. It contains an entry on *ukalimani* as “*kazi ya kufasiri papo kwa papo mazungumzo kutoka lugha moja kwenda lugha nyingine*” (an act of instantaneously translating speech from one language into another) and two entries on *tafsiri* as “*eleza maana ya maneno au matini yaliyoandikwa kutoka lugha moja kwenda lugha nyingine*” (explain the meaning of words or a written text from one language to another) or “*matini au maelezo yaliyotolewa kutoka lugha*

*moja hadi nyingine*” (a text or explanations rendered in one language from another).

The data on the dictionary definitions of *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* indicate that the two terms have evolved over time, with translation changing from a Swahili word *kugeuza* to a word *tafsiri*, originating from Arabic. The data also demonstrate that the ordinary people’s understanding is to a large extent represented and to a small extent not. For example, meanings 4-8 in Table 2 are not captured in dictionaries. Again, the data reveal that the term *ukalimani* is much younger than *tafsiri*, although the practice of interpreting predates translation.

### ***Scholarly Definitions of “Ukalimani” and “Tafsiri”***

As opposed to ordinary people who consult general purpose dictionaries when they encounter any difficult word, or any word with unclear spelling, pronunciation, etymology, meaning, usage, and syllable structure, experts of a particular field, on the other hand, may consult specialised dictionaries and other relevant sources like books and journal articles when they are troubled with a terminology. Scholarly definitions of the two terms are, thus, surveyed here to determine how they evolved and how distinct terminological conceptualisation is from ordinary language conceptualisation and whether or not it copes with changes.

The first attempts at a scholarly definition of *tafsiri* can be traced as far back as the 1990s (see Mwansoko, 1996; Shitemi, 1997). Mwansoko defines *tafsiri* as:

*...zoezi la uhawilishaji wa mawazo katika maandishi kutoka lugha moja hadi nyingine. Kwa maelezo ya Catford (1965: 20) kufasiri ni “kuchukua mawazo yaliyo katika maandishi kutoka lugha moja (lugha chanzi) na kuyaweka badala yake mawazo yanayolingana kutoka lugha nyingine (lugha lengwa) (Mwansoko, 1996: 1).*

...an exercise involving the transfer of written ideas from one language into another. In Catford’s (1965: 20) words, to translate is “to replace textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language)”.

(Translation mine)

During Mwansoko and Shitemi’s time, no attempts at defining *ukalimani* were explicit and the period between 1996 and 2000s was characterised by scholarly silence on both *ukalimani* and *tafsiri*.

In the 2010s, however, we see scholars like Mshindo (2010), Wanjala (2011), Mwaituka (2012), Haule and Feslas (2012), and Bakize (2013) attempting scholarly definitions of *tafsiri*. Unlike their predecessors, the 2010s generation scholars try to address both *tafsiri* and *ukalimani*. Mshindo and Wanjala start by tracing the etymological roots of the terms where they propose a Latin origin (Mshindo, 2010: 2; Wanjala, 2011: 13). While Mshindo argues that the concept *kufasiri* is based on *translating*, which is derived from a Latin word *translatio*, meaning ‘carrying across’, Wanjala believes that the Kiswahili language borrowed the concepts *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* from the English language (which also adapted them from Latin) and gave them equivalents and meanings.

To begin with *tafsiri* (Mshindo uses the term *kufasiri* to mean to translate or translating), after tracing its etymology, Mshindo offers a general definition of the term, attempts a critique, provides many more definitions from other scholars as well as their critique. However, he avoids giving his own definition. Instead, he says:

*Kietimolojia dhana ya kufasiri imetokana na neno la Kilatini translatio lenye maana ya ‘kupeleka upande wa pili’ au ‘kuleta upande wa pili’. Fasili mojawapo ya kufasiri ni kufafanua maana ya matini moja na kutayarisha baadaye matini nyengine inayowiana nayo, ambayo huitwa tafsiri na ambayo inawasilisha ujumbe ule ule uliomo katika matini ya awali kwa kutumia lugha nyengine. Matini inayofasiriwa huitwa matini chanzi na lugha ambayo inatumika katika kufasiri inaitwa lugha lengwa; tafsiri inayotayarishwa mara nyengine inaitwa matini lengwa. Kufasiri lazima kuzingatia shuruti zinazowekwa na muktadha, kanuni za sarufi za lugha mbili zinazotumika, desturi zao za uandishi na semi zao.*

*Fasili ya kufasiri iliyotolewa hapo juu ina walakini kama nyengine nyingi ambazo zimewahi kupendekezwa. Tatizo la fasili hiyo ni kwamba imetumia dhana ya msingi ya ‘maana’. Pengine msomaji anaweza kudhani kwamba anaelewa maana ya maneno yaliyomo katika matini, lakini ukweli anayeelewa maana ya maneno yanayosemwa au yanayoandikwa ni yule mtu mwenyewe aliyeyasema au aliyeyaandika.*

Etymologically, the concept *translating* is derived from a Latin word *translatio*, meaning ‘carrying across’. One of the definitions of *translating* is elaborating the meaning of a text

and preparing in its place another one, called *translation*, which corresponds with it and represents the same message as the original in another language. The translated text is called *source text* and the language used in translating is called target language; the resulting translation is sometimes called *target text*. When translating, one must consider conditions imposed by context, grammatical rules of the two languages involved and their norms of writing and speech.

