

# SOME REMARKS ON JI-BEARING VERBS IN KISWAHILI

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

By 'ji-bearing verbs' we mean verb forms as the following in which the reflexive element *ji* in Kiswahili precedes a verb or other form: *jiamini* 'be self-confident', *jidanganya* 'cheat oneself', *jifungua* 'deliver a baby', *jihadhari* 'beware', 'be cautious', *jihami* 'be defensive', *jifanya* 'pretend', *jihimu* 'rouse self'/'wake early', etc. In these examples, forms such as *amini*, *danganya*, *hami*, and *fanya* are common verbs in this language meaning 'trust', 'cheat', 'defend' and 'do', respectively, while *hadhari* is a noun for 'a caution', 'a precaution' and the form *himu*<sup>1</sup> does not exist as an independent word in the language. This means *ji*-element may precede various forms to create verbs in the language expressing additional reflexive sense 'self'. However, syntactically, all the verbs thus created belong only to one subcategorization frame, i.e. one-place or non-object taking verbs.

Our remarks on such verb forms in this paper are prompted by a number of issues. The first is the fact that the revised version of *Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu* (KKS) by Oxford University Press is to appear with a much longer list (about forty to be precise) of such verb forms against only five in the original version. The second is the appearance of *ji-* with a variety of forms as mentioned above. This has raised controversy of a theoretical nature with regard to the typology of such verb forms. And the third is the issue relating to the valency of such verb forms. In the Revised Version of KKS, valency markings as "transitive" or "intransitive" have been shown for all verbs including those under consideration. This appears to have implications on some theoretical notions of reflexivization in general and the reflexive element in particular. These are the main issues we will briefly remark upon in the following sections.

## 2. REFLEXIVIZATION OF LEXICAL FORMS

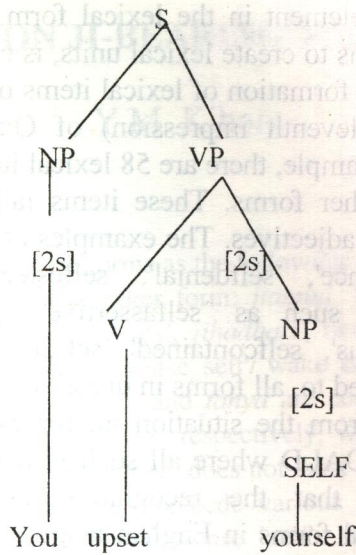
In linguistic studies, reflexivization is basically a syntactic process relating sentence constituents that are coreferential. However, the combination of the reflexive *ji-* element and other forms as described in the preceding section involves a morphological element and a word form, which together create a lexical unit with a reflexive sense. Thus, the two processes differ in that the syntactic one involves constituents that are distinct and separate from one another while the latter involves elements coming together to form a single lexical unit. However, while in English language, both processes involve the form 'self' attached to some other form, in Kiswahili, they involve the reflexive element 'self' realised differently – as *ji* – and the optional *enyewe* form in the syntactic

process and as *ji-* prefix element in the lexical form. The attachment of 'self' element to some other forms to create lexical units, is currently, fairly widespread in languages leading to the formation of lexical items of various category classes. In the Fourth Edition (eleventh impression) of Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (OALD), for example, there are 58 lexical items with a combination of the reflexive 'self' and other forms. These items fall into two main category classes namely, nouns and adjectives. The examples of nouns include forms such as 'selfcontrol', 'selfdefence', 'selfdenial', 'selfesteem', etc. while those of adjectives include forms such as 'selfassertive', 'selfassured', 'selfcentred', 'selfconfident', 'selfconscious', 'selfcontained', 'selfdrive', 'selfevident', etc. In the OALD edition being referred to, all forms in question are listed as separate lexical entries. This is different from the situation in, for example, the Third Edition (sixteenth impression) of OALD where all such forms appear as compounds of 'self'. This may imply that the recognition of reflexivized entries as separate/independent lexical forms in English language is a recent development. We consider this to be the case also with the expanded list of Kiswahili's *ji-* bearing verb forms in the Revised Version of KKS. And, for linguistic studies, it implies an expanding role of reflexivization as a lexical formation process. Generally, in the treatment of various linguistic forms with "self" in English language, the distinction is usually made between the lexical forms cited above (i.e. "selfsteem", "selfconfident", etc.) and the others tied to personal pronouns like "yourself", "himself", "themselves", etc. which are only sensitive to syntactic environments as those in (1) below:

- 1 (a) You upset yourself  
 (b) You yourself upset John

In Phrase structure Grammar analyses the form "yourself" in (1a) is regarded as a noun phrase (NP) dominated by a verb phrase (VP) and is coreferential to the subject NP "you". The form "yourself" in (1b), on the other hand, is also treated as a component of the subject NP category. So, in both these cases, the NP status of this category is not in dispute. The controversy is, rather, over a mechanism to indicate coreferentiality between "yourself" form in (1a) and the subject NP to distinguish it from other case-marked NPs in the same position (e.g. "John" in (1b)). It is normally the accusative case-marked categories such as "John" in (1b) that are treated as object NPs. For the NP "yourself" in (1a), Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar (GPSG), for example, only analyses it as in (2) below as an attempt to mark subject boundedness of the reflexive element (Gazdar G and I Sag 1981).





where 2s is Second Person Singular.

The Kiswahili equivalent of the English language forms with "self" treated in (1) and (2) above is expressed by *-enyewe* form, which may follow a *ji*-bearing verb form or a nominal form as in 1(a), and (b), respectively. However, our mention of *-enyewe* form here calls into question a common case of the constructions in (3) below receiving similar translation in English language and creating an impression that they are also analysable in the same way:

- 3 (a) **a- me- ji- kata**  
 SP- TP- Refl- cut  
 `She/he has cut him/herself`
- (b) **a- me- ji- kata mwenyewe**  
 SP- TP- Refl-cut self  
 `She/he has cut her/himself`

Although *mwenyewe* 'self' is an optional element, it is (3b) which is equivalent to sentence (1a) above analysed as (2). As for the analysis of (3a), we intend to put forward our proposal after considering the grammatical features of *ji*-bearing verb forms in the next section.

Our interest here is with the *ji*-bearing verb form which may stand itself as a lexical form or operate in a VP structure. This is the form we consider to be equivalent to English language lexical forms with "self" referred to at the beginning of this section, although in Kiswahili only the category verb (V) is involved with the morphological form of 'self', i.e. the *ji*- prefix.

### 3. GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF JI-BEARING VERB FORMS

The *ji-* element is a reflexive clitic in Kiswahili which, basically, operates as a prefix in syntactic or lexical forms. Syntactically, Ashton (1944:43), for example, treats it as a reflexive "object prefix" which can be used for any person singular or plural. Ashton also notes this element to correspond "to nouns of all classes where the sense allows". Syntactically also, this element only attaches to verb forms designated transitive and bitransitive where the sense allows. Lexically, however, Khamisi (1985:101-102), basing himself on the insights of Lexicase framework (one of the lexicalist theoretical frameworks) treats this element as a "derivational affix" which does the "object subtraction" function although itself a prefix. By this he means the reduced valencies of syntactic or lexical forms when reflexive *ji-* element is prefixed to them. That is to say, when two-place verbs such as *amini* 'trust', 'believe', *danganya* 'cheat', 'deceive', *hami* 'insulate', 'protect', etc. have *ji-* prefixed to them to form *jiamini* 'be selfcondifent', *jidanganya* 'cheat oneself', *jihami* 'be defensive', etc., the latter become one-place verbs. Khamisi considers this function to be similar to that of various derivational suffixes in Kiswahili which change the valencies of verb forms as exemplified below:

- 4(a) (i) *pend-a* 'like/'love' (2 - place)  
*pend-ez-a*  
(1) 'be pleasant' (1- place)  
(2) 'to please' (2- place)
- (iii) *pend-an-a* 'like/love each other' (1- place)
- (b) (i) *fung-a* 'tie', 'close', 'lock' (2- place)  
(ii) *fung-ik-a* 'be locked/closed' (1- place)  
(iii) *fung-an-a* 'fasten together' (1 - place), etc.

