

THE PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING DERIVATIONAL AFFIXES IN BILINGUAL DICTIONARY, ENGLISH-KISWAHILI

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contrasing English and Kiswahili derivational affixes, two factors need to be considered. First, the mode of affixation which is predominant in each language (prefixation and suffixation, and the degree of affixation observable in both languages) which reflects the potentiality of each in forming more complex lexemes. Secondly, it is important to compare the affixes in one language with corresponding affixes in the other both semantically and syntactically, pointing out the combinatory rules of the affixes in order to analyse the problems that can arise when complex lexemes of these languages are contrasted. But to understand the problem of contrasting bilingual affixes the significance of derivational affixes in a language and their effect on the basic meaning of the stem to which they are attached needs to be annotated.

2. THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

A derivational affix is an important linguistic device in word formation systems and is attached to stems to form new lexemes through derivational processes. Semantically a derivational affix has a definite meaning of its own (Stern 1964) and whenever it is attached to a stem it modifies the basic meaning of the stem. Its independent character enables it to combine freely with different stems to form complex lexemes without changing its derivational meaning.

- E₁. un + wise - not wise
 un + happy - not happy
 un + known - not known

The negative sense is signalled in all the lexemes coalesced with the negative affix un-.

Derivational affixes are entered in dictionaries as entry words (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English OUP 1976; The American Heritage Dictionary HMC 1982) because they have meanings of their own, and hence can be defined and translated into other languages.

- E₂. dis - pref. forming ns, adjs, and
 verbs meaning ----- not
 (dis + honest = not honest),
 absence of action (disbelieve)
 Sykes 1976: 292

- hood. - pref. forming ns of condition
 or quality or grouping (child-
 hood, sisterhood etc.) Ibid: 516

Knowledge of the meaning of an affix greatly helps the compiler and the user of a dictionary to disambiguate the sense of a complex lexeme.

The degree of affixation in a language reflects the morphological productivity of a language. The higher the degree of affixation the greater the potentiality the language has in word formation. Suffixation and prefixation are the most common derivational processes in languages although one mode of affixation may be more dominant in one language than in the other. Kiswahili and English, our languages of reference, differ both in their manner and degree of affixation. The most common process of affixation in English is suffixation - a characteristic of Indo-European languages (Mathews 1974: 124) - while in Kiswahili prefixation predominates. Unlike Kiswahili, English is very rich in affixes. It has no less than two hundred affixes (Hornby 1974: 1032 - 1035), a factor which characterizes the high degree of affixation that is observable in many English words. For example, whereas Kiswahili has no adjectivalizing affix (that can be attached to a lexeme to form adjectives) English has various affixes.

E₃: ful; less; al; ous;
 able; ic/ical; an; ac etc.

This paper attempts to pause/expose the problems a dictionary maker faces in translating English derivational affixes into Kiswahili and how he solves them. In this discussion we shall analyse the semantic structure of the English affixes and compare them with the corresponding affixes in Kiswahili.

3.0 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND KISWAHILI DERIVATIONAL AFFIXES.

English has different types of affixes, some of which have more than one variant, e.g: -er/- or for agent or in-; im-; il-; ir-; etc. for negation. Others are syno-affixes i.e. synonymous affixes. Semantically, every affix has a meaning of its own but in some cases a set of affixes may denote a general common meaning: such as negative affixes dis-; un-; in-; non- etc. Affixes can be classified on the basis of the sense they collectively denote. e.g. affixes of manner, number, negation etc. or on the basis of their function e.g. categorial affixes which form nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs etc. In this paper, affixes are classified on the basis of their semantic structure.

3.1 Negating Affixes

Negation of sentence elements (nouns, adjectives, adverbs etc) is usually done by a quantifier (none of which may precede the noun or numeral) and by merging a negative affix with the stem of a lexeme, (Hutchins: 1971), the latter being mostly applicable to adjectives, adverbs, verbs, deverbal nouns etc. Hence whenever the negating affixes (dis-; non-; un-; il-; ir-;) etc are attached to a stem of a lexeme they signal the negation of the basic meaning of the stem.

E₄: unwanted (not wanted); dishonest (not honest)
 nonsense (no sense); inaccurate (not accurate)
 impossible (not possible); illiterate (not literate)
 irrelevant (not relevant) etc.

unwanted	-	siotakiwa (that which is not wanted)
dishonest	-	sioaminifu (that is not honest)

It must be emphasized that deletion of the -o of reference would distort the derivational meaning of the deverbal adjective.