The definition of translating provided above is problematic like many others that had once been proposed. Its problem is that it uses the basic concept of ‘meaning’. Perhaps readers may think they understand the meaning of words found in a given text, but in reality it is the writer or the speaker of such words who understands their meanings.

(Translation mine, emphasis in original)

Mshindo’s concern here suggests that it is inappropriate to use the word ‘meaning’ in defining translation as it is slippery since it is only the author of the text who knows best the meanings of the words used in that text.

Another definition of *tafsiri* given by Mshindo, but which also suffers from the same problem as the above, according to him, is “*kuhawilisha mawazo kutoka lugha chanzi (LC) kwenda lugha lengwa (LL)*” (transference of ideas from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL) (p. 2). Like meaning, Mshindo says, ideas can be best understood only by their originators.

That said, Mshindo (2010: 3-12) concludes by urging readers to treat as only theoretical whatever *kufasiri* definition they come across since that concept cannot be pre-defined and be the end of the story because it revolves around social, cultural, political, and economic tensions.

On *ukalimani*, Mshindo argues that it is an aspect of *kufasiri*, but only distinguished from *kufasiri* on the basis of orality. He postulates that:

*Ukalimani si dhana ngeni miongoni mwa watu wengi; hata wale ambao kufasiri si taaluma yao. Kufasiri kunaweza kuwa kwa maandishi au kwa maneno ya kusema. Kunapokuwa kwa maneno ya kusema huitwa ukalimani. Ukalimani ni shughuli ya kiakili inayoweza kuwasiliana kwa maneno yanayosemwa au ishara zinazooneshwa baina ya watu ambao hawasemi lugha (Mshindo, 2010: 30).*

Interpreting is not a new concept to many people; even to those whom translation is not their profession. Translation may be in the form of written or spoken words. When it is in spoken words, it is called *interpreting*. Interpreting is a cognitive activity that facilitates oral communication between people who do not speak the same language, or who do not use the same signs.

(Translation mine, emphasis in original)

Wanjala (2011) approaches this matter differently from his predecessors. He avoids focusing on *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* as key terms of his book title and consequently avoids their definitions on the early pages. Instead, he foregrounds the English terms *interpret* and *translate*. Wanjala (2011: 13) starts by citing the two words from TUKI's (2006) *English-Swahili Dictionary* and concluding that *lugha ya Kiswahili imekopa dhana hizi kutoka lugha ya Kiingereza kwa kuzitafutia visawe vyake pamoja na maana, ambapo lugha ya Kiingereza pia ilikopa neno "translate" kwa kutohoa neno la Kilatini "translation", lenye maana ya kuhamishia upande wa pili.*" (The Kiswahili language borrowed these concepts from the English language and gave them equivalents and meanings, whereas the English language also adapted the word *translate* from a Latin word *translatio*, which means carrying across). Wanjala goes on to define the English concept *translate*, arguing that:

*Kwa maelezo haya, dhana ya translate ina maana moja kuu ambayo ni kuhawilisha ujumbe ulioandikwa kutoka lugha chasili hadi lugha lengwa, yaani kufasiri.*

Based on these explanations, the concept *translate* has one main meaning, which is to transfer a written message from a source language to a target language, i.e. translating.

(Translation mine)

At later stages, Wanjala factors in issues of "process", "writtenness", "functionality", "language norms", "context" and "culture" and defines *tafsiri* as:

*...mchakato wa uhawilishaji wa ujumbe katika maandishi, pamoja na uamilifu wake, kutoka lugha chasili kwenda lugha lengwa kwa mujibu wa isimu, muktadha na utamaduni wa lugha zote mbili. Uhawilishaji huu wa ujumbe hulenga mawasiliano kati ya jamii mbili zinazotumia lugha tofauti (Wanjala, 2011: 39).*

...a process of transferring written messages, including their functions, from a source language to a target language in accordance with linguistic and cultural norms, as well as the context of both languages. This transfer of messages focuses on communication between two communities using different languages.