In (a) and (b), when verb-roots *pend* and *fung* are extended with the derivational suffixes as shown, the valencies of the verb forms involved are reduced by one. According to Khamisi (1985:147), the rule for the derivational process involving *ji-* is distinguished from those involving the suffixes such as those above by *ji* being marked as a prefix and the others as suffixes in the rules, respectively. Also, Khamisi considers "syntactic" the derivational processes that lead to the change of the subcategorization frames and "lexical" those not effecting such changes.

The discussion above highlights two interesting issues. The first of these concerns the consideration of *ji-* prefix as word formant and the second concerns the valency of *ji-* bearing verb forms. On the first, we have observed in section (2) above that, reflexivization is, indeed, increasingly becoming a word forming process. However, as we have observed, this process has its limits, since although the *ji* element can operate with almost all transitive verbs, only a handful of the verb forms with this element currently qualify as independent words in the language. And of these few, Khamisi, (*op.cit*) observes that there are some which are "fossilised" (that is to say, those having *ji-* appearing as a permanent and/or non-separable component) while others are "non fossilised" (that is to say, those with separable *ji-* element). The fossilised ones are forms



such as *jitahidi* 'do one's best', *jihimu* 'rouse oneself', *jitanibu* 'vaunt oneself', etc. of which the forms combining with *ji* are not common in the language, and others such as *jivuna* 'show off', 'brag', *jiona* 'stand aloof', 'feel superior', etc. which carry meanings different from the common meanings<sup>2</sup>. The non-fossilised forms, on the other hand, are mainly common verb forms in the language having *ji-* element attached to them to emphasise or focus on "self". These include forms like *jiamini* 'be self-confident', *jinyima* 'deny oneself', *jisaidia* 'help oneself', etc. These latter are the forms, which are slowly finding their way into the dictionary because of expanding usage. For the lexicographers, this is certainly an attempt to make the dictionary user friendly.

Below (Table 1) we provide a typology of *ji-* bearing verbforms entered in KKS. We shall list these as (a) Fossilised forms, (b) Forms carrying meanings different from common ones, and (c) Non fossilised forms as per our definitions above.

In all the columns in Table 1 the *ji* element (even if of a different history such as some in the column mentioned above) represents 'self'. Linguistically, the structural and the semantic bases for columns I and II, respectively, can be used to support a claim that Kiswahili has verbal lexical items with *ji-* as an inseparable component. And, as far as we are concerned, we have no problem with the entry of such items into the dictionary. However, with respect to the list in column III, all we can say at this point is that it is not exhaustive. There are many even more popular forms left out. Some examples of more popular *ji-* bearing verb forms left out in the column include forms such as *jikimu* 'support oneself', *jikomboa* 'save/liberate oneself', *jikosha* 'restore one's image', *jikwaa* 'stumble', *jikosoa* 'admit one's mistakes', *jikwamua* 'extricate oneself', *jineemsha* 'feather one's nest', *jinyima* 'deny oneself', *jinufaisha* 'feather one's nest', *jitegemea* 'be self reliant', *jiponza* 'jeopardize oneself', etc. Without many such popular forms being listed, it becomes difficult for us to determine why those particular ones and not others were entered. This also means that there are as yet no firm criteria for treating non-fossilised *ji-* bearing verb forms as independent lexical items.

The formation of all the *ji-* bearing verb forms entered in KKS appears to be a straightforward matter: prefixing *ji* to a verbal lexical form. As an affix *ji* appears "bound" with regard to items in columns I and II, and "free" with regard to items in column III (CF Williams 1989:280 on rules of formation of morphological forms). All the columns also display only a handful of extended verb forms with this element. This raises the question whether or not the *ji* element is part of the process of extension or has any role in extending the verbs. As we saw above, Khamisi (*ibid.* pp.280-303) considers the affixation of *ji* as a 'derivational' process, which may precede or follow the process of derivation of certain suffixes. In Phrase Structure Grammars, on the other hand, the *ji* element in lexical items can be treated as an affix in the "head" position. Such an element is normally the one applied last and which carries all the information about the word that is accessible to rules (for details see Williams (1981, 1989:282-286); Campbell (1988:206); Kihore (1994:13), etc.). Both the regular place of occurrence of this element as well as the common syntactic behaviour of all the items in which it is part appear to be more clearly, in conformity with this theoretical position.