E ₉ : immovable	-	sisogezeki (I cannot be moved)
unwanted	-	sitakiwi (I'm not wanted)

It should be noted that syntactically the negative deverbal adjectives are prefixes with the subject Noun Class (NC) markers of the noun being qualified and that the -o of reference takes the appropriate NC marker of the subject referred to.

E ₁₀ : immovable (stone)	-	(jiwe) <u>lisilosogezeka</u>
unwanted (books)	-	(vitabu) <u>visivyotakiwa</u>
illiterate (person)	-	(mtu) <u>asiyejua</u> kusoma

(2) The negative affix si- merges only with deverbal adjectives and not with adjectives or denominalised adjectives.

E ₁₁ : ungenerous	-	sio karimu
unconscious	-	sio na fahamu
unofficial	-	sio rasmi
illogical	-	sio na mantiki
illegitimate	-	sio halali

What this observation means to a bilingual dictionary maker is that Kiswahili has restricted negative affixes for adjectives, verbal nouns and verbs. Moreover the affixes are dependent on other affixes, e.g. subject NC markers and -o of reference, in order to denote the same sense as in English.

Having elaborated the complexity of translating into Kiswahili the English negative lexemes it becomes obvious

that the patterns of negating lexemes in these two languages are different. A dictionary maker cannot simply attach a negative affix to stems of lexemes in Kiswahili as in English, but has to understand the combinatory rules of every stem and the affixes so as to make a distinction between lexemes which coalesce with the negative affix and those which do not.

3.2 Affixes Expressing Condition of State

The affixes -dom; -hood; -ship etc denote condition or state of an action, ideas or feeling as in boredom, friendship, boyhood etc. The Kiswahili equivalent for these affixes is affix u- except for some loan words which do not take the affix u-.

E ₁₂ :	<u>freedom</u>	-	<u>uhuru</u>
	<u>boredom</u>	-	<u>uchoshi</u>
	<u>friendship</u>	-	<u>urafiki</u>
	<u>relationship</u>	-	<u>uhusiano</u>
	<u>widowhood</u>	-	<u>ujane</u>
	<u>childhood</u>	-	<u>utoto</u>
But	wisdom	-	hekima

Translation of these English affixes is simple in that they are rendered by the Kiswahili affix u- which is simply attached to the root of the Kiswahili lexeme.

3.3 Affixes Expressing Qualities or Characters Typical of a Person.

Qualities describing things or human beings or principles held by human beings are expressed by affixes -ness; -ism etc as in egoism, heroism, dryness etc. These affixes are also rendered by the affix u- in Kiswahili.

E ₁₃ :	<u>egoism</u>	-	<u>ubinafsi</u>
	<u>heroism</u>	-	<u>ushujaa</u>
	<u>communism</u>	-	<u>ukomunisti</u>
	<u>Americanism</u>	-	<u>umarekani</u>

3.4 Agentive Affixes

The agentive affixes -er/-or, -ist, -arian/ -ian, -cide etc may be divided into marked affixes; -arian/ -ian for animate agents (e.g. disciplinarian, musician) and unmarked affixes: -er/-or; -ist, -cide, (e.g. adaptor, instructor, articulator, lecturer, linguist, catalyst, insecticide, regicide etc) for animates and inanimates alike. In Kiswahili, the agentive markers are rendered by NC indicators m-/mw- for animate agents and the NC indicator ki- for inanimate agents except for irregular forms where NC ki- may also be used for animate agents:

E. 15	teacher	-	<u>mw</u> alimu
	inspector	-	<u>mk</u> aguzi
	typist	-	<u>mp</u> igataipu
	cyclist	-	<u>mw</u> endesha baiskeli
	politician	-	<u>mw</u> anasiasa
	librarian	-	<u>mk</u> tubi
	regicide	-	<u>mw</u> uamfalme
But	articulator (speech)	-	<u>ki</u> tamka
	catalyst	-	<u>ki</u> chocheo
	adaptor	-	<u>ki</u> geuzi
	insecticide	-	<u>ki</u> uadudu

The Kiswahili agentifiers are simple and consistent and easily correspond to the English affixes. They are usually marked, for they are restricted to their respective NC markers i.e. ki- (for inanimate) and m-/ mw- (for animate).