(Translation mine)

On the concept *ukalimani*, Wanjala (2011: 32) states, “*ni kuhawilisha ujumbe ulioko katika mazungumzo, pamoja na uamilifu wake, kutoka lugha chasili hadi lugha lengwa kwa kuzingatia isimu, utamaduni na muktadha wa jamii husika.*” (is the transfer of oral messages, including their functions, from a source language to a target language in accordance with linguistic and cultural norms, as well as the context of both languages.)

Bakize (2013: 1) starts with making reference to Mshindo (2010) and, as he claims, comes up with a simple definition, probably to suit his reader’s level (secondary school students):

***Kufasiri ni kuhamisha ujumbe, maana au taarifa katika maandishi kutoka lugha moja (lugha chanzi) kwenda lugha ya pili (lugha lengwa).***

**Translating is transferring written messages, meanings or information from one language (source language) to another (target language).**

(Translation mine, emphasis in original)

Regarding *ukalimani*, Bakize foregrounds professionalism and orality, and emphasises retention of meaning without any loss, distortion or change. He notes that:

*Kwanza kabisa, msomaji aelewe kuwa ukalimani ni taaluma ... Kwa maana rahisi na yenye kujitosheleza, ukalimani ni taaluma ya kuhamisha moja kwa moja maneno yaliyo katika mazungumzo/maongezi au ishara zinazooneshwa kutoka lugha moja kwenda lugha nyingine bila ya kupoteza, kupotosha au kubadili maana.*

*Mazungumzo ndiyo mwega (mhimili) mkuu wa ukalimani. Mfumo wa mazungumzo ndio unaosaidia kuona utofauti uliopo baina ya tafsiri na ukalimani (Bakize, 2013: 40).*



First of all, the reader should understand that interpreting is a profession ... In simple and self-sufficient sense, interpreting is a profession consisting in direct transfer of spoken words/oral speech or visual signs from one language to another without loss, distortion or change of meaning.

Orality is the major prop (pillar) of interpreting. It is the oral system that helps us to see the difference between translation and interpreting.

(Translation mine)

Contrary to the rest of the scholars surveyed, Mwaituka (2012: 17) breaks the 'oral-written' dichotomy syndrome and recognises recordings as texts which can be subjected to translation and brings in time factor as a main differentia between *ukalimani* and *tafsiri*. She says:

*Ingawa zinatumika katika maana zisizo za kitaaluma kama mbadala, ukalimani na tafsiri si kitu kilekile. Kukalimani ni kuchukua ujumbe kutoka lugha chanzi na kuuhawilisha kwenda lugha lengwa kwa mdomo...wakati Tafsiri ni kuhawilisha maana kutoka matini moja kwenda matini nyingine (iliyoandikwa au kurekodiwa), huku mfasiri akiwa na muda (wa kutumia kamusi, faharasa n.k.) ili kuweza kutoa matini sahihi.*

Although they are used in a non-academic sense as alternatives, *interpreting* and *translation* are not the same thing. Interpreting refers to taking messages from the source language and transferring them orally to the target language... whereas *translation* refers to the transfer of meaning from one text to another (written or recorded), while the translator has time (to use dictionaries, glossaries, etc.) to produce an accurate text.

(Translation mine, emphasis in original)

On comparative merit, Mwaituka's definitions can be described as current as they reckon with current trends of the discussions on these terms where the 'oral-written' dichotomy is being criticised (Pöchhacker, 2004: 10; Schäfner, 2004: 1-2).

The above survey of scholarly definitions of *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* shows that the terms have evolved over time, with *tafsiri* appearing on the scene since the 1990s, while *ukalimani* only taking shape in the 2010s. Again, the data demonstrate that the terminological

conceptualisation of the two terms is distinct from ordinary language conceptualisation in that it strives for precision, clarity and disambiguity, while ordinary language conceptualisation tends to be more general and broad. This does not, however mean that terminological conceptualisation is not without problems. Finally, the data suggests that the definitions have not coped with changes as it will become obvious shortly.

### Discussion

The brief look at what the dictionaries, publications on *ukalimani* and *tafsiri*, and ordinary people say in the sections above suggests that our current notions of *ukalimani* and *tafsiri* are historically very recent and new, both being borrowings entering Kiswahili from a foreign language. I beg to differ with Mshindo and Wanjala, who maintain that *tafsiri* and *ukalimani* are from Latin. These are borrowings that entered Kiswahili from Arabic probably between around the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Nurse & Spear, 1985: 80-81; Bosha, 1993: 154). Although the practice of interpreting is not new, compared to *tafsiri* whose practice paradoxically emerged after the introduction of writing, the term *ukalimani* is much younger, only appearing in dictionaries and scholarly writings in the 2010s. While the terms are new, most of their definitions are out of date and are fraught with shortfalls.