**Table 1: Typology of ji- bearing verbforms in KKS**

I Fossilised Forms	II Forms with meanings different from common ones	III Non-fossilised forms
<i>jifaragua</i> `vaunt oneself'	<i>jidai</i> `purport to be past oneself'	<i>jiamini</i> `be self confident
<i>jjgamba</i> `brag', `boast'	<i>jifanya</i> `pretend to be'	<i>Jiaminisha</i> `convince oneself'
<i>jihimu</i> `rouse oneself'	<i>jifungua</i> `deliver a baby'	<i>jiamulia</i> `judge for oneself'
<i>jinaki</i> `praise oneself'	<i>jikomba</i> `ingratiate oneself in extreme manner'	<i>jiandaa</i> `get ready'
<i>jimamasa</i> `equivocate'	<i>jipendekeza</i> `ingratiate oneself'	<i>Jibaidisha</i> `keep oneself from sth'
<i>jitahidi</i> `do ones best'	<i>jiona</i> `feel superior'	<i>jibanza</i> `lurk', `hide oneself'
<i>jitamibu</i> `vaunt oneself'	<i>jivuna</i> `show off,' `brag'	<i>jibari</i> `stay clear of sth/sb'
<i>jitukusa</i> `wiggle ones body'	<i>jivunia</i> `pride oneself of something'	<i>Jidanganya</i> `deceive/cheat oneself'
<i>jiketua</i> `pretend to be what one is not'		<i>jieleza</i> `explain oneself'
		<i>jifutua</i> `expose oneself'
		<i>jihadhari</i> `be cautious'
		<i>jihami</i> `be defensive'
		<i>jihusisha</i> `get involved'
		<i>jikaza</i> `try ones best'
		<i>jikita</i> `consolidate ones position'
		<i>jikusuru</i> `go to the trouble of'
		<i>jinata</i> `be stuck up'
		<i>jipodoa</i> `put on make up'
		<i>jisaidia</i> `help oneself, `go to the toilet'
		<i>jitwaza</i> `act haughty'
		<i>jiuzulu</i> `resign'
		<i>jizatiti</i> `prepare self for''



On the second issue which concerns the valencies of the *ji-* bearing verbal forms, we note that all KKS entries of *ji-* bearing verbforms in the columns above are marked "intransitive" except the following seven items which are marked "transitive":

4. (a) **jifanya** `pretend'
- (b) **jifungua** `deliver a baby'
- (c) **jigamba** `brag', `boast'
- (d) **jihimu** `rouse oneself'
- (e) **jimamasa** `equivocate'
- (f) **jikusuru** `deny oneself something to gain object'
- (g) **jivunia** `pride oneself of something'

Of these, 3, namely, *jifanya*, *jifungua* and *jivunia* belong to column II, 3, *jigamba*, *jihimu* and *jimamasa* belong to column I and *jikusuru* belong to column III. So, all such forms are not restricted only to a particular type of *ji-* bearing verb forms.

The "transitive" forms listed here are normally associated with syntactic structures such as the following:

5. (a) **jifanya mwerevu** `pretend to be clever'
- (b) **jifungua mtoto** `deliver a baby'
- (c) **jihimu kuwahi** `wake up early'
- (d) **jivunia<sup>3</sup> kitabu** `pride oneself of a book'
- (e) **jigamba kuwa bora** `boast of being the best'
- (f) **jikusuru kufanya jambo** `deny oneself to achieve something'