3.5 Diminutive Affixes

Affixes -ling; micro-; -kin, -let etc. which denote smallness in English are vaguely rendered by diminutive marker ki-/ ki(ji)- in Kiswahili.

E. 16	duckling	<u>ki</u> bata	(small duck)
	seedling	<u>ki</u> mbegu	(small seed)
	manikin	<u>ki</u> jitu (dwarf)	(small man)

<u>lambkin</u>	<u>kikondoo</u>	(small sheep)
<u>streamlet</u>	<u>kijito</u>	(small stream)
<u>piglet</u>	<u>kijiguruwe</u>	(small pig)
<u>booklet</u>	<u>kijitabu</u>	(small book)
<u>microfilm</u>	<u>kijifilamu</u>	(very small film)
<u>micrometre</u>	<u>kijimita</u>	(very small metre)

But as it can be noted, the diminutive marker ki-/ki(ji)- does not signal the sense of "the young of" in Kiswahili as is the case in English where both senses: 'small' and 'young' are contained. Moreover "seedling" cannot be translated as "a small seed" but a young plant.

What is important to note here is that in this context these affixes do not express diminution alone but they also denote "the young of....." which is lacking in the ki-/ki(ji)- affixes. Hence to translate piglet, lambkin, duckling or seedling with kijiguruwe, kikondoo, kibata and kimbegu respectively would be faulty. Seedling has to be treated differently for it is neither a small seed nor a young seed but a young plant. Moreover the ki- affix in this context signals a derogative meaning "like..." e.g. kibata = like a duck, kikondoo = like a sheep. For the purpose of precision a translator is forced to give description that denotes "the young of" concept.

- E. 17: duckling - mtoto wa bata (the young of a duck)
 lambkin - mtoto wa kondoo (the young of a sheep)
 piglet - mtoto wa nguruwe (the young of a pig).

As for seedling, the Kiswahili lexeme deviates from the norm as has already been noted. Hence, "mche", which means a young plant, is used instead. The use of descriptions in bilingual dictionaries is usually discouraged for they do not help the dictionary user especially a translator who is interested in getting an equivalent word in the target language. In order to avoid the use of phraseological definitions as well as avoiding the ambiguity that would be caused by the use of ki-, the prefix ka- which is a variant of diminutive ki- (observable in many Bantu languages) could be used to form complex lexemes.

- E₁₈: duckling - kabata

	lambkin	-	kakondoo
	piglet	-	kaguruwe
But	seedling	-	mche

3.6 Affixes Expressing Manner

When the denominal adjectivalizing suffixes -ish; -wise; -like etc - are attached to nouns (to form adjectives) they denote behaviour or manner of the agent e.g. childish- (behaving like a child)-; animal-like (behaving like an animal); crabwise- (acting like a crab) etc. The Kiswahili affix expressing this concept is ki-

E ₁₉ :	child <u>ish</u>	-	<u>kitoto</u>
	woman <u>ish</u>	-	<u>kike</u>
	man <u>like</u>	-	<u>kiume</u>
	king <u>like</u>	-	<u>kifalme</u>
	animal <u>like</u>	-	<u>kinyama</u>
	crab <u>wise</u>	-	<u>kikaa</u>
	clock <u>wise</u>	-	<u>kisaa</u>

Although ki- as we have already noted has a derogatory sense (Cf. kitoto = like a child) and kinyama (animal like), it also denotes "high regard" (Cf. kiume = manlike) kifalme (kinglike) kijasiri (heroically). It is worth noting therefore that ki- is associated with diminutive indicator as well as an indicator of manner. Thus the dictionary-maker has to know that the Kiswahili affix ki- is used to denote both manner and diminution, unlike English which has a different affix for each concept.

3.7 Affixes Indicative of Origin

The English affixes that indicate the origin of something or make reference to something or to some concept include: bio- (of life); aero- (of aircraft); biblio- (of books); anthro- (of man); haemo- (of blood); hydro- (of water); chrono- (of time) etc. None of these affixes have Kiswahili equivalents which correspond to them both semantically and syntactically.

E ₂₀ :	aero-	-	-a ndege/aeroplani
	bio-	-	-a uhai/maisha
	biblio-	-	-a maandishi
	haemo-	-	-a damu
	hydro-	-	-a maji
	anthro-	-	-a kuhusu binadamu
	chrono-	-	-a wakati

Translation of these affixes has not yet been done except for complex lexemes which have nonetheless been done haphazardly without first coining the Kiswahili equivalent affixes. Such equivalent affixes would ensure consistency in translating English complex lexemes with common affixes.