To begin with, most of the above definitions of *tafsiri* suggest that it is simply an act of transference through which the content (ideas, message, information, meaning) of a text is transferred from one set of written language signs (the source language) into another set of written language signs (the target language). This sort of conceptualisation is too vague as it downgrades *tafsiri* to mere transference of content and is too narrow as it reduces it to the handling of written documents only. From ordinary people's understanding, *tafsiri* is too broad to be reduced to mere transference. From a terminological point of view, and considering current trends of the discussions on translation, *tafsiri* entails more than mere transfer of written messages. Making further reference to Jakobson (2004: 139), Munday (2009: 5, emphasis in the original) goes beyond the writtenness syndrome and identifies three types of translation which reveal its broadness:

1. Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
2. Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.

3. Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.

What we see here is that translation is so broad, but most of the definitions of *tafsiri* we have explored focus only on translation proper. There is, therefore, a need to highlight the key elements to be considered through the process of *tafsiri*, instead of emphasising writtenness vis-à-vis orality. These elements include, inter alia, permanent availability of a source text, correctionability of a target text, and non-spontaneity or non-instantaneuity. Thus, any attempt at defining *tafsiri*, be it dictionary-wise or scholarly, must presume that our concept of that term is broad and dynamic so that it reflects the current meanings of the term as far as current trends in the discussion on translation studies are concerned.

On *ukalimani*, most of the definitions surveyed emphasise orality. Like the one on *tafsiri*, this kind of conceptualisation is myopic. It excludes interpreting from, into or between signed (rather than spoken) languages and also does not account for such variants of interpreting as ‘sight interpreting’, ‘live subtitling’ or even the on-line written interpretation of internet chats (Pöchhacker, 11-12). Schäffner (2004: 1) calls this “laypeople’s view” as “attempts have been made to provide more specific criteria for defining” *ukalimani* in “the academic field of Translation Studies and in translator/interpreter training” as summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Interpreting Definitional and Identity Criteria

S/N	Criterion	Description	Source
1.	Instantaneuity or immediacy	Interpreting is performed ‘here and now’ for the benefit of people who want to engage in communication across barriers of language and culture	Kade (1968); Seleskovitch (1978: 2); Pöchhacker (2004: 10); Gercek (2011: 7)
2.	Ephemerality	Interpreting is performed in a transient or short-lived event	Pöchhacker (2004: 11)
3.	Real-timeliness or contemporariness	Interpreting is ‘real-time’ human translation in an essentially shared communicative context; the speakers produce text contemporaneously and interpreter’s rendition is also contemporaneous	Pöchhacker (2009: 128); Hale (2007: 128)

4.	Irreversibility or one-time availability of source text	The source-language text is presented only once and thus cannot be reviewed or replayed.	Kade (1968), cited by Pöchhacker (2004: 10); Schäfner (2004: 1-2); Gercek (2011: 7)
5.	Uncorrectionability and irreversibility of target text due to time pressure for its production	The target-language text is produced under time pressure, with little chance for correction and revision.	Kade (1968), cited by Pöchhacker (2004: 10)

Considering these, and other criteria, one can define *ukalimani* as:

- (1) an **activity** or **process** consisting mainly in
- (2) **cognitive processing** of information in order to
- (3) **produce utterances/signs/texts** which are presumed to
- (4) have **similar** or **equivalent sense** or **meaning** and/or **effect**
- (5) as **previously existing/produced utterances/signs/texts**
- (6) in **another language/mode of communication** and/or **culture** based on
- (7) mainly **one-time presentation/availability** of an utterance/sign/text in a source language and
- (8) **immediate production** of target language utterance/sign/text
- (9) guide by issues of **ethics and morality**
- (10) under **time pressure**
- (11) with **little chance for correction and revision**
- (12) for the purpose of **enabling** or **facilitating communication**/interaction
- (13) between parties entangled in **communication barrier**
- (14) in a given **setting/situation/context** because of
- (15) **language differences**

### Conclusion

The key features which define and distinguish *tafsiri* and *ukalimani*, as outlined in previous Kiswahili studies, are orality and writtenness of the messages dealt with. Overemphasis on these two features has led to the narrowing of the purview of the two concepts. As a result, the definitions offered by the previous scholars have failed to catch up and capture the two terms' current meanings in everyday use and as used in interpreting and translation studies. The view that has been extended and supported in this study is that the two concepts are much broader than they can be thought of. This being the case, it is recommended that any attempt at defining *tafsiri* and/or *ukalimani*, be it for inclusion in a dictionary or in a scholarly publication, must presume that our conception of any of the two terms is broad and dynamic. As such, the definition so attempted must reflect the current meanings of the term(s) taking into consideration the current trends in the discussions on translation and interpreting studies.

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