No example of syntactic use is immediately available for the form **jimamasa**. The elements accompanying the verbforms in (5) are what are regarded as "objects"; and such elements do not, normally, operate with the verb forms designated "intransitive". However, for any verb form to qualify as `transitive' it must have the capability to entail the "object" category in syntactic structure. Now, before giving our view on the status of the forms accompanying the *ji-* bearing verb forms in (5), let us look elsewhere in the language for other syntactic structures involving a *ji-* bearing verb form and a nominal form. These are as exemplified in (6):

6. (a) **a- me- ji- umiza kidole**  
       SP-TP- Refl-hurt finger  
       `She/he has hurt her/himself on the finger', etc.
- (b) **a- me-ji- kata mkono**  
       SP-TP-Refl-cut hand  
       She/he has cut her/himself on the hand'

(c) **a- me-ji- choma mkuki**

SP-TP-Refl-pierce spear

'She/he has pierced her/himself with spear', etc.

By and large, it is with the constructions in (6) and not so much those in (5) that questions have been raised about the category status of the nominal form in such VP structures. Normally, for such elements to be "objects" of a Kiswahili sentence, they need to be able to be represented by an "Object Prefix" (OP) in the verbal structure and for the constructions involved to be able to passivize. None of these conditions is, however, possible with any construction involving a *ji* bearing verb form in Kiswahili. This brings us back to the question of the analysis of such constructions raised in connection with (3) above.

The intransitive status of all *ji* bearing verb forms pointed out above means that none of the constructions in (5) and (6) could be analysed as (2) above. We had indicated that the only Kiswahili construction equivalent to those analysable as (2) is the one with *enyewe* immediately following the *ji* bearing verb form such as (3b) above. That means, all constructions with *ji* bearing verb forms occurring with or without categories such as those in (5) and (6) need to be analysed differently. Before making our proposal let us take note of the following. This is that although the *ji* bearing forms have been categorised differently above, in syntax they have been shown to have a common behaviour; i.e. none co-occurs with object category. This means that our rule proposal must focus not on the distinction of such constructions themselves but rather on distinguishing them from those resulting from their non *-ji* bearing verbal counterparts as exemplified in (7):

7. (a) **a-me-ji-kata**

P-TP-Refl-cut

'She/he has cut her/himself'

(b) **a-me- (u)-kata mti**

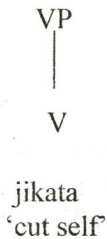
SP-TP- (OP)-cut tree

'She/he has cut (it) tree'.

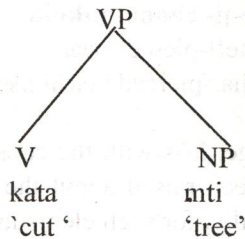
Here construction (7a) involves *ji* element while (7b) doesn't. The difference between the two constructions is that (7a) doesn't take object while (7b) does. For constructions such as (7a) we propose an analysis in (8a) to contrast an analysis of (7b) as (8b):



8. (a)



(b)



With regard to (8a), take note first, that the only way a syntactic rule can access prefix *ji-* is when it combines with the verbal form. As this is regular structurally and in syntactic behaviour, such a combination can be treated as a unit. Secondly, the analysis in (8a) is similar to the one proposed for non-object entailing verbs basing on some GPSG insights (refer to Pullum (1985:56) and Kihore (1994:87-92) for details). The only difference is that the latter verbs will not bear *ji-* under any circumstances. Such analysis is restricted to the VP structure, which, in Kiswahili, can have other categories too such as "subject", etc. represented only by affixes, which are morphological elements not accessible to syntactic rules. As such, the tree must only be the unconventional one in (8a).

## NOTES

- 1 Although Kiswahili has the form *himiza* 'encourage', 'hasten' which is, clearly, a derivation from this form.
- 2 Note here, however, that, at least, the *ji* in *jitahidi* and *jitanibu* forms cited above are not the Kiswahili *ji-* prefix under consideration but an original component of the borrowed Arabic forms. It is, therefore, only a coincidence that it also attains the sense "self" as the Kiswahili prefix.
- 3 This form, although appearing as the only exception, conforms to the others in not accepting the Object Prefix (OP).

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