E ₂₁ :	anthropoid	-	-enye kufanana na binadamu (having resemblance to man)
	anthropology	-	elimu inayohusu binadamu (study of nature of man)
	haemorrhage	-	utokaji damu (flowing of blood)
	haemophilia	-	uvujaji mwingi wa damu (severe bleeding)
	hydroelectricity	-	umeme wa maji (water electricity)
	hydropathy	-	utumiaji maji kwa tiba (use of water for treatment)

From these examples it is evident that the Kiswahili descriptions lack the precision and consistency that is observed in the English lexemes.

It should be stressed here that consistency and precision is very important in lexical development and hence Kiswahili dictionary makers will need to establish affixes where they do not exist for developing terms of specific conceptual fields. For example, terms which contain the prefixes: hydro-, anthro-, haemo- etc. should have equivalent affixes in Kiswahili for every Kiswahili term where its counterpart in English has it.

In so doing, we shall have maintained consistency in coining the terms of a particular field and at the same

time capturing the basic sense of the concept in all related terms.

E ₂₂ :	<u>hydro</u>	=	<u>maji</u>
	hydroelectric	-	-a umememaji (of water electricity)
	hydropathy	-	tibamaji (water treatment)
	hydroponics	-	ukuziamajini (growing in water)
	<u>haemo</u>	=	damu (blood)
	haemorrhage	-	mtoko damu (flowing of blood)
	haemophilia	-	mvujo damu (severe bleeding of blood)
	<u>anthro</u>	=	-adamu (mwanadamu) (man)
	anthropoid	-	-a kiadamu (like man)
	anthropology	-	elimuadamu (education + man)
	anthropologist	-	mwanaelimuadamu (specialist + education man)
	<u>chrono</u>	=	<u>tarihi</u>
	chronology ⁵	-	elimutarihi (education + date)
	chronometre	-	mitatarihi (metre + date)
	<u>bio</u>	=	<u>uhai</u>
	biology	-	elimuuhai
	biochemistry	-	kemiauhai
	biography	-	maandishiuhai

3.8 Numerical Affixes

English has very distinct affixes expressing number (of items constituted) in a unit: mono-; bi-; tri-; quad-; demi-/semi- etc. These affixes have no special equivalents in Kiswahili other than the ordinary words for numbers which denote the senses expressed by the English affixes.

E ₂₃ :	mono-	-	moja (one)
	bi-	-	wili (two)
	tri-	-	tatu (three)
	quad-	-	nne (four)
	demi-/semi-	-	nusu (half)

When translating complex lexemes with numerical affixes one has to give descriptive renderings.

E ₂₄ :	monocotyledon	-	kotiledoni moja
	monolingual	-	-a lugha moja
	bilingual	-	-a lugha mbili
	tricycle	-	-enye magurudumu matatu
	semicircular	-	-a nusu duara

The translation of the English affixes in 3-7, - 3.8 shows explicitly that Kiswahili lacks some affixes that should denote the concepts rendered by the English affixes, a factor which limits the derivational process of lexemes in this language. This derivational gap forces a dictionary maker to give descriptions for these affixes so as to disambiguate the senses of the affixes and the lexemes to which they are attached.

4. CONCLUSION

Kiswahili affixes are limited and few in number (Ashton 1944) and most of them are verbal or nominal while English is rich in affixes which cut across various grammatical categories: nouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc. In contrasting the affixes of these languages, two problems arise.

- 1) Kiswahili affixes cannot be matched with English affixes as the former are fewer in number compared to the latter. Because of this shortcoming a set of different English affixes denoting one common sense have been rendered by a single affix in Kiswahili. In some cases it has not been possible to find Kiswahili affixes and hence descriptive renderings had to be employed.
- 2) Because of lack of corresponding affixes in these two languages, translation of the affixes has been very inconsistent in some cases and at times has failed to signal the exact sense contained in the affix of the source language. To remedy this, it has been proposed that affixes could be coined where they do not exist and applied accordingly.

FOOTNOTE

1. Note that because Kiswahili is an agglutinating language, a complex lexeme may carry a complete meaning like that of a sentence in other languages.

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